

**Parent experiences of their parental engagement in the early  
grades**

**Carli Schoeman**

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**Parent experiences of their parental engagement in the early grades**

by

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

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AUGUST 2018

## Declaration of authenticity

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I, Carli Schoeman, hereby declare that this thesis, titled

*“Parent experiences of their parental engagement in the early grades”*

is my own work. All references that were consulted are included in the reference list. This thesis submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree Magister Educationis at the University of Pretoria was not previously submitted for a degree at any other university.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

# Ethical clearance certificate

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<b>CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE</b>	CLEARANCE NUMBER: <b>EC 17/06/02</b>
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### **DECLARATION**

To whom it may concern

I hereby confirm that I have proofread and edited the language of the following dissertation, including the bibliography.

#### **Title of dissertation**

Parent experiences of their parental engagement in the early grades

#### **Candidate**

Carli Schoeman



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13 September 2018

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---

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## Abstract and keywords

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This qualitative research study explores and describes parents' experiences of their engagement in their children's formal education within the early grades by looking to understand the importance of developing accountable partnership relationships between the school and the parent. The importance of parental engagement in a child's life has been well documented in the literature and has been linked to positive academic achievement, self-esteem, school attendance, work performance, and improved social behaviour of children. The literature suggests that there are numerous role-players in the parental engagement process, such as the parent, the educator and the learner.

Three primary schools in the Pretoria area were identified as research sites, where 19 participants took part in the study. This study relied on a qualitative interpretivist paradigm that allowed me to understand the meaning that parents assign to their experiences of parental engagement within the early grades. The theoretical framework of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005) guided the research study. The data collection instruments that were used, namely semi-structured interviews, observations, and artefacts (which include collages and the biographical data profile), allowed me to gain an in-depth perspective of the parents' experiences of their engagement within the early grades. The data were transcribed and coded to compile the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data. These data assisted me in answering the primary and secondary research questions.

From the study it became evident that the parents valued parental engagement and that they wanted to be engaged in their children's education in the early grades through their individual motivational beliefs, their perception of invitations for involvement from others, and their perceived life context. Schools need to adapt to accommodate parents' life contexts in order to promote their children's achievements by providing training to parents on how to become actively engaged and by providing alternative means of communication between the school and the parent.

## Keywords

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- Parent
- Experiences
- Formal education
- Foundation Phase
- Parental engagement, parental involvement
- Child, childhood



## **Titel: Ouerervaringe van hul ouerbetrokkenheid in die vroeë grade**

### **Abstrak en sleutelwoorde**

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Hierdie kwalitatiewe navorsingstudie word ouers se ervaringe van hul betrokkenheid in hul kinders se formele onderwys in die vroeë grade ondersoek en beskryf deur die belangrikheid van die ontwikkeling van verantwoordbare vennootskapsverhoudinge tussen die skool en die ouer te verstaan. Die belangrikheid van ouerbetrokkenheid in 'n kind se lewe is goed gedokumenteer in die literatuur en is gekoppel aan positiewe akademiese prestasie, selfbeeld, skoolbywoning, werksprestasie en verbeterde sosiale gedrag van kinders. Die literatuur stel voor dat daar verskeie rolspelers in die ouerbetrokkenheidsproses is, soos die ouer, die onderwyser en die leerder.

Drie laerskole in die Pretoria-omgewing is geïdentifiseer as navorsingspersele, waar 19 deelnemers aan die studie deelgeneem het. Hierdie studie was afhanklik van 'n kwalitatiewe interpretatiewe paradigma wat my toegelaat het om die betekenis wat ouers aan hul ervaringe van ouerbetrokkenheid in die vroeë grade heg te verstaan. Die teoretiese raamwerk van Hoover-Dempsey en Sandler (2005) het die navorsingstudie gelei. Die data-insamelingsinstrumente wat gebruik is, naamlik semigestruktureerde onderhoude, waarnemings en artefakte (wat collages en die biografiese dataprofiel insluit), het my in staat gestel om 'n diepgaande perspektief op die ouers se ervaringe van hul betrokkenheid binne die vroeë grade te kry. Die data is verwerk om die temas en subtemas wat uit die data na vore gekom het op te stel. Hierdie data het my gehelp om die primêre en sekondêre navorsingsvrae te beantwoord.

Uit die studie was dit duidelik dat die ouers waarde geheg het aan ouerbetrokkenheid en dat hulle by hul kinders se opvoeding in die vroeë grade betrokke wou raak deur hul individuele motiverende oortuigings, hul persepsie van uitnodigings vir betrokkenheid van asook hul waargenome lewenskonteks. Skole moet aanpas om ouers se lewenskontekste te akkommodeer deur opleiding aan ouers te verskaf oor hoe om aktief betrokke te raak en alternatiewe kommunikasiemiddele tussen die skool en die ouer te verskaf.

## Sleutelwoorden

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- Ouer
- Ervaringe
- Formele opvoeding
- Grondslagfase
- Ouerbetrokkenheid
- Kind, kindjare

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## **List of addenda**

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### **Addendum A**

Examples of consent letters to:

- 1) Gauteng Department of Education
- 2) Principal
- 3) Parents (participants)

### **Addendum B**

Examples of data collection methods:

- 1) Individual semi-structured interview
- 2) Programme: Collage
- 3) Biographical data profile

### **Addendum C: (On CD)**

- 1) Transcribed individual semi-structured interviews
- 2) Transcribed biographical data profile
- 3) Observations
- 4) Voice recordings of collage discussions
- 5) Voice recordings of group collage discussions
- 6) Photographs of collages

## Chapter 1: Overview of the research enquiry

---

### 1.1 Introduction

The South African Schools Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996b, hereafter ‘South African Schools Act [84 of 1996]’) stipulates that formal education and schooling are compulsory for all learners between the ages of six and fourteen. This provides opportunities for parents to become engaged in their children’s school careers and school governance (Engelbrecht & Green, 2007). In South Africa, there are two fundamental documents of legislation that recognise the rights of children, which by implication also denote that parents should be engaged in their children’s formal education. Both the Constitution of the Department of Education (Republic of South Africa, 1996a) and the South African Schools Act (84 of 1996) confirm the right of all learners, including all citizens, to basic education in the language of their choice (Engelbrecht & Green, 2007).

Lemmer, Meier and Van Wyk (2012) state that parental engagement can be described as a process in which educators and parents work in collaboration towards a common goal for the benefit of the learner. Parental engagement has been widely researched in the educational context and can further be defined as a “set of group-specific actions, beliefs and attitudes that serve as an operational factor in defining categorical differences among children and their parents from different racial-ethnic and economic backgrounds” (Desimone, 1999:11).

The importance of parental engagement in a child’s life has been well documented and takes on various forms, for example home-based behaviour, school-based activities or parent-teacher communication (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Sandler, Whetsel, Green, Wilkins & Closson, 2005). It has formerly been linked to positive academic achievement, self-esteem, school attendance, work performance and improved social behaviour of children (Lemmer, 2007; Von Otter & Stenberg, 2015; Westergård, 2015).

Cotton and Wikelund (1989) and Landsberg, Krüger and Swart (2011) state that educators and parents who share a joint focus on the learner's formal education can achieve success towards shared goals. Thus, the relationship between the school and the parent plays a critical role in supporting the learner in achieving set goals. Foundation Phase educators have reported that greater parental engagement helps them to understand the learner and the culture and background of his or her family. This results in their being able to support the learner more appropriately (Westergård, 2015) and, consequently, this improves the educator's job satisfaction (Eldridge, 2001).

According to Lemmer (2007), parental engagement in South African schools has mostly been limited to financing schools and volunteering at school-based activities. Even when parents are invited to become involved, their participation is not significant (Levin, 1997). In this regard, Dietz (1997) explains that when parents are limited to a particular type of involvement, only a few parents become involved; therefore, parents should be given diverse types of involvement to deliver optimal results.

It should also be understood that parents, especially in the South African context, experience many obstacles in their involvement in their children's formal education. Bornman and Rose (2010) state that some parents rarely visit their children's schools because of their being illiterate and unable to read and write, being embarrassed by their financial situation, their non-payment of school fees and a general unfamiliarity with the school system (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005). In addition, Foundation Phase educators affirm that they often struggle to communicate with the parents of learners in their classes owing to the abovementioned reasons and others (Lemmer, 2007).

Against the background of this discussion, the study focused on exploring parental engagement in the Foundation Phase of selected primary schools in Pretoria. The findings of this study will help Foundation Phase educators to gain insight into how parents experience their engagement in the early grades. At the same time, the

findings will give me the opportunity to gain knowledge about the support that parents require in order to foster parental engagement in the Foundation Phase.

## **1.2 Rationale**

According to Van Wyk (1996), educators traditionally held the belief that learners' social background, including socio-economic-status, ethnicity, family structure and their parents' educational level were the main predictors of their academic achievement. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (2005) revised model of the parental involvement process found that positive student achievement can be achieved by incorporating the following aspects: the parents' motivational beliefs, the parents' perceptions of invitations for involvement from others and, lastly, the parents' perceived life context. There are thus overt and covert reasons involved in learners achieving academic success, which resulted in my interest in this research topic.

During my experience as a Grade 3 educator, I have observed various challenges that are posed in the daily life of the South African educator. One of these is the non-involvement of parents in their children's formal education. I became acutely aware of the needs of the children in my class. It is crucial to gain insight into parents' experiences of their engagement because it is their experiences of their role as partners in their children's formal education and the challenges they experience in being involved in the Foundation Phase context that influence their children's academic success. Such insight may further contribute to the formulation of guidelines for schools on how to encourage or support parental engagement in the early grades in the South African context.

## **1.3 Purpose statement**

In reviewing the literature, it became clear that parental engagement has been linked to positive learner outcomes, such as academic success, that could benefit the school and the learner's family in ways such as creating a positive learning environment and improving the relationships between the family members (Desforges & Abouchar, 2003). Gaining insight into parents' experiences may lead to recommendations to assist educators and school management teams to develop



more effective programmes and school policies that may increase parental engagement in the early grades. As stated before, the purpose of the study was to explore and describe parents' unique experiences of their parental engagement in the early grades, especially from a South African perspective.

#### **1.4 Research questions**

The primary research question this research aimed to answer was:

What are parents' experiences of their parental engagement in the early grades?

The secondary research questions of this study are as follows:

- In what ways are parents engaged in their young children's education in the early grades?
- What are parents' views on the importance of parental engagement in the early grades?
- What support do parents require in order to foster parental engagement in the early grades?
- How do parents experience their engagement in their young children's school activities?
- What are the general obstacles that hinder parental engagement?

#### **1.5 Concept clarification**

In light of the terminology used to introduce this topic, it is crucial to clarify the meaning of each of these terms and make the view on this phenomenon explicit.

##### **1.5.1 Parent**

The concept 'parent' refers, in some contexts, to the child's birth parents but may also include caregivers, foster parents and legal guardians, such as family members or other close family that makes a contribution towards the child's educational outcomes (Department of Education, 1997; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1997). The term 'parent', therefore, encapsulates the biological or adoptive parent or legal guardian of a child, the person legally entitled to custody of a child, or the person who

undertakes to fulfil the obligations of a person referred to towards the learner's education at school (South African Schools Act 84 of 1996:5). The previously mentioned term 'parent' refers to a single parent, but for the purpose of this study, the plural form 'parents' will be applied.

### **1.5.2 Experiences**

The Oxford Dictionary (Chandler & Munday, 2011) describes experiences as gaining knowledge of the world through direct, first-hand experience in everyday life. These experiences represent a person's understanding of the world and can be influenced by aspects such as culture, race, age, education, religion, socio-economic status and gender, to name a few.

### **1.5.3 Formal education**

Dib (1987) defines formal education as an educational model that is structured and managed according to a given set of laws and involves the educator, the student and the institution. Formal education also means the intentional teaching of knowledge, skills and values to a child through the guidance of a prescribed curriculum and a trained educator in a specific setting, such as a school. In South Africa, formal education is compulsory from the age of six to fourteen (Engelbrecht & Green, 2007).

### **1.5.4 Foundation phase**

According to the South African Schools Act (84 of 1996), the term 'Foundation Phase' refers to Grade R, Grade 1, Grade 2 and Grade 3 classes (learners of six to nine years of age). This phase is the first of formal education. For the purpose of this study, the term 'early grades' will be utilised as this term is universally accepted and applicable to other countries outside of South Africa.

### **1.5.5 Parental engagement**

Botha (2013) describes parental involvement or engagement as the active and supporting participation of parents as partners of the school in the formal and informal education of their children. Engelbrecht and Green (2007) note that parental

involvement takes on various forms, such as parents' insight into their children's progress, their participation in decision making, and when parents are critical of information about issues in education. The aim of parental involvement is to achieve the objectives of education as extensively as possible (Botha, 2013). However, it has been declared that, for the purpose of this study, the term 'parental involvement' will be used alongside 'parent or parental engagement'. In this study, parental engagement will be viewed as all activities of parents with children in the Foundation Phase, referring to engagement activities at home and at school.

### **1.5.6 Child or childhood**

Louw and Louw (2007) state that, according to the Constitution of South Africa (Republic of South Africa, 2005), a Foundation Phase 'child' is any child between the ages of five and nine. In the South African Children's Act (38 of 2005), a 'child' is defined as a person below the age of 18. In the South African schooling context, a 'learner' is defined as any person receiving an education or who is obliged to receive education in terms of the South African Schools Act (84 of 1996). The concept of a child, and subsequently also of a learner, is described, however, not only in terms of a specific age group but as being representative of a specific concept. The term 'childhood' refers to the early part of the life course that distinguishes children from adults and the systemic space created by this process that is occupied by children (James & James, 2012). The delineation of the terminology illustrates how complex this phenomenon is and paves the way to integrate literature on how it has been studied before.

### **1.6 Preliminary literature review**

The literature review explores the role that different role-players fulfil in formal education. Firstly, the role of parents and their involvement in children's formal education will be discussed prior to the roles of the school, the educator, the child and the community in parental engagement.

### **1.6.1 The role of the parent in formal education**

The concept of 'family', or 'parent', refers in some contexts to the child's birth parents but can also include caregivers, foster parents and legal guardians, such as family members, or other close family that makes a contribution towards the child's educational outcomes (Department of Education, 1997; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1997). The South African Schools Act (84 of 1996) supports this, by stating that a parent is considered the biological parent, the legal guardian or anyone else responsible for the care of the child. A family can also be described as:

...[t]wo or more people who regard themselves as family and who perform some of the functions that families typically perform. These people may or may not be related by blood or marriage and may or may not usually live together. (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1997:11)

The Department of Education (1997) identifies the roles of the parent as the right to participate in the expansion of the child's educational programme, that the rights of the child are notified and consent is given for the child's participation, and the right to be part of the educational process.

According to the "Quality Education for All" report by the Department of Education (1997), all parents should be equipped with the following parenting skills: the skill to facilitate learning at home from a young age, to make important decisions about the child's schooling, to participate actively in their children's learning, to set goals for their children despite barriers that are experienced and to become peer counsellors to other parents. This notion is further explored by also looking at parent engagement.

The parental involvement process of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005) describes parents' motivations for being involved in their children's education. Parents' 'role construction' includes the belief about what they should do in relation to their children's education (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005). Role construction involves how parents think they should raise their children, and is, therefore, constructed socially. Bandura (1986, 1997) states that 'self-efficacy' is an individual's own abilities to act in ways that will produce successful outcomes. This refers to the decisions that parents will make by thinking about the desired outcomes they want to achieve in

terms of parental engagement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005). Parents who are high in efficacy will be more involved in their children's education, and parents who are low in efficacy are associated with lower parental expectations and engagement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005).

Aspects that can also contribute to parents' decisions in becoming involved are the knowledge, skills, time and energy they have for the possibility of involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). If parents are prepared to engage in meaningful relationships with the school, regardless of their perceived knowledge, skills, time and energy, they will be more motivated to be engaged in their children's education (Deslandes, Morin & Barma, 2015). It becomes clear that parental engagement has a different meaning or connotation according to different people. In this regard, Bakker and Denessen (2007) and Cotton and Wikelund (1989) state that parental involvement can take on different forms, such as attending parents' meetings, volunteering at school activities, assistance with homework, motivating the child, responding to school obligations, arranging appropriate space for studying at home and modelling appropriate behaviour, such as reading for pleasure.

Previous studies have shown that when parents are involved in their children's formal education, they want to be offered various types of involvement, for example fund-raising, serving on the school governing body or catering at sports days (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005; Lemmer, 2007). Cotton and Wikelund (1989) state that parents seek more direction when involving themselves in their children's formal education.

Parents and families play a major role in the young child's achievements, such as exposing their children to home-learning activities from a young age (Department for Children, Schools & Families, 2008; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005). Looking at the broader implications for involvement, parental engagement has advantages not only for children but also for parents. Parents are an integral part of their children's lives that influences their educational outcomes. With that being said, it is also true that parental engagement poses challenges.

Parents experience numerous obstacles that may prevent them from being actively involved in their children's formal education (Lemmer, 2007). Parents often experience challenges such as being single, having a family that is unemployed or has a low income, experiencing problems with transport to the school or requiring someone to look after small children or elderly people at home (Dietz, 1997).

Despite the hindrances parents may face, the advantages of continuous parental engagement outweigh the obstacles posed by it. Parental engagement celebrates possibilities such as children's academic success, increased self-confidence and improved educator morale. Also, Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) acknowledge that not all parents need to be encouraged to become involved in their children's education, and some need no encouragement for further involvement. Parental engagement is developmental in nature and should be promoted in every child's school career. Continuous and intentional parental engagement can assist schools and educators to motivate increased engagement by parents.

### **1.6.2 The role of the school and the educator in formal education**

The possibilities of active parental engagement for schools and educators have been well documented (Engelbrecht & Green, 2007). As mentioned earlier, educators' experience increased their motivation and self-esteem and led to a better understanding of learners and their families' culture and increased job-satisfaction when parents are actively engaged in their children's school careers (Eldridge, 2001). Invitations from educators also tend to be a critical component in the involvement of parents. Anderson and Minke (2007) found that educator invitations were directly related to parental engagement behaviours, and most importantly, when parents perceived that their involvement was desired by educators, they would overcome challenges to be involved, despite a lack of resources, knowledge, skills, time and energy.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (2005) revised model of the parental involvement process highlights the importance of invitations from the school and the educators for parents to be involved. Landsberg et al. (2011) strongly recommend schools to establish good relationships with parents, which will secure a long-term and

sustained impact. Parents are a valuable resource, but they are not always acknowledged for the valuable contributions they make to their children's formal education (Department of Education, 1997).

Griffith (1998) and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995, 1997) state that the school personnel and the environment of the school, in general, make the parent feel welcome. Other studies have reported that parents felt that they enjoyed talking to the educator on a regular basis, that they were open to ask questions and that the educator had a sincere interest in their child (Kohl, Lengua & McMahan, 2002).

Adams and Christenson (1998, 2000) mention that invitations from the educator contribute to the development of trust in the parent-teacher relationship, and when parents regard the educators as trustworthy, it leads to increased involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005). As schools experience many obstacles to involving parents, they have come up with numerous ways in which they can adapt to accommodate different schedules, preferences and capabilities, such as arranging parent-teacher meetings on Saturday mornings to accommodate parents' work schedules, communication in the parents' home language, regular home visits done by educators, and involving parents as volunteers to help with school activities (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989).

Various studies have reported that educators still favour the traditional roles of parental engagement, such as parental engagement in outings and fundraising (Cankar, Deutsch & Kolar, 2009). In the process of unveiling these conflicts, principals have an important role in developing, supporting and maintaining a fully welcoming school climate for school staff, parents and children (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005). Griffith (2001) adds that principals should meet all the needs of school members (staff, parents and children), perform visits to classes on a regular basis and publically advocate for school improvements.

Lemmer (2007) reported about a certificate in Parental Involvement that was introduced by the University of South Africa through distance education to promote parental engagement in diverse South African areas. The assignment was simple:

participants had to compile a project over nine months to promote parental involvement in their schools, and afterwards compile a written record of the implementation, together with supporting documents (Lemmer, 2007). The results were successful, with multiple participants reporting about parents taking pride in their volunteering work, parents feeling appreciated for contributing their time to the school instead of the normal financial contributions, educators reporting that the culture of learning and teaching had improved as a result of the mere presence of the parents at school and, lastly, children also were feeling the effect of parents visiting the school on a more regular basis (Lemmer, 2007).

### **1.6.3 The role of the child in formal education**

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (2008) state that from birth, children have two main role-players in their lives, namely their parents and their educators. The main role-player is the parent and as soon as the child starts school, the secondary role-player is the educator. The parent continues to have a huge influence on the child's life, throughout school and beyond adolescence. Thus, research suggests that when parents are engaged in their children's formal schooling, they are seen as 'partners' of the school (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003).

The reviewed literature suggests that invitations from the child encourage parents to become more involved, and because the invitations come from the child, the parent has the desire to be responsive to the child's school success (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005). Learners' invitations may come from the school, the educator or the child. Children's invitations for involvement may emerge from parents' observations that the child is having difficulty with schoolwork or from the child's expressing difficulty with the homework of a specific subject (Clark, 1993). Specific invitations from the child or the educator tend to encourage parents to be involved in their children's educational success (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005).

Parental engagement has been proven to have a positive effect on children's academic achievement, behaviour, attitude towards school, time spent on homework, self-concept, absenteeism, motivation and retention (Cotton & Wiklund, 1989). Lemmer (2007) also states that children in the school feel safer when their



parents visit the school grounds on a regular basis, and they have sensed a more positive classroom atmosphere. If children feel that they are cared for, and when parents encourage them to give their best effort, they achieve better academic results and are more likely to remain in school (Epstein, 1995). Children remain the central figures in the partnership between their education, development and success in school (Epstein, 1995). They rely on their parents and educators to help them move forward and succeed.

#### **1.6.4 The role of the community in formal education**

A community refers to “all individuals and institutions that have a stake in the success of children in school and in the well-being of families” (Epstein, 1995:703). It follows that the community plays a supportive role in encouraging parental engagement that may influence Foundation Phase learners’ formal education. The Department of Education (1997) emphasises the role of the community, including educators, children, parents and other family members, and states that these individuals are responsible for taking ownership of the schools in the area and giving the child a sense of responsibility. Because the community represents a wider social realm, it is important to keep in mind the complexity of such communities and families and the reality it represents.

Schools should acknowledge the diverse types of families in South Africa (Gerdes, 1998). Some children have differently abled family lives, and educators need to be encouraged to acknowledge that families are unique, complex and dynamic and that every family’s involvement will be different (Engelbrecht & Green, 2007). Schools can help children by reaching out to the community beyond those represented by the parent body alone, keeping in mind a flexible approach to the different family types in South Africa (Lemmer, 2007). Previous research has shown that when educators and schools had high expectations of community support, they received generous support from the wider community for activities that were organised at schools. Contributions from the community should not be in financial form only, but in diverse types, such as volunteering, incorporating parents’ ideas and contributing to the upkeep of the school (Lemmer, 2007).

Illustrating the diverse views on how parents, schools, learners and communities can be involved in formal education called for including a meaning-making framework that represents this phenomenon.

### **1.7 Theoretical and conceptual framework**

Miles and Huberman (as cited in Maree, 2016) state that the theoretical and conceptual framework serves the main purpose of identifying the participants that will or will not take part in the research, allowing the researcher to gather general constructs and report on relationships that may be present during the course of the study. This framework will serve as the cornerstone of the research study (Maree, 2016).

The framework can be described as:

...a network, or “a plane”, of interlinked concepts that together provide a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon or phenomena. The concepts that constitute a conceptual framework support one another, articulate their respective phenomena, and establish a framework-specific philosophy. (Jabareen, 2009:51)

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler’s (1995, 1997, 2005) revised theoretical model of the parental involvement process (see Figure 1.1) addresses the following three questions central to parental engagement: Why do parents become involved in their children’s education? What do parents do when they are actively involved? Once parents are involved, how does their active involvement influence learner outcomes?

The revised theoretical model of the parental involvement process includes five levels (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005), which are elaborated on extensively in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.6). To illustrate the importance of this particular framework briefly, a brief overview will now be provided. The first level focuses on parents’ motivations to be involved, such as the parental role construction for involvement, parents’ sense of efficacy for assisting the child to succeed, parents’ perceptions of invitations to be involved, and parents’ self-perceived knowledge, skills, time and energy that they have available for being involved. The second level includes involvement behaviour that is either home-based or school-based and activities that

account for the influence of the involvement – encouragement, modelling, reinforcement and instruction. The third level focuses on children’s perceptions of their parents’ involvement. The fourth level addresses proximal outcomes that lead to learner achievement. The completion of the model consequently leads to the fifth level, namely learner achievement.

Only the first level of the model will be applied in the study, because the aim is to focus only on the parents’ experiences of their parental engagement, thus excluding the children. The first level enables one to take an in-depth look at parents’ motivational beliefs for involvement, such as the personal motivators of the parents, which include their role construction and what they believe they should do in relation to their children’s formal education. Their motivational beliefs refer to whether they believe they can make a substantial difference in their children’s education by being involved (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005). The life context of the parent refers to the self-perceived knowledge, time, skills and energy the parent possesses to contribute to his or her involvement. General invitations from the school, the educator and the child cause the parent to feel that he or she is a valued participant in his or her child’s formal education (Griffith, 1998).

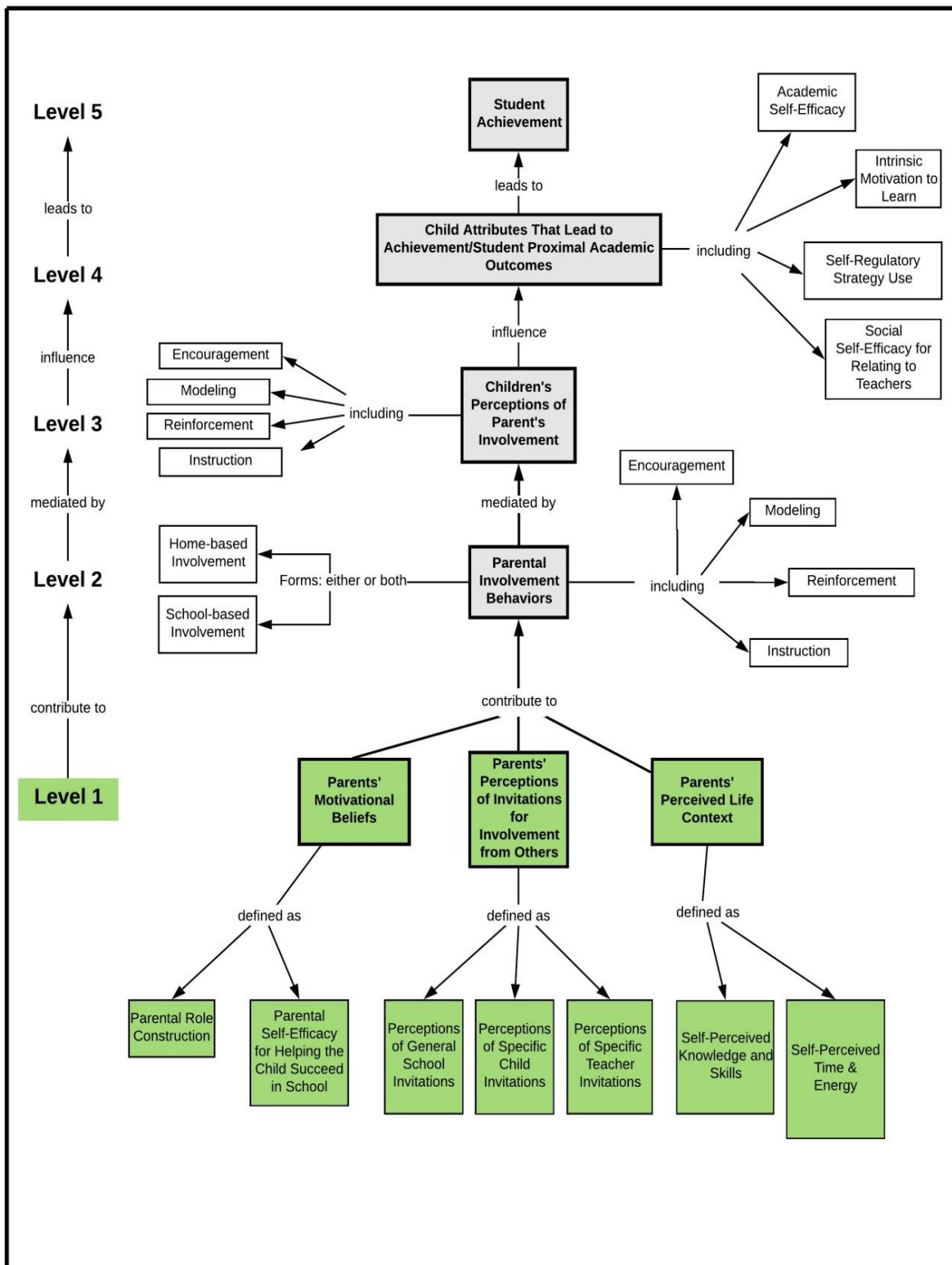


Figure 1.1: Revised Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model of the parental involvement process (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005:74)

To apply this conceptual and theoretical framework to the data I have generated, I utilised the interpretivist paradigm to make meaning of the participants' experiences within their unique research site, as discussed in Chapter 4 (see Section 4.3).

