

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Collaboration and communication as effective strategies for parent involvement in public schools

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In South African educational literature and educational research, the influence of the home and family environment on school achievement has not received the attention it deserves. The study under review shows that parents who play an active role in the homework and study programmes of their children contribute to their good performance in schools. Although the South African Schools Act creates expectations for parents to be active partners in school governance, our research shows that they are not all participating meaningfully in their children's education. This is evident in the low attendance at many parents' meetings, their lack of involvement in fundraising projects and the lack of interest shown by many in their children's schoolwork and homework. This article examines two factors, namely collaboration and communication, as effective strategies for active parental involvement in schools. A quantitative research was used to determine the perceptions of teachers regarding aspects of parental involvement in school governance that were considered essential. The findings revealed, amongst others, that collaboration and communication determined the parents' commitment to the education of their children and the role they play in school governance. The research affirms the view that input from the parent community was crucial in both co-curricular and extra-curricular programmes of the school.

**Key words:** Collaboration, communication, parent involvement, cooperative governance, school governance.

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Many governments in both the developed and developing worlds are supporting a greater decentralisation of school governance and empowerment of interest groups for a variety of perceived political, economic and educational benefits (Moller, 1999; Ngidi, 2004). In keeping with international trends, South African schools have also moved towards decentralisation and more powers concerning education and school governance has been devolved to schools. While there is clear evidence of a shift in authority to the local level, devolution of power is not absolute with control still remaining firmly in the hand of the central education authorities. However, Squelch (1998) asserts that democratic school governance has now been initiated and formalized through legislative mandates intended to exact compliance with regulation concerning the election, composition and functioning of governing bodies. As parents, teachers and the general public become more involved in school affairs, a shift in power and authority

occurs. A principal can no longer be 'lord' of an educational fiefdom. Instead, a democratic coalition of interest groups is now responsible for administering and managing schools (Holt and Murphy, 1993).

Parent involvement may be interpreted as parents' commitment to the education of their children, and the role they play in school management (Mestry, 2004). Across international studies reviewed, parental involvement was measured as participation in parent-teacher conferences and/or interactions, participation in school activities or functions, engagement in activities at home, including but not limited to homework, engagement in learners' extra-curricular activities, assisting in the selection of learners' courses, keeping abreast of learners' academic progress, reaction to academic grades, imparting parental values, and the level of parental control and autonomy of support in the home environment (Gonzales-De Hass et al., 2005). In South Africa, the introduction of Outcome-based Education (OBE) created opportunities for greater parental involvement in public education at both the primary and secondary levels. This approach to education requires parents to share in the responsibility

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of their children's education, ensuring the active promotion of the culture of learning and a goal of making educational outcomes of the highest standards (Department of Education, 1997). Studies of learners from primary to secondary schools show a beneficial relationship between parental involvement and learner variables such as academic achievement, sense of well-being, attendance, learner attitudes, homework and educational aspirations (Gonzales-DeHass et al., 2005; Koonce and Harper Jr., 2005; Hill and Craft, 2003).

However, according to Gaynor (1998), many countries are still grappling to cope with the new role of parents as active stakeholders in education. Presently, in South African schools, most parents do not participate meaningfully in their children's education? This is evident in the poor attendance of parents at parents' meetings, their limited involvement in fundraising projects, low attendance at parent-teacher meetings, recalcitrance in paying school fees, inability to maintain proper control of learning support material issued to their children, poor matric results, and lack of interest in learners' school work and homework (Mestry, 2004). The Education White Paper 6 confirms that non-recognition and non-involvement of parents serve as barriers to quality education (Department of Education, 2001). Bastiani (1988); Bauer and Shea (2003) and Izzo et al. (1999), suggest that most often it is not a lack of interest that prevents parents from becoming involved in their child's education, but rather problems of poverty, single-parenthood, non-English literacy, the effects of the HIV/Aids pandemic, and cultural and socio-economic isolation. Ballen and Moles (Bauer and Shea, 2003) assert that parents who are among the poorest sections of society are locked in the difficult struggle to survive, they live in inadequate housing, are badly paid, work unsocial hours and/or are unemployed. With the increase in either one parent or both parents working or parents working in more than one job, children are often left alone. In these situations the parents are often pressured for time and are unable to assist their children in their school work. Furthermore, parents are often uncertain about what to do and about their own importance, and feel intimidated and unsure of their collaboration with the school.

