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**AN ANALYSIS OF PARENTS'
REASONS FOR PARTICIPATING IN
SCHOOL GOVERNANCE**

By

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A minor-dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the award of the degree of
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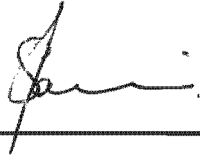
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Declaration:

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature: 

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ABSTRACT

The focus in this study is on those parents who accepted their role in school governance as advanced by the South African Schools Act of 1996, *i.e.* the parents who serve on school governing bodies. The central concern of the study is to gain an understanding of the factors and processes that inform the decision by these parents to accept these voluntary positions on school governing bodies.

The study explores the perceptions of parents in a working class area regarding their roles in school governance. Data was collected for this purpose from parent governors at 12 high schools in Mitchells Plain. Questionnaires were sent to 65 parents at 11 of the schools and in-depth interviews were conducted with 10 parent governors at one other school. The analysis and interpretation of this data was informed by Grounded Theory principles. These principles guided the construction of a conceptual model which facilitated the analysis and interpretation of the data.

The findings suggest that there are a number of factors which combine and reinforce one another in eventually leading to voluntary participation in school governance. These factors include the life experiences of parents, their particular histories with the school and the context within which participation took place. The intervening conditions of time and new policies further facilitate, but also constrain participation. However, the most significant of these factors is the understandings which parents have developed regarding the value of education, parents in education and school governing bodies. These understandings, or a philosophy of education, form the basis for the decision by parents to participate in school governance.

The analysis suggests that this philosophy of parents regarding education arises out of the particular working class experiences of parents. There is a desire among parents to improve their social and economic existence, and the contribution which education can make to this is recognised. It is this recognition of education's role, along with the desire for social mobility, which ultimately accounts for their decision to participate in school governance.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Motivation for the Study

There is a long history of the fight for parental involvement in educational matters in South Africa which stretches as far back as the days of slavery at the Cape in the 17th century (Sayed, 1996). In the 1950s, the Teachers' League of South Africa, in the quest for greater parental involvement in school governance, established Parent-Teacher Associations in some schools. The Parent, Teacher and Student Associations (PTSAs) formed in the 1980s were seen as community structures which gave voice to those parents and students who were usually marginalised in terms of school governance (Sayed & Carrim, 1997:91). The PTSAs operated parallel and in opposition to the management councils and school committees. These management councils and school committees were often regarded as illegitimate structures since they had very limited governance powers and their members were appointed by the apartheid state. The demand for greater representation and decision-making powers of parents gained prominence with the growth and development of PTSAs. The formulation of a post-apartheid policy of school governance had to consider these demands.

The importance accorded to parents of learners in the governance of schools is reflected in the South African Schools Act (SASA) of 1996. Chapter three of the SASA states that "the number of parent members must comprise one more than the combined total of other members of a governing body who have voting rights" (1996:18). This effectively 'weights' parental involvement in school governance above that of the other elected members (Sayed & Carrim, 1997:96). The contribution of parents to the governance of schools is thus regarded as paramount as they are viewed as the major stakeholders in schools by the SASA (1996).

The Western Cape Education Department's (WCED) 'Schools for the Future' project, which is aimed at promoting school-based management, further emphasises the role of parents in school governance. The emerging vision of the WCED in this regard is for

schools to have “more power to decide how they want to run themselves” (WCED, 1999:9). With the adoption of this vision, the role of school governing bodies will be significantly enhanced. Thus, the role of parents – the major stakeholders in school governance – would also be heightened.

Both the SASA (1996) and the WCED vision underscore the role of parents in school governance. Indeed, parents are valuable stakeholders in education with an important contribution to make. As parent governors, they are in a position to ensure that their needs, concurrent with their local conditions, are met (Levin, 1997). Furthermore, the involvement of parents and other stakeholders like learners and educators advances democratic school governance. The decisions made by school governing bodies where these stakeholders have representation would carry much greater legitimacy (Vincent, 1996). Consequently, there is much support for greater representation by parents on school governing bodies (see Anderson, 1998; Beare, 1993; Moore, 1992; Shaeffer, 1992). The SASA (1996) enables this greater participation by parents in school governance and its concomitant advantages.

However, the successful implementation of the SASA (1996) policy on school governance is dependent on the acceptance by parents of their role in school governance. Deem *et al.* (1995), in a study of parent governing body members in schools in England and Wales, found that parents in working class schools were less inclined to participate in school governance. Georgiou (1996) thus concludes that participatory initiatives favour middle class parents. If this were the case in South Africa, then the SASA (1996) policy on school governance would not be empowering working class parents. The danger would exist that the existing gap between rich and poor schools could widen.

I teach in Mitchells Plain, a sprawling working class township in Cape Town. My consequent affiliation to Mitchells Plain, coupled to the findings by Deem *et al.* (1995) among working class parents, has served to focus my study on parent governors in Mitchells Plain high schools. My interest was thus in the implementation of the SASA (1996) policy of school governance and how it was received in a working class area.

1.2 Aim of this Study

My focus in this study was on those parents who had accepted their role in school governance as advanced by the SASA (1996), *i.e.* the parents who serve on school governing bodies. The central concern of this study was to gain an understanding of the factors and processes that had informed the decision by parents to embrace the SASA (1996) policy on school governance and accept positions on school governing bodies, *i.e.* **what were parents' reasons for participating in school governance?**

I was also interested in the perceptions of parents regarding their role in school governance. What was the contribution which they believed their voluntary participation could make to the schools they served, and did this belief impact on their decision to become parent governors?

The SASA (1996) policy on school governance enters a particular context when implemented. A high school in the working class area of Mitchells Plain was that context in this study. Bowe et al. (1992) highlight the role of context in the implementation of policy. An additional concern was thus how the context within which parents had to serve as school governors influenced their decision to become members of a school governing body.

Very little research has been done on the responses by parents and schools to the new SASA (1996) policy on school governance. The value of this study therefore lies in the contribution it makes to the scant pool of knowledge on the subject of school governance in post-apartheid South Africa. The greater awareness and understanding gained of the factors which motivate working class parents to participate in school governance is also valuable, especially if the noble ideals of the SASA (1996) regarding the democratisation of education is to be meaningful to schools in working class areas too.

1.3 Limitations of Study

The focus of this study was on the views of parents regarding their participation in school governance. The data for the study was collected from interviews with parent governors and questionnaires sent to parent governors. Primarily due to time constraints, but also because parent perceptions were the primary concern of this study, I did not interview the other representatives on the school governing body. Neither was I able to observe the participants during the course of their duties as school governors. The responses from the interviews and the questionnaires therefore had to be accepted at face value, since there were no checks on whether what was claimed was in fact the case.

This study was conducted in Mitchells Plain, a 'coloured' working class area. Because of the racial divisions created by apartheid, the South African working class is not a homogenous group. The 'coloured' and 'African' working class share a dissimilar set of life histories because of the different way both groups experienced apartheid in South Africa. Furthermore, this study focused on parent governors at a particular school. Consequently, the findings cannot be generalisable beyond the context of this study.

1.4 Structure of this study

This document is organised into five chapters:

- The first chapter provides the rationale for the chosen topic of the study. The focus and main aim of the study are also outlined here. In addition, the limitations of the study are presented.
- In Chapter two, the literature related to parental participation is reviewed. International policy initiatives in this regard are included here. The development of a policy on school governance in South Africa, culminating in the SASA of 1996, is also examined.

- The research methodology chosen for this study is discussed in Chapter three. The choice of site and data collection strategies are explained. The motivation for using a grounded theory approach in the analysis and interpretation of data is sketched. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the validity and reliability of this research.
- In Chapter four, the findings are presented and discussed. Grounded theory principles guide the analysis and interpretation of the data and provide a conceptual structure to this analysis.
- The conclusions drawn from the findings are discussed in Chapter five and are informed by the literature discussed in Chapter two. This chapter concludes by highlighting the areas of further research as indicated by this research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The perception that greater involvement by parents in education benefits the education process seems to be held by most people involved with education today. This was not always the case. In the past, parents were encouraged to leave their children's education in the hands of the experts, the principal and teachers. This all started to change after the findings of the Plowden Report of 1967 were released. The Plowden Report was a United Kingdom (UK) government report into primary schools and its research showed that the attitudes of parents strongly influenced their children's progress at school (Partington & Wragg, 1989:1). From this point on, the increasingly important role of parents in education gradually became more recognized.

This literature review sets out to unpack the notion of parental participation in education. It outlines the different understandings of parental involvement and participation, and attempts to construct an understanding of participation as opposed to mere involvement. Since parental participation in school governance is the focus area of this dissertation, a brief overview of this policy internationally is undertaken. The aim of this overview is to contextualise some of the later discussion, which draws on international experience. Once thus contextualised, some of the advantages of greater parental participation are explored. It then becomes evident that participation could be conceptualized in two ways – participation as 'choice' and participation as 'voice'. These conceptualizations are clarified and some illustrations of participation as 'voice' – concurrent with the central tenet of this dissertation - are then examined. This is followed by an attempt to discover what would constitute meaningful participation. Anderson (1998) refers to this concept as 'authentic participation' and the numerous obstacles to this authentic participation are also outlined before some solutions to these obstacles are explored.

The focus then shifts to South Africa and in particular, parental participation in school governance in South Africa. The development of policy in this regard in the South African context is traced here. It includes the anti-apartheid initiatives, the last of the apartheid government's initiatives and the evolution of the South African School's Act (SASA) of

1996 after the transition to democracy in 1994. The intentions of the SASA with regard to school governance are explored along with some of the realities that it has to contend with. The review concludes by examining some of the reasons why parents agree to participate on school governing bodies which is key to this dissertation. The role of discourse and context in these decisions is highlighted here.

2.1 Involvement and Participation

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, school improvement has been high on the educational agenda the world over and increased parental involvement has been recognized as a major contributor to school improvement (Davies & Johnson, 1996:5). According to Jackson and Cooper (1989), “[n]early everyone, it seems, recognizes the vital role that families play ... in helping schools as volunteers, as decision-makers, and as child advocates.” (1989:263). Anderson (1998) shares this view, but states it much stronger by pointing out that “[t]he discourse of participation has become hegemonic not only in the United States of America but around the world ... The discourse of participation and the reforms that are promoted under its umbrella have, for many, taken on the force of common sense.” (1998:572).

Woods (1988) and Vincent (1996) concur. However, they point out that the support which the idea of participation receives from both conservative and left wing politicians is due to the divergent aims and understandings of participation. In addition, there are varying degrees of involvement and even differences between involvement of parents and participation by them.

There are numerous examples in the literature of the different types of involvement of parents in education (Davies & Johnson, 1996; Georgiou, 1996; Jackson & Cooper, 1989; Moore, 1992; Vincent, 1996). Moore (1992) illustrates five types of involvement. On the first level, there is the basic exchange of information between parents and the school. Here reference is made to letters, reports, parents-meet-teachers evenings and visits to school when there are problems with their own children. There is minimal expenditure of time and energy by parents at this level (p.133).

The second level is where parents become personally involved in their children's schoolwork. This would take the form of creating an enabling environment at home for learning by ensuring that children have the time and space for it. It would include the buying of necessary books and assisting with homework and other school related tasks (Moore, 1992:133). There is much more sustained parental involvement at this level, but the focus of that involvement is, as at the first level, the parents' own children.

The third level of involvement is where parents become involved as volunteers in school activities. Here they would normally serve as Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) members, classroom aides, fund-raisers or helpers on field trips and extra-mural activities (Moore, 1992:133). The whole class or the school would benefit from involvement at this level. This would thus represent a shift from the first two levels where the benefit of involvement was solely for parents' own children. However, the function of parents at this level would be to support the teachers and adopt their approaches (Vincent, 1996:44).

The fourth level is where parents act as decision-makers. They serve on school governing bodies or local school councils where they are involved in making school policy for the school their child attends (Moore, 1992:133). As at the third level, those who are affected by parental participation include more than the parents' own children. The level of influence is far wider now than at the other levels. However, although they are acting as decision-makers here, it is as part of a group like the school governing body.

Finally, Moore (1992) recognizes parental choice, where parents choose the school their child will attend and the subjects they will do, as the fifth type of involvement by parents (Moore, 1992:133). Jackson and Cooper (1989) view this type of involvement as decision-making as well. At this level the parent makes decisions as an individual (p. 265) and the focus of their decision is their own child (Moore, 1992:134).

Moore (1992) has not only illustrated that there are varying degrees of involvement, he has also shown that parental involvement could affect parents' own children or the whole

school. There is also a clear movement from the basic level where parents are mere supporters of teachers and the school, to a level where they are actual decision-makers, helping to shape the way the school operates. I want to refer to this movement as a shift from involvement to participation, where participation implies that the actions of parents influence more than just their own children and also where parents act as decision-makers. In this dissertation, my primary concern is the participation of parents, especially as parent governors on school governing bodies. The policy of including parents in school governance has been adopted by many countries and the development of these policies in some of these countries is sketched in the next section.

2.2 The International Experience

Parent participation in school governance is a relatively new concept in education. It is only since the latter half of the 1970s that the idea started gaining credence and only really took root in the mid-1980s and early 1990s. However, it is a concept that has taken hold in numerous countries, both rich and poor (Davies & Johnson, 1996:5). What follows is a brief description of the different forms it takes in some of these countries. A concise account of the development of these initiatives in the United Kingdom (England and Wales) and the United States of America (USA) is included here because most of the literature related to school governance focuses on these countries. Poorer countries are also examined due to their similar social and economic status to South Africa, with particular reference to Chile. The development of this policy in South Africa is not included here as it is examined exclusively in a later section.

Education in the 1960s and 1970s in the United Kingdom (UK) was characterized by concepts such as 'child-centred learning' and 'comprehensive schools', and stressed the need to enhance self-esteem and promote equality (Beresford, 1992:45). In addition, the global economic recession in the 1970's resulted in intensified pressure for greater relevance in education as well as reduced state expenditure. Public schooling had to make a greater contribution to national economic interests since it was not delivering what the labour markets needed (Vallie, 1996:1). The welfare policies were believed to have failed.

The Conservative Party under Thatcher used these conditions to promote their policies of reduced public expenditure and the privatization of state-owned industries. Terms like 'New Right' and 'Thatcherism' were used to describe them (Deem *et al.*, 1995:30).

In education, parental 'choice' and decentralization of some of the power to school level became part of these policy reforms. Elements of these policies were also supported by critics to the left of the political spectrum who criticized the collectivist arrangements and cumbersome bureaucracy which were part of the welfare state (Deem *et al.*, 1995:30). Through various Acts of Parliament, among them the 1986 Education Act and the 1988 Education Reform Act, the power of school governing bodies was increased and the number of parents serving on school governing bodies was also increased (Beresford, 1992:45). Parents could now play an integral part in school governance.

In the USA, the call for greater parental 'choice' gained ascendancy at about the same time, during the Reagan era, and for similar reasons (Vallie, 1996:1). In the current system of education in the USA, there are numerous school districts in each State. Each school district has a school board and the parents on the board are elected by the people living in the school district. It is the role of the school board to oversee education in its particular school district. A fairly new concept, local school councils consisting of the principal, representative parents who will be in the majority, teachers and sometimes even students at a particular school are being advocated in some States. They have even been introduced in certain districts, despite opposition from the National School Boards Association, among others (Shannon, 1994:388-390). The 'Chicago Reforms' are an example of these local school councils being set up so that decision-making authority can be moved closer to the school.

These policies of decentralization coupled with a measure of privatization and the paying of school fees is also gaining credence in many developing countries. According to Samoff (1998), these represent a common set of recommendations by institutions like the World Bank coupled to the provision of aid to struggling developing countries. Examples of such policies can be found in Senegal (Clemons, 1998), Zimbabwe (Maravanyika, 1998), Chile

(McGinn, 1990), Sri Lanka (Lewin & Berstecher, 1989) and Papua New Guinea (Maha, 1997) amongst others. In Chile for example, parents are involved in decision-making at school level, schools are allowed to charge school fees and maintain a surplus of funds while the government retains control of curricular matters, exit examinations and teacher salaries (McGinn, 1990). In most of the countries where decentralization policies are applied, a similar system is in effect (Clemons, 1998; Lewin & Berstecher, 1989; Maha, 1997; Maravanyika, 1998; Samoff, 1998).

It is clear from the above that policies which accord greater powers and responsibility to parents are gaining momentum, despite varying social, political and economic contexts. Numerous reasons outlining the advantages of increased participation by parents are put forward by advocates of these policies. The next section will examine these advantages.

2.3 The Advantages of Parental Participation

Proponents of greater parental participation in education put forward various justifications for this policy. As shown earlier, the popularization of this policy has its roots in times of financial austerity by the state. In poorer countries, the state was often unable to adequately maintain an expanding education system, especially in these austere economic conditions (Shaeffer, 1992). State institutions were also seemingly not delivering adequate services as in education where public schooling was perceived to be unable to produce the promised equality or necessary quality (Vallie, 1996; Beresford, 1992). In order to make up the shortfall, parents could be asked to contribute towards their children's education by paying school fees. In this way, the education system could undergo the necessary expansion and improve its quality, despite the state's austerity measures (Shaeffer, 1992; Davies & Johnson, 1996; Moore, 1992).