## **1.8 Paradigmatic approach**

### **1.8.1 Meta-theoretical paradigm: Interpretivism**

A paradigm can be defined as a specific worldview that ties a researcher to making assumptions according to a certain perspective (Maree, 2007). A paradigm refers to different concepts, practices and values that are linked to the specific paradigm, and it is the approach to thinking about and conducting research (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Paradigms are models or patterns that contain a number of assumptions and are used by the researcher for collecting and interpreting the data (Barker, in Joubert, Hartell & Lombard, 2016). Joubert et al. (2016) point out that a paradigm directs exactly what will be researched, how the research will be done and the way in which the research will be interpreted.

In order for researchers to position themselves in the research, they must acknowledge that their own personal, cultural and historic experiences shape their interpretation of an enquired reality (Creswell, 2013). The ontological approach to a qualitative enquiry notes that reality is constructed by social, political, historical and economic interaction, whereas external influences cause reality to change constantly (Joubert et al., 2016). The epistemological approach notes that reality is constructed by interactions in a specific social context and that the researcher will interpret subjective views (Joubert et al., 2016). Methodological approaches in interpretivism address the fact that knowledge can be gained by interacting with reality (Joubert et al., 2016). Qualitative interpretivist studies rely on an inductive method, where the researcher will generate meaning from the data (Creswell, 2013) by developing emerging themes. An in-depth discussion on the importance of ontology and epistemology is provided in Chapter 3 (see Section 3.3.1).

As discussed before, the study aims to explore and describe parents' experiences of their parental engagement in the early grades. Incorporating the interpretivist

paradigm enables the researcher to understand the meaning that the participants assign to their experiences (Maree, 2007). Maree (2007) states that behaviour is constructed socially and that interpretivist research will give the researcher an insight into how a group of people makes sense of the circumstances that they encounter on a daily basis. The advantages of the interpretivist paradigm include the rich descriptions it provides (Maree, 2007). However, interpretivism has been criticised for not being able to generalise the findings further than the situation being studied (Maree, 2007). The purpose of this study is not to generalise findings but rather to develop a better understanding, apply the findings and inform schools on how to include and promote parental engagement, especially in the early grades.

### **1.8.2 Methodological approach: Qualitative research**

Lincoln and Denzin (2003) describe qualitative research as research that is mainly focused on giving a detailed account of events as they occur, with the objective of capturing everyday behaviour. Creswell (2013) further states that qualitative research can be seen as an approach that is used for exploring and understanding the meaning that individuals or groups assign to a social or human problem. The aim of qualitative research is to describe and understand phenomena where they naturally occur (naturalistic context), with the objective of understanding the meaning that the participants convey (Maree, 2007), and to compile a report with a flexible structure (Creswell, 2013). The importance of constructing such a research plan is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3 (see Sections 3.3.2 and 3.4).

### **1.9 Methodological considerations**

Maree (2007) describes a research design as a plan that is based on the underlying philosophical assumptions to indicate how the participants will be selected, what data-gathering techniques will be used in the research and how the analysis of the data will be done. To determine what design will be used, the researcher needs to consider a few practical issues, such as the availability of participants, where the data will be collected and how the data will be analysed (Stangor, 2014).

### **1.9.1 Case study research**

Yin (in Creswell, 2013) states that in a case study, the researcher will undertake an in-depth analysis of the 'case', such as a programme, an event or one or more individuals. Cases are bound by time and activity, and the researcher will collect a wide range of information about the 'case' over a specific period of time (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2013). Bounding the 'case' will allow the researcher to distinguish clearly between the participants who will be included in the study and those who will be excluded (Rule & John, 2011). As indicated by the theoretical and conceptual framework, each parental engagement phenomenon is unique and complex and thus a bounded system in nature. The design and the focus of the study necessitate the study of cases.

Yin (2013:16-17) defines a case study as follows:

A case study is an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the 'case') in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident.

Case studies can be used for a wide range of purposes, such as providing an understanding of a particular description of a 'case' to explore a general problem within a limited setting or using them for teaching purposes (Rule & John, 2011). Without diverting too much from the topic, it is important to briefly explain the nature of a case study as a research design.

Rule and John (2011) highlight the strengths of a case study as having depth, being flexible, providing increased versatility and being manageable for the researcher to conduct. A case study allows the researcher to examine a particular subject intensively; it is flexible in terms of what can be studied and versatile because it can be used in combination with other research approaches (Rule & John, 2011). A case study is reasonable, in the sense that it allows the researcher to identify important sets of information, and it will also enable the researcher to finish the study on time (Rule & John, 2011). The strength of case studies has a comparative advantage, compared to other research methods (Yin, 2013). Yin (2013) notes that researchers often view the limitations of a case study as not being rigorous enough, researchers

not being able to generalise from a case study, and the unmanageable workload thereof.

The case study, as a research design, allowed me to explore and describe parents' experiences of their parental engagement in the early grades. This rationale is further discussed in Chapter 3 (see Section 3.4). From an interpretivist perspective, the case study design enabled me to develop a holistic understanding of the participants' experiences of parental engagement (cf. Maree, 2007). The case study design enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon by using detailed data collection methods (such as semi-structured interviews and observations) to enhance the study.

### 1.9.2 Selection of participants

A non-probable purposive sampling strategy to identify the participants for the study was utilised. As Maree (2007) states, when purposive sampling is used, the participants are chosen according to a predetermined set of criteria that are relevant to the research question. The research participants are intentionally selected according to the predetermined set of criteria, because of their knowledge of and interest and experience in the relevant topic, and because they are suitable to advance the purpose of the research (Maree, 2007; Rule & John, 2011). I utilised the following inclusion and exclusion selection criteria to identify suitable participants, which are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3 (see Section 3.4.1).

**Table 1.1: Criteria for the selection of participants**

Participants	Reason for selection
Parents of Grade 3 children – criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Approximately 10 fathers or mothers</li> <li>- Parents who volunteer to participate in the research</li> </ul>	The proposed study focuses on parents' experiences of their parental engagement in the early grades



Participants	Reason for selection
Parents who have been involved in their children's formal education from Grade 1 to 3	Parents with knowledge and experience of parental engagement in the early grades
Three primary schools – criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- School A: Quintile 5</li> <li>- School B: Quintile 5</li> <li>- School C: Quintile 4</li> <li>- Circuit 1 school</li> <li>- Ex-model C school</li> </ul> These schools are double-medium schools within the Pretoria region	Proposed schools include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- School A</li> <li>- School B</li> <li>- School C</li> </ul>

### 1.9.3 Data collection and documentation

According to Joubert et al. (2016), the qualitative researcher is the primary instrument in identifying the case and collecting the data that are necessary for the proposed research. The major components in data collection are gaining access to key participants, having the necessary resources to conduct the research, such as a computer, having a detailed schedule for data collection and providing for unplanned events that may hinder the data collection process (Yin, 2013). Observations, individual semi-structured interviews and artefacts, such as collages, are identified as the data generation techniques in which the parents participated, paired with a biographical data profile of the school (see Section 3.4.2) (see Table 1.2).

**Table 1.2: Data collection techniques**

Data collection method	Means of documentation	Aim
Observations - I observed the participants during the interviews and when they completed the collages	Notes of observations Tape recorder	Present detailed observations

Data collection method	Means of documentation	Aim
Interviews (semi-structured) - Interview schedule attached in Addendum B	Audio and written transcriptions	To compile parents' experiences of their parental engagement in the early grades
Artefact: Collages - Theme: "My experiences of my involvement in my child's formal education" - Collages completed individually by the parents - The participant and I discussed the outcome of the collage afterwards	Collages made by the parents using a combination of pictures, materials, photographs and written words	Pictorial storytelling of their experiences of parental engagement, using pictures, materials, photographs, words, cards and symbols
Artefact: Biographical data profile - The participants completed a table where all their biographical data will be filled in (see Addendum B)	Written biographical data profile (hard copy)	To gain in-depth knowledge about the biographical details of the participants, such as age, gender, etc.

### 1.9.3.1 Observations

Observation enables the researcher to gain an insider's perspective into the group dynamics and behaviour of the participants (Maree, 2007). Creswell (2013) states that when a researcher is observing, he or she should make notes according to the behaviour and activities of the participants. Observation allows the researcher the advantage of 'being there' in the data collection process (Rule & John, 2011).

Some of the advantages of conducting observations are that the researcher can record valuable information as it occurs, unusual aspects can be noticed during the

observations and the researcher has the opportunity to get a one-on-one experience with the participant (Creswell, 2013). Challenges of using observations as a data collection method are that participants often find the researcher to be intrusive during the observation of the participants and some researchers have poor observation skills (Creswell, 2013).

### **1.9.3.2 Semi-structured interviews**

Yin (2013) states that interviews are some of the most important sources of evidence in a case study. An interview is a guided conversation between a researcher and a participant, where the researcher gathers information, such as the ideas, beliefs, opinions and behaviour of the participant (Maree, 2007). Beforehand, the interviewer compiles an interview schedule with a set of field questions that will initiate the discussion, which is followed by further questions that emerge as the interview continues (Rule & John, 2011).

The main aim of qualitative interviews is to obtain rich data that will help the researcher to understand the experiences of the participant (Maree, 2007). There are multiple advantages to conducting interviews in the data collection process. Interviewing the participants allows the researcher to have control over the questions that will be asked, which is useful when the participants cannot be directly observed (Creswell, 2013) and allows for pliability in the data collection process (Rule & John, 2011). Some of the limitations of interviewing are that the presence of the researcher may influence the participants' responses and that the interview provides information in a specific place, rather than the field environment (Creswell, 2013).

### **1.9.3.3 Artefact: Collages**

Fritz and Beekman (in Maree, 2007) state that collages can be used as a way of pictorial storytelling by using different mediums, such as photos, materials, written words or slogans, that convey a message on a certain topic. There are no rules when completing the collage other than visually creating the topic that is being investigated (Fritz & Beekman, 2007). I instructed the participants to create a collage that conveys their experiences of parental engagement in the early grades.

Ultimately, the collage is a representation of the participants' experiences. The participants and I discussed the completed collage afterwards to contribute to the process of commencing with analysing the data for themes.

#### **1.9.3.4 Biographical data profile**

The biographical data profile was completed for the school and for each participant. This provided me with additional biographical information about the case, which is crucial as a case consists of not only the participants but also the setting and environment in which the case takes place.

#### **1.10 Data analysis and interpretation**

Maree (2007) explains that data analysis is an iterative and evolving process, suggesting that data collection, processing, analysis and reporting are all interweaved and that none of these aspects can function as an individual concept. Seidel (in Maree, 2007) developed a model for data analysis to explain the cyclical process that includes noticing, collecting and thinking about the data. For example, when a researcher reflects on the data that he or she has collected, the researcher then notices some gaps in the collected data that require additional attention and then needs to return and collect the missing data (Maree, 2007).

The data analysis strategy used in the study is thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is regarded as an instrument, rather than a specific method or approach (Engelbrecht, in Joubert et al., 2016). The steps that have been followed in the data analysis are set out, according to Braun and Clarke (in Joubert et al., 2016) (see Table 1.3), and are further discussed in Chapter 3 (see Section 3.5).

**Table 1.3: Steps in thematic analysis**

<b>Description of the process</b>		
1	Get familiar with the data	Transcribe the data if necessary; read and reread the data; document initial ideas

Description of the process		
2	Create initial codes	Code interesting characteristics of the data and link the data with the codes
3	Identify possible themes	Link the codes in the initial themes and collect data that are relevant to the potential themes
4	Revise themes	Check the themes in terms of the coded excerpts
5	Refine and name the codes	Analyse the data to refine all of the themes in order to get specific definitions for the themes
6	Give feedback	Analyse the selected excerpts that link with the research questions and the literature, using appropriate examples

As indicated in Table 1.3, the researcher gets familiar with the data, establishes codes that are relevant to the data, identifies themes that appear and then decides what aspect of the data is captured in each theme that has been identified (Braun & Clarke, in Joubert et al., 2016). The data that emerged from the interviews were transcribed as soon as possible. Codes, as determined by the theoretical framework (see Section 2.6), were set up before the interviewing process to identify possible themes that would emerge from the interviews. These codes were used to establish words or themes that are linked to parents' experiences of their parental engagement in the early grades. The conceptual and theoretical framework served an important role in the entire process to gather and make sense of the generated data as presented in Chapter 4 (see Section 4.3).

### **1.11 Alignment of research questions, data collection strategies and data analysis strategies**

The following table addresses how each research question (see Section 1.4) is answered and analysed through the data collection and data analysis. The answering of each question can be viewed in Chapter 5 (see Section 5.3).

**Table 1.4: Alignment of research questions, data collection strategies and data analysis strategies**

<b>Research questions</b>	<b>Data collection strategy</b>	<b>Data analysis strategy</b>
In what ways are parents engaged in their young children's education in the early grades?	Semi-structured interviews Collages Observations	Thematic analysis as interpreted from conceptual theoretical framework
What are parents' views on the importance of parental engagement in the early grades?	Semi-structured interviews Collages Observations	Thematic analysis as interpreted from conceptual theoretical framework
What support do parents require in order to foster parental engagement in the early grades?	Semi-structured interviews Collages	Thematic analysis as interpreted from conceptual theoretical framework
How do parents experience their engagement in their young children's school activities?	Semi-structured interviews	Thematic analysis as interpreted from conceptual theoretical framework
What are the general obstacles that hinder parental engagement?	Semi-structured interviews Biographical data profile	Thematic analysis as interpreted from conceptual theoretical framework

Owing to the criticism qualitative approaches receive on how trustworthy the generated data are, it is crucial to touch briefly on the issue of quality, the role of the researcher and ethics. The latter is further elaborated on in Chapter 3 (see Sections 3.6 and 3.7).

### **1.12 Quality criteria**

Rule and John (2011) describe the term 'trustworthiness' as a concept that encourages scholarly rigour, transparency and professional ethics to gain the trust of the research community. Denzin and Lincoln (in Joubert et al., 2016) state that there are four subcategories of trustworthiness, namely credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability. Guba (in Rule & John, 2011) describes credibility as the extent to which the case study has described the nature and the thoroughness of the case. Transferability makes mention of the extent to which the findings of the study can be generalised (Maree, 2016) and how confirmable the data are by providing evidence of how other people give support to or confirm the research findings. Merriam (as cited in Maree, 2016) describes dependability as the way in which the researcher can reproduce the research findings with similar participants in the same research context.

### **1.13 Role of the researcher**

The main aim of the interpretivist paradigm is to analyse a situation to provide insight into a situation and how a group of people makes sense of the given circumstances (Maree, 2007). The interpretivist paradigm enabled me to interact closely with the participants and to gain knowledge and form a clear picture of what the parents' experiences are in terms of their parental engagement in the early grades. My role as the researcher was to explore and understand the phenomenon of parental engagement within the context of the school as a unique setting to use this knowledge to contribute to the body of scholarship and make schools more aware of how to incorporate parental engagement in the early grades.

### **1.14 Ethical considerations**

Stangor (2014) states that the concern about the research participants is only one aspect of ethics in research. Other aspects are protecting the anonymity of the participants, informing them about the nature of the research and protecting them from physical and psychological harm (Joubert et al., 2016; Stangor, 2014). Furthermore, it includes maintaining honesty in conducting and reporting research,

together with giving credit for ideas and considering how knowledge gained through research should be used. Rule and John (2011) state that ethical research and practice are very important aspects of the research process. The importance of this topic is only briefly described in the next paragraphs but further elaborated on in Chapter 3 (see Section 3.7).

It is crucial to conduct research with special care and sensitivity by means of obtaining informed consent from the participants, protecting the participants from deception and harm and protecting the privacy and confidentiality of the participants (Yin, 2013). The participants were voluntarily selected, and no group of people was unfairly included or excluded from the sample (Yin, 2013).

I conducted the research according to the Ethics and Research Statement provided by the University of Pretoria. I thoroughly described who the participants were and how they were selected to participate in the research study. The nature of the research enquiry and the characteristics of the participants were declared and all of the participants were informed about their role in the research, what was expected from them and what the possible advantages and disadvantages of the research might be. The identities of the participants were protected. I obtained permission from the Gauteng Department of Basic Education and the principals of the schools (Schools A, B and C) where the research would be done, as indicated in the attached addenda (see Addendum A).

### **1.15 Anticipated limitations**

The data collected represent a small group of parents in School A, School B and School C. Joubert et al. (2016) identify this aspect as important, as the aim is not to generalise findings from such a small sample. Rather, the nature and uniqueness of each case and its setting were described in depth (see Section 4.2). Looking at the unique reality of the phenomenon is important, keeping in mind that the phenomenon is built up from multiple aspects, as described by the conceptual and theoretical framework.



Owing to the voluntary participation of the identified participants based on their availability and accessibility, the data may be influenced as the size of the sample is jeopardised. Although this may be considered a limitation, it is also important to consider the meaning behind withdrawals. In light of this phenomenon, namely parent engagement, it becomes evident that there are various reasons that contribute to the small size of the group of participants, based on the factors discussed in the preliminary literature review (see Section 1.6).

### **1.16 Proposed chapter outline**

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the research. In Chapter 2, the literature review is conducted. Methodological considerations are discussed in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 presents the data analysis and results. In Chapter 5, the conclusions and recommendations of the research are provided.

## Chapter 2: Literature review

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### 2.1 Introduction

The rationale and context of this research enquiry shed light on the importance of exploring this phenomenon (see Section 1.2). It is also necessary to consider how this phenomenon has been investigated and the insights I have acquired. I first provide a general survey of current thinking of parental engagement in the South African context, focusing on the role of the parent and different family structures that are of importance, as well as the barriers that parents experience in their engagement. Next, I contemplate the official policy documents that are relevant to parental engagement in South Africa. I also highlight the partnership that exists between the home and the school and discuss the home-school reciprocal partnership. I conclude the chapter by explaining the theoretical framework of the study.

### 2.2 Parent engagement from a South African point of view

The concept of a partnership between the parents and the school is widely supported by research (cf. Christenson & Reschly, 2010; Epstein, 2016). However, in the unique South-African context, there are multiple aspects, such as poverty and diverse family structures, that come into play when the topic of parental engagement is considered. Such factors (see Section 1.6) can have a significant influence because schools, parents and educators are affected by their environment and socio-context on a daily basis.

The prominent idea behind parental engagement in South Africa involves those parents who are passive because their roles are mostly limited to voluntary school-based activities (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009). Research has, however, shown that active and meaningful parental engagement in schools has made a positive contribution in many other countries, as well as in South Africa (Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2004; Van Wyk, 1996). This aspect will now be explored.

### **2.2.1 The role of parents and family structures**

Parents are among the most important people in the lives of young children, not only for daily aspects, such as socialising, but also in children's school lives. Parents play a significant role in helping children build and refine their knowledge and skills, as well as their learning expectations, beliefs, goals and coping strategies. Ultimately, the main intention of the parent's involvement will be to promote and support the child's learning, school achievements and general wellbeing (Lemmer et al., 2012). Some of the prevalent functions that parents contribute to the holistic development of the child are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Family structures in South Africa are diverse, with different types of families to consider. Lemmer et al. (2012) categorise the different family structures as follows: the traditional nuclear family, where two biological parents raise their children in one home; the polygamous family, where multiple spouses are married to each other; the extended family structure, where multiple family members live together and share household responsibilities, such as raising the children and performing general household duties; single-parent families, where only one adult raises the children; reconstituted or blended families, where one or both of the parents have children from a previous marriage but combine their families; and lastly, the child-headed household, where a child has become the head of the household due to circumstances such as the death of a parent. The dynamics and uniqueness of such a family unit have a far-reaching influence on how parents become motivated to participate in their children's school careers.

Louw and Louw (2007) state that family relationships play a crucial role in the home setting. These family relationships reflect continuity and change in the family (Louw & Louw, 2007). The family, in all of its distinct forms, is one of the most basic practices and is the central group that plays a role in the young child's upbringing (De Witt, 2016). Parents act as agents for socialising in their children's social development and influence their children's social development in a direct and indirect manner (Louw & Louw, 2007). According to the direct method, parents are instrumental in choosing the environment in which the child will find him- or herself, such as their home, the neighbourhood and the school. To the contrary, parent-child

attachment and parenting styles have an indirect influence on children's social development. Parents introduce their children to the social world, where they develop an understanding of themselves and their place and value in society – an understanding that influences their choices and experiences over the course of their lives (Louw & Louw, 2007).

Different parenting styles are critical in the child's early years of development. Baumrind (in Louw & Louw, 2007) identifies four different parenting styles, which are combinations of parental behaviour across a wide range of situations. The first is the authoritative parenting style, where parents are highly accepting of and involved with their children. Parents are warm and sensitive towards their children, but appropriate boundaries are set. The second is the authoritarian parenting style. These parents have high expectancies for their children but show poor communication strategies. They scream, demand and criticise their children to maintain control over them. Thirdly, permissive parents are those who cherish their children but have little control over them. These parents are warm and accepting, but instead of being involved, they are inattentive. They tend to have little to no control over their children's behaviour, which results in the children having to make decisions at an age where they are not ready to do so. The fourth parenting style describes uninvolved parents. These parents display low levels of acceptance and parental involvement. They are emotionally distant and detached and do not have enough time and energy to attend to their children's needs. In the worst form, these parents abuse their children by neglecting them.

The parent is also responsible for supporting the child in school-related activities. These activities include going to see the child's educator, visiting the child's classroom, attending parent-teacher meetings and picking up the child's report card (Patrikakou & Weissberg, 2000). It is the parent's responsibility to create a stimulating environment for learning throughout the child's academic career, such as providing the child with a desk to do homework, making books available for reading and communicating with the child (De Witt, 2016). These activities and providing a sense of the importance of learning will form the basis of the child's formal education.

When referring to parental engagement, one must consider exactly who the parents are by creating a sense of community in the classroom, where learners will feel confident about whom they live with (Lemmer et al., 2012). Lemmer et al. (2012) mention that educators need to be well informed about the learner's family background, norms and how they are being taught at home. To gain insight into the family's culture and norms, it may be of assistance to the educator to understand the parenting style of each parent. Schools and educators need to be sensitive when working with different types of families and put the emphasis on who the learners are and not whether they fit the definition of a 'traditional family'. It is the responsibility of the school governing body to ensure that single parents, grandparents and anyone who is caring for the child are involved. This means that educators should acknowledge the fact that in some disadvantaged households, the siblings or the grandparents fulfil the caregiving function (Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2004b). It is their duty to encourage the involvement of a wide variety of caregivers of the learner and to accommodate all families, regardless of the barriers they experience (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009).

### **2.2.2 Barriers to parental engagement**

Aspects that prevent parents from being engaged in their children's formal education can be attributed to many factors (Du Plessis, Conley & Du Plessis, 2007). Parents face the challenge of dealing with a very different form of education than that which they may have been used to in their childhood (McKenzie & Loebenstein, 2007). Many aspects of modern life prevent active parental engagement, and schools need to recognise and acknowledge these barriers in order to actively minimise, address and even eradicate such barriers in the school environment (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009). Some barriers have been briefly discussed in Chapter 1 and will now be elaborated on as it is crucial to view this phenomenon in its given context.

#### **2.2.2.1 Poverty**

Poverty is a common occurrence in current South African schools (Du Plessis et al., 2007). Learners from low-income families face challenges such as not being able to attend school regularly, transportation problems and a lack of suitable clothing and

school supplies, such as stationery (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009). One of the results of poverty is the non-payment of school fees and the inability of parents to buy basic necessities, such as stationery (Lemmer et al., 2012). Parents who live in poverty are often absent and forced to move away from the home environment and seek opportunities elsewhere to generate money (McKenzie & Loebenstein, in Engelbrecht & Green, 2007). Poverty has a major influence on parental involvement in areas where parents are affected most. Some schools are located in neighbourhoods where access to libraries, cultural institutions, health services and recreation is limited (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009). Parents from lower-income groups experience high levels of stress, which influences the parent-child relationship and further limits parental involvement (McKenzie & Loebenstein, in Engelbrecht & Green, 2007). Schools can assist these learners who are in need by being sensitive to the restrictions that low-income families face, having an understanding of the environment in which the parents live and respecting all parents, regardless of their poverty status (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009).

#### **2.2.2.2 Family structures**

As has been mentioned previously, family structure plays a significant role in parental engagement (Patrikakou & Weissberg, 2000). Epstein (1990) has found that even though single parents reported that they spent more time assisting their children with tasks such as homework than those in two-parent families, they still reported that they did not have the time and energy to attend to what the educators expected from them. As mentioned before, it may be difficult for the single parent to attend school activities frequently, as single parents cannot share the parenting responsibility with a spouse (Patrikakou & Weissberg, 2000). The single parent may also not have a trustworthy adult who is available to look after the other children at home to attend parental activities. The care of children is a huge responsibility for all parents, which also encapsulates diverse problems in terms of becoming active parents who have time to take part in parental activities within the school setting (Demircan & Erden, 2015).

Single parents may experience more challenges in being involved in their children's school activities. Single parents who do not have a spouse to share the parenting

responsibilities with may find it difficult to participate in activities outside of the home (Patrikakou & Weissberg, 2000), as they want to ensure an organised environment for their children after school (Barge & Loges, 2003). One way of assisting these parents can be to arrange child care at school when parents have to attend teacher-parent meetings (Demircan & Erden, 2015; Patrikakou & Weissberg, 2000).

### **2.2.2.3 Transportation**

A resource that is often taken for granted pertains to the ability to be mobile. The reality of transportation issues affects most South African parents. Even when parents have the time to come to school, they have difficulties with transport due to reasons such as not owning a car, a lack of finances to afford the transport or the unavailability or lack of safety of public transport to visit the school (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009).

### **2.2.2.4 Parents' careers**

The socio-economic conditions of most South Africans have resulted in parents spending more time at work. Some parents have more than one job to provide sufficiently for their families. Nowadays, society demands more from working parents, requiring higher educational levels and an increase in time at work (Knopf & Swick, 2007). Stressors, such as longer working hours and work responsibilities, result in families not spending enough time with one another (Knopf & Swick, 2007). This may influence the academic achievements of the young child.

### **2.2.2.5 Language barriers**

South Africa is a multilingual country with 12 official languages. Parents who have a native or home language that differs from the language of learning and teaching may be demotivated to become involved owing to their not being able to express themselves effectively and establish a relationship with the educator to promote future communication (Bojuwoye & Narain, 2008). The importance of communication and the ability to express oneself about the academic progress of one's child should not be overlooked or underestimated.

### **2.2.2.6 Negative experiences**

Parents who have experienced negative interactions with the school in the past develop a negative attitude towards present school experiences, which may prevent them from being actively involved in school activities (Lemmer et al., 2012). Another reason for passive parental engagement is parents experiencing self-doubt and low confidence in their own academic abilities and feeling challenged and incapable to help their children with academic tasks, such as homework (Barge & Loges, 2003). This aspect demonstrates the notion that schools and educators need to guide and support parents by providing them with relevant information about, and even training in, becoming actively involved parents (Squelch, 1994).

The above discussion presents some of the barriers parents may experience that may negatively influence parental engagement. Therefore, the following quote by Lemmer and Van Wyk (2004a:268) is crucial: “Disempowered parents aren’t going to come knocking at the door and say, ‘Here I am’.” Therefore, parents who are absent should not be labelled as uninvolved; instead, an act of understanding should be initiated. Schools can assist these parents who experience barriers to involvement by being more considerate of their needs and their family structure, which will motivate such parents to become actively engaged (Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2004a). Anderson and Minke (2007) note that regardless of parents’ personal socio-economic status and barriers to involvement, they will make a positive contribution to their children’s formal education when they perceive that their engagement is supported and appreciated by educators.

To conclude, most parents in South Africa, despite their adverse living situations, want to become active members who are engaged in school activities, but they need assistance and information from the school on how to be actively involved (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009). Schools and educators have the opportunity and are in the position to develop effective ways to empower all types of families and parents to become actively engaged in all areas of the child’s life (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009).