Calabrese (1990) and Crozier (2000) argue that parents are not the sole reason for their lack of involvement. This view is substantiated by research undertaken by the Alliance Schools Initiative (2004), who found that many parents encounter obstacles to participating in their children's education. Some of the hurdles to effective parental involvement are negative communication from schools and the insufficient training for teachers on how to reach out to parents. Parents believe that they are not welcomed in schools and reported a high degree of alienation and hostility towards them. The lack of parental education and parenting skills, the time and job pressures of parents and language barriers also have serious implications for positive parental involvement in schools (Koonce

and Harper, 2005; Bauer and Shea, 2003). From these arguments it is clear, therefore, that collaboration and communication between schools and parents are problematic.

For the purposes of this study we examined two key areas which involve parental participation in education, namely:

- Parents and the community where we determined the importance of parental and community involvement in the education of the learners.
- Cooperative Governance where we determined the role of parents on the governing body.

### **The importance of parent and community involvement**

The idea of partnerships in the educational situation is of particular importance in the interrelationship between family, the community and the school. In its Code of Conduct, the South African Council for Educators (Republic of South Africa, 2000) stipulates that teachers should recognize the parents as partners in education, and promote harmonious relationships with them. They must keep parents adequately and timeously informed about the well-being and progress of the learners. Section 4(m) of the National Education Policy Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996b) states that community participation should be realised as one of the guiding principles in education and all interested parties must be involved in all aspects of the education system. This entails the active collaboration among all the role players in the educational process, namely teachers, principals, parents, learners and professional support personnel (Donald et al., 2002).

The potential benefits of empowering parents are substantial (Morgan, 1989; Johnson, 1990; Batey, 1996; Singh et al., 2004). Khan (1996), Oosthuizen (2003) and Smit and Liebenberg (2003) state that parents have equal strengths and expertise when compared to teachers, that they can contribute and receive services on an equal footing and can even share responsibilities and accountability with the professional staff in schools. The rationale for community-based education support, according to Muthukrishna (2001), is the acknowledgement of the current limited resources and services for support in the education system; hence schools should draw on the existing resources in their community. As Wiebe (Holt and Murphy, 1993) astutely notes: "Parent participation in school can enhance student learning and behaviour, spread workloads, offer more experiences to the students and spread the good news and encouragement to the community of the fine job being done by their teachers and students". Squelch and Lemmer (1994) and Heystek and Louw (1999) explain that active parental involvement improves learner performance, reduces drop-out rates, causes a decrease in delinquency and fosters a more po-

sitive attitude towards the school. Squelch (2000) further maintains that this involvement is considered to be a more effective means of supporting standards of teaching and creating effective schools because it is more inclusive and seeks to meet collective needs and aspirations of the community.

According to Templeton (Wolfendale, 1989) parents are important in the process of educating their children because schools are also accountable to the parents of the children that they are educating. There is a growing recognition internationally that all aspects of school improvement—challenging curricula, instruction for active learning, rigorous assessments, and effective school management and classroom organization – are more likely to succeed if families and communities are effectively involved (Hiatt-Michael, 2001). When parents are involved in their children's education, learners report more effort, concentration and attention. Learners are more inherently interested in learning, and they experience higher perceived competence (Koonce and Harper, 2005).

Swap (Bauer and Shea, 2003) describes four basic models of parent involvement. In the first model, the protective model, the goal is to reduce conflict between parents and teachers, primarily through separating their functions, that is, 'protecting' the school from parent interference. The protective model assumes that parents delegate the education of their children, and that the school is then accountable. There is little parent intrusion but structures exist for collaboration and communication. The second model is that of school-to-home transmission, in which the school enlists parents in supporting the objectives and activities of the school. This model assumes that parents should endorse the importance of school expectations through collaboration and communication. The third model proposed is that of curriculum enrichment, in which the goal is to expand and extend the school's curriculum by incorporating the contributions of parents. In this model, parents and teachers are assumed to work collaboratively to enrich curriculum objectives and content. In the final model, parent-teacher partnership, the goal is for parents and teachers to work together to accomplish success for all children. This model assumes that a common mission requires collaboration between parents and teachers. This is a true partnership based on collegiality and mutual understanding of the roles and responsibilities of parents and the school.

