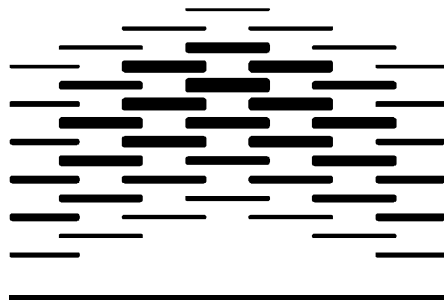


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Understanding Parents' Perceptions of Education:
Parental Involvement and Home-School Interaction in two South
African Communities



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Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful enquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other (Freire, 1993, p. 53)

Abstract

The purpose of this thesis was to gain a deeper understanding of parents' perceptions of education in South Africa, and the connection that can be made between these perceptions and their involvement and interaction with the school.

Seeking to contribute to the current literature on parental involvement and home-school interaction, this thesis questions the agenda, values and underlying beliefs that parents associate with the concept of education, as well as those prioritised by the national education system. Conceptualised in terms of the Home and School sphere, the explicit and implicit agendas and values of the home and school are discussed in relation to the parents' and school's role and responsibility towards their children's education. Fieldwork for this study was carried out in two socio-economically defined communities in the Western Cape Province of South Africa, where qualitative research interviews were conducted with parents, school representatives and community workers.

The economic agenda of schooling, in terms of preparing children for future employment and economic success, was found to be central in both communities. While education for employment was seen to be a common theme, the aim of equipping the community's children through the school was also seen to be a social and culturally loaded experience. A relative continuity and cultural integration between the School and Home sphere in the middle income community, is argued to have put children in an advantaged position, here the 'cultural code' or cultural capital necessary to navigate the education system is reinforced and initiated in the home environment. In the low income community however, a difference in home language (i.e. other than English) as well as epistemological and cultural background contributed to a relative dislocation between parents and the school, and consequently also affected their perception and attitude towards involvement in the school sphere. Experiences shared by research participants in both communities suggest that formal education is perceived as holding significant symbolic value and power in society, influencing the individual parent's perceived ability, authority and sense of entitlement when interacting with the school.

Keywords:

parent, education, parental involvement, agenda of schooling, cultural capital, perception, cultural integration

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Abbreviations

C2005	Curriculum 2005
DoE	Department of Education (South African)
EFA	Education for All
FoK	Funds of Knowledge
GCIS	Government Communication and Information System (South African)
OBE	Outcomes Based Education
SASA	South African Schools Act
SGB	School Governing Body
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund,
WCED	Western Cape Education Department

1. Introduction

Education is the basic building block of every society. It is a fundamental human right, not a privilege of the few. It is no coincidence that parents around the world demand education for their children as their first priority. Children themselves yearn for the opportunity to fulfil their dreams (United Nations, 2012).

According to the above statement made as a part of the United Nations Secretary General's Education First initiative, education is valued as an essential tool for transformation and the first priority for all parents to ensure future success of their children. At once education is seen as having a clear goal to equip individual children and members of society – no less than a basic human right. This message is emphasised in the current global education discourse and its influence on the design of national education policy as well as the local community perceptions are clear. South Africa is no exception to this case, where perhaps an even stronger emphasis has been given to the transformative role of education, as a means of changing the economic, social and political landscape of South African society (Department of Education, 2000).

While the outcomes and possibilities of education are seen to take focus, as Stephens (2007) explains below, the desired results or consequences for education cannot merely be assumed without adequately considering the context within which schooling is taking place:

The consequences of schooling for social and economic participation are highly variable, and a valid account of them requires attention to subtle aspects of the local relations between students home communities and their experiences at school, as well as the larger social, cultural and historical contexts within which they are situated (Stephens, 2007, p. 11).

The context in which education or schooling takes place are seen to have an important, if not defining impact on the way a child experiences his or her 'education.' More and more attention is being given to a holistic conception of education and recognition of the impact and influence of the local community context on the quality and outcomes of education. Included in this discussion has been a greater recognition of community, school and parent relationships, and the rise in the importance of the concept of 'parental involvement.' The concept of Parental Involvement has been used to define and discuss the interaction that takes place between the children's home and school environment, closely linked and understood as contributing to the success of the education process.

Parental involvement in South Africa has been officially defined through the South African Schools Act (Department of Education, 1996) where parent participation in schools is primarily understood in terms of their representation on School Governing Bodies (SGBs). Policy on parental involvement is deeply influenced by the political transformation taking place in South Africa, with democratic participation of parents in schools receiving the most emphasis. With a national curriculum (C2005) implemented around South Africa, schools in South Africa face the challenge of meeting a diversity of needs and community contexts across the country, while teaching the next generation the skills and values deemed necessary for their successful participation in South African society (Department of Education, 2000).

Research into home-school interaction in South Africa has presented varied findings and highly differentiated levels of parental involvement. Findings often point to a narrow definition and limited conception of parental involvement as limiting progress, and there have been calls for a widening of the definition and standards for parental involvement to accommodate the diversity of parents and communities across the country (Lemmer & van Wyk, 2004a; Lewis & Naidoo, 2004). The influence of socio-economic levels and educational background of parents is often pointed to as explaining the varying success and levels of parental involvement (Mmotlane, Winnaar, & wa Kivulu, 2009; Mncube, 2009, 2010). This is in line with international research which is also beginning to focus on parents' compliance with previously established standards for parental involvement (Casanova, 1996; Shumow & Harris, 2000). However, beyond an evaluation of compliance and understanding of already instituted standards for parental involvement, 'little information exists as yet on how parents decide to become *involved or not* in their children's education' (emphasis original Mncube, 2010, p. 235).

Taking one step back, it is argued that before the behaviour of parents and home-school interaction can be explained, the underlying perceptions and understanding of education within the community must be taken into account. As the extract from the book 'Growing Up in the New South Africa' (Bray, Gooskens, Kahn, Moses, & Seekings, 2010) explains:

Home is not only an economic base and nexus of interpersonal relationships...it is also an arena in which culturally informed and historically influenced attitudes to schooling are played out... (Bray et al., 2010, p. 209).

Here the emphasis is placed on understanding the interaction between the home and school spheres by first looking into the attitudes and understanding of education originating in the home. In line with this, before the parent's reaction to the school's parental involvement

policy can be commented on, there must also be an analysis of the underlying aims and values associated with the national, and in turn, local school policy which parents meet on a daily basis. While education quality is discussed on a global level, and indeed is influenced by it, the importance of the local community context and perceptions of the individuals taking part in schools must not be forgotten.

1.1. Research Aim and Questions

With the general research context presented above in mind, this research project was designed with the aim of better understanding parents' perceptions of education, and the connection that can be made between these perceptions and their behaviour with regards to the school. Seeking to contribute to the current body of literature on home-school interaction, it is hoped that this research will be able to question the value and underlying beliefs connected to education in the South African context, and in this way provide for a deeper understanding of the perception and reception of school on the local community level.

Focusing on the perceptions of the parents as well as the underlying values and agenda of the education system, fieldwork for this thesis was conducted in two communities (A and B) in the Western Cape Province of South Africa. Interviews were conducted with parents, school representatives and local community workers, who shared stories and experiences, describing their personal history and feelings as well as their understanding of schooling in their community. While the two communities chosen can in no way be claimed as representative of the entire South African population, they were chosen in the hope of demonstrating some of the possibilities of diversity found amongst South Africa's population, and the consequences that this can have on how education is perceived, and parental involvement is understood and played out.

Research focused on answering three main questions which later guided the structure of the analysis and discussion presented in this thesis:

- How do parents understand education? Specifically in terms of who is responsible for educating the children and the purpose and value associated with it.
- What are the cultural values associated with the home and school sphere?
- How can the perceptions of education, and the values associated with the home and school, be connected to the level of parental involvement in the community?

1.2. Thesis Outline

By way of answering the research questions, this thesis has been divided into seven different chapters including the introduction.

Chapter Two will add to the introduction given here in order to give a broad literature review outlining the work already carried out concerning Home-School interaction. This will be followed by an introduction to the education context in South Africa, and relevant parental-involvement studies already taken place.

Chapter Three will then turn to a specific discussion on the research design and methodology employed during the fieldwork, including a more detailed description of the two communities where the fieldwork took place (Community A and B) as well as the research participants who took part.

Chapter Four will introduce and discuss the theoretical concepts and ideas that will later be used to interpret and analyse the research interviews.

Chapter Five and Six will simultaneously present the findings from the fieldwork as well as present the interpretation and analysis according to the theoretical concepts laid out previously. Chapter Five will focus on discussing the parents' perceptions of education, while Chapter Six will look more closely into the values of the Home and School sphere.

Chapter Seven will attempt to conclude this thesis, presenting a brief summary of the research carried out, as well as some final thoughts and reflections on the main findings and their significance.

2. Research Background

In seeking to understand more about the interaction between parents and schools in South Africa, and more specifically, within the two communities involved in this project, the research must first be located within the global, national and local education context, as well as in relation to previous research carried out within the field. As highlighted in the introduction chapter, this thesis is focused on how parents' perceive and value education, and the following chapter aims to set the stage for later theoretical discussions and analysis, by outlining the relevant research already carried out on parental involvement, as well as the South African education context in which this research has taken place.

For the purposes of this thesis, the 'home' will be understood in terms of the parents of the learner, and will also be interchangeable with the term 'family.' Similarly, 'school' will represent all official school representatives including principals, teachers and administrative staff. Factors such as the location, structure, history and community in which the home and school are found will be used to contextualise and understand the respective perceptions, but will not be the main unit of analysis.

The chapter will begin by outlining the current discussion around home-school interaction and international research around parental involvement in schools. Moving from a global to national level, the chapter will then outline the educational context of South Africa, specifically in relation to the objectives of apartheid and post-apartheid education policy. Finally, an overview of research into home-school interaction and parental involvement in South African schools will be given, highlighting the work already done and knowledge upon which the current thesis seeks to build.

2.1. Home – School Interaction

The interaction and conceptualisation of the home and the school in educational literature has changed shape dramatically over the years, with a move to encourage the increased involvement and participation of parents within the school arena (Epstein, 2001a; Heystek & Louw, 1999; Lemmer & van Wyk, 2004b). This shift has in turn affected the conceptualisation of the parent's role in schooling, where parents who were previously seen as 'clients' of the school, are being viewed more as 'partners' (Epstein, 2001a; Heystek & Louw, 1999; Lareau, 1987). An often quoted model for understanding the home-school

interaction is Epstein's (2001a) 'spheres of influence.' In this model, Epstein refers to the 'overlapping spheres of influence' between the school, family and community (Epstein, 2001a), where the greater the area in which the school, community and family 'overlap,' the greater is the integration and opportunity for partnership between the different parties. This partnership between the home and the school is practically played out through interaction with or 'parental involvement' with the school, which is in turn classified into 6 main types: Parenting, Communicating, Volunteering, Learning at Home, Decision Making, and Collaborating with the Community (Epstein, 2001b). Whereas the parent's responsibilities and interaction with the school were before focused within the sphere of the home, there is now increasing responsibility and expectations from the school for parents to become involved in the school sphere. Where the education of the child was before left largely up to the professional expertise of the school, the responsibility is now more often conceptualised as being shared (Epstein, 2001a, 1986, 2001b).

This change in the conception of the Home and School has been argued to have been based on the assumption that increased parental involvement has a positive influence on educational outcomes (Epstein, 2001a; Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003), and an increase in educational outcomes is in turn associated with an increase in education quality. This shift in the conception of the school and home and their respective roles, can also however be linked to an international trend of decentralisation in education policy. In many countries and to varying degrees, authority and decision making power with regards to education has been delegated to regional, provincial or local government, often with central government defining education goals and standards while local government or even schools being left to manage the implementation (Coleman & Early, 2005).

With the assumption that increased parental involvement results in increased learning outcomes and education quality, the rhetoric around parental involvement and partnership with schools has been profuse, and been included in many education policies around the world (Lemmer & van Wyk, 2004a). Governments see increased parental involvement as a way to achieve their education objectives, and encourage schools to implement policies to help parents to get involved in their children's education. This position can be demonstrated in Epstein's (2001a) statement on parental involvement in schools below, where the importance of parental involvement is assumed and focus has moved to the school's responsibility in facilitating this involvement:

We have moved from the question, Are families important for student success in school? To, If families are important for children's' development and school success, how can schools help all families conduct the activities that will benefit their children? (Epstein, 2001a, p. 42)

Despite this encouragement however, teacher training regarding parental involvement is largely absent from teacher training curricula, and national education policies seldom result in dedicated resources for schools to help get parental involvement programmes started (Epstein, 2001a; Lemmer & van Wyk, 2004b). In order for parental involvement to benefit the children and school as a whole, teachers need to be trained in understanding the varying homes that their children come from, and the perceptions and expectations that parents might have that influence their involvement (Epstein, 1986; Shumow & Harris, 2000). A potential result of this lack of teacher training has been the implementation of a relatively narrow definition of parental involvement in schools, and fixed standard for evaluating parents' cooperation and fulfilment of their new role.

While the rhetoric of 'partnership' is often used when describing parental involvement, it can be seen as masking the extent to which the school is still generally the main authority with regards to education. With this authority also comes the power to define what activities families should take part in and how exactly parental involvement should be defined and implemented (DeMoss & Vaughn, 2000; Lemmer & van Wyk, 2004a). Casanova (1996) cautions an uncritical acceptance of the benefits of parental involvement without closer examination of the definition and its implementation. Not all parental involvement in schools can be classified as beneficial, with some types of parental involvement resulting in the favouring of certain learners over the interests of others. He also points out that just because parents are not seen to be involved in the school arena does not necessarily mean that they are not interested in their child's welfare or education. Many circumstances at home interact and contribute towards their decision to be involved with the school (Casanova, 1996).

In an attempt to understand the relationship between the home and the school better, research studies are focusing more and more on who the parents are in different schools and what factors influence their perception of the school and their role in it. Many factors such as socio-economic background (Lareau, 1987), ethnicity (Lareau & Horvat, 1999), language (Blackledge, 2001), teacher's attitude towards parents (Epstein, 1986) and a climate of mutual trust and confidence between parents and the school (Casanova, 1996) are found to be influencing parental involvement levels. Researchers are also examining the structure and the objectives of the schools, as well as the inherent attitudes and values that influence their

interaction with families and the community (Breidlid, 2003; DeMoss & Vaughn, 2000; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Shumow & Harris, 2000). A call for deeper understanding of the reasons parents decide to be involved with schools has been made, looking to better understand involvement by parents and improve the definition for parental involvement and future strategies for understanding home – school interaction (DeMoss & Vaughn, 2000).

Continuing from the above discussion around home-school interaction, the following section will now introduce the South African context in which research for this thesis took place. A focus on national education policy will give important background for analysis of home-school interaction in South African schools, highlighting some of the main issues that are relevant to parental-involvement in this context. This contextual background will later be used in conjunction with different theoretical concepts, to interpret the experiences and stories shared by the research participants in Community A and B as they interacted with their local school.

2.2. Education Policy and Objectives in South Africa

Political vision and educational policy are often closely linked, and a very clear example of this can be seen in the changing education policy of South Africa. Harley and Wedekind (2004) highlight the important connection between political vision and education in South Africa, through the political transformation of South African society from apartheid to democracy and the simultaneous restructuring of education policy. During apartheid, education was a significant site of struggle, used to implement the political vision of separate social, political and economic development through a school system structured according to state defined racial categories (Soudien, 2007). With the end of apartheid in 1994, education was again targeted as a vital sector to be used to shape South African society, this time used to instil values of democracy and human rights through one national system and curriculum for all South Africans (Department of Education, 2000; Harley & Wedekind, 2004). The previously separate and racially defined education departments were combined into one national education department (Soudien, 2007). Based on the guidelines set out by the South African Schools Act (Department of Education, 1996), the new national education policy aimed to implement a policy of equality for all South African citizens, providing equal opportunities through education for skills training and development, ensuring that the separate economic development and prosperity of a minority of the population was a thing of the past (Harber & Mncube, 2011).

Organisation of education in post-apartheid South Africa was defined by a policy of decentralisation as the new government sought to include all citizens in the process of education, creating opportunity and place for meaningful participation (Sayed & Soudien, 2005). Hanson (1998 as cited in Coleman & Early, 2005, p. 72) describes decentralisation as ‘an “almost natural outcome” as nations make the transition from autocratic to democratic forms of government.’ In contrast to the centrally controlled and autocratic system under apartheid, the policy of decentralisation aimed to practically implement democratic values right down to the school level, giving communities and parents a majority voice in the running of their schools (Lemmer & van Wyk, 2004a; Soudien, 2007). This policy of decentralisation was officially legislated through the South African Schools Act No. 84 (SASA) (Department of Education, 1996) where rights and responsibilities for parents in terms of the school were laid out, and mandatory School Governing Bodies (SGB) were instituted.

A new national school curriculum (C2005) was designed to emphasise the new political vision of society, setting the standard for what would be deemed a ‘good education’ or ‘good quality’ education. This is emphasised below in a quote from the then Minister of Education Professor Kader Asmal, speaking about the vision of the revised curriculum statement (Department of Education, 2000):

This curriculum is written by South Africans for South Africans who hold dear the principles and practices of democracy. It encapsulates our vision of teachers and learners who are knowledgeable and multi-faceted, sensitive to environmental issues and able to respond to and act upon the many challenges that will still confront South Africa in this twenty first century (Department of Education, 2000, p. 1).

Education policy in post-apartheid South Africa aimed to unite all South Africans by equipping them with the skills and values needed to fulfil their political, economic and social roles in the new democratic society. With a clear vision of political transformation, the institution of the revised national school curriculum (C2005) will be now further focused on, laying a foundation for further discussion of parents’ perception of the school values and their interaction with their local school.

With three main design features, C2005 was defined in terms of an Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) teaching strategy, an integrated knowledge approach to content, and making use of learner-centred teaching pedagogy (Harley & Wedekind, 2004). C2005 represented a

directly opposite policy to the apartheid education policy but has been argued to have ‘emerged as a *political and not a pedagogical project*’ (emphasis original Harley & Wedekind, 2004, p. 198) receiving much of its support as a result of its symbolic value as opposed to its pedagogic credentials (Jansen, 1998). While debates around the formation of the OBE policy and its implementation are many, what is key to this discussion is what Soudien and Baxen (1997) refer to as the ‘philosophical and pedagogic truths,’ and ‘identity producing mechanisms’ at work within the new curriculum (1997, p. 450). They point to the importance of examining the implicit assumptions contained in the curriculum, specifically concerning the philosophical and pedagogical positions put forward as ‘truths.’ The final report of the Task team charged to produce the *Review of the implementation of the National Curriculum Statement (C2005)*, point similarly to the curriculum’s role in selecting and defining a particular value set, knowledge system and pedagogical principles which will underpin the education system:

A national curriculum should serve two overarching aims. On the one hand, it needs to satisfy the general aim of nation building and setting out the philosophy underpinning the education system...On the other hand, it also needs to address the specific aim of selecting socially valued knowledge (and its scope, sequence, depth, emphasis, skills and content) as well as overarching pedagogical principles, to provide clarity for teachers and other education stakeholders around the knowledge and teaching expectations of the curriculum (Dada et al., 2009, p. 11).

