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WHAT ARE THE FACTORS THAT MILITATE AGAINST OR FACILITATE PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL GOVERNANCE?

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WHAT ARE THE FACTORS THAT MILITATE AGAINST OR FACILITATE PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL GOVERNANCE?

A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY OF TWO PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN THE NORTHERN SUBURBS OF PIETERMARITZBURG, KWAZULU NATAL, SOUTH AFRICA.

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ABSTRACT

Apartheid education in South Africa created and maintained deliberate inequalities between schools serving the Indian, Coloured and African communities on one hand and the White population on the other hand. The advent of democracy in South Africa in 1994 addressed a range of issues, one of which was school governance. The South African Schools Act of 1996 was a bold attempt by the government to address issues like school governance. This act created a new school-governance landscape based on a partnership between the state, schools, learners, parents, school staff and the local communities.

The aim of this study was to establish reasons why parental involvement is muted in some public schools but more active in other public schools. The participants in the study were parents, school principals and the chairpersons of the school governing bodies of the two schools. The purpose of the study was to listen to differing perspectives on why parents were involved, or not involved, in school governance.

The research used both quantitative and qualitative methodology to gather data, and it assumed the form of a comparative case study of the two schools. A survey questionnaire and semi-structured interview were used as data collection techniques. Findings of the study revealed that those parents who were involved in school governance did so because they wanted to be of assistance to both their children, as well as the schools their children attended. In addition, parents who were not involved in school governance cited different reasons for their non-involvement, ranging from a lack of time, a lack of knowledge and skills, as well as institutional difficulties at the schools their children attend. There was evidence of a conflict between policy and practice in respect of parental involvement in school governance. Policy expected parents to be involved in school governance, and assumed that all parents were familiar with the roles of school governors. Parents, on the other hand, seemed to lack a clear understanding of what school governance entailed, and what the school governance policy expected from them.

DECLARATION

I, PRAVESH RAMISUR, declare that the work presented in this document is my own. Any references to work by other people have been duly acknowledged.

Signed: ....

I declare that this dissertation has been submitted with/without my approval.

Signed: Supervisor ....

Pietermaritzburg

Date: ___ **February 2007**

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. An Introductory word

The inequalities of an unjust education system in South Africa prior to the emergence of democracy in 1994 are well documented. Following the 1994 democratic elections, a non–racial education system based on the principle of equity was established. The right of parents to be involved in school governance was acknowledged in the South African School's Act (1996). All state schools had to elect governing bodies on which parent representatives had to be in the majority. Thus, for the first time in the history of education in South Africa, all public schools were compelled to include parents in decision making at school level. With the introduction of the new system of school governance, education ventured out of its traditional bureaucratic cocoon into the domain of parental involvement in the running of schools.

1.2. Parental involvement

Education systems worldwide have undergone, or are currently undergoing, reform. Policy-makers, administrators and other relevant educational stakeholders were continuously seeking ways in which to enhance teaching and learning. Parental involvement was increasingly being viewed as a useful tool in improving learners' achievement and conduct. In addition, Hornby (2000) included the following as the benefits of parental involvement: a positive parental attitude towards teachers and the school; positive learner behaviour and attitudes; improved learner performance; an improved school climate; increased parental satisfaction with the school; and overall school improvement.

The promotion of the active participation of parents in the education of their children was a growing phenomenon both in South Africa as well as internationally. The need for parental involvement in school governance appeared to provide the impetus for the introduction of a fresh perspective on education in South Africa. South Africa, having

just emerged from the ravages of apartheid education in 1994, seemed ripe for a new, democratic education system. Such a shift required the combined efforts of not just the educational authorities, but other educational stakeholders as well. Parents formed an integral part of a grouping that ought to be involved in this ideal of a democratic education in the country. With this notion of parental involvement in mind, the educational authorities in South Africa proceeded to implement policies to improve education in the country. One of the outcomes of the new educational policies was the implementation of parental involvement in education as an essential prerequisite in educational management.

In South Africa, there has been a significant shift in educational policy since the early nineties. The South African School's Act of 1996 was an attempt to legislate the concept of participatory democracy so that parents had a more profound role to play in their children's education. In addition, Curriculum 2005 (C2005), which had been internationally researched and proved that learner achievement was enhanced through parental involvement, had been introduced in South African schools (Coleman,1991).

The passing of the South African School's Act in 1996 shifted the responsibility of decision-making in schools from the principal and educators with minimal participation from parents, to a more decentralized and co-operative approach. The Act created School Governing Bodies, and these bodies were required to assist the principal in the management of schools. Parents had to be in the majority on these bodies. School governing bodies had a host of important functions to perform, ranging from policy formulation for schools to the recommendation for the appointment of personnel at schools. However, as ready as the country may have appeared to be in preparation for a democratic education system, there were still major obstacles to overcome. One of these obstacles was the question of parental attitudes and perceptions of parental involvement in education.

1.3. A scenario

Picture a scenario of two sister schools situated in the same suburb of a city. Both of the schools are almost identical in terms of infrastructure. These schools are built out of brick and cement with ceilings and asbestos/wrought iron roofs. Both of these schools have buildings that are well-maintained, with all doors and windows in full working order. None of the doors or windows is damaged in any way. The classrooms are large enough to accommodate the number of learners present in each classroom, up to a maximum of 45 learners. In other words, there is no evidence of overcrowding in either of these schools. There are sufficient numbers of desks and chairs for all the learners to be seated comfortably. Each of the schools have the following facilities: a playing field, a library/resource centre, a computer centre, change-rooms with ablution facilities, and an administration building that houses offices for the principal, deputy-principal, heads of department, secretary, a reprographic room for the production of worksheets and other learning-teaching support materials, as well as staffroom facilities for the educators. Each of these schools also has piped, hygienic water, as well as proper sewerage facilities. Both of the schools are fully fenced, creating the impression of being safe from possible criminal elements. This is to suggest that learners of both schools are in a protected environment while they are at school. Both schools have educators who are qualified to at least the minimum standard expected of teachers by the Education Department. The school management teams of both schools are in place and fully functional. Access to each of these schools is via tarred roads. In addition, public transport to both schools is easily available, with the drop-off points being at the respective school gates.

From the above description, there appear to be no significant differences between these schools. However, on closer inspection, differences between these schools become apparent. One school has a higher learner enrollment than the other, and the school with the larger learner enrollment has a higher number of educators on staff. Another difference is that one school has a majority of learners from one racial grouping while the other school has a 60-40% split with two racial groupings being in the majority. A

further difference is that the school with a higher learner enrollment levies a higher school fee than the other school.

In spite of the relative similarities and the differences between these schools, one school seemed to enjoy a greater level of parental participation and involvement than the other. This difference in the level of parental involvement amongst schools intrigued me, because I am able to relate to the smaller of the two schools in the scenario. I was a member of a school governing body for a period of three years. The school I served in as a school governing body member was in many ways similar to the smaller of the two schools described above. This school always drew a small number of parents, averaging between 40-60 parents to its school meetings. This figure was, in my opinion, inadequate because the school had a population of approximately 600 - 700 learners per year during my term of office as a school governor. The implication of this attendance figure was that not more than 50 learners on average were represented at any given meeting, considering that in a few instances, two parents represented one learner. The school governing body made numerous attempts to address this situation of low parental turnout for school meetings. School meetings were scheduled to be held on Saturday afternoons in an attempt to cater for the working parents. One meeting was even held in town closer to the source of public transport to cater for parents who commute by public transport. In spite of these measures, the governing body could not attract parents in greater numbers to school meetings.

On the other hand, another school in the area, just about 2 kilometres away from the school I served in as a school governor, did not seem to experience the same difficulties we experienced in respect of attracting parents to school meetings. With this school, parents seemed to be willing to attend school meetings, irrespective of the time of day or the day of the week it was held. This school attracted an average of 250-300 parents to its meetings. School functions at this school attracted a larger crowd of parents when compared to the school I served in as a school governor.

In view of the vital role function played by the school governing bodies, it was difficult to fathom the reasons for the differences in the level of parental involvement amongst

schools. Was it because parents were so heavily committed that they did not have the time to show greater involvement in school governance? Was it because of work commitments that parents could not commit to school governance? Could it be that parents felt that they were inexperienced or unqualified to make a meaningful contribution to school governance? Or, perhaps, were parents simply not interested in getting involved in school governance, choosing instead to allow the school management teams to continue with this essential task?

These questions provided the necessary motivation to undertake a modest piece of research with the intention of attempting to understand the reasons for the differences in parental involvement among different schools. This research project will help in determining the reasons for the inconsistent levels of parental involvement in school governance. If policy expectations of parental involvement are not being met, then what steps should be taken, and by which role-players, to address and rectify the situation.

As an educator, I have constantly encountered situations where parental turnout at meetings or other school gatherings is low. No less than two parents meetings at my school had to be re-scheduled due to poor attendance by parents. This seemed to be the norm in some of the other schools in the area where I teach. Parents seemed to keep away from meetings where important decisions, like the issue of school fees and curriculum matters and discipline at school are taken. Often, parents tended to leave these decisions to the educators and school management teams to address. In addition to this, my experience as a governing board member of a school where parental involvement is low has convinced me to do a qualitative research study of two primary schools in one suburb in an attempt to investigate the level of parental involvement in each of them. I identified two schools with contrasting levels of parental involvement so that I could examine what factors encouraged or militated against parental involvement in these schools.

1.4. The Research question

My research study investigates the level of parental involvement in schools by posing the following question:

- What are the factors that militate against or facilitate parental involvement in school governance?

In addressing the above question, the following associated issue needs scrutiny:

- o What are the levels of parental involvement in school governance?
- o To what extent are the parents of school children trained in school governance?
- o To what extent are parents of school children experienced in school governance?

1.5. The methodology used in this research study

This research study was a mixed mode approach study of two primary schools in the northern suburbs in the city of Pietermaritzburg, the capital city of the Province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Evidence was gathered using both quantitative and qualitative approaches to research. Initially, survey questionnaires were sent out to 50% of parents ranging from grade 2 to grade 6 from both schools. The returns to these surveys helped to identify those parents who were keen to be interviewed by me so that further discussion could be generated on the topic of parental involvement in school governance. The next stage of the data-gathering process was the semi-structured interviews with the parents, who were keen to be interviewed, as well as the SGB chairperson and the principals of the respective schools. Five parents from each of the two schools who were keen to be interviewed were identified, and these parents, together with the school principal and the SGB chairperson of each school formed the heart of the semi-structured interview stage of the research project.

1.6. Conclusion

This chapter introduced the important aspects of school governance, and the role played by parents in school governance. Chapter 2 introduces the literature review to parental involvement in school governance. The literature review goes on to expand the meanings of certain critical terminology like parents, parental involvement, and school governance. Chapter 3 talks about the methodology employed in this research study, the research settings, the research design as well as a discussion on the ethical issues involved in this project. Chapter 4 deals with a description of the findings, as well as a description of the discussion of the findings made in the research project. Chapter 5, the final chapter, presents a summary of the main findings of the research project, a few suggestions on how to improve parental involvement in school governance, as well as suggested areas for further research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

The origin of the study, the background and rationale of the research project has been dealt with in the preceding chapter. Chapter 2 locates the study in relation to studies undertaken by other researchers covering the same topic. The literature review covers the definition of the concepts of parental involvement in schools, the origin of parental involvement as policy and practice, the South African School's Act (SASA), the theories that underpin parental involvement, the barriers to parental involvement, and the benefits of parental involvement.

2.2. Defining the concepts

An important requirement of the South African School's Act is that parents should show greater involvement in the education of their children. This section examines the meanings of the following words/terminologies: parent, parental involvement and governance in relation to how these are used in the study.

2.2.1. Parent

A definition of the term "parent" is necessary as there are multiple meanings attached to the word. The World Book dictionary (1991: 1514) defines the word parent as "a father or mother; a person who has not produced an off-spring but has the legal status of a father or mother; any animal or plant that produces off-spring; source, cause or origin." According to Dekker and Lemmer (1994), the word "parent" is referred to as a collective term, while others think of it as a specific group within the whole. Gulwa (1996) asserts that the term "parent" refers to the parents of learners in specific schools. Van der Walt (cited in Louw , 2004) describes parents as holders of authority who are responsible for the growth and development of their own lives, as well as their children's lives.

Landman *et al* (1992) describe a parent as the primary educator of the child, where the home provides the fundamental and central background.

In the South African School's Act, parent refers to "the parent or guardian of a learner; the person legally entitled to custody of a learner; or the person who undertakes to fulfill the obligations of a person referred to above towards the learner's education at school" (ELRC, 2003). The SASA defines a parent in the following manner:

- The natural parent of a learner, whether male or female.
- The guardian of a learner.
- A person granted legal custody of a learner.
- A person who undertakes to act as a parent of a learner for the purpose of the learner's education at school (SASA, 1996).

For the purpose of this study, the word "parent" refers to not just the biological aspect of parenthood, but it includes the entire parent community of a specific school in a specific environment with all its diversities (Louw, 2004). It also incorporates caregivers and grandparents who act as parents, as is common in Black African societies in South Africa (Myeni, 2005).

2.2.2. Parental involvement

The Committee to Review the Organisation, Governance and Funding of Schools (known as the Hunter Commission) in South Africa was tasked with recommending to the National Minister of Education a national framework of school organization, ownership and governance which would enjoy wide support and be financially sustainable from public funds (Greenstein, 1995: 201). One of the recommendations of this committee was that the governance of education should be a shared responsibility of parents, teachers, students and community members (Ibid, 204). The committee further recommended that parents have the largest representation in their own right, as well as in their power to select community representatives. Hence, parental involvement was regarded as critical in the education of their children.

2.2.2.1. Definition of "parental involvement"

Although schools have been working to involve families for years, there seemed to be an absence of what parental involvement really means. Many parental involvement efforts were loosely aimed at connecting parents to the school by creating familiarity with staff and facilities. However, there seemed to be a growing trend, both nationally and internationally, that effective parental involvement meant more than just getting parents to the school. Parents were utilized as partners in teaching and learning, so they were recognized as legitimate participants in school governance. Parental involvement helped foster community cohesion, and supported the development of parenting skills (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 2002).

Christenson, Rounds and Franklin (in Lemmer, 2003: 159) define parental involvement as a form of home-school collaboration. Home-school collaboration implies that there should be a partnership between the home (parents) and school (educators) and both should work towards a common goal. But parental involvement is broader and more inclusive. Parental involvement focuses on the role of parents in their children's education, and the relationship between home and school and how parents and educators can work together to promote the social and academic development of the learner.

The term "parental involvement" can be defined as the 'active and significant involvement of the parent in all aspects (both curricular and non-curricular) of the child's formal education (Kruger and van Schalkwyk, 1997). Maharaj (cited in Mbatha, 2005:12) described parental involvement as the relationship which parents and teachers share, and these groups use their abilities to their fullest in order to give children the best possible education. The White Paper on Education and Training (1996) in South Africa described parental involvement to include partnerships in education. Cotton and Wikelund (2001) defined the term "parental involvement" as several different forms of participation in education and with schools". Squelch and Lemmer (in Mbatha, 2005:8) defined parental involvement as the 'active and willing participation of parents in a wide

range of school-based and home-based activities, which may be educational or non-educational'.

This research study uses the definition of parental involvement as expressed by Christenson, Rounds and Franklin (cited in Lemmer, 2003) when they asserted that parental involvement focuses on the role of parents in their children's education, the relationship between home and school and how parents and educators can work harmoniously together to facilitate the development of the learner, both academically and socially.

2.2.2.2. Why the need for parental involvement?

The South African School's Act holds that learners, parents and educators promote the acceptance and responsibility for the organization, funding and governance of public schools in partnership with the state. The implication was that parents must, by law, participate in school activities. It also implied a shift in the traditional role parents used to play by merely being members of parent-teacher associations (Louw, 2004). Parents now had the capacity to determine what was in the best educational interest of the child. However, this right does not mean that parents must take over the task and responsibility of the school, but they (the school and parents) must work together.

The parent is the primary educator of the child. The care, development and education of the child are the responsibilities of the parent and not that of the school, the community, the teacher or the state. This point reaffirms the immense importance placed on the role of parents in school governance. The job of educating has become too complex a responsibility for any one group (like teachers) to do alone (Kruger and van Schalkwyk, 1997).

The co-operation between parents and schools is what Fullan (2001) calls the "power of three" (parent, teacher and learner collaboration). These three elements form what Fullan call the triad members (1996: 203). Mortimore, et. al (cited in Fullan, 2001) in a study of school effectiveness found that parental involvement practices is one of twelve key

factors that differentiated effective schools from less-effective schools. Such involvement included attendance school meetings, including those about children's progress.

Gold and Miles (cited in Fullan , 2001) posed the following question: "Whose school is it, anyway?" Hargreaves and Fullan (2001) seemed to answer this question when they argued that the boundaries of schools were becoming more permeable and more transparent. Schools were no longer the domain of teachers only. There was an increasing involvement of parents in the education of their children. This development was both inevitable and desirable. It was inevitable because there seemed to be a relentless demand for accountability from public institutions. It was regarded as desirable because in a post-modern society, the task of education could no longer be accomplished unless forces were combined.

2.2.2.3. Categories of parental involvement

Dekker & Lemmer (1994) suggest that parents are involved in school matters in one of three ways in South Africa:

i). *Cooperation:* parents and educators need each other and both are in pursuit of one common goal, namely effective teaching and learning. They have to co-operate with each other on all possible levels in the school because they can learn much from each other. Co-operation implies active involvement, which arises from the parents' interest in their children's well-being.

ii). *Participation:* Participation does not mean every parent must be involved in everything. Rather, parents should be represented sufficiently on all levels. If parents participate more actively in school activities, the standard of education could be improved.

iii). *Partnership:* Parents and teachers have to be partners because the demands made by education necessitate such co-operation. The relationship between parents and teachers should thus be a partnership relationship rather than a client type of relationship. Each partner in this relationship should accept his/her responsibilities and pull his/her weight because if one partner neglects his/her obligations, the burden

becomes heavier on the other partner. Partnerships, therefore, require co-operation, not confrontation; integration, not isolation; continuity, not competition (Louw, 2004).

Parental involvement is therefore a process through which parents participated meaningfully in the various educational activities of their children. Such activities may include attendance at meetings and school functions to intensive efforts to help the teachers to become better educators of their own children.

The LSU Ag Center (2005) in Louisiana, United States of America, suggests parents can show involvement in six different ways:

i). Parents as teachers and preparers: Parents are their children's first and most important teachers. As parents guide their children's behaviour, they teach and prepare them for school. Parents provide meaningful learning activities at home for their children, and they prepare, support and enhance whatever was learned at school.

ii). Parents as learners: Parents can participate in educational programmes that help them discover and learn ways to create a supportive learning environment for their children. They can become more involved in helping their children improve their schoolwork, for instance, by providing encouragement, arranging for appropriate study time and space, modelling desired behaviour (such as reading), and monitoring homework.

iii). Home-school communication: This process involves parents who attend and fully participate in parent-teacher conferences, and respond to school obligations such as newsletters and other communiqués from school representatives.

iv). Parents as volunteers: These are parents who commit their time and energies in a wide array of school activities. Such activities may include helping out in the office, serving as field chaperones, or being involved in the school sports programme.

v). Parents involved in governance, decision-making and advocacy. Here, parental involvement ranges from parent-teacher organization participation to school-improvement team activities and holding office as school board members.

vi). Parents as community collaborators: These parents work to establish and maintain community, business and organized support programmes for education.

Dimock, O'Donoghue, and Robb (cited in Feuerstein, 2000) identified five basic categories of parental involvement: school choice; decision-making through formal structures or site-based councils; teaching and learning; the effects of the physical and material environment; and communication.

Epstein (1994) identifies six types of school and parent/community involvement. These include the following:

Type 1: Parent skills: Families are assisted with parenting and child-rearing skills, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions that support children as students at each age and grade level. It also assists schools in understanding families (Edwards, 2004).

Type 2: Communication: Frequent and positive home to school communication (in the form of telephone calls, progress reports, conferences, notes, newsletters and home visits) help parents to feel more self-confident and more comfortable with the school, and they are more likely to become involved in school matters (Comuntzis-Page,1996). Parents are more likely to participate in schools if they receive information from school about classroom activities, their children's progress, and how to work with their children at home (Ibid, p. 2).

Type 3: Volunteering: This type of parental involvement at school refers to parent volunteers who assist teachers, administrators and children in classrooms or in other areas of the school. It also refers to the parent who comes to school to support and watch student performances, sports and other events.

Type 4: Learning at home: This refers to parent-initiated or child-initiated requests for help. Parents look for ideas from teachers on how to monitor and assist their children at home with learning activities co-ordinated with the children's class work. It involves families with their children in learning activities at home, including homework and other curriculum-linked activities.

Type 5: School's decision-making: Decision making involves including families as participants in school decisions, governance, school councils, committees and other parent organizations.

Type 6: Collaboration with communities/agencies: It refers to parent and community activists in independent advocacy groups that monitor the schools and work for school improvement.

There seem to be links in the types of parental involvement as suggested by Dekker and Lemmer (1994), Dimock, O' Donoghue and Robb (1998), Epstein (1994), and the LSU Ag Center (2005). For instance, number iii by Dekker and Lemmer, number v by the LSU Ag Center, Dimock, O' Donoghue and Robb's second category, and Epstein's type 5 all suggest a similar type of parental involvement, that of parents becoming members of parent-teacher structures in an attempt to get parents involved in decision-making at schools. Like Epstein (1994) suggests, parents who take part in the decision-making of the school become prepared for governance matters and possible school board membership.

From the preceding discussion, it is apparent that parental involvement implied more than just attending meetings and being part of traditional fund-raising efforts. One type of parental involvement was not better than the other types. What was important was that parents became involved in the education of their children to help them to succeed at school. However, this study focuses on just one aspect of parental involvement, namely the attendance at school meetings by parents.

2.2.2.4. The benefits of parental involvement

Desimone (1999) asserts that parental involvement was a desirable policy focus for several reasons. Some of these reasons included: parental involvement as an efficient social investment with a pay-off that is far greater than that its costs; parental involvement addresses issues of equity and equal opportunity; and it ties with the belief that the primary responsibility for children's well-being lies with the parents.

Involving parents in the education of their children could bring about many benefits to parents, learners, teachers and the entire society. Literature abounds with accounts of research indicating the benefits of all those involved in the education of children. The

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World Bank compiled the following benefits to learners whose parents show an involvement in their education: an increased sense of security and emotional stability; an increase in the achievement (by the achievement of better grades and test scores); an increase in the attendance figures at schools; an increase in the graduation rate, and parallel increases in college attendance; more learners are involved in extra-curricular activities; and better, positive attitudes and behaviour (The World Bank, 1999).

Teachers and schools also derived benefit from this kind of relationship. Schools received greater financial support from the parents and communities; there was higher student achievement; a higher morale amongst learners; improved classroom performance when parents tutor their children; and an increase in self-satisfaction and personal confidence was experienced by parents (The World Bank, 2002).

Parental involvement can help identify and address factors that impact on educational success, factors such as low participation and poor academic performance. The World Bank (1994) study in Gambia, Africa illustrates this point. This study made use of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) in order to understand why girls do not attend schools, and to mobilize communities in an effort to counter this phenomenon.

An examination of case studies by Bosset (cited in Mbatha, 2005) in Kenya, Philippines, Bangladesh, Columbia and Bolivia arrived at the conclusion that parents tended to become more involved in school activities when they contributed their time, financial resources, materials and labour. These parents tended to become more involved in school activities like attendance at meetings and monitoring teachers' performances. Teachers, in turn, felt more obliged to deliver better education to learners as a response to parents' inputs.

