School – Family Collaboration: A Case Study in an Informal Settlement in Rustenburg

By

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the dissertation submitted for the Master’s Degree in Inclusive Education to the University of Johannesburg is my own work. Any work that has been used before has been declared.

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to identify factors that hinder collaboration between the school and the families and developing strategies to overcome those barriers. Perspectives on school-family collaboration and theoretical framework were also discussed. A qualitative investigation was explored. It was approached using Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model. This model helps us to understand the complexity of the family as a system and how the individual child functions within the family and society. Data was obtained by means of individual and focus groups interviews with educators, parents and school management team at a school located at an informal settlement in South Africa. The study revealed that families, school management team and educators regard collaboration as vital for the learners’ academic success. The study also revealed barriers occurring at different levels, namely: the family, schools and community. Recommendations based on the findings were made: Develop involvement strategies that are appropriate to the school’s community setting for example informal settlements. Teacher training should equip educators with skills for initiating collaboration. Department of Education together with the school governing body should collaborate in empowering educators and parents.

Keyword: school family collaboration, barriers informal settlements.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

Since the adoption of a new education policy framework in 1994, the role of parents in school
has come to be embraced as a critical element that should be encouraged for the sake of
improving the effectiveness of the school. A general view is that educators cannot work alone,
without parental support. In July 1999, the Minister of Education announced a national
mobilization plan for educating and training in South Africa under the slogan “Tirisano”,
translated as “working together” (Department of Education {DoE}, 1999:6). Priority three of
a nine–point programme set out by the Minister was entitled: Schools must become centers of
community life. In another move, the DoE published its Norms and Standards for Educators,
in which were set out seven roles for educators (RSA, 2000b:12-25). The role entitled:
Community, citizenship, and pastoral role, included the following: “… the educator will
develop supportive relations with parents and other key persons and organizations based on
critical understanding of community and environmental issues” (RSA, 2000:14).

The concept of school and family relations is further emphasized by policies such as the South
African School Act (1996), which clearly accords parents a stake in matters pertaining to
school governance and partnering the schools in the education of children. Also, White Paper
6 (Inclusion Policy) has as one of its principles a community approach to supporting learners
in attaining academic success. This entails the active collaboration of all stakeholders,
including parents. Clearly the exposition of recent changes in the South African education
system indicates that the government is committed to making school and family
collaborations a central element within the education system, but it has provided a great
challenge to both educators and family members (in the entire community) to revamp their
ways of working with each other (Ellis & Hughes, 2002:22).

Collaboration is based on an assumption that education is a shared responsibility between all
stakeholders (Friend & Cook, 2003:275). Ideally, it is envisaged that families and educators
can discuss expectations for students’ achievement and their respective roles in helping meet
them. They can develop programmes to promote effective school-family community
partnerships that support positive academic, behavioural and social competencies in all
students, and they can engage in efforts to increase mutual respect, understanding, caring and flexibility among families and the school community. When problems arise, they are addressed jointly by families, students, and educators in a respectful, solution-focused manner (Gomez & Greenough, 2002:40).

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

It is clear that partnership between the school and family is an essential element for learners’ academic success, in the sense that it leads to improved school marks (Henderson & Berla, 2004), better behaviour (Epstein, 2001), higher self-concept (Friend & Cook, 2003) and more positive attitudes toward school, learning and school attendance (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001). However, such a relationship does not always develop easily in all communities. For example, schools located in informal settlements find that collaboration between parents and school remains challenging, with parents and families leaving the responsibility for educating learners solely to the educator, and educators appearing not to be concerned by working in isolation from families. The problem is that if this gap between schools and families is left to widen, children will lose two most important sources of support, and school-related problems will result. This study therefore investigates factors hindering a school located in an informal settlement from working collaboratively with families to ensure that children learn successfully.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research question being investigated is: What are barriers that affect school-family collaboration in an informal settlement?

In addition, specific questions are:

a. What are barriers to school-family collaboration?

b. What are possible strategies for overcoming barriers to effective school-family collaboration?
1.4 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE INQUIRY

This study aims to investigate factors that hinder collaboration between the school and the families, so as to develop strategies to overcome those barriers.

The specific objectives to be addressed are twofold:

a. To explore and describe barriers that hinder effective school and family collaboration.

b. To suggest and describe possible strategies for effective school and family collaboration in an informal settlement.

1.4.1 Contribution of the study

The study should inform education policymakers, practitioners and all parties with an interest in the South African Education system, regarding specific challenges faced by the school and families in an informal settlement. Educators will be aware of barriers that are hindering collaboration between the parents and the school, and so be able to overcome them and improve the quality of education. Meanwhile, research such as this study will be help fill the gap in this field of knowledge.

1.5 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

As a primary school educator in an informal settlement, which is highly characterized by social problems among the school-going populations, such as poverty, teenage pregnancy, drug and alcohol abuse and sexual violence, my concern was parents’ apparently passive participation and invisibility in the general running of the school, in particular in regards to the education of their own children. The implied negative behavior and attitudes displayed by parents must be a source of frustration to educators’ efforts in providing appropriate support for successful learning.

In terms of formal education, some actions and/or interventions cannot be implemented without parental consent or participation. Meanwhile, In terms of informal education, parents, irrespective of their own level of formal education, are the primary educators of their own children, and they may be expected to know their children better than any other adult. They
lay the children’s foundation for school learning, as well as maintaining a nurturing home environment in which children can flourish (Balint, 2005:21). These factors render families the source of experience and knowledge that may improve the quality of their children’s education. Therefore, educators cannot educate successfully without the collaboration of the parents, and they should not be left out of the education process (van Wyk, 2004:121). Moreover, in the African context, collaboration is aligned to indigenous beliefs which place the responsibilities of childrearing on all adults in the community. As stated by Mbiti (1969:110), it is the community which must protect the child, feed it, bring it up, educate it and in many other ways incorporate it into the community. The extension of these traditions to formal schooling is a significant factor in the development of the country’s education system.

Without collaboration between school and family, communities could see children exhibiting various social problems, for instance dropping out of school, ill-discipline, withdrawal from school to help or replace parents in the fields, street begging, looking after younger siblings, or providing for home care for a sick family member (Educators Voice, 2002:1). Further problems could be school disruptions caused by lack of shared vision and insufficient communication of values, beliefs, customs and practices in the schools (Moloi, 2002: 08).

1.6 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model is of relevance to this study, in particular its interpretation of the critical and continuous role that families play. It lays the foundation for understanding and promoting cooperation and collaboration between the most important systems in children’s lives. The ecological systems theory represents the family as a system, nested in a number of other societal systems, and helps to explain the effect the school family relationship can have on children’s learning and development. This model helps us to understand the complexity of the family as a system and how the individual child functions within both that family and wider society.

With reference to the microsystem, families should be included in all aspects of their child’s schooling, including decision-making, governance and advocacy. In turn, schools should work with those families to establish school level policies that promote school-family collaboration. The innermost core is the individual child, who has face-to-face interactions with those most influential in his or her life, including parents, other family members and educators. The
mesosystem, meanwhile, refers to the relationship that develops and exists between these microsystems. There are important interactions between families and school, school and community, and community and families, three systems that are strongly influential in the life of a learner, depending on the frequency and quality of the interconnections. Negative or conflicting relationships may place a child at risk in all three settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1998).

According to Bronfenbrenner (1998), the exosystem refers to one or more environments in which the developing learner is not involved directly as an active participant, but which may influence or be influenced by what happens in settings and relationships that directly influence him or her. In my study, the exosystem is the environment in which the study takes place, namely the informal settlement. It is characterized by shebeens (shacks where liquor is sold), poor sanitation, and rudimentary housing. Parents are often afraid for their safety when walking around on daily business, let alone walking to school.

The Macrosystem encompasses the attitudes, beliefs, values and ideologies inherent in the systems of a particular society and culture, which may have an impact or be influenced by any of the above systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1998). Examples of values and beliefs could include democracy, social justice and ubuntu, and it is within this sphere that family collaboration becomes a matter of multicultural engagement. Institutions and dynamics outside the family, school, and community are important in a learner’s life, for instance the parents’ place of work and their obligations, the school governing body and its priorities, church facilities and recreational pursuits. Decisions made by a school governing body might directly affect the school curriculum, or contradict family values and beliefs, resulting in a withdrawal of any support a family might have considered giving to the school (Deslandes, 2005:168).

If educators and families are to work together, there is therefore a need for a holistic approach, that is one that sees all stakeholders assisting in the creation of an environment that is conducive to learning and teaching, and so geared to improving the quality of education (Balint, 2005).

It is now necessary to clarify key terms and concepts used in this study.
1.7 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Three key terms used in the study, and that require clarification are:

a. Informal Settlement: According to Mazur (1995:40), informal settlements are often referred to as ‘squatter settlements’ or ‘shantytowns’, and are held on a basis of traditional land tenure, not in accordance with the country’s formal or ‘legal’ system of ownership. They are common features of developing countries and are typically the product of an urgent need for shelter by the urban poor. Characterized by a dense proliferation of small make-shift shelters, built from diverse material, they invariably contribute to a degradation of the local ecosystem and are associated with severe social problems.

b. School-family collaboration: According to McClain (2006:12), school family collaboration is a cooperation process of planning that brings together school staff, parents, children and community members to maximize resources for child achievements and development. Swart and Phasha (2005:219) describe school family collaboration as an emphasis on the relationship between families and schools and the way they work together in supporting the learning and development of children. They further define it as a preventative, solution-focused approach in which both partners attempt to develop learning communities that support learning and development, and address barriers as they arise.

c. Barrier: The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (2004:160) defines barrier as any natural obstacle which bars access, or anything immaterial that keeps separate and apart. According to the Collins English Dictionary (1994:124) barriers are defined as things that hold apart, separate or hinder. A barrier is an obstacle or circumstance that keeps people or things apart, and that prevents communication and bars access to advancement (Davies, 2002:376). Applied to the sector of the education system in South Africa under examination in this study, it is an impediment to the coming together of learners’ parents and the school, for largely social and economic reasons, to be more closely investigated in this study.
1.8 FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF THE STUDY

Chapter 1 introduced the research, followed by the historical background, the statement of the problem, aims and contribution of the study, its theoretical framework and rationale, and definition of terms.

Chapter 2 will outline the literature study, identifying barriers to collaboration between the school and learners’ families.

Chapter 3 presents the research design and methodology, the research methods, the process of sampling and the research instruments, as well as the challenges faced by the researcher and successes achieved.

Chapter 4 presents the findings and results relating to school-family collaboration.

Chapter 5 concludes with a discussion of the research findings.

1.9 SUMMARY

This chapter has highlighted the background to the study, that is the importance of school-family collaboration. The problem relating to informal settlements in South Africa statement was outlined, and, drawing on the ecological model of Bronfenbrenner, it was asserted that the study explore school family collaboration in relation to the various systems in which they operate, and look for solutions that take a holistic approach.

The next chapter is a literature study aimed as ascertaining barriers to school-family collaboration.
CHAPTER 2

SCHOOL-FAMILY COLLABORATION: A LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews literature on overcoming barriers to school family collaboration. It begins by distinguishing between involvement and collaboration, as the two terms are often used synonymously. According to Van Wyk (2004:127), parental involvement occurs when parents are involved and are actively participating in school activities. For Steyn (2002:16) it is an umbrella term for different types of activities that encourage parents to actively participate in non-academic and academic activities in support of their children’s education. Gololo (1998:14) indicates that the definition as it pertains to South Africa has changed with time, wherein the pre-1994 government related it to parental responsibilities for finance, discipline and crisis resolution in schools. The author further states that, in the new South African education dispensation, parental involvement includes a voice and active participation in the governance of their children’s schools.

Viewing the concept from an inclusive education perspective, Swart and Phasha (2005:219) term it school-family collaboration, and place emphasis on the relationship between families and schools and the way the two institutions work together in supporting the learning and development of children. They further maintain that it is a child-focused philosophy that guides educators and parents to cooperate and collaborate in enhancing learning opportunities and success for children in four areas, namely: academic, social, emotional and behavioral. Mastropiere (2000) interpret the term as relating to a scenario in which educators do not operate in isolation, but rather strive to understand the expectations of parents and give them the opportunity to contribute to the educational process. The South African School Act of (SASA:1996) requires a sharing of power among parents, educators and the community in a way that will support the core values of democracy. The school governing body (SGB) is an important structure that ensures school development and the families’ collaboration is crucial for its efficiency and effectiveness. Clearly, a central idea behind the term collaboration is a process of planning whereby stakeholders come together equally to maximize resources for the children’s achievement and development.
SECTION A

2.2 FORMS OF SCHOOL AND FAMILY COLLABORATION

There are various ways in which school and family collaboration can take place. The following are identified and discussed:

2.2.1 Collaboration in academic support

The parents’ role in academic activities has been associated with learners’ success, since the children can be strongly encouraged in their academic pursuits by the support and interest of the parents. Learners often need help with their homework well and may be guided by their parents on how to use their free time more productively. They benefit from seeing consistency between the values and lessons taught at school and those practiced at home (McClain, 2006:17).

A primary aim of school-parent collaboration is to improve and support the learning activities. Van Wyk (2004) identifies several academic activities in which family collaboration may be utilized:

a) Defining learning contents and aims, the educator’s values and philosophy play an exceptional part in Curriculum 2005, where the educator himself/herself must select content and establish aims. The parent can provide input that ensures the maintenance of accepted principles and values.

b) The presentation of the lessons is the educator’s task, but a parent may contribute their own experiences and knowledge to the classroom. For instance, a traffic official may be involved in a lesson about road safety, or a parent involved in industry may help in the manufacturing of teaching aids.

c) Parents may assist with remedial teaching by revising learning material that have already been presented in class.

d) Assistance may be rendered by parents to learners in finding information and in planning learning projects.

e) The parents could contribute to creating an environment in the classroom, for example by helping to decorate it.
However, all of these examples require communication between the school and parents, since it is important that the main aim of the learning process is not lost. Any collaboration must contribute to school effectiveness and learner’s success.

2.2.2 Collaboration in fund raising

Schools often welcome funds to cover their operational costs and to purchase educational material. It is therefore a positive help to the school if parents can contribute financially to the running and even expansion of the school (Johnson, Pugach & Hawkins, 2004:4). However, in the case of the school in this study, the parents are in the lowest economic bracket and have sufficient difficulty in avoiding the worse effects of poverty, without being expected to subsidize the education system. There is provision in SASA (1996) section 21, for a no school fee status to be implements, whereby schools are funded wholly by the Department of Education (DoE). The money is intended for just such needy schools in informal settlements, as well as poorer rural schools. The participating school was receiving of R208, 675.00 per semester, because the ordinary grant from the state was generally not enough to provide education for all.

Nevertheless, SASA does encourage parents of all background to assist the school where possible in finding other sources of income. For instance, fundraising projects may be undertaken, not necessarily for the fees but to help pay for other school activities. According to van Wyk (2004:128), parents may serve on the fundraising committees and help with funding policies of the school. For example, when a school hosts a fete or concert, parents may be responsible for selling tickets and manning stalls (Letsholo, 2006:10). In addition, they may also ask for donations for the school from their employers.

2.2.3 Collaboration in physical development of the school

Development is not only concerned with maintenance of existing structure and buildings, but also refers to the expansion of the school as its operations become diversified (Wentzel 2008:50). According to van Wyk (2004:129), parents should assist in the improvement of school grounds, supply and maintenance of physical amenities and planning further expansion of the school. The safety of learners should be ensured at all times and, in this respect,
families might be prepared to volunteer to assist when there are threats to the safety of learners. This is in line with the Letsema idea reflected in the Tirisano principle to assist in school development in South Africa (van Wyk, 2008: 130). This national mobilization plan for educating and training, which was announced in July 1999 by the Minister of Education, urged educators, parents and the community to work together (DoE, 1999:6). It is acknowledged that some parents, even though they may not have a regular or substantial income, have skills that may benefit the school. Through volunteering these skills they would thus ensure that any money available to the school is used not to employ expensive professionals, but for other projects or programmes. It can be argued that the schools in communities where parents volunteer in great numbers stand a better chance of developing rapidly than those in communities where parents are not forthcoming (van Wyk, 2004:130).

2.2.4 Collaboration in school governance

Parents have a role to play in the school governance by virtue of being elected to the SGB. According to SASA (1996), the composition of an SGB should be as follows:

a) Parents of the learners at the school
b) Educators
c) Other members of the school who are not educators
d) The school manager.

Amongst the functions of the SGB stipulated by SASA are to “promote the best interest of the school and ensure its development” and:

to supplement the resources supplied by the state in order to improve the quality of education provided to all learners of the school. To do this, parents may be asked to pay school fees. The majority of parents must agree upon the amount for the school fees, and the governing body must administer such funds.

The SGB must also prepare a budget each year, which shows the estimated income and expenditure of the school for the following year, and from these responsibilities it follows that the SGB is a partnership of different stakeholders that includes parents.
2.2.5 Collaboration in the implementation of inclusive education for learners with special needs

The National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training and National Committee for Education Support Services report (1997), which informed the educational policy on inclusion of learners with special needs, recommended that parents be included in assessment of needs and provision of support to schools and learners. Other policies and legislation, namely White Paper 6 on inclusion of learners with special needs (2001), and SASA (1996) support the optimal involvement of parents in the education of learners with special needs. The above-mentioned policy documents emphasize that parents must participate in the process of identifying barriers to learning and development, and in developing plans of action to address them. This involvement in the assessment process is particularly important when confronting the challenge of developing an inclusive school. In addition, through the insight they bring, the parents can play a major role in providing an extra hand where additional support is required in the school or classroom (Engelbrecht, Green & Naicker, 1999:172). Collaborating in the development of an inclusive learning environment benefits the school, and facilitates an understanding of the learners’ family-school situation, thus reducing the educators’ load, and enriching their work (Wentzel, 2008:55).

