

EDUCATOR EXPECTATIONS OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT
IN THREE WESTERN CAPE PENINSULA PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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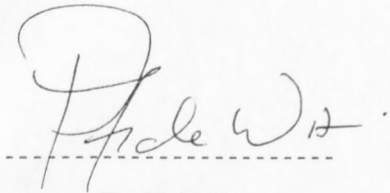
Pieter de Wit

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Education

Faculty of Education
Cape Peninsula University of Technology
Supervisor: Professor R Chetty
November 2007

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this dissertation is my own original work and has not in its entirety, or part, been submitted at any university for a degree.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P de Wit', is written over a horizontal dashed line. The signature is cursive and somewhat stylized.

P de Wit

30 November 2007

ABSTRACT

Educators often lament the lack of parental involvement necessary to support effective schooling. Since schools are primarily funded by the state and, in most cases, governed by the parents, questions arise regarding the parental support that schools need and the expectations educators have of such parental involvement. Legislation, as contained in the South African Schools Act, 1996, stipulates the parameters of parental involvement and authority in the governance of the school and the national Department of Education encourages close cooperation between parents and schools.

This dissertation explores the questions surrounding parental involvement as it pertains to the expectations of the educators. The dissension expressed by educators demand an investigation into the functionality of the mutual support structures. In an attempt to remedy any existent discord that may exist between the educators and parents, it is necessary to glean responses directly from the educators to ascertain their perceptions of parental involvement.

To elicit feedback from the educators, a questionnaire was used with both closed questions and questions which allowed for open/written responses. The questionnaire design allowed information collection to address educator needs, educator wants and what educators are currently getting from the parents as far as support and involvement is concerned. Educator expectations of the most basic and necessary involvement from the parents was weighed up with their expectations of parental involvement in a healthy educator/parent relationship and balanced against actual and current involvement and support offered and given by the parents.

Educators of all three schools indicated that communication ranks as the first priority to improve parental involvement in the schools. Schools that are committed to improve or encourage parental involvement first seek to improve the parent-educator relationships. The areas most in need of parental support are the teaching of discipline and social skills at home and the encouragement of learners to excel, parental aid at fundraising drives and homework supervision. These findings support Cherian's view that parental support of the educator is served by parental interest in the learner's education which includes offers of help to learners who bring home school work (Cherian, 1991:938).

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While this work is my own, many people have contributed generously of their time, energy and patience and thoughts towards the development and completion of this research.

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- The principals and staff of the respondent schools, who gave selflessly of themselves to provide a 100% questionnaire return rate.
- My wife Erica whose excellent knowledge of MS Excel ensured flawless data capturing and spreadsheet analysis.

DEDICATION

This work I dedicate to my Heavenly Father, my God Yahweh, to Whom I prayed for insight in my darkest hours.

This work is also a dedication to my mother, Mrs H.A.J. Alexander, who inspired me to attempt the unattainable.

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ACRONYMS, ABBREVIATIONS AND TERMINOLOGY

Acronyms and abbreviations:

| | |
|-------|--|
| DOE | National Department of Education |
| NGO | Non Governmental Organisation |
| PTA | Parent and Teachers' Association |
| SGB | School Governing Body |
| WCED | Western Cape Education Department |
| USASA | United Schools Sport Association of South Africa |
| VoIP | Voice over Internet Protocol |

Terminology:

Pupil/Child/Learner/Student: A person attending a school in South Africa is referred to as a 'learner' but literature refers to 'pupil', 'child' and 'student' interchangeably. A decision was made to use the term 'learner' in the context of the school environment.

Since this research also includes references to the educational environment of the learner at home, the term 'child' was used in the context of parent and child interactions in the home.

Teacher/Educator: Literature applies the term 'teacher' and not 'educator', but since both terms have the same meaning, it was decided to use the term 'educator' in this research, in line with terminology commonly accepted in the South African school milieu.

VoIP: Voice over Internet Protocol. Verbal communication using the Internet. Speech-capable connectivity to talk to a person anywhere in the world connected to the Internet at a fraction of the cost of using 'landline' telephones.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Schools are not autonomous islands in our suburban seas where children are sent for a few hours each day to receive a formalised education. The education of children remains, primarily, the responsibility of the parents (Vos, 1997:160). Secondary to the responsibility of parents, schools exist as centres of education where educators skilled in various disciplines support and enhance parents' own instruction of their children (Yeats, 1991:112; Topping, 1986:29).

The unique educational environment available to our children today has not always existed. It was forged by parents and educators who collaborated to tear down the barriers of segregation in the hope of establishing their dream of what education could be. Extreme sacrifices were made to achieve this dream and it paved the way for mutual alliance between educators and parents to educate learners, not in isolation, but through a communal and shared approach.

Since the exclusions of the past, South African education, with the publishing of the South African Schools Act in 1996, has taken bold steps to establish an education system that is not only inclusive of all our people, but also on par with the global best. Many changes have been effected in education and, as is often the case with change, not all changes have been received equally well by educators or parents. Since change remains the only constant in the education of learners, we shall not achieve an education system perfectly suited to all. However, for all to comprehend the change, to embrace the change and to be change agents themselves, educators and parents need avenues of communication to address pertinent educational issues and allay the fears of confusion and incomprehension where it may exist. The post 1994 educational structure is completely dependent on the pooled support of parents and educators to realise the dreams of those who went before and who so passionately forfeited so much so that we may succeed.

We enjoy a formal education system today that not only includes every person, but also encourages everybody to improve their education. For the first time, legislation exists to empower parents to share in their children's school education and to actively manage their community schools as is understood by the role of the School Governing Bodies and described in the South African Schools Act, 1996.

For many of our peers and colleagues, parents and educators alike, who find themselves naively entrenched in their perceptions of past education practices; various positive changes are not completely understood and therefore not supported. Even now, there are parents and educators who feel that the chasm which previously existed between the school and the home should not be bridged and that the roles of the parents and the teachers should remain distinctly separate and mutually exclusive.

Further to this, not all families are able to provide the educational support their children so desperately need. The causal factors are as numerous as the reasons for this malady and remediation is not simplistic. One needs but notice the media headlines, daily proclaiming all the obstacles facing our young democracy, to realise that our struggle for all the wonderful yields we expected, is not yet concluded. Too many social ills are allowed to infect our families, our children and our schools. Bold leadership and passionate cooperation between our schools and communities is needed to secure the communal spirit of *Ubuntu* between our schools, learners and parents.

Considering the unique situation of our current education system, parental involvement in the affairs of schools remains a delicate matter. Even though the concept is at this stage fairly novel to many parents and educators, it is crucial to the holistic education of our children. Barker and Stevenson (1986:157) found that high levels of parental involvement have a positive effect on pupils' scholastic achievement. They maintain that for parents to be able to manage their children's educational careers effectively, parents must know the expectations of the school and their children's achievement. Sue and Okazaki (1990:913) and Teachman (1987:554) support this by stating that parental involvement, coupled with availability of resources at home, creates an environment conducive to studying.

Moreover, what may be seen by many as positive parental involvement may not always be received as such by the educators or the schools. Careful consideration should be given to addressing specific identified needs, since alienation may very well follow in the footsteps of well-intended but insensitive meddling. Parental involvement and support must at all times be wholly acceptable in the schools, appreciated by the educators and be supportive of the organisational structure of the school. Positive parental involvement will always be indispensable to the learners, the educators and their schools, but it is fraught with pitfalls and it befalls the school leadership to establish and enforce well demarcated parameters for parental involvement.

In all honesty, there are educators who are extremely happy with the support they receive from their parent bodies, but there are also schools that dread parental involvement in their schools. To ensure that the appropriate support is given to schools, one needs to glean an insight into the expectations that educators may harbour regarding parental support and involvement. The personal experience of the researcher suggests that the needs and requirements of educators are traditionally poorly addressed. Even so, with all the help that may be offered, it is vital to very carefully assess where best parents can aid the educators.

1.2 Definitions and features of parental support and involvement

According to Ferrara & Ferrara (2005) parental involvement may be classified under the following six headings:

- Parenting: Help all families establish home environments to support children as learners
- Communicating: Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programmes and children/learners' progress.
- Volunteering: Recruit and organise parent help and support.
- Learning at home: Provide information and ideas to families about how to help learners at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions and planning.

- Decision making: Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives.
- Community Collaboration: Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programmes, family practices and learners' learning and development.

This classification is a fair guide to positive parental involvement and support of the learner's education. However, although this table seems fairly comprehensive, a fair number of South African educators may very well express greater emphasis to be placed upon the creation and maintenance of a home environment that caters for the very critical needs of the child. Needs such as sustenance, personal safety and a warm bed to sleep in.

Tizard, Schofield and Hewison (1982:1-15) reiterate that parental involvement is necessary and important in learners' scholastic achievement but they do not delimit the parental support and involvement. Unfortunately, 'negative' involvement may be even more harmful than non-support or non-involvement. Hewison and Tizard (1980:209-215) conclude that if a child feels that his/her parents are interested and involved, encourage him/her and approve and praise his/her achievements, the child's scholastic achievement is likely to improve. The opposite is, unfortunately, also true.

Not all educators may view parental involvement in the same light. Educators with a high sense of 'self-efficacy' view parents as less threatening and are more open to working with them to solve learning and behavioural problems (Green and Hoover-Dempsey, 2007:264-285). Therefore, educators often dictate the degree to which parents can be involved in the learners' education.

In the same vein, parents' views of involvement in the schools also vary considerably according to their own historical perceptions of school when they were learners. Schools may be viewed as authoritative or unappealing due to the parents' poor relationships, current or historic, with their schools. Parents who did not achieve academically, may even resent the fact that their children could surpass their own educational achievements.

Parent/Educator relationships may also be strained by the traditional, or historic separation parameters between the home and school and the commonly perceived notion that the educator and the school are responsible for the education of the learner. In addition, there is often a lack of agreement over the roles and responsibilities and false assumptions regarding parental interest. Athey (1981:353-67) observes that since learners' educational environments are influenced by parental perceptions expressed in the home environment it is essential not to alienate the parents by barring their involvement in the school.

1.3 Purpose of the research

Most schools are primarily funded by the state and, in the majority of cases, governed by the parents. This is an over-simplified perception since the dynamics of school governance is rather more complex. Of all the issues surrounding parental involvement, two questions recur most often: Are the schools receiving the parental involvement that they need? Are the expectations of the educators addressed by this parental involvement?

Mutual support between all the role players involved in the education of our children, as well as open and informative channels of communication, promotes a positive educational environment for learners. In reality, disparaging criticism from parents and educators about a lack of communication and support for each other is too often expressed. As an educator, the researcher has received many such complaints from his colleagues and members of school parent bodies.

This research intends to provide some insight into the expectations of the educators regarding parental involvement in their schools since an investigation into the functionality of the mutual support structures is necessary to remedy any existent discord that may exist between the educators and parents. In turn, this may open routes of communication to allow a better flow of information between educators and parents and consecutively, should create more positive parental involvement in schools. The purpose of the study was achieved through answers provided by the educators to the following critical questions:

- What do the educators expect from their parent bodies?
- How do parents contribute to the school?

The methods used to gather data were through questionnaires. Responses from all the educators of the three schools were requested. The questionnaire is a dual design so that it incorporates delimited responses and open questions. The open questions are structured to elicit brief responses from the educators to allow for the provision of more subjective data.

1.4 Limitations of the research

The research was based on a small sample as the scope of the mini-thesis is sharply focused and it should be tightly controlled for dimensions relevant to the educational research models used. This ensured greater explanatory power than could be revealed by a larger sample, although the latter would have been useful for generalisation. Chetty (2007:103) feels that research which is based on large quantitative sample surveys is insufficiently generalisable to be of value in the creation of organisational knowledge for academic purposes and should be challenged. The value of this approach is that it yields rich insights into the process, which shapes behaviour in the sector and as a coherent account, it has face validity Chetty (2007:103).

The sample frame consists of educators from three primary schools in the Western Cape Peninsula and potential limitations presented are the following:

- The schools are primary schools;
- the schools are situated in comparatively affluent areas; and,
- the schools are overtly well supported by their respective parent bodies.

Since the three schools are not intended to be representative of all Western Cape Peninsula schools, the factors mentioned should not detract from the study, which was to examine the parental support at the three schools.

1.5 Organisation of the dissertation

This dissertation is organised as follows:

Chapter One contextualised the study, outlined the purpose of the research project and provided an overview of the study together with the manner in which the report is organised.

Chapter Two presents a review of the relevant literature. Jubber (1988) contends that the socio-economic status of the parents determines the level of support that the educators may receive. Jubber enjoys much literature support, but this view is by no means uncontested. The contention is that, although a high socio-economic status presents parents with the means to support the educators, it should not be taken as the defining factor. Cherian (1992:125-27) and Chetty (1985), supported by various researchers, argues that parental support of the learners, despite the influences of socio-economics, is a superior indicator as to the support educators could expect from the parents.

Chapter Three contains the methodology. Both a quantitative and a qualitative process was used in the instrument. The questionnaire allowed for objective selections from lists and more subjective responses in the way of written comments. Validity, reliability and ethical considerations were addressed in the design of the instrument.

Chapter Four presents the respondents' tabulated results and the interpretation of the data from the research process.

Chapter Five offers the findings and conclusions, recommendations and suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Chapter One set out the key issues to be addressed in this dissertation, that is educator expectations of parental involvement in three Western Cape Peninsula primary schools and parental contribution to the schools. This chapter reviews current literature on the topic to present a range of perspectives regarding educator expectations and parental involvement in schools.

Regarding Educator Expectations: Educator expectations vary considerably from school to school and this is especially true for the Western Cape Peninsula with the vast disparity that exists in the schools. In the context of this study, educator expectations are examined within two broad strands: Firstly, the fulfilment of parental obligations to the learner, which includes responsibilities as co-educators, providers and guardians of their children and secondly, the parents' involvement with, contributions to and support for the educator. Most importantly, educators expect a sound home environment to be maintained since the home environment is vitally important to support the learner in the attainment of his/her full potential. This supportive home environment would include a sound parent-child relationship, a socio-economic status that allows for the needs of the child and the family to be catered for and where favourable living conditions are maintained (Jubber, 1988).

Regarding Parental involvement: Parental involvement in school, according to Epstein (1992:1139-51) refers to the parents' role in their child's education at home and at school. It can take several forms: presence at school, communicating with the teachers, or helping at home with homework. Pogoloff (2004:116-19) states that parental involvement in their children's education also includes parental warmth (loving and caring for the child), supervision (of homework and being aware of the child's whereabouts) and affective support such as encouragement and praise about school, talk about courses that can be selected, attending school activities in which the child is involved, help with homework when asked and going to a special event with the child.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

A pervasive perception carried through much literature is that parental support, and specifically the level of parental support is inextricably linked to the socio-economic status of the parents. Jubber (1988) is one researcher who contends that the rich provide better educational support for their children. Jubber is, in this instance, supported by Naicker (1979:24) and Banks (1976:68-69) who also found that, in essence, wealth equals good education and good educational support. Jubber's findings goes further by outlining a strong association between economic status, parental occupations and parental levels of education and the qualitative rating of the school attended by their children. This, to Jubber, clearly demonstrated the way in which those parents with the financial means, social influence and political clout, have been able to support their children's education at home and at school (Jubber, 1988).