It was now argued by Beare (1993) and Smit and Van Esch (1996) that because parents were contributing directly to their children's education by paying school fees, they should also be allowed to determine how the school used this money. In other words, schools would now have to be financially accountable to parents which would ensure that their

finances were optimally utilized. Furthermore, Beare (1993) and Smit and Van Esch (1996) contend that accountability should not end with finances. Where parents are allowed greater participation, they can ensure that schools are more responsive to their wishes and needs. Schools would thus be accountable to parents for the education they provide and this should lead to an improvement in the quality of education since parents will want to ensure that their children receive the best possible education (Beare, 1993; Crump & Eltis, 1996; Meyer, 1997; Moore, 1992; Smit & Van Esch, 1996). Where the quality of education is enhanced and the wishes and needs of parents are met, Moore (1992:135) as well as Davies and Johnson (1996:5) point out that the educational experience of learners is enhanced and this results in improved performance by learners.

Shaeffer (1992) puts forward the view that it is often very difficult for a centralized bureaucracy to implement policies as intended, especially in poorer countries where capacity is often lacking. This results in the ineffectiveness of these policies (p.6). Even in developed countries, Anderson (1998) and Levin (1997) view a large bureaucracy as being cumbersome and self-interested. Murphy (1991) thus argues that those closest to the learners and the learning process should be included in the task of implementing educational policies. These could then be more efficiently implemented since people at the local level are charged with doing this, thus circumventing the large and often cumbersome bureaucracy (Murphy, 1991). Moreover, local actors could even shape these policies to best suit their specific needs, thereby further enhancing efficiency (Levin, 1997:261).

Another advantage of more participation by parents is that it will lead to better relationships between parents and teachers. Parents, because of their closer association with the school, will be more aware and sympathetic towards the needs and challenges facing teachers (Whitty, 1997). They would also be more inclined to become involved in school affairs and thus lead to a greater sense of ownership of the school (Georgiou, 1995). Furthermore, where people as a group have taken ownership of their school, they can shape it in such a way that it best serves their needs and leads to an improvement in the quality of their lives. According to Shaeffer (1992:9) and Vincent (1996:7), they would thus have been empowered.

Beare (1993) puts forward the view that increased participation by parents and other stakeholders in education contributes to more democratic school governance. This view is shared by others (Deem *et al.*, 1995; Meyer, 1997; Sayed & Carrim, 1997; Whitty, 1997; Woods, 1988). Beare (1993) sees this as being of major importance since broadening the decision-making base would give some of the previously marginalised groups like parents and learners a voice in educational matters (p.203). Furthermore, policies and decisions carry greater legitimacy where there has been greater participation by relevant stakeholders (Anderson, 1998; Sayed & Carrim, 1997; Vincent, 1996; Woods, 1988).

There are thus numerous advantages associated with the increased participation by parents in education. However, there are also disadvantages. These include parental interference in school management and the domination of participatory initiatives by the middle classes. Some of these obstacles are examined later. Nevertheless, as with general involvement by parents in educational matters, there is support for a greater role for parents in decision-making in education by both conservative and more left wing politicians (Deem *et al.*, 1995). This is largely as a result of the different understandings of participation.

2.4 The Different Understandings of Participation

As suggested earlier, participation is essentially conceptualised in two ways - participation as 'choice' and participation as 'voice'. Participation as 'choice' is where parents are allowed to decide which school their child would attend and the subjects he/she would do. The idea is that parents would choose the school that could best serve the interests of their own child (Jackson & Cooper, 1989; Woods, 1988). Parents would not choose a school that is inefficiently run or has a high failure rate and where a school that has been chosen does not seem to fulfil their child's particular needs and desires, he/she would then move to another school. In other words, the parents - as individual decision makers - would leave 'bad' schools and not try and get them to improve, thereby favoring 'choice' over 'voice' options (Vincent, 1996:11-12).

Jackson and Cooper (1989:267-269) point out that by allowing parents to choose the 'best' schools for their children, they force all schools to improve so that they will be able to attract enough learners to remain viable, or face closure. This would lead to the general improvement of standards throughout the system, despite the fact that parents are making choices as individuals. However, Whitty (1997) argues that in such a system, parents would all want to send their children to the 'better' schools. These schools would be in great demand and in a position to select their learners. They would then also choose only the 'better' learners, which generally favours those who can afford to pay more (pp. 13-17).

The 'weaker' learners and those from poorer families will now be forced to go to the only schools they can afford and that will accept them – the 'weaker' schools – thus denying them meaningful choice (Vincent, 1996). Increased participation by parents through 'choice' is thus only open to a minority of parents (Whitty, 1997). Furthermore, where this is the only kind of participation allowed, the 'better' and 'weaker' schools will maintain their respective statuses. There will not be an overall improvement in the education system as a whole (Moore, 1992:151). It would thus seem as though the ability of parents to give shape and direction to a school through 'choice' mechanisms is questionable. However, participation as 'choice' is not the understanding of participation that relates to this dissertation. (For a more detailed debate on its merits or otherwise, see Bridges and McLaughlin (1994) amongst others)

The participation as 'voice' options are the concern of this dissertation. Participation as 'voice' is where parents are allowed the space to direct and shape the school their children attend (Anderson, 1998; Moore, 1992; Sayed, 1997; Vallie, 1996; Vincent, 1996; Whitty, 1997). It can be as an individual or as part of a larger group, but one's contribution as an individual would tend to be considerably weaker than that of a collective. Consequently, where participation as 'voice' is advocated, parents are usually viewed as part of a community or as a stakeholder group.

Community participation in education is seen by most as an advantage (Plank, 1996). However, there are differing understandings of what constitutes a community and once

these are unpacked, it is more difficult to achieve overall agreement regarding the value of community participation. The most basic understanding of a community is one which is constituted by geographical boundaries. According to Plank (1996), such an understanding of a community would normally favour pluralism and inclusivity (p.14). In this understanding of community, all groups falling within the particular geographical area are included in it, irrespective of race, class, culture or religion. In order for any level of solidarity to develop in this community, "it must, of necessity, project group identity as stable, consistent and internally homogenous" (Sayed, 1996:8). But this has become increasingly difficult as geographical communities have become increasingly fractured along cultural, religious, class and racial lines, especially in urban areas (Sayed, 1996; Schultz, 1998; Shaeffer, 1992; Vincent, 1996).

Alternatively, a community could be defined in terms of its social bonds. Here we would be referring to ethnic neighbourhoods or religious communities. Although there could still be differences between people in such a community, there would be much more commonality, but particularism and exclusion would also feature strongly (Plank, 1996:14). However, in light of experiences like those in Rwanda and apartheid in South Africa, Sayed and Carrim (1997) question the wisdom of affirming particularist and exclusionary notions of community (p.9).

Despite these considered shortfalls and conflicting notions of community, Plank (1996) argues in favor of community involvement in education. Shaeffer (1992) supports this view in light of the enormous contribution that he believes communities can make towards schools, particularly due to their knowledge of local conditions (p.18). Sayed and Carrim (1997) also point out that community participation may provide "a sense of solidarity between individuals, and consequently a stable form of group participation and representation in the education system" (p.95). However, attempts to include the community in education would have to consider the negative features outlined above. Measures would need to be adopted to negate them and only then would the value of community participation in education be experienced (Plank, 1996; Shaeffer, 1992). Sayed and Carrim (1997) believe that this is why the South African Schools Act of 1996 (SASA)

only has qualified support for the role of the community in education. Members from the community who can assist with the activities of a school can be co-opted by governing bodies and do not have voting rights (SASA,1996:18).

Closely linked to community participation in education is stakeholder participation. Here people represent the interests of those who are said to have a stake in education and in this way, all the stakeholders' interests are represented. According to Unterhalter (1998), stakeholder representation is an attempt to acknowledge and accommodate difference. However, Sayed and Carrim (1997:95) sound the following cautionary note:

The notion of 'stakeholder' suggests that certain people have more of a stake than others in particular contexts. This delimits who in fact may be claimed to be legitimate participants in making particular decisions in particular situations. There is an implicit suggestion in this that not all things are open to all people all of the time.

Thus, in the South African Schools Act (1996) where stakeholders are stipulated as being parents, educators, high school learners and non-educator staff, school governance becomes the province of these four groups. This supposes that these 'stakeholders' have the greatest contribution to make, even though this may not be the case. Others beyond this group who may indeed be able to make a considerable contribution to the processes of the school are only able to do so if the legitimate stakeholders decide to co-opt them onto the school governing body (Sayed & Carrim, 1997:95).

A further problem highlighted by Deem *et al.* (1995) is that stakeholder representatives are expected to represent the interests of certain groups. In order to ensure that they do, they would need to regularly account for their decisions and actions to the groups they represent (p.36). As with community participation in education, stakeholder participation cannot be uncontestedly accepted as a good thing. However, it is an attempt to ensure that the interests of the groups most directly affected by the processes at a school have a voice with regard to these processes. As such, the drawbacks outlined need to be considered, but stakeholding remains a genuine attempt to give voice to parents, amongst others, and

should thus not be discarded. This kind of participation most represents the participation on governing bodies enabled by SASA (1996). It is a means of giving parents 'voice' regarding school governance. But participation is not always meaningful and not everybody is willing and able to utilize the opportunity to participate.

2.5 Authentic Participation

In order for participation to be meaningful, Shaeffer (1992) says that all the relevant stakeholders should be included and spaces would have to be created so that the various voices could be heard. Participation in these conditions will ensure wider representation of legitimate interests (p.10). Anderson (1998) shares this view, but believes that while the democratic process is important, the ultimate ends of participation should also be addressed. These ultimate ends should be "the constitution of a democratic citizenry and redistributive justice for disenfranchised groups, ... [and] more equal levels of student achievement and improved social and academic outcomes for all students." (p.575).

The relevant stakeholders should thus be included in the process, but existing local conditions would need to be considered by the state to ensure that greater participation can also be meaningful for those without the skills needed for effective governance. Furthermore, greater participation should be a means to increase learning outcomes by ensuring more effective and efficient practices at schools. Where participation takes place under these conditions and has these effects, Anderson (1998) refers to it as 'authentic participation' (p.575).

2.5.1 Obstacles to Authentic Participation by Parents

All participatory initiatives do not always qualify as authentic participation. There are numerous obstacles to an authentic participation. One of these obstacles relates to parents themselves. According to Levin (1997), parents often lack a broader vision when it comes to education. Their concern is limited to their own family. This view is shared by others (Beresford, 1992; Deem *et al.*, 1995; Shaeffer, 1992; Shannon, 1994; Woods, 1988).

Consequently, parents would have difficulty identifying shared interests where the whole school could benefit and not just their own children (Beresford, 1992:52). Parents are also not viewed as a homogenous group. It would thus be difficult for a few parents to represent the interests of a larger group since they are “a variety of individuals who do not possess a collective voice” (Beresford, 1992:51).

The changing family structure represents another challenge in the pursuit of authentic participation by parents. The number of families where both parents work as well as single parent households is on the increase. According to both Anderson (1998:593) and Jackson and Cooper (1989:266), parent participation in formal organizations decreases in these situations.

There are also indications that parents are perceived to lack the skills needed for participation in educational matters (Anderson, 1998; Beresford, 1992; Shaeffer, 1992). Sometimes parents see themselves as lacking the necessary knowledge and expertise to make decisions related to education. They are then quite prepared to defer these responsibilities to the ‘experts’ like the principals and teachers (Munn, 1998:392). Alternately, they do not believe that their contribution will make any difference, thus they show no interest (Barberton, 1998:268).

However, there are also elements within the system who are hesitant to relinquish their control because of their knowledge and expertise in relation to education. Shaeffer (1992) refers to them as the ‘ruling elite’, and in a school situation they would be the principal and the teachers (p.12). These elements are also reluctant to surrender their positions of power within the system in order to allow parents to be fully involved in decision-making at school level – especially where this was solely their province in the past (Georgiou, 1996:35). This view is supported by Smit and Van Esch (1996) who, in their assessment of parental participation in Dutch schools, found that principals and teachers were reluctant to accept parental participation in school affairs (p.67). Du Toit (forthcoming) found similar results in her study at two primary schools in Cape Town.

The problem of access to parental participation opportunities mostly affects poorer parents (Beresford, 1992:49). Time constraints are a bigger concern of lower level workers whose work does not allow autonomy and flexibility in this regard (Finders & Lewis, 1994) or where time off means money lost (Deem *et al.*, 1995). Time is especially a problem for single parents or mothers who have to be concerned about child care when attending meetings (p. 60). Furthermore, working class parents are most likely to feel intimidated by the school and its environment since it is "packed full of reminders of their own anxious and often disempowering schooldays, seeped in incomprehensible language and terminology" (Beresford, 1992:49). They would thus lack 'cultural capital' which Bourdieu (1971) describes as the self-confidence gained from knowledge and experience of certain conditions (in Deem *et al.*, 1995:53). This would further elide substantive participation, especially for working class or poorer parents. Thus, although there may be the space for participation, it is often the poorer parents who find it difficult to utilize this space and make their voices heard.

For this reason, Georgiou (1996) believes that increased parental participation initiatives favor middle class parents because they are inclined to make use of these opportunities far more effectively (p.35). Whitty (1997) sees this as leading to a widening of the gap between schools, depending on the socio-economic status of their parent populations. Some schools will be able to grab the opportunity - because of their material and cultural resources - while others cannot and therefore the differences between them could widen (p.32). Increasing parental participation could thus foster inequality (Anderson, 1998:580).

The state's intent when introducing participation initiatives could also undermine its authenticity. Where it is being introduced merely to bail out the state in terms of its financial obligations, the participation initiative loses legitimacy (Paterson & Collett, 1999). Similarly, increasing parental participation may merely serve to give democratic legitimacy to an education system by granting expression to local stakeholders (Anderson, 1998:577). However, enough power is not always ceded to local structures for participation to be meaningful (Stromquist, 1998:13) and parents become 'state volunteers' as opposed to 'active citizens' (Deem *et al.*, 1995:157). When parents realize this, they are

less inclined to be enthusiastic about participation initiatives (Jackson & Cooper, 1989:266-267).

In addition, Beare (1993) believes that “participative decision-making is a politically diversionary tactic” (p.202). It is an opportunity for the government to deflect anger and frustration to these local structures of participation (Shaeffer, 1992:12). Christie (1995) contends that the National Party government’s initiatives to decentralize white education in the early 1990’s represent an example of shifting the conflict and criticism related to segregated schooling to school governing bodies who could now decide whether or not to admit black students (p.53).

From the above it would seem that there are numerous obstacles to authentic participation. However, despite these obstacles, an authentic participation by parents could be achieved if these obstacles are considered when introducing participation initiatives. Some of the strategies needed in order for this to happen are explored in the following section.

2.5.2 Towards an Authentic Participation

It would seem that parents themselves represent one of the obstacles to authentic participation. One of their alleged shortcomings is that they lack a broader vision and are able to focus only on their own child and family. Moore (1992) suggests that even if this is true, a parent’s action which may be intended to benefit only his/her child, very often has the effect of benefiting the whole school. One of the examples he cites is school discipline. Where a parent is concerned enough about how poor school discipline affects his/her child to do something about it, his/her input will help shape the school’s policy and thus the whole school would benefit (p.135). The argument here is that precisely because parents are concerned about their own child’s education, they would make decisions that would be in their child’s best interest, and by extension the whole school.

It is also suggested that parents are not a homogenous group and that it would be difficult for a few of them to represent the often diverse interests of all (Shaeffer, 1992). Rose

(1990) and Plank (1996) share the view that a sense of solidarity cannot be forced on people. A shared sense of identity has to be allowed to develop out of a shared set of experiences, needs and wants (Rose, 1990:434). For this reason, Moore (1992) believes that parental participation and authority should be limited to the individual school that their children attend. This would give parents that shared set of experiences, needs and wants, and consequently, a shared identity (p.147). Furthermore, where a few parents represent the interests of many, there has to be particular adherence to processes of accountability. There should thus be regular contact between the representatives and the larger group. This would hold the representatives accountable to the wishes of the collective and contribute to the development of a collective voice (Sayed & Carrim, 1997:97). In this way, democratic participation is enhanced since opportunities for all the voices to be heard are created (Anderson, 1998:595).

A major problem seems to be the lack of relevant skills, knowledge and confidence related to educational matters among parents. This was especially so among poorer parents. According to Carnoy (1998), the capacity of parents to utilize the opportunity has to be considered when introducing participatory initiatives. Where parents lack specific skills and knowledge, extensive capacity building has to take place to enable them to effectively participate. This view is supported by much of the literature (Beresford, 1992; Levin, 1997; Maha, 1997; Moore, 1992; Muller, 1998; Shaeffer, 1992; Stromquist, 1998). It could also help prevent those who already have these skills – usually the middle classes – from benefiting alone from these initiatives, thereby maintaining their positions of privilege in the system.

Parents' own negative school experiences have also led to continued feelings of uselessness in matters related to education and schools. Principals and teachers need to be sensitive to these fears and would have to make every effort to eliminate these feelings of inadequacy by continually encouraging parents and developing trust between them and the school (Finders & Lewis, 1994). This is made easier when there are already some parents involved, because these parents are best-placed to encourage initiatives involving other

parents (Moore, 1992:151). Parents are less afraid of, and more willing to work with others like them who do not remind them of their own negative school experiences.

Encouraging parents to participate is made more difficult by problems of time constraints or family situations (Deem *et al.*, 1995:60). For this reason, they contend that parent participation must be seen to be of benefit to participants (p.63). This view is supported by Anderson (1998). He argues that the response of parents to participation initiatives will vary depending on the degree of authenticity of the participation process (p.592). Therefore, to ensure that parents are willing to participate in decision-making processes at schools, the participation structures have to be given enough power and control.

