Black parental involvement in education

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The South African Schools Act of 1996 (SASA) provides formal power in education to parents as well as communities. SASA creates the expectation for parents to be meaningful partners in school governance. It envisages a system where school based educators would collaborate with the parents to ensure quality education, including curriculum matters such as outcomes based education (OBE). An ethnographic study was conducted in historically disadvantaged black secondary schools. The study focused on the effects of black parental involvement on the success of their children. For a period of twelve months spread over two years (2002/2003), 24 parents with learners in eight different historically disadvantaged secondary schools (HDSS) were investigated. The findings of the study revealed that the black parents' role is crucial in the enhancement of learner success. Parents who played little or no role in their children's homework and study programmes contributed to the poor performance of their children in the classroom. Also, the extremely limited success thus far in the implementation of OBE in historically black communities was significantly due to the absence of co operation between the school and the home. This study affirms the view that community input is crucial in the development of curriculum in schools. Without proactive black community involvement, HDSS are less likely to succeed in their efforts to improve education.

Introduction

The underpinning philosophy of the South African Schools Act of 1996 (SASA) is that schools are encouraged to become self managed as well as self reliant (Mathonsi, 2001:1). The principal is no longer expected to carry the burden of managing the school alone. In terms of the amended provision of section 16 of SASA, a School Manage ment Team (SMT) must be formed to assume responsibility for the day to day running of the school and for the implementation of the school's policies. It is the task of the school governing body (SGB) to deter mine such policies and it is this new understanding of governance that is at the centre of the reorganisation of the school system. But to what extent this is taking root in our schools is captured succinctly by Mat honsi (2001:1) when he states:

> We all know what the policy says and we also know that in many schools, the principals, SMTs, educators and SGBs are struggling with poor resources, absence of the culture of teaching and lear ning, and school communities which even if they are willing to make a contribution, are themselves the victims of a poor educa tion, unemployment and general poverty.

Parents send their children to schools with the expectation that they will get quality education in order to secure their future with a decent vocation. Policymakers and school administrators take for granted that schools will provide this quality education. Frequently, education policy designers view community participation as a panacea for whatever is going wrong or missing in educational delivery (Rugh & Bossert, 1998:166). Since parents are part of a larger society, they constitute a significant section of the community pertaining to educa tional matters. Hall and Engelbrecht (1999:231) point out that parents need to be involved in their children's education and this involvement must include insight into their children's progress, participation in decision making and being critical of information on educational issues. Furthermore, they argue that parents who respect diversity and are willing to become involved in education can influence a com munity in how it supports its institutions.

However, parental involvement in education is beset with prob lems because it is influenced by a number of factors that include the parents' social class. Parental involvement in educational matters can be influenced by the socio economic status (SES) of parents. McGrath and Kuriloff (1999:604) point out that policymakers and school ad ministrators cannot be indifferent to the effects of SES on parental involvement in education. They state that efforts to involve parents may be biased by giving further advantage to wealthier parents while creating hindrances to the involvement of the working class. Such an imbalance in parental involvement in education is clearly identified in historically disadvantaged secondary schools (HDSS) where most of the parents lack the required literacy levels of participation. In addi tion, many of these parents are unemployed, consequently reducing their role in negotiating from a point of strength.

In the current climate of educational changes in South Africa, researchers are focusing on factors that might have an impact on the learners' achievement, especially scholastic achievement (Myburgh, Niehaus & Grobler, 1999:165). The learner's background is considered to be a crucial factor that influences the learner's performance. Com munity constitutes part of this background. In this study, the focus will be on the impact of black parent involvement on the scholastic achievement of the learners attending the historically disadvantaged black schools in townships.

Review of selected studies on parental involvement in education

The South African Schools' Act of 1996, section 23 (9) stipulates that there must be one parent more in a school's governing body than the combined total of other members with voting rights (Department of Education, 1997a:25). Throughout the world there are efforts to in volve parents in education as schools strive to improve quality. Several writers in the United States of America have recently studied the impact of social class upon parental involvement in schools and concur that the role of parents in education is imperative irrespective of social class (McGrath & Kuriloff, 1999; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Lee, Cro ninger & Smith, 1999; Lareau, 1987). However, no matter which class a learner belongs to, it is a critical commonplace that parental involve ment is crucial. Some of these researchers have alluded to the impor tance of family background on the learners' educational experiences. Lareau (1987:703) cited researchers such as Bernstein and Cook Gumperez who have pointed out that classroom learning is reflexive and interactive and that the language used in classrooms draws un evenly from the socio linguistic experiences of children at home.