### **2.2.3 The school governing body**

After the elections in 1994 and South Africa being declared a democratic country, successful efforts have been made by the government to involve stakeholders in decisions regarding parental involvement (Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2004a). In addition, the South African Schools Act (84 of 1996) defines the concept of a 'parent' by outlining basic parental obligations, setting requirements for schools related to parents' right to information and providing for parent and community representation in compulsory school governing bodies (Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2004a). Consequently, it has become mandatory in South-Africa to include parents as active participants and incorporate them in the governing body of a school (Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2004a). Parents congregate as a majority and representative group together with the school governing body, and one parent from the majority group represents the group and takes on the responsibility to act as chairperson (Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2004a).

The main function of the school governing body is to help and support the principal, educators and other staff members at the school in order to promote the performance of their professional functions (Du Plessis et al., 2007; South African Schools Act 84 of 1996:20e). Every three years, the school governing body has the right to vote for new or existing parent representatives to serve as activists on the governing body; such representatives are regularly informed of what the school governing body has decided on their behalf (Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2004a). The school governing body allows parents to be actively engaged in school governance issues. However, some of the barriers that influence active parental involvement are a lack of skills, parents who live far from the school and parents who do not have the time available to visit the school for these meetings (Du Plessis et al., 2007). Nonetheless, parents should be provided with the opportunity to represent their reality within the school context so that schools may better understand the challenges that parents face.

### **2.2.4 Benefits of parental engagement in educational settings**

Studies have demonstrated that parental engagement holds the following benefits in educational settings: it benefits learners by allowing them to be the link between the

home, the school and the community; it improves schools by connecting the goals that educators and parents have for the learner; it helps educators by adequately understanding the backgrounds and other characteristics of each family; and it strengthens families by increasing interest and support in their children's academic progress (Epstein, 2016). Educators, parents and learners all have different expected outcomes of what active parental engagement entails, but mostly there are some uncertainty and disagreement about which practices of involvement are important and how participation from all families can be acquired (Epstein, 2016). Although there is some uncertainty regarding best practices, healthy partnerships between the home and the school may increase involvement from parents (Epstein, 2016) and potentially improve academic success within the young child.

### **2.3 Official policies on parental involvement in South Africa**

In South Africa, multiple legislation documents exist that emphasise the right of parents to become actively involved in their children's formal education. Some of these legal documents are the South African Schools Act (84 of 1996), the South African Children's Act (38 of 2005) and the Quality Education for All – Overcoming barriers to learning and development document (Department of Education, 1997). These documents provide a clear description of the term 'parent' and the specific expectancies the legislation has for parental responsibilities.

Epstein and Dauber (1991) state that school programmes and educator practices are the strongest and most stable predictors of parental engagement in a school; therefore, all schools should adopt a written policy on parental engagement. However, it seems as if such policies are rarely found in South African primary schools. Lemmer and Van Wyk (2004a), for instance, found that none of the primary schools in their study had policy guidelines on parental engagement and that only one principal advised educators on how to deal with parents. If schools have a definite and clear policy on how to involve parents actively, parents are more likely to get engaged in their children's schooling activities (Lemmer et al., 2012). This is an indication that local public primary schools need assistance with and guidance in implementing a written policy on how to engage parents actively in diverse school

activities. In order to develop a better understanding of parental engagement, various policy documents were studied, as discussed below.

The South African Schools Act (84 of 1996) states, in Chapter 1, number 1, that a parent can be defined as follows:

Parent means: the biological or adoptive *parent* or legal guardian of a *learner*; the person legally entitled to custody of a *learner*; or the person who undertakes to fulfil the obligations of a person referred to in paragraphs (a) and (b) towards the learners' education at school.

Chapter 2, number 3(1) of the South African Schools Act (84 of 1996) elaborates on the specific duty of parents to pay school fees:

Parents' liability for payment of school fees: A *parent* is liable to pay the *school* fees determined in terms of section 39 unless or to the extent that he or she has been exempted from payment in terms of *this Act*; A *parent* may appeal to the *Head of Department* against a decision of a *governing body* regarding the exemption of such *parent* from payment of *school* fees.

Chapter 2, number 3 of the South African Schools Act (84 of 1996) further elaborates on the parents' responsibility to pay school fees and ensuring attendance:

Subject to this Act and any applicable provincial law, every *parent* must cause every *learner* for whom he or she is responsible to attend a *school* from the first *school* day of the year in which such *learner* reaches the age of seven years until the last day of the year in which such *learner* reaches the age of fifteen years or the ninth *grade*, whichever occurs first.

Part 1 (no. 18) of the South African Children's Act, 2005 (38 of 2005) lists the responsibilities and rights of parents as follows:

Parental responsibilities and rights: 18. (1) A person may have either full or specific parental responsibilities and rights in respect of a child; (2) The parental responsibilities and rights that a person may have in respect of a child, include the responsibility and the right – (a) to care for the child; (b) to maintain contact with the child; (c) to act as guardian for the child; and (d) to contribute to the maintenance of the child. (3) Subject to subsections (4) and (5), a parent or other person who acts as guardian of a child must – (a) administer and safeguard the child's property and property interests; (b) assist or represent the child in administrative, contractual and other legal matters; or (c) give or refuse any consent required by law in respect of the child, including – (i) consent to the child's marriage; (ii) consent to the

child's adoption; (iii) consent to the child's departure or removal from the Republic; (iv) consent to the child's application for a passport; and (v) consent to the alienation or encumbrance of any immovable property of the child. (4) Whenever more than one person has guardianship of a child, each one of them is competent, subject to subsection (5), any other law or any order of a competent court to the contrary, to exercise independently and without the consent of the other any right or responsibility arising from such guardianship. (5) Unless a competent court orders otherwise, the consent of all the persons that have guardianship of a child is necessary in respect of matters set out in subsection (3)(c).

Lastly, the Quality Education for All – Overcoming barriers to learning and development document (1997:87) emphasises that parents should be equipped with the necessary skills that will make it possible for them to do the following:

Facilitate learning at home from a very young age; Make informed decisions e.g. about early intervention programmes; Participate actively in the learning of their children by participating in school governance and supporting the child after school; Set goals for their children gender or limitations due to disabilities or chronic illness; Become change agents and effective advocates in the struggle for the rights of all children; Participate in the development of programmes for educators; Manage and facilitate learning within safe environments in informal day care centres; Access resources (especially in rural areas); Become peer counsellors to other parents with children who experience barriers to learning; Participate in policy development, assessment and monitoring of equity in education.

Throughout these policy documents, it is made clear that parents should be active members in the various domains of the child's holistic development that contribute to the school environment. Parents are a valuable resource for every school, and their input, however small, should be acknowledged by the school staff.

#### **2.4 The home-school partnership**

Home-school partnerships can be defined as a learner-centred connection between individuals in the home setting and the school setting, where the parent and the educator consequently share the responsibility for the progress and development of the learner (Clarke, Sheridan & Woods, 2010). A partnership between the home and the school continues and grows over an expansive period of time and becomes inherently part of the child's school career.

#### **2.4.1 Outcomes of the home-school partnership**

Research has shown that continued parental engagement can lead to favourable outcomes, such as stronger academic achievement and improved school attendance (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002). An active school-parent partnership can develop into 'family-like' schools (Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders & Simon, 1997) that improve the awareness on the child's individual profile and, in turn, promote the ability to reach the families of the learners (Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2004a). It is desired that schools in South Africa should be attentive to the needs of families and establish a reciprocal and cognisant relationship with them (Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2004a).

When an effective partnership between the home and the school is established, parents will learn from one another and add their expertise and skills together to set their sights on a common focus, which will be to improve the education of all the learners (Cowan, Swearer Napolitano & Sheridan, 2004). The benefits that learners gain from parental engagement not only promote their academic success but also give them a more positive attitude towards learning (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009). It has also been observed that parental engagement decreases school drop-out rates, leads to increased security and emotional stability within the learner, and results in more socially acceptable behaviour and increased school attendance (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009). A positive school-teacher-parent relationship will enable schools and educators to develop a better understanding of the learner's home situation and become more committed to learning and development, which may contribute to improved collaboration between educators and parents who are responsible for helping the child actualise his or her potential (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009). When parents are regularly involved in school activities and their children's learning, these parents' self-esteem will increase and they will feel more confident about their abilities to help their children because of having a shared responsibility with the educator to promote the learner's learning development (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009).

#### **2.4.2 Communication and interaction**

The primary function of communication is to transfer information and create supportive partnerships between educators and parents (Barge & Loges, 2003).

Barge and Loges (2003) state that parents and educators should interact regularly, both formally and informally, through multiple types of interaction, to maintain a positive relationship. The most routine interaction between the parent and the educator is the exchange of information about the learner's performance at school (Rutherford & Edgar, 1979).

According to Lemmer and Van Wyk (2004b), communication between the home and the school is critical to secure an effective home-school partnership. The extent to which the school communicates regularly with parents will determine the parents' level of involvement in the activities of the school (Stein & Thorkildsen, 1999). Two-way communication between the home and the school and the school and the home needs to take place frequently in the form of parent-teacher conferences, written communication, such as a family communication journal (Anderson & Minke, 2007), home visits and telephonic conversations (Knopf & Swick, 2008). McKenzie and Loebenstein (2007) mention that home-school communication tends to be mainly one-way, with the communication being initiated by the school. Two-way communication does not occur only from the school to the home but includes interaction with and feedback from both parties (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009). Open lines of communication allow for trustworthy relationships that will ensure a sound home-school partnership and will benefit educators, administrators, parents and learners (Beale, 1985). Educators and parents must inform each other about the best ways in which they can be reached to minimise the frustration of not being able to reach each other (Patrikakou & Weissberg, 2000).

The best opportunity for educators to communicate with parents is through regular parent-teacher conferences (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009). Typically, parent-teacher conferences are held for the main purpose of discussing the learners' progress regarding their academic and social curriculum (Knopf & Swick, 2008). In the majority of these conferences, it is only the educator and the parent who are involved, but some schools prefer the learner to join in on these occasions (Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2004a). Parent-teacher conferences provide the opportunity for the educator and the parent to discuss the learner's progress in detail, as well as areas

in which the learner is doing well and what the educator wants the learner to work on, without any interruptions (Barge & Loges, 2003).

A common trend among schools is to communicate with the parent only when a problem arises in the classroom, such as a learner displaying behavioural or learning problems (Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2004a). In a qualitative study conducted by Barge and Loges (2003), it was found that parents preferred educators to contact them also when the learner's performance was good or when the learner did something well. The participants in the study made it clear that they disliked it when educators only contacted them with negative information, such as poor behaviour. More positive communication between the school and the home made the parents 'feel good' and resulted in the parents praising the child, thereby motivating the child. A few examples of positive communication with the parent can be to send the learner's work in his or her news book home for the parent to sign, to use personalised 'glad notes' to praise the learner formally (Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2004a) or to send the parent a text message to inform him or her personally (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009).

Effective home-school communication will not only benefit the educator and the parent but also the learner. Epstein (1996) states that frequent home-school communication will ensure that the educator gains insight into each learner's family views as well as the learner's abilities, talents, difficulties and progress. The parents will be at ease to communicate with the school as they will be fully informed about the programmes and policies of the school. In addition, parents' interactions with their children are increased when they feel more capable to assist their children with activities at home (Epstein & Dauber, 1991).

### **2.4.3 Partnership**

Relationships form the foundation of the partnership between the home and the school. This home-school partnership is built on trust and respect and is formed over an expansive period of time (Knopf & Swick, 2002). Learners are central in the home-school partnership and act as a connection between the parent and the educator (Epstein, 2010). In such a partnership, educators and parents will

collaborate to share facts, guide learners, solve problems and celebrate milestones together (Epstein, 2010). According to Cowan et al. (2004), a partnership recognises that parents are irreplaceable members of the educational force. The benefits of a healthy partnership may not be seen immediately and will present themselves over a period of time (Cowan et al., 2004).

#### **2.4.4 The knowledge of the parent**

Educators are seen as the experts in their area, and parents are seen as experts on their children, possessing important knowledge about them (Rodd, 2012). According to Rodd (2012), there are certain virtues that will ensure the development of a good home-school partnership. These virtues acknowledge that parents are experts who can teach their own children; they are different from one another but skilled to make informed observations and provide educators with important information (Rodd, 2012). Lastly, parents are involved with and care about the wellbeing of their children; they are standing central in making decisions that affect their children and share accountability regarding their children with educators (Rodd, 2012).

#### **2.4.5 The parent-teacher association**

Most parents still need help to know how they can get involved in the activities of the school. Effective parent outreach programmes can assist in both encouraging already active parents and helping those families who would not have become involved on their own (Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2004b). An example of such a programme can be the parent-teacher association. The members of the parent-teacher association drive parental engagement in the school and will be responsible for, depending on the school, raising funds and motivating parents in each grade to get engaged in the activities at the school. In this way, even parents who are shy would feel comfortable in becoming involved (Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2004a). When parents are convinced that their child's school is using multiple techniques to get them engaged, they tend to become more involved in the activities at the school (Epstein & Dauber, 1991).



The parent-teacher association will also be responsible to accommodate parents in certain ways when organising events such as the parent-teacher conference and fundraising events. Lemmer and Van Wyk (2004a) observed in a qualitative study, which examined the parental engagement in public primary schools in South Africa, that a number of schools made significant efforts to present school activities at times that would be convenient to working parents. These schools held their parent-teacher conferences on Saturday mornings, Sundays and even on public holidays so that all parents would be able to attend these, regardless of their working hours. In addition, some parents may not be English-speaking and need someone to translate for them at a parent-teacher conference (Berger, 1995). Only a small number of schools reported providing multilingual communication at annual parent meetings (Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2004b). It would be useful for the educator to invite someone that could help to translate so that these parents would feel more comfortable.

## **2.5 The home-school reciprocal relationship**

A relationship can be defined as “the state of being related or interrelated...the relation connecting or binding participants in a relationship...a state of affairs existing between those having relations or dealings” (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2017). The most important relationships in a learner’s development are those that exist between the members of the family and those between the support systems in their lives, specifically between the home and the school (Clarke et al., 2010). Multiple role-players, such as the parents and the educator, are involved in the home-school partnership. Parental engagement can occur both at home and at school and will be discussed accordingly.

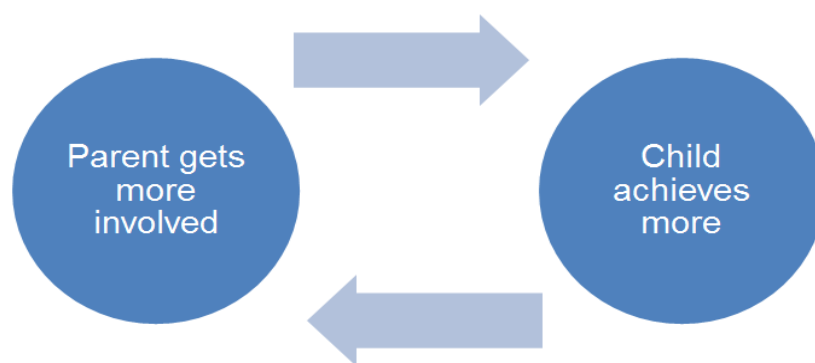
### **2.5.1 Role-players who are involved**

Schools and educators cannot take on the sole responsibility of education for the learner, as parents must accept some of the responsibility themselves (Joubert & Prinsloo, 2001). The role that parents fulfil makes up an integral part of the learner’s

schooling (Mncube, 2010), as the parents' active engagement has become a necessity (Joubert & Prinsloo, 2001).

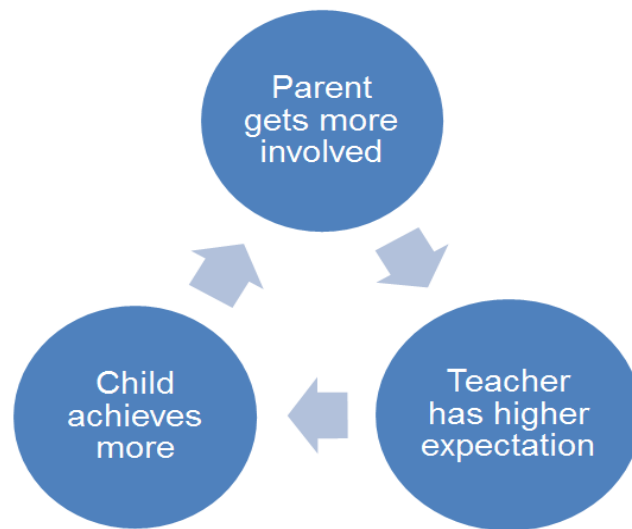
In the past few years, family dynamics have been affected by aspects such as more diverse family structures, families that spend less time together, parents who are single and employees who experience higher societal demands, such as increased time at work (Knopf & Swick, 2008). These stressors are all part of the factors that parents have to balance with their children and family time (Knopf & Swick, 2007). Schools need to provide support for families that will enable them to be engaged in diverse schooling activities, even when they experience multiple challenges (Dunst, 2002).

Desforges and Abouchar (2003), whose research focused on learner achievement and attainment, state that children's learning at home has a substantial effect on their achievements and that parents tend to get more engaged once their children achieve more (see Figure 2.1 below).



**Figure 2.1: Motivational cycle with parent and child (Ward, 2013:5)**

Parents increase their engagement in their children's schooling when they are motivated by their children's successes (Ward, 2013). Parental participation positively influences how the educator perceives the child and, in turn, motivates the child to do better and achieve better (Ward, 2013). The cycle in Figure 2.1 can consequently be extended to Figure 2.2.



**Figure 2.2: Motivational cycle with parent, educator and child (Ward, 2013:5)**

The school, in any community, serves as the organisation that reaches all families and is perfectly situated to encourage parents to be engaged in their children’s formal education (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009).

### **2.5.2 Home-based engagement**

Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) distinguish between two different types of parental engagement: home-based engagement and school-based engagement. Home-based engagement is often known as ‘the curriculum of the home’ and refers to the learning activities with which the parent assists the learner at home (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009). Schools can help parents by supplying them with information on and skills in helping their children at home with tasks such as homework, planning and decision making (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009). Examples of home-based engagement include parents talking to their children about what they are learning at school (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009), helping children with homework, arranging for children to play with other children of the same age and making sure that children’s homework is done on school nights (Cowan et al., 2004; Patrikakou & Weissberg, 2000).

Anderson and Minke (2007) state that parents’ engagement at home is not as visible to school personnel as their engagement at their children’s school. Educators only

see parents when they are involved at school (e.g. volunteering) versus involvement at home (e.g. helping their children with homework) (Anderson & Minke, 2007). However, there is a wide range of opportunities where parents can get engaged in their children's school activities, both at home and at school (Levine-Rasky, 2009).

Schools have a significant responsibility to inform parents of various ways which they can get engaged in at the school (Knopf & Swick, 2007; Patrikakou & Weissberg, 2000). Families should be able to use their different strengths and talents to participate in and contribute to engaging with the school (Murray, McFarland Piazza & Harrison, 2015). Educators should seek parent input in different ways where they have identified the areas in which parents will most likely get involved (Knopf & Swick, 2007). Furthermore, educators should invite those parents who are uninvolved and find ways to integrate their strengths in this partnership.

### **2.5.3 School-based engagement**

Parental engagement at school refers to parents and volunteers who help educators and children in different areas of the school environment (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). School-based engagement also includes other family members who come to school to support a wide range of school activities, such as sports games, learner performances and other events (Epstein & Dauber, 1991).

Further examples of school-based engagement can be to go and meet the child's educator, to pay a visit to the child's classroom, to volunteer at a school function, to attend parent-teacher conferences or to pick up the learner's report card at the end of the term (Barge & Loges, 2003; Patrikakou & Weissberg, 2000). Lemmer and Van Wyk (2004a) report that some schools also use parents to coach sports teams or ask parents to act as security patrols during school events that are held in the evening. From a child's viewpoint, attendance at parent-teacher meetings and attendance at general school activities, such as a sports match, make a difference, and learners tend to notice when parents miss these occasions (Barge & Loges, 2003). In light of the South African view on parental engagement, it is important to utilise a meaning-making framework to represent the complexity of such a phenomenon. The

theoretical framework will serve this function in representing this phenomenon and depicting the data.

## **2.6 Theoretical framework**

Diverse theories on parental engagement have been developed by international scholars at different institutions, mostly in developed countries such as the United States of America (Epstein, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005). However, a suitable and contextual model on parental engagement in South Africa has not yet been developed. Because South Africa has not yet developed such a model, the revised theoretical model of the parental involvement process, as developed by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995, 1997, 2005), will be utilised. The original model of the parental involvement process was revised by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler to allow for a more accurate set of hypotheses to understand more clearly why parents become engaged and how parental engagement affects learner achievement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005). Thus, the model that is used in this study is called the 'revised' model. The identified theoretical framework serves the research focus well, seeing that parents' motivational beliefs, invitations for involvement and perceived life context will slightly differ, as the South African context will be taken into account.

The Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model of parental involvement was developed to understand parental involvement better by focusing on the perspective of parents (Anderson & Minke, 2007). In taking this perspective, scholars, researchers and other stakeholders can develop a better understanding of the reasons why parents become involved in their children's education and development and the influence of their engagement on learner achievement (Hoover-Dempsey, Whitaker & Ice, 2010). The Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model is divided into five levels that aim to represent parents' preliminary decisions on how to become engaged in their children's formal education and the possibility for children to actualise themselves (Anderson & Minke, 2007). The focus of this research enquiry is to understand the experiences of parents' involvement, which are described in the first (marked in green) of the five levels in the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model. Although only

one of the levels will be applied to this study, I present the entire model, including all five levels, in Figure 2.3. After that, I briefly explain each of the levels and elaborate on the particular level that is applicable to this study.

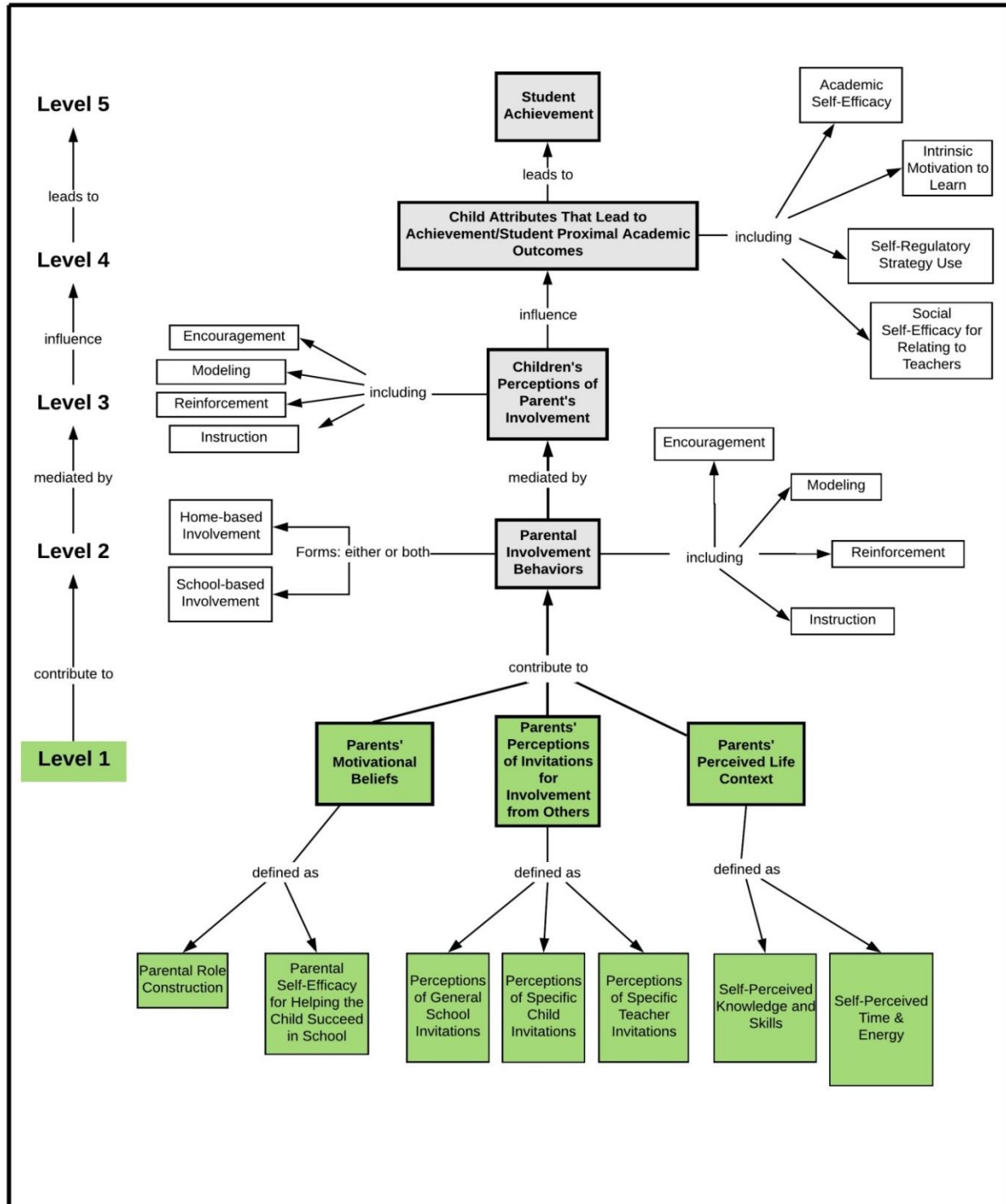


Figure 2.3: Revised Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model (2005:74) of the parental involvement process

As discussed before (see Section 1.7), the process that is displayed in the model (see arrows) addresses three central questions: *Why* do parents become involved in their children's education? *What* do they do once they are involved? *How* does their active involvement influence learner results? Each of the levels within the model will be discussed accordingly.

### **2.6.1 Level one**

The first level within the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model (2005) indicates that parents' involvement in their children's education is motivated by two factors, namely parents' role in constructing their involvement, and their sense of efficacy to help their children achieve success at school (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). The first factor – role construction – refers to the parents' opinion on what they should do regarding their children's education, while the second factor – parental self-efficacy beliefs – refers to the parents' belief that their active engagement will make a difference in their children's education (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005).

The school, the educator and the learner are all responsible to regularly and intentionally send invitations to the parent to get actively involved. These invitations play an important role in parental engagement. The school plays a key role in actively involving parents, in that a welcoming atmosphere encourages parents to become involved in different parental programmes, such as volunteering (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2010). Furthermore, invitations from the educator to parents will help to build and establish a relationship of trust and can promote an active home-school partnership (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2010). The invitation to the parent to be actively involved with his or her child may be the most important invitation. To demonstrate an example relating to the discussed aspect, when a child experiences difficulty in a homework task at home, it can persuade the parent to assist the child or to take action in considering enrolling the child for extra tutoring sessions (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2010).

Lastly, parents' perceived life contexts are also important and include the knowledge, skills, time and energy that they have in order to be engaged in their children's learning and development (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Some parents believe

that they have inadequate knowledge and skills to assist their children; such parents become resourceful in reaching out to other family members, friends and even the educator to support their children (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). To contextualise the challenges parents are facing, scenarios that should also be considered are, for example, those where parents have long working hours and increasing work responsibilities are added to their task agreement, and parents in full-time careers who have to apply for leave to attend school activities. Such scenarios can hinder parents from becoming actively engaged in their children's learning and development in the early grades.

### **2.6.2 Level two**

Level two refers to the two different parental engagement activities in which parents can participate. Firstly, home-based engagement refers to activities that take place between the parent and the child outside of school, for example to assist the child with homework or to review schoolwork before a test (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005). Secondly, school-based engagement includes activities that are undertaken by parents at the school, for example to attend a parent-teacher conference or volunteering at a bake sale (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005).

Level two also refers to the four different mechanisms that parents use when they take part in involvement activities and behaviours, namely encouragement, modelling, reinforcement and instruction (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005). Parental encouragement acknowledges the parents' support and motivation with regard to their children's academic-related activities. Parental modelling refers to the actions of parents that are observed by their children, such as being responsive and competent and knowing how to solve problems. Parents' positive reinforcing behaviours will develop learner attributes that are associated with positive learning outcomes. Finally, parental instruction refers to social interactions between the parent and the child, for example when they work together to solve a mathematical problem.



### **2.6.3 Level three**

Level three pays attention to children's perceptions of their parents' engagement. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005) suggest that children need to understand and experience their parents' engagement in order for these activities to influence their learning and behaviour. Children's reports of their parents' encouragement refer to their experience of how their parents encourage them to, for example, do homework or be aware of how they are doing in their schoolwork. Secondly, children's reports of their parents' modelling explain how parents help their children in different ways with tasks such as homework. Thirdly, parents' reinforcement techniques include showing child behaviour that is approved of, for example having a good attitude towards doing schoolwork. Lastly, parents' use of instruction shows children different ways to master their work, for example to take a break when they are frustrated with their homework.