Critique towards the South African curriculum can be seen as aimed at exposing the assumptions behind the curriculum and its objectives for education. Put forward as ideologically ‘neutral,’ C2005 can be argued to be carrying an inherent cultural ‘script for modernity,’ (Soudien & Baxen, 1997, p. 455) foreign to the majority of the South African population. These values are based on epistemological and ontological assumptions different to those found in many South African homes, resulting in a constant negotiation between the home and school arena (Bredlid, 2003). Those who experience this disjunction are the teachers, learners and parents in communities around South Africa which in turn has an effect on the perceptions and interaction of parents with the school.

From the brief outline above, it is possible to see how national political objectives affected the design and formation of education policy in post-apartheid South Africa. The new curriculum was especially highlighted in order to point out the political objectives of South African education and set the scene for a closer examination of how education policy influences the relationship between the home and school arenas. The next section will give an overview of

parental involvement research in South Africa, highlighting the main issues currently being debated and which have motivated the current research study.

2.3. Parental Involvement in South Africa

Parental involvement in South Africa is often referred to as ‘parental participation’ in line with the democratic terminology of citizenship, rights and responsibilities characterising the current political discourse (Lemmer & van Wyk, 2004a). A relatively broad definition of ‘parent’ has been set out in the South African Schools Act No.84 (SASA) (Department of Education, 1996) encompassing the wide range of home situations that many of South Africa’s children find themselves in. Through this document, a parent is defined as the parent or guardian of a learner, the person who has legal custody over the learner, or alternatively the person who undertakes these obligations towards the learner’s school (Department of Education, 1996, chap. 1). From this broad definition it would seem to follow that the conception of home-school interaction in South Africa has managed to escape the narrow definition boundaries of many other countries, providing space for a variation in home contexts and therefore a variation in the type of home-school interaction that is applied in different contexts.

Parental involvement in a South African context has been primarily defined by the guidelines for School Governing Bodies (SGBs) laid out in the South African Schools Act No. 84 (SASA) mentioned above (Department of Education, 1996). Through these guidelines, representative parents are elected to serve on the SGB for a period of three years, serving the needs of the school, parent body and local community. Amongst other things, the SGB is responsible for determining the school’s admission, language and school fee policy, deciding on a code of conduct and administering the school budget (Lemmer & van Wyk, 2004a). In addition to representation on the School Governing Body (SGB), official ‘responsibilities’ and areas for involvement of the parent body include making sure that their children attend school, attending parent-teacher meetings and information gatherings, as well as helping their children at home with their homework and reading (WCED, n.d.).

While representing a strong commitment by Government to promote democratic school governance and acknowledge the importance of parents in the school’s decision making process, in practice, research by Lewis and Naidoo (2004) points to a definition and structure of parental involvement that seems more focused on increasing the efficiency of school

management as opposed to incorporating authentic participation of all of the school's stakeholders:

At the school level, the policy statements articulate and enforce a highly structural norm, viewing parental participation in school governance through a technocratic, apolitical perspective that privileges form and structure over local meanings and process. This approach gives little consideration to the practice of the policy across diverse, historically situated contexts that characterise post-apartheid (Lewis & Naidoo, 2004, p. 103).

As the quote from Lewis and Naidoo (2004) suggests, the definition and structure of the SGBs does not give adequate space for the accommodation of a variety of parents and schools, situated in a variety of communities and contexts. Instead, parental participation in this way could in fact be inherently excluding and serve to limit meaningful participation of parents who do not have the skills or experience necessary to actively participate in a SGB, but who could contribute and participate in other ways. Research by Lemmer and Van Wyk (2004a), Mmotlane et al (2009) and Mncube (2009) conducted on the functioning of SGBs and levels of parent participation in South Africa, has generally found low levels of participation and inefficient SGBs. In line with these findings, there has been a call for a widening of the definition and guidelines for parental participation in schools in an attempt to include and make space for the 'diverse, historically situated contexts that characterise post-apartheid' (Lewis & Naidoo, 2004, p. 103).

While the South African government is focused on promoting democratic participation in schooling through increased parental participation in SGBs, explanations of the responses of parents and decision to participate in the school or not remain unclear (Mncube, 2010). International research projects have focused on socio-economic levels and class factors in an attempt to explain involvement levels (Horvat et al., 2003; Lareau, 1987), while South African researchers, Mmotlane et al (2009), encourage a multi-dimensional analysis of parental participation by examining the interrelation of a variety of personal characteristics including gender, living standard, education level, marital status and employment status. They found that although these characteristics play a role, a range of other factors including a parents attitude towards schooling are important (Mmotlane et al., 2009, p. 529).

Continuing to look at factors affecting parental participation, a study by Singh et al (2004) found that a low socio-economic status combined with low levels of literacy and employment contributed to the low levels of parental involvement in previously disadvantaged schools. Parents did not feel 'competent' enough to engage with the school and 'regarded the schools

as being competent enough to deal with their children' (Singh et al., 2004, p. 303). The parents felt confident that the school would be able to take full responsibility for the education of their children, and that this quality education would lead them to a better future with a good job (Singh et al., 2004). At the same time however, the authors point out that the parents also felt intimidated by the school and that it was possible that the way the school had defined parental involvement was structured in such a way as to inadvertently exclude many of the parents.

Another factor that potentially affected parental involvement was the difference of culture between the school and home, expressed by a lack of recognition and value given to indigenous knowledge, culture and practices within the school (Singh et al., 2004). They point out that indigenous knowledge is often 'viewed as having minimal contribution to knowledge produced in school' (Singh et al., 2004, p. 302). Linking back to the discussion on the South African curriculum (C2005), it is possible that within certain South African communities the knowledge system of the home differs to the inherent epistemological assumptions of the school objectives. This could be contributing to the further exclusion of parents who feel unable to become involved or contribute within the school arena (Breidlid, 2003; Soudien & Baxen, 1997).

While the national objectives for education policy through C2005 have been made quite clear, research into the objectives of South African parents with regards to education are less defined. In fact, wa Kivulu and Morrow (2006) comment on the fact that public opinion surveys in South Africa have not specifically asked respondents about education, remarking that:

Much of the substantial scholarly literature on South African education therefore exists in an attitudinal vacuum, where it is difficult to know how the findings of specific studies measure up against the actual state of public opinion (wa Kivulu & Morrow, 2006, p. 176).

Many studies have examined the interaction of the home and school as has been shown above, however, I hope through this research project to look more closely into the attitudes towards, and objectives of schooling that parents within two socio-economically and culturally diverse communities have.

From this brief overview of the literature and South African education context, it is hoped that a sufficient foundation and background has been given, on which the following chapters will be able to build. A background to the current conception of parental involvement in the

international literature as well as South African literature has been given, a brief background to the national curriculum and debate around its content and underlying values has been introduced. Finally, reference to the lack of research around parents' perceptions and objectives concerning education has been pointed out, which will therefore be the focus of the research for this thesis, hoping to bring a deeper or more nuanced understanding to the current parental involvement debate.

3. Research Methodology

The following chapter aims to give an explanation of the research methodology employed during this project. Through this chapter, an attempt will be made to demonstrate why certain methods were chosen, and how they were practically applied to the research aim to understand parents' perception of education and the South African schooling system. Specific focus will be given to the process of fieldwork in South Africa.

I will start by outlining the particular research strategy that underpins this project, emphasising the epistemological and ontological assumptions that provide a foundation for the way the knowledge created through this process was perceived and constructed. This will be followed by an explanation and description of the main research method used, leading on to a motivation of the sampling process, selection of the research site, and participants. Included in this section will be an introduction to the two communities in which the fieldwork was conducted, Community A and B, as well as an outline of the participants who took part. This will lead to a discussion around the role of the researcher and data analysis process, and finally end with a section describing the ethical considerations as well as an evaluation of the trustworthiness and authenticity of the knowledge created during the project.

3.1. Research Strategy

From the project's conception to its conclusion, an underlying assumption of the social construction of reality permeated the proceedings (Berger & Luckmann, 1971). As opposed to an objectivist understanding of social phenomena, this research project took its starting point in that social structures such as the School and Home, are created and function in different ways according to the experiences and perceptions of the social actors involved i.e. the children, parents and teachers (Bryman, 2008). As Taylor and Bogdan (1984 as cited in Patton, 1990, p. 57) explain, 'the important reality is what people perceive it to be.' In line with this constructivist ontological position, the epistemological implication is an interpretivist standpoint on knowledge (Bryman, 2008). There is a focus on knowledge that is created as opposed to collected, formed through the interactive negotiation and meanings attached to actions by the social actors (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). It follows that research will then be a process of the researcher accessing the 'lived experience' of the participants,

and through this process creating knowledge together with the research participants (Creswell, 1998).

In the context of this project, knowledge was created through the interaction of the researcher and research participants, primarily parents, and then school authorities, connected to the different primary schools. This interaction and accessing of meaning is based on the tradition of *verstehen* which:

places emphasis on the human capacity to know and understand others through empathetic introspection and reflection, based on direct observation of and interaction with people (Patton, 1990, p. 57).

In an attempt to understand the way parents perceived education and schooling in South Africa, I as the researcher and traveller, embarked on a journey to South Africa. I hoped that through interaction with parents, school authorities and community workers, that we would together be able to reflect on their relationship with and perceptions of the school institution in South Africa, and in turn better understand the influence that this had on parental involvement in primary school education.

Based on the ontological and epistemological assumptions above, a qualitative research strategy was chosen as the most appropriate means of addressing the research aim. A desire to see reality through the eyes of the research participants, as well as an emphasis on naturalism and describing the context in which the participants were located, are key preoccupations of qualitative methodology and of this study (Bryman, 2008; Patton, 1990). In addition to this, a focus on flexibility guided the research and aimed to enable the views of the participants to lead the direction of the study. This was done with the intention of ensuring that emerging concepts were to a great extent grounded in the meanings expressed by the participants and not the researchers own preconceived ideas and framework (Bryman, 2008).

3.2. Research Method: Semi-structured Interview

In line with the features of qualitative research, the main research method used to access the meanings and experiences of the research participants, was the semi-structured research interview¹ (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), describe this as a method that attempts to ‘understand the world from the subject’s point of view, to unfold the

¹ Hereon referred to as an interview

meaning of their experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations' (2009, p. 1). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all research participants, aiming to understand the daily life and interactions of parents with the local primary schools and attempt to unfold the meaning behind the different levels of parental involvement.

A semi-structured interview presupposes that the interview goes beyond a casual conversation and is guided by some kind of framework. In this case, an interview guide was used in order to create a framework for both the researcher and participant, highlighting certain themes that I hoped to cover during our time together. However, the shape and direction of each interview varied according to the research participant and their particular views and experiences (Patton, 1990). The flexibility of this type of research method allowed me to adapt the interview according to the context and participant, as well as modify the interview guide and direction of the interviews as new insights and concepts began to emerge. While the interview guide was first formulated in Oslo, it was under constant revision during the process of the fieldwork. This once again reflects the epistemological assumptions of this study, where knowledge is produced in interaction and together with the research participant, and is not a one way flow of information from participant to interviewer. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) reiterate this point saying that:

in a qualitative research interview, knowledge is produced socially in the interaction of interviewer and interviewee. The very production of data in the qualitative interview goes beyond a mechanical following of rules and rests upon the interviewer's skills and situated personal judgment in the posing of questions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 82).

The location of the interviews varied according to the preference of the participant, but emphasis was placed on finding both a time and place where the participant would feel comfortable and inconvenience to their daily schedule and duties would be minimized. For parents in Community A and B there was a mixture between interviews taking place in their homes, or at their work places. Six out of the ten parent interviews took place in homes, while the remaining four interviews were held at their place of work (in three out of the four cases this was the school). In Community A, I was always accompanied by one of the community workers who helped to introduce me to the participant and explain the project, as well as practically show me how to reach the interview location. Three of the five parents in Community A preferred to speak in their mother – tongue, isiXhosa, and in these cases, the community worker kindly acted as translator. All the participants in Community A were

offered this possibility as it was important that they felt comfortable during the interview and able to express their views in their own language.² In Community B I conducted the interviews alone and in four of the five cases was invited to have the interview in the parent's home. For the school representatives, all interviews took place on school property and during school hours. All interviews were recorded after approval was given to do this by the participant. This enabled me to focus on the interview and pay attention to where subtle comments needed to be clarified or questioned further (Patton, 1990). The recording also helped me to be able to listen to the interviews once they were over and note down a summary of the main points which I could present to the research participant and follow-up on later.

While all efforts were made to ensure that the participants were comfortable with the interview and questions, it is impossible to ignore the power balance that is evident in any kind of interview situation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). In an attempt to lessen this power imbalance and give over more control to the participants, I arranged a follow-up for all interviews that took place. These interviews took place in person for all participants in Community A, while for Community B these took place mainly through email correspondence. This difference was partly a practical necessity as very few of the participants in Community A were comfortable or able to use email, but also as a result of difficulty in finding time to meet all the participants in Community B again. During these interviews, participants were given a copy of the summary notes that I had taken during the interview and given the opportunity to read over and make any corrections or extra comments that they felt were necessary³. The follow up interviews varied in length but on the whole received very positive feedback and hopefully contributed towards participants feeling more a part of the process, and giving them a chance to see the outcome of the interview and in some cases, talk more about the research and what was going to happen next (Patton, 1990). I also used this opportunity of a follow up interview to ask further clarification questions and additional questions that had emerged since our last interview, and to have a better overview of the direction that the research was taking.

² Extracts from interviews in which translation was given by the community worker are specifically marked 'translator' at the beginning of the extract.

³ In the cases where the interview had been translated, the summary notes were translated back again verbally to the participant and an opportunity given to the participant to give feedback.

3.3. Sampling

As Patton(1990) explains, ‘perhaps nothing better captures the difference between quantitative and qualitative methods than the different logics that undergird sampling approaches’ (1990, p. 169). Quantitative studies often focus on choosing a random sample that can then be used to make generalizations to the wider population (Patton, 1990). The sample size is therefore generally large and as far as possible, those chosen are representative of the entire population under study (Bryman, 2008). Qualitative studies such as this one, on the other hand, are generally associated with purposeful sampling techniques which seek to identify a small group of information-rich participants (Patton, 1990). The purpose is to conduct fewer in-depth studies, with the view of creating or highlighting theoretical concepts (Bryman, 2008).

In line with this distinction, the sampling method employed in this project can be classified as purposive sampling, where, ‘the goal of purposive sampling is to sample cases/participants in a strategic way, so that those sampled are relevant to the research questions that are being posted’ (Bryman, 2008, p. 415). According to Patton’s (1990) further classification of purposive sampling, the methods used can be further narrowed down to include elements of both criterion and snowball sampling. In order to carry out this comparative study, I needed to select two communities that were relatively distinct according to their socio-economic status, and for practical reasons, situated relatively near to one another.

3.3.1. Introducing Community A

Community A has a population of about 80 000 people and was first established during the 1950s as hostels for migrant labourers coming to work in the Western Cape Province in the fruit and canning industries. Up until the 1980s and under the apartheid regime, movement in and out of the community was strictly controlled and primarily for single male workers who would then travel back once a year to visit their families resided in the Eastern Cape Province. Already overcrowded and lacking good facilities and adequate infrastructure, a relaxing of pass laws during the 1980s meant that many wives and children came to join their husbands in the hostels, but by doing so were forced to live in already overcrowded and inadequate living conditions (“Community A Migrant Labour Museum,” n.d.).⁴

⁴ For reasons of confidentiality, the name of the Community A Museum website needed to be removed from the text and was therefore also removed from the reference list.

Today, out of the original hostels built by the government, Community A has expanded to include many informal houses as more and more people move from the rural Eastern Cape Province to the Western Cape Province to look for employment (Small, 2008). The majority of the people living here identify themselves as belonging to the Xhosa ethnic group, with strong family and cultural ties to the Eastern Cape Province. As a result of this, it has been very common for families to travel back to the Eastern Cape for important family gatherings and events, as well as to travel home to the Eastern Cape for the main Christmas holiday.

With a high level of unemployment, the community also experiences a high crime level in comparison to the middle income communities in close proximity (Strategic Development Information and GIS, 2012a). Many of the parents who are employed in the community, work mainly in the construction industry or as domestic workers. The end of apartheid brought an end to the definition of the community as a temporary hostel community supplying cheap labour, and the first schools were built encouraging the focus on the right to equal education and employment opportunities for all South Africans. Since then more schools have been built in Community A with the total now standing at 4 primary schools and 2 high schools.

Speaking to one of the community workers, I was told that the first primary school in the community was built after the end of apartheid in 1994, meaning that before this time, parents had to send their children to schools in communities located up till 25 kilometres away.

Commenting on what the impact was when the first primary school was built in the community, one of the research participants explained that:

Ja, it was a big change, because this was a community that was based for migrancy which is the people who are just coming to work for cheap labour. There was no expectation for graduates you know like and for people who went to school, it was just people with no skills, like illiterate people that were not expecting to stay here. So 1994 there was a big change, the parents also who were staying here were encouraging people to go to school so that they can get better jobs (Aworker1).

Given the total population however, this is still understood as inadequate and the schools are often overcrowded and under resourced. All four of the primary schools in Community A are classified as ‘non-fee paying schools’⁵ meaning that parents are not required to pay school

⁵ All schools in South Africa are classified into five ‘quintiles’ or categories, based on community data captured during the national census focused on income, unemployment and literacy levels. Quintile 1 represents the schools with the lowest level of resources while 5 represents those with the highest, and funding from the Department of Education is allocated accordingly. As from 2008, schools falling into quintile 1, 2 and 3 were classified as ‘no-fee’ paying schools (Kanjee & Chudgar, 2009), and according to information posted on the

fees and the schools receive extra funding by the South African Education department (GCIS, 2012).

As well as representing an opportunity for education for the children of the community, the schools in Community A offer many services to the community including help in registering children for birth certificates and social grants, a social services and domestic abuse centre as well as a feeding programme for the most needy children and their families. In addition to this, one of the schools interviewed also hosts an adult learning centre which runs courses for adults in the community who did not have the opportunity or ability before to complete or even start schooling. The services offered are understood within the context of the community where unemployment and poverty is high, and where a large proportion of the population has recently moved from the rural Eastern Cape, needing help to register for government grants and services and help get established in the community.

