Matsidiso Naong & Itumeleng Morolong

Challenges to parental involvement in school governance

First submission: 12 July 2010
Acceptance: 28 February 2011

Many parents find it difficult to embrace their governance role within public schools, with the exception of those within elementary schools. Despite the intention of the South African Schools Act of 1996 to change this situation, some primary schools reported a mixed-bag of responses regarding parental involvement in school governance. This article reveals that "young to middle-aged" parents display immense energy, inquisitiveness, and a desire to lead and be involved, while their older counterparts still accept and respect the unfolding of events at school without question.

Uitdagings rakende die betrokkenheid van ouers in die bestuur van skole

Baie ouers vind dit moeilik om hul bestuursrol binne openbare skole aan te gryp met uitsondering van ouers in aanvangsonderrigskole. Ten spyte van die poging van die Suid-Afrikaanse Skolewet van 1996 om die situasie te verander, verklaar sommige primêre skole 'n mengelmoes van reaksies aangaande ouers se betrokkenheid in die bestuur van skole. Die artikel toon dat "jonger tot middeljarige" ouers baie energie en nuuskierigheid vertoon en 'n behoefte het om leiding te gee en betrokke te wees, terwyl hul ouer eweknieë steeds net die gebeure by die skool sonder enige bevraagtekening aanvaar en respekteer.

Dr M N Naong, School of Teacher Education, Faculty of Humanities, Central University of Technology, Private Bag X20539, Bloemfontein 9300 & Mr I P Morolong, Senior English Teacher, Lereko Secondary School, Mangaung, Bloemfontein 9301; E-mail: mnaong@cut.ac.za.

Acta Academica
2011 43(2): 236-263
ISSN 0587-2405

<http://www.ufs.ac.za/ActaAcademica>

SUN MEDIA
BLOEMFONTEIN

One of the hallmarks of a democratic education system is its character of inclusivity, transparency and accommodativeness of all relevant stakeholders, in particular as far as the parent body is concerned. The promotion of the active participation of parents in the education of their children is a growing worldwide phenomenon (Ramisur 2007: 1). Bandlow (2009: 20) states that there are numerous definitions of parental involvement. Her extensive study shows that Fan (2001) focuses on parents' aspirations for their children's academic success; communication with their children about school; participation in school activities; communication with teachers about their children, and supervision of children at home. Similarly, Jeynes (2003) finds that parental involvement is positively related to the academic achievement of children regardless of race, while Deforges & Abouchar (2003) describe effective involvement initiatives as the provision of a safe and stable environment; intellectual stimulation in the home; parent-child discussion; the significant presence of good role models who exhibit constructive social and educational values. These exemplify good citizenship, hold aspirations for personal fulfilment, and serve as a model of participation in the work of the school and school governance.

In terms of the *Parental involvement in education* (Sheldon [*s a*]) document, parental involvement includes a wide range of behaviours, but generally refers to parents' and family members' use and investment of resources in their children's schooling. These investments can take place in or outside school, with the intention of improving children's learning. Parental involvement at home can include activities such as discussions about school, helping with homework, and reading with children. Involvement at school may include parents volunteering to assist in the classroom, attending workshops, or attending school plays and sporting events. In addition, the typology of Epstein *et al* (1997) is universally revered and regarded as the international benchmark for parental involvement. This typology proposes a framework of six types of parental involvement:

- Parenting – efforts to assist parents with child-rearing skills and establishing home environments that support children as students;
- Communicating – school-to-home and home-to-school communication about school programmes and children's progress;
- Volunteering – recruiting and training families as volunteers and audiences at the school or other locations to support learners and school programmes;
- Learning at home – involving parents in home-based learning, including the provision of information and ideas to families about how to help their children at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning;
- Decision-making – including parents as participants in school decision-making, governance, and advocacy by means of parent-teacher organisations, school councils, committees, and other parent organisations, and
- Collaborating with the community – involving parents in school-community collaborations to strengthen school programmes, family practices, as well as student learning and development.

This article investigates parental involvement from the governance role as promulgated in the South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996) which provides for the establishment of school governing bodies with considerable powers at all public schools. These governing bodies should include the school principal, and elected representatives of parents, teachers, and non-teaching staff. In secondary schools, governing bodies may also have co-opted members without voting rights. Governing bodies are juridical persons in South Africa. The next section reflects on the history that led to regulated parental involvement in school governance.

1. Theoretical framework: the governance role of parents

Prior to the South African democratic dispensation, governance of schools in the erstwhile Dept of Education and Training seemed the sole responsibility of the school principal and his/her

management team, with minimal involvement of parents, if any. As a result of this situation and as part of the process of rebuilding the school system, the South African government passed the South African Schools Act (1996) "... in an attempt to give parents the responsibility of managing the schools their children attend and of legitimising parental participation in the life of the school" (HSRC & EPC 2005: 120). Edge (2000) defines school-level governance as a radical form of decentralisation (Mncube 2009: 84). According to Msila (2004: 301), "... the South African Schools Act provides formal power in education to parents as well as communities". In addition, he contends that the South African Schools Act creates the expectation in parents to be meaningful partners in school governance. However, "... questions of school governance, and the forms of school community relationships it expresses, have been a key concern of education policy in South Africa" (Christie 2001: 56). The Act also requires that schools establish school governing bodies (SGBs) comprising parents, teachers, students (in secondary schools) and members of school support staff (Van Wyk 2004, HSRC & EPC 2005). Section 23(9) of the South African Schools Act 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" (Niitembu 2006: 48).

