

**CHALLENGES TO PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN HOMEWORK  
ASSIGNMENTS OF LEARNERS IN A HISTORICALLY DISADVANTAGED  
PRIMARY SCHOOL IN CAPE TOWN**

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**2013**

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ASSIGNMENTS OF LEARNERS IN A HISTORICALLY DISADVANTAGED  
PRIMARY SCHOOL IN CAPE TOWN**

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

**MASTERS IN EDUCATION**



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*UNIVERSITY of the*

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**SUPERVISOR**

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## KEY WORDS

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Challenges

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Primary School

Parent

Parent – child interaction

Community

Inclusive Education

Historically disadvantaged



## ABSTRACT

### **Challenges to parental involvement in homework assignments of learners in a historically disadvantaged primary school in Cape Town**

South Africa is amongst the lowest performers in numeracy and literacy in the developing countries, according to Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS 2006). Systemic research conducted by the Western Cape Education Department has pointed to the fact that the literacy and numeracy skills of the learners in the Western Cape are far below what is required for them to learn and develop effectively. Many educators blame parents for learners' poor academic achievement. This study therefore aims to explore challenges to parental involvement in the homework assignments of learners in a historically disadvantaged primary school in Cape Town.

This exploratory qualitative case study followed an interpretive paradigm. Data was collected via field notes; and semi – structured interviews from individuals and focus groups. Thematic data analysis was used to determine challenges to parental involvement in homework assignments of the primary school learners. This research study is grounded on Epstein's model of overlapping spheres of influence of family, school and community on learners' learning; six typologies of parental involvement; and on Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model of human development. General systems theory was kept in mind during the study. Where parents were not involved in homework assignments, it was not a deliberate act. The findings highlighted challenges such as poverty, unemployment, inequalities; lack of educational resources; lack of structure in the home; single parenting, school and community factors, and a lack of educational stimulation that negatively affected parental involvement in homework assignments. The blame that educators apportioned on parents for learners' poor academic outcomes was thus found to be inaccurate. True systems thinkers never debate whether the cause or the solution is situated in one single system, but considers the interdependence between all the systems. The whole is therefore more important than the sum of the parts. Despite the many challenges that parents experience in helping the learners with homework, the parents still want their children to excel in academic work. Parents in the historically disadvantaged school however seek assistance in how to help the learners with homework assignments.

## DECLARATION

I declare that “**Challenges to parental involvement in homework assignments of learners in a historically disadvantaged primary school in Cape Town**” is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Roland Abrahams

Student number: 9513643

Signed .....



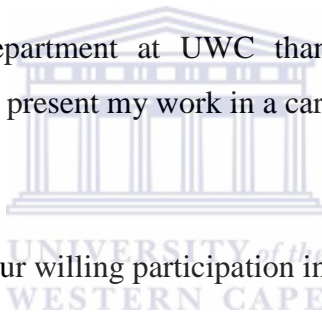
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My son Ryan and daughter Kelly to whom this study is dedicated.

My late mom and dad for the positive role models they were in my life. Their memory will always be treasured!

My Lord and My God, for the Grace and mercy I receive daily.

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

<b>WCED</b>	=	<b>Western Cape Education Department</b>
<b>PIRLS</b>	=	<b>Progress in International Reading Literacy Study</b>
<b>SGB</b>	=	<b>School Governing Body</b>
<b>SASA</b>	=	<b>South African Schools Act</b>
<b>DoE</b>	=	<b>Department of Education</b>
<b>SES</b>	=	<b>Socio-economic status</b>
<b>SDP</b>	=	<b>School Development Programme</b>
<b>NCLBA</b>	=	<b>No Child Left Behind Act</b>
<b>UFPB</b>	=	<b>Federal University of Paraiba</b>
<b>PPCT</b>	=	<b>Person Process Context Time</b>
<b>CAPS</b>	=	<b>Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement</b>
<b>SIP</b>	=	<b>School Improvement Plan</b>
<b>BCP</b>	=	<b>Basic Concepts Programme</b>
<b>HIV</b>	=	<b>Human Immunodeficiency Virus</b>



## LIST OF FIGURES

- Figure 1.1**    **Overlapping spheres of influence**
- Figure 1.2**    **Six typologies of parental involvement**
- Figure 2.1**    **Overlapping spheres of influence**
- Figure 2.2**    **Weak partnerships between family, school and community**
- Figure 2.3**    **Strong partnerships between family school and community**
- Figure 2.4**    **Bio – ecological model of human development**
- Figure 4.1**    **Overlapping spheres of influence**



## LIST OF TABLES

- Table 2.1**    **Six typologies of parental involvement**
- Table 2.2**    **Relevance of type 4 for this research**
- Table 2.3**    **Proximal Processes**
- Table 3.1**    **Overview of the research process**
- Table 4.1**    **The process of data analysis**
- Table 4.2**    **Themes and sub-themes that emerged in this study**



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WESTERN CAPE

**TABLE OF CONTENT**

KEYWORDS..... i

ABSTRACT..... ii

DECLARATION..... iii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS..... iv

LIST OF ACRONYMS..... v

LIST OF FIGURES ..... vi

LIST OF TABLES..... vi

**CHAPTER ONE**

**ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY**

1 INTRODUCTION..... 1

1.1 RATIONALE..... 2

1.2 PURPOSE..... 2

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY..... 2

1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT..... 3

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SUB QUESTIONS..... 3

1.5.1 Main Research Question..... 3

1.5.2 Sub Questions..... 3

1.6 LITERATURE REVIEW..... 4

1.6.1 CHALLENGES TO PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT..... 4

1.7 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK..... 5

1.7.1 Epstein’s overlapping spheres of influence..... 6



1.7.2	Epstein’s six typologies of parental involvement.....	6
1.8	Bronfenbrenner’s Bio-ecological model of human development.....	8
1.9	CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK.....	9
1.9.1	Parental involvement.....	9
1.9.2	Homework.....	10
1.9.3	Families.....	10
1.9.4	Parent – child interaction.....	10
1.9.5	Home – school communication.....	10
1.10	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN.....	11
1.10.1	Population and sample.....	11
1.11	DATA COLLECTION STRATEGIES.....	11
1.11.1	Interviews.....	11
1.11.2	Semi-structured interviews.....	12
1.11.3	Advantages of semi-structured interviews.....	12
1.12	INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS.....	12
1.12.1	Learners.....	12
1.12.2	Principal.....	13
1.13	FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS.....	13
1.13.1	Parent Focus Group.....	13
1.13.2	Educator Focus Group.....	14
1.13.3	SGB Focus Group.....	14
1.14	Field notes.....	14
1.15	DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION.....	14



1.16	OBJECTIVITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS.....	15
1.17	ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	15
1.18	PROPOSED STRUCTURE OF THIS STUDY.....	16
1.19	CONCLUSION.....	17



CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1	INTRODUCTION.....	18
2.2.	THE RATIONALE FOR PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT.....	18
2.2.1	Challenges to parental involvement.....	23
2.2.2	International Background on Parental Involvement.....	25
2.2.3.	UNITED STATES OF AMERICA Department of Education.....	27
2.2.3.1	HISPANIC PARENTS.....	27
2.2.3.2	SCOTTISH SCHOOLS.....	27
2.2.3.3	GHANAIAAN SCHOOLS.....	27
2.2.3.4	Hong Kong .....	28
2.4	Background of Parental Involvement in South African Schools.....	29
2.5	POLICY ON HOMEWORK.....	30
2.5.1	SASA 84 of 1996 DoE (1996).....	30
2.5.2	WCED Homework Circular 0045/2005 WCED (2005).....	30
2.5.2.1	Homework roles as per homework circular 0045/2005 WCED (2005).....	30
2.6	THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK .....	32
2.6.1	EPSTEIN’S THEORY on Parental Involvement.....	32
2.6.2	SIX TYPOLOGIES of Parental Involvement.....	35
2.6.2.1	An example of using the 6 Typologies.....	38
2.7	Different view to Epstein’s on Parental Involvement.....	39
2.8	BRONFENBRENNER’S Bio- Ecological Model of Human Development.....	40

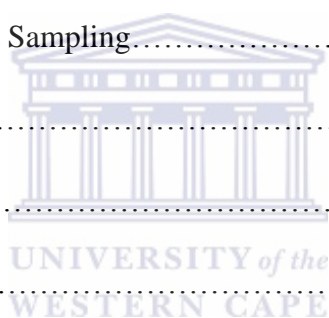
2.8.1 Discussion on the Bio- ecological systems..... 43

2.9 CONCLUSION..... 46



CHAPTER THREE  
EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

3.1	INTRODUCTION.....	47
3.2	METHODOLOGY APPROACH.....	48
3.3	PARADIGM.....	49
3.4	RESEARCH DESIGN.....	49
3.4.1	Case Study.....	49
3.5	SAMPLING.....	50
3.5.1	Purposive and Convenient Sampling.....	50
3.6	PARTICIPANTS.....	50
3.6.1	SAMPLE.....	51
3.6.2	Focus group samples.....	51
3.6.3	Individual Samples.....	52
3.7	Selecting a Site.....	53
3.8	DATA COLLECTION.....	53
3.8.1	INTERVIEWS.....	54
3.8.1.1	Semi-structured interview.....	54
3.8.1.2	Basic Individual Interviewing.....	54
3.8.1.3	Focus group interviews.....	55
3.8.2	Field notes.....	56
3.9	Triangulation.....	56
3.10	DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION.....	57





3.10.1 Thematic Framework.....	57
3.10.2 Interpretation.....	58
3. 11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	59
3. 12 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY.....	60
3. 13 CONCLUSION.....	61



## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1	<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	62
4.2.1	<b>THEME: Challenges to parental involvement in the home</b> .....	63
	Sub – Theme 1.1: Lack of parent education.....	63
	Sub – Theme 1.2: Lack of educational stimulation.....	64
	Sub – Theme 1.3: Socio – economic factors.....	64
	Sub – Theme 1.4: The effects of family structure.....	66
4.2.1.1	<b>THEME: POSITIVE ASSISTANCE</b> .....	66
4.2.2	<b>THEME: Challenges in the school that affect parental involvement</b> .....	67
	Sub – Theme 2.1: Lack of educator training.....	67
	Sub – Theme 2.2: Medical – model approach.....	67
	Sub – Theme 2.3: The effect of the SGB on parental involvement.....	68
	Sub – Theme 2.4 Policies.....	69
	Sub – Theme 2.5 Language.....	71
	Sub – Theme 2.6 WCED.....	72
	Sub – Theme 2.7 Middle – Class Institution.....	73
4.2.3	<b>THEME: How the community affects parental involvement in homework</b> .....	73
	Sub - Theme 3.1 An unsafe environment.....	73
4.3	<b>INTERPRETATION</b> .....	75
4.4	<b>SUMMARY</b> .....	77

## CHAPTER FIVE

### FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1	INTRODUCTION.....	78
5.2	SUMMARY OF FINDINGS.....	78
5.3	Findings that respond to the Research Questions.....	78
5.3.1	MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION.....	78
5.3.2	Sub - Question 1 .....	79
5.3.3	Sub - Question 2 .....	80
5.3.4	Sub - Question 3.....	80
5.4	SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS RESEARCH STUDY.....	81
5.4.1	Homework.....	81
5.4.2	The School Improvement Plan.....	81
5.4.3	Assist the learners in the school.....	81
5.4.4	Assist the WCED in its research.....	81
5.4.5	The existing body of knowledge.....	81
5.4.6	Encourage a change in approach.....	82
5.4.7	Adopt an Asset based approach.....	82
5.5	RECOMMENDATIONS.....	82
5.5.1	The HOME.....	82
5.5.2	The SCHOOL.....	82
5.6	LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY.....	83
5.7	SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH.....	84
5.8	CONCLUSION.....	84

REFERENCES.....	86 - 92
APPENDICES.....	93-133
APPENDIX	
A - F = Participants Consent Forms.....	93 - 98
G- K = Interview Schedule (semi-structured interviews).....	99 - 103
L = Field notes.....	104- 106
M = Principal's permission to conduct interviews at the primary school.....	107
N = WCED approval to conduct the interviews at the primary school.....	108
O = Extract of interview with Individual (Principal).....	109 - 111
P = Extract of interview with Educator Focus group.....	112
Q = Extract of interview with Parent Focus Group.....	113
R = Extract of interview with SGB Focus Group.....	114
S = Extract of interview with Individual gr 1 learner.....	115
T = Extract of interview with Individual grade 3 learner.....	116
U = Themes and categories that emerged from the data.....	117
V = Collective responses from the participants to the interview questions.....	118- 133

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY**

#### **1 INTRODUCTION**

In this study the researcher aims to explore challenges to parental involvement in the homework assignments of learners in a historically disadvantaged primary school. According to the Western Cape Education Department's (WCED) Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, WCED (2006), learners' lack of numeracy and literacy skills is an international phenomenon. Studies conducted in the Western Cape by the WCED indicated that learner achievement in Literacy and Numeracy was below what is expected in primary school.

In 2002 the WCED assessed the reading and numeracy results of a representative sample of grade 3 learners in all schools. The study by the WCED found that only 36% of learners were achieving the reading and numeracy outcomes expected of a grade 3 learner and that the majority of learners in grade 3 were performing two to three years below expectation, WCED (2006). According to Van Staden and Howie (2006), South Africa's performance in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2006 assessment, emphasises the need for the education department and educators at primary schools to reassess current strategies implemented in literacy. There is therefore definitely a need to address the challenges that learners in primary schools are confronted with in completing homework assignments e.g. in numeracy and literacy (Van Staden and Howie, 2006).

Sound research is therefore needed to determine the reasons why primary school learners are underachieving in numeracy and literacy. Parental involvement can take many forms and involves the participation of parents in every part of a learner's education from birth to adulthood. Studies have consistently indicated that effective parental involvement in primary school learners' education could have a positive impact on students' outcomes (McBride and Lin, 1996), and (Epstein, 2002). The importance and efficacy of parental involvement in schooling has been validated by research (Epstein, 2002).

According to de Carvalho (2001:12), parental involvement in schooling has been rhetorically regarded as both the problem and solution for improving the academic outcomes of historically disadvantaged learners.

## **1.1 RATIONALE**

I am an itinerant learning support educator and serve historically disadvantaged primary schools in Cape Town. I engage with educators, learners and parents on a daily basis regarding the education of learners. What I have experienced over the years is that educators attribute the low academic outcomes of the learners to the lack of parental involvement in the learners' education. The educators also refer to the disinterest of the parents in the learners' schooling as the cause for the high failure rate of the learners at the primary school in this study. Parents in the historically disadvantaged primary schools that I serve regard the educators as the "experts" in helping the learners with schoolwork. Parents therefore seek help from the school to help their children but view the school as not being sensitive to their (parents') needs.

Literature shows that there has been decades of research on parental involvement in education by researchers such as Joyce Epstein, amongst others, who did a seminal study on parental involvement. However a universal definition of parental involvement in homework has not been established (Enoki and Yap, 1995). Parental involvement in schooling in disadvantaged areas in South Africa is limited and has not received the recognition it deserves (Smidt and Liebenberg, 2003). For these reasons I decided to explore the possible challenges to parental involvement in the homework assignments of the learners in a historically disadvantaged primary school in Cape Town.

## **1.2 PURPOSE**

The purpose of this study is to explore challenges experienced by parents when assisting primary school learners with homework assignments at home. The challenges experienced by parents could lead to possible causes of the learners' low educational outcomes in numeracy and literacy. The aim would therefore be to develop strategies in future research studies, to possibly assist parents in helping learners with homework assignments at home.

## **1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

This research study is in line with the requirements stipulated by the WCED in its Numeracy and Literacy Strategy Plan, WCED (2006). This research study could make a possible contribution to the research required by the WCED on how to rectify the situation with regards to why learners are not performing in numeracy and literacy. The study could play a potentially significant role in contributing to schools' homework policy with regards to

parental involvement in learners' literacy and numeracy homework assignments. According to Smidt and Liebenberg (2003:1), research relating to parental involvement in schooling within South Africa is limited, as well as restricted to wealthier social groups. The researcher hopes that the findings in this study would contribute to the existing body of knowledge of parental involvement in the historically disadvantaged schools.

#### **1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Many educators are of the opinion that parents are not interested in their learners' homework. The view of many educators is also that working class parents lack the mental resources to help learners with homework (Dornbrack, Scheckle and Felix, 2008:103). If the educators determine that the parents are unable or incapable of supporting homework, the educators might then decide not to allocate any homework, (Dornbrack, Scheckle and Felix, 2008:111). The researcher's "hunch" is that some of the parents are willing to help their children with homework but possibly do not know how to assist with homework. The parents therefore might need support and guidance from the school. I have decided to conduct the research on parental involvement in order to explore the responses of parents, educators, learners, the school governing body, and the principal regarding the challenges that parents might experience when they are involved with the learners' homework.

#### **1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SUB QUESTIONS**

In this section the main research question and sub questions will be discussed.

##### **1.5.1 Main Research Question**

The main research question is:

What are the possible challenges that parents experience when they assist their children with homework?

##### **1.5.2 Sub Questions**

The sub questions are:

- ❖ How are the parents in this research study currently involved in the homework assignments of the learners at the historically disadvantaged primary school?
- ❖ How does the parent - learner interaction at home affect parental involvement in the homework assignments?

- ❖ What factors in the school contribute to the possible challenges to parental involvement in homework assignments in the home?

## **1.6 LITERATURE REVIEW**

The researcher in this study hopes to present a narrative literature review by reviewing, summarising and synthesising a volume of literature on the proposed topic of parental involvement in primary school learners' homework assignments (Coughlan, Cronin and Ryan, 2008). Historical information on parental involvement in learners' homework, current background and research conducted on the research topic intends to be highlighted.

### **1.6.1 CHALLENGES TO PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

According to Mncube (2009), Lansberg and Nel (2005), Felix, Dornbrack and Sheckle (2008), Mmotlane; Winnaar and wa Kivulu (2009), and de Carvalho (2001), the following are some of the challenges to parental involvement in learners' homework.

- ❖ **Language**

Parents in disadvantaged areas in most cases do not speak the language of learning and teaching. This will affect the communication between parent and child with regards to the instruction about homework assignments.

- ❖ **Educator training**

Educators might not have received training on how to engage with parents. This could negatively affect the home - school interaction with regards to how homework assignments should be done.

- ❖ **Family structure**

We have to understand the complex nature of the family structure. The number of families with an atypical composition has increased dramatically. There are more single- parent families; step – families; families of mixed religion; families with adopted or foster children and grandparents raising grandchildren.



### ❖ **Socio - economic status**

The effects of poverty and unemployment are some of the major challenges that have a negative effect on homework completion. Parents of low socio - economic status (SES) are found to be less involved in the teaching of new learning skills and cognitive intellectual activities. Parents who are affected by poverty might not regard the education of the learners as a priority as their daily needs will take preference.

Working – class parents were seen as lacking the cultural capital to assist their learners with homework. Deficit discourses ascribed to working class parents constructed them as having limited resources to draw on to assist learners at home with homework. Parents who had limited material resources were then also perceived to be lacking mental resources to help their children with homework (Dornbrack, Scheckle and Felix, 2008:111). Some challenges to parental involvement in schools and their children’s education are due to negative attitudes and inferior feelings of parents. Factors such as daily psychosocial stressors; attitudes, and behaviour towards schooling affects parent participation in homework assignments.

Parental involvement in most cases is only seen in terms of attendance at parent teacher meetings, and little attention is paid to the role of parents as active partners with the school in the learner’s homework assignments (Enoki and Yap, 1995:50). Inappropriate attitudes from educators, who undervalue working class parental involvement, might see the parents’ involvement as not being beneficial to helping with homework. Parents’ occupations may limit their availability for involvement activities (Enoki and Yap, 1995:50). The home culture may hold schools in such high regard that it is not considered appropriate for parents to be involved in the learner’s education as the educators are seen as the “experts.”

## **1.7 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

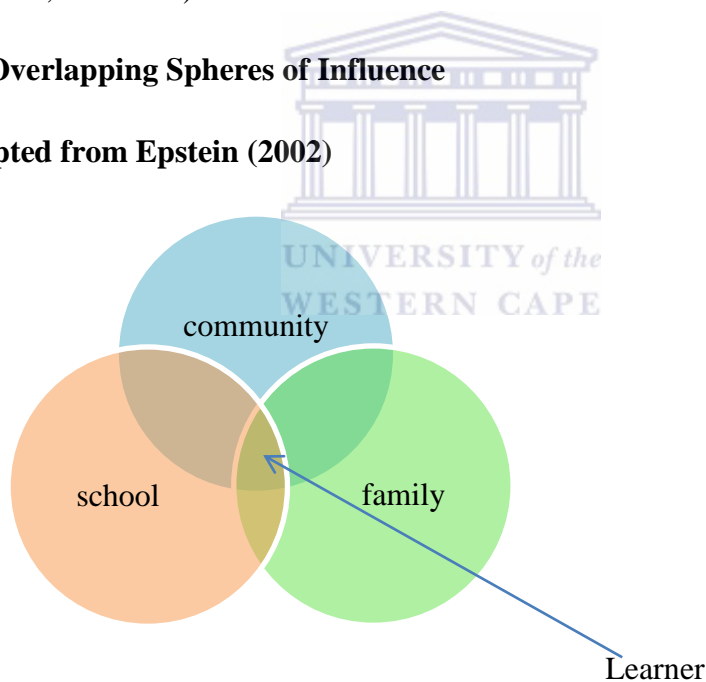
This research study is grounded on Epstein’s model of overlapping spheres of influence of family, school and community on learners’ learning; Epstein’s theory of six typologies of parental involvement in education (Epstein, 2002); and on Bronfenbrenner’s (1994) bio-ecological model of human development. General systems theory will be kept in mind when applying Bronfenbrenner’s bio - ecological model of human development, (Landsberg, Kruger, and Nel, 2005:12).

### 1.7.1 Epstein's overlapping spheres of influence

Epstein's overlapping spheres of influence Epstein, (2002) signify areas of interdependence and independence, (**figure 1.1**). The intersections of the spheres represent spaces where families, schools and communities share the responsibilities of the learner's development. Some activities in families, schools and communities are performed independently; this causes the spheres not to overlap significantly which does not benefit the learner. Some activities are conducted mutually which causes the overlapping spheres to be pushed together which benefits the learner. The learning and development of learners are the main reasons for the partnership (Epstein, 2002:163). Homework assignment completion could also benefit the learners positively when successful partnership activities are developed between family, school and community. This will cause a greater overlap of the spheres of influence which will benefit the learner. This model could create inclusive school communities (Landsberg, Kruger, and Nel, 2005:217).

**Figure 1.1 Overlapping Spheres of Influence**

Adapted from Epstein (2002)



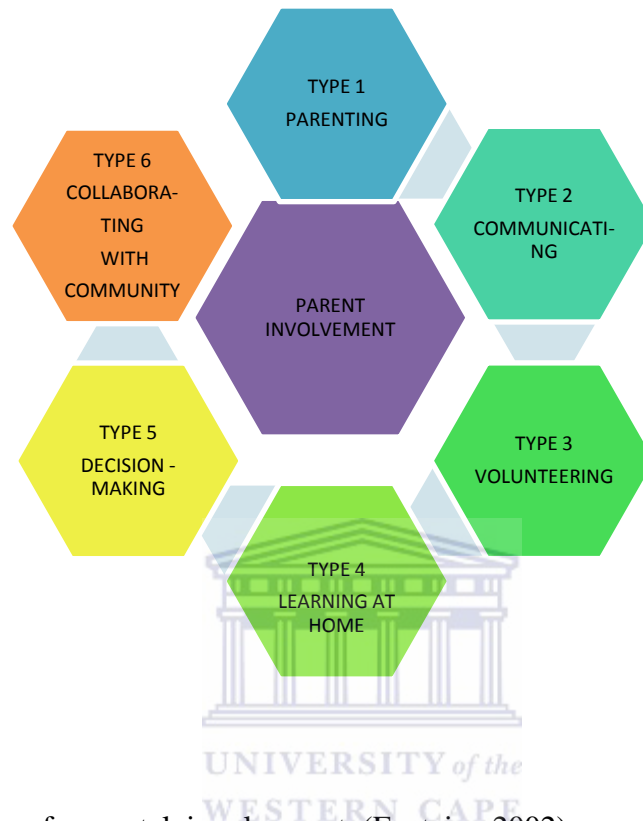
### 1.7.2 Epstein's Six Typologies of parental involvement

Epstein developed six types or typologies of parental involvement to develop a comprehensive programme of school, family and community partnerships (Epstein, 2002).

**Figure 1.2** below shows the six types of parental involvement.

## Figure 1.2 Six Typologies of parental involvement

Adapted from Epstein, (2002)



The six typologies of parental involvement (Epstein, 2002) are all important; this study however will mainly focus on **type 4** which is learning at home. This is fully addressed in chapter two. The six types of parental involvement (Epstein, 2002) are explained below.

### ❖ Parenting

Parenting builds on parenting strengths and helps families improve parenting skills. It helps to understand child and adolescent development, and sets home conditions that support learners with homework. Parenting also assists schools in understanding families.

### ❖ Communicating

It helps parents to understand school programmes and student progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications.

### ❖ **Volunteering**

Volunteering improves recruitment, training, work, and schedules to involve families as volunteers to support learners and homework programmes.

### ❖ **Learning at Home**

This typology provides information and ideas to families about how to help their children in learning activities at home or in the community, including homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, planning and linking schoolwork to real life.

### ❖ **Decision Making**

It equips parents and other community members with the tools they need to function as decision-makers. Decision making includes families and community members as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy through the School Governing Body (SGB).

### ❖ **Collaborating with the community**

It identifies and coordinates resources and services from the community to strengthen school programmes, family practices and student learning and development. Collaborating with the community also establishes and promotes partnerships with individuals and organisations in the community, particularly those that provide support services for learners and their families.