The state has an important role to play in this regard. It has to ensure that the broader education policies are facilitative of authentic participation and not merely to gain legitimacy or deflect conflict (Anderson, 1998:595). These participation structures have to be given enough powers to ensure that they are able to do more than just implement the education department's directives. Where this is the case, parents recognize the participation initiatives as opportunities to shape schools to serve their best interests and are then more inclined to want to be part of the process (Anderson, 1998; Maha, 1997; Moore, 1992; Shaeffer, 1992). However, Moore (1992) cautions against giving too much power to schools. He believes that the central administration should maintain control over certain issues so that equity concerns or non-discriminatory issues are addressed (p.147).

The attitudes of principals and teachers could also negatively impact on parent participation. In order to overcome this negative impact, Shaeffer (1992) believes that principals and teachers would have to be willing to adapt and take on new forms of behavior which would involve learning new skills and new ways of relating to others. This implies that training initiatives should not be limited to parents. Teachers and especially principals would also have to undergo extensive training to instill these new behaviors and capacities. These skills could even become part of teacher training initiatives (pp.24-27). Alternatively, Moore (1992) argues that "because school staff are more assertive and more familiar with educational issues, parents ... must have a numerical majority of council seats

to hold a rough equivalence of power with school staff" (p.147). Combining the two strategies could go a long way towards reducing the power and influence of teacher and principals on school governing bodies.

It would appear then that 'authentic participation' as outlined above could be possible. The obstacles would need to be considered and mechanisms addressing these have to be set up to ensure that 'authentic participation' remains within reach. However, as Shaeffer (1992) concludes, participation initiatives are processes involving different people in differing contexts. Therefore, despite considering the above suggestions, participatory initiatives cannot really be standardized (p.12). It is perhaps appropriate then that the focus now shifts to the development of a policy of parental participation in South Africa.

2.6 Parental Participation in School Governance in South Africa

According to Sayed (1996), the issue of parental involvement in educational matters stretches back to the days of slavery at the Cape in the 17th Century. However, during the 1980s, the demand for greater representation and decision-making powers for parents gained prominence with the growth and development of Parent, Teacher and Student Associations (PTSAs). I will focus here on the development of this policy from this period up to the South African Schools Act (SASA) in 1996. During this period, there were the apartheid government's reform initiatives from 1990 onwards. There were also initiatives undertaken by the forces opposed to the apartheid government. Finally, there is the SASA (1996), a product of the African National Congress (ANC)-led government. The debates and policies from these perspectives during each of these periods as they relate to parent participation in school governance are examined below.

2.6.1 National Party Initiatives from 1990 to 1994

Between 1979 and 1990, approximately 200 House of Assembly (HOA) schools – white schools – were forced to close due to low numbers. There was a massive shortage of places in the overcrowded black schools at the same time as well as increasing political pressure

for desegregation (Christie, 1995:46). In these conditions and in the context of the National Party's stated commitment to the dismantling of apartheid as well as a failing economy, the NP government unveiled their plans for education in the future in the Education Renewal Strategy (ERS) in 1991.

The ERS was based on New Right views of education and called for greater privatization and decentralization of the education system (Collins & Gillespie, 1993:36). Privatization would mean less state expenditure and parents as consumers of education would be expected to make up the shortfall by paying school fees. With parents as consumers, paying fees, they would now be given certain decision-making powers, thus constituting decentralization (Kallaway, 1997:46).

These policies were only applied to HOA schools and saw the introduction of various school models, culminating in the Model C schools. All white schools had to convert to the Model C option by 1992 unless two thirds of parents felt otherwise (Tikly & Mabogoane, 1997:162). In these Model C schools, a management council of parent representatives would have decision-making powers over a wide range of issues including staff appointments, school fees and the language policy. Race would not be an admission factor any longer (Christie, 1995:49).

Although these initiatives may seem progressive in that decision-making powers had been devolved to parents thereby democratizing education, Collins and Gillespie (1993) believe that it contains reactionary elements (p.38). This view is supported by Parker (1995) who observes that since schools can charge fees, privileges can be maintained by charging high fees which only those with sufficient financial resources – mostly whites – are able to pay. Furthermore, Christie (1995) states that despite race not being an admission factor any longer, the rights to 'own culture, language and religion' remain cornerstones of the policy (p.51). With parents deciding on admission policies which can be based on culture and language, the right to 'autogenous' education – which Tikly (1997) describes as education that reflects the language, culture and religion of the group concerned - would still be allowed (p.183). It would merely be couched in a different language, that of culture,

language and religion (Tikly & Mabogoane, 1997:163). With the management councils making these decisions being controlled by mostly white parents, the culture, language and religious practices of whites would continue to be dominant (Christie, 1995:51). Chisholm (1997) therefore views these decentralization initiatives as a major effort by the NP to maintain white control over education.

2.6.2 *Anti-apartheid initiatives*

The formation of Parent Teacher Associations in the 1950s in Cape Town by the Teachers' League of South Africa as part of their Anti-Coloured Affairs Department campaign represents the roots of the anti-apartheid school governance initiatives. The National Education Co-ordinating Committee (NECC), formed in response to the crisis in Department of Education and Training (DET) schools (black schools) as a result of a protracted school boycott in 1985, represented a resurgence of anti-apartheid initiatives in this regard. These initiatives were couched in the context of the anti-apartheid struggle. They were thus not simply to gain control of decision-making structures at school, but were part of an overall strategy in the struggle against apartheid (Carrim & Sayed, 1993:23). Education was seen as a tool for people's power where people would take control of local structures and shape them to serve their interests and needs (Greenstein, 1995:194). The result was the emergence of Parent, Teacher and Student Associations (PTSAs) in black schools in the 1980s (Sayed, 1997:357).

These PTSAs represented an attempt to involve the relevant stakeholders, including parents, teachers and high school students in decision-making, thereby making school governance more democratic. It would also legitimate decisions because of the involvement of relevant stakeholders and would ensure educational accountability to parents and students (Sayed & Carrim, 1997:91).

In the 1990s, with the unbanning of anti-apartheid organizations and negotiations underway, organizations realized the need for generating viable alternatives to apartheid education. The African National Congress (ANC) released their Education and Training

Framework Document while the NECC sponsored the National Education Policy Initiative (NEPI). Of these, NEPI placed the most emphasis on elaborating the role of PTSAs as school governance structures (Sayed & Carrim, 1997:92). NEPI's objective was to generate policy options for a future democratic South Africa (Badat, 1997:23). In terms of educational governance, NEPI proposed that PTSAs should be representative structures which would determine school policy within a national framework. The implementation of policy (i.e. management and administration) should be left to a Management Executive consisting of the principal and senior staff (NEPI, 1992).

2.6.3 School Governance after 1994

The 1994 elections saw the installation and establishment of a legitimate and democratic government. A single National Education Department was set up and numerous policy initiatives were undertaken. The Report of the Committee to Review the Organization, Governance and Funding of Schools (1995), or the Hunter Report, was one such initiative. In relation to school governance, the report suggested that parents, teachers, high school learners, non-teaching staff and the principal as an *ex officio* member should serve on the governing bodies of public schools. Parents would constitute a majority on the governing body.

The government's response to the Hunter Report was in the form of two White Papers (November 1995 White Paper 2a: Department of Education, 1995 and February 1996 White Paper 2b: Department of Education, 1996) with White Paper 2b of 1996 later being tabled as the South African Schools Bill in April 1996. The composition of school governing bodies outlined in the Bill was similar to that of the Hunter Report, with parents still to constitute the majority (Sayed & Carrim, 1997:93). A menu of responsibilities for governing bodies was also included and was dependent on their ability to manage them (Tikly, 1997:179). The Bill passed through many phases in parliament before the South African Schools Act (SASA) was eventually passed in November 1996.

2.6.4 The SASA (1996) and School Governance

With the passing of the SASA (1996), the Model C system of school governance has been maintained and extended to all schools (Chisholm, 1997:64). Schools are thus allowed to raise additional funds by charging school fees and, under certain provisos, to determine admission and language policies. Sonn (1997) believes that SASA (1996), in relation to school governance, has as its central tenet the democratization of schools. Decisions therefore have to reflect the input from the various relevant stakeholders to ensure this democratic governance (pp.1-2). Thus, Muller (1998) suggests that the “central impulse behind the School’s Act is unquestionably to maximize participation, principally parental participation” (p.8).

This central impulse is illustrated by the fact that the SASA (1996) calls for the representation of parents, educators, non-educator staff and high school learners on school governing bodies. The principal is also expected to serve on the governing body in his/her official capacity. Members of the community with relevant expertise could also be co-opted by governing bodies, although they will not have voting rights. In this way, the relevant stakeholders in education - as determined by the SASA (1996) - are enabled to participate in school governance. Furthermore, parents have to constitute the majority of members on these governing bodies (p.18). This ‘weighting’ of parents above the other stakeholders emphasizes the role of parents in school governance.

Beresford (1992) warns that parents often do not want to or find it hard to participate in school governance matters. Some of the reasons for this have been outlined above. In the South African context, Paterson and Collett (1999) contend that this is especially the case where parents lack the expertise to serve on school governing bodies. This view is supported by Campbell (1998) and Muller (1998). Muller (1998) argues further that greater parental participation is largely dependent on the concept of the neighborhood school with easy access for parents. However, the neighborhood school is fast disappearing as parents exercise the right to choose schools, often sending their children to schools outside their neighborhoods. This is even the case in working class areas. Because parents now live far

from the schools they have chosen for their children, they are unable or unwilling to travel there at night to participate in school governance (pp.8-9).

The above realities illustrate the difficulty to effect authentic parental participation on school governing bodies in South Africa. They also emphasize the need for capacity building and ongoing training of school governing body members (Campbell, 1998; Muller, 1998; Paterson & Collett, 1999). If this capacity building is not forthcoming, many parents would not be able to utilize the opportunity for participation and resultant empowerment, as envisaged by the SASA (Paterson & Collett, 1999). The fast disappearing concept of the neighborhood school in many of our communities is also placing participation out of reach for many parents. These realities could undermine the objectives of democratizing education, through the representation and participation of all the relevant stakeholders, if they are not adequately addressed. Despite these difficulties, there are parents who are willing to participate in the governance of their schools. The focus now shifts to these parents in particular.

2.7 Parents on School Governing Bodies

In this section, I will present some of the views related to the reasons why parents participate in school governance. Cherryholmes (1988) suggests that certain actions taken by people are shaped by discourses. He refers to these actions as discourse-practices since they are shaped by discourses and in turn, they re-inforce discourses by their practice. According to Ball (1993), “[d]iscourses are about what can be said and thought, but also about who can speak, when, where and with what authority” (p.14). Ball (1994) argues that policy should also be viewed as discourse. As such, it gets one thinking about specific issues and in a particular way at a particular time (p.20). Policies thus prioritize specific issues and try and get people thinking about those issues in a particular way.

In terms of school governance in South Africa, one of the discourses permeating the SASA (1996) is democracy. The SASA (1996), through this discourse, tries to get parents to believe that their participation is important because it would advance the interests of

democracy. They, as stakeholders in education, are being given the opportunity to be part of school governance. Furthermore, by insisting on numerical superiority of parents on governing bodies, the importance of parents in particular is emphasized (Sayed & Carrim, 1997:97). Thus, as a result of the discourse of democracy and the way parents are constructed in terms of school governance in the SASA (1996), parents would want to be part of school governance structures. Their participation in these is shaped by the discourse, and would enhance democracy (the discourse). It could thus be seen as a discourse-practice.

The translation from policy to implementation is also influenced by the context within which the policy is to operate. Bowe *et al.* (1992) refer to this implementation of policy as the context of practice. Here the policy is interpreted and recreated by practitioners who bring to it their own understandings, values and purposes (pp.19-22). Its effects are thus unpredictable (Ball, 1994:17). For Deem *et al.* (1995), social and economic context together with personal history impact on decisions by parents to participate on school governing bodies. Therefore, in order to determine why parents participate in school governance, their personal profiles would have to be considered. These profiles represent their histories as well as their positions in their families, communities and in society.

Deem *et al.* (1995), in their study of parent governors in England, found that the willingness of parents to participate in school governance by serving on governing bodies was greatly affected by their personal profiles. For many, being a school governor was not their only experience of voluntary activity in the community. For some, it represented part of “a long ‘career’ of active citizenship helping people” (p.3). In other cases, some of them had previously been involved at the school as voluntary helpers like classroom aides. Through this experience they had become familiar with the school environment. It was this experience that served as a springboard to governorship for these parents (p.3). Then there were also those parents who felt that schools could use their expertise from the world of business, especially now that governing bodies had been given added responsibilities (p.3).

Vincent (1996) makes the point that participation is affected by class, ethnicity and gender. According to her, these “may all be important factors in determining opportunities and willingness to participate” (p.10). Thus, Anderson (1998) believes that participation initiatives could be captured by white, middle class parents (p. 580). Tikly and Mabogoane (1997) have shown that this is the case in former Model C schools in South Africa, even where there is a substantive black learner population. Assimilationist approaches to desegregation in these schools have resulted in them maintaining their white environment and ethos. In these circumstances, black parents are likely to feel estranged and thus unwilling to participate in the governance structures (pp.169-171). Reasons for working class parents not participating have been outlined above and include time available and relevant knowledge.

In relation to gender being a factor affecting participation, Deem *et al.* (1995) have found that parents whose previous assistance at schools served as a springboard to their participation were mostly mothers. It was most often mothers who were at home during the day and thus had the time to volunteer to assist at schools (p3). However, Deem *et al.* (1995) also found that women were most affected by family and child commitments. In many cases these were seen as their primary responsibilities and only once these had been sorted out, could they consider participating in the governance structures (pp.58-61).

The personal profile of a parent could thus be said to affect his/her willingness to participate in the school governance structures. Where parents have a history of voluntary activity in the community or at schools, they were more likely to take part in school governance. There were also those whose work experiences were deemed beneficial to the school and this encouraged them to get involved. However, participation is also affected by class, ethnicity and gender. It would seem to be more difficult to get parents to serve on governing bodies in black, working class areas. Mothers would be more likely to have had contact with the school as a volunteer thus enabling further participation. On the other hand, they would also be more affected by family commitments, making participation more difficult.

According to Shaeffer (1992), participation holds many advantages for the individual and that this promotes parental participation. He suggests that "one can gain more knowledge, learn better practice and end with a greater awareness of the problems that exist, the causes behind these problems ... and in some cases, their possible solutions" (p.11). Shannon (1994) observes that some people seek positions as school governors in order to further political careers (p.90). However, Deem *et al.* (1995) have found that involvement was seldom encouraged by the prospect of personal development or gain (p.58). *

From the above it is evident that the decision by parents to be part of school governance structures is influenced by the discourses permeating the relevant policy documents. By fostering a discourse of democracy, the SASA (1996) seeks to ensure that parents are part of decision-making structures at schools. Where parents take on this discourse, they would want to be part of school governing bodies in the interests of democracy. However, their decision to be part of the school governing body or not is also affected by parents' personal profiles, their histories and the context within which they exist. These factors need to be considered when examining the reasons for participation by parents in school governing structures.

Very little research exists in South Africa on the implementation of the policy of school governance as advocated in SASA (1996). As a result, there is a dearth of knowledge on the response of schools and parents to this new policy. The subject of this dissertation is related to the area of implementation of the policy of school governance. I am especially interested in the decision by parents to participate in school governance and how this decision is influenced by the context within which the policy is applied as well as by their understandings, values and purposes. Consequently, this study would contribute to the filling of some of the gaps which exist in relation to the subject of school governance in South Africa. In light of the paucity of research in this regard, a study of this nature is imperative in South Africa today.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the process of enquiry followed in conducting this study will be made explicit. McMillan and Schumacher (1993) contend that reliability is enhanced by making this process explicit since it will enhance the possibility of future researchers, using the same methodology, discovering the same phenomena in a similar context. I will therefore address the following in this chapter; firstly, the choice of site for the research, secondly, the methodological approaches adopted and thirdly, how the data was organised and interpreted. The rationale for each of these choices will also be explained.

3.1 Situating the Research

The research was conducted among parents serving on school governing bodies in high schools in Mitchells Plain. I had been a teacher in Mitchells Plain for the past fourteen years. My history here was thus largely responsible for my interest in educational matters in the area. Mitchells Plain was established in the 1970s by the apartheid government as a dormitory township on the outskirts of Cape Town. It was intended as an area where many of Cape Town's Coloured working class would live and commute to and from the city on a daily basis. Many of its earliest inhabitants came from District Six and the other Coloured townships in Cape Town. Since then, Mitchells Plain has developed into a sprawling township with over a million inhabitants and fourteen high schools. Twelve of these were included in this study. Of the two which were not, the managerial problems at one of the schools precluded them from the research and the other is where I teach.

I decided not to include my own school in the study because of my familiarity with its governing body members. Bogdan and Taylor (1975) recommend that "researchers choose settings in which the subjects are strangers" (P.28). This view is supported by Neuman (1997) who also emphasizes unfamiliarity as a point to consider when choosing a site of research. McMillan and Schumacher (1993) concur and argue further that the reliability of the research findings are enhanced where the researcher is unknown to the participants.

According to them, if the researcher is known by the respondents, it will influence the responses and thus the reliability of the findings (p.387).

However, my experience as a teacher in the area for the past fourteen years gave me a sense of familiarity with the social context of Mitchells Plain. This familiarity was useful in establishing rapport during interviews. My experience as a teacher in the area was also invaluable in gaining access to parent governors through principals and teachers at schools who did not view me as an outsider and were thus more receptive to my requests. I was therefore familiar with the area but not with the respondents.

The study involved parent governors from twelve of the fourteen high schools in Mitchells Plain. Questionnaires were sent to eleven of the schools and in-depth interviews were conducted with parent governors at one other school, which I will call Newlands High. This school was chosen because of its proximity to my own school and thus shared a similar community. However, it also meant that I was unfamiliar to the parents at Newlands High and this held certain advantages as described above. These focused interviews were not conducted with parents from the other schools largely due to time constraints.

