MANAGING COMMUNICATION TO STRENGTHEN EDUCATOR-PARENT PARTNERSHIPS AT SELECTED PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN THE UMBUMBULU CIRCUIT, KWAZULU-NATAL

by

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DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation "Managing communication to strengthen the educator-parent partnerships at selected public secondary schools in the Umbumbulu Circuit, KwaZulu-Natal" is my own work and that all the sources that I used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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SIBISI R.N. (MR)   DATE

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to all educators out there who want to make a difference.

"Successful and unsuccessful do not vary greatly in their abilities, they vary in their desires to reach their potential "- John Maxwell

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ABSTRACT

National legislation such as South African Schools Act, No. 84 of 1996 introduced important reforms impacting on school and parent communication. It mandated the establishment of school governing bodies in all schools to ensure that parents participate in their schools and to open an effective way of communication between educators and parents. However, the literature study established that in some schools, mostly the historically disadvantaged black schools, communication between educators and parents is still very poor and mostly ineffective.

This study examined the role of the school principals in managing effective communication between educators and parents at schools to ensure that effective partnerships between educators and parents are achieved.

A qualitative investigation in two public secondary schools in the Umbumbulu Circuit, KwaZulu-Natal was done. Data were gathered by means of in-depth interviews with the principals of each school, and focus group interviews with the educators and parents of each school and document analysis.

The findings revealed the following: relationship between educators and parents is still very poor in some schools, the communication between educators and parents is still ineffective, there is still a lack of parental involvement in some schools, and most schools do not have policies on effective management of communication and comprehensive programmes on parental involvement.

The study recommends that principals need to be empowered to effectively manage communication in their schools to ensure effective partnerships between educators and parents, and schools should design their own training programmes conducted by principals or specialists for parents on the importance of parental involvement in the education of their children.

Key words: communication, communication methods, home-school partnerships, parental involvement, policies

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CHAPTER 1

AN OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Research clearly demonstrates that the more parents are involved in their children's education, the more successful the children become (Singh, Mbokodi & Msila, 2004; Ngidi & Qwabe, 2006; Van Deventer & Kruger, 2008; Lemmer, 2013). Academic success is certainly the most important reason for the development of the parent-teacher partnership. As educator and parents forge partnership, benefits extend to the educator, parents, class, school and ultimately, the school district. Strong parent-teacher partnerships can have a snowball effect on all stakeholders (Olender, Elias & Mastroleo, 2010). As the school develops strong partnerships and effective communication with parents, we can begin to observe numerous effects on individual learners, educator, parents, classrooms, schools and districts. Benefits of well managed partnerships include: a decrease in learner dropout, improved learner conduct, improved support from community, increased trust between educators and parents and the opportunity for parents and educator to learn more from one another (Keyser, 2006). Lemmer (2013) also mentioned that the benefits of parents as partners include personal empowerment and greater satisfaction with the school, and becoming more informed about the child and better acquainted with their rights and responsibilities, as articulated in education legislation and school policies.

There may also be consequences for poor management of the educator-parent partnership and communication. Gonzalez (2002) argued that the lack of an educator-parent partnership and poor communication may lead to excessive peer influence on learners, inevitably creating negative educational outcomes, which will range from truancy to drug abuse and depression to low grades, poor attendance and disciplinary problems resulting in violence.

However, successful partnerships require a well-designed programme, which includes good planning, organisation and communication, which will encourage more collaboration between stakeholders involved. The success of any partnership depends largely on how well the process of communication is managed. The research thus emphasises that the success of educator-parent partnerships is dependent on sound communication between educators and parents of learners (Crozier & Reay, 2005; Keyser, 2006; Wanda, 2006). Keyser (2006) suggests that effective

communication between educators at school and parents at home is central to the success of building good educator-parent partnerships at school. Crozier and Reay (2005) concur that more equitable dialogue between educators and parents is one of the cornerstones of an effective partnership.

Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) describe effective schools as schools that are well managed and led, clear about what their tasks are and thorough in their organisation. More significantly, they are also schools that work hard to relate effectively to the parent body. Effective schools communicate with parents about issues that involve the education of their children, and also provide a range of appropriate opportunities for parents to be involved in their children's work and discuss their progress. They help parents in providing practical encouragement and support for their children's school learning. In fact, no educator-parent partnership can succeed without effective communication between home and the school (Monadjem, 2003). The principal, as head of the school management team, is often instrumental in ensuring that the partnership between educators and parents is effective through the proper management of communication between these two important stakeholders.

Communication is an important management and leadership skill and has been determined as a quality pertaining to organisational success (Everton & Weinstein, 2006). There is thus an increasing emphasis in the leadership literature on the importance of interpersonal communication skills. Effective communication includes not only the delivery of messages but also the fostering of listening skills. The fact that most people can hear perfectly adequately but only a minority can actually listen in the sense of genuinely attending (Bender, 2005), points to the importance of acquiring active listening skills for effective communication. Active listening is about sensitivity to others' feelings and perceptions, and it is a total involvement in the communication process. Understanding can only be obtained when active listening is applied.

Popkin (2002) believes that the school principal's leadership skill of communication is a two-way process that involves the skill of conveying messages successfully and the skill of active listening. Within such conducive conditions for genuine communication, all stakeholders become aware of where they fit into the school as a team and how they contribute to that team.

The skill of 'facilitating' important messages via effective communication within the team enables all members to perform at their peak level in the pursuit of a common vision and mission of excellence in teaching and learning (Popkin, 2002). This idea proposed by Popkin (2002) has resulted in a shift from a management style based on control and aggression to one centred upon caring and connection which is made possible through communication as a two-way process.

1.2 HOME-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION

Home and school share the goal of helping children learn and feel successful. Therefore, communication between school and home is critical in enhancing home-school relations. Research has proven that when parents and teachers work together, everyone benefits: students tend to earn higher grades, perform better on tests, attend school more regularly, have better behaviour and show more positive attitudes towards themselves and toward school. School programmes that include strong parent involvement are effective (Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2003; Keyser, 2006; Wright, Stegelin & Hartle, 2007) in enhancing the learning experience.

The extent to which the school communicates with parents determines their involvement in the activities of the school. Risimati (2001) maintains that the principal must be an effective communicator. The principal needs to communicate effectively with all the stakeholders (educators, learners, parents and entire community). The principal should see to it that the lines of communication are always open between educators and parents. Potter and Powell (1992) cited in Risimati (2001) suggest that, since communication is central to effective home-school relations, the principal should have a policy regarding all aspects of communication. These authors further suggest that all stakeholders should be involved in drawing up such a policy. Therefore, the principal should manage the communication process of the school to ensure that there is effective partnership.

The above discussion clearly indicates that communication between educators and parents is very important and it can contribute a lot to improving the quality of teaching and learning at school, thus improving the academic achievement of learners. It is therefore important to find more effective ways of communication between educators and parents to ensure strong collaboration between the two.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Since 1994, within the context of South African schooling, legislation such as the South African School Act (SASA) 84 of 1996 has introduced important reforms which impact on school and parent communication. SASA mandated the establishment of school governing bodies in all schools to ensure that parents participate in their schools and to open an effective way of communication between educators and parents. These reforms according to Lemmer and Van Wyk (2003) have created an environment that is more conducive for effective communication between educators and parents. In terms of specific implications for home-school communication, the broad definition of a parent used by the Act (RSA, 1996) implies that schools should acknowledge a variety of family structures and develop a range of home-school communication strategies accordingly. Within the framework of SASA, educator-parent communication is recognised as essential to effectively improve the quality of teaching and learning.

In spite of all these reforms, research has shown that, in some schools, mostly the historically disadvantaged black secondary schools, communication between educators in schools and parents at homes is still a challenging issue. Research by Singh, Mbokodi and Msila (2004) indicates that there is insufficient participation of black parents in schools. This insufficient participation is due to a lack of or ineffective communication between the educators and parents. The study conducted by Legotlo, Maaga, Sebogo, Van der Westhuizen, Mosoge, Nieuwoudt and Steyn (2002) on the perception of stakeholders on the cause of poor performance in Grade 12 in the provinces of South Africa revealed a lack of resources, lack of discipline, poor morale and lack of communication as factors. Lemmer and Van Wyk (2003) also attest to the fact that home-school communication is one of the most traditional and vital forms of parental involvement but is often poorly implemented.

One of the local principals that I had a conversation with regarding communication with parents showed great dissatisfaction, stating that parents do not come to school meetings when asked to and do not participate in any activities taking place at school. As a result, it becomes a challenge to deal with problems such as learner discipline, learner motivation and learner performance if parents are not involved. On the other hand, parents blame the educators for not involving them in school activities. This blaming situation creates unnecessary tension between educators in school and the community, and thus impacts negatively on effective teaching and learning.

The above discussion points to the fact that new strategies are needed to organize effective communication in school programmes. Communicating the 'how' and 'what' of learning activities increase school-to-home and home-to-school exchanges about learners' progress (Epstein & Sheldon, 2006). Communication through notes, memos, conferences, report cards, newsletters, phone, e-mail, and other traditional and innovative strategies increase positive relation between home and school. However, for any kind of communication to be effective, it needs to be managed properly in order to achieve the intended results (Epstein, 2001). Therefore, this research project examines how the school, especially the principal, manages communication between educators and parents to ensure that effective partnership between educators and parents is achieved. The study was conducted at selected secondary schools in the Umbumbulu circuit, KwaZulu- Natal.

Against the above background, the study thus poses the following question:

How can communication in secondary schools be managed to ensure effective educator-parent partnerships?

In order to respond to this question effectively, four sub-questions were formulated and investigated so that the solution to these sub-questions can contribute to the solution of the main research question.

The following sub-questions are deduced from the main research question:

(i)   What is the role of the school principal in facilitating communication between educators and parents to ensure an effective educator-parent partnership?

(ii)   What is the nature and of communication between educators and parents in secondary school?

(iii)   How do educators and parents see the role of the (school) principal in managing communication to ensure an effective educator-parent partnership?

(iv)   How can guidelines be proposed for (school) principals to manage communication between educators and parents?

1.4 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The general aim of the study is to explore the role played by the principal in managing communication between educators and parents so as to ensure a strong educator-parent partnership at school. In order to achieve this aim, the objectives are:

(i)   To investigate the managerial role of the principal in facilitating communication between educators and parents to ensure an effective educator-parent partnership.

(ii)   To examine the nature of communication between educators and parents in secondary school.

(iii)   To investigate the views of educators and parents regarding the role played by the (school) principal in managing communication between educators and parents to ensure effective educator-parent partnership.

(iv)   To develop guidelines on how communication can be improved to ensure effective partnership between educators and parents at school.

1.5 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The research seeks to examine how the school, especially the principal, manages communication between educators and parents to ensure an effective partnership between these two important stakeholders. The role of the school principal in communicating actions and plans as the school's senior manager and his/her ability to establish a positive and constructive environment for all is quite critical. This entails a focus on the principal's management skills to communicate with educators and parents, creating a mutual awareness of what the school intend to achieve. The study of this nature is important because it will shed some light on the nature and effectiveness of communication between educators and parents, especially in black secondary schools in the Umbumbulu Circuit, KwaZulu-Natal. These schools, pre-dominantly black, have a long history of challenges with regard to the issue of involving parents in the education of their children. Communication between educators in schools and parents at home is still a challenging issue. There is insufficient participation of parents in schools.

Furthermore, this investigation hopes to shed light in identifying and understanding some of the challenges faced by the school principals regarding management of communication between educators and parents. It is also hoped that the findings will help the principals to implement some

of the guidelines on how to improve communication between educators and parents to ensure that effective collaboration is realised.

1.6 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

A brief outline of the research methodology together with the means of data collection and data analysis is provided in this section of chapter one. A more in-depth exposition of research methods will be covered in chapter 3 of this project.

1.6.1 Literature Review

In an attempt to determine the role of the school principal in facilitating and managing communication between educators and parents, the literature on the management of communication was explored. The literature analysis focused on both South African education in general and literature with a universal perspective and context. The literature study encompasses both local and international sources that include official documents such as legislations, journals, policies, recognised authoritative books, research papers on the related fields, periodicals as well as newspapers.

1.6.2 Empirical Investigation

In order to understand how the school, especially the principal, manages communication between educators and parents to ensure an effective partnership between these two important stakeholders, a qualitative approach was used as the best option for the optimal collection of appropriate data. A qualitative research approach was chosen because the researcher wanted to gain a deep understanding of how communication between educators and parents is being managed in secondary schools. Locke, Spirduso and Silverman (1993) argue that a qualitative research approach is a systematic strategy for answering questions about people in a bounded social context where the focus of attention is on the perception and experience of participants. Therefore, to understand the meaning constructed by people and their experience regarding the management of communication between educators and parents, it is essential that a qualitative research approach is used in this research project.

1.6.2.1 Selection of schools and participants

Two schools from Umbumbulu Circuit were selected as research sites. First, these schools were selected on the basis that they were accessible to the researcher thus typifying the sampling procedure as convenient (Leedy, 1997). Second, one school is dysfunctional (an underperforming school, with poor a Grade 12 pass rate over the period of five years) and the other is functional (a school with exceptional grade 12 results over a period of five years).

Purposive sampling was used to select the participants for this research project. Lund Research Limited (2012) states that in purposive sampling, the researcher selects a specific type of people who can provide the desired information, either because they are the only people who possess it or can confirm it according to the criteria set by the researcher. The researcher targeted educators and parents serving on the school governing bodies of the secondary schools of this area for the reason that they could best provide reliable information about the role played by the principals in managing communication between educators and parents. Educators were asked to share their experiences on how communication with parents was managed by school principals. Parents on the other hand were asked to share their perceptions and experience on the nature and effectiveness of communication between home and school. Principals of both schools were selected as participants in this study as well. The researcher was of the opinion that the principals are best equipped to provide insightful opinion about their own role in managing communication in their schools.

The in-depth discussion on the selection of schools and participants will be provided in chapter three.

1.6.2.2 Data collection techniques

In order to find answers to the postulated research questions, this research project used a variety of data collection methods, namely individual interviews, focus group interviews and document analysis.

(i) Individual interviews

The individual interview technique is used to gather qualitative and in-depth information of those individuals specifically affected by a particular programme or project, its context, implementation, results and impact (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). The researcher used semi-structured individual

interviews as a data collection instrument to interview the two school principals from the respective research sites. The participants were individually interviewed in order to determine how they managed effective communication and what their opinions were with regard to the challenges and benefits of communication in ensuring a strong partnership between educators and parents. Permission was sought beforehand with the relevant authorities to undertake this study in schools as well as from the participants to tape-record the interview for later analysis.

(ii) Focus group interviews

Focus group interviews were conducted with educators and parents serving on the school governing bodies. This technique was chosen considering its numerous advantages. It is possible to conduct interviews within a relatively short period of time. Financial costs are limited, considerable probing is permitted and participants are exposed to each other's perceptions and opinions. As a flexible technique, unanticipated issues are explored which allow for participants to build on the responses from others, with the effect of gaining a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of study (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). The researcher was of the opinion that data collected from the focus group interviews would stimulate new ideas and provide creative concepts on the solving of problem of managing educator-parent communications which the researcher would not have been able to solve with the same efficiency if another data collection instrument were to be used. Permission was sought beforehand from the participants to tape-record the interview for later analysis.

