CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION, PROBLEM FORMULATION, AIM OF RESEARCH, RESEARCH STATEMENT, RESEARCH METHODOLOGY, DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS AND PROGRAMME OF STUDY

1.1   INTRODUCTION

The extent to which the school environment is successful in supporting the learning of its learners depends heavily on the foundation laid at home (Berger 1991:122). Parents are seen as primary educators who play a major role in academic education. The parents first provide the informal education at home, i.e. language and conceptual development before children can start school. During this stage, children acquire basic communication skills which improve through play activities. By the time children start school, that is, during the Foundation Phase, they are expected to develop the academic language needed for cognitive tasks and they must grasp abstract concepts during this stage (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2002:49), which is now called formal education. Children in school are now in the stage of using language for learning (Owens 2001:381; Grolnick & Slowiaczek (1994:241). McCarthey (2000:148) declares that "… a learner in a formal situation has to learn culturally appropriate ways of using language and constructing means from texts for him to understand the exact meaning of long utterances, spoken over a short period of time." Learners have to have a good foundation in carrying out instructions in the classroom. According to Olivier (1998:1) for learners to succeed in the Foundation Phase school, they must have a good foundation in the school's language of instruction.

Extensive research has shown that the support for learning further encourages motivation of learners as well as of educators. For example, Berger (1991:123) emphasises that all parents should be encouraged to take part in helping their children with schoolwork. Marjoribanks (1993:441) also states that "… the family is a powerful determinant of children's learning and when the school and home have divergent approaches to life and to learning, children are likely to suffer in their school learning." This implies that when the school and home can equally motivate the child, there is likely to be success. Van Schalkwyk (1990:2) says that "… if parental-involvement were a worthless exercise it would have long stopped functioning and been forgotten." The support for learning is so important that it has an influence on the attitude, behaviour and performance of the child at school.

Like other countries in the Southern African region that gained democracy and independence, South Africa recognises and encourages parents to play a role in the

academic education. For the aim of this education to be fully achieved, a child needs the ongoing support of the parents. The role of parents is also important in the development of values, beliefs, interests and the identity of the child.

South Africa faces a change towards a new paradigm, as well as a new education system. The South African education system of the past was seen by many as an irrelevant content-based curriculum which did not reflect the life experiences, culture and traditions of the vast majority of the diverse learner population. There was an urgent need for change in education and training in South Africa. These perceptions resulted *inter alia*, in a new curriculum, Curriculum 2005 (C2005), underpinned by a philosophy which is labelled transformational Outcomes-Based Education (OBE). The new curriculum has been phased in from 1998 and is driven by the vision of lifelong learning for all South Africans, and is a shift from a content-based to an outcomes based curriculum. The aim is to equip all learners with knowledge, competencies and orientations needed for a successful future life. The vision for the future is to educate thinking competent citizens (South African Department of Education 1997a:1).

In the report of the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI)(1992:120), parents were seen to be a focal point in the success of education in South Africa. According to the UNISA Life Project (1994:118) parents in South Africa will also have to take far more responsibility for the education of their children than in the past. In supporting the importance of the support for learning, the Minister of Education, Kader Asmal, announced recently that certain aspects of the new curriculum would be redefined, but stressed that the system of Outcomes-Based Education was not being abolished as the framework and principles upon which it is based, are considered sound. Writing in the *Pretoria News* (7 June 2000:9), Asmal contends that: "The challenge facing us in South Africa is to create an education system that liberates human potential and enables our citizens to take their rightful place in all spheres of life-economic, social and political. Lifelong learning for all is at the centre of our approach. In order to realise this vision on a highly educated citizenry participating in all spheres of life with the confidence derived from a complete education, we need approaches and methods which enable us to reach the goal. Outcomes-Based Education is that approach and method." On this note, the parental role is also emphasised and recognised. The South African Schools' Act (Act 84 of 1996:89) emphasises the role of the parents in the education of their children as a vital support for learning.

Parents who do not work harmoniously with the school could in many ways counteract what the educators expect of their children. This means that all parents in South Africa should be motivated and encouraged to give support in the education of their children.

Bush (1990:170) stresses that most parents are eager to help but need and appreciate direction and concrete suggestions.