According to Epstein (2002), schools need to look at partnerships with families and communities to assist learners with improving their educational outcomes. Joyce Epstein is the leading researcher who favours parental partnerships in learners' education and believes that learners learn and grow at home, at school and in the community. Both Epstein's overlapping spheres of influence and Epstein's six typologies of parental involvement are explored in full in chapter 2.

## **1.8 Bronfenbrenner's Bio - ecological model of human development**

According to Bronfenbrenner (1994), there is an interaction between the learner who is nested in the centre of the systems namely the micro, the meso, the macro and exo systems, and all the adults who interact with the learner. All the parties are therefore affected by the interaction of all the Bronfenbrenner (1994), bio-ecological systems. Lansberg, Kruger, and

Nel (2005), states that this bio-ecological model explains the direct and indirect influences on a learner's life by referring to the many levels of environment or contexts that influence a learner's development. A school which encourages reciprocal relationships between parents, learners, the community and other organisations is more effective than one that does not interact with other systems (Landsberg, Kruger, and Nel, 2005). This is the inclusive practice that this research study envisages by including parental involvement and other caregivers who can contribute to the positive educational outcomes for the learners. This theory is fully presented in chapter two.

## **1.9 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

Our general daily communication with people usually occurs through a system of vague and general agreements about the use of terms. According to Babbie and Mouton (2001), other people do not really understand exactly what we aim to communicate, but they get the general idea of our meaning. Conceptualisation is therefore the process through which we specify what we will mean when we use particular terms.

In the following section the different concepts that are used in this study will be clarified.

### **1.9.1 Parental involvement**

Parental involvement in education has been the focus of decades of research by researchers such as Epstein (1987); Chavkin and Williams (1993); Honig (1990); and Jones (1989). However there is very little agreement on how parental involvement may be best implemented (Enoki and Yap, 1995). There is no universal definition for parental involvement (Enoki and Yap, 1995). Parental involvement in homework assignments and education is conceptualised differently by many countries, it could possibly therefore lead to confusion and misunderstanding. Parental involvement is promulgated by the South African Schools Act (SASA) 84 of 1996, DoE (1996). The School's Act 84 of 1996 DoE (1996) regards the parent or guardian of a learner to fulfil obligations towards the learner's education at school. The governance of every public school is vested in the school governing body (SGB), and a parent may serve as the chairperson of the SGB. Subject to SASA 84 of 1996 DoE (1996), the SGB must promote the best interest of the school; and strive to ensure its development through the provision of quality education for all learners at the school, SASA 84 of 1996 DoE (1996).

### **1.9.2 Homework**

The concept of homework in this study is taken from WCED circular 0045/2005 WCED (2005) provincial guidelines for the management of homework in public ordinary schools. The document states that homework is part of the teaching and learning activities of schooling, and requires effective management by principals, educators, parents and learners. Homework is defined as an interactive activity that connects learners, families and schools (Epstein and Sanders, 2000).

### **1.9.3 Families**

Understanding the dynamic and complex nature of changing family structures is the key to developing sustained family - school partnerships. The stereotypical view of the nuclear family is still evident in learners' books, in the media and in classrooms today. There are more blended families today including single - parent families; step families; families of mixed religion; extended families; families with same sex parents; families with adopted or foster children, and grandparents raising grandchildren (Moletsane, 2004).

### **1.9.4 Parent - child interaction**

A lack of parent interaction can deter learner development. By contrast, a positive, stable, stimulating and supportive relationship with adults can render learners resilient to the effects of a negative environment (Moletsane, 2004). According to Epstein and Van Voorhuis (2001), homework may be designed to guide and promote positive communications between parent and child. Parent-child conversations may help reinforce the importance of homework, and learning, and promote students' understanding of how schoolwork is used in real-life situations. Homework may spark conversations between parents and learners about what students are learning in class (Epstein and Van Voorhuis, 2001).

### **1.9.5 Home - school communication**

According to Lemmer and Van Wyk (2004), home - school communication is important to home - school relations. To promote effective communication with families, schools should design a variety of school-to-home as well as home-to-school communication strategies with all families. This communication should be part of a co-equal relationship and educators should not have deficit views about parents. Therefore home-school communication should strive to give parents a voice and avoid patronising parents (Lemmer, 2004).

## **1.10 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN**

This study intends to use a Qualitative Case study approach and an interpretivist paradigm. According to Babbie and Mouton (2001), the primary goal of studies using a qualitative research approach is defined as describing and understanding, rather than explaining human behaviour. Qualitative research will enable the researcher in this study, to understand the possible challenges to parental involvement in homework according to the view and experiences of the participants. This section will be further explored in chapter 5.

### **1.10.1 Population and sample**

According to Bless and Higson-Smith (1995), the unit of analysis is the person or object from whom the social researcher collects data. The participants in this research study will be purposively and conveniently selected from the population of the historically disadvantaged primary school. The researcher will conduct interviews with three focus groups, namely a parent focus group, an educator focus group and a school governing body focus group. Individuals who will be interviewed are the principal of the school, and 9 primary school learners who will be interviewed separately.

## **1.11 DATA COLLECTION STRATEGIES**

According to Babbie and Mouton (1998), using multiple sources of data is important in case studies of all kinds. This involves using more than one method, multiple interview or observation occasions. Using multiple sources of evidence sometimes called triangulation, can represent aspects of thick description. The methods used for data collection in this study are: individual semi - structured interviews; focus group semi – structured interviews, and field notes.

### **1.11.1 Interviews**

According to Babbie and Mouton (1998:289), a qualitative interview is an interaction between an interviewer and a respondent in which the interviewer has a general plan of inquiry but not a specific set of questions that must be asked in particular words and in a particular order. A qualitative interview is essentially a conversation in which the interviewer establishes a general direction for the conversation. Ideally the respondent does most of the talking (Babbie and Mouton, 1998:289).

### **1.11.2 Semi - structured interviews**

The researcher in this study will conduct individual; and focus group semi – structured interviews with the participants. The prime concern of the interviewer would be to explore the world from the perspective of the participants. The researcher also wishes to construct an understanding of how the participants make sense of their experiences with regards to parental involvement in learners’ homework assignments (Dowling and Brown, 1998:72).

### **1.11.3 Advantages of semi - structured interviews**

According to Wilkinson and Birmingham (2003:43), the format and ordering of the questions are informed by the on-going responses of the interviewee to the questions posed. The researcher could ask for clarification if the answers are not clear. Within each topic the interviewer is free to ask the questions that are deemed appropriate in the words the researcher considers best. The strengths of semi - structured interviews are that the researcher can prompt and probe deeper into a given situation. The researcher can also explain and rephrase the questions if the respondents are unclear about the questions, (Wilkinson and Birmingham, 2003:43).

## **1.12 INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS**

This is one of the most frequently used methods of data gathering within the qualitative approach, (Babbie and Mouton, 2003:289). It differs from most other types of interview in that it is an open interview which allows the object of study to speak for him/her, rather than to provide the respondent with a battery of the researcher’s own predetermined hypothesis - based questions (Babbie and Mouton, 2003:289). A qualitative interview is an interaction between an interviewer and a respondent in which the interviewer has a general plan of inquiry but not a specific set of questions that must be asked in particular words and in a particular order (Babbie and Mouton 2003: 289). The individuals who will be interviewed in this study are explained below.

### **1.12.1 Learners**

Nine primary school learners will be interviewed individually. The learners will be directly involved in the homework assignments and they would be able to give “thick” descriptions of parental involvement in their homework assignments. These nine learners will form the sample of the primary school pupil population at the school in this study.



### **1.12.2 Principal**

An individual interview will also be held with the principal of the school. The school in this study only has one principal. Information with regards to the school's homework policy, and parental involvement in the homework assignments of the learners, would be areas that the principal could have first-hand information about. This information could add value to this research study.

### **1.13 FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS**

The focus group is a special qualitative research technique in which people are informally “interviewed in a group-discussion setting,” (Neuman, 2003: 396). The focus group interview should take about 90 minutes to complete. Enough participants have to be chosen so that the interview does not fall flat if some members choose to remain silent. Doing one focus group can hamper the result of the study so about three to five focus groups are suggested (Babbie and Mouton, 2003:292).

#### **❖ Advantage of focus groups**

The main advantage of focus groups is the opportunity to observe a large amount of interaction on a topic in a limited period of time (Babbie and Mouton, 2001:292). Group discussions provide direct evidence about similarities and differences in the participants' opinions and experiences as opposed to reaching such conclusions from separate statements of each interviewee (Babbie and Mouton, 2003:292). Focus groups are useful because they tend to allow a space in which people may get together and create meaning. In this research study the researcher will interview three focus groups. The researcher intends to obtain the “individual” responses of all the participants in the group (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:291-292). Information on the interviews will be discussed further in chapter three. The focus groups used in this study are explained below.

#### **1.13.1 Parent Focus Group**

A focus group of 12 parents from the primary school parent population will be interviewed in this research study. These parents would best understand what the challenges to parental involvement in learners' homework assignments might be.

### **1.13.2 Educator Focus group**

A focus group of four educators will represent the primary school educator population of the school in this study. They will form the educator sample. The educators will be interviewed as they are directly involved in providing homework assignments to the learners; they have direct contact with the educators; and also they are involved in setting up the homework policy at the school. The educator focus group could therefore add valuable insight into the challenges of parental involvement in homework assignments of the learners at the historically disadvantaged primary school in this study.

### **1.13.3 SGB Focus group**

The chairperson and three SGB members would represent the SGB focus group. The SGB would add great value to the topic on challenges to parental involvement in the homework assignments of the learners. The SGB has input in the formation of the school's homework policy.

### **1.14 Field notes**

According to Wilkinson and Birmingham (2003:135), notes are an expanded account of all kinds of information a researcher might obtain during an interview session and which you assemble after the event. The researcher subtly jots down, phrases; abbreviations or just one or two words which capture interesting aspects of the interview about challenges to parental involvement in the homework assignments of the learners at the historically disadvantaged school. There are no hard and fast rules about what and how the researcher records the notes (Wilkinson and Birmingham, 2003). Notes are to be recorded to the chronological flow of the interview session with the participants. The researcher should wait until the notes have been completed before returning to the notes to edit or to re organise the notes thematically, (Wilkinson and Birmingham, 2003). In this study field notes were used.

### **1.15 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

In this study the researcher will apply thematic analysis. According to Ritchie and Lewis (2003), the thematic framework is used to classify and organise data according to key themes, concepts and emergent categories. The analyst must first gain an overview of the data coverage and become thoroughly familiar with the data set. The task is to identify recurring themes or ideas. Themes are then sorted and grouped under a smaller number of broader,

higher order categories or “main themes” and placed within an overall framework (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). The interpretations that this study hopes to make from the data analysis will hopefully lead to enhancing the way parents interact with their children when assisting with homework. Interpretation means relating one’s results or findings from the qualitative data from challenges to parental involvement in homework assignments and then relating it to existing theoretical frameworks to show whether these are supported or proved false (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). In this research study it would be to compare the challenges that parents could be facing in this study to the challenges other researchers have identified in the field of parental involvement.

### **1.16 OBJECTIVITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS**

When enhancing validity and reliability in the qualitative paradigm, it is related to triangulation (Babbie and Mouton, 2001:275). Triangulation is the use of multiple methods which this proposed study intends to adopt in its use of multiple methods of data collection. Triangulation is considered one of the best ways to enhance validity and reliability in qualitative research (Babbie and Mouton, 2001:275). This section is elaborated further in chapter 3.

### **1.17 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Ethical conduct ultimately depends on the individual researcher. The researcher has a moral and professional obligation to be ethical, even when the research subjects are unaware of or unconcerned about ethics (Neuman, 2003:116). Voluntary participation; no harm to the participants; anonymity and confidentiality and special attention to the participation of the learners in the study will be adhered to (Babbie and Mouton, 2001:520). The researcher in this study is aware of the ethical considerations and will conduct the research in accordance with the required ethical procedures as stipulated by the University of the Western Cape; and the Western Cape Education Department. Ethical clearance will be obtained from The University of the Western Cape; and the Western Cape Education Department. The researcher will also apply for permission to conduct research at the school where the research will be conducted. No research will take place until consent has been acquired from all the participants and role players. The participants will be informed about the nature of the study that their participation would be voluntary, and that they could withdraw at any stage of the research process. Each participant will receive a consent form informing them of the nature and the conditions of participation. Each participant will be assured of the confidentiality of

information and that no harm would come to them by participating in the study. The consent form to the focus group members will inform each member that they would be committed not to divulge information shared in the group, to any person outside of the group. Arrangements will only be made with all the participants to collect data once the ethical committee of the University of the Western Cape gives its approval. The time and place of conducting the interview will be decided by the principal of the school, the SGB chairperson, and all the focus group members. Learners are regarded as minors therefore permission to conduct interviews with the learners will be obtained from their parents. The researcher will be careful to explain the procedure and purpose of the research study carefully to all participants. The interview schedule will be implemented at the convenience of all participants. The content of the consent forms will also be explained thoroughly to the individual participants and the focus group members before the interview begins.

Data that will be collected during this research study will be stored for a period of about five years at the University of the Western Cape.

## **1.18 PROPOSED STRUCTURE OF THIS STUDY**

### **Chapter 1**

The orientation of the study is presented in chapter one.

### **Chapter 2**

This chapter will present the literature review. The theoretical and conceptual framework on which the study is based will also be explained.

### **Chapter 3**

This chapter will explain the research methodology that will be used in this study.

### **Chapter 4**

This chapter will contain the analysis and interpretation of the data collected from the participants.

### **Chapter 5**

This is the final chapter which will include the key findings, suggested recommendations for future research, and the conclusion to the study.

## 1.19 CONCLUSION

In this chapter the researcher presented the orientation of the study. This chapter also presents the overview of the entire research. The researcher explained the rationale and purpose of the study. Detail on the conceptual framework and theoretical framework on which this study is grounded is presented. The challenges to parental involvement in education as explained by other researchers are highlighted.



## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter gives an overview of the research process. This chapter reviews related literature on parental involvement in the education of learners at primary school and the theoretical framework that this study is grounded on.

The aim therefore of literature review is to establish what has been done in a chosen field of study. A survey of the literature is a very important part of any study because it is the main access point to the relevant body of knowledge. The body of literature could be explored by a researcher to locate and position his or her own research (Mouton, 1996:120-121). Every research report has to be placed in the context of the general body of knowledge. The researcher therefore has to show where his/her report fits into the picture. There might be general agreements and disagreements among the previous researchers about the topic being researched and this should be indicated to the reader (Babbie and Mouton, 2001:565-566). The focus of the researcher has to be on those studies that have direct relevance to the chosen field of study. The literature review would bring the reader up to date with the previous research in the area of study. It could also form the basis for future research in the field of study (Coughlan; Cronin; and Ryan, 2008).

The researcher in this study intends to present a narrative literature review by reviewing, summarising and synthesising a volume of literature on: “Challenges to parental involvement in the homework assignments of learners in a historically disadvantaged primary school in Cape Town.” Hopefully the reader will then be provided with a comprehensive background for understanding current knowledge in the field of parental involvement in homework. The importance of new or further research in the field of parental involvement in homework could also be highlighted by the researcher (Coughlan; Cronin and Ryan, 2008).

#### 2.2. THE RATIONALE FOR PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Families have untapped sources of knowledge that they use in everyday life activities, this includes skills and understanding of how to repair items in the home, making things; using transportation routes and many other possible skills. Parents could use their knowledge to help their children to develop strategies that could be of benefit in understanding literacy and numeracy homework assignments (Epstein and Sanders, 2000:292). Hoover- Dempsey and

Sandler (1995: 319) believe that there should be a fit between parental involvement and the school's expectations. Parents' involvement choices and activities should be in line with the school's expectations which will lead to positive educational outcomes for the learners. If parents act as role- models by asking questions about the school day and homework assignments then the learner will understand that the parent regards school related activities as important.

This type of activity by the parents could lead to positive educational outcomes. Parental involvement influences the cognitive and social development of learners in a positive way says (Driessen; Smidt & Slegers, 2005: 509- 510). They also agree that parent involvement is an important strategy for advancing the quality of the learners' education.

Findings in a qualitative study on parental involvement by student teachers at the University of South Africa (UNISA) were that parent involvement is an important part of any whole school strategy aimed at school improvement (Lemmer, 2000:60).

A longitudinal study of more than three thousand primary school learners was implemented to assess the attainment and development of primary school learners (Desforges, 2003). In the longitudinal study the impact of parental involvement in a "home - learning environment" which consisted of reading; visits to the library; identifying sound symbol relationships with 26 single sounds of the English alphabet; playing with numbers and shapes; teaching nursery rhymes, singing, painting and drawing was the main focus (Desforges, 2003). Particularly the impact of parental involvement in interaction with professional provision was of interest.

The findings of the longitudinal study were that "higher home learning environment" showed increased levels of cooperation and conformity, peer sociability and confidence, lower anti-social behaviour and higher cognitive development scores. Higher home learning environment had the strongest effect on cognitive development of learners (Desforges, 2003:23).

Parental involvement seems like "being in search of the elusive magic bullet" (Enoki and Yap, 1995).

Parental involvement is therefore unique to each school as it is possibly conceptualised differently so parental involvement practices differ. However according to Bauer (1995) as long as there is some form of parental involvement it augers well for future, more structured parental involvement partnerships. According to research by Epstein (2001); Lemmer (2000);

Hoover - Dempsey; Jones (2001); Enoki and Yap (1995); De Carvalho (2001), and Jeynes (2005), parental involvement in learners' schoolwork does lead to positive educational outcomes. Parents do play a critical role in learners' cognitive development and school achievement. Parental involvement in learners' schooling does lead to many positives such as improved educational outcomes; homework completion; and better parent – child and parent – school interaction according to Epstein (2004); Lemmer (2000); Mmotlane, Winnaar and Kivilu (2009); and Enoki and Yap (1995).

The James Comer School Development Programme (SDP) shows that parental involvement benefits not only students and school, but also parents (Comer, 2005:38). The SDP was a pilot project at a low performing school in Connecticut in America where parents were poor (Comer, 2005:38). Parents initially did not attend parent - educator meetings. The school did not impose a parental intervention programme to improve parental participation. A mental health and social services programme was provided which built trust and respect. Parents felt they were adding value to the school and in this way parents became more involved in the education of the learners.

In the SDP, an understanding of the problems leading to parents not being interested helped to develop a framework for change. Student academic achievement could be greatly improved when all adult stakeholders work together in supporting academic learning of the learners (Comer, 2005: 38-43).

Parent involvement is the latest trend sweeping Ontario education; it is a priority in most of the schools, making demands on time, energy and resources (Jeynes, 2005). Research indicates that parental involvement at home has more impact on student achievement than parental involvement in school based activities (Jeynes, 2005). A qualitative, exploratory study on parental involvement was done by Smidt and Liebenberg in 2003, in a very poor school in Cape Town. The aim of the study was to understand the dynamics and the reality facing these poverty stricken parents when attempting to be involved in their children's schooling (Smidt and Liebenberg, 2003). The data obtained from focus group interviews revealed that parents in the community were extremely disempowered and felt that they had very little say in the education of their children. Findings revealed that mainstream school's themselves posed barriers for parental involvement in the education of their children (Smidt and Liebenberg, 2003). Educators were also found to be out of touch with the realities of sub-economic living conditions (Smidt and Liebenberg, 2003).



Research relating to parental involvement in learners' schooling within South Africa according to Smidt and Liebenberg (2003:1) is limited, as well as restricted to the richer social groups. Mestry and Grobler (2007) conducted a research on factors that determine the importance of parental and community involvement in the education of the learners. Collaboration and communication have been identified as effective strategies for active parent involvement. Collaboration occurs when role players in the learners' education are brought together to achieve common goals that could not be accomplished when the role players work in isolation of each other.

According to Mestry and Grobler (2007:176) the influence of the home and family environment on school achievement has not received the attention it deserves. Most often it is not a lack of interest that prevents parents from becoming involved in the learners' education, but rather the challenges of poverty, single parents, cultural and socio-economic isolation, (Mestry and Grobler, 2007:177). The home environment and parental involvement in learning were seen as two key influences on learner learning. The support that families provide for their children at home has the greatest impact on achievement (Ross; Graham and Barnard, 2010). In 2009, the Harvard family research showed that complementary learning is effective when working to improve the learning outcomes of the most disadvantaged learners (Ross; Graham and Barnard, 2010). In a Chicago longitudinal study 704 low – income parents were interviewed about their parental involvement when their children were in pre-school. The findings were that the more activities parents reported taking part in, the better the learners performed in reading (Miedel and Reynolds, 1999: 379).

According to Louw, Van Ede, and Louw (1998:75) Piaget divides human cognitive development into four periods, namely:

1. The sensori-motor period which ranges from birth to about two years of age
2. The pre-operational period which ranges from two years to about seven years
3. The period of concrete operations which ranges from 7 years to about 11 years
4. The formal operational period which occurs at adolescence

The ages of the learners in this study, range from 6 years to about 10 years. The learners would therefore be classified as being in the pre-operational period, and the period of concrete operations as indicated above.

Louw, Van Ede, and Louw (1998:77) states that Piaget divides the pre- operational period into pre-conceptual thought which means that the learner does not yet understand what a concept involves. This pre-operational period is also divided into intuitive thought which refers to thinking that is not based on logic, but on perceptions from which conclusions are drawn. Learners are therefore unable to understand conservation which means that certain attributes of a substance such as length and quantity remain unchanged in spite of changes or transformations that the substance may undergo (Louw, Van Ede, and Louw, 1998:77). Learners during the pre-operational period centre their attention only on one aspect at a time, the learners during this period of cognitive development are unable to decentre. Learners also view the world from their own personal perspective they are unable to mentally place themselves in another person's position (Louw, Van Ede, and Louw, 1998:77). By the end of the pre-operational period learners should be able to classify objects on the basis of one dimension however they are incapable of multiple classification. They will be unable to classify on the basis of colour and size at the same time. According to Louw, Van Ede, and Louw (1998:79) Piaget states that even though learners during the pre-operational stage can count, they do not necessarily have a number concept. During the pre-operational phase the learner also imitates the behaviour of a model who is no longer present, and the learner realises that a word represents something. During the pre-operational period therefore development of the learners takes place in the symbolic function (Louw, Van Ede and Louw, 1998:79).

Concrete operational learners cannot think about abstract ideas and they don't also speculate about possibilities. These concrete operational learners can however reason in terms of the observable reality in front of them (Louw, Van Ede and Louw, 1998:80).

According to Louw, Van Ede and Louw ( 1998:82) Piaget's viewpoint of how learners construct their knowledge could be used as a guideline when creating a setting in which they (learners) can learn and gain knowledge. It is therefore imperative that parents and educators should understand that learners seek stimulation. The parents and educators should therefore create situations in which learners can actively explore and learn (Louw, Van Ede and Louw, 1998:82).

Parental involvement is therefore important in helping the learners with homework assignments as research indicates. There are many positive educational outcomes such as better communication between home and school, improved self - esteem and confidence

amongst others that are gained from a partnership of parent and school. However in disadvantaged communities there could be challenges that are barriers to parental involvement in learners' education. I therefore, as the researcher, intend to explore and understand what the challenges might be with regard to parental involvement in learners' homework assignments in the historically disadvantaged primary school in this study.

Challenges to parental involvement are discussed below.

### **2.2.1 Challenges to parental involvement**

The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 DoE (1996) states that parents are to be involved in the education of the learners, but the following might be some of the challenges to parental involvement in learners' homework (Mncube, 2009).

- ❖ Educational level of the parents
- ❖ Parents are afraid to challenge the status quo of the school because they fear victimisation of their children.
- ❖ Language barrier.
- ❖ Educators might not have received training on how to work with parents.

#### **Challenges according to Lansberg, Kruger, and Nel (2005)**

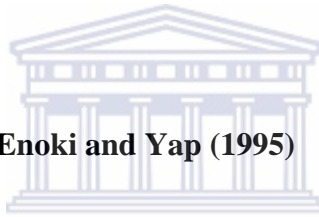
- ❖ Families differ in terms of their skills, knowledge, resources and time available to promote the learning and development of their children.
- ❖ The complex nature of the family structure has to be understood. The number of families with an atypical composition has increased dramatically. There are more single - parent families; step – families; families of mixed religion; families with adopted or foster children and grandparents raising grandchildren; extended families due to Human immunodeficiency virus ( HIV), or parents that are employed far from home, and parenting that is sometimes left to siblings.
- ❖ The effects of poverty, unemployment; and high illiteracy rates.
- ❖ Parents of low socio - economic status (SES) are found to be less involved in the teaching of new learning skills and cognitive intellectual activities
- ❖ Parents' own perceptions and experiences of education are also factors that could influence family involvement in learners' homework.

### **Challenges according to Felix, Dornbrack and Sheckle (2008)**

- ❖ Working –class parents were seen as lacking the cultural capital to assist learners with homework. Parents who had limited material resources to assist their children were then also perceived to be lacking mental resources to help their children at home with homework.

### **Challenges according to Mmotlane; Winnaar and wa Kivulu (2009)**

- ❖ Some challenges to parental involvement in schools and their children's education are due to negative attitudes and inferior feelings of parents.
- ❖ Low socio-economic status plays a major role in non-parental participation.
- ❖ Factors such as daily psychosocial stressors; attitudes, and behaviour towards schooling affects parent participation.
- ❖ Understanding the problems associated with non-parental involvement in their children's schooling.



### **Challenges according to Enoki and Yap (1995)**

- ❖ Narrow conceptualization: parental involvement is only seen in terms of attendance at parent - educator meetings and little attention is paid to the role of parents as active partners with the school in the learner's homework.
- ❖ Inappropriate attitudes from educators who undervalue working class parental involvement and might see these parents' involvement as not being beneficial to help with homework assignments at home.
- ❖ Parents' occupations may limit their availability for involvement activities.
- ❖ Cultural characteristics: The home culture may hold schools in such high regard that it is not considered appropriate for parents to be involved in the learner's education as the educators are seen as the "experts."