(iii) Documentation analysis

The examination of relevant documents was also conducted to collect information about the schools. This included official documents such as school policies on partnerships, government policies on parental involvement at schools and documents used by schools for external communications. These documents included correspondence to parents, minutes of parents' meetings and filed records of communication with parents.

1.7 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The data analysis was conducted according to qualitative data analysis. The research particularly used the inductive analysis approach. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006) qualitative

data analysis is primarily an inductive process of organising data into categories and identifies patterns and relationships among categories, starting with specific data and ending with categories and patterns. In this way, more general themes emerge from data rather than being imposed prior to data collection.

Data analysis and data gathering was done simultaneously. As soon as the researcher began to gather data, he also began the process of sifting the data in search of patterns. With the data collection and analysis taking place simultaneously, information derived from initial interviews was used to compile the research report.

All the tape-recorded interviews, notes and other relevant material accumulated during research were synthesised and grouped together according to themes and categories. This allowed patterns to emerge from data to increase the understanding and enable the researcher to present the findings appropriately.

1.8 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF RESEARCH

To ensure validity, the data collection was based on more than one method. Individual interviews, focus group interviews and document analysis were used to collect data. Different methods were also used to collect data from the respondents during the interview sessions. The respondents were allowed to listen to the tape recorded interviews and were also given time to go through the notes to make sure that what was recorded was exactly what they said. This allowed the researcher the opportunity to make corrections before the final draft was analysed. The quotations from the interviews were direct quotations from the transcribed data.

Lastly, the interviews were conducted in the language that was familiar to the participants, mainly IsiZulu, and then translated into English for analysis. This reduced the potential for misinterpretation.

1.9 RESEARCH ETHICS

Scientific research is a form of human conduct, and therefore has to conform to generally acceptable norms and values by meeting a crucial obligation, namely to ensure that it is ethically

acceptable (Mouton, 2011). Hallowell, Lawton and Gregory (2005) and Meistry (2006) concur that ethics is considered to be an essential aspect of research practice.

Against the above statements, this research strove to maintain objectivity and integrity in conducting research. This was achieved by firstly requesting an ethical clearance from the University of South Africa as a procedure to follow when intending to conduct a research study. Also the permission from the Department of Education authorities was requested to conduct research in schools. Lastly, permission was requested from the school authorities of the selected schools. The informed consent was requested from the participants before the interviews were conducted. The participants were informed about the aim of the research and assured that their privacy, confidentiality and sensitivity would be protected. They were also informed that they had the right to withdraw from the participation at any time if they felt uncomfortable. The participants were assured that the information obtained from them would solely be used for the purpose of the research.

Importantly, the research reported the findings fully and did not misrepresent results in any manner. Lastly, plagiarism was avoided by always acknowledging the sources used in the research.

1.10 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

- Chapter 1 contains an introduction, the background of the research, the problem statement, aims and objective of the study and the description of concepts.
- Chapter 2 provides the literature review on role played by principals in managing communication between parents and educators in schools. The literature review also focuses on the importance of communication between educators and parents in the education of their children and the strategies of managing this communication. Prevailing studies on communication between educators and parents are also examined.
- Chapter 3 provides the detailed discussion of the research methodology used to investigate the management of a partnership between educators and parents at schools. This chapter also deals with the data collection methods used in the study and the analysis thereof.
- Chapter 4 deals with the presentation of results regarding the management of partnerships at the secondary schools in the Umbumbulu Circuit.

- Chapter 5 is the final chapter. It serves as a synthesis and the summary of results. The recommendations and conclusion also feature in this chapter.

1.11 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

The study focuses on the management of communication in schools between educators and parents. As stated by McMillan and Schumacher (2006), conceptual analysis involves clarifying the meaning of a concept by describing its essential meaning, different meanings and the appropriate use thereof. Therefore, this section defines the concepts as they are used in the research.

1.11.1 Partnership in Education

There are various terms concerning co-operation between schools as well as other institutions. Various names have been given to this co-operation which comprises a rich variety of characteristics. In some countries, it is generally referred to as Partnership in Education, but terms such as "School-community connections", "Community involvement", "Role players involvement" are also used to describe co-operation between education and community structures (Lemmer, 2003). Partnership in schools is a collaborative arrangement and endeavours to forge relationships among schools and other entities (corporate enterprise, community agencies, students, parents, colleges, other schools, and individuals) designed to share resources, achieve common goals, and to foster educational achievement, improvement and reforms. In this research, much attention is given to the parent community as partners and to parental involvement in education.

1.11.2 Effective Partnership

Easen (1992) define effective partnership as a working relationship that is characterized by a shared sense of purpose, mutual respect and willingness to negotiate. This implies a sharing of information, responsibility, skills, decision-making and accountability. This suggests that parents can be effective partners only if educators take notice of what they say, how they express their needs and if parents' contributions are treated important.

1.11.3 Effective Home-School Relationship

According to Lemmer (2003) effective home-school relationship is built on four elements: the creation of two way communications, enhancement of learning at home and at school, the mutual

support and joint decision-making. It is dependent upon strong relationships amongst parents, learners, educators and community personnel working collaboratively to achieve a common mission.

1.11.4 Principal

According to South African Schools Act, (RSA, 1996) the principal is "an educator appointed or acting as the head of a school". The principal is the main figure of authority in the school that leads by his example and by supportive action. The principal negotiates the value system with learners, staff and the community at large, articulates the value systems and reinforces it through the disciplinary systems (Squelch & Lemmer, 1994). The fact that the principal is referred to as a head of a school and educational manager automatically implies that he is in charge of all that goes on at school.

In this study 'principal' refers to the chief accountable officer and the most senior educator of the school, either a male or a female. The principal is also an educator whose primary responsibility is to teach, lead and manage the school.

1.11.5 Educator

The South African Council of Educators, Act 21 of 2000 defines the 'educator' as "a person who teaches, educates or trains other persons or provides professional educational services at an institution" (RSA, 2000).

In the study 'educator' means a person who teaches in the school. The concept of educator is synonymous with the concept of teacher.

1.11.6 Parent

The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (RSA, 1996) defines the concept 'Parent' as:

- The parent or guardian of a learner.
- The person legally entitled to custody of a learner.
- The person who undertakes to fulfill the obligation of a person referred to in 1 and 2 toward the learner's education at school.

Therefore, when referring to parents in this study the term is used broadly as set in out in the South African Schools Act.

1.11.7 Parental Involvement

Parental involvement as defined by Squelch and Lemmer (1994) means participation of parents in a wide range of school-based and home-based activities to improve their children's education. This involvement implies support given to schools which takes the form of co-operation, participation and partnership. Co-operation implies that parents support the school at home through their actions such as demonstrating loyalty toward the school and supervising their children's homework. Participation means that parents become more involved in school matters, for example, by serving on certain committees. Partnership means going to the extent that parents participate in decision making processes at the school.

1.11.8 Communication

Communication is a process of circular interaction involving a sender, receiver, and message. In human interaction, the sender or receiver may be a person or group of people. The message conveys meaning through the medium or symbol used to send it, as well as in its content (Moran, Harris & Moran, 2011).

1.12 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This research project explores the experiences and challenges of the school principals in managing communication, to ensure effective partnerships between educators and parents at schools. This chapter provided the background and the rationale of the study. The research design and the methodology that was used in the study were introduced. It also described the method of data analysis and interpretation. Lastly, it also looked at ways of ensuring reliability, validity and research ethics.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Schools strive to establish partnerships with parents to support teaching and learning. Effective communication is fundamental to this partnership and building of a sense of sharing between home and school (Kowalski, 2011). In these ever changing times, effective partnerships between educators and parents become even more essential to meet the needs of the children for whom they share responsibility. Epstein (2001) describes communicating with parents as one of the six major types of parent involvement practices critical to establishing strong working relationships between educators and parents. Cultivating the educator-parent partnership is also considered vital to the development of schools as teach communities (Schussler, 2003). Research has also consistently shown that learners' success is directly related to the strength of the partnership and communication between parents and schools (Ngidi & Qwabe, 2006; Van Deventer & Kruger, 2008; Lemmer, 2013). Olender, Elias and Mestroleo (2010) state that if we really believe that parents are partners in their children' education, then we must do whatever we can to bring them into the educational schema. It is therefore important that schools establish effective communication strategies that will to bridge the gap between home and school.

2.2 EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

2.2.1 Definition

Effective communication is a process of sending the right message that is also being correctly received and understood by the other person/s (Kowalski, 2011). Effective communication not only conveys information, but it encourages effort, modifies attitudes, establishes and maintains relationships (Bender, 2005). It could indeed be said that effective communication is the cement in the management process, which holds it together. However, effective communication is often complicated by an inability to accurately interpret communication. Misinterpretation results in inappropriate responses which may create serious and sometimes long-lasting difficulties flowing from communication distortion. In order to prevent such misunderstandings, schools must continuously strive to send relevant and objective messages (Marzano, 2003; Kowalski, 2011).

There are several ways in which the communication occurs between the school and other stakeholders. The following sections discuss these various ways in details.

2.3 HOME-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION

Steinberg (2007) defines home-school communication as "a transactional process of exchanging messages and negotiating meaning to establish and maintain relationships". The focus of this definition in this study is on the quality of relationship that develops between the participants as well as on the transfer and interpretation of messages.

Communication between school and home is critical to home-school relationship. The extent to which the school communicates with parents determines their involvement in the activities of the school, and it is the key factor in turning a relationship to a partnership. Crozier and Reay (2005) suggest that a more equitable dialogue between parents and teachers is one of the cornerstones of a positive partnership between educators and parents. Keyser (2006) concurs with the view that effective communication is central to the success of building a positive educator-parent partnership.

Lemmer and Van Wyk (2009) state that to make the school and home continually share their respective information about the child on a regular basis, two-way communication must be established. Two-way communication occurs when educators and parents dialogue together. Effective dialogue develops out of a growing trust, a mutuality of concern, and an appreciation of contrasting perspectives (Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2009).

Sharing the same view, Wright, Stegelin and Hartle (2007) argue that the process of sharing information through continuous dialogue is one of the most important components of building partnerships. Communication across schools, homes and communities involve commitment to be informed as well as to inform. Schools typically share information about programmes such as curriculum, schedules, routines, discipline, guidance, strategies, rules, philosophy of teaching and child progress. Families may share information about their perception of their children's personality, previous experience, health, strength and needs and their personal goals for their children. Therefore, the journey for all involved is to find communication strategies that will reach everyone.

However, Keyser (2006) states that many communications with families have been structured to be one way. Parent meetings are still a traditional method of one way communication in which a

teacher has prepared a development report to share with parents; even with daily checking this can be dominated by teachers reporting on a child's academic progress.

Therefore, working to improving the quality of communication will serve to nurture positive and strong partnerships with families.

2.3.1 The Theories of Family-School Communication

The section below examines theories of family and school partnership by Epstein. According to Epstein (2001) these theories help to explain the mechanism for building educator-parent partnership. Amongst the most useful are the symbolic interactionists, reference group theory and three perspectives on family school relations. The three main theories explain the basic differences in philosophies and approaches of educators and parent that produces more or fewer, shallow or deeper family-school partnerships. These theories are discussed in the next section.

2.3.1.1 Symbolic Interactionists Theory

According to this theory our self-concept, personality, values and beliefs are product of our interaction with others (Mead, 1934). This theory suggests that we learn how others perceive and anticipate our goals and behaviours, and we fashion our behaviour to fulfil the expectations of others and to receive their recognition. In terms of educator-parent partnerships, if the educators do not interact with parents, they cannot be informed about and understand the parent's expectations for their children or the educators, themselves. They cannot shape their teaching behaviour to be responsive to those expectations. If parents avoid teachers, they cannot be informed about or understand the school's expectations for their children or the parents, themselves. They cannot shape their behaviour to provide useful assistance to the students and teachers.

It is apparent from the above theory that the role of principals in facilitating communication between educators and parents is very essential to ensure that there is effective interaction between educators and parents so as they can both understand and be informed about each other's expectations.

2.3.1.2 Reference Group Theory

This theory (Merton, 1968) makes other important connection between esteem and interaction. A reference group is a collective or an individual who is taken into consideration by another group or individual that influences their attitude and behaviour. This happens when one group or individual recognises the importance of the other and admires the positions and actions of the others. For examples, in planning a children's educational programme, if educators considers the part parents play, it may be because the teacher considers parents an important reference group. If, in planning their family activities, parents take the educators' or schools' goals and actions into account; it may be because they consider educators an important reference group. Sometimes only a higher-status group influences the behaviour of the others, in an unreciprocated pattern. Educators may take parents into account without parents reciprocating the consideration, as in some communities where parents have strong control of educational politics and policies. Or parents may consider teachers an important reference group without educators reciprocating, as when parents try to help their children with school work even if the educators has not given their encouragement or ideas about how to help at home.

This theory suggests that management of communication between educators and parents is central to the success of building effective partnership between educators and parents. The role of the school principal is this regard is to develop a well- designed programme which will include good planning, organization and communication, which will encourage the importance of others and admire their position and actions when planning children's educational programmes.

2.3.2 Three Perspectives on Family-School Relations

According to Lemmer and van Wyk (2009), these three perspectives are:

- Separate responsibilities of families and school;
- Shared responsibilities of families and school; and
- Sequential responsibilities of families and school

2.3.2.1 Separate responsibilities of families and school

The assumption based on the separate responsibilities of institutions stresses inherent incompatibility, competition and conflict between families and school. This perspective assumes

that the school bureaucracies and family organisation are directed, respectively, by educators and parents whose different goals, roles and responsibilities are best fulfilled independently. It asserts that distinct goals of two institutions are achieved most efficiently and effectively when educators maintain their professional, universalistic standards and judgements about the children in their classrooms and when parents maintain their personal attention and particularistic standards and judgement about their children at home.

In managing communication, principals should be aware of this perception. The principals should know that useful knowledge can be found at home, therefore should ensure that educators respect the role played parents at home in nurturing and education of children.

2.3.2.2 Shared responsibilities of families and school

The assumption here emphasise the coordination, cooperation and complementarities of schools and families and encourages communication and collaboration between the two institutions. This perspective assumes that the schools and families share responsibility for the socialisation and education of the child. Educator and parents are believed to share common goals for their children, which can be achieved most effectively when educator and parents work together.

The role of the principal is to see to it that line of communication between educator and parents is always open to ensure that the common goal of helping children is achieved.

