

CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY, FINAL CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS OF THE
RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 SUMMARY OF RESEARCH

5.1.1 ORIENTATION

The aim of this research was to determine and examine the extent, level, form and content of the learning support by the parents of the Grade Two learners in a predominantly Tsonga school in the learning of their children, and the relationship of their involvement with the learning behaviours of the learners. This aim was achieved by directly and indirectly involving parents through a questionnaire using a semi-structured interview, ethnographic observation at home during learning tasks and at school in the classroom, and through an analysis of the response made by parents to correspondence from the school.

The following research sub-questions were investigated:

- How do the parents of Grade Two learners in a Township school support the learning of their children?
- What resources to support cognitive development and the learning of specific skills and content are available to Grade Two learners of a Township school in their homes?
- What are the capabilities of the parents of Grade Two learners in a Township school, to help their children with their schoolwork and their homework?
- Which problems and which forms of incapability occur and/or are experienced among the parents of Grade Two learners?
- What are the frequency, form, extent and content of the relationship of the parents with the educator of their children?

- What is the observable influence of the support for learning of the parents of Grade Two learners in a Township school on the learning behaviours of their children in the classroom?

5.1.2 REVIEW OF CHAPTERS

The research attempted to understand the nature of the support for learning. This study comprises of five chapters as briefly summarised in the following paragraphs:

The opening chapter introduced and formulated the research problem. The aim of the study was outlined. The theoretical frame and the key concepts that featured prominently throughout the study were defined. The research plan was proposed. The methods of research were explained and the programme of the study was outlined in this chapter.

Chapter Two reported on the literature review of the role played by parents in the formal education of their children and the effect of parental involvement on the learning behaviours of children in the Foundation Phase. The dimensions of child development in the Foundation Phase were examined, namely, physical development, psycho-social development and cognitive development. Theorists on child development, such as Havighurst (1976:18), Hurlock (1978:141), Landreth (1993:21), Michael (1990:319) and Vrey (1990:99) agree that as the child develops physically, he learns to use his body more economically and more efficiently.

Concerning the psycho- social development of the child, Lambert and McCombs (1998:9) state that this is the stage when emotions play an important role in the young child's life. According to Meyer, Moore and Viljoen (1990:152), both the emotions themselves (positive and negative) and their patterns of expression change with age, but as the child matures he increasingly gains control over his emotions. According to Nelson (1996:5), the cognitive task of the human child is to make sense of his/her situated place in the world in order to take a skilful part in its activities.

During the Foundation Phase the child shows increased interest in and comprehension of the world around him. He begins to see reality in a more objective way. At this stage the child explores his world actively and gains new knowledge and skills and also begins to master the basic scholastic skills.

Contextual influences on the dynamics of parental involvement such as the educational level of parents and the culture of the community whereby language, literacy and religion

play a role were considered. Family size and the role of parents was looked at generally with regard to the problems which could arise in the facets of the physical dimension, affective dimension, normative dimension and cognitive dimension.

Chapter Three was devoted to the empirical study. Qualitative and quantitative research methods were executed. The research is considered qualitative because it was non-experimental and some data were in the form of verbal description. The research was also quantitative because some data were collected through structured observation and a questionnaire. The following four research methods were applied:

- **Questionnaire**, extended into unstructured interviews.

The Parental Involvement in Learners' Education Questionnaire (PILEQ) (Appendix A) was designed to involve 39 families of the Grade Two learners in one class in the Foundation Phase in a Tsonga school. The PILEQ was first constructed in English, then translated into Tsonga by the educator and retranslated into English for accuracy of translation. The PILEQ contained two sections: Section A consisted of biographical data concerning matters such as names, ages, number of children in the family, rank of child and marital status of parents (questions 1-12) and the qualifications and work life of the parents (questions 13-27). Section B addressed parental involvement in the learners' education at school (questions 28-35) and in the home (questions 36-63).

The researcher administered the questionnaire at the respondents' homes on different dates as per appointment. The interview questions following on the questionnaire were carefully planned and accurately worded. The purpose was to obtain more descriptive information to provide qualitative understanding of quantitative data. A record of the interviews was kept in the form of written notes.

- **Ethnographic observation**

The ethnographic observation took place during the execution of a learning task (based on the classwork of the morning at school) by the learner under the guidance of the parents. As the observer was also the researcher and the designer of the learning task, she clarified what was needed in the learners' tasks. The purpose was to clarify understanding about the interactions between individual children and their parents in respect of a learning task. The activity was recorded in detail by the researcher.

The ethnographic observation was also executed with learners in the classroom. The purpose was to observe how the learners behaved during lessons. The observation in the

classroom would be related to the data on the parents in an effort to understand the influence of the parents' support on the learning of their children.

▪ **The learners' behaviour schedule**

The behaviour schedule was developed to look into the cognitive behaviours of the learners. It was filled in on a daily basis by the researcher for a period of 12 weeks. A 5-point scale was used (see Appendix B). The first week was scheduled for observation and note-taking only. The learning behaviours of the learners were noted on the schedule. The main purpose was to observe particular learning behaviours more systematically, to identify behaviours with significant difference from the general classroom behaviour and to examine whether there were any effects coming from the home which might be the cause of such behaviours.

▪ **Correspondence with parents**

Correspondence was used with parents in the form of one letter per week for five weeks (Appendix C). Simple and straightforward letters were developed in English. The letters were translated into Tsonga by the educator for the sake of the parents, and translated back into English to control for accuracy of the translation. In addition to information of a general nature, each letter contained a request for objects to be used in a future lesson.