Community involvement in education

The experiences of two countries are briefly examined in two inter national studies; the relationship between communities in their in volvement in schools was apparent in these studies.

Rugh and Bossert (1998:123) discussed the importance of community involvement in a programme referred to as *Fe Y Alegria* (FYA) as practised in Bolivia. Although the FYA might differ as one moves from country to country where it is practised, Rugh and Bossert (1998:123) cited Swope who highlighted the following as the basic ways of involving the community in FYA:

- a community group invites FYA to start a school in its area;
- a school is opened immediately with resources at hand;
- other local organisations are contacted to build a broad support;
- community groups participate in the construction of the school to reduce labour and finishing costs;
- a parent association begins operation immediately and works closely with the principal;
- FYA involves the parents in their children's education;
- FYA works with the community to create a variety of formal and informal education programmes.

Among other factors that make FYA successful is the emphasis on the role of the community and democratic leadership (Reimers, 1997).

In another study, Social Forestry, Education and Participation (SFEP) project in Thailand (whose purpose was to change teaching, learning and school community relations) the invaluable need for community involvement was identified (McDonough & Wheeler, 1998). In the SFEP project, it was found that the community has much to contribute to the education of their youth. It is unfortunate that throughout the world, indigenous knowledge is viewed as having minimal contribution to knowledge produced in school (McDonough & Wheeler, 1998:50). However, the SFEP helped in changing the community perceptions of their role in education. This study discovered that teachers who used parent or community knowledge in the classroom improved their teaching. When education is made relevant to community needs, it becomes easier for the parents to participate in school issues. This is also evident when parents support the inclusion of teachers in their projects; it consequently lessens teacher anxiety when s/he has to effect change in the classroom. In SFEP, the teachers who committed themselves in community projects did not have any difficulty relating such activities to the curriculum and content they were expected to teach (McDonough & Wheeler, 1998:55).

In South Africa, the introduction of outcomes based education (OBE) paved the way for greater parent involvement in education. The new system expects the parents to play a crucial role in the new education system. They are required to share the responsibility of education with the state (Department of Education, 1997b:27). Furthermore, the new system requires the parents to use knowledge gained to build and develop their community and country. For most parents, the initial challenge is to understand the new curriculum and get involved with the governing bodies of schools. The latter has to ensure the birth of a new generation of learners who are well equipped to deal with the challenges of a changing society.

Transformational OBE expects the parents to perform a number of duties pertaining to education. The learners, educators and the community are expected to become a single, united voice in shaping the curriculum of the school (Department of Education, 1997c:28). Parents are also invited to play a monitoring role on a number of issues including:

- ensuring that educational outcomes are of the highest standards;
- identifying and articulating the values and beliefs of those who share the learning site and helping to develop the vision of the school;
- the active promotion of the culture of learning through the creation of a culturally encouraging and learner friendly climate;
- assistance in the development of determined achievers and the construction of a positive learning environment;
- being agents for the gathering and utilisation of all resources available in the community which could promote the learning process.

Pearson (1996:273) contends that thoughtful teachers build and respect the community. These values are espoused in the FYA and SFEP programmes. These programmes affirm that parental involvement in education is of utmost importance. If there is no collaboration between schools and communities the rhetoric in schools about respect for cultural traditions will be empty and the learners will be marginalized by insensitive curricula, foreign to their traditions.

However, there are several critics who have argued that, among other things, the limited success of OBE was due to its hasty implementation. Christie (1999:283) pointed out that the problematic nature of OBE's implementation was due to its hasty introduction and poor planning. As a result of this haste, the teachers were not well prepared. Potenza and Monyokolo (1999:236) supported Christie by pointing out that teachers were not made part of the process. If teachers who are implementers are not well prepared, it was worse for parent involvement.