### **2.6.4 Level four**

In level four of the model, there are four attributes, namely academic self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation to learn, self-regulatory strategy use and social self-efficacy for relating to educators that are related to the child's academic success (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005). A child's academic self-efficacy includes the belief to be able to complete schoolwork successfully. Intrinsic motivation to learn refers to the child's interest in learning new things at school. Strong self-regulation skills include the ability to set goals and pay active attention to engagement in learning. Furthermore, a sense of self-efficacy to relate to educators includes the child's beliefs that his or her engagement with the educator will be productive and end with positive results.

### **2.6.5 Level five**

Level five indicates that parent and learner variables in level one to four contribute to the learner's achievement, which is the major outcome of the parental involvement process. Learner achievement is an important aspect that should be included in research on parental engagement. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005) suggest that additional learner outcomes of parental engagement (such as learner

behaviours, attitudes, habits and skills contributory to achievement) should be thought of as intermediate outcomes of the parental engagement process.

Looking at the nature of this research enquiry, the revised model of parental involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005) is suitable for this study. It thoroughly explains the preliminary decisions that parents make in being engaged in their children's education. This model empowered me to gain a deeper understanding of parents' experiences of this phenomenon and guided the phases of data collection and analysis. Although this model has been developed in the United States of America, it can be implemented in South Africa. The essence of the model reflects the complexity of parental engagement and can thus clearly depict the challenges that parents in South Africa face.

## **2.7 Summary**

In this chapter, I discussed the existing literature relevant to parental engagement in the early grades. After describing parental engagement in the South African context at Foundation Phase level, I explored the benefits thereof. The discussion was followed by the policies that are relevant to parental engagement in South Africa and the role of the partnership between the home and the school. The importance of this phenomenon has been conceptually rationalised and motivated in international and national literature. The theoretical framework by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995, 1997, 2005) represents this phenomenon from an international perspective; however, such a theory for South Africa does not exist. The purpose of the study is not to conceptualise a new theory but rather to explore how this well-conceptualised framework can be utilised in developing contexts (see Table 5.5). By utilising this particular meaning-making framework, I was enabled to explore and understand the unique experiences of South African parents about their parental engagement in the early grades.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the methodological choices I have made and justify these against the purpose of my study and the research questions I have formulated in Chapter 1. I will describe the selected paradigms, the research design I have

followed and the data collection, documentation, analysis and interpretation procedures I have relied on. I will furthermore discuss the measures employed to ensure rigour and the ethical guidelines I have adhered to.

## **Chapter 3: Methodological considerations**

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### **3.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter, an overview of the body of scholarship on parental engagement in the South African context and the importance of a reciprocal partnership between the home and the school was provided. I elaborated on the revised model of the parental involvement process of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005) that served as the theoretical framework for this enquiry. This chapter commences by exploring the research design and methodology that I have chosen for this research study. I will discuss the different techniques that were used to collect the data and elaborate on how I analysed the collected data. Lastly, I will explain the quality criteria and ethical considerations that I have adhered to.

### **3.2 Rationale**

The primary aim of this research study was to gain a deeper understanding of the views that parents have about their engagement in their children's early grades and to explore the different ways in which they are engaged. This enquiry also shed light on the support that parents need in order to engage themselves fully in the education of their Foundation Phase children. In essence, this study enabled me to explore and describe parents' experiences of their engagement in their Foundation Phase children's early grades.

In Chapter 1, most aspects pertaining to how this research enquiry was conceptualised were discussed briefly. The following sections are dedicated to elaborating on the importance of developing a well-constructed framework that is aligned with the theoretical framework and purpose of this inquiry.

### **3.3 Research paradigm**

#### **3.3.1 Ontological and epistemological premises**

A paradigm can be defined as a set of beliefs about reality that represents the individual's view about the world and how the individual will manage different situations (Lombard, 2016). Paradigms, therefore, serve as a framework for observations and insight, and influence the way one sees and grasps a phenomenon (Babbie, 2005). Paradigms can thus be used as a lens through which reality is interpreted (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b). In this study, I utilised an interpretivist paradigm and a qualitative mode of enquiry to understand and interpret the concept of parental engagement in the early grades.

Interpretivism, often combined with constructivism or social constructivism, holds the view that individuals strive to understand the world in which they live and work and, therefore, develop and appreciate subjective meanings of their experiences (Creswell, 2014; Fouché & Schurink, 2011). Nieuwenhuis (2016b) and Creswell (2014) are both of the opinion that interpretivist studies have the general aim of understanding the phenomenon that is being studied through the meaning that people assign to their observations, and consequently rely as much as possible on the views of the participants. Thus, the interpretivist paradigm makes an effort to “get inside the person and to understand from within” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007:21). Researchers who use a qualitative approach to research do not seek to ‘find’ knowledge but rather to explore and understand it (Merriam, 2009). These researchers are interested in how individuals arrange themselves and how these individuals are compatible with their environment through symbols, rituals, social structures and social roles (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b).

Nieuwenhuis (2016b) states that interpretivism is based on the following assumptions: human life can only be understood from within; social life is a distinctly human product; the human mind is the purposive source or origin of meaning; human behaviour is affected by knowledge of the social world; and the social world does not ‘exist’ independently of human knowledge. I therefore assume that the experiences of parental engagement in the early grades of all the participants

involved in this research enquiry are shaped by the unique environment in which they are settled, their diverse cultures and the social structures in which they function.

### **3.3.2 Qualitative research approach**

McMillan and Schumacher (2014) define qualitative research as a type of research that refers to a comprehensive study that can make use of direct observations and interviews to study participants in their natural setting. Qualitative research requires the researcher to consider an interpretive approach to the world, where the researcher studies participants or objects in their natural settings, while striving to interpret the data in terms of the meaning that the participants assign to these (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

An important characteristic of the qualitative enquiry is that the research process is mostly inductive, where the researcher “gathers data to build concepts, hypotheses or theories rather than deductively testing hypotheses” (Merriam, 2009:15). Inductive reasoning moves from the specific to the general, while using data-gathering methods, such as a specific set of observations and interviews, to locate patterns and themes that might emerge (Babbie, 2005; Merriam, 2009). Qualitative studies are, therefore, chosen by researchers for the rich descriptions that the data potentially can produce (Engelbrecht, 2016) and are naturalistic, revealing the natural setting in which interaction occurs (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b).

Creswell (2014) identifies the following characteristics of the qualitative research process: the researcher explores a problem and develops an understanding of the central phenomenon; the literature review justifies the problem that has been identified; the researcher poses the purpose statement and research questions; the data that are collected from participants reflect the views of the participants; the data are analysed by the researcher to identify themes; lastly, the report is written in a flexible manner to include the researcher’s subjective reflexivity. This process served as a clear guideline according to which this research enquiry was undertaken.

The qualitative design, joined with an interpretivist paradigm, is appropriate, as the participants were studied in their natural setting, in conjunction with their realistic experience and meaning of being engaged in their children's school career. This research framework enabled me to gain a comprehensive view on the participants' experiences of their involvement in order to capture and interpret the meaning that each participant attributed to his or her experiences.

### **3.4 Case study research design**

Stake (1995) defines the case study as the specific and intricate study of a single case, where the researcher seeks to comprehend its activity within important situations. Qualitative research studies such 'cases' over a period of time, by using multiple data-gathering techniques (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The 'case' must be investigated within its real-world surroundings (Yin, 2014), and multiple data collection methods are used to provide depth to the case study (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013). The intent of a case study researcher is to learn more about a sample and how this system functions by comprehensively getting familiar with the single diverse aspects the case consists of and which are being studied (Stake, 1995).

Cohen et al. (2007:257) state that case studies often follow the interpretive tradition of research, by "seeing the situation through the eyes of the participants". Case studies allow the researcher to answer the "who", "why" and "how" questions of the research and, in addition, allow the researcher to focus on the case and retain a real-world perspective while conducting the research (Yin, 2014). Qualitative researchers are interested in the meaning that participants assign to their real-life experiences, and the case study allows the researcher to immerse him- or herself in the data that originate from the enquiry (Fouché & Schurink, 2011).

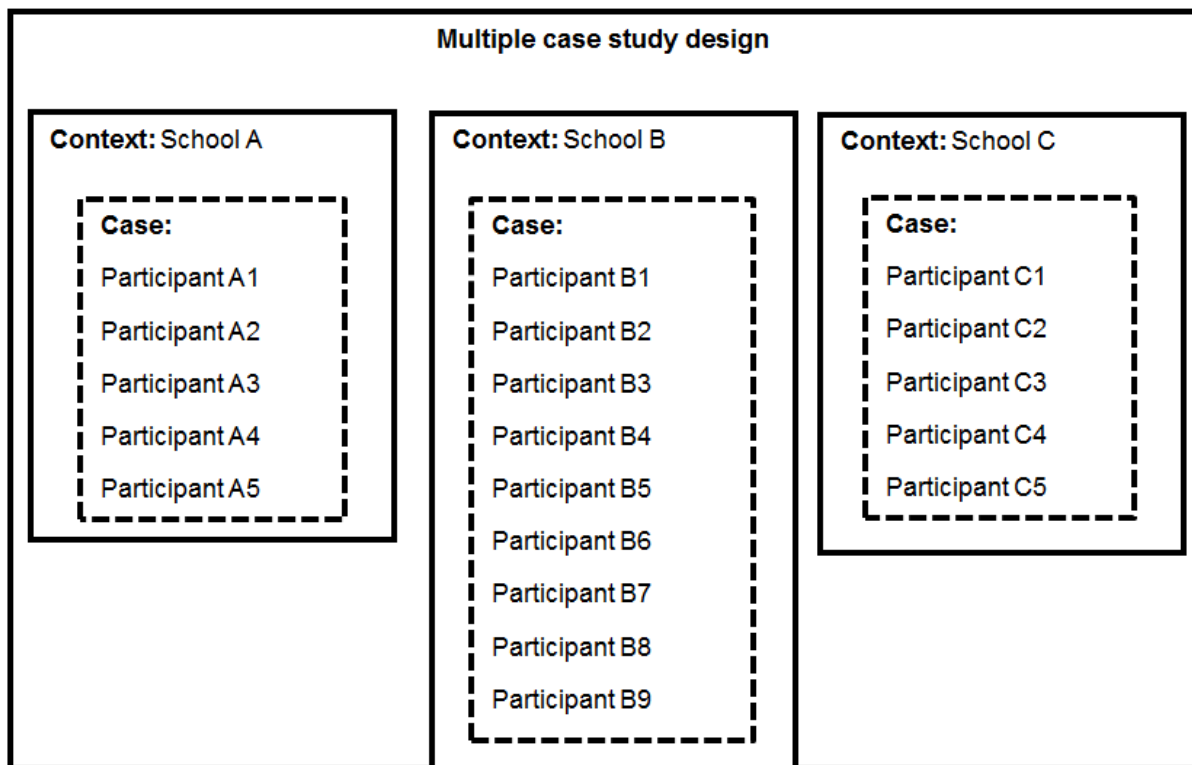
Case studies are flexible and can be used for multiple purposes (Rule & John, 2011). Firstly, a case study can be used to provide rich data and clarify the relation thereof to a wider context. Secondly, it can be used to describe a general problem within a specific context. Thirdly, it can be useful when a researcher wants to produce

theoretical insight. Fourthly, a case study may explain other similar cases. And lastly, it can be used for teaching purposes. Multiple educational environments exist, and case studies can serve multiple audiences and will allow readers to judge the consequences of a study for themselves (Cohen et al., 2007).

Case studies have a number of strengths and weaknesses to consider when conducting research. An important aspect of the case study is that it, firstly, allows the researcher to explore and investigate the reality of the case in a certain context (Joubert, 2016). This in-depth investigation of the case allows the researcher to investigate the uniqueness and complexity of the case (Joubert, 2016). Further strengths of a case study include the following: its results are easily understood (Cohen et al., 2007); the investigation of a case can be completed by a single researcher and does not need a whole team of researchers; and the choice of participants, the extent of the case and the choice of methodology are all versatile, for example one person, an organisation or a country can be regarded as a case (Joubert, 2016).

In addition to this, there are some weaknesses that are unique to the case study method. When only one researcher is involved in the study, the case study may be selective, biased and subjective. Although the results of this study cannot be generalised, there may be some principals, educators and parents that can relate to the findings of the study. My focus throughout the research study will not be to generalise the findings but rather to interpret and understand the phenomenon in terms of the participants' experiences of their engagement in the early grades (cf. Stake, 1995). The case study in this enquiry is outlined in Figure 3.1 below.





**Figure 3.1: Case study design (adapted from Yin, 2014:50)**

Figure 3.1 depicts that cases are adherent to contextual conditions. The dotted lines between the context and the case indicate that the boundaries between these two are not likely to be distinct (Yin, 2014). This study represents a phenomenon that educators, readers, children, principals and others can relate to as everyone has experienced parental engagement in their school career at some point in time.

### **3.4.1 Selection of participants and research sites**

In a qualitative enquiry, the intent of the researcher is to develop a comprehensive understanding of a central phenomenon, in this enquiry referring to the experiences of parents of their engagement in the early grades of their children's education. The next step is to select participants and sites that will help the researcher to understand the phenomenon that is being studied (Creswell, 2014). The term 'sampling' refers, firstly, to the unit of analysis as described by Merriam (2009) and the researcher's decision on the type and quantity of cases that will be involved in

the study and, secondly, to the method that the researcher will use to conduct the sampling (Lombard, 2016). Maree (2016) states that sampling generally refers to the sample size of the study and includes the number of participants, incidents and actions that will be studied.

For the purpose of this study, purposive sampling was used to identify the three primary schools as research sites and the parents affiliated to these schools as participants. Purposive sampling enables the researcher to select a case because it provides some feature or process on which the researcher is focused (Silverman, 2013). The common element of purposive sampling in this research is that the three primary schools and the participants are selected according to a set of predetermined criteria that are relevant to the purpose of the research (cf. Maree, 2016). This has been discussed in Chapter 1 (see Section 1.9.2) to some degree. The three different primary schools were purposefully selected because, firstly, they are all ex-model C schools; secondly, the language of learning and teaching is English; and thirdly, most of the learners in the three primary schools speak a different home language than the language of learning and teaching at the school. The selection criteria which were used to select the three different primary schools are listed below:

- Quintile 4 or 5 school
- Circuit 1 school
- Ex-model C school
- Double-medium school
- In the Pretoria region

The following criteria were used to select the parent participants at each of the three primary schools. The participants are:

- parents, caregivers or legal guardians of Grade 3 learners from the three selected schools, which include mothers and fathers;
- parents who volunteered to participate in the research; and
- parents who have been involved in their children's formal education in the Foundation Phase.

By using purposive sampling for the sampling and selection criteria, I was able to identify participants whose children were in the last grade of the Foundation Phase and who have had a few years of experience in parental engagement. I was able to relate to these parents because of my three years' teaching experience as a Grade 3 educator and because I have worked with these parents on a number of occasions.

### **3.4.2 Data collection and textual data**

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary factor in identifying the case in the data collection process (Engelbrecht, 2016). Yin (2014) notes that the case study researcher should learn to integrate real-world events within the data collection plan by adapting to the interviewees' schedules and availability. With this in mind, Yin (2014) identifies the major tasks in data collection as follows: gaining access to the interviewees; having the correct equipment to conduct the research, for example a computer; developing methods for asking for assistance from peers; making a list of data collection activities and when these should be completed; and lastly, providing for unforeseen circumstances, such as changes of interview dates.

There are various different data collection methods that can be used in a qualitative enquiry (Nieuwenhuis, 2016c). In the following section, I will discuss the different techniques that were used to complete the data collection of the study.

#### **3.4.2.1 Semi-structured interviews**

Nieuwenhuis (2016c) describes the interview as a two-way guided conversation, in which the interviewer asks the participant some questions to gain insight into the participant's ideas, opinions, views and conduct to collect the necessary data. In addition to this, Cohen et al. (2007) state that the interview seeks information on behalf of the interviewer to supply information on behalf of the participant. Thus, the three different aims of the interview are as follows: to gather information that has a direct influence on the research objectives; to identify and test certain hypotheses; and to use the interviews in addition to other data collection techniques in a research study (Cohen et al., 2007).

I chose to use semi-structured interviewing as it is essential to the purpose of the inquiry. The semi-structured interview is adaptable and allows the interviewer to change some of the interview questions if the participant requires more clarity, while the interviewer is warned to take caution not to deviate too far from the predetermined set of interview questions (Engelbrecht, 2016). Interviews have multiple strengths, such as being target-specific, focusing on the case that is being studied and providing valuable insight into the perceptions and attitudes that are held by the participants (Yin, 2014).

Although interviews are one of the most popular data collection techniques (Creswell, 2014), some weaknesses are associated with it. Creswell (2014) notes that interviews provide information that is 'filtered' through the eyes of the participant and interviews are deceptive as the participant provides information that the interviewer wants to hear (Yin, 2014). Maxwell (2002) adds that interviews present some problems for the generalisability of the inquiry. The researcher is in the presence of the participant for only a short period of time and, consequently, has to make conclusions about the rest of the participant's life (Maxwell, 2002). Another disadvantage may be that the presence of the interviewer may influence the responses of the participant (Creswell, 2014). As a result, the interview may be valid as an interpretive expression of the participant's account in the interview but may exclude other aspects of the participant's viewpoint that have not been discussed in the interview (Maxwell, 2002). The interviewer needs to use certain techniques, such as recording the interview, to ensure that no inaccuracies are made due to poor recall (Yin, 2014). Furthermore, this technique is joined with other techniques to ensure that multiple views of the same phenomenon are obtained.

In these semi-structured interviews, I utilised the predetermined set of questions compiled at the beginning of the study (see Addendum B). To ensure that my interviews were well recorded, I made use of a tape recorder. After this, I transcribed each interview. Transcription requires the researcher to convert the recordings from the interview into text data on a computer for analysis (Creswell, 2014). These transcriptions would assist me in analysing the data. When the workshops were still in the planning phase, I was expecting more parents to attend. Owing to practical

reasons, the first individual semi-structured interview (see Addendum B) with the participants was completed on paper, and the discussion of the collage was recorded with the tape recorder.

### **3.4.2.2 Observations**

Observation is the process of gathering open-ended first-hand information by observing participants and places during the course of research (Creswell, 2014) and may lead the researcher to observe things that have become routine to the participant (Merriam, 2009). As a data-gathering technique, observations are used to understand a particular occurrence that is being observed, and researchers use their five senses to collect these fragments of data (Nieuwenhuis, 2016c). Observations are jointly used with semi-structured interviews and other artefacts (in this study, the collages and the biographical data profile) to validate and diversify the findings (Merriam, 2009).

Using observations as a means of data collection has advantages and disadvantages. One of the main strengths of observations is the first-hand information that the researcher obtains from the participant, as the primary behaviour is studied in an actual 'real-world' environment (Engelbrecht, 2016). Observing allows the researcher to record the information as the research progresses, to study genuine behaviour and to study individuals who find it difficult to express their ideas (Creswell, 2014). To the contrary, observations can limit the researcher to the sites and situations to which he or she can gain entry, and at these sites, the researcher may find it difficult to develop a close bond with the participants (Creswell, 2014). Nieuwenhuis (2016c) highlights the fact that the nature of observations is highly selective and subjective. Researchers should be aware of their own biases, try not to focus on a specific event or object within the whole of the research (Nieuwenhuis, 2016c) and be aware of how their presence affects the behaviour and responses of the participants (Rule & John, 2011).

According to Nieuwenhuis (2016c), there are four different types of observations, namely the complete observer, the observer as participant, the participant as observer and the complete participant. The type that was best suited for this study

was the observer as participant. This type of observation requires the researcher to be part of the situation but to focus on his or her role as the observer during the situation (Nieuwenhuis, 2016c). The participants are aware of the researcher's observing activities, and the quantity of information that is being revealed is controlled by the participants (Merriam, 2009). This suggests that I was keenly aware of patterns of behaviour while the parent participants completed the semi-structured interview and the collage, without my becoming involved or interfering with the dynamics of the activity. The parents were observed while they were completing the collage and the biographical data profile. Any interaction that the participants had during this time was further observed and noted down. The duration of the observations at each research site was different but lasted more or less 90 minutes.

This data collection method is, therefore, suitable for this enquiry, as the observations were used in conjunction with the semi-structured interviews and the artefacts, namely the collage and the biographical data profile. Throughout the data collection phase, I alerted myself to my own biases and how my presence affected the participants so that it did not influence the data interpretation process.

### **3.4.2.3 Collage**

Physical material as a type of document (Merriam, 2009) can be a valuable source of information if such material is available in a research enquiry (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004). I used all of the collages made by the participants as these assisted me in identifying emerging themes (Henning et al., 2004). By using collages as a creative means of data collection, participants use pictorial storytelling to express a consolidated story of themselves (Fritz & Beekman, 2007). The primary research question was used as a prompt to guide the focus of the collage, but there were no rules for or boundaries in completing the collage. By discussing the outcome of the collage with the participant, the researcher can extract information that reveals underlying themes, interests, values and abilities that the participant conveyed through the pictures, slogans or words that were used (Fritz & Beekman, 2007).

In this study, the parent participants were asked to complete a collage with the theme of "My experiences of my parental engagement in my child's early grades".

The parents were introduced to developing a collage with a demonstration and a thorough explanation of how to complete the collage before they started. Different open-ended materials were made available to the participants, such as old magazines, newspapers, material, coloured paper and stationery, such as coloured pencils, crayons, scissors and glue. After the collages had been completed, the parent participants discussed the outcome of the collage during a semi-structured interview session. The participants were given the opportunity to tell their stories and elaborate on the way they organised and executed the collage. Themes and patterns that emerged from the collage were discussed. The themes that emerged from the visual presentation were documented and used for further data analysis.

#### **3.4.2.4 Biographical data profile**

The biographical data profile can also be regarded as an artefact. The biographical data profile contains the biographical data of each participant, as well as the school as the physical setting, and sheds light on each participant. The participants completed forms that included information such as their name and surname, date of birth, gender, contact number, email address, occupation and their residing address. The same profile was conducted for each school during the visit to the school principal. This was of utmost importance to understand the setting and situatedness of every participant and to prevent me from making inferences that were not sensitive to the participants' surroundings and context. This information is confidential and will not be published.

### **3.5 Data analysis process**

Qualitative data analysis refers to the process of arranging, accounting for and describing the data that have been collected, as well as understanding the patterns and themes that are associated with the data (Cohen et al., 2007). In this process, the data that have been collected are transformed into findings (Patton, 2002). Nieuwenhuis (2016a) states that the main goal of qualitative data analysis is to make a summary of what the researcher has seen or heard, such as words, expressions, themes or patterns that will assist the researcher in understanding and interpreting the data. Cohen et al. (2007) note that qualitative research focuses on interpretation,

so the researcher should be able to know what the data analysis should accomplish, and through this, choose the correct method of data analysis. For this study, I chose to use thematic analysis to analyse the data that were collected.

According to Engelbrecht (2016), thematic analysis can be regarded as an instrument rather than a method of data analysis. Throughout the process of thematic analysis, units of the textual data, such as the interviews, observations and field notes, regardless of their length, are arranged according to their meaning (Engelbrecht, 2016) and identified by using the process of coding. Codes are labels that the researcher assigns to different themes or categories that emerge from the data (Rule & John, 2011). Themes that frequently emerge from data are established by words, sentences or illustrations that can be grouped together under a certain theme or sub-theme (Engelbrecht, 2016). I constantly had to move between the data and the analysis to see if the themes were linked to the phenomenon that was being studied. The main purpose of coding is to identify multi-dimensional, descriptive categories that will serve as a provisional framework for the data analysis (Engelbrecht, 2016). Coding allows the researcher to get familiar with the data and to interpret “what the data is saying” (Rule & John, 2011:77).

In Chapter 1 (see Section 1.10), the different steps that I undertook to conduct the thematic analysis were explained. Braun and Clarke (in Joubert et al., 2016) describe six steps in thematic analysis that can be followed chronologically. These are the steps that the researcher should follow: the researcher gets familiar with the data; creates initial codes; identifies possible themes; revises the themes; refines and names the codes; and gives feedback.

After collecting the data at the three different primary schools, the data were immediately transcribed. The tape recorder ensured that important information was accounted for and each interview was accurately transcribed. In addition to this, the observations, as well as the collages that the participants completed and the biographical data profile, helped to strengthen and deepen the description of the phenomenon. After the transcriptions had been completed, codes that could lead to



themes that emerged from the data were identified. The codes that the researcher has identified, can be added together to form emergent themes (Engelbrecht, 2016).

Immersing myself in the data enabled me to compare the data sets with one another and identify themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data that had been collected. This strengthened the research investigation by using the method of triangulation, where a number of methods are used to collect data (Le Cordeur, 2016) to support the findings of a qualitative study (Rule & John, 2011). Using triangulation strengthens the internal validity of the study (Merriam, 2009) and broadens the researcher's understanding of the phenomenon that is being studied (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The process of triangulation guided me to determine when data saturation was reached and no new insights could be obtained from additional data (Rule & John, 2011). Since the trustworthiness of the data sets is of paramount importance in any study, the ways by which it can be improved will be discussed next.

### **3.6 Quality criteria**

In a qualitative study, the researcher must keep in mind the procedures that can be used to determine the trustworthiness of the data analysis (Nieuwenhuis, 2016a). Trustworthiness in research indicates that the study will improve scholarly thoroughness, transparency and professional ethics to gain confidence within the research population (Rule & John, 2011). Guba (1981) suggests four criteria that should be considered when presenting a trustworthy study, namely credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability. These four aspects will be discussed next.

#### **3.6.1 Credibility**

Credibility is the extent to which a research enquiry sets out to measure what it set out to study (Rule & John, 2011). Nieuwenhuis (2016a) names the following strategies that can be used to ensure the credibility of a study: making use of well-established research techniques; using a research design that fits the research question; making use of member checking, where the participants check the

transcripts of the researcher's interviews or field notes for accuracy; and being familiar with the participants from an early stage (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In addition, the researcher must interpret and report the data analysis as honestly as logically as possible (Denzin & Lincoln (2003).

### **3.6.2 Transferability**

Transferability refers to the degree of generalisability of the research findings (Merriam, 2009). According to Nieuwenhuis (2016a), there are two strategies that the researcher can use to increase the transferability of the research study: firstly, by using thick descriptions in describing the participants and the research design; and secondly, through purposeful sampling, by carefully selecting the participants in the study. If the researcher applies these two strategies, the reader can make connections from the research findings to other cases (Nieuwenhuis, 2016a).

### **3.6.3 Confirmability**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that confirmability is the degree to which the research findings are shaped by the participants, and not the researcher's bias, motivation or interest. Strategies that can be used by researchers to increase confirmability include using triangulation (using multiple data collection instruments) and reducing researcher bias (Nieuwenhuis, 2016a). Researchers tend to develop relationships with the participants, but this can be overcome by making use of member checking (see Section 3.6.1) (Nieuwenhuis, 2016a).

### **3.6.4 Dependability**

Dependability can be seen as a replacement for reliability (Rule & John, 2011). The researcher can ensure the authenticity of the study by the following methods: making use of member checking for transcripts of interviews and field notes; allowing the reader to see the raw data of the study; using thick descriptions to describe the case and the research progress; using triangulation; describing ethical considerations; collecting data until the data have become saturated; and admitting and describing the limitations of the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

### **3.7 Ethical considerations**

Rule and John (2011) note that researchers must conduct their studies in an ethically sound manner to ensure the quality of the research, which contributes to the trustworthiness of the study. The following ethical considerations have been adhered to during the data generation process.

#### **3.7.1 Voluntary participation and informed consent from participants**

The participation of participants must be entirely voluntary, and the participants should be informed about the true nature of the research (Du Plessis, 2016). The participants provided me with their informed consent after I have informed the participants about the purpose, procedure, risks and benefits of the study (cf. Johnson & Christensen, 2012). The letter of consent stipulated that their participation was voluntary and that they could choose to withdraw from the study at any given time. There would be no consequences for such a decision.

#### **3.7.2 Protecting participants from deception and harm**

Deception in research can be defined as not informing the participants that they are being researched, failing to tell the truth, telling lies or even treating the participants in a dehumanising way (Cohen et al., 2007). In some studies, a degree of deception could be necessary to conduct a valid study (Johnson & Christensen, 2012); however, in this study, it was crucial to ensure that the participants were fully informed about the true purpose and conditions of the research enquiry and were motivated to tell the truth and not hide any details about their experiences. Any deception, risks or harm that could be directed towards the participants were not intentional or planned for, and no such incidents were reported.