Collaboration and communication have been identified as effective strategies for active parent involvement in schools. Collaboration is a process in which people (parents and the school personnel) with diverse expertise and experience work together to generate new solutions to mutually defined problems. Collaboration occurs when power and authority are shared and where people are brought together to achieve common goals that could not be accomplished by a single individual or organization independently. Setting specific goals and objectives is one of the most crucial components for parent engage-

ment in their child's education and this is a participatory decision-making process between parents and teachers (Koonce and Harper, 2005). Petit (Bauer and Shea, 2003) suggests that collaboration with parents involve monitoring, informing and participating. In monitoring, schools make parents aware of their mission and expected outcomes. In informing, parents are made aware of policies, procedures, aims, and expectations of the school and the classroom. Participation, involves active participation on the part of the teachers and parents.

De Pree (1989) states that good communication is most vital in organizations, as it create a common bond of interdependence and mutual interest among interlocking contributors. Schools must make the effort to provide information to the parents about the school curriculum, administration, facilities, and day-to-day running of the institution, and create time for parents to hold formal and informal dialogue with the staff (Mestry, 2004). Therefore, there must be open communication between schools and parents to counteract miscommunication.

Communication is an essential condition for effective collaboration. Collaboration implies joint decision-making amongst all the relevant stakeholders. Appropriate decisions can be taken only if everyone has sufficient information at their disposal. Therefore, the principal or school management team has to communicate vital information for true collaboration to exist.

## **School governance**

In terms of the South African Schools Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996a) the school governing body (SGB) is charged with the governance of a public school. Parents form the majority on the SGB. Empowering governing bodies in shared decision-making requires active participation of all stakeholders who have a vested interest in the school. This implies creating the necessary climate, structures, processes and support mechanisms for engendering genuine participation and involvement. This is essential if all stakeholders are to be involved in raising the quality of education.

The core functions of the SGB is to promote the educational interests of the school and consequently of the learners. Crease and Bradley (1997) (in Xaba, 2004) assert that the SGB has a strategic role to play in the running of the school, which implies setting strategic frameworks, aims and objectives within the school's vision and mission, setting policies and targets for achieving objectives and monitoring and evaluating progress. There are notable consequences of the South African Schools Act and these are: an increased autonomy of schools; clearer definition of the legal position of governing bodies (s16); extension of the powers, duties and responsibilities of governors (s20 and s21); increase in the responsibility and accountability of parents and communities; and the curtailment of the principal's role of primary decision mak-

er.

The success of the SGB performing the compulsory functions (s 20) depends on the support, cooperation and trust amongst all the relevant stakeholders. Although this list does not include a full range of responsibilities of governing bodies, it illustrates sufficiently the pivotal role of the SGB and the indispensable link it forms between the school and the community it serves. The former Minister of Education, Asmal (1999) contended that an SGB led by parents exercises a trust on behalf of the parents of the community, and functions as an indispensable link between the school and community. Parents should be empowered and equipped with the necessary skills to enable them to facilitate learning at home and make informed decisions about the future of their children.

### The aim of the research

The general aim of this research project was to investigate what factors contribute to effective parental involvement in education. The specific aims were to:

Explore the importance of parental involvement.

Determine the perceptions of teachers about the aspects that constitute effective parental involvement in school governance.

Devise guidelines that could inform effective parental involvement in school governance.

### RESEARCH METHOD AND DESIGN

Quantitative research methods were utilized in this research. Creswell (1994) describes quantitative research techniques as an enquiry into a social or human problem, based on testing a theory and analyzed with statistical procedures, in order to determine whether the predictive generalizations of the theory holds true. In this research the empirical investigation was made up of a structured questionnaire that was designed to obtain the perceptions of teachers identifying factors that contribute to effective parental involvement in schools.

The unit of study was school teachers and principals. The target population comprised 400 teachers and principals from schools in the Gauteng Province. Twenty primary and secondary schools in the Sedibeng and Johannesburg South districts were selected randomly. In each school twenty questionnaires were completed by teachers (principal, school management team and post level 1 teachers). Of the 400 questionnaires handed out to 20 randomly selected schools, 314 were returned suitable for analysis representing a return rate of 78.5%.

### DISCUSSION OF MEASURING INSTRUMENT

The questionnaire was designed on the basis of a literature survey related to the factors that impact upon effective parental involvement. Questions were formulated in such a way that respondents could indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with statements

which related to parent involvement. They measured the perceptions of teachers and principals identifying aspects that are essential to parental involvement in schools on a six-point, equal interval scale, where 1 represented 'strongly disagree' and 5 represented 'strongly agree'. The respondents were assured of confidentiality and that they would remain anonymous at all times.