According to Engelbrecht, Green and Naicker, (1999:56), the development of an inclusive school has to be placed in the context of building an inclusive society, of which the family is the central part. The values and norms of the schools that have to reflect the principles of inclusion need to be developed within the family and other parts of community life. Furthermore, by virtue of their majority representation on SGBs in South Africa, families have a central role to play in developing local school policies and governing the schools in such a way that the principles relating to inclusion are developed and pursued in practice. Parents have a key role in the special education process and they need to ensure that the individualized education programme (IEP) has specific goals and objectives relating to their children’s future ability to live in the community (Mastropiere & Schruggs, 2000).

2.3 BENEFITS OF SCHOOL-FAMILY COLLABORATION

Literature indicates that parent and family collaboration could be beneficial to both the educators and families in various ways.
2.3.1 Benefits to parents

Parents’ benefits go far beyond the boundaries of feelings of empowerment and ownership (Cohen, Linker & Stutts, 2006:421). School and family collaboration in school governing activities can provide parents with the opportunities to build their own skills and empower them to speak for themselves within the schooling system (SASA, 1996:37). In addition, collaboration in school activities brings families together, enabling them to interact and share common joys and sorrows (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005:164). This is particularly important in informal settlements, where families have fewer social networks for support. By actively collaborating in school activities, they can gain access to additional social networks and facilitate access to further resources in the community (Hoover-Dempsy, Walker & Sandler, 2005:40).

2.3.2 Benefits to educators

Walther-Thomas, Korinek, McLaughlin and William (2000) asserted that many childhood practitioners and parents as practitioners are able to identify with some of the common issues in raising children. By collaborating, educators and parents bring together two important parts of a child’s world, namely: (a) the educator’s specialized knowledge and understanding of child development and education, and (b) the parents’ in-depth knowledge of their own individual child and the circumstances within the family and social context. This kind of interaction also enters another dimension, as it facilitates the expansion of their own understanding of diversity and family pattern and practices (Mestry, 2004).

Parental involvement in school activities improves the relationship between the two groups of stakeholder. The school personnel, who know parents by virtue of their participation in school activities, tend to treat them with greater respect (Letsholo, 2006:13). Conversely, parents who understand the aims, nature and functioning of the school are likely to support the educator, and contribute positively to the education of their children. According to McClain (2006:51), collaboration leads to trust. Where parents and educators collaborate, they are more likely to trust each other, leading to a healthy partnership in the education of the child. Parental involvement is mutually beneficial, since parents and educators no longer feel alone when dealing with difficult students and situations, and the educator has powerful allies in parents. Knowledge of the child’s home and school situation can influence his/her education
in a positive way. Parents can contribute valuable information about their children. Information concerning children’s likes and dislikes, strengths and weaknesses, along with any relevant medical details, can often only be obtained from the parents. Such information can help the educator to help the child to succeed (Cohen, Linker & Stutts, 2006:420), and save the educators time and effort in having to determine it for themselves.

School-family collaboration is the most successful way of combating delinquent behaviour and improving school attendance. Parental involvement can lessen the educator’s workload, by for example getting parents to help with sporting activities, in chaperoning learners during field trips and helping them create activities (Henderson & Mapp, 2002:117).

2.3.3 Benefits to the learner

According to Henderson and Berla (1994:1), there is strong evidence that children whose parents take an active part in school activities tend to succeed not just in school, but throughout life. For example, they experience emotional stability and security and are better able to adjust to school and overcome any problems they may encounter, particularly with behaviour and learning. In addition, the likelihood of dropping out of school is reduced significantly (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker & Sandler, 2005:44). Furthermore, Wentzel (2003:50) argues that collaboration can facilitate continuity between home and the school programmes, and thus ensure consistency in the child’s life.

SECTION B

2.4 BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE SCHOOL-FAMILY COLLABORATION

Despite all these benefits related to school and family collaboration, a number of factors which could be a hindrance have been identified. Discussion of these barriers falls into the following categories: (a) time constraints; (b) inadequate information about establishing collaboration; (c) financial constraints; (d) differences in language and culture; (e) ineffective means of communication; (f) conflicting expectations of parents or families and educators.
2.4.1 Time constraints

Time is one of the most important resources in a school, and almost all of it is allocated to direct teaching (Van Wyk, 2004:130). A factor of school life is that in most systems the importance of collaborative planning for the continual improvement of schools is not acknowledged or honoured by the creation of a schedule that supports regular, frequent and compensated meetings of adults (Peled & Rosenblat, 2002:349). This is true where both parents work, but particularly so in the case of single working mothers because they may be faced with many commitments, for example returning home tired, having to prepare a meal and listen to questions about homework (van Wyk, 2004:125).

It is difficult for parents to be actively involved with schools, especially during regular school hours. In the informal settlements and rural schools, an additional problem is that parents often return from work very late (Letsholo, 2006:17). This may be especially true for families of migrant workers who, McClain (2006:27) noted, work from dawn to dusk and have a high mobility rate. These families have very little time to establish collaboration schedules for school activities. They often feel intimidated by school buildings, the organizational structures and personnel (Gomez & Greenough, 2002:39). Indeed, educators also have limited time to meet with parents during the school day and, as a result, schools are regularly scheduling alternative meeting times, such as after school and weekends (Johnson, Pugach & Hawkins, 2004:08). Furthermore, an often overlooked concern related to these meetings is the burden placed on educators to be away from their own families for evening or weekend meetings (Letsholo, 2006:18).

Schools may organize events for staff convenience, with activities scheduled at times that may be inconvenient for working parents (Davies, 2002:388). Many parents hold down two or three jobs in order to cope with economic difficulties, so work schedules prevent them from attending meetings and other events. Parents whose own school experience was unsuccessful or stressful may be uncomfortable with interactions at their child’s school, and may be reluctant to return to school as parents (Gomez & Greenough, 2002:39). Some of the parents have a limited education and are not sure they have anything of value to contribute, whilst other parents feel underutilized, especially in decisions affecting the academic life of the school (McClain 2006:19). Conversely, some parents are unsure about how to help their
children learn, not knowing what the school needs or not understanding how the system works.

Lack of adequate resources serves as a barrier to schools establishing a relationship with parents. Family problems such as lack of food, clothing and shelter tend to take precedence over involvement in the children’s school. Adams and Christenson (2000) noted that some homes have no area set aside for parents to assist their children with school work. Basic facilities, such as tables on which to work, and electricity to provide adequate lighting, are unavailable in some homes (Inger, 2000).

2.4.2 Inadequate information about establishing collaboration

Neither educators nor families necessarily possess the skills required for working collaboratively. In South Africa, as in other parts of the world, school-family collaboration has largely been confined to taking responsibility for finance, discipline and crises in the school (Gololo, 1998:12). Parents have been made to believe that education is the sole responsibility of the school, while the school believes that education should be carried out far from interference by the parents. In addition, educators also have to deal with the negative publicity and criticism about education and the decreasing respect, trust and support formerly accorded to them as respected members of the community. As noted by Christenson and Sheridan (2001), teacher education has not always equipped teachers with skills essential to working collaboratively with parents.

2.4.3 Financial constraints

Insufficient money for start-up or expansion of collaboration activities is a psychological and practical barrier to successful outreach (Letsholo, 2006:17). Letsholo further states that the financial resources that are available to schools are declining, and decisions relating to expenditure signal that schools do not consider family-school collaboration as having an essential claim on their budget, or being key to their mission. Meanwhile, many families without adequate resources are already overwhelmed by their own budgeting, some suffering extreme economic stress in addressing their own food, clothing and shelter needs. This will take precedence over collaboration in their children’s education (van Wyk 2004:126). Van Wyk further states that “many black families living in South Africa are experiencing stress
which affects the way they relate to their children and the school; they are in extremely traumatic life situations and are struggling to survive”. According to van Wyk (2004:126), in the rural and informal settlement schools the situation is worse as many families are unemployed and faced with urgent problems in surviving.

Henderson and Mapp’s (2002) literature review revealed that low socio-economic status (SES) families were unable to participate in school activities because they were struggling to provide for their families. Problems included unemployment; demanding, inflexible work schedules; poor mental and psychical health; and limited access to professional support systems. All these in turn play a part in keeping families from active collaboration with schools.

2.4.4 Differences in language and culture

According to McClain (2006:28), language barriers are often a critical factor for many immigrant families, especially in an informal settlement. In these poor communities, people have often been thrown together from different cultural backgrounds, and they speak different languages (Mailwane, 2003:63). McClain (2006:63) states that miscommunications often occur when a student’s family does not have “the same semantic and pragmatic sense of language as the educator”. A study conducted by Heine (2000), among Japanese-American communities, revealed that language was a factor affecting family collaboration to such an extent that families felt schooling should be the responsibility solely of the teacher.

The many factors that may have an influence on multi-cultural family involvement have been examined in recent literature of Letsholo (2006:17). Differences of language or lack of a common language may be a source of tension for families whose culture differs from that of the educator. Insecurity regarding their ability to communicate in, for example, English may wrongly be interpreted as apathy. Cultural differences also influence non-verbal communication very strongly, for example eye contact and personal space. Some cultural groups experience strong eye contact as threatening or even insulting, whilst for others it is a sign of attention and respect. Stereotyping by either the educator or the family may lead to misunderstandings and conflict, and ignorance or lack of information concerning cultural differences may cause misunderstanding (for instance, the misspelling or mispronunciation of a name). Finally, people who come from a cultural background that was treated negatively in
the past feel animosity and mistrust towards the system, and this could damage family collaboration.

2.4.5 Poor communication

Communication plays a vital role in school-family collaboration, and for families to become involved in education there must be two-way communication between the home and the school (Letsholo, 2006:31). Unfortunately, some schools have a tendency to contact families only when there is a problem, which can be very discouraging for parents. In some instances, communication with families occurs only when the child receives special services (Balint, 2005:9).

According to Epstein, (2001) there are still too many schools where educators do not understand learners or their families, and where families do not understand the staff in their children’s schools. Furthermore, these misunderstandings are a result of differences in communication motives, styles, methods and procedures. When multiple problems in communication exist, family-school collaboration is unable to develop the levels of trust and respect necessary to become successful (Adams & Christenson, 2000).

2.4.6 Conflicting expectations of parents or families and educators

Educators and parents tend to blame each other for many problems that currently exist among young people. In a representative study (van Wyk, 2004), the researchers asked a number of parents or families and educators to describe instances of child misbehaviour (conduct, personality, or achievements problems) that had produced disagreement between them. Educators attributed home-related factors as the main cause, whilst parents cited these less often than any other. Interestingly, educators never attributed the behavior to school-related causes (Epstein, 2001).

Many families (parents) view educators as uncaring individuals who teach only because they cannot qualify for more demanding positions (Friend & Cook, 2000:277). They are believed not really to care for the children they work with and are only concerned with obtaining more time away from school. Some of the complaints that parents expressed concerning school included feeling helpless, powerless and ignored by school staff. They also felt that educators
would retaliate against their children if they complained about poor teaching, and believed educators unfairly blamed them for problems that belonged to the school. Low-income parents in particular feared being intimidated by school staff. Many black parents thought educators had little faith in their children’s ability to succeed in school (Letsholo, 2006:14). Parents have traditionally responded to ill treatment by the school through avoidance, feeling that they are not welcome in the school. Some parents got the message that “parents need to interfere” (Gomez & Greenough, 2002:27).

Realities faced by educators include overcrowded classes, especially in the informal settlement. A high number of educational changes, for example Outcome Based Education (OBE) and the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) have been difficult to implement in the classes, due to the lack of resources and insufficient training (van Wyk, 2004:127). These overwhelming responsibilities put pressure and a heavy demand on educators’ personal and professional lives, and can lead to avoidance of contact with parents.

According to Johnson, Pugach and Hawkins (2004:8), like families, educators have a limited time to meet with parents during the school day. Rescheduled meetings merely increase the burden placed on educators to be away from their own families for evenings or weekends.

2.5 SUMMARY

Epstein (2001) states that it was commonly thought that there was a sequential influence of family and school on the growth and development of a child. Furthermore the family was viewed as primarily responsible for nurturing the child and laying the foundation for his or her entry into school. The school was seen as the socializing agent that prepared the child for his or her role in the larger community.

Collaboration among parents and teachers should not begin when a specific problem arises. It is against the background of a history of positive home-collaboration that solutions to problems can more easily be obtained. Also, a key to being able to develop the broad array of parent involvement programmes described by Epstein is for the school (educators and administrators) to take on a collaborative posture when interacting with parents. Educators need to develop effective communication skills and a problem-solving orientation that permits them to work in partnership with parents toward viable solutions.
In this chapter, school-family collaboration was differentiated from family/parental involvement. The benefits of school-family collaboration to parents, educators and the learners were highlighted, especially the need for all groups to interact. On the other hand, barriers to effective school-family collaboration were highlighted, notably inadequate information about establishing collaboration, financial, language and cultural barriers, and ineffective means of communication. Finally, poverty and conflicting expectations of parents/families and educators were shown to be major obstacles to collaboration. Chapter 3 discusses the Research Design, with special reference to the research methodology, data collection techniques and the challenges and successes of the researcher.
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The methods used to investigate the problem are explained in this study. The discussion begins with the research problem—barriers that affect school-family collaboration in an informal settlement. Justification for my choice of methods, including the criteria for selecting the site and participants, is provided.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

This study falls within the qualitative paradigm. Qualitative study is described by Mouton (2001) as an approach to social research which takes as its points of departure the insider perspective on phenomena. Similarly, McMillan and Schumacher (1993) stated that qualitative research describes and analyses people’s actions, beliefs, thoughts and perceptions. Such studies are concerned with individuals’ world-views or belief systems, rather than seeking one “truth” as in conventional quantitative studies (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). I chose a qualitative paradigm for this study because it offers opportunities for the exploration of and deeper explanation of the parents’ and educators’ views about the phenomena studied.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design chosen is that of a case study, which Yin (2004) defined as an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and in which multiple sources of evidence are used. According to Merriam (1998), a case study as a format for design is thus characterized by the focus on a phenomenon that has identifiable boundaries. Data regarded as not being applicable to the case would not be utilized, unless indirectly reflecting the nature of the case. Merriam points out that the process is more important than the outcome, by which she means that a description of how, where, when, and why things happen in the case are noted, and form an essential part of the outcome. The context is also more than part of the case, and the interaction between context and action is usually the unit of analysis.
A case study design was employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation (De Vos, 1998). Case studies are distinguished from other types of qualitative research in that they are intensive descriptions and analyses of a single unit or bounded system, such as an individual, a programme, event, group, intervention or community (Patton, 1990).

The case study permitted me to focus on a single case, namely a primary school located in an informal settlement, the focus being on the school-family collaboration and its specific events and processes. The purpose remains to elaborate a concept, or develop a model, in relation to sub-components and associated empirical meanings (Mcmillan & Schumacher, 1993). Considering these characteristics, I calculated that the design would enable me to capture as much information as possible about views on school-family collaboration at a research site. In addition, the investigation enabled me to go deeper and include how factors interplay with each other to create barriers to school and family collaboration. As stated by Bryman and Burgess (1991), such a description is relevant for rich description about the case and its dynamics.

3.4 SAMPLING

I followed purposive sampling to select the research site and participants. This sampling strategy is based on the assumption that the researcher intends to discover, and to gain insight from a sample which has provided the most information relevant to the research question (Mcmillan & Schumacher, 1993). Accessibility and willingness to participate played a role in deciding on the participants.

3.4.1 Research site

I conducted this study at an informal settlement in Rustenburg, in the North West province of South Africa. This area is inhabited mostly by people who work in the nearby mining area, and whose place of origin is not Rustenburg. The inhabitants are from provinces such as the Eastern Cape, and neighbouring countries such as Lesotho, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. I did not use my school for fear that families who are aware of my position as an educator might
feel obliged to participate in my study. My choice for the location was motivated by the following factors:

a) The research site was a primary school located in an informal settlement in Rustenburg. The school was one of the pilots for inclusive education in the North West province
b) It admitted learners from diverse backgrounds, some of whom were presenting with barriers to learning
c) Its proximity to the informal settlement meant it served learners from the nearby informal settlement
d) The school was surrounded by a number of shebeens (places where liquor is sold)
e) The unique characteristics of problems reported by the school, including learners coming to school drunk or having smoked dagga and taken other forms of drugs
f) Poverty and a high rate of unemployment amongst the parents.

I chose a school with a high number of learners experiencing problems that might hinder their academic success, and one faced with the demands of implementing inclusive education, I considered that a school in such a situation would welcome my study. Moreover, as a pilot for inclusive education I assumed that my study would contribute towards suggesting guidelines on how school-family-community in an informal settlement could work collaboratively for the successful implementation of relevant educational practices.

3.4.2 Participants

A total of 20 participants expressed interest in participating in the study, that is 10 school personnel and 10 parents. However, for varying reasons I was only able to collect data with 15 participants, that is 4 parents (one male and three female), 2 School Governing Body members (one of each gender), 4 members of the School Management Team (SMT) (2 males and 2 females), 5 educators, (2 males and 3 females). One of the female educators was a special needs educator.


