Black Parental Involvement in South African Rural Schools: Will Parents Ever Help in Enhancing Effective School Management?

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Abstract The South African Schools Act (SASA), Act 108 of 1996 accorded the parents in public schools crucial role to play in school governance. The parents are expected to guide their schools and help their communities as they ensure that schools have a symbiotic relationship with the community. Parents serving in schools governance do not only help to uphold the country's Constitutional values and learners' right to education. They are there to secure the future of their children and work with the principals to steer the schools to success. Amongst others, the SASA wants to ensure that schools enhance the elimination of poverty and instil a human rights culture. The parents serving in School Governing Bodies (SGBs) are supposed to be part of this agenda. This study was conducted in a rural area in the Eastern Cape Province. Five principals raised concerns about the conspicuous absence of parents in school governance and they attributed the lack of their schools' effectiveness to this. A qualitative study was conducted to investigate what the principals and their school management teams expected from parents. The parents were also asked what they expected from schools and how they could be included meaningfully in school governance. The parents highlighted a number of aspects on what could be done to involve them, including the use of traditional leaders in fostering collaboration. There was also a strong case for schools to embrace African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS) to make schools more relevant and meaningful.

Keywords: African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS); School effectiveness; School governance; Collaboration

1. Rural school challenges and their legacy

Much has been done by government since the end of apartheid education. Policies have been introduced to address inequalities in education to ensure that education becomes a vehicle of democracy in the society. Yet despite these endeavours, there are still schools that are under-resourced and are still facing challenges. Among these are hundreds of rural schools in South Africa. Apartheid failed to address the challenges of difference among schools. Motala and Pampallis (2001) contend that learners under apartheid education system were faced with inequality regarding access to education with poor provision of resources. Recently, Fleisch (2008:1) has argued that South Africa has two education systems; the first has better resources in former white schools with better performing learners. The second one comprises of poorly resourced schools, mostly in historically black African schools. Christie (2008: 101) also highlights the need to recognize the differences between poor and affluent schools. Furthermore, she states that schools in poor and disadvantaged communities are seldom well resourced as schools in wealthier areas. In most cases rural schools are the worst far below the level of many poor urban schools.

    Apart from the lack of resources in rural areas, there is an absence of participation by important stakeholders such as the parents and the community. It should be noted that many rural areas have a particular history in South Africa. These areas are usually situated away from the cities usually with few or no everyday resources for the communities; in some rural schools there is no running water and electricity. Poverty is also another strain in running many of these schools, as parents are indigent and usually live from hand to mouth. Msila (2010:171) cites Graaf who points out that rural schools are poor quality schools where basic necessities are lacking. Graaf also states that rural schools are inferior because they are products of

communities without political power. Yet parents who will serve in SGBs need to have some power otherwise they will be impotent and redundant in schools.

Generally, school principals in South Africa are faced with a number of challenges and this even more daunting for rural schools principals. In the face of educational changes school principals and their management teams have to use various strategies to ensure that their teams become change agents or agents of change. However, in rural schools where there are challenges such as lack of basic resources and lack of cooperation from burnt out teachers with low morale change initiatives can be stalled. This is even more so when the parents are not playing any role. The teachers' sense of professionalism and potential to share leadership roles is usually lacking in a number of schools where teachers are despondent due to poor conditions. Many underperforming principals and other school managers frequently report work overload.

Work overload of school management and teachers in general can lead to a poor school climate. The school climate is determined and is intermingled with school culture. School climate is of high importance and it is school climate that gives a hint of how a school is run. Badenhorst (1997:346) points out:

> Creating or fostering an acceptable climate will become a more important aspect of the management of South African schools. Because schools, being so complex structures, are continuously growing, and growth always takes place from below, the first or basic level of organisational culture is of major importance.

The management of the school needs to lay foundations of an effective school culture; this school culture needs to be embraced and be reflective of the role players such as parents, learners and the community around the school. There is usually a show of public dissatisfaction towards schools: that they are not delivering what they should be delivering. Many see the betterment of society as dependent upon schools. Yet few people really work to ensure that schools are improved in quality. This improvement refers to the enhancement of school climate and school culture. Without a conducive culture and climate, school management would not succeed in ensuring quality and results. Managing change effectively in many schools has become almost impossible when the climate and culture are not enhanced.