Jubber's arguments are however challenged, specifically by Cherian (1992) and Chetty (1985) who contend that, although a high socio-economic status presents parents with the means to support their children, it should not be taken as the singular defining factor to determine parental educational support. Cherian (1992:10) and Chetty (1985) further state that parental support of the learners, despite the socio-economic influences, is a superior indicator of the support educators could expect from the parents.

Earlier research done by Cherian (1991:889-91) showed that, although parents' income is related to the scholastic achievement of their children, it does not necessarily identify the personal support of the learner's educational environment, which includes his/her educators and the school. Banks (1976:69) also showed that significant differences were evident in the educational attainment between upper middle class students of high ability and those of working class students of similar ability. Here again, the issue of personal involvement in the child's education was omitted. Van der Velde (1987) introduces two additional factors; the parents' level of education and the parents' occupational levels (important elements considered on par with their socio-economic status), as determinates of their children's scholastic achievement. The inclusion of the parents' educational level as an indicator of their children's academic success confirms that parents who have enjoyed a good education are potentially able to effectively promote and augment the education of their children at home.

This transfer of knowledge, through social interaction in the home milieu, underpins Cherian's later research (Cherian, 1992) regarding the importance of learner support at home. This view is shared by Van der Velde (1987) and by Lauer (1992:470-471) who also confirmed that parental involvement in their children's education was pivotal to ensure they performed better than their counterparts. Counterparts who did not enjoy the same parental involvement since their parents' socio-economic status did not allow them to involve themselves in their children's education.

The socio-economic status of parents as a determinant of parental support is most certainly a significant and persistent factor that influences the child's performance even after completion of his/her secondary education. Persistent in that, according to Banks (1976:70), children of high ability and high economic status were more likely to graduate from a tertiary institution than children with high ability, but with a lower economic status. Research by Lauer (1992:470-471) proved that school leavers of high academic ability, but who are from the lower social classes are less likely to attempt tertiary education. Without tertiary qualifications, parents may very well find themselves repeating the socio-economic status cycle they had to contend with as learners and in turn, subject their children to the same lack of educational support.

Naicker (1979:24) agrees with Lauer and provides further support by stating that the working class child is unlikely to have the same continuity enjoyed by the middle or higher class children. According to Naicker (1979:24), 'the experiences of the lower working class child is that his home and his subculture rarely provide him with the mechanisms for internalising successor surviving failure in school'. Home background variables related to school attainment have been identified with the higher performances of middle class children and with the lower performances of working class children (Naicker, 1979:23).

2.3 Educator Expectations

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, educator expectations vary considerably in the confines of the Western Cape Peninsula. In this section, literature sources delimiting educator expectations in the context of parental involvement and contributions will be explored.

2.3.1 Home milieu

Aspects which constitute the home environment are physical living conditions, family factors, language development, cultural background, parental attitude, influence and involvement, parental educational styles, as well as parent-child relationships (Maja, 1998:2). The home environment is of critical importance to support the learner in the attainment of his/her full educational potential. Attainment of educational potential is also attributed to the amount of effort the learner contributes, but failure to reach his/her true potential, a much more frequent occurrence, is often ascribed to internal factors such as illness, or external ones such as lack of resources, proper nutrition and lack of parental involvement, which are not within pupils' control (Smith, 1996:7-8). The home milieu therefore includes the obligations and responsibilities of parents to be co-educators, providers and guardians of their children. These are the most fundamental of educator expectations, since a sound home environment is essential to support the learner. In tandem with these most basic expectations include sound parent-child relationships, a socio-economic status that allows for the needs of the child and the family to be catered for and where favourable living conditions are maintained (Jubber 1988).

The importance of a sound background to support the child's education cannot be underestimated. According to Jubber (1988), this is especially applicable to the home, as it is the primary education centre. The parents, being the primary educators, are highly appraised by the child in his/her infantile years, when the most basic and lasting impressions of his/her milieu are shaped. Dienaar (1994:1) states that relations and behaviour patterns in the home most often determine relations and behaviour patterns that occur outside the home. For this reason parent and child interaction in the home may influence both academic results as well as general behaviour at school. The home is the key social institution for providing care, training, education and the bringing up of children (Vos, 1997:160) and the parents are generally recognised as the champions and the home as the primary setting for socialization (Maccoby, 1984:320).

In Jubber's 1988 study of 267 pupils from 15 Cape Town schools, he clearly showed that domestic and familial variables were strongly associated with measures of school performance and school achievement (Jubber 1988).

The home environment is an important determiner of school behaviour and success, according to Jubber (1988:47) and as the child grows, the people in the child's home become progressively more meaningful to him/her and this is carried on into the school environment. Jubber's findings suggest that a home where the learner's scholastic education and social education is advanced is a "good quality information environment". Interestingly, only the quality of magazines received and the number of newspapers bought, distinguishes this kind of home from those "less educationally enhancing". Jubber found that it is the quality of the verbal exchanges rather than newspapers, books, magazines, television, or video that makes the difference between homes as educationally enhancing. The children of such homes apparently spend about as much time on their homework as do other children with a slight tendency for some of them to be a little more studious than their peers. They also watch about the same amount of television as their peers. The only difference is that they are encouraged to discuss programmes with their parents more frequently. The children are also by far more likely to belong to a library and to borrow more books than their peers (Jubber 1988). Boykin (1986:326) also aligns himself with researchers who believe that parental involvement has an effect on pupils' scholastic achievement, maintaining that pupils of parents who fail to provide an appropriate intellectual atmosphere in the home or any kind of material which promotes intellectual growth tend to perform poorly at school (Jubber, 1988; Cherian, 1987).

Papalia and Olds (1992: 331) support Jubber and Boydn in that they suggest that a pupil's home environment which includes aspects such as how much reading materials are available, how parents feel about education, what they do for and with their children, plays an essential role in the scholastic achievement of the pupils. This may very well be extended into the realm of the school and classroom, since scholastic achievement levels and learning problems may arise from the pupils' personal problems at home.

The relationship between the home and the scholastic achievement of learners is borne out by the fact that learners spend more of their waking hours in and around the home than they do in school (Cherian, 1992:4-10). According to Moeketsi (1998) indications are that if the environment is positive, it can promote constructive behaviour changes and pupils' scholastic achievement is likely to be improved. However, if the environment is negative, scholastic achievement is lowered (Moeketsi, 1998).

Further contributory factors described by Thompson, Alexander and Entwisle (1988:325) referred to the "non-intact" families where children from single parent families are seen as being more disadvantaged in view of their economic status, as well as their stability.

Banks (1976:68-69) and Pogoloff (1994) recognise the main indicators of a sound home environment as those related to the material, economic, cultural, motivational and emotional aspects of the home. Each of these categories reveal a cluster of variables which are interrelated and are mutually reinforcing. Studies by Pogoloff (1994) have extended existing research by examining the mediating role of parental supervision and affective support between family structure and parental education. She also examined the mediating role of parental warmth between family structure and school achievement. An important addition to the relevant literature was that adolescents from non-intact families do not perform as well as adolescents from intact families. The reason, according to Pogoloff (1994) is that their parents provide less warmth, less supervision and less affective support related to school matters. In other words, the relationship between family structure and school achievement is negated when parental warmth, supervision and affective support is present. Adolescents with less-educated parents do not perform as well as adolescents with better-educated parents partly because their parents do not monitor their whereabouts and support them to a lesser extent. Pogoloff (1994) concludes that parental affective support, expressed in terms of praise, encouragement, discussions about school and their presence at school in the audience, appears to be a critical parental behaviour when introducing the role of non-intact families and less-educated parents in relation to learners' support and school achievement.

2.3.2 Parental attitudes and conduct

Children are profoundly influenced by their parents' behaviour and attitudes (Clark, 1989:8). How parents view the learner's school, his/her educators and his/her attainment of a formal educational qualification has an enormous effect on how the child will view his/her own education (Clark, 1989:8). It is thus of utmost importance that the child be supported to engender a positive concept of education, and at the least, to make up his or her own mind about the importance of education that he or she may be exposed to.

The intentional and perhaps verbal degrading of educational facilities, such as schools, is a gross violation of the learner's intrinsic rights to decide for him/herself. This is especially the case if this derogatory conduct is pursued by a parent (Clark, 1989).

Parents have frequently been implicated as principal causal agents in children's behavioural, emotional, and cognitive development (Whiting, 1980:95-116). This means that parents may project their negative attitudes on children and children may present those negative attitudes as a scapegoat, expressing lack of parental involvement in their poor achievement (Whiting, 1980:95-96).

Bippus (2005:49) presents the following negative parental attitudes and conduct as examples of what he terms 'parenting ills':

- Parents who never read to their children, review a spelling list or monitor homework assignments.
- Parents who assume no role in monitoring what their children watch on television, how much sleep they get or what they eat.
- Parents who lie to school officials about attendance and fail to teach manners to their children by attaching no consequences to misbehaviour.
- Parents who refuse to attend a parent-teacher conference or even respond to requests to discuss the progress of their children.
- Parents who do not teach their children basic vocabulary, how to count to 10 or the difference between left and right.
- Parents who allow a 6-year-old to smoke.

Even when educational reformers consider what may be done to help children being raised by irresponsible parents, they generally focus instead on strategies to hold schools more accountable. Instead of addressing parent accountability, the reformers ignore the worse aspects of parenting (Bippus, 2005:49).

According to Berg (1990:40), a healthy home with open and good communication patterns, produces healthy educational functioning in pupils whose emotional energy is then, in a sense, freed, allowing them to concentrate their efforts on their academic pursuits. For example, children in relatively cohesive and intellectual homes, tend to show more rapid mental development (Berg, 1990:40)

2.3.3 Parental motivation and encouragement

Motivation for learning begins in the home and must be reinforced by people outside the home, therefore, the development of the learning abilities of pupils is affected by the home environment (Papalia and Olds, 1992:331-335). This supports the idea that the home is important to help the child to establish his/her place in the society. People who can help children find a place in the society are their parents (McCown, Driscoll and Roop, 1996:75). The aspiration parents have for their children's schooling influences the accomplishment of pupils at school. Parental support of the educator is thus given when parental interest in the learner's education leads to offers of help to learners who bring home school work (Cherian, 1991:138).

Alkin (1992:1145), in support of McCown *et al.* (1996), also maintains that learning is made possible through adequate intellectual development and motivation for learning, which begins in the home and that motivation must be reinforced by teachers and other societal forces. Motivation is seen by DeSalvo and Zurcher (1984:7-17) as inextricably linked to scholastic achievement and this motivation always arises from the home. Maccoby (1984:317-328) succinctly captures the concept of motivation at home by stating that; 'since parents are generally recognised as the champions, and the home as the primary setting for socialization, the school and the home may play a significant role in the scholastic achievement of pupils'.

Pupils' capacity to do well at school is to a certain degree dependent on the encouragement they get from their parents (Kapambwe, 1980:16). In an analysis of a national sample of primary schools in Britain, Douglas (1964) found that parental level of encouragement has a greater effect on scholastic achievement than their socio-economic status would suggest (cited in Van der Velde, 1987:6). Parents of achieving pupils have been found to give their children more praise and approval, to show understanding and to be closer to their children. On the other hand, parents of underachievers are more domineering, over restrictive and use more severe and frequent punishment (Berg, 1990:8). This is why children of domineering and over-restrictive parents have a lower level of academic motivation (Berg, 1990:8).

2.3.4 Parenting styles

Parenting styles is another factor that has a big effect on the child's perceptions of school and education. It is in the home that pupils begin to develop a sense of the self (Schaefer, 1987:107). This is fundamentally important as to where the child will place himself in his society and his responses to society. Msimeki (1988:453) maintains that pupils who have developed a positive self-concept are likely to learn and achieve more in their school work, whereas pupils with a negative self-concept are likely to experience difficulties in learning and performing well at school. Since the sense of self begins at home, the development of a positive self-concept is likely to improve pupils' scholastic achievement, whereas a negative self-concept leads to a decline in scholastic achievement (Louw, 1991:283). Louw maintains that pupils with a negative self-concept also show high levels of anxiety and later show poor social adjustment and poor school progress (Louw, 1991). He adds that a fully functioning pupil is characterized by a positive view of the self and accurate realistic perception of the self is an important determiner of his/her own destiny (Louw, 1991:260-290).

Child-rearing parental styles that emphasise effort and initiative, rather than a specific level of ability, are associated with the highest level of pupils' academic achievement (Ames, 1992:261-271). Vos (1997:162) concludes that parents of academically motivated and achieving pupils are likely to place a high premium on freedom, independence, mastery, competence and achievement rather than on dependence and submission on the part of their children. Thus, pupils tend to cope with any challenges the school poses for them, whether difficult or not. If such pupils are faced with difficult school tasks, it may be easy for them to deal with such tasks effectively and this could contribute to their scholastic achievement (Moeketsi, 1998)

Moeketsi (1998) adds that parents of achieving pupils are always democratic and encourage an active "give-and-take" interaction with their children. They also show curiosity and a respect for knowledge, while, in contrast, their counterparts are parents who are autocratic and submissive. Autocratic and submissive parents tend to forget that parental dominance of the children, particularly maternal dominance and submissiveness, seriously affect the development of autonomy and restrains academic motivation (Moeketsi, 1998).

There appears to be some agreement that pupils' personality, motivation, and educational opportunity are gradually formed by the kinds and qualities of the interaction that they share with those close to them such as parents (Parkinson, Wallis, Prince and Harvey, 1982:329-333). Cherian (1992) proposes that parental aspirations are communicated to the learners by parental motivation and praise.

2.3.5 Parental aspiration and praise

Parental aspiration elevates pupils' scholastic achievement (Cherian, 1992). It is regarded as an important aspect of pupils' scholastic achievement and relates to achievement in general (Moeketsi, 1998). Jubber (1988:37) contends that praise is an 'unusual' human form of positive reinforcement and is regarded as a conditioner of behaviour throughout life, but since socialisation is a two-way process, achievement on the part of pupils will elicit praise from parents, and this will reinforce such achievement behaviour (Jubber, 1988:3-7). Praise and approval from parents, in relation to scholastic achievement, have a positive outcome for all concerned with the child's education (Hewison, 1982:156-162). Cherian (1992:4) suggests that a good home, wherein pupils experience positive parental aspirations and involvement and availability of resources, is the one which plays a significant role in determining the scholastic achievement of pupils. Both direct instruction and involvement have a positive school outcome (Berger, 1987:15).

Clark (1989:67) maintains that parents should avoid predictions, threats or warning about school failure because some pupils will deliberately fail to produce the 'expected' results, communicated by the parents. The aspirations parents have for their children's schooling undoubtedly influence their scholastic achievement (Clark 1989:67).

2.3.6 Parent / Teacher interaction

The importance of sound communication between the educators and parents cannot be overestimated. In the traditional framework of parent and educator interaction, it is most often the educator's role to guide the subject matter and educators often dictate the degree to which parents can be involved in the pupils' education (Welch and Sheridan, 1995). Since parents' backgrounds differ in varying degrees, their communication styles vary considerably and it is up to the educators to listen carefully to what is being communicated by the parents (Welch and Sheridan, 1995).