The issue of parental support for learning obviously cannot be examined in isolation. In line with the orthodidactic theoretical framework one has to consider the possible correlations of any form of poor performance with shortcomings in the learning behaviours of the learner, guidance and facilitation by the educator and content-specific demands. Educators, parents and learners should work in close harmony with the inputs of each other and deal with content which is appropriate in terms of relevance and level of difficulty (Du Toit 1992:17). The child is never in isolation. He/she is always surrounded by the family system, classroom system which will later be embedded in the school system. The child in the family system is surrounded by his/her grandparents, parents and siblings who play a role in cognitive development. In the family system there may be a number of different roles that often overlap and are sometimes contradictory, for example, in a stressed family where a child is expected to take a role of both child and parent which might have an effect in his/her learning. Similar roles and contradictions might be seen in a classroom system where the teacher/educator over-burdens the child with work. For example, if the child is spotted a good performer he/she may be asked/expected to take a supervisory or even a teaching role from time to time. At school he/she will meet with other children in the classroom and in the school premises as a whole which might also affect the child either positively or negatively.

If learners do not participate adequately in the learning activities presented by the educator the reasons might include any number of home-related factors, such as that they lack language skills or come from a different background than the teacher or the majority of other learners in the class, or that the father is absent in the home, or that the parents leave for work early and return home late, which allows them little opportunity for cultivating a meaningful relationship with their children (Bouwer 1989:51). Educators must learn to harmonise the elements in the school-learning situation in many ways for learners to learn successfully. They must, for example, understand the learners' cultural and social background and strive for optimum co-operation from the parents.

It is of great importance that educators should communicate with parents to keep them informed about their children's progress. It is the desire of parents to see their children being successful in their school career. There must be a strong home-school relation and the child must not see a difference in intent between a parent and an educator. Improved communication would have a positive effect on children's learning as well as on their behaviour at school. Berger (1991:122) emphasises that "... the teacher is central to parental involvement in the educational process. The teacher's role includes those of facilitator, counsellor, friend, communicator, programme director, interpreter, and resource developer."

Many African parents, for various reasons, appear to fail in providing the support at home which is necessary for their children's cognitive development prior to school entry, and also later for their mastery and application of the content presented at school. Some of the problems that influence the performance of African learners are, amongst others, a lack of interest, poor motivation, and school facilities that are not up to standard. If the majority of African parents were actively involved in the education of their children one could surmise that many African children could then also be performing to their potential at school.

The staff of a particular school which is the location of a research project by the University of Pretoria, identified the lack of parental involvement as one of their primary concerns and a reason for the poor academic performance of many of their learners.

The support for learning is of special importance during the beginning years of a child's school career. The modern paradigm of the past is being replaced by a postmodern paradigm with profound implications for education. Parents are now expected to provide support in the education of their children, and are regarded as assets in their children's lives. Postmodern curriculum experts believe that a transformative curriculum model is necessary to deal with the postmodern learning environment (Umtapo Centre Literacy Unit 1993:3). A transformative curriculum is about learners acquiring insight which is achieved through activities that develop the abilities of the learner. This has implications for all curricula which parents have to be part of.

A study looking at the nature of the home environment of Grade Two learners in a Township school, more especially at the support for their education provided by the parents, could be expected to yield valuable insights in this regard. The learning gains and learning behaviours of the learners acquired in the previous year, during Grade One, might yield some information about the effect of the home environment on learning in school, which could remain hidden if the research addressed the period of school entry itself only in formative vein.

1.2   PROBLEM STATEMENT

The specific problem to be researched is: *What is the extent, level, form and content of the support for learning of the parents of learners in Grade Two in a Township school in the learning of their children, and what effect does their support for learning have on the learning behaviours of the learners?*

The research problem can be unpacked to look at questions such as the following:

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

1.3   AIM OF RESEARCH

Based on the above problem identified in the Foundation Phase school setting in South Africa, the study aims to determine and examine the extent, level, form and content of the involvement of the parents of Grade Two learners in a Township school in the learning of their children, and the correlation of their involvement with the learning behaviours of the learners.

An effort will be made to identify environmentally, systemically and culturally viable areas of enhancement of the support for learning in the learning of learners in the Foundation Phase in a Township school.