The main questions asked in this study are:

- What solutions do rural parents have in enhancing school management and leadership?
- How do principals see the role of parents in leading the schools?

2. Socioeconomic Status and Parental Involvement

Lareau and McNamara (1999) maintain that schools usually reproduce inequality and that learners from backgrounds which have more valuable social and cultural capital tend to fare better in school. These writers also cite others who have identified critical class differences in parents' and learners' attitudes toward schools and showing that these class differences affect the learners' progress in school. Some research in South Africa has shown how the social and cultural capital negatively influences parental involvement in schools (Singh, Mbokodi & Msila, 2004; Msila, 2005; Msila, 2009). Bourdieu (1983) defines the terms cultural capital and social capital. These are both aspects that poor parents are unlikely to have. Cultural capital refers to something that can be acquired to a varying extent, depending on the period, the society and the social class, in the absence of any deliberate inculcation and therefore unconsciously (Bourdieu, 1983). This writer also defines the social capital as the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition. Poor families with no social capital or cultural capital schools remain one of the few mechanisms that are able to provide a better life (Mortimore, 483).

Ball, Bowe and Gerwitz (1995) cite Bourdieu who states that the working class ways of life when it comes to schooling remain largely organised around the practical order of simply getting by. The choice of school

has simply to fit into the practicalities of getting by rather than into some grander social agenda of new and rarer distinct goods. School has to be "fitted" into a set of constraints and expectations related to work roles, family roles, the sexual division of labour and the demands of household organisation (Ball et al. 1995:411). Ball et al. continue to state that schooling in working class families is usually not related to long range planning but very much to the present. The poor parents' aspirations are often vague and typically limited by the wants and needs of the children themselves. Reimers (1999) also argues that education and poverty are related in a number of ways. Poor children are raised in homes where there is low cultural capital and such children end up having low educational opportunities. "In turn, as the children of the poor develop insufficient skills and knowledge to gain access to high productivity jobs and to transfer cultural capital directly to their children, their low education levels 'cause' poverty to be reproduced between generations" (Reimers 1999: 536). Parental involvement in schools is informed by all of these factors.

Principals and other stakeholders in schools need to understand these complexities when dealing with poor parents in their schools. Some research in South Africa has shown that parents have a tendency of moving back when it comes to school governance because they maintain that teachers have the necessary skills to lead schools without their support. However, the current SASA wants to ensure the participation and commitment of all stakeholders in education, so that educational transformation can be enhanced. The Schools Act is based on the Constitution of the Republic and parents who form part of the School Governing Body (SGB) are supposed to work in partnership with teachers and other relevant stakeholders. Effective partnership in schools has the following qualities:
Mutual trust and respect, Shared decision making, Common vision, Open communication, Good teamwork, Promotion of the interests of the partnership rather than those of the individual and Respect for the roles of different partners. (Potgieter, Visser, Van der Bank, Mothata & Squelch, 1997).

Local and international research has shown that the educational level of parents and their socio-economic status have an influence upon the involvement is schools (Singh, Mbokodi & Msila, 2004). Poor parents, even when it comes to choice they are unable to get involved in the game of selecting the best schools for their children. Coons and Sugarman (1978) stated, "The poorer the family, the less ability to furnish home remedies for educational ailments, the more difficult to escape an under-financed or mismanaged public school system."