#### **3.7.3 Protecting the privacy and confidentiality of the participants**

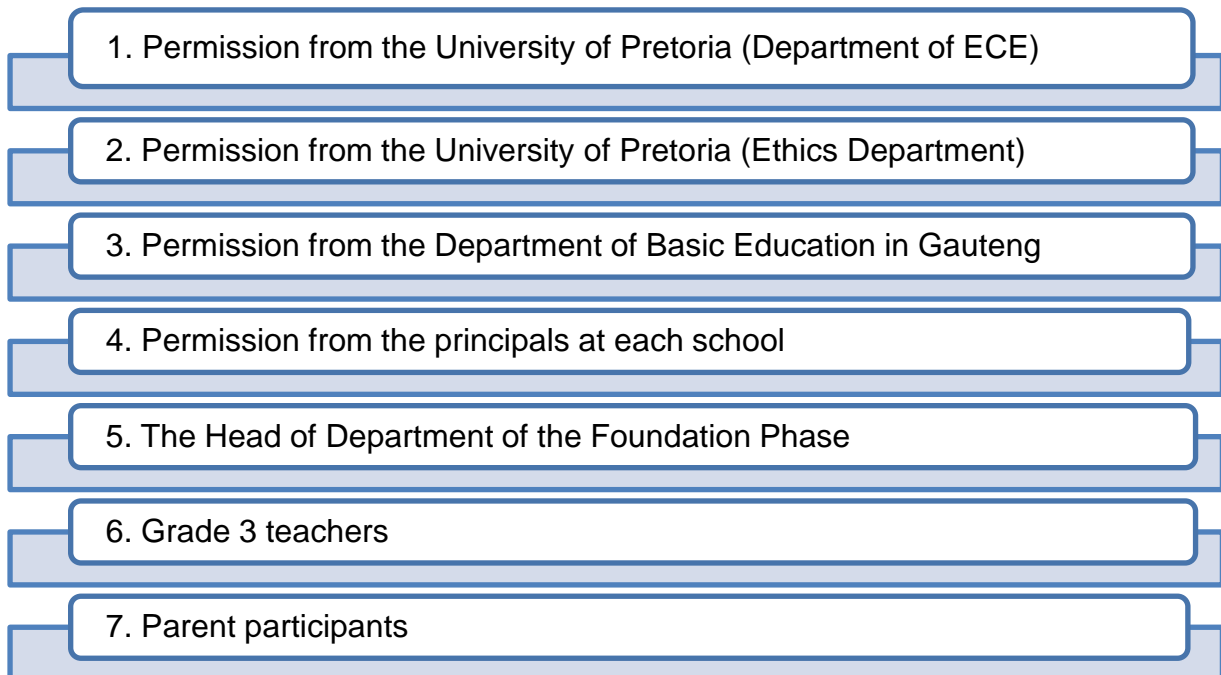
Researchers must protect the privacy and the confidentiality of all participants and not expose them to any procedures or risks that are not related to the study (Du Plessis, 2016). Privacy refers to the component of personal privacy, while confidentiality refers to managing information in a confidential way, so as not to make the personal information public (Strydom, 2011). In this study, the names of

the three respective schools were concealed using codes, for example “School A”, “School B” and “School C”. The identities of the participants were also concealed by using pseudonyms, referring to them as “Participant A1”, “Participant B2”, “Participant C3”, and so forth. The alphabet letter represents the school and the number represents the participant, for example Participant A1 is the first participant at School A. It was clearly stated in the letter that the principals and the participants received that their identities would be concealed.

Rapport and open communication were established, which also increased the trustworthiness of the inquiry.

### 3.7.4 Permission to conduct the research

Before I could complete this study, I had to gain permission to conduct the research from various institutions. Figure 3.2 depicts the different institutions that I had to consult with.



**Figure 3.2: Permission from different institutions to gain access to the sample**

As shown above, I had to get permission from the Department of Early Childhood Education at the University of Pretoria first by defending my proposal successfully. After that, I applied to the Ethics Department of the University of Pretoria to receive ethical clearance. After I had obtained my ethical clearance certificate, I applied to the Gauteng Department of Education, from which I received the clearance certificate to go ahead with the data collection.

As soon as I received the clearance certificate from the Gauteng Department of Education, I met with the respective principals of each school. I explained the nature of my study and the data collection process. All the necessary approval documents to conduct this enquiry were provided to them. The head of department in the Foundation Phase handed out the letters to the learners to give to their parents. A date and time were set and confirmed by each school, and the workshops were concluded at the premises.

Each of the data collection workshops contained the following information: a presentation on parental engagement in the early grades to all the parents that were present, followed by the completion of the collages by each of them and a discussion of the outcome of the collage afterwards. Using observations, transcriptions of the interviews, collages and the biographical data profile throughout the process deepened my understanding of the phenomenon and prepared me for the data analysis process.

### **3.8 Summary**

In this chapter, I presented the research methodology for this study. The rationale and the research design for the study were discussed. Further, I explained how the case study guided the research, including the different criteria that guided the selection of the schools and the participants. The sampling procedure was explained, together with the different data collection instruments that were used to collect the data. I described the data analysis procedure and the quality criteria that were taken into account. Finally, I elaborated on the different ethical issues that were considered throughout the research process.

In the next chapter, the data analysis will be discussed. I will discuss the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data and will include the observations that had been made during the data collection process.

## Chapter 4: Data analysis and results

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### 4.1 Introduction

In Chapter 3, I explained the paradigmatic choices that were utilised for this study and justified the reason for using a case study research design along with the different data collection methods. These methods included interviews, observations and the two different artefact documents – collages and the biographical data profile. I concluded the chapter by elaborating on the different ethical measures that were taken to ensure that the study adhered to the ethical requirements.

### 4.2 Permission to enter research sites

The following discussion is closely related to the data collection strategies, as explained in Chapter 3. The well-designed data collection strategies enabled me to go to each research context prepared and explore the lived experiences of the participants by carefully observing and recording my understanding. While arranging the permission to conduct research at each of the three schools, I took cognisance of the place or location of the site, the context or environment and the participants' reactions and interaction with these sites (cf. Engelbrecht, 2016). Upon meeting with the school principal of each school, I informed him or her of the purpose of the research enquiry and provided all the necessary documentation. After I received permission from the principals, I handed them the consent letters and the outline of how the workshops would be conducted (see Addendum A). The educators distributed the letters to the parents, after which the parents returned the reply slips to the educators, which I then collected. Table 4.1 indicates the number of letters that were distributed at each school, as well as the number of reply slips that were received. The last column shows the number of parents who attended the workshop at each school.

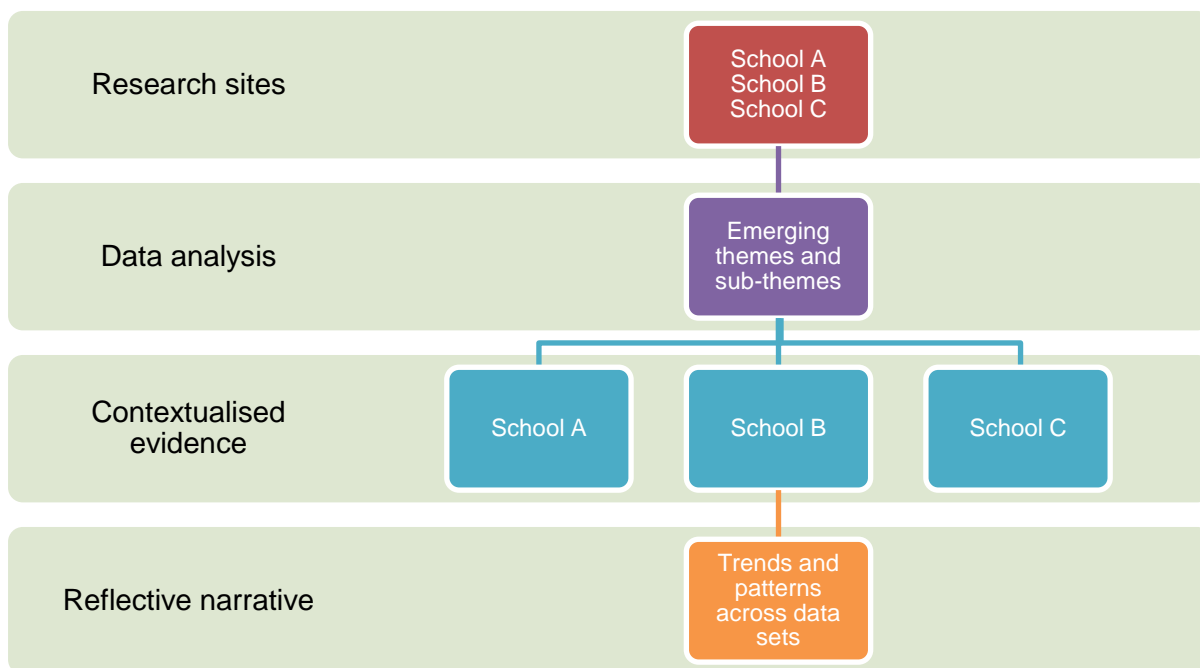
**Table 4.1: Number of participants at each school**

School	Total number of letters distributed	Total number of reply slips received	Total number of participants attending workshops
School A	200	50	5 (School A, Participants A1, A2, A3, A4 and A5)
School B	160	10	9 (School B, Participants B1, B2, B3, B4, B5, B6, B7, B8 and B9)
School C	160	24	5 (School C, Participants C1, C2, C3, C4 and C5)

Table 4.1 indicates that between 15 and 25% of the parents from the respective sites showed interest in participating in this event, upon which less than 5% were able to attend the workshops. This table provides valuable information about parental involvement and will be utilised as contextual information during the interpretations.

As a guideline as to how this chapter has been structured, I will discuss each case study respectively. Firstly, I will report on the context of each research site and strengthen the report by also including photographs. Secondly, I will summarise the identified themes and sub-themes that emerged from the respective data sets to allow me to conduct the data analysis within each of the three case studies. Each of the emerging themes and sub-themes is generated with evidence from each research site. I will conclude the chapter with a reflective narrative to demonstrate the common trends that are evident among these research sites. The emerging themes and sub-themes will then be utilised further in the final chapter as conclusions and recommendations. The structure is visually depicted in Figure 4.1 below.





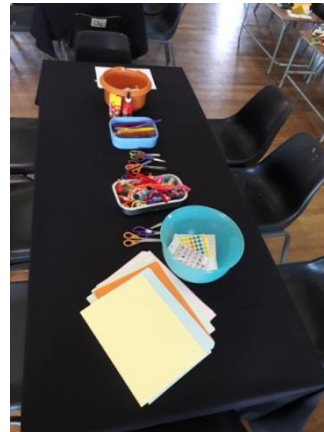
**Figure 4.1: Overview of structure of data generated and analysed**

The following discussion will contextualise each of the three research sites where the data were generated.

#### **4.2.1 Research site for first case study: School A**

To understand parental engagement, it is imperative to explore the support and involvement of school management. The vice-principal was receptive towards the objectives of the research enquiry and assisted in arranging the workshop and distributing the slips to the parents. She provided the venue, involved the janitor to provide access to the grounds for all the participants and prepared the hall with a table and chairs. Although 50 parents had initially indicated that they would participate, only five parents arrived. Four participants were on time and one was late, which interrupted the session and required us to start anew. All of the participants were eager and willing to participate and initially sat at one table while the activities were explained. One participant moved to another table to allow himself more space, which isolated him from the group discussion and complicated the audio recordings. Given the nature and location of the hall, some unforeseen interruptions (e.g. by aeroplane and cars) occurred, which influenced the dynamics

of the discussions. The following photographs (see Illustrations 4.1 and 4.2) show the layout of the first research site and the materials used to help the parents express their experiences of parental engagement in the early grades.



**Illustrations 4.1 and 4.2: Venue and material used for collage at School A**

#### **4.2.2 Research site for second case study: School B**

I met with the principal and the head of department to discuss the research objectives. The head of department of the Foundation Phase assisted me in arranging the workshop and distributing the letters to the parents. The janitor assisted me in preparing the hall by moving around the tables and chairs. The school hall was close to the gate where the parents entered. Ten parents had indicated that they were going to attend, but only nine participants arrived. Six participants were on time and sat at one table. The remaining three participants arrived late and sat at different tables. All of the participants demonstrated a positive attitude towards the study, except for one participant who used a vulgar word to describe me. There were some interruptions throughout the morning, which influenced the quality of the recordings (e.g. construction work in the office). The following photographs (see Illustrations 4.3 and 4.4) show the layout of the second research site and the materials that were used when completing the collages.



**Illustrations 4.3 and 4.4: Venue and material used for collage at School B**

#### **4.2.3 Research site for third case study: School C**

The principal at this school was very interested in the objectives of this study. The head of department of the Foundation Phase assisted me in making arrangements for the workshop and distributing the letters to the Grade 3 educators. On the morning of the workshop, the head of department provided me access to the classroom as the school hall was no longer available. Although 24 parents had indicated that they would attend the workshop, only five parents showed up. Some of the participants were not familiar with the school grounds and could not locate the Grade 3 classroom. The classroom environment provided a different dynamic as the participants sat much closer to one another and engaged in conversation. The following photographs (see Illustrations 4.5 and 4.6) show the layout of the third research site and the materials that were used to complete the collage.



**Illustrations 4.5 and 4.6: Venue and material used for collage at School C**

I have contextualised the research sites and briefly described the group interaction and school involvement that prepared me for analysing the evidence, as illustrated in the following section.

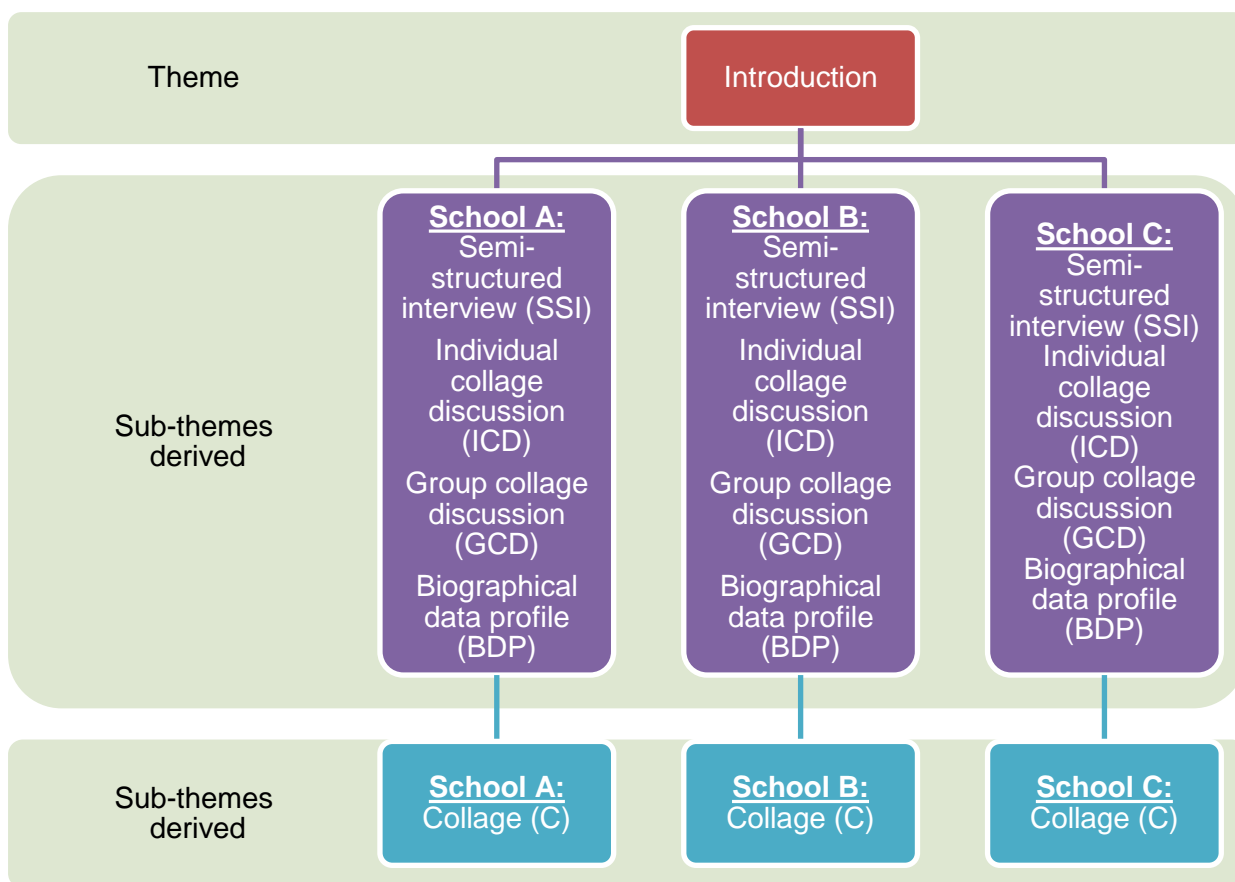
### 4.3 Results of the data gathered and discussion of the findings

During the course of the data collection phase, data were collected through the use of individual semi-structured interviews, observations and the artefacts constructed by the participants, namely the collages and the biographical data profiles. The themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data are summarised in Table 4.2.

**Table 4.2: Summary of the main themes and sub-themes**

<b>Theme 1: The nature of parental engagement in the early grades</b>
Sub-theme 1.1: Importance of parental engagement
Sub-theme 1.2: Parental engagement at home
Sub-theme 1.3: Parental engagement at school
<b>Theme 2: Hindrances that influence parental engagement in the early grades</b>
Sub-theme 2.1: Work commitments and time available for engagement
Sub-theme 2.2: Communication between the school and the parents
Sub-theme 2.3: Educational challenges faced by the school
<b>Theme 3: Family structure and dynamics influencing parental engagement in the early grades</b>
Sub-theme 3.1: Diversity in family structures
Sub-theme 3.2: Presence of elders in family dynamics

Figure 4.2 displays the structure of how the data were analysed and presented in the following section. In discussing the themes and related sub-themes, I will include verbatim quotations from the semi-structured interviews and the artefacts constructed by the participants (i.e. the collages and biographical data profiles). In addition, I include excerpts from my observations to support my discussion. Lastly, I will include a collage that is applicable to each sub-theme.



**Figure 4.2: Overview of structure of data generated and analysed**

### **4.3.1 Theme 1: The nature of parental engagement in the early grades**

The evidence from the data highlighted the importance and value the parents attach to engaging with their children in various contexts. Two aspects of parental engagement that emerged relate to the home and the school as separate environments, which indicate that the participants were involved in multiple areas of their children’s lives, which are unique and complex in nature and call for separate discussions.

#### **4.3.1.1 Sub-theme 1.1: Importance of parental engagement**

A broad range of responses from participants allowed me to gain an in-depth perspective of how the participants viewed the importance of their engagement in their child’s early grades.

#### 4.3.1.1.1 Semi-structured interviews (SSI)

##### **First case study: School A**

Parental engagement is crucial and the foundation of children's future. *"Grade 1 is of the utmost importance because it is the start of the kid's education ladder that he must climb. If he starts not right he will struggle with further development"* (SSI:A1).

Another parent agreed by stating as follows:

*It is of utmost importance to be involved as much as you can. It helps you to understand whether your child are progressing or struggling with schoolwork, how he or she interacts with the teachers or other school kids. And it shows that they are important to you and their education is important.* (SSI:A5)

In contrast to this notion, another parent expressed that over-involvement in educational activities is not beneficial and restricted to cultivating good morals – *"Parents should be involved on a limited basis. Parents are not trained especially with regards to formal education. Parental involvement should be more on discipline, spiritual and physical wellbeing of kids"* (SSI:A2). Another viewpoint raised is that *"Foundation Phase children need guidance"* (SSI:A3), and parental involvement should *"help their children and to advise them about the importance of education... It is very important to set an example to your child about the importance of school activities"* (SSI:A4).

##### **Second case study: School B**

Parental engagement in the early grades sets the foundation for further involvement – *"For me personally, I think it's very important as Foundation Phase is a do-or-die stage, and needs to make my children aware of the educational importance in their life"* (SSI:B1). Another parent added that *"Foundation Phase is the first block in building the child's future; we as parents should be actively involved helping the kids to phantom [sic] the basis and articulation of the various forms"* (SSI:B2). Parental engagement in the early grades includes multiple positive features for the child, the parent and the school. *"Being involved as a parent boosts the child's morale and confidence"* (SSI:B4). Another parent added:

*It is important to be involved as a parent. It gives the child confidence, enhances child-parent involvement and trust. Parent gets to... understand the child better and identifies areas of need and how the child can be supported... (SSI:B7)*

Young children are still fully dependent on their parents –

*...they fully depend on us almost at everything in the process of growing.... Your involvement enhances what they are taught at school, and gives more confidence to their teacher as you are equally involved. (SSI:B6)*

### **Third case study: School C**

The parents were aware of the crucial role that parental engagement plays in their children's lives – *“Parental involvement is crucial in motivating and for the child to realise at an early age the importance of education”* (SSI:C2). Being involved from a young age will allow parents to recognise the challenges that their children are experiencing – *“It is important for parents to be involved as this helps parents to understand the shortfalls of our kids so as to seek professional help is possible”* (SSI:C3). This will give the parents a clear picture of how the child is doing at school – *“I think it is important so that a parent can have a clear picture of how her child cope, succeed or fail”* (SSI:C1). The parents mentioned that their engagement in their children's schooling is quite a positive experience – *“The experience is quite positive and enjoyable as you see the rewards thereof in that the child's always growing”* (SSI:C2).

#### **4.3.1.3 Collages**

### **Third case study: School C**

The collage of Participant 5 from the third case study clearly depicted the essence of this sub-theme and requires more discussion. The participant explained that, to her, parental engagement meant that her son was close to people who were different from him and who would help him reach his full potential. She explained the collage by stating that the best way to get involved as a parent was to engage with and support the educators. A depiction of how she constructed parental engagement is captured in Illustration 4.7.



**Illustration 4.7: Importance of parental engagement (Participant C5: Case study 3)**

#### **4.3.1.2 Sub-theme 1.2: Parental engagement at home**

The participants came to express how they viewed their own involvement in their children’s lives by referring to the activities in which they were involved at home. The parent participants were found to be diverse in their responses about their engagement activities at home.

##### *4.3.1.2.1 Semi-structured interviews*

#### **First case study: School A**

Participant 1 considered parental engagement as being involved with children’s homework, taking them for psychological therapy and arranging play dates to help children balance education and socialising (SSI, ICD:A1). For Participant 2, activities such as homework, organising supervision at home, preparing healthy food to eat and applying fair discipline (e.g. regarding chores, routine and watching TV) were viewed as a means of being involved as a parent (SSI, ICD:A2). Participant 3 also included some of these activities but elaborated by including transport (e.g. to school or sports), attending to homework and purchasing additional reading material that



can support learning (SSI, ICD:A3). Participant 4 mentioned various activities, for instance assisting with homework and school projects, preparing or baking treats, socialising with her children through touring and excursions, involving them in doing gardening with her and going to church as a family (SSI, ICD:A4). Participant 5 also mentioned these activities and included the following: assistance with homework, ensuring the child has the correct uniform and stationery, baking and preparing food and playing with the child (SSI, ICD:A5).

### **Second case study: School B**

Participant 1 said that she assisted her child with homework and reading at home, preparing healthy food and engaging in informal play (SSI, ICD:B1). Participant 2 also mentioned playing informally with his child (ICD:B2). Participant 3 included some of the activities mentioned above, but further included washing and preparing the child's school clothes, transporting the child to and from school and taking the child to see a movie on weekends (SSI, ICD:B3). Participant 4 was also engaged in the abovementioned activities but added that she also baked goods, checked the newsletters for important information and attended church activities with her child (SSI, ICD:B4). Participant 5 mentioned taking her child on tours during the school holidays and taking her child to extra-mural activities, such as hip-hop classes (SSI, ICD:B5). Participant 6 said that he was responsible for applying discipline (e.g. behaviour and morals) and engaging in informal activities with the child, such as gardening (SSI, ICD:B6). Participant 7 also completes most of the activities mentioned above. She added that she checked that the child had the correct uniform and stationery for school and arranged play dates for her son (SSI, ICD:B7). Participants 8 and 9 also mentioned that they were engaged in the abovementioned activities, namely homework, reading, gardening, baking and arranging play dates over weekends (SSI, ICD:B8) (SSI, ICD:B9).

### **Third case study: School C**

The engagement activities in the third case study were in agreement with those of the participants in the previous two case studies. Participants 1 and 2 are married; therefore, they agreed by stating their engagement as follows: assisting their child

with homework and school projects, reading books, applying discipline (e.g. regarding chores and a set bedtime), preparing healthy food, touring and enquiring about the child's school day (SSI, ICD:C1) (SSI, ICD:C2). Participant 3 also engaged in the activities mentioned above but added that he engaged in informal play with his son (SSI, ICD:C3). Participant 4 also made mention of the same activities and added that she took her child for therapy at the occupational therapist and the optometrist and attended church with the family (SSI, ICD:C4). Participant 5 mentioned that she took her child to the library and transported the child between the home and the school (SSI, ICD:C5).

#### 4.3.1.2.2 Collages

##### Second case study: School B

The collage of Participant 3 in the second case study clearly depicted the essence of this sub-theme. In this collage, she addressed the matter of how she shows her parental engagement at home by being involved in washing, cooking and taking her children to school daily. They also like to go and watch a movie once a month, and she helps the children with homework in the afternoons. She ensures that the children follow a healthy diet.



Illustration 4.8: Parental engagement at home (Participant B3: Case study 2)

### 4.3.1.3 Sub-theme 1.3: Parental engagement at school

The participants expressed their views on parental engagement at school, and from their responses, it became clear that all of the parents were involved in a range of the same activities at school.

#### 4.3.1.3.1 Semi-structured interviews

##### First case study: School A

The participants at School A indicated that they attend the parents' meetings that are held by the school on a quarterly basis – *"I only attended parents' evenings and have 'close' relations with the teacher"* (SSI:A1). Two other participants added that they *"[a]ttend meetings"* (SSI:A4) and *"[a]ttending parent meetings"* (SSI:A5).

Participant 1 indicated that if he had concerns, he would make an appointment with the principal and discuss the matter –

*...en as dit dan groter probleem is, dan maak ek gewoonlik met die skoolhoof 'n afspraak, dan sit ons om die tafel en bespreek ons maar. (...and if it is a bigger problem then I will arrange a meeting with the principal, then we sit around the table and discuss it)* (ICD:A1)

Two of the five parents said they attended the sports activities that took place at school. Participant 4 said that he *"[a]ttend sports activities at school"* (SSI:A4). Participant 5 mentioned that she took turns with her husband to attend the sports meetings, owing to work-related matters – *"Attending sports meetings"* (SSI:A5), but she added, *"Sometimes I can't, then my husband goes"* (ICD:A5).

##### Second case study: School B

Some of the parents indicated that they were only engaged at school by attending parents' meetings – *"...a parents' meeting and to be involved in school activities"* (ICD:B2). Participants 3 and 5 responded, *"...come to school meetings..."* (SSI:B3) and *"... attending parents meetings and some school activities that we are invited to"* (SSI:B5). When asked whether they attended parents' meetings, Participant 9 answered, *"Yes we do attend"* (ICD:B9).

Other methods of engagement at school were mentioned – *“Come to Braai Day, ... come to concerts”* (SSI:B3). Another participant mentioned other *“school activities”*, but did not specify when he responded with *“[a]ssist in her school activities at school”* (SSI:B6).

The participants reported using the parents’ meetings to discuss their children’s behaviour and academic progress and then use this to assist the children. Participant 3 said, *“...talk to teacher about the behaviour in the class”* (SSI:B3), while Participant 6 talks to the teacher about the challenges and the obstacles that the child is facing – *“have follow-up with the challenges that are reported as the obstacles in her progress”* (SSI:B6). Participant 6 added that he valued the remarks that the educator had about the child – *“Checking on the remarks of the teacher and do follow-up”* (SSI:B6).

### **Third case study: School C**

The workshop at School C was held in a Grade 3 classroom. The participants had to park their cars at the front of the school premises and walk to the class. My father stood at the gate to direct the participants to the class. In my observations (Observations, School C), I wrote that some of the participants did not know where the Grade 3 classes were.

Only one participant mentioned that he attended the meetings that were held at the school, and he used this opportunity to inquire about his children’s performance. Participant 3 mentioned, *“I attend all meetings, read their diary so I can get feedback from teachers, also ask teachers questions about my kids’ performance in class”* (SSI:C3). Participant 2 indicated that he insisted on seeing the marks that his children received for tests and projects – *“By insisting on seeing results of tests, projects, et cetera”* (SSI:C2). Participant 4 mentioned a number of occasions on which she had visited the school to meet with the educator regarding some concerns that she had (SSI, ICD:C4).

Only one participant mentioned attending sports activities. Participant 3 said that he watched all the sports matches at school. In this regard, he said, “*I do come and watch the games, every time*” (ICD:C3).