The study

This was an ethnographic study, using a sample of 24 parents with children in eight different schools. The researchers focused on investigating the influence of black parental involvement on the performance of their children. The reason for delimiting the study to the black community only is based on the many challenges this community faces in the post apartheid South Africa. The term "black" refers specifically to the traditional African person in South Africa for the purposes of this study.

The study was initially conducted in the latter part of 2002 (July to December) when the learners were in Grade 10 and there was a follow up study on the same participants in the first six months of 2003, when the learners were in Grade 11. The main purpose of the follow up study was to investigate whether the same factors that prevailed in 2002 were still crucial in 2003. The investigation was conducted in the schools where the researchers engaged in observations, interviews and the examination of progress reports of the learners. The principles of confidentiality and anonymity were strongly adhered to by the researchers. Interviews were conducted with teachers, parents and learners. There were also observations and interviews done at the homes of the learners. There were a number of reasons that necessitated the use of the ethnographic method.

Weiss (1998:256) describes ethnography as a prototypical qualitative method that makes many demands upon the researchers. In this research, the voluntary participation of the participants was acknowledged at all times. Furthermore, the use of pseudonyms ensured their anonymity. Goetz and LeCompte (1984:32) described the purpose of educational ethnography as providing rich, descriptive data about the contexts, activities and beliefs of participants in educational settings. Like many field studies, ethnography takes place in a natural setting. This objective was achieved in this study. While field observation was conducted, the researchers as observers imposed minimal structure upon the setting.

Many researchers use the term "field study" almost synonymously with ethnography. Bailey (1994:245) pointed out that in ethnographic research, the observer attempts to become a part of the culture or subculture that s/he is studying. Taylor and Bogdan (1984:124) stated further that in an ethnographic study, the researcher tries to render a "true to life" picture of what people say and how they act and hear the people's words and actions are left to speak for themselves. Furthermore Spradley and McCurdy (as cited by Bailey, 1994:245) define ethnography as the task of describing a particular culture. Cultural anthropologists, studying ancient cultures, have employed this research method in the past.

Frequently, ethnographers have no precise hypotheses, no structured questionnaires and their goal is to describe the culture or subculture in as much detail as possible, including language, customs, values, religious ceremonies and laws (Bailey, 1994:246). It is largely due to the latter reason that the ethnographers need to immerse themselves in the culture they are attempting to describe. They need to be participant observers who in the process have to try to resocialize themselves and internalise the aspects of the culture under focus. The above issues

were carefully considered during the entire duration of the investigation.

The sample

The sample in this study was selected using purposeful sampling. Gay and Airasian (2000:209) point out that qualitative researchers generally rely on purposive selection of participants. These participants were selected so that they could provide rich data concerning the research topic. Of importance to the qualitative researcher is to understand the setting studied. Gay and Airasian (2000:209) further state that qualitative researchers typically deal with small purposefully selected samples that can enrich the data. Ethnography, being a qualitative research method, regards any person from a group a good sample.

All the Grade 10 learners during 2002 were from the historically disadvantaged African schools. Rationale for selecting these schools was that critics (Christie, 1999; Potenza & Monyokolo, 1999) believe that failing schools are the historically disadvantaged African schools. These schools were also selected because it is a critical commonplace that OBE has limited success in township schools because there are either limited or no management structures and parents are not effectively involved in school matters.

The sample also comprised teachers who taught the learners participating in the study. In the selected schools at least two teachers teaching the learners were selected. There were however three schools where three teachers participated in the study. There were 19 teachers who were part of the study.

Lincoln and Guba's (1985:290 300) model was employed in order to ensure that the reliability and validity aspects of the study were satisfied. Ethical measures that were adopted included the participants anonymity and confidentiality being guaranteed at all times during the research and feedback.