Enslin and Dieltiens (2002) argue that encouraging communities to involve themselves in the education of their children was indeed beneficial. Participation in school governance had many positive spin-offs: schools were assumed to understand the realities of the communities they served, with the argument being they knew best what the needs of the learners were. The school and parents, instead of distant government

officials, now made decisions. Furthermore, the community was involved in generating school's policies so that they may feel a sense of ownership over the school, and support its progress.

Piper (2002) asserts that participatory democracy not only encouraged an active citizenship, but also stimulated diversity of opinion and a strong civil society. Participatory democracy also promised trust and solidarity. A civil society where people came together freely as equals to engage in common projects could build the relations of trust that democracy thrived on.

Squelch and Lemmer (1994) believe that education in some schools in South Africa has almost collapsed. Factors that contributed to this failure included the following: the undermining of authority and discipline; the negative attitude held by some learners and teachers; a shortage of relevant provisioning; and the failure of communities to regard schools as community properties. Societal problems such as drug addiction and alcohol consumption, crime, vandalism of school property, poverty, unemployment and dysfunctional family life contributed to the collapse of education in some schools (Mbatha, 2005). These forces could be overcome by combining the forces of home, school and the community.

 Hornby (2000), writing on the benefits of parental involvement in Britain, claimed that increased parental involvement was important because of the benefits that such involvement brought, including the following:
   i). More positive parental attitude towards teachers and school.
   ii). More positive student attitudes and behaviour.
   iii). Improved learner performance.
   iv). Improved school climate.
   v). Higher school attendance
   vi). Less disruptive behaviour by learners.

Feuerstein (2000) added to the list of benefits of increased parental participation by including the following:

i). Increased parental satisfaction with the school.

ii). Increased self-confidence of parents involved.

iii). Overall school improvement.

Cotton and Wikelund (2001) identified the following as benefits of involving parents in school governance in Canada:

i). The elimination of mistaken assumptions parents and school staff may have of each other – about each others attitudes, motives, intentions and abilities.

ii). the growth of the parents' ability to serve as resources for the academic, social and psychological development of their children.

iii). An increase of parents' own skills and confidence, sometimes furthering their own education and upgrading their jobs, thus providing improved role models for their children.

iv). An increase in parents serving as advocates for the schools throughout the community.

Oosthuizen (2004) cited the following as the advantages of close co-operation between parents and schools/educators:

i). Parental participation in the education process at school leads to a huge improvement in the school climate, and the learners' school achievements.

ii). Parents can make meaningful contributions to school activities that fall outside the expertise of educators but in which the parent is an expert as a result of his/her particular professional background and/or field of interest.

iii). Much education time may be saved if educators are relieved of certain tasks that parents may perform. This enables educators to be more readily available for the execution of their educational tasks.

2.3. School Governance

Cotton & Wikelund (2001) defined governance as something that included any activity that provided parents with the opportunity to take part in decision-making about school programmes. This included being a school governing board member, a participant on a parent advisory committee or a school improvement programme. Areas in which parents may help to make programme decisions included goal setting, the development and implementation of programme activities, assessment, personnel decisions and funding allocations.

2.3.1. A history of school governance in the international and South African contexts

This section of the chapter examines the history of parental involvement in school activities, including school governance in both the international and the local South African context. It also looks at the emergence of school governing bodies, especially in South Africa.

The calls for parental involvement in schooling are nothing new. In the 1970s, researchers such as Sarason (1971) in England suggested that parents should play a greater role in school governance. The Plowden Report (in England) proposed a number of strategies in relation to both families and schools, and a major focus was on parental involvement in the educational process (David, 1993). These strategies were pursued with vigor in the 1970s. In the 1970s, the Taylor Committee in England recommended that each school have its own system of government or management rather than being tied in to local government. These governing bodies, as they would become to be known, would be representative of the local parent body, the community and teachers (Ibid, p. 50).

The restructuring of public schools in the United Kingdom began in the 1980s. In Britain, the Education Act of 1980 stipulated how schools should be governed, especially in terms of the roles of parents (David, 1993). The Education Act of 1980 in the United Kingdom granted parents the right to be represented on the governing bodies of the

schools their children attend. The major aim of the legislation was to make schools more open and accountable to the public, and particularly to parents. This act required schools to make public their admission levels and their educational strategies. Parents were granted more rights by this piece of legislation: firstly, in the choice of schools for their children; secondly, to complain about procedures on an individual basis; and thirdly, to be involved through parental representation on school governing bodies. The Education Act of 1986 in the UK granted parents increased parental representation on school governing bodies (Hornby, 2002). When John Major became the British Prime Minister in 1990, he developed the idea of a Citizen's Charter on which education featured very prominently. In 1991, a Parent's Charter for Education was published, which increased parental rights to information about schools and their children's progress, and an increase in the role of parental school governors to include budget control.

Educational reform in the United States of America (U.S.A.) was similar to those in Britain. Until the 1960s, the federal government in the U.S.A. played a limited role in educational provision. This responsibility was largely at the state and school district levels. However, schools in the U.S.A. were seen as instruments of solving the social ills of the country. Educational change in the U.S.A. has been in three different waves: firstly, the focus on curriculum; secondly, raising standards through parental choice; and thirdly, on national goals (David, 1993). In the 1960s and 1970s, political debates in the major cities of the U.S.A. focused on how to revise traditional bureaucratic systems of control of schooling to allow for more community participation. As a result of political action in the 1960s, a revised system of community control in large cities was created to allow for greater parental participation on individual school boards. Parents became involved in the running of the schools attended by their own children, selecting teachers and disciplining children (David, 1993).

There has also been a great deal of educational reform in other countries like New Zealand, Denmark and Australia (Arnott & Raab, 2000). The educational reforms in these, and indeed other countries, have different names to describe them in the different countries. Some of these names include: developed school management, site-

based management, and local management of schools. Change has always been about power and extended participation. Arnott & Raab (2000) see change in educational governance in terms of two elements:

i). Decentralization to school level of responsibility of decision-making.

ii).The sharing of decision-making power amongst key stakeholders at school level – head teachers, teachers, parents, students and other community members.

Prior to 1994 in South Africa, the entire educational system was organized along racial lines, and the practice of parental involvement in decision-making at school level differed along similar lines (van Wyk, 2000). In most schools serving the white population in South Africa, statutory parent bodies were established, and these bodies had a wide range of decision-making powers. In schools serving the non-white (Indian, Coloured and African) populations, a few members of parent bodies could be elected by parents; the majority were government appointees (Hyslop, 1989).

Before the introduction of the South African School's Act (SASA), parents had been brought closer to schools through official and unofficial structures. The governing of public schools in South Africa prior to (the passing of the SASA in) 1996 was left to the state, and it (the state) was assisted by bodies called the Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) in primary schools, or Parent-Teacher-Student Association (PTSAs) in secondary schools. Unfortunately, these structures were not really active bodies in terms of the governance of schools (Motala & Pampallis, 2001). Furthermore, the powers and responsibilities of these structures were not properly laid down. The general aims of PTAs/ PTSAs included the following:

i). Furthering the educational aims of the school within the community.

ii). Instilling a democratic approach to decision-making and problem-solving.

iii). Fund raising and monitoring the use of school funds (Sithole, 2001 in Motala & Pampallis, 2001).

The purpose of PTAs (both internationally and locally) was to bring together local stakeholders to participate in the running of the schools to ensure the continued co-operation and functioning of schools. PTAs were non-statutory government structures

that played nothing more than an advisory role. Smith (1985) asserts that in the United Kingdom, PTAs were low-visibility bodies that were responsible for providing essential extras like books, videos, computers, etc. PTAs, according to Smith, were heavily involved in fund-raising activities, a view supported by Motala and Pampallis (2001), Hanafin and Lynch (2002) and Hancock and Hellawell (1998). In South Africa, the lack of success of PTAs/PTSAs was due to various factors including a lack of necessary skills and a lack of clarity about the roles they should play. The result was that many PTAs/PTSAs functioned largely as crisis committees, operating only when there was an emergency (Education Policy Unit, 1993 in Motala & Pampallis, 2001).

There were demands from diverse quarters for the introduction of participatory and representative governance of schools in South Africa. These demands came to fruition with the passing of the South African School's Act in 1996.

2.3.2. The South African School's Act (SASA)

An examination the South African School's Act, and a look at some of the duties and responsibilities of school governing bodies follows. Some of the difficulties faced by school governing bodies are mentioned thereafter.

The passing of the South African Schools' Act (1996) was described by the then South African national minister of education as one of the most transformative pieces of legislation, one that opened up a new chapter in school governance. The SASA covered funding, organisation and governance of schools, and heralded an end to state governance of public schools in South Africa. It ushered in a new era of control of public schools. The control of all public schools shifted from the state to SGBs. In order to achieve an active and effective management at school, an active, innovative participation was required of educators, parents, the local community, and learners (in secondary schools). The SASA intended to take democracy to the local level - the level of the school. This implied a greater degree of participation by more people. The SASA bound the provincial education ministry to ensure that policy decisions in school were arrived at after considering the best interests of the learner. The SASA devolved

responsibility for many schooling functions to the SGBs of the schools. It had important implications for local schools by means of school communication, de-segregation, and parental choice of schools, school's selection of learners, employment of teachers and the creation of a market in public schooling. The SASA shaped the context in which schools must now develop (Karlsson, et. al., 2001 in Motala and Pampallis, 2001).

The SASA had been a genuine attempt by the state to assist disadvantaged schools and to redress past inequalities, but these came at the expense of increasing the workload of SGBs and the financial responsibilities of parents. This raised the question of parents' role in the state-parent partnership. The state seemed to be increasingly shedding its responsibility for the provision of education, and transferring these to SGBs. Parents serving on SGBs, in turn, viewed their role as co-opted fund-raisers carrying out national/provincial level of instructions rather than as decision-makers in educational matters (Karlsson, et.al. in Motala & Pampallis, 2001). Motala, et al. (1999); Jones (1986); Hanafin & Lynch (1998); Pollard (1986) and Hancock & Hellawell (1998) express congruent views about parents regarding themselves as fund-raisers for schools in different countries of the world.

2.3.2.1. Functions and Responsibilities of SGBs internationally and locally

A SGB had a wide variety of duties and responsibilities including budgeting, employment of professional and non-professional staff and dealing with issues relating to productive learning. Sarason (1997) regarded these responsibilities as awesome and difficult, and they required commitment from those parents serving on the SGB. Sarason also claimed that SGBs were legislated forums that existed to create and support productive learning. Farrell & Law (2000) include as the function of the SGB the issue of accountability. SGBs are held accountable for various features, including standards in public schools. Farrell & Law (2000) suggested that SGBs found it difficult to account, both collectively and individually. For SGBs to be accountable, they needed to hold the principal responsible. In the USA, Danzberger (cited in Fullan, 2001) found that SGBs or School Boards could be crucial agents for school improvement.

Danzberger recommended that reforms be aimed at strengthening the capacity of school boards to bring about and monitor change.

According to the SASA, the school governing bodies must fulfill the following functions: develop a mission statement for the school; adopt a code of conduct for learners of the school after consultation with learners, parents and educators of the school; determine the admissions policy and language policy of the school within the framework of national policies; recommend the appointment of academic and non-academic staff to the school; and supplement the school's resources in order to provide quality education to its learners. These duties illustrate the pivotal role played by the governing bodies, and the vital link it forms between the school and the community it serves.

2.3.2.2. Difficulties facing SGBs in South Africa

Since the establishment of SGBs, one of the key problems confronting provincial education departments had been the building of capacity of SGB members. This was more so in the previously marginalized and disadvantaged school communities. Without the necessary skills for members to participate fully in governance, these structures could not claim to be democratic. Section 19 of the SASA makes provisions for this lack of capacity in the form of training for school governing bodies. However, training for governing bodies around the country was both patchy and uneven. For instance, 69.3% of inhabitants in the Northern Cape lived in poverty, in stark contrast to the Western Cape (17.9%) and Gauteng (21.1%) (Hartshorne cited in van Wyk, 2000). This difference in the capital resource of the provinces made it difficult for the provincial administrations to implement national policies. Thus, provinces could not afford to provide adequate training for school governing bodies.

The Western Cape Province relied on non-governmental organizations for their training needs, while the Eastern Cape, together with service providers, had produced guidelines for training purposes but could not put out tenders because of a lack of financial resources (Vally, 1998:479). In the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) province, the School Governance Training Unit provided schools with manuals on the following topics: Duties

and Functions of the SGB; Basic Financial Systems for Schools; School Fund Departmental Instructions; Development of SGB Constitutions; Code of Conduct for Learners (Karlsson, et.al, 2001). Training was also provided by two teacher unions, namely the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU) and the Association for Professional Educators of KwaZulu Natal (APEK) (Karlsson, et al., 2001). However, the large number of schools, together with their widespread distribution throughout the province, and a lack of funds hampered capacity building programmes for SGBs in KZN (McPherson & Dlamini, 2001 in Karlsson, et. al, 2001). Although all the provinces had planned for training, many lagged behind Gauteng province in the actual training of governing bodies.

Some provinces (like in KZN) had contracted universities and non-governmental organizations to develop training manuals and provide workshops for SGB members, but very little or no training actually took place (van Wyk, 2000). Consequently, many governing bodies were ill-equipped to meet the complexities of the tasks confronting them. An investigation into perceptions of SGB functions revealed that stakeholders had just a partial knowledge of their legislated functions (Karlsson, et. al, 2001). Stakeholders' demands that they be empowered and informed were therefore understandable and justifiable. Furthermore, incapacity to perform certain functions may well have led to SGBs functioning as crisis committees only (Karlsson, et al. 2001).

In 1992, almost all of the former whites-only schools in South Africa were virtually forced by the then Nationalist Party to become state-aided Model C schools (Karlsson, et al, cited in Motala & Pampallis, 2001). The governing bodies of these schools had settled into their roles and they were fully functional. These school communities had grown accustomed to the roles of the governing bodies and the levels of parental power that SGBs represented (Motala & Pampallis, 2001). However, in disadvantaged communities in South Africa who had just emerged from apartheid education, most parents never had any experience of school governance (van Wyk, 2000).

There was some evidence of racial tensions arising from the ethnic composition of SGBs in South Africa (Jansen & Sayed, 2001). In KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), for instance,

press reports seemed to suggest a lack of African representation in the former White and Indian school governing bodies. A 1999 Human Sciences Research Council report entitled "Racism, 'Racial Integration' and De-segregation in the South African Public Secondary Schools" reported that African parents and learners were either under-represented or not represented at all on SGBs. Many of the former White schools now had learners from other race and ethnic groups. However, these learners often lived far away from the schools they were now enrolled at. The distance to these schools often made it difficult, sometimes impossible for the parents to be involved in school governance. The SGB, therefore, was not representative of the school's learner population because the majority of the SGB members were from the White parent community (Jansen & Sayed, 2001). In this context, racial conflict in schools seemed to be exacerbated. For many of these African parents, the only link they had with the schools was through school fees, something many of them could not afford to pay. Fees reinforced the perception of schooling as a financial transaction and not a relationship between community, parents and the school. In contrast, white parental involvement in schools was significant and went beyond the payment of school fees only.

The SASA and its provision for governing bodies were built on the idea of "neighbourhood" or "community" schools. This, however, was fast disappearing. Many parents were exercising their right to choose the schools they wanted their children to attend, and many parents chose schools outside their neighbourhoods. Many African parents sent their children outside their home townships into what they perceived to be better schools in the former White, Indian and Coloured suburbs. Many Indian and Coloured parents had moved their children out of the traditional Indian and Coloured schools and enrolled them at former Whites-only schools, often some distance away from their residential areas. These parents saw schooling as a means of gaining access to the middle class society, and an opportunity for their children to learn and work in an interracial context (Samuel & Yusuf, 2004). The phenomenon of migration was widespread and was not restricted to middle class parents only.

Many African working class parents living in the former African townships sacrificed much to enroll their children in better-resourced schools (van Wyk, 2000). This has led to many suburban schools in the previously White, Indian and Coloured communities admitting children from diverse ethnic groups. Ideally, the SGB should have been representative of all the groups at a school, but this did not always happen. Many of these schools were far away from the townships, thereby making parent participation in school governance difficult or impossible (van Wyk, 2000).

2.3.3. What are the theories underpinning parental involvement?

2.3.3.1. *The theory of cultural capital*

Perhaps the most widely recognized theory that helped to explain the difference in the level of parental involvement was Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital (Feuerstein, 2000). According to the cultural capital theory, schools represented and reproduced middle or upper class values and forms of communication. Schools embodied these values because teachers came predominantly from middle or upper class backgrounds. The teachers were able to communicate effectively with middle and upper class parents who shared similar beliefs as themselves. The same teachers had difficulty in relating to parents who came from different cultural backgrounds. This bias towards middle and upper class values put working class parents and learners of working class parents at a distinct disadvantage because they (the learners) had to adapt to the dominant culture of the school to meet the teachers' expectations. This process promoted the involvement of the middle and upper class and limited the involvement of those in the lower classes. Bourdieu therefore theorized that differences in the level of parental involvement could lead to the reproduction of status relations among groups (Feuerstein, 2000).

Penã (2000) and Moreno & Lopez (1999) reiterated the view that parental involvement was influenced by cultural differences between family and the school. Penã (2000), in a study of Spanish speaking children in an English medium school in the USA noted that the culture of the children differed from those of the teachers in the school. Most of the

teachers were English first language speakers as compared to the learners. In view of this cultural difference between teachers and learners, many of the parents of the learners felt they should not be involved in their children's school. This led to a very low rate of parental involvement in the matters of this school. Penã emphasized that the parents' culture affected how they became involved as well as whether the teachers and the school validated their language and culture. In the United States of America, when minority parents did not participate in traditional parent-school activities, the teachers interpreted this behaviour as indifference (Penâ, 2000). Many teachers did not understand the cultural differences between parents and school staff (Penã, 2000). Some teachers believed that parents were not savvy enough to assume leadership roles in schools. They (teachers) assumed that poor parent attendance meant that parents were not interested.

The cultural deficit theory (Desimone, 2000) was popular in the United States of America and the United Kingdom in the 1950s and 1960s. The theory viewed the working classes parents as intellectually and linguistically less able (Hanafin & Lynch, 2002). These perceived limitations resulted in the attribution to working class people of culturally specific values that militated against the success of learners in school. Such parents were deemed to have little interest in education, thus condemning their children to failure in school (Hanafin & Lynch, 2002).

Such views (as the cultural deficit theory) were now seen as simplistic and biased towards the culture of the middle class. In the Republic of Ireland, research by O'Neill (cited in Hanafin & Lynch, 2002) with working-class mothers suggested that value orientation depended on economic circumstances. These mothers argued that the low participation and achievement in education were caused by the cumulative effects of poverty, low income, lifestyle and the cost of education to large families. Kellaghan, et al (cited in Hanafin & Lynch, 2002) attributed educational disadvantage to discontinuity between home and school environments, and these discontinuities were seen as differences rather than deficiencies.

Lareau (1987) borrowed Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital but related it more directly to parental involvement. Lareau stated that indicators of cultural capital included the following: the amount of interaction the parent has with other parents; parents' understanding of the school processes; amount of contact parents have with school personnel; and parents' communication skills. Lareau used these indicators in a qualitative study to determine that the upper-middle class parents were more likely to become involved in school activities while on the other hand, working class parents were more likely to embrace a supportive but less-involved role. Lareau also found that teachers gave better evaluations to students whose parents were involved in the school. In spite of ethnic and other differences (like age and class), researchers such as Moreno & Lopez (1999), Poghosyan (1997); and Cotton & Wikelund (2001) still found parental involvement a crucial factor in helping to ensure the success of learners at school (Fullan, 2001).

2.3.3.2. *The social capital theory*

There seemed to be strong arguments that societal levels of educational attainment were linked to levels of economic development. There was a vast body of research that showed that the combined inputs of families, communities and the state's involvement in education contributed to improved outcomes (Mbatha, 2005).

Bordieu defined social capital as the "aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to a network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition–in other words, to membership in a group, which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital" (cited in Mbatha, 2005: p. 58). Coleman (1991) described social capital as connections - social capital consists of some aspect of social structure that facilitates certain actions of actors within the structure. This had striking similarities to Putman's assertion that social capital refers to connections among individuals – social network norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. The World Bank defined social capital as the institutions, relationships and norms that shaped society's interactions. "Social capital is not just the sum of the institutions which underpin a society – it is the glue that holds

them together. Social capital includes education, governance, religious institutions, neighbourhood groups and associations, cultural diversity, languages, ..., legal and police systems, and so forth" (World Bank, 1999: p. 218).

Social capital refers to social networks available to parents that enhance students' abilities to benefit from educational opportunities. Putman (2000) used social capital in his description of Hannafin's 1916 discussion of rural school community centres. Hannafin was particularly concerned with the cultivation of goodwill, fellowship, sympathy and social intercourse among those who make up a social unit. Coleman (cited in Feuerstein, 2000) contributed the first empirical evidence of a relationship between school drop-out rates and social capital. According to Coleman, all schools had social structures that influenced social achievement. However, some schools had stronger relationships with families than other schools (they possessed more social capital). Therefore, these schools were able to promote higher levels of achievement. Other factors that influenced social capital included the school's understanding of its obligations to students; parents' knowledge of the school system; and the existence of norms that support high student achievement (Feuerstein 2000).

Coleman regarded social capital as an elusive concept that referred to the quality of relationships between and among people. With respect to families, social capital was seen as the number of adults in the family and the quantity of attention they gave to their children for their (the children's) personal development. With regard to the community, social capital was seen as the social relationships that existed among parents and the institutions in the community. He argued that social capital in the community depended on the stability and strength of the community's social structure (Schneider cited in Mbatha, 2005).

Why is social capital important? Parental involvement in their children's education was always regarded as beneficial to the children. It had been argued that when parents, teachers, learners and the community interacted, schools were likely to improve. The social capital theory supported the idea of involving parents and communities in the life of the school. The basic belief of social capital was that interaction enabled people to

build communities. A sense of belonging and a relationship of trust were of great benefit to people.

The World Bank report of 1999 made a case for social capital and its benefits to schools: teachers were more committed, learners achieved higher test scores, the schools' facilities were better utilized in communities where parents and citizens took an active interest in the educational well-being of the child.

According to Coleman (1991), the best way to improve schools was to foster closer ties with parents, teachers and learners. Social capital allowed citizens to resolve collective problems with greater ease. Putman (2000) believed people benefited more if they co-operated with each other, but individuals derived greater benefit by shirking their responsibilities in the hope that the work will be done by others for them. In addition, Putman (2000) noted the following advantages of social capital: Child development is powerfully shaped by social capital because trust within families, schools, peer groups and the larger community affect the child's opportunities and choices, and consequently, their behaviour and development; In high social capital areas, public spaces are cleaner, people are friendlier, and the streets are safer. He maintained that some places had a higher crime rate, partially because people did not participate in community organizations and did not supervise younger people (Smith cited in Mbatha, 2005).

2.3.3.3. *School culture and values*

A further theory that helped to explain differences in level of parental involvement was developed by Feuerstein (2000). He suggests that there were major structural differences amongst schools in relation to the social class they served. From this perspective, schools in working class neighbourhoods tended to be more regimented and controlled by administrators. On the other hand, schools in the wealthier areas favoured more participatory forms of governance. Feurstein reported that these differences were related to workplace values. These differences were also representative of the varying expectations of teachers and parents from differing class

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backgrounds. On the basis of this "culture and values theory", parents from poor communities, on average, were less involved in their schools than are parents from wealthier communities (Feuerstein, 2000).