#### 4.3.1.3.2 Collages

##### **Second case study: School B**

Participant 2 wrote that he was engaged at his child’s school by attending parents’ meetings and participating in school activities. He further stated that he had to ensure that the children received a good education when they attended school.



**Illustration 4.9: Parental engagement at school (Participant B2: Case study 2)**

#### **4.3.2 Theme 2: Hindrances that influence parental engagement in the early grades**

The evidence in the data highlighted some factors that pose challenges to the parents’ engagement in the early grades. Three sub-themes that emerged from the data are parents’ work commitments and the time they have available for engagement, communication between the school and the parents, and the educational challenges that are faced by the school. Each sub-theme is discussed below.

### 4.3.2.1 Sub-theme 2.1: Work commitments and time available for engagement

One obstacle that stood out in the data set, was the parents' commitments at work and the time they have available for engagement in their children's early grades. All of the participating parents expressed a high level of dissatisfaction in terms of their work commitments and the time they have available to spend at home with their children. This was closely related to specific occupations that require parents to spend more time at work. I will explain next the data collected from each school.

#### 4.3.2.1.1 Semi-structured interviews

##### First case study: School A

Two parents explained that they spent a lot of time at work – “... *forever at work*” (ICD:A3) and “[w]ork and other commitments” (SSI:A4). Participant 4 further mentioned “[a]bsenteeism due to work-related matter” (SSI:A4). Another participant mentioned that she frequently travelled for work, and she did not have someone to look after the children – “*I travel a lot with my work, ... I deploy, for weeks..., who's going to take the children to school*” (ICD:A5).

Participant 5 indicated that she and her husband “*alternate in terms of attending the meetings, sometimes myself, sometimes we can't... So then we... maybe I'm having a meeting at a certain time and then that time she's running*” (ICD:A5).

The parents indicated that they did not have much time to spend with their children. Participant 5 explained, “*So that is, for me also time... We don't have time. Sometimes ... we get home at six o'clock, then the children are tired, then maybe they want to sleep*” (ICD:A5). Participant 3 said that he was unable to take his children to the public swimming pool over the weekend, owing to the nature of his work (“*Metro Police*”) (BDP:A3) and stated, “*I don't have time for it. I'm forever at work*” (ICD:A3). Participant 2 said that he was tired from his own work during the day and wanted to rest in the evening – “*We're tired from our own work, ... just need to rest*” (SSI:A2).

## **Second case study: School B**

The data reiterated that the participants from School B also experience their work commitments as an obstacle to engagement. Participant 9 described his most significant obstacle to being engaged as “[w]ork or business commitments” (SSI:B9).

Two parents mentioned that their children were tired by the time they picked up their children or arrived home after work, and then they still had to do homework with their children – “*Working hours that I have to put in and by the time I fetch them from aftercare they are too tired to concentrate*” (SSI:B1) and “*Time factor – coming home late from work and starting with the homework*” (SSI:B7).

Participant 8 added that her mother helped the child with homework while she was at work –

*Sometimes I’m always at work, actually you know I don’t get time. Most of the time she spends with my mother, so I come back later and then she finish doing whatever and then I’m teaching her... helping her with her schoolwork.* (IDC:B8)

Another obstacle is that School B arranges activities that take place during working hours, which makes it difficult for parents to attend – “*Work – sometimes activities take place during working hours and it is not always possible to take some time off*” (SSI:B4).

## **Third case study: School C**

Only a few participants identified work commitments as an obstacle to engagement in the early grades. Participants 1 and 2, who are married, mentioned that they were working parents and that work served as an obstacle to active engagement. Participant 1 said, “*The fact we are working parents, we come home very tired, I still have to cook for the family, catch up on the news on TV – prepare for the next morning. It is tough*” (SSI:C1). Her husband, Participant 2 said, “*Work commitments are an obstacle*” (SSI:C2). He added that a busy schedule prevents them from coming to the school during the day, “*Ja, we hardly are able to come during the day ourselves. The way our schedules are, so we hardly see the teachers during the day actually*” (GCD: School C).

Lastly, Participant 3 said that his job as a consultant required him to spend long hours at work. This resulted in his arriving home late – *“Work commitments – As a consultant, I work till late sometimes and when I get home the kids are sleeping and I can’t go through homework with them”* (SSI:C3).

#### 4.3.2.1.2 Collages

##### **Third case study: School C**

In this collage, Participants 1 and 2 used the picture of the books and the computer to show that they were both working parents. Participant 1 mentioned that she came home tired after work, while still having to cook for the family (SSI:C1).



**Illustration 4.10: Work commitments and time available for engagement (Participants C1 & C2: Case study 3)**

#### 4.3.2.2 Sub-theme 2.2: Communication between the school and the parents

Communication between the school and the parents is of the utmost importance and emerged as the second sub-theme from the data collected. This includes communication between the school and the home, as well as the different methods



that the school uses to communicate important information to the parents. During my conversations with the parents, they voiced their opinions and mentioned effective communication strategies currently used by schools, while also giving recommendations on what the school could improve on in terms of communication.

#### 4.3.2.2.1 Semi-structured interviews

##### **First case study: School A**

Communication is the key to success between the school and the home – “*Communication is vital always*” (SSI:A2) and “*communication is the key to success especially between teachers and the parents*” (SSI:A3).

One participant noted that he goes to the educator or the principal if he has concerns to discuss with them –

*... as ek iets optel dan sal ek by die juffrou vra na skool. ...as dit dan groter probleem is, dan maak ek gewoonlik met die skoolhoof 'n afspraak. (If I notice something then I will ask the teacher after school... if it is a bigger problem, then I will arrange a meeting with the principal). (ICD:A1)*

Participant 1 said that his grandson was too shy to show the educator the message that he wrote –

*Byvoorbeeld as ons iets in die boek skryf wat sê: Gee dit vir die juffrou, dan sal hy nie sommer dit doen nie. (For example if we write something in the book and tell him to give it to the teacher, then he won't do it). (ICD:A1)*

If the child does not show the educator the message, there will be no communication between the educator and the parent.

Recommendations made by parents included the following: “*Sending newsletter more regularly*” (SSI:13). One should also take notice of the fact that learners often misplace newsletters, which causes their parents not being informed about important events at school.

## **Second case study: School B**

Participant 4 stated that parents at this school were not involved “*because of the communication breakdown (for example kids misplace newsletters sometime)*” (SSI:B4) and “*we miss out on important activities*” (SSI:B4).

Another participant requested that educators should “*not only ... [use] homework books to convey information*” (SSI:B2). This means that if the child does not show the educator the book, there will be no communication between the educator and the parent.

Multiple participants requested more frequent meetings between the educator and the parent – “*Parents should meet with teachers more often or there must be regular communication between the teacher or school and the parent (regular feedback)*” (SSI:B7) and “*Need more interaction with the school, teachers on the children’s progress*” (SSI:B9). Participant 3 said, “*The teachers need to give feedback to us so that we help each other when coming to the kids’ education*” (SSI:B3). Participant 5 supported this statement by saying, “*I recommend that after the teachers or school experience a certain challenge with a child, they need to attend to it with immediate effect*” (SSI:B5). Participant 6 added that “*[t]eachers need to be free to report on a child’s behaviour and be open to parents – communication*” (SSI:B6).

Participant 4 mentioned that he had contacted the school before but “*[m]ost times, the phone lines go unanswered*” (SSI:B2).

## **Third case study: School C**

Two participants were satisfied with the current communication strategies – “*The support I currently get is sufficient, which is in the means of letters from the school to remind us of the due dates in projects*” (SSI:C1) and “*Positive and express appreciation by the school*” (SSI:C2).

In contrast, other participants mentioned their unhappiness with the current communication at school. Participant 4 stated that the school “*needs to work harder at improving more active teacher and parent communication about their learners’*

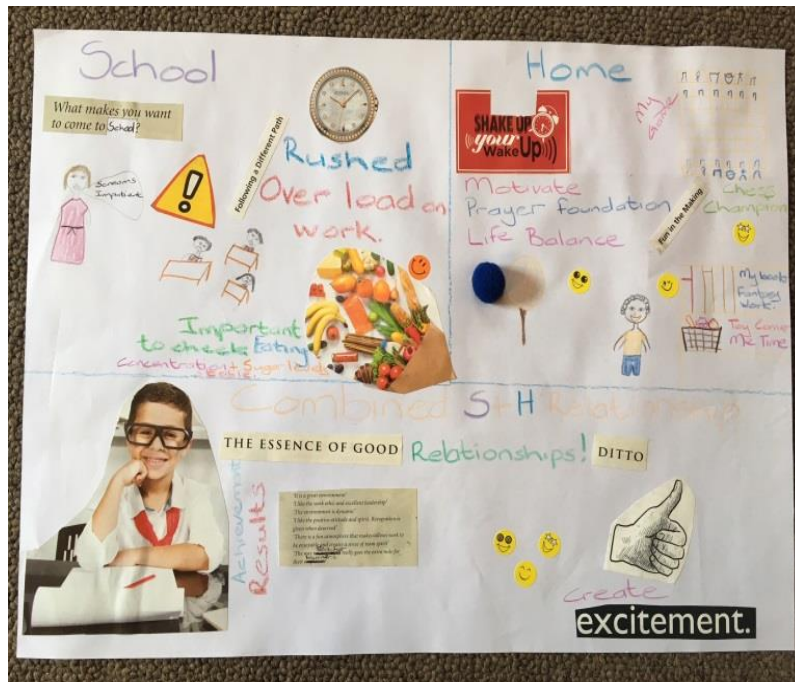
*progress, especially if there is concerns and not wait to discuss matters when the first report is handed out*" (SSI:C4). Participant 3 supported this statement but added, *"...more information on what the kids will be doing in advance so we prepare on time"* (SSI:C3).

Participant 4 recommended that educators should *"know and understand we as parents are not attacking them when we come and speak about concerns about our kids or when we need to ask about what is being done at school during lessons"* (SSI:C4). Two participants recommended that the school give incentives or rewards to the learners if their parents are frequently involved – *"Incentives or reward given to the kids to push for our involvement"* (SSI:C1). Participant 1 added that the school must be *"rewarding children for parental participation"* (SSI:C2).

#### 4.3.2.2.2 Collages

##### **Third case study: School C**

Participant 4 mentioned a few occasions where she met with some of her son's educators, after which the educator labelled her as a 'problem mother'. The participant mentioned that the school should improve the active communication between the educator and the parent, and that frequent feedback from the educator on the child's academic progress should be provided.



**Illustration 4.11: Communication between the school and the parent (Participant C4: Case study 3)**

#### **4.3.2.3 Sub-theme 2.3: Educational challenges faced by the school**

This sub-theme was certainly the one that extracted the most reaction from the participants. Some parents seemed to be generally satisfied and had no complaints with the school that their children attended, while other parents' concerns were clear in their verbal interviews and visual collages. The parents' responses were revealing, showing some insight into the general organisational climate of each school.

##### *4.3.2.3.1 Semi-structured interviews*

#### **First case study: School A**

Participant 5 mentioned that active parental involvement at this school was absent – “... *involvement from the parents is also not that sharp*” (ICD:A5). She added that the parents at this school did not attend sports meetings.

Two participants said that the content of the learners' homework was difficult – “*Sometimes the curriculum or homework is not clear enough. ... some research that*

*the parents must do to assist their kids*” (SSI:A1). Participant 2 agreed and added that “[t]he kids are doing some advanced things at school compared to my schooling days” (SSI:A2). One participant mentioned that the children have difficulty understanding Afrikaans – *“They’re struggling a little bit with Afrikaans...”* (ICD:A4).

Two participants felt that the learners received too much homework – *“Sometimes I feel that the homework is too much for a Grade 3 child. The teacher does not explain... how to assist the child”* (SSI:A5). Participant 2 agreed with the abovementioned statement – *“Please send less homework home”* (SSI:A2). This amount of homework allows parents to spend less time with their children and *“now I must sit with the child two to three hours to do homework”* (ICD:A5).

Participant 5 said that the parents’ meetings at this school were *“monotonous. It’s like same things every year, there’s no fresh ideas, fresh things that they come up with”* (ICD:A5). Further: *“It’s so boring. Very boring”* (ICD:A5).

## **Second case study: School B**

Conflicting responses emerged on the level of active parental engagement at this school. Participant 2 stated, *“There is limited to non-involvement at this school... The school can do better”* (SSI:B2). Another participant said, *“Most parents are involved. I believe it is positive but there is also a room for improvement”* (SSI:B4).

Some general concerns were raised. Participant 3 was *“worried about his reading that I end up coming to the teacher many times, thinking she’s not doing anything about it”* (SSI:B3). Another participant believed that *“teachers need to explain more to them as well, guide them as to what or how to do this, and explain everything to the kids all the time, allow the kids to ask questions if they don’t understand”* (SSI:B5). The last concern was brought up by Participant 7 – *“Afrikaans – can’t help him because I don’t know it”* (SSI:B7).

Lastly, one participant noted the following: *“Parents are not involved anymore because we have a choice to come or not to come, so the school needs to force the*

*parents to get involved by putting a must on the letters when they send home, not a choice” (SSI:B3).*

### **Third case study: School C**

The participants gave positive feedback in terms of the Grade 3 educators. Only one participant mentioned incidents about which she was unhappy. Participant 5 said that she would like it if the parent and the educator could act as partners in the educational journey – *“I’d like also the teacher and me be partners work together to help our kids” (SSI:C5).* Participants 3 and 4 suggested that the educators should give the parents guidelines on what the learners would be doing throughout the term – *“Give us more information about what is coming in advance, more one-on-one meetings for struggling kids” (SSI:C3).* Participant 4 added, *“I would like a clear roadmap of the learner’s educational journey per term on every subject. Teachers must give a proper educational work schedule per term” (SSI:C4).*

Participant 4 mentioned a few concerns. She said, *“This school’s teachers are very impatient” (ICD:C4).* Another concern was that the educators were *“overloading them (learners) with work” (ICD:C4).* She further mentioned that the educators were harsh towards the learners and that the educators screamed in class. She needs more frequent feedback on her son’s performance, recommending that the educator sends the learners’ books home on weekends. Participant 4 added that her son’s educator saw her as a ‘problem mother’ and retaliated on her child – *“You are seen as: “Ag, you again!” (ICD:C4).* The participant would like the educators to know that she is not attacking them when she comes to school to discuss something.

During the group collage discussion, Participant 4 asked the other participants whether they also had concerns about the educators of the school, upon which one participant answered, *“...my one actually compliments her teacher” (GCD: School C).* It seemed as if not all of the participants were in agreement with Participant 4. In my observational notes (Observations, School C), I wrote that Participant 4 looked puzzled when the other participants did not agree with her complaints about the educators. The claims made by Participant 4 should thus be treated as an isolated

incident, as none of the other four participants mentioned anything similar to her statements.

#### 4.3.2.3.2 Collages

##### First case study: School A

The participant described the parents' meetings as 'monotonous' and 'boring' (see the yellow stickers). The amount of homework (refer to the pink question marks next to 'Homework') that learners receive is too much, and the educators are doing less work at school, so most of the work has to be completed at home.



Illustration 4.12: Educational challenges faced by the school (Participant A5: Case study 1)

#### 4.3.3 Theme 3: Family structure and dynamics influencing parental engagement in the early grades

Parental engagement in the early grades is an important aspect of the child's formal education, and the data collected show that family structure and the dynamics thereof play a major role. Two sub-themes emerged from the data, which were the diversity in family structures and the presence of elders ('elder' in this study meaning

'older family member') in family dynamics. It became evident that the family structure has a definite effect on parental engagement in the early grades.

#### **4.3.3.1 Theme 3.1: Diversity in family structures**

In this study, it is evident that the diversity in family structure plays a crucial role in parental engagement in the early grades. The participants felt free to report on their family structure and the impact this had had on their engagement in their children's formal education. Hence, their family structure has an influence on their approach to parental engagement in the early grades.

##### *4.3.3.1.1 Semi-structured interviews*

#### **First case study: School A**

Only two participants mentioned that family type at School A. Participant 1 has been raising his grandson from birth – *“(Child’s name) is nou eintlik ons kleinkind, ja, wat permanent by ons bly van geboorte af en goed. ((Child’s name) is actually our grandchild, yes, who has lived with us permanently from birth)”* (ICD:A1).

Participant 5 further mentioned that their extended family lived far away. She does not have anyone to look after her child when she has to be at work – *“Well, not to have other family in your environment to support you when you have work commitments makes it difficult”* (BDP:A5). Even when the school says that children are allowed at the meetings, she prefers not to take the child along to the meeting. She commented as follows:

*So sometimes it's difficult if I would like to go and attend something, where the child must stay at home. And I don't have someone to look after her. Sometimes they say the children can come but I've seen, I've picked up that sometimes children are very disturbing. Sometimes I feel okay, maybe I must leave her with someone but I can't.* (ICD:A5).

#### **Second case study: School B**

The first participant is a single mother, whose husband has passed away. She mentioned the following:



*I am a single parent not by choice; lost my husband in 2015 but I'm trying my best to assist both my Grade 3 and 1, which most of the time is a bit challenging and hope to learn how to cope. (SSI:B1)*

Participant 2 is a divorced parent, whose children are living with their mother. He does not receive information from the school on time, and does not get to help the children with homework. He said, *"Divorced or separated. Not residing with the kids. I get information very late. I cannot be involved in their homework"* (SSI:B2). He only sees the children on weekends – *"I get weekend visitation rights"* (ICD:B2).

Lastly, another parent's child stays with her grandmother, but the grandmother is unable to help the child with homework because she is unable to speak English. Participant 8 assists the child with homework when she gets home – *"But most of the time she's staying with my grandmother, but I help her with homework most, I'm the only one. Because my mother she's talking Afrikaans"* (ICD:B8). She further added, *"She can't talk English. So I'm the one who's helping her with everything"* (ICD:B8).

### **Third case study: School C**

Participants 1 and 2 are married, and they asked me if they could complete their collage together. I agreed, and they also discussed the collage together. Participant 2 acknowledged that supporting a child requires a secure and solid environment at home – *"A stable family environment makes it easier for parents to support the child. Support of both parents is very crucial"* (SSI:C2).

Participant 5 is a single mother, who raises her son alone – *"Because it's just only me and him"* (ICD:C5). Furthermore, she tries to help him in any way possible, just so that his life circumstances can be different than hers – *"I like to be involved to anything as a parent to help anywhere I can so his life must be different than mine..."* (SSI:C5). This last statement from Participant 5 underscored the significance of parental engagement in the early grades.

#### 4.3.3.1.2 Collages

##### First case study: School A

The collage of Participant 1 outlines the essence of this sub-theme. In this collage, he is referring to his grandson, who is nine years old. The grandson has been living with them permanently since birth. He mentioned that the child has a stepfather, a mother and two brothers, but they do not live with them.

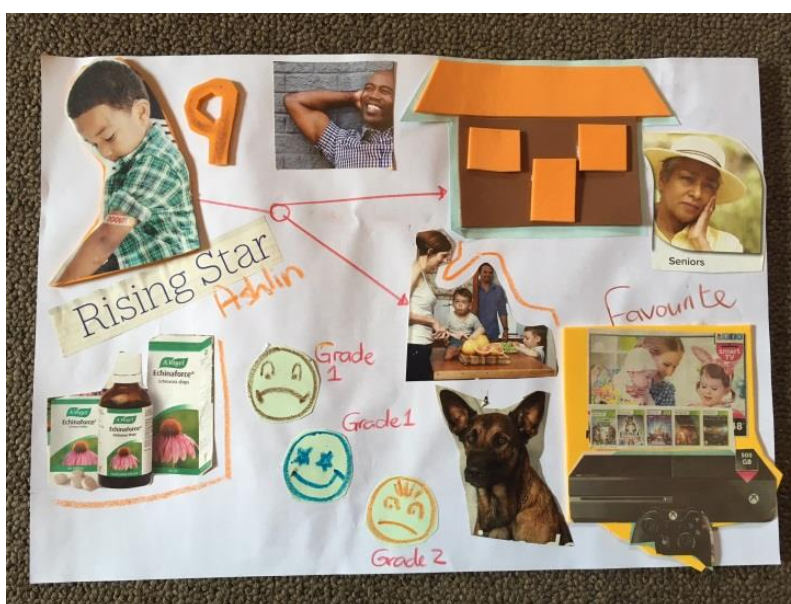


Illustration 4.13: Diversity in family structure (Participant A1: Case study 1)

#### 4.3.3.2 Sub-theme 3.2: Presence of elders in family dynamics

The last sub-theme to be discussed is the presence of elders in family dynamics. Most of the participants acknowledged the positive efforts and investment that their elderly had put into their education and upbringing.

#### 4.3.3.1.3 Semi-structured interviews

##### First case study: School A

Only some of the participants indicated that the presence of elders in the home had an influence on them. The second participant indicated that his parents were very responsible, and that had taught him to be a responsible parent as well – “*Very much*

*influence. Having responsible parents helped me be one as well*” (BDP:A2). Participant 4 stated that it helped him in teaching his children to develop their lives – *“To learn how to help our children to develop their life”* (BDP:A4). Compared to these responses, Participant 3 responded that he came from a home of five people and his wife was mostly engaged in the children’s early years – *“Family number 5; my wife is near me who is mostly involved”* (BDP:A3).

The response of Participant 5 stood in stark contrast to those of the rest of the participants. While the other participants referred to the presence of elders in family dynamics, she referred to the fact that her extended family (including grandparents), lived far away. They do not live close enough to support her when she has to attend meetings and sports activities at school or to assist if she has work responsibilities. She said, *“Well, not to have other family in your environment to support you when you have work commitments makes it difficult”* (BDP:A5).

### **Second case study: School B**

Some participants’ parents were strict, which helped them instil discipline in their own home. Participant 1 responded, *“To be very strict”* (BDP:B1). Participant 7 gives her children chores to do at home – *“Because we were taught to do our own house chores, it has helped me to be able to teach my children to do the chores in the house and take responsibility”* (BDP:B7).

Difficult circumstances at home had a significant influence on some of the parents’ parenting. One parent had learned to cope with adverse circumstances when her parents passed away at an early age – *“...my parents died when my sister was still in high school. So I learned to be responsible for my kids early”* (BDP:B3). Participant 4 was raised by her grandparents, as her parents worked far away – *“I was raised by my grandparents as my parents were working far. That has made me realise the importance of being involved in your child’s life as my parents never attended school activities due to their work commitments...”* (BDP:B4). Children of working parents learn to be independent at a young age – *“Both parents working and we’re doing all by ourselves”* (BDP:B5).

Two participants noted that their home circumstances were beneficial to them. Participant 6 said that being a part of a small family allowed him to give clear direction to his children – *“My family structure is of a small family...easy for us as parents to give direction and assist with this regard”* (BDP:B6). Participant 9 indicated that his parents had been immensely involved in his education – *“My parents were heavily involved in assisting me at Foundation Phase, with schoolwork”* (BDP:B9).

### **Third case study: School C**

Participant 1 stated that her parents had been less involved in school activities but more involved in activities at home – *“Positively in a traditional way of parenting, which was not so much involved in school (but reprimanding, good morals, doing chores)”* (BDP:C1). Two participants mentioned that they grew up without their parents, and their siblings had to take over the role of the parent – *“My mother died when I was still very young and my eldest sister took over her role in supporting my schooling. On that I saw the importance”* (BDP:C2) and *“I grow up in a different situation... with my sisters, without our parents”* (BDP:C5).

Participant 3 stated that his parents made sure that the children were educated and assisted the children with schoolwork – *“...our parents ensured that we are educated and helped every step of our education”* (BDP:C3). Participant 4 added that she grew up in a home where religion had an influence on the family’s views – *“Close-knit, strong Christian views are my influence”* (BDP:C4).

One challenge that arose was the fact that some participants grew up in challenging circumstances, for instance some participants’ parents had passed away at an early age. Factors such as these have the potential to influence one’s parenting. The participants shared personal information, which shed some light on current parental engagement in children’s early grades.

#### 4.3.3.1.4 Collages

#### Second case study: School B

In this collage, Participant 5 mentioned that her child enjoyed spending time with her grandparents during the school holidays. She added that her daughter was a favourite in the family and was well liked by her grandparents.



**Illustration 4.14: Presence of elders in family dynamics (Participant B5: Case study 2)**

#### 4.4 Reflective narrative

This reflective narrative serves as an overview of all the trends and patterns observed in the three case studies as captured in the themes and sub-themes. Reflecting on the data across the three case studies was integral, as it can be described as a meaning-making process for me. I was able to interpret and link certain aspects of each school to a common trend that occurred across the case studies.

Parents across the three case studies had a general misunderstanding of what parental engagement in the early grades entails. As seen in Illustration 4.15, this



well as the educational challenges that are faced at this school. In comparison, there were fewer complaints at Schools A and C; these schools were positive towards the objectives of my research and eager to participate in the study.

Some parents had a negative attitude towards their time given to the study and their commitment towards assisting me in the research. This can be seen in the number of parents who indicated that they were going to attend versus the parents who did attend the workshop at each school. In my observations, I wrote that some participants arrived late at each school, which interrupted the proceedings. At School A, four of the five participants were on time. At School B, only three out of the nine participants were on time. At School C, four out of five parents were on time. In addition, some parents were pushing for time during the workshop at School B and made it clear that they had other responsibilities they had to attend to – “...*Some of the participants made it clear that they were in a hurry and they had things to do after the workshop*” (Observations: School B).

The case analysis across the three case studies allowed me to gain an in-depth understanding of the data collected during my research project. Certain aspects of the attitude of the management of each school towards the study were closely connected to the responses of the parents in terms of communication strategies used by the school, educational challenges faced at school and concerns that parents had about general issues at school. This may be related to the level of parental engagement as it emerged in the identified themes and sub-themes.

#### **4.5 Summary**

In this chapter, the fieldwork reports of each school were discussed. Photographs of the different research sites were provided. Furthermore, I elaborated on the three main themes that were identified in the data that were collected. The sub-themes under each main theme were explored and discussed.

In the next chapter, I will present the findings of the study by relating the results I presented in Chapter 4 to the existing literature. In my discussion, I will highlight the

correlations and contradictions, as well as silences in the data. I will also indicate new knowledge that emerged as a result of this investigation.



## Chapter 5: Conclusions and recommendations

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### 5.1 Introduction

In Chapter 5, the three main themes that emerged from the collected data will be discussed in order to draw conclusions from these and propose recommendations. The results or findings of the data analysis will be compared to the existing literature to assist me in answering the research questions of this study. The importance of the theoretical framework will also be included, as well as considering the trustworthiness of this study. This chapter and the study will be concluded by presenting the recommendations that are made and the possible contributions of this research study to the body of scholarship and to schools.

### 5.2 Literature control

The literature control enables one to illustrate the relationship between the current knowledge and the results of this study. The literature control is illustrated in different categories and provided in four separate tables (Tables 5.1 to 5.4) (see Sections 5.2.1 to 5.2.4) to elaborate on the different themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data. In Table 5.1, I illustrate the similarities that emerged between the existing literature and the results of this study. Table 5.2 presents the contradictions that exist between the existing literature and the results of this study. Table 5.3 compares the results with the existing knowledge on parental involvement, indicating the silences in the data. The new insights that emerged from the research through the data analysis process are shown in Table 5.4.

#### 5.2.1 Similarities between the existing literature and the results of this study

Table 5.1 presents the similarities that were found between the existing literature on parental engagement in the early years and the results of this study. Throughout the data collection phase, I noticed comparisons between the themes and sub-themes and the existing literature on this research topic. The interpretive discussion

illustrates how the outcomes of this study are linked to the existing literature on parental engagement in the early years.

**Table 5.1: Comparison of results with existing knowledge: Supporting evidence**

Theme 1: The nature of parental engagement in the early grades			
Sub-themes	Author and year	Existing knowledge	Interpretive discussion
1.1 Importance of parental engagement	Epstein (2016:3, 247)	“The concept of partnership between the parents and the school is widely supported by research.”	One parent (SSI:C5) at School C noted that she would like to be in a partnership with the teacher to work together to assist her child.
	Van Wyk (1996:125)	“Active and meaningful parent involvement in schools has made a positive contribution in many countries overseas, as well as in South Africa.”	Eighteen parents agreed that it gives them satisfaction to be part of their children’s learning. Their involvement shows their children that they are interested in their education and allows them to bond with the child, further allowing them to understand the behaviour of the child. Participant C2 said, “ <i>Parental involvement is crucial in motivating and for the child to realise at an early age the importance of education</i> ” (SSI:C2).
	Lemmer et al. (2012:158)	“The main intention of the parent’s involvement will be to promote and support the child’s learning, school achievements and general wellbeing.”	All 19 parents agreed that they gave their full support to their children and encouraged them to take part in all school activities.