Often there is a lack of agreement over the roles and responsibilities and false assumptions regarding parental interest (Davis, 1994) and this is why Welch and Sheridan (1995) stress the fact that positive communication between educators and parents is essential. The educator should steer clear of insensitive, defensive or unintended communication. All educator-parent interaction should be approached as a potentially 'win-win' situation, rather than a 'win-lose' confrontation.

In reality, not all educators are expert orators or communicators, and may view parent/educator interactions with a degree of trepidation. Clark (1989) believes that educators with a high sense of 'self-efficacy' view parents as less threatening and are more open to working with them to solve learning and behavioural problems experienced by their children.

There are many factors contributing to the breakdown of parent-teacher relationships and Pogoloff (2004:116-19) has identified four barriers:

- a tradition of separation between home and school;
- a tradition of blaming parents for children's difficulties;
- changing demographic conditions; and,
- persistent school structures.

Educators are remarkably multi-skilled people who are expected to manage a variety of situations during the course of their day. However, as has been the personal experience of the researcher, principals at times place huge burdens on trained, but inexperienced educators, to deal with parents who lack both social and communication skills. Most often parents are called in to a school when the aid of a parent is needed to address a negative issue regarding their child. In many instances, parents arrive at meetings with pre-conceived notions and with an agenda that may not support the real issues of the meeting. In an effort to promote positive communication during formal parent/educator meetings, consultation sessions with 'specialist' education staff have been successfully used. This not only lifts the burden from educators who may have had to deal with more aggressive parents, but also allows for third party mediation where an education 'specialist', skilled in dealing with less responsive parents, can communicate on behalf of the educator and the school.

In many countries, parent consultation has a long and established history as an important method of service delivery relevant to the training and practice of school psychology. Parent consultation refers to any communication between a professional and a parent and within school psychology. Parent consultation may be defined as a structured, indirect, collaborative, problem solving relationship between the psychologist (consultant) and one or more parents (*consultees*) (Sheridan, Kratochwill, & Bergen, 1996). Although school consultation has traditionally focused on teacher consultation, in recent years the practice of parent consultation has increasingly become the focus of theory, research, and practice. Rationales for parent consultation as a method of service delivery by school psychologists include the fact that parent consultation fosters home-school partnerships (Christenson & Cleary, 1990), and consultation is a relatively easy, time-limited and cost-effective method of service delivery (Sheridan, Kratochwill, & Bergen, 1996).

The most common model of parent consultation within school psychology derives from behavioural consultation. Behavioural consultation is a structured model with four interview stages:

- Problem identification;
- problem analysis;
- treatment implementation; and
- treatment evaluation (Sheridan, Kratochwill, & Bergen, 1996).

A survey of school psychologists in the early 1990s indicated that the behavioral consultation model was the most widely used method of consultation in the field in school practice (Costenbader, Swartz, & Petrix, 1992). Behavioral consultation applied to parents as consultees has been used increasingly in the last decade to address a variety of child behavioral problems (Sheridan, Kratochwill, & Bergen, 1996). In the South African context, parent consultation, rather than parent/educator meetings would be a more effective mode of treatment delivery for a variety of school-related behavioural concerns, including problems with social skills and homework completion.

2.4 Parental support

In line with sources of information thus far reviewed, literature dictates several existing avenues of parental support. This support varies in degrees and will be discussed under the headings pertaining to the maintenance of supportive homes, learner support and educator support.

2.4.1 Supportive homes

It has been established in this chapter that enough evidence exists to prove that high levels of parental involvement have a positive effect on pupils' scholastic achievement. But for parents to be able to manage their children's educational careers effectively, Barker and Stevenson (1986:157) maintain that parents must know the expectations of the school and comprehend their children's achievement of the school's expectations. Teachman (1987:554) takes this notion further by adding that knowledge of school expectations coupled with availability of resources at home creates an environment conducive to learning.

An investigation conducted by Van der Velde (1987), indicates that there are certain parental attitudes, such as aspiration and interest, which are crucial in promoting scholastic achievement. Pupils' learning environments are influenced positively by the home environment (Athey, 1981). Throughout the developing child's life, much emphasis is often placed on academic performance and it appears that a large proportion of the child's future success in life is dependent upon her level of academic performance (Maja, 1998). Many factors play a role in, or influence academic performance, factors that include intellectual potential, motivation, the level of expertise of the educators, and self discipline. One other factor which also plays a role in academic performance, is that of the home environment (Maja 1998:1)

Education of the child is completed only if she receives support from both the school and home environment. The school is a resource centre and the contexts of learning are widened into the home and the community by home members (Deer, 1980:20-24).

This means that both the school and the home have an inextricable role in the education of the child. In consideration, it must be borne in mind that the school cannot and does not take over from the home because even when pupils are attending school, they continue to live with their parents (Yeats, 1991:112; Topping, 1986:29). The parents thus remain the primary educators.

The influence of the home is also of critical importance in pupils' general psychological and social development, and in particular, in the use they make of their abilities in the formation of their attitudes, opinions and in the development of motivation towards the school and a future career (Fountain, 1993:7). Learners differ as a result of the home experiences and their ability to benefit from educational opportunities and this could contribute to variations in scholastic achievement among learners (Moeketsi, 1998).

Since the home is regarded as the intermediate variable of social class, clear differences are noticeable regarding the adjustments which working class children make in their responses to schooling. Generally, when the child enters school for the first time, he/she may find that this new environment is in many respects discontinuous with that of her home (Naicker, 1979:24). This discontinuity, however, is not so great for the middle class child who is likely to have experienced many forms of cultural and educational experiences at home which are similar to those of the school (Deutsch, 1973:65).

Learners spend more of their waking hours in and around the home than they do in school and the more they grow, the greater the hours (Fountain, 1993:7). 'Parents take their child home after professionals complete their services and parents continue providing the care for the larger portion of the child's waking hours. No matter how skilled professionals are, or how loving parents are, each cannot achieve alone what the two parties, working hand-in-hand, can accomplish together' (Welch & Sheridan, 1994).

Both schools and families can be considered open systems. According to Welch and Sheridan (1995), each is comprised of a number of subsystems (the student subsystem in schools; the sibling subsystem in families) that are related to and dependent on each other.

Similarly, schools and families are interrelated and interdependent. In other words, the beliefs, attitudes, values, norms, practices, events and virtually every other variable in one setting (the home) affect those present in the other setting (the school). Clearly, there is a significant and reciprocal relationship between the home and school settings that must be appreciated to maximise students' development and learning.

Welch and Sheridan (1995:297) state that in a hypothetical situation, a school in an affluent university community, where the parents are generally well educated and work at professional jobs, the students will consistently score well above national norms on standardised testing. Such a school demands excellence and prepare pupils for tertiary education while the parents support the school and also demand high standards and practices from the school. In contrast to this, an inner city, low socio-economic school will again have parents that are primarily uneducated and of mixed racial and cultural background. Many of the parents are unemployed or employed in minimum wage jobs. English is often not spoken and the parents may be of immigrant origin. Gang membership and drug use is high and several students bring knives and guns to school. The school, therefore, focuses its efforts and resources on survival functions, such as safety on the school grounds. These same priorities are apparent in the homes and neighbourhoods of the students and there is poor academic achievement (Welch and Sheridan, 1995:297).

2.4.2 Learner support

The direct involvement of parents, their support in various ways and showing interest in children's education, can improve pupils' scholastic achievement (Cherian, 1992). Pupils have advantages when their parents are involved and encourage them in their school work (Hewison and Tizard, 1980:209-215). Hewison and Tizard (1980:209-215) conclude that if a child feels that his/her parents are interested and involved, encourage him/her, approve and praise his/her achievement, the child's scholastic achievement is likely to improve.

Cherian (1992:10) reports that learners of parents who support them by showing interest in their school progress tend to perform better in their school work than those whose parents are less supportive and interested in their school work.

Parents of high achieving pupils tend to reinforce the value of school to some extent because they expect the school to do something for their children. Cherian (1992:10) and Chetty (1985) stress that a high degree of parental interest, expectations and educational influence is fundamentally important to pupils' scholastic achievement.

Negative feelings about the school and schoolwork could adversely affect children's scholastic achievement (Moeketsi, 1998). This is why parental support in children's work is of importance because the interest of the pupils in their work is deeply affected by the degree of interest their parents show in their work. Shawinsky (1988:51-56) maintains that the stronger the learner support, the greater the likelihood of satisfactory school achievement will be.

If parents, as models, motivate their children and above all, if they get involved by supporting their children's school work, they make learners realise the importance of education and learners are likely to progress scholastically. This may well result in increased homework being completed by the learners (Dekker, 1995:14). Ryan (1996:143-154) argues that whatever form of involvement the effect of parental support on learners' scholastic achievement is important, provided the involvement is well-planned and serves to integrate pupils' experience at home and school. Thus, pupils predisposed to mastery in the classroom use effective strategies, prefer challenging work and have a positive attitude towards their school work (Ames and Archer, 1988:260-267). Vrey (1979:54) indicates that 'in such an expanding home environment the child learns about different behaviours and attitudes displayed and that such stimulation and language forms the most important part of his development'.

2.4.3 Educator support

When there is positive parental involvement in schools, educators feel positive about teaching (Epstein, 1990). Educators who involve parents in the children's education, rate all parents, including less educated and single parents as higher in helpfulness and follow-through than do other educators. They tend to refrain from making stereotypical judgements about poor, less educated, or single parents (Epstein, 1990).

Parental involvement in schooling refers to the parents' role in their child's education at home and at school. It can take several forms: presence at school, communicating with the educators, or helping at home with homework (Epstein, 1992).

Findings from Deslandes' study (1996) revealed that parental affective support was the best predictor of adolescents' school grades. Consistent with Paulson's results (Paulson, 1994). Deslandes (1996) concluded that parental involvement dimensions predicted achievement above and beyond parenting style dimensions. However, no information was obtained as to whether parenting style, parental involvement in school dimensions, or family background characteristics best predicted school achievement.

2.5 Parental obligations

In accordance with the South African Schools Act, 1996, parents are expected to send their children to school on a regular basis. However, it is nearly impossible to determine whether absent learners are not perhaps kept at home because of sickness or because they are needed to baby-sit younger siblings or watch an ailing family member. Little to no effort is made to hold parents accountable who violate the law because it is time-consuming and costly (Pogoloff,2004).

It is not politically correct to refer to some parents as irresponsible when there are no standards for parenting, as there are for educators. Legislators, who themselves may be parents, are reluctant to consider legislating specific parent responsibilities, even though research, as well as common sense, proves that learners benefit from parents who read to them, who ensure they eat and sleep properly and who supervise homework.

Kurdek and Sinclair (1988:90-94) state that when there is a relative lack of a responsive, caring atmosphere and consistently enforced standards and rules of behaviour, pupils usually develop disruptive behaviour in the classroom and become less efficient in their study habits. They become reluctant to attend school regularly and such behaviours and attitudes are likely to depress their scholastic achievement.

Therefore, lack of parental involvement and supervision increases the likelihood of developmental problems such as a negative self-concept. This in itself will impact on the pupil's perception of him/herself later in life.

Authoritative parenting style shows a high degree of warmth, supervision, and psychological autonomy granting (Deslandes, 1996). Specifically, adolescents who describe their parents as treating them warmly, firmly and democratically are more likely than their peers to obtain high grades in school. In agreement with other research (Herman, Dornbusch, Herron & Herting, 1997). Deslandes (1996) reports a positive relationship between the three dimensions of parenting style (i.e., warmth, supervision and psychological autonomy granting) and school grades. Her study was conducted with 525 French-speaking adolescents living in the province of Quebec.

Lee (2001:23-25) and Deslandes (1996) noted a negative relationship between parent / educator contacts and school achievement. They suggested that communication between parents and educators were more likely to occur when adolescents are experiencing problems in school. Other research has found that family discussions about students' school experiences, courses and future educational plans have a sizable effect on school achievement (Lee, 2001).

2.6 Gatekeepers

The level of parental involvement in a school is often regarded as an indicator of the general parental support the school receives. Parental involvement should, however, be carefully planned and demarcated so that involvement does not become interference. Van der Velde (1987) stresses that this responsibility lies at the door of the school principal. The level of parental involvement in the classroom situation is one example where demarcated involvement must be established. At an independent school where the researcher served as an educator, an 'open classroom' policy was practised. Parents were welcome to attend formal lessons with the learners. This may have been a way in which parents were assured that their children indeed received the level of education the parents so dearly paid for, but it also lent itself to abuse and instances of lesson interruption.

As the relationship between schools and the parent bodies again comes under the spotlight in South Africa, educators will have to become the gatekeepers of their profession, their classrooms and their schools. This may very well be a formidable task unless the educators are afforded all the possible aid that can be mustered.

2.6.1 Critical skills

Currently no normal (educator training) institution or Faculty of Education in South Africa offers a course to adequately prepare novice educators for encounters with parents. Pre-service and professional growth (in-service) training and staff education programmes should include skills training to prepare educators and school management to communicate and interact with parents and other interested parties. Fine (1990) states that school psychologists may need to educate school personnel about the role of psychological consultants and take active steps in helping to bridge the gap between parent and school systems.

Critical skills that are currently in demand include:

- How to reach out to parents and work effectively with parents who have unsettled or struggling children in the school.
- How to advise or assist families with parenting and adolescent-rearing skills that support learning and learner progress.
- How to elicit support from families who have children continually failing in school;
- How to help working class parents bridge the gap between the home and school environment, where the school environment may be regarded as middle class orientated.
- How to aid families and learners from other areas who come to a school unprepared in the basic skills on which the curriculum is founded.
- How to encourage, support and motivate pupils who experienced successive failures and poor academic performance.

(Adapted from Naicker 1979)

2.6.2 Imperatives

At the high school level, studies conducted by Deslandes (1996), have suggested both negative and positive correlations between activities of parental involvement and school performance. For example, Lee (2001) and Deslandes (1996) noted a negative relationship between parent-teacher contacts and school achievement. They suggested that communication between parents and teachers were more likely to occur when adolescents are experiencing problems in school. Other research has found that family discussions about students' school experiences, courses and future educational plans have a sizable effect on school achievement (Otto and Atkinson, 1997).

In the home environment it is of the utmost importance that care should be taken when education or educational institutions are discussed or commented on by people whom the child is exposed to. This is not something that can be policed or legislated. Where communities are ill-disposed towards education, a complete paradigm shift is needed. This will not happen autonomously, but rather as a result of the education system and education institutions proving their worth and importance to communities that are by choice antagonistic and distrustful of education, because of their experiences at the hands of the previous ruling regime.

2.7 Collaborative Education

Though the school has become the focal socialising agency within educational systems, the school cannot and does not take over completely from the home. This is because even when children are attending school they continue to live with their parents and are deeply influenced by their behaviour and attitudes (Yeats, 1991).

Child education is not the transfer of knowledge from the educator to the learner, but rather a joint venture between all three role players; the parents, the learner and the educator, as represented by figure 1 (p 28). In this representation, learners, parents and educators share equally in the responsibility of the learner's education. Mutual support and mutual interaction provides an educational synergy which is far greater than what can be individually attained by any of the parties. In addition, child education also includes a myriad of peripheral and contributory factors that are crucial to preserve, support, nurture and enhance the intricacies of interactive collaboration between the role players (Potvin *et al.*, 1999).