3. Research Methodology

The sample of five schools was selected through purposive random sampling. This form of sampling involves random selection of a small sample and it has much emphasis on information-rich sample and not on generalising to the broader population (Struwig & Stead, 2004). The study was an ethnographic study and this is a form of qualitative research approach that studies the culture and customs of groups of people. Brink (2000) points out that an underlying assumption of the ethnographer is that the behaviour of people can only be understood within the cultural context in which it occurs. The ethnographer looks at how culture impacts in the shaping of the experience. The culture under scrutiny was that of five rural schools in two adjoining villages in the rural Eastern Cape. In each of the five schools, the principals were interviewed. Three of the schools were high schools and two were primary schools. In addition to the five principals, 21 parents were interviewed in a period of twelve weeks. In four schools four parents were interviewed and in the fifth one, five parents were interviewed. All these parents belonged to the school governing body. After hearing about the influence of the headman in schools, the researcher also interviewed the headman. The headman is the main representative of the chief of the area. All the interviews with parents were conducted in IsiXhosa and were later translated by the researcher when he was transcribing them. The parents were informed about the written notes and they confirmed what they said during the interviews.

During the observations the researcher was able to observe four different quarterly meetings in each of the schools. He also recorded the meeting proceedings after getting permission from the principals and the

SGB members. The meetings were all vital to the study because the parents were looking at how rural schools can work closely with school management teams to enhance effectiveness and achievement. In two of the schools the researcher observed a School Garden Project where a group of parents ploughed the school fields. They planted vegetables and the idea was to sell the products; part of the money went to the school and the other was divided amongst the workers. In another school the parents were in the school to work with groups of learners. The researcher observed two such classes which were both 40 minutes in duration.

3.1 Participants

3.1.1 The five principals and their schools

Below the schools are given pseudonyms to protect their identity:

Table 1: The principals' characteristics

School	Gender and age	Experience as principal	Academic qualifications
Rose Primary	Female – 40 years	8 years	HDE 4yrs
Lily Primary	Female – 57years	15 years	SPTD
Lilac High	Male – 38years	5 years	BA, HED
Marigold High	Male-51years	7 years	SED
Nyibiba High	Male – 46 years	10 years	SED, BA

3.1.2 Parents

There were 21 parent representatives who were participants in the study. Significant about these participants was that 14 of them were women and only seven males. These 21 were the ones who were interviewed. Of the 21 parents:
Two had grade 12 qualifications
Three had grade 10
Ten had grade 6 to grade 8 education,
Three had "some primary education" (between grade 1 and grade 4)
Three had never been to school.

4. Findings of the Study

The rural schools shared many common aspects with the participants stressing that poverty of the families made it difficult to run the schools. The principals stated that it was challenging to lead schools without the parents. All the three high schools had never had more than 40 % pass rate in their grade 12 results. Usually grade 12 results are used as yardstick for school success in South Africa. The principals concurred that had there been more parental involvement the picture would have been different. Some of the aspects that are common in all the schools were late coming of the learners, high absenteeism, unsuitable and unsafe buildings. There was also the growth of bullying in some of these schools with one principal reporting of the use of dagga within school grounds by older boys in the toilet. The Rose High school principal contended:

> I do not know how many times I have written letters to parents here. They never come to our rescue. If we are lucky, we see them at the beginning of the year then they vanish. Problems always surface in the school but there are no parents to help us.

He also added:

> The only time you see parents is when there are certain problems, especially those prone to sensationalisation by the community. A few can be sometimes confrontational when they believe that their child has told them the right information. When we need parents in meetings and other school events, they never come. It's not like we never tried before. We have tried so many times before.

Like the principals, parents shared similar ideas pertaining to school involvement. One stated:

> It is very frustrating for us as members of the committee not to see fellow parents in the school. How much more for the teachers? Most of our parents are not employed. They should be able to come to school and assist whenever their help is needed. They never come…Maybe they are still of the opinion that the school decisions should be made by teachers only.

It appears that the school has tried so many times to lure the parents to take part in administering the school. The principal initially had novel ideas of raising funds for the school. He tried a vegetable garden in an attempt to raise school funds. The garden had beetroot, spinach, potatoes, cabbage and mealies. The caretaker was asked to tend the garden and look after the plants. When these were ripe, the school sold them. Raffle was also tried to boost the coffers for only ten percent normally pays the school fund (of R25.00) at the beginning of the year. Parents hardly supported these initiatives. Interestingly, the parents appeared when the learners' representative body raised concerns that the principal had mismanaged the funds. The principal avers:

> I had a vision. There is so much that we need at this school. Parents never come to meetings. Once there was an impasse based on gossip and misinformation, parents came to a meeting. When they came, they supported the allegations of the mismanagement of funds even when they had no argument to support their claims. They became my adversaries when I needed them. How does one manage a school effectively in such an environment?