3.3.2. Introducing Community B

Community B has a population of about 30 000 and is a relatively well established community compared to Community A, with people first settling there in the 1820s (Heap, 1993). The community originally served as a centre for the small farming community, and a place to resupply for those travelling up or down the Eastern coast of South Africa. In recent years the community has grown substantially and supports a settled, largely middle income population that is constantly growing as a result of a general migration to the Western Cape Province in search of employment (Small, 2008). The main languages spoken are English and Afrikaans (Strategic Development Information and GIS, 2012b).

We moved here when we started going to school, so it was more that kind of setup. My mom was born in East London, and my dad in Cape Town in Fishoek, in Seapoint area. Then they got married, and they just loved the feel of Community B and the fact that it wasn't near a city...I have lived here ever since I can remember (Bparent1).

As opposed to Community A, there are as many as 8 government primary schools in Community B as well as a number of independently owned smaller primary schools. Many families from surrounding communities are also known to send their children to schools in Community B because of their reputation of providing a high 'quality education.' One of the parents interviewed gave the following explanation when asked why they chose to send their

South African Government Information site, by 2010 81% of government schools in South Africa had been classified as 'no-fee' paying schools (GCIS, 2012).

children to the local government school, focusing on the school's good reputation and the involvement of parents in the management of the school:

The thing is that we also looked for schools – the schools in this area, we did a lot of research, and we found that people said these are the good schools in this area, and we applied for them and fortunately the kids got in. And the schools here, because it is a model C school⁶, the parents have a say in it, the parent body actually run the school to some extent. The government does have a part – it is a government school, but the parent body has a say in it which is very important (Bparent2).

Due to the classification of Community B during apartheid as a 'white' area, all the schools in the community are generally much better established and resourced than those in surrounding communities (e.g. Community A), and fall within quintile 5. All of the primary schools in Community B are classified as 'fee paying schools' meaning that the majority of school funds are raised through school fees from the parents as opposed to funds from the South African Education department (GCIS, 2012). These schools therefore rely on the parents for most of the school funding, although parents can apply for exemption from these fees on proof of their inability to afford them (WCED, n.d.).

Representatives from both schools that were interviewed in Community B explained that they offered a wide range of sports activities and extra-mural activities for students, often facilitated by the hiring of extra coaches and volunteering of parents. In the case of one of the schools, they were also known for having a large remedial department available for students with learning disabilities, providing access to occupational therapists, speech therapists or even a school psychologist.

3.3.3. Research participants

After selecting the two communities in which I would conduct my research, I created a list of criteria, from which I was able to narrow down my list of possible participants. These criteria were based on my research question and further emphasize the 'purpose' behind my sampling. All research participants needed to meet one main criteria in that they should have experience with the phenomena under study i.e. parental involvement with and interaction with the school (Creswell, 1998). From this starting point, I primarily was interested in talking to parents of children who were currently attending primary school. Furthermore, these

⁶ 'Model C' schools refer back to the racial classification of schools during apartheid, to schools reserved for 'white students,' who in turn received preferential funding from the government. Although the funding structure for schools has changed (see not on quintile system), these schools are still perceived today to be the best resourced schools for parents to send their children to (Roodt, 2011).

parents should have children in the upper half of primary school, namely from grade 4 to 7. As my study is focused on understanding parents' perceptions of schooling, I preferred if possible to speak to parents who had had some experience with the schooling system and had at least 3 years of contact with their child's school. My assumption was that parents who had children in the second half of primary school, would have had more time to experience and form an opinion on the school. I also am primarily interested in government schools and used this when selecting schools and parents. In some cases however, I did speak to parents who had children in both government and private schools.

The sampling method described can also be classified as snowball sampling, as after presenting my criteria to both the 'gatekeepers' and initial research participants, they were able to lead me to and suggest further information-rich participants based on the criteria and my explanation of the project (Patton, 1990). This was mostly the case for sampling the parents, while for contacting school authorities the criterion sampling was more relevant. This will be emphasized especially in the following section as I explain the process involved in accessing both communities and contacting the research participants.

The primary focus for this research project was to understand perceptions of parents, and for this reason, the majority of participants interviewed were therefore parents (10 out of 19). In addition to interviewing parents however, it was analytically useful to try to gauge the perception of school representatives as well, specifically in respect to parental involvement and attitudes to the school. This perspective was then able to be compared to the parents' own perception and give me a deeper understanding of daily school life and interaction between the school and home. Finally, three community workers were interviewed (two from community A and one from Community B).

Community A participants

Ten interviews in total were conducted in Community A. Of these ten, five were parent interviews, three were school representatives (one principal, one deputy principal and one teacher) and two were community workers linked to the local community museum.

From the brief contextual description given on the research site, parents interviewed during this project do show some of the general characteristics of the community e.g. a low level of formal education and very often single parent families, but at the same time must be treated as

individuals with individual experiences, beliefs and attitudes. All of the parents interviewed were mothers, where three of the five were single mothers. They were all originally from the Eastern Cape Province and so ethnically belonging to the Xhosa group, but had moved at different stages and for different reasons to the Western Cape Province. All had experience with school themselves to some degree, but had completed up to different levels. Only one of the mothers had completed and passed the final Grade 12 or ‘matric’ examination. The five mothers interviewed each had experience with different primary schools as they each were currently sending their children to different primary schools in the community. Of the primary schools that their children were attending, three of them were located in the community, while two were located outside. Four out of the five mothers was employed, while the one who was unemployed served as the secretary of the School Governing Body (SGB) at her children’s school.

Table 1: Overview of parents interviewed in Community A

Community A	Aparent1	Aparent2	Aparent3	Aparent4	Aparent5
Formal Education level	Grade 11	Grade 6	Grade 12	Grade 9	Grade 11
Marital status	Single mother	Married	Single mother	Single mother	Married
Employment status	Unemployed – SGB secretary	School cleaner	Librarian	Domestic worker	Domestic worker
No. children and ages	4 children - 21 - 17 - 12 - 6	5 children - 20 - 17 - 11 - 8 - 1 (grandchild)	3 children - 17 - 14 - 9	3 children - 21 - 12 - 3 (grandchild)	4 children - 15 - 11 - 10 - 4

Interviews with school representatives were conducted at two of the four primary schools in Community A; at one of the older more established schools and at one relatively new primary school. All four primary schools were approached to take part in this study, but only two responded to my initial contact, and subsequently took part in interviews.

The community workers from Community A were both involved in the work carried out by the local museum, commemorating and educating the community about the history of the community and how the community had originally been formed as a hostel community for migrant labourers. The museum is also a community centre and hosts many programmes focusing on connecting the different members of the community, through exhibitions, youth programmes, dance and cultural performances. Interviews as well as many informal conversations with the community workers enabled me to receive greater insight into the way the community lived and what was valued. Their help in introducing me to the community and the different research participants was invaluable.

Community B participants

Nine interviews in total were conducted in Community B. of these nine, five were parent interviews, and three were held with school representatives (one principal, one group interview with the school secretaries, one group interview together with the principal, teacher and financial secretary).

While parents interviewed from Community B may on the surface seem to be a relatively homogenous group, as with the parent group in Community A, they each had had different experiences and their own beliefs and attitudes which cannot be reduced to their common community characteristic. Four mothers and one father were interviewed, although during one of the interviews with a mother the father also joined in towards the end. All were 'white' and spoke English as their mother tongue, although one of the mothers was originally from Zimbabwe. All except one of the mothers had been born in Community B, the rest had moved there during the course of their adult life. All of the parents interviewed were married with three of the mothers not formally employed, while one mother worked as a pre-school teacher and the other worked part time as an administrator at her children's primary school. All of the parents had completed and passed Grade 12, and all except one had continued on to further or higher education. As opposed to the parents from Community A, all the parents sent their children to government primary schools within the community.

Table 2: Overview of parents interviewed in Community B

Community B	Bparent1	Bparent2	Bparent3	Bparent4	Bparent5
Formal Education level	Grade 12	Higher Ed.	Higher Ed.	High Ed.	Higher Ed.
Marital status	married	married	married	married	married
Employment status	House wife	Pre-school teacher	House wife	House wife/home business	Part time school administrator
No. of children and age	2 children - 10 - 12	3 children - Pre-school - 11 - 13	2 children - 7 - 11	2 children - 11 - 15	3 children - Pre-school - 11 - 13

Interviews with school representatives took place at two different primary schools. This decision was taken partly as a result of the number of schools agreeing to take part in Community A, and partly as a result of limited time. Both primary schools are well established within the community and have been running for more than 30 years.

The community worker from Community B had trained and worked as a teacher in the community, as well as previously been in charge of running a pre-school. She now worked for one of the local churches, running youth programmes at the local primary schools. As a parent, teacher and community worker, she was able to give a reflected opinion about the interaction of parents with schools in the community.

3.3.4. Research Access

After deciding on the research topic and doing as much background reading as was possible from Oslo, it was time to travel to South Africa and start finding and contacting my potential research participants. An initial desire to have all such details settled before my arrival in South Africa was soon dismissed, as colleagues and staff encouraged me to make these decisions when in the field. In order to stay true to my selected qualitative framework, I needed to make sure that the research participants were relevant to the study and this could not be efficiently achieved remotely. In addition to this, flexibility and the importance of process is vital to the credibility of the research process. Researching in two communities would also have to mean being flexible enough to adapt the research process to meet the

needs of participants from both communities, and more importantly using avenues of communication with which they would feel most comfortable with.

While having spent a considerable number of years living in South Africa first with my family and then separately as a student, the importance of knowing the context and having a good idea of the issues facing parents and schools in urban South Africa encouraged me to spend as much time in the initial days seeking out advice from those already working in the field and communities. An informal meeting with a local education activist group resulted in additional questions being added to my interview guide and insight into my plan to contact participants. This was followed by speaking to community workers connected to the museum in community A and one of the local churches in community B. Both community workers turned out to be invaluable contacts during the research period, and turned out to be ‘gatekeepers’ as well as participants in their respective communities.

As my research would take place in two different communities, I needed to operate and manage two different networks and often switch between two very different modes of contact and communication. A relative ‘outsider’ to Community A as opposed to Community B, I spent a significant amount of time thinking and planning how best to approach parents and schools⁷. As a previous member of Community B, and planning to live there with my family during the fieldwork period, I felt most comfortable with my ability to make contact with and carry out my research here. Community A however, I felt would be more of a challenge and was relatively unknown to me. My initial inquiries resulted in a positive feedback and offers of assistance from a range of people, however I was aware that I needed to take my time in the initial stages to ensure that the networks that I decided to use would be the most relevant to my research, and avoid making promises to take up help from people that I could not effectively keep.

I had originally planned to use the schools in both Community A and Community B as starting points for contacting both parents and school authorities. However, after initial efforts to contact schools and advice, I was convinced that this would not be the most effective way especially due to my time limitation of 2 months. My emails and telephone calls had gained very little response if any at all with my initial request to ask the schools to help me in

⁷ See further discussion in ‘Role of Researcher’

contacting parents. It was at this point that I decided that it was best to lessen the burden on schools and ask only for a chance to meet with the principal and a teacher, while the two community workers effectively took the role of ‘gatekeepers’ in terms of coming into contact with parents. It was very important that parents involved in the study should do so on a voluntary basis, and the logistics of achieving this while going through the school were complicated. I did not want to put the school in a position where they felt like they were being ‘tested,’ as this would more than likely only result in them referring me to parents who they deemed adequate for me to approach. The community workers became my first official research participants, and after taking part in an interview, both kindly agreed to help me to get in touch with parents in their respective communities. I gave both a set of information sheets with my picture on it, describing my project and its aims, as well as who I would like to speak to during the research, and what a participant could expect from taking part (included in Appendix). Through their own networks, they then were able to contact parents that they knew and who met the criteria laid out before (Creswell, 1998). Parents in Community A then suggested a time and place to meet, while the community worker in Community B gave me a list of names and contact details of parents who had expressed an interest in participating.

Returning to the schools, I found that the way I approached the schools was done slightly differently in both communities although I learnt that the most effective method was to physically visit the schools. In Community A I was accompanied by the community worker, as he had had previous experience working with the schools and often his familiar presence made entrance into the principal’s office much smoother. After showing the letter of introduction and project information, a time was suggested to meet again. In Community B I first sent emails to the schools outlining the project and presenting the relevant documentation and letters of introduction from the Oslo and Akershus University College. These emails were followed up by telephone calls and arranging a time to come in to the school and speak with the principal.

3.4. Role of the Researcher

Examining the ethical implications of research in terms of the ‘role of the researcher’ is very much in line with the epistemological assumptions of this project. Where interview knowledge is seen as produced, relational and contextual, reflecting on the researcher’s role in the knowledge produced is equally as important as focusing on the individuals that were interviewed (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

In interviewing, the importance of the researcher's integrity is magnified because the interviewer him- or herself is the main instrument for obtaining knowledge (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 74).

Where knowledge is produced in interaction between researcher and participant, the relation between these two individuals as well as the context of their meeting and initial assumptions about each other, has a large impact on the knowledge that they together create (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). This reflection on the relationship between researcher and interviewee is also known as 'reflexivity' and has been described by Lincoln and Guba (2005) as:

the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher ... It is a conscious experiencing of the self as both enquirer and respondent, as teacher and learner, as the one coming to know the self within the process of research itself (2005, p. 210).

Conducting research in two different communities, I very early on in the process saw the wisdom of focusing my efforts on one community at a time – as far as practically possible. Staying in Community B as an 'insider' and visiting Community A as an 'outsider' meant a constant reflection on my role and identity in the creation of knowledge together with the different research participants (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

Driving into Community A on my first day, on the way to visit the museum, I was immediately aware of my ethnicity in contrast to the majority of those around me. Though I cannot tell what casual bystanders were thinking, I was slightly shocked at how aware I was of my own ethnicity as a 'white' person and how it made me feel. This definitely affected my cautious first contact with the museum guide who later became an invaluable gatekeeper into the community, research participant and friend. My awareness of my identity as a young middle class white female seeking to interview parents in a predominantly black, poor community affected my interaction with potential participants, and made me very humble about seeking to make contact with community members. I was pleasantly surprised to see however, how quickly the focus on my ethnicity as my main identity indicator, shifted to focusing on my age and educational/research background. I was welcomed by various community members, even if they seemed slightly surprised to hear that I was from Community B, a short 10minutes drive away. Here my identity as a part of the new up and coming generation of educated South Africans seemed to come to the forefront. My economic status as middle class and belonging to a small privileged proportion of South Africans was apparent, and I felt that this contributed to the power imbalance during interviews. I tried to compensate for this by emphasising that participants decide on a venue and time for the interviews suitable for them. I felt that this meant that they often chose a venue where they

felt in control and comfortable, and I could more naturally take my place as a guest and as someone who was there to learn from their experience, as opposed to tell them what I think they should do from my privileged position.

An insider, and resident in Community B during the time of my fieldwork, I stayed with my family and was to some extents equally challenged in my role as researcher here as when I was in Community A. Having moved to and lived in this community myself for my last 3 years of high school, I had also been back to visit my family regularly here over the past 7 years. In this regard I had access to a network of contacts within the community and was often recognised as ‘My mother’s daughter,’ or ‘My sister’s sister’ etc. I have called myself an ‘insider’ in Community B, but this is more in relation to Community A as opposed to my feelings in this regard. While my connections with members of the community at times meant that it was hard to negotiate contact with people as a researcher and not just a daughter of the community, I was also able to see the advantages of this position when it came to meeting with research participants and establishing common ground and an atmosphere of familiarity and trust during interviews. Community B is a relatively small community and my sister had previously attended one of the schools where I conducted interviews. After this was made known, staff at the school felt much easier about my presence there and were eager to help where they could.

3.5. Data Analysis

As the quote from Patton (2002) below suggests, the process and sequential description of qualitative data analysis is not simple to navigate, saying nothing of recording and explaining it to others. When and how it begins is also often difficult to define:

For data collection based on surveys, standardised tests, and experimental designs, the lines between data collection and analysis are clear. But the fluid and emergent nature of naturalistic inquiry makes the distinction between data gathering and analysis far less absolute (Patton, 2002, p. 436).

As Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) point out in their focus on the craftsmanship of the researcher, the process of analysis is intricately linked to the qualities of the researcher as much as to the research participant, with the knowledge resulting from the project being a joint production and result of both relational and contextual factors:

When the person of the researcher becomes the main research instrument, the competence and craftsmanship – the skills, sensitivity and knowledge – of the researcher become essential for the quality of the knowledge produced (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 84).

The analysis ‘technique’ used during this project can be broadly classified as ‘Bricolage,’ involving therefore a variety of methods, techniques and concepts in the process of both creating and interpreting the meaning and experiences shared by research participants (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Preparation for this analysis began during the creation of the interview guide as broad themes were incorporated into the structure of the interview questions. During the actual interviews, writing of interview summaries and follow-up interviews, these themes were either built on and extended or in some cases completely disregarded. On my return to Oslo, I started the task of transcribing the interviews and further developing the themes that had emerged during the field, using a combination of techniques falling under ‘Meaning Condensation’ (Giorgi 1975 as cited in Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 205) and ‘Meaning Interpretation’ (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). An ongoing reference to the aim of the research had to be kept in mind, as the task of identifying and choosing which information and experiences could be included in the final analysis, given the limited page number and time period. In conjunction with the theoretical concepts and framework which was later chosen, the analysis process also included what Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) refer to as a re-contextualization of the interview data within broader frames of reference.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

As with all research, the entire process needs to be examined according to established ethical considerations. This research project will be examined from two different perspectives, according to formal ethical requirements, and then according to the view that research is a ‘craft.’

3.6.1. Formal Ethical Principles

Formal ethics boards have been institutionalized over the last years in order to protect research participants, and set out fixed criteria that all research projects should satisfy before entering the field. The Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) and the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) Research Directorate were both applied to during the planning of this project, and requested information on the goals and methods of the project, as well as an outline of who I would be contacting and how. Summarized under three main

headings, these two institutions needed explanation and confirmation concerning among other things, informed consent, confidentiality and assurance that no harm would come to participants (Bryman, 2008).

Designing an information sheet and consent form that would equally satisfy the institutional demands of the NSD and WCED, be 'fit for purpose', and suit the needs of the participants in both Community A and B was a challenge. I was sensitive to the fact that based on the difference in education level of the participants in both groups, their English language skills, and their familiarity with these types of forms, a contextualized approach should be taken when contacting and informing potential participants about the project. In order to overcome this challenge, I was very aware of designing an information sheet that was clear and simple, highlighting in clear sections who I was, what the project was about, what I required from any potential research participant, and the voluntary and confidential nature of the project. By asking the community workers make the initial contact with potential parents, they were able to explain in a way that the parents from both communities understood and felt comfortable with the project. They also represented people whom the community members knew and trusted and so could also freely ask questions about the project that they might not have felt free to ask me, a stranger. Once I was in the field I realized that adding in my picture onto the information sheet was a wise, as people appreciated being able to put a 'face' to the project. I arrived at many interviews where the research participant would smile and say that they recognized me from the form. Finally, before each interview started I would spend some time explaining the information sheet and consent form verbally, making sure that the participant knew where I was from and what exactly the interview would be about. What was most important to many it seemed was what would happen afterwards. I found that the majority of the participants were very pleasantly surprised when I mentioned that they would have an opportunity to see my notes from the interview and that I was very interested in hearing their own feedback on the interview, as well as offering to provide them with a copy of the final report when I was finished. I was also able to explain that my family lived close by or in the community, so there was a possibility of us meeting again, and in this way I was not an outsider whom they would never hear of or see again.