Research problem and aim of the research

The South African Schools Act of 1996 has decentralised school management. This Act stipulates that parents need to be involved in the education of their children. Research done in many countries has shown the importance of parental involvement. South Africa introduced a new system of education in 1997. It appeared that when many were talking about the limited success of OBE, attention was frequently focused on teacher and learner empowerment. It appears that there has been less emphasis and focus on parent empowerment. Community involvement was not a priority at that stage. Yet the new system of OBE supports co operation between the school and the community. Whilst much research has been done that attributes the limited success of OBE to teachers' under preparedness, it appears that less has been done in investigating the lack of the community's participation in educational matters as a possible cause for the limited success of OBE in South Africa (Mbokodi, Singh & Msila, 2003).

Parental role in education is crucial in ensuring the success of the learners. Presently, there appears to be insufficient participation of black parents in managing schools although there are a number of critics who acknowledge the importance of parental involvement in ensuring quality. Vassallo (2000:1) points out that parental involvement in a child's education is a strong predictor of learner achievement: typically, the more involved the parent, the better off the child. He confirms that the key to school reform is the parent. According to Vassallo (2000:1), once parents assume the responsibility of advocating for and supporting their children's education, they will become partners with educators to create the schools their children need. Hence, the research problem investigated in this study focused on the extent of black parental involvement in the education of their children. The aim of the research was therefore to investigate the role of black parental involvement in education and to identify effective strategies to enhance black parental involvement especially in HDSS.

Procedure

The study was divided into two parts. The first part of the study was conducted when the learners were in Grade 10 in 2002. Two visits per week were made to the classes where the participants were studying. In these classes we noted their performance and interviewed them as well as their teachers. The interviews (for about 10 to 15 minutes each time) were conducted during the breaks. Also, at least twice per week, the homes of the participants were visited. At their homes, the activities of the learners were observed as well as those of their parents. Each visit, either at school or home, did not exceed an hour. There was minimal disruption by the researchers to the normal routine of activities within any of these environments. Similar procedures were observed in a follow up study when the learner participants were in Grade 11, six months later.

There were a few challenges posed by the study. Often it was difficult to find parents at the homes of the learners due to various reasons. Forty percent of the homes were comprised of single parents and if a parent was delayed somewhere, there was nobody to talk to until another visit was made. In several homes parents would be delayed either at work, church societies, prayer meetings or other engagements. Sometimes we had problems in finding the learners because some of them were engaged in community projects such as choir practice or sports. Frequently, we would stay in a home until late in the evening without talking to anybody but observing and waiting.

Findings
Home conditions

The home conditions of many participant learners in the study were not suitable for the learners. Seventy percent of children were not in any motivating home environment at all. In the homes visited, these learners were expected to do many chores and these easily distracted them from their schoolwork. In at least 45% of the households investigated, the parents would expect their children to help in a *spaza* shop where the children would be selling goods for the family's sustenance. By the time the children finished some of these chores, they were so tired that they wanted to go to sleep. Many parents did not seem to understand their role as parents. In fact, 90% of them regarded the schools as being competent enough to deal with their children. Children who lived in the informal settlement areas were the hardest hit by the home environment. Homes visited in these areas did not have enough space and the number of family members occupying the house usually made it impossible for the learners to work in their homes. Many of these homes are in communities where there are no public libraries.

The problems that children experienced in their homes had an impact on their performance in the classroom. Eighty percent of the parents in the study constantly spoke about their different domestic problems and their children were aware of these problems. Mrs. Lizwi spoke about her impending divorce and how it was impacting negatively on the home environment. She also pointed out that her daughter was blaming her for the family dysfunction. Another young couple was having financial difficulties since the father had just been retrenched from a local car plant. The family now depended on the mother who worked as a domestic. These real life examples reveal that the nature of the home environment had an effect on the learner's performance. The SES of any family impacted on the learners' performance in class. This was however, not the only determinant because there were a few learners (10%) who managed to excel despite the domestic problems and low SES in their homes.

All the teachers interviewed complained of the domestic problems that were a hindrance to learner achievement. One teacher in the study actually told us of a learner whose work was deteriorating because of the constant fighting between the learner's parents. Furthermore, the teacher pointed out that he had stopped giving the learners homework knowing that they would not be assisted at their homes. However,

being a Mathematics teacher this frustrated him. His learners, he be lieved, needed much practice after school as they did during the school hours. This did not materialise. Even of greater concern to him was that many of these learners who experienced cognitive dissonance would eventually drop out of school.