### Data collection methods and analysis

When one attempts to determine the perceptions of teachers using a structured questionnaire it is important that the instrument is valid and reliable (Rose and Sullivan, 1996).

Before proceeding with the first-order factor analysis the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy (MSA) and Bartlett's test of sphericity were used to determine whether one could comfortably proceed with the factor analysis of the 43 items. Three questions with a KMO of less than 0,6 were excluded from the factor analysis. The KMO measure of sampling adequacy was good and the Bartlett's test of sphericity ( $p = 0,0000$ ) was also statistically significant. The validity and effectiveness of a structured questionnaire was further investigated by means of successive first- and second-order factor analytic procedures. The first-order procedure involved a principal component analysis (PCA1) followed by a principal factor analysis (PFA1). These procedures were performed using the SPSS 11,0 programme (Norusis, 2000) to identify a number of factors that may facilitate the statistical procedures. The first order procedure resulted in 8 factors that were used as input for the second order procedures. This consisted of a principal component analysis (PCA2) followed by a principal factor analysis (PFA2).

These procedures resulted in the 40 items being reduced to two factors namely:

- Effective parent collaboration consisting of 21 items with a Cronbach-alpha reliability coefficient of 0,913.
- Effective parent communication consisting of 19 items with a Cronbach-alpha reliability coefficient of 0,892.

These two factors formed the dependent variables in the research. The factor mean scores in relation to the various independent variables were compared with one another in order to determine whether the groups differed from one another in a statistically significant way in respect of the two factors mentioned above. In addition to these probability values symbolized by 'p', and the effect size ( $\eta^2$ ), which provides the proportion of variance accounted for, is provided. The effect size indicates how consistently differences in the dependent scores are caused by changes in the independent variable (Heiman, 2000). When using ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) or the t-test, effect size is computed by squaring the  $\eta$ .  $\eta^2$  squared

indicates the proportion of variance in the dependent variable that is accounted for by changing the independent variable. In this research project both eta (  $\eta$  ) and eta squared (  $\eta^2$  ) are provided. Gravetter and Wallnau (2002) and Rosenthal et al. (2000) further state that for analysis of variance, the simplest and most direct way to measure effect size is to compute  $\eta^2$ , the percentage of variance accounted for. Field (2005) states that effect sizes are useful because they provide an objective measure of the importance of an effect. However, we could have a very large effect (such as 80% of the variance explained) but the finding may have no importance or practical significance whatsoever.

### Hypothesis and statistical analysis of the data

At the multivariate level two independent groups can be compared for possible statistical differences in their mean scores using Hotelling's  $T^2$ . This implies that the vector means of the two independent groups are compared in respect of the two factors considered together. Should a statistically significant difference be found at this multivariate level then the Student t-test is used in respect of each of the variables taken separately.

In respect of three or more independent groups, multivariate differences are investigated by means of MANOVA (Multivariate Analysis Of Variance) in respect of the three factors considered together. The vector mean scale scores are compared and should any difference be revealed at this level then ANOVA (Analysis Of Variance) is used to investigate which of these three factors is responsible for the significant statistical difference. Groups are analyzed pair-wise by means of either the Scheffé or the Dunnett T3 tests. If the homogeneity of variance in the Levene test (an advanced form of the Student t-test) is more than 0.05 ( $p > 0.05$ ) then the Scheffé test is used to investigate possible differences between pairs. Should the homogeneity of variance be less than 0.05 ( $p < 0.05$ ) then the Dunnett T3 test is used to investigate differences between the various pairs.

A statistical hypothesis usually postulates the opposite of what the researcher predicts or expects. In this form it is known as a null hypothesis and is usually represented by the symbol  $H_0$ . The alternative hypothesis is represented by the symbol  $H_a$ . If the researcher thus expects that there will be a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of female and male teachers with respect to parent involvement (research hypothesis) then the hypothesis will be stated in the form of a null hypothesis. It is the null hypothesis that is tested using the statistical techniques. Examples of appropriate hypotheses are given in Table 1.

### Discussion of the Factor Mean Scores and Empirical Findings

Only information for those independent groups whose

mean scores with respect to the dependent variables differed from one another will be discussed below.