1.4   RESEARCH STATEMENT

As suggested in paragraph 1.1, inadequacies in or a lack of the support for learning might be expected to impact negatively on the learning of Grade Two learners in the classroom. In terms of the dynamics of problematic teaching and learning, the researcher would expect to find that learners do not participate optimally in the formal learning situation if they lack opportunities at home to assimilate the fundamental knowledge required to understand the new content and skill presented in school, in the sense that the subject material might be too advanced, or that they lack the frame of reference by which to associate the new content

with other fields of their knowledge, which in turn might result in their not following the explanation. They could also be expected to lack the motivation for learning which stems from a positive attitude to education and from self-confidence as learners which in turn might affect the pass rate.

1.5   RESEARCH PLAN

1.5.1   LITERATURE STUDY

A study of relevant literature will be undertaken regarding the effect of the support for learning by parents in the education of their children in the Foundation Phase and the Foundation Phase school learner will be considered.

1.5.2   SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

A questionnaire which will gather information from a small sample of African parents on how they are involved in the education of their children, will be developed, translated into Tsonga and piloted prior to the investigation. To accommodate the great illiteracy factor among the parents, the researcher will administer the questionnaire verbally as well as individually. Open-ended questions will be included. Additional questions will be posed by the researcher to ensure clarity in the understanding of the researcher regarding all responses of the parents.

1.5.3   PARTICIPATORY OBSERVATION OF PERFORMANCE ON A LEARNING TASK

In close collaboration with the educator, a learning task will be devised and updated daily in accordance with the content dealt with in class. After completing the questionnaire, the parents will be requested to assist their child in performing the task and the dynamics of the event will be recorded for qualitative analysis of method, level, skill and relationship. This procedure will also be piloted before engaging in the main phase of the research.

1.5.4   ANALYSIS OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN SCHOOL AND HOME

The educator will communicate weekly, in writing, with the parents. Each letter will be prepared in collaboration with the researcher to contain an item requiring some form of response from the parents. The responses will be analysed and will be related to the overall learning behaviours of the children.

1.5.5   CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

The purpose of the observation is to observe how the learners behave in class, for example, who raise their hands when questions are asked, after how long do the learners respond to questions, which learners always respond to questions, what is their attitude towards learning, do they have interest in the task, do they have confidence, do they ask questions where they do not understand, or do they have self-initiated remarks, how is their general learning behaviours and how is their reading competence in class.

1.5.6   RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The results and findings in paragraphs 1.5.2, 1.5.3, 1.5.4 and 1.5.5 will be described and later be given a full detailed discussion.

1.5.7   CORRELATIONAL ANALYSIS

Relationships will be drawn between data obtained in paragraphs 1.5.2, 1.5.3, 1.5.4 and 1.5.5.

1.6   DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

1.6.1   PARENT

For the purpose of this study, a parent is any adult whose role is to guide and accompany the child towards responsible adulthood. According to the South African Schools Act of 1996c, Act 84 (RSA 1996:4), the term **parent** refers to:
"(a)   the natural parent of a learner,
(b)   the guardian of a learner,
(c)   a person legally entitled to custody (physical control) of a learner, and
(d)   a person who undertakes to act as a parent of a learner for the purposes of the
            learner's education at school."

1.6.2   PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT / SUPPORT FOR LEARNING

According to Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994, in Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski & Aposteleris 1997:538), parental involvement is the dedication of resources by the parent to the child within a given domain.

For the purpose of this study, parental involvement is viewed from a pedagogical perspective of the home as well as the school. The support for learning entails the supportive participation of parents in the learning activities of their children at home such as to contribute to basic skills education, supervision and helping of children when homework is given. Involvement of parents by the school entails informing parents about the behaviour and performance of their children at school and about school rules, for example by holding teacher-parent meetings.

1.6.3   THE TEACHER / EDUCATOR

The term teacher means "enabling or causing others to do by instruction and training" (Cowie 1995:1329). In terms of the South African Schools' Act, 84 of 1996, the term **teacher** is replaced by the term **educator**. In Outcomes-Based Education, the traditional role of the teacher as "instructor" has been replaced by the "educator", who acts as a "facilitator for learning and development" and is a major source of support for learners. The roles expected of the educator are learning mediator, facilitator, leader, administrator and manager, assessor, and discipline and phase specialist.