Wells (1996:31) states that parental involvement and achievement ideology are linked because the learners tend to adopt their parents' ideology with regard to achievement . In this study this assertion was true. Two parents, Cindy (Ncedile's mother) and Thembi (Sizwe's mo ther) were very vocal about what they wanted for their children. Their involvement and belief was reflected in the work of their children. In homes where the female parent had some formal education, there was a greater likelihood for children to be assisted by their mothers. Child ren of female parents who had at least high school qualifications produced above average results.

Absence of collaboration between the school and the home

The teachers in the study pointed out that the expected collaboration between parents and the school on general educational issues was far from satisfactory. Seventy five percent of the teachers stated specifi cally that the parents' ignorance was to be blamed for the schools' lack of success. The teachers believed that the parents were not doing their share of the work as expected. Three teachers who were strongly vocal about the parents' ignorance stated that education in the historically African schools would never succeed because parents distance themselves when it comes to education. A deputy principal said that, as a school manager, parents frustrated him:

They never come to PTA meetings, but they are quick in judging the teachers, our parents here are in no way involved.

However, parents also complained that schools were not involving them enough in school matters. Many of the parents had heard about Curriculum 2005 but were quick to say that they did not understand what it entailed because the schools never involved them when it was introduced. In fact, 90% of the parents in this study did not know much about OBE. One parent actually pointed out that even when she went to a PTA meeting:

Nobody cared to simplify the technical language for us. Many of us are not as educated as the teachers, but when we are con fused, we just accept what they say without having the courage to question them.

It was evident that both parents and educators were blaming each other for the parents lack of involvement in education. However, truth of the matter was that there was limited collaboration between the HDSS and the black parents.

The relevance of school work

Parents who said they would have liked to help their children, found school work unrelated to what they knew. One even complained that she was concerned as to where her child "was to be employed, given the scarcity of jobs for matrics and graduates, given the irrelevant nature of education that her child was receiving". One mother who is a bank clerk was concerned that the talent her child had, which is painting, was not nurtured in his school. As a result of this, her son's work was not enhanced because his talents were not adequately developed in the school. Seventy percent of the parents did not appear to know exactly what was wrong with the education their children were getting, but many were certain that there was something amiss with the education system. One parent complained about values and discipline and she pointed out that:

The children today have low morals and you wonder what the schools are doing. Education is being changed to the detriment of our children's sinking morals. There is no discipline in our schools.

Overloading of teachers

Teachers cited similar problems of being overloaded in various ways. The teachers pointed out that parents expected them to do more than they could manage as educators. Teachers also complained that usually they are expected to produce good results at the end of each year although the parents were not working with them. One teacher said:

They (the parents) expect us to produce a well rounded child. They condemn us when the children do not attain the best of results; however, they hardly help in enhancing their children's learning.

The teachers in the study cited the overload of teachers as a source of dissatisfaction among teachers. They stated that even when they call parents to meetings to report the progress of their children, they never turn up. Anna, a Grade 11 teacher, summed up the feelings of the educators concerning black parental involvement in education:

It frustrates us when you call a parent and they do not pitch up. Sometimes you want to explain to the parent how the school can work with the home to strengthen the child's ability but they ne ver come, this leaves the teacher as the only one for the welfare of the child at school.

However, all the parents felt that the teachers are the ones qualified to do the job of teaching. Wilma, a domestic worker who has a good command of the English language, contended that she has a Grade 6 education only. She therefore cannot be expected to help her child in algebra that she had never done at school. She said:

I am prepared to try and pay school fees, maybe attend meetings but I cannot be expected to help my child do mathematics. That is the teacher's work.

Some parents like Wilma and Sammy are parents who can only give their children emotional support but are incapable of helping them otherwise.