2.3.2.3 Sequential responsibilities of families and school

The third perspective emphasises the critical stages of educators' and parents' contributions to child development. This approach is based on the belief that the early years of a child's life are critical for later success, and by age five or six, when the child enters formal schooling, the child's personality and attitude toward learning are well established. Parents teach their young children needed skills, arrange educational programmes and experiences, and are guided or supported by social and educational agencies (e.g. pre-school educators and the media) to prepare their children for school; thereafter the teacher assumes the major responsibility for educating them.

The above literature clearly illustrate that it is vital for principals and staff to understand these theories of family-school communication as they can help in building effective partnership between

educators and parents in school. The section below look at the different ways of communication to strengthen effective partnership between educators and parents is achieved.

2.4 EFFECTIVE EDUCATOR-PARENT COMMUNICATION

There are many ways of initiating parent teacher partnerships and each of them should be planned with an eye to establishing a context in which the educator and parent are seen as equals. This will lead to the establishment of communication that is two way, respectful, honest and productive (Olsen & Fuller, 2012). Olsen and Fuller (2012) categorised the most common types of communication between educators and parents as written communication, verbal (oral) communication and communication through technology.

2.4.1 Written Communication

The goal of written communication is to organize concise and accurate information so that parents are able and willing to read and understand it (Graham-Clay, 2005). According to Steyn and van Niekerk (2007), written communication will always remain part of a manager's task. Newsletters, bulletin, circulars, e-mails, chatrooms and school web pages are all part of the interchange of communication in a school.

2.4.1.1 Welcoming letters

Olsen and Fuller (2012) believe that it is very important for teachers to initiate communication with parents. Sending a welcoming letter will show parents that teachers are interested in meeting their children, help them prepare for educators' expectations in the classroom and inform them on how they can become involved. Olsen and Fuller (2012) state that welcoming letters may include information about school policies, year plans, ways in which parents can be involved in their children's education and school activities and a description of communication tools that will be used throughout the year. In most cases, parents appreciate schools that take time to share important information and that, on its own, may strengthen the school-home partnership.

2.4.1.2. Newsletters

This is the most common form of written communication that the school can use in order to convey the message to parents. These are regular written publications that often inform parents about the

events at school. This opens up parental involvement and teacher-parent communication (Olsen & Fuller 2012). The principal may use a weekly or monthly newsletter as a medium to communicate to parents the important events taking place at school. This will create a valuable opportunity for parents to be involved at school.

2.4.1.3. Progress reports

This is a method of sharing students' academic progress. Educators evaluate and record students' grades and then write comments regarding students' weaknesses and strengths.

2.4.1.4. Parent Bulletin Board

Another way of communication that the school may use to communicate with parents is a bulletin board. A bulletin board, according to Olsen and Fuller (2012), is an attractive display of information for parents that includes notices of community events that might be of interest to parents, news clipping about school activities, announcements about school events, and so forth. The school must strategically place the bulletin board so that parents see it when they are at school. The bulletin board can also be an effective way the school can use to communicate with parents.

2.4.2 Communicating through Technology

Classroom phones, voice mails, e-mails, school and classroom websites are some of the most commonly used methods. When choosing an appropriate technology for communication with parents, teachers need to make sure that parents have access to that technology (Olsen & Fuller, 2012). Effective school leaders see technology not only as a tool for transforming teaching and learning, but also as a vital resource for building relationships. Unfortunately, technology planning in schools has focused primarily on hardware and software acquisitions and not on the utility of technology to improve school communication (Flanagan & Jacobsen, 2003). The principal and staff of the school need to take advantage of technology to improve communication with parents.

2.4.2.1 Electronic mail

Electronic mail or E-mail is probably the most prevalent technology tool used by schools for communication. In simple terms, it is identical to standard mail messages but delivery occurs

electronically rather than physically. E-mail can be and often is interactive; information is exchanged by the communicants. The process occurs in asynchronous time because there is a lag time period between sending and receiving messages. Without question, e-mail, more than any other technology tool, has made it possible for stakeholders to initiate conversations with the school (Kowalski 2011). According to Cleary (2008), e-mail is increasingly being used because of its low cost, speed and ability to convey information to multiple audiences.

2.4.2.2 Electronic newsletters

Electronic newsletters are transmitted via the internet. According to Kowalski (2011), electronic newsletters are more flexible and less expensive than hard-copy newsletters. However, electronic newsletters have a serious limitation in many schools, as they cannot be used to reach stakeholders who do not have access to the internet.

2.4.2.3 School web pages

School web pages have become one of the most widely-used technological products. Kowalski (2011) believes that the following issues should be decided by the school governing bodies and principals when using this type of communication.

- Roles and responsibilities – Policy should address roles and responsibilities with regard to the school website. A webmaster must be appointed to oversee the technical aspect of the site and an editor to monitor the content that is published.
- Educational value – the website is intended to support the PR function, which in turn supports the school's teaching and learning objective. Therefore, the content must be regularly received for value to ensure that information is accurate, fair and relevant to the reviewing publics
- Student privacy – a school policy should be adopted regarding confidentiality before information can be posted to the website.

2.4.3 Verbal Communication

Verbal communication is any communication involving words which makes up a particular language (Cleary, 2008). However according to Cleary (2008), the recipient of the message considers both verbal and non-verbal aspects of a message; therefore the two should complement

each other. If the sender conveys one meaning verbally, but another non-verbally, that leaves the recipient confused and is likely to cause misunderstanding. Verbal communication requires strong interpersonal skills from the educators and a desire to listen and understand. Educators who project warmth, friendliness, honesty and respect have fewer difficulties establishing good relationships with parents, than those who talk to parents in a cold, professional tone (Olsen & Fuller, 2012).

Informal communication is the most common regular kind of communication. It can be a casual conversation parents have with educators while dropping off or picking up their children from school. If this is done with respect and with genuine interest in the parent's child, it can achieve positive results. This is because it does not occur in a more formal setting, such as an educator-parent conference where the parent may feel as if formal feedback is what goes on records.

Despite the fact that communication is fundamental to the establishment of effective partnership between educators and parents, sometimes it is difficult to achieve. The section that follows will therefore discusses the major barriers to communication.

2.5 BARRIERS TO COMMUNICATION

There are several barriers or roadblocks that may interfere with the creation of good communication between school and parents. According to Cleary (2008), communication barriers or roadblocks are any factors that hamper the achievement of understanding between a sender and a recipient. Both the school and parents set up these roadblocks. Some roadblocks are used to protect positions and others occur because participants are unable to understand one another's positions. The principal as a manager at the school should be aware of these roadblocks so he can effectively manage communication between all the stakeholders of the school, particularly between educators and parents. Cleary (2008) states that awareness of the roadblocks will help to improve communication.

2.5.1 Parent Roadblocks

Berger and Riojas-Cortez (2012) identified the following parent roadblocks:

- My own and my child guardian role;
- Avoidance role; and

- Club-waving advocate role.

2.5.1.1 My own and my child guardian role

Many parents, often subconsciously, view their children as an extension of themselves. "Criticize my child and you criticise me" is their message (Berger & Riojas-Cortez 2012). When parents put up a shield against perceived criticism, it becomes difficult to communicate with them. They may withdraw from open, honest communication in an effort to protect their child and their own self-esteem. A parent's vested interest in the child can be channelled in a positive direction. Berger and Riojas-Cortez (2012) state that effective communication, with positive suggestions for encouraging the child, can help parents become partners with the school.

2.5.1.2 Avoidance role

Berger and Riojas-Cortez (2012) state that those parents, who do not feel the sense of belonging, avoid going to events that take place at school. If parents feel inadequate, they avoid coming into contact with the school. Those parents can benefit from encouragement so that they can contribute and be involved. Van Deventer and Kruger (2008) agree that to create a school environment that is conducive to good school-community relations and effective communication, the principal can make the school facilities available for community activities such as evening classes for adults and social purposes as well as maintaining regular contact with outside communities. The principal and educators must be tactful, considerate and sympathetic about what they can do with respect to requests from the public.

In managing educator-parent partnership, the principal must be tactful, considerate and sympathetic about what they can do with respect to requests from the parent.

2.5.1.3 Club-waving advocate role

Sometimes parents get carried away with their devotion to their children and they exhibit this through a power play. These parents often become abrasive in their desire to protect their children. Club-waving parents express concerns through confrontation (Berger & Riojas-Cortez 2012). Schools must therefore acknowledge these concerns and change the situation when it is sensible to do so. In addition, parents could be given opportunities to be leaders in areas where they can contribute. The school governing body could be a forum for this.

2.5.2 School Roadblocks

Berger and Riojas-Cortez (2012) identified the following as some of the school roadblocks.

2.5.2.1 Authority figure role

All too often, school educators or principals who act as chief executive officers hinder communication. These educators and principals claim to be the authority, ready to impart information to the parents. They neglect to set the stage for parents to be partners in the discussion (Berger & Riojas-Cortez, 2012). Bloom (2001) also states that power differentials that exist between families and schools sometimes affect home-school communication. Some schools tend to communicate with parents in a controlling, disrespectful and demoralizing way.

Schools that ignore and communicate with parents in a disrespectful way destroy effective communication. The principal and staff therefore need to be aware of this roadblock in order to improve communication with parents. The role of the principals is to establish and manage communication that is two way and respectful between educators and parents.

2.5.2.2 Busy teacher role

According to Berger and Riojas-Cortez (2012), the greatest roadblock to good communication between parents and teachers is time. Steyn and Niekerk (2007) agree that time is an element in communication that usually causes problems. Some teachers are too busy and do not have time to communicate with parents. Both teachers and parents need to set aside time for communication. In order for schools to overcome this barrier, the role of the principal should to plan reorganize schedules to include time to communicate with parents.

2.5.2.3 School climate

Sekongo (2002) indicates that some schools have an uninviting atmosphere; many parents do not always feel as if they belong, or that the school cares, and that schools tend to communicate with them mainly when their children are in trouble. Thus, communication between parents and schools is largely of a negative nature.

Some of the biggest barriers to communicating and working effectively with families are the attitudes of many schools (educators) toward families and families toward schools. Van Deventer and Kruger (2008) believe that a school climate has a strong directive influence on the motivation and achievement of a good partnership between the school and families. The principal of a school and its staff should therefore consciously strive towards creating a positive and open school climate.

An environment influences behaviour as well as shaping thoughts and creating feelings in people, both adults and children. The environment gives messages about how to behave. It may not be easy to set up the environments that invite parent to schools, but, when possible, it is a worthy goal (Gonzalez-Mena, 2010).

Gonzalez-Mena (2010) suggests that the school must create a sense of belonging from the beginning, and make sure that the school environment is welcoming to everybody.

Berger and Riojas-Cortez (2012) emphasise on an open-door policy. Schools that have a closed-door policy and are unpleasant or that require appointments for everything set a negative environment for home-school relations. By establishing an open-door policy early, the environment is set for parents and school to work together. Schools need to avoid the 'problem conference' syndrome. Dialogue between parents and school should occur before a problem develops. This can be done through constant contact with parents.

The above literature review on communication barriers demonstrated that there can be some barriers to effective communication between educators and parents in schools. To avoid these roadblocks, the principals should play an active role in managing communication to strengthen educator-parent partnership. However, to manage communication effectively, the school principals should develop effective communication skills that will help them to be highly effective in performing their tasks, especially in managing communication. The management of that strengthen educator-parent partnership require principal who are effective communicators. The following section will discuss the role of the school principal as an effective communicator. In this section, the focus will be on the ten traits of highly effective principals and relate how these traits can be utilized by the principals in managing communication to strengthen educator-parent partnership in their schools.

2.6 THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL AS EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATOR

A key element of an effective school is an effective principal with effective communication skills (McEwan, 2003). Although school success is influenced by all stakeholders, school principals remain one of the most important elements in this success. The educational leader who maintains an effective leadership style and healthy relationship usually communicates effectively. McEwan (2003) identified ten traits of highly effective school principals that are essential in the communication and management of schools, to establish a climate of teaching and learning that fosters academic achievement. These ten traits are discussed in the next section.

2.6.1 Ten Traits of a Highly Effective Principal

This section will look at the traits of a highly effective principal. Each trait will be described and discussed. At the end of each trait, benchmarks will be listed.

2.6.1.1 The highly effective principal is a communicator

The highly effective principal "is a communicator, a genuine and open human being with the capacity to listen, empathise, interact and connect with individual students, parents and educators in productive, helping and healing ways, as well as the ability to teach, present and motivate people in a larger group setting"(McEwan 2003).

Principals are always communicating, interacting, and maintaining contacts with different people all the time they are on the job. According to McEwan (2003) the average principal conceivably communicates with thousands of individuals during a school year. Highly effective principals must therefore have good communication skills because the most important task of the principal is to communicate in appropriate, productive and meaningful ways with everyone. Gupton (2003) states that if the principals of today are to be effective leaders, as distinguished from managers, they must be masters of the crucial C's: Communication, Connection, Collaboration, Community building, Child advocate and Curriculum choices. The effectiveness of any principal as a leader is tied to his ability to master the skill of communication more often than any other skill. Highly effective principals lay aside their own personal needs to be heard all the time and are able to listen to others, pay attention, connect emotionally with others and be sensitive.

This trait suggests that the principals in managing communication in their schools must have the ability to pay attention and listen to both educators and parents. They must have empathy to the needs and concerns of educators and parents, and be able to connect emotionally and productively with all the stakeholders.

2.6.1.2 The highly effective principal is an educator

The highly effective principal "is an educator, a self-directed instructional leader with a strong intellect and personal depth of knowledge regarding research-based curriculum, instruction, and learning that motivates and facilitates the intellectual growth and development of self, students, educators and parents" (McEwan, 2003: 24).

The primary task of the school is teaching and learning. It is therefore the primary task of the principal, as the leader of the school, to ensure that teaching and learning is taking place and is effective. The highly effective principal supports and protects the instructional time at all costs. An effective principal is an instructional leader. Gupton (2003) defines instructional leadership as focused on student learning. It consists of direct or indirect behaviour that significantly affects teacher instruction and, as a result, student learning. A highly effective principal as an instructional leader recognises instruction as the top priority of the school; knows that management is only a part of leading; and goes beyond managing from the office to monitoring and providing support for instruction to educators. A highly effective principal is aware of what is going on in the classroom. This type of principal seeks, in a collective manner with educators, the ways to improve instruction. Gupton (2003) believes that understanding children and how they grow and learn is essential to teaching and being an effective principal.

2.6.1.3 The highly effective principal is an envisioner

According to McEwan (2003: 43), an envisioner is an "individual who is motivated by a sense of calling and purpose, focused on a vision of what school can be, and guided by a mission that has the best interest of all students at its core".

The highly effective principal develops and protects the vision of a school as a leader. For any organisation, including a school, to be successful, it must have a vision which will give the sense of direction and common purpose to everyone. It is therefore the task of the school principal to give that direction and a sense of achieving the common purpose. Van Deventer and Kruger (2008)

describe an effective leader as someone who demonstrates the ability to bridge the gap between where the school is and where he eventually wants it to be. The highly effective principal is able to look at a low performing school and envision what it will look like after the mission has been achieved. A highly effective principal always has a clear vision for the school and has the ability to focus on the vision and follow it to completion. He is not easily distracted in his efforts to achieve the vision. McEwan (2003) points out that highly effective principals are not distracted by what some think should be done or by what others believe cannot be done; their eyes are fixed on the finish line. This quality sets apart highly effective principals from other principals: the ability to see what others cannot see and make it happen.