One of the main aims of this research was to give parents in the two communities a voice to share their experiences with the school and their feelings towards the place of education in South Africa. Unlike a quantitative project, the aim is not to generalize the responses, but to

maintain and emphasize the individuals involved and preserve the context within which they were speaking from. Maintaining the focus on the individual participants while respecting their privacy and ensuring anonymity has been an issue that I had to long think over. A statement made by Parker (as cited in Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 73) questioned the ethical appropriateness of anonymising research participants claiming that by doing this you might unintentionally be silencing ‘the very voice in the research that might originally have been claimed as its aim.’ At the same time however, I am aware of the need to ensure that their privacy is respected, and that their stories and the time shared with me will not lead to any inadvertent embarrassment or unintended harm through the judgement of their neighbours or others.

The final formal requirement was that no harm came to the research participants. While I can safely say that no physical harm came to participants during the research process, I was aware also of minimising any possibility of emotional or psychological harm. During some of the interviews, parents shared stories of their background and family situation which in some cases brought out strong emotions as they remembered or dwelled on hard situations. As far as possible, I tried to respect their privacy by not probing sensitive subjects, and allowing them the time to reflect and regain their composure before moving on. It was also encouraging to see that many of the participants felt happy with the interview process and mentioned that it had made them consider and think about issues that they had not before reflected on.

3.6.2. Moral Conduct as a Craft

While accepting that it is important to conform to generally accepted ethical standards, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) suggest that by providing a ‘thick ethical description’ of the situation, it is possible for the researcher to make choices informed by the specific context of the participants. In this way, making ethically responsible decisions is based more on the moral integrity and ability of the individual researcher to understand the particular situation, than applying context neutral ethical guidelines to fieldwork cases. Moral conduct is seen as a ‘craft’ requiring careful reflection and time to master (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). By keeping a comprehensive field diary during the fieldwork period, I hoped to capture everyday details of the process that I otherwise might have quickly forgotten, including meetings with participants and community members that influenced my views and introduced me to new ways of viewing everyday occurrences. This helped me to provide a better description of the

context provided earlier under the Research Site and Research Participants, and was a way of continuously reflecting on the decisions I made during the fieldwork. By contacting local organisations and speaking to other community members, I also gained valuable advice and insight into both communities I would be working in and what would be seen as acceptable ways to contact parents and community members. This was complemented with a continuous dialogue with my supervisor and other researchers and colleagues in the field.

3.6.3. Trustworthiness and Authenticity

While the assumptions and understanding of knowledge has been laid out at the beginning of this chapter, it is now left to outline how the knowledge produced during the research project can somehow be evaluated in order to gauge its quality. The idea of ‘evaluating’ research has many connections to the rigorous testing of quantitative data results and findings, and there is much debate on how exactly to evaluate qualitative research. However, in line with the ontological and epistemological assumptions of this project I have chosen to use Lincoln and Guba’s (1985 as cited in Bryman, 2008, p. 377) criteria of trustworthiness and authenticity. As opposed to trying to apply the same standards of quantitative evaluation to qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985 as cited in Bryman, 2008, p. 377) have set out general guidelines for qualitative evaluation that are more in line with the ontological and epistemological foundations upon which qualitative research is built.

In terms of trustworthiness, Lincoln and Guba (1985 as cited in Bryman, 2008, p. 377) lay out four general areas that should be examined, namely credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Firstly, credibility acknowledges that reality is seen as constructed by the social actors who live it, and therefore looks to respondent validation and triangulation as two methods for cross-checking and going towards ensuring that what the researcher understood during the interviews, is what the participant meant (Bryman, 2008). As explained previously under the research methods, notes from all interviews were made and presented to all participants, and in many cases this was done during a follow-up interview. In this way, the participants or ‘respondents’ were given an opportunity to check what had resulted from our interview together and as Kvale and Brinkmann(2009) note, they were given a chance to ‘object’ and clarify the notes. Although only one research method was used during the project, I was aware of using triangulation as a method of comparing the information from the different interviews (Bryman, 2008), helping me to clarify comments and statements that can only be understood in the context of that community. This was a continuous process

throughout the fieldwork and writing process, as the number of interviews increased and more and more connections could be made between interviews and across communities.

Secondly, providing a ‘thick description’ of the research context and keeping detailed notes of the preparation and interview process contribute to building up a holistic picture of the research and its relevance (Bryman, 2008). As opposed to quantitative research, the knowledge created could never be separated from the influence of both myself as the researcher and the participants who took part. However, by understanding the context of the communities and situations in which they live, it is hoped that this can contribute to a better understanding of parental involvement and home-school interaction in this context, and highlight potential cases where it could be related to other similar contexts. This detailed documentation and description of the research process, in addition to explanation of data analysis contributes to evaluating the third criteria laid out, namely the dependability of the research (Bryman, 2008). Emphasis on transparency and consultation with my peers and supervisor throughout this project help to ensure that the knowledge created can be trusted and depended upon.

Finally, Lincoln and Guba (as cited in Bryman, 2008) set out ‘confirmability’ as the last of the criteria used in order to establish ‘trustworthiness’ of the research. This criterion is focused on the researcher’s role and influence on the knowledge created and in terms of this project has been expanded on under the previous section outlining the ‘role of the researcher.’ As opposed to attempting to be a neutral or objective researcher during this process, I have attempted to be very aware of my own assumptions and identity and what this contributes during my interaction and time spent in the field.

During the process of this research process, I feel that ensuring the authenticity of the knowledge produced has been a major focus and also been felt as an important responsibility, if not a burden. Lincoln and Guba (1985 as cited in Bryman, 2008, p. 379) describe authenticity in many ways but I have focused on two aspects that they highlight, that of ‘fairness’ and ‘ontological authenticity.’ Fairness focuses on evaluating how ‘fairly the research ‘represents different viewpoints among members of the social setting’ (Bryman, 2008, p. 379), while ontological authenticity looks to how ‘the research helps members to arrive at a better understanding of their social milieu’ (Bryman, 2008, p. 379). Establishing the fairness of this research must I feel be left up to the reader as they go through not only this

chapter but throughout this thesis. Continual reflection and on both my own actions and those of the participants has been my aim in order to ensure that that which I have been privileged to hear and engage in is represented through these pages.

The aim of this chapter has been to give an overview and explanation of the research methodology used during this thesis, combined with personal insights and reflections of the time spent in South Africa. Placing the research process within a broader epistemological framework, it is hoped that this chapter has served to locate the theoretical and analytical discussion that will follow in the next chapters, as well as give a closer insight to the reader of the fieldwork process and community context in which the research took place.

4. Theoretical and Conceptual Tools

The following chapter will outline the theoretical and conceptual tools used to interpret the experiences and information shared by participants during the fieldwork in South Africa. In line with the aim of this thesis, to better understand parents' perception of education and their interaction with the school, it was important to focus on theoretical concepts that enabled interpretation to take place from a global, national and local level perspective. As opposed to using one overarching theoretical framework, it was therefore decided to focus on 'medium level' tools of analysis which would more easily be able to be applied to the research findings. This choice is illustrated by the selection of concepts outlined below, and their organisation in terms of 'The Global education discourse,' 'Agenda of Education,' and 'Home-School interaction.'

The chapter will begin by explaining the Global Architecture of Education (Jones, 2006), giving a broad framework for understanding the global policies and education trends that are seen to be influencing national education policy and local parents' perceptions in South Africa today. This section will also outline the discussion around 'Education Quality' as an example of current education trends, and introduce the idea of a 'global hierarchy of knowledge' (Jones, 2006, 2007). Through this section it is hoped that the foundation will be laid in terms of providing tools to understand the underlying agenda of education, and the knowledge system, skills and values that are associated with it.

Moving from a global level of analysis to a national level, the next section will be built around Serpell's (1993) interpretation of the significance of schooling, in terms of the economic, cultural and pedagogic agendas of schooling. This model for interpretation will be used to understand both the South African education agenda on a national level, as well as the intentions or agenda of parents in Community A and B. Finally, under 'Home-School Interaction,' the concept of cultural integration and the school as a site of socialisation will be explained (Darnell & Hoëm, 1996), laying the foundation for the discussion of home – school interaction and parental involvement on the local level. Here, the concept of cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) will also be introduced, in order to understand the connection between the influence of the education agenda and parents' perception thereof, and their consequent interaction and behaviour towards formal education institutions. The chapter

concludes by emphasising the links between these global, national and local level tools for analysis, laying the foundation for their later use in the analysis chapters.

4.1. Global Education Discourse

While a national education system is by definition designed by national authorities and implemented in line with national goals and objectives, an increasingly connected world has seen a rise in the influence of global education networks and organisations such as UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP and the World Bank (Jones, 2006; King, 2007). This network has been termed by Jones (2006), the ‘global architecture of education,’ highlighting their promotion of a specific understanding of education as universal, included in which is an inherent understanding of the role of education in connection to economic development. Defined by Jones (2006), the global architecture of education is understood as:

...a system of global power relations that exerts a heavy, indeed determining, influence on how education is constructed around the world. For poor countries, the global architecture of education shapes the relationship between education, development and poverty strategies. It determines how education takes its place as a dimension of economic, political and social policy at country level (Jones, 2006, p. 43).

As well as focusing on economic development, Jones (2006) refers to the global architecture of education as an inter-linking structure influencing how education is conceived as a part of political and social policy, and promoting a particular set of values. It is argued that this increase in influence on a global level has resulted in a tendency towards standardisation of education policy on the national level, around an assumed universal conception of the aims and values attached to education. Despite the diversity of national contexts, education policy within this global framework is focusing less and less on the cultural context in which education is taking place, and more and more on the importance of compliance with this global conception of education (Jones, 2006, 2007; King, 2007).

Before examining the specific influence of this global architecture of education on national education policies, it is important to emphasise the assumptions that are inherent to this conception of education, of which two are particularly relevant to this study. Firstly, as emphasised by Jones (2006), education is strongly linked to development, with increased education investment linked closely to an increase in economic development (Fägerlind & Saha, 1989). Through education, modern values and skills are taught, which will serve to develop the human capital in a country, and contribute towards greater economic efficiency

and development (Fägerlind & Saha, 1989; Jones, 2007). Tucker (1999) however cautions that it is important to understand this particular understanding of education and development in the context in which it was formed, and not necessarily as a universalised truth. He argues that the current conception of education and development was conceived in a 'Western' context and cannot uncritically be applied in all countries. Secondly, inherent in this conception of education is the assumption of the ability of education to promote 'universal' values such as democracy, equality and human rights. These in turn are understood to create a peaceful and ordered society, providing the right conditions for innovative and effective development (Jones, 2007, p. 325). While this assumption is not necessarily false, I argue that it is indeed over simplified and needs to be examined and contextualised in order to meet the needs and values of the society where it is implemented.

The influence of these assumptions behind global education and subsequently global trends on national education can be demonstrated through a statement made by the South African Department of Education, where they describe the objectives of the revised national curriculum (C2005). The following extract is taken from the introduction to the curriculum document outlining the goals that will be achieved through the new education curriculum:

A prosperous, truly united, democratic and internationally competitive country with literate, creative and critical citizens leading productive, self-fulfilling lives in a country free of violence, discrimination and prejudice (Department of Education, 2000, p. 4).

From this statement, it is possible to identify the assumption of education leading to development, with the emphasis on 'productive' citizens and a 'prosperous...competitive country.' In addition to this, the connection between education and a peaceful and ordered society is assumed through the aim to equip 'literate, creative and critical citizens' who strive towards creating 'a country free of violence, discrimination and prejudice.'

As a more concrete example of the application of the global architecture of education as a tool for analysis, the following section will examine the current focus on 'quality education,' and the assumptions and values which are inherently included in this conception.

4.1.1. Education Quality, Objectives and Assumptions

A shift in the global education agenda has also moved the 'quality of education' into focus (UNESCO, 2005a), which in turn is influencing the way national education policies are implemented and evaluated around the world. Access to primary education has been a priority on the global education agenda ever since the Universal Declaration for Human

Rights was formed in 1948. Here the right to education was established and compulsory and free elementary education stipulated, aiming to ensure the availability of primary education for all children (see section 26 in United Nations, n.d.). It is only in recent years however, that the quality of the education being provided has received serious attention (UNESCO, 2005b). A general focus on access to universal primary education took centre stage up until the Dakar Framework for Action in 2000, where a *quality education* was deemed the right of every child (UNESCO, 2005b). It was here that the discussion around quality education was written into the global education agenda, with one of the six Education For All (EFA) goals defined in Dakar in 2000 aiming to improve all aspects of the quality of education (UNESCO, 2000a, 2000b).

Each of the EFA goals defined on the global education agenda is followed by a strategy for implementation and framework for evaluation (UNESCO, 2000b), so too was the case for providing quality education. In order to evaluate progress towards this goal, some kind of agreement had to be reached on what was considered a ‘quality education’ and what factors would adequately contribute towards reaching it. UNESCO’s report ‘The Quality Imperative’ (2005b), refers to the diversity of opinion when it comes to defining and evaluating quality education, cautioning that the ‘quality’ of education is inherently linked to the perceived aims of education. These aims for education are also in turn situated in a certain context which is influenced by the values and beliefs of that society:

It should be remembered that agreement about the objectives and aims of education will frame any discussion of quality and that such agreement embodies moral, political and epistemological issues that are frequently invisible or ignored (UNESCO, 2005b, p. 37).

The report explicitly acknowledges that different moral, political and epistemological standpoints will affect the discussion of quality education, at the same time acknowledging that these issues are not often adequately recognised, or even purposefully ignored. On the one side it is acknowledged that education policy and its aims and objectives vary around the world according to the social, political and epistemological context. On the other hand however, it is seen how an increasing influence of global education networks have resulted in a standardisation of education objectives based on a sometimes different set of social, political and epistemological assumptions. The tension between these different aims and objectives and their relative influence is one of the key areas of interest for this research and will be seen to reappear in many different ways.

While referring to the diversity of situations and understandings of quality education, a universal framework was nonetheless designed, and highlighted five dimensions of education that would help focus any evaluation or discussion on quality education provision. These dimensions were based on the assumption of two broad universal objectives for education, namely, ‘cognitive development and the accumulation of particular values, attitudes and skills’ (UNESCO, 2005b, p. 35). How is cognitive development measured and which particular values and skills have been deemed universal and built into this global framework? As highlighted above, these ‘universal’ objectives cannot escape the fact that they too are based upon certain inherent epistemological, moral and political beliefs. That this is the case, however, is not necessarily the problem, rather that this is not always acknowledged and accordingly applied in education evaluation, is. It is argued that this inherent question has been conveniently ‘ignored’ or ‘invisible’ in subsequent policy documents and national evaluations. More specifically, the global education agenda and evaluation of its respective quality, favours education based on western values and skills, with the aim of achieving a particular mode of economic development foreign to many societies where it is applied (Bredlid, 2009; Brock-Utne, 2000; Dimmock & Walker, 2000; Tucker, 1999). It is important to highlight this situation, as this method for understanding education quality and global education trends will have consequences for both national education policy design and its effective implementation in different contexts.

While the Quality Framework tends towards a ‘top-down’ perspective on education quality, UNESCO (2005b) also specifies the importance of evaluating education and the role of schooling in terms of the aims and objectives of the individuals taking part on a daily basis. Society, communities and ultimately parents will be more willing to participate and send their children to school if they see that they will be receiving an education which is relevant and useful for their child, community and society’s development i.e. if they see that their children will be receiving a ‘quality’ education (UNESCO, 2005b). This is outlined in the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005 where the ability of schooling to serve its children and society is directly linked to its quality:

The instrumental roles of schooling – helping individuals achieve their own economic and social and cultural objectives and helping society to be better protected, better served by its leaders and more equitable in important ways – will be strengthened if education is of higher quality (UNESCO, 2005b, p. 28).

Through this statement it is possible to see that education or schooling has specific economic, social and cultural roles, linked to the objectives of the individuals taking part in schooling.

Therefore, while the objectives and assumptions of the global agenda and national education system are important to consider, equally important are the objectives and assumptions that the people on the ground have in determining the outcome and quality of education.

From this point of departure in the global education context, and with a focus on what it means to define a education quality, the research for this project focuses on the interaction of the school and home environment in two socio-economically distinct communities in South Africa. It is through this interaction between the home and the school that the official objectives of the education system meet with the understanding and objectives of the parents and learners who take part in the school. This in turn will be argued to have consequences for the decision and level of parental involvement. South Africa is just one example of a country that has been influenced by the global education community in the design of their national education policy.

The following section will now focus on theoretical concepts that will be used to interpret the national objectives and agendas behind education policy. These same concepts will in turn be shown to be applicable on the local level analysis, with regard to the agenda and prioritisation of parents towards their children's schooling.

4.2. Agendas of Education

In his book 'The Significance of Schooling,' Serpell (1993) defines the system level goals and 'agendas' that form the basis of a national education system, examining the intentional agenda behind the school⁸, and in what context it is formed and influenced. Serpell (1993) identifies 3 'agendas' for schooling that motivate the process and formulation of education policies, and consequently affect the outcome of school-family relations on the community level.

According to Serpell (1993), there are economic, cultural and pedagogic agendas of schooling, seeking to promote 'economic progress, transmission of culture from one generation to the next, and intellectual and moral development' respectively (Serpell, 1993, p. 1). The emphasis and priority given to the economic, pedagogic and cultural agendas, should

⁸ Serpell (1993) focuses his analysis of education objectives through the practical level of community – school interaction. In this way, the agenda of the school represents the agenda of the education system and is often used in its place. In this way he is also able to bring the analysis down to the local level looking at how the national education agenda implemented through the school, meets the local education agendas of the community in which the school is located.

ideally be coordinated and complementary, based on the needs of the country and the context of the community in which the school is located (Serpell, 1993).