### **Challenges according to de Carvalho (2001)**

According to de Carvalho (2001) the challenges in disadvantaged homes are:

Single parents; working mothers, low educated parents, handicapped and chronically ill parents, those with a great number of children; poverty; working irregular night and double

shifts all of whom have time constraints and limited skills and resources. The working class parents' life circumstances are very different and harder than those of the middle and upper class parents (de Carvalho, 2001). The sources of inequality of educational opportunity appear to lie first in the home itself, and the cultural influences immediately surrounding the home. De Carvalho (2001) argues that the sources of inequality of educational opportunity appear also to lie in the school's ineffectiveness to free achievement from the impact of the home. Similar challenges to parental involvement in homework assignments as indicated might be the cause of learners in this research study receiving low educational outcomes in numeracy and literacy.

### **2.2.2 INTERNATIONAL BACKGROUND ON PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

This section briefly highlights how parental involvement unfolded from 1950's to 1980's in America. According to research by Epstein and Sanders (2000: 285), during the 1950's most families; schools and communities were treated as separate contexts in educational studies.

During the late 1960's and 1970's researchers agreed on the importance of family involvement in education, there were however disagreements about whether schools were effective and not much focus on whether communities were important in assisting with learners' education (Epstein and Sanders ,2000:285). Very little attention was given to the value of partnerships between families, schools and communities to improve the academic achievement of learners (Epstein and Sanders, 2000:286).

According to de Carvalho (2001:11) the middle class parents were involved in learners' education during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. What emerged in the context of the 1960's civil rights movement in America was the criticism of school segregation of the African - Americans, social exclusion and the low educational performance of other minority groups. Educational solutions such as parental involvement in education followed the criticism of the factors that emerged from the civil rights movement but it took the middle-class model of family and school relations and this was seen as a problem (de Carvalho, 2001:11).

In 1966 the renowned Coleman Report emphasised the importance of family background characteristics for the low educational performance of the minority groups (de Carvalho, 2001:11). The Coleman Report on Equality of Educational Opportunity, according to de Carvalho (2001:11), recognised that the sources of inequality of educational opportunities were in the home of the minority groups but the report also showed the ineffectiveness of the

schools to free learner achievement from the impact of the home. Since then educational research have invested in family child - care and socialisation processes that support educational interventions of the family in order to prevent the school failure of disadvantaged groups (de Carvalho, 2001:12-13).

Parental involvement in education gained prominence in the 1960's with amongst others the "Title 1" programme (a programme that legislated the involvement of low-income parents to prepare their young children for successful entry to school), in pre-school and elementary grades of the United States of America (Epstein and Sanders, 2000:285).

The "Title 1" programme is part of the United States of America's, "No Child Left behind Act" (NCLBA) of 2001, United States Department of Education, (2004). "The Title 1" programme therefore aimed to improve the academic achievement of the disadvantaged learners at primary schools.

During the 1970's research and practice determined that parental involvement would improve schools and positively improve learners' educational outcomes (Epstein and Mavis, 2000:285). During this period the New York City community control movement got education authorities to understand that partnerships with the community were vital in decisions concerning the education of low-income learners.

The importance of parental involvement in learners' education and greater partnerships between family, school and community gained prominence in the 1980's (Epstein and Mavis, 2000:285). The reason for this was that educational authorities noticed the learners exiting schools with a lack of quality and skills. This lack of skills by the learners would eventually affect the United States of America's standing in the global economic community (Epstein and Mavis, 2000:286).

The attention was now also on the escalating social and economic problems faced by families. Challenges such as young, single parents; more children living in poverty; homeless and foster children and families; more family mobility during the academic year and single parents working outside of the home became the reasons for the importance of improving schools for all children (Epstein and Mavis, 2000:286).

Parental involvement in education and stronger partnerships between schools and communities started taking centre stage because it was recognised as a vital link to improve educational outcomes of learners (Epstein and Mavis, 2000:286).

### **2.2.3 UNITED STATES OF AMERICA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

The No Child Left behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 of the United States Education Department (2004) regards parental involvement as: The participation of regular two- way meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities. The goals of the NCLB act of 2001 details how to increase parental involvement in education and how to support parents as partners in education. NCLB act of 2001 also aims to close the achievement gap between minority students and their white peers.

#### **2.2.3.1 HISPANIC PARENTS**

The Hispanic parents regard parental involvement as participation in informal home activities such as checking homework; reading to children; and listening to their children read. Hispanic parents also view their parental role as teaching morale, respect and behaviour. Hispanic parents believe they might be overstepping their boundaries if they interfere with their children's education in the class (Smith, Stern and Shatrova, 2008).

#### **2.2.3.2 SCOTTISH SCHOOLS**

The Scottish education authorities acknowledge the vital role that parents and caregivers play in the learner's learning and development. They also recognise the parents as the first and on-going educators of the child, Scottish School's Act (2006) Scottish Department of Education (2006).

#### **2.2.3.3 GHANAIAN SCHOOLS**

According to Donkor (2010: 23), in the Weija community of Ghana, the education of a few learners was low and the illiteracy levels were high. There was a lack of parental involvement as parents worked in the stone quarries and learners were left to their own devices. The education and literacy levels of the parents were very low. The Ghanaian government then introduced "Free compulsory basic education," to boost education in the communities and the country (Donkor, 2010:23). In spite of this initiative by the Ghanaian government, parental involvement in the learners' education remained low. Schools then created environments suitable for informal interaction between parents, educators and learners. There was a belief from the school that this social capital that they introduced would influence academic success, educational achievement and life chances of the learners in Ghana (Donkor, 2010:28). Ghanaian parents eventually viewed parental involvement in the following ways

- ❖ If they (parents) helped their children to get a good education, their children would one day take good care of them (parents).
- ❖ The parents believed it was their moral obligation to be good parents because if they did not take good care of their children, they believed God would punish them (parents) according to (Donkor, 2010:28).

#### **2.2.3.4 HONG KONG**

Chinese culture regards education as the most effective avenue to social and economic advancement and the improvement of the person. Chinese school children in general face pressure on academic achievement (Tam and Chan, 2009: 82). Homework consists of drilling and practice. Chinese parents in Hong Kong support the use of homework as a learning strategy. Homework is the main activity outside of school for Chinese learners in Beijing and Taiwan. To support the importance of education, Chinese parents offer help with homework by providing assisting and monitoring the homework process. The Chinese – American parents spend more time on homework, structure the learner’s time, and show more encouragement for mathematics (Tam and Chan, 2009:83). Parental involvement in homework is often considered a preferred form of home – school collaboration among Chinese parents. According to Tam and Chan (2009:85) parental involvement in education in Hong Kong often relates to the socio – economic background of the family. Middle – class parents in possession of cultural and social capital help learners with homework more readily than their working – class counterparts. Family socio – economic status among Hong Kong Chinese families in Hong Kong is indicated by parents’ highest education attainment. Parents with primary school education or below were more likely to be uninvolved in learners’ education in Hong Kong than those with education attainments at secondary level or above (Tam and Chan, 2009:89). Given the heavy homework pressure among Hong Kong students, learners of younger ages rely more on their parents’ emotional and practical support. Parental involvement at this stage of the learner’s education is more likely to be effective in developing the learner’s motivation and efficacy beliefs (Tam and Chan, 2009:96). As learners advance in their schooling, their reliance on their parents becomes less as the learning materials become more difficult for parents to handle. According to Tam and Chan (2009:96) among working – class learners in Hong Kong, parents’ involvement in homework is likely to be the only support for school learning, which plays an important role in positively influencing educational outcomes.



## **2.4 BACKGROUND OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS**

The parental involvement practices in South African schools are stipulated in the South African School's Act (SASA) 84 of 1996, DoE (1996).

Parental involvement in the governing bodies of schools arose as an aspect of the negotiation between the National Party and the African National Congress during 1990 and 1994. This negotiation had a political and ideological nature, according to Fataar (2001:15) and it was to shape the education policy context in the post 1994 election period in South Africa.

The South African School's Act (SASA) 84 of 1996 DoE (1996) is aimed at remaking the South African schools' landscape from an Apartheid government's exclusion policy to an inclusive education practice (Soudien and Sayed, 2004:108). Inclusive practices which include parental involvement in educational activities at home is also emphasised in Education White Paper 6 of 2001 DoE (2001). Parents now have the responsibility of managing their children's schools through school governing bodies (SGB).

The responsibilities of the SGB suggest that democratic structures could be put in place at the schools. According to Soudien and Sayed (2004:108) however particular features such as, assuming that parents come from traditional middle - class nuclear families, compromises the possibility of achieving this.

When several definitions of parental involvement are considered it becomes clear, according to Bakker and Denessen (2007), and de Carvalho (2001) that parental involvement mainly pertains to model-behaviours of middle class parents. These parents have proven to effectively contribute to children's positive school outcomes and well – being.

In this research study parental involvement is accepted as promulgated in the South African School's Act (SASA) 84 of 1996 DoE (1996). The number of parent members must comprise one more than the combined total of the members of a governing body who have voting rights. This implies that parents have to play an important role on the School's Governing Body (SGB) in the educational matters concerning the learners of the school and this includes homework assignments according to SASA 84 of 1996, DoE (1996).

## **2.5 POLICY ON HOMEWORK**

The South African School's Act (SASA) 84 of 1996 DoE (1996) provides for a uniform educational system in South Africa; also it provides for the organisation, governance and funding of schools.

### **2.5.1 SASA 84 of 1996 DoE (1996)**

According to SASA 84 of 1996 DoE (1996), the SGB is to promote the best interests of the school and strive to ensure its development through the provision of quality education for all learners, this includes homework assignments. According to SASA 84 of (1996) (DoE, 1996), the SGB should:

- ❖ Encourage parents and learners at the school. This implies that parents have to be encouraged with regard to homework assignment completion at home as well.
- ❖ Determine the extra- mural curriculum of the school. This could also include homework assignments that have to be completed at home.
- ❖ Co-opt a member or members of the community to assist in discharging its functions.

### **2.5.2 WCED Homework Circular 0045/2005 WCED (2005)**

WCED homework circular 0045/ 2005 WCED (2005) suggests that homework assignment demands should not represent a disproportionate burden for parents and learners, especially the poor and the historically disadvantaged WCED (2005).

#### **2.5.2.1 Homework roles as per homework circular 0045/2005 WCED (2005) are stipulated as follows:**

##### **❖ The role of the principal is to:**

- Ensure that the diverse home circumstances of learners are taken into consideration when the homework policy is developed.
- Distribute and discuss the homework calendar with all parents early in the academic year.

- Ensure that there are alternative arrangements regarding space, time and educator supervision of homework for all learners with difficult home circumstances.

❖ **The role of the educator is to:**

- Ensure that the parents and learners know the homework policy and the implications of effective learning.
- Inform parents of any problems that their children might be experiencing with homework and then put in place strategies to possibly improve the situation.
- Share with the parents what would be taught in class during each term so that parents would know what sections of work to focus on.

❖ **The role of the parent is to:**

- Understand that homework plays a valuable role in their children's schooling.
- Believe that parental involvement in homework assignments could help their children to understand that doing homework could enhance their academic achievement.
- Encourage their children to discuss their homework at home, be supportive but parents should not do the homework for their children.
- Discuss homework with the educators; also make the homework experience a fruitful learning experience for the learners.

❖ **The role of the learner is to:**

- Ask their parents for guidance when they (learners) have difficulty with the homework assignments.

The policy by the DoE (1996) and the WCED (2005) clearly indicates the roles to be played by educator, parent, learner, and principal with regards to homework assignments. It is therefore the role of the principal and the SGB to ensure that the policy is implemented correctly so that it could benefit parental involvement in the homework assignments of the learners.

## 2.6 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research study is grounded on:

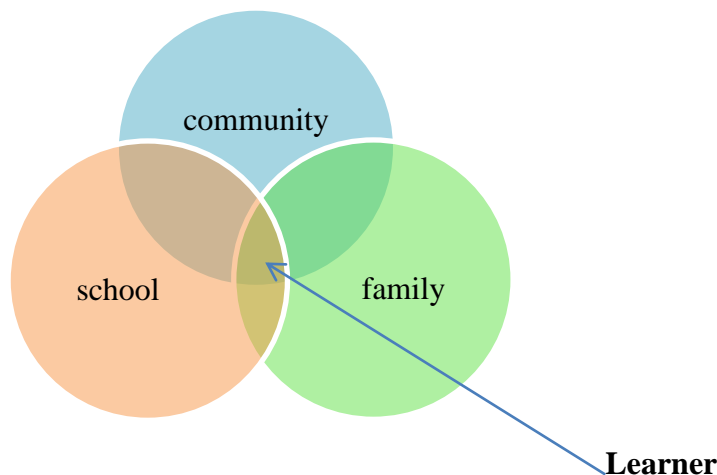
- ❖ Epstein's model of overlapping spheres of influence of family, school, and community on learners' learning; and Epstein's theory of six typologies of parental involvement (Epstein, 2002).
- ❖ Bronfenbrenner's (1994) bio-ecological model of human development.

### 2.6.1 EPSTEIN'S THEORY ON PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

According to Epstein (2002), learners learn and grow at home, at school and in the community. The active involvement of families and community is important to the development of effective inclusive learning communities (Landsberg, Kruger, and Nel, 2005). These links between families, school and community with regards to the learners' education could lead to positive educational outcomes, and possible improvement in homework assignment completion (Epstein, 2002). Hence the researcher found Epstein's theory relevant in this study.

**Figure 2.1 Overlapping spheres of influence**

Adapted from Epstein (2002)



The overlapping spheres of influence, Epstein (2002) shows the three major areas (school, home, community) in which learners learn and grow. The family, school and community may be drawn together or pushed apart. The Epstein (2002), overlapping spheres of influence demonstrates the importance of the family and school relationship and the joint responsibility for learners' learning and development.

The model of school, family, and community partnerships shows the learner at the centre as indicated in **(figure 2.1)**. The learners are the main actors in their development and success in school. It is partnership activities that have to be formed to guide, and motivate learners to produce their own successes (Epstein, 2002). If learners feel cared for and encouraged to work hard at their schoolwork, they are more likely to do their best in numeracy and literacy and in all other subjects.

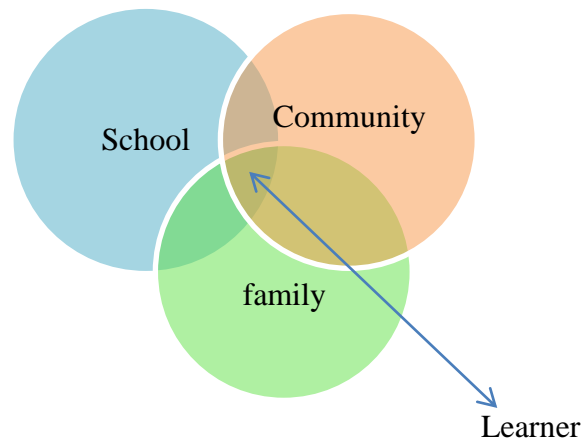
Homework assignment completion could also benefit the learners positively when successful partnership activities are developed between family, school and community. The learning and development of learners are the main reasons for the partnership. This model could create inclusive school communities (Landsberg, Kruger, and Nel, 2005).

In the model there are some practices that school, family and community conduct separately and some activities that they conduct jointly to influence learners' development and learning (Epstein, 2002). According to Landsberg, Kruger, and Nel (2005), depending on the perspectives and actions of educators, families and community, the spheres could be pushed together to increase overlap when the partners work together or pulled apart when they do not. Parents might believe that as learners get older they become more independent and parents are less competent to help. Educators might have views that parents are not interested in helping with homework (Landsberg, Kruger, and Nel, 2005).

In a partnership educators create family-like schools where each learner's individuality is recognised, parents create more school-like families where the importance of homework assignments are recognised, and communities create family-like settings where programmes for learners and parents are offered (Epstein,2002). All these terms are consistent with the theory of overlapping spheres of influence (Epstein, 2002).

**Figure: 2.2 Weak partnerships between family, school, and community**

Adapted from Epstein (2002)



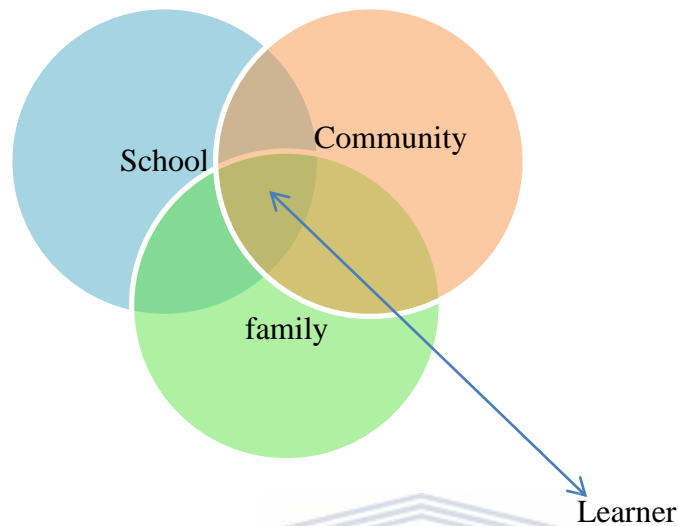
If each sphere of family, school and community see “their job” as separate from the others e.g. Educators might say, “If the family would just do its job, we could do our job.” Families may say, “I raised this child; now it is your job to educate my child,” (Epstein, 2002).

If there is no cooperation between parents, school, and community in helping learners with homework then the learner will not benefit. As is evidenced in **figure 2.2** when the family, school, and community spheres are drifting apart, the overlap in the middle which represents the learner becomes smaller. As the spheres pull together in **figure 2.3** below, learners gain a stronger feeling of security and being cared for while they are encouraged to work hard in the role of learner.

It is therefore important to have inclusive practices from all the role players, namely, family, school and community. When there is positive collaboration between all the role players in the learner’s development the overlap of the spheres could increase as represented by figure **2.3** below.

**Figure 2.3 Strong partnerships between family, school, and community.**

**Adapted from Epstein (2002)**



## **2.6.2 SIX TYPOLOGIES OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

Epstein (2002) identified and described six types of partnerships of care that can support the successful learning and development of learners. All six are important to establish a strong partnership that will benefit successful learning for the learners, parents, school and community.

**Table 2.1 Six typologies of parental involvement**

**Adapted from Epstein (2002)**

Type 1.	Parenting
Type 2	Communicating
Type 3	Volunteering
Type 4	Learning at home
Type 5	Decision making
Type 6	Collaborating with the community.

The six types of parental involvement activities are discussed below.

❖ **Parenting**

Parenting builds on parenting strengths and helps families improve parenting skills. It helps to understand child and adolescent development, and sets home conditions that support learners with homework. Parenting also assists schools in understanding families.

❖ **Communicating**

It helps parents to understand school programmes and student progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications.

❖ **Volunteering**

Volunteering improves training, work, and schedules to involve families as volunteers to support learners and homework programmes.

❖ **Learning at Home**

This typology provides information and ideas to families about how to help their children in learning activities at home or in the community, including homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, planning and linking schoolwork to real life.

❖ **Decision Making**

It equips parents and other community members with the tools they need to function as decision-makers. Decision making includes families and community members as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy through the School Governing Body (SGB).

❖ **Collaborating with the Community**

It identifies and coordinates resources and services from the community to strengthen school programmes, family practices and student learning and development. Collaborating with the community also establishes and promotes partnerships with individuals and organisations in the community, particularly those that provide support services for learners and their families.

It is important to note that even though all the Epstein, (2002) six typologies of parental involvement are important, this study will mainly focus on typology 4 which is learning at home.

The relevance of typology 4 is discussed in **table 2.2** below.



**Table: 2.2 Relevance of Type 4 for this research**

**Adapted from Epstein (2002)**

Typology 4  Learning at home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>❖ Parents could acquire information on the homework policy of the school.</li><li>❖ Parents could discuss schoolwork at home with their children.</li><li>❖ Parents could acquire information on how to assist in learners improving their assessment results in literacy and numeracy.</li><li>❖ Parents could have a timetable of homework that could require their children to discuss and interact with their family on what they (learners) are currently learning in the class.</li><li>❖ Parents could have a calendar in the home indicating activities for parents and learners e.g. reading and counting activities.</li><li>❖ Parents and families could participate in setting goals for their children with regards to numeracy and literacy.</li></ul>
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Type 4 – Learning at home activities involve families or caregivers with their children in academic learning activities at home that are co-ordinated with learners’ classwork and that contribute to student success in school. These include interactive homework, goal setting for academic subjects.

Of all the types of involvement, most families want to know about how to help their children at home so that they could do better at school. Schools may implement activities that help families encourage, praise, guide and monitor their children’s work by using interactive homework strategies. One major challenge that must be met for successful Type 4 activities is to design and implement a regular schedule of interactive homework that requires learners to take responsibility for discussing important things they are learning at home.

If type 4 activities are well designed and implemented, then student homework completion, academic outcomes should improve. More families will know that their children are learning in class, and will know how to monitor, support and discuss homework.

❖ **The advantages for learners of Type 4 learning at home.**

- Gains in skills, abilities, and assessment codes linked to homework and classwork.
- Homework completion.
- Positive attitude toward schoolwork and homework to be completed at home.
- View of parents as more similar to teacher and of home as more similar to school.
- Self-concept of ability as learner.

❖ **The advantages for parents of Type 4 learning at home.**

- Know how to support, encourage, and help learners at home each year.
- Discussions of school, classwork, and homework.
- Understanding of instructional programmes each year and of what learners are learning in each subject.
- Appreciation of educator skills.
- Awareness of own child as a learner.

❖ **Advantages for educators of Type 4 learning at home.**

- Better design of homework assignments that have to be completed at home.
- Respect for family time.
- Recognition of equal helpfulness of single-parent, dual-income, and less formally educated families in motivating and reinforcing the learning of the learners.
- Satisfaction with family involvement and support.

**2.6.2.1 AN EXAMPLE OF USING THE 6 TYPOLOGIES (see table 2.1) IN READING**

The following is an example of how the 6 typologies could also be used to improve reading.

Type 1. Workshops for parents could be arranged for parents on various ways to read aloud with learners at home as a homework activity.

Type 2. Parent – educator workshops on reading goals could be held at the start of the school year and another meeting could be held midyear on the reading progress that has occurred at home.

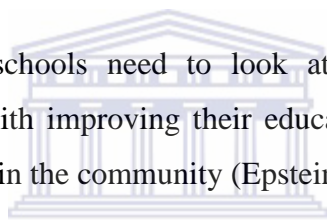
Type 3. Reading partner volunteers, guest readers of favourite stories, and other on – going reading activities could be discussed with the parents to implement as homework at home.

Type 4. Weekly interactive reading homework activities for all students to read aloud for a family member could be discussed between parents, learners and educators.

Type 5. The SGB could provide support for a parent or family room to provide information on learners’ reading and to conduct read – at – home programmes.

Type 6. Donations of books for the classrooms or school library, or for learners to take home could be explored by the parents and school from business partners in the community.

According to Epstein (2002), schools need to look at partnerships with families and communities to assist learners with improving their educational outcomes. Learners learn and grow at home, at school, and in the community (Epstein, 2002).



## **2.7 DIFFERENT VIEW TO EPSTEIN’S ON PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

Maria Eulina de Carvalho, an educational researcher at the Federal University of Paraiba (UFPB) assumes a different view to Epstein on parental involvement in learners’ homework assignments. In her book, “Rethinking *Family- School Relations: A critique of parental involvement in schooling*,” de Carvalho (2001) develops a different argument to researchers like Epstein who are pro parental involvement in learners’ homework assignments. De Carvalho (2001) is of the opinion that the researchers who follow the Epstein model of parental involvement might be followers because they may have witnessed a few middle class parents being involved in their children’s homework assignments which resulted in positive educational outcomes. De Carvalho (2001:101) argues that homework might not help at – risk learners as it needs favourable socio-economic conditions at home. Homework depends on family conditions, and thus may enhance the chances of failure it intends to reduce; it could actually magnify the problem (de Carvalho, 2001: 130). Research favours parental involvement in homework assignments, whereas studies that focuses on the challenges of homework assignments are only starting to emerge (de Carvalho, 2001: 135). While forms of parental involvement in learners’ homework assignments have worked for

middle class families, poor and working class parents have to leave the schooling of their children to the school and the educators. The argument of de Carvalho (2001: 101) is that when educators expect parental involvement in learners' homework assignments they do not consider the challenges that parents in the working class disadvantaged communities and schools might have. According to de Carvalho (2001: 98), some of the challenges are: single parents; working mothers; low educated, handicapped and chronically ill parents; those with a great number of children, in poverty; as well as those working irregular night and double shifts all of whom have time constraints. This refers to the majority of parents in historically disadvantaged public primary schools. However de Carvalho (2001:39) does not find fault in parents' involvement in learners' homework assignments. The view of de Carvalho is that equal quality educational opportunities be offered to historically disadvantaged learners while compensating for challenges such as unequal social conditions and inequalities.

## **2.8 BRONFENBRENNER'S BIO-ECOLOGICAL MODEL OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**

To understand Bronfenbrenner's (1994) bio - ecological model of human development, a researcher has to understand "The General Systems Theory" argues (Landsberg, Kruger, and Nel, 2005:12).

According to von Bertalanffy (1968:42) general systems theory is concerned with interactions of components in a system and systems research in the study of human relations are much more complex. The whole is more than the sum of its parts, is a definition of the basic systems problem which is still valid today (von Bertalanffy, 1972:407).

According to Senge (1990:69), in systems thinking all are concerned with a shift of mind from seeing parts to seeing wholes, from seeing people as helpless reactors to seeing them as active participants in shaping their reality. Systems' thinking is the cornerstone of how learning organisations think about their world (Senge, 1990).