### Gender

Table 2 above indicates that there is a statistically significant difference ( $p = 0,040$ ) between the vector mean scale scores of males and females with respect to effective parent communication factors considered together. Thus  $H_0T$  can be rejected. This statistically significant difference at the multivariate level is manifested in a difference at the univariate level in respect of the effective parent communication only. Thus  $H_0T2$  can be rejected. However, as there is no significant statistical difference in respect of the effective parent collaboration,  $H_0T1$  is not rejected.

According to the table, both males and females agree that communication plays an important role in effective parental involvement. The effect size for this factor (effective parent communication) is regarded as small ( $\eta = 0,117$  and  $\eta^2 = 0,002$ ) as only 0.2 percent of the variance in the dependent variable can be explained by gender as an independent variable. The practical significance of this effect size is perhaps to be found in the communication style of female teachers. In almost every culture females play a supportive role in a family. In the same way women in the school community require that effective communication between parent and educator be present in order to attend to the needs of the learners in their care. Females see themselves as playing a variety of roles in the classroom, from care-giver, facilitator, and counselor to educator. This is in agreement with the more collaborative nature of females (Smit and Cronje, 1997). However, in general, the lack of communication between parents and teachers, as well as teachers who do not understand the importance of parental involvement, and those who are not prepared to work with parents, are some of the identified barriers to parent involvement (Steyn, 2002).

The effect size of the independent variable, namely gender of teachers and principals, on the dependent variable, namely that of effective parent collaboration, was negligible ( $\eta = 0,040$  and  $\eta^2 = 0,014$ ). This possibly suggests that, for effective parental involvement in schools, there should be collaborative efforts by parents, teachers and governors of the school. Perceiving parents as members of the collaborative partnership with the school implies that they are of equal importance to all other role players and are expected to contribute their expertise in a collegial, trusting manner towards a shared goal (Swart and Pettipher, 2001). Learning how to work more collaboratively is a new experience for everyone, especially teachers who are used to working in an isolated manner and there should be a paradigm shift from the role of expert to that of collaborative agent.

Donald et al. (2002) call for the pursuit of an understanding of the meanings and attitudes different role players have about their collaboration with each other deeper than just trying to install quick fixes, in order to re-

**Table 1.** Hypotheses with respect to univariate and multivariate analysis.

Dimension	Variable	Symbol	Description	Test
Multivariate differences	Gender	HoT	The vector mean scores of male and female teachers considered together do not differ statistically significantly from each other.	Hotelling's T <sup>2</sup>
		HaT	The vector mean scores of male and female teachers considered together do differ statistically significantly from each other.	
Univariate differences	Gender	HoT	The factor mean scores of male and female teachers considered separately do not differ statistically significantly from each other.	Student t-test
		HaT	The factor mean scores of male and female teachers considered separately do differ statistically significantly from each other.	
Multivariate differences	Mother tongue groups	HoM	The vector mean scores of the four mother tongue groups taken together do not differ statistically significantly from one another.	MANOVA
		HaM	The vector mean scores of the four mother tongue groups taken together do differ statistically significantly from one another.	
Univariate differences	Mother tongue groups	HoA	The factor mean scores of the four mother tongue groups taken separately do not differ statistically significantly from one another.	ANOVA
		HaA	The factor mean scores of the four mother tongue groups taken separately do differ statistically significantly from one another.	
Pair-wise differences	Mother tongue groups	HoS/D	The factor mean scores of the four mother tongue groups compared pair-wise do not differ statistically significantly from one another in respect of the factors considered separately.	Scheffé or Dunnett T3
		HaS/D	The factor mean scores of the four mother tongue groups compared pair-wise do differ statistically significantly from one another in respect of the factors considered separately.	

**Table 2.** Significance of differences between male and female teachers regarding the following two factors.

Factor	Group	Factor mean	Effect size	Hotelling's T <sup>2</sup> (p-value)	Student t-test (p-value)
Effective parent collaboration	Male	3,586	= 0,040	0,095	0,481
	Female	3,670	<sup>2</sup> =0, 014		
Effective parent communication	Male	4,361	= 0,117	0,040*	0,040*
	Female	4,5855	<sup>2</sup> = 0,002		

N (Males) = 75; N (Females) = 232. \* Statistically significant at the 5% level (0, 01 < p < 0, 05).

establish the links between teachers, schools and communities.

From the above, it is evident that both teachers and parents in most schools experience problems of communicating and collaborating with one other.