Examining the relative importance given to each agenda of schooling, Serpell (1993) explains the tendency for the economic agenda to be given priority over the cultural agenda. In this case, the economic and cultural agendas of schooling do not necessarily reinforce each other, and in most circumstances this is to the detriment of the cultural agenda, and ultimately the economic agenda as well. Looking back to the previous explanation of the global architecture of education, it is possible to link this economic tendency to the relative global focus that is given to promoting economic development through education (Jones, 2006, 2007). This in turn is seen to affect the focus given to the economic agenda when national education policies are designed. Brock Utne (2000) gives the example of African leaders, who in the run up to the EFA conference in Jomtien, advocated for the inclusion of a culturally contextualised education strategy when defining the World Declaration on Education For All (WDEFA). The African leaders were concerned that education should be ‘culture orientated and incorporate African norms and values, African traditional practices, and help share the historical identity of Africans’ (2000, p. 9). Using Serpell’s (1993) framework we can identify their desire to focus on or at least explicitly make clear the cultural agenda of schooling, ensuring that this too would be built into the global education agenda.

While the economic agenda of education is seen to receive relative priority on both a global and national level, this economic agenda is not necessarily ‘culturally neutral’ but, as pointed out by Tucker (1999), is argued to have been created within a very specific cultural, social and epistemological context. As was mentioned briefly above, the development strategy linked to education is argued to have been formed within a Western context, and is therefore based on an implicit cultural agenda that promotes modern values such as rationality, critical thinking, individualism and an orientation to change (Breidlid, 2003, 2009). With this inherent understanding of development in terms of modernisation, the global education agenda is seen to simultaneously promote a Western understanding of economic development together with the culture and modernist values that it was grounded upon.

Tied together with the implicit modern values that are promoted through this conception of economic development, is the specific epistemology or ‘global hierarchy of knowledge’ that it supports (Jones, 2007, p. 331). The global education agenda is seen to be built upon a system which is grounded on knowledge that is rationally determined, and as opposed to indigenous

knowledge systems, is ‘disconnected from environmental/ecological relationships, cultural practices and spiritually centred wisdoms’ (Goduka, 2000, p. 63). While admittedly a wide generalisation, in relation to education in an African context, the dominant economic development path connecting a western scientific knowledge system to modernisation and economic growth should be re-evaluated with the recognition of the different epistemological foundation found in the African context (Hoppers, 2002; Smith, 1999).

While Serpell (1993) focuses on the agendas behind the design of education on a national level, he is also concerned with the objectives and agenda of the community taking part in the education at school level. In line with UNESCO’s understanding of quality education (UNESCO, 2005b), the interaction of the national and local agendas is understood as the point at which the success or quality of the education is really determined. Continuity between the national agendas of schooling and the community’s agendas for schooling is necessary in order for the school to be relevant for those who take part in it, and in order for the national objectives to be achieved (Darnell & Hoëm, 1996; Serpell, 1993).

Just as the economic and cultural agenda of the school do not always necessarily reinforce each other, so too can be the case with the economic and cultural agenda of the community. One example of a discontinuity of agendas explained by Serpell (1993), is given when there is a tendency of communities with less economic power to adapt and seek to learn the ways of the more economically powerful groups as a result of their higher level of social prestige. If the culture of the economically successful community is different to that of the less economically successful community, economic success can be mistakenly connected to the culture. This may result in an attempt to learn the ways of the more prestigious group often adopting the cultural values and tendencies associated with that group as well (Serpell, 1993, p. 2). Bringing this example into a South African context, one of the legacies of apartheid due to the policy on separate development was that the white minority population excelled economically as opposed to the majority of the black South African population. The white minority was, and in many ways is still associated with economic prosperity, and one of the objectives of post-apartheid education policy was to use education as a way to give all South Africans the skills and education necessary for economic development and prosperity (Harber & Mncube, 2011). School is therefore seen in this scenario as a place where valuable economic skills can be learnt in order to increase the social prestige of the less powerful groups, despite the simultaneous move away from the home culture and economic systems of the community. While parents might see this process as a means of their child excelling and

making a better life for themselves, it may also inherently mean a move away from their community if the culture associated with the economic success is different to that of the community (Serpell, 1993). In relation to this study, the understanding of continuity or cooperation between local and national agendas for schooling will be examined through the understanding and relation of parents and teachers to each other in Community A and B. This will be compared to the agenda of the South African education system, focusing on its organisation and curriculum (C2005).

Moving from a global and national level of analysis of the objectives of schooling, the next section will introduce the concept of cultural integration, followed by cultural capital under the heading 'Home-School Interaction.' These concepts will be used to understand the interaction and relationship between parents and teachers on the local community level, by highlighting the similarities or differences between the home and the school culture.

4.3. Home-School Interaction

4.3.1. Cultural integration in Home-School interaction

Up until this point, the agenda of education and schooling has been mainly discussed on a global and national level. This was necessary in order to give a framework and broader context for future analysis, but also to highlight the different levels and influences guiding South African education policy design for this study. The following section will now introduce the term 'cultural integration' as used and defined by Darnell and Hoëm (1996), as well as the conception of the school arena being a site of socialisation.

Darnell and Hoëm (1996) refer to 'systems' and 'subsystems' when identifying the relationship between the school and community. The education system is understood as a subsystem of the total society, in the same way that the school is a subsystem of the total education system (Darnell & Hoëm, 1996). Through this understanding, the interaction and relationship between education, schooling and the community is understood as interdependent, each intricately connected and 'located' in related spheres. This interpretation can also be related to Epstein's (2001b) model of home-school relations which is explained in terms of the 'overlapping spheres of influence.' Here, the greater the area in which the school, community and family 'overlap,' the greater is the integration and opportunity for partnership between the different spheres (see previous discussion on partnership in Context chapter). None can be examined in isolation and must always be understood in relation to each other

and as a part of a larger 'system' (Darnell & Hoëm, 1996). From this understanding of systems and subsystems, the success of the children at school from the surrounding community, is in direct relation to the student's trust and identification with the school. The child moves between the different home, community and school spheres on a daily basis, and the degree to which he/she experiences continuity, in terms of *cultural integration* is the degree to which he/she will excel (Darnell & Hoëm, 1996).

According to Darnell and Hoëm (1996), the school is also a 'site of socialization,' its influence dependent on the interaction of the home and school culture of the child, or degree of cultural integration. In cases where the school is not culturally integrated with the community, the students will experience a dislocation between their school and home, with a similar dislocation resulting between the students' parents and the school. This dislocation is then said to lead to a favouring of the culture represented by the school, over that of the student's home. This is referred to as 'de-socialisation' and 're-socialisation' below, as opposed to the normal 'socialisation' process or cultural reinforcement which would take place in an integrated school:

...if the cultural background of the students and the culture of the school lack symmetry, there will be conflict. The cultural influence of the school will tend to weaken the self-concept and identity of the students, render their patrimonial background irrelevant and de-socialisation and re-socialisation will occur. The socialisation process taking place in a well-balanced school will connect the students to essential elements and sectors of the society in which the school is found (Darnell & Hoëm, 1996, p. 271)

In the quote above, Darnell and Hoëm (1996) highlight the importance of cultural integration or cultural 'symmetry,' referring to the potential of dislocation if this is not the case. They also point out the effect of this dislocation on the parents, and the consequence of the students becoming dislocated from their home environment.

In terms of the 'cultural agenda' of schooling and communities mentioned in the previous section, cultural integration similarly incorporates the aims and objectives of both the school and the community, when looking at the degree of integration or the degree of continuity between the school and community. An ideal situation would be one in which there is cultural homogeneity between the school and the community, however this is an unlikely situation and generally is more often the case that there is some degree of variation (Darnell & Hoëm, 1996). While Serpell (1993) identified three agendas (economic, cultural and pedagogic) when examining the aims and objectives of schooling, Darnell and Hoëm's (1996) definition

of cultural integration incorporates both economic, cultural and pedagogic elements in its conception. When using the term cultural integration, the culture of the school and community is understood in terms of four dimensions or components, namely, 'technology, economic systems, social order and aestheticism (including spirituality)' (Darnell & Hoëm, 1996, p. 267). While Serpell's framework helped to identify the different agendas on the different levels (national and local), Darnell and Hoëm's concept of cultural integration will help to take the analysis further by understanding the agenda of the community and school in terms of their cultural characteristics and integration with the school.

It is important to highlight three main points from Darnell and Hoëm's (1996) conception of cultural integration and home-school interaction so far. Firstly, education and schooling do not take place in isolation from the community in which they are located. There is a relationship between the school and community and the success of the school actually depends on its integration with the community. This assertion places great importance on the contextualisation of schooling and the importance of considering the environment and community in which the school is located when designing the overall system. Secondly, the education system and therefore school is implemented with specific aims and goals in mind. Schools are sites where socialisation of students takes place according to the agenda of the education system. The values and standards of the society in which they form a part are taught, and must therefore also be relevant to the local community in which they live (Darnell & Hoëm, 1996). Finally, integration between the school and community is understood in terms of culture. Different levels of integration will depend on the degree of difference between the culture of the school and the community, affecting the relationship between the school, students, and parents (Darnell & Hoëm, 1996).

Bringing the discussion from the conceptual down to the practical level, Darnell and Hoëm (1996) explain the school as a site at which interaction between individuals and groups from the school, family and community takes place. According to the perceptions and different understanding of the situation of the people involved, different actions will be taken, affecting all involved to a greater or lesser extent:

In schools there will always be interaction between individuals and between groups. These forms of interactions can be planned, or take place at random, and will interfere with or complement the individuals or groups involved. Factors that determine the outcome of these on-going contacts such as prestige, authority, and ability are expressed in different forms of behaviours. During such interaction, the actors behave in accordance with their perception of the situation (Darnell & Hoëm, 1996, p. 276).

From the exert above, we can see how the people's perceptions affect their actions and interaction, at the same time as their values or beliefs with regards to authority, prestige and ability affect their perception of situations and therefore their interaction (Darnell & Hoëm, 1996). With social values forming a part of the definition given for culture, Darnell and Hoëm propose that it is at the point of intersection of values and interests during interaction, that integration between the community and the school is best understood. Ideally, both values and interests will be shared between the school and community facilitating community – school interaction, however this is not always necessarily the case (Darnell & Hoëm, 1996).

The concepts used by Darnel and Hoëm (1996) are based on their work with schooling in minority indigenous communities and villages, where it is typical that the minority culture of the community is not reflected or integrated within the majority culture of the school and education system. The culture of the school in South Africa has been previously argued as representing and promoting Western values and culture through the design of the new curriculum and structure of the school system. The school culture is based on a language, values and epistemology that is inherently foreign to many South African communities, often inhibiting meaningful interaction between the community and school (Breidlid, 2003; Soudien & Baxen, 1997) (see discussion in Context chapter). In this case, the culture of the school does not necessarily represent the majority of the population, so the use of 'dominant' is more useful when describing the culture of the school. With the global economic education agenda taking priority, the dominant culture of the global education agenda has been prioritised over the majority culture of South Africans. This in turn affects cultural integration between the school and the community and ultimately the interaction of parents with teachers at the school.

While the concept of cultural integration enabled the analysis of community-school interaction according to a comparison of the cultural make up and values of each group, the following section will introduce Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1989; see also Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). The concept of cultural capital will bring a further level of interpretation when analysing the interaction and involvement of parents with the school, conceptualising the inherent structure of society in relation to education, and the effect this has on parents' perceptions and subsequent behaviour.

4.3.2. Cultural Capital and Home – School Interaction

The following section aims to introduce Bourdieu's (Bourdieu, 1997; see also Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) concept of cultural capital, and the relationship that exists between the structure of the School and Home spheres. Through this concept, the balance of power and recognition given by the formal education system to certain cultural resources will provide a deeper understanding of cultural integration and who sets the standard for home-school interaction between parents and school representatives. This will be an important conceptual tool when applied to the experiences and communication explained by parents during the research, helping to understand the way they perceived their interaction with their children's school and the efficacy of this interaction.

In the context of home-school interaction, cultural capital can be understood as the cultural experiences and resources of the home, which facilitate children's adjustment to the school environment (Blackledge, 2001). All families possess resources in the form of knowledge, language, values and educational experience, while schools generally operate according to a language policy, are built upon certain norms and values, and are based on a certain epistemological foundation. The resources of the family however, are only seen to be classified as cultural capital when the resources they possess are recognised or acknowledged by the school and its inherent standards (Lauder, Brown, Dillabough, & Halsey, 2006). Lareau and Horvat (1999) emphasise this point with regards to parents' possession of cultural capital by explaining that:

parents' cultural and social resources become forms of capital when they facilitate parents' compliance with dominant standards in school interactions (Lareau & Horvat, 1999, p. 46).

In other words, possessing similar cultural resources to those on which the school system is built, helps parents to understand how the school functions and promotes smoother and mutually reinforcing interaction. In contrast to this, when the parents do not possess similar cultural resources to those operating and recognised by the school, they are seen as operating at a disadvantage, unable to communicate or interact efficiently to the benefit of their child. An example of this situation was given by Singh et al (2004) during their research into parental involvement in historically disadvantaged secondary schools in South Africa. It was found that the high unemployment rate and low literacy levels of some of the parents in the community affected their ability to communicate and become involved in the school and 'consequently reduc[ed] their role in negotiating from a point of strength' (Singh et al., 2004,

p. 301). In this situation we can see how because the parents lacked certain cultural resources acknowledged by the school i.e. employment and formal education, their knowledge and skills were not converted into cultural capital, resulting in their feeling that any communication with the school would be from a position of weakness.

An important point to make here is that the power of defining what cultural resources are valuable is in the hands of the school institution. This idea is closely linked to the term 'symbolic capital' which is used to identify cultural capital that is recognised by a particular society or institution (in this case the school), as having value (Bourdieu, 1989). In the case of home-school relations, cultural capital that is in line with the dominant culture of the school is recognised as having value in aiding interaction and communication with the school and is therefore seen as having symbolic value. Consequently if the school defines standards for cultural capital that are different to that possessed by the parents in the community, they are inherently disadvantaging or excluding these parents through their definition of symbolic capital. In terms of home-school interaction, a common criticism of schools has been the way in which they define the standards and forms for parental involvement. This can relate to the language that communication to parents is given in, times that school meetings are scheduled, or even the form in which parent-meetings are conducted and School Governing Bodies (SGBs) are structured (Lemmer & van Wyk, 2004b; Mncube, 2010).

In recognition of the way that the formal school system has defined certain resources from the Home as useful at school, researchers such as Moll et al (1992) and Rios-Aguilar et al (2011), have developed another concept called 'funds of knowledge' (FoK). This conception seeks to acknowledge and incorporate the resources found in the homes of students who do not necessarily measure up to the dominant standard of cultural capital defined by the school. Moll et al (1992) explain that:

Our analysis of funds of knowledge represents a positive (and, we argue, realistic) view of households as containing ample cultural and cognitive resources with great, potential utility for classroom instruction (Moll et al., 1992, p. 134).

By incorporating the FoK found in homes into the classroom activities and school program, the school will be encouraged to recognise the parents and communities in which the school is placed as resources, not only focusing on perhaps their relatively low socio-economic level by national standards. By doing this, schools are then also forced to focus on the language, values and strategic knowledge employed in the community and homes of their students,

facilitating a greater degree of cultural integration and trust between the home and school spheres.

Finally, another concept closely related to that of cultural capital and home-school interaction, is *habitus*. Referring to the way people behave as well as the way people perceive behaviour, Bourdieu describes habitus as ‘both a system of schemes of production of practices and a system of perception and appreciation of practices’ (1989, p. 19). In this way, habitus is learnt as a result of the environment in which a person lives, and represents the everyday ‘common sense’ knowledge that a person uses to negotiate through the daily tasks of life (Berger & Luckmann, 1971). The culture of the community in which a person lives will affect the type of assumed and everyday knowledge that a person lives by, and in the same way creates a framework for guiding behaviour and the way situations are understood (Blackledge, 2001). In relation to cultural capital and home-school interaction, the habitus of a parent will affect the way they interact with the school and teachers, and their experience and framework for behaviour will either aid them in their interaction or will act as a barrier to good communication and understanding (Blackledge, 2001).

By using Bourdieu’s cultural capital theory, it is hoped that a deeper understanding and recognition of the structuring power of education in South African society can be gained. The concepts explained above will be applied to the experiences and interactions explained by the parent and school representatives, as well as the design of the curriculum (C2005) and its inherent values and agenda.

4.4. Summary

This chapter has outlined a variety of theoretical tools and concepts that will be used to understand the information shared by parents during research, and help create a deeper understanding of parents’ perception and involvement with schools in Community A and B.

The discussion above has attempted to present tools that will enable a global, national and local level of analysis in order to emphasise the importance of context, and a holistic perspective of education. By discussing the global architecture of education, it is hoped that the national education policy in South Africa will be understood with added depth, stressing the importance of questioning policy aims and assumptions and their subsequent influence on the national and local community level. Through Serpell’s three agendas of education, the

aims and objectives behind national education policy can be critically examined in order to better relate the interaction of schools with their communities.

With the global and national context in mind, the concept of cultural integration was introduced in order to facilitate understanding of the relationship between communities and schools and more specifically families and schools. Together with cultural integration, the use of cultural capital theory will be used to analyse different situations described in parent and teacher interviews, bringing the focus to understanding and interpreting the views and perceptions that parents have and how this affects their interaction with the school.

5. Findings and Analysis: Parents' Perception of Education

In an attempt to go beyond a description of parental involvement in Community A and B, the following two chapters seek to understand the underlying beliefs, goals and values that parents have of their local school. These perceptions can then be considered in relation to the national education discourse and the implicit values that have shaped society's understanding and behaviour towards schools around South Africa. Moving from the purely theoretical discussion in chapter four, the chapters will together present and discuss the views and perceptions of the parents, school representatives and community workers interviewed during the research fieldwork. Grouped and discussed in terms of Community A and Community B, the two chapters will simultaneously be a presentation of the research findings, as well as an interpretation thereof, using the theoretical concepts, related research, and contextual background introduced in previous chapters.

This chapter will be separated into two main sections beginning with a description of the current parental involvement situation in Community A and B. The second section will then focus on the perceptions that parents had of education, highlighting three main themes that emerged, namely the roles and responsibilities associated with the Home and School, the aim or purpose for education, and finally the symbolic value or standard that education represented. The following chapter will then discuss the values associated with the Home and School. Discussed in terms of the cultural agenda of schooling this section will use both a national and local level of analysis to examine the way explicit and implicit values of the home and school affect the way parents perceive and in turn interact with their children's local school. Throughout the analysis it is clearly marked which community is in focus or when a comparison is being made. Which community is discussed first or second in each section however varies as was seen most natural for the flow of discussion in that section. Moving between global, national and local levels of analysis, the following chapter will attempt to portray the connections and multiple influences which play a part in the ultimate experience and perception of education, by parents with the school.