The systems in this research study are the home (microsystem); the school (mesosystem); the education department (exosystem); the community (macrosystem), and learner development (chronosystem). The person and not the environment is at the centre of Bronfenbrenner's bio - ecological model. Bronfenbrenner's earlier theorising focussed on the aspects of context namely the environment, and he discounted the role that the person played in his or her own development, he then became very critical of himself for focussing too much on the context

and not the person (Jonathan, Mokrova, and Hatfield, 2009). The single most important difference from his earlier writings is his concern with processes of human development (Jonathan, Mokrova and Hatfield, 2009).

In the 1990's the proximal processes were defined as the key factor in development. It was from this time onward that Bronfenbrenner discussed the Person-Process-Context- Time (PPCT) model that has become the essence of his theory.

In order therefore to implement a study that is grounded by the mature bio - ecological theory version, all four elements (PPCT) of the model should be present (Jonathan, Mokrova, and Hatfield, 2009), and (Landsberg, Kruger, and Nel, 2005:10).

The researcher in this study intends to use the mature version of Bronfenbrenner's (1994) bio - ecological model of human development.

**Table 2.3 Proximal processes**

**Adapted from Landsberg, Kruger, and Nel (2005)**



<b>Person factors</b>	Personal characteristics that individuals bring with them into social situations.
<b>Process factors</b>	The patterns of interaction that occur in a system.
<b>Contexts</b>	The families, schools, classrooms, the education department, and the local community.
<b>Time</b>	Individual and environment changes.

Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model is discussed below.

## Figure 2.4: BIO - ECOLOGICAL MODEL OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Adapted from Bronfenbrenner (1994)

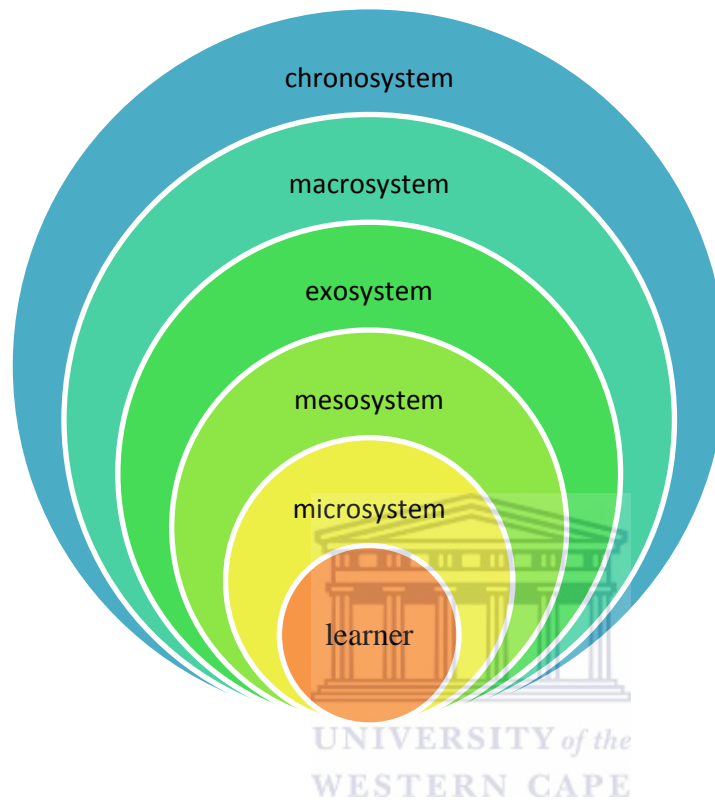


Figure 2.4 indicates the interrelationships between the learner and the multiple other systems that are connected to the learner from a bio-ecological systems theory perspective. The challenge however is to understand these complex interrelationships between all the systems in the development of the learner especially with regards to homework completion at home (Landsberg, Kruger, and Nel, 2005).

According to Bronfenbrenner (1994) a researcher has to consider the entire bio-ecological system in which growth occurs to understand human development. In dealing with challenges to parental involvement in the homework assignments of learners, the researcher has to explore the different levels of the system see **figure 2.4**

The bio-ecological model of human development shows the benefits to the learner who is nested in the centre of all the systems (Landsberg, Kruger, and Nel, 2005). It is the successful interaction of all the members in the systems that could contribute to the improvement in the learners' educational outcomes in numeracy and literacy. The major challenge though, is to

understand the complexity of the interactions and the interrelationships between the learner and all the role players connected to the learner from a bio-ecological systems theory perspective (Landsberg, Kruger, and Nel, 2005:9). There could be possible challenges affecting parental involvement in any one of the systems. One cannot therefore only explore one of the systems to determine if challenges exist or not. The researcher aims to discuss the challenges to parental involvement in the following paragraphs by using the Bronfenbrenner bio-ecological systems (1994).

According to Landsberg, Kruger, and Nel, (2005:10) one has to take into consideration the P-P-C-T interacting dimensions when understanding development e.g. when understanding the challenges to parental involvement in homework assignments. The following is a description of P-P-C-T in this study.

- ❖ Personal characteristics that individuals bring with them into a situation, called person factors, in this study it would be all the people in the systems that could have an influence on challenges to parental involvement in the homework assignments of the learners.
- ❖ The patterns of interaction between all the people in the whole system who interact with one another regarding homework assignments, called process factors.
- ❖ The context e.g. in this study the context would be the home, the school and the community.
- ❖ Time: Changes over time due to the maturing of the individual as well as possible changes in the environment of the learner in this study.

### **2.8.1 Discussion on the Bio-ecological systems**

#### **❖ Microsystem ( refer to figure 2.4)**

This system constitutes a pattern of interpersonal relations experienced between individuals and the systems in which they function e.g. the family, the school, and the community. Proximal processes (see **table 2.3**) occur in the microsystem. This system involves continual face-to face contact, with each individual reciprocally influencing the other (Landsberg, Kruger, and Nel, 2005:11). The challenges that parents might face with regards to homework completion could be found in the microsystem. The learner is nested in the centre of the microsystem and the involvement in homework assignments from parents, caregivers, siblings and significant others occur in the microsystem. The microsystem therefore is a

pattern of activities, social roles and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given face – to- face setting. The people in close relationship for a substantial amount of time, in the microsystem, have the most immediate effect on the learner (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

#### ❖ **Mesosystem**

The mesosystem refers to the relationships that develop and exist between the microsystems. This system constitutes a pattern of activities, roles and interpersonal relations experienced between individuals and the systems in which they actively participate e.g. in this study it would be the home, the school, and the community. Proximal processes as explained above are played out here. At this level the family, school, and peer group interact with one another with regard to homework assignments. A learner from an unsupportive home environment may not receive the emotional support required to complete homework, thus placing that learner at risk of developing barriers to learning (Landsberg, Kruger, and Nel, 2005:11).

#### ❖ **Exosystem**

The learner is not involved directly as an active participant in the exosystem but the learner may be influenced by what happens in relationships in the exosystem. In this study the exosystem would include the Western Cape Education Department who is responsible for homework policies. The parents' place of employment could affect the amount of time that the parent has to help the learner at home with homework. This could therefore affect the quality of the parents' interaction with the learner with regards to assisting with homework in the home (Landsberg, Kruger, and Nel, 2005). The WCED could make decisions about policies that could affect the learner, the parent, and the educators at the school.

An example is the Curriculum and Assessment Policy statement (CAPS) 2011, WCED (2011) that the educators now have to follow which was implemented after the Outcomes Based Education policy was ended by the education department. The change in policy could affect how it is implemented and interpreted by the educators which could have an effect on the way parents are engaged with regards to homework assignments.

The CAPS (2011) document also assumes that the language of teaching and learning is the same language that learners and parents use in the home. The language could affect the communication between educator, learner and parent. This could affect how instructions are interpreted and executed with regards to homework completion in the home.



### ❖ **Macrosystem**

This system refers to the attitudes, beliefs, values and ideologies inherent in the systems of a particular society and culture which may have an impact on or be influenced by any of the other systems (Landsberg, Kruger, and Nel, 2005:12). The culture of the community in this study will be explored. The disadvantaged community in this study has inherited the apartheid legacy of South Africa's pre - 1994 apartheid system. The exclusionary practices of the apartheid system could still be entrenched in the people of the geographic area of this study. The community has also been placed here due to the apartheid era's group areas act of separateness. The area is also renowned for violence and gangsterism. This could negatively affect parental involvement in homework assignments.

### ❖ **Chronosystem**

This system refers to the developmental time frames which cross through the interactions between these systems and their influences on the development of individuals (Landsberg, Kruger, and Nel, 2005). The dimension of time as it relates to the learner's environment e.g. the stages of development of the learner's life could have an effect on the learner's achievement in academic work. The tough economic times which South Africa faces could affect the employment of parents. If there are no finances in the home, it would be difficult for parents to afford school fees and other educational resources which could have a negative impact on the homework assignments of the learners at the historically disadvantaged school (Landsberg, Kruger, and Nel, 2005). Non-payment of school fees causes tension between families and schools because schools need the finances to develop the school in the best interest of the parent and the learner. If parents are unable to pay school fees, it could have a negative influence on the learner's educational outcomes.

The researcher applied the Bronfenbrenner bio-ecological human development model in this study to explain that challenges to parental involvement in the homework assignments of the learners in the historically disadvantaged primary school could exist if there is an imbalance in any one of the systems. The reason for this is that a challenge in any one of the systems could have an effect on all the other systems in the development of the learner.

## 2.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter on literature review explored international parental involvement and parental involvement in South African primary schools. The way in which policy affects parental involvement in homework was explored. The roles of the participants in the homework assignments of the learners were discussed. The theoretical framework on which this study is grounded was explained in detail. The challenges to parental involvement in the education of learners at primary school, as emphasised by different authors, have also been indicated.

In the next chapter the researcher will explain the research methodology that will be used in this study.



## CHAPTER THREE

### EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the researcher presents the research methodology adopted to conduct this study on challenges to parental involvement in homework assignments of the learners at the historically disadvantaged primary school. The research design is a plan of how the research will be conducted (Babbie and Mouton, 2001: 74). This chapter also features the population and sample, data collection strategies; data analysis and interpretation procedures for the study.

**Table 3.1 Overview of the research process**

#### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Methodology Approach	Qualitative
Paradigm	Interpretivist
Research Design	Case Study
Sampling	Purposive and Convenient
Participants	Principal; Educators; SGB; Parents and learners
Site	Historically disadvantaged primary school
Data Collection	Interviews Semi structured interviews Individual interviews Focus group interviews Field notes Triangulation
Data Analysis and Interpretation	Thematic Analysis
Ethics	
Trustworthiness	

The researcher will use the structure and information in table 4.1 to explain the research process in the following paragraphs.

### **3.2 METHODOLOGY APPROACH**

This study used a Qualitative approach as information collected was not statistical nor was it in the form of numbers (Corbin and Strauss, 1990: 17). The primary goal of studies using a qualitative research approach is defined as describing and understanding, rather than explaining human behaviour (Babbie and Mouton, 2001: 270). It can refer to research about person's lives, lived experiences, behaviours, emotion and feelings as well as about organizational functioning; social movements, and interaction between people.

Qualitative research enabled me in this study, to understand the possible challenges to parental involvement in homework, according to the view and experiences of the participants. Qualitative methods can be used to uncover and understand what lies behind any phenomenon about which little is yet known or it could be used to acquire new and fresh information on the phenomenon being researched (Corbin and Strauss, 1990:19). Challenges to parental involvement in learners' homework in this study were therefore explored.

Exploratory studies are done to satisfy a researcher's curiosity for better understanding, and also to determine priorities for future research (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). According to Babbie and Mouton (2001) exploratory studies do have its shortcomings; they seldom give satisfactory answers to the research questions. The exploratory studies however do hint at the answers and can give insights into the research methods that could provide definitive answers (Babbie and Mouton, 2001).

The qualitative research approach in this study was conducted in the natural setting, which is the historically disadvantaged primary school of the participants. The primary aim was to obtain in-depth ("thick") descriptions and understanding from the participants about possible challenges to parental involvement in the homework assignments of the learners. The research approach is often inductive in its approach, and the qualitative researcher is seen as, "the main instrument" in the process (Babbie and Mouton, 2001: 270). Qualitative methodology is also an empirical strategy for answering questions about parental involvement in homework assignments (Babbie and Mouton, 2001).The value of the

qualitative approach in this study was that valuable empirical information was collected from the participants who were directly involved in the homework assignments.

### **3.3 PARADIGM**

This research study is situated in an interpretivist research paradigm. According to Henning (2004:21) interpretive research is concerned with meaning and it seeks to understand the participants' definitions and understanding of situations. The interpretive paradigm does not concern itself with the search for applicable laws and rules, but rather seeks to produce descriptive analyses that emphasise deep, interpretive social phenomena (Henning, 2004:21). Knowledge is constructed by people's intentions, beliefs, values and reasons, meaning making and self-understanding (Henning, 2004:20). Interpretive research is a communal process, informed by participating practitioners. Phenomena and events are understood through mental processes of interpretation which are influenced by and interact with social contexts. Researchers in an interpretivist paradigm are extremely sensitive to context (Henning, 2004:20). The interpretive paradigm points to the use of qualitative research methods, both in collecting and in analysing data (Henning, 2004:22). In this study an interpretivist paradigm was well suited to the qualitative research approach that was being adopted.

### **3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN**

Research design could be understood as the planning of any research from the first to the last step. According to Babbie and Mouton (2001:74) a research design is a plan or a blueprint of how one intends to conduct a research. Research design is thus a programme to guide the researcher in collecting, analysing and interpreting observed facts. In order to achieve the objectives of social research a careful thought-out strategy is needed from the researcher. The first steps in developing a good research design require the researcher to answer important questions about the research. This would relate to the focus, the unit of analysis and the time dimension of the problem (Bless and Higson-Smith, 1995: 63-64).

#### **3.4.1 Case Study**

The appropriate research design for this research proposal was a Case Study because this research was interested in a specific organisation namely the historically disadvantaged primary school and the families that the school served. Case studies help researchers connect the actions of individual people to large scale processes (Neumann, 2003:33). This study is

therefore a qualitative intrinsic case study because it explored and understood what the possible challenges to parental involvement in homework assignments of the learners were (Stake, 1995: 236). We study a case when it is of very special interest; we come to understand its activity within important circumstances. We enter the scene with a sincere interest in learning how participants function in their ordinary pursuits and with a willingness to put aside many presumptions while we learn (Stake, 1995:236). I, as the researcher, listened to the stories of the participants and acquired an in-depth understanding of the research topic. The stories that I collected as data were interpreted during the analysis stage, therefore an interpretive paradigm was adopted in this study.

### **3.5 SAMPLING**

#### **3.5.1 Purposive and Convenient Sampling**

Purposive sampling selects cases with a specific purpose in mind and is used in exploratory research. The purpose then would be less to generalise to a larger population than it is to gain a deeper understanding (Neumann, 2003:213). The participants in this research study were purposively and conveniently selected from the population of the historically disadvantaged primary school. It was convenient for me to conduct the study at this site as I am an educator at the primary school. The samples that were interviewed are involved at the school or live in close proximity to the school so there would not be any inconvenience caused to the participants with regards to transport. I did not interview all the members who belonged to the primary school in this research study. A sample of parents; educators; learners, together with the principal and the school governing body members were selected. I, the researcher, determined the sample for this research study when the school was visited. The sample represented the population and participation was voluntary.

### **3.6 PARTICIPANTS**

In this research study the educators, principal, school governing body members and educators were the participants from whom the sample was selected for the interview process. Participants were interviewed at the school because it was convenient. The researcher has therefore to consider if the semi-structured interview should take place at the school or at the participants home (Dowling and Brown, 2001:73). To make the participants feel at ease, the choice of location was offered to the participants. It has to be remembered that there are no neutral venues, nor are there hard and fast rules for determining the effects of the location.

The researcher has to ensure that any obvious unintended effects of the setting are minimised and taken into account when formulating the findings of the research (Dowling and Brown, 2001:73).

According to Selfhelpmanenberg (2008) the community in which the participants in this study live is one of the most distressed communities in Cape Town. Police statistics reveal that it is the community with the highest rate of public violence in Cape Town. The socio-economic problems that plaque this community are poverty, substance abuse, overcrowded homes, dependence on government grants, women-headed families, teenage pregnancies, HIV and AIDS, and gangsterism ( Selfhelpmanenberg,2008). This particular community is notorious as a “gangland”. The other negative feature of this community is the high percentage of community members who have spent time in prison. The result of this is a high rate of HIV/AIDS, children carrying the burden of fathers in jail, dysfunctional family structures, and adolescents battling to fit into society. Violence is one of the biggest challenges in this community. Children also beat each other from primary school level (Selfhelpmanenberg, 2008).

### **3.6.1 SAMPLE**

Qualitative researchers focus on how the sample or units illuminates social life. The primary purpose of sampling is to collect specific cases, events or actions that can clarify and deepen understanding. Qualitative researchers’ concern is to find cases that will enhance what the researchers learn about the processes of social life in a specific context (Neumann, 2003: 211). The unit of analysis is the person or object from whom the social researcher collects data (Bless and Higson-Smith, 1995:64). As the researcher learns the roles and relationships among participants, appropriate informants could then be identified. A capable informant is one who has the knowledge and experience the researcher needs for analysis. The informant should possibly have the ability to reflect, have the time to be interviewed, and should be willing to participate in the study (Morse, 1994: 228).

### **3.6.2 Focus group samples**

#### **❖ Parent focus group**

A focus group of 12 parents from the primary school population was interviewed in this research study. These parents were representative of the parent body and would best

understand what challenges to parental involvement in learners' homework assignments would be. These 12 parents formed the sample of the parent population.

#### ❖ **Educator focus group**

A focus group of 4 educators represented the educator population at the school. The educators were interviewed as they possibly had valuable input into the homework performance of the learners. The educators possibly were aware of possible challenges to parental involvement in homework assignments in the home of the learners as they had direct contact with the parents during parent - educator meetings. The educators also implement the school's homework policy and therefore added valuable insight into the challenges of parental involvement in homework assignments.

#### ❖ **The School governing body ( SGB) focus group**

The chairperson and 3 SGB members represented the SGB. The SGB has input in the formation and implementation of the school's homework policy. The SGB is also governed by the South African's Schools Act 84 of 1996 DoE (1996), which determines how the SGB should function. The SGB functions in the best interest of the parents and the learners with regards to education at the school in this study.

### **3.6.3 Individual Samples**

#### ❖ **The Principal**

The school only has one principal. An individual interview was conducted with the principal of the school in this study. The interaction that the principal experienced over the years with regards to parents, learners and homework policy at the school added great value to this study.

#### ❖ **The Learners**

I interviewed 9 of the primary school learners who represented the sample of the learner population at the school. The learners are directly involved in the homework assignments and they contributed "thick" descriptions of challenges to parental involvement in their homework assignments.



### **3.7 SELECTING A SITE**

I used the historically disadvantaged primary school as the site in this study. The setting in which this study was conducted was identified and the access to and characteristics of possible participants were considered (Morse, 1994:222). The researcher should inform the administrators to determine if the proposed research project would be welcomed on the site. Administrators may be weary of a project that could evaluate the staff or the institution, if they have no control over the outcomes of the research. The administrators might feel that the results could be detrimental to the organisation (Morse, 1994:222). The principal and school governing body was informed about the research study that I conducted at the school.

### **3.8 DATA COLLECTION**

In this research study, semi – structured interviews were conducted. Data was collected from individual interviews, focus groups interviews and field notes. Semi–structured interviews were used to get the views of the participants on parental involvement in learners’ homework assignments (Dowling and Brown, 2001:73).

I explored the world from the view of the participants. The researcher hoped to understand how they (participants) made sense of their experiences with regards to the possible challenges to homework assignments of the learners. Data is what the researcher experiences and remembers, and what are recorded in the notes and becomes available later for analysis (Neuman, 2003: 381). Using multiple sources of data is important in case studies of all kinds; this involves using more than one method, multiple interview or observation occasions, and a variety of informants. The number and types of methods, the number of informants depend on the nature of the research questions (Babbie and Mouton, 2001:282). The rationale for using multiple sources of evidence is based on the idea of replication as it increases the confidence the researcher can have that a finding is reliable (Babbie and Mouton, 2001:282).

Using multiple sources of evidence sometimes called triangulation, represented aspects of thick description. The data that this study obtained from the participants provided a rich and deeper understanding of the challenges that parents faced in the historically disadvantaged primary school when they attempted to help the learners with homework (Babbie and Mouton, 2001:282).

The researcher in this study was immersed in the natural setting of the participants and acquired an insider or “emic” view of the participants (Babbie and Mouton, 2001: 282). In

this way an inductive approach was followed therefore inductively built new interpretations about challenges to parental involvement were developed. This approach served as an empirical strategy for answering the research questions about the challenges of parental involvement in homework assignments (Babbie and Mouton, 2001:278.)

### **3.8.1 INTERVIEWS**

The interview is one of the most frequently used methods of data gathering within the qualitative approach. A qualitative interview is an interaction between an interviewer and a respondent in which the interviewer has a general plan of inquiry but not a specific set of questions that must be asked in particular words and in a particular order (Babbie and Mouton, 2003: 289).

#### **3.8.1.1 Semi - structured interview**

The semi - structured interview could be described as resembling a conversation. The questions are open and more flexible (Dowling and Brown, 2001:73). A structured interview with standard questions was possibly not suitable in this study therefore a semi-structured interview for an interpretivist approach was used (Dowling and Brown, 2001:73). The intensity of the interaction of the interview required the interview to be recorded by using a voice recorder. Permission would however have to be received from the participants to record the interview process (Dowling and Brown, 2001:73). Permission was received from all the participants in this study to record the interviews.

The researcher in this study conducted individual semi – structured interviews with all the participants after written consent was received from each participant. The prime concern of the interviewer was to explore the world from the perspective of the participants. The researcher then constructed an in – depth understanding of how the participants made sense of their experiences with regards to challenges to parental involvement in homework assignments. The semi- structured interview is also the research instrument (Dowling and Brown, 1998:72-73).

#### **3.8.1.2 Basic Individual Interviewing**

The basic individual interview is one of the most frequently used methods of data gathering within the qualitative approach (Babbie and Mouton, 2001:289). Individual interviewing is an open interview and participants speak for themselves. Qualitative interviewing design is

characterised by being flexible, iterative, and continuous (Babbie and Mouton, 2001:289). Individuals who were interviewed in this study were:

- ❖ The principal.
- ❖ Nine primary school learners who will be interviewed individually.

### **3.8.1.3 Focus Group Interviews**

The focus group is a special qualitative research technique in which people are informally “interviewed in a group-discussion setting,” (Neuman, 2003: 396). In this research study a parent focus group; an educator focus group; and an SGB focus group were interviewed. The focus group interview lasted for about 90 minutes. Permission from the participants was requested to record the interview by using a voice recorder. Focus groups are useful because they tend to allow a space in which people may get together and create meaning. The main advantage of focus groups is the opportunity to observe a large amount of interaction on a topic in a limited period of time (Babbie and Mouton, 2003:291). Group discussions provide direct evidence about similarities and differences in the participants’ opinions and experiences as opposed to reaching such conclusions from separate statements of each interviewee. Enough participants have to be chosen so that the interview does not fall flat if some members choose to remain silent (Babbie and Mouton,2003:291). Doing one focus group can hamper the result of the study so about three to five focus groups are suggested. In this research study I conducted interviews with a parent focus group, an educator focus group and an SGB focus group. The researcher hopes to manage the focus group interview by attempting to gather data from each participant in the focus group (Babbie and Mouton, 2003:292).

#### **❖ Advantages of focus groups**

- The natural setting allows participants to express opinions freely.
- The participants tend to feel empowered.
- Open expression among members of marginalised social groups is encouraged.
- New ideas could be stimulated.
- To gain insight into or raise awareness to the research topic.

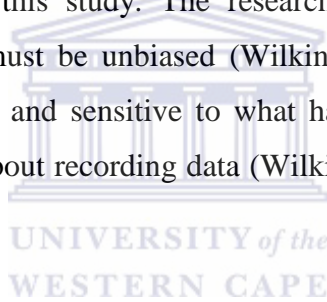
#### **❖ Limitations of focus groups**

- Only one or a few topics can be discussed in a focus group.

- Focus group studies rarely report all the details of the research study.
- The researcher during the interview may unknowingly limit open, free expression of the participants in the focus group according to (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:291); (Neuman, 2003:396), and (Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003:97).

### **3.8.2 Field notes**

According to Richardson (1994:225) field notes have a private and intimate character. Notes should be about what the researcher saw, heard or felt during the interview. Everything has to be written down no matter how unimportant it may seem at the time. One has to be as inconspicuous as possible in note taking and the researcher has to analyse the notes regularly. It is important that the researcher takes notes regularly and promptly regardless of the circumstances (Fontana and Fey, 2003: 366). Field notes were used to gather in - depth understanding of the possible challenges to parental involvement in the homework assignments of the learners in this study. The researcher is the primary instrument in qualitative data collection and must be unbiased (Wilkinson and Birmingham, 2003:144). The researcher needs to be alert and sensitive to what happens during the data collection stage and has to be disciplined about recording data (Wilkinson and Birmingham, 2003:144) and (Neuman, 2003: 375).



### **3.9 TRIANGULATION**

In field research there is a need for multiple types of evidence gathered from different sources, often using different data collecting methods. Unlike the experimenter, the qualitative researcher casts the net widely to gather in a lot of different fish so that the richness and complexity of human environments can be captured (Baker, 1999:255). In triangulation therefore the researcher gathers evidence from multiple sources to address the questions at hand from different points of view. Ultimately a researcher needs to narrow down, the qualitative researcher begins broadly to explore the whole situation so that the research subject is not trivialised. According to Baker (1999:255) by triangulating evidence, this bringing together of different types of evidence against each other is a way to determine which explanations are accurate and which ones should be rejected.