It is evident that the need for parental involvement in school governance appears to provide the impetus for the introduction of a fresh perspective on education in South Africa. In addition, the Act is an attempt to legislate the concept of participatory democracy, giving parents a more profound role to play in their children's education (Ramisur 2007: 2). The passing of the South African Schools Act in 1996 shifted the responsibility of decision-making in schools from the principal and educators, with minimal participation from parents, to a more decentralised and co-operative approach. The Act created SGBs which are required to assist the principal in the management of schools. Parents must be in the majority on these bodies. SGBs have numerous important functions to perform, ranging from policy formulation for schools to recommendations for the appointment

of personnel at schools. However, as ready as the country may have appeared to be in preparation for a democratic education system, there are still major obstacles to overcome in terms of meaningful parental participation.

Ramisur (2007: 11) contends that the South African Schools Act holds that learners, parents and educators promote the acceptance and responsibility for the organisation, funding and governance of public schools in partnership with the state. This implies that parents must, by law, participate in school activities. It also implies a shift in the traditional role parents used to play by merely being members of parent-teacher associations (Louw 2004). Parents now have the capacity to determine what is in the best educational interest of the child.

Parental involvement, in particular governance, has recently become a common feature within the broader educational discourse in South Africa. Documentary evidence shows that many governments in the developed and developing worlds support a greater decentralisation of school governance and the empowerment of interest groups for a variety of perceived political, economic and educational benefits (*cf* Ngidi 2004, Mestry & Grobler 2007: 176). The role of parental involvement in education has received greater interest. Epstein's model of parental involvement suggests that home/school communication should be a two-way communication and reflect a co-equal partnership between families and schools (*cf* Lemmer & Van Wyk 2004, Mncube 2009: 84).

Research on the effects of parental involvement has shown a consistent, positive relationship between parents' engagement in their children's education and learner outcomes. Studies have also shown that parental involvement is associated with learner outcomes, such as lower dropout and truancy rates;[1] higher grade-points averages (*cf* Gutman & Midgley 2000), and increased achievement in reading (*cf* Senechal & LeFevre 2002). Whether or not parental involvement can improve learner outcomes is no longer an issue. Feinstein & Sabates

1 *Cf* Bandlow 2009: 49, Deforges & Abouchar 2003, Fan 2001, Henderson & Mapp 2002: 24, Jeynes 2003.

(2006), Harris & Chrispeels (2006), and Ramisur (2007) focus on how parental involvement affects learners; why parents do and do not get involved in their children's education, and what role schools and teachers can play in creating parental involvement (Sheldon [*s a*]).

Prior to the democratic education dispensation in South Africa, parents had no wish to interfere in professional matters relating to the organisation and governance of the internal affairs of the school (Mncube 2009). It is alleged that the reason for this was that "... unconcern was a phenomenon which often occurred in modern society and a lack of interest in the parent community" (Kauffman *et al* 2001). For many schools in South Africa, in particular the historically disadvantaged schools, the involvement of parents as governors is relatively new, as the first SGBs took office as recently as 1997. Limited training for all governors makes it difficult for school principals and SGB members to work together constructively (Heystek 2006: 475).

This situation led to a lack of black parental participation, in particular in the SGBs of the former Model C schools (Mncube 2005). One fundamental source of this lack of interest is the legacy of the apartheid education system, for example, that of submissiveness, obedience and compliance which led to the majority of these parents embracing and upholding these virtues to live by. According to Clase *et al* (2007: 246), the decision of the members of governing bodies to participate in government policy in South Africa can be complex, because the term participation has different meanings for different people against a background of the cultural diversity in the country. Clase *et al* (2007) and Mabovula (2008) indicate four ways of participating in the governance and management of schools in South Africa:

- Community participation that points to common and shared aspects of human interaction. An unqualified allegiance to community participation becomes increasingly difficult because communities become increasingly fragmented on the grounds of class, race, sex, and nationality.

- Participation as partners, which implies that legal partners obtain the right to participate in educational processes.
- Regulated (co-operative) participation, according to which the nature of participation is restricted in an attempt to move away from the potential antagonism that can be caused through community participation or the participation of partners.
- Weighted participation, according to which certain groups of participants have more rights than others. For example, parental representation, in the present situation in South African schools, would constitute the majority in SGBs.

There is no doubt that the meaningful involvement of parents in children's schooling can enhance the educational process. Parents can contribute insight and knowledge that complement the professional skills of school staff in ways that strengthen academic and social programmes (Bandlow 2009). Henderson & Mapp (2002: 24) also maintain that parent involvement initiatives can only succeed if parents are part of a contextually focused school improvement process designed to create positive relationships that support children's total development. Parent involvement programmes that are instituted in bureaucratic and inflexible school environments are less likely to yield positive results than those that form part of a more collaborative organisational structure (*cf* Bandlow 2009, Ramisur 2007).