5.1. Parental Involvement in Community A and B

As explained in the Context chapter, parental involvement in South Africa is largely spoken about in terms of ‘democratic participation’ and ‘partnership’ between parents and schools, with an emphasis on community ownership of the school and policy decisions (Lewis & Naidoo, 2004). According to this conception of parental involvement, a dynamic and two-way communication should exist between parents and schools, seemingly despite the location and context of the community. What this relationship actually looks like in reality, and how it functions in the different community contexts is less universal. How parents decide to get involved in the school and what reasoning they use is similarly unclear. In order to begin the discussion of the research findings, this chapter will start by giving an overview of the parental involvement in Community A and B. This will include a description of general patterns found in the schools as well as a reference to the effect of the socio-economic levels on involvement. It is hoped that, combined with the general context laid out in the Background chapter, and local context described in the Methodology chapter, that the reader will have an adequate foundation from which to understand the analysis of parents’ perceptions and home-school values that will follow.

According to information shared during interviews with school representatives, the schools in both Community A and B had a similar basic structure and formal definition for parental involvement based on the guidelines set out in the South African Schools Act (Department of Education, 1996). Despite operating under the same national and provincial policy guidelines however, the level and type of involvement of parents in Community A and B varied dramatically. Parental involvement in Community A was generally considered to be low in comparison to Community B and the standard for involvement set out above in terms of SGB participation, parent meetings and homework and reading support at home.

While the basic parental involvement structure tended to be the same in both communities, schools in Community B that were interviewed had additional plans and policies in place that focused on communicating and involving parents. These policies included ‘liaison moms’ (parent representatives for each school class), school fundraising events, social school events, concerts, sports activities and an official parents fundraising committee:

You can get involved in anything and everything at XX Primary which is great... They also have what they call liaison moms in the class, and class head moms and then the grade heads, and so then everyone meets so there is that level of communication going

on there. And the parent teacher meetings - I haven't found them to be closed to any of that which is great (Bparent3).

And I find another thing that we also have a lot of parental involvement on is at sport – especially sport meetings itself, the support of the parents is a lot more than at high school. (Bschool3)

In comparison to this, schools in Community A did not appear to have any additional communication structure for parents outside of the official SGB and teacher-parent or school information meetings, although they expressed that they would have liked to hold workshops with parents if the resources allowed. Some of the interviewed parents from Community A did comment on the lack of after school sports activities for the children, but explained that due to a lack of resources, this was not possible. Parents explained that currently they were more involved in helping the school to find land to build a new and permanent school building as the school was currently operating out of temporary classrooms which were not suitable during the hot summer weather. Understandably this was taking first priority.

(Translator) She is saying really like they work in conjunction with the school and the principal especially. For example now they are fighting for the school to move from here. As already stated, this school is not a permanent space for this school. So they would love to move opposite to this land over the street, to have their own permanent space (Aparent1).

As a result of a far more limited school structure (physically and in terms of policies set up to involve parents), parents in Community A relied much more on the SGB as the main channel of communication and involvement with the school, and the importance of this was reflected in the interviews with parents. Parents were aware of the SGB and were used to receiving updates as to the latest SGB meeting and decisions taken concerning the school budget and student discipline issues:

Yes, the school governing body, we feel we are involved, because every time you must be there to the meetings, yes so they feel they are close to the school, they know everything what's going on at school (Aparent5).

The functioning of the SGB however, was very much in line with what Lewis and Naidoo (2004) expressed when they referred to the SGB more as a technocratic tool for administration of the school, as opposed to a forum where parents had real power to influence and impact the kind of learning and process of schooling in their community. While the SGB did function as a channel for information in Community A and forum for communication, it is questionable whether real 'participation' and power was available, and given to parents in terms of implementing real change in the way the school functioned. This relationship

between parents and the school will be more closely discussed under the section ‘Entitlement and Accountability.’

Parents in Community B, on the other hand, were aware of the SGB as a committee that made important decisions for the school, but did not express much specific knowledge about its functioning or even direct involvement in their meetings. As opposed to Community A, the SGB was not considered the main channel for information for parents, but was rather a governing body which was actually seen to be implementing change, albeit only directly involving a few elected parent representatives:

I think the governing body at XX Primary School, I think I know that they are there, and I know that I could bring things to them if I needed, and I know they do do great things for the school. But it kind of feels very ‘out there.’ I don’t know if that makes any sense but it feels a little bit removed from my daily life. Ja I don’t often think about going to them or what they are doing (Bparent3).

5.1.1. School structure and Socio-Economic Status (SES)

From the brief overview above, it would seem on one level that the reasons for the differing levels of involvement in the two communities simply relates to the number of opportunities for parental involvement that the school provides, confirming what Lemmer and van Wyk (2004a) assert in their research into parental involvement, that the implementation of parental involvement policy and its effectiveness relies mainly on the initiative and resources of the local school:

Departmental communications (Department of Education s.a.) stress civic responsibility and governance as contained in the Schools Act but the initiative to welcome, support and use parents in the school and the classroom or support learning at home remains entirely in the hands of the individual school (Lemmer & van Wyk, 2004a, p. 263).

Another reason that is also often given for differing levels of parental-involvement, is the socio-economic level of the parents and community in which the school is located (Lemmer & van Wyk, 2004a; Singh et al., 2004). Although schools taking part in both Community A and B were all government schools, according to the resources and socio-economic level of the community, funding was either received directly from the Department of Education (as in the case of Community A), or raised through school fees and school fundraising events (as in the case of Community B). With a greater reliance on parents for financial support for the running of the school, schools in Community B were in a way forced to adapt their structure to accommodate, include and encourage parental involvement and attendance of school social

and fundraising events. Through this structure and as a result of this attitude, parents were seen as a resource by the school, admittedly for their financial role, but also as a resource for organising additional fundraising events and running and supporting after school activities.

In Community A on the other hand, financial support and funding came almost exclusively from the government, and therefore the attitude of the school 'having all the answers' or being a centre for resources for the community was reinforced, and not often complemented by the school acknowledging the community as having answers and resources that they also could be taking advantage of. Schools in Community A often had integrated a feeding programme for children from disadvantaged families, offered parents help registering their children for birth certificates and identification documents, as well as provided help contacting social service departments connected to the school. With these contextual factors in mind, school representatives saw a multitude of social problems connected with the poverty level in the community and explained how these factors affected both the ability and interest of parents in being involved in the school:

Other parents don't attend the meetings, other parents are working and they use trains to come back from work. Others they are drinking, others they are poor you see. Others you can just see that they just get the influence from others. They are influenced so that they are not dedicated. They are just influenced. But the poor environment is a big problem to the community. Because most of them are not working because there are no jobs in these days. (Aschool2).

The explanation above from one of the school representatives, highlights the impact of the social context of the community on parents' ability and willingness to attend school meetings. Long working hours, lack of transport and high levels of unemployment are just some of the factors facing parents in Community A.

From the above description and extracts from the research, it is possible to see how the implementation of national guidelines and definition of parental involvement is carried out very differently in Community A and B. While the socio-economic level of Community A and B is a definite factor in explaining the differing levels of parental involvement, Mmotlane et al (2009) caution any analysis that relies on only one characteristic and encourage a more holistic perspective. In the course of the following sections, I hope to create a broader picture and understanding of the context of both these communities, and through this, a deeper understanding of the decisions that parents make on a daily basis concerning the involvement and communication with their children's school. Throughout the discussion, examples will be given to illustrate the home-school interaction and different situations that parents in both

communities faced when considering or actually getting involved in the day to day reality of their child's school.

5.2. Parents' Perception of Education

To understand the nature of interactions existing between homes and schools it would be important to examine these attitudes to the teaching and learning relationship, especially in terms of how home-school partnership is viewed, what people expect from it, what they believe are possible barriers to its implementation and people's awareness and appreciation of, and readiness to participate in, practices designed to ensure interactions between homes and schools for the benefit of children and communities (Bojuwoye, 2009, p. 464).

While participants from Community A and B generally have different working and living conditions, as well as educational backgrounds, common to all who were interviewed was a general belief in the importance of education in South African society today. This broad consensus and commitment to education in South African society echoes the interpretation made by wa Kivulu and Morrow in their article based on the South African Social Attitudes report (2006). They concluded that, despite a diverse citizenship and experience of daily reality, there exists a general commitment to education and belief in its value to society. While education is obviously valued and supported in South Africa, what 'education' is understood to be is important to address, before then trying to understand why it is considered to be important. With a greater understanding of what parents perceive to be 'education' and why it is important, it is hoped that we will also be able to understand more about why they choose to be involved or not in the actual education process.

The perceptions of parents will be discussed under three main headings starting with the understanding and differentiation of the roles and responsibilities of the Home and School. This will be followed by a move to understand the value or main agenda that the community and parents have attached to education, also in relation to the current global and national education discourse. Finally, the status of education in society will be discussed, exploring the position and structuring power that the school system exerts, how parents and school representatives in turn perceive these standards, and the consequences this has for subsequent interaction.

5.2.1. Education at Home and Education at School

Officially, ‘education’ has come to be automatically associated with the formal national schooling system, charged with the task of teaching children the skills that they will need to be able to effectively live and participate in society (Fägerlind & Saha, 1989). However, when questioned more closely, how parents view ‘education’ in terms of who is responsible to teach and what they are teaching, is I argue, a far more complex and nuanced picture. The time spent in both Community A and B provided a clear illustration of this, as the different perceptions and conceptions of the home and school pointed to a broader community understanding of the socio-political context and epistemological starting point.

While the research conducted during the fieldwork period was focused mainly on primary schooling in Community A and B, it is necessary to understand what research participants understood in terms of ‘education’ and ‘schooling’ generally, in order to comment on their specific interactions with their children’s primary school. This section will attempt to do this by focusing on how the research participants from Community A and B understood two areas, namely; How do parents perceive and separate the different responsibilities of the Home and School? And what skills and knowledge are the School and Home seen as teaching?

Different perceptions of the role of the parents and teachers will be connected and discussed in terms of the Home and School spheres. The description of these two social structures laid out in this section will be used as a foundation for later analysis, when the implicit values, educational content and culture of the Home and School will be discussed.

Community B

While speaking to research participants in Community B, it was clear that a shift has been taking place towards a conception of shared responsibility for education between parents (or the home) and the school (Epstein, 2001a; Heystek & Louw, 1999). The term ‘partnership’ was often used when school representatives spoke about the parents, giving the impression that it is no longer the teachers who have ultimate control and authority over the education of the children, but both the teachers and children’s parents. In line with research done by Epstein (2001a), the Home and the School ‘spheres’ in Community B, can be understood as overlapping, with both the parents and the teachers having a role in the education of the child. In the extract below, one parent points to this area of overlap by comparing the experience her parents had in terms of educating their children, with her experience now as a parent:

I think maybe when I went to school, my mom and dad helped with homework, but ja, maybe in that day they felt the school would educate the child, and I think more now it is school plus home (Bparent4).

As opposed to before where parents relied primarily on the school to complete the task of educating their children, parents are being given, and some say taking, a more active and assertive role in the education of their children. Bojuwoye (2009) in his research on home-school partnership in the South African province of Kwazulu Natal, had similar findings, understanding the increasing overlap between the home and school spheres, in terms of the parents' desires and belief in their ability to contribute to their children's education:

Many parents support this idea of 'overlapping spheres of influence' by acknowledging that they really need to know what is happening in school to contribute maximally to their children's development (Bojuwoye, 2009, p. 464).

This belief in their ability to aid the teacher in their child's educational development is also illustrated through the extract below, from a parent who explained her conscious decision to make herself known to the teacher, in order that she might be well informed about her child's progress and any areas in which she might help and support the teacher at home:

But I have always made a point of it from day 1 of being a face that they know. I want the teacher to know me, I want the teacher to know that I want to know what is going on... To me it's a very very important part of my child's education. I want to know what they are teaching them – not to go in there and tell them what to do – I am not one of those moms, because I am not a teacher. But I want them to know, that if something is lacking, if something is not right, I want to fix it. If he is struggling in a certain area of maths, don't tell me in the second term, when it happened in the first term. I want to know so I can fix it (Bparent1).

Here it is clear how the parent sees her relationship and interaction with her child's teacher as an important part of her child's education experience. The role of parent and teacher is understood as separate, but her ability to aid and support the teacher and her child in his learning is also stated very clearly.

While confident in their own role, parents in Community B were still aware and supported the value and role of the school in educating their children, pointing out the ability of the school to 'equip' their children for adult life in society. Many of the parents interviewed focused on the importance of the social development that took place at school and saw this as a crucial part of their child's education. As opposed to focusing on the academic content learnt at school, parents seemed to focus more on the practical social lessons that the school was able to teach their children, which by implication, they were not able to teach at home. The school

was understood as providing a social training ground for their children and representing a more accurate picture of the ‘real world’, teaching them lessons that they as parents were not able to adequately teach them at home:

I would rather equip my child and put him in a mainstream [government] school like that, than whip him out and home school him and protect him, because that is what the world is like and we have to equip them (Bparent1).

On more than one occasion, parents referred to home-schooling and the academic standard that was able to be achieved through this type of education, however pointing out that while academically strong, children in these situations did not have the benefit of the social development that other children gained through the school system:

You can’t compete with the academic programme for home-schooling, because you are one person, and you might have more than one kid but you focus all your energy on one subject, and you can probably cover 2 or 3 years in terms of syllabus, in a year of home schooling, but you don’t have the social development, the getting on with kids that you don’t like, the standing up against the bullies that you have got in your class, the working together on projects, the getting together, which I think equips you for the work environment. It’s working as a committee, as a team, you know – and you don’t get that (Bparent5).

This view was supported by a school representative from this community as he explained that ‘education’ went beyond academic skills to include a more holistic view of education as a part of a child’s general development:

I think if you look at our performances, parents recognize our school as a very well established and efficiently run school. We don’t just provide opportunities for kids to perform well academically speaking, but we also look at ways to develop the whole child (Bschool1).

While greater parental involvement has been promoted by national education authorities, and it is clear that parents perceive themselves as partners in their children’s education, parents in Community B seemed to also point to local contextual factors or personal experiences, when explaining their decisions to be more involved in the education of their children.

During one of the interviews, a parent pointed to an increase in criminality in the community and so an increase in concern of parents for the safety for their children. A desire to follow up their children and ensure their safe arrival and return to and from school, had naturally led to a greater presence of parents at school and gradually greater involvement in the school’s activities and school sphere:

I think we are a lot more protective of our kids now and more aware of what can go wrong. We are scared of leaving our kids alone too much maybe. I think that is why we are maybe there at every match, at every practice watching. We would never let our kids walk home anymore, well ja, I think I would feel uncomfortable with letting them walk home alone. I think because of that you just naturally while you are there you might as well get involved (Bparent3).

Another parent seemed to imply that a change in economic opportunities since the fall of the apartheid government, resulted now in greater competition for scarce jobs for their children. While during apartheid, the South African job market favoured people from the 'white' race category, this was no longer the case (Harley & Wedekind, 2004). The parents therefore saw the value of education as even higher and more important for differentiating their children in their later search for employment:

So for my husband and I there is definitely a big emphasis on getting a good education, because of the colour of our children's skin, and because we are living in a country where they are the minority – and you have got to be switched on and you have got to get a good job. So I think there is definitely a lot more pressure since when my husband and I matriculated, but then it is a balance, we don't want to freak out completely (Bparent1).

While conducted in a different socio-political context, research by Vincent and Martin (2002) into the partnership and interaction of middle class parents with the school, also pointed to increased concerns about employment as a reason for parents involvement and move into the school sphere:

These parents shared a feeling of responsibility for their children's education. They perceived a congested labour market with credential inflation, and were subsequently anxious to secure their children's future (Vincent & Martin, 2002, p. 115).

While the connection between education and employment will be discussed in more detail in later sections, what is important to highlight from the discussion so far is the perception of a partnership between parents and the school in Community B, conceptualised in terms of a large area of overlap between the Home and School sphere. In addition to this, parents in Community B placed great importance on, and were aware of the school's role in teaching their children the social skills that would be necessary for their future success in the working environment and society in general.

Community A

While 'education' seems to have become a joint project between parents and teachers in Community B, parents and school representatives in Community A seemed to have a much

more separate view of the roles of the parents and the school, connected with a distinction between 'education' that was received at the formal school, and 'education' that took place at home. In this way, the area of 'overlap' between the home and school sphere was markedly smaller in Community A as opposed to Community B (Epstein, 2001a). Education at home and at school were both seen as holding value, but at the same time were explained in a way that marked their difference in terms of the separation of responsibilities and different areas of application. The statement made below by one of the parents points to this separation of spheres, explaining that there are some areas that the school is not able to teach the children about, pointing to the responsibility instead of parents to teach their children about their own community:

(Translator) Like what she is saying is that the education at home, and the education at school somehow is different, because there is other things that the school cannot do for the children... there is education at home whereby they sit the children [down] and explain the situation outside (Aparent1).

While parents in Community B emphasised the school's role in their child's social development, parents in Community A seemed to differ, explaining that this kind of education was the responsibility of the home. As the parent quoted above explains, the school is not able to teach the children everything, and parents need to teach and explain some things to their children particularly related to the social development and preparation of their children for adult life in the community.

Education at school on the other hand, and the responsibility of the teachers, was closely associated with learning academic skills such as numeracy and literacy. This role of the school in Community A was referred to when speaking to school representatives, and illustrated by the interview extract below where a 'quality education' is defined directly in terms of the focus on a school curriculum which prioritises language and mathematics:

I can tell you point 1. The reason why we are here. The curriculum is very important. You can speak about the extra-murals and all that but curriculum is number 1. So learners must make sure that they do get a quality education. Like for instance, language and maths. Those are the two things that the department is looking at (Aschool1).

An interview with a community worker gave further insight into the role of the school and focus on numeracy and literacy skills, pointing again to how 'school' education would equip the children in Community A with the skills they needed to take their place in steering South Africa's economy. This statement again needs to be understood within the context of

Community A, wherein the majority of the people were classified as ‘black’ under the apartheid government, and so excluded from the ‘skilled’ labour market, through limited access to education and directly discriminating labour laws:

No the curriculum it is good because although it is good on the sense they motivate people to go for literacy and numeracy, which is one of the most critical areas that we need in our country. Because we need people to be able to read and to write, we need people who can work, who can be accountants, who can control our money or our economy of the country (Aworker2).

This difference in what education is understood to be can be further understood by referring to the different conceptions or types of knowledge that are represented and taught in the home and school in Community A. Serpell (1993) discusses this difference between the knowledge in the home and the school by referring to ‘traditional wisdom’ and ‘wisdom of the nation’ (1993, p. 18). ‘Traditional wisdom’ is perceived as established and passed on to children at home by the parents, and considered important in preparing children for their role and place in the community. ‘Wisdom of the nation’ is in turn the knowledge taught to children at school which prepares the children for their role and place in society and the nation in general. This distinction between knowledge systems of the home and school was referred to during an interview with one of the community workers in Community A. While distinguishing between education or knowledge learnt at school and learnt at home, he also added the opinion that the knowledge associated with the school was usually given priority over that associated with the home, resulting in a lack of respect by children of their parents:

Looking at young people they are so exposed to European education which is what we get from the schools. I still remember when I argue with my father, I will argue about all the international stuff ... but you know he will just bring me back you know to the authors that I don’t know, about the history where I am coming from. Which is the history that I am not aware about. You know like some of the wars that took place between the Xhosa and the Zulu you know he always try to drag me down from this issue so that like there can like also be that respect to him that I don’t know everything. He is the one that is deep rooted when it comes to knowledge. And some of the stuff he gets from his parents... (Aworker1).