2.3.4. Barriers to parental involvement

Because school plays an important part in the child's development, parents and guardians are typically interested in what occurs there. This interest, however, can be mediated by school-level characteristics. Kerbow and Bernhart (cited in Feuerstein, 2000) believed that some schools had the ability to promote parental involvement while other schools did not. Although empirical research in this area is not conclusive, early results indicated that certain school level factors can influence the amount and character of parental involvement (Feurstein, 2000).

Hornby (2002), in an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of parental involvement in schools in England, New Zealand and Barbados, believed that there was a set of six factors that influence the levels and type of parental involvement in schools.

The first factor was demographic changes. Hornby asserted that there had been two major changes in families in the last few decades which made parental involvement in schools more difficult. Firstly, a vast majority of mothers of school-going children were now in the workforce. This trend was not peculiar to any one country but it was a universal trend. Secondly, almost half of the marriages ended in divorce so a substantial proportion of children lived in single-parent families. Where both of the parents were working, or there was only one parent heading the family, it became increasingly difficult for these parents to have a high level of involvement in their children's education. The latter change had major repercussions for South African school-going children, as was the trend with school-going children world-wide. The issue of working parents in South Africa received acknowledgement by policy analysts as a factor that militated against parental involvement in school governance (Mokgalane, Vally and Greenstein, 1996).

The next factor was historical/societal. In some countries (like Barbados) there was no history or societal expectation of parental involvement in schools. Schools were seen as places where children were sent to be educated. Parents were not expected to become involved in schools. Although this view is changing, it remained ingrained in peoples' minds, which made it difficult to establish satisfactory levels of parental involvement. This factor seemed prevalent in South Africa, largely amongst the parents of African learners, although this was not confined only to this sector of the population. My years of experience as an educator taught me that those parents who are themselves uneducated or poorly educated tend to view education as the domain of the teachers and the school, and were consequently keen to let their children be educated by teachers at schools without them (the parents) getting involved in the education of their children.

The third factor was that of parental attitudes. From her numerous studies of parental involvement, Epstein (cited in Hornby, 2002) asserted that almost all parents cared about the education of their children irrespective, of their backgrounds. Therefore, it was not a lack of interest on the part of parents that led to a low level of parental involvement. Epstein suggested that few parents knew what schools expected from them, and this was at the core of the problem. It was this lack of knowledge that seemed to act as a barrier to the establishment of higher levels of parental involvement. According to Moreno and Lopez (1999), the parents' knowledge of school-related activities was an important factor in their level of involvement in school. Heystek and Louw (1994) found that the most important reason why parents in South Africa are not involved in school activities was their (parents') negative attitude towards school.

The fourth factor was that of the organisation of the school. It was much easier to establish high levels of parental involvement where the majority of children attended schools in their residential areas. This implied that children should attend local schools closest to their homes, ideally within walking distance to the school. The notion that schools should become the focus of the community hinged on parental involvement in schools. Where children attended their local schools, it was easier to get parents involved in the schools which they (the parents) saw as part of their communities.

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Where children were transported to schools outside the area they reside in, these schools were seldom identified with by the local community. This made it difficult to ensure a satisfactory level of parental involvement.

A similar situation was prevalent in the urban schools in South Africa. African parents particularly sent their children to urban schools a distance away from their township homes. The majority of these learners were transported to schools in some form or another, generally using public transport. These learners were enrolling in increasing numbers in the former White, Indian and Coloured schools. As more African children sought admission in the former White schools, Indian parents moved their children away from former Indian schools to former White schools or private schools (Samuel & Sayed, 2004). There seemed to be a lack of ownership of schools by these parents, partially because the schools their children attended were far away from their houses and their areas of residence. This phenomenon of migration of learners to schools out of their residential areas was reducing parental involvement on an increasing scale (Motala, Vally and Modiba, 1999:603).

The fifth factor was that of school culture. The more autocratic the school management structure was, the less likely they were to sustain parental involvement, which was based on partnerships between parents and the school. Parents may be unwilling to become involved in school matters if they did not feel that the school climate (the social and educational atmosphere of the school) was one that made parents feel welcome, trusted, respected, heard and needed (Comuntzis-Page, 1996). Moreno and Lopez (1999) argued that schools have unique personalities which facilitate or constrain certain behaviours. The way parents perceived the school environment influenced the way in which they (the parents) behaved in that school. In a study of 158 Latina mothers of school going children attending an English medium school in the U.S.A., Moreno and Lopez (1999) found that Latino parents perceived the school environment as uncomfortable, cold and indifferent to their needs. This could have been partially due to the Latino parents' lack of familiarity with the US schools. Thus, Latino parents felt less-welcome in their children's schools and were less involved in their children's education.

Finally, the issue of teacher attitudes had a bearing on parental involvement. Positive teacher attitudes to working with parents were essential if parental involvement was to be successful. Some teachers had a negative attitude towards working in collaboration with parents. There existed among some teachers a feeling of superiority over parents. This attitude may have led to parents becoming resistant to greater involvement than that which was required of them. There was a tendency for parents to be viewed as less-intelligent than teachers (Hornby, 2002).

In addition, Penã (2000) also suggested that language was a major barrier to increased parental participation. She contended that language differences became apparent at parent meetings. Often in the case of English second language parents, they could not follow proceedings at meetings because they were not familiar with the language used. The language issue prevented the active participation of non-English speakers from engaging in discussions. Consequently, these second language speakers may have thought it unnecessary to attend school meetings because they did not understand what was discussed.

Penã (2000) also discussed the educational level of the parents as a potential barrier to greater parental involvement in school. It was often taken for granted that all parents are able to read and write. The school management team sent out notices in the printed form with the assumption that all parents were able to read and understand these. Parents, who were not literate enough to read these notices, may have, in all probability, chosen to ignore the notice to attend the school meeting.

A study conducted by Adams and Waghid (2003) explored the current practices of SGBs in five selected schools in the Grassy Park area of the Western Cape province in South Africa. All five schools were historically disadvantaged schools. Unemployment, alcoholism, drug abuse and general violence were endemic in these schools. The major concern of the community was that of survival. Their findings indicated that training for these SGB members was inadequate. As a result, these SGB members were not empowered to execute their tasks as school governors with much success. The school communities were extremely poor and lacked the necessary educational

levels to enact their roles as governors. Adams & Waghid suggested that the communities shied away from participation in SGB structures because their energies were geared towards making a daily existence. What emerged from this study has already been mentioned earlier in this paper – training for SGB members needed to be undertaken if democratic governance was to become a genuine reality.

An empirical study was conducted by Louw (2004) among parents and teachers in Heidedal and Mangaung in Bloemfontein, South Africa to determine why there was inadequate parental involvement in previously disadvantaged schools in the area. The study was conducted among teachers and parents. Table 1 below is a summary of the responses received to the question about factors that hinder parental involvement:

Table 1: Factors that hinder parental involvement: Parents responses

FACTORS	NO OF RESPONSES	%AGE
The school is too far – transport problems	27	49
I'm not interested	0	0
Lack of time	30	54.5
I usually find out too late	4	7.2
I'm usually tired	4	7.2
Teachers are unfriendly	0	0
There are too many activities per year and they last too long	12	21.8

Most parents (54.5%) claimed that a lack of time prevented them from attending school activities, while 49% stated that distance from school and a lack of transport were hindrances. 21.8% of respondents claimed that there were too many activities and/or these activities were too long. None of the respondents said that a lack of interest prevented them from attending school activities. The sentiments of the parents seem to be corroborated by the teachers in the survey. Ninety percent of teachers surveyed (154/170) indicated that they thought that transport was a critical factor that prevented parents from showing greater involvement in school governance, and 76.4% of teachers in the study felt that a lack of time was a contributory factor to low parental involvement. What emerged from the findings was that the distance parents lived away from schools, and a lack of time by parents, were two significant factors that militated against greater parental involvement in school governance.

2.4. <u>Conclusion</u>

In the context of the wider transformation of South Africa's schools into effective institutions of learning, it was deemed necessary to create partnerships between the school and the parent community. Such a partnership between the school and parents was expected to enhance the learning experience of children on the basis of international trends. All schools wanted to offer their learners the best education possible, and this ideal could become a reality if there was greater parental involvement. However, as has been discussed, both in South Africa and internationally, parental involvement takes many forms and is enhanced or hindered by a number of factors, making the ideal difficult to achieve. A number of theories have been examined that explain differential levels of involvement. This chapter also looked at the definitions of the different terminology (parent, parental involvement and school governance) as used in the study. The theories that underpin parental involvement in school governance were discussed, followed by some of the barriers to parental involvement. The next chapter discusses the research methodology adopted for this study.

CHAPTER 3:
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

This chapter of the research study examines the methodology used in gathering the relevant data required in an attempt to provide answers to the research topic. The research paradigm is outlined before a discussion follows on the different approaches used in this project. A detailed discussion of the data collection tools used is preceded by approaches used by the researcher. The pilot study preceding the research study is discussed, followed by an in-depth discussion of the context of the research project. A discussion on how the ethical issues of the research project were addressed by me during the research process concludes the chapter.

3.2. The intention of the research

The broad focal area of the research was the involvement of parents in the governance of public (state) primary schools. For the first time in the history of South Africa, legislation made provision for the formal involvement of parents in the governance of schools. The South African School's Act of 1996 made provisions for, amongst others, the establishment of school governing bodies to govern public schools. The act granted the governing bodies immense powers (as outlined in the literature review chapter). However, once the novelty of increased and legal parental involvement in school governance had subsided, the reality of the task facing public schools began to emerge. There were public schools that enjoyed a healthy parental participation in school governance. Unfortunately, the same level of interest was not evident in many other public schools.

Studies about parental involvement in school matters, including governance, have been undertaken by researchers both abroad as well as in South Africa. Some of the researchers who carried out research projects on school governance in South Africa include Louw (2004), and Adams & Waghid (2003). Mbatha (2005) conducted research

on parental involvement in two high schools in the Imbali area of Pietermaritzburg. Mthembu (1999) conducted research on parental involvement in academic and non-academic activities in a secondary school in Claremont. Myeni (2004) investigated teachers' and parents' perceptions of their relationships in two schools in the uBombo circuit in KwaZulu Natal. However, there is no record of a research study on parental involvement in school governance in the northern suburbs of Pietermaritzburg.

Therefore I saw in this situation an opportunity for a modest piece of research on parental interest in school governance in some public primary schools. This research study is aimed at examining the factors that encourage or militate against parents participating in school governance. In addressing the above concern, the following associated issues deserve investigation:

- To what extent are parents of public school learners adequately experienced to make a meaningful contribution to school governance?
- To what extent are parents of public school learners trained in school governance?
- What are the levels of parental involvement in school governance?

3.3. Methodology

3.3.1. Research paradigm

The research study fell within an interpretivist paradigm of social research. The interpretivist paradigm aims to explain the subjective reasons and meanings that lie beneath social action (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2002). Interpretative social science emphasizes a detailed reading or examination of text, which could refer to a conversation, written words or pictures. The reading is to discover embedded meaning. According to Neuman (1994), people carry their subjective experiences to a text. When a researcher studies the text, he or she gets absorbed or gets inside the viewpoint the text presents as a whole, and then develops a new meaning of the whole. The interpretive approach is concerned with how ordinary people manage their everyday life,

or how they get things done. It is also concerned with how people get along with each other.

This research project was an attempt at understanding the reasons why parents were either involved, or not involved, in school governance. The intention was neither to change the behaviour or attitudes of parents, nor to destroy myths and empower people to change society, as suggested by the critical paradigm to research. The study was not an attempt at describing the behaviour of parents, nor was it an attempt to discover natural laws so that people could predict and control events, as such an attempt will fall under the positivist paradigm of research. I believe that the reality to be studied consisted of people's subjective experiences of the external world.

The type of research undertaken here was what Terre Blanche (2002) refers to as applied research. In applied research, the findings have a practical application. Applied research aims to contribute towards issues of problem-solving, decision-making, policy analysis and community development (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2002). My aim was to see to what extent a policy (the SASA in this instance) was working or not with regard to school governance.

3.3.2. The approach to the study

Since the purpose of the study was to establish reasons why parents are either involved or not involved in school governance in two specific schools, it was decided to use a comparative research method as well as the case study approach to the research study.

3.3.2.1. The comparative method of research

This type of research involves the study of two or more cases. Two or more cases are done, and then these are compared and contrasted (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The focus of comparative research is on similarities and differences between units. Comparative research helps the researcher to identify aspects of social life that are general across units as opposed to being limited to just one unit alone. All researchers

want to generalize to some degree. It is difficult for a researcher to detect hidden biases, assumptions and values until a concept is applied in different cultures or settings. Different social settings provide a wider range of events or behaviour, and the range in one culture is usually narrower for human behaviour in general (Neuman, 1994). Thus, research in a single setting focuses on a restricted range of possible social activity. Comparative studies can eliminate or offer alternative explanations for causal relationships. Its major strength is that it can also raise new questions and stimulate theory building.

However, comparative studies have limitations. Firstly, these can be more costly, more difficult and more time-consuming than research that is not comparative. The issue of equivalence (the making of comparisons across divergent contexts, or whether a researcher correctly reads or understands data about people from a different historical era or culture) has a major role to play in comparative research, and is also a frequent limitation of comparative studies.

This study makes use of the comparative method of research because I believe that by comparing the two schools in terms of parental involvement in school governance, I hoped to understand the reasons why the level of parental involvement in school governance differed from one school to the other.

3.3.2.2. Case studies

The research study took the form of case studies of two schools. Neuman (1994) defines case studies as ideographic research methods – methods that study individuals as individuals rather than as members of a population. According to Anderson (1996), case studies are studies that research specific educational institutions or situations. Such institutions or situations are worthy of study because of their individual histories or unique contributions. Case studies are concerned principally with the interaction of factors and events (Bell, 2002). The case study, according to Bell, is particularly appropriate for individual researchers because it provides the opportunity for one aspect of a problem to be studied in some depth within a limited time scale, although some

case studies have been carried out over prolonged period of time (like a three year study).

Data in case studies is collected in a very systematic way. The case study approach allows researchers to gather a large volume of information on one or a few cases. It goes into greater depth and gets more detail on the cases being examined (Neuman, 1994) Case studies are usually qualitative in nature, and it aims to provide in-depth description of a sample of cases (Mouton, 2001). Using the case study approach allowed me to gather a large volume of data, largely qualitative but also quantitative in nature. The interview stage of the research project allowed me to gather sufficient qualitative data whilst the questionnaires allowed me to access more data of both the qualitative and quantitative types.

3.3.2.2.1. Strengths of case studies

Bell believes that the great strength of case studies is that it allows the researcher to concentrate on a specific situation and to identify the various interactive processes at work. These processes may be hidden in a large scale survey but may be crucial to the successes or failures of systems or organizations. Case studies create a case study data base which incorporates multi data sources as opposed to some methods that base their conclusions on just one particular test or questionnaire. Case studies go beyond a single method of collecting data, incorporating all types of data, and it looks for "converging lines of inquiry" (Anderson, 1996: p. 163). Case studies use triangulation to interpret converging evidence, pointing to a clear conclusion. Conclusions suggested by different data sources, according to Anderson (1996), are far stronger than those suggested by one source alone.

3. 3.2.2.2. Limitations of case studies

Although case studies are descriptive in nature and provide rich information, they do have limitations. Inevitably, where a single researcher is gathering information, certain selections have to be made. The researcher selects the area for study and decides

what materials to present in the final report. It is difficult to cross-check information so there is always the danger of distortion (Bell, 1999). There may be problems with the validity of information. Causal links are difficult to test. Critics of the case study approach point out that generalization are not always possible from case studies (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2002). It is very difficult to generalize on the basis of just one case. It was difficult to make generalizations based on my study because the study was not substantial in terms of using a number of research sites. This research study made use of multiple case studies, where the research was conducted in two research sites. Some level of generalization may be made in multiple case studies since the data is being generated from more than one research site. As Anderson (2006) asserts, multiple case studies sometime provide the base for generalizations, and can indicate exceptions within cases. Critics look down on case studies on the grounds that it lacks rigour. Case studies incorporate no statistical tests. Anderson (1996) asserts that many critics of the case study approach claim that it lacks reliability, and that another researcher might arrive at a different conclusion. Nevertheless, case studies often generate hypotheses that might be rigorously tested by other research methods.

3.3.3. Rationale for using both qualitative and quantitative data

This project was a mixed method approach, where elements of both qualitative and quantitative data were used. The research design was largely qualitative in nature. Researchers using the qualitative perspective approach are more concerned with an understanding of the individual's perceptions of the world (Bell, 2002). Qualitative researchers seek insight rather than just statistical analysis. They focus on the rich day-to-day lives of ordinary people in routine everyday situations (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989). Groups of researchers stress that there is a need for a detailed appreciation of immediate interactional circumstances of events in the social world and the historical and cultural contexts out of which they grow. Consequently, many sociologists and anthropologists began looking in detail at everyday events by using a range of so-called qualitative research methods that aim at uncovering the person's point of view from within the social situations they occupy (Ibid, p.25). The qualitative researcher questions whether a scientific approach can be used when dealing with human beings.

The data for my study was largely in the form of words from documents and interviews. Qualitative data is gleaned from subjective meanings, definitions, symbols and descriptions of specific cases (Neuman, 1994). The qualitative researcher emphasizes that human action is essentially deliberate, and that people do not simply react to events and situations, but reflect on this situation and then act on this reflection (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989). Human beings have the ability of choice and they can act upon the world to change it to suit their own needs, aspirations and perceptions. Qualitative data in this research study was acquired from the survey questionnaires as well as from the interviews with parents, school principals and SGB chairpersons of the two research sites.

The qualitative approach was clearly the mode of research that best lent itself to my area of investigation. I was aware that data collected in my interviews with parents, principals and governing board chairpersons (data termed "soft" because it is rich in anecdotes, descriptions of people, places and conversation) would not be easily handled by statistical procedures. The research required the investigation of peoples' feelings, perceptions and values. Methodologies that are more rigid and less empathetic would not be suitable. This study incorporated the rich descriptive material gained from the interviews, thereby making it more meaningful than statistical research. Qualitative data was also acquired from the open-ended questions in the survey questionnaires. Section B of the questionnaire (appendix 6) required respondents to express their opinions, and this type of data is also not effectively dealt with using statistical procedures.

My research study also made use of quantitative data. Quantitative data for the study assumed the form of descriptive statistics taken from the survey questionnaire. These statistics were essential in determining the level of parental involvement in school governance. The assumption was that the greater the number of parents attending governing board meetings, the more likely it was that they (the parents) were showing keener interest in the school, and all that happens at the school. On the other hand, a lower number of parents attending governing board meetings was assumed to signify a lack of, or limited interest, on the part of the parents in school governance. Additional

quantitative data was to have been extracted from SGB minutes of meetings showing the number of parents who attended school governing body meetings. However, accessing this information from the minutes of SGB meetings was not possible, for reasons outlined later on in the chapter.

Quantitative data was gathered from questionnaires sent by me to a select group of parents, referred to as the target population (Anderson, 1996), or the population for the study (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989). The population in this study referred to the parents of children attending the two schools chosen as the research sites for this study. Since it was not possible to interview the whole of this population, a representative sample had to be obtained using survey questionnaires as a guide. Sampling is a process of systematically selecting cases for inclusion in the research project (Neuman, 1994). For the purpose of this study, the chairpersons and school principals were chosen as interviewees, while the parents of learners ranging from grades two to six were identified as the survey respondents in the first instance. Principals were chosen because they, as the leaders of schools, were in a position to elaborate on the SGB and how it was functioning. The SGB chairperson had to be a part of the research by virtue of the fact that he/she was the elected parent leader. Issues of school governance involve both the chairperson and parent so the chairperson of the SGB needed to be a part of the research. Based on the responses from parents in the surveys, five parents from each school were selected to be interviewed. The rationale for this choice of population is discussed later in the chapter.

3.3.4. Methods of data collection

The methods used to gather data vary according to the researcher's preferences and appropriateness to the task (Bell, 2002). I opted to make use of the survey questionnaire and unstructured interview to gather data.

3.3.4.1. Survey questionnaires

Many studies in education use survey questionnaires to describe the characteristics of groups of people called populations. The researcher may be interested in certain characteristics of the population, such as attitudes and opinions, and also basic descriptive characteristics such as age and gender. Such information is not available from any other existing source, so a survey provides the means of obtaining it. While it is desirable to collect data from all members of the population, it is often not practical. Consequently, a survey is conducted where an attempt is made to reach a sample of the population to collect detailed information from them (Anderson, 1996).

3.3.4.1.1. Potential advantages of questionnaires

The survey questionnaire is the most widely used data collecting technique in sociology and in many other fields as well. Surveys have been developed within the positivist approach to social science. Surveys produce quantitative information about the world. They ask people questions about their beliefs, opinions, characteristics and past or present behaviour (Neuman, 1994). Surveys are useful as a means of probing research questions for two important reasons: first, they are more cost efficient than a study of the entire population would be; secondly, surveys are sometimes more effective because it would take too long and it may require too many researchers to contact the whole population (Anderson, 1996). Survey questionnaires have the advantage of sampling many respondents who answer the same questions. The survey questionnaire was beneficial to me because in addition to time constraints and the scope of the research study, I am the sole researcher which makes it almost impossible to sample the entire population. In addition, costs were dramatically reduced because the study did not necessitate the posting of the questionnaires to the respondents. I was granted consent to use the learners as couriers of the surveys to their parents, and for the return of these to the school.

3.3.4.1.2. Limitations of survey questionnaires

The literature highlights some of the problems associated with questionnaire surveys that are not handed in personally to the respondents (Anderson, 1996; Bell, 2002; Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989 and Neuman, 1994). The biggest problem facing the researcher is the issue of non-return of questionnaires. As Bell (2002) states, all researchers are dependent on the goodwill and availability of subjects. This issue was evident in my research study because the number of survey questionnaires returned to the researcher was as follows: school A: 44.7% returned and 55.3% was not returned. In school B, 68% returned the questionnaires while 32% did not return them. Anderson (1996) states that in addition, there are three basic problems faced by researchers: non-contact; refusals; and the inability to respond. Non-contact refers to the non-contact with the respondents, or lack of accessibility to respondents. I did not have any personal contact with the respondents of the survey. Often, research subjects choose not to respond to the research instrument (i.e. the questionnaire in this instance), and the evidence of this is visible in the high rate of non-return of the survey questionnaires by parents. The third problem (that of inability to respond) arises because the respondents do not know how to respond when the questions are poorly phrased (Anderson, 1996). The survey respondents seemed to complete those questions that required short, precise answers, but they chose to ignore the open-ended questions that required them to commit themselves to views and opinions.

3.3.4.1.3. Enhancing the response rate to surveys

I attempted to enhance the response rate by sending what Anderson calls a "pre-letter" (1996: 203). My pre-letter (appendix 4) was sent out one week prior to sending out the questionnaires. The gist of the research study was outlined in this letter. The sending of this letter was an attempt to give parents adequate time to prepare for the questionnaire that was to follow.

3.3.4.2. The interview stage of data collection

The next stage of the data gathering process was the interview stage. An interview can help the researcher to gain access to hidden data that does not emerge in formal questionnaires. Interviewing has persisted within educational research as a valid means of collecting information about people's experiences, perspectives, beliefs and attitudes (Powney & Watts, 1987; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993 in Dickson, 2003).