Triangulation is the use of multiple methods which this research study adopted in data collection. Triangulation is considered one of the best ways to enhance validity and reliability in qualitative research. In social science therefore it is better to look at the research topic from

several angles than to observe it in only one way (Babbie and Mouton, 2001:275). Triangulation in this study was done by comparing the answers from the educator focus group, the parent focus group, the SGB focus group, the individual principal and the individual learners to the semi – structured interview questions that were posed. The researcher also had field notes with which to compare data from the multiple sources. These were the multiple methods used. The answers from the participants agreed with each other therefore triangulation was achieved and evidence was therefore accurate.

According to Janesick (2000: 391) in the area of qualitative research methods and design, historically there have been periodic discussions of triangulation, as an important part of the design process. In the 1970's four basic types of triangulation were identified namely; data triangulation; investigator triangulation; theory triangulation, and methodological triangulation. In the new millennium however some researchers have used the idea of crystallisation as a better way to view qualitative research designs and their components. Crystallisation recognises the many facets of any given approach to the social world as a fact of life (Janesick, 2000:392). What we see when we view a crystal, depends on how we view it, how we hold it up to the light or not. The term parental involvement in this study was viewed from different angles; these angles were the answers from the different participants to the research questions. The researcher acknowledges the term “crystallisation” as explained by Janesick (2000:392) but in this study the term triangulation was used for reliability.

### **3.10 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

The final stage of the interview process began by drawing together the data collected and structuring them in such a way as to make ready for analysis. The responses from the participants to the research questions were grouped. This approach allowed themes, issues and concerns to be identified (Wilkinson and Birmingham, 2003: 63).

#### **3.10.1 Thematic Framework**

In this study thematic analysis was applied. The thematic framework was used to classify and organise data according to key themes, concepts and emergent categories (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). Data from the participants in this study was transcribed from the audio recording and also from the field notes made during the semi- structured interviews. The notes concerning the challenges to parental involvement in homework assignments were transcribed verbatim; it was handwritten in this study. I then had the raw text which was read a few times to

understand and gain insight into the detail of challenges to parental involvement in homework assignments. The responses to the semi-structured interviews that this study acquired were then analysed. The analysis gave me deeper insight into the study and it contributed to the findings that I explored. Data analysis was gained from the inductive approach used in the study. The inductive approach helped me to gain valuable information from the “bottom up” i.e. first from the participants themselves (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). The true test of a competent qualitative researcher comes in the analysis of the data, a process that requires the ability to capture understanding of data in writing. Henning (2004) argues that the analysis process is the “heartbeat” of the research. Sometimes the meaning of a sentence may become clear only later in the interview, transcript or the field notes. Human communication is not linear and the interpretation should not be linear either (Henning, 2004). In the slow process of transcribing data the researcher comes close to the data. Once the transcription is ready and codes have been awarded to different segments or units of meaning, the related codes can be categorised by colour coding. The categories will already begin to show the themes that will be constructed from the data and that will be used in the discussion of the inquiry. When a researcher is satisfied that the themes represent a reasonably “researched” chunk of reality, each theme can be used as the basis for an argument in a discussion around them. Processed data do not have the status of “findings” until the themes have been discussed and argued to make a point, and the point that is to be made comes from the research questions (Henning, 2004).

### **3.10.2 Interpretation**

Interpretation means to relate one’s results or findings from the qualitative data to the existing relevant theoretical frameworks to show whether these are supported or proved false (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). Interpretation is the process by which meaning is attached to data. It depends on the insight and imagination of the researcher. Qualitative researchers will make reference in their interpretation of data to the understandings possessed by their subjects while giving credence to what participants say (Miller and Brewer, 2003). Researchers have to develop and maintain a critical attitude towards what respondents tell them. All data are socially situated and constructed in that time and place limit them. They are impacted by the methods used to collect them and the social interaction between the people in the research process (Miller and Brewer, 2003). Babbie and Mouton (2001) refer to the elaboration model, the interpretation method which aims at elaborating on an empirical relationship among variables in order to interpret the relationship. In this research study it would be to compare

the challenges that parents could be facing with regard to their involvement in learners' homework assignments, to the relevant literature on parental involvement in homework.

### **3.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The researcher has a moral and professional obligation to be ethical, even when the research subjects are unaware of or unconcerned about ethics (Neuman, 2003: 116). Human research should never injure the people being studied, regardless of whether they volunteer for the study. This often concerns being careful not to reveal information that would embarrass subjects, or endanger their home lives, friendships or jobs. The researcher must look for the subtlest dangers and guard against them. Voluntary participation; no harm to the participants; anonymity and confidentiality and special attention to the participation of the learners who are regarded as minors in this study, was adhered to (Babbie and Mouton, 2001:520).

I was aware of the ethical considerations and agreed to conduct this research study in accordance with the required ethical procedures. The rights and welfare of all the participants in this research study were protected. The interests and the identities of the participants were protected. I conducted the research in accordance with the ethical and professional guidelines as specified by the University of the Western Cape; the Western Cape Education Department and the school in this research study. Ethical clearance was obtained from The University of the Western Cape; the Western Cape Education Department; and also the school where the research was conducted.

No research was conducted until consent had been acquired from all the participants and role players. The participants were informed about the nature of the study and that their participation was voluntary. Participants were informed that they could withdraw at any stage of the research process. Each participant received a consent form informing them of the nature and the conditions of participation. Each participant was assured of the confidentiality of information and that no harm would come to them by participating in the study. The consent form to the focus group members informed each member that they would be committed not to divulge information shared in the group to anybody outside of the group. Arrangements to conduct interviews were made with all the participants once the ethical committee of the University of the Western Cape gave its approval. The time and place of conducting the interviews was decided by the principal of the school, the school governing body chairperson and all the focus group members. Permission was obtained from parents to

conduct individual interviews with their children. The interview schedule was implemented at the convenience of all participants.

### **3.12 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY**

According to Babbie and Mouton (1998:276) the basic issue of trustworthiness is how the researcher can persuade his or her audience, including himself that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to or worth taking account of. A qualitative study cannot be called transferable unless it is credible, and it cannot be said to be credible unless it is dependable. Credibility is achieved through prolonged engagement, which is to stay in the field until data saturation occurs. Credibility is also achieved by consistently pursuing interpretations in different ways (Babbie and Mouton, 1998:276). A researcher should look for multiple influences that are relevant to the topic of research.

Many qualitative researchers have struggled to identify more appropriately how we do what we do (Janesick, 2000:393). Therefore rather than take terms from the quantitative paradigm, qualitative researchers have offered alternative ways to think about descriptive validity and the unique qualities of case work. Validity in the quantitative arena has a set of micro definitions. Validity in qualitative research has to do with description and explanation and whether or not the explanation fits the description (Janesick, 2000:393). Perfect reliability and validity are just about impossible to achieve but they are ideals researchers strive for. Both ideals are important in establishing the truthfulness, credibility, or believability of findings (Babbie and Mouton, 2001:119).

#### **❖ Validity**

A qualitative researcher's empirical claims gain validity when supported by numerous pieces of diverse empirical data. Validity arises out of the cumulative impact of many collections of diverse details that only together create significant evidence (Babbie and Mouton, 2001:119). In this study the use of multiple methods of data collection was used to obtain validity and trustworthiness in this research study.

#### **❖ Reliability**

Reliability is whether a particular technique, applied repeatedly to the same object, would yield the same result each time. Reliability is a concern every time a single researcher or observer is the source of data, because there is no certain guard against the impact of an



observer's subjectivity (Neuman, 2003:184). Reliability means dependability. According to Neuman (2003:186) qualitative researchers use multiple techniques to obtain reliability. In this study semi - structured interviews was conducted with individuals and with focus groups. Field notes and voice recordings were also used to obtain reliability.

### **3.13 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter a detailed description of the research process was provided. The research design of a qualitative interpretive case study was presented. Participant selection was explained. Data collection, data analysis and the interpretation process were described. An explanation of trustworthiness and reliability in the qualitative research process in this study was presented. The ethical procedures that were implemented and adhered to by the researcher were also explained. In the next chapter the researcher presents the data analysis and interpretation of the data that were collected from the participants.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter data collection methods as well as ethical considerations were discussed. In this chapter the analysis and interpretation of the data will be presented.

Once data were collected, reading and interpretation of the data were the starting points for meaningful analysis (Bazeley, 2009:7). The process of data analysis involved making sense out of the text. It was also a continual, analytical reflection by the researcher about the data collected in order to get a detailed understanding of the participants' views on the topic. Transcriptions were later analysed according to the following steps as suggested by (Cresswell, 2003:191).

**TABLE 4.1 THE PROCESS OF DATA ANALYSIS**

**Adapted from Cresswell (2003)**

STEPS	EXPLANATION OF DATA ANALYSIS ACTIVITIES
1.	Organisation and preparation of the data e.g. Transcription.
2.	Read through all data to get a general sense of the information and to reflect on its overall meaning.
3	Begin data analysis with a coding process. Coding involves taking text data into categories. Label categories with a term.
4	Colour code about 5 or 7 categories or themes. These themes appear as major findings. In this study 3 themes were used. Each theme consisted of sub – themes.
5	Use a narrative passage to convey the findings of the analysis.
6	A final step is to make an interpretation or meaning of the data. Comparison could be made with relevant literature. Findings might confirm past information or diverge from it.

Based on the data analysis of all the data collected the following themes and sub-themes as represented in **table 4.2** emerged as challenges to parental involvement in homework assignments of learners at the school in this study.

**Table 4.2 THEMES AND SUB-THEMES THAT EMERGED IN THIS STUDY**

<b>THEME</b>	<b>SUB-THEMES</b>
4.2.1 The challenges to parental involvement in the home.	1.1 The lack of parent education.
	1.2 The lack of educational stimulation.
	1.3 Socio-economic factors.
	1.3.1 The effects of poverty.
	1.3.2 The effects of unemployment.
	1.4 The effects of family structure.
4.2.1.1. Positive assistance	1.5 Help from other family member.
4.2.2. The challenges to parental involvement in the school.	2.1 The lack of educator training.
	2.2 The medical model approach.
	2.3 The effects of the SGB.
	2.4 Policy
	2.5 Language
	2.6 WCED
	2.7 A middle class institution
4.2.3. How the community affects parental involvement in homework assignments.	3.1 An unsafe neighbourhood.

The themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data will be discussed in detail below.

#### **THEME 4.2.1 CHALLENGES TO PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE HOME**

##### **Sub- Theme 1.1. Lack of parent education on Parental Involvement**

It emerged from the study that many of the parents had not received formal education when they were of school going age. Due to the lack of education, many of the parents cannot read and write. The illiteracy of many of the parents is a challenge to parental involvement in the

learners' homework assignments. Parents will not be able to assist the learners with reading and writing at home. Parents will not be able to read the homework instructions to the learners. The parent focus group said "*we did not get education in our day how are we then supposed to help our children today.*" The principal also indicated that parents have a lack of education and have difficulty in helping the learners with homework. The educator focus group indicated that the parents or caregivers did not get an education so they cannot read and write. When parents have a lack of education it would be a challenge for them to understand the notices sent home. Parents might view the educators as being the "experts" in schoolwork therefore due to their own lack of education they might not engage in conversations regarding the learners' education. According to Moletsane (2004:221) the legacy of education during the apartheid years left millions of people illiterate and unfamiliar with school routines.

### **Sub-Theme 1.2. Lack of educational stimulation on Parental Involvement**

It emerged that many parents in this study do not have a formal education. Parents may as a result of their own lack of education, possibly not know how to help their children to persevere during difficult times with homework e.g. challenging mathematics homework activities. Parents may not even know how to provide stimulating educational activities for their children. What emerged from the SGB focus group was that "*there was a lack of educational stimulation in the home.*" The learners also indicated that their parents were not reading books in the home and "*their parents did not take them to the library so that they could read books*". The educators indicated that "*there was no educational stimulation from the parents with regards to reading skills in the home.*" The lack of parental education could also be the cause of the lack of educational stimulation in the home. According to Moletsane (2012:259) learners who live in environments where parents read or write poorly will lack educational stimulation.

### **Sub- Theme 1.3. Socio- Economic Factors**

#### **❖ The effects of Poverty and Unemployment on parental involvement**

The SGB focus group indicated that "*socio-economic factors and the home environment was a challenge to parents.*" Factors such as large families with up to 10 children living in one home have a negative effect on learning. The large number of family members living in one small "Wendy house" causes overcrowding and as a result learners have no space to do homework. Parents have indicated their frustrations about living in such conditions.

According to a parent *“there is friction so we fight.” “I am frustrated that I must help my child with homework.”* According to Moletsane (2004:169) if one knows the parental socio-economic status one could possibly predict the learners’ academic outcomes.

#### ❖ **The effects of Poverty on parental involvement**

The learners, educators, and the school governing body indicated that the parents lived in wood and iron shacks. This indicates the level of poverty that the parents and learners in this study experience. Many educators also indicated that *“poverty was a major challenge for parents”* The parents might not make learners’ homework a priority as they (parents) have to provide food and other needs for the family that takes preference over schoolwork. According to Landsberg and Nel (2005:29) poor parents lack the finances to pay school fees, buy books and other educational resources for the learners. The parent focus group said *“we are poor, we cannot pay school fees, and we cannot pay for education.”* Poverty is therefore a major challenge to parents in this study.

#### ❖ **The effects of Unemployment on parental involvement**

It emerged that parents are not home to supervise the learners after school. Parents leave home early in the morning to find some form of employment to provide for the family. On many occasions the parent returns home very late at night. Parents are therefore not deliberately away from home. It is therefore a challenge for the parent to spend quality time with the learners to assist them with homework activities. The educator focus group indicated that *“there is no money for food; parents depend on a government grant.”* The social grant helps the parent to an extent, but the amount of money is not sufficient to take care of all the needs of the home. Socio-economic factors of poverty and unemployment could make parents very demoralised and depressed. Parents are the learner’s first educators and if they struggle to survive it could lead to frustration, it could also lead parents to keep the learners home to look after younger siblings while parents attempt to find work. If this should happen it will negatively affect learners’ education. One cannot blame poverty for learners’ poor academic achievement as many learners have succeeded in education despite the poor socio-economic conditions (Landsberg and Nel, 2005). Despite the statement by Landsberg and Nel (2005), the effects of poverty on the parents in this study play a major role in how the families have to survive to make a living. It is the learner in the historically disadvantaged school who is at the receiving end of poverty and unemployment, as the learner then has to experience a lack of parental involvement in homework assignments. Unfortunately

challenges like poverty and unemployment, hamper parental involvement in this important primary school stage of the learner's life.

#### **Sub – Theme 1.4. The effects of Family Structure on parental involvement**

It emerged from the data that learners live with single parents, or grandparents. During the school week learners stayed with different family members and weekends the learners would go to their single parent or other caregivers. An unstructured, unstable living environment could cause learners to be confused as to whose rules to obey. According to the learners “...my mommy sometimes helps me...” “...when my mom struggles to help me she says I must ask my sister to help me.” “my granny or my foster mom helps me...” According to the principal there are many single parents at the school. It is evident that the family structure could have a negative effect on the learner's homework if so many different family members are helping with homework assignments. There is bound to be different confusing methods being given to the learner, for example, on how to calculate mathematics homework. According to Moletsane (2004:168) the term family is not the traditional Westernised nuclear family with mother, father and child. Family forms have changed over time children now have single parents or are orphaned. There are therefore many challenges in the home which has a negative effect on parental involvement in the homework assignments of the learners. There are also challenges in the home, the school and the community which overlap. The researcher will however discuss these challenges separately as it is presented in **table 4.2**.

Despite the many challenges in the home in this study that affect parental involvement in the homework assignments of the learners, there are some positive signs with regard to homework completed at home. The following theme highlights the positive sign to homework completion at home.

##### **THEME 4.2.1.1 POSITIVE ASSISTANCE**

The empirical evidence highlights the fact that there are many challenges to parental involvement in the home. However the following quotes from the learners highlights the positive aspect of homework completion at the home “...My brother helps me...” “When my mom struggles to help me then she says my sister must help me.” This empirical evidence highlights the fact that there are other family members willing to assist the learner with homework in the home. According to Bronfenbrenner (1994) the positive interactions that the individual has with other members in the microsystem is valuable to the development and

growth of the learner. If there could be further interaction between all the systems that has a positive influence on the learner's development it will make a positive impact on the relationship between the whole system, the home, the school and the community.

## **THEME 4.2.2 CHALLENGES IN THE SCHOOL THAT AFFECT PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

### **Sub – Theme 2.1. Lack of Educator Training**

It emerged from the educator focus group that when they studied at teacher training colleges they did not receive training to engage with parents about schoolwork. According to the educator focus group “... for me it was a lot of theoretical things ...” “... the college did not prepare me...” “...there was no information on how to deal with parents...” If parents did not get training on how to engage with parents regarding schoolwork, it could lead them to isolate parents from homework discussions. According to Christie (2008:133) fundamental change of existing education systems is an extremely difficult task and it takes time.

### **Sub- Theme 2.2. Medical - model Approach.**

The principal stated that many of the educators were “*from the old school*” and they need *specialised training to help the learners...*” Some educators said “*We attended college in 1977...*” These statements from the school members indicate a medical - model approach whereby educators and the principal are looking outside of the school to help the learners. A medical - model approach according to Elof and Ebersohn (2001) is to identify problems in a learner and think that an expert from outside has to help to “fix” the learner. If educators were trained in 1977 and have not adopted “lifelong learning” then they could still be using an ideology of exclusion. Parents might therefore be excluded by the school when homework policy is discussed. The medical – model approach does not look at the valuable assets in the environment that could be used in partnership to assist with whatever the “need” might be. With a medical – model approach therefore the school could be excluding the parents in homework discussions, when the parents are actually a valuable asset in the homework assignments of the learner.

The following empirical evidence from the data collected from the school principal, the educators and the school governing body demonstrates the choices that have been made at the school with regards to parental involvement in the homework assignments of the learners.

The principal: *“Parents are not interested...”* The Educator focus group: *“I don’t think the parents realise how important schoolwork is...”* The SGB focus group: *“Homework is a good thing but our parents are not skilled enough to assist the learners.”*

According to Epstein (2001:9) the above empirical evidence that were used by the school in this study reflects a view of separate spheres of influence. It also emphasises the medical model thinking of the school. This type of view causes the school not to include the parents in homework assignments. The shift to inclusion from about the 1970’s led to a radical shift in education from a deficit model to a social systems change approach, Lansberg and Nel (2003:5). A shift in paradigms does not necessarily imply an overnight change in practices. While inclusion is very prominent in education today, the medical model is still frequently used in the school, as the empirical evidence from the participants in this study has shown. When blame is apportioned on the parents then it demonstrates that the school is still functioning in a medical model paradigm, Lansberg and Nel (2003:5).

### **Sub- Theme 2.3. The effect of the SGB on parental involvement**

The school governing body by law should act in the best interest of the learners and the parents with regard to schooling according to SASA 84 of 1996 DoE (1996). It emerged from the SGB members that they are not aware of the contents of the SASA 84 of 1996 DoE (1996) document which is actually their “guidebook,” by law, to govern the school. The SGB members said *“... we have not seen or read it...”* The parents are therefore disadvantaged because the SGB, who should govern the school in the best interest of the parents and learners, are not fulfilling their duties. It emerged therefore from the data that the school is a challenge to parental involvement in homework. According to Mncube (2009:10) parents play an important part in governing the school but most of the parents are not fully on board.

SASA 84 of 1996 gives parents via the School Governing Body (SGB) the responsibility to act in the best interest of the learners. SASA section 20.1 (a) states that the SGB of a public school must promote the best interest of the school and must provide quality education for all learners.

SASA 84 of 1996 section 23.9 states that the number of parent members must comprise one more than the combined total of other members of a governing body who have voting rights.

Parents therefore form the majority on the SGB. To empower governing bodies in shared decisions about educational matters like homework policy requires strong partnerships,



support and co-operation from all the partners of the school according to Mestry and Grobler (2007:176).

SASA 84 of 1996 section 19.1. (b) States that the WCED should provide continuing training to the SGB to promote the effective performance of their functions.

SASA 84 of 1996 section 19.2 states that the WCED must ensure that the principals of schools should assist the SGB in the performance of their functions.

The empirical evidence highlights the fact that the SGB in this study are not familiar with their role as stipulated in SASA 84 of 1996 DoE (1996). This therefore results in the SGB not acting in the best interest of the parents and the learners with regards to homework. The school in its isolation of the SGB by not partnering and assisting the SGB with SASA 84 of 1996 causes a “pushing apart” of the Epstein, overlapping spheres of influence. According to MnCube, (2009:10) parents play an important part in governing the school but most of the parents are not “fully on board”. The parents are not given the opportunity to participate in important decisions, like homework assignment policy as has been the case in this study.

#### **Sub – Theme: 2.4 Policies.**

##### **❖ Education white paper 6**

Education White Paper 6 (2001) defines inclusive education and training by means of the following clauses contained in the document:

- It acknowledges that learning also occurs in the home and community and within formal and informal settings and structures.
- It acknowledges the central role played by educators and parents.
- It acknowledges the general orientation and introduction of governing bodies and educators to the inclusion model.

The following quotes from the principal: *“Inclusive education practices to me are very difficult. “...educators are from the “old school.” “We did not get specialised training...” “...learners need specialised education...”*

Educators’ focus group response to policy: *“I have no idea what you are talking about. “First (OBE); now (CAPS). We focus so much on CAPS...” ... there is no time to discuss policy...”*

The above responses from the educator focus group and the principal highlights the fact that the school is not following an inclusive education policy. The parents are possibly therefore not included in the homework planning. This illuminates the fact that the educators' lack of knowledge of the inclusive practices of White Paper 6, (2001) is a challenge that affects parental involvement in learners' homework assignments at home.

According to Phalidi (2007) educators are not familiar with policies governing their working lives.

#### ❖ **WCED circular 0045/2005 guidelines to homework**

The WCED circular 0045/2005 is intended as a tool for the effective management of homework in schools and explains the role of the principal, the educator, the parents and the learners with regards to homework. The circular also states that homework demands should not represent a disproportionate burden for learners and parents especially the poor and the disadvantaged.

The following quotes are empirical evidence from the participants e.g. principal, educators and SGB with regards to homework assignments:

Principal: *"Each group of educators at school had to draw up a homework policy."*

Educators: *"I was not part of the drawing up of the school's homework policy."*

SGB: *"The homework guideline circular 0045/2005 WCED (2005) most SGB members have not seen it."*

The empirical evidence illuminates the inconsistencies and confusion between all the role players at the school with regards to the homework policy. These factors indicate that the school therefore contributes to the challenges to parental involvement in the homework assignments of the learners as the school staff is not sure of the homework policy implementation at the school in this study.

#### ❖ **(CAPS) 2011**

(CAPS) 2011, is based on social transformation, active and critical learning. It also states that inclusivity should become a central part of planning and teaching at each school.

According to empirical evidence from the educator focus group: *"We focus so much on CAPS that there is no time to discuss policy. The CAPS document is not aligned to the workbook. I*

*do my preparation according to the WCED CAPS document but when I link it to my workbook for the learners then “it is not on the same page.” According to CAPS (2011) we have to teach something else every week. In a school quarter of 10 weeks we have to plan for 10 weeks, so the time according to the planning schedule does not allow time for consolidation.*

The educators are challenged in implementing the WCED’s new CAPS (2011) document. The educators state that they have no time for repetition and consolidation it therefore implies that they might not be engaging with the parents on aspects of homework assignments. This empirical evidence from the educator focus group therefore highlights another major factor in the school which contributes to the challenges of parental involvement in the homework assignments of the learners

According to Christie (2008:132) policy is formulated in terms of what would be regarded as ideal, rather than changing what actually existed. The case in point is the historically disadvantaged school where the situation with regards to learners and parents are not ideal, there are challenges, yet the policy that is implemented does not take the challenges into consideration, and it is expected that the policy must be applied as if the situation at the historically disadvantaged school in this study is ideal.

### **Sub – Theme: 2.5 Language**

Empirical evidence from the educator focus group highlights that *“the learners do not understand the terms that are used. The parents do not speak the language we speak.”*

Learners who attend school where the language of teaching and learning is English and their parents can only speak the vernaculars could cause low self - esteem in parents and caregivers. This encourages the non- involvement of parents and caregivers and worsens the fact that they cannot assist their children with schoolwork, according to Lansberg and Nel (2005:37).

This implies that the learners’ home language is not the language of learning and teaching (LoLT). The language problem could be a cause of great concern for learners entering primary school. It would imply that learners are not able to comprehend what the educators are saying. This could be a contributing factor to the lack of parental involvement in homework because the communication between parent and learner could be affected as there would be a lack of comprehension between them.

## Sub – Theme 2.6 WCED

The following is the response from the educators about the WCED:

*“What the department wants from us they expect from us. Firstly they want a preparation book; they (WCED) want more administrative stuff.”*

Most educators are struggling to meet all the expected administration requirements from the WCED with regards to its CAPS (2011) document. The empirical data from the educators highlight the fact that they are so focused on CAPS (2011) that they are unable to focus on problems that might exist inside and outside of the classroom. This could imply that the educators are not focussed on the learning that the learners must do inside the classroom. It also implies that the educators are not focussed on the role that parents must play with regards to the homework assignments at home. The fact that educators cannot solve problems inside and outside of the classroom suggests that educators are possibly isolating the parents from parental involvement. The WCED therefore indirectly contributes to the Epstein overlapping spheres of influence being separate which affects parental involvement in the homework assignments of the learners. The fact that the educators are focussing more on the WCED than what the learners and parents need could be disadvantageous to the homework assignments that parents have to complete at home.