Some of the factors that prevailed in these schools are dilapidated structures. In Rose Primary and Nyibiba High schools, the principals have tried to add new mud structures because the teachers do not have staff rooms. The principal in Rose Primary operate from her *bakkie* which acts as her office. Many classrooms in Nyibiba, Rose and Lilac schools do not have doors because the vandals had stolen these. In Rose and Marigold the vandals have been stealing taps linked to rain drums. As a result the principals in this study concurred that they needed the community to fight the vandalism that prevailed. The principals stated that apart from poverty of the families that they had to contend with, there was always the low morale among teachers, the non-involvement of the district officials, the aloofness of parents and learners who appear to be trapped in low academic performance.

The Marigold principal stated that he needed parents all the time as he tried to introduce various projects in the school. Many of these could not be realised because the parent elements was not there. Some of the things that failed in the school were:

i.   Feeding Scheme
ii.   Subject choices of the learners
iii.   Rebuilding the school
iv.   Appointment of extra teachers by the SGB
v.   Improving the academic performance of the learners

Yet in more instances the teachers end up taking most decisions. The principal is not content with this for "at this day of democracy" he believes that they need more stakeholder involvement. The principal recalls an incident when he had just arrived at the school. With his HODs they noticed three learners in two different classes who had learning disabilities. They invited the parents to school because they wanted to suggest these children be sent to special schools. He said:

> None of the parents came to school but one. Even when they did come they confronted us telling us that their children were "not abnormal". This was before the debate of inclusive education. We called an expert to come and talk to all parents about learning disabilities but few of them came up. We wanted them to help us see the symptoms of children with learning disabilities at home. Many thought that the school management had sinister plans to rid from the school of certain learners.

The principals also highlighted the problems relating to classroom management. A number of teachers were not finding any usefulness in giving homework to learners. Everyday many learners came to school with work that has not been completed. He emphasized that the system of education in South Africa required collaboration between school and home. He argued:

> This new system of education requires commitment from parents. I do not get that here. None of my colleagues do. How do we run a school like this? I think even my training did not accommodate the conditions here. That is what my teacher training lacked…The NCS is about involvement of a number of people. Talk about assessment you will see we need parent assessment as well. But where are the parents?

Interestingly, the parents in the SGB found time to reflect about their involvement in school management. They also contemplated in strategies of how to lure parents to school activities including the children's learning. The parents appeared to have common solutions to their challenges. They were interviewed using focus group interviews of seven participants each. The initial questions in each of the interviews tried to ask parents about ways of confronting the challenges of poverty. It appeared that many parents were resigned to their positions stating that many of them could hardly do anything to help their schools. Many were women who have never worked, waiting for money from male family members who work in cities. Some were grandparents of the children.

The parents in the study concurred that many of them although they were SGB members, they hardly helped the school management team in running the school. A number of them stated that most of the time they believed that educators are better qualified to run the schools. Others argued that they sometimes get the sense that "some teachers do not appreciate our involvement". They also agreed that sometimes when you have nothing to offer and are poor "you feel your state of poverty; that the school will benefit nothing from you". The nature of schools is also perceived as being uninviting by some poor parents. The climate is different and the people in the school, the educators are also much different from them. An SGB member from Rose argued:

> I know that our principal wants us in the school. She likes to see us working with her. However, when we get to the school, you experience the climate that is different, a climate that says, "I do not want you-you do not belong here". It is a mysterious feeling, as if the surroundings are telling you that you are not educated enough to be working with teachers.

This was supported by a parent from Nyibiba who stated:

> I wish that we could have specific duties pointed out from the start. We do not want to be seen by educators as people who are increasing their burden; as if we have come to spy upon the teachers. Teachers have much work pressures already and as parents we have many expectations after all they are more educated and know more than parents about the purposes of school. However, I would be so happy to know my exact role when I am called.