School environment

At times the school environment seemed not to be open to parents. Sixty eight percent of the parents interviewed mentioned that the schools "intimidated" them and appeared to be unwelcoming to their ideas. Solly, a parent in his mid forties stated that he goes to his child's school "only when it is really necessary. Maybe when my boy has done something bad." Solly stated that Parent Teacher Association meetings are for parents who can speak fluently and those who are not daunted by the presence of teachers. It appears that to many parents, the schools were not invitational. The parents also pointed out that the tea chers never called them for ideas of improving quality in the schools. Wilma conceded that:

The parents are only called when the staff wants to report some thing. Our ideas do not seem to matter although some of us would like to be involved.

The absence of parent school collaboration was frequently mentioned by the teachers who viewed this as the main cause for non cooperation between parents and teachers. Teachers almost unanimously stated that parents do not honour school meetings. Thembile, a school's language head of department, pointed out that:

What surprises me is that when these parents move their children from township schools to city schools, they attend all school functions. What changes them I really cannot figure it out. The black parents readily condemn black teachers but they do not seem to care for me, no support at all is forthcoming from our township parents towards the disadvantaged schools.

The teachers stated that the school environment was hampered by the conspicuous absence of parents in decision making. The teachers have to make decisions frequently without the involvement of the parents. This is tantamount to a bureaucratic form of management but if there is a lack of involvement of parents, then a collegial climate cannot be easily created within the school's milieu.

The teachers also attributed some of the problems in the schools to the lack of support programmes for black parents within the schools. One teacher pointed out:

Given that we are a township school, we should have guidance teachers to guide our learners. Our learners do not have the ideal support at their homes. But in our school two teachers who

had psychology and expertise in school guidance were rede ployed. Only a handful appreciated their work seriously, but now we are witnessing the true effects of losing key personnel through redeployment. The government is to be blamed for aggravating the conditions in our township schools.

There were also other teachers who maintained that if guidance tea chers' services were maximised, the learners could be empowered to work even with less parental supervision. The other main concern cited by all the teachers in the study was the lack of libraries in the schools. Even where schools had a room available for a library, there were no qualified teachers who could take the role of a librarian. Thelma, a teacher, pointed out:

In this school there are stacks of books that lie haphazardly in one unused classroom. These books are not used even though they were sponsored new to us. Instead we use the room as an ex tra staff room. How can we succeed with OBE without library facilities in our township schools?

The question posed by Thelma is a very pertinent one: rich resources must be available to the learners to cope with OBE but this goal can only be achieved by having well managed support services such as a media centre. The issue of having media facilities is crucial to the success of OBE and seeing that our HDSS are inadequately equipped with resources, implementing OBE has become a major challenge to teachers in these schools. The school's media centre, as pointed out by many teachers, can at least solve several of the black learners' prob lems experienced at home.

The learners' views

The learners in the study did not escape the influence of their commu nity and family values. On the surface few seemed to be challenging the *status quo* of social reproduction. However, Apple (1993:95) con cedes that researchers and theorists should challenge beliefs about passivity of learners in social reproduction. Apple noted that the learners act out their opposition in inherently contradictory and rela tively disorganised ways. All the learners in the study wanted to achieve academically although they understood that this might not obviously lead to opportunities. Ncedile, a conscientious learner pointed out:

I want to be in the medical field after I pass my matric. I know that today it is difficult to be employed. Look at my cousin, Jola. He qualified as a teacher four years ago but he is still unem ployed. He only works part time as a cashier. I'm afraid to end up like him, but I will study on despite these obstacles.

Ncedile's determination can be labelled by Fine, as quoted by Wells (1996: 26), as a "complicated contradictory consciousness," operating within the minds of and lives of the poor adolescents. In this citation, Fine pointed out that learners who succeed academically and graduate from high school seem to deny or dismiss the stories of failure and persist against all odds.

The learners who are involved in community based organisations also seem to improve their chances of scholastic achievement. Two learners who were not in any community organisation in 1998 but had joined some between that period and the second visit had improved scholastically. While the teachers did not want to attribute the achieve ment to community involvement alone, they admitted that these lear ners' skills and knowledge were developed to a significant extent by these organisations. One of these learners was in a drama group and the other was in a reading club. Both learners improved in language and other subjects such as history and biblical studies. According to the teachers, Millie was struggling with her language classes and lacked the confidence to speak in front of her classmates. However, her dramatic change in 1999 made her teacher find out what had helped her. It was only then that she found out that she was in a com munity drama group. Her confidence had surged and her language marks had improved. McLaughlin (2001:14) argues that community based programmes and organisations have a potential of making sig nificant contributions to young people's learning and development.