However, to make the vision a reality, effective principals need to have the ability to motivate all stakeholders to believe in the vision. According to Steyn and Niekerk (2007), highly motivated staffs are more cooperative, more productive, always looking for better ways of doing things and are usually concerned about quality.

The role of the principal in terms of this trait is to develop a school vision that is clear in giving the sense of direction and common purpose to both educators and parents. The common purpose of effective educator-parent partnership is the educational achievement of children in schools. The principal should therefore articulate this vision clearly and make it happen.

2.6.1.4 The highly effective principal is a facilitator

McEwan (2003: 69) sees a highly effective principal as a facilitator, "an individual with outstanding human relations skills that include the ability to build individual relationships with parents, teachers and students, collaborative teams with staff members and parents and a school-wide community of leaders".

The principalship is a people-centred job; you interact with different people all the time. There are varieties of management skills that the principal needs to possess to effectively manage a successful school, but without the ability to form relationships, the management skills that the principal possesses become meaningless. It is very important for principals to establish and maintain sound human relationships with all school stakeholders. Highly effective principals take time out of their busy schedule to develop relationships with educators, parents and learners in the school to bond and promote cooperation with all school stakeholders. Individual relationships always have an

impact on the productivity and how work is done. Van Deventer and Kruger (2008) believe task performance is adversely affected by a poor relationship. If people are unhappy, that may have a negative impact on their productivity, hence poor student achievement. McEwan (2003) agrees that productivity in a school does depend to a great extent on how well people get along with each other and how they are treated by their administrator. Happy educators will always perform their duties to impress their principal and always yield good results.

The trait of highly effective principal as a facilitator implies that the principal should facilitate and manage communication in a way that it establishes a sound relationship, promote parental involvement and cooperation between educators and parents.

2.6.1.5 A highly effective principal is a change master

McEwan (2003) believes that a highly effective principal is a change master, "a flexible, futuristic, and realistic leader who is able to motivate as well as manage change in an organised, positive and enduring fashion".

Change is an inevitable part of life. Our lives are always in a continuous process of change as the circumstances demand. Like any other organisation, the school's future depends on continuous change to be successful. Van Deventer and Kruger (2008) state that any organisation depends heavily nowadays on its ability to master change, which becomes a pervasive, persistent and permanent condition of all organisations. It is therefore the task of the highly effective principal to master this change in a school. The success of any school will depend on how the change is managed.

Sometimes change can be met with resistance as people are sceptical to move from a situation which is comfortable to a situation which is new and challenging. According to Van Deventer and Kruger (2008), the intensity of educators' resistance to change depends on what is being changed and whether the stability of the school is being threatened. The resistance might be caused by fear, uncertainty and frustration to the people involved. Highly effective principals understand and know how to manage the change in an organized way. McEwan (2003) states that the highly effective principal knows how to help resisters overcome their fear, uncertainty and even anger that are a natural part of any change.

Principals who are change masters become successful in their mission of turning an underperforming school into an excellent, highly performing school.

As mentioned in 1.3 of this study, communication between educators and parents in some secondary schools is still a challenging issue and partnership does not exist, therefore acquiring this trait can help the principals to motivate both educators and parents to change this situation and work together to achieve effective partnership. The principal should therefore be able to manage change in an organized way and master the process of change in their mission to strengthen partnership in schools.

2.6.1.6 A highly effective principal is a culture builder

This is the one of the important traits of a highly effective principal, to be a culture builder. According to McEwan (2003: 89) a culture builder is "an individual who communicates (talk) and model (walk) a strong and viable vision based on achievement, character, personal responsibility and accountability".

Van Deventer and Kruger (2008) define organisational culture as reflecting the underlying assumption about the way work is performed, what is acceptable and what is not acceptable, and what behaviour and actions are encouraged and discouraged. The culture of the school has an impact on the performance of the individual and the school as a whole. Successful schools are built on a good and a positive culture that promotes effective teaching and learning. The highly effective principal as a leader of a school has a responsibility, as well as the power, to build a positive culture that promotes positive working environment and effective teaching and learning at school.

A highly effective principal also leads by example, in term of character, personal responsibility and accountability. The effective principal is a role model to educators, learners and parents. The effective principal walks the talk. The principal cannot expect educators to be responsible and accountable if he is not responsible and accountable. The highly effective principal as a leader builds culture by modelling the way. McEwan (2003) believes that to be a culture builder is to engineer development of culture that is fuelled by "caring, concern, collegiality, humour, collaboration, communication and character, combined with accountability, responsibility and achievement".

The effectiveness of the school does not depend only on good curriculum and beautiful buildings but rather on the school culture that promotes responsibility, accountability, collaboration, effective communication amongst stakeholders, and effective teaching and learning. Van Deventer and Kruger (2008) emphasise that by effectively managing the culture of the school, the principal will create an environment in which both educators and learners will positively and enthusiastically contribute to the success of the teaching and learning.

This trait suggests that the principals' role in managing communication should be to build the school culture that promote effective communication, collaboration and the development of the shared vision between educators and parents. The vision of building school culture should be a collaborative activity among the principal, educators and parents. The principal should therefore build the school culture that will strengthen effective partnership between educators and parents.

2.6.1.7 The highly effective principal is an activator

The highly effective principal is "an activator, an individual with gumption (drive, motivation, enthusiasm, energy, spunk, and humour) enough to spare and share with staff, parents and students" (McEwan, 2003:106).

A highly effective principal is an individual who is enthusiastic, always motivated to do more, always looking for new ways of doing things, is persistent, and takes advantage of any opportunity to develop the school. McEwan (2003) states that activators as highly effective principals are "quick to take advantage of any opportunity for advancing and enhancing their schools programmes and reputation in the community, they finish what they start, follow through on what they pledge to do, and quadruple their output by empowering and energizing others to work with the same degree of intensity and enthusiasm for their vision". Highly effective principals are able to motivate both educators and learners to work harder with great enthusiasm to achieve the vision of the school. Unless the principal is a good activator, he will be unable to empower, energise and motivate the whole team to work together as one to achieve the common purpose.

For effective partnership between educators and parents to be achieved, the principals should take an active role in mobilizing both educators and parents to work together. The principals should further always look for more effective ways of managing communication between educators and parents to achieve effective partnership.

2.6.1.8 The highly effective principal is a producer

McEwan (2003: 131) describe a producer as a "result-oriented individual with a strong sense of accountability to taxpayers, parents, students and educators who translate high expectations into intellectual development and academic achievement for all students".

These types of principals focus on achievement, productivity and accountability. They recognise that the school's success is judged on the learners' achievement and learners' academic achievement gives them the opportunity and options in their future. These principals also recognise that parents have high expectations about their children; they therefore have a strong sense of accountability to their communities. The highly effective principal recognises that to turn a low-performing schools into a high-performing school, the focus should be on achievement, set standards of learning and teaching, good and positive school culture, as well as organised developmental strategies to improve the school. According to McEwan (2003: 124) producer principals know that "without system, organisation, structure, habits and routine achievement, achievement doesn't just happen. The highly effective principal believes that achievement is the bottom line".

2.6.1.9 The highly effective principal is a character builder

The highly effective principal is "a character builder, a role model whose values, words and deeds are marked by trustworthiness, integrity, authenticity, respect, and generosity" (McEwan, 2003: 134).

A highly effective principal builds a school with a strong character. The character of a school, according to McEwan (2003), is derived from the lives of the adults in that school and most particularly the life of the principal. From this argument, it is clear that the principal as an executive officer of the school influences the character of that school. If the principal is unfair, disrespectful, discouraging, everyone will soon feel free to follow. The powerful force of a school character is derived from the principal. The principal with a strong character builds and manages the school with a strong character.

McEwan (2003) describes a school with character as a school with a high level of school pride, commitment to a common cause, a willingness to accept responsibility, a mutual respect for one another on the part of student and educator, an emphasis on honesty, reliability and fairness, and

respect for individual rights but not at the expense of the school community. The highly effective principal always models these qualities every day. Without character builder, the other nine traits could be meaningless.

The role of the school principal in managing communication, it terms of this trait, should to promote the character of mutual respect, trust and responsibility between educators and parents.

2.6.1.10. The highly effective principal is a contributor

This is the final trait of the ten traits of highly effective principals discussed in this section. McEwan (2003: 154) describes the contributor as "a servant leader, encourager, and enabler whose utmost priority is making a contribution to the success of others".

Highly effective principals know that to be a good leader is to be a good servant to the people they lead by serving their schools. The servant leader according to Greenleaf (1977) serves the people he/she leads, which imply that employees are an end in themselves rather the means to an organisational purpose or bottom line. This definition clearly means that the highly effective principals devote themselves to serving the needs of all staff rather than being served by others. They focus on meeting the needs of those they lead, bring out the best in them, and always encourage them. Like servant leaders, highly effective principals look after the needs of educators and learners, so they can reach their full potential, and perform at their best. If educators, learners and parents feel that their needs are well looked after by the principal, they become more effective in their duties, and more involved in the life of the school, hence the school achieves better results.

None of the ten traits is more critical than that of the contributor to the realisation of the other nine traits of highly effective principals. The highly effective principal knows that without the contributor trait, it will be very difficult to manage communication to achieve effective amongst all stakeholders, especially educators and parents.

The discussion above has shown that all of the ten traits are important in order to be a highly effective principal. Even though it is impossible for one principal to master all ten traits, but they must somehow try to achieve all of them to some extent to be highly effective principals. If the principals can master these traits, they can be able to manage communication in their schools and develop a long lasting and an effective educator-parent partnership.

2.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, a literature review on the educator- parent communication was described. The literature study revealed that communication between educator and parents is critical to home-school relationship. It also indicated that effective communication is the cornerstone for effective partnerships to exist; therefore it is always important for principal to find more effective ways of communication between the school and parents to ensure that a strong partnership is realised. Theories of family-school communication were discussed. These theories explained the differences in philosophies and approaches of educators and parents to the family-school partnership. It also looked at the role of school principals in managing communication. Lastly, ten traits of highly effective principals were discussed. The literature study revealed that these traits are essential in the communication and management of the school, to establish a climate of teaching and learning that fosters academic achievement.

The next chapter describes the methods and procedures that were followed in collecting data.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Educational research involves the rigorous and self-critical process of arriving at dependable answer to questions and solutions to problems of an educational nature through the systematic collection and analysis of data, the interpretation and presentation of findings and the logical construction of sustained argument (Sharp, 2012). The goal of research is therefore simple to collect information that will assist in providing solution to the problem raised by the study. This goal will only be realised if the envisaged research is conducted in a manner that the information collected is precise and relevant to the question posed. The main purpose of this study is to examine how the school, especially the principal, manages communication between educators and parents to ensure that effective partnership between educators and parents is achieved. As was already indicated in 1.3, four sub-questions were formulated which will be investigated so that the solution to these sub-questions can contribute to the solution of the main research problem or question.

The four sub-questions which were formulated were:

(i)   What is the role of the school principal in facilitating communication between educators and parents to ensure an effective educator-parent partnership?

(ii)   What is the nature of communication between educators and parents in secondary schools?

(iii)   How do educators and parents see the role of the (school) principal in managing communication to ensure an effective educator-parent partnership?

(iv)   How can guidelines be proposed for (school) principals to manage communication between educators and parents?

The methods that were used to collect relevant data, together with the methods that were used to analyse the collected data are reviewed in this chapter. In a nutshell, this chapter provides a broad methodological orientation of the study and also endeavours to clarify key issues in the research design and methods. First, the chapter outlines the research design and the rationale for choosing that type of design. Second, it describes the research sample and how the sampling procedures and data analysis will be accounted for and treated. Finally, the adherence to ethical issues is explained.

3.2 THE RESEARCH DESIGN

3.2.1 Qualitative Research Design

In an attempt to determine the role of the school principal in facilitating and managing communication between educators and parents, the researcher adopted a qualitative research approach. McMillan and Schumacher (2006) state that qualitative research design is a method that emphasises the gathering of data on naturally occurring phenomenon. Berg (2009) further emphasises that qualitative research properly seeks answers to questions by examining various social settings and the individual who inhabits these settings. Qualitative researchers, then, are most interested in how humans arrange themselves and their settings and how inhabitants of these settings make sense of their surroundings. Therefore, this approach allows researchers to share in the understandings and perceptions of others and to explore how people structure and give meaning to their daily lives.

Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005) concur that a qualitative research approach deals with subjective data that are produced by the minds of the respondents where researchers attempt to understand the significance that the respondents attached to the environment. There are no manipulations or control of behaviour or setting, nor any external imposed constraints. Bouma and Ling (2006) also state that qualitative research sets out to provide an impression of a phenomenon. Qualitative researchers exercise great discipline to find out what is going on from the perspective of those who are in the situation being researched.

The characteristics of qualitative research which makes it an appropriate approach for this study are discussed in the following paragraphs.

3.2.2 Characteristics of Qualitative Research

3.2.2.1 Qualitative research aims to extend understanding within the context of a particular situation

The qualitative design describes and interprets the experience regarding a particular situation in order to understand the participant's meaning ascribed to that situation. The researcher puts aside any prejudgment and collects data on how the individual make senses out of a particular experience or situation. The typical technique is for researchers to conduct in-depth interviews with the informants directed toward understanding their perspective with the phenomenon (McMillan &

Schumacher, 2006). Creswell (2009) suggests that the researcher enters the informant's world and, through on-going interaction, seeks the informant's perspectives and meanings.

3.2.2.2 Studies may be designed and redesigned

The qualitative research design is based on flexible and explorative methods because it enables the researcher to change data progressively, so a deeper understanding of what is being investigated can be achieved (Welman, *et al.,* 2005). Bouma and Ling (2006) also state that a qualitative research design allows for more continuous reflection on the research in progress and more interaction with the participants in the research, and there is usually more room for on-going alteration as the research proceeds. Creswell (2009) concurs by stating that the research process for qualitative research is emergent. This means that the initial plan for research cannot be tightly prescribed and all phases of the process may change or shift after the researcher enters the field and begins to collect data.

3.2.2.3 Multiple sources of data

Berg (2009:4) states that qualitative research design includes "methods of observation as experimental natural settings, photographic techniques, historical analysis, documents and textual analysis, sociometry, sociodrama and similar ethnomethodological experimentation, ethnographic research, and a number of unobtrusive techniques". Qualitative research typically gathers multiple forms of data, such as interviews, observations and documents, rather than relying on a single data source. The researchers then review all of the data, make sense of it and organise it into categories or themes that cut across all of the data sources (Creswell, 2009).