Part of the aim of this endeavour was to gain insight and understanding of the views of parents on school governing bodies. However, the nature of the research was exploratory. Furthermore, it focused on parent governors at a particular school. As a result of these two factors, the findings of this study cannot be said to be generalisable. Despite this, where a similar methodology is followed in a similar context, similar findings should be reached (Murphy & Mattson, 1992:89). These findings could thus help interpret actions in similar contexts. Furthermore, it will also be useful in identifying further areas of research.

3.2 Data Collection Strategies

Triangulation is described by Cohen and Manion (1989) as the “use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour” (p.269). It is advocated by a number of researchers (see for example, Adelman et al. 1980; Cohen & Manion, 1989; O’Connell Davidson & Layder, 1993). There are various types of triangulation, among them time, space and methodological triangulation. Time triangulation is an investigation of a phenomenon in two or more time periods. An example of space triangulation would be an investigation which includes a number of schools in an area or country and methodological triangulation is where various data collection strategies are used (Denzin, 1988). Triangulation is said to enhance the validity of research findings because it helps to “explain more fully the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint” (Cohen & Manion, 1989:269). In an attempt to enhance the validation of data and findings, I employed elements of time, space and methodological triangulation. My data collection strategies were unstructured interviews and questionnaires and in the process of outlining them, the types of triangulation will be clarified. However, the limitation to the study is the inability to triangulate responses from the interviews and questionnaires. These responses have to be taken at face value since there were no checks on whether what was claimed was in fact so, either through interviewing others or observing the participants during the course of their duties, primarily due to time constraints.

3.2.1 Interviews

Cannell and Kahn (1968) consider the interview as “a two-person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information” (in Cohen & Manion, 1989:307). It enables a researcher to gain access to information which is otherwise difficult to access like “an understanding of people’s ‘private’ worlds” (Murphy & Mattson, 1992:90). An interview “makes it possible to measure what a person knows (knowledge or information), what a person likes or dislikes (values and preferences) and

what a person thinks (attitudes and beliefs)” (Tuckman, 1972 in Cohen & Manion, 1989:309).

There are various types of interviews which Cohen and Manion (1989) have identified as structured, unstructured, non-directive and focused. The structured interviews have the questions, their sequence and wording organised beforehand and the interviewer has little or no freedom to modify these. These interviews are usually associated with surveys and each person has to be asked the same question in the same way. In non-directive interviews, minimal direction is given by the interviewer. These are usually associated with some form of therapy. The focused interview is in a non-directive situation, but with more interviewer control. The unstructured interview allows for much more flexibility and freedom. Despite being relatively open-ended, it is focused around a particular topic and is thus guided by a general set of questions. Even so, the interviewer is allowed to modify or add questions depending on the responses. Open-ended questions are used extensively here and there are no restrictions on the content or manner of reply.

The unstructured interview was chosen as the primary data collection strategy (See Appendix 1). Since the focus of this dissertation is on the reasons parents have for participating in school governance, the unstructured interview was regarded as the most suitable method for gathering appropriate data. Greater depth to responses is enabled because respondents can be probed or questioned for further clarification (Cohen & Manion, 1989:313). It would also allow respondents to attribute their own meanings and interpretations to events and relationships thereby providing “a greater understanding of the subjects point of view” (May, 1993:94). My aim was to develop a greater understanding of the point of view of parents, and thus unstructured interviews were considered the most appropriate strategy.

Before interviewing the parents earmarked for this study, I conducted pilot interviews with two parent governors outside this study. McMillan and Schumacher (1993) contend that pilot interviews contribute to the identification of problem areas that could arise in the actual interviews. This strategy gives the interviewer an idea of which questions make

respondents uncomfortable. Respondents should also be asked to evaluate the questions for clarity and intent. It would also demonstrate how long the interviews would last. In short, the pilot interview presents the interviewer with an idea of what works and what needs to be modified. As a result, modifications related to making respondents feeling uneasy and clarity were made to the schedule of questions before the actual interviews were undertaken.

The interviews were conducted with ten parents who served on the school governing body of Newlands High. Five of these parents were interviewed about two months before their terms as governors expired and the other five, about four to six weeks after they had been elected. The aim was to get a comparative view of those parents who had experience as opposed to those who were inexperienced but with many expectations. The ideal would have been to interview the same group of people twice - as new parent governors and as experienced ones. Time constraints made such a task impossible and this was the only way to get that comparative perspective. However, it did involve researching the same phenomena amongst different people and at a different stage. As such, a form of time triangulation was achieved here.

In order to set up the interviews, I needed access to the parent governors. Such access was largely dependent on the principal of the school since he was able to arrange a meeting between the parent governors and I. Burgess (1985) emphasises the need to gain the support of the principal when conducting school site research since the principal is often the gatekeeper in these circumstances. Neuman (1997) advises that elements of the intended research would have to be disclosed to the gatekeepers in order to get their support. Once I had outlined my research to the principal, along with my intent and reasons for choosing Newlands High as my primary site, he gave me his full support. I was then allowed to address the parent governors at their following school governing body meeting where they all agreed to be interviewed. The second group of interviews were negotiated in similar vein at the newly elected school governing body's first meeting.

All the interviews were conducted in the respondents' homes at a pre-arranged time which was convenient for them. It was hoped that the respondents would feel more at ease in an environment wherein they were comfortable. The anonymity of their responses was again highlighted. The first part of the interview requested some historical background information which immediately put respondents at ease due to the non-threatening nature of these questions. Meason (1988) advises that non-threatening issues be raised at the beginning of interviews. This would help to put interviewees at ease and also enhances rapport. This strategy greatly facilitated rapport between us and because respondents were more at ease, they would be "more likely to disclose aspects of themselves, their thoughts, their feelings and values" which would enhance validity (Kitwood, 1977 in Cohen & Manion, 1989).

The interviews lasted between thirty and fifty minutes and were recorded with the permission of respondents. Although the tape recorder seemed to make some of the respondents a little nervous initially, they soon lost this nervousness and even seemed to forget its presence after a while. Although May (1993) points out that a tape recorder may inhibit responses, the advantages of its use far outweigh this disadvantage. Where the interview is not recorded, it usually lacks continuity due to the taking of notes. Often, the interviewer cannot record the response fast enough and this results in an inaccurate reflection of the interview. This view is supported by Cohen and Manion (1989) who add that where responses are left out, they are usually those that the interviewer does not want to hear and thus results in bias. By recording the interview, the respondents' own views, in their own words, are reflected. For this reason, any extracts quoted from the transcripts of the interviews will be in the original form, without corrections.

According to McMillan and Schumacher (1993), personal characteristics also influence responses. Cohen and Manion (1989) warn that factors like age, gender, education levels, race, religion or social class in certain contexts could all be a source of bias. While it is difficult to measure the influence of all of these factors, they did not seem to unduly affect the way people responded. However, my position as a teacher in the area could have influenced some of the respondents into trying to boost my perception of their school and

its governing body. This factor would need to be considered when analysing the data. Nevertheless, as indicated earlier, the principal of Newlands - somebody they knew and trusted - introduced me and endorsed my study. Furthermore, my familiarity with the community facilitated my establishing rapport with interviewees. These elements appeared to have had favourable results.

The shortcomings of the interview as a research tool also need to be recognised. Primary among these are those related to validity. The validity is affected by a misleading picture being given by respondents and its main cause is bias (Cohen and Manion, 1989). Biased or misleading responses could be the result of asking leading questions or the effect of the social identity of the interviewer on the interviewee (O'Connell Davidson & Layder, 1994). McMillan and Schumacher (1993) recommend that researchers have to reflect on how these factors affect the data being collected. Through this reflexivity, "there is the potential to pre-empt or reduce bias and distortion" and thus enhance validity (O'Connell Davidson & Layder, 1994:52). The pilot interviews which were conducted supported this process of reflexivity. Validity is also enhanced where good rapport has been established. People are then more likely to speak openly about issues (Kitwood, 1977 in Cohen & Manion, 1989). Methodological triangulation further enhances validity (Cohen & Manion, 1989:269). A questionnaire was thus also one of the data collection strategies.

3.2.2 The Questionnaire

A questionnaire (see appendix 2) was also used to collect data. These were in English and Afrikaans so that language preference would not be a barrier to parents responding. Parent governors at eleven of the fourteen high schools in Mitchells Plain were asked to complete the questionnaire. In order to get the questionnaire to these respondents, I had to seek permission and assistance from the various principals or governing body secretaries where they were teachers. These people were asked to deliver the questionnaire along with a covering letter (see appendix 3) outlining the purposes of the study to parent governors on their respective school governing bodies. They were to request respondents to complete the questionnaire and return it in a self addressed stamped envelope, which was also provided.

The fact that I was a colleague from Mitchells Plain contributed towards a positive response to my requests to deliver the questionnaires to the parent governors at the respective schools.

The respondents were parent members of high school governing bodies. The focus of my research was on parent governors at one school with whom in-depth interviews were conducted. The questionnaire enabled me to reach many more parent governors who served in a similar context and to test whether there were certain factors which were common to the whole group. In other words, I wanted to see whether it would be possible to generalise some of the findings across a broader area than Newlands High. This represents a limited form of space triangulation, where a similar issue is investigated across a larger area. It could thus serve to further enhance the validity of the findings despite a different data collection strategy being used.

McMillan and Schumacher (1993) point out that the biggest advantage of questionnaires is that they can ensure anonymity. This encourages greater honesty and thus the data would be more reliable (p.238). Standardized questions were used to enable easier coding of responses. To encourage respondents to complete questionnaires and reply, Leedy (1989) advises that they should be easy to complete. All the questions were thus closed questions where responses had to be indicated by a tick or a number in an appropriate box. No open-ended questions were included since a primary concern was that parents would not complete and return questionnaires and open-ended questions often result in a poor response, especially among people with limited literacy levels (Cohen & Manion, 1989:320). Since one of the major drawbacks of a questionnaire is the low rate of return (p.320), I did not want to do anything to further negatively affect the return rate. This proved to be a legitimate concern since only twenty-nine of the sixty-five submitted questionnaires were eventually returned. Most of these I collected from schools, a possible indication that the respondents found it easier to return the questionnaire to schools than to post them.

Despite a forty five percent return, the questionnaires complement the interview data. They provide a broader view of the issue, albeit a more superficial one. The questionnaire responses necessitated some quantitative analysis as opposed to the qualitative analysis of the interview data. This further methodological triangulation also strengthens the validity of this study.

3.3 Data Analysis and Interpretation

Once the data had been collected, the challenge was now to make sense of all the data. This meant that the data had to be systematically organised and interpreted (Patton, 1990:371-372). The data collected was both qualitative (the interviews) and quantitative (the questionnaire) which necessitated a somewhat different approach to the organisation of the respective bits of data. An explanation of the methods used in this analysis and interpretation follows.

Grounded Theory was used for this task. According to Le Compte and Preissle (1993), a Grounded Theory is used where the aim is to construct a theory which explains a phenomenon (p.252). In the case of this study, that phenomenon was parental participation in school governance. Grounded Theory is described by Glaser and Strauss (1967), the pioneers of this approach, as “the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research” (p.3). One of the advantages of using a Grounded Theory is that it would ensure that the constructed theory is applicable to the area of study since the theory “is derived from the data and then illustrated by characteristic examples of data” (p.6). It is thus ‘grounded’ in the data.

The recorded interviews were transcribed. May (1993) points out that transcribing the open-ended replies associated with unstructured interviews is helpful for developing a familiarity with the data. This familiarity is essential for the analysis of interview responses (p.106). A close reading of the transcribed data was undertaken so that the coding of the data could be done. Coding is described by Strauss and Corbin (1990) as the naming of segments of data pertaining to similar events, incidents or ideas. The names of

categories (or codes) were either arrived at inductively or deductively. Inductive or *in vivo* codes are described as words or phrases which tended to emerge from the data while deductive codes are informed by the researcher's own knowledge and experience (Strauss & Corbin, 1990:69). The similar segments of data were then grouped together which enabled comparison and analysis between and within groups or categories.

The process of sifting through the categories is referred to as the 'constant comparative method' by Glaser and Strauss (1967). All the segments of data that have been assigned to a category are compared and contrasted with the aim of establishing what the emerged categories mean. It is a search for differences and similarities between segments of data as well as categories. It is also a means of identifying sub-categories and relations amongst categories. Boulton and Hammersley (1993) make the point that this may result in the re-assignment of some of the segments of data to other categories and the emergence of new categories (p.18). I found that this iterative process enriched the analysis and understanding of parents' responses.

The analysis of the quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire was conducted by the grouping of responses under the headings from the questionnaire (See Appendix 4). It also involved making a frequency count at each of the questions. The results from this exercise were used to develop a picture of the high school parent governor community in Mitchells Plain within which to contextualise the closer analysis of the interview responses.

3.4 Validity and Reliability of Research

The validity and reliability of this research has been enhanced by various tools and strategies. The first of these is triangulation. As shown above, elements of time, space and methodological triangulation were employed. Furthermore, interviews were conducted with two groups of five parents each. I could thus validate respondents' statements by comparing them to those of others interviewed.

By using unstructured interviews as my primary source of data, I could gain greater clarity with regard to the responses of interviewees. In this way I could ensure that I had a clear understanding of the meanings they attached to statements by further probing. Furthermore, by recording these interviews, I ensured that their understandings were accurately represented, thereby further enhancing reliability and validity.

In qualitative research, the researcher is acknowledged as an active participant in the research (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The researcher's own social identity and values will impact on the data collected and the picture of social reality that is constructed (Guba & Lincoln, 1988). O'Connell Davidson and Layder (1994) contend that the researcher should continually monitor his/her assumptions throughout the research process. This process is referred to as reflexivity. They claim that it will result in better research and has the potential to pre-empt and so reduce bias and distortion (p.52). My position in relation to the area being researched, the parents interviewed and conclusions drawn was thus continually considered.

This chapter has attempted to clearly explain the methodological process of enquiry that was followed in this research along with the rationale for the methods employed. The context within which the research was conducted was also described. The primary source of data was qualitative. Where this is the case, it is especially important to provide a detailed account of the process of enquiry in order for the credibility of the research to be determined (Patton, 1990). It is what this chapter has aimed to do.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter is divided into two main sections. The first section is a description of the school governing body parent community at high schools in Mitchells Plain. This section is also an attempt to contextualise the social circumstances. The responses from the questionnaires discussed in the previous chapter constitute the main source of information for this task. The findings from the interviews conducted at Newlands High then follow in a second section.

The aim of this second section is to gain greater clarity regarding the reasons for the participation by parents in school governance. In this section of the chapter, I used Strauss and Corbin's (1990) paradigm model for developing a grounded theory (pp.99-115) as a basis to provide a conceptual structure for my theoretical analysis. The central focus of this analysis is voluntary parental participation in school governance. A number of factors are adduced to explain voluntary participation.

The first category of factors which is discussed is that which Strauss and Corbin (1990) refer to as the causal conditions. They describe these causal conditions as "events or incidents that lead to the occurrence or development of a phenomenon" (p.100). I have identified three broad sub-categories within the category of causal conditions. These are the philosophy of education held by parents, their life experiences and their previous formal contact with the school. These three sub-categories, although separate, reinforce one another and work together towards voluntary parental participation.

The second category of factors Strauss and Corbin (1990) refer to is the contextual. Voluntary parental participation in school governance takes place in a particular context. This context is the specific set of conditions which frames the action eventually taken (Strauss & Corbin, 1990:101). At a broader or macro level, policies related to school governance are placed here. These policies are implemented at the micro level of the school. The school is situated in a particular community. I have referred to this community

as the mesa level of context and it is also briefly sketched. Parental participation takes place within this overall context and is also influenced by context.

Another set of conditions that impacts on the eventual decision to serve on the school governing body or not is referred to as intervening conditions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). These intervening conditions are described as “the broader structural conditions”. They pertain to a phenomenon and include conditions related to time, culture and economic status (p.103). These conditions facilitate or constrain the particular action. The intervening conditions that have emerged from the data have been grouped under two sub-categories. The first of these relates to time, or specifically, the availability of time. The second intervening condition is the impact of the new policy related to school governance. The effect of these two categories on the eventual decision to participate in school governance is examined in this section.

All the categories in the model interact with one another and together result in a particular action which is taken. In this case, that action is the decision whether to participate in school governance or not. To conclude the model, the action taken results in an eventual outcome. That eventual outcome would be how the school and the school governing body now function as a result of the action taken by parents. The importance of exploring the outcomes is recognised, but time constraints made it impossible to adequately address this task. However, despite this outcome falling beyond the scope of this research, some of the issues related to the functioning of the school governing body that have emerged from the data are explored here.

4.1 Description of the High School Governing Body Parent Community in Mitchells Plain

The school governing body parent community which formed part of this research was specifically chosen because it forms part of a broader community of parents of high school learners in Mitchells Plain. The research was focused on a particular school where in-depth interviews were held with parent governors. This information was complemented by a

questionnaire which was sent to parent governors at 11 of the other 13 high schools in Mitchells Plain. Consequently, of the 87 parent governors at high schools in Mitchells Plain, 75 were included in this study. These responses, together with the interviews, were valuable in developing a profile of parent governors at high schools in Mitchells Plain.