3.4.3 Procedure for recruiting participants

I used the staff and parents meetings organized by the school as a platform for recruiting participants for the study. The language used for the parents was Setswana, which gave participants the freedom to express themselves in their own ways, and use the language they understood. Having initially obtained permission from both the district office of the DoE and the school principal, I presented the contents of my research proposal to them, including the research methods. I explained the purpose of the study, and clarified the participants’ right to protection and voluntary participation. The right of withdrawal without penalty was also emphasised. I also assured them that their names would not appear on the document, with pseudonyms being used for the sake of anonymity. Their information would be treated with confidentiality. I asked their permission to tape-record the interviews, and explained that the audio-tapes would not be shared with anyone, other than my supervisor. The tapes were to be kept in a safe place for a period of two years after completing my study. Participants were informed that even though there was no payment for their involvement, transport and food would be provided in those cases where they lived further away from the school. The interviews would take place at the school in the afternoon and from 45 minutes to one hour.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

Having examined the various methods that qualitative researchers employ, such as observation, focus group interviews, individual interviews, document and visual images (De Vos, 2005), the methods that I selected as most appropriate to collecting data for my particular study were focus group interviews and individual interviews.

3.5.1 Focus group interviews

Welman, Kruger and Mitchel (2005) described focus group as in-depth interviews with groups. These groups consist of a small number of individuals or ‘interviewees’, who are drawn together for the purpose of expressing their opinions on a specific set of open questions. According to De Vos (1998), they are purposive discussions on a specific topic and related topics, taking place between eight to 10 individuals with similar backgrounds and common interests. Furthermore, the focus group interviews enable the researcher to develop inductively, which is from bottom up rather than from the top down. Group interviews assists
in obtaining perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993). It provides better access to the participants’ own language, concepts and concerns, hence it is a technique best used to find out what people think and feel (Cohen & Manion, 2000).

I conducted focus group interviews with three groups, comprising four parents, five educators and four school management team (SMT) members. For the parents, the interviews were conducted in their mother-tongue Setswana, to give the participants greater freedom of expression. They were audio-taped with parents’ permission. During the interview with each group I reiterated to the volunteer participants their rights to withdraw without penalty. Each volunteer was offered an opportunity to ask questions before signing a consent form. I informed them that I would listen to the interviews on the tape and if there was anything that required clarification, I would go back and ask them. The interviews took place on 3rd August 2007, at the school, at 3pm after classes had finished and the children left. This was to make sure that the educational activities were not disturbed. The interviews lasted between 30 – 45 minutes. The following four questions were asked to all the participants:

a. What are your views about school-family collaboration?
b. How do you work with parents / families?
c. What are barriers to effective school family collaboration?
d. How can these barriers be overcome?

Focus group interviews with school management team and the educators began on 7th August 2007. Members who showed up for the interview were the principal, deputy principal and two HoDs from the intermediate and senior phase. The head of the foundation phase did not show up as she was away on a staff development programme. The questions asked were the same as those asked to the parents. Interviews with the educators and SMT lasted only 30 minutes due to time constraints. The interviews were conducted in English, in the staffroom.

The focus group permits data collection through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher, and in this way participants were able to query others and explain to each other (De Vos, 2005). Focus groups permitted probing, and allowed participants to build upon responses of others.
3.5.2 Individual Interviews

Cohen and Manion (2000) define an individual interview as “a purposeful conversation, usually between two people on a topic of mutual interest”. Similarly, De Vos (1998) described individual interviews as face-to-face interactions between an interviewer and an interviewee, where the purpose is to understand the latter’s life experience or situation as expressed in his or her own words.

I was able to conduct individual interviews with only 4 parents and 2 members of the SGB. In this way, I was able to obtain clarity on some issues which had not been satisfactorily explored during focus group interviews, and others that had emerged in them. The fifth parent was not available due to work commitments. The chairperson of the SGB apologized for not attending the interviews, but the other two members of the SGB did not send any apologies. Interviews were held on 6th September 2007, at the school. I reminded the participants of their right to participate or withdraw without negative consequences. I had asked participants’ permission to tape-record the sessions. I conducted the interviews in a face-to-face manner, which provided an opportunity to negotiate closeness with the participants. The interviews lasted for 30 minutes. The same questions as for the educators and school management team were asked.

3.6 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF DATA

The trustworthiness of the study addresses issues of reliability and validity. When qualitative researchers consider research validity, it generally refers to research that is plausible, credible, trustworthy and therefore defensible (McMillan and Schumacher (1993)).

I used five strategies proposed by McMillan and Schumacher (1993). Firstly, I used both individual and focus group interviews, which allowed for triangulation in data collection and analysis. Variety of methods enhanced the validity of data, as the weaknesses of the focus group interview were complemented for in individual interviews. Secondly, I used participants’ verbatim accounts, thus gaining literal statements and quotations from the document. In this study I presented extensive direct quotations from the data to illustrate participants’ meanings and to enable the readers to attach their own interpretations. Thirdly, the use of the tape-recorder facilitated accurate data gathering. During interviews I asked the
participants’ permission to tape-record the interviews. The fourth strategy proposed by McMillan and Schumacher (1993) was “member checking”, that is checking informally with participants for accuracy during data collection. Unfortunately, however, it was not possible to conduct these member checks due to time constraints.

Finally, McMillan and Schumacher (1993) state that qualitative research researchers do not aim at the generalization of the results, but rather at an extension of understanding.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

In this study, data analysis of the transcribed interviews was conducted according to steps prescribed by Creswell (1994), and McMillan and Schumacher (1993). I listened to the audio-tapes of each session to capture what was emerging. The process permitted identification of tentative themes and relationships which were further explored in the interviews. The emerging themes were integrated and compared with the data selected during the interviews. The units of measuring were then arranged into major categories and sub-categories. Those portions of the transcripts reproduced in the final analysis were translated into English. Finally, suitable quotations were selected as rich data to illustrate the categories.

3.8 SUMMARY

This chapter described the qualitative research and the research design. The use of qualitative methodology has a considerable contribution to make to this study. The rationale made in this chapter was for the choice of the qualitative approach for the study of overcoming barriers to school-family collaboration. This chapter also described the methods used to obtain data, namely focus group interview and individual interviews. The method of data analysis and steps taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the data were also given.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS RELATING TO SCHOOL-FAMILY COLLABORATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I present findings of the transcribed and analysed interviews which were conducted according to the steps prescribed by Creswell (1994). I listened to the audio-tapes of each session and transcribe them verbatim. The transcripts were then translated from Setswana to English. The units of meaning were then arranged into categories and sub-categories. Finally, suitable quotations were selected as rich data to illustrate the categories.

I therefore present the findings under three themes, namely: (a) general views about school-family collaborations; (b) barriers to school-family collaboration; and (c) suggestions for overcoming such barriers to school-family collaboration.

4.2 VIEWS ABOUT SCHOOL–FAMILY COLLABORATION

From the data collected by means of both focus and individual interviews, it became evident that both participants, namely: parents, educators and the school management team (SMT), share a view that collaboration is vital for learners’ academic success. A teacher cannot do it alone. They cited various reasons for their standpoints. It was interesting to note that even though parents’ levels of education were generally lower than those of their parents, they held school-family collaboration in high regard. However, there were barriers specific to informal settlements that should be overcome. This is how they expressed their views with regard to school-family collaboration:

Parent 1:

*Go bothokwa gore batsadi ba tseye karolo mo ditirong tsa sekolo ka gore barutabana ba le nosi ba ka se kgone jaaka motswana a kile a tlhalosa gore sedikwa ke ntša pedi ga se thata, mme kgetsi ya tsie e kgonwa ka go tshwaraganelwa.*

Translation: It is important that parents should play their role in their children’s school because educators cannot do it alone, two hands are better than one. Collaborating with educators will make their work easier and manageable. First let’s help educators to give our children the correct education, and as parents we should visit the school to help educators.
School Management Team (Principal) 1 a male teaching Economic Management Sciences in Grade 7:

You cannot just teach at school and try to teach children [inaudible] with the children, so it’s very important that you are able to collaborate with the parents.

Educator 2 is a male teacher responsible for Art and Culture in Grade 7:

It is important to work collaboratively with parents. Learning plays through a triangular shape, without the involvement of parents who know more about their children and who also can agree … You only meet with learners maybe on seven hours or eight hours, they spend most of their time with their parents, and therefore they will help us a lot.

Participants cited various reasons for school-family collaborations, which I have discussed under the following headings: (a) sharing different expertise; (b) supporting the child with academic work; (c) teaching as a shared responsibility; (d) preventing inappropriate behaviour; (e) knowledge about the learner’s home environment and historical development; and (f) support for the teacher and school activities.

4.2.1 Sharing different expertise

Both parents and teachers possess special expertise, skills, knowledge and experience of working with children. Three parents expressed the view that teachers possess special understanding of challenges that learners present with at school, and in this way they are in the best position to make parents aware of the child’s problems. They can also alert parents to the child’s problem when they begin to sense it.

Parent 1 is a male, working at a mine:

Barutabana ba na le go itemogela mathata a a rileng ka bana ba rona. Ngwanake o e leng gore ke “slow learner” nna ke le motsadi wa gagwe ke sa mo lemoge, morutabana o kgona go ntemosa bothata jwa ngwana. Ke nagana gore go mosola go tsaya karolo no sekolong gore ke kgone go tlhaloganya gore ngwanake ke motho wa mofuta mang... a ka tswelela pele ka dithuto dife.

Translation: Educators experience problems with our children. My child, who is a “slow learner”, as a parent I was not aware, the educator can make me aware of my child’s problem. I think it is important to collaborate with the school so that I can understand problems encountered and which stream of education to take.
Parent 4 is a married woman, unemployed and dependent on her child’s grant:

*Rona batsadi dilo tse re sa di itseng re kgona go di itse ga fela re fithelela kwa sekolong re ikamanya le barutabana ba bana ba rona.*

Translation: As parents we are able to know the conditions of our children only when we collaborate with educators.

It was also clear that five educators saw those parents who possessed special expertise as being able to help with lessons or school maintenance, e.g., traffic officials offering lessons on road safety, flower arrangers decorating the classrooms, electricians checking the wiring, and builders and carpenters assisting with the upkeep of the buildings. This was made clear by educator 3, as she expressed that:

*Working collaboratively with the parents is very much important because parents have different abilities to assist us in the school.*

### 4.2.2 Supporting the child with academic work

Four parents saw their collaboration with the school as important for the child’s academic performance. They could monitor the child’s academic progress, ensure that homework was completed and also provide encouragement to their child, especially when they encountered challenges in relation to school work. Parent 1 expressed this as follows:

*Ga ngwana a newa di “home work” motsadi o tshwanetse go mo rotloetsa gore a di dire a mo thuse fa a palelwang teng. Motsadi o kgona go tla fa sekolong fa a bidiwa ga ngwana a sa dire tiro ya gagwe ya sekolo.*

Translation: When a child has homework, the parent should assist and encourage the child. The parent can visit the school when they are called and if their children’s work is unsatisfactory.

### 4.2.3 Teaching as a shared responsibility

Although their level of education was lower than that of educators, three parents viewed education as a responsibility that should be shared with the educators. There was an acknowledgement that children spent most of their time at two places, namely home and school. At both places, they were under the supervision of different adults, all of whom played a parental role, whether real or *in loco parentis*. For this reason, both sets of adults should work together towards the development of a child.
Parent 3 is a married woman who is working at a neighbouring school:

Sekolo ke legae le le legolo le le fetisang legae, mo e leng gore ngwana o tlhola kwa teng le morutabana o e leng motsadi wa gagwe ka nako eo. Jaanong leka gore wena o le mme o buisane le morutabana oo gore kana ke tlisa ngwana ke o, ngwana o wa me o bokowa mo ditsebeng, mo matlhong, ke “slow learner” ebile o tseela dithaka ka bonya.

Translation: School is an environment where the child spends most of his / her time with the educator who plays parental role. As a parent you must try to inform the school about the health of your child, for example ears and eyes problems, and a child being academically challenged.

Parent 4:

Ngwana o mo ruta ko lapeng gore a ye kwa sekolong go tlaleletsa ka thuto e motsadi a e mo fileng.

Translation: The child is taught at home and educators are adding to the education that was taught at home.

This perspective was echoed by educator 1 who expressed that:

We must work collaboratively with parents ... whatever difficulty we get from these we should discuss it with their parents.

Similarly, School Management Team (SMT) 2 (the Deputy Principal of Senior and Intermediate Phase) averred that:

… to come and share ideas on how to bring these children up. We need to sit together and see what we can do for the benefit of the learners.

4.2.4 Preventing inappropriate behaviour

School and family collaboration was viewed as important for protecting children from elements that could put them at risk of school failure. Two parents were of the opinion that if they were working well with the school, children would not roam in the streets but would stay at home and focus on school work. In this way, they would be less likely to engage in inappropriate behaviour. Two parents expressed this in the following excerpts:

Parent 1:
Go botlhokwa gore re thuse barutabana ka bana ba rona, ba nne mo lapeng ba se tlaletlale ba dire ditiro tsa bona tsa sekolo.
Translation: It is important that as parents we should work together with educators to ensure that our children do not loiter in the street, but focus on their school work.

Parent 4:
*Tirisannommogo ya dikolo le malapa e a thokega go faposa bana mo maitsholong le ditiro tse di ka ba sitisang go tswelela mo dithutong gongwe tsa ba tlogedisa sekolo.*
Translation: School-family collaboration is necessary to prevent behaviours and activities that place learners at risk of academic failure and dropping out of school.

4.2.5 Knowledge about the learner’s home environment and development

An expression was made by two school management team members and three educators that school-family collaboration facilitated a better understanding of children on the part of the teachers. Both the teachers and SMT members indicated that it was only when the teacher had a better understanding of the children’s background that they could help them succeed at school. They particularly indicated the importance of understanding the family background.

According to the SMT 2, a head of department at the school:
*It is very important that you are able to collaborate with parents; you don’t know what’s the child’s problem at home, so you don’t know what you can do to assist if you are not aware of the background of the child.*

Similarly, Educator 3 supported the statement as she mentioned that:
*It is imperative that we work with the parents collaboratively because the family background is the most important thing in the learning and teaching of the child. If we do not know the background of the child, it will … [w]e will encounter problems when teaching them.*
4.2.6 Support for the educator and school activities

Educators are faced with various challenges in the classrooms and school in general, and they need the support of parents, both in dealing with the diverse population of learners and also offering their support for academic activities and programmes. The district-based support teams function in the development and ongoing support of local Institutional Level Support Teams (ILSTs) in schools and other educational institutions. They support the capacity-building of educators, school management and parents, with a particular focus on curriculum and institutional development.

Particular difficulties relating to illnesses were regarded as requiring communication with parents, as a principal indicated:

SMT 1 (principal):
You can expect to have four children suffering from Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), you need to monitor medication … so we are teaching with classes of 64, 65 children, so I mean if parents can play an active role …

SMT 2 also added that:
We got to know that the parents whom we are working with, we’ve got to see to it that they are supportive to what we are doing as the school….what are their problems so that we can sit together and see what we can do for the benefit of the learners.

4.3 BARRIERS TO SCHOOL-FAMILY COLLABORATION

This section covers participants’ perspectives about factors that hinder effective collaboration between the school and families living in an informal settlement in Rustenburg in the North West province. I have grouped the perspectives, into three broader categories, namely: community, family and school factors.

4.3.1 Community-related factors

According to Bisshoff, du Plessis, and Smith (2004:19), community refers to a cultural or ethnic or language group. The authors further state that a cultural group, for example, may
have certain values it believes should be transmitted to the younger generation. Engelbrecht, Green, Naicker (1991:56), define community as comprising chiefs, local dignitaries (members of the town council), youth organizations, welfare groups, civic leaders and other local people.

(a) Infrastructure
Generally, informal settlements are characterized by poor living conditions, and this one was no exception. The state of the infrastructure was generally poor. For example, services such as electricity, water and sanitation were not available. People were living in small dwellings (or “shacks”) made of cardboard and corrugated iron. They are crowded together with no clear demarcation between the dwellings and the streets. The homes are not electrified, and the streets are small with no lighting. Finding water is a major problem faced by people living in this area, and they are compelled to travel long distances to fetch it, often from the river. Most adults (women) living in that area are unemployed, and those who do have jobs are employed in the surrounding mines. One parent described the conditions in that area as follows:

Parent 1:

Motse wa rona ga se motse o tlhabologileng, o santse o le kwa morago ka ditlhabololo, ga go na motlakase, ditsela, metsi, kwa re a gelelang teng go kgakala, re nna mo matlong a mannye, ga go tsogiwa phakela ke mathata fela, bana go robalwa mo fatshe.
Translation: Our community is backward in terms of developments. There is no electricity or water, so we are compelled to travel long distances to fetch water from the river. There are no proper roads, and we stay in small houses. Children sleep on the floor due to overcrowding.

Parent 4 clarified the state of infrastructure in the following:

Re a sokola re nna mo motseng o wa rona o o senang ditlhabololo tse di maleba, tse di ka kgontsang bana ba rona gore ba kgone go ruteqa. Re na le dikgoreletsi tse dintseng jalo tsa go nna mo mekhukhung (diziozo) e e senang sepe sa (furniture) re sokolotse ruri.
Translation: We are suffering due to poor community that has no proper resources for children to get educated. We have barriers like that, we stay in the corrugated iron houses, with no furniture, and we are struggling.

Four parents acknowledged these conditions as affecting their children’s educational performance, thus making it imperative for them to work hand-in-hand with the teachers in improving the children’s performance. However, they also pointed out the very same
conditions as a barrier to their collaboration with the schools and teachers. They particularly indicated that school called the meetings in the evening, probably as an attempt to accommodate parents who were working during the day, and also as a strategy to avoid interfering with the school timetable. However, due to poor infrastructure, particularly lack of electricity, it becomes difficult for them to walk to school in the evening. They regard it as unsafe to walk in the dark.