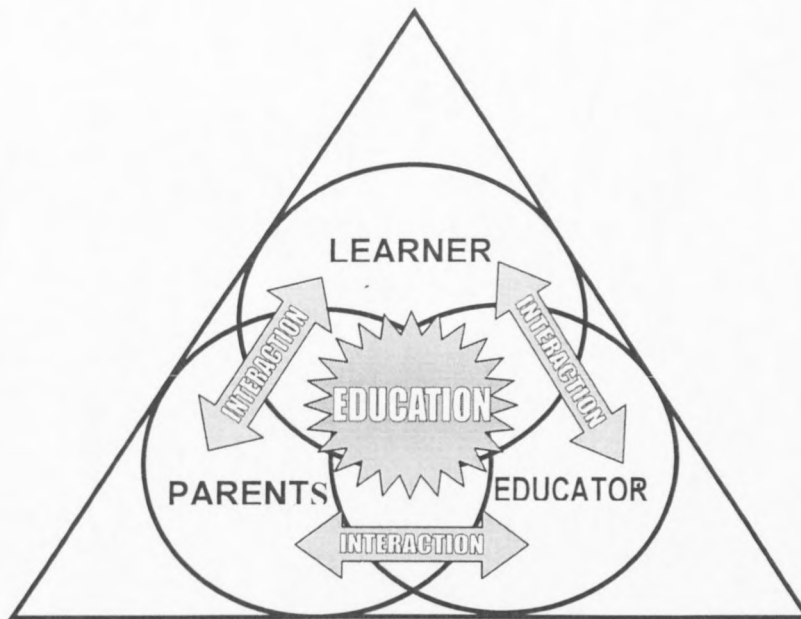


Figure 1: The co-educational environment

Responsibility lies with school principals to open dialogue to determine what schools and parents should expect from each other. A process determined collaboratively with parents should outline what will happen if an educator or parent does not live up to agreed-upon expectations. While government bodies will probably never hold parents accountable, it is essential that our schools continue to try (Potvin *et al.*, 1999).

Jubber (1988) describes collaborative education as a home environment supportive of the learner's education and conducive to learner support and encouragement. In an attempt to equalise educational opportunities, Jubber (1988) suggests that it is necessary to consider the opportunities which the home and family create, or do not create and the many ways in which they either promote or do not promote the attitudes, values, behaviours and stocks of knowledge conducive to school success.

In an attempt to measure co-educational support, researchers looked at family structure and the socio-economic status of families to gauge what support was given to the child and the educators. Pogoloff (2004) found that non-intact families and less-educated parents risk having low-achiever adolescents.

Pogoloff's findings prove that adolescents from non-intact families obtain lower grades because their parents are less likely to provide warmth, supervision and affective support, the latter being defined in terms of behaviours such as encouraging, praising, discussing course selection and attending school activities in which the adolescent is involved. Involving parents of poor achievers may prove especially challenging since parents tend to stay away from their child's school if they feel they will be blamed for their child's wrongdoing.

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter presented contrasting views of the notion that the socio-economic status of the parents determined the level of supportive parental involvement that educators may receive. As was evident from the literature, the level of interest that parents showed in their children's education seemed a more appropriate factor to determine the level of parental involvement expected by the educators. In Chapter Three, the design of an instrument capable of measuring the nature and levels of parental involvement, juxtaposed against the expectations of educators, will be examined.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Chapter Two presented contrasting views of the notion that the socio-economic status of the parents determined the level of supportive parental involvement that educators may receive. As was evident from the literature, the level of interest that parents showed in their children's education seemed a more appropriate factor to determine the level of parental involvement expected by the educators. In this chapter, the design of an instrument capable of measuring the nature and levels of parental involvement, juxtaposed to the expectations of educators, is examined.

3.2 Formulation of the instrument

The design of the instrument best suited for this research was dictated by the primary purpose of the study which was to discover what the educators expect from their parent bodies and to find out how, if at all, parents contribute to the school. To achieve this, a questionnaire was used with both closed questions and questions which elicited open/written responses. This measuring instrument design allowed objective selections from lists and more subjective responses in the way of written comments. Unlike research interviews, the research questionnaire were less likely to be influenced by bias and subjectivity, which may inadvertently be projected by the interviewer. Validity, reliability and ethical considerations were specifically addressed in the design of the instrument.

Data collected from the questionnaire addressed the following:

- *Educator needs*. That is, what the educator expects as the most basic and necessary involvement from the parents.
- *Educator wants*. That is, parental involvement that should be forthcoming in a healthy educator/parent relationship,
- *What Educators get*. That is, current involvement and support offered and given by parents.

3.3 The questionnaire

Investigating educator expectations implies giving the educators an opportunity to express their opinions. It was expected that the anonymity of the questionnaire would provide a non-threatening, unbiased and objective way for educators to express not only their 'needs' and 'wants', but also their satisfactions and their misgivings.

The questionnaire starts with an introductory letter which briefly and succinctly explains the reason for the survey and a request to complete the survey. The introduction is also worded in a way that it should appeal to the altruism of educators since it infers that it will, potentially, enhance education in South Africa. Further aid is given to the respondents in the form of brief instructions before every section of questions. The instructions explain how to complete each section and in Section A, the instructions also explain the numerical values representing the choice options of the scale that is used.

By their very nature, surveys are inherently regarded by most educators as a time consuming exercise. This researcher has personally experienced the sighs and expressions of dismay by educators in the staffroom when confronted with 'yet another survey' to complete. The layout of this instrument was therefore meticulously designed so that, in initial appearance, the questionnaire would not appear to be time consuming or laborious to complete. It was expected that starting the survey with multiple choice questions, it would convey the message that completion of the questionnaire would be accomplished quickly.

Section A contains fifteen questions which are specifically designed to allow the researcher to discover whether the expectations of the educators are met. Closed questions are used in this section and the questions are delimited to a 5-point Likert Scale. Respondents were to select only one option as an answer. The option choices are Strongly disagree, Disagree, Undecided, Agree and Strongly Agree. Albeit that a five point scale, with the option of 'undecided' is not the most desirable method to force the respondents to make a decision or to take a stance, it does remove the feeling of coercion and possible alienation at the start of the survey. In addition, it allows an option for the respondents to indicate that they just do not know.

The second section of the questionnaire, Section B, comprises two sub-sections of questions. This section deals with; communication, personal parent-educator meetings, general parent-educator conferences, school bodies in need of support, spheres in need of parental involvement and factors to encourage parental support. In the first sub-section, questions with multiple answer options are posed and in the second sub-section, questions to elicit the educators' opinions are posed. This is also a way in which the educators could express themselves in writing. Since the context of the questions posed in Section A focused their attention on the general topic, they now had a way to express their 'needs' and 'wants' by writing them down. These written responses showed the expectations that the educators from each school had and once all the responses were collated, it gave a good indication of the overall wants and needs of the educators. Additionally, it also highlighted areas where parental involvement may have become unacceptable to the point of being viewed as parental interference.

A pilot study was done to ensure that all possible ambiguities were removed from the questionnaire. I solicited the aid of seven fellow educators at a school not related to this research as respondents for the pilot study and to critique the questions. On their recommendations, two questions were modified to more accurately elicit responses that would answer the critical questions when posed to the research respondents. In general, the questionnaire was designed to appear easy to complete, easy to comprehend and the questions receptive of all possible answers.

3.3.1 Sample Frame

The sample frame is composed of educators from three primary schools in the Western Cape Peninsula. Two of the schools are Independent schools in the southern suburbs of Rondebosch and Newlands and the other school is a state-aided school in the Northern Suburbs. To ensure anonymity and for the purpose of identification, the Independent schools will be referred to as School A and School B and the state-aided school as School C. The 3 schools were sampled purposefully, since they offered me convenient access. A number of years ago, this researcher was fortunate enough to have taught at School A and upon his request to include the school as a research subject, he was given all possible assistance and access.

School B offered the researcher much the same courtesy and assistance since he is well known to the principal and senior educators, many of whom had previously studied with the researcher and taught with him. School C was chosen since the researcher is the parent of a learner at School C and he is well acquainted with the principal and deputy principal at the school.

3.3.2 Sampling Method

The participants in this study were selected through random sampling to ensure that the study was underpinned scientifically and the data that was collected would be as objective as possible. Every educator in the three schools had an equal chance of being included in the study. The three schools in the study were selected purposively. Each of the three schools has learners from Grade 1 to Grade 7. In some of the schools, there was a single teacher in the Grade. Hence no sampling was required and the teacher was automatically chosen to be part of the study. There were a maximum of three teachers per Grade in some of the schools. In instances where there was more than one teacher per grade in a school, the researcher put the names of the teachers in a box and chose one name. In all cases, the chosen respondents agreed to participate in the study. All the respondents (as indicated Table 1) agreed to participate in the study after they were informed of the study.

Table 1: Sampling Frame

| | SCHOOL A | SCHOOL B | SCHOOL C |
|---------|----------|----------|----------|
| GRADE 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| GRADE 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| GRADE 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| GRADE 4 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| GRADE 5 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| GRADE 6 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| GRADE 7 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| | 7 | 7 | 7 |

TOTAL RESPONSES: 21

PERCENTAGE RESPONSE RATE: 100%

3.4 Ethics

In acknowledging the admonition of Cohen *et al.* (2000:50), The researcher was obliged and ethically bound to balance this quest for knowledge and information with the rights of the educators who have graciously volunteered their answers and comments. Achievement of this balance is discussed in this section.

3.4.1 Permission

First and foremost, permission to conduct the survey was sought from the relevant authoritative bodies. Schools A and B are Independent schools and the researcher requested permission from the principals to conduct the survey. Contact was initiated verbally, by telephoning the principals and followed up with e-mails to explain the nature of the study more clearly. Tentative permission was then granted by both principals and the researcher was invited to meet in person with the principals.

School C, a state-aided school, falls under the Western Cape Education Department and the researcher had to apply to the school principal and the Director of Education for permission to conduct the survey. The school principal indicated that permission should be obtained from the WCED. The supervisor of this dissertation managed to secure permission for the researcher to conduct the survey in the WCED school.

3.4.2 Confidentiality

The questionnaire that was sent to the schools was designed so that when completed, it would not reveal any biographical data or identifying information about the educators; nor information about the schools that were sampled. This was a deliberate consideration to ensure anonymity and because biographical data was not relevant to the study. The completed questionnaires were immediately sealed in folders to ensure confidentiality and the perusal and data capturing was done in the strictest confidence, away from the schools.

Cohen *et al.* (2000:50) state that the essence of ethics within research is for researchers to balance the importance of the information with the rights of those to be interviewed. The design of the survey questionnaire granted the respondents complete anonymity and precluded any individual being exposed for divulging sensitive information or expressing an unpopular opinion.

Any perceivable risk to the respondents was nullified by the following factors:

- The introductory letter clearly requested that no identifiable markings, names or grades be written on the completed instruments.
- The names of the schools will not be disclosed.
- The instruments do not allow space for any personal details to be entered.
- Confidentiality and anonymity will be rigorously observed.

3.4.3 Informed consent

Informed consent, as noted by Cohen *et al.* (2000:51) is central to the ethical consideration of a survey. Four aspects need to be addressed before a survey is conducted:

Competence: The respondents are professional educators and thus were seen to be competent to complete the survey. In addition, the researcher met with the principals in advance of the survey date to explain the background of the study, introduce the type of instrument to be used and through questions and answers, allay any uncertainties that may surround a survey being conducted at the school.

The interpretation of questions is always a factor to consider, even in a homogenous group of educators. To this end, questions were reworked in the pilot study to exclude ambiguity or wayward interpretation. Concise explanatory notes on the questionnaire catered for any unforeseen difficulties since the absence of the researcher's personal attendance was maintained while the survey was conducted to exclude bias.

Voluntarism: Participation in this survey was completely voluntary and this was stressed in the introductory letters to the school principals and in the letters to the educators who completed the survey. All the respondents are adults and chose to participate on their own volition.

Full information: All the respondents, which included educators from Schools A, B and C were informed of the reasons why the data was requested and how the results would be applied. This information was communicated to the respondents by the principal and by the researcher, via the introductory letter. The researcher also supplied contact details to all the respondents to contact him, should the need arise for more information to be supplied regarding the survey.

The Western Cape Education Department also demanded full information regarding the survey and was supplied with all the answers, explanations and documentation for the following criteria:

- Concise description of the research project.
- Provision of copies of the questionnaire.
- A letter from my supervisor stating that I am registered at a tertiary institution.
- The names of the departmental institution (school) where the research will be conducted.
- Who the respondents will be.
- The period during which the research will be conducted.
- A completed Research Application form.

Comprehension: Considering the sample group, the instrument is constructed in a simplistic format with brief explication headings before each of the sections to be completed. No technical terms or acronyms which are not part of the general vocabulary of educators were used.

3.5 Reliability

Reliability is the extent to which an instrument is consistently measuring whatever it measures (Mulder, 1982:209). Reliability measures the accuracy of the research. To test the reliability of the questionnaire, another researcher, using the same instrument, and working within the same parameters should conduct the survey with a similar response group, at the same time (Blaxter *et al.*1996:200). The results obtained from these two surveys, when analysed, should reflect similar results to indicate that the questionnaire is reliable. Peculiar to this particular survey, reliability was tested since three schools sampled, allowed for comparison between the three samples. In addition, all attempts have been made to exclude bias, ambiguity and unethical issues which could adversely affect the results.

3.6 Validity

Validity refers to the extent to which an instrument measures what it is intending to measure (Mulder, 1982:215). In this study the validity of the questionnaire was tested, checked and amended in a pilot study before the questionnaires were used for data collection.

To discover whether the researcher has actually measured that which it was designed to measure will be revealed during analysis of the completed survey instruments. All possible care and consideration was given to the designing of the instrument to ensure that pertinent, accurate and relevant data would be obtained to contest or support the arguments set out in the literature review.

The use of a questionnaire as a survey method was carefully chosen so as to offset many possible obstacles that often occur when alternative methods, such as interviews are used. Validity is maximised when bias is minimised (Cohen *et al.*, 2000:121) Bias may include:

- Attitudes, opinions and expectations of the survey compiler, evident in the cover letter, instructions and question design.
- A tendency to view the respondent from a personal point of view.
- A tendency for the data analyst to seek responses supportive of preconceived views.
- Misperceptions and misinterpretations of written responses, especially when concepts are abbreviated.
- Respondents viewing questions as ambiguous, unintelligible or out of context.
- Race.
- Religious convictions.
- Social status.
- Social class.
- Age.
- Gender.
- Sexual orientation.

The questionnaire, as opposed to an interview, is less likely to allow bias, especially since the following criteria are applied using identical survey questionnaires:

- The same questions are used.
- the same wording is used.
- the questions are asked in the same order.

3.7 Timing of the questionnaire

A rule of thumb is to approach the school principals and request from them dates which would best suit the school and cause the least amount of interruption to their schedules. However, schools do operate under the protection of the Education Department and it is important to know that general research will be refused between the months of October and December since most schools would be preparing and finalizing syllabi for examinations.