**Theme 1: The nature of parental engagement in the early grades**

Sub-themes	Author and year	Existing knowledge	Interpretive discussion
	Louw and Louw (2007:250)	“Parents are instrumental in choosing the environment where the child will find himself/herself, such as their home, neighbourhood and school.”	All of the parents underscored the importance of parental involvement in the early grades, including the choice of school their child is attending.
	Demircan and Erden (2015:222)	“The care of children is a huge responsibility for all parents which also encapsulate diverse problems in terms of becoming active parents who have time to take part in parental activities within the school.”	Thirteen parents mentioned that being involved as parents allowed them to identify areas of need or challenges that their child is facing. Support can then be given to children who are facing challenges in class.
	Ward (2013:4)	“Parents increase their involvement in their children’s schooling when they are motivated by their children’s successes.”	Thirteen parents mentioned that their involvement boosts the child’s morale and confidence, and that parental involvement motivates the child to succeed in life.

**Theme 1: The nature of parental engagement in the early grades**

<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Author and year</b>	<b>Existing knowledge</b>	<b>Interpretive discussion</b>
1.2 Parental engagement at home	De Witt (2016:182)	“It is the parent’s responsibility to create a stimulating environment for learning throughout the child’s academic career, such as providing the child with a desk to do homework, making books available for reading and communicating with the child.”	All parents indicated that they assist their children with homework. Some parents said they bought additional books for reading, and one parent (SSI:C5) said that she took her child to the library. Participant B4 started a book club on weekends for her daughter and her friends.
	Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009:83)	“Home-based involvement is often known as ‘the curriculum of the home’, and refers to the learning activities that the parent assists the learner with at home.”	A number of activities were recorded where parents showed their involvement at home (see Section 4.3).
	Anderson and Minke (2007:318)	“Parents’ involvement at home is not as visible to school personnel as their involvement at their child’s school. Teachers only see parents when they are involved at school (e.g.volunteering) versus involvement at home (e.g. helping the child with their homework).”	This was evident in the study, as parents reported more active involvement at home than at school. Involvement activities at school were limited to parents’ meetings and volunteering activities.

**Theme 1: The nature of parental engagement in the early grades**

<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Author and year</b>	<b>Existing knowledge</b>	<b>Interpretive discussion</b>
1.3 Parental engagement at school	Patrikakou and Weissberg (2000:112)	"...going to see the child's teacher, visiting the child's classroom, attending parent-teacher meetings and picking up the child's report card."	All of the parents mentioned that they attended parents' meetings when their time allowed it. Such meetings are used to discuss the child's progress and behaviour in class. Other parents said that they attended other school activities, such as sports meetings and concerts.
	Knopf and Swick (2008:424)	"Typically, parent-teacher conferences are held for the main purpose of discussing the learner's progress in regards to his/her academic and social curriculum."	Participants B3 and B6 said that they used the parents' meetings to follow up on challenges that were reported by the teacher and to talk about the child's behaviour in class – "... <i>have follow-up with the challenges that are reported as the obstacles in her progress</i> " (SSI:B6).

**Theme 2: Hindrances that influence parental engagement in the early grades**

<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Author and year</b>	<b>Existing knowledge</b>	<b>Interpretive discussion</b>
2.1 Work commitments and time available for engagement	Knopf and Swick (2008:420)	“Nowadays, society demands more from working parents, requiring higher educational levels, and an increase in time on the job.”	In total, 12 participants mentioned that commitments at work were an obstacle to engagement. They also have limited time available for active engagement. Some of the parents have to work on the weekends, and this limits their time with their children.
	Knopf and Swick (2008:420)	“Stressors such as longer working hours and job responsibilities result in families not spending enough time with each other.”	Specific job types were mentioned where parents spend a lot of time at work, such as consultants, accountants, metro police officers and lawyers. As one participant said, <i>“I don’t have time for it. I’m forever at work”</i> (IDC:A3).
2.2 Communication between the school and the parents	Stein and Thorkildsen (1999:40)	“The extent to which the school communicates regularly with parents will determine their level of involvement in the school’s activities.”	Parents at Schools A and C were happy with the current communication strategies that were used by the school.

**Theme 2: Hindrances that influence parental engagement in the early grades**

Sub-themes	Author and year	Existing knowledge	Interpretive discussion
	Anderson and Minke (2007:314)	“Two-way communication between the home and the school and the school and the home need to take place frequently in the form of parent-teacher conferences, written communication such as a family communication journal.”	All of the parents accentuated the importance of frequent communication. One parent stated that communication was <i>“the key to success”</i> (SSI:A3). Multiple communication strategies were mentioned by the parents, such as parents’ meetings, phone calls and personal messages in the communication book.
	Knopf and Swick (2008:424)	“...telephonic conversations.”	The parents are able to reach the educator by phoning the school office. A message is then given to the educator to phone the parent back.
	Barge and Loges (2003:147)	“...parents and teachers should interact regularly, formally and informally through multiple interactions, to maintain a positive relationship.”	Participant A1 said he felt comfortable to go to the educator to discuss certain matters.
	Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009:57)	“The best opportunity for teachers to communicate with parents is through regular parent-teacher conferences.”	The communication strategy that was mentioned the most by all of the participants was to attend the parents’ meetings that were held at the school.



**Theme 2: Hindrances that influence parental engagement in the early grades**

<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Author and year</b>	<b>Existing knowledge</b>	<b>Interpretive discussion</b>
2.3 Educational challenges faced by the school	Bojuwoye and Narain (2008:275)	“Parents who have a native or home language that differs from the language of teaching and learning may be demotivated to become involved due to reason that they cannot effectively express themselves and to establish a relationship with the teacher to promote future communication.”	Two of the parents mentioned that they were not able to help their children with their Afrikaans homework, as they were not familiar with the language.
	Lemmer et al. (2012:173)	“Parents, who have experienced negative interactions with the school in the past, develop a negative attitude towards present school experiences which will prevent them from being actively involved in school activities.”	Participant C4 complained extensively about her child’s educator. Multiple scenarios were brought up of negative experiences that she had had with educators at the same school in the past.

**Theme 2: Hindrances that influence parental engagement in the early grades**

<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Author and year</b>	<b>Existing knowledge</b>	<b>Interpretive discussion</b>
	Barge and Loges (2003:147)	“Another reason for passive parent involvement is when parents experience self-doubt and low confidence in their own academic abilities and may feel challenged and incapable to help their children with academic tasks such as homework.”	Three parents at School A said that they struggled to assist their children with homework. They stated that the quantity of homework was too much and that the content thereof was difficult. One parent mentioned that he had to use the Google search engine to assist his child.

Theme 3: Family structure and dynamics influencing parental engagement in the early grades			
Sub-themes	Author and year	Existing knowledge	Interpretive discussion
3.1 Diversity in family structures	Lemmer and Van Wyk (2004b:184)	“Teachers should acknowledge the fact that in some disadvantaged households, the siblings or the grandparents fulfil the care giving function.”	One of the participants (ICD:A1) mentioned that their grandchild is living with them, so they were raising the child. Another participant (ICD:B8) said that her daughter was living with her grandmother most of the time.
	Patrikakou and Weissberg (2000:117)	“...it may be difficult for the single parent to frequently attend school activities, as the parent cannot share the parenting responsibility with a spouse.”	Three out of the 19 parents who were interviewed indicated that they were single parents.
3.2 Presence of elders in family dynamics	Lemmer et al. (2012:158)	“When referring to parental involvement, one must consider exactly who the parents are by creating a sense of community in the classroom, where learners will feel confident about who [sic] they live with.”	Five parents mentioned that they were raised by both of their parents; two parents were raised in a child-headed household by their older siblings; and two parents were raised by their grandparents (see Section 2.2.1)

### 5.2.2 Contradictions between the existing literature and the results of this study

Contradictions were noted between the existing literature and the results of this study. These contradictions are summarised in Table 5.2. The interpretive discussion elaborates on the reasons for these contradictions.

**Table 5.2: Comparison of results with existing knowledge: Contradictory evidence**

Theme 1: The nature of parent engagement in the early grades				
Sub-themes	Author and year	Existing knowledge	How does what I found contradict what is known?	Interpretive discussion
1.1 Importance of parental engagement	Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009:16, 17)	“When parents are regularly involved in school activities and their child’s learning, parents’ self-esteem will increase, and they will feel more confident about their abilities to help their child because of having a shared responsibility with the teacher to promote the learner’s learning development.”	Participant A2 believes that parents should be involved on a limited basis, as parents are not trained to conduct formal education.	Although the benefits of continuous parental involvement are widely available, one parent (A2) still saw the educator as the ‘expert’. Consequently, his involvement is on a restricted basis.

Theme 1: The nature of parent engagement in the early grades				
Sub-themes	Author and year	Existing knowledge	How does what I found contradict what is known?	Interpretive discussion
1.2 Parental engagement at home	Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009:83)	“Schools can help parents by supplying them with information and skills about how to help their children at home with tasks such as homework, planning and decision making.”	Eight out of the 19 parents indicated that they required more guidance from educators to prepare their children at home for upcoming work that would be done in class.	This is an indication that parents need more information on what the learners will be completing in class throughout the term. Clear guidelines from educators in terms of learning outcomes will be of assistance.
1.3 Parental engagement at school	Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009:57)	“The best opportunity for teachers to communicate with parents is through regular parent-teacher conferences.”	Participant A5 said that parents’ meetings are “ <i>monotonous</i> ” and “ <i>very boring</i> ”, which discourages her to attend these meetings (ICD:A5).	The most common form of involvement at school is to attend quarterly parents’ meetings. The school should constantly update the content of the parents’ meeting to keep parents interested in attending these meetings.

<b>Theme 1: The nature of parent engagement in the early grades</b>				
<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Author and year</b>	<b>Existing knowledge</b>	<b>How does what I found contradict what is known?</b>	<b>Interpretive discussion</b>
	Barge and Loges (2003:146)	"...examples of school-based involvement can be to go and meet with the learner's teacher, to pay a visit to the learner's classroom, to volunteer at a school function, to attend parent-teacher conferences."	In my observations, I wrote that some parents at School C were unfamiliar with the school grounds and could not locate the Grade 3 classroom.	I doubt if these parents knew where their child's class was. This is a clear indication that the parents have not visited the child's class before the workshop for this study was held.

Theme 2: Hindrances that influence parental engagement in the early grades				
Sub-themes	Author and year	Existing knowledge	How does what I found contradict what is known?	Interpretive discussion
2.1 Work commitments and time available for engagement	Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009:17)	“Many aspects of modern life prevent effective parent involvement, and schools need to recognise and acknowledge these barriers in order to actively minimise, address and even eradicate such barriers in the school environment.”	Participant B4 mentioned that school activities take place during work hours, which does not accommodate working parents.	Schools should adjust their time allocations to accommodate working parents. If school activities were hosted during normal working hours, very few parents would be able to attend.
2.2 Communication between the school and the parents	Patrikakou and Weissberg (2000:116)	“Teachers and parents must inform each other about the best ways in which they can be reached, to minimize the frustration of not being able to reach each other.”	At School B, one parent mentioned that there was a “ <i>communication breakdown</i> ” (SSI:B4) between the school and the parents. Another parent added that School B should “[i]mprove their response time in responding to telephonic calls. Most times the phone lines go unanswered” (SSI:B2).	If there were clear lines of communication between the school and the parent, this situation could have been avoided.

<b>Theme 2: Hindrances that influence parental engagement in the early grades</b>				
<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Author and year</b>	<b>Existing knowledge</b>	<b>How does what I found contradict what is known?</b>	<b>Interpretive discussion</b>
	Knopf and Swick (2008:423)	"...home visits..."	None of the parents mentioned any home visits done by educators.	Home visits have the potential to inform the educator about the parents and child's circumstances at home.
	Stein and Thorkildsen (1999:40)	"The extent to which the school communicates regularly with parents will determine their level of involvement in the school's activities."	At School A, one parent said that the school should send the newsletter more regularly. At School B, six parents stated that they needed to see the educators more frequently. At School C, two parents asked for more frequent meetings with the educators regarding the child's academic progress.	The parents in this study voiced their opinions, and it is clear that all three of the schools can improve on their lines of communication with the parents to discuss matters that occur in class.
	Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009:66)	"...two-way communication does not occur only from the school to the home, but includes interaction and feedback from both parties."	It became clear that some parents believed that the communication between the school and the home should be initiated by the school.	Communication is not a one-way channel. The parent should play an active role in the communication between the school and the home.



Theme 2: Hindrances that influence parental engagement in the early grades				
Sub-themes	Author and year	Existing knowledge	How does what I found contradict what is known?	Interpretive discussion
2.3 Educational challenges faced by the school	Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009:16, 17)	“When parents are regularly involved in school activities and their child’s learning, parents’ self-esteem will increase, and they will feel more confident about their abilities to help their child because of having a shared responsibility with the teacher to promote the learner’s learning development.”	Three parents at School A mentioned that they were struggling to assist their children with homework because the content thereof was difficult. They have to use the Google search engine to assist their children. Participant A2 said, <i>“Sometimes one need Google to help with homework. The kids are doing some advanced things at school... Not understanding the school work can be a problem”</i> (SSI:A2).	The parents who mentioned that they struggled to help their children with the homework needed more guidance from educators on how to assist the learners. Educators need to explain the methods used in the homework, for example a mathematics problem. Parents will feel more comfortable with and able to assist their children.

<b>Theme 2: Hindrances that influence parental engagement in the early grades</b>				
<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Author and year</b>	<b>Existing knowledge</b>	<b>How does what I found contradict what is known?</b>	<b>Interpretive discussion</b>
	Squelch (1994:55)	"...schools and teachers need to guide and support parents by obtaining relevant information and even training in how to assist them in becoming an actively involved parent."	In the semi-structured interviews and collages, none of the parents mentioned any training given to parents by the school in terms of becoming an actively involved parent.	Schools should give parents the necessary training with regard to parental involvement, after which parents will feel more comfortable with becoming actively involved in school activities.
	Anderson and Minke (2007:319)	"...regardless of parents' personal socio-economic status and barriers to involvement, they will make a positive contribution to their child's formal education when they perceive that their involvement is supported and appreciated by teachers."	None of the parents in the study mentioned any socio-economic barriers that are faced, but from the semi-structured interviews, it was clear that their involvement efforts often go unnoticed by educators.	Schools and educators need to acknowledge the involvement of parents at home and at school.

<b>Theme 2: Hindrances that influence parental engagement in the early grades</b>				
<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Author and year</b>	<b>Existing knowledge</b>	<b>How does what I found contradict what is known?</b>	<b>Interpretive discussion</b>
	Epstein (2016:5)	"...parent involvement... help teachers by adequately understanding the backgrounds and other characteristics of each family..."	Participant A5 felt that the educators at this school did not understand the background of the various learners in the school.	The reason for this may be that the educator's background is different from the learners' backgrounds. Participant A5 compared her upbringing to that of the educator.
	Lemmer and Van Wyk (2004a:270)	"...examples of positive communication to the parent can be to send the learner's work in his/her news book home for the parent to sign..."	Participant C4 said she wanted to see her child's school books on a weekly basis as she wanted to monitor the child's progress and help the child where needed.	If the books are sent home on a weekly basis, parents will have a comprehensive overview of what is happening in class. It seemed as if her child's educator was not sending the books home.

<b>Theme 2: Hindrances that influence parental engagement in the early grades</b>				
<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Author and year</b>	<b>Existing knowledge</b>	<b>How does what I found contradict what is known?</b>	<b>Interpretive discussion</b>
	Lemmer and Van Wyk (2004a:269)	"...a number of schools made significant efforts to present school activities at times that will be convenient to working parents. These schools held their parent-teacher conferences on Saturday mornings, Sundays and even on public holidays so that all parents could attend, regardless of working hours."	Participant B4 said that school activities were held during work hours, which caused her not being able to attend them.	Schools need to be considerate when arranging meetings and activities at school and take all stakeholders into account, including working parents, single parents and parents who live far from the school.
	Patrikakou and Weissberg (2000:117)	"One way of assisting these parents can be to arrange child care at school when they have to attend a teacher-parent meeting."	Participant A5 was unable to attend some meetings as she had no one to look after her daughter during that time.	The school should arrange childcare during this time. This will greatly influence the total number of parents attending these meetings.

**Theme 2: Hindrances that influence parental engagement in the early grades**

Sub-themes	Author and year	Existing knowledge	How does what I found contradict what is known?	Interpretive discussion
	Ward (2013:4)	"Parental participation positively influences how the teacher perceives the child, and in turn, motivates the child to do better and achieve better."	Participant C4 mentioned that the educator had a negative attitude towards her. The educator then took this out on her son, who in turn got bullied because he was told to sit at a desk behind the educator's desk.	The true circumstances of this situation are unknown, but in my opinion, it is unacceptable for the educator to place the learner at a desk that is behind her desk. This certainly does not motivate the child to do and achieve better.

Theme 3: Family structure and dynamics influencing parental engagement in the early grades				
Sub-themes	Author and year	Existing knowledge	How does what I found contradict what is known?	Interpretive discussion
3.1 Diversity in family structures	Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009:126)	“It is their (teachers’) duty to encourage the involvement of a wide variety of caregivers of the learner, and to accommodate all families, regardless of the barriers they experience.”	Parents in this study did not mention any educators who did not welcome a wide variety of the child’s caregivers.	Educators need to be open to the idea of welcoming a wide variety of caregivers, as the educator is not always familiar with the child’s circumstances at home.
	Patrikakou and Weissberg (2000:107)	“Family structure plays a big role in parent involvement.”	In this study, five parents were raised by both of their parents, two parents were raised by their older siblings, and two parents were raised by their grandparents. Three parents in this study are single parents who raise their children by themselves.	Family structure certainly plays a significant role in parental involvement. One single parent said that he did not reside with his children, which means that he could not help them with homework (SSI:B2). Another single parent lost her husband three years ago and said it was “ <i>challenging</i> ” to learn how to cope alone (SSI:B1).

Theme 3: Family structure and dynamics influencing parental engagement in the early grades				
Sub-themes	Author and year	Existing knowledge	How does what I found contradict what is known?	Interpretive discussion
	Epstein (1990)	“Even though single parents reported that they spend more time assisting their children with tasks such as homework than two-parent families, they still reported that they did not have the time and energy to attend to what the teachers expect of them.”	Participant B2 said that he was unable to help his children with homework, as he did not live with them. He said, “ <i>I get weekend visitation rights</i> ” (ICD:B2).	At the moment, this parent gets limited time with his children owing to the divorce. On weekends he just wants to do fun activities with the children.
	Patrikakou and Weissberg (2000:117)	“...it may be difficult for the single parent to frequently attend school activities, as the parent cannot share the parenting responsibility with a spouse.”	The three single parents in this study did not mention that they were unable to attend school activities frequently.	As previously mentioned, if the school offers childcare during such meetings, single parents would be able to attend the meetings.

<b>Theme 3: Family structure and dynamics influencing parental engagement in the early grades</b>				
<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Author and year</b>	<b>Existing knowledge</b>	<b>How does what I found contradict what is known?</b>	<b>Interpretive discussion</b>
3.2 Presence of elders in family dynamics	Lemmer et al. (2012:158)	"...the main intention of the parent's involvement will be to promote and support the child's learning, school achievements and general wellbeing."	Two parents in this study grew up without their parents. Two other parents mentioned that they had been raised by their grandparents.	The parents of these participants were not able to provide them with support in terms of learning, school achievements and general wellbeing.



### 5.2.3 Comparison of results with existing knowledge: Silences in the data

Poland and Pederson (1998:293) state that speech is often the main focus of qualitative research and that silences in data are significant, because “what is not said may be as revealing as what is said” in the study. The silences that have been identified are closely linked to the themes that have emerged from the data. The silences are listed below, followed by an interpretive discussion of possible reasons why these gaps or silences are present.

**Table 5.3: Comparison of results with existing knowledge: Silences in the data**

Author and year	Trend	Interpretive discussion
Lemmer et al. (2012:157)	“Teachers need to be well informed about the learner’s family background, norms and how learners are taught at home.”	One participant (SSI:A5) mentioned that the educators were not aware of the backgrounds of the learners at the school. Being knowledgeable about and aware of the various backgrounds of learners will strengthen the relationship between the school and the home.
Squelch (1994:55)	“Schools and teachers need to guide and support parents by obtaining relevant information and even training in how to assist them in becoming an actively involved parent.”	It became clear throughout this study that parents need more guidance from the school on how to become actively involved. Schools and educators need to guide parents and provide them with an action plan for each term in terms of academic work that will be done, as well as opportunities that suit their diverse circumstances to make themselves available for involvement. Schools need to be adaptable to the current educational environment.

### 5.2.4 Comparison of results with existing knowledge: New insights

Some aspects in the sub-themes of this study have emerged as novel ideas. The categories are presented according to the main themes and sub-themes that have emerged from the data. The new insights are discussed in Table 5.4, and the table

depicts how the interpretive paradigm has been applied. These insights are also discussed in Section 5.8 as possible contributions of this study.

**Table 5.4: Comparison of results with existing knowledge: New insights**

Author and year	Existing knowledge	Interpretive discussion
De Witt (2016:250)	“The family in all of its distinct forms is one of the most basic practices and is the central group that plays a role in the young child’s upbringing.”	In my opinion, the role of the family is often overlooked when considering the topic of parental engagement in the early grades. Educators tend to focus on the parent, and not on the influence that family values have on parental engagement.
Epstein and Dauber (1991:290)	“School programmes and teacher practices are the strongest and most stable predictors of parent involvement in a school, therefore, all schools should adopt a written policy on parent involvement.”	Throughout this study, it was clear that the parents wanted to be engaged in their children’s formal education, but schools need to adapt to accommodate the challenges that parents face. Schools also need to seek alternative methods in ensuring effective communication between the school and the parent.

### 5.3 Answering the research questions for this study

The main purpose of this research enquiry was to explore and describe parents’ experiences of their parental engagement in the early grades. The research questions, as set out in Chapter 1, can now be answered. The secondary research questions assisted me in laying a foundation to ultimately answer the main research question (cf. Joubert, 2016). The answer to the main research question reviews the possible contributions of this study as guided by the theoretical framework that was used. The research questions that led my study are answered in Sections 5.3.1 and 5.3.6.

### 5.3.1 Secondary research question 1

#### **In what ways are parents engaged in their young children's education in the early grades?**

The answer to this question emerged from sub-theme 1.2 'Parental engagement at home' and sub-theme 1.3 'Parental engagement at school', where the parents explained how they were involved in their children's lives at home and at school.

- The parents felt free to elaborate on different methods of involvement. Throughout the study, the parents mentioned multiple areas of their engagement. Two areas of parental engagement arose, namely involvement at home and involvement at school.
- The parents showed more engagement with their children at home than at school. At home, there are numerous opportunities for them to be involved, whereas at school, the opportunities are mostly limited to parents' meetings and volunteering activities, as mentioned below. The answer to the different engagement opportunities is twofold, namely parental engagement at home and parental engagement at school.
- Parental engagement within the home environment. At home, parents assist their children with homework and subject-related assignments. If the need arises, children are taken to therapy sessions for a wide range of educational needs. Parents arrange play dates for their children to play and interact with their friends. Parents are further responsible for maintaining discipline at home, by assigning chores to each child, limiting television time and having set bedtimes for children. Some of the parents mentioned that their family attended church on Sundays to provide the children with religious principles. Parents ensure that their children have a healthy diet by preparing nutritious food. With regard to their schooling, parents ensure that their children are taken to school on time, that their school uniforms are washed and ironed, that they have the correct stationery at school and that they regularly enquire about their children's school day. On a social level, parents enjoy baking with their children, doing some gardening on weekends, playing with the children at home and touring or taking them on trips in the school holidays. They also

take their children to the library and buy additional educational material, such as toys and books, to enhance their educational journey. They also take their children to extra-mural activities, such as hip-hop classes, for additional enrichment.

➤ Parental engagement within the school environment.

Parents are engaged at school by attending parents' meetings and meeting with the principal or class educator when the need arises. According to the parents in this study, these meetings are mostly used to discuss the learner's academic performance and behaviour in class. Only a few parents mentioned that they attended sports activities at school. Other school activities that are also attended are concerts and volunteering activities, such as the Braai Day at School B. By summarising these examples of parental engagement, it is clear that parents are more involved at home than at school. This relates to Anderson and Minke's (2007) statement that parents' engagement at home is not as visible to educators as their engagement at school. Educators only see parents' engagement at school, for example volunteering at the school, versus their engagement at home, for example when they help their children with homework. This indicates that parents are versatile in their engagement with their children.

### **5.3.2 Secondary research question 2**

#### **What are parents' views on the importance of parental engagement in the early grades?**

The answer to this question mostly emerged from sub-theme 1.1, 'Importance of parental engagement'. In the individual semi-structured interviews, the parents were asked the question, "What are your views on the importance of parental involvement in the Foundation Phase?" The answer to this question is closely linked to sub-theme 1.2, 'Parental engagement at home' and sub-theme 1.3, 'Parental engagement at school', where the parents' different areas of involvement were discussed.

➤ Parental engagement in the Foundation Phase is rewarding.

Most of the parents felt that there were rewards associated with continuous parental engagement in the early years. Being actively engaged allows the parent to recognise any academic challenges that the child is facing and attend

to the matter as soon as possible. It will inform the parent on how the child is interacting with the educator and peers. Parental engagement boosts the child's morale and confidence, and the child will realise that the parent is interested in and part of his or her education. Parental engagement allows time for the parent and the child to form a strong bond. Most of the parents were able to formulate their own idea of the importance of parental engagement in the early grades. All of the parents seemed to be noticing the effect of active engagement, as well as the positive rewards that are associated with it. One participant's response was quite unique and captures the essence of the importance of parental engagement – *"... an exercise that takes time and requires commitment. It's quite fun if you understand it. It gives satisfaction to be part of a child's learning"* (SSI:B7). Although the participating parents come from different backgrounds and cultures, they all attached the same underlying importance to engagement in their young children's lives.

➤ The young child is fully dependent on the parent

The parents in this study highlighted the importance of parental engagement by stating that the Foundation Phase child is still young and fully dependent on the parent. One parent mentioned that this phase was a 'do-or-die' stage in the child's life, where the parent gets the opportunity to make the child aware of the significance of education in his or her life. Another parent said that the early grades of primary school were the first block in building the child's future, where continuous parental engagement is seen as an investment in the young child's life.

### **5.3.3 Secondary research question 3**

#### **What support do parents require in order to foster parental engagement in the early grades?**

The answer to this question mostly emerged from theme 2, 'Hindrances that influence parental engagement in the early grades'. Sub-themes 1.1 'Work commitments and time available for engagement', 1.2 'Communication between the school and the parents' and 1.3 'Educational challenges faced by the school' shed light on some of the areas where parents need support in their engagement with their child's early grades.

- Parents need more guidance and training on how to become actively engaged.
 

Schools need to train and assist parents to become active members of the school environment. This should include providing guidelines in assisting the learner with homework, a roadmap of the work that will be covered in each term in order for parents to prepare the learner for upcoming work and assisting the child with assignments and projects. Parents need to realise that the educator is not the only person who is responsible for the education of the child. Some parents still hold the opinion that the educator is the 'expert', as evidenced by one participant saying, *"Parents should be involved on a limited basis. Parents are not trained especially with regards to formal education. Parental involvement should be more on discipline, spiritual and physical wellbeing of kids"* (SSI:A2). A partnership between the school and the home will not be able to become fully functional if parents are involved on a limited basis only.
- Providing parents with short-term and long-term goals on how to support their children both academically and socially.
 

Short-term goals are specific activities and strategies that allow the child to move toward his or her long-term goals, such as getting along with their peers, developing self-control, being aware of other people's feelings and coping with stressful situations. Long-term goals focus on the learner's academic achievement and pursuing a certain passion. The school can assist the parent by making them aware of these goals and motivating the child to achieve them in due course.
- Opportunities to become involved over the course of the school year.
 

Activities that are hosted by the school should be planned well in advance. The school should provide the parents with this list of activities in order for the parent to be aware of these activities. The activities can be included in the yearly planner that are handed out to parents or be communicated to them on a quarterly basis.
- Diverse communication methods to ensure that parents are informed on all school-related activities in general and specifically with regard to their child.
 

In terms of communication, schools need to make an effort to inform parents on how they can get involved in their children's education. Schools should use a

variety of methods to communicate with the parent, as most of the parents mentioned that children misplace general newsletters. Different communication methods can include emails, the school communicator, messages that are sent to the parents' cellphones or written messages in the learner's homework book.

#### **5.3.4 Secondary research question 4**

##### **How do parents experience their engagement in their young children's school activities?**

This answer mostly emerged from sub-theme 2.3, 'Educational challenges faced by the school'. The parents were eager to voice their opinions on the current parental engagement at each school.