As indicated in the previous chapter, 29 (or 45%) of the questionnaires were returned. Despite the disappointing return rate, the sample was sufficiently representative to develop a general description of parent governors in the area. Most of the respondents (62%) were long-serving members who had been on their school governing bodies for more than two years. The remainder, who were relatively new to their school governing bodies (serving for less than 1 year), were ordinary members and represented 14% of the respondents. The questionnaire survey was carried out in June 2000, towards the end of the governing bodies' first term of office. It was thus not surprising that the majority of parents were relatively long-serving members. Of the chairpersons or vice-chairpersons who responded, 83% had been on their school governing body for more than two years. This was also the position at Newlands High where all the members of the outgoing school governing body had served for more than two years. In contrast, 67% of the newly elected governing body was new to school governance. The other members were either re-elected (17%) or had previous experience at another school (17%).

A majority of the respondents (55%) were ordinary members. Of those who held portfolios on their respective governing bodies, 21% were chairpersons or vice chairpersons, 10% secretaries or their assistants and 14% treasurers or their assistants. The majority of the portfolio holders were either chairpersons or vice chairpersons which could be because the SASA (1996) stipulates that these positions have to be held by parents. At Newlands High, these were the only executive positions held by parents on the outgoing governing body. The situation was very different on the new governing body where 80% of the parents held various executive positions.

Deem *et al.* (1995) found that most of the parent governors in their study in England and Wales had experience of voluntary activity in their community (p.3). This was also the

case in Mitchells Plain high schools, as borne out by the questionnaire responses and the interviews. A substantial majority (87%) of questionnaire respondents had been involved in voluntary activities in their communities. Of these, 21% were involved in more than one activity while 25% had also served as primary school governors. Among the chairpersons or vice chairpersons, 50% had previous experience as parent governors at primary school level and all of them had a history of voluntary community activity of some sort. A similar picture emerged at Newlands High where 90% of all the parents interviewed had some history of involvement in voluntary activities in their communities. Two of them also had experience as primary school governors.

According to Deem *et al.* (1995), some previous contact with schools was very often the springboard to governorship (p.3). The majority of questionnaire respondents (58%) reported that they had had previous contact with their schools. This contact took the form of assistance with fund raising or as Grade 12 invigilators. However, there was a substantial number (42%) who had no previous contact with the school outside of the usual contact with teachers of their children. At Newlands High, 60% of the interviewed parents had not had any significant previous contact with the school. The remaining 40% all felt that their previous contact as invigilators, classroom aides, at adult education classes or as fund raisers had made them more aware of, and comfortable with, the school environment. It had thus not been very difficult for them to make the transition to school governor after this previous contact.

The reasons given for initially becoming involved in their respective school governing bodies were fairly evenly spread with a slight majority (38%) citing service to their community as their main reason for involvement. A substantial number of parents (31%) felt that their expertise would be of benefit to the school governing body while 24% wanted to serve their own children's interests. The remaining 7% were asked by others to serve on the governing body. A possible reason for their participation being sought was their possession of particular attributes or skills which could benefit the school governing body. They were thus not there merely for their own children's interests. Along with those serving their community and those lending their expertise, they represented the parent

governors serving on their school governing bodies for the benefit of more than just their children, or for the 'common good'. Together, they represented 76% of respondents - a substantial majority. Among the executive members, the majority serving for the 'common good' was slightly more at 77%. At Newlands High, 90% of the parents had decided to become involved in school governance to serve the 'common good'. This number was evenly split between those who were asked, those with expertise and those who wanted to serve their communities.

The interest in the welfare of all (the 'common good') was further illustrated by the belief that the learners as a collective benefited most from their involvement. This view was shared by 76% of the respondents. All of the interviewed parents were of this view. A few of the questionnaire respondents also believed that the parents (14%) or educators (7%) were the main beneficiaries of their participation. There was only one parent who believed that the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) benefited most from his/her participation.

When parents were asked to whom they were accountable for decisions, a large majority (69%) reported that they felt accountable to the other parents. The WCED received the second most support (14%) and learners 10%. Although very few believed that they were accountable to educators (7%), it is perhaps significant that there were indeed some who felt that they had to account for their decisions to the educators. The interviewed parents all believed that they were accountable to the other parents.

With regard to there being any difficulty in fulfilling their obligations to their respective school governing bodies, the majority of respondents felt that family (34%) or work commitments (28%) were the biggest obstacles. Work and family commitments were also cited as obstacles among 40% of the Newlands High parents. Since Mitchells Plain is mostly a working class area, this would seem to support the assertion by Finders and Lewis (1994) and Deem *et al.* (1995) that poorer parents found it harder to take time off work, especially where it meant that they would be losing money. These parents were also more likely to be part of a family where it would be necessary for both parents to work. Both

Anderson (1998) and Jackson and Cooper (1989) contend that parent participation was more difficult under these conditions.

There was also 17% of questionnaire respondents who felt that there were no obstacles to their participation. While this is not a big group, it is significant since these respondents specified this response under the open section 'other' on the questionnaire. McMillan and Schumacher (1993:243) claim that one of the shortcomings of a questionnaire was that respondents were forced into given responses, even though their response did not fit any of the options. Respondents were also often unwilling to write in an answer under an open section (Cohen & Manion, 1989:320), so when they made the effort to do so, it was usually because they felt quite strongly about it. For this reason, it could be said that this 17%, although not a majority, was a significant proportion of the sample. Furthermore, among the interviewees, who were not limited by forced choice options, 50% believed that there were no obstacles to their participation.

The last two questions of the questionnaire sought to determine what parent governors enjoyed most about being a parent governor and secondly, what they found most frustrating. A majority of respondents (38%) was of the view that their greater understanding of educational issues as a result of their participation in school governance was what they most enjoyed. There was a substantial number who most enjoyed serving their communities (24%) and 21% who appreciated the fact that they now knew the educators much better. Of those who enjoyed serving their communities, 43% also indicated that serving their community was the reason for their participation. The majority of the interviewed parents (60%) found the process of rendering a service most satisfying. Of these, 50% got involved because they wanted to serve their communities. The other 40% of interviewed parents found their greater understanding of educational issues most rewarding. There was also 17% of questionnaire respondents who felt that serving their own children's interests was what they most enjoyed. Of these parents, 80% had initially become part of their school governing body to serve their own child's interests and were now finding that most rewarding.

A significant majority of questionnaire respondents (62%) found the lack of support and interest displayed by other parents to be the most frustrating aspect of their participation. This trend was evident among the interviewed parents as well, where 70% had similar frustrations. There were also some who had problems with the length of meetings (17%) or difficulty understanding the educational jargon (7%). A few parents (10%) were also frustrated by the negligible impact their participation was having on their communities. This was especially so for one parent who had joined the governing body to serve his/her community but now found that his/her participation was not making a significant impact on the community. Among the interviewed parents, 20% were frustrated by the domination of educators on the governing body. Their responses were not limited by forced choice options and this was not a given option on the questionnaire.

An accurate picture of parent governors at high schools in Mitchells Plain may not be possible from a 45% questionnaire return rate. However, it does provide a fair representation of this community, especially when complemented by the interview responses of Newlands High's parent governors. From these responses, it was evident that most of these parents had been serving on their respective governing bodies for more than two years. There were more ordinary members among them and a substantial majority within this group had been or still were involved in some other voluntary activity. A considerable number of the entire group (46%) had not had any previous significant contact with their school preceding their election to their governing body. However, the majority of parents in the sample did have some sort of contact with the school prior to being elected.

Most of the parents also became involved in school governance to serve the 'common good', as opposed to the good of their own children. The vast majority believed that their participation was of most benefit to the learners at the various schools but that they were accountable to the parents of learners for their decisions. Work and family obligations were the main obstacles to participation. It also emerged that the clearer understanding of educational issues which parents now had was what they most enjoyed about being parent

governors. Finally, the low interest and support of other parents was the most frustrating factor for a very large majority of parents.

A profile of the broader community of parent governors at high schools in Mitchells Plain was thus beginning to emerge. At this point an in-depth analysis of the interviews conducted at Newlands High was necessary in order to obtain greater clarity regarding the factors which determined parental participation in their school governing body. In the following section, the context of the study is briefly sketched, after which the findings regarding parental participation are outlined.

4.2 The Context of the Study

Before examining the findings at Newlands High, it is useful to outline the context within which the study took place, since this context also informs the analysis.

Newlands High is in Mitchells Plain, a working class area described in the previous chapter. When the research was undertaken in 2000, Newlands High was in its 20th year of existence. It is one of the bigger high schools in Mitchells Plain with a role of between 1300 and 1400 learners. Newlands High is situated in one of the more established areas in Mitchells Plain with most of its learners living in the surrounding area. It is a dual medium school with subjects offered in English and Afrikaans.

The parent governors from Newlands High interviewed in this study all lived in Mitchells Plain. There were five females and five males in the interview sample. Three of the respondents were part of families where both parents worked, one of them a female. The four other female interviewees and one male interviewee did not work. There was only one single parent family among the interviewed parents and it was headed by a female who did not work. All the interviewed parents were part of working class families.

4.3 Findings at Newlands High

It is important to point out that two groups formed part of the interview sample. Group One was interviewed towards the end of their term of office. Their responses to some of the questions were therefore based on their **experiences** as parent governors at Newlands High. The parents in Group Two were interviewed shortly after taking up their positions on the school governing body. Some of their responses would therefore relate more to their **expectations** as parent governors as opposed to their experiences. The respondents in the two groups were:

GROUP 1	GROUP 2
Mr EA	Mr DH
Ms AN	Ms PJ
Mr FH	Ms ST
Mr PR	Ms AS
Mr AW	Ms ED

The focus of this study was the reasons parents accepted positions on school governing bodies. As indicated above, Strauss and Corbin's (1990) paradigm model was used as a basis to conceptualise a set of relationships between the various categories which emerged from the interviews. These relationships as they pertain to one another and the central idea or phenomenon (voluntary parental participation) are set out under the following headings:

- Causal Conditions
- Context of Voluntary Participation
- The Intervening Conditions
- Elements Related to Policy Implementation

4.3.1 Causal Conditions

The parents in Group Two all volunteered to serve on the school governing body. The meeting which was held to elect the new governing body members was not attended by sufficient parents for elections to be held. Two subsequent meetings were held before the parent governors were eventually elected. In contrast, when the previous governing body was elected, there was much more interest. Parents were nominated and, after an election, became part of Newlands High's school governing body. Despite these differences, all of these parents decided – either by accepting their nomination or by volunteering – to give of their time to serve on the school governing body. This section outlines the 'causal conditions' that led to their decisions in this regard.

A Philosophy of Education

All the interviewed parents had a particular understanding of education – what I have referred to as a philosophy of education. Consequently, they held various views on the role or value of education today. Among these views was the belief that education was essential in order to gain meaningful employment. There was also the view that those with education should use their education to improve conditions in their communities. The role of parents in education represented the second aspect of this philosophy. Parents were also seen as having an essential role in education. Part of the role of parents in education was in school governance as part of the school governing body. The third feature of the philosophy of education as outlined is therefore the role of the school governing body. These three factors are the underpinnings of their particular understandings of education as they emerged from the data.

The Role of Education

All the interviewed parents recognised the value of education, especially in so far as it represented a gateway to employment opportunities. Some of the parents, through their own experiences in their families or work, judged the value of education on the effects of a

lack of education. Mr DH and Ms ST, both from Group Two, spoke of their experiences in their families. Mr DH's father had no education and his family experienced financial hardship as a result of this. A similar situation pertained in Ms ST's home. She had three sons,

and because they've got no education, they are laying at home. There's no work for them. Daar's nie werk nie want hulle weet nie hoe of wat nie. (There's no work because they don't know how and what) ... they don't have the qualifications to go and work.

Mr PR, of Group One, was in a position to observe the effects of a lack of education in the workplace:

It's very painful today, being a union organiser, when you come across senior people that's older than you that can't read or write, and if there's documentation to be signed, they have to use their thumb print. So therefore I think that education is extremely important.

These three parents had experienced or observed the hardships associated with a lack of education and thus emphasised its value. Mr DH and Ms ED, also of Group Two, believed that those with education should use it to uplift their community and society in general. According to Ms ED:

Education's role is to prepare people for a meaningful role in society. Through education, they must be able to take up a place in society in such a way that they can make a meaningful contribution to the society they live in and not just be takers from that society. People with education are or should be able to contribute to the improvement of a society.

Mr DH also contended that "education [was] a tool ... to lift the community up." Education was thus more than a gateway to employment for them. Mr DH went on to say that he was trying "to use [his] education to help people." Thus, for Ms ED and Mr DH, volunteering for the position on the school governing body represented an opportunity for them to use their education to benefit others.

All of the interviewed parents recognised the importance of education in society today, mainly for employment purposes, but also for the general upliftment of society. They all

therefore wanted to ensure that today's youth be given the best possible educational opportunity. These views had contributed to their decision to be part of the school governing body because then they could help to provide that educational opportunity, the value of which they all recognised.

Role of Parents

The parents interviewed all had strong views regarding the role of parents in education in general. This role entailed being involved in their children's education at home and at school. At home that role would be more in a supportive capacity. Ms ED summed up the overall views of parents in this regard:

A family can contribute to a child's education by showing an interest in that child's schooling, in whatever way, even just by asking what they're busy with at school or whatever. They can also give them all the support and encouragement necessary to achieve success. And they can create an atmosphere in the home that supports the child's studies and encourages learning.

According to Mr EA of Group One, parents also needed to take an interest in what was happening at school. This view was echoed by all the parents who were regulars at their children's Parent-Meet-Teacher evenings. Some of them saw the role of parents at school extending to the involvement of parents in school governance. Mr PR, also of Group One, believed that it was important for parents to support the principal and staff in the execution of their duties by being involved in school governance. In that way they could ensure that the school functioned well. This view was shared by Ms AS and Ms PJ, both of whom were part of Group Two. Mr AW of Group One also wanted parents to be involved in school governance, but not necessarily to support the principal and staff. He contended that the school belonged to the community. "[The] school is a community school. It belongs to us. For that reason I think that parents must become involved."

Ms ST, a Group Two respondent, felt very strongly that parents had to be involved in the affairs of the school. In her view, "a parent must be involved to be able to understand what's happening at a school." When parents understood what was happening at a school,

they would then know where to help and what type of help was needed. Ms PJ, Mr EA and Ms AS were all of the view that greater involvement would lead to greater understanding of conditions at school. Where there was greater understanding of conditions, parents could make contributions that would improve conditions at the school.

Both groups of respondents believed that parents had an important role to play in the affairs of the school. For some respondents, this would be a supporting role. For others like Mr AW, parents should play a leading role. There were also those who believed that they would gain greater understanding of school conditions as school governors. These respondents felt that this was the reason parents had to be involved in school governance. Despite these differences, all of them saw the role of parents in school governance as being a significant one. For them as parents, it was thus important to be involved themselves and in this way serve their school or their community.

The Role of the School Governing Body

The various respondents emphasised different aspects when describing the role of the school governing body. It emerged that there were four areas in particular where these parents believed the school governing body had a major role to play. These areas related to school discipline, the community, the parents and the learners.

The maintenance of discipline at school was regarded as a priority for Mr EA and Mr PR, both part of Group One. They both felt that the governing body should be involved in school discipline. The school governing body was responsible for the setting up of a code of conduct which all had to follow. Ms ST of Group Two also shared this view and pointed out that it was not the task of the governing body to maintain discipline at school. This was the role of the principal and educators. However, where serious discipline problems arose, a hearing was normally held where the offenders would appear before the governing body. The school governing body was thus also involved in the application of the disciplinary code of conduct. These parents thus believed that although the school governing body was not involved in the day to day maintenance of discipline at school, it gave the staff the tools

(through the school's code of conduct) and back-up, where necessary, to maintain discipline at school. In this way the school governing body played an important role in the maintenance and control of discipline at Newlands High.

Another important role ascribed to the school governing body was that of forging closer links with the community around Newlands High. Mr FH of Group One pointed out that the parents on the school governing body represented the community and therefore had to govern the school in the interests of the community. Mr AW, also of Group One, suggested that the governing body should try to bring the school and community closer together. He argued that the school had much to offer the surrounding community:

Open your computer room and make it available on a Saturday for children to come and learn skills. The facilities are there ... People are not wealthy here, so it's not just a matter of wanting from the community. It's a give and take situation whereby you open the facility to people who cannot afford ... to pay for that.

Similar sentiments were expressed by Mr FH, who pointed out that the school's sports fields could be made available to the community after hours. Both Mr AW and Mr FH believed that this would be one way that the school could help to uplift the community and also provide much needed recreation facilities in the area. The community as a whole would benefit from the school by enhancing employment opportunities and providing recreation facilities. The school governing body would be making the decisions regarding the utilisation of the computer facilities and sports fields. They would thus be responsible for the advancement of the community and Mr FH and Mr AW viewed this as an important role of the school governing body.

Ms ED of Group Two wanted the governing body to forge closer links between the school and its community. She believed that the school should be encouraged to "start activities that put pupils in the communities, that give them a sense of where they belong and come from." Such activities would be of benefit to both the learners and their community.

The lack of interest and support by other parents was found to be most frustrating to 61% of questionnaire respondents. All the interviewed parents also mentioned this as one of their frustrations, yet they all believed that parents had an important contribution to make towards the success of Newlands High. The school governing body was seen to be in the best position to get more parents to make this contribution. For example, Ms ED of Group Two said that they had “to ensure that there [was] greater parental involvement at all levels.” Mr FH, a Group One respondent, also believed that the school governing body should make a greater effort to make parents aware of the issues confronting the school and the input they could make, even by visiting them at home.