In the WCED CAPS document (2011:26) the home language curriculum content **assumes** that the learners come to school able to understand and speak the language of learning and teaching. Empirical evidence from the educator focus group however illuminates the fact that language is a problem and that the language of the school is not spoken at home. *“The children do not understand the terms that are used and the parent does not speak the language we speak.”*

If the WCED in its CAPS (2011) document **assumes** that the learners in this study come to school able to speak the various types of literacy then the (WCED) did not consider the challenges that parents and learners in this historically disadvantaged primary school in this study might experience with regards to language usage.

It could also be assumed then that when policy is drawn up, it is not drawn up for the disadvantaged working class but for the middle class where one could assume that learners come to school with the language of teaching and learning. The WCED therefore contributes

to the “pushing apart” of the overlapping spheres of influence which negatively affects parental involvement in homework assignments.

### **Sub – Theme 2.7 Middle – Class Institution**

According to the following empirical evidence from the educators it seems that homework is done better in advantaged areas. *“In another area parental involvement would be more holistically done.”* The SGB says: *“The broader picture is that we are in a disadvantaged area...”*

De Carvalho (2001:3-4) argues that there are two movements in which school is considered, the first refers to the history of schooling as a middle class institution where parental involvement is not regarded as deficient and the second is where parental involvement is deficient. The above quotes from the educators and the school governing body confirm De Carvalho’s (2001) view and this could cause educators to continue to blame parents. According to Christie (2008:158) schools serving poor communities, are very different to those serving the wealthy, and inequalities in education and resources still saturate the system. When educators mention that, *“in another area parental involvement in homework assignments would be holistically done”*, it implies that there is a middle class parental involvement activity where learners are stimulated to learn and parental involvement in homework assignments is the norm versus the historically disadvantaged parent’s difficult and harder life circumstances where challenges like poverty, low-educated parents and economic inequality exists which negatively affects involvement in homework assignments argues de Carvalho (2001: 108). Educators should keep this fact in mind when expecting parental involvement in homework assignments in historically disadvantaged schools otherwise it could cause educators to blame the parents for learners’ poor academic outcomes in mathematics and literacy. It is for this reason that de Carvalho (2001) urges researchers to rethink parental involvement in homework assignments especially in historically disadvantaged schools.

## **THEME 4.2.3 HOW THE COMMUNITY AFFECTS PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS**

### **Sub – Theme: 3.1 An unsafe environment**

The individuals and the focus groups who were interviewed in this study provided similar answers when questioned about the community. What emerged is that the community is

notorious for crime, violence, gangsterism and drug abuse and presents as a major challenge to parental involvement in the homework assignments of the learners.

The learners said “... *they shoot in our area and it is dangerous...*”

The principal said “...*there is a drug problem in the area...*”

The educator focus group “... *drug abuse and alcohol is rife in the community...*”

The SGB “... *violence and gangsterism is a challenge...*”

The community is unsafe. The parents cannot walk freely in the community. The parents cannot take their children to the library as it is not safe to walk in the community when the gangsters shoot in the area. The parents would not attend school parent meetings as it would be too dangerous to be out in the community especially if the school meetings are held at night. The community dangers emerged as a major challenge to parental involvement by all the participants. According to Epstein and Sanders (2000:292) the community is one of the spheres of influence that could affect learners' learning. The community does pose a challenge to parental involvement in the homework assignments of the learners in this study.

The **figure 4.1** of overlapping spheres of influence Epstein (2002) and Bronfenbrenner (1994) is used by the researcher in this study to interpret challenges to parental involvement in the home, the school and the community.

## Figure 4.1 Overlapping spheres of influence

Adapted from Epstein (2002), and Bronfenbrenner (1994)

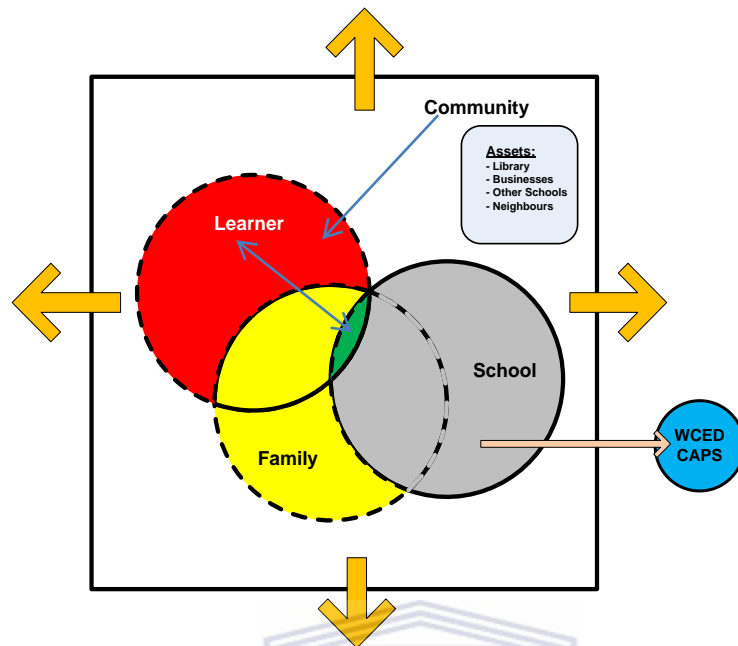


Figure 4.1 KEY

Community Red	= at risk	Liabilities (drugs, gangsterism, crime, violence)
Home Yellow	= hope	Learner Green = growth
School Grey	= uncertainty	WCED Blue
Assets Library, businesses, schools, neighbours		
===== Boundary dynamics		

### 4.3. INTERPRETATION

(In conjunction with Figure 4.1 above)

The family (yellow), the community (red), and the historically disadvantaged primary school (grey) are represented by the overlapping spheres; and the learner is nested in the centre of the overlap (green). The assets are in the community. The WCED is situated outside of the community.

Liabilities such as drug abuse, gangsterism, violence and crime are found in the community. The liabilities are not indicated in **figure 4.1**. The empirical evidence from the principal, the learners, the parents and the SGB highlights the liabilities such as gangsterism, drug abuse,

crime and violence. These liabilities have a negative effect on parental involvement in the homework assignments of the learners.

The green section represents the learner who is nested in the centre of the bio - ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The red colour represents the danger for the learner who is at risk of being influenced by the negative influences of gangsterism and drugs in the community. This is indicated by the arrow from the learner to the red sphere representing the community **figure 4.1**.

The broken line boundary between the spheres in **figure 4.1** represents the instability in the relationship between all those in the different bio – ecological systems of development of the learner (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). This is regarded as a major challenge to the parent in helping the learner with homework assignments. The broken line boundary also indicates the unstable family structure.

The community in this research is regarded by the local police department as the leading drug and crime area in Cape Town. The gang leaders target school learners as young as 6 years old to join the gangs and are then used to pedal drugs according to empirical evidence from the SGB focus group. The affluent lifestyle of the gangs could be the lifestyle that the learners might seek which could result in them choosing a life of gangsterism over family values, and over a sound quality education.

Most parents in this study are not home when learners get home from school, so learners when left alone are exposed to the liabilities in the community. Learners are easily influenced. The red sphere therefore represents the challenges such as the liabilities in the community that could negatively influence the learner and as a result also negatively affect parental involvement in homework activities.

The four orange arrows in **figure 4.1** point outwards which indicate that the spheres are working in isolation, or pulled apart (Epstein, 2002) which results in a small area of overlap the green space in **figure 4.1**.

According to Epstein (2002) when the overlapping spheres of influence push away from each other or pull apart as is the case in this study, then it does not benefit the learner. The school in **figure 4.1** appears to be working in isolation of the learner, the home and the community. CAPS (2011) emphasises that one of the key principles of effective teaching and learning, is to always place teaching and learning within the context of the learners' body, home, school,



and community context. Educators appear to be placing more emphasis on completing the curriculum aspect to satisfy the requirements of the WCED. Therefore in **figure 4.1** the orange arrow points from the school towards the WCED (the blue sphere) on the outside of the community in **figure 4.1**.

The researcher's interpretation in this study therefore is that challenges to parental involvement do not only occur in the home. There are challenges in the school as well as in the community that affect parental involvement in the homework assignments of the learners in the historically disadvantaged school in this study. According to Landsberg and Nel (2005:13), a true ecological systems thinker never debates whether the cause or the solution is situated in one single system, but considers the interdependence between all the systems.

#### **4.4 SUMMARY**

This study sought to explore the challenges to parental involvement in the homework assignments of the learners at a historically disadvantaged primary school. Data was collected through individual and focus group semi - structured interviews. Categories were then created after which data was discussed in detail. The data illuminated the fact that many challenges to parental involvement in homework existed in the home. Parental non - involvement in homework was not a deliberate act but occurred due to challenges like poverty, unemployment, crime, violence, drug abuse and a lack of education of the parents amongst others. It was initially thought that challenges might only exist in the home of the learners. However the data highlighted the fact that many challenges that affected parental involvement in the homework assignments of the learners also existed in the school and in the community.

The next chapter will discuss recommendations for the possible alleviation of the many challenges that effect parental involvement in the homework assignments of the learners in this study. The recommendations however are not exhaustive.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

In the previous chapter the researcher explained how data was analysed and interpreted. In this chapter the researcher intends to discuss the findings that emerged from the empirical study. This is done to highlight what the study revealed about the main research question and sub questions. This will be followed by recommendations and concluding remarks.

#### **5.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

The findings illuminated the fact that the parents in this study want to be involved in the learners' education. Parents want the best education for their children and want their children to succeed in life. According to Mmotlane, Winnaar, and Kivulu (2009: 527) in South Africa, like in Australia and Britain, most parents believe in education and would like their children to be educated. The findings in this study revealed that parents want to help the learners with homework assignments but do not know how to help the learners with the assignments. The lack of parental involvement in the homework assignments of the learners at the historically disadvantaged primary school is therefore not a deliberate act but is forced upon the parents due to the many challenges that they experience. The findings revealed that the challenges to parental involvement in homework assignments are not only found in the home. There are many challenges that also exist in the school and in the community. The challenges in the whole system namely, home; school and community therefore negatively affect parental involvement in the homework assignments of the learners in this study. It is the primary school learner who in the final analysis does not receive positive academic outcomes in numeracy and literacy and as a result many learners at the primary school in this study repeat grade one.

#### **5.3 FINDINGS THAT RESPOND TO THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

##### **5.3.1 MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION**

What are the possible challenges that parents experience at home when assisting the learners with homework?

There are many challenges that negatively affect parental involvement in learners' education. In instances where parents are not involved in learners' education it is not a deliberate act. The challenges of poverty and unemployment are major findings. Parents have other everyday needs that take preference over school fees and educational resources for their children. The challenge of unemployment causes parents to be away from home to find a temporary job to earn money to provide for the family. Learners in most cases are left in the care of the grandmother or caregivers. The grandmothers are old and in most cases illiterate. Learners therefore lack role models in the home whom they could emulate. The homes are small and overcrowded which is not conducive to doing homework. The challenge is therefore for learners to be resilient during tough times but when the parent or caregiver is not around due to other needs, the learner is left exposed to negative influences like the liabilities in the community that take preference over doing homework. The challenges of poverty and unemployment that parents in this study experience are a cause for concern. Possible future qualitative studies could be considered to explore ways to possibly alleviate parents from the challenges of poverty and unemployment so that a better focus could be placed on helping the primary school learners with their homework assignments. The abuse of the drugs results in a lack of love and affection from the parents. Learners feel rejected and uncared for. This causes a lack of confidence and a lack of self - esteem in the learner. Learners are also physically and verbally abused by the parent. The lack of a stable solid foundation in the early years of the learner is therefore absent. This has a negative effect on the learners' schoolwork. The findings revealed that one of the primary school learners in this study smoked drugs in the home. The learner became ill and was rushed to hospital. Moletsane (2004:171) highlights the fact that in homes where the families are abusive and alcoholic it negatively affects the learner's academic and intellectual development. The following are some of the many challenges that the findings highlighted.

### **5.3.2 Sub-Question 1. How are the parents currently involved in the learners' homework assignments?**

The findings revealed that parents want their children to excel in schoolwork and they want the best education for their children. The current problem is that parents do not know how to help their children with the homework assignments. Parents do not understand the homework activities. Findings highlighted the fact that parents themselves did not receive an education so they in most cases are unable to help the learners with homework. Parents currently need assistance in how to help the learners at home with the homework assignments. The parent

focus group emphasised that they do not understand the mathematics activities that the learners must do. They get frustrated when they must help the learner as the learner is unable to explain the instruction to the parent. There is also the challenge of the language used by the parent that is not the language of learning and teaching of the school. Currently parents are mostly not involved with the homework assignments of the learners. Parents are seeking help from the school to guide them in ways to help with homework activities in the home.

### **5.3.3 Sub-Question 2. How does the parent - learner interaction at home affect parental involvement in the homework assignments?**

The parent- learner interaction at home is not conducive to learning. Parents are away from home due to unemployment. Parents are also abusive towards the learner after the parents have indulged in alcohol or drugs. The interaction is therefore in most cases unpleasant. The language usage is also more instructional. Parents would give learners commands instead of having a conversation. The findings highlighted the fact that parents scold at and physically abuse their children. A therapeutic situation which one would expect for learners of primary school age to enjoy with the family does not in most cases exist in this study.

### **5.3.4 Sub-Question 3. What factors in the school contribute to the possible challenges to parental involvement in homework assignments at home?**

Educators have in most cases not been trained to work with parents. Educators have been trained to teach subjects such as Mathematics and English amongst others. Many educators at the school in this study have not up skilled their qualifications. Findings revealed that some educators had qualified as educators in the year 1977. This means that educators have qualified during the apartheid years of exclusion in South Africa. Educators could therefore still be excluding parents from participation in discussion on homework policy because educators could still be adopting an ideology of exclusion which was an apartheid ideology. Findings also revealed that educators are not familiar with White Paper 6 of 2001 DoE (2001) which promotes inclusion, and they are not familiar with the WCED homework guideline policy 0045/2005 WCED (2005). This policy gives clear guidelines for home and school on how to manage homework activities for learners. Educators also blame parents for the learners' low academic outcomes. A finding that is difficult to understand is that educators are aware of the challenges that parents experience in the home yet the educators continue to blame the parents for the learners' low academic outcomes. The school however is the next system after the home in the Bronfenbrenner bio-ecological systems model (1994), to free the

learner from the poor early start in life in the home. The school therefore has to provide the necessary educational support that the parents are unable to provide in the home. The findings highlight the fact that learners are still repeating the early grades in primary school and learners are still receiving low academic outcomes. A finding is that the school is working in isolation of the parents and this is a major challenge as the parents are seeking help from the school so that they (parents) can in turn help their children. According to de Carvalho, (2001) the sources of inequality of educational opportunity appear to first lie in the home and then the sources of educational opportunity appear to also lie in the school's ineffectiveness to free achievement from the impact of the home.

#### **5.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS RESEARCH STUDY**

The findings highlight the challenges to parental involvement in the homework assignments of the learners in the historically disadvantaged primary school in this study. The findings in this research could potentially make a contribution to:

##### **5.4.1 Homework**

The findings could add to the current parental involvement homework practices at the school.

##### **5.4.2 The School Improvement Plan (SIP)**

This study could possibly contribute the school's improvement plan by suggesting the role of partnerships between all the assets in the school's environment.

##### **5.4.3 Assist the learners in the school**

The findings could assist the learners to improve their academic outcomes in mathematics and reading.

##### **5.4.4 Assist the WCED in its research**

The findings could assist in further exploring why the learners at the school in this study are not achieving in mathematics and literacy.

##### **5.4.5 The existing body of knowledge**

It is hoped that the findings in this study could add value to the existing body of knowledge on parental involvement in historically disadvantaged schools because according to Smidt

and Liebenberg (2003:1) research relating to parental involvement especially in South Africa is limited as well as restricted to wealthier social groups. This was the case in this study of the historically disadvantaged primary school in the Western Cape, where research on disadvantaged primary schools appeared to be limited.

#### **5.4.6 Encourage a change in approach**

The findings in this research could hopefully encourage the school personnel to adopt a change in approach from a mental - model mode of thinking Senge (1995) to an inclusive model.

#### **5.4.7 Adopt an Asset based approach**

The strengths of all the assets i.e. school, parents and community at the site could be used to form stronger partnerships to assist parents and learners with homework. This research study could potentially add value in this regard.

### **5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS**

In response to the challenges in this study the researcher recommends the following

#### **5.5.1 THE HOME**

##### **❖ BASIC CONCEPTS PROGRAMME (BCP)**

The BCP developed by Dr Louis Benjamin in 2005, enhances the thinking skills of learners. The content of the BCP is particularly important for learners who have not had adequate early childhood stimulating experiences. In the light of the learners in this study who do not enter the primary school with the language needed to understand the language of learning and teaching, the BCP is an ideal tool to equip the learners with the necessary language skills. If the programme was designed to train educators to help learners at school, then the BCP could be taught to parents to help them, to help the learners at home.

#### **5.5.2 THE SCHOOL**

##### **❖ Poverty alleviation**

The SGB could apply to the WCED for the school in this study to be afforded status of being a non-school fee paying school. It would also stop the parents from worrying about whether their children would be sent home from school or not because of non-payment of school fees.

- **Vegetable garden**

Parents could be allocated a section of the school grounds on which to plant vegetables. The parents could then sell the produce and it could generate income for the home and the school (Mbokodi, 2008:295).

- ❖ **Educator professional training programmes**

- It is recommended that the school organises professional training sessions for the educators in inclusive education practices according to Education White Paper 6 of 2001 DoE (2001).
- Training is suggested with regard to WCED circular 0045/2005 WCED (2005) on guidelines to homework.

- **Adopt an Asset- based approach**

The Asset-based approach Ebersohn and Eloff (2001) focusses on strengthening the inherent skills and assets within the whole system i.e. home; school and community.

- ❖ **An after- school homework programme**

An after school homework programme known as the Gevirtz Homework project could be researched by the primary school in this study to assist the learners who are not getting parental support at home. The Gevirtz Homework project could also give learners a safe place to be after school away from the liabilities in the community that could affect them negatively (Cosden, Morrison, Albanese, and Macias, 2001).

## **5.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

This research study is limited in that it only focuses on the challenges to parental involvement in the homework assignments of primary school learners of one historically disadvantaged primary school in Cape Town. The sample used was also a small sample. The findings and recommendations of this research study therefore cannot be generalised to other schools. Another limitation in this research study could be that some participants might have been reluctant to provide detail during the semi-structured interviews because I, the researcher, am

a learning support educator at the school. The participants were however assured of the confidentiality of the interview.

## **5.7 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

**5.7.1** The asset- based approach could be researched to explore ways of including the assets that exist in the environment that could enhance parental involvement activities that would improve the academic outcomes of the learners.

**5.7.2** The value of school, family and community partnerships in homework could be researched.

**5.7.3** Boundary dynamics is an area of study which could expand existing theory and knowledge about parental involvement which could provide a broader theoretical bridge to understand the innovation and learning possibilities at the boundaries between parents, schools and communities (Price – Mitchell, 2009:291). This could therefore be a topic that could be researched at the school in this study.

**5.7.4** This research study on “*challenges to parental involvement in homework assignments of learners in a historically disadvantaged primary school*” could be used as a basis for further qualitative studies on the value of parental involvement at the school in this study.

## **5.8 CONCLUSION**

This study was conducted to explore challenges to parental involvement in homework assignments of learners in a historically disadvantaged primary school. The empirical evidence from the participants in this study highlighted the fact that many challenges such as poverty, unemployment, inequalities and lack of resources, frustrations; lack of structure in the home; single parenting and a lack of educational stimulation were but a few challenges that negatively affected parental involvement in the homework assignments of the primary school learners. Despite these many challenges the parents still want their children to succeed in academic work but do not know how to help the learners due to the challenges experienced. The “hunch” that the researcher in this study had about parents not knowing “how” to help the learners with homework was found to be accurate. What emerged from this study is that the challenges to parental involvement in the homework assignments of the



learners were not only found in the home but also existed in all the other systems namely, the school, and the community in which the learner develops. A true ecological systems thinker according to Landsberg, Kruger, and Nel (2005:13) would never argue that the cause or the solution to parental involvement in homework assignments is situated in one system only. A true ecological systems thinker would consider the interdependence between all the systems that could have a positive effect on parental involvement in homework assignments and the academic development of the learners.



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**APPENDIX A**

**PRINCIPAL’S CONSENT FORM**

As part of the fulfilment of the requirements of the Masters in Education Degree (M.Ed.) of the University of the Western Cape (UWC), I, Roland Abrahams, am required to conduct a research. I have chosen to research the following topic:

**Challenges to parental involvement in homework assignments of learners in a historically disadvantaged primary school in Cape Town**

Participation is voluntary. Participants are expected to answer a few questions in a one-on-one individual semi-structured interview. All responses will be handled with complete confidentiality and your identity will be protected at all times. Your participation in this project will not prejudice you in any way. You are also free to withdraw from participation at any stage should you feel that your rights are being infringed upon, or that you are being inconvenienced in any way by your participation.

If you agree to the conditions of participation in this study as specified above please sign this form in the space provided.

\_\_\_\_\_ Signature of participant

\_\_\_\_\_ Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_ Institution Affiliation

\_\_\_\_\_ Contact Number

I thank you

Roland Abrahams

UWC Student number: 9513643

NB. For verification please feel free to contact my supervisor:

Professor Moletsane (Faculty of Educational Psychology)

The University of the Western Cape

Contact details: Landline: 021 959 2429.

## APPENDIX B

### SCHOOL GOVERNING BODY (FOCUS GROUP) CONSENT FORM

As part of the fulfilment of the requirements of the Masters in Education Degree (M.Ed.) of the University of the Western Cape (UWC), I, Roland Abrahams, am required to conduct a research. I have chosen to research the following topic:

#### **Challenges to parental involvement in homework assignments of learners in a historically disadvantaged primary school in Cape Town**

Participation is voluntary. Participants are expected to answer a few questions in a one-on-one individual semi-structured interview. All responses will be handled with complete confidentiality and your identity will be protected at all times. Your participation in this project will not prejudice you in any way. You are also free to withdraw from participation at any stage should you feel that your rights are being infringed upon, or that you are being inconvenienced in any way by your participation.

If you agree to the conditions of participation in this study as specified above please sign this form in the space provided.

\_\_\_\_\_ Signature of participant

\_\_\_\_\_ Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_ Institution Affiliation

\_\_\_\_\_ Contact Number

I thank you

Roland Abrahams

UWC Student number: 9513643

NB. For verification please feel free to contact my supervisor:

Professor Moletsane (Faculty of Educational Psychology)

The University of the Western Cape

Contact details:

Landline: 021 959 2429.

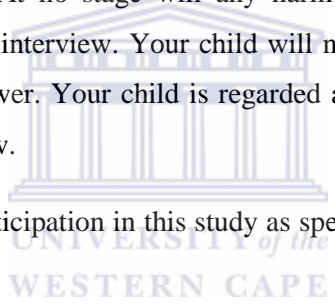
**APPENDIX C**

**PARENTS INDIVIDUAL CONSENT FORM (The learners are regarded as minors so parent consent needed).**

As part of the fulfilment of the requirements of the Masters in Education Degree (M.Ed.) of the University of the Western Cape (UWC), I, Roland Abrahams, am required to conduct a research. I have chosen to research the following topic:

**Challenges to parental involvement in homework assignments of learners in a historically disadvantaged primary school in Cape Town**

Participation is voluntary. Your child will be interviewed individually about his homework assignments that are completed at home. All responses will be handled with complete confidentiality and your child's identity will be protected at all times. Participation in this project will not prejudice you or your child in any way. Your child will also be free to withdraw from participation at any stage should he or she wish to do so.. At no stage will any harm come to your child as a result of participation in this semi structured interview. Your child will not be forced to answer any question that he or she does not want to answer. Your child is regarded as a minor and by law I would need your consent to conduct the interview.



If you agree to the conditions of participation in this study as specified above please sign this form in the space provided.

\_\_\_\_\_ Signature of parent of learner  
\_\_\_\_\_ Signature of learner (minor)  
\_\_\_\_\_ Signature of Researcher  
\_\_\_\_\_ Institution Affiliation  
\_\_\_\_\_ Contact Number

I thank you

Roland Abrahams

UWC Student number: 9513643

For verification please feel free to contact my supervisor: Professor Moletsane in the Faculty of Educational Psychology at The University of the Western Cape. Contact details:

Landline: 021 959 2429

## APPENDIX D

### LEARNER'S CONSENT FORM

My name is Roland Abrahams. I study at the University of the Western Cape. I am studying about how parents help learners like you at home with homework so that you can do well and pass in numeracy and literacy in your grade at your school. I have also informed your parents about my studies and I have asked your parents if I could ask you a few questions about how you do your homework at home. I need you to give me permission to ask you a few questions about your homework and I would like you to give me some answers about it. In this way you will help me with my university homework. You don't have to help me if you don't feel like it. You must choose what you want to do. The questions I will ask you will not cause you any problems and I will not tell your teachers or your parents about the answers you give me as your answers are private. We at university use a word like "confidential" which means your answers are important and nobody else needs to know about it. If you agree to help me, you can decide at any time afterwards to tell me that you don't feel like answering anymore. Then we will stop. If you agree to the helping me with my study then you must please sign or write your name on this form. I have given your parents a similar form to sign as they must also give their permission for you to help me. Your parents can phone my lecturer at UWC to ask them any questions about my homework.

\_\_\_\_\_ Signature of learner (minor)  
\_\_\_\_\_ Signature of Researcher  
\_\_\_\_\_ Institution Affiliation  
\_\_\_\_\_ Contact Number

I thank you

Roland Abrahams

UWC Student number: 9513643

NB. For verification please feel free to contact my supervisor

Professor Moletsane (Faculty of Educational Psychology)

The University of the Western Cape

Contact details: Landline: 021 959 2429.