### Teacher unions

Table 3 above indicates that there is a statistically significant difference (p = 0, 076) between the vector mean scale scores of educator unions with respect to effective parent collaboration factors considered together. Thus, HoT can be rejected. This statistically significant difference at the multivariate level is manifested in a differ-

ence at the univariate level in respect of effective parent collaboration only. Thus Hot1 can be rejected. However, there is no statistically significant difference in respect of effective parent communication and Hot2 is therefore not rejected. The effect size of the independent variable, namely union affiliation, on the dependent variable, namely that of effective parent collaboration, was small (= 0, 116 and <sup>2</sup>= 0,013). The practical significance of this effect size is attributed to the more collaborative style of the unions and thus would expect that parents also be collaborative with the teaching and non-teaching staff of schools. The effect size of the independent variable of effective communication, was, however, negligible (= 0, 22 and <sup>2</sup>= 0,000).

Respondents belonging to SADTU agreed that effective

**Table 3.** Significance of differences between respondents of educator unions in respect of the two factors.

Factor	Group	Factor mean	Effect size	Hotelling's T <sup>2</sup> (p-value)	Student t-test (p-value)
Effective parent collaboration	SADTU	3,732	= 0,116 ²=0, 013	0,076	0,048 *
	NUE	3,520			
Effective parent communication	SADTU	4,539	= 0,022 ²= 0,000		0,713
	NUE	4,502			

\*Statistically significant at the 5% level (0, 01 < P <0, 05). N (SADTU) = 166 N (NUE) = 123

**Table 4.** Significance of differences between mother tongue groups in respect of the two factors.

Factor	Group	Factor mean	MANOVA p-value	ANOVA p-value		Scheffe/Dunett T3				Effect size
						A	B	C	D	
Effective parent collaboration	A	3,138		0,000**	A	/	**	**		= 0,317 ²=0, 100
	B	3,651			B	**	/	**		
	C	4,105			C	**	**	/	**	
	D	3,578			D			**	/	
Effective parent communication	A	4,125	0,000**	0,004**	A	/	**	*	*	= 0,206 ²= 0, 042
	B	4,591			B	**	/			
	C	4,591			C	*		/		
	D	4,584			D	*			/	

\*\* Statistically significant at the 1% level (p>0.01). \* Statistically significant at the 5% level (p>0, 01 but < than 0, 05). A = Afrikaans (N=49). B = English (N=138). C = African (N=58). D = Other (N=66)

parental involvement is important, whereas respondents belonging to NUE tended to partially agree. A possible explanation could be that whereas NUE has been a historically 'White' union, mostly representing teachers from ex-model C schools, parental involvement has always been an integral part of the management of the school through SGBs. However, respondents belonging to SADTU are from historically 'disadvantaged' schools and therefore the role and functions of school governors and parental involvement in the education of children has hitherto been non-existent.

### Mother tongue

Using the data in Table 4 it follows that there is a statistically significant difference at 1% level between the mother tongue groups at the multivariate level. HoM is thus rejected in favour of the research hypothesis HaM. At the univariate level the factor mean scores of the four mother tongue groups differ from one another in respect of the first two factors namely, effective parental involvement (p=0,000) and effective communication (p=0,004). HoA1 and HoA2 are thus rejected in favour of HaA1 and HaA2.

In respect of the pair-wise comparison the following conclusions can be made:

- Relative to effective parent collaboration, teachers in the mother tongue Group C (African) have a significantly higher score than teachers in the other mother tongue groups (A, B, D). The teachers in Group C thus perceive effective parent collaboration as more important. The reason for this perception may be the introduction of new education legislation, the South African Schools Act of 1996, which stipulates that schools are now managed as partnerships with SGBs.
- In respect of effective communication, teachers in the mother tongue Groups B, C, and D have higher factor mean scores than teachers in the mother tongue Group A, that has the lowest mean score. It is also significant to note that teachers in the mother tongue Group A (Afrikaans), have the lowest mean score in respect of parental involvement. The reason for this may be that teachers in this group feel strongly that all school matters pertaining to the learners are the responsibility of the school, and parents are reluctant to interfere in the teaching and learning that takes place in the school.