Ms PJ and Ms AS, both of Group Two, emphasised the role of the school governing body in the advancement of the learner’s interests. Ms AS felt very strongly that the learner’s interests were paramount and said that this was one of the reasons she volunteered for the position on the school governing body: “I thought of the children. That is also the main thing, why I got up [and volunteered], not knowing what it really involved yet, but I was just thinking about the children.”

There were also parents who explicitly stated that it was not the role of the school governing body to interfere in the management of the school. Both Mr AW of Group One and Mr DH of Group Two made the point that they were not to interfere in the day-to-day running of the school. Mr PR stated that he “would not want ... the governing body to interfere with the teaching staff and their issues” and Mr FH agreed that “the governing body was not there to watch the teachers.” Despite these views, Mr PR of Group One also contended that “the parent is there to see that everything is done properly by the teaching and non-teaching staff”, while Mr FH, also of Group One, visited the school nearly every day: “Most of the time, I’m here at the school – nearly every day I take a walk. I walk around the school grounds. I watch where’s the security. I see what the teachers are doing. I go have a chat to the principal and the vice principal.”

While the governing body may not actually have interfered in the day-to-day running of the school or with the teaching staff, it seems as though Mr PR would want the governing body

to be able to do just that. Furthermore, Mr FH, by his actions, does watch what the teachers are doing. These two parents, both of Group One, may have learned over the years that the management of the school was not the function of the governing body. However, this shows that, initially at least, they did have this idea and it motivated their participation in school governance.

The interviewed parents all believed that the school governing body thus had a significant role to play in the school. Whether this role was to help address some of the problem areas like school discipline, to foster greater parental involvement or to see to it that teachers were doing their jobs properly, the overall objective was developing a Newlands High that operated optimally. The significant role which parents believed the school governing body could fulfil therefore also impacted on the decision of parents to become part of the school governing body. The interviewed parents also felt that parents had an important role to play in education. This role included providing support to their children at home and at school as well as further participation in the affairs of the school. The main reason members emphasised the role of parents and the school governing body was because of the contribution these could make to education and the value they ascribed to education.

Together, the role of parents in education, the role of the school governing body and the parents' perceptions of the value of education constitute a philosophy of education. This philosophy provided the foundation for parents' eventual decision to participate in school governance. The other causal conditions were built upon this foundation.

Life Experiences

I have grouped the second of these causal conditions under the sub-category 'Life Experiences'. This sub-category includes certain relationships and experiences to which respondents were exposed and which seemed to have had a significant effect on their current activities. In their study of parent governors in England and Wales, Deem *et al* (1995) found that the personal histories of parents were among the factors which affected

parents' willingness to participate in school governance. Interestingly, these elements emerged in this study too.

The first of these was the contribution of role models to their development. The second was a long history of voluntary participation in community organisations. For some of these parents, becoming part of the school governing body was merely an extension or continuation of this voluntary participation. The third was the confidence in their ability related to school governance which some parents had gained as a result of specific experiences at work or by serving on other school governing bodies. These elements are examined below.

Role Models

All of the respondents mentioned the positive influence of an adult or adults while they were growing up. Mss PJ, ED and AS, all of Group Two, along with Mr FH of Group One spoke of the particular role that their parents had played in their development. These were the people to whom they looked up and regarded as good examples to follow. Ms ED's view of her parents encapsulates the feeling of this group of respondents: "They were always an example to us, you know. They showed us, by the way they lived their lives, what was appropriate or not and for that we developed a lot of respect for them."

Some of the other respondents had role models outside of their families who had made a significant impact on their lives. Three of them were largely influenced by particular teachers in their youth. Ms AN of Group One spoke of the personal interest two of her teachers showed in their students and how they were willing to do more than just academic work with them. Mr DH (Group Two) and Mr AW (Group One) also had teacher role models. Both of them had grown up in townships on the Cape Flats where there was much poverty.

Mr AW saw his role model as the type of person he would like to become:

This is the type of guy that I would like to be. This is the type of person that one could look up to and learn something from. Get guidance from. Not pushing your parents aside, but an outsider. You know what your father's values are, but now let's go outside there and see what you can pick up from an outsider.

The principal at Mr DH's high school was his role model:

My principal at high school ... He was my role model. They called him a skollie principal. We in Lavis was mos branded skollies, because of the background. And he showed us that you can be a skollie, but you can still be a gentleman. He taught me one thing. Education is the key. You must use education to enhance yourself, to further what you want to be in life

He also gave them the confidence to do this, despite conditions in the township.

For these parents who had teachers as role models, the value of education and the educational experience was clearly evident. Their role models had made a considerable contribution to their internalisation of the value of education and the development of their philosophy of education. They thus wanted to ensure that others would be able to benefit from education, as they had. However, some respondents had role models who were neither their parents nor their teachers.

The role models from Mr PR's (Group One) youth were from a soccer club he played for. They were people whom he "had major respect for and ...looked up to" because they sacrificed of their time so that youngsters like him could develop their skills. Ms ST's (Group Two) role models were the reverend and his wife from the church to which she belonged as a youngster. These people made a huge impact on her life with their willingness to help others and "that is why I could look up to them".

As a result of the contact which these respondents had with their respective role models, they experienced the value of somebody doing things for the benefit of others. In some cases, they were among the direct beneficiaries of these selfless acts. For others, like for

Ms ST, it was something that they wanted to emulate. Either way, all the parents who had been positively influenced by others while growing up had internalised the value of voluntary activities. As parent governors, they were themselves now participating in a voluntary activity. Some of the interviewed parents had a long history of voluntary participation.

Voluntary Participation

In the study by Deem *et al* (1995) mentioned above, many of the parent school governors were found to have had a history of voluntary activity in their communities. School governorship was merely an extension of this voluntary participation in the service of others (p.3). Among the parents interviewed in this study, only one had not been involved in any voluntary activity in his adulthood. All the others had been involved in some or other voluntary activity, with the involvement of some of them stretching over many years. These voluntary activities ranged from activities related to sport, religion, welfare and education.

Mr EA of Group One had a very long history of voluntary participation in sport. As a teenager, he experienced some of the advantages of recreational activities and still viewed it as a means to keep the youth off the streets. Similarly, Mr PR, also of Group One, had been part of a soccer club for twenty five years. His experience as a youngster in this club was also positive and he thus continued to see the value of such recreational activities for the youth.

In the cases of Ms PJ (Group Two) and Ms AN (Group One), they had been actively involved in recreational activities as teenagers, but did not continue with these activities after leaving school. Instead, they had taken up various voluntary activities in their community as adults. Ms PJ was "involved with 'Friends of Lentegueur' where we do work at the hospital. I'm also involved in a soup kitchen ... at the Lentegueur clinic [and] a ladies support group." Ms AN's involvement was in various church voluntary groups which

provided support for those in need. Similar involvement in religious organisations was shared by Mr FH (Group One) and Ms ED (Group Two).

Ms ST of Group Two had a long history as a volunteer in the service of others. As a teenager, she “was involved with the old people at the old age homes ... taking them out, pushing the wheelchairs, going to speak to them during the week after school.” As an adult, this active involvement continued in various organisations such as a counsellor for cancer patients and an administrator in a sports club. Ms ST, like Mr AW of Group One, also had a long association with school governance. Ms AS of Group Two was not involved in any recreational or voluntary activities as a teenager, but had been part of numerous organisations as an adult. Initially she was in an organisation which offered support for other women. She later became involved in a programme which counselled youth with problems relating to teenage pregnancies and drug abuse. It was this work with the youth that got her interested in helping at the school:

I was in an organisation called ‘Love in Action’ where we counselled abused women, teenage pregnancies, all that. We would go with them to court when they have to appear and all those things and umm, young boys came, young girls for counselling. Some of them were on drugs. The girls were pregnant. And that is umm, I think it’s there that it started actually... and for me it’s just a drawing, just a drawing to the school.

A substantial majority of questionnaire respondents (83%) also had a history of voluntary participation. While it was not possible to determine the extent of their participation, voluntary participation meant giving of their time for the benefit of others. It could thus be argued that they did so because they recognised the value of those particular activities. This recognition may have been as a result of their own experience as beneficiaries in similar activities when they were younger. Alternately, it may have been because they enjoyed helping others. What does seem to be the case is that for most of these parents from both Groups One and Two, their participation in school governance represented an extension of their voluntary activities in their service of others. There were also parents who chose school governance as their voluntary activity because of their experience and expertise in this area.

Confidence in Ability

The experience which some parents had gained as school governors over the years had engendered in them a confidence in their abilities with regard to school governance. A similar confidence was also acquired by the expertise gained from the world of work. This expertise was especially valuable where it was related to the duties of the school governing body. The resulting confidence from their experience and expertise seemed to spur these parents on to take up positions on the school governing body.

Some of the parents interviewed had previously served on the old school committees or the Parent-Teacher-Student Associations (PTSAs). Not all of them regarded that experience as a factor motivating their present participation. However, Mr AW (Group One) and Ms ST (Group Two) viewed it as a strong motivating factor for their participation. They were also the parents with the most experience in school governance. Mr AW had served on the PTSA at Newlands High as well as the Parent-Teacher Association of his son's nursery school and primary school. Ms ST had fifteen years experience in school governance, all at primary school level. This experience had given Mr AW and Ms ST an acute sense of the role that parents could play in school governance. Mr AW believed that his experience was invaluable to the school governing body:

Going back to the nursery school and the primary school and my involvement on the PTSA ... There were situations, and I personally learnt a lot as I saw the situations as it happened at the school. That is why, without wanting to sound like a know-it-all, I could guide people – even the current governing body, even the current principal ... because of the knowledge, the experience that I've picked up.

For these two parents, their school governance experience largely contributed to their decisions to become a part of Newlands High's governing body. They both believed that this experience would benefit Newlands High. Two of the other members, Mr PR (Group One) and Ms ED (Group Two), believed that the experience they had accumulated through their work had given them the confidence to participate meaningfully in school governance.

Mr PR felt that

being a trade unionist, it was important to know things around the Labour Relations Act and Basic Conditions of Employment Act and so the interest was there. I was very equipped with that and that even boosted me more. As a result, I was unanimously elected as the chairperson because I was very outspoken and I knew the nitty-gritty.

This knowledge gained from his world of work equipped him for his role as a school governor. Ms ED was a primary school teacher in the local community. She believed that her work had given her “a better understanding of this community and the types of problems in many households around here.” Because of this understanding, she was more aware of the needs of the community and thus the possible role the school and school governing body could play in the community.

The experience and expertise that parents had acquired through their previous participation in school governance or their work gave them a confidence in their abilities as school governors. Armed with this confidence, they were more willing to participate in school governance. This was especially the case where parents had substantial relevant experience and where that experience was fairly recent. These parents also seemed to be much more positive about the specific role that they and other parents could play in the affairs of the school. On the other hand, parents like Ms PJ of Group Two and Mr FH of Group One - with less experience and from many years ago - found their experience to be less valuable and not a motivating factor in their present participation. Work experience, where relevant, was also a motivating factor. People who had gained expertise from the world of work that could benefit the governing body were spurred on by that expertise to participate in school governance. They, like Mr PR, were often recognised as assets by their governing bodies and thus elected to senior positions.

The importance of life experiences in the decision to participate in school governance was illustrated by the three elements outlined above. Through their role models, parents had internalised the value of selfless acts and the importance of education. Most of them had a long history of involvement in voluntary activities themselves – an action built upon what

they had learnt from their role models. Their voluntary participation in school governance could be seen as an extension of this general voluntary participation into the educational sphere. This extension into educational matters was probably influenced by their particular philosophies of education as outlined above. Furthermore, school governance was chosen as the area of voluntary participation because of the level of confidence which some parents had gained in this area as a result of previous experience in school governance or expertise from the world of work. These relationships and experiences of parents had collectively contributed to their role in school governance. The effect of another relationship – a history with the school – on the involvement of parents in school governance is explored in the following section.

A History With the School

Georgiou (1995) contends that a familiarity with the school environment could serve as a springboard to school governorship (p.34). Through this experience, parents became more aware of the needs of the school and are thus more inclined to become involved in school affairs. This familiarity was usually gained by parents who served as voluntary helpers at the school. It also emerged that there were other types of contact that had similar effects and these are also examined below.

The Parent-meet-Teacher gatherings where reports were collected and the progress of their children was discussed represented the initial contact with the school for most of the interviewed parents. They were regulars at these meetings, but for most of them, this did not facilitate their participation on the school governing body. However, Ms AN of Group One felt that “being at school, attending these meetings, I got to know the teachers ... and that is how I built up a relationship with the school.” This made it easier for her to eventually take up a position on the governing body. Mr AW, also of Group One, expressed similar sentiments and also believed that through these meetings, he became “familiar with the circumstances at the school.” He became more aware of the needs of the school and therefore decided to participate in its governance.

Mr DH and Ms ST, both of Group Two, had children who were in their first year of schooling at Newlands High. As such, they had not yet had any contact with the school at Parent-meet-Teacher gatherings. However, Mr DH had completed his matric studies at Newlands High's adult education classes. This was how he became familiar with some of the educators who were also educators at the adult education classes:

I know from the time I went to night school there, Newlands' name is very high, because they've got some of the best teachers teaching there and I know, I came from there. The teachers are committed. So I thought, hey, but something's going wrong here. So I thought maybe I can help them to put Newlands back on the road again to where they were before.

As a result of his previous contact with the school, Mr DH was now prepared to participate in the governance of the school so that the school could regain its prestigious position in the community.

Ms PJ and Ms AS, also of Group Two, regularly assisted at school as classroom aides when teachers were absent. Ms PJ was also an invigilator during the Grade 12 final examinations. Consequently, they were both fairly familiar with conditions at school. It was this familiarity that made them recognise the need for their involvement and contributed to their decision to volunteer to be school governors.

Most of the parents thus had some contact with Newlands High before they became parent governors. For two of them, the contact at Parent-meet-Teacher gatherings was instrumental in their further participation. The two respondents who were involved as classroom aides both felt that they were involved at school governance level because they could see that their assistance was needed. The contact Mr DH had had at the Adult Education classes contributed to his further participation. This would tend to show that any previous contact with the school could facilitate further participation. Furthermore, the more often or regular the contact (as with the classroom aides or Adult Education classes), the more familiar parents become with the school and the greater the chance of this contact facilitating further participation.

The causal conditions as outlined in this section were grouped under the sub-categories a philosophy of education, life experiences and a history with the school. These sub-categories are interconnected and reinforce one another. Their collective effect is to lead to the voluntary participation of parents in school governance. In line with the model of Strauss and Corbin (1990) being used in this analysis, this voluntary participation in school governance takes place in a specific context which also needs to be explored.

4.3.2 Context of Voluntary Participation

Context is described as the particular set of conditions within which an action – the decision to participate in school governance – is taken (Strauss & Corbin, 1990:101). For Strauss and Corbin (1990), it is important to examine the context within which an action is taken since this examination will enhance the understanding of the eventual action taken. Context is considered at three broad levels here; at the macro level, the mesa level (representing the surrounding community) and the micro level of the school.

The macro level is illustrated by the policy on school governance. A new policy related to school governance was introduced with the legislation of the SASA (1996). This policy provided the frame within which school governance would take place. Those considered to be relevant stakeholders in education (parents, high school learners, educators and non-educator staff members) were all given representation on school governing bodies. Parents were given a prominent role to play. Thus, there were to be more parent representatives than the combined total of all the other representatives. The policy was seen as an attempt to place parents at the centre of school governance (Muller, 1998) and to promote greater democracy by including all the relevant stakeholders in school governance (Sonn, 1997). The macro context level could thus be seen as the environment in which the SASA (1996) enables greater parental participation. The effect of the introduction of the school governance policy – the macro context – on the decision by parents to participate in school governance is explored in a later section. However, this policy enters a mesa- and micro context.

The mesa level of context is represented by the community. The community was generally described in geographic terms by the interviewed parents who included people living in the area surrounding the school, or those who had children at the school, in their description of 'the community'. The sense of commonality to this community was thus Newlands High. All the interviewed parents believed that there were numerous problems in their community. These problems ranged from dysfunctional families to unemployment to gangsterism and drug abuse. Some of the interviewed parents believed that because Newlands High was in the midst of this community, they could do more to address some of these problems. As indicated earlier, Mr AW of Group One suggested that the school's computer facilities could be made available to the community after school hours. He believed that such an action would facilitate skills development and thus help address the unemployment problem in the community. A similar arrangement regarding the use of the sports field after school was suggested by Mr FH, also of Group One. This arrangement, he felt, would "draw their [the children's] interest off the street." By serving on the school governing body, these parents would thus be in a position to address some of the problems in the community, many of which were affecting the school as well.

The school was set at the micro context level. According to Mr DH of Group Two, Newlands High had an excellent reputation as a quality school in Mitchells Plain. However, they were swiftly losing that reputation and Mr DH believed that through his participation, Newlands High could regain its esteemed reputation. Ms PJ, also of Group Two, suggested that the lack of discipline which she experienced as a classroom aide at Newlands High was the main reason for the loss of Newlands High's good reputation. For Ms ED of Group Two, "the lack of interest and involvement by most of the parents" was at the heart of the problems experienced at Newlands High. It was for this reason that she volunteered to serve on the school governing body, "otherwise [she] would have been the same as the other parents who don't want to get involved."

Newlands High thus seemed to be a school which had an excellent reputation, but was rapidly losing that reputation. Many of the learners were ill-disciplined and few of the parents were interested. These conditions at Newlands High prompted some parents,

particularly those of Group Two, to serve on its school governing body. There were also socio-economic problems in the surrounding community. The prospect of addressing some of these problems through the school governing body also encouraged participation. The new school governance policy was introduced into this context with the aim of enabling meaningful participation by parents and other stakeholders in the governance of schools. Whether parents would actually take to this policy or not, within this particular context, was further affected by the intervening conditions.