The responses of the parents in the form of the number of objects sent to school and the promptness with which the request was carried out, were recorded by the educator. The purpose of the correspondence was to find out which parents of the target group would demonstrate involvement in the learning of their children by responding to correspondence from the school and to ascertain whether their specific degree of involvement generally related to the learning behaviours of their children.

Chapter Four gave a report on the results and findings per research activity. The results were analysed and interpreted. A straightforward frequency analysis as well as relational analysis were developed which, individually and collectively, contributed to the investigation of the main problem, that is: *What is the extent, level and form of involvement of the parents of learners in a Grade Two class in a Township school in the learning of their children, and what effect does their support for learning have on the learning behaviours of their children?* The findings derived from the results are summarised below.

5.1.3 FINDINGS

The responses on the Parental Involvement in Learners' Education Questionnaire (PILEQ) (Tables 4.4 – 4.9, representing the responses per family, not per parent), revealed that, in the course of more than five school terms after their child's school entry in Grade One, only 23.1% of the families had had opportunity to enter into conversation with the principal of the school. By May of the school year, only 38.5% of the families knew the name of the class teacher. Eight families (20.5%) knew the name of a member of the Governing Body of the school and 38.5% knew some of the functions of the Governing Body. On a positive note, very few families (only three – 7.7%) had any complaints about the school.

The majority of the families (61.5%) met with the teacher of their children on some occasions. Twenty-one families (53.8%) had visited the school only on parent meeting days and only three families (7.7%) visited the school at own choice. Fifteen families (38.5%) had never visited the school.

In case of a difficulty being experienced, more than half of the families (59.0%) explained language items to their children. The method for a particular task was addressed by 28.2% of the families. The work was read sentence by sentence by a parent, either in Tsonga or in English, in 10.2% of the families.

About half of the families (46.1%) had a habit of checking their children's work, i.e. 28.2% checked nearly every day and seven families (17.9%) checked once a week. On specific occasions, the following were found: Three families (7.7%) paid attention to their children's progress only after attending a parent meeting, 5.2% checked only at the end of each term and one family only checked when the child had failed. Nearly $\frac{1}{5}$ of the families (17.9%) checked the child's work only when there was time and an equal proportion (17.9%) had never monitored their children's progress.

Thirty-four families (87.2%) had radios while 28 families (71.8%) had television sets in their homes. Only 11 families (32.4%) who had a radio explained some of the programmes on the radio to their children, while 53.6% of the 28 families who had a television set explained some of the programmes on television to their children. Seventeen families (43.6%) took their children on educational outings.

Twenty-five families (89.3%) allowed viewing times on Saturdays and 23 families (82.1%) allowed Sunday viewing times. Seventeen families (60.7%) allowed afternoon viewing times while six families (21.4%) allowed their children to watch television in the evenings.

Tables 4.10 – 4.16 containing data on the relationships between a set of selected aspects of parental involvement revealed the following findings: There was no strongly significant relationship between the variables “gender of children” and “aspects of parental involvement”. The amount of help was equally the same to both children, a boy or a girl.

There was a statistically significant relationship on the 5% level between how many children were in the family and how much involvement the parents had in their learning (as suggested by the resources they bought). It was found that the fewer the children were in the family, the more resources were bought for them.

There was no significant relationship between whether parents were a couple or were single or widowed and the amount in which they were involved in their children’s education.

There was no statistically significant relationship between “qualifications of parents” and “aspects of parental involvement”. When asked about their support for their children during the interviews following the questionnaire, it emerged that some of the better qualified parents were especially willing to help their children with schoolwork and some of a small number (10.3%) of the illiterate parents were willing to help, while some were less willing. Poverty and illiteracy appeared to be the main causes of non-involvement of some of the parents in the education of their children.

There was a slight relationship on the 10% level of significance between the “type of work” parents do and “aspects of parental involvement”. The amount and nature of literacy materials and the goals for using literacy did not differ much between the working-class families and those who were not working.

The parents’ number of years of work and aspects of parental involvement indicated that there was a significant relationship level between how long the parent had been working and whether he/she had a problem with the school.

In the interviews with the families following up the questionnaires, it was found that most parents demonstrated their willingness to assist in their children’s education in different ways, although some of them did not themselves have education at all.

Concerning the question of **resources**, 34 parents professed to be actively supportive of their children's learning. Some indicated that they were able to buy the necessary resources such as numeracy instruments, drawing books, pictures, crayons, scissors and reading books. It was found that some use fingers, pebbles, counters, matchsticks, pens, pencils and crayons for counting. Of the 39 families, 11 claim to have some show of interest, despite the fact that they were suffering from extreme poverty. It was difficult for them to buy the relevant resources, but they improvised by using their fingers and matchsticks to count since they recognised the value of education. Only five parents appeared to have a total lack of involvement in the education of their children. It was found that of these, four were illiterate and one was literate. When asked about their support for their children, it emerged that they do not know the value of being supportive since they have never been exposed to education, and some said as they could not find jobs, they had no money to buy resources for their children.

It was found that the amount and nature of **literacy** materials of the goals for using literacy did not differ much between the working families and those who were not working. The majority of the parents demonstrated their interest and involvement in their children's education. It was found that 22 of the literate parents and 12 of the semi-literate parents demonstrated their interest and involvement in their children's education by spending a few minutes in the afternoon reading together with their children. One parent added that she sometimes allows silent reading and then after a few minutes asks her child to draw the relationship between her own background experience and ideas from the text. It was also found that some literate parents have never done reading with their children because of domestic chores. Some parents who could not read nor write depended on the siblings for help.