Parent 4 highlighted that:

Ke retelelewa ke go tsenela dikopano bosigo ke tshaba go betelelewa, go tletse matlo a a rekisang bojalwa, ga gona dipone ga go a sireletsega go tsamaya bosigo.

Translation: I cannot attend meetings in the evening because I am afraid I could be raped. There are lots of shebeens where liquor is sold. There are no lights in the area, and it is unsafe to walk in the dark.

4.3.2 Family-related factors

Family-related factors include economic status, for example unemployment, poverty and an inability of families to meet basic needs such as nutrition and shelter. Broken homes, divorce and parents who are absent for a long time due to working far away from home are additional hurdles to collaboration of families with schools.

(a) Parents’ lack of understanding of their role and responsibility

Parents do not seem to understand their roles. The SMT associates the problem with parents’ level of education. Most parents do not understand the importance of education because most of them never had the opportunity of going to school. Educators indicated that parents tend to place their responsibilities on the educators’ shoulders.

SMT 1:

Parents don’t know the expectations that will really require them to participate, and some of them just don’t care [pause]. Reckless, they are negligent, they are unwilling to accept the responsibility for school matters. Parents are negative towards the school and educators. So, it’s really vital and it’s very hard to get people to participate. So sometimes you’re fighting a battle that you cannot win and you are required to deliver, but you cannot deliver because you don’t get to speak to these people or deliver the service to the community and to the Department, so it’s really hard.
SMT 2:

They don’t see the reason why they should be called at school. What they believe in is I have given my child to the teacher, so the teacher must take the responsibility in bringing up that child. Educating the child, teaching whatever culturally and everything that’s what I think causes the problem really here.

(b) Time constraints

For working parents, time constraints were cited as barriers undermining school and family collaboration. Parents who are working leave their homes early in the morning and arrive home late in the afternoon. Women may be working as domestic workers and men at the mines, making it difficult for them to attend school activities when invited to do so. Even if they try, they tend to arrive late, by which time the school meetings are over.

Parent 2 (married female) mentioned that:

*Re tlhoka nako, re a dira, re tsoga phakela thata, re tla bosigo re lapile.*

Translation: Time is the barrier in collaborating with the school because we are working. We leave our homes very early in the morning and arrive home very late.

Educator 3 confirmed that:

Some parents are working (employed), so if you call them you have to give them time, so that they can ask at work to take a day off and then come to school for the learner’s problem.

(c) Child headed households/Absence of an adult figure

All the participants, four parents, two members of the SGB and four of the SMT, and five educators saw child-headed households as a barrier to effective school family collaboration. The child-headed family phenomenon is widespread in South Africa, although most of such situations are associated with deaths related to HIV/AIDS. In informal settlements it is exacerbated by factors such as poverty; unemployment; parents working far away and for long hours; inadequate housing; poor nutritional resources; inadequate access to health services; shebeens; poor services, such as electricity, water and sanitation; teenage pregnancies; school drop-outs; and children being left on their own for a number of reasons. Parents from the poor rural areas are hoping that by bringing their children closer to the cities their lives will be better. Due to these factors, children end up living on their own and this undermines school-family collaboration. Whenever parents are called, they do not respond to
the invitation from the school. This was raised by the school management teams and educators.

SMT 1:
You get households that papa is living in the mines and the children are raising themselves here. So the father comes home to supply money and food wherever there is, but when there are … you know there is a … so that’s major barrier also because how do you get the mama from Transkei she doesn’t know she is err … the children are taking care of each other so you will find …

This frustration was echoed by SMT 2, who asserted that:
It is difficult to get hold of parents because these parents are not staying with their kids. Most of the parents are all at villages and fathers are working in the mines. So these kids, they are just … you know on their own.

Educator 5 (a female teacher teaching in the foundation phase) also supported this view:
When we call the parents, they are not there. Children come and tell us they live alone and parents live far away from home.

4.3.3 School Factors

School factors include an inflexible curriculum, which prevents it from meeting diverse needs among learners. When learners are unable to access the curriculum, learning breaks down. Sometimes educators, through inadequate training, use teaching styles which may not meet the needs of some learners. According to Balint (2005:43), an inclusive learning environment fosters the personal, academic and professional development of all learners. For Engelbrecht, Green and Naicker (1999:48) the school should be an environment that is free of harassment and discrimination, because it is about respecting learners and valuing them as collaborators in teaching and learning.

(a) Educators’ insensitivity towards learners and parents
Educators’ insensitivity to learners and parents may be manifested by their passing remarks that hurt the learners, especially if they do not comply with the requirements of the school. These include incidences where learners do not come to school wearing school uniforms or when their performance is not good. Two parents expressed their views through the following:
Parent 3:

Sekgoreletsi se sengwe e fitlhele e le gore ke le motsadi ke ishokolla ngwanake a sa tlhape sentle, ke se na la maimemogelo a gore nka dirang. Ngwanake a ya kwa sekolong a se na le “uniform” e e feletseng, ga nkare ke mo apesa lekgasanyana le la jerese, ke mo rwesa ditlhako tse eseng tsa sekolo ke re ke a iteka ke le mosokodi, a tsamae ka leoto gonne morutabana o a mo apola. Jannong ga a thaga koo a gatsela, ke le mo hoto yoo sa kgoneng, ke setse ke utlwile bothoko ke kukegile maikutlo ke retelelwe ke go ya kwa sekolong fa ke bitswa. Translation: Another barrier is that as a parent you find that you are struggling to take care of your child’s hygiene, not even being aware of what to do or not to. My child goes to school without full school uniform. When I try to dress her warmly in a rag of a jersey, she takes it off to rather feel the cold because her clothes and shoes are not like those the other children wear. This is because she’s afraid of an educator who will mock her in front of other children.

As poor as I am, even when I try my best my child would rather go barefooted. I am so hurt that even when the school calls me, I am not in the mood to collaborate.

Parent 1 also added that:

O fitlhele ngwana a sa utwwelele sentle ko sekolong, ngwana Morutabana o mo raya ga o utlwe o tonki, jaanong mafoko ao bana ba’ rona ga ba’ tla ka ona mo lapeng, rona re le batsadi, re sa tshwane ka maikutlo, nako ngwe mafoko a ntseng jalo a dira gore nna ke le motsadi ke utlwe bothoko ke nne fa fatshe, ka nthla ya mafoko a morutabana a a bolelelang ngwana wa me. E be e re fa ke bidiwa ke setse ke utlwile botlhoko, ke palelwa ke go ya sekolong. Ke ipotsa gore ke ya go kopana jang le morutabana o o bitsang ngwana wa me tonki.

Translation: Children sometimes go out of their way to do some bad things, for example you find that the child does not listen at school, so the educator would refer to that child as a ‘donkey’ and those words come home. We differ in emotions. Sometimes those words hurt us and we become discouraged from attending to school activities or to meeting that particular educator who calls my child a donkey.

(b) Lack of tolerance

People living in this informal settlement come from different cultural backgrounds and speak different languages. It became clear when I was interviewing the parents that there were some families from as far as Zimbabwe and other parts of Africa. Some families originate from the poor rural parts of South Africa. These families have settled in the informal area for number of reasons such as: As this informal area is closer to the mining area, they are hoping to find jobs in the mines. They have left their places of origin for various reasons such as: civil wars,
poverty and or otherwise. Again, its closeness to the mining area also make it an attractive place for people from rural areas that migrated there for job prospects. These people are bringing their idiosyncratic characteristics to the schools – language and behaviours. Their cultures and language are different from those of the teachers. As teachers speak Tswana language becomes a barrier for communication: Some teachers do not know how to communicate with the parents, more so that the parents’ level of education is lower and cannot communicate in English.

The frustration was expressed by one member of the School Governing Body (SGB) as she indicated that:

*Ke ditso tse dintsí, jaanong o fithela gona le gore ba bangwe gaba batle go thaloganya setso sa ba bangwe kante re tshwanetse re amogelane re kgone go dira mmogo re ye ko pele.*

Translation: There are many different cultures and they do not want to understand each other and respect one another so that we can be able to work together for the future.

Educator 1 added that:

The other barrier is the language problem because here at our school we have multilingual children (learners speak up different languages), so it’s difficult to communicate.

(c) **Unwelcoming school environment**

Parents do not find the school environment welcoming. They relate such attitudes to their level of education. There is lack of cooperation and trust between educators and parents, which greatly hampers the establishment of collaboration between the families and the school.

Parent 3 mentioned that:

*Ke rata kere ekete re le batsadi kgotsa barutabana kgotsa sekolo re lemoge gore rona batsadi ga re motho a le mongwe re batho ba bantsintsi ba re batlang gore e re ga re tsena foo re amogelesege sentle ka maleme a rona a a farologaneng gore re utlwe bofutho ba sekolo seo.*

Translation: I would like to say, parents or educators or the school should realize that we as parents are not the same person, we differ and we want to be accepted or welcomed with our different languages to feel the warmth of the school.
Parent 4 added that:

*Batsadi re na le dingongorego nako e nngwe ga o tla fa sekolong ka go thoka go rute ga o utlwa o sa amogelesaga mo sekolong. Kwa ntle ga go rute ga gape go na le mabaka mo go rona batsadi a a etsang gore ga o tsena mo sekolong o ipone o ka re ga o mo gae.*

Translation: As parents we have complaints. Sometimes when we visit the school we feel unwelcome because we are uneducated. Besides that, there are other reasons that make us fell unwelcome.

(d) Poor Communication

Two parents expressed their concern about poor communication on the part of schools not communicating frequently with parents. They only communicate when they need monetary contributions from parents or when there is a problem with the child. Parents know nothing about everyday activities at school (school management). According to Parent 3, the school was not very communicative:

*Sekolo se tsaya dikgwedi di le tharo go ya go thataro se sa re reye sepe go sena molaetsa ope ka ga tsamaiso ya sekolo. Re bidiwa fela fa go na le bothata ka ngwana. Mme fa ngwana a dira sentle ga o bdiwe.*

Translation: The school takes a period of three to six months without communicating any single message to parents, even mere information with regard to how the school is run. We are not being called when the child does well, only if there is a problem.

Parent 1 said that they were only contacted by the school when it needed money, or when a child was experiencing a problem:

*Ba kopana le batsadi fela ka nako e e leng gore ba batla ditshlete mo batsading kampo bana ba tshwanetse ba duelelwe.*

Translation: They meet the parents for monetary purposes only, or for the children to pay their school fees.

She added that:

*ga se gantsi ba re bolelela gore bana ba rona ba bontsha ba kgona eng ba sa kgone eng.*

Translation: They do not always inform us about the strengths and weaknesses of the child.
In contrast, the member of the SMT indicated that they accommodated parents by scheduling the meetings for Sunday mornings. Parents were not willing to share their cellphone numbers:

SMT 1:

The school meet parents on Sundays because the working hours are really hectic. We cannot meet during the week. So Sunday mornings we have our meeting. And then also we’re having a policy regarding if you call a parent in the school. But you have almost formed a way by which you call the parents in, but you cannot phone because they don’t have cellphones, and landline phones at home. We find it very hard to reach parents.

She described other frustrations encountered when trying to communicate with parents:

Communication is a problem. If you send letters to the parents you don’t know whether it does reach the parents because there is no response. It is extra funds that you need to pay for transport to reach them, and for teachers to go out. I know people say you know you are a teacher you go … the school governing body must bring funds but it’s unfair. It’s really unfair when you arrive there. The elder brother was really drunk at home, now you need to have communication with a drunkard.

Educator 1 echoed the complaints:

You have almost formed a way by which you call the parents in through cellphones. They don’t have phones at home. If you send letters home … you don’t know whether it does reach the parents because no response.

(e) Poor support from the Department of Education

The principal should have guidance on how to establish school-family collaboration, but during interviews, the SMT member (principal) stated that the school did not have a written policy on the matter, and he maintained that the SGB, principal and educators just ran the school the way they thought best. The DoE did not facilitate school-family collaboration, nor support the schools. The principal gave an example of the District Based Support Team (DBST) having identified the school to pilot inclusive education, but the team visited the school only once. Throughout the entire year, no workshops were held to equip the staff on how to work with learners experiencing barriers to learning.
In the interviews, one member of the SMT 1 blamed the DoE for not being supportive, through the following statement:

Educators are carrying an enormous extra burden and the Department is not aware of that educators are expected to do home visits and work with learners experiencing barriers to learning with no experience on remedial education, and also because of violence in the informal settlements. If you are a lady it is not safe due to the area we are working at.

SMT 4 also laid blame at the door of the DoE:

The Department is not providing sufficiently with such things. I mean it takes a lot of work and it takes the educators’ teaching time and the preparation time to do the social thing. And I mean as an educator you cannot be a teacher, a parent, a gardener, a cleaner, a social worker, a fundraiser.

4.4 STRATEGIES FOR OVERCOMING SCHOOL-FAMILY COLLABORATION

This section presents participants’ views regarding strategies for improving school and family collaboration. There was a consensus that collaboration could be strengthened in non-academic and academic activities. Significantly, parents recognized commitment as a basic principle for school and family collaboration, believing that when they send their children to school they should pledge to protect them from any potential harm to their welfare, health and safety.

They expressed a belief that such a commitment, if adhered to, would be important for collaboration with the school.

For parent 3, the commitment would require mutual input:

*Karolo e botlhokwa e batsadi ba ka e tsayang mo sekolong ke gore go nne le tirisanommogo le botshepegi go tsweletsa tiro ya ngwana ya sekolo ka tlhomamo, go nne le go tlotlana.*

Translation: The most important part that can be taken by parents at school is to work collaborately for the benefit and success of the learner. Trust should prevail and respect for one another.

They further expressed that they could participate in both non-academic and academic activities at school.
4.4.1 Non academic responsibilities

Non-academic responsibilities include activities such as cleaning the school grounds and surroundings, creating vegetable gardens for needy children and taking care of the school buildings. Indeed, development is not only about maintenance of the existing physical structure but, according to van Wyk (2004:129), the safety and recreational wellbeing of learners should be ensured at all times. In this respect, families might be prepared to volunteer to assist with fundraising activities, help supervise learners on field trips, assist with playground supervision and guardianship, decorate the school, make minor repairs and help to coach sport.

(a) Gardening and maintenance of school buildings and playgrounds.

Two educators expressed the view that parents should be involved in non-academic activities, such as gardening and maintenance of school buildings and grounds. Educator 1 mentioned that:

*We should involve parents by asking them to participate in activities that are in the school, for example … giving them opportunities to work in the garden, to see to it that the whole school is clean.*

Two parents support educators as they stated that:

Parent 3:

*Go dira tshingwana kgotsa letsema la tshingwana ko morago ga tikolog ya sekolo gore bana ba rona ba nne le mokgwa wa go bona dijalo tse e leng gore di ba thusa mo kagong ya mmele go lwantsha masole a megare gore bana ba, ba kgone go nna le ilhaloganyo e e fodileng, segolo thata bo digwete, bo eng, tse di ka ba thusang go ka nna le ilhaloganyo e ntle le go bona sentle mo sekolong.*

Translation: … to create a vegetable garden or volunteering to come together to create a vegetable garden at the back of the school, so that plants can help in the building of healthy bodies and destroy harmful diseases, for the children to have a healthy mind especially vegetables like carrots helps children to think and see clearly at school.

Maintenance of school buildings was an important role that parents identified, particularly involving themselves in improving, renovating and repairing school buildings and infrastructure.
Parent 1 stressed the importance of being notified of any need for help:

_Arolo e nna ke bonang nka e tseny a mo sekolong ke ya gore ga go n ale le mathata mo sekolong ka mpo go na le sengwe se barutabana ka mpo se mogokgo a ka ratang se ka dirwa mo sekolong jaaka go penta, go tlhabolola mo sekolong sa rona, kago. A re itsise nka tla ka tsaya karolo ka mpo ka gongwe go na le sengwe se nna ke bonang gore se a tlokagala mo sekolong sa rona jaaka gongwe matlhabaphefo a rona a sa bulo tsele, a sa tswale a sa etseng. Ga mogokgo a ka re itsise nka leka ka gotlhe go thusa mo sekolong._

Translation: I can participate in school if there are problems, or assist educators or the principal. If they want help with things like painting and improving school buildings, we must be informed. If I see a need to assist at school, like windows not working properly or not closing, then if the principal notifies us, I would try by all means to assist the school.

(b) School management activities

The principal should create a positive school climate by realizing that all parents are able to contribute to the education of their children, no matter what their level of education or income. It is important to improve the parents’ self esteem, especially when working with parents with little or no experience of school, or who have negative associations with schools. It is easier to invite parents to come to school for social events so that they can become familiar with the school and learn more about what is happening there.

Principal (SMT 1) felt that the school should train parents in various aspects of the school, particularly on the educative role of parents at home and at school:

… to come and share ideas on how to bring these children up. Parents should encourage their children to study for a test or examination well in advance. Parents could come to school and share interesting stories or legends of the past with the younger generations.

For SMT 2 it was important to consult first:

We have to know that the parents with whom we are working are supportive to what we are doing as the school. If problem arises, we should sit together and see what we can do for the benefit of our learners.

Two educators noted that the parents could also participate in school governing committees. Training and staff development is an essential investment, but both school staff and families need the knowledge and skills to enable them to work with one another, and with the larger community, to support childrens’ learning.
Educator 2 felt it would help if parents were represented on the governing body, as this would help save money:

… by putting them in SGB and also volunteering would help to minimize school fund.

For Parent 1, training was important:

*Barutabana le bona ba tshwanetse go tlhatlhelwa ka ga tsamaiso ya tirisanommogo le tsweletso thuto ya bana.*

Translation: Educators too must be workshopped for collaboration to be effective and for learner success.