The practical or substantive significance of the medium effect size ( = 0, 317 and ²= 0,100 ) in respect of the dependent variable, effective parent collaboration, is probably to be found in the past history of the educational system where schools were segregated according to mo-

mother tongue. Afrikaans and English mother tongue teachers are largely found in the former White, Coloured and Indian schools and, as these schools are largely multicultural, it is expected that their perceptions would be more positive regarding collaboration with parents. Regarding 'effective parent communication', the effect size of the mother tongue variable was found to be small ( $F = 0,206$  and  $\eta^2 = 0,042$ ). The practical significance again lies in the past managerial dispensation in school governance where parents had very little or no say at all in school matters and school governance.

Numerous reports in the media have highlighted serious conflicts between principals and/or the SGBs. Conflicts arise because there is usually a power struggle between parents and teachers. Principals and teachers in many schools feel that parents interfere and encroach in their domain, while parents are of the opinion that teachers deliberately exclude them in important decision-making.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the conceptual framework developed as a result of the empirical findings, this study shows that in general the two factors, namely, effective parent collaboration and effective parent communication, have an impact on parent involvement in schools. Their involvement is also predicated and influenced by their gender, level of education, location, and ethnicity. The findings of this research are now amalgamated by the following recommendations.

### **Training teachers and parents to work with each other**

A genuine partnership with parents requires a substantial change in teacher attitudes and practices. An in-service training and support programme should include the development of communication skills (written and verbal), parent-teacher interviews, involving parents in the curriculum, and other aspects of home/school relationships. This can be achieved through a coherent pattern of induction into the profession, supported and extended by further opportunities for development when in a permanent post, which is essential for both serving and intending teachers.

Workshops should be arranged for parents. The essence of a workshop is that it should include a practical and experimental component in which teachers and parents share their knowledge and skills not only in planning but also in carrying out a programme of teaching. Workshops can create opportunities for parents to air a wide range of issues and concerns, to make social contacts and to listen to invited speakers. The workshop component per se is essentially practical and involves teachers and parents taking part in joint activities designed to help the child to learn new skills or to develop competencies

and behaviours.

## **Communication**

Effective communication skills and processes are essential in schools that reflect South Africa's multi-cultural society. For many teachers in a multi-cultural school, the most easily identified problem in working/communicating with parents is 'the language and cultural barrier'. This could be considerably eased if there were at least one educator who had knowledge of another language spoken by the children in that school. Schools could invite parent members who were conversant in more than one language spoken in the school, to act as interpreter / translator in written and verbal communication with the learners and their parents.

Whether a school has only one parent with whom communication in English presents a problem, or whether it has 90 per cent, an interpreter should be available to both parents and staff. Translating of prospectuses, newsletters and notices is essential for effective communication in a multi-cultural society. Holding meetings for parents who do not speak English requires that translators be available at these meetings to translate sequentially what is said. Unless schools are prepared to overcome the 'language barrier', they cannot hope to enlist effective parental support for their work.

## **Training programme for SGB**

According to the South African Schools Act, parents should have stronger representation among the governors in schools. If parents are not adequately represented among the governors, they do not and cannot exercise an appropriate level of participation in the life of a school. If parents and teachers are to act in partnership, parents must be formally involved in the governance of schools. Most parents have the interest, but lack the necessary knowledge and skills to perform the duties of governors. They therefore need practical advice and detailed explanations on how to be actively involved in school governance and how they can play an active role in the education of their children. The school together with the education districts should take the initiative to plan induction programmes for new parent governors elected or co-opted to SGBs. This developed programme should help capacitate parents as to their role functions on the SGB, demarcation of their school management duties, encouragement of parent-educator collaboration through advisory team links on issues such as pupil behaviour, discipline and school uniform.

## **Conclusion**

Government policy places parents in the role of monitoring their children's activity (such as homework) and behaviour. Implicitly, parents are cast in the role of calling teachers to account. The pressure on schools to recogni-

ze that parents have a right to a voice and thereby to information, as well as ensuring their commitment to school values and mission, continues to increase. Explicitly, parents now have a potentially greater opportunity, through membership of the SGB, to have a say in the decision-making process and management of the school. School management needs to cultivate a genuine ethos of collaboration in order to help the school community become actively involved in their children's education. In order to develop a more effective practice in parental involvement, educational authorities should provide a framework and a process through which the concerns of hard-pressed teachers and the anxieties and frustrations of parents can be examined in a critical, but constructive way. There should be a willingness to examine existing policy and practice, and to think it through in ways that suggest and pinpoint areas of growth and further development. True dialogue can transform teachers, learners and parents to partners. Open communication between parents and teachers can help ensure that the issues that are raised in parent-teacher conferences are resolved amicably.

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