There was general consent: parents want to know what teachers expect of them. Some were saying that they could sense disrespect from some members of staff. He recalled once when as parents they went to a school to talk to a few teachers who had a habit of coming to school reeking of liquor. Some teachers, including the culprits questioned the parents' presence and qualifications to be judges in the case. Yet despite these hindrances, the parents stated that they would all like to work with the school management teams if their involvement would make the management of the school better. The parents in the sample discussed ways in which the schools could enhance their involvement in management of the schools. These were also raised in the three quarterly meetings that were convened in Rose Primary, Nyibiba High and Lilac High schools. There were a number of suggestions that the parents raised that would make the parent-schools relationship better and effective. From the sample the main suggestions to come were:

    (a) that school management should use parents more. The participants maintained that at the beginning of each year, the school management team should call parents and discuss their role. Linked to this, was the idea of ensuring that schools should become more inviting to parents by being more helpful to parents and this includes running special projects for parents.

    (b) that parents could be used to a certain extent in educating the learners. The parents were mainly concerned about the growing drug usage and abuse among learners. They were also concerned about promiscuity among learners. In one of the schools, there was a maximum of four learners who were pregnant.

    (c) the parents also discussed the needs to instil certain moral values on learners. Among these was the need to "go back" to old age values as communalism and respecting every adult in the society. The parents believed that with teachers they could play a role in restoring high standards to schools by using what they called "African culture" – *ubuAfrika,* as they termed it. Values such as *ubuntu* would restore the sense of good schools in rural areas. It seemed that many perceived the absence of good values in schools and not poverty was among the main causes of parental aloofness from schools.

    (d) the parents also maintained that school meetings could be used to address a number of issues relevant to rural families than merely on "school matters" only. Teachers and learners can use the time to "educate" the community in various aspects. The parents stated that if schools cannot address their way of life, they cannot be seen as being useful.

    (e) the last main suggestion was suggested more by the larger parent meetings observed. The parents added that rural schools will never function effectively if traditional leadership is not involved in governing the schools.

5. Discussion of the findings

The findings show the complexities of parental involvement in rural schools. The parents have shown that it is not only poverty that defeats their role in public schools. The parents' suggestions also became a positive contribution to the study's findings. Even rural parents who are usually seen as apathetic to school involvement can make huge contributions when given this opportunity. The discussions will be discussed under three themes that were teased from the participants' contributions:

    i.   The poor parents and schools
    ii.   Forging links between schools and community: a question of relevance
    iii.   The case for the African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS) in rural school management
    iv.   Traditional leadership and school governance

5.1 The poor parents and schools

The principals of all the five schools related that their parents are not involved in the education of their

children; that they hardly help in school management. In fact, literature has proven that parental involvement in education defeats the attainment of a democratic and egalitarian society (Lareau, 1989; McGrath & Kuriloff, 1999; Fine, 1993). The involvement of parents in education is supposed to ensure that all parents become part of their education's children, it embraces egalitarian objectives. However, McGrath and Kuriloff (1999:604) write:

> However, two aspects of parent involvement in the late 1990s suggest that increased emphasis on parent involvement and school's accountability to parents actually may subvert such egalitarian aims. First parents differ by social class, race and ethnicity in their access to schools and their effectiveness in dealing with educators. Second, the concerns of involved parents often are narrow and aimed primarily at gaining advantage for their own children.

It was apparent in this investigation that many parents did not think that they had the necessary social capital to partake in school decision making. Parents in rural schools have no power hence no voice in the education of their children. Even if these parents did not like the product they were getting from the rural schools they have less choice. According to Hirschman's seminal work, *Exit, voice and loyalty* (1970), consumers have a right to choose any of the options open to them in the markets. If they are not satisfied by a product, they exit and choose somebody else; sometimes they might choose to be loyal and continue with the supplier. However, when they really feel that they can change the service provider they voice out their despondency with the product and this is the voice option. According to Hirschman (1970) customers exercise choice when they want an improved situation or when they are dissatisfied with the current one.