### 4.4.2 Academic responsibilities

Academic responsibilities involve monitoring of children’s academic progress, such as ensuring that homework is completed, and supporting children when they encounter challenges in relation to schoolwork. It is possible for parents to collaborate in various areas within the classroom. They may be used to help in the class, by putting out apparatus for learners to use, clearing the tables and covering books. Parents may also supervise classroom activities, such as checking pupil’s completed work, listening to children read, and supervising audio-visual equipment.

**(a) Helping learners**

Parents could help children with homework, by ensuring that it is completed on time. Homework is a way of teaching self-discipline, therefore parents could see to it that the child does his/her homework, preferably at a set place. They could also participate in intervention activities with learners who are experiencing barriers to learning.

This aspect of assisting learners with barriers was highlighted by Parent 2:

*Go thusa bana ka tirogae ko lapeng le tiro ya sekolo, le se se tlhokagalang mo sekolong le fa bana ba na le mathata a go tshwarela dithuto ka bonya.*

Translation: To assist with homeworks and school activities and also assisting with slow learners.
Educator 3 saw the importance of establishing procedures for intervention:
by meeting or by calling them during … intervention when we have problems to come
and discuss some of the things on how to assist learners … most of the work on RNCS
means family collaboration.

(b) School visits and intervention
With regard to academic activities, three educators mentioned involving parents in the
following ways: assisting their children with homeworks; assisting learners in finding
information and in planning learning projects; assisting with manufacturing of learning aids
and helping to create a conducive environment by becoming involved in decorating the
classroom.

Parent 1 envisaged such possibilities:

Go naya batsadi tshono ya go tla go eta kwa sekolong ka nako ya fa dithuto di tsweletse pele
go bothokwa gore go bonwe gore go dirwa eng kwa diphapsosing, go bona gore a bana ba
dira seo se tshwanetseng kwa diphapsosing. Batsadi ba ka thusa ka go dira didiriswa ts a thuto,
ba baakanya diphapsosi ts a bana gore tikologo ya phaposi e nne e e itumedisang.
Translation: Giving parents the opportunity for visiting the school during teaching hours on
particular days, to see whether their learners are doing what they are supposed to do in classes.
For example, by preparing learning aids, decorating the classrooms and creating a conducive
learning environment.

For Parent 3, culture was an important resource that could be shared through collaboration;

Re tshwanetse go tla ka nako ya fa go diragatswa setso ka ntlha ya gore re batho ba merafe e
e e farologaneng ka bontsi. Batsadi ba bidiwe gore ba tle go diragatsa ka letsatsi leo go
bontsha meaparo ya bona ya setso.
Translation: We should visit the school especially in cultural day because we have so many
cultures in our community. We should come together as parents from different cultures to
come and help our children.

(c) Collaborating with the entire community and its agencies
Two parents liked the idea that the entire community should work collaboratively with the
school. As this particular school is located close to a mining area, they believed that parents
working at the mines should play a role by asking for donations, and thus assist in improving
and maintaining the school buildings and sports grounds.
Parent 1:

go na le maene o o bulwang mo thoko ga motse wa rona, o bulwa ke batho ba ba tswang ko ‘America’. Mme dikolo tsa rona di sokola ka ditirelo di tshwana le mapatlelo, laeborare le lefelo la go ithutela dikhomputara. Ba tshwanelwa ke go thusa dikolo tsa rona ka go tlhabolola meago ya dikolo.

Translation: There is a mine that is opening near our community, owned by outsiders from America. Our schools are lacking resources, so these mines should assist the school by creating a school sportsground, library and computer centre. The miners should ask for donations to renovate the school buildings.

This sentiment was shared by both members of the SGB and five educators. One SGB member warned that invitations should not be limited to particular parents (who regularly attend the school meetings). Two members of the SGB suggested that all parents in the community should be invited to participate in the school activities. An important point that they mentioned was that parents should not only be invited to the meetings, but also could participate in extra curricular activities.

This point was expressed by SMT 3:

We should involve not only parents who come to the meetings or whose children attend school here. We should involve all the parents in the community. Invitation letters or circulars should be sent to all the parents of the learners at the school, and in the community.

There was a suggestion by two SMT members to encourage other stakeholders to render services at the school. These include nurses, social workers, psychologists and the business community, particularly the mines in the area.

For SMT 3, the businesses in the area were a potentially fruitful source of funding:

The school should involve more especially the community, the business community like the shops by asking donations to assist the school.

SMT1 saw health and welfare as an area where collaboration with the community could be beneficial:

We need a school nurse visiting a school, at least once a week to check up on these kids. We need more social workers. The social workers that are here at school are not enough to deal
with all the social problems that we have in here. We need psychologists to come out to schools, working specifically with the learners at schools as we had in the old system.

Three educators also noted the importance of involving community agencies in poverty alleviation, and in dealing with problems in the community and schools.

Educator 5 emphasised the possibility of helping ease the strain on the poor:

I think we should ask donations from different companies to alleviate poverty in the community.

Particular social problems were the target of Educator 4’s concerns:

We also need to work in partnership with health workers to educate our learners concerning drugs, sexual problems … all those, so that the learners must be aware and be put on the safe side of our lives.

Considering the difficulty involved in communicating with parents, educators suggested that learners should also be involved as collaborators, particularly with language translation.

Educator 1

If we call parents to come to school, they do not understand the language used by the school, so we ask learners to translate for us. I do think communication can be overcome through giving newsletters. You find that time is a problem, now we believe if we send out letters to parents through their learners it will be easy for them to even discuss and know about the language.

(d) Educators to initiate the relationship

While it is clear that parents appreciate that they should work collaboratively with the schools, and also that the entire community and agencies are important, it was interesting to note that parents prefer the educators to take a proactive role in initiating this collaboration and in mobilizing resources. This is based on their belief that educators are in a better position to initiate the partnership. They particularly mentioned that educators should mobilize resources, invite community counselors, social workers, health workers, police, municipality staff, road and transport employees and business people.
Parent 3 felt the school should initiate the relationship:

Tshwaragano ya morafe le sekolo ke selo se se botlhokwa thata ga sekolo sona se ka ema ka maoto sa bitsa pitso e e maleba le tlhabololo mo morafeng gore go nne le tshwaragano e e botoka, e e tseneletseng, e e maleba le go itsise makanselara tsa motse gore pitso eo kgotsa kgothakgothe e nne e e kitlanyeng mme e le gore go itsiwe morafe ka tsamaiso ya sekolo gongwe diphetogo tse tla beng sekolo se rata go ka tla ka tsone malebana le morafe.

Translation: Collaborating with the community and school is very important, if the school can stand on two feet and call a proper meeting about partnering properly, and request the councilors to call extensive meetings to inform the community about the smooth running of the school and the changes they want to implement.

(e) Improvement of infrastructure

Three parents suggested that educators improve the infrastructure by sending projects to the community.

Parent 3 added that:

Dikgoreletsi tse gore di fele ke gore barutabana, ba itse tikologo e re mnang mo go yone. Ba kgone go ka romela ditlhabologo ka e le batho ba ba rategieng ba ba itseng gore ga re nna mo lefelong le le ntseng jaana ba ka dira jang. Ba romele di ‘projects’ tsa go baakanya ditsela ka thuto ya bona le mokhanselara. Ba kgone go kopana le mokhanselara ba bontshana le ene ka kemo ya rona. Ba romele ‘project’ ya dintlo, ya ditsela le ya mabone gore dikgoreletsi tse di fele.

Translation: There are barriers to be overcome. Educators should familiarize themselves with the community so that they can send projects, especially if they are qualified and educated. Educators need to meet with counselors and share ideas about the area, and to send projects that could improve housing, roads and lights so that the barriers could be overcome.

(f) Educators to seek donations

Three parents suggested that educators, by virtue of their educational background, should mobilize resources. However, this would be possible only if they familiarized themselves with the community that they serve.

Parent 1 saw companies as potential sources of donations:

Ke ne ke nagana gore ka gore barutabana ba rona ba rategile go feta rona batsadi, aa ba ka seke ba tsamaya ba ya ko ditheong tse dingwe tse e leng gore ba ka kgona go re kopela di
“donation”, ba kopele bana ba ba sokolang gore ba kgone go ba rekela sengwe jaaka di uniform gore le bone ba tshwane le bana ba bangwe ere ga ba tla kwa sekolong ba seke ba ikutwa ba le ko tlase e bile ba ikobonya.
Translation: I was thinking that, educators are better educated than us parents. Is there any possibility that they could visit some companies to ask for donations for poorer children so that they can buy something like school uniform for the children. Then they would look like the others and not have feelings of inferiority, or withdraw themselves from others.

One SMT member and three educators were of the opinion that they should organize educational programmes for parents in the form of workshops and seminars to educate parents about how they could become involved.

SMT 3 thought that the relationship could go beyond merely donating money:

The school should involve more especially the community, the business community like the shops, to ask donations to assist the school. Parents who are working in the mines should ask their employers to adopt the school.

For Educator 3 the way forward was through training and empowerment:

By workshopping the parents to empower them on how to assist learners with their school work.

Educator 4 saw a need to educate the parents as well:

I think Adult Basic Educational Training (ABET) in our community can be involved er… to alleviate problem of illiteracy of parents. Er… where parents are given the chance to study at their pace of their own, on their level also. I think ABET is relevant that can come and assist to overcome this problem. Also by workshopping the parents, by involving that parent, the parent illiteracy will be overcome.

(g) Respect of and sensitivity towards diversity

Respect of the diversity in the community and sensitivity towards children was mentioned as an important factor by four parents. If these two important points could be adhered to, the school environment would be welcoming to all parents, whatever the language or cultural background.
Acknowledgment of diversity was important to Parent 3:

Ke gore ke rata ke re ne e kare le batsadi kgotsa barutabana kgotsa sekolo se lemoge gore rona batsadi ga re moto a le mongwe re batho ba ba ntsintsi ba re batlang gore e re ga re tsena foo re amogelesege sentle ka maleme a rona a a farologaneng gore re utlwe bolelo kgotsa bofutho ba sekolo seo.

Translation: I want the educators or the school to realize that we are not one person, we are different and we want to be accepted with our different languages and to feel welcome at school.

The sentiment was echoed by Parent 4:

Le ka gore… mokgwa o mongwe wa gore ditso tsa rona ga re tsena mo sekolong re le batho ba maleme a a farologaneng re kgone go ka mma le kamogeselelo e e siameng go ya ka diteme tse re leng mo go tsona ka re se batho ba le bangwe re le mefuta e e farologaneng ya merafe.

Translation: According to our different cultures, if we enter the school building we must be welcome properly as we are different cultures.

It was clear from the four parents’ perceptions that they expected the teachers to be sensitive to their children, particularly when they spoke to them.

Parent 3 expressed concern about how learners should be spoken to in class:

le mafoko a barutabana ba a dirisang go kgalema bana, ka gore lefoko ga o le raya ngwana a sa le yo monnyane o gola ka lone. Ga a setse a itse gore ene mo phaposing ga a tsewe jaaka bana ba bangwe, o feleletsa le sekolo a se tshaba. Fa ngwana a le mo phaposing ga a utlwe le ga morutabana a bua ka gore lefoko lengwe le lengwe le morutabana a le huang, ga se le le monate kgotsa le le mofang thotloetso gore le ena a ikutlwe gore ke karolo ya phaposi eo. Ke nangana gore barutabana le bona ga ele gore go na le dithuto tse ba ka di tsamayang ba di newe ka tirisanommogo magareng ga batsadi le sekolo.

Translation: The way we are using words to rebuke the children, if you say something to the child, she is still young and will grow with that. In class the child will feel isolated and bunk the lessons. The child will be afraid of the educator, and anything he or she says will affect the child and the child will be discouraged. I think educators should be workshopped about school-family collaboration.

Parent 1 envisaged a holistic, community-wide involvement with the school:

Dilo tse ba batlang gore di nne teng mo sekolong e nne gore ke tse di kopanang le morafe; e seke ya mma fela batsadi ba bana ba ba tsenang sekolo. Go tshwanetse go mme le tshwaragano
le di ‘khanselara’ tsa rona ba tle ba ntshe maikutlo a bona jaaka barutabana gore bone ba ka nagana gore dikolo tse di mo motseng wa rona di ka tsweletswa pelejang jaaka bona ba na le le sedinyana go feta rona batsadi.

Translation: Things that the school needs should be the ones that unite the community and the school. It should not be only parents whose children attend the school, but also the whole community must be involved, with all the councilors to share ideas and feelings about how to improve schools in their community, especially that they are more qualified than the parents.

(h) Improvement of communication channels

A need to improve communication channels and strategies was mentioned as important. An open and two-way communication process was viewed as an element for facilitating an atmosphere.

One member of the SGB noted the importance of communication and respect for diversity:

O tshwanetse o buisane sentle le batho ka maitseo.. Pele o tsaya tshwetso o bo o buisane le batho. Dilo tsotlhe di simolola ka go buisana, segolo jang mo motseng o wa rona o o sa thlobologang.

Translation: When communicating to one another we should respect other languages, especially living in an area with cultural diversity in an informal settlement.

Acknowledging the difficulty experienced in communicating with parents, SMT 1 said that telephoning parents was not an effective way because some parents did not have telephones, whilst others refused to give their numbers to the school. This made it difficult to reach all parents. It was also indicated that even though meetings were scheduled for Sundays morning, still some parents do not respond positively because their employers did not grant them leave. Given those difficulties, SMT 1 suggested that:

So the best way is by getting a letter out. So, for the Xhosa-speaking children, they issue them with a Xhosa letter. In Tswana they issue a Tswana letter. Even the ones that calling in for remedial work… an individual meeting also Setswana or IsiXhosa. But we also do have English one.

From the above quote, it is clear that the two SMT members recognized the importance of using different languages to reach out to parents. They also indicated the importance of activities in which parents are invited to participate, seeing it as important to share with parents ideas on how to bring up these children.
4.5 SUMMARY

From the above, it is clear that while both parents and educators realize the importance of family collaboration at schools, the process is currently not happening, or is not effective. However, they were to various degrees aware that it may be possible to establish collaboration. They further agreed that barriers could be overcome through a good relationship between the school and parents. The parents, school governing body, educators and school management team members who were interviewed, reported that school-family collaboration is essential for learners’ educational success.

The purpose of the study was to identify barriers that hinder school-family collaboration. Categories emerged from this chapter; namely (a) general views about school-family collaboration, (b) barriers to school-family collaboration, and (c) suggestions for overcoming such barriers to school-family collaboration. The findings in this study directly indicate a need for increased educator and staff development in working with diverse populations of learners and their families.

In chapter 5, a discussion of the important findings will be presented, with limitations noted and recommendations made.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the research findings, in particular revealing that parents, school management team members and educators regard collaboration as vital for the learners’ academic success. They particularly noted the following benefits: (a) bringing in different expertise; (b) supporting the learners with their academic work; (c) sharing responsibility on various issues; (d) preventing inappropriate behaviour; and (e) supporting educators. It was interesting to note that parents embraced this form of collaboration, irrespective of their level of education.

These findings were also noted in other South African studies conducted in settings other than informal settlements. For example, Molukanele (1998) and Ditinti (1998) conducted studies in black townships around Gauteng, and in both it was concluded that school-family collaboration was important for teacher support, early identification of learning problems, and mitigation of irregular school attendance. In a similar vein, international research conducted by Dushek in (2001), at Rice Lake Area School District in the United States of America (USA) revealed similar findings. The participants showed that they believed there were overwhelmingly positive benefits to the educators when there was increased collaboration by the parents, which in turn reflected positively on their children’s development of skills and acquisition of knowledge.

As noted by Mestry (2004), parents remain assets to the formal education of their children because they know them better than anyone else does, and the fact that they have sent them to school signifies their serious interest in their formal education. Therefore, parents cannot be isolated from their children’s education. South Africa, in particular, has education legislation which requires parents to collaborate actively in the education of their children. According to Section 16(1) of the South African Schools Act (SASA, 1996), the governance of every public school is vested in its governing body, and parents form the majority of the governing body. SASA thus envisages a system where educators would collaborate with the parents to improve the quality of education. In this light, schools cannot operate alone, but rather they should
draw on parents’ expertise, even though their educational training is not the same as that of the educators. Such an effort would instill in the parents a sense of ownership, responsibility and accountability towards the school (Mailwane, 2003:35).

However, it was also interesting to note participants speaking about involvement as though it were synonymous with collaboration. Involvement refers to the willingness and active participation of an individual (Gololo, 1998:1). It is not limited to actual learning tasks but includes contributing to the notion of habit formation and attitude development. Its meaning is different from collaboration, which goes beyond the definition provided, as a cooperative process of planning that brings together school staff, parents, children and community members, so as to maximize sources of children’s achievement and development (Henderson & Mapp, 2002:17). According to Swart and Phasha (2005:219), in school and family collaboration there is an emphasis on the relationship between families and schools and how they work together in supporting learning and development. They address barriers as they arise. Failure to understand collaboration will definitely cause problems to the system.

With regard to barriers to school-community learning, this study revealed them as occurring at different levels, namely: the community, schools and families, and thus is in line with Bronfenbrenner’s ecosystemic theory, which lay claims to the interaction of factors at various levels (See Table 5.1, below).
Table 5.1: Components of Bronfenbrenner (1998)

Desperate living conditions revealed by this study as affecting school-family collaboration clearly can have far reaching implications. Research has shown “mothers experiencing economic problems are likely to maintain family routines and schedules” (Hoover-Dempsey, 2005:79). Families are often ashamed of their circumstances and would rather retreat into the background than be exposed at some parent-teacher event (McClain, 2006:25). Some low-income families do try to support their children’s education, but research has consistently shown that levels of collaboration are lower than those of families who do not live in poverty (Dushek, 2001:43:19).