3.3.4.2.1. Semi-structured interviews

The interviews were of a semi-structured nature. This form of interview is a more flexible form of an interview because it allows depth to be achieved by permitting the interviewer to probe and expand the interviewee's response (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989). A probe is a neutral request to clarify an ambiguous answer, to complete an answer or to obtain a relevant response (Neuman, 1994). If the interviewee provides information freely, then prompts and probes will not be necessary. I sought consent from the interviewees (prior to the commencement of the interviews) for the audio recording of the interviews. In this way, there would not have been a need for detailed notes to be made by the researcher. The advantage of using audio recording was that the interviewer could spend time being a better listener instead of trying to record notes and simultaneously trying to be a good listener (Walker, 1985). However, consent was not granted in all cases, so I wrote detailed notes of the interview as these progressed.

The selection of the interviewees was based on the returns of the surveys. A comprehensive record was made of every parent who indicated they were keen to be interviewed. Next, these parent responses were classified into two groups – those who were currently involved in school governance and those not involved in school governance. Four parents from each school who were not involved in school governance, and one parent from each research site who was involved in school governance were then identified for interviews. The parent component from school A had to include at least one member of the African race in view of the high attendance of

African learners at this school. In addition to the parent component for the interviews, the principal and SGB chairpersons from each school were also identified for interviews.

3.3.4.2.2. The researcher as the interviewer

Since this study was a small-scale project, I was the interviewer. I was assisted by a co-researcher specifically to provide assistance to those interviewees who were isiZulu mother tongue speakers. The use of a co-researcher was a useful tool because she translated the questionnaire into isiZulu for the benefit of the isiZulu participants in the research project. She (the co-researcher) assisted during the interviews by rephrasing questions in isiZulu, or translating respondents' responses into the English language so that I could make more meaning out of these responses (Neuman, 1994). I was always aware of interviewer bias so as not to taint the information generated by the interviews. Communication between an interviewer and interviewee may reveal communicational and sociolinguistic differences between them. These differences point to the potential for misunderstanding and miscommunication between researcher and interviewee (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989). The use of the co-researcher went some way in negating these miscommunications as referred to by Hitchcock & Hughes (1989).

3.3.4.2.3. The interview environment

All interviews were conducted in a neutral environment away from the schools, either in the home or office of the interviewees. This was done in order to make the interviewees feel comfortable so that the conversation could be more natural and spontaneous. Ethical protocols (as discussed later in the thesis) were adhered to at all times during the interviews. It was envisaged that the survey questionnaires and semi-structured interviews methods of data gathering would capture the relevant data from the targeted population about their involvement or non-involvement in school governance.

3.3.5. Constructing the research instruments

3.3.5.1. Survey questionnaire (Appendix 6)

The use of an interview schedule presupposes a certain degree of knowledge about the people one intends to study (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). As a result, novice researchers who are unfamiliar with the field of study they are about to enter, may find the task of creating and generating topics to be covered in the questionnaire to be particularly demanding. In addition, a working knowledge of questionnaires in general is a prerequisite for the designing of an effective questionnaire that would yield useful information rather that heaps of useless information. I had to consider numerous technicalities when compiling the questionnaires. Some of these technicalities included wording issues, the length of the survey, question order and sequence, and format and layout (Neuman, 2004).

Section A of the questionnaire was about parents and their attendance at school meetings. The intention was to ascertain how many parents attended school meetings, the type of meeting called up by schools, how parents commuted to attend these meetings, as well as the distance these parents lived away from the school. Section B of the survey dealt with the South African School's Act as well as school governance. The questionnaire was developed and submitted to parents for a trial. The questionnaire was further subjected to a review by my supervisor, and the necessary amendments were made to it.

3.3.5.2. Semi-structured Interview (Appendices 7, 8 & 9)

Cognisance was taken of the fact that a structured interview will restrict the researcher to the pre-selected questions, their wordings and the order in which they appear in the interview schedule. A structured interview affords the researcher very little latitude to deviate from the schedule (Dickson, 2003). Therefore, a semi-structured interview was employed to allow for the respondents' experiences, beliefs, views and convictions to

emerge when responding. Prompts used in semi-structured interviews allowed interviewees to deviate from the restriction of focused questions.

Construction of the interview schedule proved to be a challenging task. This led the researcher to believe that no researcher is ever perfect, but is inherently and inevitably flawed (Dickson, 2003). For example, I was concerned that my preconceived expectations of the interviewees would be reflected in the questions asked. The risk was that this flaw could direct the research into pre-determined channels. I had to accept that questions invariably always reflect the interests of those who construct them (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). A researcher, according to Bogdan and Biklen, is advised to acknowledge and consider one's own opinions, prejudices and bias and to confront these with the data. I held my own opinions, so tact and diplomacy were used in an attempt to negate these opinions. For instance, instead of asking parents why they did not attend school meetings, the question was changed to the following: "Could you explain some of the reasons why you or your spouse/partner attend or do not attend events/meetings at your child's school?" I wanted to know what parents' opinions were about the school but I could not ask this question directly. Instead, the question was phrased as follows: "How do you feel whenever you go to your child's school? Do you feel welcome, or do you feel like an outsider in the school?" Another question about the parent's opinion of the school was phrased as follows: "Would you refer to the school your child attends as 'our school' or 'my child's school?'"

3.3.6. Piloting the study

A pilot study is a small-scale study conducted prior to the actual research. All data-gathering instruments should be tested to check how long it takes respondents to complete them, to check that all answers and instructions are clear and to enable the researcher to delete any item(s) which do not yield usable data (Bell, 2002). Neuman (1994) regards the use of pilot studies as one way of improving reliability of information obtained during the research process. This exercise may take more time but it is more likely to produce reliable measures (Ibid, p. 130).

Pilot studies are often used to test questionnaires and other techniques to see whether there is any possibility that worthwhile results will be found. Like Anderson (1996) asserts, it is always difficult to criticize one's own work, and in developing questionnaires it is essential to obtain comments from a group of the intended respondents. If pilot studies do not yield promising results, researchers sometimes have to consider the rationale, design or validity of their study (Anderson, 1996). Thus, pilot studies are an excellent way of avoiding non-significant research.

There is often the temptation in a small-scale study to proceed straight to the distribution stage but the researcher is advised to give the questionnaire a trial run, even if it means using family and friends for the purpose (Ibid, p. 128). Ideally, it should be tried out on a group similar to the population of the study, but if this is not possible then the researcher should make do with whoever he or she can get. Respondents in a pilot study will tell the researcher how long it took them to complete the questionnaire. If respondents in a pilot leave out any part of the questionnaire, the researcher needs to ascertain the reasons for this omission. The main purpose of pilot studies is to remove any grey areas from the instruments so that the respondents in the main study will not experience difficulties in completing the instrument (Bell, 2002).

A pilot study was undertaken to test the methodology of this research study. The intention was to seek clarity on the data collection methods used in the study. Five parents from a school, that was not one of the two selected research sites, were used in the pilot study. Of these parents, two were parents of African learners and the other three were parents of Indian learners. In addition, the school principal and the former chairman of the school governing body were also used to pilot the research study. The parents were handed the questionnaires, and they were requested to be allowed to be interviewed. Parents of African learners were offered the option of answering the questionnaire and the interview questions in English or isiZulu. Both of these parents opted to answer the questionnaires in English, and to be interviewed in English. My co-researcher, who is an isiZulu mother-tongue speaker, was present at the interviews with the African parents in the event I needed her to translate from English to isiZulu, or vice versa, during the interviews.

The pilot study undertaken proved to be a valuable exercise. I engaged in a verbal discussion about the questionnaire with two of the respondents. Both indicated that the questions seemed confusing because they seemed to lack coherence. On closer inspection, I found that the questions seemed scattered at random, without proper sub-sections to hold questions about a certain aspect together. The initial questionnaire was long, with no sub-sections to signpost the different aspects I wanted respondents to respond to. All the questions were numbered numerically from number 1 to number 18. The questionnaire was subsequently amended such that it had distinct sub-sections, which seemed to give it a more complete look.

On reflection, I realized that I did not have any medium of invitation for respondents to participate in the interview stage of the project. The interview stage was a vital stage in the research. Subsequently, sub-section C entitled "Consent for interview" in the questionnaire (see appendix 6) was included. The pilot study also forced me to review the interview schedule because three of the interviewees took almost 30 minutes to answer the questions. I felt this was too long as I targeted each interview to be about 15-20 minutes in duration. After careful consideration, as well as taking advice from my supervisor, some questions were either amended or deleted from the interview schedule. The number of questions in the interview schedule (with the SGB chairperson) was reduced from 19 to 16 questions, and the parents' interview questions were reduced from 19 to 16 questions. In addition, my supervisor informed me that the interview schedule appeared blunt because it lacked an introduction. Consequently, each interview schedule had an introductory question added to it.

3.4. The context of the research study

3.4. 1. The choice of schools as research settings

I am an educator in a primary school in the northern suburbs of Pietermaritzburg, and I proposed using my school as a research site. However, I was advised by the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Higher Degrees Committee against using my school as my research site. I was informed that I could have formed relationships with the parent community of

my school over the period of time that I served at the school. These relationships could influence the evidence gathered, thus casting doubt over the reliability of the project. In addition, Bogdan & Biklen (1992) suggest that researchers should study "something in which you are not directly involved" (p. 60). They advise novice researchers to choose research sites where they are almost strangers to the subjects. The main reasons for their suggestion are that people who are intimately involved in a research setting find it difficult to distance themselves both from their personal concerns and from their common-sense understanding of what is going on. A researcher who studies a known research site is more likely to see things from one point of view. For the researcher in a known setting, his opinions are more than definitions of the situation - they are the truth (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

Other problems include the following: If the researcher knows the subjects well, then the subjects will not see the researcher as a neutral observer, but as a teacher or a member of a particular group. They see the researcher (teacher) as a member of a specific group or as a person who has interests and opinions to represent. They may feel inhibited to relate to the researcher as a person they can talk freely with. Conducting research with people you know can be confusing and upsetting. Becoming a researcher involves the learning of specific skills and procedures, and changing your way of thinking about yourself and your relationship with others. It involves feeling "comfortable with your role as a researcher" (Ibid, pp. 60-61). If known people are the subjects of a research project, then the transition from your old self to a research self becomes difficult.

Hitchcock & Hughes (1989) claim that emotion, values, attitudes and expectations all play a part in any fieldwork situation. These issues can become compounded when the researcher is in a familiar setting. Bogdan and Taylor (cited in Neuman, 1994) recommend that researchers choose settings in which the subjects are strangers. Consequently, I chose to conduct my research in a school similar to mine in many respects, ranging from the learner enrollment, to facilities at the school. This school seemed to have a lower rate of parental involvement in school governance. I was aware of this situation at this school because of my involvement in the governing body

of the school. My experiences of this school's governing body indicate that parental involvement in school governance was limited. The second school I chose to conduct my research in seemed to enjoy a greater level of parental involvement. I arrived at this conclusion based on my discussions with colleagues whose children were or currently are learners at this school. I addition, I live in an area close to this school, so I encounter numerous parents whose children attend this school. The general consensus amongst those parents I spoke with about the issue of parental involvement was that there was a healthy participation from the parents in the governance of the school.

Hitchcock & Hughes (1995) contend that researchers engage in a case study to locate the story of a certain aspect of human behaviour in a particular setting and the factors influencing the situation. In this way, themes, topics and key variables may be isolated. In accordance with the case study method of research, I decided to choose two schools as research settings. The decision to choose two schools merits justification. Examining respondents across the two school settings could only add to the richness and complexity of the data since both of these school sites had contrasting levels of parental participation in school governance.

The research project was conducted in two schools in the former Indian suburbs of Northdale and Raisethorpe in Pietermaritzburg, the capital city of the province of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. These schools (hereafter referred to as school A and school B) were identified as research sites because of the contrasting levels of parental involvement in school governance. Whilst the parents showed a keenness to become involved in school governance in school B, school A found very little evidence of this type of enthusiasm. School A was the school that attracted little parental involvement, which the researcher was aware of due to his previous involvement in the SGB of this school. My tenure as a school governor of this school ended in 1998, so it is assumed that my influence (if any) in the school would have been greatly reduced by the time this research study was undertaken. In addition, the staff complement of the school had changed over the years due to educator mobility. The school governing body also

changed, with new members coming on board. I was certain that I would be viewed by the SGB as an outsider rather than an influential person.

School A was identified as a research site because of my previous involvement in the school's governing body as a parental representative. Both the school principal and the SGB chairman of school A were familiar to me. Also, some of the educators serving at this school enjoyed a cordial relationship with me so I felt that I would be able to count on them for their support in completing the research project, especially with the data-capturing process. Familiarity with all of these role-players made it simpler for me to successfully obtain consent to conduct the research in this school. Although I went through the formal procedure of applying for consent (to conduct research) from the educational authorities (both governmental and school-based), I used my acquaintance with the principal and SGB chairperson to expedite the process. Like Bogdan and Biklen (1992) assert, there are many ways to negotiate an entry into a research site, and one of these ways is to use friends inside the system to slip in.

However, the choice of school A as a research site merits further motivation in light of what Bogdan and Taylor (1984) assert about using a familiar site for research. As reported earlier in this chapter, School A was familiar to me because of my prior involvement in the school's governing body. Bogdan and Taylor suggest that a researcher choose research settings in which the subjects are neutral. Although the principal, a few educators and the chairman of the governing board were known to me, this relationship in no way influenced the research process. My association with the SGB ended when I resigned from the school governing body in 1998. The termination of my formal relationship with these individuals and the school structure was not acrimonious. I used this relationship with them in order to make it easier to gain access to this school for the purpose of the research. I did not have any contact with parents of learners attending school A since I had severed ties with this parent community, so it was unlikely that I would have any influence on what parents filled in the questionnaire, or what they said during the interviews.

The choice of using school A as my research site was not without limitations. The possibility existed that both the principal and SGB chairperson may not have been totally honest in their responses to the questions during the interview. They may have responded in a manner they felt I wanted them to respond, instead of being honest, thereby possibly tainting the data. However, there were no guarantees that such a situation may not have presented itself in any other school, so I decided to proceed with using school A as one of my research sites.

School B was identified as a research site for two reasons. Firstly, anecdotal accounts from parents abound about successful interaction between the school and the parent community at this school, which points to a potentially healthy parental involvement in school governance. Secondly, the experiences of my colleagues whose children were (or still are) learners at this school seemed to suggest a healthy parental-school relationship.

 Both of these schools were ex-House of Delegates (H.O.D.) schools under the former apartheid political dispensation in South Africa. Both schools were similarly well served in terms of infrastructure. Both schools were of brick walls and tin roof constructions. Both schools seemed to be in good condition, with all doors and windows intact. There did not appear to be any visible evidence of vandalism. Both schools had adequate furniture for the learners, educators and other management staff. Both schools had a playing field of reasonable size. There were electricity supplies, piped water and proper sewerage systems at both schools. A computer centre and resource centre were found at each school. There were proper tarred roads serving as access routes to both of these schools. Public transport in the form of mini-bus taxis was easily accessible to and from both schools.

It was evident from the descriptions above that there was very little between these two schools in terms of infrastructure and facilities. The only significant difference seems to be in the socio-economics of the community served by these schools. School A seems to serve a community that could best be described as ranging from poor to lower middle class. School B seemed to serve a community that could be described as ranging from

higher lower class to middle class. This claim was made on the evidence of the houses built in the areas, as well as the modes of transport used by the population of each area served by the respective schools. However, this claim could not be verified as there did not seem to be any available research carried out to this effect. Table 2 illustrates some of the relevant data of the schools chosen for the research study:

Table 2: Learner enrollment at research sites

School	Grade Range	School Classification	Locality	Roll	LEARNER RACIAL COMPOSITION				LEARNER RACIAL COMPOSITION (PERCENTAGE)			
					I	B	W	C	I	B	W	C
A	0-7	Section 21	Urban	553	355	189	-	9	64.2	34.2	-	1.6
B	0-7	Section 21	Urban	968	917	37	1	14	94.7	3.8	0.1	1.4

Key

I – Indian   B - African   W- White   C- Coloured

Table 3: Racial composition of SGB's at research sites
(Elected parent members only)

	INDIAN	AFRICAN	COLOURED	WHITE
SCHOOL A	5 (100%)	-	-	-
SCHOOL B	5 (100%)	-	-	-

Table 4: Number of educators (state-paid and SGB paid)

School	Indian	African	White	Coloured	SMT members	TOTAL (incl management)
A	21	2	-	-	5	23
B	32	1	-	-	5	33

A high percentage of learners attending school B (between 70%-80%) resided in close proximity to the school. As table 2 indicates, the majority of learners attending school B were from the Indian population (94.7%). There was a very low attendance by learners

of African descent in school B (3.8%). School A, on the other hand, seemed to have a much higher attendance of learners from the African sector of the population (34.2%) when compared to school B. The teacher population of both schools A and B (table 3) showed a vast majority of teachers coming from the Indian population (91.3% and 92.8% respectively). Both of the schools had elected governing bodies consisting of Indian parents only. Herein seemed to be a disjuncture between policy and practice, because the school's governing body ought to be representative of the learner population of each school but in reality this was not the case. The SGB of both the research sites did not seem to reflect this diversity.

Table 5: The number of questionnaires handed out and returned (expressed as a percentage)

School	Returned: YES to interview	Returned: NO to interview	Returned: Blank	Total Returned	Not returned
A	27	57.9	13.6	44.7	55.3
B	30.2	51.2	18.5	68	32

Like table 5 indicates, school A had a return rate of 44.7% of questionnaires, which included the blank questionnaires. School B yielded a higher return of 68% which included the blank questionnaires. Attempts were made to ensure a higher return rate by sending out what Anderson (1996) terms a pre-letter before the questionnaire. In addition, the researcher kept in mind what some writers like Neuman (1994) said, that the length of questionnaires should be about 3-4 pages in length. The survey questionnaire sent out to parents was three pages in length. In spite of these measures, there were many questionnaires that were either not returned or returned blank.

3.4.2. Selecting the respondents

50% of learners from grades 2-6 formed the sample, and these learners were handed out survey questionnaires for hand-delivery to their parents. School A had 13 class units from grades 2-6 whilst school B had 18 units from grades 2-6. Seven class units of learners from school A and nine units from school B were identified to receive the

questionnaires. These units made up at least 50% of the schools' population from grades 2-6. Every learner in each of these units was given a questionnaire, irrespective of race, gender, religion or any other distinguishing factor. Out of a total population of 391 learners from grades 2-6, 200 questionnaires were handed out to school A. School B was handed 350 questionnaires to hand out to a population of 695 learners from grades 2-6. These figures represented at least 50% of the learners in the grades 2-6 in each of the research sites.

The sample is a procedure which allows the researcher to select people from a large group (or the population) in question. Since it is often not possible to reach the entire population, a representative sample is obtained. I made use of the stratified random sample as suggested by Anderson (1990). With this sampling method, the population was first divided into groups (those who were involved in school governance, those not involved in governance, involvement according to race, and non-involvement according to race). This approach was particularly desirable when, as part of the research, the researcher is interested in differences amongst two or more schools. This method of sampling ensures that each school is represented and it facilitates school comparisons (Ibid, p. 199).

Samples are more cost-effective because it is more efficient in cost benefit terms to select a part of the population instead of sampling the entire population. In addition, samples are more effective in that it would take too long and require too many researchers to contact the entire population. However, a fundamental principle of sampling is that the researcher cannot generalize from the sample to anything other than the population from which the sample is drawn (Neuman, 1994).

The questionnaires were not sent out to learners in grades 1 and 7. This decision to exclude parents of grade 1 learners was taken with the assumption that these parents may lack the necessary experience in school governance since their children have just entered mainstream schooling and are only in grade 1. Parents of learners in grade 7 were excluded because it was felt that they may not be too keen to be part of a survey involving primary schools since their children were likely to progress to a secondary

school to be in grade 8 the following year. The decision taken to exclude parents of learners in grades 1 and 7 were, however, not without limitations. Perhaps there could have been some parents who had children in grades 1 and/or 7, but these parents had the relevant experience in school governance. These parents could have had children attending other schools, so their inputs were not considered. However, the decision to leave out parents of learners in grades 1 and 7 had been taken in an attempt to reduce the population to a manageable size.

I decided to interview seven people in total, consisting of five parents, the principals and the SGB chairpersons from each of the two research sites. In this way I hoped to get a more varied range of opinions from the interviewees during the interviews. Based on the returns received, a sample of 5 parents from each of the two schools was drawn up for interviews. Of the 5 parents identified from school A, one of them from had to be from the African population. In addition, the African parent selected for the interview should be residing a distance of about 5 km or more away from the school such that their children need to commute to school either using public or any other forms of transport.

Parents chosen for the interviews were those who indicated (on the questionnaire) a keenness to be interviewed. These parents were either not involved in, or involved in school governance matters. Of the 5 parents, one from each school had to be currently involved in school governance while the remaining four were not involved in school governance. In addition, the school principals and chairpersons of the governing bodies of each school were also interviewed.

3.5. Ethical issues (Appendices 1-5)

Ethical issues are the conflicts, concerns and dilemmas that arise over the proper way in which to conduct research. Ethics define what is or what is not legitimate to do, or what moral research procedures are involved. Many ethical issues involve a balance between two values – the pursuit of scientific knowledge on the one hand, and the rights of the research subjects (those being studied) on the other. The overarching ethical

issue in teacher research involves the relationship between the researcher and the subjects being researched. Academic literature tends to emphasize the protection of the human subjects. Potential benefits of the research must be weighed against the potential costs such as the loss of dignity, self-esteem, privacy or democratic freedom (Neuman, 1994). Although codes of ethics and other researchers provide guidance, ethical conduct ultimately rests with the individual researcher (Ibid, p. 428). Researchers have a moral and professional obligation to be ethical, even when research subjects are unaware of and unconcerned about ethics.

There are numerous issues a researcher needs to take note of during research. One such issue is that which Neuman (1994: 430) terms "Human Subject Protection". This deals with the treatment of research subjects' human rights in the name of science. Social research can harm subjects in several ways: physical harm; psychological harm (including stress, anxiety, discomfort or loss of self-esteem); legal harm; and harm to one's career or income.

The next issue the researcher needs to consider is that of informed consent. Informed consent is regarded by Anderson (1990) as the most fundamental principle for ethical acceptability. Traditionally, researchers have met ethical standards by obtaining informed consent, guaranteeing anonymity, and allowing subjects the choice of opting out of the study at any time they felt threatened or uncomfortable (Clark & Erickson, 2003). One of the fundamental ethical issues of research is that the subject should never be coerced into participating in the research project. The involved participants must be informed of the nature and purpose of the research and its risks and benefits. Participation must be voluntary. Obtaining the consent of the subject is not adequate. They need to know what they are being asked to participate in so that they can make informed decisions. A written consent, or a letter of informed consent, informs the subject about their rights as well as providing them with some information about the research procedure. Anderson (1990) cites six basic elements of informed consent: an explanation of the procedures used in the study and their purposes; a description of any reasonably foreseeable risks and discomforts to the subjects; a description of any benefits that may be reasonably expected; a disclosure of any alternative procedures

that might be advantageous to the subject; an offer to answer any questions concerning procedures; and a statement that participation is voluntary and that the subject is free to withdraw at any stage of the research process. A letter of informed consent (appendix 4) outlining all the necessary information was forwarded to all the parents who formed the research population.

A further issue to consider is that of the subject's privacy, anonymity and confidentiality. Confidentiality refers to the keeping secret the names that a subject may mention during the research (Neuman, 1994). The researcher violates the privacy of the subject only to a minimum degree necessary, but the information on the subjects is protected from public disclosure. The subject's identity is guaranteed by the researcher by not disclosing this to anybody.