4.3.3 *The Intervening Conditions*

Strauss and Corbin (1990) describe the intervening conditions as a set of conditions which constrain or facilitate a particular action (p.103). In this case, that action is the decision to participate in school governance. The first of the intervening conditions explored here is the availability of time and its enabling or limiting effect on the decision to participate in school governance. I then examine the impact which the new policy on school governance had on the interviewed parents by focusing on how it affected their eventual decision to participate in school governance.

Time Available

The amount of time that parents had at their disposal not only influenced their decision to participate, but was also an obstacle to their successful participation. Five of the parents believed that participation was made easier by the fact that they had the time available to participate. Mss PJ, ST and AS, all of Group Two, were housewives and felt that this gave them more time to participate. However, this was not part of the reason for their participation. For Ms AN of Group One, the extra time she would have available for

herself did contribute to her decision to participate when she was elected:

I was thinking already of giving up my job and I wasn't going to sit at home and stagnate and sit down and not do anything. I had to start somewhere with something and when I was nominated and elected, I felt okay, here [was something] I could do.

Similarly, Mr FH of Group One had "just gone on pension. I was at home and I had time on my hands." The extra time that Ms AN and Mr FH now had not only made it easier for them to participate in school governance, but helped make up their minds to accept their nominations. This indicated that parents who did not have formal work found that the space that this created for them made it easier to participate. It was also evident that where parents suddenly had extra time available, they were willing to get involved in school governance.

On the other hand, some parents had difficulty finding the time to always be available for school governing body business. For these parents, work commitments were the major obstacle. Mr EA and Mr PR, both of Group One, had work commitments which could not be rescheduled and sometimes these interfered with their school governing body commitments. Although the retired Mr FH no longer had work commitments, he could understand how participation could be difficult for someone who had to work:

There were times when we had three, four or five meetings in one week, especially when we had nominations for an HOD or a principal or vice-principal. I felt sorry for [them] because I was at home and could sleep late the next day. Other people go to work. You could see the frustration creeping in the minute you go after 11 o'clock.

Under these conditions it would indeed be very difficult to attend all the meetings if one had to work. Ms AN and Mr FH also alluded to the effect of work on their participation since they were prepared to take up positions on the governing body only because Ms AN was about to give up her work and Mr FH had recently retired. Participation would be much easier without the obligations associated with working. There were also religious and family commitments cited as obstacles to participation.

Ms AN (Group One) was “very involved with the church.” She sometimes experienced a clash between her church and governing body commitments. Ms ED of Group Two, a church Minister’s wife, also had certain obligations as a Minister’s wife. She expected these obligations to interfere with her governing body commitments, but would try and ensure that it would have a minimal effect on her role in the governing body. Ms AS of Group Two was concerned about her husband’s support. To her it was very important that he supported her “because when I must go to meetings, I don’t want him grumbling...he sometimes thinks I take on too much, but I’ll have to sit and explain to him why I feel it’s necessary to do this thing.”

The availability of extra time does therefore seem to promote a willingness to participate in school governance. On the other hand, time constraints due to work, family or religious commitments hindered the participation of some parents. It could thus be argued that time as a resource was an important factor which affected the decision whether to participate in school governance or not, as well as the quality of that participation.

The Impact of the New Policy

The introduction of the new SASA policy also facilitated and constrained parental participation in school governance. With the introduction of this new policy, parents were given a much bigger role to play in school governance. They were given more responsibility and could now make a significant contribution to the development of their children’s schools. The idea that parents had a meaningful role to play in school governance was instrumental in the decision by Mr EA of Group One to participate in school governance. He never wanted to be a part of the school governance structure before because “things were always done in secret [and] dictated by the school.” For Mr EA, the new policy on school governance had afforded parents the opportunity “to get involved [and] to change things.” It was now worthwhile for parents to be part of the school governance structures since they would be allowed to make a considerable contribution. Mr EA wanted to make that contribution. Ms PJ of Group Two, who had served on the old school committee, also recognised the difference in the level of participation for parents

which the SASA (1996) now enabled. She therefore felt that it was important for parents to participate in school governance, especially since they could now play a significant role, unlike in the past. The decision by both Mr EA and Ms PJ to participate in school governance thus constituted an acceptance by them of the new SASA policy which allows parents to make a substantive contribution.

The fact that the policy was new and unknown to Mr FH of Group One was what drew him to the first meeting held at Newlands High relating to the establishment of their school governing body. He was curious about this new governance structure and “wanted to know what a governing body did. What are their functions going to be? How are they going to be elected?” Once these basic issues had been explained to them, Mr FH was willing to be part of the new governance structure. However, it was the introduction of a new policy that had lured him to the meeting and some of its content that had convinced him to be part of the structure.

The introduction of the *new* policy also affected the participation of Mr PR of Group One. The implications of this policy meant that it was important for governing body members to have an understanding of certain laws. As shown above, Mr PR gained that understanding and knowledge through his work experience. He, and others, recognised that this knowledge and understanding was important in light of the new roles for parents in school governance. Also, because it was a new policy, his expertise was at a premium. The new policy had thus contributed to his election and his acceptance of a position on the governing body.

In contrast to Mr PR, Ms AS of Group Two, a new parent governor, expressed the concern that she did not have the necessary skills needed to be a school governor: “If they ask me something, will I be able to do it?” According to the parents in Group One, they had quite

an intensive skills development programme at the beginning of their tenure. Ms AN on the subject:

When we started out as a governing body, I didn't know a thing. We got in people from TIP [the Teacher In-Service Project, an NGO working in the field of school governance]. We had workshops every other Saturday to lead us into this, telling us from day one – taking us through this thing step by step, telling us what is expected of us as a body and what we can expect. That was quite interesting...I learnt a lot.

However, these effective workshops were held with parents who were already serving on the governing body. Those parents who still had to make the decision to participate or not were not aware of a subsequent skills development programme. For these parents it was more difficult to indicate a willingness to participate in light of their lack of skills, as Paterson and Collett (1999) also contend.

One of the aims of the SASA (1996) was to provide a more meaningful role for parents in school governance. Some of the parents were encouraged to become part of the new school governing body because they believed that they would now be able to play a significant role. Another consequence of the introduction of the new policy was that it meant that school governors with particular expertise – like Mr PR's expertise regarding some of the labour policies - would now be more sought after. His subsequent election to the position of chairperson supports this assertion. However, not all parents had the necessary skills needed to be a school governor. Where these skills were lacking, participation by parents was impeded.

The intervening conditions of time and the new policy on school governance have both contributed to the eventual decision by parents to participate in school governance. That decision was facilitated by the availability of extra time, the possibilities which the new policy enabled and the level of expertise now required by parent governors. The lack of this expertise impeded participation, which was also impeded by time constraints as a result of work, family and religious commitments. The intervening conditions therefore made participation more difficult or easier and in this way impacted on the subsequent action (the decision to participate in school governance) taken by all the interviewed parents. When

parents volunteered to serve or accepted their nomination and election to the governing body, they also accepted their new roles in school governance. The outcome of their decision in this regard is thus the implementation of the new policy on school governance.

4.3.4 Elements Related to the Operation of the School Governing Body

As indicated earlier, it was not the intention of this research endeavour to focus on the functioning of the school governing body. However, certain issues related to the implementation of this policy emerged from the analysed data and are thus included here. These issues have hampered the realisation of some of the policy intentions such as greater parental participation in school governance and stakeholder representation. The issues discussed here relate to the conduct of educators, parents and learners in this regard.

Educators as Obstacles

Educators were viewed as obstacles to the effective functioning of the school governing body by their conduct and dominance. Mr PR of Group One emphasized the need for unity amongst school governing body members. However, the educators sometimes compromised this unity by discussing issues outside meetings after a decision had already been made by the governing body. Mr EA, also of Group One, indicated that educators would even go ahead and do their own thing, despite the fact that the governing body had made a contrary decision. These actions not only undermined the school governing body, but also led to friction between governing body members.

Mr DH and Ms ST, from Group Two, also mentioned the discord between educators and parents on the governing body as a potential obstacle to the success of their new governing body. Both of them indicated that they had heard from previous governing body members how the educators would overturn decisions made by the governing body. They were determined not to allow the same situation to happen in the new governing body.

Another problem associated with educators was that they and the principal would sometimes take advantage of the parents on the school governing body. Mr AW of Group One articulated the reasons for this very well:

It's seven [parents] that don't know each other, from different backgrounds and because we now have to look up to the educator portion of the governing body and the principal for guidance, in my opinion, these people are taking advantage. They are saying, here's a gap here. We can get away with some things.

He also believed that parents themselves looked up to the principal and the educators and were often prepared to follow what they suggested:

Parents unfortunately will always take their cue from the principal and the educators ... and they enjoy it. That's my opinion. As I said, they see here's a gap. These people don't know what's going on so let's buy a new telephone system or photocopiers...Whatever motivation they come up with, our parents fall for it and say yes, buy it or let's do it...Basically what I'm saying is that there's too much educator influence.

Ms ST of Group Two supported the position that the educators and principal tended to dominate the governing body. Although she was new to the Newlands High governing body, she had also recently been elected to the governing body of her son's high school. The experience on this governing body, although a mere six months, had already shown her that

[e]ven though there's only two representatives from the educators on the governing body, dat hulle domineer die ouers ... [en] die governing body lede kyk op na die hoof.

([e]ven though there's only two representatives from the educators on the governing body, they dominate the parents ... [and] the governing body members look up to the principal.)

Ms ST even suggested that there not be any educators on the governing body "want hulle is te sterk vir ons" (because they're too strong for us). The voices and opinions of the parents would only be heard if the educators were not there to assert their views. Although Ms ST later acknowledged the need for educators on the governing body, her initial opinion on the subject clearly indicated that she, like Mr AW, believed that the educators dominated the school governing body. Despite this belief, they both felt that it was important for the

views of parents to be represented and were thus still willing to be part of the governing body. In order for the views of the parents to be reflected, consultation with the broader parent body to canvass their views was essential. However, parental apathy was making this very difficult.

Parental Apathy

Muller (1998) suggests that the maximisation of parental participation was the “central impulse behind the School’s Act” (p.8). However, according to every parent interviewed, the lack of support by parents was one of the factors which they found most frustrating. Among the questionnaire respondents, 62% were also most frustrated by the lack of support and interest of parents. Mr FH of Group One, who lived very close to the school, found it very frustrating that the parents of learners in his immediate area very seldom attended school meetings: “When there’s a parent meeting, you will probably find one other parent out of these thirty houses....Parents who could walk to the meeting but don’t take notice of it.”

According to Mr EA, also of Group One, this lack of contact with the parents subverted the intentions of the policy of parental representation on the school governing body. The parent representatives were supposed to represent the views of the full parent body and needed to be accountable to them for decisions taken by the school governing body. However, they were often unable to do this because the parent representatives were seldom able to adequately consult with the parents whom they represented. Furthermore, very often they needed the support of parents at a function and it was not forthcoming. As Ms AN (Group One) pointed out, “[o]ur last dance that we had was badly supported by parents.”

The newly elected parents had also already had occasion to experience the apathy of parents. The election of the new school governing body was very problematic. Ms ED of Group Two explained:

We had to have three meetings before we could get a new school governing body. And then only because people volunteered. At all these meetings there were very few people. This indicates to me that the parents, the majority of them, are not really involved or interested in the affairs of the school.

The realisation that parents were not interested in the affairs of the school contributed to Ms ED's decision to volunteer to serve on the school governing body. She did not want to be the same as "the other parents who don't want to get involved." Because of the difficulties associated with the election of a new governing body, the newly elected parents all expected parental apathy to be a problem. This awareness, coupled with the importance of parental involvement that they all spoke of, meant that they were already thinking of ways to get parents more involved. This determination should stand them in good stead as they try to address what would seem to be a major frustration at most of the high schools in Mitchells Plain. Another stakeholder represented on high school governing bodies is learners. However, there seemed to be problems with regard to their participation.

Learner Representation on the School Governing Body

The issue of learner representation on the school governing body was only mentioned by two parents. Both of them indicated that the learner representatives were not able to fulfil their obligations to the governing body and the learners whom they represent. Mr FH of Group One started out as an opponent of learner representation when he withdrew from the old Parent-Teacher Association when it became a Parent-Teacher-Student Association. He had now learned to accept the need for learner representation on the school governing body, but expressed the concern that they were not utilising this opportunity:

They [learner representatives] are never there. They always have some excuse...you will find that eventually the learners will say, what's the governing body doing? They don't get any feedback because their reps don't go...One of their reps for this year was in the meeting last night for the first time from January and it's June now.

Mr FH was concerned that the learners were not being informed nor consulted because their representatives were often absent. He explained the reason for their absence and offered a possible solution:

I was the one that asked that a Grade 12 learner not be picked as a student rep...The reason is that Grade 12 learners have to study the whole year. When it comes to exam time, they will never be there...The funniest part is they always pick the rep ... that's in Grade 12.

This view was supported by Mr PR who was also of Group One. He added that perhaps learner representatives were "scared to raise certain issues" and felt intimidated by the other representatives on the governing body. These may be contributing factors to their absence since they felt that their input was seldom called for or considered. Since Mr PR believed that their input was important, he would make a special effort to find out what their concerns were before a meeting, and then raise these himself. However, this was made exceedingly difficult by their frequent absence from meetings.

Although none of the other parents mentioned the learner representatives, the impressions of Mr FH and Mr PR seemed to indicate that learner involvement in school governance at Newlands High was negligible, even when the learner representatives were at meetings. Learner representation had been included on high school governing bodies because they were considered one of the major stakeholders whose contribution to the school was valued. However, where this contribution was not being made, the intention of the SASA (1996) in this regard was not being fulfilled.

According to Sonn (1997), the central tenet of the SASA (1996) in relation to school governance was the democratisation of schools. Decisions taken by schools thus have to reflect the input from the various stakeholders. These democratic ideals were being elided by the conduct of the educator and learner representatives on the school governing body as well as the broader parent body. The educators, by their dominance in the school governing body, had often silenced the voices of parents. The parent representatives found it difficult to adequately consult with the broader mass of parents since they seldom attended meetings. The views carried to school governing body meetings by the parent

governors were thus representative of very few parents. Only minimal parental participation was possible under these conditions. Furthermore, since learner representatives were often absent from governing body meetings, the views of learners were not being heard and the actions of the governing body were not accounted for to learners. All of these factors combined to undermine the democratic ideals of the SASA (1996). However, there was an awareness of these problems among the new governing body members as well as a determination to resolve them.

4.4 Concluding Comments

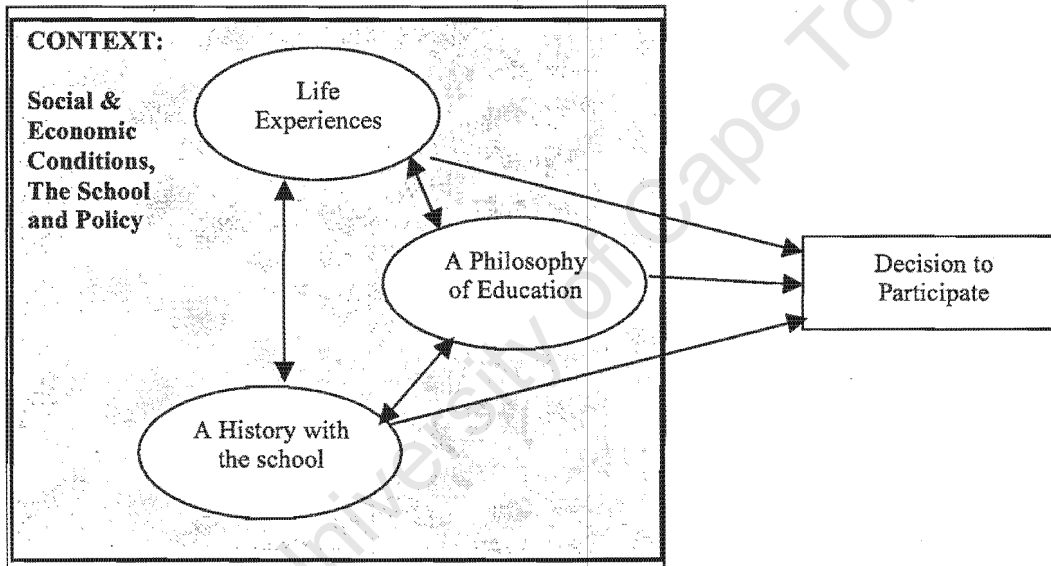
The above represents the findings as they relate to the questionnaires and interviews. Some of these findings had a direct bearing on the reasons for participation by parents in school governance, the primary focus of this research. Others did not, but were included here since they shed light on the general issue of parent attitudes towards school governance and were thus also considered important. It is apparent from these findings that the decision by parents to participate in school governance has been shaped and framed by a number of factors, described above as causal conditions, context of voluntary participation and intervening conditions.

None of these factors can be considered in isolation since they all impact on the eventual decision to participate in school governance. The causal conditions exist within a particular set of contextual conditions. It was under those specific conditions that the causal conditions led to the voluntary participation of parents in school governance. Furthermore, the particular context not only framed the causal conditions, but also contributed to eventual participation. This participation was further affected by the intervening conditions which either facilitated or constrained the eventual action. Together, the three conditions combined to lead to voluntary participation.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This study set out to develop an understanding of the reasons for parents participating in school governance. In this concluding chapter, I want to highlight the interplay between the various factors mentioned in the previous chapter which shaped and characterised this voluntary parental participation. Figure 1 illustrates this interplay. I will also advance an explanation for the development of some of these factors. The aim here is to gain an in-depth understanding of the reasons for parental participation on school governing bodies. This formal analysis will be guided by the theoretical overview undertaken in chapter two.