3.2.2.4 Inductive data analysis

Induction is the formation of general theories from specific observation as opposed to deduction, which is the derivation of a new logical truth from existing fact (Goddard & Melville, 2001). According to Creswell (2009), qualitative researchers build their patterns, categories, and themes from bottom up by organising the data into increasingly more abstract units of information. This inductive process means working back and forth between the themes and the database until the researchers have established a comprehensive set of themes. It also involves collaborating with

participants interactively, so that participants have a chance to shape the themes that emerge from the process. This approach provides a means for discovering the practical understanding of meaning and action, therefore organising or reducing data in order to uncover patterns of human activities, action and meaning (Berg, 2009).

3.2.2.5 Researcher' role

Unlike the quantitative researcher who is detached from the study to avoid bias, a qualitative researcher becomes immersed in the situation and phenomenon being studied. A qualitative researcher assumes interactive social roles in which they record observations and interviews with participants in a range of contexts. Qualitative scholars emphasise the importance of data being collected by a skilled, prepared person in contrast to an objective, neutral instrument such as a survey (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

3.2.3 Limitations of a Qualitative Research Design

Since the qualitative research design uses an inductive approach to data analysis, the result of induction is not always necessary true, while the results of the deductive approach used in quantitative research is always true since the results are derived from existing facts (Goddard & Melville, 2001).

Also since the researcher becomes immersed in the phenomenon being studied, the researcher may be overly emotional or subjectively involved, there may also be possible manipulations by research participants of the research process to serve their own interest (Mouton, 2011).

3.3 SELECTION OF RESEARCH SITES AND PARTICIPANTS

3.3.1 Selection of Schools

As indicated in 1.6.2.1, the participating schools were selected on the basis of accessibility to the researcher, thus typifying the sampling procedure as convenient (Leedy, 1997). Apart from accessibility, the research sites were selected in anticipation of collecting information rich data from one dysfunctional and one functional school to provide a means of contrast. Bipath (2002) describes dysfunctional schools as schools associated with poverty; material deprivation and disruption of

communities that was characteristic of apartheid policies of previous government and which may have contributed to the breakdown of teaching and learning in schools. These schools generally attain 40% and below in the National Senior Certificate Examination. According to Christie (1998: 289) four categories of problems have been identified in these schools: poor physical and social facilities, organisational problems, poor school-community relationships and poor relationships between the educational department and the schools. Bipath (2002) further describes the functional schools as schools that attain pass rate of 80% and higher in the National Senior Certificate Examination; schools that are well organised and managed and exhibit order and discipline; schools that have rules and regulations that are known and adhered to by both educators and learners; educators and learners that attend school daily; and schools that have a good school-community relationship. As indicated in paragraph 1.6.2.1, this study was conducted at the two secondary schools, namely, a dysfunctional school with a poor Grade 12 pass rate over the period of five years, and a functional school with exceptional Grade 12 results over the period of five years).

3.3.2 Selection of Participants

The participants for this study were purposively selected which resonates with selecting participants for a particular purpose based on particular indicators (Bogdan, 2007). The indicators relate to their involvement in active communication with school stakeholders with a view to strengthen partnerships. In line with what has already being discussed in 1.6.2.1, participants meeting this criterion were principals of the selected schools, five class educators of grade 12 learners and three parents, namely the chairperson and two other parents serving on the school governing bodies of the respective schools. Grade 12 class educators were chosen because they are perceived to be the most experienced teachers and are in charge of the most senior and a critical grade at school. Grade 12 results are a reflection of the entire school's academic performance. Grade 12 class educators have a responsibility to communicate information to parents as needed. The researcher therefore is of the opinion that they can provide reliable information with regard to their experience on the effectiveness of communication between educators and parents. The parents serving on the governing body were chosen because, by law, they officially represent the parent component of the school. It is their responsibility to communicate with both educators and parents as needed. The researcher believed that they could provide the desired information with regard to their opinion on

the role played by the school principal in managing effective communication between educators and parents.

3.4 METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

In this study a methodological triangulation was used to collect data. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) maintain that methodological triangulation involves the use of more than one method in the pursuit of a given objective. This improves the validity of the research. This research study therefore used a variety of data collection methods, namely individual interviews, focus group interviews and document analysis.

3.4.1 Interviews

Creswell (2009) states that qualitative interviewing means that the researcher conducts face-to-face interviews with participants, interviews participants by telephone, or engages in focus group interviews with six to eight interviewees in a group. These interviews involve semi-structured and generally open-ended questions that are few in number and intended to elicit views and opinion from the participants. Berg (2009) describe semi-structured interviews as interviews that are more or less structured, questions may be re-ordered during the interview, wording of questions is flexible, level of language may be adjustable and the interviewee may answer questions and clarify issues, and the interviewer may add or delete probes to add further insight as the interview progresses. Semi-structured interviews were therefore used for this research study because of flexibility with regard to presentation structure, and to allow the respondents to freely respond without limitation.

Against the above background, this research study utilised both individual and focus group interviews to collect data.

3.4.1.1 Individual interviews

An individual interview is a one-on-one method of data collection that involves an interviewer and an interviewee discussing specific topics in depth, used when seeking information on individual, personal experiences from people about a specific topic or issue (Hennink, Huttler & Bailey*., 2011). The researcher used semi-structured individual interviews as a data collection instrument with the

principals from the selected schools. The purpose of the individual interviews was to determine their role in managing effective communication between educators and parents in their schools and what their views are with regard to the challenges and benefits of communication to ensuring a strong partnership between educators and parents. The researcher believed that they were the best equipped to provide insightful information about their own role.

(a) Advantages of individual interviews

The individual interview is chosen because it allows the researcher control over the process and the interviewee the freedom to express his or her thoughts. It can be done over the telephone, thus allowing the researcher convenience and unlimited geographical range (O'Leary, 2004). It is suitable when one is particularly interested in complexity or when the issues are controversial or personal (de Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport, 2011).

The individual face-to-face interviews were conducted by the researcher to allow the researcher total control of the process and the interviewee the freedom to express their thought without the limited by time as it would be if the interviews were done telephonically. This gave the researcher the freedom to ask for clarity on unclear answers and to follow up on interesting answers. The telephone was used to set up appointments only with the interviewees.

(b) Disadvantages of individual interviews

The individual interviews also have some limitations. They tend to be quite expensive and time consuming (Cozby & Bates, 2012). The responses could be misconstrued or even, at times, untruthful (de Vos, *et al*., 2011). Interviews done over the telephone may cause the inability of a researcher to read non-verbal cues and have less control throughout the interview process (O'Leary, 2004).

The researcher addressed these issues by conducting face-to-face interviews with the principals to be able to read all non-verbal cues during the interview process. This approach also helped in reducing the cost of telephonic interviews thus getting enough time to get to a deeper understanding of what was being investigated.

3.4.1.2 Focus group interviews

Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005) describe the focus group in-depth interview as the type of interview that consists of number of individuals or interviewees that are drawn together for the purpose of expressing their opinion on a specific set of open-ended questions. Focus group interviews were conducted with both the Grade 12 educators and parents serving on the governing bodies of the two schools. The participants were interviewed in order to determine their perceptions on the nature and effectiveness of communication between educators and parents, and their opinion with regard to the role played by the school principal in managing effective communication to ensure strong educator- parent partnership.

(a) Advantages of focus group interviews

The focus group interview data collection method is chosen due to its numerous advantages. Data are collected in a group environment, which provide a large volume of information from variety of perspective (Hennink, *et al.,* 2011). Interaction among the participants can stimulate them to state their feelings, perceptions and beliefs that the participants would not express if interviewed individually (Patton, 1990). Focus group interviews provide a stimulating and secure setting for members to express ideas without fear of criticism, create fuller, deeper understanding of phenomena being studied and stimulate spontaneous exchange of ideas, thoughts and attitude in the security of being in a crowd (de Vos, *et al.,* 2011).

The researcher was therefore of the opinion that, data collected from the focus group interviews would provide a large volume of information on solving the problem of managing effective communication between educator and parents which the researcher would not have been able to gather if an individual interview were to be used.

(b) Disadvantages of focus group interviews

There are, however, several disadvantages of focus group interviews that may interfere with the reliability of data collected from participants. Focus group interviews can be quite costly and require a researcher who is well-skilled to conduct and manage group dynamics, they are less confidential and individual members may have a lot of social influence and dominate the conversation (Hennink, *et al.,* 2011). Participants may display social posturing or desire to be polite

and fit in with the norms or they may feel that they are being forced to comply (de Vos, *et al.,* 2011). It is not the most appropriate method to use if the research is to explore sensitive areas (King & Horrocks, 2010). Lastly, focus group interviews often inhibit the response of participants; some participants are not able to express their feelings freely because they are intimidated by the presence of other participants in the group (Welman, *et al*., 2005).

The researcher explained to the participants their rights to privacy, anonymity and confidentiality and received the consent from the participants before the interviews were conducted. The researcher assured the participants that their identity would remain anonymous and they would be protected from any emotional harm. The researcher also requested the participants to sign the confidentiality agreement for them to feel completely free to express their true feelings without the fear of being intimidated by the presence of other participants in the group. That gave participants the confidence that their rights were protected.

3.4.2 Document Analysis

Berg (2009: 338) states that document analysis is "a careful, detailed, systematic examination and interpretation of a particular body of material in an effort to identify patterns, themes and meaning". Typically document analysis is performed on various forms of human communication, which includes various permutations of written documents, photographs, motion pictures or videotapes, and audiotapes.

Schools official documents were used to collect and analyse information about the schools. These documents included official documents such as school policies on partnership, government policies on parent partnerships at schools, as well as documents used by school for external communication. The documents for external communication included correspondence to parents, the records of minutes of parent meetings, filing of records of communication with parents and registers of attendance of parents to school meetings.

The documentary sources were compared with data gathered, and then added as new information to the study. The data from all available sources that were utilised during the research process were integrated to conclude the data collection stage.

3.4.3 Data Collection Procedure

Participants in the study were the principals, educators and parents of two secondary schools. At first, brief meetings were held between the researcher and the school principals of each school. At these meetings, the researcher introduced himself and asked permission to conduct research in their schools. The nature of research to be conducted, its aims and implications on learner's education was explained in detail.

The researcher then a focus group interviews with the educators and parents of the respective schools. The interviews were guided by the prepared semi-structured interview schedules. Interviewees were referred to as P1 (principal of school A) and P2 (principal of school B), and no names were used in reference to any responses. These interviews were arranged so that they took one hour at most and the researcher ensured that participants would not be kept for a very long time. The interviews were conducted at a time convenient for the interviewees. The venues and times for the interviews were planned and agreed upon in advanced by both the researcher and the respondents. Prior to the interviews, the researcher maintained constant contact with the participants through telephone calls, to ensure that they were ready for the interviews and would honour the interview appointments. Questions were asked in the preferred language of the respondents, so as to secure their good understanding of the questions.

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The analysis of data was conducted according to qualitative data analysis. The research particularly used the inductive analysis approach. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006) qualitative data analysis is primarily an inductive process of organising data into categories and identifying patterns and relationships among the categories, starting with specific data and ending general themes that emerge from data rather than being imposed *a priori*. Mouton (2011) views data analysis as involving breaking up the data into manageable themes, patterns, trends and relationships. The aim of data analysis is to understand various constitutive elements of the data through an inspection of the relationships and to see whether there are any patterns or trends that can be identified or isolated or to establish themes in the data.

In this research, the data consisted of the transcripts of all interviews, the notes made during interviews and notes made during document analysis. All notes and other material accumulated during the research were synthesised, grouped according to different themes and categories and

analysed according to those themes. Moreover, the researcher listened to all taped recordings of interviews, while developing understanding and checking the accuracy of the transcripts. All data pertaining to each theme was first marked with a specific colour and then stored under the relevant theme. Finally, the researcher then compiled a composite summary of the data.

3.6 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF THE RESEARCH

To ensure validity, the data collection was based on more than one method. Both the individual interviews as well as the documentation analysis were conducted to obtain data. Different methods were also used to collect data from the respondents during the interview sessions. Apart from writing down responses from the participants, permission was requested from the participants to tape record the interviews and the oral recordings were transcribed by means of a word processor. The respondents were allowed to listen to the tape recorded interviews and were also given time to go through the notes to make sure that what was recorded was exactly what they said. That allowed for an opportunity to make corrections before the transcripts were finalised. The quotations from the interviews were direct quotations from the transcribed data.

Lastly, in conducting the interviews in the language that is familiar to the participants, the error of misinterpretation was reduced.

3.7 RESEARCH ETHICS

Scientific research is a form of human conduct, and therefore has to conform to generally acceptable norms and values by meeting the crucial obligation of ensuring that it is ethically accountable (Mouton, 2011). Hallowell, *et al.* (2005) and Meistry (2006) concur that research ethics is considered to be an essential aspect of research practice.

3.7.1 The Right to Privacy

Mouton (2011) believes that in an increasingly public and transparent world, scientists have to be extremely watchful in respecting subjects' right to privacy.

In this study, therefore, participants were assured that their privacy would be protected. Bouma and Ling (2006) also state that participants must be reminded that they are free to withdraw at any time without penalty; it is not ethical to pressure participants to complete interviews. Participants of the

study were therefore informed that they had the right to withdraw from participation at any time if they felt uncomfortable.

3.7.2 The Right to Anonymity and Confidentiality

Participants have the right to remain anonymous. This right should be respected both where it has been promised explicitly and where no clear understanding to the contrary has been reached. Anonymity refers to the principle that the identity of the individual is kept a secret while the principle of confidentiality refers to the information gathered from subjects. Therefore, the researcher should to the extent that is possible, anticipate potential threats to anonymity and confidentiality (Mouton 2011).

Against the above background, the research strove to maintain the participants' anonymity and confidentiality by not using the names of the participants. Interviewees were referred to by means of symbols and no names were used in reference to any responses. The participants were also assured that the information obtained from them would be used solely for research purposes.

3.7.3. The Right to Full Disclosure about the Research

It is important that all involved in the research study are fully informed as possible so that they know what they are part of, what their role in the study is, what the overall goal is and which procedures are involved (Bouma & Ling 2006).

Before the research began, meetings were held with all involved. The nature of the research to be conducted, its aims and implications was explained in detail.

3.7.4 The Right to Informed Consent

The participants in research must be able to make voluntary, informed decisions to participate. The decision to participate must be based on knowledge of what will be involved, what will be demanded in terms of time, activity and topics covered, what risks are likely, and where to lodge a complaint should that become necessary.

Informed consent was requested from the participants before the interviews were conducted. The nature, the aims and the topics to be covered were explained in detail to the participants during the

first meeting. The letter requesting permission to conduct research was sent to the District manager as well as the school principals.

3.7.5 Ethical Issues in Data Collection

Research needs to respect the research sites so that they are left undisturbed after the research study. This requires that the researcher be cognisant of the impact of prolonged interviewing and minimize the disruption of physical setting (Creswell, 2009).

In this study, the interviews were arranged so that they took one hour or less and the researcher ensured that participants were not kept for very long. The interviews will be conducted at a time convenient to participants.