Chaka & Dieltiens (2006) indicate that education in historically disadvantaged schools has experienced problems that undermine initiatives to promote parental involvement. They identified unemployment, which gives rise to the parents' low socio-economic status and which, in turn, does not permit parents to provide books and other relevant learning materials necessary for successful study, and lack of support programmes that empower "previously disadvantaged" parents to participate fully and meaningfully in education. Although the South African Schools Act was founded on principles of participation and representation in school governance, it appears that not everybody understands the notion of "participation" in the same way (Brown & Duku 2008: 434).

Mncube's (2009: 95-6) study identifies sources of lack of participation as being related to the level of education of parents in general; a lack of education on parental involvement in school activities; a fear of academic victimisation of their children; the language barrier, and difficulty in attending meetings. Congruent with Mncube's findings, Heystek (2003: 328) adds that negative attitudes toward schools and feelings of inferiority prevent parents from being effective partners of schools. It is, however, worth noting that the role of the school principal can never be underestimated. It is crucial that parents are made to feel wanted and that their contribution is valued only if the principal maintains good public relations with parents (*cf* Haviland 2003: 51, Barrera & Warner 2006). Parents should know that school education cannot replace home education, but complements it. The principal and staff should endeavour to meet parents at every possible opportunity.

2. The context of the South African education system

Ramisur (2007: 1) maintains that the inequalities of an unjust education system in South Africa prior to 1994 are well documented.[2] Following the 1994 democratic elections, a non-racial education system based on the principle of equity was established. The right of parents to be involved in school governance was acknowledged in the South African Schools Act (1996). All state schools had to elect governing bodies in which parent representatives had to be in the majority. Thus, for the first time in the history of education in South Africa, all public schools were compelled to include parents in decision-making at school level. With the introduction of the new system of school governance, education ventured out of its traditional bureaucratic cocoon into the domain of parental involvement in the running of schools.

2.1 School governance in the democratic era

The South African Schools Act, which made many contributions to the new education system, ushered in the new age of school

2 *Cf* Le Roux 2001, Makgoba 1998, Mothata & Lemmer 2002, Waghid & Schreuder 2000.

governance (Chaka 2008: 15). The Act's major contributions can be summarised as follows. A single, democratic, non-racial and equitable public education system was established. Two categories of schools – public schools and independent (private) schools – replaced the various categories that existed during apartheid. A uniform system of school governance was introduced in all public schools. Important powers and functions were decentralised to the level of the school community, drawing on the traditions of democratic anti-apartheid struggles and of the former Model C schools.

Brown & Duku (2008: 434) concur with Chaka (2008) that SGBs are tasked with addressing specific aspects and functions. The South African Schools Act mandates the structure, roles and responsibilities of SGBs. Naidoo (2005) points out that, in terms of the official conceptualisation of governance, the South African Schools Act does not mandate the SGB to lead or manage the day-to-day operational issues of schools linked to teaching, learning and assessment. Rather, the Act specifies that SGB leadership responsibilities include the determination of admission policy, the setting of language policy, making recommendations on teaching and non-teaching appointments, the financial management of the school, the determination of school fees, and engaging in fundraising (SASA 1996). The specification of roles gives clear direction to the nature of the participatory activities in which parents and other SGB members can engage (Brown & Duku 2008).

As the main legislation legitimating school governance, the South African Schools Act is a tool aimed at, *inter alia*, redressing past exclusions and facilitating the necessary transformation to support the ideals of representation and participation in schools and in the country as a whole (Brown & Duku 2008: 432, Waghid 2003). In addition, the democratisation of education includes the notion that stakeholders, such as parents, teachers, learners and others (for example, members of the community near the school) should participate in the activities of the school. Through representation on the SGB, all the stakeholders can share in the decisions made by that body (DoE 1997: 6).

3. Purpose of the study

Prior to the advent of democracy in South Africa "white" schools practised the notion of the inclusion of parents in school governance, although on a limited scale (Mabovula 2008: 14). This article aims to report on the empirical findings regarding barriers pertaining to the effective involvement of parents in school governance in South African primary schools. This article addresses the following research questions: What are the perceptions of parent bodies with regard to their governance function as prescribed by the South African Schools Act? Are there impediments to the involvement of parents in the governance of primary schools? To what extent is the school principal involved in the parents' lack of involvement?

4. Methodology

4.1 Research design and data collection strategy

The quantitative research approach used in this study was mainly descriptive and exploratory in nature. A self-administered structured questionnaire was used for data collection. De Vos *et al* (2003) state that surveys provide a means of measuring a population's characteristics, self-reported and observed behaviour, awareness of programs, attitudes or opinions, and needs.

The measuring instrument used is based on the original Parent Involvement Questionnaire (PIQ) developed by Stallworth (1982). His questionnaire was directed at teachers and principals, whereas in this study, the majority of the same issues are directed at parents only. This questionnaire was adapted to the South African situation, in that some questionnaire items were rephrased to address specific governance issues. The 24 questionnaire items sought to determine whether the challenges to parental involvement in school governance were due to policies and procedures, teacher or principal attitudes, lack of resources, or lack of "know-how". An additional pertinent questionnaire item, grouped according to the factor analysis, included the following: the principal's impact or role and the

teacher's attitudes (respect, welcoming atmosphere, approachable and sympathetic); communication between the school and parents (forms of communication, timeous flow of communication, clear and unambiguous information, sufficiently encouraged and meaningful communication); level of cooperation between the principal and the parent body (consultation, volunteerism enhanced, and so on), and familiarity of parents with their roles as prescribed by the South African Schools Act of 1996 (knowledge of the constitution, how the SGB is constituted, the SGB's tenure of office and any existing constitution, and whether it is correctly constituted).