The survey questionnaires were taken to the three schools on the same day and the principals promised to return the completed questionnaires within three days. This is most fortunate, since it places an urgency upon the respondents to complete the survey and lessens the chances of possible liaisons between educators that may discuss completed surveys with educators from the other surveyed schools.

3.8 Data analysis

Accurate data analysis depends on the meticulousness and accuracy of the contributory steps which started with the definition of the research questions to the development of a design structure. Between these extremes lie the development and implementation phases of the sampling plan and the conceptualization of the measuring instrument.

To arrive at an accurate, testable hypothesis, the data was organised and accurately represented. Firstly, the data was checked and captured on computer using software that allowed fluent integration with other data entered. This allowed for easy analysis and interpretation. Quantitative analysis of the data, with descriptive statistics was the next step in the analysis process. Data needed to be clearly labelled and described to allow interpretation by all interested parties. To aid and illustrate this interpretation, graphs were used. The graphs were augmented by labelling statistics which became evident once all the data had been reviewed against the research questions. Since the Lickert scale was used in the survey instrument, graphic representation of the results were plotted on a dotplot and a bargraph.

An excel data-analysis template was used to capture every single response. This was initially categorised under the names of the schools and then combined to give an overall interpretation of the data. The spreadsheet formulae catered for the delimited responses to questions posed in Section A to be entered into a grid representing the question number in the x-axis with the response on the y-axis. Each school's responses were kept separate and entered in isolation to prevent cross-contamination of the data. The written responses from Section B was captured, listed and then grouped under topic headings. The topics were self-generating, i.e., the topics were derived from repetitively mentioned concepts listed by the respondents. For example; 80% of the respondents at one of the schools listed fundraising as a priority. Fundraising thus became the heading/topic under which all aspects of fundraising were listed.

3.9 Conclusion

The research design was structured in such a manner as to produce significantly accurate data which was used to answer the research questions. Careful consideration was given to validity, reliability and ethical issues. Complete objectivity is a tall order, but every attempt was made to eliminate data corruption, bias or slanted data analysis. The data interpretation is examined in Chapter four.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this study is to examine educator expectations of parental involvement in three Western Cape Peninsula schools. In addition to looking at the overall responses of the educators who contributed to the study, it was of interest to discover if there were any significant differences between the responses of the two independent schools and the state aided school. This chapter will present the results and analysis of the data.

The study allowed the use of a questionnaire that included both closed questions and questions which elicited open/written responses. An informative introductory letter, requesting the respondents to complete the survey introduced the questionnaire to the respondents. Each section of the questionnaire was headed by succinct instructions on how to complete the questions. The first part of the questionnaire catered for objective selections from lists. Capturing of this data was done on a spreadsheet which allowed for uncomplicated analysis. The second part of the questionnaire, with more subjective responses in the way of written comments, allowed for more wide-ranging and personal responses. This was an opportunity for educators to express their opinions protected by anonymity. Tabular representations of responses are used in this chapter to clarify the responses and the weighting assigned to the options.

4.2 Section A of the questionnaire

This section contained fifteen questions, giving the respondents the opportunity to indicate: the level of parental support in various areas of school governance, avenues of communication and parental interest in school matters. Closed questions were used in this section and the questions were delimited to a 5-point Likert Scale. Respondents selected only one option as an answer. The option choices were: Strongly disagree, Disagree, Undecided, Agree and Strongly Agree. The option of 'undecided' was included to provide the respondents an opportunity to indicate that they did not have an answer to the question. Respondent answers are indicated in the tables below and a graph (figure 2, p.88) was used as a way to represent the answers to questions 1 to 15 simultaneously .

4.2.1 Educator–Parent forums

This question refers to the existence of forums where educators and parents meet together. Forums may include meetings to disseminate information, discussion workshops and Question & Answer sessions, Annual General Meetings of the Management Council, Parent/Teacher association or organisation, sub-committee meetings or grade meetings. Such meetings may be social in nature, for example, a *braai* at school in the first term where parents are encouraged to acquaint themselves with one another and the educator, or more structured with agendas that may be set by either the parents or the educators to discuss pertinent issues. The responses of all three schools are listed in Table 2, with a combined total score also given.

Table 2 Educator/Parent forums are held once a term

| Responses | School A | School B | School C | Total |
|-------------------|----------|----------|----------|-------|
| Strongly Disagree | 2 | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| Disagree | 2 | 1 | 0 | 3 |
| Undecided | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| Agree | 1 | 2 | 2 | 5 |
| Strongly Agree | 1 | 2 | 4 | 7 |

The results for this question are surprising in that it was expected that educators from all three schools would indicate agreeable responses. Indications in Table 2 are therefore that School C, the public school, held forums once a term, allowing parents to meet with the educators. The independent schools, School A and School B may have educator-parent forums, but these may not be as established as in School C and may be initiated only when specific issues arise to warrant such a meeting. Analysis of point 4.4.3 (Rate of PTA meetings) enforces the notion that School C seems to have more established educator-parent forums than Schools A and B.

4.2.2 Parental attendance of Educator–Parent forums

Question 2 seeks to establish whether parents support the parent-educator forums. A 50% support rate was given as a yardstick to aid the educators to more easily gauge the attendance percentage or rate of parents attending such forums. The responses of all three schools are listed in Table 3, with a combined total score also given.

Table 3 More than 50% of parents attend Educator–Parent forums (meetings)

| Responses | School A | School B | School C | Total |
|-------------------|----------|----------|----------|-------|
| Strongly Disagree | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| Disagree | 2 | 1 | 2 | 5 |
| Undecided | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| Agree | 3 | 1 | 3 | 7 |
| Strongly Agree | 0 | 3 | 1 | 4 |

The totals in Table 3 indicate that there is no consensus among the educators as to whether their educator/parent forums are well attended, that is, more than 50% of the parents attend the forums. Closer examination shows that educators from School B and School C are in agreement with the statement, but that the respondents of School C may not really know how well their parent/educator forums are attended. Results for this question therefore remain inconclusive if all the responses are added together. It has not been unequivocally established that the forums are either well supported or not.

4.2.3 Parent Teacher Association (P.T.A.) vacancies

This question sought to gauge the educators' perceptions of the vacancy rate of their Parent Teacher Association. The significance of the educators' responses must be viewed in the light of what P.T.A.'s (Parent Teacher Associations) represent to the educators. A brief glimpse into the background of this organisation shows that P.T.A.'s were traditionally non-statutory bodies that primarily served as 'socialisation' bodies to bridge the gap between parents and educators. This body comprised volunteer parents who served without recompense, for the sole benefit of the school.

In many schools, the P.T.A.'s functioned in a similar vein to the current School Governing Bodies (S.G.B.'s) but without legislated authority. P.T.A.'s served the schools in a range of diverse enterprises, crucial to the sound functioning of the schools. The inception of School Governing Bodies made the P.T.A.'s redundant, but most schools retained their P.T.A.'s because of the essential services their members rendered to the schools. Rather than dissolving their P.T.A.'s, schools that have retained this institution have indeed empowered their P.T.A.'s by including their representation on the School Governing Bodies.

Many educators surreptitiously view the vacancy rate on a school's Parent Teacher Association as an unofficial yardstick indicative of the condition of the school's governance. Responses to this question not only indicates the level of parental involvement in the three P.T.A.'s but also allows a glimpse into how the educators rate their own school's governance. Consensus among colleagues and other parents are that a well governed school, where excellence is the standard, no PTA vacancies should exist. In truth, the P.T.A.'s at schools that are viewed by parents and educators as 'excellent' schools often have P.T.A. sub-committees managed so excellently that, although tasked with critical issues, they function virtually autonomously of the P.T.A.'s. This is unfortunately the exception to the rule as not many schools enjoy the governance or a parent body from which highly skilled parents can be sourced in aid and support of the school. Now, more than ever, parents are not averse to serving on the PTA committees, since this gives them a presence and a sense of real involvement in their children's formal education. Table 4 indicates the numerical values regarding the question of P.T.A. support, as seen by the educators.

Table 4 All positions on the Parent Teacher Association are filled

| Responses | School A | School B | School C | Total |
|-------------------|----------|----------|----------|-------|
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Disagree | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Undecided | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Agree | 3 | 2 | 3 | 8 |
| Strongly Agree | 4 | 5 | 3 | 12 |

A brief glance at the total results in Table 4 immediately indicates that the educators of all three schools are very much informed about the status of their P.T.A.'s. This is a very positive state of affairs for all three schools since the P.T.A.'s represent the essence of educator/parent interactions and parental support for the schools. The fact that all positions on the P.T.A.'s of all three schools are filled show that the parents themselves are supportive of the schools and enough parents are willing to voluntarily offer their time to serve on the P.T.A.'s. The results show that all three schools enjoy healthy parental support.

4.2.4 Parents as class representatives

This question deals with direct parental support of the educator. Class representatives are parents who usually do not serve on any other school committees or bodies and who wish to aid the educators on a more personal level. Tasks performed by the class representative may include the organisation of parent volunteers to transport learners to class outings, helping the educator in the preparations and practices for school or class shows or helping the educator with non-academic administration work. Class representatives are not remunerated for their services, but reciprocal compensation is made when tasks involve financial expenditure.

Parental commitment to the position of class representatives is therefore a reasonable indicator of parental support that the educators may be receiving from the parents of learners in their classes. It is not without shortcomings since many very committed and supportive parents who would love to aid the educators may be working full time and would therefore not be available to help the educator during normal office hours. Table 5 reflects the responses by the educators regarding the question of class representatives.

Table 5 Parents are keen to offer their services as class representatives

| Responses | School A | School B | School C | Total |
|-------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Disagree | 1 | 1 | 2 | 4 |
| Undecided | 1 | 1 | 2 | 4 |
| Agree | 4 | 2 | 1 | 7 |
| Strongly Agree | 1 | 3 | 1 | 5 |

As noted above, the position of class representative is mostly an unenviable one since parents are often saddled with huge responsibilities for which they are held accountable, but for which they are not remunerated. Thus said, results for this question, as reflected in Table 5, conveys the notion that parents are indeed positive about offering their services as class representatives. Upon closer inspection of the results of the individual schools, it is clear that parents may perhaps not be clamouring for the position, but they do support it. All three schools should be delighted with this state of affairs since, as with the positive results of question 3, the schools enjoy very good parental support.

4.2.5 Parents' support of school fundraising drives

Parents are obliged to pay their school fees. A quorum of the management council, in consultation with the finance committee, determines the monetary value of the school fees and the parents show their acceptance of the calculated school fees by a majority vote at the annual general meeting of the Management Council. This is the legislated and democratic practice employed by all schools, even independent schools, which are not restricted by legislation regarding the determination of school fees. Schools in lower socio-economic environments would correspondingly have lower school fees in comparison to schools in the higher socio-economic suburbs. To augment financial shortfalls, schools often arrange fundraising drives. This represents one of many possible ways open to schools where parents are able to aid the schools without carrying a personal financial burden. Parents may for example help at a cake sale or marshal at a sponsored cycle race. In Table 6, the survey responses with the majority of answers in the cells marked Agree or Strongly Agree would show that educators are happy with the general support given by parents.

Table 6 Parents support school fundraising drives

| Responses | School A | School B | School C | Total |
|-------------------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Disagree | 1 | 0 | 2 | 3 |
| Undecided | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| Agree | 4 | 3 | 3 | 10 |
| Strongly Agree | 2 | 4 | 0 | 6 |

The most significant and surprising information drawn from Table 6 is that the independent schools, School A and School B, which have significantly higher school fees in comparison to School C, a public school, have a significantly higher rate of parent support at fundraising drives. This is surprising in that public schools often rely on money from their fundraising drives to augment income shortfalls of parents who default on their school fee payments. It is therefore expected that fundraising drives at state-aided schools would be well supported by the parents. From the results, this is not the case. On the other hand, it is rare for independent schools to encounter school fee defaulters, since parents who send their children to independent schools are financially able to do so, yet it is the independent schools who have the highest parental support for their fundraising drives.

The perceived discrepancy between the independent schools and the public school, as noted above, calls for further investigation. With this in mind, point 4.5 of this chapter deals with areas where educators would like to see more parental support and it is interesting to note that the educators of all three schools rated the need for parental support at school fundraising drives as very high.

4.2.6 Parents' pride in the school

Whether parents show pride in the school or not is based solely on the perceptions of the educators and every educator would weigh this question up against their unique experiences and personal perceptions of how the parents view the school. This is not a quantifiable measure of parental support and pride of the school, but will allow some conclusions to be drawn about how parents feel about the school their children attend. Educator perceptions are noted in Table 7.

Table 7 Parents generally show pride in the school

| Responses | School A | School B | School C | Total |
|-------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Disagree | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Undecided | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| Agree | 3 | 2 | 4 | 9 |
| Strongly Agree | 4 | 5 | 0 | 9 |

Table 7 shows that educators from all three schools have overwhelmingly indicated that they perceive their parent body as being proud of their schools. This is an enviable position for a school to be in and it is most certainly an asset that the school management could capitalise on. There is a marginal difference between the independent schools and the state-aided school and it is to be expected. The independent schools have parent bodies that have specifically selected the schools and so will show pride in the school that enjoys their support, whereas the public school takes learners from a feeder area with set boundaries and learners attend the school by default and not necessarily due to the parents' selection.

4.2.7 Keeping parents abreast of education methodology

This is one of the most important reasons to ensure good communication exists between the school and the parent body at large. It also proves the school's commitment to create an atmosphere of inclusiveness (of parents) in the matters pertaining to the education curriculum. In addition, it serves to promote transparency and to allow parents access to educational policies and documented concepts that would not normally be accessible to them. Parents who are closely involved with their children's formal education will feel informed, empowered and less inhibited to address educational issues at parent-educator forums. Table 8 reflects the views of educators as to how well they think their parents are informed.

Table 8 Parents are kept abreast of current education (teaching) methodology

| Responses | School A | School B | School C | Total |
|-------------------|----------|----------|----------|-------|
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Disagree | 1 | 2 | 1 | 4 |
| Undecided | 2 | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| Agree | 2 | 2 | 4 | 8 |
| Strongly Agree | 2 | 2 | 1 | 5 |

On average, the surveyed schools are keeping their parents abreast of education methodology, as indicated in Table 8. There is room for improvement as some disagreement exists with four educators who have indicated that the parents are not being kept abreast of current education methodology.

4.2.8 Timetable slots for parent/teacher interviews

Schools committed to promote good parent-educator relations will allow as much access to the educators as time would allow. The inclusion of parent-educator interview slots in the timetable is one way of creating an opportunity for parents and educators to meet so that they may discuss educational issues, express concerns or praise performance of learners, face-to-face. There may very well be parents who, due to work commitments, are not able to attend such sessions during office hours. Alternative arrangements can always be made to accommodate such parents at times more suited to them. Table 9 indicates how the respondents viewed the availability of timetabled slots for interviews.