Concerning watching **television** and listening to the **radio** programmes, it was found that a few parents appeared to have discovered the value of these media. One parent indicated that television and radio are educational and pointed out that she thoroughly explains the programmes, and sometimes asks her child to tell about any experience she has had or has heard which is related to the characters or feelings awakened by the programmes. Some parents who did not have television or radio, indicated that they allow their children to go to the neighbours because they know that their children will gain knowledge and will be able to describe some of the programmes to them. Very few parents were found to have a total lack of involvement and support for learning since their children never ask questions about programmes or never describe the programmes to them.

With regard to how parents give support with their children's **homework**, a small number of parents appeared to be actively involved. It was found that their children are aware that whenever they come from school they must do their homework before they become involved in other activities. A considerable number of parents appeared to have a show of interest, but because of time constraints they are not actively supportive. They leave early when the children are still asleep and there is no direct supervision coming from them. It was found that a few parents do not have patience for doing homework together with their children since they say that they cannot concentrate after their long working hours.

The ethnographic observations made at learners' homes revealed that, in numeracy and reading tasks, the parents spent a few minutes using their fingers and counters such as pebbles to count out the number question or reread sentences presented to their children, until the children were able to do the task on their own. Some parents like reading because, according to them, it refreshes their memory, it prevents them from yawning, it keeps them active and prevents them from listening to gossips. The parents who could not read nor write, instructed their children to listen carefully to the instructions given by siblings and/or aunts. If some learners happened to make a mistake, the sibling and/or aunt patiently asked him/her to repeat the task and to do it aloud until he/she got it right. If the same learner was still encountering a problem, the sibling and/or aunt would persist in reading together with him/her until he/she managed to do it on his/her own.

Some parents, on the other hand, were observed to be impatient and harsh to their children once they realised there was a mistake. One parent said mistakes were not permitted, another parent said if her child kept on making a mistake there would be no future for him and one more parent admonished the child to be quick and not to waste time. Some parents were more patient and allowed their children more time to correct mistakes. At the end of the exercise, they indicated that they felt more comfortable by having been present when their children were doing a learning task.

The majority of the parents were more knowledgeable in Tsonga than in English. Some were fluent and quick in reading Tsonga and some mistakes were encountered in reading English. Generally, parents were enthused by the kind of exercise presented and displayed growing eagerness to know more about the best ways to approach the learning tasks.

In numeracy tasks, most parents helped their children by using counters (e.g. pebbles and beans) for counting. If the child happened to add incorrectly, the parent would tell him/her

to repeat the work using fingers. Parents encouraged the children to speak out when counting to enhance concentration and to avoid making mistakes again.

The ethnographic observations made with learners and their educator in the classroom revealed that some learners were active and used their own initiative by asking their own questions apart from their classwork. Some learners enjoyed it to answers questions in full sentences and were eager to participate in the conversations through questions. If, during reading, they were asked to say what they think is going to happen next or what is the picture about, they would think and use their existing knowledge to add what they think will happen or describe the picture to the class. These learners appeared to be good readers and also had insight in the meaning of the story and the educator's questions. Some were good in both Tsonga and English. Some of the learners, however, would lose interest during the lesson, would look around, appear withdrawn, look shy or would not follow instructions or explanations correctly while some would even look bored and start making a noise. These learners frequently had pronunciation problems in English and they seemed to use limited skills and strategies while writing.

With regard to numeracy, there were still some learners who were slow in writing and those who were still struggling to add, subtract or multiply. The majority of the learners were able to finish the work ahead of time and some even volunteered to give the answers to the sums on the board.

The findings on the behaviour schedule revealed that some learners demonstrated a good many dimensions of significantly positive learning behaviours in comparison to the mean percentage of the total class. Some parents of some of these learners had appeared to be supportive during the learning tasks observed by the researcher in their homes, which could have led to the positive learning behaviours of these learners in school. The parents of some of these learners were found to be strict and impatient during the learning tasks observed in their homes, but despite their variously negative treatment, their children showed significantly positive learning behaviours which may therefore have stemmed from other supportive factors. The same learners each time displayed significantly negative learning behaviours in only one dimension (e.g. execution of instructions or amount of work or self-initiated remarks).

The findings from the Learning behaviours Observation Schedule again revealed that some learners demonstrated a good many dimensions of significantly negative learning behaviours in comparison to the mean percentage of the total class. Some parents of some of these learners indeed appeared to be strict, impatient and less willing during the

learning tasks observed by the researcher in their homes, which could have contributed to these learners' significantly negative learning behaviours. Since some of these learners demonstrated significantly positive learning behaviours in two, three and five dimensions e.g. confidence, skill displayed, knowledge displayed, group behaviour, self-initiated remarks and self-initiated questions), the findings suggest that the degree of negative learning behaviours was less than the degree of positive learning behaviours.

The findings which were derived from correspondence with parents revealed that of the 39 families, nine families responded to all the letters, 25 responded but not fully and five families responded to none of the letters. The positive response was extremely high in five families (Learners 2, 7, 25, 29 and 37) in that the learners brought considerably more objects than required.

The parents of Learner 2 sent more than what was required in the first letter, and the exact number in the third, fourth and fifth letters. However, they did not respond to the second letter. During the ethnographic observation made by the researcher in their home, these parents could not read nor write but were found to be willing to help and asked the sibling to help while they were present. Learner 2 was observed to be trying hard in class which could be the results from his parents' positive behaviours.