The questionnaire consisted of two parts. Part A pertained to biographical data (location of school, gender, age, qualifications, marital status, employed or not) and Part B contained 20 closed-ended and four open-ended questions, on a 5-point Likert rating scale ranging from "strongly disagree = 5" to "strongly agree = 1". The questionnaire was then distributed to a total of (n = 488) randomly selected parents of learners from (n = 8) predominantly black African primary schools. Table 1 shows the breakdown of schools that participated in this research for an MTech: Educational Management study.

Table 1: Breakdown of data collection sites

No	Primary schools (n = 488)	Bloemfontein (n = 250)		Botshabelo (n = 238)	
		no	%	no	%
1	Kgabane primary	52	10.7		
2	Legae primary	53	10.9		
3	Kgato primary	52	10.7		
4	Morafe primary school	45	9.2		
5	Monyatsi primary	48	9.8		
6	Tlotlisang primary			85	17.4
7	Amohelang primary			66	13.5
8	Refihlile primary			87	17.8
Total		250	51.3	238	48.7

Initially, five schools were targeted in Botshabelo, but because schools were scattered over a wide area, and due to time constraints, the researchers decided to put in a concerted effort by aggressively focusing on those schools that were easily accessible. Assistance of principals and teachers at these (n = 3) schools was solicited, and the survey finally yielded a substantial and satisfactory response rate (n = 238) overall. The English questionnaire was translated into Sesotho, the most widely spoken language in this area. There was a successful return rate of 47% of fully completed questionnaires.

4.2 Rationale for the selection of the population and sampling

It is a given that the majority of published articles on and studies in this topical issue focus mainly on active members of the SGBs.[3] In this study, the authors decided to solicit even opinions from those parents who were not necessarily elected representatives of SGBs; in other words, any parents irrespective of their position at the school.

4.3 Data analysis

The analysis intended to identify underlying factors from the responses of respondents on the scaled items in the questionnaire. These dimensions were formulated based on the high correlation between items. To determine the reliability of the questionnaire, a factor-analysis procedure was used to investigate the construct validity of the instrument concerning the examples of the barriers to parental involvement in South Africa's primary schools. The *alpha* reliability coefficient for the 24 items of the questionnaire was 0.8468. Since the data were not normally distributed, the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U-test was performed on the data to test for significant difference between parents of mainly diverse gender, age and qualifications for each of the 24 items, presented only in a consolidated summarised form of four core variables.

3 *Cf*, for example, Clase *et al* 2007, Mncube 2009, Brown & Duku 2008, Tsotetsi *et al* 2008, Heystek 2004 & 2006.

Although the means are presented in the tables, significance is based on the ranks of the absolute values of the differences.

5. Results

5.1 Biographical data of respondents

Table 2: Demographics

Gender (n = 488)	Age	Qualification		Employed	Un-employed
	Mean	Below matricu-lation	Post matricu-lation		
Female (66%)	28	63%	37%	44%	56%
Male (34%)	35	57%	43%	41%	59%

Table 2 indicates that over 52% of the respondents did not study beyond Grade 12 or matriculation. The majority of them were women, with a mean age of 28 years. It is interesting to note that more females (44%) are employed as opposed to 41% of the male respondents. The study also revealed that despite the time constraint (working until late and a myriad of other household commitments) women are still generally the ones who show keen interest in what is happening to their children at school by attending school meetings and other activities. The most profound finding is that, increasingly, female respondents do not feel discriminated against by their male counterparts. This may be due to the fact that three of the eight schools have women as principals.

5.2 Impediments to parental involvement

Table 3 provides an overall summary of the most common obstacles regarding the effective involvement of parents in the governance of (primary) schools. These items are generated from the responses to the open-ended questions of the measuring instrument. There is also significant diversity in the obstacles identified in Table 3.

Table 3: Most common impediments to parental involvement

No	Response	%
1	Parents' views and contributions are undermined and not always taken seriously by teachers	62
2	Dissenting voices are silenced	59
3	Principals are always in "cahoots" with favourites; they mobilise and loyalists are voted into office	53
4	Parents are not always sure about how to get involved	52
5	It is not the norm for schools to ask/invite parents to be involved, except during fundraising projects	44
6	The school environment is intimidating; does not welcome parental involvement	39
7	Teachers perceive parents as uneducated and untrained for educational decisions	33
8	Parents do not always have time, because some of them work	32
9	Trust in principals and teachers that they know what is best for their children and school in general	22
10	Language barrier: often meetings, documents from authorities and communication to parents are written in English	12
11	Inferiority complex, self-doubt and fear	8

According to Table 3, a sense of deprivation, oppression and power struggles between the school and the parent community still seem prevalent at primary schools. On the part of the parents, factors such as the language barrier, self-doubt or fear, parents not having time for and enough trust in teachers and principals, ranked very high among impeding factors. It can thus be inferred from the findings that "there are still impediments to the involvement of parents in the governance of primary schools" in South Africa. This which affirms hypothesis two of this study.