Table 9 Timetable slots exist for parent/teacher interviews during the day

| Responses | School A | School B | School C | Total |
|-------------------|----------|----------|----------|-------|
| Strongly Disagree | 1 | 2 | 3 | 6 |
| Disagree | 1 | 1 | 2 | 4 |
| Undecided | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| Agree | 1 | 3 | 1 | 5 |
| Strongly Agree | 3 | 0 | 1 | 4 |

The total responses, as reflected in Table 9, suggests that the educators have rather different views of whether timetable slots exist for parent/teacher interviews or not. This does not negate the question, but rather begs further questioning into the practicality of parent/educator interviews during the day, office hours for most parents. School C is the only school which clearly indicates that the educators do not feel that adequate time is made available to allow for parent/educator interviews during the day.

4.2.9 Parents' support of school sport meetings

Parental support at school sport meetings and matches is a good indicator of parental involvement and support of the school since parental attendance at these meetings goes far beyond encouragements verbalised from the sidelines.

In the time the researcher served as a sub-committee member of the United Schools Sport Association of South Africa (USASA), he realised that many schools' sport administration was managed by volunteer parents. The parents liaised with schools in their regions, arranged sport meetings, organised the transport for school sport teams and even chaperoned individual learners at provincial level when the learner's own parents were not able to accompany the learner. This incredible commitment is borne out by the educators in Table 10.

Table 10 Parents support school sport meetings and matches

| Responses | School A | School B | School C | Total |
|-------------------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Disagree | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Undecided | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| Agree | 1 | 2 | 4 | 7 |
| Strongly Agree | 5 | 5 | 2 | 12 |

Educators of all three schools have overwhelmingly indicated that their learners' parents support school sport meetings and matches. The level of support was not measured or indicated in Table 10 but in point 4.5 of this chapter, educators do mention better parental attendance at school sport matches as one of the improvements they would like to see in their schools.

4.2.10 Communicating school matters to the parents

Regular newsletters keep parents up to date regarding school matters. It is also a way to reach out to the parents by keeping them informed and included in school-related matters. Printed media, as opposed to word-of-mouth has a number of advantages which include the following:

- It is a fairly inexpensive communication method which can be filed and referenced at any time.
- It eliminates the possibility of ambiguity or misunderstanding as may be the case when information is communicated verbally.
- Parents not able to attend informative meetings at school are kept informed by newsletters.

Often newsletters have reply slips attached which parents complete and return to school. Reply slips not only allow the school to provide a way for parents to communicate back, but also provide proof that the parents have read the newsletter. Schools that have a well organised administration system may even use the return rate of reply slips to gauge parental involvement. Parents who regularly do not respond to newsletters will be identified and proactive action by the school can then be initiated to contact the parents. Table 11 notes the responses of educators to the question of newsletters.

Table 11 Regular newsletters communicate school matters to the parents

| Responses | School A | School B | School C | Total |
|-------------------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Disagree | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Undecided | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Agree | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Strongly Agree | 6 | 7 | 6 | 19 |

Table 11 very clearly shows that all the educators surveyed, bar two, have indicated that regular newsletter do communicate school matters to the parents. Parent response to the newsletters is another question and this has been noted by educators who, in point 4.5, have indicated that a lack of action from parents regarding the newsletters needs to be addressed.

4.2.11 Communication routes to the principal

Uninhibited access to the school principal promotes a sense of association with the parents. This is important if schools wish to engage with their parent bodies, since many parents view principals as aloof and not normally available to communicate with them. Principals who practise an “open door policy” should ensure that parents have multiple communication routes available to them to contact the principal. The knowledge that the principal is accessible goes a long way to removing the traditional barriers between the school and the parents and gives parents a sense of inclusiveness. Methods of communication are increased on a regular basis due to advances in communication technology.

Current protocol would delimit methods of contact to: telephone calls, personal interviews, electronic mail, letters posted to the school principal, notes sent to the school principal via the learner and other opportunities, for example, an informal chat at a school sport meeting. Table 12 reflects the responses of the educators regarding communication routes to the principals.

Table 12 Parents have various routes of communication to gain access to the principal

| Responses | School A | School B | School C | Total |
|-------------------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Disagree | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Undecided | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| Agree | 1 | 2 | 3 | 6 |
| Strongly Agree | 5 | 5 | 3 | 13 |

Routes of communication to the principals are clearly not a problem as can be seen by the responses in Table 12. This is a sign that the principals of all three schools surveyed actually make themselves available to the parent body and that they do allow for different methods of contact.

4.2.12 Meddling parents

Involvement of parents in the school is essential to maintain a healthy relationship between the role players in the learner's education but it is fraught with pitfalls. Where school principals have established sound policies and set strict parameters to the limits of parental involvement, a healthy co-educational relationship is maintained between the educators and the parents. The opposite is also true for schools that do not have strong leadership and where "pushy" parents may very well dictate their perceived terms and conditions. It is well to remember that the principal is the person who is held accountable when problems arise, even if the origin of the problems is not his/her own doing. Table 13 reflect the responses of the educators who participated in the survey and the table may very well highlight areas where parental involvement may have become unacceptable to the point of being viewed as parental interference.

Table 13 Parents meddle too much in the general running of the school.

| Responses | School A | School B | School C | Total |
|-------------------|----------|----------|----------|-------|
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Disagree | 3 | 1 | 1 | 5 |
| Undecided | 3 | 2 | 3 | 8 |
| Agree | 1 | 2 | 2 | 5 |
| Strongly Agree | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 |

The resultant responses of Table 13 prove beyond doubt that all three school principals should be commended for their managerial acumen regarding parental involvement in their schools. The researcher's personal experience is that independent schools often find it a little more difficult to manage parental involvement since parents feel that they would like to be personally assured that they are 'getting their money's worth' when they pay rather substantial school fees and are then barred from entering classes during lesson times. It is not uncommon for independent school parents to come to their child's school at around 11h00 to 'see how their child is doing'. At an independent school where the researcher taught, this was a frequent occurrence. Some of the mothers would have free time after the morning's ritual of breakfast and gymnasium and arrive at school unannounced to visit their children in their classes. This is not often the case for public schools where both parents are usually at work during school hours.

4.2.13 Parent respect for staff professionalism

"My dad says all teachers are losers" is one comment the researcher will remember for a while yet. The comment was made by a learner attending a prominent independent school where the researcher taught. Unfortunately the true perceptions of parents regarding their views of the educators to whom they entrust the formal education of their children are not always so forthcoming and most often only uttered in heated interchanges when they have been called to the school due to gross misconduct by their child. Overall, parent/educator relationships are sound, as reflected in Table 14 and it is not the norm for parents to voice their opinions in front of the educators. However, what parents say at home is the most critical issue here.

The report in Chapter 2, specifically point 2.3.2 regarding parental attitudes and conduct, proves the impact upon the child/learner of parents' communicated attitudes and views of schools and education. Negative parental comments have a profound impact upon the learners' perception of the school and the educators.

Table 14 Parents respect the professionalism of the staff to educate their children

| Responses | School A | School B | School C | Total |
|-------------------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Disagree | 1 | 2 | 2 | 5 |
| Undecided | 1 | 1 | 3 | 5 |
| Agree | 5 | 3 | 2 | 10 |
| Strongly Agree | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |

There is a difference of opinion as can be seen by the results reflected in Table 14. Educators of the two independent schools, School A and School B are more in agreement with the statement that their professionalism is respected by the parents, compared to the perceptions of educators at the public school, School C. There are no overt reasons for this and within the confines of the question, a plausible answer is not readily forthcoming. Mutual respect between the educators and parents is one of the issues addressed under point 4.6 in this chapter.

4.2.14 Parent intolerance of vandalism

Vandalism is not a social affliction limited to any specific socio-economic group. Learners from independent schools are just as capable of vandalism of school property as learners from public schools. The researcher is able to testify to this as he has had to deal with 'little delinquents' at independent and public schools. Vandalism seems to be universally abhorrent to all parents as seen in the results in Table 15.

Table 15 Parents will not tolerate incidents of vandalism against the school

| Responses | School A | School B | School C | Total |
|-------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Disagree | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Undecided | 1 | 1 | 3 | 5 |
| Agree | 4 | 3 | 2 | 9 |
| Strongly Agree | 2 | 3 | 1 | 6 |

Table 15 indicates that educators do feel that parents are intolerant of vandalism against the school. Those educators who noted an 'undecided' option have either not been faced with such acts of vandalism and therefore do not have an opinion, or have found parents to be less than committed to support them when the culprit was caught.

4.2.15 Parent support for and defence of the school

Protection of schools is not a novel issue in South Africa. During the 1970s many of us were encouraged at youth rallies to set fire to our schools as they were perceived as subversive institutions of the ruling regime, while at other schools, armed parents organised themselves into *ad hoc* militia, working in shifts to patrol around the schools at night to discourage arsonists. In the context of this study, gangsterism is used in the broader term to include both the infamous Western Cape Peninsula Gangs who so often terrorise Cape Flats schools and the school gangs formed by learners to emulate the adult gangs in their areas. All three schools surveyed are situated in the higher socio-economic suburbs and it is not expected that the threat of gangsterism was a prevalent issue in the schools. However, no school is completely devoid of 'schoolyard gangs' and both educators and parents need to be prepared to defend the school as a whole, should such a gang become less benign.

Table 16 Parents readily rally to support or defend the school against gangsterism

| Responses | School A | School B | School C | Total |
|-------------------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Disagree | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Undecided | 2 | 0 | 3 | 5 |
| Agree | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Strongly Agree | 5 | 6 | 1 | 12 |

Table 16 shows a particularly strong response from the independent school educators who feel that the parents would indeed rally to support the schools against gangsterism. The educators at School C, the public school, do not disagree entirely, but the amount of responses under the option of 'undecided' suggests that the educators are not completely convinced that the parents would come to the aid of the school. This does not necessarily indicate apathy by the parents, but could be that the educators have not experienced the threat of gangsterism and therefore have no idea how the parents would react to such a threat.

4.3 Section B of the questionnaire

This section of the questionnaire is divided into two sub-sections. The questions were designed to provide a deeper insight into the issues of: bilateral communication, parent-educator meetings and conferences, school bodies, spheres of parental involvement and the encouragement of parental support. Multiple answer options are given to the respondents in the first sub-section and the second sub-section contains questions to draw out educator opinions. Providing a way for the educators to express themselves is essential since it adds depth to the options they selected. The written responses should allow a deeper insight into the needs and wants of the educators.

4.3.1 Methods of communication used by parents

The most important factor to ensure sound parent-educator is communication. This is borne out in the responses by all the educators. Specific references showing the importance of communication between educators and parents can be found under points 4.6.1, 4.6.2 and 4.6.3 where educators from all three schools have indicated that communication ranks as the first priority to improve parent involvement in the schools. Table 17 represents educator responses indicating the methods of communication used by parents in the three schools.

Table 17: Methods of communication used by parents

| Options | School A | School B | School C | Total |
|-----------------------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|
| Telephone | 7 | 7 | 7 | 21 |
| one to one interviews | 7 | 7 | 6 | 20 |
| e-mail | 6 | 7 | 1 | 14 |
| letters | 6 | 5 | 6 | 17 |
| homework book note | 6 | 7 | 6 | 19 |
| fax | 2 | 0 | 3 | 5 |

It is evident from Table 17 that the telephone remains the most common instrument of communication between educators and parents. Interviews, letters and notes in homework books are also avenues of communication used by all three schools.

Of significance is the fact that the public school, School C, lags far behind the independent schools, School A and School B, as far as using e-mails are concerned. This may very well be ascribed to the limited access both parents and educators have to electronic mail. Both School A and School B have sophisticated computer-aided teaching tools in the classrooms and educators at these schools enjoy uninterrupted internet connections.

This is not the case in the public school. At School C, educators have to book a time slot at the computers capable of connecting to the internet. Further to this, websites visited or e-mails sent must be logged in a register. Since educators are in reality only able to access these 'internet capable' computers during their break times, the educators do not view e-mailing as a predominant method of communication. Many parents associated with School C do not have access to computers capable of sending or receiving e-mail and therefore will also not view e-mail correspondence with the educators as pertinent.

4.3.2 Rate of parent-educator meetings

This question seeks to establish the amount of parent-educator meetings held per year at the schools surveyed. Schools that are committed to improve or encourage parent involvement may often seek first to improve the parent-educator relationships. The rate of parent-educator meetings is one method to improve communications and the schools that do offer many such meetings per year will certainly go a long way to improve parent involvement. Table 18 looks at how many such parent-educator meetings take place during the year.

Table 18: The rate of parent-educator meetings at the schools

| Options | School A | School B | School C | Total |
|---------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|
| Never | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Once a year | 5 | 1 | 0 | 6 |
| Twice a year | 1 | 4 | 0 | 5 |
| Three times a year | 0 | 1 | 3 | 4 |
| Four times per year | 1 | 0 | 3 | 4 |
| More than four times a year. | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| At educator or a parent request | 5 | 3 | 2 | 10 |

The significance of the answers offered by all three schools is that parent-educator meetings are scheduled and do take place. Judging from the responses, there seems to be some indecisiveness by educators who may view the statutory meetings of the Management Council and the PTA as separate from the one-on-one meetings with the parents. The significance of the results is that in all three schools, educators and parents are able to request meetings. In the promotion of parental involvement, this is of significance as parents and educators alike have the authority to arrange such meetings.

4.3.3 Rate of PTA meetings

The role and significance of PTAs was discussed in point 4.2.3 under the heading PTA vacancies. Since the PTAs are relied on to perform remarkable feats to support the educators, they should be allowed to meet uninhibited and as often as they wish. Table 19 shows the rate of such PTA meetings at the three schools that partook in this survey.

Table 19: The rate of PTA meetings at the schools

| Options | School A | School B | School C | Total |
|------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|-------|
| Never | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Once a year | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| Twice a year | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| Three times a year | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Four times per year | 1 | 2 | 1 | 4 |
| More than four times a year. | 1 | 0 | 4 | 5 |

Both the independent school results, School A and School B, are inconclusive since they are spread over all of the possible options given. No significant reason can be attributed to this anomaly since both schools do have most active PTA bodies with well established sub-committees that frequently meet with parents and educators. Educators representing School C, the public school, are assured that their PTA meetings are held more than four times a year.

4.3.4 School bodies in need of support

Under Section 21 of the South African Schools Act, 1996, schools which do not have the parent support to constitute a quorum in their Governing Body, will fall under the direct administration of the Department of Education. Identification of the school bodies and committees in need of parental support is therefore a key indication of existing parental involvement and support of the school. To ascertain which bodies and committees were most in need of parental support, educators were asked to indicate their choices by ticks next to the names of the bodies and committees listed in Table 20.

Table 20: School bodies and committees most in need of parental support

| Options | School A | School B | School C | Total |
|-------------------|----------|----------|----------|-------|
| Governing Body | 2 | 2 | 3 | 7 |
| PTA | 3 | 4 | 3 | 10 |
| Social Committees | 1 | 2 | 2 | 5 |
| Fundraising | 4 | 5 | 6 | 15 |
| Extra-curricular | 1 | 0 | 3 | 4 |
| Sport | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |

Table 20 shows fundraising as the school body or area where there is the greatest shortage of parental support. This is true for all three schools and the significance is that this sentiment is borne out by educator comments made in point 4.5 where the issue of fundraising enjoys rather significant response. The two most prominent areas of parental representation, namely the School Governing Body and the PTA are listed by the respondents as areas needing parental support. Since all three schools are functioning without vacancies in these bodies, it may be deduced that more parents should make themselves eligible for election to serve on these bodies.