The parents of Learners 7, 25, 29 and 37 played a highly positive participatory role by responding highly to all the letters. The same parents were found to be fully supportive during the ethnographic observation made in their homes. The learners of these parents showed extremely positive behaviours and wanted to ask more questions than the others in class. In some cases these learners (Learners 7, 25, 27 and 37) would, for example, want to know more about an unfamiliar word in a sentence, which they found difficult to pronounce, which could indicate a positive influence of the support for learning from home.

The parents of Learner 39 were among those who responded to all the letters, but in some cases their son brought fewer objects than what was requested. These same parents (of Learner 39) were also observed to be patient and supportive in the learning task, whereas their child at times showed a negative learning behaviours and reacted in an unusual way in the classroom, which could have been contributed to by other factors outside the home.

The parents of Learners 10, 14, 27, 33 and 38 did not respond to any of the letters. It is surprising to find the parents of Learner 27 in this group since, during the ethnographic

observation made in their home, they demonstrated their positive involvement by being patient and motivating their child to learn. These same parents perhaps showed positive involvement to capture the situation when there was no link between them and the school. Despite the incidence, Learner 27 was found to be doing well in both language and numeracy. She also displayed significantly positive learning behaviours in many dimensions on the learning behaviours observation schedule filled in by the researcher in the classroom.

The parents of Learners 10, 14, 33 and 38 were found to be less willing, strict and impatient during the ethnographic observation made in their homes. It was found that Learners 10 and 33 initially appeared to have little confidence in the classroom, showed little interest in tasks, were slow in reading and writing and they seldom raised their hands when questions were asked, which might have been contributed to by the parents' actions. In contrast, learner 38 was found to be a good achiever despite the negative behaviours of his parents, whereas Learner 33 became motivated and his learning behaviours were thought to normalise.

Finally it was found that some of the parents who responded to some of the requests, claimed to be actively involved in their children's education, and their children displayed significantly positive learning behaviours in some dimensions, whereas some other children displayed significantly negative learning behaviours in some dimensions.

5.2 CONCLUSIONS

5.2.1 ORIENTATION

The focus of this study has been on the support for learning provided by African parents to Foundation Phase learners in a Township school. The support for learning is generally influenced by the skill and knowledge which parents have and on the relationship between parents and children which is also shaken up by the child. The main research question has been: *What is the extent, level and form of the support for learning provided by the parents of learners in Grade Two in a Township school and what influence does their support have on the learning behaviours of the learners?* The main research question was unpacked into six subquestions of which the conclusions are discussed in paragraphs 5.2.2.1 - 5.2.2.5; and synthesised in paragraph 5.2.2.6, all investigated with regard to one Tsonga school in Mamelodi, Pretoria.

5.2.2 ANSWERING THE RESEARCH QUESTION

Subquestions 1 and 3 are answered in association with paragraph 5.2.2.1, followed by the conclusions concerning subquestions 3 to 6 in paragraphs 5.2.2.2 – 5.2.2.5. The overall conclusions concerning the main question are contained in paragraph 5.2.2.6.

5.2.2.1 What are the capabilities of the parents of Grade Two learners in a Township school, to help their children with schoolwork and their homework? How do these parents support the learning of their children?

It was stated in the literature review that by being helped with schoolwork and homework, the learning child should not only learn how to do the particular task, but also how to observe, analyse, monitor and review one's own learning activities (see paragraph 2.3.6.1). The literature review again revealed that cognitive development depends heavily on the ongoing quality of the parent-child interaction (see paragraph 2.3.6.2).

The literature review, as discussed in Chapter Two, revealed that the support for learning should be accompanied by the motivational value of personal interest, encouragement and positive praise in the family (see paragraph 2.3.5.1). The literature review again revealed that the support for learning makes a major contribution to the children's later reading development (see paragraph 2.3.6.1). In paragraph 2.3.6.2, it was found that children with less experience of being read to at home tend to exhibit somewhat poorer knowledge of literacy as they begin school and also to make slower progress in learning to read.

It was found in this research that some parents are capable to provide in the learning of their children, support, for example, by reading to their children, telling them stories about the books they had read, reading together with them, and by asking them questions on what they had been reading about or by even asking them to come up with or create their own stories which may be related to the text. Some parents, for example, interpreted the lesson or task to their children and checked their schoolwork and homework nearly every day, whereas some parents check once a week or when there is time. Some parents, for example, have no time to do the work with their children or to even check whether the children have done the work or not.

It was found in this research that some parents support their children's learning, for example, by explaining language items to them. Some, in a very particular way, corrected errors, for example in numeracy tasks, through the use of counters (pebbles and

matchsticks). A very few parents read the work sentence by sentence, either in Tsonga or in English. Some parents used examples related to what the text is about. Those who cannot read nor write asked the siblings and/or aunts to help. The forms of support are reflected in Table 4.6 and in paragraph 4.3.2.2.

There wasn't any remarkably rich variety of ways in which parents helped their children. Their assistance focused somewhat on understanding, but the practice was not of a good value since they chiefly resorted to only one method of helping, i.e. drill and practice. There was hardly any striking experience like that of bringing in other methods such as problem solving.

The majority of the mothers had education from junior primary school (35.9%) up to senior primary (23.0%). A limited number had qualified at matric level (10.3%) and an equal proportion (10.3%) had never attended school. Some of the fathers who responded had qualified at junior secondary school (37.5%) and matric level (25.0%) while one qualified at junior primary and one at senior primary. In addition to the generally low level of the parents' qualifications, the kind of education under the earlier Bantu Education may further have influenced their lack of depth of a culture of literacy and their limited scope of education as well as lack of educational knowledge and skills in so much that their support for learning appeared to be stereotyped.