DIAGRAM 1



5.1 The Interplay Between the Causal Conditions

A philosophy of education was found to be the foundation for voluntary participation in school governance. This philosophy was grounded in a particular working class context of exclusion. All the parents in the sample had developed an understanding of education where the contribution of parents and school governing bodies was considered essential to the delivery of highly valued education. The high value attached to education and their

participation was shared by all the interviewed parents. Furthermore, the other factors leading to parental participation were developed in relation to this philosophy.

Deem *et al.* (1995), in their study of parent governors in England and Wales, found that working class parents tended to undervalue education and were thus less likely to become involved in school governance (p.63). Although this may have been the case among the more general parent community at Newlands High (see the findings on parental apathy), it was not found to be so among the parent governors interviewed. In some cases it would seem that quite the contrary was true, especially where these working class parents had experienced the effect of a lack of education themselves. Parents' working class experiences had resulted in their previous exclusion from opportunities and disempowerment. These parents had therefore come to value education even more. Thus, when this opportunity to take charge of and shape conditions affecting their lives presented itself, the kind of opportunity from which they had previously been excluded, these parents were consequently more than willing to do so.

Anderson (1998) points out that where parents recognise that their participation is an opportunity to shape schools to serve their best interests, they would be more inclined to participate (p.592). For these parents, one of these best interests was the acquisition of the skills required to move up the social mobility ladder. Education was recognised as being instrumental in the pursuit of this social mobility. It is this recognition of the value of education among the parent governors in this study which promotes their willingness to participate in school governance. Thus, although the philosophy of education is the foundation of voluntary participation in school governance, it is driven by the belief that education is the key to improving their social and economic conditions, hence the high value attached to education.

The sub-categories 'life experiences' and 'a history with the school' from the conceptual frame in the previous chapter are shaped by parents' philosophies of education, while also contributing to the construction of this philosophy. Deem *et al.* (1995) emphasise the contribution made by certain aspects of life experiences to voluntary parental participation

in school governance. They contend that a history of voluntary participation or necessary expertise gained in the world of work often represents the impetus for involvement in school governance (p.3). Deem *et al.* (1995) suggest further that previous contact with the school, as classroom aides for example, is very often the fore-runner to school governorship (p.3). Similar results were found in this study. Interestingly, the school governors in this study who were also classroom aides were both mothers, which seems to support the contention by Deem *et al.* (1995) that since mostly mothers are at home during the day, they are able to volunteer for such duty (p.3).

The parents in this study who suggested that their contact with the school as classroom aides affected their decision to become members of the school governing body were both part of Group Two. The use of classroom aides was a recent innovation at Newlands High. It was thus only the new members of the governing body who could experience the substantive contact with the school through this programme and the consequent heightened awareness of conditions at school. In their case, this awareness led to a realisation of the need for their participation at governance level. This issue also represented the most significant difference between the experienced parent governors from Group One and the new ones from Group Two.

The decision to assist at the school as a classroom aide, and then to become a member of the school governing body was influenced by parents' philosophies of education. The move from general voluntary participation to voluntary participation in education was similarly influenced. Parents were willing to give of their time to an educational enterprise because they recognised the value of education and the contribution that they could make through the school governing body to the promotion of education. Similarly, parents were thus also willing to bring their relevant expertise to the school governing body.

One of the factors which is not mentioned by Deem *et al.* (1995) as a life experience influencing parental participation, but which emerged from this study, is the contribution of role models. The role models mentioned by respondents in both groups contributed to their appreciation of voluntary participation. They thus sought to emulate their role models by

participating in voluntary activities. The value of education was heightened where these role models were educators, thus enhancing these parents' philosophies of education. The idea that through education many new opportunities could become available, was also advanced by their contact with these role models. This message was not lost on these parents who were denied opportunities because of their working class roots and political conditions.

The three sub-categories (A philosophy of education, Life experiences and A history with the school), together provide the impetus for parental participation in school governance. The philosophy of education is the bedrock upon which the other sub-categories are built. They are thus clearly interconnected and reinforce one another. However, it is the hope that education will be able to improve their positions in society that feeds this philosophy. The context within which these factors operate, including the social and economic conditions which parents believe education can change, thus also contributes to the eventual decision to participate. Again, the philosophy of education is the factor which makes context meaningful in the decision regarding parental participation in school governance.

5.2 The Role of Context

Some of the interviewed parents recognised the contribution that the school, school governing body and education could make towards alleviating some of the communities' problems. There was thus the belief that the problem of unemployment for example – especially pertinent in this working class area – could be addressed by education. Education could provide the necessary skills to secure employment, and the school was where that education could be gained.

Another element of context is the school which was found to share some of the communities' problems, like gangsterism. School conditions were also affected by the apathy of the general parent body. However, the school was the epicentre of this community. It was the school and how the school was affected by the community's

problems which gave parent governors a shared sense of identity. According to Rose (1990), this shared sense of identity is what is needed for collective action to succeed (p.434). Newlands High provided parents with that common identity and their concern was serving the best interests of Newlands High. This would seem to contradict Beresford's (1992) assertion that parents have difficulty identifying shared interests from which the whole school could benefit, not only their own children (p.52).

The contextual conditions provided by the policy on school governance (outlined below), the community and the school frame the causal conditions. It is within these conditions that voluntary participation takes place. However, these contextual conditions also contribute to voluntary participation. In addition, the conditions are not static and, as they change, so too does the effect they have on voluntary participation. The school conditions were a bigger motivating factor for parents from Group Two. School conditions were perceived by them to be worsening, hence the greater need for their participation.

5.3 Constraint and Facilitation

The SASA (1996) policy on school governance not only frames parental participation in school governance, it also facilitates and constrains participation. Ball (1994) argues that policies should also be viewed as discourse. As discourse, policies get one thinking about specific issues in a particular way at a particular time (p.20). Similarly, the SASA (1996) policy on school governance could be viewed as discourse in that parents are constructed as the most important stakeholders in school governance by virtue of their superior 'weighting' on school governing bodies. Where parents accept the view that they are the major stakeholders in education and the school, the policy – as discourse – has succeeded in getting parents to think of themselves in a particular way – as parent governors. They recognise that they now have a meaningful role to play in school governance, an opportunity which apartheid policies had denied them, and are willing to do so.

There is also a discourse of democracy permeating the SASA (1996) policy on school governance since emphasis is placed on the representation of all the relevant stakeholders on the school governing body. This democratic discourse also encourages parental participation by underlining the contribution to democracy which parents' participation will make. Discourse, as it speaks to parents through the SASA (1996) policy, therefore contributes to parental participation in school governance.

However, it is also evident that the SASA (1996) policy on school governance constrains participation. The policy positions parents at the heart of school governance by privileging their participation above that of the other stakeholders. Where the skills required for school governance are lacking, Munn (1998) suggests that parents would display very limited interest (p.392). Although the need for special skills motivated participation by Mr PR who had gained these skills through his work, it also made it difficult for some, like Ms AS, who was unsure about her ability to perform as required. While Ms AS's perceived lack of relevant skills did not prevent her from participating, it may well have been one of the reasons so few parents attended the meeting to elect a new governing body.

The examples given of Mr PR and Ms AS above, highlight the fact that the parents who formed part of this study were an exceptional group of parents. They were exceptional because they were the ones who came forward and accepted a voluntary position on the school governing body. For the most part, they have the enthusiasm, experience and confidence which sets them apart from the ordinary parents in this community.

Another intervening condition was the availability of time. Where time became available – as for Mr FH and Ms AN – it facilitated participation. On the other hand, time constraints limited participation. Finders and Lewis (1994) conclude that mostly working class parents are affected by time constraints related to work since they are least able to take time off work (p.51). Two of the five working parents sometimes experienced difficulty attending governing body meetings. Both were from Group One. The new governing body had not yet been operational long enough for Group Two parents to have experienced clashes between governing body commitments and work commitments. In addition to work related

time constraints, there were also family and religious constraints cited as hindrances to participation.

In Deem *et al.*'s (1995) study, they found that family obligations impeded the participation mostly of mothers. Mothers were usually expected to first ensure that their own family's obligations had been met before participating in school governance. Participation for mothers with small children was even more difficult (pp.58-61). None of the interviewed parents in this study had small children. However, two of the five mothers who were interviewed were the only respondents who suggested that their family obligations could hinder their participation. Gender thus did seem to impact on the capacity of parents to participate in school governance, albeit in a very limited capacity.

5.4 Implementation Shortcomings

Although it was not the intention of this study to focus on the operation of the school governing body, certain issues related to the functioning of the school governing body also emerged in the findings. Sonn (1997) suggests that democratisation is the central tenet behind the SASA (1996) school governance policy (pp.1-2). Thus, all the relevant stakeholders are given representation on school governing bodies. Furthermore, parental participation is privileged. Therefore, there are more parents represented on school governing bodies than the other stakeholders. However, Bowe *et al.* (1992) argue that policy is not uncontested as the practitioners apply their own understandings and needs to the policy, hence the gap between policy intent and implementation (pp.19-22). The evidence in this study suggests a similar gap.

The lack of regular participation by the learners and parental apathy negated meaningful participation by these stakeholders. Furthermore, as educators appeared reluctant to relinquish their control over school matters, they too steered the policy away from the stated intentions of maximum participation by parents. These actions tend to confirm the assertion by Bowe *et al.* (1992) that policies are influenced by the context within which they are to be applied, as well as by the understandings, values and purposes of the actors

involved (pp.19-22). Further evidence that the implementation site would continue to be a site of contestation was that two of the parents in the new governing body were not prepared to allow educators to negate their participation any longer. However, their statements of commitment in this regard could not be verified since observation of the operation of the school governing body was not part of this study.

Finally, the evidence presented in this study suggests that there were a number of factors which contributed to voluntary parental participation in school governance. Among these were the life experiences of parents, the particular histories which parents had with the school and the context within which voluntary participation took place. The intervening conditions of time and new policies further facilitated, but also constrained participation. However, the most significant of these factors was the understandings which parents had developed regarding the value of education, parents in education and school governing bodies. These understandings, or philosophy of education, was the basis for the decision by parents to participate in school governance.

This philosophy of education itself arose out of the particular working class experiences of parents. There was a desire among parents to improve their social and economic existence, and they recognised the contribution which education could make towards this improvement. It was this recognition of education's role, along with the desire for social mobility, which ultimately accounted for the decision to serve on the school governing body. However, as indicated above, these parents were part of a select group. Furthermore, this particular community in Mitchells Plain, although working class, is different to other poorer areas in Mitchells Plain and elsewhere. The findings of this study are thus particular to this area in Mitchells Plain. The low level of participation and consequent lack of empowerment of working class parents, despite the intentions of the SASA (1996), should thus remain a concern.

5.5 Further Research

It was not the aim of this research to evaluate the implementation of the SASA (1996) policy of school governance. However, inadequacies related to the implementation of this policy surfaced and were mentioned. These inadequacies included parental apathy, educator dominance on school governing bodies and erratic learner involvement. These issues suggest that some of the well-meaning intentions of the SASA (1996) are not being fulfilled. Studies focusing on these elements would contribute to a greater understanding of school governance. Research which focused on parents who do not participate in school affairs, especially in a working class area, could also heighten the understanding of both parent apathy and participation among working class parents.

Another interesting study would be to test Beresford's (1992) view that participatory initiatives favour middle class parents. Such a study could take the form of a comparison between the operations of a school governing body in a working class area and one in a middle class area. This endeavour would be of particular relevance to South Africa in light of the SASA's (1996) intent to promote equity and democracy in education.

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APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1 Where are you from/ In which area did you grow up/ which school did you go to/ what activities were you involved in while growing up (sport, church)?
- 2 Who were your role models while you were growing up? / who did you especially look up to and why?
- 3 Which other activities in the local community are/were you involved with?
- 4 Is your work related to your interest in community affairs? (i.e. what type of work do you do?)
- 5 What contact did you have with the school before being elected?
- 6 What do you view as education's role in society – what is its function?
- 7 How involved should parents be in making decisions relating to the education of their children?
- 8 What do you view as the role of the SGB?
- 9 How involved are parents in affairs at school?
- 10 How long have you been a member of this SGB/ what position do you hold?
- 11 What motivated you to become a member of this SGB?
- 12 Which issues in M/Plain (generally) require the most attention?
- 13 How can your SGB help resolve these problems?
- 14 How different are these problems from your original area?
- 15 How can a family contribute to a child's education?
- 16 What qualities should a parent serving on a SGB have?
- 17 What options are there for parents who are unhappy with your decisions?
- 18 Who do you usually speak to on educational issues?
- 19 What do you think is going to make it difficult for your SGB to achieve all its goals?
- 20 Are there any obstacles that may prevent you from always being able to give your all to the SGB?
- 21 What expectations do you have for your SGB? (What would you like to see happen at the school as a result of your input?)
- 22 Do you think your participation on the SGB will help you understand the school better? If yes, how? If no, why not?

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR A PARENT MEMBER OF A HIGH SCHOOL GOVERNING BODY

Please tick (✓) in the appropriate box.

1 How long have you been a member of this school governing body (SGB)?

- A. Less than 1 year
B. Between 1 and 2 years
C. More than 2 years

☐

2 Which position on the SGB do you hold?

- A. Chairperson or Vice-Chairperson
B. Secretary or Assistant-Secretary
C. Treasurer or Assistant-Treasurer
D. Ordinary Member
E. Other Executive position (Please specify)

☐

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3 With which other voluntary activities are/were you involved? (You may tick more than one here)

- A. Sports/ Cultural/ Religious Organisations
B. Neighbourhood Watch
C. Support Groups
D. Primary School Governing Body
E. None
F. Other (Please specify below)

☐

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4 What contact did you have with this school before being elected? (You may tick more than one here)

- A. Assisted with invigilation
B. Assisted with sport
C. Assisted with fund-raising
D. None
E. Other (Please specify below)

☐

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APPENDIX 2

Rank your responses to the following questions on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is the most appropriate answer and 5 the least appropriate.

5 Why did you get involved in this school's SGB?

- A. Someone asked you to
- B. You felt the school could benefit from your expertise
- C. You wanted to serve your community
- D. To look after your child's interests
- E. Other (Please specify below)

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6 The factors which make it most difficult to always fulfil your obligations to the SGB.

- A. Work commitments
- B. Family commitments
- C. Transport constraints
- D. Religious commitments
- E. Other (please specify below)

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7 Who benefits most from your participation on this SGB?

- A. The Learners at the school
- B. The Educators at the school
- C. Parents of learners at the school
- D. Western Cape Education Department (WCED)
- E. Other (Please specify below)

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APPENDIX 2

8 To whom are you accountable for your decisions as a SGB?

- A. The Learners at the school
- B. The Educators at the school
- C. Parents of learners at the school
- D. WCED
- E. Other (Please specify below)

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9 What do you enjoy most about serving on the SGB?

- A. That you have got to know the educators much better.
- B. That you are providing a valuable service to the community.
- C. That you are able to look after your child's interests.
- D. That you have developed a better understanding of educational issues.
- E. Other (Please specify)

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10 What is most frustrating about serving on the SGB?

- A. The length of meetings.
- B. The difficulty understanding educational jargon.
- C. The little impact on the community.
- D. Lack of interest and support from other parents.
- E. Other (Please specify below)

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Thank you again for your time and effort. Please do not forget to mail this questionnaire back to me.

APPENDIX 3: Letter which accompanied questionnaire

5 Bridle Close
Kenilworth Park
7708
14 June 2000

Dear Parent Governor

I am conducting some research on the role of parents on School Governing Bodies (SGB's) in Mitchells Plain. The objective of this study is to fulfill the requirements towards my Master's degree while the ultimate goal is the development of more effective SGB's.

As a parent member of a SGB, you are aware of the need to develop effective SGB's. You could assist me in gathering information towards these goals by completing the enclosed questionnaire. It should take no more than 15 minutes of your time, but your effort will be invaluable in this endeavour.

I have also enclosed a self-addressed postage paid envelope and ask that you mail the completed questionnaire back to me.

Thank you for the courtesy of your assistance.

Yours sincerely

S.C. Janari

APPENDIX 4: Questionnaire Results (29 Respondents)

TABLE 1

<i>How long a member?</i>	
< 1yr	4
1-2 yrs	7
> 2 yrs	18

TABLE 2

<i>Position on sgb</i>	
chair/vice	6
sec/asst	3
treas/asst	4
ord memb	16

TABLE 3 (could ans more than 1)

<i>Other vol acts</i>	
sprr/clt/rel	17
nbhd wtch	7
supp grp	1
prim sgb	6
none	5
other	0

TABLE 4

<i>Prev cont with school</i>	
invigilator	5
sport	0
funds	12
none	12
other	0

TABLE 5

<i>Why got involved in sgb?</i>	
asked to	2
expertise	9
serve comm	11
own child's int	7
other	0

TABLE 6

<i>Who benefits most from your part'n?</i>	
learners	22
educators	2
parents	4
WCED	1
other	0

TABLE 7

<i>To whom accountable?</i>	
learners	3
educators	2
parents	20
WCED	4
other	0

TABLE 8

<i>Obstacles</i>	
work	8
family	10
transport	2
religious	4
other	5

TABLE 9

<i>What I enjoy most</i>	
know educ's better	6
serving comm	7
serving my child's int	5
undst educ issues	11
other	0

TABLE 10

<i>Find most frustrating</i>	
length of meetings	5
difficulty with jargon	2
low impact on comm	3
low intrst from parents	18
other	1