A researcher cannot demand access to an institution, an organization or to materials. People will be doing the researcher a favour by agreeing to help. Consequently, people will need to know exactly what they will be asked to do, how much time they will be expected to give and what use will be made of the information provided by them. Administrators, parents and keepers of documents will have to be convinced of the researcher's integrity and of the value of the research before they decide whether or not to co-operate (Bell, 2002). A gatekeeper is somebody with the formal or informal authority to control access to a research site. Formal organizations like schools have authorities from whom permission must be obtained prior to entering the site and conducting research. Researchers can expect to negotiate with gatekeepers and bargain for access. It is ethically and politically astute to follow protocol and to call on gatekeepers to seek their consent for the progress of the research project (Neuman, 1994).

With these issues in mind, informed consent was sought for the following:
i). Use of the respective schools as research sites from principals, SGB chairpersons and the Provincial Education Department (appendices 1-3).
ii). Retrieval of statistics from SGB records.
iii). Involvement of parents in the survey (appendix 4).

iv). Interviewing of parents, principals and SGB chairpersons (appendices 7-9).

The confidentiality of the respondents was guaranteed, with a reminder that their names will not be divulged to anybody without their prior knowledge and consent. In addition, parents were afforded the option of quitting at any stage of the research process if they felt uncomfortable for some reason or the other. Cohen & Manion (1994) contend that no protocol or code of practice can resolve all problems, but they still consider a code of ethical practice as something that makes researchers aware of their obligations to their subjects.

This research project involved people from different cultures (both English-speaking and isiZulu speaking subjects). This made informed consent difficult, partly because of the language barrier, and also because it was possibly difficult for people from other cultures to understand the nature of research and its uses. The researcher is seen as more powerful by the subjects and they (the subjects) therefore feel obligated to participate in a research study. Anderson (1990) suggests that an important safeguard is to involve researchers from the other cultures to assist in explaining the research and in interpreting its results. It is for this reason that the service of a co-researcher, who was an isiZulu mother tongue speaker, had been engaged.

3.6. Credibility, trustworthiness and validity

Reliability and validity are central issues in all scientific measurement. Reliability deals with the dependability of an indicator. If the researcher has a reliable indicator or measure, the same result will be attained each time the same thing is measured as long as the measuring is not changing. The information provided by an indicator (like a questionnaire) does not vary as a result of characteristics of the indicator (Neuman, 1994). Validity refers to the degree to which a method, test or research tool actually measures what it is supposed to measure (Wellington, 2000). Wellington warns that we cannot be 100% sure of validity but we can only lay some sort of claim that the test or method is valid.

The reliability and credibility of the questionnaires were determined by a pilot study and literature search. The pilot study consisted of 5 parents, 1 school principal and 1 former school governing body chairman. Included in the parents for the pilot study was 1 parent from the African community.

Both the survey questionnaire and the interview schedule were translated from English into isiZulu in order to cater for those respondents who chose to interact with the research study in their preferred language, which is isiZulu (in the province of KwaZulu-Natal). The use of the services of a co-researcher during the interviews was an attempt by me to add credibility to the findings of the study.

Since the study entailed using just a representative sample, and since it was just conducted in two research sites, it was difficult to generalize the findings of this study to the wider picture. The findings of the research in the two research sites did not mean that the findings will be applicable to all other primary schools in the area, or indeed anywhere else in the province or country.

3.7. Data analysis

Data analysis is the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, field notes and other materials accumulated to increase the researcher's understanding of them, and to enable a researcher to present this information to others. Analysis involves working with data, organizing them, breaking them into smaller and more manageable units, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and deciding what to tell others (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

All returned survey questionnaires were documented in the form of a spreadsheet for each research site using the Microsoft Excel computer package. Statistical summary sheets of the questionnaires were prepared for each question in the questionnaire depicting the responses to each question (appendices 11 and 12). Once the data had been captured, a careful analysis of the data was undertaken. The data was used to draw inferences about the two research sites.

Not all the interviews were recorded because consent for this was not forthcoming from the interviewees. In fact, only one interviewee (chairman B) agreed to have the interview recorded. Since consent from the other interviewees was not granted, detailed notes were taken by the researcher during the interviews. The interview notes, together with the transcript of one interview, were then analysed in detail. This was a labour-intensive task that had to be undertaken in order to make sense of the data collected. Patterns and themes in the data, for instance, recurrent behaviour, objects or vocabulary, were elicited. Once patterns were identified, they were interpreted in terms of a social theory or a setting in which it occurred (Neuman, 1994).

3.8. Challenges faced during the research process

The research process did not proceed as initially planned. I encountered various challenges during the research process. Firstly, some of the African parents from school A indicated a willingness to be interviewed, and consequently supplied me with contact numbers I could contact them on. Of the eight responses I collected from the African parents, only one of them could be contacted. I was forced to amend the initial research plan that required two African parents and three Indian parents whose children attend school A to be interviewed. In view of the challenges faced in contacting the African parents, I decided to interview just one African parent who resided close to school A.

Another challenge I faced was that I tried unsuccessfully to secure an interview with the chairperson of the SGB of school B. Numerous attempts to secure an interview with this chairperson proved fruitless because he was an attorney who travelled to other provinces for prolonged periods of time as part of his duty. I was instead able to secure an interview with the past chairperson (of the SGB of school B) whose tenure as chairperson ended when he resigned in March 2006.

The next challenge faced was that the SGB of both schools A and B refused to grant me access to the statistics I requested. Consent was sought from both SGBs for the

attendance figures of parental attendance to school meetings. The intention was to use these figures to verify the parental attendance at meetings. Unfortunately, I was unable to secure these figures from the SGBs, so I was unable to trace the attendance of parents at school meetings over a period of three years as initially planned. Both schools A and B informed me of their decisions in writing (refer to appendices 10a and 10b).

3.9. Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodology adopted for this research study. It has provided an in-depth discussion of the methodology employed, the instruments used to gather data, and the selection of schools as the research sites. In addition, a thorough description of the ethical issues that accompanied my research project was provided.

CHAPTER 4:
DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1. Introduction

Chapter 4 presents a summary of the data gathered in an attempt to gain insights into parental involvement in school governance. The main purpose of the research was to investigate the reasons why parents showed a keen interest in school governance in some schools while there seemed to be an apparent lack of interest in other schools. In addressing this question, the following associated issues were examined:

> ➤ To what extent were parents of primary school learners trained in school governance?
> ➤ To what extent were parents of primary school learners experienced in school governance?
> ➤ What are the levels of parental involvement in school governance?

The data was gathered using survey questionnaires and semi-structured interviews as tools. The survey questionnaire was also used to determine which parents were willing to be interviewed so that more information could be gathered on the topic.

This chapter is divided into two sections. Section 1 presents the data as collected from the two research sites. Section 2 deals with an analysis of this data, as well as a discussion on the main findings of the research project.

4.2. Data Presentation and analysis

4.2.1. Section 1: Data Presentation

In this section, I discuss the data as presented by the survey questionnaire and interviews. The discussion of the data gathered from the questionnaire is discussed first, followed by a discussion of the interviews. Some of the data presented is in the quantitative form and some is in the qualitative form.

4.2.1.1. Survey questionnaire (Refer to appendix 6)

The first tool used to gather data was the survey questionnaire. These questionnaires were handed out to the learners for hand delivery to their parents/guardians. Parents or guardians of learners from grades two to six in both of the research sites were identified as potential research subjects. These survey questionnaires were handed out to 50% of the "target population", the school's learner population from grades two to six (Neuman, 1994). The following tables (tables 6 and 7) reflect the number of learners in each grade from grades 2-6 in both of the research sites, as well as the number of survey questionnaires handed out:

Table 6: Roll and surveys handed out: School A

GRADES	ACTUAL ROLL PER GRADE	NUMBER OF SURVEYS HANDED OUT
2A; 2B	64	32
3A; 3B; 3C	66	33
4A; 4B; 4C	86	44
5A; 5B; 5C	120	60
6A; 6B	55	28
TOTAL	391	197

Table 7: Roll and surveys handed out: School B

GRADES	ACTUAL ROLL PER GRADE	NUMBER OF SURVEYS HANDED OUT
2A; 2B; 2C	114	76
3A; 3B; 3C	118	59
4A; 4B; 4C; 4D	154	78
5A; 5B; 5C; 5D; 5E	200	100
6A; 6B; 6C	109	37
TOTAL	695	350

The statistics in table 8 (below) reveal the response rates from the respondents with regard to the number of questionnaires returned. School A had an overall return rate of 44.7% whereas school B yielded a higher return rate of 68%.

Table 8: Statistical returns of survey questionnaires handed out:

School	Returned: YES to interview	Returned: NO to interview	Returned: Blank	Total Returned	Number not returned	Total number handed out
A	24 (27%)	51 (57.9%)	13 (13.6%)	88 (44.7%)	109 (55.3%)	197
B	72 (30.2%)	122 (51.2%)	44 (18.5%)	238 (68 %)	112 (32%)	350

In Section A of the survey questionnaire, 74 (84%) of the respondents from school A replied that they are aware of school meetings being held at the school, while 190 (79.8%) of the respondents from school B concede to being aware of school meetings being held. Only three respondents from school A and two from school B indicated that they were not aware of parents' meetings being called at their children's school. This seems to suggest that both schools are keeping the parents informed about meetings or other school events being held.

When asked whether they attended the last school meeting, 43 respondents (48.9%) from school A and 106 respondents (44.5%) from school B indicated in the affirmative. 34% of respondents from school A and 0.8% from school B indicated they have not attended any of the prior SGB meetings.

A higher percentage of respondents from school A (44.3%) as compared to school B (8.4%) indicated that they walked to the school to attend meetings. School A respondents seem to have a lower percentage of parents (26%) who indicated that they have their own vehicle to travel with to attend meetings, whereas 62.6% of respondents from school B indicated that they have their own vehicles to travel with to school meetings. 10.2% of respondents from school A indicated that they use public transport to school for meetings and 7.9% indicated that they use other means of transport to get

to school. Respondents from School B indicated that 2.1% of them use public transport as a means of transport to get to the school and 3.8% use other means of transport.

54.5% of respondents from school A indicated that SGB meetings are held at convenient times for them to attend whilst 14.3% indicated that the meetings are not held at a suitable time. At school B, 52.9% of respondents indicated that meeting times are convenient for them and 26.5% indicated that the meeting times are not convenient for them.

When asked if they would attend more SGB meetings if these were held at any other suitable time, 63.6% from school A agreed whilst 15.9% indicated that they would not attend more meetings. 60.9% of school B respondents indicated that would attend more meetings and 13% indicated that having the meetings at any other suitable times would not make them attend the school meetings.

Section B of the survey questionnaire dealt with the respondents' knowledge of the South African School's Act (SASA). A number of respondents indicate that they are unaware of the SASA (47.8% from school A and 46.3% from school B).

68.2% of respondents from school A and 68.9% from school B are in favour of parents becoming involved in school governance. On the question of whether parents can make a meaningful contribution to schools, 75% of respondents from school A and 73.4% from school B agreed that parents can make meaningful contribution to schools.

Table 9 indicates the responses to the question of who should be responsible for the administration of schools. All the respondents chose to answer as combinations, for instance, school should be administered by parents, principals and educators.

Table 9: Who should administer a school?

School	Parents	Principals	Learners	Government	Teachers
A	40.9%	30.7%	8%	55.7%	36.3%
B	47%	69.7%	12.6%	33.6%	50%

Respondents were asked to speculate as to what are some of the reasons many parents are not involved in school governance. The responses to this question are contained in table 10 below:

Table 10: Reasons for parents not getting involved in school governance: Parents' perspectives (expressed as a percentage)

Reasons (as surmised by respondents) for non-participation of parents in school governance	School A	School B
They do not have the necessary skills or education.	16.3	37.4
They do not have the necessary experience.	16.3	37.8
Principals and teachers are trained to do this sort of task.	7.1	20.2
Parents feel intimidated by teachers and principals.	13.8	11.8
Parents should not take on the responsibility of the state.	4.6	7.1
Parents do not have the time.	29.1	42

When asked why parents were not involved in school governance, the most common reason (as chosen by the majority of the respondents of both schools) was that parents did not have the time for this activity. Some of the other more common reasons (as cited by at least 20% of respondents) for non-participation in school governance included the following: no experience; no skills and training; work-related factors; transport; and poor health. The less-common reasons (cited by less than 5 respondents) for non-involvement in school governance included the following: a lack of opportunities; family commitments; the timing of parent meetings; a feeling of intimidation by educators; nepotism by teachers; a lack of sympathy from the school and its role-players towards parents facing challenges; and educators and the principal were adequately equipped to handle the governance of the school.

Other popular reasons (as cited by at least 20% of the respondents) during interviews but not contained as alternatives in the questionnaire included the following: parental apathy; the timing of meetings being unsuitable for some parents; work commitments such as shift work; transport difficulties; family responsibilities (such as minding children), studies and single parenting. The less commonly cited reasons included the issue of language of communication at meetings, SGBs not being fully representative, no incentives being offered to the parent for his/her involvement in school governance,

and some parents did not see themselves as wealthy enough to serve on school governing bodies.

On the question of parents being trained prior to taking on a responsibility like school governance, 72.7% of respondents from school A and 73.9% from school B were in favour of this type of training. 75% of respondents from school A and 73.4% from school school B agreed that this type of training is needed. Respondents were questioned whether they would be keen to undergo school governance training. 53.4% from school A and 50.4% from school B indicated they would attend such training. Respondents were asked for reasons why they would be willing or unwilling to undergo school governance training. The more common reasons (cited by more than 5 respondents) for willing to attend training courses included the following: to gain knowledge and experience; to serve the school better; help in making informed decisions; to execute the task of governance more effectively; to equip parents with the necessary skills; and to support the principal and teachers of the school. Reasons provided for not wanting to attend such training include the following: School governance was too demanding and stressful; parents did not have the time; and work pressures. Some of the less common reasons (cited by less than 5 respondents) for not wanting to attend such training included the following: no transport; family responsibilities; parents engaged in studies; poor health of parents; parents felt intimidated by educators and principals; and a desire not to become involved in the SGB of the school.

When asked whether they were currently involved in school governance, 5.7% of respondents from school A and 69.3% from school B indicated they are involved in the governance of their children's school.

The reasons given by respondents for their involvement in school governance included the following: parents could use the opportunity to build better relationships with their children and their children's educators; to ensure a better standard of education for children; involvement in school governance was a moral responsibility of parents; and to ensure that school funds were properly spent.

The question on what can be done by the school, SGB or Education Department to get more parents involved in school governance drew a wide variety of responses and suggestions. One of the suggestions from the majority of the respondents was that parents needed to be educated and trained in school governance in order to build the parents' capacity to manage and govern schools. Another popular idea was that the school needed to hold more meetings with parents to keep them informed. In addition, these meetings must be held at a time convenient to the majority of the parents, preferably on a Saturday afternoon. Where parents could not attend such meetings, the school should send out questionnaires to those parents requesting their inputs. In this way, more of the parents will have some say in the decisions taken at meetings.

Some of the less common suggestions (made by less than 5 respondents) included the following: Education Department personnel should be present at all parent meetings to ensure that the meetings were properly conducted and that the meetings were not monopolized by just a handful of the wealthier and more influential parents; there needed to be an open line of communication between the Education Department and parents so that parents may communicate freely with the Education Department without the interference of teachers and the school principal; the Department of Education should print information brochures, pamphlets and posters, and use the mass media as instruments to reach parents in the drive to advocate school governance to the parents at large; and to provide transport to meetings for parents who experience transport difficulties in attending school meetings. A small minority of parents actually felt that the school and Education Department cannot do any more because parents need to shed their apathetic attitude and become involved more in school governance. For instance, parent B4 asserts that parents "need to shed their apathetic attitude and show greater interest in the school". Parent A4 said that it was time "parents take responsibility for their children's education".

4.2.1.2. Semi-structured interviews (appendices 7-9)

Interviews were conducted with the principal, the SGB chairperson and five parents each from both schools A and B. The selection of parents for the interviews was based

on the returns of the questionnaires. Those parents who were keen to be interviewed were requested to furnish their names and contact details so that I could make contact with them to set up the interviews. It was a relatively easy task to secure interviews with parents whose children attended school B because these parents seemed keen to be interviewed.

However, securing interviews with parents linked to school A proved more challenging, for reasons ranging from parents' failure to honour the interview dates, to parents being unwilling to be interviewed in spite of indicating their intentions to the contrary. In addition to these challenges, an interview with the chairperson of the SGB of school B proved to be a real challenge. He did not seem to have the time to participate in the interview because he cited a very tight work schedule, which included work after hours.

Parents interviewed will hereafter be referred to as parent A1, A2, B3 etcetera. The chairperson of the SGB will be referred to as 'chairperson A or chairperson B, while the school principal will be referred to as 'Principal A or Principal B.

4.2.1.2.1. School A

As an introduction, all interviewees were asked for their views on parental involvement in school governance. All of the respondents agreed that parental involvement was beneficial to the school. The principal, although mildly enthusiastic about increased parental involvement, felt that parents needed to know about the goings-on at school. The chairperson summed up parental involvement very well when he asserted that "parents needed to realize that they needed to invest in their children's education, and the greater the level of parental involvement, the better the investment". All five parents indicated that school A was convenient because it was the one closest to their houses. Two of the four parents indicated that the school their children currently attend is the same school that they (the parents) attended as learners, so they preferred to send their children to this school. However, one of these parents indicated that he would change his child's school if he could get the opportunity because he is not satisfied with school A.

Four parents said that they went to the school daily to bring their children back home after school. Two parents said that they went to the school at least once weekly to check on their children's progress. When questioned about the reasons for them going to the school, parents indicated they did not wait for an invitation from the school or teacher, but instead went along on their own accord for parent-teacher discussions. Parents went to school because they saw this act as a vital step in their children's lives.

When asked how parents felt whenever they went to the school, not all of them expressed similar sentiments. Parent A1 indicated that he "gets a lump in my throat whenever I go to the school, even if it is to pick up my children". He indicated that he distrusted the SGB and school since, he believed, they had breached the confidentiality he placed in them when he disclosed his health condition to them. He suspects that the governing body, teachers and principal have leaked this sensitive information about his health status that he entrusted them with. Parent A1 believed that many parents now know of his status, which has made him feel uncomfortable and angry. Because parent A1 blamed the school and its educators for his health status becoming public knowledge, he distrusted the staff and SGB of school A. Parents A2 and A4 indicated they felt welcome at the school. Parent A4 felt he got a cold reception whenever he, or his spouse, went to the school.

When questioned about the attitude of parents towards the school. The principal indicated that the parents generally had a good attitude, and they did not display "any bitterness towards the school". Three of the five parents indicated that they referred to the school as "our school" because each of these parents had a long association with the school since they themselves were learners at the same school. However, two of these parents regarded the school as "our school" only because their families had a tradition of attending this school, and for no other reason. Only parent 1 referred to the school as "my child's school" largely because of the distrust he has developed for the school and its educators. In addition, he felt that the educators were victimising his children because of his dire pecuniary situation which made it impossible to pay the required school fees.

Of the five parents interviewed, three attended the last SGB election meeting, but for differing reasons. Parents A2 and A3 attended the last SGB election meeting out of curiosity because they wanted to see who the new SGB members were. Parent A4 wanted to use the last election meeting as an opportunity to raise a few concerns she had pertaining to the school. Parent A1 last attended a SGB meeting of parents in 2004. His reason, as outlined earlier, was because of his distrust of the principal, educators and the SGB members.

When questioned about the type of assistance parents could offer to the school, the principal indicated that parents offered their services in the following areas: home visits to discuss issues like learner absenteeism from schools; maintenance of the school; financial aid; and relief teaching. Parent A1 indicated he has the ability to coach certain codes of sport, teach skill classes in certain areas of expertise he had like Art and Woodwork, and he had different handyman skills in the fields of plumbing, electrical and welding that the school could utilise. Parent A2 was willing to offer financial assistance to the school, and conduct sports coaching with the learners. Parent A3 was experienced in safety and security, and he could offer these skills and knowledge to the school. Parent A4 was willing to get involved in fund-raising, sports coaching and assistance with relief teaching. However, the school did not seem to be too keen to harness the capacity of these parents because they (the parents) had not been contacted by the school in spite of them offering their services to the school.

When asked to speculate why some parents do not attend SGB meetings, Parent A1 indicated that he did not attend meetings because of his dislike of some of the educators. Parent A2 felt that SGB meetings were a waste of time because a lot of talk went on at these meetings but this talk was rarely translated into action. In addition, he felt that the same issues were constantly on the agenda, so nothing new was on offer at these meetings. Parent A2 felt that the school principal was too domineering at the parent meetings. Parent A4 was of the view that the parents' meetings were too financially-focused. She felt that every parent meeting degenerated into a financial meeting with the emphasis always falling on financial matters. In addition, Parent A4 felt that there appeared to be a group of parents who seemed to dominate these

meetings, and it was the same group of parents that was very frequently seen at the school chatting to the principal and educators.

All five of the parents agreed that the school could have done more to inform parents about the SGB, especially its functions. They believed that the school should have sent out a newsletter outlining the functions of the SGB, who the SGB members were as well as the contact numbers of each SGB member. Parent A4 even suggested that the school set aside a room to allow parents to meet and caucus before an election so that they could get somebody who they thought would best serve the interests of the learners and parents, and in so doing, preventing parents with selfish motives from getting on the SGB. He believed that the same parents seemed to get elected repeatedly, and he questioned the legality of the SGB because he suspected some of these parents serving on the SGB did not have children currently attending the school, thereby making them ineligible to stand for elections. There seemed to be uniformity by all five parents on the issue of parents being kept more informed about the happenings at the school. Parent A1 felt that members of the SGB and/or staff members should pay home visits to parents to elicit their views, especially those who do not attend SGB meetings.

4.2.1.2.2. School B

The structure of the interview was similar with respondents in school B. As an introduction to the interview, interviewees were asked whether they felt that parental involvement in school governance was important. The chairperson expressed very strongly the need for parents to show greater involvement in school governance when he asserted that "parental involvement is extremely important". The chairperson believed that parental involvement created a two-way channel of communication between the school and home environment. The principal remarked that "self-managing schools were only a theoretical reality, but it could not happen without the support of parents", hence parental involvement was absolutely crucial. All five parents concurred with the principal and SGB chairperson that parental involvement was useful. However, parent B1 was of the opinion that although parental involvement was

important, it needed to be limited to certain aspects of school only. He was not in favour of SGBs because he felt that parents on the SGB looked for their personal interests only, and not the interests of the learners. He believed that parents should only act in an advisory capacity, and they should not be allowed to make any decisions for the school.

Three of the parents interviewed indicated that the school their children attended was the one closest to their houses, whilst the other two parents indicated that this school was not the one closest to their houses but it was their school of choice. These parents had done some form of enquiry before deciding to enroll their children at school B. These enquiries included queries about school fees charged by the school. They also held discussions with parents whose children attended school B. Two of the parents indicated that their children were previously at other schools that levied a much higher school fee, but they (parents) were not satisfied with the quality of teaching and learning at these schools. Other reasons for the choice of this school included: stricter control by the teaching staff; not too many learners of the African race at the school (cited by one parent); the belief that the education provided at this school was of a superior standard; and that the educators had a good attendance record to school.