The show of praise was constrained, perhaps also by a lack of knowledge and skills. A culture of literacy appeared limited in most of the parents. Even those who had a potential level of efficient literacy on account of their school qualifications, life experience and exposure to task and were employed did not do much in support of their children's reading and writing. Their level of schooling and training did not appear to contribute much to the support, neither did the difference between the literate parents and those who were not highly literate.

Some parents appeared to be strict, impatient and less willing to help during the observation of the learning tasks in their homes. Some claimed that their children never ask for assistance (see Tables 4.6 and 4.7).

It is clear that some of the participating parents indeed regard the school as an autonomous institution, that educators are sufficiently competent to work alone and that their participation as parents amounts to intrusion in the work of professionals (Letsie 1994:42; Van Schaik 1990:54-55). One possible reason for the low rate of support may

be that some parents lack motivation themselves which may be caused by the illiteracy and semi-literacy factors.

It may be concluded that the knowledge and capabilities of the parents do not seem to be challenging in support of their children's reading and writing. The methods used appeared to be repetitious and how they were applied was not satisfactory. The parents' poor experience of education under the earlier political dispensation in South Africa appears to have caused them to have very limited knowledge on how to provide support for learning.

5.2.2.2 Which problems and forms of incapability occur and/or are experienced among the parents of Grade Two learners in a Township school?

The literature review, as discussed in Chapter Two, revealed that there are contextual influences (for example, educational level and income of parents, culture of the community and family size), which may hinder parents from being fully supportive in the learning of their children, but these in turn may affect family life both positively and negatively. Positively, members of the family may be in a position and have the time and desire to nurture and to deal with the problem or the task for the child to learn effectively. The parents cannot teach the children things they do not know, but they have the potential to improvise and set a very high ideal and values in the education of their children. If parents are devoted, value education and apply disciplinary methods and routine, this will enhance independence in children. The unavailability of assets in the community and the socio-economic factors may, however, also negatively affect the family.

It was found in this research that some families, for example, find it difficult to provide support for learning in the education of their children. One possible reason may be that parents work far away from home. They leave early when the children are still asleep and return home when the children have already fallen asleep again. Parents may be tired and stressed themselves and they may, therefore, not be in a position to give guidance and learning support to their children. This possibility is supported by literature consulted (Grolnick *et al.*, 1997:539; Heystek 1999:109 and Weeto 1997:52) which reveals that stressful events might take time from parents, drain energy and attention, or both, making parents less psychologically available for or aware of the requirement to render support in their children's education.

Another possible reason that further deters parents from being supportive may be that some parents, for example, are illiterate and lack motivational skills themselves which again makes it difficult for them to apply problem-solving methods.

The support for learning, chiefly in the formerly disadvantaged families, leaves much to be desired, and the lack of variation in support strategies might be strongly related to the education these parents had received. They never knew that they are part of the education system, even the literate and semi-literate parents, they were never involved in the education of their children.

It is important for parents, employed or not, literate or not, to be motivated to encourage their children to work hard and if possible, ask assistance from people who can be of help to their children. Moeketsi (1998:41) brings together the findings of different researchers who all agree that the child's home environment and the support he/she gets from home can help to enhance learning and positively affect scholastic performance.

5.2.2.3 What resources to support cognitive development and the learning of specific skills and content are available to Grade Two learners of a Township school?

Educational resources are important since they enhance the children's learning. It was found in this research that the majority of the parents, for example, rely on the use of fingers, counters and pebbles for counting. It was again revealed that although the majority of the families had radios (87.2%) and television sets (71.8%) in their homes, the number of families who interacted about programmes presented on the radio or television was considerably less. Only 11 families (32.4% of the families who had a radio) explained some of the programmes on the radio to their children while 53.6% of the 28 families who had a television set explained some of the programmes on television to their children (see Table 4.8 and paragraph 4.3.2.2).

In this study it was found that the vast majority of the learners (81.5%) occupied the first, second and third position in the child rank. Eleven (28.9%) were the oldest (or only) child in the family, 26.3% occupied the second and third position in the family whereas 13.1% were below the third position in the age rank.

It was revealed that the position of the children in the family did not affect the way the resources were bought for them. It was again found that the fewer the children were in the family, the more resources were bought for them. With the various home language categories (Tsonga, Tswana, North Sotho and English) Tsonga was the most spoken (79.5%) in the homes and a high percentage (84.0%) of the Tsonga parents bought resources for their children. Some of the minority groups (Tswana and North Sotho parents) also bought resources for their children.

Most children were allowed to watch television on Saturdays and Sundays in comparison to only few on weekday afternoons and on weekday evenings. Some parents stated that although television is educational, they want their children to spend much time on schoolwork, especially on weekdays so as not to be like them (parents) who were never exposed to education. It appears that television would be well used educationally if parents could sit together with their children and explain the programmes to them.

It appears that there were insufficient resources in the families. However, the absence of resources is not the end of learning and does not in any case deny the child to learn. It does not limit the support parents can provide, for example, some parents cited the books they had read to their children, some asked siblings to help with reading while some used counters to count.

5.2.2.4 What are the frequency, form, extent and content of the relationship of the parents with the educator of their children?