The community worker here seems to point to two things which are interesting to note, reaffirming the separation of the home and school spheres according to their epistemological foundations. Firstly, the community worker explains that the knowledge, and in this case, history taught at home, is directly related to the ethnic history of the student (Xhosa), whereas the history taught at the school is based on the world and experience outside of the community or ‘international’ history. In this way, the education associated with the school is

inherently foreign to that of the home, in that it is grounded in a culture and history that is 'European' as opposed to African. The term 'European' could also be substituted with 'Western' or 'modern' pointing to a clear demarcation between the traditional indigenous knowledge system inherent in Community A, as opposed to the modern knowledge system on which the school in South Africa is grounded (Breidlid, 2003). Booth (1997) argues that similarities can be drawn between many African countries in regard to this stating that:

At independence most African countries inherited schools which had been designed by Western educators with Western criteria in mind. Many of today's educational systems in Africa are still quite similar to those originally designed by Europeans. An important consequence is that institutions of formal learning remain based on cultures which are quite distinct from those of Africans (Booth, 1997, p. 435).

Secondly, young people are criticized for not having enough respect for their parents and the knowledge that they have and represent in the community. Here it seems to be asserted that the knowledge of the home should be given more respect or priority than that gained at school, due to the respect and authority that is due to parents in this community. This reference to a 'hierarchy of knowledge' (Jones, 2007), was discussed in the Theory chapter, where it was explained that not only do these different conceptions of knowledge exist, but as the community worker above implies, it is the knowledge conveyed by the school system is given more value and officially recognized at the expense of other local knowledge systems e.g. that of the home. Ultimately the effect of this prioritization is most often felt at the point of interaction between children and their parents, with a loss of respect by children of their parents, and the knowledge that is traditionally passed on at home. When this occurs, there is a danger of what Darnell and Hoëm (1996) refer to as 'de-socialization' of the children away from the culture and traditions of the home community.

This situation, while apparent in Community A in 2012, is not a new phenomenon, as research carried out by Kuper almost 25 years ago suggests:

At the present time, the social structure which gives power to the older generation is challenged by... schooling for a literate society... Formal education weakens the claim of the uneducated that the possession of the greatest knowledge is obtainable only through age. Books and classes, quick roads to learning, contradict the system of gradual education... (Kuper, 1986 as cited in Booth, 1997, p. 436).

During research into the cultural underpinnings of the South African curriculum, Breidlid (2002, 2003) highlights the dislocation between the curriculum (understood here in terms of representing a modern knowledge system) and many South African homes (a traditional knowledge system). This situation has resulted in many teachers as well as students having to

‘cross epistemological borders’ on a daily basis as they travel to and from the school (Bredlid, 2002, p. 45), once again emphasizing the separation of the school and home spheres as experienced by Community A.

This relative separation between the roles and responsibilities of the home and school in Community A and B will be further built on in later analysis, as well as the significance of the different knowledge systems apparent in the Home and School. Firstly however, the discussion will focus on further understanding parents’ perception of education, in terms of discussing the reason behind the value it is given. In this way, the knowledge represented in the home and school will be seen in terms of its ability to be transferred and applied between the two spheres. This discussion will begin by presenting parents’ understanding of the importance of education in accessing employment, followed by the more specific analysis of the status of education in South African society.

5.2.2. Education and Economics

Parents, school representatives and community workers in Community A and B were open and supportive of education and the formal school system, despite different conceptions of the roles and responsibility associated with it. In different ways, research participants shared why they felt that education was important to their children, and of what value it was to their children’s future. Economic progression was closely related to ‘success’ in Community A, where gaining a ‘decent,’ ‘stable,’ and well paid job was considered to be of key importance. In this way, what Serpell (1993) refers to as the ‘economic agenda’ of schooling is seen to be given priority. This is closely linked to the ultimate value of education, and choice of parents to invest time and money into their children’s schooling. As a way of situating the responses of the research participants, the discussion below will firstly focus on the national education agenda on South Africa, followed by the information shared by participants in Community A and then B.

According to Serpell (1993), the national education system operates according to system level goals or ‘agendas’ and it is often the case that the economic agenda of education receives most focus (see discussion on the agendas of schooling in Theory Chapter). This is argued to be the case in South Africa, as post-apartheid governments see education as playing a key role in equipping and providing all South African citizens with the skills they need to progress and build up the new democratic South Africa (Harber & Mncube, 2011). Transformation of society is understood not only in social terms, but also economic terms. Through increased

education quality and opportunities, the population will be equipped with the skills needed to contribute to the economy, increase their income level and as a result, close the socio-economic gap that is so evident within society:

Literate and educated people are in a better position to obtain meaningful and decent formal employment, and to create work opportunities for themselves and others. Education has the potential to iron out income disparities. Conditions for a more educated society are more likely to bring about a reduction in poverty, unemployment and want, and increase the overall standard of living of the population (UNDP, 2010, p. 41).

Amongst the skills deemed most important are numeracy and literacy, mirrored in the current global education agenda (Jones, 2007) and receiving full support by the South African Department of Basic Education through the recent institution of the Annual National Assessment numeracy and literacy tests (Department of Basic Education, 2011):

Our children and youths need to be better prepared by their schools to read, write and think critically and solve numerical problems. These skills are the foundations on which further studies, job satisfaction, productivity and meaningful citizenship are based (Department of Basic Education, 2011, p. 8).

From the brief overview above, it is possible to see how the South African education system, focuses explicitly on promoting and providing for the economic progress of the individual community members and society as a whole. This priority in the national education discourse is in turn seen to affect the way in which schools focus and motivate the value of education in their communities, as well as the way parents perceive the value of education for their children.

Community A

Many parents interviewed in Community A emphasised the new employment opportunities that education would provide their children with, as compared to their own experience and current state of employment. Keeping in mind that historically, Community A had been established as temporary hostels for unskilled migrant labour, parents explained that with education, their children would not be limited to the temporary 'unskilled' job market as they themselves had been. Their children would have the possibility to apply and work in permanent positions that their parents in the community had not previously had access to.

The parent highlighted below is currently working as a cleaner at her children's school, while her husband works in the construction industry, a common type of employment for men in Community A. The construction industry is known to be seasonal and extremely unstable,

with men working temporary contracts and often waiting on the side of the road for days without receiving an offer for work. With education, this parent saw her children as having an opportunity to gain fixed and stable employment in a different industry, leading to them having what she considered a much better quality of life than she and her family were now experiencing:

(Translator) Parents wish that their children can be educated, so that they can get proper jobs and then have a better future or life as well. Because they don't want their children to work in places where they will for instance work temporarily or at a place where maybe there will be some time where they say the company has closed down. They want their children to be in a very stable position or life you see. That's what they wish (Aparent2).

Building on this understanding, interviews with school representatives also made the direct connection between education and so-called 'proper jobs.' In speaking to one of the school representatives, this connection was explained even further by saying that the alternative to education and a decent job, was a life funded by illegal activities:

They [the parents] know that they [the children] must be educated so that they get decent jobs, and to support themselves once they become adult people. I mean we must all work, where are you going to get the money if you don't work? Surely you are going to do something wrong? You are going to sell drugs (ASchool1).

While this statement must be understood within the socio-economic context of Community A where the level of crime was relatively high, it is also interesting to question whether a broader assumption is being implicitly made between what is considered 'right' and 'wrong' in society, i.e. having a decent job and working as a 'drug dealer.' 'Education' in this sense is seen to have been given a symbolic value that is used to make value judgments not only on people's lifestyle choices but as to their value and moral standing as a person, with very stark alternatives. Either a child is educated and therefore able to gain a decent job, or the child will most likely turn to crime as a means of financially supporting themselves. Education in the society is then not only a standard for entry into the job market but defined as the only way to develop and navigate towards economic and moral success:

(Translator) What she is saying, is that by going to school, you become a right person. And by this way you become a successful man or a successful lady, and then you live a healthy life you see – when you are at school. That's what she is saying (Aparent4).

This parent continued to explain the success available through schooling in terms of providing the power for her children to choose: 'You don't need to wait for someone to do something for you. All the doors are open for you' (Aparent4). It seems that with education, her children

would be able to take more control over the direction of their lives, having a wider range of skills and employment opportunities, and therefore the increased power to choose for themselves and have the chance to be ‘successful.’

An interview with a community worker in Community A went on to explain the value of education in society as encouraged by the national education department. Here once again the priority given to the knowledge system on which the school is based is evident, and importance of the skills that education at school represents in securing future economic success:

Education is one of the important things. That’s one of the values that I think the department is instilling in our lives. That if we don’t go to school then there is nothing that we can do. You cannot live a better life if you don’t go to school. That’s where you get all the information. That’s where you get all the tools to prepare to go with your life you see (Aworker2).

Once again, the perception outlined above points to the value of education in terms of granting access to a ‘better life,’ defining the path to success and giving the children the ‘tools’ to reach it. Combined with the views expressed by other parents, it seems possible to again identify the way formal education creates a normative judgment or dichotomy between ‘success’ and ‘failure,’ explicitly emphasising the importance of the information taught at school, entrenching the hierarchy of knowledge and separation between the Home and School spheres referred to before.

Community B

In comparison to parents from Community A, parents from Community B did not seem to make such a strong connection between completing school, finding a decent job, and securing future ‘success.’ Taking this assumption less for granted, parents were more likely to stress the difficulty in securing employment after school, and the need for children to complete some form of higher education as extra security for entry into the job market:

And in South Africa if you don’t go to university there is not much chance of you getting a decent job. So they need to get educated. So the pressure for that is quite strong (Bparent3).

Other parents saw education as not necessarily being enough to guarantee employment at all, and focused rather on the importance of the skills and creativity of the individual. Pointing to an extremely competitive job market in South Africa, one father interviewed in Community B referred to his own experience of having completed a higher education but nonetheless being currently unemployed and having to do a variety of small jobs to support his family. He

emphasised how the current generation of learners would have to focus on not only education, but their personal creativity and skills to help them secure employment and financial stability.

He explains here that:

You obviously want your kids to be trained as best as possible, but nowadays not even that is good enough because of the job situation, so for me it's being innovative and taking what skills you have and applying it to a whole host of different areas and then just pursuing that you know – whatever you are passionate about (Bparent2).

Similar to the parents in Community B, one of the principals emphasised that a 'good education' was not necessarily enough to guarantee a job. He pointed to the high rate of unemployment in South Africa, and the situation that many of the people who were unemployed were in fact also educated:

It's a tough question to a great extent because as we are sitting here now, the unemployment in South Africa is like almost 30% or close to that and if you look at those people who are unemployed, they are very qualified people so it is almost like a very good education in itself is not necessarily going to guarantee you a position (Bschool1).

Despite this challenge and reference to the inadequacy of a 'good education', the principal carried on to explain how the school should be a place of 'preparation' for the children in the community for the challenges they will meet in society. It would appear from the excerpt below that at the school they are consciously emphasising a wider variety of areas and skills in their curriculum, trying as best they can to adapt to the needs of the society and provide beyond what is conventionally considered a 'good education.' With this type of education, children will be prepared to face a potentially challenging society and be equipped with the extra skills to help them succeed in finding employment in a tough job market:

What we aspire to is that when the kids leave XX Primary School that we have prepared them and equipped them well enough to meet the challenges that society will offer them – in high school and in the years beyond. So that is our primary responsibility and we are totally committed to providing the best that we possibly can (Bschool1).

From the extracts and explanations outlined above, it is possible to see the focus and priority given to the social development and 'extra' skills expected from the school in order to equip their children. Parents as well as school representatives see their role as providing the children with more than just the basic numeracy and literacy skills encouraged by the department of

education, as opposed to in Community A where this is seen to be the main focus. While the focus in Community B is more directed towards the social development and equipping of the children, in both communities it is apparent that the value of the activities taking place at school are seen as key to the children's future success in society.

5.2.3. Education as Cultural Capital

While the previous section discussed the perceived value that parent's placed on education with regards to employment and economic success, the following section will analyse parents' perceptions of education using Bourdieu's cultural capital theory (Bourdieu, 1989). This section will begin by discussing how parents perceive education as creating a standard for success in their community. This is followed by a closer look into how this standard is affecting the interaction of the home and school sphere and parent's own perception of their ability to be involved in their children's education.

The institutionalised value of education in South African society has in effect created a 'standard for success,' where some are by virtue of this standard judged as 'succeeding' and some as 'failing.'

And the structure of the distribution of the different types and subtypes of capital at a given moment in time represents the immanent structure of the social world, i.e. the set of constraints, inscribed in the very reality of that world, which govern its functioning in a durable way, determining the chances of success for practices (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 46).

A parent from Community A currently working as a domestic worker referred to the value of education and the standard it represented in society in terms of providing entry into the job market by explaining that:

...everything needs some education. Nothing you can do without an education. Even the domestic worker now, you must educate before you can work there. Yes, that's why I say it is very important (Aparent5).

In the case described by the parent above, it is clear that this symbolic value that education holds has increased in her opinion, with formal education being more necessary to the children of this generation as opposed to hers. Access to the same job (domestic worker), now required a higher level of education than before, meaning that the standard for job entry had been raised. It is interesting to see that although the value of education had increased, the parent did not necessarily seem to think that the contents and skills necessary to complete the job had changed. It is possible to view this situation in terms of Bourdieu's (1989) cultural capital theory, where in this case educational qualifications are considered to represent

cultural capital, that can in turn be converted into increased likelihood of ensuring employment and therefore economic success. The value that is placed on the cultural capital (educational qualifications) then creates a standard in society controlling access to employment (in this case the domestic worker position). The value of education (institutionalised cultural capital) is therefore understood by parents in terms of its ability to be converted into a job (economic capital) (Bourdieu, 1997).

In understanding further the value and standard that education has in this community, it is possible to refer to two characteristics of cultural capital that Bourdieu considers inseparable, namely, the technical skills gained through formal education and the social skills and status attached to it:

On the one hand, Bourdieu does acknowledge that certificates and degrees do guarantee a technical capacity. On the other hand, however, certificates and degrees also attest to a "social competence," understood as a sense of social dignity on the part of the holder (and a corresponding capacity to set herself apart from others) (Lareau & Weininger, 2003, p. 581).

As the parent from Community A explained, it appears that she considers the symbolic value of the cultural capital represented by education to have increased in value in terms of social status and thus the ability to set oneself apart from others in a competitive job market. While the contents and technical skills that education conveys do not necessarily seem to have changed, or be more necessary to complete the job: 'Even the domestic worker now, you must educate before you can work there' (Aparent5).

In a similar way, parents in Community B expressed this increase in symbolic value of education in terms of the fact that it was now necessary for their children to complete a higher level of education in order to gain access to a successful career. Where before, completing the basic 12 years of schooling or 'matric' qualification was considered sufficient, children were now expected to continue further with higher education after school, again the 'standard' associated with education had been raised:

I think it [schooling] definitely is more pressurized now. You know when I matriculated, you still had a very strong sense that you had a choice of career, and you could pretty much do whatever you want and find work (Bparent1).

The 'rules of the game' in South African society continue to emphasise and reinforce the importance of the formal education system and the knowledge and skills that are taught there, as opposed to the knowledge and skills taught in other arenas, e.g. in the home and

community (see previous discussion in 2.1.). From this general discussion of the standard and value given to education in society, the following section will continue to use the concept of cultural capital to understand the way this standard affects the perceptions of parents and their subsequent decision to be involved in the school.

Parents' ability to conform

In the same way that education was understood as holding symbolic value as a standard for success and entry into the job market, it is possible to see how this understanding of education also affected the decision and perceived ability of parents to become involved in their children's school. It has been highlighted above that schools in South Africa have defined expectations and standards for parental involvement, and this necessarily includes skills or *habitus* that is necessary to be able to meet these expectations for involvement in the formal school arena. According to Bourdieu (1989), habitus represents 'both a system of schemes of production of practices and a system of perception and appreciation of practices' (1989, p. 19), therefore the national and local definition by schools for parental involvement represents a system by which parents are taught what parental involvement should look like, as well as influenced as to how they perceive themselves as measuring up to that system. In defining this standard for involvement, certain skills or resources for parents are acknowledged and given value, including specifically formal educational qualifications:

parents' cultural and social resources become forms of capital when they facilitate parents' compliance with dominant standards in school interactions (Lareau & Horvat, 1999, p. 46).

These cultural resources (namely formal educational qualifications), therefore are recognised as cultural capital for the parents who have them, but are also in essence barriers for effective interaction for those who don't (Bourdieu, 1997). This situation points back to the research by Mncube (2010) and argument he makes that, 'the involvement of parents in school activities can be hindered by a school's expectations of them' (2010, p. 235). By a school defining parental involvement and communication mainly in terms of helping their children with their homework and reading to them at home, this by definition excludes many parents who have not attended school themselves or who are unfamiliar with the knowledge or content taught at school.

Defining cultural capital in this case in terms of formal school qualifications, it is possible to look at the different levels of cultural capital possessed by the parents in Community A and B and comment on the affect that this had on their interaction with the school. Listening to the

background of the parents that were interviewed in Community A, only one of the parents had successfully passed the final matric exam as opposed to all of the parents in Community B who had not only completed and passed the matric exam, but had gone on to complete some form of higher education. All of the parents in Community B were as a result literate and familiar with the school system and content which their children were working on at school. This meant that fulfilling the requirement of reading and helping their children with homework was a possibility. For parents in Community A however, first-hand knowledge of the school system as well as of the curriculum content could not be assumed and explained, and therefore it was very easy for the school to judge these parents as ‘uninvolved’ when comparing their actions according to their standards of ‘parental involvement.’

We have got a problem when it comes to homeworks, there is a problem of non-parental involvement, whereby you give learners homeworks to go and do at home, and they come back to you with their homework not done. And when you ask they will tell you that there is no one to assist them. Their parents are illiterate, though we encourage them to go to the neighbours, but we are still experiencing problems of the homeworks and the assignments and the projects (Aschool3).

This difference between the educational background and level of cultural capital in terms of the school, emphasised the separation between the home and the school, as well as affecting the parents’ perception of their ability to help or be ‘involved’ with their child’s schooling. These perceptions in turn then translated into action and trends for higher levels of parental involvement amongst parents from Community B as opposed to parents from Community A.