Family factors that came to the fore include lack of parents’ understanding of their roles, time constraints and child-headed households. For working parents, time constraints were cited as a barrier to school and family collaboration. Parents who were working or changing jobs left their homes very early in the morning and arrived home very late in the afternoon, making it difficult for them to honour invitations to attend school activities. Also, they often have scheduling difficulties and conflicting demands on their time. Schools may organize events for the staff convenience, with activities scheduled at times that may be inconvenient for
working parents. Many parents hold down two or three jobs in order to cope with economic restraints (Davies, 2002:388).

Epstein (2001) reminds the reader that schools must take into account the realities of today’s families, if school family collaborations are to flourish. New and unique opportunities for parents to support their children will need to be found. In a study by McClain (2006), family members interviewed suggested educators need to be more flexible with the times they are available, extend themselves more, build relationships and have more frequent contact with parents, all of which take time.

The child-headed family phenomenon is widespread in South Africa. Although most of such incidents are often associated with deaths related to HIV/AIDS, the situation in informal settlement is exacerbated by factors such as: poverty, unemployment, parents working far away and for long hours, inadequate housing, poor nutritional resources, inadequate access to health services, the ubiquity of shebeens, poor services such as electricity, water and sanitations, teenage pregnancy, high school drop-out rates, and children being left on their own for a number of reasons (Hoover-Dempsey, 2005:150).

According to Balint (2005:48), providing childcare during school events, meetings and activities diffuses the need for parents to expend limited resources to pay for such care. The author further states that schools may need to seek district or even community support to make these kinds of services available.

Some parents possess limited understanding of their roles as collaborators, and prefer to leave all the responsibilities to the educators. Such parents find themselves not knowing what to do or what should be their contribution. They are unsure about how to help their children learn, not knowing what the school needs or how the system works. They often feel intimidated by the school’s buildings, organizational structure and personnel (Gomez & Greenough, 2002). Often such situations are common amongst parents with limited education and those with previous unsuccessful school experiences, especially in areas such as the informal settlement (Gomez & Greenough, 2002). This proved to be in line with Mailwane (2003), Mestry (2004) and Letsholo (2005), who acknowledged that illiterate parents may be unable to give support to their children in literacy and numeracy tasks. However, this does not mean that the potential contribution of illiterate parents to the education of their children should be
overlooked. As noted by both the authors, such parents can provide supportive roles in other areas of functioning, such as physical care, life skills education, musical enrichment, cultural and recreational activities (Mailwane, 2003; Mestry, 2004; Letsholo, 2005).

At the school level the following factors surfaced as hindering collaboration between schools and families: (a) Educators’ insensitivity towards learners and parents; (b) inappropriate information channels; (c) poor support by the Department of Education.

The results from the study indicated that parents were not satisfied with the treatment they received from the educators, whom they perceived as rude and hurtful in their remarks, thus discouraging parents from taking part in school activities. There were also incidences where learners did not come to school in uniform or when their performance was not good. This scenario pushes parents away from the school because, as Steyn (2002:31) states, parents want the kind of school that welcomes them and their children as they are, and does not insult them by indicating that there is something wrong with the way they look, speak or dress. Trust and respect between families and school are vital elements to the creation and maintenance of school-family collaboration (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001:115). No amount of education, activities or resources can compensate for a lack of these in the implementation of a collaborative programme.

In Letsholo’s study (2005:18), many parents viewed educators as uncaring individuals who teach only because they cannot qualify for more demanding positions, who do not really care for the children they work with, and who are only concerned with obtaining more time away from school. Some of the complaints that parents expressed concerning schools included feeling helpless, powerless and ignored by school staff. They also felt that educators would retaliate against their children if they complained about poor teaching, and that educators unfairly blamed them for the problems of the school. Parents from the informal settlements in particular fear being intimidated by school staff. Parents have traditionally responded to ill-treatment by avoiding the school (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005:102).

Under apartheid, education in South Africa was divisional, racially based and ethnically based. Inequalities in education disadvantaged education for blacks and vast disparities were in existence, with the community at large not being encouraged to contribute to educational matters (Steyn, 2002:3). Partly perhaps as a legacy of this era, teachers’ attitudes towards
parents in the informal settlement are the following: (a) parents are negligent, for example, sending children unbathed to school; (b) they are irresponsible, and do not attend the meetings called by the school; and (c) they do not assist their children with homework.

The results indicated poor communication between the school and the families. The SMT, together with the families, indicated that they were trying to communicate by telephone, but unfortunately parents do not have them. The SMT also used letters but they were not sure whether they reached parents, because there were no replies.

It is essential that the school strive to increase communication with parents, and that it ensures they are gradually drawn into schools for effective collaboration. Both educators and families would want to assist each other in the education of the children, but communication problems hinder them from doing so, especially in the informal settlement, where cellphones and landlines were not available.

According to Christenson and Sheridan (2001:117), effective communication is the foundation of family collaboration in education. Furthermore, an underlying goal of communication is “to provide consistent messages to families that the school will work with them in a collaborative way to promote the educational success of the learner.”

Communication must be meaningful, positive, on-going, and flow easily from home to school and vice versa. Educators must enable families to feel as if they can contact the school with pertinent personal information about their children that may affect the learners’ academic performance, without feeling a sense of judgment or intolerance from the staff (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001:117). The author further states that, through two-way communication, parents and educators can be informed of what is expected relative to learner’s behaviour, achievement, and discipline. Lastly, this can in turn set a stage for establishing shared goals and mutual decision-making, avoiding misunderstandings and helping parents understand how to reinforce learning and school instructions in the home. Steyn (2002:72) urges schools to take the responsibility to create explicit means to guarantee that information reaches the parents, using translators and interpreters if needed, as well as home visits when parents do not have a telephone.
In the interviews, the SMT accused the DoE of not being supportive to the educators. Such a response accords with the argument of Christenson and Sheridan (2001:104), that working with the families requires extra time and energy and, without the necessary resources and support from the Department, this can become a burden. Furthermore, another reality is that educators have to deal with large classes and a large number of educational changes and children with different abilities. These overwhelming responsibilities and pressures place a heavy demand on educators’ personal and professional lives and can lead to “avoidance of parents”.

The school is a pilot school practicing inclusive education. The District-Based Support Team (DBST) needs to support the capacity-building of educators, the SMT, parents and learners with a particular focus on curriculum and institutional development. A second focus of DBST is to help Institutional Level Support Teams (ILSTs) to link with formal and informal support systems in the surrounding community, for example local clinics, doctors and social workers, as professionals who work with learners and families who may experience abuse or physical barriers. Poor support by the DoE prevents parents from working with educators.

Within the context of South African schooling, legislation since 1994 has introduced important educational reform that has impacted on family collaboration. SASA, (1996) describes basic parental duties and provides for parent and community representation in mandatory SGBs. In the report released by the National Commission on special Needs in Education and Training (NCSNET) and national Committee for Education support Services (NCESS), the principles of family collaboration were extended to encompass collaboration in the assessment of needs, as well as the provision of support to school and learners.

The abovementioned policy documents emphasize that parents must be involved in the processes of identifying, through assessment procedures, any barriers to learning and development, and in developing plans of action to address them. This is particularly important when confronting the challenge of developing an inclusive school. In addition to the insights they bring to this process, they can play a major role in providing an extra hand where additional support is required in the school. In many countries, the ability of a school to provide additional support is dependent on parents’ involvement in the life of the school (Engelbrecht, Green & Naicker, 1999:55-56).
From the findings there was a consensus that collaboration can be strengthened if parents try it in non-academic and academic activities. When parents collaborate in such activities, the relationship between them, the educators and other stakeholders is improved, in the sense that they get to know each other well and support each other when a need arises (van Wyk, 2004). Educators also get an opportunity to focus entirely on teaching and learning activities, and in this way learners’ academic success rates improve.

Participants alluded to the importance of improving communication channels between the school and families as a strategy for overcoming barriers to collaboration between the two agencies. In particular, an open and two-way communication process between families and schools was emphasized as an element for facilitating an atmosphere conducive to such collaboration. Conferences are a way of facilitating such communication, as they allow for sharing of ideas. However, they should be characterized by a sense of confidentiality. From Sander’s (2005) point of view, parent-teacher conferences allow time to discuss the importance of the child following a routine, and having respect for both adults and children. Furthermore, an interview should be a time to talk about those areas that are not specifically noted on a report card but which still affect the child’s learning, especially in an informal settlement where telephones and letters are not being effectively used.

Teaching and utilizing good communication skills is a practice that schools should focus on if school-family collaboration is to succeed (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005). Communications should be meaningful, positive, and on-going, and flow easily from home to school (Griffith, 2000). Effective communication skills are essential in schools that reflect multicultural society for example an informal settlement. Holding meetings for parents who do not speak English requires that a translator be available, to translate sequentially what was said. This could assist the school in overcoming the language barrier.

A school policy on school-family collaboration in the informal settlement should be put in place so that its actions are well-directed (Balint, 2005:38). The written policy on family collaboration in school is important because it is a symbolic pronouncement of solidarity between the home and the school, and is a programme of action as well as proclamation of intent (Letsholo, 2006). A written policy on family collaboration legitimizes its importance and helps both the educators and parents to better their roles in school programmes (Mestry, 2004). Through the policy on family collaboration, especially in the informal settlement, the
obstacles will be addressed and the school have a consistent approach and practice, as well as clear directives on what is expected of all the stakeholders with regard to family collaboration in particular (Griffith, 2001).

Parents in particular emphasized the importance of respecting diversity in the community, and sensitivity towards children was mentioned as an important factor that would facilitate school-family collaboration. Swick (2001:133) notes that “when people lack a full understanding of one another’s culture, they tend to rely on stereotypes, images that usually are very incomplete and incorrect”. Similarly, Sanders (2006) noted that perceptual distortions are common where educators have not taken time to learn about new families in the community. Therefore, Osher (2000) and Swick (2001) suggested the following strategies as effective for ensuring that different cultures are welcomed, and respected:

(i) Educators to acquire accurate and meaningful information on the values and characteristics of children and parents.

(ii) Joint activities between parents and educators to facilitate relevant exchanges of ideas about each other’s context and cultures.

(iii) Parent-educator involvement in planning classroom cultural activities that engage everyone in rewarding and enjoyable cultural learning.

(iv) School-family cultural festivals, where family and citizens share foods, talents, ideas and concerns in a warm and responsive school-community planned setting.

(v) School-family community education programmes that broaden the understanding of the various cultures and groups in the community.

A welcoming school climate was mentioned as a means for facilitating families and schools collaboration. This element was strongly emphasized by parents as they perceived schools as unwelcoming and uninviting. For that they reckoned that an improved school climate that is welcoming would make them feel needed and trusted to participate in school activities. However, if the climate is otherwise they may as well distance themselves from the school. This is in line with Mestry’s (2004) point that when a school’s atmosphere is cordial and inviting, parents can feel a sense of psychological security when approaching the school’s doors. In such a case they may also volunteer their services, or at least be part of the audience.
From Peled and Rosenblatt’s (2002:350) point of view, schools can create a positive climate by reaching out to family and community members, and providing a structure in which they can become involved. For a school located in an informal settlement, and which is greatly populated by a reasonable number of parents whose level of education was below that of the educator, Mestry’s (2005) call for the removal of fear and intimidation could be idea. This should occur alongside efforts to clear and straighten negative stereotypical attitudes about the schools and families, and other visual invitational signs at any visible points at schools – notice boards, gates, staff rooms and principal’s offices. On the other hand, Letsholo (2006:72) pointed out that for principals to create an invitational school climate they must encourage the school’s staff members to be positive to family collaboration; and to have positive attitudes towards the parents and their encounter with them at all times.

Clearly, an important point alluded to by participants of this study was parents’ lack of information or skills to collaborate effectively with the school, and for that parents highlighted the importance of having them equipped with such skills. Letsholo (2006:18) believed that workshops that addressed parents’ own learning needs will provide them with new and exciting learning opportunities through community education, and so strengthen parental involvement. It is therefore essential that schools take it upon themselves to recruit and train parents so that they are able to be competent partners and leaders in the education system (Lemmer & van Wyk, 1996:14).

5.2 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

The following were limitations of the study.

Due to a national strike I was unable to conduct individual interviews with the school management team and the educators. The time given to conduct interviews was less than I had asked for, that is only 30 minutes and not one hour. The national strike that took place affected the amount of time I spend conducting interviews with educators and the school management team, and thus the type of data that I intended to collect. The educators were not comfortable sharing information because they started doubting my motives, even though I continued to assure them that I was doing the study for a Masters in Education, not the Department of Education. I initially intended using 20 participants, but only 15 turned up. As a novice researcher, I did not have enough knowledge to conduct the interviews.
Limiting the research study to one school and the use of the research method which is the case study, I used a relatively small sample of parents, school governing body, educators and school management team. This prevented me from generalizing the findings to a wider population.

5.2.1 **Recommendations for further study**

Further research on school-family collaboration in the informal settlement is required for this topic because the research study focused on one school only. It is not possible to draw conclusions from one school only, so there is a need for a wider range of schools, whether in other informal settlements, or different types of community. The topic of school-family collaboration should include collaboration with the community as well, thus enabling the researcher to examine a more holistic series of systems, as intended in my introduction. The researcher would examine a larger number of schools in culturally different areas, whether urban or rural, township or informal settlement. Different type of schools would be researched, whether on the basis of socio-economic backgrounds or grades. Different type of methods could be used so that the study would be generalizeable to a wider population.

5.3 **CONCLUSION**

From the above discussion, it becomes evident that barriers to school-family collaboration in an informal settlement can be overcome if parents are first willing to be involved in their children’s education, and moreover they could be better resolved if principals are committed to the establishment and implementation of family collaboration programmes. It is clear that the principal plays a vital role in the creation of a culture of family collaboration, as well as developing a collaborative approach that involves educators, parents, business, learners and other social agencies in the education process of the school.

With the rich diversity of cultures now prevalent in today’s classrooms, it is imperative that the school management team and educators set aside any cultural biases and learn to actively solicit family collaboration so that all voices may be heard and understood. I believe the goal of school-family collaboration for the educational benefit of learners will not occur unless educators and families directly address the barrier and issues indicated in this review, and learn how to communicate, trust and respect one another.
REFERENCES


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APPENDICES A-M
KOPO YA GO DIRA DIPATLISISO MO BATSADING LE BARUTABANA BA MOTSE WA BOITEKONG MO KGAOLONG YA RUSTENBURG

Nna Mavis Raborifi ke le Mmatlisisi ke kopa tetla ya go dira dipatlisiso mo batsading ba sekolo potlana sa Tshirolegang, ka setlhogo se se latelang. PHEDISO YA DIKGORELETSI TSE DI DIRANG GORE BATSADI BA SE TSEYE KAROLO MO THUTONG YA BANA BA BONA. E IKAEGILE MO METSENG E E SA TLHABOLOLWANG SEKAI: MATIKIRI. Ke tshepisa gore ditshwanelo, dikgatlego le dikeletso tsa batsaya karolo di tla tlotliwa. Batsaya karolo gab a neb a patelediwa go tsweletsa dipuisano go ya kwa bokhutlong, ba na le tetla ya go tlogela nako nngwe le nngwe fa ba sa tseege sentle.

Diphetolelo di diphitlhelelo tsothle tsa buka eno di tla fithilelela batsaya karolo.

Ke tshepa gore kopo e, e tla amogelwa.

Weno

M. M. Raborifi
The Principal & Educators  
Tshirologang P. School  
P O Box 7728  
Rustenburg  
0300  

06 March 2007  

Request for conducting research study in Boitekong (Tshirologang Primary School).

I am a student researcher at the University of Johannesburg, previously known as ‘RAU.’ I am requesting permission to conduct research in Tshirologang P. School in the Boitekong area.

The main purpose of the study is to identify factors that hinder collaboration between the school and families, so as to develop strategies to overcome those barriers.

I identified Tshirologang Primary School for the following reasons: firstly, there are many children experiencing barriers to learning; secondly, the school is being chosen as a pilot school that practices inclusion; thirdly, learners’ problems cannot be handled properly without parents’ collaboration. Lastly parents in Boitekong area are not involved in their children’s education and I feel that parents should be involved effectively.

I will follow two methods of data collection, namely, focus groups and individual interviews. Focus group interviews will be conducted with 10 educators and 10 parents / family members from the sample. There will be four groups with each comprising five members. The first group of educators will comprise managers (principal, his deputy and the three heads of department), whilst the other group will comprise educators who are not in the management position. The same will apply to parents.

There will be a group comprising members of the school governing body and another group of non-members of the school governing body. The reason behind the grouping is to allow members to feel free to express their views without worrying about the reactions of their managers / seniors. Moreover, the strategy will capture perspectives as seen from the management point of view, and from those of ordinary members.
Individual interviews will be conducted with only 5 teachers and 5 parents, following the focus group interviews. They will be conducted in a face-to-face manner. Individual interviews will enable me to explore issues that were not satisfactorily explored and those that emerged in the focus interviews. The sensitive aspects could be more openly discussed, giving me an opportunity to clarify points raised or omitted during the focus group interview. The interviews will be tape-recorded (with the participants’ permission). They will be held in a comfortable and non-threatening setting. The preferred place will be the staffroom with chairs placed around the table so that the respondents can talk with each other informally and to the researcher. The school is the nearest place to be reached by the participants. The interviews will be conducted in Setswana and later be translated into English. I am aware that some participants whose home language is not Setswana might have a problem expressing themselves clearly. If that happens, I will allow them to use both English and Setswana. I will also get another person who understands their language and Setswana to read my transcripts. This is to ensure that I capture their views accurately.