It was stated in the discussion of the data regarding parents interacting with their children in learning tasks that parents who participate in school activities and speak and read more to their children, contribute to better performance in their reading in school. It was further disclosed that the parents' role is of inestimable importance in laying the foundation for learning to listen, speak, read and write, and above all, in supervising all learning (see paragraph 4.4.2.3).

It was found in this research that some parents' willingness to help their children with learning tasks opened good relationships. For example, Table 4.5 indicated how parents visited the educator of their children on different occasions: A good number of parents (53.8%) met with the educator on parent meetings, whereas 7.7% frequently visited at own choice. Nearly 40% of the parents, however, had never communicated with the educator of their children.

In this research it was also found that the majority of the parents, mainly from the township area, responded to the letters which contained information from the educator of their children, which would mean that there was a willingness in some parents to cooperate with the educator of their children (see Table 4.20).

It appears that some parents from the informal settlement do not actively support the school as an organisation. For example, four families never took part in any of the requests as opposed to only one from the township, which could also suggest that the

literacy factor, poverty factor and deficient culture of learning cause some parents to distance themselves from the education of their children or from being supportive to the school's requests which in turn may affect children's learning (see paragraph 4.6.3). This is supported by Mnisi and Shilubane's (1998:6) finding which reveals that some learners indeed have non-supportive homes, little parental care and involvement, few resources in their homes, little intellectual stimulation and illiterate parents. It is stated in this research that close contact between school and home should be maintained if the child is to learn effectively (see paragraph 2.3.1 and 4.3.2.3).

5.2.2.5 What is the observable influence of the support for learning of the parents of Grade Two learners in a Township school on the learning behaviours of their children in the classroom?

The findings from the Learning behaviours Observation Schedule revealed that some learners demonstrated a good many dimensions of significantly positive learning behaviours in comparison to the mean percentages of the total class. The parents of some, but not all, of these learners had appeared to be supportive during the learning tasks observed by the researcher in their homes which may lead one to say that the support for learning which these parents had provided, may have contributed to the positive learning behaviours of their children in the classroom.

The parents of some of these learners were observed to be less willing, but were harsh and impatient in supporting their children with the learning tasks. Despite the various negative behaviours of the parents, their children showed significantly positive learning behaviours which may, therefore, not be exclusively associated with their parents. In the absence of clear, strong influence of the parents of these learners, one could suggest that there might be some other factors which may have positively influenced the learning behaviours of these learners, such as interest, personality, motivation from within, perhaps even self-respect, and/or motivation or teaching skill from the educator.

It was again observed that some learners demonstrated a good many dimensions of significantly negative learning behaviours in comparison to the mean percentages of the total class. The parents of some, but not all, of these learners had appeared to be less willing to help during the learning tasks observed by the researcher. The negative behaviours of these parents could lead one to conclude that they may have influenced the learning behaviours of their children in a negative direction. There could also be other factors which may have influenced the learning behaviours of some of these learners, for

example, aggressiveness, shyness or intellectual disabilities and/or education factors such as teaching methods.

In conclusion, one may state that, even if some parents appeared to be supportive during the observation of the learning tasks in their homes, some of their children appeared to display a significantly negative learning behaviours in class, which would mean that the negative influence might have been contributed by other factors as the children lacked discipline, that they were less gifted or that they lacked cognitive developmental skills, or that there was educator influence and/or even peer influence in this regard.

5.2.2.6 The main research question: *What is the extent, level and form of the support for learning of the parents of Grade Two learners in a Township school and what effect does their support for learning have on the learning of the learners?*

Having looked at all the research subquestions, it may be concluded that the improvisation of the means used, even though methods were the same for the majority of the parents in their support for learning, is an indication that the majority of the parents were willing to play a role in the education of their children.

The majority of parents had qualified at early school levels, some at junior and senior primary school and some at junior secondary school. A limited number of parents had qualified at matric level, that is, two fathers and four mothers, but an equal number of the mothers had never attended school. The majority of the literate and some of the semi-literate and even the illiterate parents, were able to engage in the education of their children, whereas some parents at all the levels of literacy were not ready to provide support.

The factors of knowledge, experience and literacy in the parents do not contribute singularly because there are perhaps many overlays of attitude which also contribute to influence. There are other factors that may bring influence. For instance, learners with many significantly negative learning behaviours on the observation scale were sometimes found to come from the homes of literate parents and some with many significantly positive learning behaviours had illiterate parents.

One of the other considerations influencing parental involvement concerns the **time** factor. Some parents spoke of time constraints because of their work commitments. Distance from work and leaving early for work might prevent parents from being supportive. The

parents' emotional feelings when tired might cause lack of support for learning, for instance, stress and many other related factors might lead to such a situation.

The problems encountered by parents concerning the form, level and content of support of their children for learning, might actually be one result of the type of education they had had themselves. Under the earlier political dispensation in South Africa, parents received poor quality education (Mawasha 1986:26), which now in turn has left them with very limited knowledge of how to provide their own children with support for learning. What parents did during the observation of their learning tasks in their homes, typically reflects how they were taught themselves.

The parents' **attitude** towards the learning of their children has been a dominant theme throughout the data and is not associated exclusively with the level of their learning and literacy. The majority of the parents were positively inclined and made ready use of positive words of encouragement in as far as the education of their children is concerned. Much positive attitude was expressed in detail by the literate parents. Although some of the illiterate parents also demonstrated concern, this was expressed generally and not in specifics.

An excess amount of strictness and/or harshness in terms of remarks was observed among some of the better qualified and even some illiterate parents. Strictness might in some parents have signified their focus for learning, as could be seen from their children's significantly positive learning behaviours on the observation scale.