Like many poor and less formally educated township parents, rural parents usually have no other choices in selecting schools. All these are dynamics that need to be understood.

5.2 Forging links between schools and community: a question of relevance

There is some research that shows that strong links between schools and communities have a potential of enhancing bonds between parents and schools (Rugh & Bossert, 1998; McDonough & Wheeler, 1998). McDonough and Wheeler (1998) conducted a study in the rural Thailand and discovered how links gave parents meaning of skills and why they could see schools as part of the villages. The parents in the study maintain that if links between schools and communities could be strengthened parents could see the need of involving themselves. Parents need to see the relevance of schools in their lives as highlighted by the participants in the study. The Thailand project displayed another good example of collaboration between the school and community in social forestry. This SFEP project was an attempt to transform the school-community relations. The learners were involved more in studies of village problems that were related to forest management issues. The Thailand project had three distinct results or goals as cited in McDonough and Wheeler (1998:11):

Transform teaching and learning by changing the traditional role of students.
Schools contribute to community capacity to address local problems.
Schools became more integrated into their immediate communities and were able to contribute knowledge vital to the development of local solutions.

The communities where the study took place were all near forested areas. In face of slow destruction or deforestation, there had been rigorous efforts by villagers to preserve the forests. It was in these villages that the fifth and sixth grade students visited communities to ask questions about forest related problems and village history. The learners also studied plants and animals as part of their classroom projects. Villagers were very helpful in guiding the learners who were studying the indigenous species. Having gathered

information on forest related problems and village history; the learners reported their findings to the villagers. In this project the learners and teachers were a powerful source of change. The parents saw the school as their place as well.

Similar to this was the Escuela Nueva in Colombia. to improve curriculum and emphasize active learning and self-pacing. Rugh and Bossert (1998: 105-107) identified four main characteristics of Escuela Nueva schools and these were:

  community involvement
  curriculum and instruction
  training
  administration.

Escuela Nueva was a system that transformed teacher pedagogy in rural Colombia. Its programme strongly promotes the links between the school and the community. The teacher is trained as an initiator of these links. The school and the community are supposed to learn from one another in a symbiotic sense. The teachers go to the community to gather all the information they think should be relevant to strengthen the links between the school and the community. Among other things that the teacher does is to record information about the parents' daily and yearly schedules. The learners also assist in the enhancement of school-community links by going out into the community to interview residents, collect recipes, songs and learn about craft products. Such activities ensure the involvement of parents in the education of their children. These links are very relevant in drawing parents closer to schools. When parents can see their roles in schools and see the relevant of schools in their lives, they are more likely to take part in school management. The parents in both cases cited here are very poor and their abode is rural. Rural schools can use the experience of the parents despite their minimal social and cultural capital.

5.3 The case for the African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS) in rural school management

Hoberg (2004) writes of how principals fail to apply AIKS using what they 'have' rather than what they are 'given'. "School principals in the rural areas are aware of AIK, and yet do not use it" (Hoberg 2004: 41). Msila (2009) supports Hoberg when he argues for the need to use *ubuntu* philosophy in school leadership. It promotes solidarity, collaboration and respect among the people in the organisation of the school. *Ubuntu* philosophy also belongs to the AIKS that Hoberg writes about. The parents stressed their need for a welcoming climate that would enable them to work well in schools. While the latter can be found also in Western models such as shared leadership, participative leadership, AIKS have these entrenched in its core; it is part of humanity. The principals should play an important role when they employ African models because they would be instilling trust and acceptance through their leadership. Hoberg (2004:41) avers:

> Educational management within the school consists of a structure and process, and should be based on organisational commitment and trust. Effective long- term quality relationships within a school community imply loyalty, support and a wholehearted commitment to the organisation. The principal's unique leadership position influences structural, operational and instructional matters in the school.

Furthermore, Hoberg (2004:42) states that principals have a huge role in the fostering of a professional school climate, "the significance of good public relations, collaborative decision-making, the importance of restoring a concern for moral values in the school and, ultimately, the use or neglect of AIK". What the parents in the study want is a return of *ubuntu* philosophy in schools. Msila (2009:71) states that the African village is based on mutual trust, respect and care. Furthermore, he cites Khoza who opines that *ubuntu* has practical implications for the workplace. Creative cooperation, empathetic communication and team work are among the most important qualities. This can be used by dysfunctional schools such as those in this study.