3.7.6 Ethical Issues in Writing the Research

One of the key ethical principles of scientific writing is that one must acknowledge one's sources. This means that the researcher should refer to any source that has been consulted.

The research will, therefore, strive to maintain integrity in writing and the presenting of the research. All sources were acknowledged. The research avoided plagiarism by always acknowledging the sources used in the research.

3.8 LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The study was conducted in the two selected schools in the Umbumbulu Circuit, so the results thereof may not be generalized to other schools provincially in KwaZulu-Natal or nationally. The study was limited to these schools.

3.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter gave the detailed description of the research design, the methods and procedure used to collect data in the research. The chapter also outlined the relevant data analysis procedures and interpretation. The chapter also explained the ethical issues that require consideration when conducting research in the educational context.

The following chapter presents analysis and interpretation of data.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the data which was collected from participants is analysed, findings are interpreted and some comments are presented. Wiersman and Jurs (2008) state that the goal of research is to collect information that will assist in providing tentative solutions to the research problem and question raised by the study.

The focus of this chapter, therefore, is to analyze and present data generated during the in-depth interviews with the secondary school principals and parents and the focus-group interviews with the teachers of the two schools. In total, two principals, ten teachers and six parents were interviewed.

Firstly, the characteristics of schools, as well as, the characteristics of participants are provided. When participants answered in their home language, especially parents, their responses were translated by the researcher. Care was taken in translation not to lose the meaning of words or responses made.

4.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF SCHOOLS AND PARTICIPANTS

This section presents the background information on both the schools and participants

4.2.1 Characteristics of the Selected Schools

This section presents the characteristics of the two schools that are included in the research. These characteristics are presented in the table below.

Table 4.1: Selected Schools

Schools	School A	School B
No. of Teachers	16	55
No. of Learners	497	1650
No. of Classrooms	11	28

School A is a small school with an enrolment of 497 learners and 16 educators and 11 classrooms. The school is in need of repair because the classrooms are old and are insufficient to meet the needs of its learners. Some of the classrooms are old prefabricated constructions donated by the state. One of the classrooms is used as a staffroom. The school has a computer room and no library. School B is a big school with the enrolment of 1650 learners, 55 educators and 28 classrooms. It is built with face brick and is very well maintained and it experiences the high number of enrolments. The school has sufficient classrooms to accommodate all the learners.

4.2.2 Characteristics of Participants

This section presents responses by participants, which are related to personal characteristics. These participants are from the two schools visited by the researcher. As indicated in paragraph 3.3.2, principals, parents serving on the governing bodies, as well as Grade 12 teachers were interviewed. They were selected because the researcher believed that they could provide the desired information with regard to their opinion on the nature and effectiveness of communication in their schools, as well as on the role played by school principals in managing effective communication between educators and parents to strengthen partnerships.

4.2.2.1 The principals of schools

Table 4.2 represents the relevant background information of the two schools.

Table 4.2: Principals of schools

Principal	School A (P1)	School B (P2)
Gender	Male	Male
Teaching Experience	21	26
Management Experience	04	18
Highest Qualifications	B.A., B. Com., H.D.E.	B.ED.

Key: B.A. - Bachelor of Arts   B. Com – Bachelor of commerce

H.D.E. – Higher diploma in education   B. Ed. – Bachelor of education

Both principals have a vast teaching experience of more than 20 years each. The principal of school A has however only 4 years' management experience, which proves him to be an inexperienced principal. The principal of school B has 18 years' management experience and is regarded as the more experienced of the two.

4.2.2.2 Educators interviewed

This section summarises the characteristics of educators interviewed in this research.

Table 4.3: Educators of School A

Educators	A	B	C	D	E
Gender	F	M	F	F	M
Teaching Experience	14	24	6	7	14
Teaching at this School	5	4	5	3	7
Highest Qualification	FDE	B.A.	PGCE, N Dip Public Management	PGCE,N Dip Accounting	STD

Key: FDE – Further diploma in education   B.A – Bachelor of Arts
PGCE – Postgraduate certificate in education
N DIP Public Management – National Diploma in Public Management
N DIP Accounting – National Diploma in Accounting

Three out five educators have teaching experience in excess of 10 years. One even has 24 years' experience. Two of these teachers have 6 and 7 years' teaching experience. Three out of five educators have relevant teaching qualifications classified above M+3 (Matric plus three qualification) which is equivalent to a 3-year Bachelor's Degree. The perception, however, exists that educators in possession of degrees are better qualified for the teaching profession than ones with only diplomas or certificates (Wanda, 2006).

Table 4.4: Educators of School B

Educators	A	B	C	D	E
Gender	F	M	F	F	M
Teaching Experience	12	14	22	10	8
Teaching at this school	6	7	8	10	6
Highest Qualification	B.A. & HDE	B PAED	B ED (Hon)	B PAED	B PAED

Key: B.A – Bachelor of Arts   H.D.E. – Higher Diploma in Education

B PAED – Baccalaureus Paedonomiae   B ED (Hon) – Honours Bachelor of Education

Table 4.4 reveals that four out of five educators have more than 10 years' teaching experience while only one has less than 10 years' experience as educators. From the table, it also emerges that all respondents in the research are in possession of academic degrees, which is adequate training that is needed for the responsibilities imposed by the teaching profession.

4.2.2.3 Parents interviewed

As set out in paragraph 3.3.2 parents who are members of the school governing bodies were interviewed as part of the research. Therefore Tables 4.5 and 4.6 below represent the summary of the personal characteristics of the parents from two schools.

Table 4.5: Parents of School A

Parent	A	B	C
Gender	F	F	M
Children at this school	1	1	1
No. of years as parent at this school	6	5	4
No. of years on SGB	3	5	2
Highest Qualification	Grade 12	Grade 10	Grade 12

Table 4.5 shows that all the participants have 4 or more years as parents at the school, which is a relatively long period to have acquired sufficient information with regard to communication between educators and parents at school. From the table it also emerges that two out of three parents have Grade 12. This could indicate that their level of literacy is sufficient to be in a good position to understand the importance of education.

Table 4.6: Parents of School B

Parents	A	B	C
Gender	F	M	F
Children at this School	2	2	1
No. of years as parent at this school	2	4	12
No. of years on SGB	2	2	12
Highest Qualification	B.A.	M.A.	B. Admin

Key: B.A – Bachelor of Arts   M. A – Master of Arts   B. Admin – Bachelor of Administration

Table 4.6 above summarises the personal characteristics of parents who were interviewed. Two out of three have been the parents at the school for 4 years or more, which is a relatively long period to have relevant information required by the research study. One participant had been a parent at the school for only 2 years which is not a long time but is also sufficient to provide the desired information. It also emerged from the table that all the participants possess either a professional degree or diploma. This would indicate that all participants interviewed are literate and have the desired information required by the research study.

Although all parents are able to speak English, they felt they could better express themselves in their vernacular language. Therefore all interviews with parents were conducted in IsiZulu and later translated into English. The next section discusses recurrent themes which emerged from data analysis.

4.3 NATURE OF THE EDUCATOR-PARENT RELATIONSHIP

It is important for the school to develop a good and a strong relationship between educators and parents if it wants to be successful. In chapter 1 of this study, it was shown that as teachers and parents develop effective relationship, benefits expand to the educators, parents, learners, class, school and ultimately the district (Olender, Elias & Mastroleo, 2010). As educators develop a strong relationship with parents, we can begin to see benefits to individual learner achievements. Risimati (2001) also believe that communication is central to effective home-school relations. Keyser (2006) in section 2.3 of this study concurs with the view that effective communication is central to the success of building a positive educator-parent relationship. Principals, educators and parents shared the same sentiments during the interviews.

Despite numerous efforts by schools to develop a good relationship with parents, some secondary schools have been unsuccessful in building these relationships. There is no effective relationship between educators and parent in schools.

Principal 1 explained:

> *They (Parents) are not 100% involved, or I would say the majority of them are not involved, probably 35-40% is involved, but that is not unique to our school, even in the surrounding schools is the same thing. When we call the parents meeting few of them do attend.*

The educators of School A also acknowledged that there is a poor relationship between educators and teachers. This indicates that parents are not supportive and co-operative. Although that educator A of School A perceived the relationship as good, the other teachers disagreed, arguing that parents are not supportive.

Educator B stated:

> "*The relationship is not a good one because if I give learners homework, parents do not support them. I don't see any support coming from parents, they don't co-operate*"

Educator B of School A concurred that the relationship does not exist. Teacher explained:

> "*The relationship is non-existent; school always opens the platform for parents to be part of the school. When we invite parents to discuss the way forward, the attendance is always poor. Others even come to meetings drunk. They are far away from the school. They don't interact with school unless we have a problem with the child.*"

The responses above suggest that in school A, the nature of educator-parent relationship is poor. Poor relationship implies that there is no effective educator-parent partnership. This remains a great challenge for principals to involve parents in school if the school is to achieve effective partnership between educators and parents. McEwan (2003) suggest that the role of the school principals is to manage communication which will establish a sound relationship between educators and parents.

Parents of school A, however, indicated that the relationship is good between educators and parents. Parent B explained:

> "*I can say the relationship is good because teachers allow us as parents to come and talk to them about children's school work. They give us time.*"

Other parents also supported this statement. Parent C stated:

> "*I see that the relationship is good because if you have a problem about the child you can come and talk to teachers. Also teachers send messages to us to come and discuss problems if there are problems*"

The research also found that there is a good relationship between educators and parents of School B.

As P2 explained:

> *"The relationship is very good with parents because they appreciate the success that we are achieving almost on an annual basis."*

Educators of School B also agreed with the principal, indicating that the relationship with parents is fairly good and parents are co-operative.

Other educators said:

> *"We think the communication is fairly good. There are instances where there are disagreements here and there but most of the time we get on well and are (parents) co-operatives."*

Parents also indicated that when they come to school they feel welcomed. One parent said:

> *"I can say the relationship is good because teachers give us time and understand clearly about the work of a child. They respect us as parents and welcome us in a good way."*

4.4 PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

It is important for schools to find more effective ways in which parents can be involved in the school. Parental involvement in schools benefits all the role players: parents, educators, schools and parents. Lemmer and Van Wyk (1996) support this by stating that parental involvement helps to improve school performance, reduce learner dropouts and engender a more positive attitude toward the school, increase commitment to teaching by teachers and increase the self-esteem of parents. In chapter 2 the study revealed that the extent to which the school communicates with parents determines their involvement in the activities of the school, and is the key factor in turning relationship into partnership (2.3). Therefore the principals can play a pivotal role in achieving this. The following section summarises the types of parental involvement stated by participants during interviews.

4.4.1 Parent Meetings

In the school visited, the main way to communicate with parents is parent meetings. Both schools hold parent meetings every term.

Educator B of School A explained:

> *"I think the principal is trying everything to involve parents, for example each and every quarter of the year he uses to invite the parents to come and see the performance of their children and also the grade 9 parents are always invited to come for subject choice meeting"*

Other educators also confirmed, when complaining about parent involvement. Educators A said:

> *"I don't see any parent involvement of Grade 12 learners because we call them to the meeting designed for Grade 12 parents but they don't come."*

For School B, they hold the parents general meeting at least once a year. Educator A explained:

> *"We hold parents meeting at least once a year."*

According to the interviews conducted in school A, it was apparent that parent's attendance at parents' meetings is very poor. P1 said:

> *"I would say the majority of parents are not involved. When we call the parents meeting, few of them do attend. At times we end up threatening learners to go and fetch their parents the following day."*

The principal also argues that parents only come to school if there is a problem and they always have excuses not to come. The principal explained:

> *"They don't come unless there is a particular incident that happened for instance the learner has done something wrong where the parent is compelled to come but even at times they will say I don't have time, I am working and so on."*

Educator at school A also agreed with the principal, blaming parents for not co-operating. Educator A said:

> *"When we invite parents to meetings, the attendance is very poor."*

Educator B responded with frustration saying:

> *"Parents do not come in numbers, their attendance is very poor. Some of the children have no parents, some do have parents but they don't care about the education of their children, they just drink alcohol and the child is struggling on his/her own."*

Educator D supported the other teachers saying:

> *"Some of the children are living with step fathers and step mothers and grandparents who are drinking. Some of the parents are scared to take time off work and come to school."*

Parents of school A also confirmed the statements made by educators.

Parent A argued*:*

> *"Parents do come but I cannot say they all come because other parents will report that they have problems. Others do come."*

From the above responses, it is evident that parent do not attend meetings when are called by the school. An unsatisfactory attendance of parents to school meetings implies a lack of parental involvement in the school. Lack of parental involvement in school may jeopardize the benefit that it may have to learners' education. The research done by Van der Westhuizen and Mosoge (2001) on parental involvement, revealed that some parents fail to attend school meetings citing such as staying far away from school and regarding getting to school meetings as an extra burden on their already depleted finances to keep their children in school, illiterate parents do not want to come to school because they feel inadequately qualify to make a valid contribution to education. Risimati (2001) states that as the head of the school, the principal play a crucial role in managing parental involvement as it is one of the most challenging tasks for educators today. However it is evident that there is a need to help secondary school principals in the Umbumbulu circuit with the role they play in getting parents involved in school to strengthen educator-parent partnership.

P2 indicated that parent meetings are well attended. The principal said:

> *"I will say that they are very much involved because even if I call the meeting, I don't get the attendance of less than 1000 parents."*

Educators at School B indicated their satisfaction on the involvement of parents at schools. Teacher B stated:

> *"Parents come in numbers when they are called into a meeting, although not as in ex-model C schools."*

Even parent B who is a member of the SGB showed satisfaction in the involvement of parents in school. The parent said:

> *"The way they (parents) are close to the school they come to all the meetings even if the reports are issued, they are collected by parents, who shows how involved the parents are in the education of their children."*

Parent C also confirmed this in the interviews that not all parents come to school meetings because they sometimes have their own problems. However, parent B of school A believed that some of the reasons for lack of parental involvement in school are the conditions.

The parent explained:

> *"Some of other parents do not want to come to the school because they lack motivation, for example the school building may have the influence on the lack of parental involvement. If the school building is in a state that satisfies parents, maybe they can be motivated to be involved."*

One parent blames the behavior on some of the teachers as one of the cause to the lack of parental involvement. Parent C argued:

> *"Maybe sometimes we need also to look at the teachers, if they are doing their work as they are supposed to. It is very frustrating as a parent to make sure that your child gets early to school and some teachers come as late as 9:00. How can you encourage your child to be early if he/she knows that teachers will be late? Sometimes the learners will just stay at home claiming that nothing is happening in school."*

4.4.2 Volunteering

Asked whether parents do volunteer at school, both principals of schools, acknowledges the involvement of parents in their school as volunteers. It is however become apparent that parent volunteer mostly for cleaning the school grounds and kitchen. This means that various talents parents have are not utilized mostly for the benefit of the children's education at school. P2 stated:

> *"Parents come to clean especially during holidays and involved in painting the school."*

At school A, volunteers are sometimes used to cook in the kitchen. P1 put it in this way:

> *"Some parents help with the cooking in the kitchen because the school has a feeding scheme."*

The responses of participants suggest that both schools use parents as volunteers only for cleaning and things that does not have direct benefit to the children's academic achievement. The study conducted by Risimati (2001) concurs stating that there is a narrow definition of the use of volunteers in schools and that it only relates mostly to cleaning the school premises. The principals are not taking advantage of talents and expertise the parents have and utilize them for the benefit of the children's education.