When asked how often parents visited the school and for what reasons, four of the five parents interviewed indicated they went to the school whenever they were called to the school by the teachers, or when the school called up a parents' meeting. Only one parent indicated he went to the school about three times a week to hold discussions with his child's educators. Parent B1 indicated he went to the school about two to three times annually. He attended the first meeting of the year and then whenever there was a parent-teacher conference held at school. Three of the five parents went to the school daily to pick up their children at the end of each school day.

Three parents agreed that the school had a warm and welcoming environment. These parents found that there was no evidence of any hostility in the air. All the parents interviewed agreed that the school was very accommodating. However, one parent indicated she felt like an outsider whenever she visited the school. She felt

uncomfortable, and she regarded the educators as strangers because she had limited personal contact with the principal and staff of the school owing to her work schedule. This parent was of the view that too much contact with the educators may be very intimidating for the educator because the educator sees too much of the parent at school.

On the question of the parents' attitude to the school, the principal claimed that parents have a "positive attitude" to the school. This attitude was evident in the responses from parents to meetings and fund-raising activities. Four parent interviewees indicated that they refer to the school as "our school" whilst the fifth parent insisted that she refers to the school as "my child's school". The four parents were proud of the school and its various achievements, and that the learners' results were pleasing. The one parent believed that just a handful of parents seemed to have a major influence on the school because they were always at the school. In addition, she believed that this cohort of parents belonged to the wealthier group of society. She felt that the school seemed to be status orientated, and seemed to focus on those parents who can make monetary contributions to the school in addition to the school fees. Parent B2 was of the opinion that the school seemed to rely solely on parents who could be of assistance to the school, but this excluded working parents (like her) who could not come to the school frequently due to work commitments.

On the question of whether parents attended the last SGB election, three out of the five (B2, B4 and B5) indicated they attended whilst the fourth (B3) had to attend another meeting on the same date and time at the secondary school his daughter attended. However, parent B2 commented that the SGB election, which was the most recent meeting called, was a waste of time because the same people seem to be re-elected. Parent B1 mentioned that parents are too busy to come to meetings during week-days. Instead, he suggested that meeting be held on week-ends to allow more parents the opportunity to attend these meetings. In addition, parent B1 felt that the principal and educators should have been tasked with school governance because they know what to do. In view of this opinion, parent B1 felt that SGB meetings were generally boring. Parent B2 claimed that the image the school had was a false one because the school

has not met all her expectations. Parent B2 also believed that a number of parents did not seem to be totally familiar with the functions of the SGB.

Parent B4 cited other reasons why parents did not attend parent meetings: apathy amongst parents; the problem of transport to the meetings for some parents; the absence of an isiZulu interpreter at these parent meetings to cater for the isiZulu parents; the staff needed to be representative of the learner population; and the need to take these meetings to parents if parents cannot attend the meetings. The issues of parental apathy and transport were also mentioned by parent B5.

Respondents had a wide variety of forms of assistance they could offer to the school. The principal presented me with written evidence in the form of surveys sent out to parents requesting them to volunteer their services to the school. The responses received by the school were sufficient evidence that parents were generous in their offers of assistance to the school. These ranged from the securing of financial assistance or other donations from the private sector, education and counselling on relevant issues like HIV/AIDS, First Aid, sport, and the compilation of policy documents, including the legal perspectives on these policies.

Respondents were asked what could be done by the school or Education Department to get more parents involved in school governance, and four of the five parents mentioned that parents needed to be trained in school governance. Such education drives could come in the form of road shows as a way of getting to as many parents as possible, or the production of newsletters relevant to school governance to hand out to parents. Schools could have fewer meetings to discuss more issues instead of holding many short meetings. These meetings should be held during week-ends.

When asked whether they were satisfied with the current SGB, all except one of the parents agreed that they had faith in the current SGB. The fifth parent (B1) could not comment since he believed that SGBs should have a purely advisory role only. Three parents indicated that they had faith in the SGB since they (the parents) elected them into office. Parent B2 wished to remain neutral on the question. Parent B1 felt

that education was better run by the government and there was minimal disruption as compared to modern day education. As a result, he did not have faith in the SGB of the school.

As a closing comment, parent B4 indicated that school governance was an exciting addition to South Africa's democracy that allowed parents to take ownership of schools in an attempt to make a difference to the lives of the learners. Parent B2 preferred greater transparency in SGBs, and more clarity of the role functions of school governing bodies.

4.2.2. Section 2: A discussion of the research findings

4.2.2.1. Introduction

This section presents an analysis of the findings that have emerged from the data-gathering process. A general discussion is made before the themes that emerged from the research are discussed. I discuss the following themes that emerged from the research: the phenomenon of migration; parental involvement – a question of time, timing, skills and/or experience; school culture; parental attitudes determine parental involvement; are SGBs closed organizations; and socio-economics and parental involvement.

4.2.2.2. General discussion

There seemed to be evidence of inconsistencies in the responses by the principal and SGB chairperson to the question on the attendance figures by parents to meetings. The principal indicated that there was an average parental turnout of between 100-120 at meetings. The chairperson responded (to a similar question) that the average parental turnout at meetings was approximately 50% of the learner population. The communication I received from the chairperson A stated that their SGB-called parent meetings had an attendance of "between 60%-70%" (refer to appendix 10). A scrutiny

of the actual figures revealed these inconsistencies. School A had a total roll of 553 learners during the time of this research. According to the principal, the average parental attendance at meetings ranges between 100-120 parents. The chairperson (during the course of the interview) indicated that the average parental attendance was approximately 270 parents. However, appendix 10 placed the average parental attendance at parent meetings between 332-387 parents (60%-70%). These statistics were vastly conflicting. However, it was difficult to verify or contest these statistics because denied access to the SGB records showing attendance of parents to meetings was denied to me.

4.2.2.2.1. Emergent Themes

The themes discussed hereafter were identified from the responses received from the interviews as well as the survey questionnaires. Every response made in reply to the questions asked during the interviews was noted, as well as all the responses made by the respondents to the open-ended questions in the questionnaires. Once the responses were recorded, they were analysed for commonalities. Thereafter, I grouped together the common ideas under headings which I felt most appropriately described them. In this way, I was able to arrive at the themes I discuss hereafter.

4.2.2.2.1.1.   The phenomenon of migration of learners

Principal A, in making closing comments on parental involvement in school governance, noted that there has been a growing trend in recent years for Indian learners who attended this school to be transferred by their parents to former Whites-only schools away from the areas they resided in. The principal lamented that such outward migration of the learners had a negative impact on parental involvement in school. She felt that these were the parents who were generally active in school governance, and they had been replaced by parents who, in her own words, "either did not have the time, skill or will" to become active in parental involvement at school. Principal A felt that the school had been bereft of the obvious advantage of ownership of the school by its community due to an absence of adequate parental involvement. In addition, principal

A felt that if parents took ownership of the school, then they would fully support the school. Such support would entail greater involvement in school governance. However, the notion that learners living in close proximity to the two research sites were enrolled in increasing numbers at the former Whites-only schools situated further away from their houses cannot be verified or contested because this issue fell outside the ambit of this research study.

The notion of learners commuting to schools was an indication of parents exercising their democratic right of choosing which schools their children should attend. Motala, Vally & Modiba (1999) call this the phenomenon of migration, and it has become widespread. By migration was implied the movement of learners to schools away from their residential areas. The phenomenon of migration often meant that parents resided far distances away from the schools their children attended. Many Indian learners residing in the former Indian areas did not attend schools in their own residential areas. Instead these learners enrolled at the former Whites-only schools or private schools (Samuel & Sayed, 2004). The parents of these learners seemed to be of the opinion that the former Whites-only schools offer superior curricular and extra-curricular programmes. The concept of 'community schools' became partially dimmer because the schools these children attended were far away from their areas of residence. This phenomenon of migration by Indian learners to the former Whites-only schools promises to make a fascinating area of study in an attempt to ascertain the reasons parents choose to ignore community schools on their doorsteps and send their children to schools further away from their places of residences.

Table 11 illustrates the distance respondents live from school A and B:

Table 11: Distance parents live from child's school (expressed as a percentage)

Distance from school	School A	School B
0-1 km	17.6	32.9
2-3 km	28.2	31.8
4-6 km	22.7	10.2
More than 6	13.0	10.2

It is apparent from table 11 that school B served a larger section of the community living in closer proximity (1 km or less) to the school when compared to school A. Collectively, school B served a higher community living within a radius of two kilometres from the school as compared to school A. It implied that more of the learners attending school A had to commute to school from distances of more than two kilometres.

The phenomenon of migration was fast eroding the idea of "community" or "neighbourhood schools" as contained in the SASA (Motala, Vally & Modiba, 1999). With this type of migration, learners move away from the schools in their immediate areas into schools out of their residential areas. It seemed as if school A suffered to a greater degree from the phenomenon of migration since a smaller fraction of its learners live within a 1 kilometre radius from the school. School B had a greater number of learners living within a 1 kilometre radius from the school, so it seemed to suggest that it (school B) suffers to a lesser degree from this outward migration phenomenon.

On the other hand, both schools A and B were the benefactors of inward migration, where learners from other areas came into these schools to replace those learners who migrated out to the former Whites-only schools. The difference between the inward migration into both these schools lay in the ethnic or racial grouping of the incoming learners. School A seemed to attract learners mostly from the African population. This accounted for the higher percentage of African learners at school A (see table 1). These learners seemed to commute from different geographic areas, and this factor could have possibly contributed to the limited interest in school governance from the parents of these learners.

On the issue of learners commuting to school, chairman A surmised that approximately 20% of the school's learner population travelled a distance of 5 kilometres or more to get to school. This seemed to suggest that approximately 20% of the learners from school A travelled from other suburbs, the city centre or the former African townships to attend school. If the majority of these learners were commuting from the African townships, then the comment by Motala, Vally & Modiba (1999) that 'parental

involvement in school governance by African parents is difficult or impossible' raises alarm bells for schools like, school A, that had a higher population of African learners. Consequently, it was not totally unexpected that schools like school A, which had a high enrollment of African learners, may have had a lower rate of parental involvement in school governance. School B, on the other hand, had just 37 learners from the African population. Some of these learners resided in close proximity to the school. The absence of the parents of these African learners from meetings at school B did not seem to have a profound impact on the meetings although chairperson B did not view this situation as a healthy one in spite of the population dynamics of the area.

Chairman B indicated that approximately 20% of the school's learner population travel from a distance of five kilometres or more to come to school. This seemed to suggest that some learners residing close to school B travel to other schools, thus creating a gap that was filled by the traveling 20%. However, this traveling 20% of the school's learner population was certainly not of the African community because the enrollment of school B (table 1) cites that African learners made up just 3.8% of the school's learner population. The learners migrating into school B seemed to come mainly from one main racial or ethnic grouping, that of the South African Indian population. Perhaps it was this difference in the learners' racial and ethnic groups in the inward migration of learners that contributed partially to the difference in parental involvement in school governance at these schools.

The phenomenon of migration affected learners of the African race to a larger extent more than any of the other population grouping in South Africa. A review of the learner racial enrollment (as illustrated by table 12) becomes necessary in order to examine the potential impact the phenomenon of migration to better-resourced schools had on parental involvement in school governance. Table 12 illustrates the number of learners from the different racial groups that attended the two schools. It was evident that school A had a high number of African learners, although I could not claim with any degree of certainty whether these learners lived commuted from the African townships. In hindsight, this information was vital and should have been included in one of the research instruments, probably the questionnaire.

Table 12: Learner enrollment at research site

School	Grade Range	School Classification	Locality	Roll	LEARNER RACIAL COMPOSITION (Percentages in brackets)			
					I	A	W	C
A	0-7	Section 21	Urban	553	355 (64.2)	189 (34.2)	- -	9 (1.6)
B	0-7	Section 21	Urban	968	916 (94.7)	37 (3.8)	1 (0.1)	14 (1.4)

Key

I – *Indians*   A - *Africans*

W- *Whites*   C- *Coloureds*

Motala, Vally & Modiba (1999) pointed out that the option of parents' choice of schools was exercised by both the middle class parents as well as the working class parents (p.603). Working class parents made tremendous sacrifices, despite their own material constraints and limitations imposed on them in terms of location and cost of schooling, to send their children to better-resourced schools. Many of these better-resourced schools are situated far from the African townships, thus parental involvement in school governance, especially by African parents whose children migrate to these better-resourced schools, is difficult or impossible (Ibid, p. 603).

Hornby (2002) conducted research in England, Barbados and New Zealand in an attempt to analyse the strengths and weaknesses of parental involvement in education in these three countries. Hornby believed there was a set of factors that had an influence on parental involvement in schools in these countries. One of these factors was the phenomenon of migration, as occurred in South Africa. Hornby found that it was easier to establish higher levels of parental involvement where the majority of the learners walked to the school. It was easier to get parents involved when their children attended local schools, schools that parents viewed as part of their community. When children were transported to schools outside of their residential areas, these schools were seldom identified with by the local community. It became difficult to ensure a satisfactory level of parental participation in these situations. A study by Louw (2004)

found that the distance of the schools from the parents' residences was a significant factor that militated against parental involvement in school meetings.

4.2.2.2.1.2. Parental involvement – a question of time, timing, skills and/or training?

This theme directly addresses the following research sub-question of the study: "To what extent are parents of primary school learners trained in school governance?" SGBs are legislated bodies in South Africa, and parental involvement has become a legal requirement. Given that school governance was a legal requirement, parents should have shown greater commitment in ensuring they participated more actively in school governance in spite of the responsibilities or other engagements they may have.

The reasons parents did not get involved in school governance (see appendix 6) begs analysis. The most common reason provided by parents for non-involvement in school governance was that parents did not have the time, as reflected in table 13:

Table 13: Reasons for parents are not getting involved in school governance (as a percentage):

Reasons (as surmised by respondents) for non-participation of parents in school governance	School A	School B
They do not have the necessary skills or education.	16.3	37.4
They do not have the necessary experience.	16.3	37.8
Principals and teachers are trained to do this sort of task.	7.1	20.2
Parents feel intimidated by teachers and principals.	13.8	11.8
Parents should not take on the responsibility of the state.	4.6	7.1
Parents do not have the time.	29.1	42

According to table 13, the second most common reason for parents not being involved in school governance was that of a lack of skills or knowledge, followed by a lack of necessary experience. The 2003 SGB election report indicated that the proportion of elected parents on SGBs with primary school education as the highest level of education was 50% of the total parents sampled for the report (KZN Department of Education and Culture, p. 42).This statistic suggested that many parents felt they were not qualified enough to serve as school governors. Adams and Waghid's (2003) study (refer to the literature review) found that governing bodies were not empowered to

execute their role functions as school governors with great success. The reason for this inability was that the school communities were poor, and they lacked the necessary education levels to enact their roles efficiently as governors.

The research study by Louw (2004) found that 54.5% of all the parents interviewed indicated that a lack of time prevented them from attending school activities/meetings (refer to table 1). In the same research study, 74% of the teachers interviewed felt that a lack of time was a contributory factor to lower parental involvement. Lemmer (1999) quite appropriately asserted that parental involvement in school governance was demanding because it required parents to sacrifice their time, something not many parents were prepared to do. One of the responses to question 13 (appendix 6) seemed to be in line with Lemmer's view when the respondent asserted that parents were not too keen to get involved in school governance because there were no incentives offered to parents for their involvement in school governance.

Mbatha (2005) highlighted the difficulties that may arise out of parental ignorance or experience on school governance matters. Mbatha's study found that the SGB membership in one school was unconstitutional because some of the members were not eligible for election to the SGB since their children were no longer learners at these schools. These members, although serving in co-opted capacities, held the important portfolios of chairperson and deputy-chairperson within the SGB. In addition, one term of office for SGB members is normally three years, unless the same parent is re-elected (Department of Education and Training, 1996). However, Mbatha discovered that the SGB chairman and his deputy had been holding these positions from 1997 to 2005 although their children had long passed through the school. These cases highlighted the difficulties that may arise from parents' lack of education, skills or experience in school governance.

Like parent B4 mentioned, some parents felt that they were not qualified to serve as school governors because they were not graduates. He, however, felt that this was a misconception because being a graduate was not a necessity for involvement in school governance. The members of the current SGB of school B were either graduates or

business people, and this created the misconception amongst other parents that this was what it took for them to become SGB members. Many parents were not graduates but they had accumulated experience in fields that were beneficial to the school. Parent B4 was of the opinion that the misconception that parents' needed a formal qualification to be eligible for school governance was one of the many challenges facing schools and the Provincial Education Department in their quest to get an increased level of parental involvement in school governance.

Furthermore, 16.3% of respondents from school A and 37.8% from school B indicated they did not have any relevant experience to govern a school. Data from the questionnaires, as well as interviews with parents, principals and the SGB chairpersons seems to suggest that parents did indeed lack training or experience, or indeed both, in school governance. Both of the principals and chairpersons interviewed indicated that parents were in need of training before they could become involved as school governors. All those parents interviewed agreed that parents must be trained so that they could make a meaningful contribution to school governance. Parents expressed a strong desire to be trained in the skills required to govern a school effectively. There was a need for some form of training in order to equip parents in preparation for a role in school governance. This type of training may have attracted greater parental involvement in school governance, and such involvement could have resulted in an increase in the attendance to school meetings by parents.

The opinions of the school principals and SGB chairpersons seemed to emphasize the point that many parents lacked experience and/or education in school governance. Principal A indicated that many parents "definitely lacked experience, especially the younger parents". Principal B indicated that parents did not have the relevant training or experience yet they (parents) have to perform vital tasks like the selection of academic and non-academic staff as school governors. Chairperson B felt that many parents were "ignorant about SGBs".

However, when parents were asked whether they were willing to attend training programmes in school governance, some of them expressed an unwillingness to attend.

In response to the question "If you had a chance, would you attend training programmes in school governance?" 53.4% from school A and 50.4% from school B expressed a willingness to attend governance training. What was disconcerting was that 22.7% of respondents from school A and 23.5% from school B had expressed disinterest in attending such training programmes. While, on the one hand, parents bemoaned the fact that they lacked training and experience in school governance, on the other hand, they were reluctant to attend such training to improve their knowledge and skills necessary for school governance had the opportunity arisen.

Other reasons for parental non-involvement included work commitments, a lack of training and/or experience in school governance, and transport. Chairperson B also indicated that he felt that some parents were not too keen on involvement in school governance because they were aware of the demands placed on school governors so they conveniently refrain from involvement. If many parents continued to cite a variety of reasons for their non-involvement in school governance, then they paved the way for other eligible parents to become school governors, irrespective of their ability, experience and/or educational level. Some of the decisions taken by these governors may yet prove unpopular with the parent community at large, so it was in the best interest of the school, its learners and its parent community for all parents to show greater interest in school governance. In this way, decisions taken by the SGB were more likely to be acceptable by all the stakeholders.

On the issue of the starting times of SGB meetings, 52.9% of respondents from school A and 54.5% from school B indicated that the times were suitable to them. However, when asked whether they would attend meetings if the meetings were held at any other suitable time, 63.6% of respondents from school A and 60.9% from School B indicated they would attend the meetings. Perhaps the SGB of both schools should try and elicit from its parent community the times parents find most suitable for meetings to take place because fifteen (15) respondents in total from both schools claimed that the meetings were held at times that are not convenient for them to attend.

A number of respondents from both schools indicated that they preferred meetings to be held on weekends to allow for greater parental attendance. The chairpersons and principals of both schools indicated that their schools attempted to hold meetings on Saturdays in an attempt to attract more parents, but the parental turn-out seemed to be worse than when the meetings were held on week-days. Consequently, both schools resorted to holding meetings on week-days beginning at 18:30 or 19:00. The parental attendance figures for meetings held on week-days showed an increase compared to figures for Saturday meetings. School A hosted "open days" on a weekday during school hours, which afforded parents the opportunity to look at their children's work and engage in teacher-parent conferences. School B hosted its open day on a Friday afternoon because many of the factories and other industries closed early on a Friday so working parents did not have to apply for leave from work to attend these open days.

The response to Section B question 8 (of appendix 6) whether respondents are aware of the SASA merits analysis. In school B, 35.3% indicated they are unaware of the act whilst 47.8% from school A indicated that they are unaware of the SASA. This data presented further challenges to both schools, as well as the Education Department. It seemed to suggest that parents were not well-informed by the schools about the latest developments in education.

Eight of the ten parents interviewed expressed similar sentiments in their response to question 14 (appendix 6) which read as follows: "What can the SGB/school/education department do to get you and other parents to take a more active interest in matters of the school?" Seven parents interviewed preferred more information about school governing bodies and its functions. There seemed to be a break in communication between parents on the one hand, and the school/education department on the other hand in this regard. It should not be assumed that all parents were aware of the functions of SGBs. All the parents interviewed expressed the desire that schools should inform parents about the duties and functions of the SGB so that they (the parents) could become more informed about school governance. Only one out of the ten parents interviewed indicated that he was fully aware of the functions of the school governing

body. His knowledge about governing bodies and its functions could be attributed to the fact that he had seven years of experience serving on school governing bodies.

4.2.2.2.1.3. School culture

The culture of a school refers to the shared way of life of the people associated with that school. It referred to their underlying beliefs, their norms and values and their interactions, the way in which schools do things (Grant, 2003). Some cultures are positive and some are negative, but both of these types of cultures have a bearing on the functionality of a school. Often, cultures are unspoken and taken-for-granted. Culture is not tangible but one can sense and experience it (Ibid, p.47). School culture could communicate any of the following feelings as one enters a school: relaxed and easy or formality and stiffness. School culture is "not fixed, immutable and inert, but created by their participants" (Hopkins, Ainscow & West, 1994: 168).

Parents A2 and A4 felt that the school radiated warmth whenever they went to the school. They felt that the teachers and principal made them feel comfortable. Parents A1 and A3, however, felt that the school presented a very cold atmosphere whenever they went to the school. Parent A1 seemed to have strong feelings of distrust and anger at school A. He felt that these feelings of anger and distrust were so strong in him that "I get a lump in my throat whenever I have to enter the school premises". He had to go to the school daily to pick up his children after school, so these emotions were a daily reminder of the contempt he felt for the school and its staff.

Parents A1 and A3 felt that the school should ensure that somebody was always in the administration block to talk to parents whenever they called at school, as this seemed to create a feeling of being valued by the school. In addition, parent A1 felt that the teachers and principal seemed to hold a grudge against his three school-going children because of his health status. Parent A1 was convinced that his daughter in grade 3, should have won an award in grade 2 in 2005 for outstanding work, but the child was denied this award because the parent could not pay the school fees for the year. Parent A1 said "I don't feel welcome at the school. It seems as if the school is holding

something against my child, which might be because of my financial position". In view of the acrimonious relationship between parent A1 and school A, parent A1 insisted he would never regard school A as 'our school' but only as 'my children's school'. His children attended school A because it was the one closest to his house. He would have gladly transferred them to any other school if he lived any closer to another school. The case of parent A1 was an isolated one in the context of this research study. However, similar cases may have surfaced at other schools, and the impact such parents could have had on other parents seeking admission to schools could have been devastating for the schools concerned.

Parents A2 and A4 expressed their dissatisfaction at teachers and parents engaging in "chatter" during tuition time. Parent A4 asserted that there existed an unhealthy friendship between the educators and SGB members of school A. He made the following claims:

> "The SGB members become too friendly with the teachers. The teachers tend to lose focus of what their jobs are – to educate children. SGB members are often seen talking to teachers during teaching time."