Discussion of findings

The findings of the research showed that parental involvement was crucial in the education of their children. The parents who spent some quality time with their children each day tend to be good motivators to their children. In this study, it became apparent that the learners who received attention from their parents early in their school lives were more empowered to deal with school work independently later on in life than those who never received this attention at home. The learners who constantly worked with their parents in 2002 when the research started were still performing well in 2003 although some parents were no longer able to assist their children due to the complexity of the sub ject matter.

Wealth can be associated with educationally relevant advantages. Amongst other things, wealth permits parents to provide books and other materials necessary for successful study as well as the means to give the learner privacy and comfort that enhances serious study (Jub ber, 1994:137). Furthermore, Jubber (1994:137) contended that econo mic status correlates highly with other significant education perfor mance influencing variables such as parental level of education. The SES of many parents in the study was at a low level and although the parents attributed their non involvement to various factors, their involvement in school issues was highly influenced by their economic status. Moreover, there are claims by some critics that issues such as homework put other children at a disadvantage. It was evident from the investigation that homework contributed significantly to many lear ners' dropping out of school. These learners who came from chaotic domestic environments mentioned that their inability to complete homework was a major factor in the decision to leave school as they lacked coping skills. Furthermore, it was found that homework often disrupted family life as it interfered with what parents wanted to teach their children and it consequently punished the learners for being poor. In the study, 70% of the children in low SES homes went home to parents who were not empowered and parents who had no resources at all to educationally enrich the lives of their children.

Lareau (1987:79) also discovered in her study the importance of cultural capital and she believes that there are various factors that in fluence parental participation in schools. Lareau mentioned parent's educational capabilities, their view of the appropriate division of la bour between teachers and parents, the information they had about their children's schooling and the time as well as the material resources available in the home all impacted on parents' involvement in school ing. Many parents in this study believed that the teachers were capable of doing the teaching alone at school. Only three parents perceived the education of their children as something that should be shared between the school and the family.

The study also showed that it was usually the mothers' task to help their children with school work. In 80% of the households visited, it was clear that the female parents were the ones who attended school meetings and were keen to know about their children's progress. In fact, this study validated the research done in the past that the school performance of a learner will be influenced by the mother's level of education (Jubber, 1994:137). Du Plooy (as cited by Jubber, 1994) pointed out that the average performance of learners with mothers with a post matric qualification was higher than that of learners whose mo thers were less educationally qualified. A practical example of the latter is a learner whose mother passed matric in the year 1998 in an Adult Basic and Training Education centre. According to the child's teacher there was a significant academic improvement in the child's performance as the mother upgraded her education. In 1997 the learner was attaining 40 50% in her schoolwork on average. However, four years later, she was attaining 70% on average. The mother's level of education was among the most important factors in the improvement of the child's progress in class.

This study suggests that black parental involvement needs to be promoted if stakeholders want to ensure success of children at HDSS. However, the study strongly indicates that parents from impoverished backgrounds also need to be empowered if they are to make a mea

ningful contribution to the education of the learners.

Using the framework of FYA and the findings of this study, we developed the following framework which could be used in schools to enhance black parental participation in education. The schools cannot expect the black learners to be empowered if they are allowing them to go to disempowered parents each day. Hence, the framework (see Figure 1) is necessary in a change process that calls for the total involvement of parents in education as envisaged in SASA. The framework is divided into five stages namely:
- Stage 1: convening level
- Stage 2: clarification level
- Stage 3: commitment level
- Stage 4: attainment level
- Stage 5: evaluation level.