- Parents are, in general, satisfied with their engagement at their child's school. At School A, only one parent complained about the current parental engagement of other parents. She said that parents were not actively involved and that they did not attend the sports meetings that were held at the school. The parents at School B mentioned that there was limited to no parental involvement at this school. They elaborated by stating that there was a lack of engagement from the side of the school. The general feeling at this school was that improvement could be made on the side of the school in terms of promoting active parental engagement at the school. The parents made positive remarks about School C and all of the parents were satisfied with the current parental engagement at that school. Only one parent expressed her negative experience about her son's teacher, but this was treated as an isolated incident, as none of the other participants mentioned anything similar.

#### **5.3.5 Secondary research question 5**

##### **What are the general obstacles that hinder parental engagement?**

The answer to this question emerged from Theme 2, 'Hindrances that influence parent engagement in the early grades', which is divided into three sub-themes, namely sub-theme 2.1, 'Work commitments and time available for engagement', sub-

theme 2.2, 'Communication between the school and the parents' and sub-theme 2.3, 'Educational challenges faced by the school'.

➤ Work-related responsibilities and spending long hours away from home.

The biggest obstacle that parents are facing in their parental engagement is their commitments at work. The parents mentioned that they had to spend long hours at work, which resulted in their not attending activities at school that are scheduled during working hours. Long hours at the office cause parents to come home late, and by then the children still need to do homework and then go to bed early. These long working hours cause parents to be exhausted at night, while still having to spend time with their children. Some parents have to travel for work, which means that their children have to stay with someone else for these periods.

➤ Lack of optimal connection between the school and the home.

The second obstacle to active parental engagement is the lack of communication between the school and the home. The parents mentioned that the schools should frequently communicate with parents to avoid a communication breakdown, as learners tend to misplace newsletters. Another concern was that educators only use the learner's communication book to communicate with the parent. If the learner does not show the parent the message, there will be no communication taking place. One single parent mentioned that he did not reside with his children, which meant that he missed out on all communication from the school.

➤ Amount of homework and parents' ability and availability to assist their child.

The parents at all three the primary schools complained about the homework. They felt that the content of the homework was not explained to the parent and the quantity of homework was too much for a Grade 3 learner.

➤ Language of learning and teaching differs from the home language.

The last obstacle that the parents experienced was the Afrikaans language. The language of learning and teaching at all three schools is English, while most of the learners speak a different language at home. Afrikaans is taught as a first additional language at these three primary schools. The parents reported that they struggled to assist their children with their Afrikaans homework, as they did not understand and speak the language themselves.



### **5.3.6 Main research question**

#### **What are parents' experiences of their parental engagement in the early grades?**

The answers from the five secondary research questions form the basis for answering the primary research question. The answer to this question relates to the importance of parental engagement in the early grades, the obstacles that hinder active engagement of parents and the influence of the family structure on parental engagement. The answer to the main research question, therefore, flows from the different data collection instruments that have been used, namely the individual semi-structured interviews, the observations and the artefacts, which include the collages and the biographical data profiles.

Throughout the study, it has been clear that all of the parents highlighted the significance of education and active parental engagement in the early grades. The vast majority of the parents agreed that the early grades are part of the building blocks for the child's future, and that their continuous engagement will add value to the child's education. It also became clear that the parents showcase their engagement in a variety of ways, including engagement at home and at school. The parents in this study placed emphasis on their engagement at home and even included activities such as washing the child's clothes. However, I believe activities such as these are the responsibility of all parents and cannot be seen as parental engagement activities. It also became clear that parents do not spend much time at school, such as attending parents' meetings and talking to the child's educator.

While talking to the parents in this study, I realised that all families have different backgrounds and family dynamics. Family structures are different from one another, and schools and educators need to be aware of this to accommodate all parents and learners. Being aware of the learner's home situation will allow the educator to assist both the parents and the learner. The day-to-day life of the participating parents are filled with long working hours, many family responsibilities and attending to the needs of their child or children. Parents have to cope with all of these stressors. Therefore, the results of this study indicate that parents of learners in the early grades see parental engagement in a positive light, despite the challenges that are

posed in their daily lives. To make sense finally of the revelations found in the data generated, analysed and interpreted, the theoretical framework is introduced again.

## **5.4 Emergent theoretical framework**

### **5.4.1 Components that added value to this study**

The literature that described what parental engagement in the early grades is constituted the components and information of the theoretical framework that added value to this enquiry. By studying the existing literature on parental engagement, one was able to gain an understanding of the concept of parental engagement. In addition to this, the revised model of parental involvement of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005) shed light on how to relate, identify and understand the parents' motivation to get involved in their children's early grades. Although this model was developed in the United States of America, the same principles apply in the South African context, although some aspects may differ slightly. Only the first level of the model was applied, as this study aimed to focus on the parents' experiences of their parental engagement, thereby excluding the learner, who is included in Levels 3, 4 and 5 as indicated in Figure 1.1 (see Sections 1.7 and 2.7 for an explanation of the theoretical framework).

Studying the revised model of parental involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005) enables one to better understand the reasons why parents initially get engaged in their children's education. A significant feature of this model is the fact that schools and educators are able to see the perspective of parents in terms of parental engagement, as level one focuses on the parental role construction for involvement. This level includes parents' sense of efficacy for assisting the child to succeed, parents' perceptions of invitations to be involved and parents' self-perceived knowledge, skills, time and energy that they have available for being involved.

Insight into the role construction of the parent and parents' sense of efficacy for assisting the child to succeed enables one to gain insight into the parents' belief that they can make a substantial difference in their children's education. Secondly, the

parental perceptions of invitations from the school, the educator and the learner are closely linked to the home-school partnership, which was discussed in Section 2.5. Lastly, the self-perceived life context of parents determines the knowledge, skills, time and energy that they have available in order to be actively engaged in their children's early grades.

#### **5.4.2 Relationship between the theoretical framework and the data**

There was a definite link between the theoretical framework and the data of this study. This study confirms the three main aspects of the first level of the revised model of parental involvement by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005), which are 1) parents' motivational beliefs, 2) parents' perceptions of invitations for involvement from others and 3) parents' perceived life context.

In an attempt to understand parental motivation for active engagement, it became evident that the parents in this study each had their own opinion about what they should do with regard to their children's education. Some parents were more focused on their engagement at home (e.g. preparing healthy food for the child), while other parents seemed to be directing their engagement towards the school (e.g. meeting with the educator about educational concerns). Further, the parents' self-efficacy beliefs stood out. The majority of the parents made it clear that their engagement in their children's early grades will have a positive influence on their children's education.

The invitations from the school, the educator and the learner were verified in the data of this study as the second main aspect. This aspect is closely related to the communication between the school and the home, which was discussed in Section 2.5.2 and sub-theme 2.2 (Section 4.3). The parents' perceptions about the invitations of the school were reported as that they do act on invitations from the school and the educator and they attend meetings and activities that are held at the school. However, out of a group of 520, of which 84 people indicated they would participate, only 19 participated in the study (see Section 4.2, Table 4.1). In their model, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005) mention that invitations to be involved from the learner will prompt parents to take action (e.g. when a child is having difficulty with schoolwork, the parent will enrol the child for extra tutoring). In this study, the parents

mentioned that such concerns are mentioned at parents' meetings, and not from the learner's side.

The third main aspect is the parents' perceived life context. Interestingly, some parents mentioned that they were unable to help their children with homework, the reason being that they did not understand the content of the homework, and secondly, that they were not literate in the Afrikaans language. Other parents reported using the Google search engine for assistance with homework.

The results of this study confirm that parents find their commitments at work to be the most significant obstacle that hinders their parental engagement. Increased time at work, as well as work-related duties (e.g. travelling for work), causes parents to spend less time with their children. Table 5.5 shows the new insights gained from the theoretical framework.

**Table 5.5: New insights gained from the theoretical framework (adapted from Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005)**

<b>The revised model of the parental involvement process (Hoover-Dempsey &amp; Sandler, 2005)</b>	
<b>Parents' motivational beliefs</b>	
<b>Parental role construction</b>	<b>Parental self-efficacy for helping the child succeed at school</b>
All of the parents had different ideas about what they should do with regard to their children's education. The parents in this study were more focused on their engagement at home.	The majority of the parents believed that their engagement in their children's early grades would make a positive difference.

<b>Parents' perceptions of invitations for involvement from others</b>		
<b>Perceptions of general school invitations</b>	<b>Perceptions of specific child invitations</b>	<b>Perceptions of specific educator invitations</b>
The parents reported that they did attend activities at school such as parents' meetings.	None of the parents mentioned that the child initiates these invitations. If the child experiences academic challenges at school, it is only picked up at the parents' meeting.	The parents reported that they made an effort to meet with the educator if the educator requested a meeting with the parent.
<b>Parents' perceived life context</b>		
<b>Self-perceived knowledge and skills</b>	<b>Self-perceived time and energy</b>	
The parents mentioned that the content of the homework is difficult, and that they need to use Google to assist their children. The Afrikaans language was posed as another challenge to assisting their children.	The most significant obstacle in parental engagement is parents' commitments at work. These commitments result in their not spending enough time with their children.	

### **5.4.3 Insights gained from the theoretical framework**

The theoretical framework that was utilised for this study shed valuable insight into parents' experiences of their parental engagement in the early grades. Apart from slight differences, the revised model of parent involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005) was applicable to this study. Although the parents in the study expressed their important role in the early grades related to the home and the school (see Table 4.2), the findings of this study confirmed the three main components of the first level of this model, which were parents' motivational beliefs, parents' perceptions of invitations for involvement from others and parents' perceived life context. The three components contributed to the parental motivation for involvement in their children's education.

### **5.5 Limitations of this study**

As a case study, some strengths and weaknesses of the study became evident. Challenges were faced and dealt with, which contributed to my becoming a more skilful researcher.

Throughout the course of this study, it was important to look at the reality from the point of view of parental engagement in the early grades, which includes being aware of multiple aspects. The findings of this study are only true for this case and cannot be generalised to the broader population of cases (Rule & John, 2011). The main focus of this study was not to generalise the findings but rather to interpret and gain an in-depth understanding of the parents' experiences of their parental engagement in the early years. Only three primary schools were included in this study, and the results are only true for these schools. The results of and recommendations that were made in this study may be true for other schools too, according to transferability, as described by Rule and John (2011).

Only one researcher has conducted this study; therefore, the case study may be selective, biased and subjective to my views. However, the role of the supervisors of remaining objective cannot be emphasised enough. Furthermore, utilising diverse data techniques strengthened the trustworthiness of the study.

The possibilities of future research on active parental engagement in the early grades are endless and are discussed as recommendations for future studies in Section 5.8. The results of a larger study may indicate the other levels of the theoretical framework (Levels 2 to 5).

## **5.6 Trustworthiness of this study**

The idea of trustworthiness in research advances values, for example academic rigour, clarity and expert morals in light of a legitimate concern for subjective research to gain levels of trust and devotion inside the research community (Rule & John, 2011). According to Guba and Lincoln (1986), there are four criteria that need to be considered when presenting a trustworthy study, namely *credibility*, *transferability*, *confirmability* and *dependability*. I will address these criteria with regard to this study (see also Section 3.7).

To ensure the *credibility* of this study, I used a well-established research method (cf. Nieuwenhuis, 2016a), which was the case study design. This method was suitable and relevant for this study, as it allowed me to gain an in-depth knowledge of the

parents' experiences of their parental engagement in the early grades. The case study research also assisted me in answering the research questions by providing rich data and describing the parents' experiences in a specific context, which were the three primary schools. Persistent observations allowed for observing elements that were important (cf. Guba & Lincoln, 1986) throughout the three workshops. Lastly, the data were interpreted as honestly and objectively as possible.

The *transferability* of the research refers to the generalisability of the research findings. As mentioned in Section 5.5, the findings of this study cannot be generalised to other cases, as the results are only true for this study. The results may be applicable to other schools as well by providing thick descriptions of each case study (cf. Rule & John, 2011).

*Confirmability* was accounted for by using the method of triangulation and reducing researcher bias (cf. Rule & John, 2011). Utilising individual semi-structured interviews, observations and artefacts, namely collages and the biographical data profiles, strengthened the utilisation of triangulation. Using multiple data collection instruments enabled me to know when the data have reached saturation and when no new insights could be obtained by collecting more data (cf. Rule & John, 2011). Triangulation enabled me to provide high-quality, meticulous and trustworthy research (cf. Rule & John, 2011).

Lastly, I ensured that this study is *dependable* by using thick descriptions to describe the case and the research progress (see Section 3.5), describing the ethical considerations (see Sections 1.14 and 3.8) and describing the limitations of this study (see Sections 1.15 and 5.5). Throughout the research process, revisions were made to certain themes and sub-themes to strengthen the study (cf. Nieuwenhuis, 2016a).

## **5.8 Recommendations**

The following recommendations for further research on the topic of parental engagement in the early grades can be proposed. These recommendations are based on the literature review and the data analysis of this study.

### **5.8.1 Recommendation 1**

Further research on this topic should focus on Foundation Phase educators and how they experience parental engagement in their classes. This research can be expanded to the rest of the Gauteng Province and completed as separate case studies to gain an in-depth perspective on the daily influence of active parental engagement, or the absence thereof, in the Foundation Phase classroom.

### **5.8.2 Recommendation 2**

Each primary school should host an interactive parents' meeting at the start of each term. This meeting should include clear guidelines for parents on how they can assist their children with homework, including specific methods that are used in each subject, for example specific mathematics methods that are used in class. Further, parents should be informed of the various ways in which they can get actively involved with the school during the term in order to enhance their children's achievement. Engagement with parents may be useful for them to understand their engagement with their children in terms of encouragement, modelling, reinforcement and instruction. These aspects are included in Levels 2, 3, 4 and 5 of the theoretical framework.

### **5.8.3 Recommendation 3**

Future studies should focus on how schools are different in their approach to parental engagement in the early grades. It should be compulsory for each primary school in Gauteng to have a policy document for parental engagement in the Foundation Phase. This policy document should contain crucial aspects, such as a panel of parents who are assigned to encourage parental engagement at the school and a yearly plan for school activities that will be hosted to encourage active parental engagement. The focus of this forum will be to engage parents, build relationships, identify areas of need at the school and support learners throughout the primary school.

### **5.8.4 Recommendation 4**

Further studies on parental engagement in the early grades in South Africa could focus on studies where a programme is developed to enhance parental engagement



in the early grades. These studies can focus on how the school adapts to accommodate different family structures, as well as their strategies in communicating with the parents. This programme can then be implemented at schools to see whether active parental engagement has improved after a certain period of time.

#### **5.8.5 Recommendation 5**

Future studies should focus on how policymakers should place emphasis on the role of parents as the primary educators of their children, especially in the Foundation Phase. These studies should not focus on school placement, governing bodies or other legal issues, but rather on the critical role that parents play in their children's academic and social performance. It became clear in this study that parents should be accountable for their input of parental engagement, or lack thereof, in their children's early grades.

#### **5.9 Possible contributions of this study**

The case study design provided an in-depth perspective of parents' experiences of their parental engagement in the early grades. Rich descriptions of the cases allowed for a holistic understanding of the phenomenon that was studied. Although the sample size for this study was relatively small, which means that no generalisations can be made from the findings of this study, the results may shed light on challenges experienced by other similar cases.

This research study builds on the existing literature on parental engagement in the early grades. The study focused on the South African parent's view on parental engagement. Insight gained from the participants' views on parental engagement provided insight into the importance that parents attach to engagement in the early grades, their role as partners of the school, the different methods of engagement and the obstacles they experience when being actively engaged. The parents of my research project are at least on Level 1 of the model and can be guided to understand and act on the other levels. The awareness and understanding that I gained from this study may assist with formulating guidelines to foster active parental engagement in the early grades of primary schools in Gauteng, and possibly the rest of the country.

## 5.10 Summary

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of parents of their parental engagement in the early grades by making use of a qualitative approach. This study gained an in-depth view on how South African parents at three schools see the importance of parental engagement, the different areas of engagement and the obstacles that hinder their engagement in their children's early years.

The data collection instruments that were used enabled me to gain a comprehensive knowledge of the parents' experiences of their parental engagement in the early grades. The semi-structured interviews enabled the parents to give written accounts of their current parental engagement, while the collages allowed them to practically display their experiences of engagement in the early grades. By being able to express themselves through a collage, they raised some concerns and recommendations on parental engagement at each school. The observations strengthened my ability to account for the experience that I had while working on each case. The mentioned data collection instruments enabled me to identify the three main themes, together with the sub-themes that were mentioned in Chapter 4.

The identified themes were compared to the existing literature on parental engagement, which enabled me to answer the research questions in Section 5.3 of this chapter. The findings of this study have shown that parents do want to be engaged in their children's early grades and they value the importance thereof. Schools need to adapt to accommodate these parents by seeking alternative methods in communicating with parents and providing them with training on how they can improve their parental engagement. Further, schools need to be considerate by taking different types of families into account, such as families with single parents and parents who are divorced. The theoretical framework that was utilised guided me in seeking out aspects of parents' motivational beliefs to become actively engaged and their perceptions of invitations from others for engagement as well as their perceived life context. The themes and sub-themes that were identified empowered me to derive conclusions and recommendations for further research on the topic of parental engagement in the early grades.

In Section 5.2, the literature control allowed me to compare the current literature on parental engagement in the early grades with the results of this study. New insights into this study (see Section 5.2.4) allowed me to realise the importance of family values for parental engagement in the South African Foundation Phase context. Another important aspect that emerged was the role of effective communication between the school and the parent. These two aspects were mentioned throughout the literature review, but it was clear that the unique South African circumstances were prominent in this study. Further research can build on ensuring that each primary school in South Africa has a written policy on parental involvement that encourages and motivates active parent participation in the Foundation Phase. Schools and educators should guide and assist parents by encouraging them to become active members of the school environment for the benefit of their children's achievement.

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## Addendum A

Example of consent letters to the following:

- 1) Gauteng Department of Education
- 2) Principal
- 3) Parents (participants)



Head: Gauteng Department of Education

Head Office

Johannesburg

### **SUBJECT: REQUEST TO CONDUCT QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN THE TSHWANE DISTRICT**

I am currently enrolled for my master's studies in the Department of Early Childhood Education at the University of Pretoria. The title of my dissertation is: *Parent experiences of their parental engagement in the early grades.*

I hereby request permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct qualitative research at three primary schools in the Pretoria region. Permission will be obtained from the principals and the parent participants at the three different primary schools.

The purpose of the study is to explore and describe what parents' experiences of their engagement in their children's early grades are, and from the research findings, to compile a set of recommendations to assist parents and schools. By

understanding what parents' recent experiences of their engagement are, educators and school management teams can develop more effective programmes to increase active engagement in schools.

I will host an interactive morning session at each school to inform the participants about the parental engagement process and the nature of the research that will be conducted. During this morning, the participants will each complete a collage that represents their experiences of their engagement in their children's early grades. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted individually with the participants. These interviews and collages will help me to gain valuable knowledge about the parents' experiences.

The dates on which the data collection will take place will be as follows: School A: 10 February 2018, School B: 17 February 2018 and School C: 24 February 2018.

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Duration</b>	<b>Location</b>
Attend workshop on "Parental engagement in the Foundation Phase"	30 minutes	In the school hall of each of the three schools
Complete collage on the topic "My experiences of my engagement in my child's early grades"	1 hour.	In the school hall of each of the three schools
Semi-structured interviews conducted by the researcher	15 minutes per participant	In the school hall of each of the three schools
Discuss the outcome of the collage that was completed by the participant	10 minutes per participant	In the school hall of each of the three schools

The parent participants will sign a letter of consent to confirm that they are going to take part in the research project. The identity of the participants will be protected, and they will be able to withdraw from the study if they prefer to do so. I will inform the participants about the nature of the research and what the possible advantages and disadvantages of the research may be.



I pledge to conduct the research according to the Ethics and Research Statement of the University of Pretoria. The research study will be evaluated and assessed and I will give the parent participants thorough feedback about the research findings once the study has been completed.

If you require any further information about the research, feel free to contact me at 082 667 1756, or you can contact my supervisor, Prof. Ina Joubert at 012 420 5636.

Your attention to this matter application is appreciated.

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Prof. Ina Joubert (Supervisor)

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Miss Carli Schoeman (Student)



The Principal

School:

Address:

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

**Permission to conduct research for a master's degree at \_\_\_\_\_ School**

I am currently enrolled for my master's studies in the Department of Early Childhood Education at the University of Pretoria. The title of my dissertation is: *Parent experiences of their parental engagement in the early grades.*

Permission to conduct the research will be obtained from the Gauteng Department of Education and the parent participants. The identity of the school and the participants will be protected and will not be published in my dissertation. The participants will have the freedom of choice to participate in the research, and they are allowed to withdraw from the study if they prefer to do so.

The purpose of the study is to explore and describe what parents' experiences of their engagement in their children's early grades are, and from the research findings, to compile a set of recommendations to assist parents and schools. By understanding what parents' recent experiences of their engagement are, educators and school management teams can develop more effective programmes to increase active engagement in schools.

I will host an interactive morning session at each school during the first term of 2018 to inform the participants about the parental involvement process and the nature of

the research that will be done. During this morning, the participants will each complete a collage that represents their experiences of their engagement in their children's early grades. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted individually with the participants. These interviews and collages will help me to gain valuable knowledge about the parents' experiences.

The dates on which the data collection will take place will be as follows: School A: 10 February 2018, School B: 17 February 2018 and School C: 24 February 2018.

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Duration</b>	<b>Location</b>
Attend workshop on "Parental engagement in the Foundation Phase"	30 minutes	In the school hall of each of the three schools
Complete collage on the topic "My experiences of my engagement in my child's early grades"	1 hour	In the school hall of each of the three schools
Semi-structured interviews conducted by the researcher	15 minutes per participant	In the school hall of each of the three schools
Discuss the outcome of the collage that was completed by the participant	10 minutes per participant	In the school hall of each of the three schools

The parent participants will sign a letter of consent to confirm that they are going to take part in the research project. The identity of the participants will be protected throughout the research. I will inform the participants about the nature of the research and what the possible advantages and disadvantages of the research may be.

I pledge to conduct the research according to the Ethics and Research Statement of the University of Pretoria. The research study will be evaluated and assessed, according to the procedures of the University of Pretoria. I will give the schools and

the parent participants feedback about the research findings once the study has been completed. If you choose to participate in the study, please sign the consent form at the end of this letter to confirm your school's participation in the study. A copy of this form will be given to you.

If you require any further information about the research, feel free to contact me at 082 667 1756, or you can contact my supervisor, Prof. Ina Joubert at 012 420 5636.

Your attention to this matter is highly appreciated.

---

Prof. Ina Joubert (Supervisor)

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Miss Carli Schoeman (Student)

.....

**Consent form:**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (name and surname of principal), hereby give permission that the research study may continue at \_\_\_\_\_ (school's name). I agree to the following:

1. I consent that samples may be collected from the collages and individual semi-structured interviews.
2. I authorise the researcher to do research and include information from field notes, interviews, collages and photographs for data analysis.
3. I understand that the researcher will adhere to the research ethics principles of:
  - voluntary participation, i.e. I give my consent for the school to participate in the study and acknowledge that participation by participants is voluntary and the participants can withdraw at any stage;
  - informed consent, i.e. my decision for the school to participate was based on information provided by the researcher; and
  - privacy and confidentiality: referring to the anonymity and confidentiality of the school's participation.

Signed on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature: Principal



Faculty of Education

Fakulteit Opvoedkunde  
Lefapha la Thuto

School:

Address:

Dear Parent

### **Permission to participate in a master's research project**

I am currently enrolled for my master's studies in the Department of Early Childhood Education at the University of Pretoria. The title of my dissertation is: *Parent experiences of their parental engagement in the early grades*.

The purpose of the study is to explore and describe what parents' experiences of their engagement in their children's early grades are, and from the research findings, to compile a set of recommendations to assist parents and schools. By understanding what parents' recent experiences of their engagement are, educators and school management teams can develop more effective programmes to increase active engagement in schools.

In the first school term of 2018, I will host an interactive workshop at each school to inform the participants about the parental engagement process and the nature of the research that will be done. During the morning session, you will be asked to compile a collage with the theme of "My experiences of my engagement in my child's early grades". These collages will be made by the participants using a combination of mediums, such as pictures, materials, photographs or written words. All these mediums will be provided by me. After the collages have been completed, I will discuss the outcome of the collage with the participant to identify possible themes that emerge from the collage.

All of the parents will fill in a written semi-structured interview form, where questions related to parental engagement in the early grades will be answered. After the collages have been completed, I will use my tape recorder to record the collage discussion to help me remember everything that we discuss. I will also make notes during our conversation. I will make use of pseudonyms in the research study to protect your identity. Only my supervisors and I will have access to the recordings, and we will regard the information collected during the course of the study as confidential and anonymous. Your decision to participate in the study is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any given time. There will be no consequences for your decision. I will give the schools and the parent participants feedback about the research findings once the study has been completed.

The dates on which the data collection will take place will be as follows: School A: 10 February 2018, School B: 17 February 2018 and School C: 24 February 2018.

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Duration</b>	<b>Location</b>
Attend workshop on "Parental engagement in the early grades"	30 minutes	In the school hall of each of the three schools
Complete collage on the topic "My experiences of my engagement in my child's early grades"	1 hour	In the school hall of each of the three schools
Semi-structured interviews conducted by the researcher	15 minutes per participant	In the school hall of each of the three schools
Discuss the outcome of the collage that was completed by the participant	10 minutes per participant	In the school hall of each of the three schools

I have received permission from the Department of Basic Education and the principal of the school to conduct the research. If you choose to participate in the study, please sign the consent form at the end of this letter to confirm your participation in the study. A copy of this form will be given to you.

If you require any further information about the research, feel free to contact me at 082 667 1756, or you can contact my supervisor, Prof. Ina Joubert at 012 420 5636.

Your attention to this matter is highly appreciated.

---

Prof. Ina Joubert (Supervisor)

---

Miss Carli Schoeman (Student)



.....

**Consent form:**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (name and surname of participant), hereby give permission to participate in the research study. I agree to the following:

1. I consent that samples may be collected from my collages and individual semi-structured interviews.
2. I authorise the researcher to do research and include information from field notes, interviews, collages and photographs for data analysis.
3. I understand that the researcher will adhere to the research ethics principles of:
  - voluntary participation, i.e. I give my consent to participate in the study on a voluntary basis and I acknowledge that I can withdraw at any stage;
  - informed consent, i.e. my decision to participate was based on information provided by the researcher; and
  - privacy and confidentiality: referring to the anonymity and confidentiality of my participation.

Signed on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature: Participant

## Addendum B

Examples of data collection methods:

- 1) Individual semi-structured interview
- 2) Programme: Collage

School: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Individual semi-structured interview schedule:**

Please answer the following questions by writing the answer on the given line:

1. What are your views on the importance of parental involvement in the Foundation Phase?

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2. In what ways are you involved in your child's formal education?

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3. How do you experience parental involvement in your child's school activities?

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4. What do you think are the most significant obstacles to being involved in your child's formal education? Please motivate your answer.

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5. What support do you, as a parent, need to enhance your parental involvement?

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6. Based on your experiences, what recommendations will you give to schools and teachers to enhance parental involvement in the school?

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### **Individual collage:**

All the participants that are present at the different workshops will be asked to complete a collage based on their experiences of their engagement in their child's early grades. The activity of completing the collage will allow the participant to explore the topic of 'parental engagement' further, by being engaged in the individual activity of completing the collage.

Theme of collage: "My experiences of my engagement in my child's early grades".

Different mediums to be used: Blank A3 paper, old English magazines, written words, slogans, photographs, colour paper, colour pencils, oil pastels, paint and different pieces of material.

The researcher will explain to the participants what to do on the paper that will be provided to them. There will be no rules that the participants have to adhere to, except for creating a visual collage of the given topic. The participants can incorporate different aspects of parental involvement, such as the following:

- The importance of parental engagement in their child's early grades.
- Different ways of showing their engagement in their child's early grades.
- The benefits of feeling engaged in their child's early grades.
- Obstacles to being more engaged in their child's early grades.

Once the collage has been completed, the researcher and the participant will discuss the contents of the collage. The participant will have the opportunity to tell his or her story and to elaborate on the way he or she had organised and executed the collage. Themes and patterns that emerge from the collage will be discussed by the researcher and the participant. These themes that emerge from the visual collage will be documented by the researcher to use in the data analysis.

## **Biographical data profile**

Please fill in the following information:

<b>Biographical data profile</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	
<b>Name and surname:</b>	
<b>Date of birth:</b>	
<b>Gender:</b>	
<b>Contact number:</b>	
<b>Email address:</b>	
<b>Occupation:</b>	
<b>Residing address:</b>	
<b>Please answer the following questions:</b>	
<b>1. How has your own family structure influenced your parenting?</b>	
<b>2. How many children do you have who are currently in the Foundation Phase?</b>	