The positive expressions from the majority of the parents show that, despite the poverty factor, illiteracy factor and many other related factors, the parents were generally willing to provide support in the education of their children. The degree of seriousness in their statements that they need to be trained in such a way that they will understand their cognitive role and how to give cognitive support to their children also indicates their willingness of the support for learning in the education of their children.

A relevant component of learning support is the parents' **liaison** with the school. About $\frac{1}{4}$ of the parents' responses on the questionnaire showed that they have met and talked with the principal of the school which would mean that $\frac{3}{4}$ of the parents do not show concern, and that they leave everything in the hands of the educators. This picture is not clearly reflected on the learning behaviours of the children. It does not influence the learning behaviours of the child singularly because some of the learners with many significantly positive learning behaviours come from the illiterate parents and some of those with

significantly negative learning behaviours come from the parents who were positively inclined.

Concerning cooperation with the school's request for lesson items, nine families responded to all the letters, 25 responded though not fully and five responded to all of the letters. A few of the learners whose parents responded positively were observed to have demonstrated many dimensions of significantly positive learning behaviours, whereas some of the learners whose parents were not so willing to help displayed a good many dimensions of significantly negative learning behaviours.

Visits by parents to the school and the educator of their children also demonstrated a positive relationship between the two parties. Some of these children also demonstrated a positive relationship between the two parties. Some of these parents also knew the name of their children's educator. Some of the parents had never communicated with the educator of their children which may lead one to conclude that they need to be taught on how to consult the school, not only when their children have failed or have encountered a problem, but any time they feel the need.

It must finally be concluded that, despite the variously inadequate learning support by some parents, their children displayed significantly positive learning behaviours which may not be strongly associated with their parents. Some learners whose parents were more positively inclined, demonstrated a significantly negative learning behaviours, which suggests that there are multiple factors which may have influenced the learning behaviours of these learners.

5.3 METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

The data sets by means of using a questionnaire, with semi-structured interview, ethnographic observation, a learner's behaviour schedule and correspondence with parents as methods of this research, were each analysed and discussed separately. The aim, administration and the use of each method were outlined.

The questionnaire was highly structured, but there was no room for any additional comments. The respondents were channelled into answering what was required without being allowed a chance to come up with their views or suggestions. The respondents could have provided more information if more probing was made.

The questionnaire is observed to have been relevant and has provided meaningful information in a descriptive way. Relational data did not show much because no strong relationships were found. There was hardly any relationship of significance difference which could lead one to say maybe a questionnaire is not the way it should have been done. Another reason could also be the uniqueness of the sample (39 families) that international findings and theory have so far failed by and large to accommodate the South African township, informal settlement and rural population.

The purpose of the interview was to obtain additional descriptive information and to provide qualitative understanding of the quantitative data. It was found to have provided relevant information on how parents could be supportive in the education of their children. The majority of the respondents applied revision or repetition and explanation methods while in numeracy they resorted to pebbles and other counters.

Parents said they enjoyed working with their children and some said they were learning new ideas when helping their children during the learning tasks even though they applied one and the same method of support.

The purpose of the ethnographic observation was to clarify understanding about the interactions between the individual children and their parents in respect of a learning task in their homes and to observe the learning behaviours of the learners in the classroom.

The ethnographic observation is regarded as the crucial method in this research. However, although it provided significant information, it should have been field noted in more detail. The ethnographic observation of parents participating in their children's learning might be a fruitful way of knowing skills and knowledge they have. This method can be interrelated with the behaviour schedule or correspondence with parents where each is interpreted with regard to the attitude of the parents. The ethnographic observation of parents particularly indicated that some of them are more enthusiastic about their children's education and that there is a need for them to be offered a better education so as to be more supportive of their children's education. It was truly possible to see the parents in authentic action, and thus to breakthrough beyond the point of verbal report and description.

The purpose of the schedule was to observe particular learning behaviours more systematically to inform the qualitative description. It could be argued that failure to award scores of 1, 2 and 5 to the majority of the learners affected the results. Careful

interpretation is required because some other factors outside the family might also have influenced the learning behaviours of the learners.

The purpose of correspondence with parents was to find out operationally which parents of the target group would demonstrate support for learning in the learning of their children by responding to correspondence from the school, and then to ascertain whether their support for learning generally related to the learning behaviours of their children.

This method strongly reflected that the negative behaviours of some of the parents observed during the learning task were related to failure to respond fully to requests from the school and thus might have negatively influenced the learning behaviours of their children. Some parents who were supportive were also those who responded positively in sending the required objects and thus might have influenced the behaviours of their children in a positive way.

Finally, one would say the Parental Involvement in Learners' Education Questionnaire (PILEQ) which was coupled with the semi-structured interview, together with the ethnographic observation made with the parents in their homes as well as in the classroom with the learners and their educator, were found to have produced much information in this research. Taking the Learners' Behaviour Schedule and correspondence with parents into consideration, one would conclude that they somehow repeat what the former set have produced. The support for learning can always be seen as a crucial factor in the children's learning.

5.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

Like most other current studies concerning barriers to learning in South Africa, this research does not claim to provide final answers in this field, but it raises some issues concerning the amount of the support for learning provided by parents in the education of their children. Admittedly, there are limitations that stem from the course of the research.

This study was limited to the parents of the learners in only one Grade Two class in only one township school, with the result that in only the particular community system will we understand what the quality of parent-child relationships in learning situations is, to determine how they could be helpful in the education of young learners.