5.3 Gender and age

Table 4: Significant differences between the genders

Underlying dimensions	Mean males	Mean females	Significance
Principal and teachers' attitudes affect my involvement	4.32	4.72	$p < 0.05$
Cooperation from the principal affects my involvement	4.13	4.59	$p < 0.05$
Communication, in general, affects my involvement	4.01	4.34	$p < 0.01$
I know my responsibilities at school (familiarity) as stipulated in the Schools Act	3.24	3.51	$p < 0.05$

According to Table 4, the principal's attitude and cooperation are the key factors determining parental involvement. In general, there were no significant differences between the core barriers to parental involvement between male and female respondents. However, Table 4 shows that the female respondents in the sample were significantly concerned or affected by the four core barriers. Significant differences in barriers regarding parental involvement of diverse age groups were found. Nearly 150 respondents with an age difference of 55 and older indicated both contentment and an indifferent view to these factors impeding their involvement. This is confirmed by a remark by a senior citizen, within the age range of 55-68:

> We've never had these opportunities, and I hope that this young generation of parents will stop their negativity and heed the call to participate in these structures and lead us, but they seem to focus their energies on always fighting the principal instead.

The trends drawn from the three biographical variables, namely gender, age and qualifications, indicate the following:

- The older the parent respondents, the more positive, trusting and content they become with the *status quo.*

- Only one factor is significantly more revealing for the younger respondents (29 years and younger) than for the older parent respondents.
- Of the four core factors, the attitude of the principal was significantly more valued/relevant for the senior citizens (55 years and older) than for the others.
- Conversely, disregard/disrespect for parental opinion attributable to inadequate education levels was significantly more crucial to younger respondents (29 years and younger), while those who are middle-aged (between 30 and 39) and above (40 years to 49) reported indifference.

6. Reflections on specific underlying dimensions to the questionnaire

Prior to reflecting on most of the pertinent issues from the questionnaire, it is vital to note that the perceived power tussle between the parent body and the teachers, as well as the parents' literacy level, featured prominently among problems experienced by some parent respondents. A number of parents claimed that a subtle tension exists between the school management team and the SGBs. More often than not, the silencing of parents is camouflaged by the excessive use of English in meetings, which necessitates the investigation of not only the role of the principal, but his/her attitudes too towards encouraging meaningful parental involvement.

6.1 Principal and teachers' attitudes affect my involvement

A genuine partnership with parents requires a substantial change in teacher attitudes and practices (Mestry & Grobler 2007: 183). Heystek's (2006: 474) study shows that the role played by the principal seems critical in the relationship between the school and the parents. As a member of both teams (namely, the school management team and the school governing body), the principal is the key player. This factor generated a "mixed-bag" of interesting

responses. A sizeable number of parents (67%) singled out the principal's attitude as key to their inclusion in or exclusion from school matters. One respondent remarked:

> The principal sidelines you when you seem to differ with his/her opinion, yet we are invited to come and suggest ways of improving our schools. What is the use of attending such meetings then? We are not their stooges!

Conversely, another respondent argued that "younger parents are very radical and impatient; they always find something wrong with the principal; they are very disruptive, and they want to bulldoze and force everybody to take their side". The most encouraging remark indicated that "things have changed for the better, unlike during our time, when we were learners. We are able to talk openly to the school principal now; during apartheid, this was not possible at all". Surely, a principal can no longer be the "lord" of an educational fiefdom. Instead, a democratic coalition of interest groups is now responsible for administering and managing schools (Mestry & Grobler 2007: 176).

These findings revealed mixed responses from the participants regarding the principals' attitude in fostering meaningful parental involvement in the governance of the school. Generational gap seems to be the significant factor, with younger parents viewing principals as fearful of change and robust engagements. On the other hand, older parents seem content and regarded their younger counterparts as often destructive, impatient and disrespectful of authority. These results proved inconclusive regarding the question as to what extent the principal is involved in the parents' lack of involvement?.

6.2 Communication between the school and the parents

An overwhelming number of respondents (63%) indicated that they frequently receive communication by means of letters, but in the majority of instances by word of mouth. However, these two methods are not always effective, because "our children tend to forget to communicate this message to us (parents) on time; sometimes we miss very important meetings". Another respondent remarked: "How I wish that our school could have a

year plan, where activities of the school are communicated well in advance; maybe include this plan with the children's report at the end of the year". Although it might be costly for some schools, the use of modern technology, such as cell-phones and e-mails, could speed up and enhance the communication between the school community and the parents. In South Africa, at least two out of every five parents have cellular telephones, which makes this method of communication one of the most effective between the school and its parent community. The financial sector, in particular banks, has recently identified cellular telephones as the ideal vehicle to give access to financial services to poor rural communities. For many poor South Africans, the system offers a first step into a world that can help them save, send, and receive money. Within a few minutes, they can send money to a relative or pay for goods without ever seeing a printed bill (Itano 2005).