Stage 1: Convening level
- Demystify leadership for external stakeholders and partners in education;
- explain the importance of parental/ community involvement in education;
- make parents aware that they can enhance quality in schools;
- discuss transformation in education with them;
- create opportunities for parents to become partners in education; and
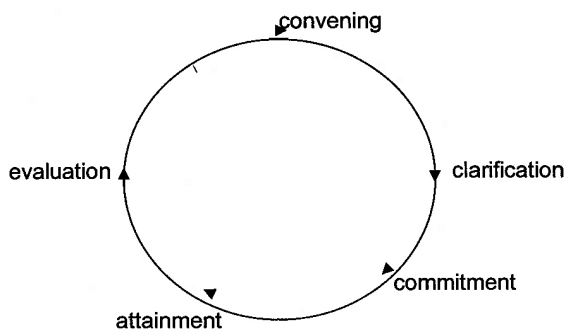- allow them to voice out what they want education to embrace.

Figure 1 Parental involvement in education cycle

Stage 2: Clarification level
- Clarify the role of parents in education;
- make teachers aware of the positive potential of their (parents) role;
- make parents aware of their role in contributing towards change in education;
- jointly draw up the vision and mission of the school;
- agree on aims and objectives;
- agree on strategic plans to attain aims and objectives;
- inform parents of curriculum matters and develop their knowledge accordingly; and
- clarify differential roles for parents with varying educational backgrounds (e.g. parents with a low literacy level can contribute meaningfully towards the upkeep of the school grounds).

Stage 3: Commitment level
- Teachers and parents must have the will to work together;
- plan jointly;
- improve relationships;
- reduce stress and anxiety;
- create a conducive climate for consensual decision making; and
- apply a collegial approach on policy issues.

Stage 4: Attainment level
- Co ordinate and control activities;
- jointly deliberate on educational issues;

- assume joint responsibility for resource utilisation;
- adopt a transparent approach in policy implementation; and
- contribute jointly towards the attainment of the vision and mission of the institution.

Stage 5: Evaluation
- Jointly evaluate educational outcomes;
- provide feedback on cost effectiveness;
- correct faulty communication channels; and
- modify current plans and consider alternative goals, if necessary.

The above stages are essential in the empowerment of parents. Evidently, from the above framework, it will be to the parents' advantage if they unite under a common banner to contribute effectively to education as decreed in the SASA. According to Mbokodi, Singh and Msila (2003), one possible way forward is for provincial departments of education to consider forming regional parent representative councils that would operate under a provincial parent representative council. These in turn would fall under a national parent body representing all South African provinces. The function of such a body would be to garner the necessary support for all parents, but especially those with a low socio economic status so that they are sufficiently empowered to play their part in their children's education. This need to be done in the spirit of Masifunde, which means: "Let us educate together." The problems facing disadvantaged communities can be arrested if we join hands in the spirit of Masifunde to face the challenges of this century.

Conclusion

Many middle class black parents who were dissatisfied with the historically black schools in Port Elizabeth took their children to private schools and other historically white schools. This option is referred to as the "exit option" by Hirschman (1970). Hirschman argued in his work that on the one hand, when clients (parents in our case) are dissatisfied with the public schools they have an option of either selecting the exit option, that is, leaving those schools they are not happy with. On the other hand there is the voice option where the clients will try to change the schools. However, the large percentage of parents in this study did not have the means to opt for the exit option and they also did not seem to feel empowered enough to want to effect changes in the parent school relationship. The parents in the historically disadvantaged African schools need to learn to intervene in school issues. These African parents who are unable to opt for an exit option out of the township schools should neither punish themselves nor let themselves be punished by the system that excludes them.

When the learners fail, the focus is on teachers who are usually blamed for the poor results. It is common knowledge that there are good teachers and there are bad teachers and this happens in any given profession. However, when learners fail the focus should also be on the parents' role in the education of their children. The absence of black parental participation was significant in this investigation. Usually people talk of the importance of empowering teachers in schools. However, there should be crucial inroads made to empower the parents as well, if the education system is to create a well rounded empowered citizen. Research has indicated that learners with more valuable social and cultural capital fare better in school than do their peers with less social and cultural capital (Lareau & Horvat, 1999:37). However, despite such impediments, there need to be ways of closing the gap between the wealthy and the poor parents. Among the ways of closing the gap between schools and community is to enhance propinquity between teachers and the parents or community members. This can be achieved by working together within the spirit of *Masifunde.*

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