Participants will be invited to the interviews verbally and by a formal letter written in English and Setswana. The letter will explain the purpose of the study and research methods. The letter will contain statements informing them about voluntary participation, their rights to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty, and how I plan to keep their names anonymous and to treat their views in confidence. This involves assuring them that their names will not appear anywhere in my final document or in association with any other material that I might decide to publish.

The information of the recorded tapes will not be shared with anyone, except my supervisor. Participants will be asked permission to tape-record their responses and to sign a consent form, which will be attached to the invitation letter. All the written information will be explained to the participants in a verbal form to ensure that they understand what they are committing themselves to. There will also be an opportunity for participants to ask questions about any matter related to the research. All these preliminary actions will be taken before they commit themselves to the study in a written form. This opportunity will also be made before the interviews began. Participants will be told that there will be no payment for their contributions. I will take the responsibility to transport them to and from school for the interviews because some parents / family members might not afford transport costs, as they are unemployed.

Hoping that my request will be accepted and thanking you for your kind attention.

Yours faithfully

M. M. Raborifi
Request for conducting research study in Boitekong (Tshirologang Primary School).

I am a student researcher at the University of Johannesburg, previously known as ‘RAU.’ I am requesting permission to conduct research in Tshirologang P. School in the Boitekong area.

The main purpose of the study is to identify factors that hinder collaboration between the school and families, so as to develop strategies to overcome those barriers.

I identified Tshirologang Primary School for the following reasons: firstly, there are many children experiencing barriers to learning; secondly, the school is being chosen as a pilot school that practices inclusion; thirdly, learners’ problems cannot be handled properly without parents’ collaboration. Lastly parents in Boitekong area are not involved in their children’s education and I feel that parents should be involved effectively.

I will follow two methods of data collection, namely, focus groups and individual interviews. Focus group interviews will be conducted with 10 educators and 10 parents / family members from the sample. There will be four groups with each comprising five members. The first group of educators will comprise managers (principal, his deputy and the three heads of department), whilst the other group will comprise educators who are not in the management position. The same will apply to parents.

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Individual interviews will be conducted with only 5 teachers and 5 parents, following the focus group interviews. They will be conducted in a face-to-face manner. Individual interviews will enable me to explore issues that were not satisfactorily explored and those that emerged in the focus interviews. The sensitive aspects could be more openly discussed, giving me an opportunity to clarify points raised or omitted during the focus group interview. The interviews will be tape-recorded (with the participants’ permission). They will be held in a comfortable and non-threatening setting. The preferred place will be the staffroom with chairs placed around the table so that the respondents can talk with each other informally and to the researcher. The school is the nearest place to be reached by the participants. The interviews will be conducted in Setswana and later be translated into English. I am aware that some participants whose home language is not Setswana might have a problem expressing themselves clearly. If that happens, I will allow them to use both English and Setswana. I will also get another person who understands their language and Setswana to read my transcripts. This is to ensure that I capture their views accurately.

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Yours faithfully

M. M. Raborifi
A STATEMENT OF CONSENT

STATEMENT OF CONSENT ABOUT CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS ABOUT THE FOLLOWING TOPIC: “BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE SCHOOL FAMILY COLLABORATION IN AN INFORMAL SETTLEMENT.”

This is to confirm that the researcher, Mavis Raborifi has explained the purpose of the study to us and that she has disclosed her identification. She told us about our rights to withdraw at any time. She assured that all the information given will be confidential and our names shall not appear anywhere in her final document or in any material that she might decide to publish. She also told us that the information is going to be tape recorded.

Signed at .......................................................... on ..........................................................

Signature: ..............................................................

Tel/Cell: ...............................................................
LEKWALO TETLA

Tetla ya go dira “Dikgoreletsi tse di dirang gore batsadi ba se tseye karolo mo thutong ya bana ba bona e ikaegile mo metseng e e sa tlhaborloagang.”

Seno ke go netefatsa gore mmatlisisi e bong Mavis Raborifi o tlhalositse bothokwa ba go dira patlisiso tse, e bile o tlhalositse gore ke ene mang o thaga kwa setheo se fe sa thuto. O re tlhaloseditse ka ditshwanelo tsa rona le gore fa re sa kgotsofala ka sengwe, re ka ikgogela kwa morago. Tsotle tse di builweng e tla nna sephiri, maina a rona a ka se tlhageelele gope mo dibukeng tsa gagwe. Dikgang tsotlhe di tlile go gatiwa mo setsayamantswe fa lo ntetla go dira jalo.

Mosaini ........................................

Mogala ..........................................
BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Kindly answer the following questions by making a cross (x) on the appropriate block.

1. YOUR AGE CATEGORY IN YEARS.

   1.1 Below 20
   1.2 25 – 30
   1.3 21 – 35
   1.4 26 – 40
   1.5 41 – 50
   1.6 46 – 50
   1.7 51 and above

2. GENDER

   2.1 Male
   2.2 Female

3. MARITAL STATUS

   3.1 Unmarried
   3.2 Married
   3.3 Widow
   3.4 Separated
4. ETHNIC GROUP

4.1 Tswana
4.2 S. Sotho
4.3 N. Sotho
4.4 Zulu
4.5 Xhosa
4.6 Shangaan
4.7 Other: Specify

5. EMPLOYMENT STATUS

5.1 Unemployed
5.2 Self employed
5.3 Employed
5.4 Retrenched

6. WHAT POSITION DO YOU HOLD IN YOUR SCHOOL?

6.1 Parent
6.2 Educator
6.3 HOD
6.4 Deputy
6.5 Member of the governing body
6.6 Chairperson of the governing body
6.7 Principal

7. SCHOOL CATEGORY

7.1 Primary
7.2 Secondary
7.3 High
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**Educator E (Foundation phase)**

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SMT (School Management team)

A. Principal

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<td>Learning areas</td>
<td>EMS</td>
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B. Deputy Principal

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<td>Arts and Culture</td>
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C. HOD (Head of Departments)

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<td>Highest qualifications</td>
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D. HOD (Head of Departments)

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PARENTS’ INTERVIEW (INDIVIDUAL)

Interviewer: Do you believe your family involvement is beneficial to the educators in assisting your child’s education progress.

Parent 1: It’s importance is that educators can identify barriers to learning e.g. if a child is a slow learner or if he/she behaves in an inappropriately (inaudible) and through assisting learners with homeworks.

Interviewer: Thank you, do you feel welcomed at the school, would you be interested in joining the planning committee to help plan future family involvement activities?

Parent 1: I can be involved by being member of the governing body. I am skilled in welding, if the school needs assistance with that I can volunteer to do it.

Interviewer: What are barriers, if any to family involvement do you experience?

Parent 1: Barriers that we encounter are infrastructure, like no electricity, no proper housing, no streets, we fetch water far away from our places. There is no privacy. When we wake up in the morning it becomes a problem.

Interviewer: How can the barriers be improved.

Parent 1: They can be overcomed through working together with the community and the school to speed up the process of developing the area that we are staying in. To add on that, there are companies who are mining in our area. They could be involved by assisting the school by creating sports facilities like sports ground.

Interviewer: How and when do you think you should be involved?

Parent 2: I don’t have interest in participating and I don’t disregard parent involvement it is just that I have a problem.

Interviewer: Do you believe your family involvement is beneficial to your child’s education?

Parent 2: For learners’ education to progress.

Interviewer: What are barriers, if any to family involvement do you experience?

Parent 2: I don’t know if there are barriers. I have not noticed if there are any barriers.

Interviewer: How do you take part in school activities.

Parent 3: By making sure that my child does his/her schoolwork and that he/she does not get late to school.
Interviewer: Do you believe your family involvement is beneficial to your child’s education.

Parent 3: Yes, I believe it is important to be involved so that children must not loiter around be at home and do their school work.

Interviewer: What are barriers, if any to family involvement do you experience?

Parent 3: You find that a child has got a problem and the educator label him/her as a donkey and we as parents we feel bad and do not want to come to school when called. Again you find that the parents are suffering no money to buy school uniform, they order the child to undress the jersey and the shoes that you clothed the child and he/she feels bad and withdrawn. As parents we do not like that. I am disturbed by my sick child I don’t want to leave her alone, I am afraid she could be raped.

Interviewer: Thank you. How can these barriers be improved?

Parent 3: For educators and parents to meet and discuss strategies that could be implemented.

Interviewer: Thank you, who should be included in participating in school activities.

Parent 3: People who are to be included are the parents especially of the participating school and the councilors.

Interviewer: Do you believe that family involvement is beneficial for learners’ education.

Parent 4: Everything starts at home, you teach the child at home and the educators adds to what you taught at home. Previously our parents did not care for our education. Now things have changed a parent plays a very important role before the child starts school.

Interviewer: Thank you, what are barriers if any to family involvement.

Parent 4: We are suffering, we stay in zozo, we are not educated, we have so many barriers. We light candles, there is no lights, our area lacks infrastructure, proper houses, electricity, proper roads and water.

Interviewer: Do you attend parents meetings if called at school.

Parent 4: No, I don’t. I am afraid, our area is full of shebeens, and no lights, the meetings are called in the evenings, we are afraid to be raped by boys.

Interviewer: How can these barriers be improved?
Parent 4: For barriers to be overcomed, educators must know the area that we stay in and bring changes, by sending us projects like people from housing, municipality, and road and safety.

Interviewer: Thank you, anything that you want to say?
Parent 4: Also by addressing the issue of our different culture. We want to be accepted even if we speak different languages.
SMT INTERVIEWS (FOCUS GROUP)

Interviewer: Necessary to work collaboratively with the family and the community?

SMT 1: Yeah, it’s very important because you need to have...you cannot just teach at school and try to teach children (inaudible) with the children, so it’s very important that you are able to collaborate with the parents. Also if you don’t communicate with the parents you don’t know what’s the problems of the children are at home, so if you don’t know what you can do to...so it’s very important to have communication and collaboration with the parents, its of vital importance.

Interviewer: Thank you Mrs Devet, Mr Madiba do you think it’s necessary to work collaboratively with families and the community?

SMT 2: Yes, I think its’ very necessary, it’s very...important really because important really because we are working with learning only not knowing the background is difficult provided some of the parents are not working, are unemployed and you know some due to ill health, some because of illiteracy they are illiterate. We don’t know what happened years before, as a school we are really...we are forced to work collaboratively with the parents.

Interviewer: Thank you Mr Madiba. What do you think is your role in involving families to collaborate with the school especially that you are serving learners from informal settlements?

SMT 1: It is enormous, my role is enormous because you have to try to get the parents to want to participate in the school activities, and that’s really a challenge. You...they, they perhaps by themselves they don’t know the expectations that will really require them to participate. And some of them I just think don’t care (inaudible) reckless, they are negligent. So, it’s really vital and it’s very hard to get people to participate, so you find that you (inaudible) into school and they don’t assist at all, they don’t...with you, so it’s really hard. So sometimes you’re fighting a battle that you cannot win and you are required to deliver, but you cannot deliver because you don’t get to speak to these people or to deliver the service to the community and to the Department, so it’s really hard.

Interviewer: Thank you. Mr Madiba what do you think it’s your role in involving families to collaborate with the school?
SMT2: My role here as the Principal it's really vital as we got to know that the parents with whom we are teaching...with whom we are working with. So we’ve got to see to it that they are supportive to what we are doing as a school, as the school what was their various... what are their problems so that we can sit together and see what we can do for the benefit of the learners.

Interviewer: Thank you Mr. Madiba. How can you collaborate with other professionals and families to address each child learning and emotionally especially that you are a (inaudible) serving learners with barriers?

SMT1: On the one...Mrs Suvani in the Centre, so the moment there is a problem in a specific area or whatever we encounter we go to (inaudible) to say look Mr so and so in our school is working with that specific line of a problem going... so speak with Mr Adams, so he speak with Mr Adams he deals with such cases. So she will refer...relevant people who (inaudible) problem. So, the first thing that we normally do is disseminate information to Mrs Suvani who will also meet people here in IEC, so if there is a problem regarding that, first thing you go to Mrs Suvani to the Centre she is the one who will disseminate information or do reference to the different sections. Actually what was the rest of that question?

Interviewer: The rest of the question was that, how do you collaborate with other professionals other than the ones...the educators that are teaching here?

SMT1: Okay. Yeah, because now she goes, then she goes via the system (inaudible), she will disseminate information to the Department of Education or she will call the people from Micro or if somebody must go to the Clinic we go there or she writes out a referral to the Social Worker here at the Clinic...working with us. So that’s the way you go, you cannot just jump, they should state the...it’s a process that you need to follow. You cannot just automatically go to the hospital you need to go via the Clinic, you need to follow a specific route there that’s the way you cannot just go straight up.

Interviewer: Thank you mme. Do you follow us; do you give feedback to the parents when you’ve got such cases of referral?

SMT1: Yes we do, we work very closely, if a parent is fully involved normally with such cases like for instance. Health or whatever, they come to us and we speak and we follow up. Sometimes we fail for instance in first day; so I mean that is Social Welfare now here we are getting in. Its really been assisting some of these parents more than the extra mile trying to get them to, you know to...what this Ga-Rankuwa to get referral...I mean it’s a process here to follow. And sometimes you are working with
parents who are what you call it uneducated or I think well I cannot make it. So really you have to work closely even in locating the parents and motivating the parents to participate, you sometimes you don’t even get the parents to participate, they break down the entire system we have been working at. Really…but we do work very, very closely, some of these parents are…you know if they find that you are assisting them they are really cooperative. But, yet again I mean they will expect and I will expect the teacher, teacher you must pay the money to Ga-Rankuwa (inaudible), teacher you must pay the money to take me to hospital or you must provide something that I really…of the teacher must do everything. So really it’s not like, I mean (inaudible), it’s not like Intel or other rural areas, this is not even…means of… its an explosion for exactly people from all over South Africa which sometimes come out of a very, very bad situation. So, they themselves are not educated in…but you know it’s your responsibility as the parent to do a, b and c. So they come to school when the teacher is not just…the teacher in class having to develop things here, they have to educate parents that is to revise all those things. So, really teachers are carrying an enormous extra burden and you know at the Department they don’t see, they say but teachers did you go to the parents house to have an interview; but if you are a lady cannot go there. And I mean how many parents must be go and see…they did not come to school? It’s really hard but when they are out there and you are working with them it’s really wonderful to see the success that we’ve made, it’s really…enormous problems when parents work with us but sometimes its really a burden the teachers…you know teaching time get lost due to social work, because even the Social Workers they (inaudible) many of these problems because of the amount of people here. And even here at the Clinics the Social Workers are even few months (inaudible). So, the teachers are really getting emotionally and enormous load they are getting. Sometimes you know the system that you do must sometimes is not sufficient. Thank you.

Interviewer: Thank you, Mrs Devet. Mr Madiba do we have a policy that involves families and the school and the educators?

SMT2: Well, not necessarily a policy which affects one division of meetings with the parents. But in overall we do have policies, if we draw through the SGB and they are presented to the parents so that we can add whatever their input there… was there…

Interviewer: Are the goals and objectives in terms of involving families (inaudible) being met in your policy?

SMT 2: No, not all of them are met some of them because of lack of knowledge of the parents, you know they are not all supportive hence we…because there are a lot of
the...encounter a lot of problems. So, in most cases as the teachers we must take the lead you know, in implementing some of the things....

SMT1: (Inaudible) meetings and we even meet them on Sundays because the working hours are really...we cannot meet... So Sunday mornings we having our meeting. And then also we’re having a policy regarding if you call a parent in the school, not anybody...if so what you call it, inlaying or the process that you have to follow. But you have almost formed a way by which you call the parents in, because if you just phone a parent if you can phone him because many don’t have phones. Er...if you phone...many of these parents don’t...cannot come to school, some of them will have a job...cannot come to school for interviews because they don’t have proof at the employer. So we’re having a formal forms which we request of the...stating the time, the date or the reason why so that they can take that form to their employer as proof of an interview, and then they can come in so, there are processes in place to call the parents. But some of them, I mean you say they don’t have...or some of them don’t have...some of them don’t want to supply cellphone numbers, they don’t have phones at home, they themselves also you find very hard to reach the parents. So, the best way is by getting a letter out.

Interviewer: What language do you use in that letter (inaudible) the parents meeting?

SMT 1: Oh Wonderful! It depends on the language (inaudible) with Tswana and it is called medium of instruction or it’s also a medium of communication. So, for the Xhosa speaking children they issue them with Xhosa letter, Tswana they issue Tswana letter, even the ones that calling in for remedial work or for referential er...an individual meeting also Setswana or IsiXhosa. But we do have English one (inaudible) is something that must go to the employer itself, so...

Interviewer: Thank you mme. Mr Adams do you involve the community businesses like for example I’ve seen the mines around here, we’ve got lots of shebeens, we’ve got lots of shops here, do you involve the community at large?

SMT 3: Yes, we do the school is involving more especially the community, the business community like the shops we ask donations to assist the school. The last time we asked for donations in the form of recycling material from one of the shops of the Tavern, the Tavern. With the mines also as the parents...most of the parents are working in the mines, we’ve tried and as we can see here, the other mine we’re saying we want to involve the mine by asking donations or by...may be adopting the schools around the area....
Interviewer: Thank you Mr Adams. When do you involve parents, do you involve parents who come to the meetings only or do you involve all the parents and how?

SMT 3: We do involve not only parents who come to the meetings we involve all the parents as we send invitation letters we or circulars we send them to all the parents of the learners at the school, we don’t send letters to specific parents. And even after the meetings that are involving the parents who are present at the meeting you may… we communicate with parents through the SGB, that’s how we involve the parents. And also by…in school activities like games well, it would be the swimming and all that staff we do involve the parents, that’s how we involve them.