They questioned the legitimacy of such visits and chats since these bisected tuition time. The parents were aware that this was an unethical practice and it should have been addressed by the principal, but they felt that the principal either seemed powerless or unenthusiastic about putting an end to this practice. Such practices left a poor taste in parents' mouths, and created the impression of a negative school culture prevalent at the school. However, these parents were unwilling to bring these issues to the attention of the principal because of their fears of victimization of their children at school. However, there was no evidence to show victimization of learners. In spite of there being a lack of evidence, there still existed amongst some parents the perception that victimization did occur, and such perceptions clearly acted as a barrier to parental involvement in school governance.

Four of the interviewees from school A indicated that parent meetings generally degenerated into finance meetings because the SGB seemed particularly concerned about finances. These parents felt that this could have been one of the reasons why

parents did not attend school meetings. Parent A4 asserted that there is "too much emphasis on finances. Meetings seem to lose its way because they shift from the agenda and almost always end up discussing finances". Parent A5 claimed that meetings "sometimes divert from the agenda because most of the questions asked are mostly about finance". Parent A2 quoted an instance where he stopped a learner who was sent home early from school. On enquiry, he found out that the learner was sent away from school because his parents had not paid in his school fees. These four parents believed that the SGB of school A, in its efforts to recoup as much of any outstanding money due to the school, were actually preventing parents from attending parent meetings because many parents owed money to the school and they felt embarrassed to be present at meetings where financial issues were constantly discussed.

Four of the five parents interviewed from school B indicated that they felt warm and welcome whenever they went to the school. They had not sensed any hostility between parents and educators, so they experienced a welcoming atmosphere at the school. They found the school warm, accommodating and pleasant. Like parent B4 claimed, she "feels welcome whenever I go to the school. Most of the teachers speak warmly". All four interviewees found that whenever they went to the school, there was always somebody at the office to see to them immediately, and in a friendly disposition. They were not made to wait for prolonged periods of time before being attended to. They also did not witness parents and teachers engaging in discussions during tuition time. These parents felt that this type of atmosphere at the school encouraged them to visit the school regularly, and it was these types of visits that attracted them to get involved in school governance like attending parent meetings. They felt that the school was moving in the right direction so they were willing to get involved in the school. They were keen to offer their services in various forms, like fund-raising, sports coaching, relief teaching, and accompanying learners and teachers on official school outings like excursions or sports trips. Principal B presented the researcher with written evidence in the form of surveys sent out to parents to elicit the various forms of assistance they were willing to offer the school. The school received many offers of assistance from parents through these surveys. Perhaps it was a positive culture prevalent in school B

that made parents want to get involved in the school. All five of these parents regard school B as "our school" because they feel like a part of the school family.

Principal B also indicated that there was hardly a shortage of benefactors and sponsors when required by the school. Consequently, the school was able to present each of its grade 7 learners with farewell gifts at the end of each academic year. This had been the practice at school B for the past two years. In 2003, one benefactor donated an amount of in excess of R30 000 towards the school to set up its computer centre. The same benefactor has pledged a further donation to the school in 2007. Principal B was of the opinion that the school and its stakeholder partners had to be doing something acceptable in order to have secured substantial donations of this nature. He speculated that the community knew that the school was fully functional so there were always offers of assistance from the parent community.

However, one of the parents from school B shared different sentiments from the other four parents. Parent B2 felt very unwelcome whenever she went to the school. She ascribed this feeling to her nature and character because she did not feel comfortable when in the company of strangers. The educators and management staff of the school were strangers to her because her child was new to the school. Hence, she was not keen to attend school meetings or get involved in other school activities. Parents B2 and B5 referred to the alleged impartial treatment of a handful of learners by the staff of the school. Parent B2 had the following to say concerning the alleged favourtism by educators:

"I believe that favourtism is rife. The teachers lean more towards those children whose parents make donations to the school."

These parents felt that the children of parents serving on the SGB seemed to receive more favourable treatment when compared to other learners. They also believed that the school seemed to be biased in favour of the wealthier parents, or those parents who had more to offer to the school. Like parent B2 mentions "some parents from status-oriented positions run the show so the school favours the children of these parents." Parent A4 had the following to say about the practice of impartial treatment:

The school tends to favour a handful of parents who become overpowering at times. These parents regard themselves as teachers. Some of the parents are too free and they have too easy access to the school. Their children tend to be treated impartially. They are too pally-pally with the teachers. No lines are drawn between teachers and parents."

Both these parents agreed that such issues did not portray a positive image of the school. Parent B2 felt so strongly about these issues that she did not wish to get involved in the school.

School culture is less observable but critical in adding to the success or failure of schools. Schools needed to take cognizance of the culture within it because culture portrayed schools either in a negative or positive light with parents. In an era when all public schools were competing for learner enrollments, schools could ill-afford to create a negative culture amongst parents as this may have translated into reduced learner admissions at the schools, and subsequent redeployment or retrenchment of educators at such schools.

4.2.2.2.1.4. Parental attitudes influence parental involvement?

There still seems to exist amongst some parents the notion that they should not be involved in school governance. This notion became evident during the researcher's interviews with some of the parents. For instance, parent B1 remarked in his opening comments that although parental involvement was critical, it needed to be limited to just a few circumstances, and these should be more in an advisory capacity. Parent B1 felt that parents should make suggestions for the benefit of the school, but not make decisions on behalf of the school. In his opinion, school governing bodies were more of a status symbol for those parents serving as members because he felt these parents were not in it for the benefit of the learners. He felt that "parents look at their own interests instead of the interest of the learners". In addition, he claimed that problems at schools had grown worse since SGBs came into being. He also felt conflict between the school principals and SGBs was inevitable because "running a school was not the core function of parents". He added that an organization normally had "one person as

its leader, and in a school, that person was the principal and not the school governing body". He contrasted the era of SGBs to the era of state control of schools, and he felt that there seemed to be better control and fewer problems during the state's reign than the current times when SGB's have been installed as governors of schools. He said that he has "no faith in SGBs. There were no problems in the past when education was controlled by the government. Parents should make suggestions, not decisions". Parent B1 felt so strongly about his views that he had never attended a single parent meeting called up by the SGB, although he had attended meetings, for instance open days, called up by the principal or educators.

In addition, Heystek and Louw (1999) asserted that the most important reason why parents did not get involved in school matters was on account of their negative attitude towards the school. My research study found that 12.5% of respondents from school A and 8% from school B felt that parents should not be involved in school governance. Furthermore, 8% of respondents from school A and 5% of respondents from school B felt that parents cannot make a meaningful contribution to schools. Some of the parents held personal views that were untested, and they based their attitude on these views. For instance, parents B2 and B5 accused teachers from school B of favouring those learners whose parents were serving members of the SGB. Parent A1 felt very strongly that the principal, teachers and SGB of the school have spread the news of his poor health condition, and consequently did not wish to have any dealings with the school, nor did he show interest in school governance. However, in both these cases above, the parents had no concrete evidence to substantiate their allegations. In addition, they had not approached the principal or SGB of the respective schools in order to test these allegations because they feared for the victimization of their children by the teachers, principal and SGB. These parents used these allegations as a basis for their decision not to get involved in school governance.

Closely allied to this feeling was the attitude of some parents about who should be tasked with the governance of the school (question 11 of appendix 6). Many of the respondents in both schools indicated that schools should be governed by the parents, principals, educators or the Education Department, either individually or as

combinations. Parent B1 claimed that the "principal, teachers and the government is tasked with the running of a school". However, 7 questionnaire respondents from school A and 20 from school B felt that the principal should be solely tasked with governance of schools, while 8 and 7 respondents from schools A and B respectively indicated that they preferred the Education Department to be solely tasked with the governance of school. There appeared to be some reluctance on the part of these parents to get involved in school governance. Instead, these parents preferred passing on the responsibility to the school principal or the Education Department. What emerged from this observation was that some parents either saw themselves as incompetent or unwilling to get involved in school governance.

4.2.2.2.1.5. Are School Governing Bodies closed organizations?

Parents B2, A2 and A4 lamented that it was the same parents who seemed to be repeatedly elected onto the SGB of the respective schools. Parent B2 claimed that SGB elections are "a waste of time because the same parents are re-elected". These parents held the belief was that the SGB seemed to be a closed organization for a select group of parents, and there did not seem to be any transparency in the election process. They felt that it was the same parents who were elected on an ongoing basis, thereby minimizing the opportunities for other parents to serve on the SGB. These parents complained about a lack of opportunities to serve as members of school governing bodies. However, there seemed to be a trend by schools of retaining parents who have experience in school governance.

There was nothing sinister about schools wishing to retain parents with school governance experience because this at least ensured continuity in the SGB if experienced members were re-elected legitimately. The KZN Department of Education and Culture analysis report of the evaluation instrument in the 2003 SGB elections noted that the vast majority of schools (95%) had retained SGB members with prior experience on governing bodies. Only 5% of schools had completely new governing bodies. 22% of schools had 4 or more SGB members with prior experience. These figures indicated that schools were actively retaining parents with school governance

experience. Alternatively, these figures may have also indicated that the same parents were doing all the work, or that once established, some SGB members were reluctant to make way for new parents (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education and Culture, p. 47).

4.2.2.2.1.6. Socio-economics and parental involvement in school governance

44.3% of respondents from school A indicated that they walked to school to attend meetings as compared to school B where only 8.4% of parents walked to school to attend meetings. In addition, 26% of parents from school A indicated they had their own vehicles to travel with to school to attend meetings whereas 62.6% of respondents of school B indicated that they had their own vehicles to travel with to school. Some parents did not have the means of transport to attend school meetings so they depended on public transport. For those parents making use of public transport, the problem increased in difficulty because public transport was not easily accessible after normal working hours. 10.2% of respondents from school A indicated they used public transport to go to the school for meetings or other related matters. In comparison, only 2.1% of respondents from school B indicated they made use of public transport to go to the school. 44.3% of respondents from school A and 8.4% of respondents from school B walked to school. The use of public transport to school meetings created problems for parents, especially in the event of inclement weather. These findings seemed to suggest that school A served a lower socio-economic community when compared to school B. These factors also contributed to the lower parental involvement in school governance at school A.

Chairman A approximated that 20% of the school's learner population travelled from a distance of 5 kilometres or more to get to school. This phenomenon of migration (as described earlier) presented cost implications for parents when it came to attendance of school meetings (Motala, Vally & Modiba, 1999). As it is, these parents had to meet massive financial expenses, especially travelling costs, to pay for their children to attend to school far away from their homes. These costs soared, especially in view of the rising fuel costs in South Africa. These travelling costs, together with the irregular

working hours of many parents, made it increasingly difficult for parents to attend the meetings held by their children's schools.

4.3. Conclusion

This research study had, as its key focus, the factors that militated against or facilitated parental involvement in school governance. Three sub-questions were posed in an attempt to answer the research question. The study has revealed that parental involvement is distinctly evident in school B, and to a lesser extent in school A. There has been evidence that of those parents involved in school governance, very few of them were experienced in school governance. No parent had presented evidence of any form of school governance training they underwent, and this seems to suggest that such training was not made available to those parents serving on SGBs.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

5.1. Introduction

The main research question of this study was: What are the factors that militate against or facilitate parental involvement in school governance? In addressing this question, three sub-questions were posed:

- ➤ To what extent are the parents of public primary school learners experienced in school governance?
- ➤ To what extent are the parents of public primary school learners trained in school governance?
- ➤ What are the levels of parental involvement in school governance at the research sites?

In order to answer these questions, the data-gathering process began with survey questionnaires being sent out to pre-determined parents. Stemming from the questionnaires, interested respondents were interviewed for further discussion on parental involvement in school governance. In addition, the principals and the chairpersons of the school governing bodies of both the research sites were interviewed.

This chapter presents a summary of the main findings of the research project. The chapter also suggests ways in which schools/governing bodies/Education Department could improve parental involvement. It examines (very briefly) the possibilities for further areas of research.

5.2. Findings of the study

Parental participation in school governance was mandated by legislation in the form of the South African School's Act. The Act expected parents and the school teaching community to interact with each other so that the learners were the eventual benefactors of this co-operation. However, this research study revealed that parental involvement in school governance was not as spontaneous as policy expected it to be.

There were numerous barriers to parental involvement. Some of these barriers included the following factors: the erosion of the concept of neighbourhood or community schools; a lack of time by parents; a lack of parental experience in school governance; and a lack of training to prepare parents for school governance.

This research study revealed that parental attendance of meetings was a matter of concern because the number of parents who attend these meetings was by no means a reflection of the learner population of the schools. The parental attendance of meetings at certain schools was more acceptable when compared to other schools. In fact, in some schools, the numbers of parents attending parent-teacher meetings was so low that not more than 50 learners were represented by their parents at any particular meeting.

One of the factors that had some impact on parental attendance of school meetings was that some parents did not view the schools their children attended as "our school". This opinion seemed to be so largely because many of the learners did not attend schools close to their places of residency. This concept of learners migrating to schools in areas other than their places of residency was not endemic to any one particular grouping in society. For instance, it was not only the African population that was a victim of migration. Learners from the other racial groupings were also victims of migration. The migration of learners had an adverse effect on the concept of community or neighbourhood schools. The erosion of the concept of community schools seemed to suggest that parents whose children commuted to schools in other areas did not attach much significance to attending parent meetings at these schools. Schools that served the local community seemed to enjoy a greater level of parental involvement when compared to schools whose learners commute from distances away.

However, the net effect of the concept of migration on parental involvement in school governance cannot be considered with any degree of certainty because both schools A and B were victims as well as benefactors of the migration of learners. When learners from either of the schools migrated out to the ex-Whites-only schools, other learners migrated into these schools so as to negate the loss of learners. The major difference

between school A and school B was in the racial or ethnic composition of the inward migrating learners. Whereas school A seemed to attract much of the inward migrating learners from the African population, school B seemed to attract most of its inward migrating learners from the Indian population. The actual effect this difference had on parental involvement is speculative. This research did not prove conclusively that the racial or ethnic composition of the learner population did indeed have a significant impact on parental involvement in school governance. However, the claim by Motala, Vally and Modiba (1999) that parental involvement by African parents is difficult or impossible may hold true for school A because a large sector of the learner population of school A came from the African sector of the population, and many of these learners commute from other areas to attend school A.

The timing of parental meetings seemed to be an important issue in determining whether parents attended these meetings. Some parents preferred meetings to be held on weekdays, preferably in the evenings. This time suited working parents because the meetings were held after working hours. However, holding meetings at these times may not have been acceptable to some parents who depended on public transport to attend the meetings. Public transport was not easily accessible after normal working hours. In addition, parents who depended on public transport were the ones who often worked till late, so they often returned home exhausted, and were not in a position to attend school meetings. These parents preferred meeting to be held on a Saturday afternoon. However, schools attempted to hold meetings on Saturday afternoons, but the parental attendance was found to be poor. These schools then reverted to holding meetings on week-day evenings.

Another finding of this research project was that many parents felt that they were not skilled in the field of school governance. Parents felt that they needed to undergo some form of training that provided them with the skills necessary for school governance. Additionally, some parents were under the impression that they needed to have a formal academic qualification in order to be eligible for election as a school governor. In some schools, the current SGB members were either members of the business sector, or graduates in some field, so parents wanting to stand for elections as school governors

were under the impression that these were the minimum requirements in order to become school governors.

The atmosphere exuded by schools helped to either invite or suppress parental attendance to school meetings. Parents seemed keen to get involved in schools where they felt welcome. Some activities, like teachers and parents indulging in chatter during tuition time, portrayed schools in a negative light. These types of activities seemed to deter parents from getting involved in such schools. Parents seemed likely to show greater involvement in schools where there was a positive atmosphere, in schools that demonstrated that effective teaching and learning took place.

Some parents held the view that school governance was the responsibility of the state, and that they (the parents) should leave school governance to professional people (the educators, school management teams and the Department of Education officials) trained to undertake these tasks. This type of opinion seemed to be prevalent among the poorer communities, while the communities belonging to the middle class tended to favour a greater level of parental involvement in school governance.

This study also found that socio-economics played a role in determining the level of parental involvement in school governance. School A seemed to attract its learners from a lower income class than school B. This was evident in the fact that more parents of learners attending school B had their own vehicles to travel with to attend school meetings and other functions. In addition, there was a higher percentage of parents (whose children attended school A) dependent on public transport to attend meetings or other school functions when compared to parents associated with school B.

5.3. Suggestions on how to improve parental involvement

Schools needed to take cognizance of the fact that school meetings were generally not well-attended by parents. Hence, it was imperative that school governing bodies, as the custodians of schools, made attempts to ascertain from parents suitable days and times when school meetings should be held. This can be done by means of survey

questionnaires early in the academic year. In addition, making a single attempt at holding meetings away from schools at venues more easily accessible to parents was not adequate. School governing bodies needed to be display greater initiative in winning the parents over in an attempt to enhance parental involvement.

Schools could have held different types of meetings at different times so that there was a spread of these meetings instead of having them clustered at a specific time of the year. For instance, a general meeting of parents could have been scheduled within the first week of the new academic year to get more parents interested since the excitement of the new school year was still fresh in the minds of both learners and parents. Thereafter, grade-specific meetings could be held so that there was closer contact between the grade educators and the parents.

Parents needed to be made aware that their inputs were valued, so they needed to feel that they had some meaningful contribution to make to the school. One way of going about making the parents feel valued was to ascertain from them what issues they needed to be addressed by the school governing body. Like parent A1 indicated, schools should have sent out surveys to parents to ascertain what they liked to be addressed on at parent meetings. In this way, the governing body, together with the staff of the school could have identified major areas of concern for parents, and addressed these at parent meetings.

Schools needed to keep parents informed of the goings-on at schools. This is easily achieved by means of newsletters sent out to parents on a regular basis. Often, schools sent out newsletters to parents only when there was a need, but this may serve to isolate the school from its parent community instead of bringing them closer together. These newsletters must be reader-friendly because the objective should be to win the support of the parents in addition to informing them about the goings-on at school. Newsletters should contain items and articles of interest to parents

Closely allied to the issue of newsletters was the issue of language of communication to parents. A large number of schools had English second-language learners. The

parents of these learners needed to be reassured that their children were indeed in good care during the school day. One of the ways of reassuring these parents was to communicate to them in their home language. Newsletters needed to be translated into the indigenous language that was common to a particular school so that parents could feel empowered, instead of having to read something in a language they are not totally familiar with. Such an exercise by the school should make parents feel valued and reassured. In addition, meetings should not be conducted solely in the school's language of learning and teaching. A translator should be present at each parent meeting to translate the contents of the meeting into an indigenous language so that parents will get a clearer understanding of proceedings at meeting.

Schools need to keep its parent community fully informed about the composition of the school governing body – who the members are, and their respective contact details. This information needs to be sent out to all parents of learners at the beginning of each year so that the information is easily accessible to parents. This exercise should reaffirm the notion that governing bodies are not secret organizations, but rather open agencies that parents may interact with if they need to.

In addition, the Department of Education needs to take a leading role in educating the general parent community about school governing bodies – its role functions, election procedures, eligibility of parents for elections, tenure, etc. This type of exercise is critical in getting more parents involved in school governance, because like this research investigation revealed, many parents do not know the functions of school governing bodies, or which parents are eligible to stand for elections. This type of education campaign could take different forms, for instance road shows (especially in the run-up to SGB elections), the printing of the relevant literature for distribution to parents, or even a sustained media campaign.

There is a vast amount of expertise amongst the parent community that could be used by schools to enhance teaching and learning. Experienced and qualified parents could be called upon by schools to present lessons to learners in an attempt to share their knowledge. Such an exercise would not only bring a new dimension to teaching, but it

would make learners see that whatever they learn at school is indeed relevant in the business world. The idea of using parents or other community members to talk to learners is a relatively under-utilised resource pool that schools need to tap into more frequently. This type of activity should make parents see that they have something noteworthy to offer to the school.

Parents need to be made to feel welcome at schools. Many parents often take time off from work to come to school to attend to certain matters. It is therefore imperative that these parents are not made to spend any more time waiting before being attended to. Such waiting could be construed in a negative light by parents, as they may feel that they are unwelcome because they are made to wait for prolonged periods of time. It may be difficult to attend to all parents immediately because of school dynamics, but there should be somebody present to immediately receive any parent who comes to school.

The school culture should be a positive one in order to reaffirm to parents that the school their children attend is indeed serious about education. Scenes of teachers, or teachers and parents indulging in chats during tuition time portray the school in a negative light. School management teams need to ensure that such incidents do not occur. Parents need to be informed about the times they are permitted to consult with their children's educators. Whenever anybody enters a school, they should encounter an atmosphere conducive to learning and teaching.

As much as schools have expectations of parents, parents too have expectations of schools. Parents expect schools to keep them informed about what happens at schools. In addition to sending out newsletters to parents, schools need to inform parents about what is expected of them. Without this knowledge, parents may feel that the school does not require their co-operation, and consequently they may play an inactive role in their children's education. Schools should inform parents, ideally at the beginning of the academic year, of the year plan. All events, meetings, parent-teacher conferences, fund-raising activities or other important dates need to be submitted to parents so they can plan well in advance in order to set aside time to attend these.

5.4. Suggestions for further research

This research study was a small-scale one based on the opinions of parents, school principals and chairpersons of school governing bodies. The study was confined to just two urban primary schools serving learners of neighbouring suburbs. The results of the study indicated that parental involvement was inconsistent in the schools used as research sites. More needed to be done by schools in order to win over the support of their parent communities. Parents, too, needed to show greater interest in the issues relating to schools their children attend.

Arising out of this project, I suggest the following areas for further research:
Firstly, much has been written about the migration of learners to schools situated out of the residential areas of these learners. It would be interesting to establish the reasons why parents choose to send their children to schools further away from their places of residences when schools are found virtually on their doorsteps.

Closely allied to the issue above goes the issue of the level of parental involvement shown by these parents in the schools their children now attend. Are these parents committed to involvement in school governance? If so, what drives them to be involved in school governance? If not, why are they not getting involved in school governance?

A second useful piece of research could be a comparative study of parental involvement in schools administered by the former House of Delegates (for Indian learners), House of Representatives (for Coloured learners), Department of Education and Training (for African learners) and the former House of Assembly (for White learners) to gauge the level of parental involvement at these schools, and the reasons thereof. To what extent do the ethos and culture of these schools attract or repel learners?

Migrant labour is a common phenomenon in South African society. Whereas at one stage, it seemed to affect mostly one racial grouping but other races have been afflicted by this social upheaval. The ills of this system are well documented, and its effect on home-school relationships could make an interesting area of research. This type of

study, which explores the social capital theory in greater depth is my third suggested area for research. This study should examine whether there is a relationship, if any, between effective families and communities on the one hand and effective schools on the other.

The fourth piece of research could include the learners' opinions of why their parents show an active involvement, or are inactive, in school governance. It may sometimes occur that parents are not totally truthful in their responses to questions about school governance, possibly because are they guilty of not showing much interest in school governance. Learners, on the other hand, may be more open about why their parents are not involved in school governance.

The final suggested research topic could be a comparative study of all the schools in a particular demographic area on the question of school governance. This research study should reveal reasons why parents are involved, or not involved, in school governance. With such a study, it may be easier to generalize the findings because the research field is wider.

5.5. Conclusion

This thesis examined the level of parental involvement in school governance in the two research sites. Chapter one introduced the background of this research study, and posed the research question. It also outlined briefly the methodology to be used in the study. Chapter two delved into a deeper understanding of key terminology like parent, parental involvement and school governance. Some of the theories that underpin parental involvement in school governance were discussed in this chapter, as well as some barriers to parental involvement were outlined. A detailed account of the methodology used in this research study is made in chapter three. Included in chapter three were discussions of the different data collection techniques, why the schools were chosen as research sites, as well as how the respondents for the research study were selected. Chapter four presented a detailed account of the research findings, as well as a discussion of the themes that emerged during the research study. Chapter five, the

concluding chapter, outlined the main findings of the study. The chapter also includes suggestions on how to improve parental involvement in school governance. In addition, suggestions for further research are mentioned in chapter five.