4.4 Spheres of parental involvement

The question posed was: **In which spheres (areas) would you like to see supportive parental involvement?** Most educators wrote down single words only while a few wrote more explanatory phrases.

In the preliminary analysis of the responses, it became evident that the educators of all three schools noted similar areas of involvement that could be grouped under five major headings. Four definitive spheres or areas of involvement represented spheres where parents could be more involved in. A fifth sphere was included to cater for educators who were happy with the *status quo*, that is, they felt satisfied with the parental involvement the school enjoyed. To analyse the responses given to this question, the spheres of involvement were summarised and tabulated. From this table, the responses were assigned percentage values so that they could be listed hierarchically. This prioritised list has the added value in that it may be a tool for school principals wishing to address the shortcomings identified by the education staff.

4.4.1 Responses from School A, an independent school

The educators from School A offered twelve responses, listed in table 21. Since a total of twelve responses represent 100%, each individual response therefore carries a value of 8.33%.

Table 21:

Spheres/areas in need of parent support and involvement at School A.

| Major area | Specific sphere of involvement | Responses | % |
|-------------------------|---|-----------|-------|
| General involvement | Social involvement | 1 | 8.33 |
| | Parents must help with fundraising | 3 | 25 |
| Academic milieu | Parents must supervise and help learners with their homework | 2 | 16.66 |
| | Academic involvement | 1 | 8.33 |
| Extra-mural involvement | Supporting learners at sport matches | 2 | 16.66 |
| Morals & values | Parents must support educators to maintain discipline at school | 1 | 8.33 |
| <i>Status quo</i> | Level of parental involvement is good | 2 | 16.66 |
| TOTAL | | 12 | 100 |

Areas in order of importance according to Table 21:

| | |
|-------------------------|--------|
| General involvement | 33.33% |
| Academic milieu | 25.00% |
| Extra-mural involvement | 16.66% |
| <i>Status quo</i> | 16.66% |
| Morals & values | 08.33% |

School A, as can be deduced from Table 21, view fundraising and social involvement of parents as the highest priority areas in need of parental support. The academic milieu, which represents parents' supervision of homework and parents' academic involvement, is seen as a secondary issue. Support of educators regarding the maintenance of discipline at school is clearly also not an important issue. Consideration of these observations would suggest that this school may not have a discipline problem.

4.4.2 Responses from School B, an independent school

The educators from School B offered sixteen responses, listed in table 22. Since a total of sixteen responses represent 100%, each individual response therefore carries a value of 6.25%.

Table 22:

Spheres/areas in need of parent support and involvement at School B.

| Major area | Specific sphere of involvement | Responses | % |
|-------------------------|--|-----------|------|
| General involvement | Governing body, PTA & Committees | 4 | 25 |
| | Fundraising | 2 | 12.5 |
| Academic milieu | Supervise homework | 1 | 6.25 |
| | Academic involvement | 1 | 6.25 |
| | Read to children | 1 | 6.25 |
| Extra-mural involvement | Sport | 2 | 12.5 |
| Morals & values | Discipline | 2 | 12.5 |
| | Values | 1 | 6.25 |
| | Support educators & respect professionalism of educators | 1 | 6.25 |
| <i>Status quo</i> | Excellent parental involvement | 1 | 6.25 |
| TOTAL | | 16 | 100 |

Areas in order of importance according to Table 22:

| | |
|-------------------------|--------|
| General involvement | 37.50% |
| Morals & values | 25.00% |
| Academic milieu | 18.75% |
| Extra-mural involvement | 12.50% |
| <i>Status quo</i> | 16.66% |

There are many differences between Table 21 and Table 22. This is of significance since both schools, School A and School B are independent schools and it was initially expected that there would be very little difference between them. Fundraising again features prominently as does support for the school's management bodies. Discipline is one of the issues enjoying high priority at this school and with values and support and respect for educators as professionals, under the heading of Morals and Values, ranks second only to the general involvement noted.

4.4.3 Responses from School C, a public school

The educators from School C offered twenty-five responses, listed in table 23. Since a total of twenty-five responses represent 100%, each individual response therefore carries a value of 4%.

School C clearly needs parental support in the disciplining of learners at the school. Under the heading Morals and Values the educators included support of educators in disciplinary matters, the teaching of discipline and social skills at home and the encouragement of learners to excel. Support and supervision of the learners' homework is another area where parental support is seen to be lacking.

Table 23: Spheres/areas in need of parent support and involvement at School C

| Major area | Specific sphere of involvement | Responses | % |
|-------------------------|---|-----------|------------|
| General involvement | Attend meetings, functions & events | 1 | 4 |
| | Fundraising & Ticket sales | 1 | 4 |
| | Read & react on letters from school | 1 | 4 |
| | Classroom administration tasks | 2 | 8 |
| Academic milieu | Supervise homework | 4 | 16 |
| | Support child at home with reading & numeracy | 1 | 4 |
| | Collaborate with educators | 1 | 4 |
| | Help with classroom supervision | 1 | 4 |
| Extra-mural involvement | Parents must help with transport | 1 | 4 |
| | Attending matches | 2 | 8 |
| | Sport coaching | 1 | 4 |
| Morals & values | Support educators in disciplinary matters | 4 | 16 |
| | Teach discipline & social skills at home | 4 | 16 |
| | Encouragement learner excellence | 1 | 4 |
| <i>Status quo</i> | | 0 | 0 |
| TOTAL | | 25 | 100 |

Areas in order of importance according to Table 23:

| | |
|-------------------------|-----|
| Morals & values | 36% |
| Academic milieu | 28% |
| Extra-mural involvement | 16% |
| General involvement | 12% |
| Status quo | 0% |

4.5 Five factors to improve parent support

In this sub-section, responses have not been reduced to totals or percentages. To ensure the transcribed responses remained as untainted as possible, the educators' penned notes were transcribed under the headings of the schools from which the responses came.

Where educators emulated the same issues, only one was retained but was moved up the list to show its importance in the school. This allowed a greater variation of issues to be listed and weighted them by noting the most important issues first and the least important issues last in the lists. It is to be noted that the words, phrases or sentences written down by the educators have largely remained unedited and may appear linguistically incorrect.

4.5.1 Responses from School A, an independent school:

Communicate and meet regularly with parents

Open various communication channels between parents and school

Allow time-slots for regular parent/educator discussion of learner progress

Host regular school/family activity (Parent/school Teambuilding events)

School management to "market" role of school to gain parent apathy

Ensure school's 'open door' policy is maintained.

School should appoint only excellent people at top management level

School should more often inform parents of positive learner behaviour

School should openly communicate its needs

Regularly display and praise learners' work for parents to view

Market school by informing parents of quality service the school provides

Educators to be professional

As was noted in the introductory paragraph of this section, point 4.6, the issues noted in point 4.6.1 are arranged in order of importance. It is therefore notable that regular parent-educator communication enjoys support from the majority of educators surveyed. In itself, the remediation of this shortfall lies with the school principal and the school management to provide for the improvement of bi-lateral communication. Further to this, parent-educator cooperation, although stated differently by the educators, is reiterated by almost all the respondents. These two areas of concern should be addressed by the school principal to improve parental support and to prevent parents and educators from feeling alienated from each other.

4.5.2 Responses from School B, an independent school:

Communication

Mutual collaboration with parents

More parent / educator interaction

Staff training to include parents – promote inclusiveness

Consider parental suggestions

Maintain mutual parent/educator respect

School management outreach programmes to parents

Encourage parents to supporting school discipline

Provide parent information sessions on

Current education methodology

Current curriculum

Study methods

time management

homework support

Discipline at home

Good parenting skills

Encourage parents to attend:

School meetings

Sport matches

Social events

Fund raising events

Acknowledge & show appreciation for parent support

Using parent expertise

The responses from School B are in line with School A in that the educators also list communication and mutual collaboration with the parents as the most important factors to promote parental support for the school. The inclusion of the parent information sessions and the encouragement of parents to attend various school events showed one educator's honest personal analysis of the school's situation and to list the issues so succinctly suggests that this educator may very well be examining these issues, separate from this study.

4.5.3 Responses from School C, a public school:

Ensure regular communication & meetings between school & home

Encourage parents to attend:

Formal & informal meetings

One-on-one consultation meetings

Provide regular parental guidance sessions with topics such as

Learner motivation

Money can't buy love

Supporting and showing interest in child's academic performance

How to maintain good discipline at home

Taking responsibility for your child's behaviour

Teaching good manners

Promote mutual trust between educators and parents

Make parents feel more involved – make use of parent skills

Encourage parental involvement in their child's education

Encourage parents to have positive attitude towards educators

Provide more educator/parent/learner activities

Promote mutual parent/educator collaboration

Regularly communicate positive aspects

Ensure School policies are well defined and strictly adhered to

Drastically increase school fees to ensure parents show interest in their investment

Keep parents abreast of changes in the curriculum and general school matters

In line with the responses from School A and School B, educators at school C also see communication as paramount to promote parental support for the school. Mutual collaboration with the parents does not feature as prominently in School C as it does with the two independent schools, but it still ranks high in importance. At this school, a number of educators noted lists of ideas under the heading of parental guidance sessions. This seemed rather unique and upon enquiry the researcher was informed by the principal that this school has actively engaged the question of fostering closer relations with their parent body and that the responses offered by the educators would most probably closely resemble the issues that came to light in the staff workshops. The notion that there are public schools which are actively engaged in promoting good parent-educator relations is encouraging and exemplary of why some schools are more successful at addressing the issue of parental support of the schools.

4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter the educator expectations of parental involvement in three Western Cape Peninsula schools were examined. Educators indicated their perceptions of issues surrounding parental support in various areas of school governance, avenues of communication and parental interest in school matters in the first section of the questionnaire.

In the second section the educators provided through their written comments, a deeper insight into the issues of bilateral communication, parent-educator meetings and parental involvement in the schools. It was encouraging to note the enthusiasm of educators who responded with very appropriate and informative suggestions and comments. It was also interesting to note that very little differences of opinion existed between the educators of the independent schools and the educators of the public school.

Analysis of the responses revealed that the research design produced significantly accurate data. This data was interpreted and analysed and allowed preliminary conclusions to be made. Where educators offered their written contributions and opinions, all attempts were made to remain completely objective. To eliminate data corruption, bias or slanted data analysis, responses were copy-typed as they appeared on the raw data sheets with little or no linguistic corrections made. Examination and interpretation of the data was concluded in this chapter and Chapter Five will now offer the conclusions, recommendations and suggestions for further study.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This study was initiated due to the dissatisfactions expressed by educators regarding a lack of support and involvement of the learners' parents in their schools. The literature study supports the notion that there are indeed many schools that have very little positive parental involvement. The findings put forward in this chapter do not negate this notion, but rather offers a different perspective of it.

The information was gleaned from three schools that are situated in the higher socio-economic suburbs of the Western Cape Peninsula and have parent bodies that are thought to be supportive of the schools and the educators. Consideration must be given to the fact that the three schools are not intended to be representative of all Western Cape Peninsula schools and this should not detract the importance of findings and conclusions drawn from the study. The answers given in the survey questionnaire suggest that the three schools were indeed well supported by their parents and that where there were problems, the educators had pro-actively identified the shortcomings and implemented plans to remediate them.

Mutual support between all the role players involved in the education of our children, as well as open and informative channels of communication was listed by the respondents as the most important factors to promote a positive educational environment for the learners.

5.2 Findings and conclusions

The subheadings for the findings and conclusions were dictated by the responses given by the educators. The open questions allowed the educators to express their unbounded concerns, satisfactions and suggestions within the realm of parental contributions and support. This allowed the responses to be grouped under the headings in this section.

In contrast to the dictated headings, Ferrara & Ferrara (2005) classify parental involvement under the following six headings: Parenting; where the school is charged with aiding families to establish home environments to support children as students. Communicating; where the school should design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress. Volunteering; where the school should recruit and organize parent help and support. Learning at home; where the school should provide information and ideas to families about how to help learners at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities. Decision making; where the school should include parents in school decisions, to develop the parents as leaders and representatives. Community collaboration; where the school should identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices and learners' education and development.

Ferrara & Ferrara's (2005) classification is a reasonably accurate guide to positive parental involvement and support of the learner's education but a fair number of South African educators may very well express greater emphasis to be placed upon the creation and maintenance of a home environment that provides the child with basic survival needs such as sustenance, personal safety and a warm bed to sleep in. Further to this, the educator responses to the open questions in the survey questionnaire were unpredictable and predetermined headings, as put forward by Ferrara & Ferrara, could not be used. Attempts to make the results fit predetermined headings would have skewed the findings and presented incorrect conclusions. By implementing an evolving or natural classification method, conclusions to the educators' perceptions can be more honestly presented.

5.2.1 Parental involvement in the academic (educational) milieu

Barker and Stevenson (1986:157) clearly states that parents must know the expectations of the school and comprehend their children's achievement of the school's expectations. Evidently, the respondent educators recognised the importance of parental involvement in the academic milieu of their schools. Interpretation of the data clearly shows that they not only comprehend the importance of this, but that all the educators support it wholly.

Specific findings are noted under point 4.2.7 of this dissertation where mention is also made of educators who suggest that even more should be done to inform parents of current educational trends and involve the parents more comprehensively in the schools' academic environment. A supportive argument is given by Cherian (1992:10) who noted that the learners of parents who support them by showing interest in their school progress tend to perform better in their school work than those whose parents are less supportive and interested in their school work. Involving parents in the academic milieu does not imply that they are expected to follow the learning areas curriculum with their children, but rather that the parents are kept abreast of the broader aspects of the curriculum and general education methodology.

In schools where established channels of communication exist, parents are informed and empowered. Ensuring that the parents are informed confirms the school's commitment to create an atmosphere of including the parents and it also allows the parents to be more closely involved with their children's formal education. The education curriculum should not be a mysterious document that is inexplicably changed ever so often when the media reports poor matric results. The curriculum should be made available for discussion at parent-educator meetings and its interpretation by the educators and the school should be understood by all the parents. A definitive conclusion from the educator responses is that parents who are given access to educational policies and curriculum changes view the school as their partners in the education of their children. This belief is supported in the schools surveyed since the respondents from all three schools indicated that they keep their parents abreast of educational matters.

Chetty (1985) states that a high degree of parental interest, expectations and educational influence is fundamentally important to pupils' scholastic achievement. This statement is in complete agreement with the findings of the survey questionnaire. Parent involvement in the academic environment of the school, although stated differently by the educators, is reiterated by almost all the respondents. Where shortfalls exist, or where parents feel uninformed or uninvolved, it would be the duty of the school principal to address this issue quickly and definitively since parents who do not comprehend what the school is doing for their children will quickly feel alienated and confused. This will have dire consequences for schools wishing to improve their educator-parent relationships.