6.3 Co-operation between the school and the parent community

Many parents (49%) claim to be encouraged by the principal and teachers to be involved in the education of their children and the betterment of the school in general. One parent aged between 40 and 49 complained: "if this was a (former) white school, the same parents would be going the extra mile, and doing very little complaining!" Another respondent in the same age category insisted:

> Things are far better now, because at our school parents regularly volunteer to help the school raise funds and clean the school grounds. Older parents mentor and support young girls and attendance at school activities is steadily improving; this is thanks to our visionary principal and SGB.

On the contrary, a respondent in the category 55 years and older complained that

> [S]chools invite us only when they want money from us, and most of us are not working. If you don't work, what is the use of attending when you have nothing to contribute financially? The

> people we elected must find other ways of raising money and stop taking the little we've got from us.

If parents and teachers are to act in partnership, parents must be formally involved in the governance of schools (Mestry & Glober 2007: 183).

6.4 Parents' familiarity with their roles

According to Mncube (2009: 90), Section 20 of the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (SASA) stipulates the functions of SGBs (DoE 1996). To establish whether parents actively participate in general school activities, the following question was put to randomly selected parents from the (n = 8) primary schools: "What do you regard as your basic function/s as a parent at your child's school?" This question was preceded by questions that focused exclusively on their understanding and interpretation of their roles as stipulated in the South African Schools Act. The following most common responses (not listed in a particular order) emerged from the respondents:

- Electing and appointing members of SGBs;
- Involvement in fund-raising and managing school finances;
- Helping with general school activities, such as sports, cultural activities, and so on;
- Assisting with general school discipline for both teachers and learners;
- Monitoring and maintaining all assets of the school;
- Helping with the formulation of an admission policy for learners;
- Developing a code of conduct for learners;
- Ensuring safety and security of both teachers and learners at school;
- Recruiting and recommending the appointment of members of the teaching staff, and
- Helping my child with school work.

It is surprising that no mention is made of participation/involvement in curriculum matters, as well as the day-to-day running of the school. It is, however, important to mention that parents have the right to have the curriculum explained to them. This includes the various options with regard to subject choices for their children and the right to formulate language policy. They should at the very least be consulted about certain day-to-day issues; for example, arrangements concerning drop-off points for children, homework, and tuck-shop arrangements. These responsibilities are not necessarily vested only in the teachers and the principal, but also in the parents. It is evident that parental training is crucial when it comes to understanding their fundamental duties as prescribed by the South African Schools Act of 1996, because only 41% of the respondents claim to know their specific roles and responsibilities as prescribed by the SASA. These are arguably either current or former members of the school governing bodies. Nearly all parents (89%) claim to be familiar with the election procedure to appoint members of the SGB. This is not surprising as the majority of them have admitted to being lobbied to vote for person A or B for a particular position. It is most encouraging that 42% of the younger respondents between the ages of 29 and 39 expressed an interest in serving as elected members of their school governing bodies. Table 3 also reflects some of these opinions. Mestry & Grobler (2007: 183) maintain that "most parents have the interest, but lack the necessary knowledge and skills to perform the duties of governors". It appears that the majority of parents gradually understand their fundamental responsibilities, especially the governance role as promulgated by SASA.

7. Overcoming obstacles to parental involvement

Important obstacles that constrain parents' ability to become actively involved in their children's education include teachers' attitudes and family resources. These obstacles, however, can be overcome by schools and by means of teacher training.

Teacher attitudes may be one obstacle to parental involvement. For example, teachers' beliefs about the impact of their efforts to involve parents in students' learning affect their efforts to encourage family involvement. Mabovula (2008) found that compared to middle-school teachers, elementary-school teachers are more strongly convinced that parental involvement is important for learners and that there should be more opportunities and assistance for parents to be involved in their children's education. Low levels of parental involvement at some schools may be the result of the staff's perceptions of parents or the degree to which they feel parental involvement is important for their learners.

Although all families want their children to succeed in school, not all families have the same resources or opportunities to be involved in their children's education. Families in which all caregivers work full-time, in which there are multiple children, or in which English is not spoken or read well, experience significant barriers to participation in their children's education. Schools must understand the demands made of their learners' families and should work towards overcoming these barriers by affording opportunities for school-to-home and home-to-school communications with families; by providing communications to families in a language and at a reading level all families can understand; by ensuring adequate representation of the entire community of parents on school advisory committees, and by distributing information provided at workshops to the families who could not attend (Karlsson 2002). Schools that work to meet these challenges and try to make involvement easier and more convenient for all families will gain support from parents and improve student achievement.

One approach to overcoming these obstacles to parental involvement is to increase the degree to which teacher training covers the issue of parental involvement. Teacher-training programmes hardly address the issue of helping students understand the impact of parents on student learning and how teachers can help parents become involved in their children's education. Without this training, teachers may not understand the importance of parental involvement or how to facilitate it. As a result, working with parents

can become one of the greatest challenges faced by novice teachers (Parental Involvement in Education *s a*).

8. Recommendations and conclusion

This article discussed the findings of a Master's study which investigated the impediments to parental involvement in the governance of schools. It became evident from these findings that there is a general sense of encouragement regarding parental participation in the affairs of a school, with particular emphasis on governance. It was also argued that it is essential to note that neither parent nor principal alone can entirely fulfil the education task. Therefore, they should collaborate. It is interesting to note that this steady and gradual growth stems from the perceived robust endeavours by the demands of the South African Schools Act placed on schools to foster parental involvement. This augurs well for the much needed support regarding pertinent issues with which schools are currently grappling, such as learner discipline, school fees and teenage pregnancies.