The researcher acknowledges the fact that learners in such a small sample were not divided in terms of their different backgrounds, for example culture, tradition, religious

affiliation, and language background and that these various influences were not given further attention. The effects obviously cannot be denied.

As previously mentioned in Chapter Four, the researcher acknowledges with regard to the statistical issues of this research that only a small number of participants have been involved in this study. The descriptive as well as relational information was contemplated with regard to a small sample size, with the hope that more relevant information would be found. Only trends could be described and interpreted for this particular sample. For example:

- In the Learning Behaviour Schedule, only codes of 3 and 4 were found to be dominating.
- Questionnaire, coupled with semi-structured interviews: The questionnaire did not allow parents to come up with their own suggestions and/or ideas.
- This technique might have contained a form of bias because it was done in the community where everybody was not in a position to understand.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the above findings and conclusions drawn from the research, the following recommendations for parents' support for learning by their children in the Foundation Phase and for further research could be considered:

5.5.1 RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING PARENTS' SUPPORT FOR LEARNING BY THEIR CHILDREN IN THE FOUNDATION PHASE

▪ Recommendation 1

Since the research results show that many of the parents' own learning experiences were limited to drill and practice methods, they did not have a rich control of reading with understanding and were not quick and creative to show their children alternative ways how to do the schoolwork, which was also carried over in numeracy tasks. It is recommended that programmes be run by schools for parents to get training in methods of learning and support. Parents should be enriched with knowledge and skills that will help them provide the necessary support in the education of their children.

▪ Recommendation 2

It is recommended that the Government should take the responsibility in training the educators and principals who in turn will provide better training to parents. There is

already an indication that this is possible through the training provided by non-governmental organisations such as the Management of Schools and Training programmes. Such training should aim at motivating and encouraging parents to provide support in the education of their children.

▪ **Recommendation 3**

It is recommended that programmes be expanded in such a way that parent enrichment courses are included where parents will be taught desirable and/or effective methods of talking and playing with their children and to teach them through play.

▪ **Recommendation 4**

There must be regular contact of the school with the parents so that they will feel free to discuss matters concerning their child. The parent must be kept informed regularly of the child's scholastic progress. If the child does not show sufficient progress, the educator ought to give certain additional exercises to the parent that the child can practice at home, which will also involve the parent. Written communication between the school and the home can be valuable if one or both parents are unable to attend the discussion evening, sports meetings, and fund-raising projects. At these meetings, educators should "sell" their school to parents in order that they may regard it as their school too.

▪ **Recommendation 5**

It is recommended that universities and other tertiary institutions include parental involvement as a course in the training of all principals and educators. In doing so, they will be able to impart better knowledge to parents who will also be able to provide better learning support to their children. The parents who have a higher level of literacy on account of their school qualifications, life experience and exposure to tasks will be able to provide more support of their children's learning.

5.5.2 RECOMMENDATION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

It is recommended that due to the deficient culture of support for learning in the home of an African child as it emerged from this research, a further study be undertaken on how to help non-reading parents to support their children in their learning. Even those who have a potential level of functional literacy on account of their school qualifications, life experience and exposure to tasks should also be involved in the research because their experience of schooling and training did not appear to contribute richly to the support of their children's education.

The research should address how parents could become critical thinkers, use different methods in guiding their children to learn so as to enhance their partnership with the school.

It is also recommended to implement ways of changing habits of reading and learning in the homes of these children. Extensive and profound research is necessary, specifically with the disadvantaged families. Therefore, the situation of parents (illiterates, semi-literates and literates) needs to be researched.

5.6 FINAL CONCLUSION

- 5.6.1 In the South African education policy, the Government endorses that parental involvement is important in the education of the children.
- 5.6.2 Findings from the literature study as well as empirical study of this research indicated that a child who is raised in a poverty stricken environment finds a school environment strange, as he/she has to learn and conform to strange norms and values which are not in line with what is taking place at home. On the other hand, a child who grew up in a well to do environment tends to have less problems conforming to the school environment to what the school expects of him/her and what he/she has been taught to practice at home. The literature study and this research concur that because of illiteracy and low level of education that prevail among African parents, some of them seem not to be willing to take part in the education of their children, and that there is a higher level of improvement in children whose parents are actively involved.
- 5.6.3 In addition to the generally low level of the parents' qualifications, the kind of education under the earlier Bantu Education may further have influenced their lack of depth of a culture of literacy and their limited scope of education as well as lack of educational knowledge and skills in so much that their support for learning appeared to be stereotyped.
- 5.6.4 Both the literature and many empirical studies cite the family as the most important entity in any child's life. It is, therefore, clear that any learner's extent of coping in the classroom and the value he/she attaches to schooling is to some extent dependent on the learner's home background. The schools need to gain greater understanding of the communities in which they function. In doing so, they may be able to provide support to parents that is relevant to them. This

support should in turn provide parents with the window currently required to actively engage in their children's education. It is important that educators and parents work together to shape the future of the learners and to inculcate in them the desire to learn.

- 5.6.5 The researcher believes that this study has shed some light into the understanding of parental involvement in the education of their children in their early schooling. It is hoped that stakeholders will formulate policies and develop practices which will motivate parents to be supportive in their children's education. This will help African learners, particularly the Foundation Phase learners, to achieve competence in learning and greater confidence and motivation to use their problem-solving skills in order to learn more and to become part of a life-long learning process. This process can result in a culture of learning which is much needed in a democratic South Africa, where all races must have an equal chance of becoming better contributors to the world.

---oooOooo---