5.2.2 Parental involvement in the home milieu

Under the banner of collaborative education, parental involvement in the setting of the home environment may not be quantifiable, but the level of involvement and the quality of involvement becomes evident when issues such as homework supervision, motivation of the learners and casual supportive remarks are made. Support of this finding is given in the literature by Hewison and Tizard (1980:209-215) who state that pupils have advantages when their parents are involved and encourage them in their school work. Within the limitations of this study, educators' perceptions of parental involvement at home was based, in part, upon their perceptions of the level support the school receives and the rate of volunteer work being done for the school by the parents. Even though the perceptions of the educators may not reflect the actual home scenarios of the learners, educators from all three schools overwhelmingly indicated that they perceive their parent bodies as being proud and supportive of their schools.

The respondent Educators indicated that, in general, parent/educator relationships are sound since the parents' attitudes and conduct proves this to the educators. Parental involvement in the home environment cannot be underestimated. The impact of a parent's communicated attitudes and views of the learner's educator and the work assigned to the learner to complete at home, has a profound effect on the learner's view of the educator and, as substantiated by Cherian (1991:138), parental support of the educator is given when parental interest in the learner's education leads to offers of help to learners who bring home school work. Findings based on the analysis of point 4.2.13 show that the independent schools agree that their professionalism is respected by the parents. This is not the case for the public school. Specifics as to why a discrepancy exists between the schools is not forthcoming from the responses given by the educators.

5.2.3 Communication as a promoter of parental involvement

Bi-lateral, parent/educator communication is unquestioningly the issue that enjoys the most support and attention from the respondents. Communication takes many guises and ranges from personalised parent-educator interviews to whole-school meetings where parents are swallowed up by the anonymity of the attendees. The issue of maintaining routes of good communication is of such importance to educators that suggestions were offered of how to improve communication and also how to remediate deteriorating communications where it exists.

Parent/educator communication cannot be reduced to casual chats when educators and parents happen to meet one another. Creating regular, acceptable and sustainable routes of communication is ultimately the role of the school principal. To maintain orderly routes of communication, a policy statement should be drawn up and the school should include in this policy aspects governing the use of communication devices, acceptable content of such communication and times of communication. While educators and parents have many forms of communication available to them, the survey responses show that the telephone remains the most common instrument of communication between the educators and the parents. Sophisticated forms of communication exist today that allows for verbal communication and video streaming over the internet. Concepts like Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) and video over internet protocol makes telephone conferencing and even video conferencing possible at the fraction of the cost of using a landline telephone.

Unfortunately these tools are not readily accessible to all schools. The findings of this study show that the public school lags behind as far as the use of electronic media is concerned. Even the use of instant messaging and e-mailing is severely restricted. In contrast to the public school, both the independent schools have sophisticated communication tools at their disposal. Uninterrupted internet connections allows the use of computer-aided teaching tools in the classrooms and educators at these schools enjoy far more flexibility in the selection of ways to communicate with the parents.

Regular newsletters, whether in electronic format or printed on paper, remains indispensable as a means of mass communication. The advantage is that the same message is sent to all parents of learners attending the school and when important reminders are posted, the newsletter can be retained for later referencing.

When reply slips are attached to newsletters, it offers the parents a way of acknowledgement or of replying to questions or statements posed by the school. Unfortunately, the rate of reply slip returns is often problematic. This specific problem was highlighted by educators. Recommendations from the respondents noted that lack of action from parents regarding newsletters sent to them needs to be addressed.

In an effort to engage with the parents, principals often inform the parents that they practise an "open door policy". All three schools apparently practise easy access to the principals as it is believed that schools committed to promote good parent-educator relations, will allow as much access to the principal and educators as time would allow. The idea of timetabled parent interview slots was put to the educators and they responded with rather different views. Timetabled interview slots may allow accessibility to the educators, but for most parents this is impractical since they work during the times that educators are available to see them.

5.2.4 Extra-mural parental involvement

It is most evident that the school fundraising drives are a bane to all the educators. According to the educators, this was one of the most prominent areas where parental support was limited. Fundraising drives are primarily designed to augment the school fees and it is therefore surprising to find that one of the areas of parental involvement where the parents themselves are the beneficiaries may not be well supported by the parents. The independent schools' educators indicated better support for their fundraising drives than the public school. Again, this is significant since it was expected that the findings would be reversed. Public schools are often cash-strapped and it was expected that the public school parents would be more enthusiastic to support fundraising events.

Extra-mural parental involvement is most evident at school sport meetings. Sport matches present a good opportunity for parents to support the school by encouraging their children, the learners at the school when they are participating in a match or participating in a field event. Respondents noted that this is also a time when parents interact with educators and the value of this interaction should not be underestimated. All three schools indicated that their sport meetings are attended by parents but the extent or attendance rate was not requested, nor given.

5.2.5 General parental involvement and support

Schools where the school principals have established sound parental involvement policies and have set strict parameters to delimit parental involvement enjoy healthy co-educational relationships with their parent bodies. The opposite is also true for schools where more forceful parents may want to dictate their own perceived terms and conditions of involvement. Educators of all three schools surveyed indicated that parental involvement policies were in place in their schools and that meetings with parents were organised and formalised. The public school has more annual meetings than the independent schools. The independent schools have less annual meetings, but have more small committee meetings and personalised educator-parent meetings.

Conclusions as to how well the annual meetings are attended could not be drawn since there was no consensus among the educators as to whether their educator/parent meetings are well attended. Respondents at all three schools indicated different responses and therefore it must be accepted that the attendance rate of parents at the forums remains inconclusive.

5.2.6 Parental involvement with regards to learner behaviour

Learner behaviour was one of the major issues raised by educators surveyed at the public school. References to learner conduct and behaviour was also made by educators representing the independent schools, but it did not enjoy the urgency of responses received by School C. The literature that was consulted beforehand has conclusively proved that learner behaviour is more strongly linked to the home environment than the school environment. Parents thus play a far more important role in aiding their children to develop intrinsically motivated personal discipline than the school could ever hope to achieve. The respondents of School C responded so unilaterally the need to improve learner discipline and behaviour that the researcher felt compelled to pursue this fact. The school principal informed the researcher that the school is experiencing a rapid deterioration in school discipline and that he has held workshops with the staff and parents to address the problem.

In the light of this chapter, it is important to realise that this pro-active engagement of the problem by both educators and parents proves that the principal is most certainly steering an inspired course of mutual cooperation between the parents and his educators. This is not only a wonderful example of inclusiveness but also a way to engage the parents in problem solving, allowing them to offer their aid to improve the school. Parents who become involved in this way often form an emotional attachment to the school. Their investment of time, advice and genuine concern will unmistakably go a long way to support the educators in their obligations to the parents and the learners.

Parental involvement or support would not be possible without the management acumen of the school principal. Problem identification lies with the educators themselves, however, the remediation of problems would be better accomplished by involving all the role players. Where this involves parents, it should be viewed as an opportunity to better serve the purpose of engaging parents in a cooperative venture and so promote mutual educator-parent cooperation. When parents have a vested interest in the operations of the school, the school is viewed as an ally.

5.3 Recommendations

Quality education for all our learners: Education equality in South Africa seems to be an almost unattainable goal. So much has been done by various authorities, Non Governmental Organisations and Government to ensure that quality education is made available to all our learners, but considerable differentiation still exists in our schools. Contributory factors include cultural differences, socio-economic differences, language differences and location (rural-urban) differences.

While our multi-cultural society and our linguistic diversity are celebrated in South Africa, it would be a folly to assume that we could reduce all to the lowest common denominator in our struggle for equality. Thus said, educators, parents and concerned groups should continue the struggle to ensure everything possible is done to provide quality education for all our learners, no matter what language they speak, how rich or poor their parents are or where they reside.

Parental accountability: Sound legislation exists to govern school and educators' conduct and educators are held accountable for their actions but parents, who are often to blame when learners' perform below their abilities, are not held accountable. Bippus (2005:49), in agreement with the literature presented in this work, suggests that schools must open dialogue to determine what schools and parents should expect from each other. A process determined collaboratively with parents should outline what will happen if a teacher or parent does not live up to agreed-upon expectations and while government bodies will probably never hold parents accountable, it is essential that schools continue to try (Bippus, 2005:49).

Parental involvement to promote collaborative education: Parental involvement in the learners' education refers to the parents' role in their child's education at home and at school and learner education is a joint venture between all three role players; the parents, the learner and the educator. Learners, parents and educators ultimately share in the responsibility of the learner's education and learner education includes many contributory factors that are crucial to preserve, support, nurture and enhance the intricacies of interactive collaboration between the parents, learners and educators (Potvin *et al.*, 1999). Schools would do well to ensure the involvement of parents and learners involvement by establishing communication routes and communication protocols, providing venues and times for interactive meetings and including the parents and learners in social events at the school..

5.4 Suggestions for further research

Although the survey was limited in its scope of selecting participating schools, this research opened the possibility to include a more representative and inclusive grouping of schools in a follow-up study where the same questionnaire may be applied to elicit responses. Should such a research project be undertaken, comparisons of public and independent schools may very well paint a different picture compared to the findings of this research.

A select group of schools representing the differentiation stated above may be involved in a longitudinal study to ascertain and record the changes that have taken place in the schools over a period of time.

Improvement or deterioration in the relationship between the school and the parents (and even the community surrounding the school) can be documented to provide insight into the dynamics of parent/school relationships in the Western Cape Schools. Research data is lacking to verify the school's role in the community as it stands to date. The school's role in the community has changed extensively and there is very little agreement as to what the school represents to the community. Once research has established the school's role, schools can work towards fulfilling their role and involve the parents and the community to support the school.

5.5 Conclusion

This research has been concluded in three schools in the Western Cape Peninsula that are not representative of the schools in this geographical area. The findings and recommendations are therefore peculiar and specific to these three schools only. Parental support for the educators and the schools are high and the educators have expressed very few needs. The few concerns that have been raised are linked to peripheral issues not immediately in need of remediation, nor essential to the smooth running of the schools. As a pro-active action, issues that have been noted by the educators should be addressed forthwith to prevent it escalating to the extent that it becomes an educational problem for the school concerned.

Since our educational emancipation in 1994, schools have had to effect changes to their administrative and educative roles. As educators, we have also had several versions of academic curricula design thrust upon us by government. During all these transitions, our parents have been with us, inextricably party to the education of the learners, but often without a voice or an invitation to overtly join us in our quest to educate the nation.

Parental disillusion of past educational practices fostered a disdain for educational institutions and educators that must now be remedied. Social ills that are threatening the sanctity of our schools must be addressed and schools, in tandem with their surrounding communities should unite in mutual cooperation and support.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Example of a letter sent to the school principals.

Supervisory body: Cape Peninsula University of Technology
Faculty of Education
PO Box 652
Cape Town
8000

Personal contact details: Tel 021 981 0070 (Office hours)
Fax 021 981 0069
Mobile 083 647 6755
e-mail piet_dewit@yahoo.com

7 May 2007

Mr (CONFIDENTIAL)
Headmaster
(CONFIDENTIAL) Preparatory School

Survey regarding educator expectations

Dear Mr (CONFIDENTIAL)

I respectfully request your assistance.

I am currently conducting a survey as part of my research for a MEd dissertation. It concerns the expectations of educators, regarding parent contributions and I believe that the findings of this study may benefit all role players involved in the education of our children.

The survey is in the form of a short questionnaire that should not take long to complete.

I shall be most grateful if you would kindly assist me in this study by allowing me to solicit the help of your staff in the completion of the questionnaire.

I respectfully request that you grant me a personal interview so that I may, in person, answer any questions you may have regarding this intrusion.

I have attached a copy of the questionnaire to this letter, so that you may peruse it at your leisure.

I courteously await your response.

Yours sincerely

Piet de Wit
Student; CPUT

Appendix 2 Cover letter to the questionnaire, addressed to the educators.

Educator Questionnaire:

Dear Sir/Madam/Miss

I respectfully request your assistance.

I need you to complete this questionnaire. I am conducting a survey as part of my research for a MEd dissertation. It concerns the expectations of educators regarding parent contributions.

The completed questionnaires will be completely confidential, so please do not write your name or any identifying information of the questionnaire.

I shall be most grateful if you would kindly assist me by completing the questionnaire at your earliest convenience. This questionnaire is also being completed by educators at other schools.

With much appreciation for your time and valuable input.

Kind regards

Piet de Wit
[Student; CPUT]

Contact details:
Tel 021 981 0070 (Office hours)
Fax 021 981 0069
Mobile 083 647 6755
e-mail piet_dewit@yahoo.com

Appendix 3 Questionnaire.

Questionnaire (Section A)

Please indicate (circle, cross, tick or colour in) your selection on the scale by selecting the number that best reflects your own personal view.

5 Implies that you **strongly agree**.

4 Implies that you **agree**.

3 Implies that you are **undecided**.

2 Implies that you **disagree**.

1 Implies that you **strongly disagree**.

← Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly agree →

| | | | | | | |
|----|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Teacher-Parent forums are held once a term. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2 | More than 50% of the parents attend Parent-Teacher forums (meetings). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3 | All positions on the P.T.A. are filled. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4 | Parents are keen to offer their services as class representatives. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5 | Parents support school fundraising drives. (If not applicable, leave blank.) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6 | Parents generally show pride in the school. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7 | Parents are kept abreast of current education (teaching) methodology. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8 | Timetable slots exist for parent/teacher interviews during the day | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9 | Parents support school sport meetings and matches. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10 | Regular newsletters communicate school matters to the parents. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11 | Parents have various routes of communication to gain access to the principal | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12 | Parents meddle too much in the general running of the school. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13 | Parents respect the professionalism of the staff to educate their children. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14 | Parents will not tolerate incidents of vandalism against the school. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15 | Parents readily rally to support or defend the school against gangsterism. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Questionnaire (Section B)

Please mark (tick or cross) the appropriate boxes:

16. Which of the following methods do parents use to communicate with you?
(Select all the appropriate blocks)

- telephone
- one to one interviews
- e-mail
- letters
- homework book note
- fax

17. How often are personal (one-to-one) parent-teacher meetings scheduled during the year at your school?

- Never
- Once a year
- Twice a year
- Three times a year
- Four times per year
- More than four times a year.
- When a teacher or a parent requests it.

18. How often are PTA meetings held per year?

- Never
- Once a year
- Twice a year
- Three times a year
- Four times per year
- More than four times a year.

19. Which school bodies or committees are most in need of parental support?

- Governing body
- PTA
- Social committees
- Fundraising
- Extra-curricular
- Sport

20. In which spheres (areas) would you like to see supportive parental involvement?

21. What, in your opinion, would be the five most important factors to improve or encourage parent support in your school?

Appendix 4 Sample group.

School A

An independent school.

One educator from each grade:

Grade 1, Grade 2, Grade 3, Grade 4, Grade 5, Grade 6 and Grade 7.

Educators sampled: 7

Responses received: 7

Percentage response rate: 100%

School B

An independent school.

One educator from each grade:

Grade 1, Grade 2, Grade 3, Grade 4, Grade 5, Grade 6 and Grade 7.

Educators sampled: 7

Responses received: 7

Percentage response rate: 100%

School C

A public school.

One educator from each grade:

Grade 1, Grade 2, Grade 3, Grade 4, Grade 5, Grade 6 and Grade 7.

Educators sampled: 7

Responses received: 7

Percentage response rate: 100%

Total educators sampled: 21

Total responses received: 21

Total response rate: 100%

Appendix 5: Graph of the combined scores: Questions 1 - 15

Figure 2 Combined responses