4.5 COMMUNICATION

Effective communication between educators and parents is very important to establish a strong relationship between home and school. In chapter 2 of this study, Lemmer and Van Wyk (2009: 183) state that to make the school and home continually share their respective information about the child on a regular basis, two-way communication must be established. Lemmer and Van Wyk (2009) further suggest that to promote effective communication with families, schools should design a variety of school-to-home as well as home-to-school communication strategies with all families.

4.5.1 Nature and Effectiveness of Communication

According to the interview with the principal of school A, it was clear that even though a variety of ways of communicating with parents of the school has been used, they still proved to be ineffective.

P1 stated:
> *"It's not easy to say if it is effective or not but what we normally do is to inform parents through letters. Of late we do send messages to parents, but few of them do respond."*

The educators of school A confirmed the ineffectiveness of communication between educators and parents stating that the community does not value education. Educators B mentioned:
> *"The communication is not effective although all means are done, the problem is not with the children, the problem is with the community itself; they do not value education as they're supposed to."*

Educators E confirmed the above statement stating:

> *"We try by all means to invite them (parents) each and every term but they have excuses and don't pitch up. It's becoming not effective enough."*

Sometimes when letters are sent to parents, learners do not give letters to the parent. Educator E said:

> *"We write letters, we give learners letters to parents, others do not give those letters to parents with their reasons known to them. Sometimes they don't come with their biological parents; they come with their neighbours or friends. When we get deeper to the matter we realize that this is not the real parent."*

Educator C at school A complained:

> *"At one stage the school uses SMS, we gathered the parents numbers, if there is any urgent meeting that needs parents to be at school, but some of those numbers are not for parents, but their (learners) own numbers. All that communication becomes ineffective."*

The above responses suggest that the nature of communication in school A is ineffective. This can have negative effect on the educator-parent partnership in school. It is mentioned in section 1.1 of the study that the success of any effective educator-parent partnership is dependent on the sound communication between educators and parents. The principal as the head of the school is instrumental in ensuring that the educator-parent partnership is effective through the effective management of communication between educators and parents.

P2 indicated that communication is very effective at school and parents are very much involved.

> *"Communication is very good, because sometimes, I see some parents coming here to talk to the educators of their children. In some cases, parents just come uninvited because they were told that they can do that."*

All educator of School B also supported the statement by the principal, viewing communication as effective. Educator D explained:

"During the 7 months that I spent here, I have had good communicative parents of the class that I am teaching. Whenever there is a problem, we invite them and they do come."

4.5.2 Types of Communication

In section 2.4 of this study, the researcher discussed different types of communication strategies the school can use to initiate communication with parents that is two way, respectful, honest and productive.

4.5.2.1 Written communication

The research found that both school A and B uses letters as their main medium of communication with parents of learners. Both schools send letters to parents via their children.

P2 mentioned:

"There is no other way, just to give letters to children because most of them (parents) are technologically disadvantaged."

P1 also confirms the use of written communication at his school. He said:

"We use letters to invite parents and sometimes we send SMS."

Even educators from both school concurs with the principals that they use letters when communicating with the large number of parents.

Educator C of school B explained:

"We send letters for larger numbers of parents."

Educator A in school A said:

"The school sends out letters and they are also reminded by SMS."

Parents also acknowledge the use of letters as the main method of communication. Parent B of school A stated:

"They (educators) write letters, nothing else unless there is a special situation."

4.5.2.2 Verbal Communication

Both schools use telephone when contacting a few parents or on special circumstances only. They do not frequently use this means of communication.

P1 explained:
> *"If there are fewer parents, we phone them."*

P2 indicated that they use telephone when there is a serious problem. When asked as to how the school conveys the message to parents when there is a serious problem, he stated:
> *"It depends as to how far be the parents, sometimes we communicate through the cell phone."*

Parent B of school B supported the statement made by the principal stating:
> *"Sometimes the principal uses the telephone during urgent situations."*

Educator C of school A also mentioned that telephone is used as a follow up method. She responded when asked about the means to ensure effective communication:
> *"That is when we phone, phoning is done for follow-up."*

The responses from participants revealed that both schools rely only on written communication especially letters to communicate with parents. They give letters to learners to deliver them to their parents. This can sometimes hinder effective communication between educators and parents as sometime communication does not reach the intended recipients. Section 2.4 of this study lists different way of communication the school can initiate to strengthen educator-parent partnership.

4.6 RECORDS OF COMMUNICATION

The following paragraphs summarise the different ways of keeping records.

4.6.1 Reply Slips

Both schools uses reply slips as a means of record keeping. P2 acknowledged the use of reply slips as a way to ensure that communication has been effective. He stated:

"The only way to know if a parent has seen the letter is that we always have the reply slip, then the parent will reply and we know that the parent have received the letter."

P1 also confirmed this finding although the school sometimes has problems in keeping them as records. He explained:

"Sometimes we include the reply slip at the bottom of a letter however because we don't have enough staff we have some challenge in making follow up to those particular thing."

4.6.2 Minute Books

Both schools use minute books from the meetings as the main methods of keeping the records of communication.

One educator of school A indicated that the school marks the register during the meeting. Educator D explained:

"We mark the register during the meeting, of who attended the meeting. Parents will write their names and the names of their children."

P2 concurred, stating:

"We have got parent minute books that is where we keep them (records) so that at any time when there are some controversial issues, we will refer them to minutes and letters they signed."

4.6.3 Policies and Procedures of Home-School Communication

It became clear that even though the principals and educators are using a variety of ways of communicating and involving parents at school, they don't have any clear guidelines in terms of policy. Neither of the schools visited have policies on communication.

P1 acknowledged that the school does not have a written policy on communication. The principal explained:

"There is no policy on communication. We only have that procedure when there is an offence, other than that there is no procedure. Any teacher can communicate with parents."

P2 also confessed that the school does not have any policy on communication and argued that they use the school policy in general, stating:

> *"We do not have any policy with regard to communication but in the school policy we state that parents are welcome to visit the school."*

Both principals acknowledge that they follow a procedure when an incident had taken place.

P2 explained:

> *"If there is no case, there is no need for me to be told, parents just come and inform the clerk. But if there is a case involved, then I have to be involved as well because in any case I must be aware of what is going on in the school. With regard to educators, I always tell them to write letters and also explain to me because if they have to invite a parent, I must know."*

Educators from both schools also supported this, stating that they don't know of any existing policy on communication with parents.

Educator A in school A indicated that there is no written policy and procedure they know about from what they have been told. He explained:

> *"Other than what we are told I can't be sure of something that had been written down as a policy on communication, but what I was told procedurally we cannot engage with anybody without consent from the SMT."*

Educator B of school A also agreed stating:

> *"There is no clear policy, what we are told is that we cannot communicate with parents without the knowledge of the H.O.D. and the principal."*

Educator A in school B also concurred that:

> *"There is no written policy that we are following contained in our files. What I know as a policy is that as an educator you cannot just personally invite the parent, you must report to the next senior person. The letter must be signed be the principal."*

Parents of both schools indicated that parents are told about the procedure during parents meeting. Parents of school A stated that when there are parent meetings, the principal always emphasises that parents can come to school if there are problems.

> *"Those who are working are given contact numbers to phone if they can't come to school personally."*

Parents of school B agreed with this arguing that even though there was no document or a policy that they knew of, during parents' meetings they were told that they were welcome to visit the school if there was a problem or to check on the child's school work. The school emphasised the school constitution.

The participant's responses given with regards to policies and procedures of home-school communication revealed that both schools do not have clear guidelines and procedure on the implementation of communication between educators and parents. Without the guiding policies on communication, principals will have challenges with the management of communication in schools. Risimati (2001) argues that the school which does not have policy to involve parents will not be able to establish successful educator-parent relationship and suggest that the principal should have policies regarding all aspect of communication and all stakeholders should be involved in drawing up such policies.

Potter and Powell (1992) suggest that the principal should have a policy regarding all aspects of communication. They further suggest that all stakeholders should be involved in drawing up such a policy. This will enable all stakeholders of the school to know and understand clearly the policy and procedures to follow when communicating with parents. Reference group theory discussed in section 2.3.1.2 explains the mechanism for building positive educator-parent partnership. The school needs to recognise the important role of parents when planning any school activities, especially drawing up of policies.

4.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has presented data collected by means of in-depth interviews, and group-focus interview methods. The responses were interpreted and the findings thereof discussed.

The nature of the relationship between educators and parents in school A is of some concern. Educators view communication between educators and parents as ineffective, since parents are not fully involved in the education of their children. On the other hand parents pointed the finger at educators. For school B, the relationship seems to be positive where parents are fully involved in the education of their child and communication is effective.

It was also evident that both schools, however, still need to find more effective ways of communication, since they still rely only on written communication to connect with parents.

In the next chapter the research presents a summary of research as well as the recommendations emanating from the research.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The study examined the role of the school principals in managing effective communication between educators and parents at schools to ensure that effective partnerships between educators and parents are achieved. The study explored different strategies employed and challenges encountered in managing communication at schools.

This chapter addresses two issues. First, it provides a summary of previous chapters. Second, recommendations are made which may help the principals to develop and sustain effective strategies in managing communication amongst all role players, especially educators and parents in schools.

5.2 SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The summary of previous chapters with regards to the role of secondary school principals in managing effective communication is discussed in the next section.

5.2.1 Chapter 1

Chapter 1 provides the general overview of the study. It sets the scene of the study. In the literature study and in the empirical investigation (1.3), it was established that in some schools, mostly the historically disadvantaged black schools, communication between educators at school and parents at home is still very poor and mostly ineffective. There is insufficient participation of parents in schools which is due to a lack of or ineffective communication between the educators in schools and parents at home. Section 1.3 highlighted legislation such as South African Schools Act (SASA) 84 of 1996 which introduced important reforms impacting on school and parent communication. SASA mandated the establishment of school governing bodies in all schools to ensure that parents participate in their schools and to open an effective way of communication between educators and parents. These reforms created an environment that is more conducive for effective communication between educators and parents. However, in spite of all these reforms, it was found that there is a lack of effective communication in some schools. Therefore, new strategies are needed to organize

effective communication in school programmes. It was also established that for any kind of communication to be effective, it is the role of the principal to ensure that it is properly managed in order to achieve the intended results.

Therefore, the study sought to examine how the school, especially the principal, manages communication between educators and parents to ensure that an effective partnership is achieved.

Section 1.4 provided the aims formulated by the researcher to determine the course of the study. These aims were realised through the literature study, while the empirical investigation consisted of semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews, as well as document analysis conducted on the participants of the selected two secondary schools.

5.2.2 Chapter 2

Chapter 2 reviewed the literature relevant to the study. This chapter investigated the role of the school principal in facilitating and managing communication between educators and parents. The literature on the management of communication was explored. The emphasis throughout the chapter was on the management of effective communication to ensure strong partnerships between educators and parents in schools.

The theory of home-school communication was discussed in section 2.3. The literature revealed that effective communication between school and home is critical to home-school relationships and is central to the success of building a positive educator-parent partnership. The Epstein theories of home-school communication include: Symbolic interactionists theory (2.3.1.1), reference group theory (2.3.1.2), and three perspectives on family-school relations (2.3.1.3).

The type of effective communication strategies that the school can use to initiate parent-teacher partnership are also discussed in 2.4. Most common types of communication between educators and parents include written communication (2.4.1), communication through technology (2.4.2) and verbal communication (2.4.3). The study suggested the following written communication: Welcoming letters (2.4.1.1), Newsletters (2.4.1.2), Progress reports (2.4.1.3) and Parent Bulletin Boards (2.4.1.4). Different types of technology that can be used as a medium of communication between the school and parents include electronic mail (2.4.2.1), electronic newsletters (2.4.2.2) and the school web page (2.4.2.3).

Barriers to communication in schools were discussed in section 2.6. The literature findings showed that both schools (2.6.2) and parents (2.6.1) sometimes set up these roadblocks. The parents' roadblocks include: my own and my child guardian role (2.6.1.1), avoidance role (2.6.1.2), and club-waving advocate role (2.6.1.3). School roadblocks include: authority figure role (2.6.2.1), busy teacher role (2.6.2.2) and school climate (2.6.2.3).

The role of the school principal as an effective communicator was discussed in section 2.8. The literature found that although school success is influenced by all stakeholders, the school principal remains one of the most important factors in this success. McEwan (2003) identified ten traits of highly effective school principals that are essential in the communication and management of schools to establish a climate of teaching and learning that fosters academic achievement. These ten traits include: the principal as a communicator (2.8.1.1), the principal as an educator (2.8.1.2), the principal as an envisioner (2.8.1.3), the principal as a facilitator (2.8.1.4), the principal as a change master (2.8.1.5), the principal as a culture builder (2.8.1.6), the principal as an activator (2.8.1.7), the principal as a producer (2.8.1.8), the principal as a character builder (2.8.1.9) and the principal as a contributor (2.8.1.10).

5.2.3 Chapter 3

Chapter 3 described the methodology of the study. This chapter described the type of approach that was used in collecting data from the participants. It also justified the choice of the approach used. In an attempt to determine the role of the school principal in facilitating and managing communication between educators and parents, the research adopted a qualitative research approach. The characteristics of qualitative research serving as the justification for the choice of this approach were discussed in section 3.2.2. It was considered appropriate because, it aims to extend understanding within the context of a particular situation (3.2.2.1), it may be designed and redesigned (3.2.2.2), it uses multiple sources of data (3.2.2.3), it uses inductive data analysis (3.2.2.4) and the researcher becomes immersed in the situation and phenomenon being studied.

Section 3.4 discussed the methods used in data gathering. The study used both interviews (3.4.1) and document analysis (3.4.2) as a methodological triangulation. In-depth interviews with the principals of each school (3.4.1.1) and focus-group interviews with the educators and parents of each school (3.4.1.2) were used in data gathering. Document analysis (3.4.2) on the official

documents such as school policies on partnership, policies on parental involvement, as well as documents used by the school for external communication was carefully examined.

The chapter also described the selection of participants in (3.2). Two secondary schools (functional and dysfunctional) from Umbumbulu Circuit were identified (3.3.1). Both principals of the selected schools, five Grade 12 class educators from each school and three parents serving on the Governing bodies of each school were used as participants of the study. Lastly, the chapter looked at the reliability and validity of the research (3.6) and the research ethics (3.7) that needed to be considered during the data collection process.