Parents want this trust, respect and mutual concern. Many transformational principals will experiment with these African models, among other things. Therefore, it was significant that parents would suggest that they would want to revert to African models of leadership. *Ubuntu* management style is bottom-up rather than top-down. Therefore, while *ubuntu* values can help in enhancing the morality among learners; it will improve leadership. Mbigi (1995) points out that *ubuntu* management is based on trust and morality, sharing (interdependence), cooperation and participation.

It is not surprising to discover that the parents would prefer the use of AIKS. These models are accommodating to all people irrespective of their socio economic status. Parents in the study fear involvement and commitment in schools because they see these as Western structures based on expertise and high formal education. The African models are likely to minimise fear and suspicion. Qualities such as solidarity, same purpose, and communalism minimise mistrust that is evident in many dysfunctional schools. Therefore, whilst the parents raised the African models mainly to enhance the children's morality, this will be a boon to school management and leadership as well. In the hands of an effective and progressive school management team, the African models can be crucial to making schools work and ensuring that the parents are part of the team. Linked to this idea is the participants' recommendation that traditional leadership should be made part of the school governance team.

5.4 Traditional leaders and school governance

The aspect that the parents raised which is the role of traditional leaders is very crucial to school management and leadership in rural areas. The headmen and the chiefs are respected members in many rural communities. In many rural areas the communities might still be following the traditional leadership hierarchy and schools cannot overlook this fact. Schools that want to achieve effectiveness will not leave behind the influence of these traditional leaders. Mbokazi and Bengu (2009:50) cite Cronje who emphasizes the role that traditional leaders can play in the provision of quality education in South Africa. Mbokazi and Bengu (2009:58) declare:

> The roles that traditional leadership plays in school governance include monitoring, supervision of the School Governing Body (SGB) activities and participating in the safety and security Committees. There are three types of membership that traditional leadership have on SGBs. The one is that of full membership of the SGB. As full members of the SGB traditional leaders perform normal functions like any member of this body.

The majority of rural community members trust traditional leaders hence it helps immensely to include them in community structures including schools. The participants in the study perceived the traditional leaders' role as very legitimate and authentic. In their study Mbokazi and Bengu (2009) found that in one site the principal and the teaching staff saw the involvement of the traditional leaders as very positive. When the participants in the study highlighted the need to include headmen, they wanted to legitimise the role of SGBs by involving traditional leaders. Whilst the history of traditional leaders can be perceived in various ways as one moves from one area to another, there are still many people who respect their role in rural societies. Rural district officials and school principals who have a vision of school success will not leave traditional leadership behind as they build collaboration in these communities.

6. Conclusion

The crucial aspect in this study was to see the parents as active participants in research. Usually research on (poor) parents usually perceives them as passive subjects who hardly have a voice to determine their destiny. The original question asked here was the role that parents think they could play in strengthening leadership in rural schools. The suggestions and recommendations that the parents raised are very significant for future research. Currently, principals of many schools complain about the non-involvement of

parents in school governance. This is even worse in poor rural areas where parents are concerned with living from day to day than be bothered about the goals of education and schools. Whilst we have seen the arguments of how social and cultural capital can be detrimental to parental involvement, the participants showed how other strategies can overcome some of these challenges. In line with some international research, making schools relevant to everyday life of the parents is crucial in rural communities. Moreover, there is potential in the use of certain African models. Although in educational leadership these have not been explored adequately, the African epistemologies might hold the missing link in school governance of schools, especially those situated in rural areas. Conscientious principals will not object to share a good vision with committed parents. Many rural parents would not want to see the reproduction of their poverty; they would certainly like education to redeem their children from their own powerlessness and illiteracy. It is effective schools with meaningful visionary leadership that would free these poor families from the unfortunate circumstances of dim educational opportunities.

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