Interviewer: Thank you Mr Adams. Mrs Makama, what are barriers that affect poor effectiveness and parents?

SMT 4: In the school or where? In the school or?

Interviewer: Yes, here at school.

SMT 4: I think the socio-economic factor causes the problem for parents to participate in the school. The socio-economic we’re looking at the place as a whole, whereby parents are not working, they are of different cultural backgrounds and they meet here. So for them to come to school it’s a problem and looking at the education of our parents also is not of that high standard. Most of them did not go to school so they don’t see the reason why they should be called at school. What they believe in is, er… I’ve given my child to the teacher, so the teacher must take the responsibility in bringing up that child. Educating the child, teaching the child whatever culturally and everything, that’s what I think causes the problem really here.

Interviewer: Thank you mme. Mrs (inaudible) what’s your opinion about barrier?

SMT 1: It’s a (inaudible) idea. Yeah, as mme Makama was saying socio-economical. Parents…and then I think sometimes you know er…I don’t know whether it’s perhaps to our political background or whatever, but you know you will arrive here at 10 O’clock on a Friday evening or Saturday evening, you will find children walking around as if that is normal. Is not just there are teenagers going to a party its all the children are playing outside unsupervised. So, its really having social problems also because people who come from all over, that is not the granny telling them, hey my son you cannot have (inaudible) walking around outside. There is no that thing or perhaps these human rights, you know the people say, but it is that child the right to walk around or to do whatever he/she likes. So, it’s really…there are many of such problems, so I mean a child is basically less (inaudible) there you go my dear. So you
know there are really parents who care around there and those people carry a heavy burden because all these children in the community are here, so that’s really an enormous barrier. And then also you get households that the papa is living in the mines also and the mama is living in Transkei, so the children are raising themselves here so the papa comes home and he will supply money and food wherever there is…but then there are…you know there is a… So that’s a major barrier also because how do you get the mama from Transkei she doesn’t know she is. Er… the children are taking care of each other so you’ll find…

Interviewer: (Inaudible)
SMT 1: Yeah… you will find really there is not even figure of authority at home. So I mean…come to school where are the authorities because there is nobody telling hey Busi you cannot be doing that. So those are really major barriers. Also communication, if you send letters home but you don’t know whether it does reach the parents because you just hear nothing. So, and I mean phoning them it places a heavy burden on the school, I mean its extra funds that you need to pay just to check up with (inaudible) if there is phone numbers available. And for teachers to go out, I know people say you know you are a teacher you go…the SGB must bring funds but it’s unfair. It’s really its unfair I mean if you arrive there when you arrive there the elder brother was really drunk at home, now you need to have communication with a drunkard. And I mean you don’t know what you’ll meeting there and if you look at the amount of interviews we are having to have socially in our area its really its eating our teaching time. Going straight to find the parents perhaps they might be at home or they might not be at home, you know driving around for hours and knowing that this (inaudible), its really is labour, is time consuming. I know Mr Lelaka said you must go and find parents but I don’t think he is tried in Boitekong, he can come with us he is welcome. Thank you.

Interviewer: Thank you Mrs Devet. Mr Madiba what are your views about the barriers?
SMT 2: The views about the barriers?

Interviewer: Barriers hindering schools, families collaborating?
SMT 2: Well, let me say…and the other lady have said earlier on. We’ve got a problem with these parents who are not staying with their kids. Most of the parents are all at villages, the fathers are working in the mines, so these kids really don’t have correct supervision they are just you know on their own. So, really it’s a problem, it’s a burden to the school to deal with such…
Interviewer: Mr Madiba in your opinion, how can these barriers be improved?

SMT 2: Well, as a school we are trying by all means to improve in the way of inviting these parents to school to come and talk to them to share ideas on who to bring these children up. We are trying by inviting them coming to talk to them and the like.

Interviewer: Thank you.

SMT 1: If I may add to that the assistance that we are having available is also a barrier because it’s insufficient for the needs that we’re having here. We need a school nurse visiting a school, visit our school once a week to check up on these kids. We need more Social Workers, the Social Worker that is here at school is not enough to deal with all the social problems that we have in here. Even the funds (inaudible) grants but you know...having interviews with the parents calling the (inaudible) to go then to assist them to get the grants if the pare...with the teachers at school. So these things we need psychologists to come out to schools working specifically with the learners at schools as we had in the old system. We don’t have those schools, er...the Department is not providing sufficiently with such things. (Inaudible) a psychologist but they can work with one or two or three cases they cannot solve all these things. So you find teachers doing counseling, fund raising...all of these things and it really it gets too much the support that we are having here, yes they are here and we’re having the people from the Department...we’re having this system, this is our Police person, this is the Micro people etc. But the system that we are having are insufficient to cater for our needs here specifically at school, even of getting these grants, I mean it takes a lot of job and it takes the teachers teaching time and the preparation time to do this social thing. And I mean (inaudible) the teachers must do this, but you cannot be a teacher, a parent, a gardener, a cleaner, a social worker, a fundraiser what else? A first aider it really gets too much there are really we need more these things...assistance and things that are really working otherwise the teacher is the one who carry all these burden.

Interviewer: Thank you Mrs Devet. Mrs Makama your suggestions about these barriers, how can they be overcome?

SMT 4: As Mrs Devet has said we need to involve the social partner, like the Social Workers, the nurses, the Police everybody to be well involved. Because partly we are taking the work of others as teachers, we are social working that is when the child has a problem you must attend to the problem whereas there are social workers that must be there to help that child. There are Police who are there, you must get to the Police Station and if we had...what is this, er... adopt a cop who was very participating I think most of
the things should not be carried by the Educators. That is why I’m saying that if our social partners can participate more, I think those barriers will be (inaudible).

Interviewer: Thank you Mrs Makama. Do you have anything to say (inaudible). Anything left out about anything…everything that (inaudible)?

SMT 1: You know I’m just of the opinion that the Department is expecting of teachers to deliver academically, to deliver socially, to deliver financially and cleaning up etc. etc. we cannot do all these things. Yes there are Police people but they are also overloaded…social workers here but they are overloaded. The Department must have specific people who are (inaudible) intensively the specific things, its really…especially Boitekong area I’m not saying its all over the country the same perhaps it could be but we especially need to have people…especially to deal with these things. Even if you look at ADD the former…activity (inaudible) from a close 34 you are…you are expect to have 4 children suffering from ADD. Now, you need medication in order to deal with ADD, so we teaching with classes of 64, 65 children so you can expect to have (inaudible) of those children to be suffering from ADD. So, you need medication and you cannot get it in our system, so I mean if…parents can pay the (inaudible) or to the doctor to prescribe these things. But you need to go via the system, so it’s really…to look into that we need intensive medical attention also. Thank you.

Interviewer: Thank you Mrs Devet. The Principal do you have anything to say about this?

SMT 2: Yeah, as it has been alluded by Mrs Devet and Makama here, really as teachers we are overburdened. You know the Department puts everything on the shoulders of the Educators hence the teachers are also, you know having problems suffering from stress because they are doing the job of the social partners like its mentioned before. There are Policemen, there are the nurses and the like and nobody is assisting on this issue, hence the teachers really are also having problems a lot of (inaudible).

Interviewer: Thank you Mr Madiba.
EDUCATORS’ INTERVIEWS (FOCUS GROUP)

Interviewer: Mrs Mashishi do you think is necessary to work collaboratively with the parents than with families? Do you think is necessary to work collaboratively with the parents rather the families?

Educator 1: Yes, I think it is very necessary to work together with the parents because here at school we are having problems from parents, we must work collaboratively with the parents (inaudible) whatever we get or any difficulties that we get from these difficulties we should discuss it to their parents.

Interviewer: Okay. Anyone to add on that?

Educator 2: Yes, because (inaudible) to pay the school fees and for every problem that they may have we must ask the parents because they are the ones who (inaudible).

Interviewer: Thank you sir. Mrs Ubani?

Educator 3: Yes, it is imperative that we work with the parents collaboratively because the family background is the most important thing in learning and teaching of the child. If we don’t know the background of the child, it will…we will encounter problems when teaching them in particular time. So parents have to play a vital role because the family background is very important in the learning of the child.

Interviewer: Thank you Mrs Ubani.

Educator 4: Yeah, no it’s fine, its fine, its fine, er…right, working collaboratively with the parents is very much important because parents have different abilities er…to assist us in the school.

Interviewer: Thank you Mr Phako. Do you want to add mam?

Educator 3: Er…parents play a vital role because as we are here as teachers those parents have allowed their children to come to school so we must work with them collaboratively er…so that we give them a better feedback with this learner thank you.

Interviewer: Thank you mam.

Educator 2: And I really think it’s also important to work collaboratively with the parents on the…that learning pays through a triangular shape, without the involvement of parents who knows more about their children and who also can agree, because that teachers you know…You only meet with the learners on a particular…maybe on 7 hours or 8
hours then they spend most of the time with their parents. Therefore they will help us a lot.

Interviewer: How do you provide a variety of opportunities for parents to collaborate with the school?

Educator 2: We provide them opportunities by meeting them or by calling them during…particularly during intervention, when we have problems with the learners, problems to come and discuss some of the things on how to assist learners to do most of the work or on NCS it means parents involvement. I do think it will include interventions and parents (inaudible) if they are able to meet the parents and also to award, because now we have awards where we may call learners and parents to come together and…

Educator 3: We involve the parents also by putting them in the SGB Committee and asking them to come and clean the school environment so that their learners can stay in a clean and (inaudible) environment.

Educator 1: We do also involve parents by asking them to participate in activities that are in the school. For example giving them opportunities to work in the gardens, to see to it that the whole school is clean and to come and visit the school even during school hours on particular days, to see whether their learners are doing what they are supposed to do in classes.

Educator 3: Right…parents in what we call “letsema” to minimise school fund.

Interviewer: Mr Motsepe?

Educator 5: Er…we call them and tell them about development in our school so that (inaudible) thank you.

Interviewer: When do you organize events for the families and the community?

Educator 5: We organize them usually quarterly and annually. Every year for example award…we hold our award…where we give learners (inaudible) performed very well…

Interviewer: Let’s hear Mrs Ubani?

Educator 3: We do organize this parents’ evenings quarterly and parents’ meetings quarterly. But for the gardening parents are supposed to volunteer to work in the garden and it’s on daily basis; it depends only if the parents can come and help us in the garden. The school evenings we do organize them quarterly provided the teachers are ready for that…for the parents.
Educator 1: Er…to add on that again we also call parents by service, er…let me say junior service, senior service and intermediate service. May be if we have problems with junior service we usually call parents of junior service to come and we discuss the problem that we are facing.

Interviewer: How can you collaborate with other professionals like social workers and psychologists hence you are a pilot school for (inaudible)? Mr Masisi?

Educator 6: We…usually we can collaborate with them…usually during (inaudible) security in our school and again when we realize that there are problems in our school, then we call the…particularly we are using the Police not necessarily the (inaudible). Thank you.

Educator 3: We do work with social workers and psychiatrists because learners (inaudible) to learning has to be psychologically tested, has to be sent to psychiatrists to see what emanated their problems. So, most of the time learners are referred to psychologists and social workers, so that their problems can be solved immediately when they are discovered. When referring a learner to a social worker or to a psychiatrist, there are forms from the inclusion from National level until to school. And to resource school where learners will get a better education that they will be a better person in the future. Thank you.

Educator 6: We work hand in gloves with the nurses especially for planning, planning in case of girls and some sexual disease. Thank you.

Interviewer: Mrs Khumalo?

Educator 4: After identifying a child maybe let me say if poverty as from…because here at our learners are from the background which is very poor. So, we help those parents because some of them doesn’t know what to do, so we help me them even to show them about the grants how important the grants are. So, we are the main one who refers these children to the social workers to help them about grants etc. Thank you.

Educator 1: We also work in partnership with health workers to…we invite them to our school to educate our learners concerning drugs, abuse of drugs, the sexual problems, the sexual harassment all those so that the learners must be aware and be put on the safe side of their lives.

Interviewer: What are barriers to effective (inaudible) in collaboration?

Educator 4: I think poverty is one of those barriers because a learner cannot come to school without food in the stomach. But at our school we are fortunate because we have the Feeding Scheme, but the Feeding Scheme is for only at our break time. After school the learner go back home and sleep without food so we encounter problems.
Interviewer: Thank you Mrs Khumalo.

Educator 1: I think the other barriers is the language problem because here at our school we have multilingual children, they are speaking different languages, so is difficult to communicate. Sometimes its difficult to communicate with parents because of the language, so I think we should try to make means of speaking to these parents but language is the other barrier (inaudible).

Interviewer: Do you have an interpreter?

Educator 1: No, we don’t have an interpreter that’s the main problem.

Interviewer: So how do you communicate with parents who cannot hear the language that you are using?

Educator 1: Sometimes we call that parent and we will ask these learners, these children of their school to translate to them because these learners knows the language we are using here at school. So, if we call parents the learner translate what we say to a parent…

Interviewer: Thank you mam. Is there anyone…Mr Motsepe?

Educator 5: Yes, another barrier is that these children are left in their home, some are opened and so on, so when we call the parents they will come and tell us that they are left alone and parents live far away from home.

Interviewer: Mrs Ubani?

Educator 3: Some of the problem is because parents are working, so if you call a parent you have to give him or her time so that he can ask at work to take off a day and then come to school for the learners’ problem. Thank you.

Interviewer: How can these barriers be improved? Mrs Ubani you have something?

Educator 3: The barriers that we mentioned can be overcomed by (inaudible) or workshopping the parents or asking them to come for a seminar or even by involving these learners. Asking the learners to maybe, if you give a learner homework, ask the learner to sit down with the parent and try to learn together with the parent. By involving that parents, the parent illiteracy will be overcomed. And also if the parents are asked to do something in the school they become so brave and they try by all means to learn what their children are doing at school. Thank you.

Interviewer: Thank you mam. Mrs Khumalo do you have something?
Educator 4: Yes. I think parents should be more involved in the school and we should also help them or assist them to whatever may be...because as we have already mentioned that may be language problem, language is the problem. May be some of them are afraid to be involved because they are afraid that they won’t be able to speak to us. So we must make some workshops and seminars to help them those parents who have difficulties with the language. Thank you.

Educator 5: Er...yes, I think different companies from...different companies can be invited to alleviate poverty in the community.

Educator 3: I think ABET in our community can be involved er...to alleviate problem of illiteracy of parents. Er...where parents are given the chance to study at their pace on their own, on their level also. I think ABET is relevant that can come and assist to overcome this problem.

Educator 1: Again I do think is the communication that can be overcome through giving newsletters, when you send letters quarterly to the parents. In a case may be we need something or we want to know about, what is happening in our school. Because as I’m saying you find that time into school is a problem, now we believe if we take letters maybe to learners to their homes it will be easy for them to even discuss and know about the language (inaudible). Thank you.

Interviewer: Do you have something to say or to add on what has already been said?

Educator ?: Alright. I think in culture we should er...especially in cultural day because we have so many cultures here in our school. We should call those parents from different cultures to come and help their kids with...especially with their attire and so on so that we may come together and be able to know each other or understand each other in culture. Thank you.

Interviewer: Thank you mam.

Educator ?: Er...I think one more input on this it’s a problem about these learners are from informal settlements. So there is no enough space, there is no privacy, there is violence and it reflects the violence that they are doing at school that it is the background of which they are coming from that this is the situation that these learners are living. So, it is also endangers the system of discipline in the school, so the teachers in the school experience so many problems about (inaudible).

Interviewer: So, how can you alleviate these problems, how can this barrier of violence, how do you think this can be improved, the practice may be that can be used?
Educator 6: I do think we can address that problem if we can go extra mile between the community where to work to be involved in infrastructure. I do think (inaudible) people who can help like social workers (inaudible). Because some of the parents instead of taking their learners that are (inaudible).

Interviewer: Thank you Mr. Masisi. Mrs Khumalo you have something? Thank you for your time.
SGB INTERVIEWS (INDIVIDUAL)

Interviewer: Mme Ntsholo do you feel welcomed at the school, would you be interested in joining the planning committee to help play future family involvement activities.

SGB: Yes, I feel welcomed, even the lady who is working in the administration is very welcoming and cooperative. Even if you want to see a teacher, she responds positively and shows you the class.

Interviewer: Are you a member of the SGB and do you enjoy working with the school?

SGB: Yes, I am and I think parents chose me with trust and I am going to serve them with loyalty. I feel proud to be a member of the SGB.

Interviewer: What have you experienced since you have been an SGB member?

SGB: Oh I have learnt so many things, that communication is very important, before you take a decision you need to consult first and agree on one common ground.

Interviewer: What are your views regarding educators’ attitude / willingness to involve the community?

SGB: Yes, what is very important is that learners are the ones we want to progress with the education, assisted by educators together with the parents. So, I think the child is in the centre. Both parents and educators must work together to assist the child to go further with his/her studies.

Interviewer: What is your level of school involvement in school activities?

SGB: I am more involved in fundraising so that the school should have enough money to cater for the learners’ needs. I also encourage parents to volunteer to clean the school and assist in anything they can think of.

Interviewer: What are barriers, if any to family involvement?

SGB: Communication barrier, everything starts with communication. Also cultural barriers. Here in the informal settlement we have different cultures and we do not respect each other. Again the problem of infrastructure for example no lights, we do not have evening studies at schools. It is not save to walk on streets.

Interviewer: How can these barriers be improved?

SGB: (Inaudible) through workshops to assist parents who do not know how to read and write.