It appears from the findings of this study that the twenty-first-century parents have undergone a complete and radical mindshift. Their mean age level is 32, indicating that the majority of them grew up during the last stages of the apartheid system. This period was characterised by intense resistance campaigns, school boycotts, and so on. These parents emerged with a new culture of immense energy, resilience, inquisitiveness and a desire to lead. The older generation, however, will arguably simply accept and respect the unfolding of events at schools without question.

Research has proved that a principal must be able to maintain good public relations with parents and, together with the staff, endeavour to accommodate parents at every possible opportunity (Heystek 2004, Mncube 2009). The principal is the anchor in the successful or unsuccessful interaction between the parents and the school. The environment must be conducive to parents, not only to avail themselves of the services of their schools, but also to be afforded the opportunity to initiate projects that advance the development

of their schools. Another model that can aid the process of fostering parental participation is one in which SGBs may wish to appoint sub-committees for other areas of governance, for example, curriculum, admissions and exclusions, and premises (Kaufmann *et al* 2001: 7-8). It is essential for the management of schools, and especially for principals, to comprehend that there will always be three categories of parents: those who are completely indifferent to the school; those who have a lukewarm attitude towards the school, and those who are really interested in children's schooling and who put their interests first (Kauffman *et al* 2001: 3-4). In addition, Kaufmann *et al* (2001) explain that some parents are often too busy to devote attention to their children or they avoid the school on the basis of an unpleasant experience of a personal nature. Ngongoma (2006), however, cautions that, separately, neither parents nor teachers can fulfil the mission of education effectively. Therefore, they should collaborate as partners.

This study provided some valuable lessons on how various generational parents perceive their involvement in the governance of schools in South Africa. This new revelation provides a basis for an in-depth comparative study to analyse this new phenomenon within the broader discourse on parental involvement in the governance of schools in this country.

Bibliography

Ary D, L C Jacobs & A Razavieh
2002. *Introduction to research in education.* 6th ed. Belmont, CA: Woodsworth/Thomson Learning.

Bandlow L Z
2009. The relationship between parental involvement and student achievement in three working-class elementary schools. Unpubl PhD dissertation in Education, Seton Hall University.

Barrera J M & L Warner
2006. Involving families in school events. *Kappa Delta Pi Record Winter* 42(2): 72-5.

Best J W & J V Kahn
2003. *Research in education*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Bless C & C Higson-Smith
2000. *Fundamentals of social research methods: an African perspective*. 3rd ed. Lansdowne: Juta Education Publishers.

Brown B & N Duku
2008. Negotiated identifies: dynamics in parents' participation in school governance in rural Eastern Cape schools and implication for school leadership. *South African Journal of Education* 28(3): 431-50.

Chaka T
2008. *School governance. Issues in education policy,* 2. Braamfontein: Centre for Education Policy Development (CEPD).

Christie P
2001. Improving school quality in South Africa: a study of schools that have succeeded against the odds. *Journal of Education* 13(26): 40-65.

Clase P, Kok J & M Van der Merwe
2007. Tension between school governing bodies and education authorities in South Africa and proposed resolutions thereof. *South African Journal of Education* 27(2): 243-63.

Cooper C E & R Crosnoe
2007. The engagement in schooling of economically disadvantaged parents and children. *Youth & Society* 38(3): 372-91.

Deforges C & A Abouchaar
2003. *The impact of parental involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievement and adjustment: a literature review.* Report 433. London: Department of Education and Skills.

Department of Education and Training (DET)
1991. *Manual for primary school organisation: a guide for principals of schools.* Pretoria: Government Printers.

Department of education (DoE)
1996. *South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996*. Pretoria: Government Gazette.

1997(a). *Understanding the SA Schools Act.* Pretoria: Government Printers.

1997(b). *School management teams: managing and leading schools*. Pretoria: Government Printers.

De Vos A S, H Strydom, C B Fouche & C S L Delport
2003. *Research at grass roots. For the social sciences and human service professions* 2nd ed. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

Edge K
2000. *Global educational reform: governance reform*. Toronto: World Bank.

Epstein J L, L Coates, K C Salinas, M G Sanders & B S Simon
1997. *School, family, and community partnerships: your handbook for action*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Fan X
2001. Parental involvement and students' academic achievement: a growth modeling analysis. *Journal of Experimental Education* 70(1): 27-61.

Feinstein L & Sabates R
2006. *Does education have an impact on mothers' educational attitudes and behaviours?* Wider Benefits of Learning Research Report, 16. London: Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning.

Fraenkel J R & Wallen N E
2003. *How to design and evaluate research in education.* 5th ed. San Francisco, CA: McGraw Hill.

Gutman L M & Midgley C
2000. The role of protective factor in supporting the academic achievement of poor African American students during the middle school transition. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 29(2): 223-48.

Hair J F Babin B, Money H & Samuel P
2003. *Essentials of business research methods: international edition*. London: Wiley.

Hansra J I
2007. The financial role of principals in Section 21 schools in South Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. Unpubl M Ed dissertation in Education Management. Pretoria: Unisa.