1.6.4   LEARNING BEHAVIOURS

Learning behaviours in this study denotes the behaviour of the learner in a situation where learning is deliberately and/or consciously taking place. The learner is called upon to pay attention to what is imparted to him/her. In such a situation the learner shows a level of interest and tries to reach an answer independently. Learning behaviours is again the behaviour of the learner in a situation where he/she can demonstrate an understanding of, and an ability to apply information and skills he/she has gained in order to complete a series of tasks successfully.

1.6.5   TOWNSHIP SCHOOLS

In the past, Africans attended schools only in the rural or township areas which were called African schools. Resources were not available in these schools. In some cases learners were taught under the trees. After the struggle against Apartheid, Africans are now allowed to attend white schools.

In the present situation there are many schools built in the African communities and the Department of Education and Training is busy providing schools with handbooks, prescribed books, writing books and stationary as well as chairs, chalkboards and buildings. Agreed,

many of the schools in the rural areas were not well provided with teaching materials. Furthermore, it should be taken into consideration that South Africa, just like any other African country, had a very high population growth that doubled (a doubling every 22 years of (+) plus million immigrants from surrounding countries) so that the economic growth and the provision of quality education cannot simply keep up, even today.

Irrespective of the fact that only about 10% of all schools in South Africa are white schools, the majority of African children will still be in African schools.

1.6.6   CULTURE

Culture includes all physical aspects and innovation by a person such as technology, architect, economy, mining, government inputs, etc. All the residents of the country take part in the modern technological culture. This social culture and lifestyle that unify us excel by far the ethnic cultural differences that divide us. Culture is a much broader concept than the terms ethnicity and race. Byrne (1996:47); Locke (1998:3) and Sue and Sue (1999:62) accept the definition of culture as a way of life of a particular social group: its customs, values, beliefs, patterns of behaviour, etc. It is important to align with the definition of culture at this stage, since the culture of a particular African group will be discussed.

1.7   PROGRAMME OF STUDY

This research will be executed according to the following programme:

1.7.1   CHAPTER ONE

Chapter One has served as general orientation, putting the problem in perspective and subsequently formulating the problem statement and aim of the research.   The aim of the research is to determine and qualitatively examine the extent, level, form and content of the involvement of parents of Grade Two learners in a Township school in the learning of their children and the correlation of their involvement with the learning behaviours of the learners. A research plan has been proposed. Important concepts to be dealt with in the study have been defined. The methods of research were explained and the programme of the study was outlined.

1.7.2   CHAPTER TWO

Chapter Two will report on the literature review of the role played by parents in the formal education of learners and the effect of parental involvement on the learning behaviours of children in the Foundation Phase.   The dimensions of child development in the Foundation Phase will be examined, namely, physical development, psycho-social development and cognitive development. The role of parents will be looked at generally with regard to problems which could arise in the facets of physical dimension, affective dimension, normative dimension and cognitive dimension.

1.7.3   CHAPTER THREE

Chapter Three will be devoted to the empirical study, to be undertaken. Relevant research methodology will be examined, before describing the research methods applied in the study. Each method will be discussed in terms of the data obtained.

1.7.4   CHAPTER FOUR

Chapter Four will give a detailed report on the results and findings per investigation. Results will be analysed and interpreted. Context of the empirical research, namely the school, the participants (learners, the educator and the parents) will be considered. Administration of each method will be outlined.

1.7.5   CHAPTER FIVE

Chapter Five will contain the summary of the study as well as the conclusions drawn from the research. Recommendations and suggestions for African parents' involvement and participation in the education of their children in the Foundation Phase and for further research will be highlighted in this chapter.

1.8   CONCLUSION

It is the wish of the researcher not to prescribe what should be done in order to enhance Foundation Phase education at the project school to be researched, but to make proposals and recommendations that could provide a sound basis as well as guidelines for joint decision-making by the parents, the community and educators for the enhancement of Foundation Phase education.

According to Topfner (1990:99) children need to spend time with adults. Utilising local people and institutions as sources of information is, therefore, important. A highly responsive system of education is needed, which can equip the youth with knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours required to consider the complex issues affecting contemporary life (Topfner 1990:100). Educators and parents should all encourage education that will prepare learners for the jobs of the 21st century.

This study will lead the researcher to redefine parental involvement. Measures will have to be taken to develop the concept of parental involvement for South African parents, particularly for those in the African communities.

Chapter Two will investigate the role played by parents in the formal education of learners and the effect of the support for learning on the learning behaviours of children in the Foundation Phase.

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