## **APPENDIX E**

### **PARENTS FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM**

As part of the fulfilment of the requirements of the Masters in Education Degree (M.Ed.) of the University of the Western Cape (UWC), I, Roland Abrahams, am required to conduct a research. I have chosen to research the following topic:

#### **Challenges to parental involvement in homework assignments of learners in a historically disadvantaged primary school in Cape Town.**

Participation is voluntary. Participants are expected to answer a series of questions in a focus group discussion session. All responses will be handled with confidentiality. Whatever is discussed within the group will remain in the group and will not be discussed outside of the group, or discussed in such a way as to give out the identity of any member of the group. The identities of all participants of the focus group must be protected at all times. Please note that your participation in this research project will not prejudice you in any way. You are free to withdraw from participation at any stage should you feel that your rights are being infringed upon or if you feel that you are being inconvenienced by your participation. No member of the group will be forced to answer any question he or she does not wish to answer.

If you agree to these conditions of participation, as stated above, and you undertake to maintain confidentiality of information, also that you will not divulge information from the focus group discussions to any outside party, please sign this form in the space provided below.

\_\_\_\_\_ Signature of participant

\_\_\_\_\_ Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_ Institutional Affiliation

I thank you.

Roland Abrahams

UWC Student number: 9513643

NB. For verification please feel free to contact my supervisor:

Professor Moletsane (Faculty of Educational Psychology)

University of the Western Cape

Contact details: Landline: 021 959 2429.

## **APPENDIX F**

### **EDUCATORS FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM**

As part of the fulfilment of the requirements of the Masters in Education Degree (M.Ed.) of the University of the Western Cape (UWC), I, Roland Abrahams, am required to conduct a research. I have chosen to research the following topic:

#### **Challenges to parental involvement in homework assignments of learners in a historically disadvantaged primary school in Cape Town**

Participation is voluntary. Participants are expected to answer a series of questions in a focus group discussion session. All responses will be handled with confidentiality. Whatever is discussed within the group will remain in the group and will not be discussed outside of the group, or discussed in such a way as to give out the identity of any member of the group. The identities of all participants of the focus group must be protected at all times. Please note that your participation in this research project will not prejudice you in any way. You are free to withdraw from participation at any stage should you feel that your rights are being infringed upon or if you feel that you are being inconvenienced by your participation. No member of the group will be forced to answer any question he or she does not wish to answer.

If you agree to these conditions of participation, as stated above, and you undertake to maintain confidentiality of information, also that you will not divulge information from the focus group discussions to any outside party, please sign this form in the space provided below.

\_\_\_\_\_ Signature of participant

\_\_\_\_\_ Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_ Institutional Affiliation

I thank you.

Roland Abrahams

UWC Student number: 9513643

NB. For verification please feel free to contact my supervisor:

Professor Moletsane (Faculty of Educational Psychology)

The University of the Western Cape

Contact details:

Landline: 021 959 2429.

## **APPENDIX G**

### **INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

#### **Semi- structured interview with School Governing Body Focus group**

The semi-structured interview will be held at the convenience of the chairperson and the two school governing body members. The purpose of the interview will be explained again to the participants. A consent form would have been received from the three participants. Permission to do a voice recording of the session will be requested.

#### **QUESTIONS**

1. What is your definition of parental involvement in schoolwork? Discuss.
2. What is your view of the WCED's circular 0045/2005 on the guidelines to homework for your school and the learners? Discuss.
3. How is the school governing body involved in the academic work of the school and the learners with regards to homework assignments?
4. What role does the school governing body play in the school? Discuss.
5. Does the school have a homework policy? What was the SGB's input into the homework policy of the school?
6. How often does the chairperson involved with the teaching staff, learners and parents of the school?
7. How is the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 with regards to parental involvement in the school implemented by the SGB?
8. Discuss any challenges that you think parents face at home or in the community with regards to parental involvement in learners' homework assignments?
9. Why do think learners are performing at such a low level in numeracy and literacy?
10. What strategies have the governing body put in place to assist parents who are possibly experiencing difficulty in helping learners at home with homework?

## **APPENDIX H**

### **Semi- structured interview with school principal**

The interview will be held at the convenience of the principal. The office at the school could be the venue. The principal would be thanked for his/her time. The purpose of the interview would be explained. Permission would be requested for a voice recorder to be used during the interview session.

### **Questions**

1. Discuss your definition of parental involvement in schoolwork?
2. How are the Inclusive practices of Education White paper 6 (2001) implemented by the principal and educators of the school with regards to parents, learners and the community?
3. Discuss how the parents of the learners are involved in the learners' education especially homework assignments.
4. Describe the partnership between the parents, the community and the principal.
5. What does the school's homework policy state with regards to parental involvement in homework? Discuss also how the WCED's homework circular 0045/2005 influenced your school's homework policy.
6. What do you think the reasons are for learners' low academic achievement?
7. What practices has the principal put in place to assist parents who possibly experience challenges in helping learners at home with homework?
8. What do you as principal think should be done to improve the situation with regards to the low educational outcomes in Mathematics and Literacy at schools?



## **APPENDIX I**

### **Semi-structured interview with educator focus group**

The interview will preferably take place at the school as all educators would be present and it would be convenient. The educators would however be given the option to decide the venue and time of the interview. Educators will be thanked for their time. The nature and purpose of the interview will be explained. Permission will be requested to record the process. The consent forms and confidentiality would be discussed again.

#### Questions

1. What is understood by parental involvement in schoolwork?
2. What do you think the reasons are for the low academic achievement of learners?
3. What is the schools policy with regard to inclusive education practices? Keeping in mind Education White paper 6 (2001).
4. How have the parents been involved in the schools homework policy?
5. During your education studies what was the institutions coursework on parental involvement?
6. What would you describe as the challenges to parental involvement in schoolwork especially homework assignments that should be completed at home?
7. What is your view on giving the learners homework in relation to the WCED's circular 0045/2005 on guidelines to homework?

## APPENDIX J

### Semi-structured interview with individual learners

Learner interview would hopefully be conducted at the school as it would be convenient but the learner's parent would have the choice of venue. Consent forms would be received from the parents of the learners and the learners as the learners would be regarded as minors. The researcher will discuss the purpose of the interview with the learners. The questions will be asked in such a way that the learners would be able to understand therefore the wording of the questions might change during the actual semi- structured interview.

#### Questions

1. What do you think parental involvement in schoolwork is?
2. Who helps you with your homework at home?
3. How do your parents or family help you with your schoolwork at home?
4. What has your teacher told you about how the school wants you to do your homework?
5. What kinds of problems do you have when doing your schoolwork at home?
6. Do you go with your parents to the school meetings with your educator?
7. What does your parent tell you about what your educator had to say about your schoolwork?
8. What does your educator tell you about your homework?
9. How does your educator explain the homework that you have to do at home?
10. What activities do you when you get home from school?
11. Why do you think some learners don't pass their tests in numeracy and literacy?
12. Which library do your parents take you to?

## **APPENDIX K**

### **Semi-structured interview with parent focus group**

The interview will be held at the convenience of the parents. The interview could be held on a Saturday at a neutral venue or in the school library if permission is granted by the principal and school governing body. Parents would be thanked for the completed and signed consent forms. The purpose and confidentiality of the interview would be discussed again. Permission would be requested to use a voice recorder during the interview the process.

#### Questions

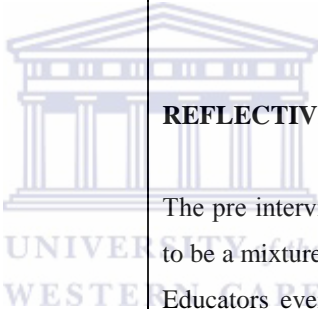
1. What is parental involvement in learners' schoolwork?
2. Discuss about the parent -teacher meetings that you attend?
3. What does the school's homework policy entail?
4. What activities is your child involved in after school?
5. How do you assist your child with homework at home?
6. What kinds of challenges do you experience when you have to help your child with homework?
7. Explain the activities of the community that you live in?
8. How does your child's homework compare to the homework you received when you were a student?
9. Explain your relationship with the principal and educators at the school?
10. Tell me about your work and family activities.

**APPENDIX L**

**FIELD NOTES**

**INTERVIEWS**

1. SCHOOL PRINCIPAL	
<p><b>Descriptive Notes</b></p> <p>I was welcomed into the principal’s office. We sat on either side of the table.</p> <p>Principal focussed on the questions.</p> <p>The phone rang twice during the session. Principal took the phone “off the hook.”</p> <p>The response to the WCED homework policy 0045/2005.</p> <p>At the end of the session the principal wished me well for the study and requested information for the school at the end of the study.</p>	<p><b>Reflective Notes</b></p> <p>The atmosphere was relaxed. I felt comfortable and I sensed that the principal was relaxed as well.</p> <p>An awkward moment as the interview stopped abruptly. Principal apologised and interview continued.</p> <p>It appeared that the principal did not really know the content of policy. He could not give the exact name and mentioned “that” when I used the policy number and description. He said that the educators were responsible for drawing up the school’s homework policy.</p> <p>This first interview at the site was pleasant and it made me very confident to conduct the remaining interviews with the participants.</p>
<p><b>2. PARENT FOCUS GROUP</b></p> <p>At the start of the interview the parents seemed a bit tense.</p>	<p><b>REFLECTIVE NOTES</b></p> <p>I think the tenseness of the moment was due the parents not knowing each other and possibly fear of speaking in a group.</p> <p>I think the comprehension of the questions might have been a challenge for the parents. This was possibly due to the language used by the researcher which was not</p>

<p>Parents waited for someone to respond to a question before they entered the discussion.</p> <p>At times some parents did not want to respond to certain questions. Parents were also hesitant at times to answer. Parents also at times agreed with what other speakers had said.</p> <p><b>3.FOUNDATION PHASE EDUCATOR FOCUS GROUP</b></p> <p>The interview was held in a foundation phase classroom after the learners had been dismissed. There was plenty of talking between the educators before the session started.</p> <p>The response to the WCED homework policy guideline 0045/2005 being implemented at the school.</p>	<p>the parents' home language. The researcher at times had to rephrase the research questions.</p> <p>I am of the opinion that parents did not want to share some of their challenges as they could have been slightly embarrassed. They did not want other parents to know about their problems. In the community there could be instances where neighbours speak negatively about others.</p> <p>In hindsight therefore I am of the opinion that parents would have been more comfortable to speak had it been an individual interview. Parents would then have shared more of their frustrations as I felt they wanted to reveal some matters they were unhappy about.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"> <b>REFLECTIVE NOTES</b></p> <p>The pre interview “talk” amongst the educators seemed to be a mixture of excitement and anxiousness. Educators eventually calmed down and were ready to field the questions.</p> <p>There was a silence after this question was posed. I assumed the silence was that the educators did not know the policy; or they were reflecting before answering; or there was no such policy at the school. I believe that there is uncertainty and confusion regarding the homework policy.</p> <p>The response from the educators was to a certain degree in conflict with the principal’s response to the same question. The educators did not want to say too much regarding the homework policy. They contradicted themselves by changing their responses. I assumed that at this stage they possibly feared “victimisation” as the foundation phase head of department was part of the focus group. The head of department left the interview</p>
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<p><b>4.INDIVIDUAL LEARNER FOCUS GROUP</b></p> <p>Learners were eager to speak and appeared very excited. Most of the research questions had to be rephrased so that the learners could comprehend what the researcher was asking</p> <p><b>5. SGB FOCUS GROUP</b></p> <p>Members spoke about what they were doing individually at the school e.g. they helped learners in the morning; they assisted when an educator was late and at times they helped learners in the community.</p>	<p>for a short while to attend to another matter that needed her attention. The session ended with all the educators very happy and excited.</p> <p><b>REFLECTIVE NOTES</b></p> <p>Learners' lack of understanding the meaning of the research questions reflected the lack of reading and educational stimulation in the home. At times learners did not have the vocabulary to express themselves. On reflection it was a good idea for my supervisor to recommend that the learners be interviewed individually as initially I wanted to conduct a learner group interview. Learners would have been too restless in a group and might have poked fun at each other.</p> <p><b>REFLECTIVE NOTES</b></p> <p>It was clear to the researcher that the SGB did not know what their role at the school was according to SASA 84 of 1996. The SGB members were working in isolation of each other. The school was therefore also not collaborating with the SGB members concerning any of the policies e.g. Homework policy and SASA 84 of 1996.</p>
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## Appendix M

2012:07:20

**UNIVERSITY WESTERN CAPE  
PSYCHOLOGYRESEARCH DEPT.**

Mr. Roland Abrahams has been granted permission by the School Governing Body and the Principal to conduct his UWC Research at our school.

We wish him all the best in his research.

Many Thanks



**PRINCIPAL  
E.C.PHILANDER**



**UNIVERSITY of the  
WESTERN CAPE**

## Appendix N

Mr Roland Abrahams  
Faculty of Education  
UWC

Dear Mr Roland Abrahams

**RESEARCH PROPOSAL: CHALLENGES TO PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS OF LEARNERS IN A HISTORICALLY DISADVANTAGED PRIMARY SCHOOL IN CAPE TOWN**

Your application to conduct the above-mentioned research in schools in the Western Cape has been approved subject to the following conditions:

1. Principals, educators and learners are under no obligation to assist you in your investigation.
2. Principals, educators, learners and schools should not be identifiable in any way from the results of the investigation.
3. You make all the arrangements concerning your investigation.
4. Approval for projects should be conveyed to the District Director of the schools where the project will be conducted.
5. Educators' programmes are not to be interrupted.
6. The Study is to be conducted from **16 July 2012 till 28 September 2012**
7. No research can be conducted during the fourth term as schools are preparing and finalizing syllabi for examinations (October to December).
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey, please contact \_\_\_\_\_ at the contact numbers above quoting the reference number?
9. A photocopy of this letter is submitted to the principal where the intended research is to be conducted.
10. Your research will be limited to the list of schools as forwarded to the \_\_\_\_\_ Education Department.
11. A brief summary of the content, findings and recommendations is provided to the Director.
12. The Department receives a copy of the completed report/dissertation/thesis addressed to:

**The Director:**

**Department**

**Private Bag  
CAPE TOWN**

We wish you success in your research.

Kind regards.

Signed: |

for: **HEAD: EDUCATION**

**DATE: 03 July 2012**



## Appendix O Extract of colour coded data analysis

### INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW WITH THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

The semi structured interview was held at the request of the principal in the school's office. I thanked the principal for affording me the opportunity to conduct the interview with him. I again explained the purpose of the interview and assured him of the confidentiality of the process. The atmosphere was relaxed as we sat opposite each other in the face to face interview. The telephone rang twice during the interview for which the principal apologised.

#### COLOUR CODE

Home : Challenges to parental involvement in the home

Community: Challenges to parental involvement in the community

School : Challenges to parental involvement in the school.

Conceptualisation of parental involvement

#### QUESTION 1: Discuss your definition of Parental Involvement in schoolwork.

**RESPONSE:** Definition of Parental Involvement to me is to stay in contact with the school and see how they (parents) can assist the educators with their children's education. My definition is to check up daily e.g. "What did you learn today?" "Did you get homework today?" "How can I as parent assist and do some work." "Check the child's books." Did the child do work today. Let the child sit and do some work.

#### QUESTION 2: How are the inclusive practices of Education White paper 6 of 2001 implemented by the principal and the school?

**RESPONSE:** Inclusive practice to me is very difficult. Most educators nowadays at our school are from the "old school." We did not get specialised training on how to help those learners who can't cope. They need specialised education so that they can develop "on their own steam." The teachers can't cope. The teachers sit with classes of 30 to 40 learners. We try at school but it is a problem.

#### QUESTION 3: Discuss how the parents are involved in the learners' homework assignments at home.

**RESPONSE:** Just about 10% of parents are involved. Major problems exist when it comes to homework that is not done. Parents must assist with things like reading at home. Children can't read. The learning support educator at the school helps parents and shows them how to assist the learners at home. Only a handful of parents attend the learning support educator's sessions. So parents are not interested.

#### QUESTION 4: Describe the partnership between the principal, the parents and the community.

**RESPONSE:** It is a poor community. The area is well known for violence and gangsterism. To the bulk of our parents the education of their children is not a priority. The parents have a culture of education not being important. To the parent their child is just somewhere for the day. They (parents)

are not clued up about education coming first. So they (parents) don't pay school fees. On open days children wear expensive clothes but the parents don't pay school fees. I think they (parents) can pay school fees.

**QUESTION 5: What does the school's homework policy state with regards to parental involvement in homework?**

**RESPONSE:** Parents should be involved. Last year each child had a book to write in the homework they had. Parents had to sign if the child did the homework but it was a futile exercise. Books were never checked and signed. It was a real struggle.

**QUESTION 6: Discuss your school's homework policy in the light of The Western Cape Education Department's homework guideline circular 0045/2005.**

**RESPONSE:** Each school must have a homework policy. I can't exactly say. At school we had various committee groups. Each group had to draw up a homework policy. That group of educators used that (WCED guideline 0045/2005) as a guideline. We don't want learners to receive too much homework so they (educators) had to draw up a policy.

**QUESTION 7: What do you think the reasons are for learners' low academic achievement in Numeracy and Literacy?**

**RESPONSE:** At the moment we struggle with comprehension. In most cases learners don't understand the instructions. That is the main problem. Once they know the instruction they won't have a problem. They can't read and comprehend that is a big problem. If they know instruction they won't have a problem.

**QUESTION 8: What do you think the challenges are that parents experience at home that prevents them from possibly helping their children at home with homework assignments?**

**RESPONSE:** I think in the bulk of the homes there are serious problems. In a few instances the children have serious baggage. Many of the parents of our learners were taught by the educators on our staff. The parents don't know their role as parents. Parents are too young to be parents. In many cases we have single parents. We have unemployment. Parents have no time. There is a drug problem in the area. The area that we are in is regarded as number one with regards to the drug problem in the Western Cape. The principals in our area were called to a meeting at the local police station where the police discussed the major drug situation in our community. Our learners are exposed to drugs. Parents use drugs in the home. These are the problems in the home. There is a lack of education of the parents in the home. Many of the parents left school during early high school and many have not matriculated.

**QUESTION 9: What practices has the school put in place to assist parents who have challenges?**

**RESPONSE:** That is a major problem because on the one side we are pushed by the Western Cape Education Department who wants the curriculum to go ahead. The work load is such that almost half of the learners have problems in class. The teachers don't have the expertise to deal with the problems that the learners have. So the teachers are in a catch twenty two situation. They want to sit and listen to assist with the problems of the learners but they (educators) have to complete the curriculum. Schools in these areas need a social worker like a learning support educator. Maybe one social worker for two schools is needed to help with the problems.

**QUESTION 10: How we can improve the outcomes in numeracy and literacy?**

**RESPONSE:** I am from the “old school.” I think if we go back where tables (multiplication tables) played a role. OBE (Outcomes based education) really messed up the whole education system. We are missing out. We must go back. The old way really helped. Maybe we should go back to the old way of teaching, where we heard singing of the times tables in the corridors. That really helped.

**QUESTION 11: How can the partnership between WCED; school, parents and community improve?**

**RESPONSE:** I think there is a big problem there because at the end of the day it seems the WCED don't want to listen what we are telling them. We can't even tell them the reason for poor results, that it could be this or that area. They just not interested. They (WCED) just want schools to perform. Schools A and B must be on the same level. If they could listen to our problems and help us in that way that will be a major partnership and then things could improve. At present they just not interested in listening to our side of things and how we struggle.



## Appendix P

### EXTRACT FROM EDUCATOR FOCUS GROUP SEMI – STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

**QUESTION 6: What would you describe as the challenges to parental involvement in homework assignments at home?**

#### RESPONSE

Most parents don't know what they must do with the children because they don't understand the new curriculum.

Language is a problem. The correct language is not spoken. The children don't understand the terms that are used.

Reading skills are lacking. The parents don't go the library. They don't take their children to the library because they as young parents didn't visit the library.

Maybe television is a problem. There is no stimulation with regards to reading skills. Parents don't tell children things e.g. I ask the children in class where they were over the weekend. They will say they were in the mall but they can't state in which mall they were.

They can't give detail about where exactly they were when they go out with the parents as they parents don't give them the finer detail.

Poverty is a challenge. They don't have money for electricity. Parents might use candle light. The circumstances in the home might not be acceptable.

Unemployment is also a challenge. Parents don't have work.

Homes are overcrowded. Children also stay in Wendy houses. There are many shacks or Wendy houses on one plot so it is very overcrowded.

Winter it is cold and wet. Some children suffer from TB.

The noise level is a problem. Drug abuse and alcohol is so rife in the home or the community. Children can't concentrate and the children don't sleep enough. Learners are tired when they come to school.

The time children go to sleep is a problem. The time that the food is ready to eat at night is also a problem that is if they have food to eat. Maybe the parent gets home late.

Socio economic conditions and home environment is a challenge.

In the neighbourhood, crime; drugs and "tik" is the biggest "sonde bok" (the greatest contributor to the challenges that the parents and the community face with regards to assisting their children). The parents are on drugs. It is detrimental to the children. I witnessed this past Friday how a child was affected by drugs. The socio economic

## APPENDIX Q

### EXTRACT FROM PARENT FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW SEMI-STRUCTURED

**QUESTION 6: What kinds of challenges do you experience when you have to help your child with homework at home?**

#### RESPONSE

When children come home I must clean the house. I must make the food. There is no one to help me. I am frustrated that I must help with homework and do the housework. I can help them but I expect children to know what they must do when they come home from school. They are then told at school what they must do. So I get angry and we fight. I then don't help them in the correct way. There is then friction between me and my children.

There is no space in the home. My in-laws are there to help. My child then cries. I then can't do homework. The next day I go to the principal to tell him I have a problem as I can't and my child can't do the work. He then says he will help me.

NB. One parent did not want to talk about the challenges.

I have three other children to attend to. There are too many distractions. My son can't concentrate because the others distract him. I am also very tired of walking to places and rushing to places the whole day.

There is no example from the teacher to show us how to do the homework. The child comes home with homework but the child does not know what to do so that we can understand. If there is no example I as parent can't help.

Mathematics is difficult. When I was at school I asked the teacher but today's children don't ask the teacher to say they don't understand. So I go to the teacher to ask.

**QUESTION 7: Explain the activities of the community that you live in.**

#### RESPONSE

There is a lot of gang violence, alcohol and abuse. I can't allow my child to play in the road. It is not good for our children to see.

## APPENDIX R

### EXTRACT FROM SCHOOL GOVERNING BODY INTERVIEW

**QUESTION 6: How is the South African School's Act (SASA) 84 of 1996 implemented by the SGB?**

#### RESPONSE

No I have not seen it or read it.

No.

What I can highlight about the SASA 84 of 1996 is that learners are to be at school and parents must see that children are at school.

**QUESTION 7: Discuss any challenges that you think parents might experience when helping their children with homework assignments at home.**

#### RESPONSE

The Mathematics is a challenge because the mathematics that we learnt those days is now totally different.

Lees is 'n groot problem. The parent tells the child to take a book to read but the parent does not say the words correctly.

Socio economic circumstances like large families. There are up to 10 children in a particular home. The learners don't have a proper place to do the homework. There is also a lot of noise from the television, family and friends.

Electricity is a big challenge.

Violence and gangsterism is a challenge.

Children are under peer pressure. Drugs like "tik" if you not in the crowd you are not the "guy." If you don't steal then you are a coward.

Shebeens (Smokkelhuise). Alcohol is sold on the road. The child goes to buy alcohol for the parent.

What is being taught at school is not being reinforced at home. Homework has to be reinforced but there is a lack of stimulation at home. There are no visuals to help children to engage in a book e.g. reading mathematics etc.

Children don't have food at home. We don't know if the child eats at home.

The child gets porridge at school. If there is no nutrition it could cause that child don't progress in schoolwork.

Victimisation of parents is a challenge.

## APPENDIX S

### INTERVIEW WITH GRADE 1 LEARNER INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW

#### QUESTION1: Who do you live with?

I live with my granny, my grandpa, my brothers and sister. My aunt and my cousin also live with us. My dad and my mom died, they were shot. I now have foster parents. During the week I stay with my granny and my aunt. I go to my foster parents over weekends and on Wednesdays.

#### QUESTION 2: Who helps you with homework?

My brother helps me with homework. I do it at the table. My brother is 9 years old. My granny also helps me with my homework on the bed. When I am at home my foster mom helps me with homework. My dad tells me what to do with the homework.

#### QUESTION 3: What does your educator say about homework?

We must write the homework in a new book. We must write the words and I don't know the other stuff because it looks so small. My teacher tells us the number of the page we must do in Reading. Homework is about writing words. My teacher gives sums on the board that I must do at home.

#### QUESTION 4: Is homework important?

Yes it is because homework will help me to learn. I want to pass.

#### QUESTION 5: Which library do you attend?

My foster mom and my granny take me to the library. We go with a van.

#### QUESTION 6: What activities do you do when you get home from school?

After I do my homework we play in the yard. We don't play in the street because they shoot the whole time at our place.

#### QUESTION 7: Why do you think some learners don't pass their tests in numeracy and literacy?

They don't pass because they don't do homework and they don't want to learn.

#### QUESTION 8: What other things must your family do before they help you with homework.

They must make food. My brother and sister must also do homework.

## APPENDIX T

### INTERVIEW WITH GRADE 3 LEARNER INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW

#### QUESTION 1: Who do you live with?

I live with my grandma. My mom also used to live there. My dad was not married to my mom. My mom, dad and brother lived in a room.

#### QUESTION 2: Who helps you with your homework?

My dad and my brother help me. I do the homework in my brother's room.

#### QUESTION 3: What does your educator say about homework?

My teacher says you had a lot of time to do your homework but you don't do it.

#### QUESTION 4: Why do you think homework is important?

Homework makes you clever.

#### QUESTION 5: Who attends the meetings with your educator?

My parents do not attend the meetings. My grandma goes to the meetings sometimes.