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Appendix 1

37 Brixham Road
Orient Heights
Pietermaritzburg
3201
31 October 2005

Mr. S. R. Alwar
Dept. Research, Strategy, Policy development & ECMIS
Private Bag X 05
Rossburgh
4072
Dear Sir

APPLICATION FOR CONSENT: RESEARCH IN PRIMARY SCHOOL

I am a M. Ed. student (student number 203400140) at the University of Kwazulu Natal (Pietermaritzburg campus). I hereby wish to seek consent from the Provincial Education Department to conduct research in two primary schools in Pietermaritzburg.

The research project is a requirement of the degree I am engaged in. The research topic is: FACTORS THAT MILITATE AGAINST OR FACILITATE PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL GOVERNANCE. The rationale for this research study stems from the problems some schools have in getting parents to show an active interest in matters of school governance. The sources of my data are parents, principals, SGB chairpersons and the South African Schools Act policy document. The instruments I will use are survey questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. I intend initiating this study in 2006. My supervisor is Dr. Volker Wedekind (school of education – tel. 033-2606120) University of Kwazulu Natal (Pietermaritzburg). My study involves research in two primary schools in Pietermaritzburg, ...Primary School and .... Primary School. I have written to the principals and governing bodies of both these schools, and I am awaiting their responses.

Enclosed are copies of the letters sent to the authorities of these schools. Also enclosed is a copy of my research proposal as submitted to the higher degrees council of the university for approval. I undertake to furnish you with any reports, findings and/or recommendations if I am requested to do so. I wait in anticipation of your favourable response.

Thanking you for your co-operation

Yours faithfully

_____
P. Ramisur (203400140) Tel.: 033 : 3914628 (w)   3915367 (h) 0828749178

Appendix 2

37 Brixham Road
Orient Heights
3201

5 MAY 2006

Mr.S. R.Alwar
Dept. Research, Strategy, Policy development & EMIS
Private Bag X 05
Rossburgh.
4 072

RE:APPLICATION FOR CONSENT TO CONDUCT RESEARCH: 203400140

My letter dated 31 October 2005 has reference.

I was informed by the university's Higher Degrees Committee not to continue with my proposed research at …… Primary School due to ethical reasons. I need to identify another school as a possible research site. I have therefore identified ………. Primary School as my next alternative. I have sought the necessary consent from both the principal and the chairperson of the school's governing body to conduct my research.

It would be greatly appreciate it if you could make the necessary amendments to my proposed study at your earliest convenience.

I await your response in this regard.

Yours faithfully

_____
P. RAMISUR

Tel: (033) 3914628 (W)
          3915377 (H)
          0828749178

Appendix 3a

37 Brixham Road
Orient Heights
Pietermaritzburg
3201
31 October 2005

The Principal/SGB chairperson
.... Primary School

Application for consent to conduct research in your school

Dear Sir / Madam

I am a Masters of Education student (number 203400140) at the University of Kwazulu Natal. As part of my studies I am expected to conduct a research project in a selection of schools. I will work under the supervision of Dr. Volker Wedekind of the School of Education in the Pietermaritzburg campus (tel. 033-2606120).

My research is based on school governance, and the topic is: FACTORS THAT EITHER MILITATE AGAINST OR FACILITATE PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS. The study involves interaction with the principal, SGB chairperson and a selection of parents of learners attending your school. I plan to make use of a survey questionnaire and a semi-structured interview in order to gather data.

Your anonymity is guaranteed at all times. Neither the names of the school nor individuals I interact with will be used in the study. The information generated from this study will be used purely for research purposes only.

I have chosen your school because of my involvement with its SGB in the past. Your school presents an excellent research site, and promises to generate a wealth of useful information on the topic. I am willing to furnish a summary of my research findings and any recommendations that may be generated from the research study to your school.

I would be greatly appreciated if consent could be granted in writing in order to meet certain administrative requirements.

In anticipation of your favourable consideration

Yours faithfully

P. RAMISUR
CONTACT NUMBER: (033) 3914628 (W) 3915367 (H) 0828749178

37 Brixham Road
Orient Heights
Pietermaritzburg
3201
31 October 2005

The Principal/SGB chairperson
…………………………. Primary School

Application for consent to conduct research in your school:

Dear Sir / Madam

I am a Masters of Education student (number 203400140) at the University of Kwazulu Natal. As part of my studies I am expected to conduct a research project in a selection of schools. I will work under the supervision of Dr. Volker Wedekind of the School of Education in the Pietermaritzburg campus (tel. 033-2606120).

My research is based on school governance, and the topic is: FACTORS THAT EITHER MILITATE AGAINST OR FACILITATE PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS. The study involves interaction with the principal, SGB chairperson and a selection of parents of learners attending your school. I plan to make use of a survey questionnaire and a semi-structured interview in order to gather data.

Your anonymity is guaranteed at all times. Neither the names of the school nor individuals I interact with will be used in the study. The information generated from this study will be used purely for research purposes only.

Your school presents an excellent research site, and promises to generate a wealth of useful information on the topic. I am willing to furnish a summary of my research findings and any recommendations that may be generated from the research study to your school.

I would be greatly appreciated if consent could be granted in writing in order to meet certain administrative requirements.

In anticipation of your favourable consideration

Yours faithfully

_____
P. RAMISUR
CONTACT NUMBER: (033) 3914628 (W) 3915367 (H)   0828749178

Appendix 4

DEAR PARENT/GUARDIAN

LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT: EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH PROJECT

My name is Pravesh Ramisur and I currently teach at Regina Primary School. I am a student at the University of KwaZulu Natal, Pietermaritzburg, studying for a Masters of Education degree. I need to conduct a research project in order to complete the course. I appeal for your assistance and corporation in conducting this research.

The project aims to establish possible reasons why parents are not showing greater interest in school governance in many schools although there is widespread interest by parents in certain schools. The study promises to have the potential benefit of understanding the reasons why parents either participate in or do not participate in school governance. My supervisor is Dr. Volker Wedekind, the Head of School: Education at the Pietermaritzburg campus (tel. 033 - 2606120).

The study is divided into two parts: firstly, a questionnaire will be sent out to parents to fill in. These questionnaires will then be collected and the information captured and stored on computer. Secondly, a few parents will be identified and invited to an interview with me to discuss matters of school governance in greater detail.

The following are important issues for you to consider:
  ➢ You are under no obligation to participate, and your child/children will in no way be victimized if you choose not to participate.
  ➢ All the information supplied in the questionnaires and interviews will be treated with strict confidence.
  ➢ If, for whatever reason you feel uncomfortable during the research process, you are welcome to withdraw at any stage.

Thanking you for your kindest co-operation

P. Ramisur   (033) 3914628 (w); 0828749178

Appendix 5

CONSENT

I, ... hereby give consent to Mr. P. Ramisur for the
following:

  ➢ To use me as a participant in the research process by completing the
    questionnaire and returning it to him.
  ➢ To use the information in his research study.
  ➢ To choose me for an interview of about 20 minutes in duration if I am selected so
    that more information concerning the topic could be collected.

I agree to take part in this research study on my own free will, without being forced
to do so by Mr. P. Ramisur or anybody else whatsoever.

I declare that I was informed about the nature and purpose of the project by way of a
letter sent by P. Ramisur to me .

I understand that the information supplied by you will kept strictly confidential. I
further understand that I am participating in this study with the knowledge that I will
not receive any remuneration.

Consent is granted/not granted (delete that which does not apply) for the use of
information from the questionnaire and/or interview in the research project.

....
Signature   Date

129

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE: SCHOOL GOVERNANCE   Number ☐

❖   *The information herein is strictly for research purposes only. Your name or other personal details will not be divulged to anybody without your consent.*

❖   *Please use a cross (X) in the blocks to indicate your choice of answers.*

This questionnaire is part of a research study based on the role of parents in the governance of public schools. The information is for research purposes only.

Section A: Parent meetings

1. Are you aware of parent meetings being held at your child's school?

   ☐ Yes   ☐ No

2. Have you attended any meeting of parents called by the school governing body (SGB)?

   ☐ Yes   ☐ no

3.1. What was the purpose of the last SGB meeting you attended?

   ☐ General information   ☐ SGB elections

   ☐ Financial   ☐ other

3.2. What would you estimate the number of parents who have attended this meeting to be? ☐ 0-10   ☐ 11-20   ☐ 21-30

   ☐ 31-40   ☐ 41-50   ☐ 50-100   ☐ More than 100

4. How do you travel to attend school meetings?

   ☐ Own vehicle   ☐ walk   ☐ public transport   ☐ other

5. How far do you live from the school your child attends:

   ☐ 0-1km   ☐ 2-3km   ☐ 4-6km   ☐ more than 6 km

6. Are parent meetings held at a time convenient for you to attend?

   ☐ Yes   ☐ no

7. Would you attend parent meetings more often if these were held at any other suitable time?   Yes ☐   no ☐

Section B: the South African Schools Act and school governance

8. Are you aware of a law called the South African School's Act (SASA)?

☐ yes   ☐ no

9. The SASA makes provisions for parents to be involved in school governance. **Are** you in favour of parents being involved?

☐ yes   ☐ no

10. Do you think parents can make meaningful contributions to schools by becoming involved in its governance?   ☐ Yes   ☐ no

11. In your opinion, who should administer (run) a school?(Choose more than one if you wish).

☐ Parents   ☐ principal   ☐ learners

☐ Government   ☐ teachers

12. Are **you** in favour of parents being involved in school governance?

Yes ☐   No ☐   Not sure ☐

13. Why do you think some parents are not involved in school governance? (Tick more than one choice if you wish)

☐ They do not have the necessary skills or education.

☐ They do not have the necessary experience

☐ Principal and teachers are trained to do this sort of task.

☐ They feel intimidated by principals and teachers.

☐ Parents should not take on the responsibility of the state.

☐ Parents do not have the time.

14. Any other reasons you wish to include?

....

....

....

....

....

15. Do you believe that the parents should be trained before they take on a responsibility like school governance?

☐ Yes   ☐ no

16. If you had the chance, would you attend such training?

Yes ☐   No ☐

Why? ....
....
....
....
....
....

17.1. Are **you** involved in the governance of your child's school.

☐ Yes   ☐ No

17.2. Please provide a few reasons why you are involved or not involved?

....
....
....
....
....

18. What could the school or education department do to get parents more involved in the governance of your child/children's school?

....
....
....
....
....
....

Section C: Consent (permission) for interview

18.1. **Would you be prepared to be interviewed so that more information can be obtained?**

Yes ☐   **No** ☐

18.2. **If yes, please supply your details for further contact:**

NAME: .... TEL. NO.: ....

❖   This questionnaire took me ☐ minutes to complete.

❖   Thank you for completing and returning this questionnaire.

❖   You will be contacted in order to arrange for an interview at a time convenient to both you and myself.   P. Ramisur

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR SGB CHAIRPERSON

*** Do you think parental involvement is important? Why?

1. How long have you been a member of the SGB?

2. How often does the SGB call up parent meetings?

3. When was the last parents' meeting held?

4. What was the parental turnout for this meeting?

5. Are meetings called up for specific purposes, or are they of a general nature?

6. What is the average turnout of parents at SGB meetings?

7. Does the SGB provide refreshment to parents at parent meetings?

8. At what time do your parent meetings normally start? Why?

9. Did any parent ever request a change of times for meetings because s/he could not attend it?

10. Was there ever an occasion when a parent approached the SGB for help in any matter related to school? Kindly elaborate.

11. In your opinion, approximately how many learners travel from a distance (say between 5 km or more) to the school?

12. Can you comment on the composition of your SGB (gender, race etc)?

13. Did anybody ever comment on the composition of your SGB? If so, briefly elaborate on this.

14. What is the SGB doing to encourage and increase parental involvement in school governance?

15. What, in your opinion, are some of the reasons why parents are involved in or not involved in school governance?

16. Besides attending meetings, how else does the SGB get parents involved in school matters?

17. Any concluding comments/remarks on the topic?

Appendix 8

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: SCHOOL PRINCIPAL
*** Do you think parental involvement is important? Why?

1. How often are parent meetings called up?
2. At what times are these meetings called up? Any specific reasons why the choice of this time?
3. Who decides on the agendas for these meetings?
4.1. By what means are parents informed about these meetings?
4.2. Do you believe this is the most effective means of communication to the parents? Why?
5. How long before meetings are notices sent out to parents?
6. Are these notices written in the English language only? Why?
7. Was there ever an occasion when a meeting of parents was cancelled/postponed/delayed? Why?
8. How would you rate the attendance of parents to parental meetings?
9. What is the most effective strategy you found that brings parents in larger numbers to school meetings/functions, etc?
10. What strategies does the school have in an attempt to increase parental attendance to meetings?
11. What offers of assistance from parents did you receive in an attempt to help to uplift the school?
12. How would you rate the attitude of parents towards the school?
13. Was the composition of the SGB ever questioned, and on what grounds was this query based on?
14. Do you think that the current SGB members have the necessary skills to make a positive contribution to school governance?
15. Do you think that the SGB members are in need of training in the art of school governance? What type of training will help enhance the skills of the SGB?
16. Any concluding comments in respect of school governance?

Appendix 9

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

****Do you think that parental involvement is important? Why?

1. Is your child's/children's school the closest one to your house?

2. Why do you want your child to attend this school and not any other?

3. How often do you go to your child's school, and for what purposes?

4. How do you feel whenever you need to go to school? Do you feel welcome, or do you feel like an outsider in the school?

5. Would you refer to the school your child attends as "our school" or "my child's school"? Why?

6. Did you or your spouse/partner attend the last SGB election meeting? Why?

7. When was the last time you attended a governing body meeting held by your child's school?

8. Could you explain some of the reasons why you attend/do not attend SGB meetings/events at your child's school?

9. Could you guess what some of the reasons are that other parents attend/do not attend school meetings/events/functions?

10. What form of assistance can you offer to your child's school?

11. What are your views about these parent meetings hosted by the school?

12. Did you ever have a problem concerning your child's school or school- work that required the interference of the SGB?

13. Are you satisfied with the current SGB? Why?

14. What can the SGB/school/education department do to get you and other parents to take a more active interest in matters of the school?

15. What level of trust/faith do you have in the SGB of your child's school?

16. Any other comments you would like to make concerning school governance?

Appendix 10 a

Mr P. Ramesar
Orient Heights
PIETERMARITZBURG
3201

S.G.B. MEETING STATISTICS

I refer to the interview between yourself and _____ on 9 August 2006.

Due to the confidential nature of the S.G.B. meetings, it is regretted that extracts of the meetings cannot be made available to you for the research into your studies. However, I wish to inform you that our S.G.B. meetings have an attendance of between 90% to 100%.
The general parents meetings (open days, parents meetings, budget meetings, etc) vary in attendance but average between 60% and 70%.
Other gatherings (sports days, awards days, cultural events, etc) are in the region of between 70% and 80%.

Hoping that this information will be of assistance to you.

NOTE :
NAME AND SIGNATURE
IS OMITTED TO
PROTECT THE IDENTITY
OF THE INDIVIDUAL
CONCERNED.

Thank you

S.G.B. CHAIRPERSON: _____

DATE: _____

P. RAMISUR
(203400140)

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Appendix 10 b

31 January 2007

Mr P.Ramisur
37 Brixham Road
Orient Heights
Pietermaritzburg
3201

Re – STATISTICS : RESEARCH : SCHOOL GOVERNING BODIES

I regret to inform you that the statistics requested by you for your research are unavailable.

I also take this opportunity of wishing you well in your studies.

Yours faithfully

_____
Principal

NOTE : NAME HAS BEEN
OMITTED TO PROTECT
THE IDENTITY OF
THE PERSON CONCERNED.

P. RAMISUR
(203400140)

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School A Summary

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE: SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

❖ *I thank you for taking the time to fill in and returning this survey.*

❖ *The information herein is strictly for research purposes only. Your name or other personal details will not be divulged to anybody without your consent.*

❖ *Please use a cross (X) in the blocks to indicate your choice of answers.*

This questionnaire is part of a research study based on the role of parents in the governance of public schools. The information is for research purposes only.

Section A: Parent meetings

3. Are you aware of parent meetings being held at your child's school?

74 Yes   3 No

4. Have you attended any meeting of parents called by the school governing body (SGB)?

43 Yes   29 no

3.2. What was the purpose of the last SGB meeting you attended?

17 General information   34 SGB elections

11 Financial   4 other

3.2. What would you estimate the number of parents who have attended this meeting to be?   4 0-10   6 11-20   12 21-30

7 31-40   18 41-50   14 50-100   3 More than 100

4. How do you travel to attend school meetings?

23 Own vehicle   39 walk   9 public transport   7 other

5. How far do you live from the school your child attends:

29 0-1km   28 2-3km   9 4-6km   9 more than 6 km

6. Are parent meetings held at a time convenient for you to attend?

48 Yes   28 no

7. Would you attend parent meetings more often if these were held at any other suitable time?   56   Yes

14   no

Section B: the South African Schools Act and school governance

8. Are you aware of a law called the South African School's Act (SASA)?

35   yes   42   no

9. The SASA makes provisions for parents to be involved in school governance.   Are you in favour of parents being involved?

60 yes   11 no

10. Do you think parents can make meaningful contributions to schools by becoming involved in its governance?   66   Yes   7   no

11. In your opinion, who should administer (run) a school?(Choose more than one if you wish).

36   Parents   53   principal   7   learners

49   Government   32   teachers

12. Are **you** in favour of parents being involved in school governance?

53 Yes   9 No   10 Not sure

13. Why do you think some parents are not involved in school governance? (Tick more than one choice if you wish)

32   They do not have the necessary skills or education.

32   They do not have the necessary experience

14   Principal and teachers are trained to do this sort of task.

27   They feel intimidated by principals and teachers.

9   Parents should not take on the responsibility of the state.

57   Parents do not have the time.

14. Any other reasons you wish to include?

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15. Do you believe that the parents should be trained before they take on a responsibility like school governance?

                64   Yes   9 no

16. If you had the chance, would you attend such training?

                47   Yes   20 No

Why?

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17.1. Are **you** involved in the governance of your child's school.

      5   Yes   53   No

17.2. Please provide a few reasons why you are involved or not involved?

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18. What could the school or education department do to get parents more involved in the governance of your child/children's school?

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School B: Summary

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE: SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

❖ *I thank you for taking the time to fill in and returning this survey.*

❖ *The information herein is strictly for research purposes only. Your name or other personal details will not be divulged to anybody without your consent.*

❖ *Please use a cross (X) in the blocks to indicate your choice of answers.*

This questionnaire is part of a research study based on the role of parents in the governance of public schools. The information is for research purposes only.

Section A: Parent meetings

5. Are you aware of parent meetings being held at your child's school?

190 Yes   2 No

6.   Have you attended any meeting of parents called by the school governing body (SGB)?

106 Yes   2   no

3.3. What was the purpose of the last SGB meeting you attended?

38   General information   61   SGB elections

42   Financial   13   other

3.2. What would you estimate the number of parents who have attended this meeting to be?   2 0-10   9 11-20   14 21-30

28 31-40   28 41-50   40 50-100   21 More than 100

4. How do you travel to attend school meetings?

149 Own vehicle   20 walk   5 public transport   9 other

5. How far do you live from the school your child attends:

42 0-1km   67 2-3km   54 4-6km   31 more than 6 km

6.   Are parent meetings held at a time convenient for you to attend?

126 Yes   63 no

7. Would you attend parent meetings more often if these were held at any other suitable time?   145   Yes   31   no

Section B: the South African Schools Act and school governance

8. Are you aware of a law called the South African School's Act (SASA)?

110   yes   84   no

9. The SASA makes provisions for parents to be involved in school governance.   Are you in favour of parents being involved?

164   yes   19   no

10. Do you think parents can make meaningful contributions to schools by becoming involved in its governance?   176   Yes   12   no

11. In your opinion, who should administer (run) a school?(Choose more than one if you wish).

112   Parents   166   principal   30   learners

80   Government   19   teachers

12. Are **you** in favour of parents being involved in school governance?

142   Yes   13   No   27   Not sure

13. Why do you think some parents are not involved in school governance? (Tick more than one choice if you wish)

89   They do not have the necessary skills or education.

90   They do not have the necessary experience

48   Principal and teachers are trained to do this sort of task.

28   They feel intimidated by principals and teachers.

17   Parents should not take on the responsibility of the state.

138   Parents do not have the time.

14. Any other reasons you wish to include?

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15. Do you believe that the parents should be trained before they take on a responsibility like school governance?

<u>176</u> Yes   9 no

16. If you had the chance, would you attend such training?

<u>120</u> Yes   56 No

Why?

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17.1. Are **you** involved in the governance of your child's school.

21 Yes   164 No

17.2. Please provide a few reasons why you are involved or not involved?

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18. What could the school or education department do to get parents more involved in the governance of your child/children's school?

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UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

4 April 2007

To whom it may concern

Ethical Clearance Certificate: P Ramisur HSS/06080

This is to confirm that at the time of binding this dissertation the final Ethical Clearance Certificate had not been issued yet. The certificate will be stored in the Faculty of Education office on the Pietermaritzburg campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal and will be available for inspection.

The provisional clearance certifcate is attached.

Yours sincerely

Dr VR Wedekind
Supervisor

School of Education and Development
Faculty of Education

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Appendix 13

Provisional ethical clearance certificate **UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL**

RESEARCH OFFICE (GOVAN MBEKI CENTRE)
WESTVILLE CAMPUS
TELEPHONE NO.: 031 – 2603587
EMAIL: ximbap@ukzn.ac.za

10 APRIL 2006

MR. P RAMISUR (203400140)
EDUCATION

Dear Mr. Ramisur

ETHICAL CLEARANCE: "FACTORS THAT FACILITATE OR INHIBIT PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL GOVERNANCE: A CASE STUDY OF TWO SCHOOLS IN THE NORTHERN SURBURBS OF PIETERMARITZBURG"

I wish to confirm that ethical clearance has been granted for the above project subject to:

1. **Supervisor's name and contact details being provided in all informed consent documents and questionnaires**
2. **Names being removed from the questionnaires**

This approval is granted provisionally and the final clearance for this project will be given once the conditions have been met. Your Provisional Ethical Clearance Number is HSS/06080

Kindly forward your response to the undersigned as soon as possible

Yours faithfully

MS. PHUMELELE XIMBA
RESEARCH OFFICE

PS: The following general condition is applicable to all projects that have been granted ethical clearance:

THE RELEVANT AUTHORITIES SHOULD BE CONTACTED IN ORDER TO OBTAIN THE NECESSARY APPROVAL SHOULD THE RESEARCH INVOLVE UTILIZATION OF SPACE AND/OR FACILITIES AT OTHER INSTITUTIONS/ORGANISATIONS. WHERE QUESTIONNAIRES ARE USED IN THE PROJECT, THE RESEARCHER SHOULD ENSURE THAT THE QUESTIONNAIRE INCLUDES A SECTION AT THE END WHICH SHOULD BE COMPLETED BY THE PARTICIPANT (PRIOR TO THE COMPLETION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE) INDICATING THAT HE/SHE WAS INFORMED OF THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT AND THAT THE INFORMATION GIVEN WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL.

cc. Derek Buchler
cc. Supervisor (Dr. V Wedekind)

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