HARRIS A & J H CHRISPEELS
2006. *Improving schools and educational systems: international perspectives*. London: Routledge.

HAVILAND J
2003. Time well spent: determining what parents want in a parent meeting. *Principal leadership*. <http//www.principals.org/portals/0/content/46782/pdf>

HENDERSON A T & K L MAPP
2002. A new wave of evidence. the impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement. *Annual Synthesis 2002.* National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools. <http//www.sedl.org/connections/resources/evidence.pdf>

HEYSTEK J
2004. School governing bodies: the principal's burden or the light of his/her life? *South African Journal of Education* 24: 308-12.

2006. School governing bodies in South Africa: relationships between principals and parent governors, a question of trust? *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* 34(4): 473-86.

HSRC & EDUCATION POLICY CONSORTIUM
2005. *Emerging voices*: *a report on education in South African rural communities.* Cape Town: HSRC Press.

ITANO N
2005. Africa's cell phone boom creates a base for low-cost banking. *The Christian Science Monitor* August 26. <http//www.usatoday.com/tech/products/gear/2005-08-28-cell-banks-africa_x-htm>

JEYNES W H.
2003. A meta-analysis: the effects of parental involvement on minority children's academic achievement education and urban society. *Education and Urban Society* 35(2): 202-18.

KARLSSON J
2002. The role of democratic governing bodies in South African schools. *Comparative Education* 38: 327-36.

KAUFFMAN E, A PERRY & D PRENTISS
2001. *Reasons for and solutions to lack of parent involvement of parents of second language learners*. Educational Resources Information Centre, Document 458956. Opinion papers, US Department of Education, PS 029914. <http:www.csse-scee.ca>

Lemmer E & N Van Wyk
2004. Home-schooling communication in South Africa. *South African Journal of Education* 24(3): 183-8.

Le Roux A
2001. African renaissance: a quest for the transformation and Africanisation of South African education. *South African Journal of Education* 21(1): 31-6.

Mabovula N N
2008. A philosophical exploration of democratic participation in school governance in selected South African Black schools in the Eastern Cape Province. Unpubl PhD thesis, Department of Education Policy Studies, Stellenbosch University.

McMillan J H & S Schumacher
2001. *Research in education*. New York: Longman.

Mestry R & B Grobler
2007. Collaboration and communication as effective strategies for parent involvement in public schools. *Educational Research and Review* 2(7): 176-85.

Mncube V S
2005. School governance in the democratisation of education in South Africa: the interplay between policy and practice. Unpubl PhD thesis in Education, University of Birmingham.

Mncube V
2009. The perceptions of parents of their role in the democratic governance of schools in South Africa: are they on board? *South African Journal of Education* 29(1): 83-103.

Mothata M S & E M Lemmer
2002. The provision of education for minorities in South Africa. *South African Journal of Education* 22(2): 106-12.

Msila V T
2004. Black parental involvement in education. *South African Journal of Education* 24(4): 301-7.

Muijs D
2004. *Doing quantitative research in education with SPSS*. London: Sage.

Mwamwenda T S
2004. *Educational psychology: an African perspective*. Sandton: Heinemann.

Ngidi D P
2004. Educators' perceptions of the efficiency of school governing bodies. *South African Journal of Education* 24(4): 260-3.

Ngongoma S A
2006. An investigation into the role of the SMT and SGB in developing a partnership for the promotion of quality education in schools. Unpubl MA dissertation, Department of Educational Planning and Administration, University of Zululand.

NIITEMBU M M
2006. Stakeholders' perceptions of parents' involvement in the governance of a Namibian rural school. Unpubl MEd dissertation, Department of Education, Rhodes University.

PROCTER P (ed)
2002. *Cambridge international dictionary of English.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

RAMISUR P
2007. What are the factors that militate against or facilitate parental involvement in school governance? Unpubl MEd Dissertation, School of Education, University of KwaZulu Natal, Pietermaritzburg.

SENECHAL M & J LEFEVRE
2002. Parental involvement in the development, of children's reading skill: a five-year longitudinal study. *Child Development* 73(2): 445-60.

SHELDON S B
2002. Parental involvement in education. Guthrie JW (ed) 2002. *Encyclopedia of Education,* 2nd ed. New York: Macmillan 1844-47.

SMIT A G & LIEBENBERG L
2003. Understanding the dynamics of parent involvement in schooling within the poverty context. *South African Journal of Education* 23(1): 1-5.

STALLWORTH J T
1982. Identifying barriers to parental involvement in the schools: a survey of educators. Unpubl presentation at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New York, 19-23 March.

TSOTETSI S, N VAN WYK & E LEMMER
2008. The experience of and need for training of school governors in rural schools in South Africa. *South African Journal of Education* 28(3): 385-400.

VAN WYK N
2004. School governing bodies: The experiences of South African educators. *South African Journal of Education* 24(1): 49-54.

WAGHID Y & D SCHREUDER
2000. Can poststructuralist nuances of sustainable living contribute towards educational transformation in education. *South African Journal of Education* 20(2): 85-90.

WAGHID Y
2003. *Democratic education policy and praxis*. Stellenbosch: Department of Education Policy Studies, University of Stellenbosch.