#### QUESTION 6: What other things must your family do before they help you with homework?

My dad goes out to get us food. He then comes home very late. My mom takes care of the baby. My granny must make food. They fetch my dad with a car.

#### QUESTION 7: Do you have difficulty with the homework?

Yes sometimes I can't do the homework.

#### QUESTION 8: Why do you think some learners don't pass their tests in numeracy and literacy?

The learners don't do their homework.

#### QUESTION 9: What activities happen in your area and what activities do you take part in?

They shoot and fight with knives. They shot my brother in his leg. My friends bought cigarettes and told me to smoke. When I did not want to my friend then hit me. My friend also bought "dagga" which I smoked. I became lame after smoking the "dagga". The "dagga" made me ill.

#### QUESTION 10: Which library do you attend?

My parents do not take me to the library.



## Appendix U

### Themes and categories that emerged from the data

THEME	CODE	CATEGORY	SUB CATEGORY
1. Parental Involvement	P.I.C.	Conceptualisation	
2. Parent / Family	P/F	Conceptualisation	
3. HOME. (Microsystem)	P.L.I	Parent / learner interaction with homework	
	C.P.I	Current PI practices with regard to homework	
	Hw.Ch Stim	Challenges of PI in homework assignments	Lack of stimulation in home
	SEF. P.Un. il	Socio- economic factors	Poverty, illiteracy
			Unemployment
	L	Language	
	S.P	Single parent	
	T	Time	
	L.Ed.	Lack of education	
	Div	Divorce	
	Dr	Drugs in the home	
4. School(mesosystem) factors affecting parental involvement in homework.	Pol. Hw.P WP6 CAPS SASA	Policies	WCED HW guidelines 0045/2005 School HW policy White Paper 6 Inclusive Education SASA 84 of 1996 CAPS document
	Trng	Principal Educators	Educator/principal training in parental involvement.
	SGB	SGB	SASA 84 of 1996
5. WCED (exosystem) factors affecting HW at home	Pol CAPS SASA	Policies	Curriculum and assessment policy statement (CAPS) SASA 84 of 1996
6. Community (macro system) societal and social values.	Com Dr.V.C.	Culture of violence, crime, drugs and gangsterism.	
7. Chronosystem	Chro Fam str.	Developmental changes in the learner Changes in family structure.	

## **Appendix V**

### **COLLECTIVE RESPONSES FROM THE PARTICIPANTS TO THE SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS**

**QUESTION:** How have you been involved in the school's homework policy especially with regards to the WCED's circular 0045/2005 on guidelines to homework?

#### **RESPONSE FROM SCHOOL PRINCIPAL**

Each school must have a homework policy. I can't exactly say. At school we had various committee groups. Each group had to draw up a homework policy. That group of educators used that (WCED guideline 0045/2005) as a guideline. We don't want learners to receive too much homework so they (educators) had to draw up a policy.

Parents should be involved. Last year each child had a book to write in the homework they had. Parents had to sign if the child did the homework but it was a futile exercise. Books were never checked and signed. It was a real struggle.

#### **RESPONSE FROM EDUCATOR FOCUS GROUP**

I was not part of the drawing up of the school's homework policy, so I can't answer that but I know the school has a homework policy.

Yes, all the teachers had a part that they were busy with, with regards to the homework policy. Some educators were busy with the truancy policy.

Not all of us were involved in the homework policy. I think the grade three Head of Department was involved.

We do have a homework policy and it is expected of children to get homework daily. The homework must be supervised and the next day to be checked, and basically that is about it. The homework must cover the two main subjects that are Mathematics and Languages.

The homework policy is in the office.

No we never had any other policies when we drew up our policy. We never had any other policy of the WCED on the table. Maybe somebody else remembers. Sorry maybe it was

there but it was not told to us that it is the WCED guidelines. I don't know if I speak under correction but I think the principal might have had such a policy when we drew up our homework policy. He could have handed it over to the homework policy development group. We were not part of the group who drew up the homework policy.

Some teachers feel that if you give children homework to do at home then about 10%; 2% and 3% don't do the homework at home.

My personal opinion is that even if it is about 10% of the class that does the homework, then at least 10 parents gave their attention to the homework. The next time it will be 20% and more parents will then be involved. We must not every time say that there are no parents who are interested as there are actually parents who are interested in their children's homework. We focus too much on the 90% who don't do their homework. We can convert the 90% who don't do their homework.

#### **RESPONSE FROM PARENT FOCUS GROUP**

It (homework) must be done. The homework must be done or they send your child to detention or some form of punishment for not doing homework.

I am aware of the policy.

Homework has to be done a certain way. It has to be neat. It can't be cramped up that's the way I understand it.

How I understand the homework policy is that the teacher says they do get homework every single day and one must see that they do it otherwise there will be consequences. But to my knowledge it is never done that way. The consequences are that if they don't do homework, they will get a verbal warning. The second offence is a written warning. The third offence the parent will be called in to speak to the School Governing Body (SGB).

I don't know about the homework policy.

The teachers in the past there was nothing that the teacher showed me how to do the work according to my child's ability. If my child does not do homework he gets punished.

I have a child that is slow. It makes me frustrated. The homework must be done today. If he doesn't do it he will be punished or sent home for not doing the homework.

If I say how it must be done. I say I can give you the answer but because my method is not the same. The child says no because he don't do it like that in the class.

### **RESPONSE FROM SGB FOCUS GROUP**

My view is that I have helped a few children now because the parents couldn't help. The children did not understand the instruction from the teacher. The teacher did not explain how it should be done. I went to another teacher in the community to help me. This teacher said the homework that was given was for a grade 2 learner who would not even be able to read the work.

The WCED homework policy is a good thing because with repetition and practice you can get better at it. The broader picture is that we in a disadvantaged area. The parents as much as teachers want to issue homework but some parents work and they don't know how to interpret homework. They also don't know how to assist learners to get to know.

Homework is a good thing but our parents are not skilled enough to assist the learners.

The guidelines (circular 0045/2005) most SGB members have not seen it. One SGB member must have seen it but forgot.

SGB input into school's homework, I have not been there.

The homework policy has been drawn up some years back already but has to be reviewed.

No I have not seen the homework policy.

I have not been to a SGB meeting yet because I was in hospital. I might still see the homework policy.

### **QUESTION 2: What is the school's policy with regards to inclusive educational practices according to White Paper 6 of 2001?**

#### **RESPONSE FROM SCHOOL PRINCIPAL**

Inclusive practice to me is very difficult. Most educators nowadays at our school are from the "old school." We did not get specialised training on how to help those learners who can't cope. They need specialised education so that they can develop "on their own steam." The teachers can't cope. The teachers sit with classes of 30 to 40 learners. We try at school but it is a problem.

## **RESPONSE FROM EDUCATOR FOCUS GROUP**

Personally I would like to say that I have no idea what you are talking about. We are so packed up with new curriculum. First Outcomes based education (OBE); presently it is the Curriculum and Policy Statement (CAPS). We focus so much on CAPS that there is no time to maybe discuss policy which is very important as these policies can help us to solve many problems inside and outside the classroom. What the department wants from us they expect from us. Firstly they want a preparation book they want more administrative stuff.

Does the school have a policy on inclusivity? "I didn't see it." At this moment I can't put my finger on it.

**QUESTION: Discuss how the parents are involved in the learners' homework assignments at home.**

## **RESPONSE FROM SCHOOL PRINCIPAL**

Just about 10% of parents are involved. Major problems exist when it comes to homework that is not done. Parents must assist with things like reading at home. Children can't read. The learning support educator at the school helps parents and shows them how to assist the learners at home. Only a handful of parents attend the learning support educator's sessions. So parents are not interested.

## **RESPONSE FROM EDUCATOR FOCUS GROUP**

I send the children's books home so that the parents can sign the books so that I can see if the children did the homework but as I said earlier many of the parents write the children's homework only to show that the homework was done. I saw in the test that the children wrote recently that they could not do the work although the work was given as homework. If they had done the homework instead of the parents then all should have passed the test but about 39% of the pupils failed the test. This proved that the learners did not do the homework but that the parents did it for them.

Homework is definitely important for consolidation but parental involvement is not what it should be.

Homework is sent home but the parents write it. I can see that the handwriting in the homework book is not the same as in the child's workbooks. The code one child suddenly has all the work correct and the handwriting is very neat but I can see it is not the child's work. Then I feel demoralised and I don't want to give homework.

I write a letter to invite the parents to a meeting with me. The parents then don't arrive for the meeting.

You also talk to the parents about it, the child says next time it won't happen again that the parent does the homework but then it just happens again.

I feel a grade three child understands better and I would expect this child to do his homework. What I do is that I send the child's book home on a Friday for the parents to sign. I don't want to surprise the parents; they must know exactly where the child stands with regards to the schoolwork. They will be able to see this when they see the child's books. I would then expect a signature and a written response from the parent but only a few parents do this.

### **RESPONSE FROM PARENT FOCUS GROUP**

If he comes from school I ask him if he has homework. At 8pm at night he tells me he has homework. I then scold him because I asked him earlier in the day if he had homework. My husband then scolds him. I then say I won't help. Later I get up to help him but then he does not know what to do.

My grandpa says leave the child if he does not want to learn.

I will ask the child if he has homework or not. I will ask him to take it out and show me.

He does not get homework but the teacher does not also help him.

I first try to understand what is required. I help both my daughter and son at the same time with their homework.

My daughter says she has homework but they are too playful and don't want to do homework. They come late night to tell me they have homework then the dad scolds.

Today's children are not like us when we were at school. You can't help them late at night. They should be told by the teacher to do homework as soon as they come home from school.

When I was at school and given homework I did it immediately but things are different as time before and now. I tried different methods. I become “moeilik” when we fight because I don’t understand the homework myself. I let my child read. With Mathematics it is a different set up so I just let my child read all the time. We read most of the time.

If I don’t understand the work at times then my child shows me how to do it.

## **LEARNER RESPONSES**

### **Who helps you with homework at home?**

My brother is still at school. My mommy helps me sometimes. My mommy says I must fill in the numbers. I want my mom to help me with my homework. I also want my dad to help me. He can’t help me because he has to do special jobs.

My mom and aunt sometimes help me. They don’t give me answers they tell me what I must write.

My mom and my sister help me. When I struggle with homework I ask my mom or my sister to help me. My dad also helps. I do homework at the table. I write homework in my diary. When my mom struggles to help me then she says my sister who is at Eros must help me.

My sister who is 17 years old helps me. If my sister does not know how to help me then she says I must ask my dad to help me. If I don’t know sometimes then I ask my granny to help me. When I stay with my granny then another friend also helps me, she is 15 years old. I also do my homework on the bed.

My brother helps me with homework. I do it at the table. My brother is 9 years old. My granny also helps me with my homework on the bed. When I am at home my foster mom helps me with homework. My dad tells me what to do with the homework.

My mom is tired when she comes home but she still helps me with my homework. I do the homework on the table in my mom’s room. My sister who is in grade 7 helps me when I have difficulty with the work. My mom sometimes says that I must do it myself.

My dad and my brother help me. I do the homework in my brother’s room.

**QUESTION: What do you think the challenges are that parents experience at home that prevents them from possibly helping their children at home with homework assignments?**

**RESPONSE FROM PRINCIPAL**

I think in the bulk of the homes there are serious problems. In a few instances the children have serious baggage. Many of the parents of our learners were taught by the educators on our staff. The parents don't know their role as parents. Parents are too young to be parents. In many cases we have single parents. We have unemployment. Parents have no time. There is a drug problem in the area. The area that we are in is regarded as number one with regards to the drug problem in the Western Cape. The principals in our area were called to a meeting at the local police station where the police discussed the major drug situation in our community. Our learners are exposed to drugs. Parents use drugs in the home. These are the problems in the home. There is a lack of education of the parents in the home. Many of the parents left school during early high school and many have not matriculated.

**RESPONSE FROM EDUCATOR FOCUS GROUP**

Most parents don't know what they must do with the children because they don't understand the new curriculum.

Language is a problem. The correct language is not spoken. The children don't understand the terms that are used.

Reading skills are lacking. The parents don't go the library. They don't take their children to the library because they as young parents didn't visit the library.

Maybe television is a problem. There is no stimulation with regards to reading skills. Parents don't tell children things e.g. I ask the children in class where they were over the weekend. They will say they were in the mall but they can't state in which mall they were.

They can't give detail about where exactly they were when they go out with the parents as they parents don't give them the finer detail.

Poverty is a challenge. They don't have money for electricity. Parents might use candle light. The circumstances in the home might not be acceptable.



Unemployment is also a challenge. Parents don't have work.

Homes are overcrowded. Children also stay in Wendy houses. There are many shacks or Wendy houses on one plot so it is very overcrowded.

Winter it is cold and wet. Some children suffer from TB.

The noise level is a problem. Drug abuse and alcohol is so rife in the home or the community. Children can't concentrate and the children don't sleep enough. Learners are tired when they come to school.

The time children go to sleep is a problem. The time that the food is ready to eat at night is also a problem that is if they have food to eat. Maybe the parent gets home late.

Socio economic conditions and home environment is a challenge.

In the neighbourhood, crime; drugs and "tik" is the biggest "sonde bok." The parents are on drugs. It is detrimental to the children. I witnessed this past Friday how a child was affected by drugs. The socio economic circumstances are challenging. The grandpa told me the mom was unemployed and the mom was not home. I wanted to speak to the parent but I couldn't. The grandma also did not know where the mother was.

The psychologist at the WCED who sometimes has to place a child at a special school gives a form to fill in the background details of the family. The pregnancy details of the mom say that she was on "tik" or alcohol. In this way you get the first hand information about the drug usage of the parent. Cigarette smoking is also another problem. Most children's poor academic achievement has its origins in the mother's womb during the pregnancy stage.

Fetal Alcohol syndrome (FAS): Before children are born they are already affected by the drugs. When children come to class for the first time we see the signs e.g. children can't sit still in class or the child does not respond even when the child is scolded. When the grandma fetches the child she also speaks about what happened during the pregnancy stage. Now we hear that most of these children's mothers have died because they either had HIV or TB or it was the drugs that caused the death.

## **RESPONSE FROM PARENT FOCUS GROUP**

When children come home I must clean the house. I must make the food. There is no one to help me. I am frustrated that I must help with homework and do the housework. I can help

them but I expect children to know what they must do when they come home from school. They are then told at school what they must do. So I get angry and we fight. I then don't help them in the correct way. There is then friction between me and my children.

There is no space in the home. My in-laws are there to help. My child then cries. I then can't do homework. The next day I go to the principal to tell him I have a problem as I can't and my child can't do the work. He then says he will help me.

NB. One parent did not want to talk about the challenges.

I have three other children to attend to. There are too many distractions. My son can't concentrate because the others distract him. I am also very tired of walking to places and rushing to places the whole day.

There is no example from the teacher to show us how to do the homework. The child comes home with homework but the child does not know what to do so that we can understand. If there is no example I as parent can't help.

Mathematics is difficult. When I was at school I asked the teacher but today's children don't ask the teacher to say they don't understand. So I go to the teacher to ask.

### **RESPONSE FROM SGB FOCUS GROUP**

The Mathematics is a challenge because the mathematics that we learnt those days is now totally different.

Lees is 'n groot problem. The parent tells the child to take a book to read but the parent does not say the words correctly.

Socio economic circumstances like large families. There are up to 10 children in a particular home. The learners don't have a proper place to do the homework. There is also a lot of noise from the television, family and friends.

Electricity is a big challenge.

Violence and gangsterism is a challenge.

Children are under peer pressure. Drugs like "tik" if you not in the crowd you are not the "guy." If you don't steal then you are a coward.

Shebeens (Smokkelhuise) Alcohol is sold on the road. The child goes to buy alcohol for the parent.

What is being taught at school is not being reinforced at home. Homework has to be reinforced but there is a lack of stimulation at home. There are no visuals to help children to engage in a book e.g. reading mathematics etc.

Children don't have food at home. We don't know if the child eats at home.

The child gets porridge at school. If there is no nutrition it could cause that children don't progress in schoolwork.

Victimisation of parents is a challenge.

Gangs recruit learners which lead to absenteeism.

Mathematics and reading are poor because they don't have an understanding of it. The child gets it at school but don't get it at home because the parents can't read.

At school we can identify with educators who have to meet the curriculum. There is only so much you can do at a time. The learners cannot absorb all the work.

Learners take work home thinking that the parents can help at

**The educational outcomes in Mathematics and Literature in our school are not good.**

**How do we improve the situation?**

### **EDUCATOR RESPONSES**

The parents don't speak the language we speak.

The beautiful workbooks that the WCED sent for the pupils are not in line with the planning we do. The workbook and the documents don't agree.

The mathematics work book is divided into week one and two etc. There are sums in the work book for a particular week but we would not have covered that yet in our planning. The document is therefore not aligned to the workbook. There is no link between the document and the workbook. I do my preparation according to the WCED document but when I link it to my workbook for the learners then it is not on the same page.

There is no place for repetition as you have to teach something else every week. There is therefore no consolidation of the work taught. There is not enough time for consolidation. A school quarter of 10 weeks we have to plan for 10 weeks so the time according to the planning schedule does not allow time for consolidation.

Parental involvement workshops have to be created to make them aware of the work that the children are doing. The parents don't have the language so we can have a class with them and explain to them this is the work your child is supposed to do.

"The same "says another educator.

I think when it comes to Afrikaans the child's home language; one of the biggest problems is that there is no library! There is one little van library in the road but the children are so widely spread here where they live. What makes my heart sore is that I will tell them, "Tomorrow is Wednesday, it is library day remember!" It is so easy to join a library these days. The child can fill in the forms but what is heart sore is that some of the parents are not interested, so they don't even find the time to walk with the children to the library to fetch the forms. The reading that the children get at school is the only reading they get as it stops when they leave the school gates in the afternoon. It will help the child a lot if he can read regularly not only at the school but at home as well. We can make parents aware of how important school is because I don't think the parents realise how important schoolwork is.

The parent must also work with the child if we want to develop the child holistically.

There is sometimes no time due to our big classes as well. We have more than 30 learners in a class. We can't do one-on-one interventions everyday with the learners. If the parent can help us at home then it will strengthen the child.

We also hear daily on television that reading is important. Also reports say that the Western Cape's children can't read and do numeracy. The parents don't even read bedtime stories to their children anymore like in previous years.

Parents also have the excuse that the children could not do the homework because he attended Moslem School (Madrassa). Parents then use the excuse of Moslem school for children not doing homework. Sometimes the child gets home at 5pm or 6pm so the parents say there was no time for their child to do homework.

## **RESPONSE FROM PRINCIPAL**

I am from the “old school.” I think if we go back where tables (multiplication tables) played a role. OBE (Outcomes based education) really messed up the whole education system. We are missing out. We must go back. The old way really helped. Maybe we should go back to the old way of teaching, where we heard singing of the times tables in the corridors. That really helped.

## **RESPONSE FROM SGB**

When the children come to school the educators asks us as SGB members to go into the class to help. What we had was a homework programme where educators and the learning support educator and some WCED officials created material at workshops to help learners in the foundation phase. This was done on Thursday afternoons. The last two years was quite successful. I think the programme is still running. Our greatest challenge is finance as a resource. There is so much that we can do but we need assistance to help. Some parents are interested and some parents are not interested so the project fizzles out as there are no finances.

## **QUESTION TO LEARNERS: WHO DO YOU LIVE WITH?**

### **RESPONSES:**

I live with my mum, my brother, ma Kathy, my uncle, and my aunty. My dad stays in a different house around the corner. I see my dad Saturdays and Sundays. I also see my dad at the taxi rank.

My aunt, my mommy and my twin baby sisters. My dad went away. He does not live here. I don't know where he lives. He lives overseas. I don't remember his name.

I live with my dad now. My mom lives in a Wendy house but I don't live there. We don't have pictures of my schoolwork on the walls. We only have Muslim stuff on the walls.

My dad, my granny and I live in a wood and iron shack. There is no schoolwork on the walls. My mom has died. On school days I stay with my granny. Weekends I go home to my dad.

I live with my granny, my grandpa, my brothers and sister. My aunt and my cousin also live with us. My dad and my mom died, they were shot. I now have foster parents. During the

week I stay with my granny and my aunt. I go to my foster parents over weekends and on Wednesdays.

I live with my mom; my sister and brother. My mom works in Claremont by Pep stores. My dad works with K.C. Towing. My dad stays by my granny in a different house.

I live with my grandma. My mom also used to live there. My dad was not married to my mom. My mom, dad and brother lived in a room.

**QUESTION: Describe the partnership between the school, the parents and the community.**

**RESPONSE FROM PRINCIPAL:** It is a poor community. The area is well known for violence and gangsterism. So they (parents) don't pay school fees. On open days children wear expensive clothes but the parents don't pay school fees. I think they (parents) can pay school fees.

**RESPONSE FROM PARENTS**

There is a lot of gang violence, alcohol and abuse. I can't allow my child to play in the road. It is not good for our children to see.

**QUESTION TO LEARNERS: What activities do you do at home after school?**

I play in the road. They shoot in our area.

They shoot and fight with knives. They shot my brother in his leg. My friends bought cigarettes and told me to smoke. When I did not want to my friend then hit me. My friend also bought "dagga" which I smoked. I became lame after smoking the "dagga". The "dagga" made me ill.

I go to Moslem school. I don't play outside because it is too dangerous the cars can knock you. I play with my best friend. They shoot guns and fight in the area.

After I do my homework we play in the yard. We don't play in the street because they shoot the whole time at our place.

I play in the court or I play by my dad in the yard. There are gangsters in our area. They hit you. They take the children's stuff then they run away. They also shot in the area.

**QUESTION: During your education studies what was the institutions coursework on parental involvement in schoolwork?**

**RESPONSE FROM EDUCATORS**

For me it was a lot of theoretical things in the classroom. Dealing with the parent for me I had to learn, for me it was dealing with parents. The college therefore did not prepare me enough to deal with parents.

I studied many years ago and there was no information on how to deal with parents.

In 1976 and 1977 when I studied I can't remember that I was taught on how to deal with parents. Maybe there was something but I can't remember it.

**QUESTION: What do you think the reasons are for learners' low academic achievement?**

**RESPONSE FROM EDUCATORS**

I feel the children are not prepared enough. They don't have the foundation consolidated. In our case most of our children are not stimulated at home. The perceptual activities are not consolidated. We must complete the curriculum so we rush through the perceptual activities.

The circumstances at home and the learners don't have place to do the homework. The parents are also not interested. The circumstances are that the parents use drugs and alcohol. There is also over population in the home or the homes are crowded. Children are possibly physically abused. Children are scared to go home in the afternoon; they want to go to other friends' home because at their own home there is not enough food. There is not warmth and love in the home as well. They don't have their own beds so they share beds and children don't also get attention. There is also no warmth because the homes are cold. There is also not enough love and affection shown towards the children.

Many parents are also very young; they don't know how to care for themselves. They also don't know what it is to care for their children. We see the young parents who bring their children to school. By care I don't only mean food but also TLC (tender loving care). They don't know how to express TLC to their children.

Many learners are also brought up by their grandmothers. Who must look at the academic side of the child at school as the mother is too young as the previous educator said. The

grandmother has to shoulder this burden. The grandmothers are also too old so they don't understand the schoolwork anymore. Now the child must go and play and fend for himself because the grandma does not understand. The mother is also not there. The grandmother says directly, "I don't understand the work." Grandmother maybe did not go to school as well to get an education. Grandma might not even be able to read and write. So she maybe wants to help the child but she does not have the skill and knowledge to help. She might also have to look after so many children, maybe not only her own children but other children in the community As well. She must also provide food for the children so the burden is on the grandmother.

Poverty plays a big role as well. Where unemployment occurs the parent only depends on the government grant. There is no money for enough food so nutrition also is very important. A child that does not eat and sleep properly you can't expect that child to come to school the next day and focus completely on his schoolwork. This is also where drugs and alcohol comes in because the parent just has time for drugs now. There is now no quality time spent with the child. When the parent is under the influence of drugs or alcohol that parent has no time for the child. The parent only has time for the drugs. The parent doesn't even care about bathing the child. The parent just uses the school as a dumping ground.

The school feeding scheme is a good thing by the WCED. Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays the children get porridge but before they come to class they must have eaten their porridge at the feeding room already. The problem now is that the children come late and they miss out on eating their porridge at school. The children now also did not eat at home so they are hungry in class.

**QUESTION: Discuss the parent teacher meetings that you attend.**

### **RESPONSE FROM PARENTS**

It is about your child. How your child progresses in class. What the teacher talks to you about it shows how your child worked through the year and how they did during the year. It is also based on the problems the child is going through e.g. attention.

In the meetings they also only speak about money e.g. when the parent must pay school fees. They also chuck your children home if they don't pay school fees. Without money they can't learn.



It is based on the problems the child is going through.

For me I went to school here but the teachers did not speak to me about money. They just talk about your child's problems at school and suggestions on how to help your child.

Without money your child can't progress and learn.

**QUESTION: How is the SGB involved in conducting business with regards to the homework?**

**RESPONSE FROM SGB**

To see that things are done properly. If it is not done properly it will affect the children at school. As a SGB member we have children at the school and it will certainly affect the interest of the child.

My purpose is to be an intermediate between parent, educator and management of the school. My purpose is also to oversee and help to draw up policy around school governance.

**QUESTION: How is the South African School's Act (SASA) 84 of 1996 implemented by the SGB?**

**RESPONSE FROM SGB**

No I have not seen it or read it.

No.

What I can highlight about the SASA 84 of 1996 is that learners are to be at school and parents must see that children are at school.

**QUESTION: What role does the SGB and parents play in the parent teacher meetings?**

**RESPONSE FROM SGB**

I have not experienced anything yet.

If a meeting is called by the school, the parents are there to find out where learners are at and if progress has been made. If there is a shortfall then bring in the school's educator support team (EST) to help learners who don't meet the requirements.



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