5.2.4 Chapter 4

Chapter 4 provides the analysis and interpretation of data collected from individual interviews, focus group interviews and document analysis conducted with all the participants of the two selected secondary schools. This was done through the key themes namely, nature of the relationship (4.3), parent involvement (4.4), communication (4.5) and records of communication (4.6).

The findings from the empirical investigation show that in most schools, despite the numerous efforts by the school to develop a good relationship with parents, it has been unsuccessful in building these relationships. There is still a poor relationship between educators and parents in schools.

In the schools I visited, it was apparent that the main strategy to communicate with parents is parent meetings. Although it was indicated that in School B, parent meetings are well attended, in School A the attendance to parent meetings by parents is very poor. It emerged from the investigation that some parents don't attend school parent meetings because they are afraid to take time off work. It also emerged that parental volunteering is mostly for cleaning the school grounds and working as kitchen staff. This means that various talents the parents have are not fully utilised by the schools.

The findings on the interviews also clearly indicated that even though a variety of ways of communicating with parents has been used, they still proved to be ineffective. The study found that poor communication impacted negatively on the management of strong educator-parent partnerships. Most schools only use the reply slips and minute books from the parent meetings as the main methods of keeping records of communication. This proved to be insufficient.

The investigation also revealed that most schools do not have policies on effective management of communication between educators and parents. This poses a problem in providing clear guidelines and procedures in terms of facilitating effective communication between educators and parents as well as involvement of parents at schools.

5.2.5 Chapter 5

This section provides the discussion based on the findings of the literature study and the empirical investigation. Because there are many recommendations, they are provided under each heading.

5.2.5.1 Parent involvement

This investigation revealed that despite the overwhelming evidence that parent involvement may have a number of benefits for both schools and parents, it found that in School A, there is still a lack of parental involvement in schools. Only a small number of parents are actively involved in their children education. Very few parents attend parent meetings when they are called. However in school B, parents are fairly involved in the school, and a large number of parents come to meetings when they are called. It was, however, found that parent volunteering is minimal in both schools. Their involvement is more or less limited to cleaning the school grounds and working as kitchen staff for the school feeding scheme. It was also apparent that principals of both schools have little knowledge on how to optimally involve the parent component at the schools for the benefit of the children education. They have little knowledge about strategies to establish comprehensive programmes on parental involvement which will involve a variety of ways. Parents are also not aware on how much it would benefit their children's education if they were fully involved in the life of their children's school activities.

It is recommended that:

- The Department of Education to conduct seminars for principals so that they may become aware of ways and means of getting parents involved in schools.
- Schools should design their own parent involvement programmes;
- Training programmes conducted by principals or specialists should be organised for parents. The programme should include the importance of parent involvement in the education of their children, awareness of their rights and responsibilities as parents in the education of their

children and the understanding of different policies, especially on communication and parent involvement;

- Schools should involve parents in decision-making processes and in developing school policies;
- The principal should try to use parent volunteers for a wide range of school activities such as helping with extra-curricular activities, helping children with homework, assisting with school fundraising, providing expertise from different fields such as counselling, motivation, and extra classes.

5.2.5.2 Home-school communications

Home-school communication is critical in enhancing home-school relations. The extent to which the school communicates with parents determines their involvement in the activities of the school and it is the key factor in turning a relationship to a strong partnership between educators in school and parents at home (1.2). The investigation found that the schools visited communicated with parents by means of written communication, especially letters, and at parent meetings. Letters were mostly passed on to parents via their children. This has posed a challenge in most cases because sometimes the messages do not always reach the intended recipients i.e. parents. This therefore causes the communication to be ineffective. Most of the time communication is always from school to home and parents do not seem to initiate communication with the school on their own.

The investigation also suggests that both educators and parents seem to have no knowledge on the procedure to follow when communicating with one another. This is due to an absence of school policy which would give clear guidelines on how to communicate with one another.

The following recommendations are made:

- The principal should assess the effectiveness of it communication strategies. This can be done by conducting a survey on both educators' and parents' experiences of the current practices;
- Principals should improve the way they communicate with parents. In addition to the traditional way of using letters, it may sometimes be necessary to use media such as newspaper and radio to announce important school activities and invite parents. Announcements via such media may reach a large number of parents, even those that are hard to find by other means;
- It may sometime be necessary to use notice boards as a means of communication with parents. They should be placed in an area that will be visible to the entire community;

- To ensure the effective management of communication between educators and parents, there should be a clear line of communication between educators and parents. The school may use the hierarchal structure as a system of managing communication. However, principals may decide on the lines of communication that will suit their school;

- The school could use homework books or diaries as a means of communication. The class educators should monitor the use of this method; and

- The principal could use local churches and community gatherings to communicate with parents on important matters. The principal could also consider using local councillors, local church leaders and traditional leaders to communicate with the community and motivate them to be more involved in the school. This may also help to reach a large number of parents, even those that normally cannot be reached via their children.

5.2.5.3 Records of communication

It is very important for schools to employ various strategies of keeping records of communication when communicating with parents on a daily basis. This will help to ensure that communication is always effective between educators and parents. This will also protect both educators and parents for future references when need arise.

The investigation revealed that both schools do not use effective ways of keeping these records of communication. They only rely on the use of reply slips, signed by parents, and the minutes taken during parent meetings.

Recommendations are as follows:

- The school should have learner files which will be kept for the entire duration of the child's enrolment at the school. The files must contain all the personal details of learners and the records of communication with parents;

- The principals should use the grade heads to keep all the records of communication with parents with regard to academic matters;

- The principal should consider appointing a member of the Senior Management Team to deal with all disciplinary issues and keep all the records of communications with parents of a child.

5.2.5.4 Policies and procedures on communication

To assist the principal to exercise good and wise leadership at schools, every school must have policies to direct effective school management (Ngema, 2009). The investigation revealed that both schools do not have policies on effective communication and parental involvement. This poses a problem in providing guidelines and clear procedures on the implementation of effective communication between educators and parents. Without the guiding policies on effective communication, the principal will have a challenge with the management of the process of communication between educators and parents.

Recommendations are as follows:

- The principals, as leaders of the school, are responsible for the development of policies on communication and parent involvement in consultation with both educators and parents;
- The principals need to be adequately trained to develop, understand and manage the process of communication as given on the policies as guidelines. It is the responsibility of the principals to provide guidance to educators and parents regarding the implementation of policies;
- The principal should ensure that both educators and parents are familiar with the content of the policies. The school should develop capacity building programmes to empower both educators and parents in terms of knowledge and understanding of the policies;
- The school policies on communication must be within the framework of the national policies.

5.3 CONCLUSION

The study investigated the role of the school principals in managing effective communication between educators and parents so as to ensure an effective educator-parent partnership at schools.

The study revealed that there is still a lack of effective communication between educators and parents in schools, especially in the black secondary schools. Parent involvement in schools is also very poor. The lack of parental involvement in school may have negative impact on the provision of quality education to children in school. The study also revealed that some schools rely only on the use of letters to communicate with parents. This sometimes creates barriers to communications in schools as some learners do not forward these letters to parents. Lastly, the study proved that some schools do not have policies in the implementation of communication. Without policies on

communication, schools will not have clear procedures for both educators and parents when communication with each other.

The present study illustrate that a lot still need to be done to strengthen effective partnership in education between educators and parents in the black secondary schools. The principals should ensure that educators and parents communicate on regular basis. They should be aware that there need not be problems before they can communicate.

Therefore there is a need to empower the principals to manage communication to promote effective partnership between educators and parents in their schools. It is the researcher's view that with the effective training of the principals in managing communication between educators and parents, the goal of providing quality education can be realised and the dysfunctional schools can be transformed to functional schools.

It is hoped that this study will prove to be useful to interested stakeholders, especially the principals who experience difficulties in managing effective communication between educators and parents in their schools.

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APPENDIX A: A LETTER REQUESTING PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

P.O. Box 958

Amanzimtoti

4126

28 August 2014

The Circuit Manager

Umbumbulu Circuit Office

Private Bag X1022

Umbumbulu

4105

Dear Sir

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

I hereby kindly request permission to conduct a research within the schools of the Umbumbulu Circuit.

At present, I am engaged in a research project towards my M.Ed (Masters in Education) degree at the University of South Africa under the supervision of Prof. S Mokoena. My research topic is:

Managing effective communication to strengthen educator-parent partnership at selected public secondary schools in the Umbumbulu Circuit, KwaZulu-Natal.

As part of my research, I will have to conduct interviews with some Principals, educators and parents of the selected secondary schools to obtain the relevant information.

In anticipation, I hope that my request will receive your favourable consideration.

Yours Faithfully

SIBISI R.N.   (UNISA student)

Contact no.   Cell: 0781476130

        Work no.: 031 903 2353

            Fax no.: 031 903 6811

            E-mail: sibisirudolph@yahoo.com

APPENDIX B: RESEARCH ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

UNISA | college of education

Research Ethics Clearance Certificate

This is to certify that the application for ethical clearance submitted by
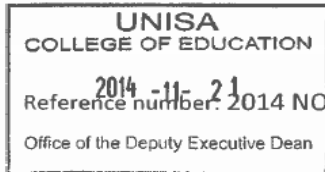
RN Sibisi [61696544]

for a MEd study entitled

Managing effective communication to strengthen educator-parent partnership at selected public secondary schools in the Umbumbulu Circuit, KwaZulu Natal

has met the ethical requirements as specified by the University of South Africa College of Education Research Ethics Committee. This certificate is valid for two years from the date of issue.
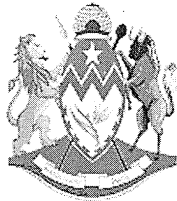
Prof VI McKay
Acting Executive Dean: CEDU

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mcdtc@netactive.co.za

UNISA
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
2014 -11- 2 1
Reference number: 2014 NOVEMBER /61696544/MC
Office of the Deputy Executive Dean

17 NOVEMBER 2014

APPENDIX C: LETTER REQUESTING PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

education

Department:
Education
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

UMBUMBULU

Enquiries: Dr JC Janse van Rensburg   Reference: Research Sibisi RN   Date: 19.09.2014
            Cell: 0837852374

Mr Sibisi RN
Kingsway High School.

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH: UMBUMBULU

1. The above mentioned refers.

2. I hereby grant you permission to conduct research towards your M.Ed degree

3. Your research topic; "*Managing effective communication to strengthen educator-parent partnership at selected public secondary schools in Umbumbulu*" will definitely be of great interest to the Umbumbulu Circuit.

Dr JC Janse van Rensburg
CES (a): Umbumbulu Circuit Management

APPENDIX D: LETTER OF REQUEST TO PARTICIPANTS

Dear................

This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a study I, Sibisi Rudolph Ntuthuko, am conducting as part of my research as a master's student entitled Managing effective communication to strengthen educator-parent partnership at selected public secondary school in the Umbumbulu Circuit, KwaZulu-Natal at the University of South Africa. Permission for the study has been given by Dept of Education and the Ethics Committee of the College of Education, UNISA. I have purposefully identified you as a possible participant because of your valuable experience and expertise related to my research topic. I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you should agree to take part. In this interview I would like to have your views and opinion on this topic. This information can be used to improve communication between educators and parents so as to strengthen the partnership between these two important stakeholders in the school.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve an interview of approximately One hour in length to take place in a mutually agreed upon location at a time convenient to you. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Furthermore, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences.

With your kind permission, the interview will be audio-recorded to facilitate collection of accurate information and later transcribed for analysis. Shortly after the transcript has been completed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points. All information you provide is considered completely confidential. Your name will be omitted from the report. However, with your permission, anonymous quotations may be used. Data collected during this study will be retained for 12 months. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like to additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at 0781476130 or by e-mail at sibisirudolph@yahoo.com.

I look forward to speaking with you very much and thank you in advanced for your assistance in this project. If you accept my invitation to participate, I will request you to sign the consent form which follows on the next page.

Yours sincerely

APPENDIX E: PARTICIPANT CONSENT

I have read the information presented in the information letter about the study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and add any additional details I wanted. I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses. I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous. I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher. With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my free will, to participate in this study.

Participant's Name:..

Participant's Signature:..................................

Researcher's Name:.......................................

Researcher's Signature:..................................

Date:.......................

APPENDIX F: FOCUS GROUP CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

I_____ grant consent that the information I share during the group discussion may be used by the researcher, Sibisi Rudolph Ntuthuko, for research purposes. I am aware that the group discussion will be digitally recorded and grant consent for the recordings, and I will not share the information to any person outside the group to maintain confidentiality.

Participant's Name:..

Participant's Signature:..

Researcher's Name:...

Researcher's Signature:..

Date:..

APPENDIX G: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS: QUESTIONS FOR PRINCIPALS

1. How long have you been the principal in the school?
2. As a principal, how do you perceive your relationship with your staff and parents?
3. How involved are the parents in the education of their children at school?
4. Apart from the Governing body, are there any ways the parent bodies are involved in the life of the school?
5. What are your views and feeling about effectiveness of communication between parents and educators at your school?
6. What are some of the methods or systems already in place to ensure effective communication (where the learner needs are concerned) between parents and educators?
7. What system do you have in place to ensure that communication has been effective when communicating with parents?
8. What challenges do you face or experience when communicating with the parents?
9. If there is a communication breakdown between educators (or the school) and parents, how do you resolve the situation?
10. When there is a serious problem with a learner in the school, what kind of strategy do you use to convey the message to the parents of the affected learner?
11. When parents do not respond to the school communication, what do you do?
12. What do you think must be done to improve communication between educators and parents at yours school?
13. How do you convey a message to parents with communication barriers, such as language or illiterate problem?

APPENDIX H: GROUP FOCUS INTERVIEWS: QUESTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

1. How long have you been teaching at this school?
2. As an educator, how do you view the relationship of educators and parents?
3. As an educator, how do you perceive the effectiveness of communication between you and parents at your school?
4. How often do you communicate with parents?
5. What kind of system do you use to communicate with parents
6. It is important to have effective communication with parents, what strategies does your school follow to maintain effective communication with parents on daily basis?
7. What are the main challenges facing educators when communicating with parents?
8. In case you have a problem communicating with parents, do you feel supported by the principal as a manager?
9. When there is a sensitive situation regarding a learner, how do you contact the parents?
10. What are your views and experiences about the role of the principal in managing communication at this school?
11. What do you think must be done to improve communication between educators and parents at your school?

APPENDIX I: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS: QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

1. How long has your child been in the school?
2. In what way are you involved in the school that would benefit you child's education?
3. As a parent, how do you view your relationship with the educators in school?
4. There are four types of parents: parents who are committed to their children but do not participate, those who participate but not necessarily supportive, parents that support and participate, and parents who are neither support nor participate in their child's education. Where do you as parent fit in?
5. What are the main challenges parents face to get involved in school?
6. How often does the school communicate with you as a parent?
7. How does the school communicate with you?
8. When you have a problem, how do you communicate with the school?
9. How do you perceive the role of the principal in managing communication at this school?
10. How do you perceive effectiveness of communication between you as a parent and the school (or educators)?
11. What do you think must be done to improve communication between educators and parents in the school?