While parents in Community B perceived the school as focusing more on social development than academic skills, parents from Community A were primarily sending their children to school to learn the academic skills that they felt they did not have or were not able to teach. This had a clear effect on their perception of their ability to help with schoolwork and get involved according to how the school defined ‘parental involvement’. As Epstein(1986) explains:

Parents' feelings that they can help (i.e., that they have adequate training to help their children with reading and math) are based primarily on their own education and their children's grade level. More parents said they could help if they had more education or if their children were in the lower elementary grades where parents needed less specialized knowledge to help the children (Epstein, 1986, p. 291).

A community worker from Community A, had a similar explanation for the lack of involvement in schools, explaining how the parents’ own lack of educational experience made them feel less able and confident when interacting with the school:

Yes it is not like they don't want to involve themselves to school, but then it is because of the social factors that they are encountering in this country you see, because some of them they are not working, they don't see why they should go to school, or maybe they would get embarrassed when they go to school once they find that they are uneducated, and then they will also say 'what am I going to say in that meeting' you see ' you know that I am not educated, I didn't go to school' (Aworker2).

This situation in Community A is supported by research carried out by Singh et al (2004) in a selection of previously disadvantaged schools around South Africa. During their research they found that the difference in education experience of parents seriously affected their negotiating ability and confidence when relating to the school, resulting in infrequent interaction and the perceived 'handing-over' of responsibility for education to the school alone (Singh et al., 2004). This transfer of responsibility for education to the school, can often be seen practically by low levels of parental involvement:

Many parents did not seem to understand their role as parents. In fact 90% of them regarded the schools as being competent enough to deal with their children (Singh et al., 2004, p. 303).

As explained in the extract, this idea of the school being 'competent enough' is often interpreted by the school as the parents not understanding the importance of their role in their child's education. However, it can also be argued that the parents were well reflected over their role in their child's education, but just had a different understanding as to what that role actually was, according to their past experience, current ability, and future educational and economic aspirations for their child:

(Translator) They send children here to school to make sure that they are educated, and to be self-reliant, and to get employment, and just like be self-reliant and work for themselves, and be independent, that's why they send children to school (Aparent1).

While schools tend to see low parental involvement as correlating with a low level of interest by parents in their children's schooling, research by Casanova (1996) cautions that this is not necessarily the case. Parents in Community A spoke enthusiastically about the education of their children, at the same time as they trusted the school to take care to teach their children what they needed to know to find a job later.

This situation is contrasted with the following statement made by a parent from Community B who demonstrates not only the confidence present in the parents' interaction with the school, but the authority that the parents assume in guiding their child's education together with the teachers:

But I have always made a point of it from day 1 of being a face that they know. I want the teacher to know me. I want the teacher to know that I want to know what is going on... To me it's a very very important part of my child's education. I want to know what they are teaching them – not to go in there and tell them what to do – I am not one of those moms, because I am not a teacher. But I want them to know, that if something is lacking, if something is not right, I want to fix it. If he is struggling in a certain area of maths, don't tell me in the second term, when it happened in the first term. I want to know so I can fix it (Bparent1).

In the case above it is clear from the parent's actions and assertions of her ability to help the teacher, that she is familiar with the school system and possesses the cultural capital and is familiar with how to use it (*habitus*), in order to be able to best navigate and negotiate the 'rules of the game' structuring involvement at school (Lareau & Horvat, 1999):

Parents' own education, their access to relevant cultural capital, their material circumstances - all these factors operate to set boundaries on who develops an active and effective voice within the school, and who is silent and defers to professional control, regardless of the degree of scepticism and mistrust with which they might do so (Vincent & Martin, 2002, p. 124).

As explained in the previous section, the schools in both Community A and B had defined the ways in which parents were able or expected to interact with the school, and inherent in this definition or standard for involvement, was the recognition of certain cultural resources and *habitus*, that enabled better communication. Only certain resources such as economic resources and formal educational qualifications (institutionalised cultural capital) were acknowledged by the dominant school system as cultural capital, resulting in a clear disadvantage for parents who did not have this experience or resources in their homes (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011).

The School's Perception of Parents

The South African government and education authorities have been criticised for national policy that does not adequately meet local needs (Lewis & Naidoo, 2004; Soudien & Baxen, 1997), but Heystek and Louw (1999) also remind us that much responsibility also lies with the school in initiating and building relationships with the parents and community, in order to promote a closer partnership between the home and school. Discussion up until this point has focused primarily on the parents' perception of education, but now will move temporarily to see how the influence of the national agenda of schooling and dominant structures governing schooling, influence the way schools perceive parents and interaction with the home and community. This will be done through analysis of home-school interaction based on the

concept 'Funds of Knowledge' (Moll et al., 1992) building on the previously discussed concept of cultural capital.

Research by Moll et al (1992) focuses on developing an awareness and recognition by teachers of the resources available and operating within their student's homes and communities, and the potential these have in enriching and being incorporated into the classroom and school arena. These resources have been conceptualised by Moll et al (1992) in terms of 'funds of knowledge' (FoK) and defined as:

historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being (Moll et al., 1992, p. 133).

Seeking to avoid what Cassanova (1996) points out as a tendency to 'transform cultural diversity into cultural deficiency' (1996, p. 31), FoK emphasises the knowledge and skills present and active in community homes, and not necessarily recognised by teachers at school as cultural capital. Given that the importance of partnership between schools and homes is given so much priority in South African education rhetoric, it seems only natural that these FoK would be prioritised for inclusion in the classroom at school, in order to improve cultural integration and continuation between the school and the community in which it is situated (Darnell & Hoëm, 1996). By encouraging teachers to become more 'involved' in the community and understand more about the home environments of their students, it is argued that a closer connection and relevance can be achieved for the learning content, classroom activities and home-school relations (Moll et al., 1992).

This concept can be used to understand the relationship between the home and school, especially in Community A, where the cultural resources of the home and community are not necessarily recognised as valuable by the school, resulting in a relative separation between the home and the school. Parents in Community A responded to the school's relative separation from the home in terms of the skills and knowledge receiving priority (numeracy and literacy), and preferred to focus on their role in the home of educating their children in the traditional social and cultural values and skills that they saw as necessary in their community. Parents in Community B however, relied on the school for the social development of their children, while asserting their ability to aid the teachers in their children's academic development. In this way, the knowledge utilised in the home and school were recognisable, promoting parent's feeling of ability in helping their children and encouraging their

participation and involvement in the school (see previous discussion on parent's ability to conform).

An interview with one of the school representatives in Community A illustrated how attempts to recognise and include the resources of the community in the school had been attempted. In one of the schools, the teachers had worked together with some of the older women in the community so that times were arranged where the women would put on their traditional clothes and meet the school children in the library to tell stories and pass on the oral history of the Xhosa people. By meeting in the library, we can see how the traditional knowledge and modern knowledge systems were literally 'meeting.' By bringing these respected members of the community into the school, the learners were being encouraged to respect and see the place and importance of the knowledge which the community had, and the importance of including more than one conception of 'history' and 'education':

For me the best way to get the learners to understand and be better learners of tomorrow, who can be leaders of tomorrow, is to utilize the community members who also have some idea of what is taking place concerning education (Aschool3).

FoK focuses on the utility aspect of knowledge, seeking to not only recognise the different types of knowledge present in the home sphere, but also to work towards mobilising and activating these funds, and include the knowledge within the classroom. Moll et al (1992) explain further by saying that there is an:

...emphasis on strategic knowledge and related activities essential in households functioning, development, and well-being. It is specific funds of knowledge pertaining to the social, economic, and productive activities of people in a local region, not "culture " in its broader anthropological sense, that we seek to incorporate strategically into classrooms (Moll et al., 1992, p. 139).

The strategic aspect of knowledge highlighted in the extract above, can also be linked to the earlier discussion of the parent's prioritisation of the 'economic agenda' of schooling in terms of the school's role in educating their children for employment and success in later life (Serpell, 1993). Schooling and formal education represented an agent of change for parents in Community A which came from outside the home sphere to transfer their children out of their current economic status and potentially out of their community. Where in previous generations parents felt that it was possible to find employment without formal education, they all explained that the economic success of their children now depended on their education at school.

Integrating FoK within the school sphere however, while theoretically appealing, has proved challenging and not always sufficient in acknowledging the balance of power which operates to maintain and prioritise the current cultural capital structure:

It is in the context of this recognition that schooling practices are always intricately related to broader issues of social class, ideology, and power, that we must situate our study and understanding of funds of knowledge (Moll, 2005, p. 276).

By considering the issues of power within educational institutions, future research into FoK hopes to combine with the concept of cultural capital, in an attempt to understand how previously marginalised resources in the home can be recognised, activated and converted into cultural and economic capital in the dominant school system (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011). It is argued that as schools in turn recognise the resources present and active in the home, especially in contexts such as Community A, this will in turn promote a more positive perception of the value of involving parents in schools, encouraging a wider definition and acceptance of different parental involvement strategies.

5.3. Chapter Summary

In seeking to explore the perceptions of parents in Community A and B, the discussion has centred on the relationship between the Home and School sphere. Beginning the chapter by questioning the different roles and responsibilities that were attached to the Home and School, it was seen how the parent's own conception of the knowledge and skill base at home, affects their perceived agenda for sending their children to school, and in turn their perceived role in the school. This individual agenda for schooling was also interpreted in relation to the national and global discourse or architecture of education, seeing the marked emphasis given to education in terms of securing economic development and job creation. Finally, the inherent structure and standard for home-school interaction was examined in terms of the symbolic value and place of education in society. Through institutionalised cultural capital, the school is seen to have defined what resources from the home are recognised in the school sphere, and therefore defined which parents possess the 'right' cultural capital and represent a resource for the school and their children's education.

Throughout this chapter, the symbolic value and power connected to formal education has been shown, and the influence this has on the individual parent on the community level. This influence and recognition of education is succinctly summarised by Bourdieu as he points to the power of educational institutions to define what cultural resources are seen as capital:

...one sees clearly the performative magic of the power of instituting, the power to show forth and secure belief or, in a word, to impose recognition (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 51).

The following chapter will attempt to take this analysis further by examining the position and perceptions of education in terms of a broader discourse of modernity which seems to be inherent in the school system. The knowledge, values, culture and language that this then implies will be seen to also play a role in the interaction and involvement of individual parents in Community A and B. Again moving between global, national and local level tools for analysis, Serpell's (1993) cultural agenda of schooling as well as Darnell and Hoëm's (1996) conception of cultural integration will be used to guide the discussion around the culture and values of the Home and School sphere.

6. Findings and Analysis: Values of the Home and School

Moving from the discussion of parents' perceptions of education, the following chapter will now turn to an analysis of the implicit and explicit values present and promoted in the home and school sphere. In an attempt to gain a deeper understanding of education in a South African context, it is important to remember the words of Higgs and van Wyk (2007), as they challenge any analysis with remembering to consider the foundational values and beliefs that underpin a society's perception of education:

An analysis of education within an African context has to shed light on how Africans learn and construct knowledge and also has to focus on the underlying beliefs and values that constitute education within an African context (Higgs & van Wyk, 2007, p. 114).

Going one step further, it must not be forgotten that the African, and in this case South African context, represents a diverse range of people and communities, and with it a variety of beliefs and values that influence their construction of daily reality and learning (Berger & Luckmann, 1971). While a national political agenda exists that attempts to unite South Africans under one common identity (Harley & Wedekind, 2004), the value of this must not overshadow and devalue the importance of their diversity, and the consequences this must have for the education system, and interaction with the home and community.

From the previous chapter it was seen how closely linked education and employment were, by parents as well as the national policy makers and global education actors. Authors such as Serpell (1993) and Darnell and Hoëm (1996), however challenge a purely economic perception of education and point to the importance of considering the cultural context and underlying values and beliefs that the education system is explicitly or implicitly encouraging (see discussion in Theory chapter).

According to Darnell and Hoëm (1996), the school is understood as a 'site of socialisation,' where specific cultural values are taught, and the national agenda and focus of education is played out along with the implicit values and standard for success. In the context of South Africa, the national cultural agenda, here understood in terms of the school curriculum (C2005), must be considered and analysed in relation to the community context and integration with the children and families that take part in it. Ideally, the values of the school and 'socialisation' process will recognise the community context and values in which the

school is located, supporting and encouraging the cultural background of the children in the school:

The socialisation process taking place in a well-balanced school will connect the students to essential elements and sectors of the society in which the school is found (Darnell & Hoëm, 1996, p. 271).

If this continuity between the home and school does not take place, tension between the school and home arenas will be created, often resulting in a weakening of community values and identity for the children, and setting in a process of ‘de-socialisation’ away from the community, and re-socialisation in terms of the dominant school culture:

If the cultural background of the students and the culture of the school lack symmetry, there will be conflict. The cultural influence of the school will tend to weaken the self-concept and identity of the students, render their patrimonial background irrelevant and de-socialisation and re-socialisation will occur (Darnell & Hoëm, 1996, p. 271).

With this understanding of the school as a ‘site of socialisation,’ the following sections will attempt to analyse how the underlying values and cultural agenda of the South African education system, are negotiated by Community A and B at the school site. An analysis of the national cultural agenda will act as a starting point for this discussion, before a presentation and interpretation of the individual views given by research participants. Individual examples of interactions explained by parents and school representatives will be highlighted, including short narratives of their experiences. It is hoped that these short stories will serve to illustrate what has been referred to as the ‘socialisation’ process, whether strengthening or weakening links to the student’s community context and background. A closer analysis of the language of learning in schools will be discussed as it is argued to relate to the overall cultural agenda promoted by the school system. Finally, the last two sections will focus in on examples of interaction that took place between parents and the school, linking previous discussion around power dynamics and the role of the school, to the values and choice of involvement of parents.

6.1. National Cultural Agenda

As explained previously in the context chapter, the curriculum (C2005) was implemented by the post-apartheid government, representing a complete change in social values and standards for South African society in support of South Africa’s move to democracy. C2005 was argued to have ‘emerged as a *political and not a pedagogical project*’ (emphasis original Harley &

Wedekind, 2004, p. 198) and assumed to be ‘culturally neutral,’ and therefore compatible and applicable to the diverse communities making up the South African nation (Soudien & Baxen, 1997). However there is an increasing concern with this assumption of neutrality, and lack of recognition given to the inherent cultural values that are contained in the curriculum and therefore forming a part of the socialisation process taking place in schools in communities such as those focused on in this study.

While it is not possible to put forward Community A and B as representative of all the communities and cultural diversity in South Africa, they do have some features which will be highlighted in order to draw connections, and point out differences, between previous research and theoretical concepts employed in this analysis. Soudien and Baxen (1997) argue that the South African education system is founded upon the cultural values of the white minority and therefore essentially foreign in many ways to the majority of South Africa’s population:

The learner is constructed as simply an innocent subject of OBE's shaping pedagogical gaze. The learner is also abstracted from the specificity of the cultural orbit of South Africa where, as Manganyi (1991) has argued, young people of the Black, mostly working-class and rural majority group are having to learn how to navigate their way through the competing ontologies and epistemologies of the minority, White, middle-class society (Soudien & Baxen, 1997, p. 456).

In terms of the statement by Soudien and Baxen(1997) above, Community A represents a majority black, Xhosa working class community, while Community B is made up of a majority white, English and Afrikaans middle-class community. It is therefore asserted that the values and implicit cultural agenda of C2005 is far similar to the values of the minority such as Community B, whereas the majority of South Africans, for example Community A, are left to negotiate between different value systems in the home and school (Breidlid, 2003). As opposed to being ‘neutral,’ C2005 is argued as being built on essentially ‘modern’ values that create tension when implemented in the majority of South African communities. As previously discussed, when the home and school spheres are based on different epistemological foundations, this will affect the interaction and communication of the parents, teachers and children.

In the following sections, the values expressed by research participants in Community A and B will be discussed and compared to the implicit cultural agenda of the school curriculum mentioned above.

6.2. Values in Community B

From the interviews carried out in Community B, it would seem that there is a high degree of cultural integration and continuation between the values of the school and the home, in line with the analysis of the curriculum referred to by Soudien and Baxen (1997). An expectation from both the school and parents interviewed was shared, emphasising the parents' primary responsibility in teaching values to the children, with the school taking on a supportive role in building on these values in the school sphere:

My belief is that it is our responsibility as a parent to teach values and morals to our kids at home. It's nice if they get reinforced at school, but I don't rely on the school to teach them. I think if there were things being taught that went against my values I would speak up about that (Bparent3).

From the interviews it seemed that there was a general assumption that the majority of the parents in the community had a similar set of values:

I think that element of parent that is just completely opposite to the values of the school – that is very small. Deep down, most parents want the same things for their kids (Bparent1).

Although not directly stated, it was implied then that these values would be reinforced by the school, and parents expressed a confidence in articulating their intention of confronting the school if a situation or conflict of values should arise. Representatives from the school on the other hand, were clear about their belief that while the parents were responsible for teaching values, these values needed to be the same as those set at school in order for the schooling and development process of the child to be successful:

They [parents] have got to set boundaries, and they have got to ensure that certain things are in place for the benefit of their child. Because we [the school] can't make your child a dream child if he is coming from a set of different values (Bschool1).

In this case it is not clear who is setting the standard for which values are taught, whether it is the parents who are deciding and then the school supporting, or the school deciding and the parents reinforcing. However, from this it can be argued that the cultural agenda of the school and home are aligned, with the aims and objectives of both the school and home being mutually supportive (Serpell, 1993). Darnell and Hoëm (1996), argue that the success of the school is dependent on the cultural integration of the school with the community, affecting the degree of trust and identification that is present in the home-school relationship, and ultimately, the success or failure of schooling. Looking at the connection between trust and parental involvement in school, research by Cassanova(1996) confirms the importance of

mutual trust between parents and teachers, and how this ultimately affects the perception and actions of both parties when it comes to responsibility and the different roles within the home and school spheres:

It seems clear then that parent involvement is likely to be enhanced by a climate of mutual trust and confidence in teachers and schools. Conversely, an atmosphere of suspicion and mistrust is likely to increase competition for the control of student learning between these two groups of influential adults (Casanova, 1996, p. 32).

From the interviews held with parents in Community B it would seem that there does exist a climate of trust between parents and teachers, enhanced by a continuation of values between the home and school environment. This would be in line with previous analysis discussions where the values of the South African school system are built upon the culture and values of the white population in South Africa (Soudien & Baxen, 1997). Continuity between the values taught by the school and the home provide a stable environment as children move between the home and school arena, strengthening trust and identification with the school and resulting in what Darnell and Hoëm (1996) refer to as ‘cultural symmetry.’

While cultural symmetry in terms of values was generally the case, one parent did explain a situation where she disagreed with what was being taught at school. The parent explained that in one of her daughter’s subjects called ‘Life Orientation’ there were topics being covered that were not a part of the home or community, and if not for her learning it at school, would not have been mentioned:

Obviously with LO (Life Orientation) and that, they are learning stuff that I don’t think they should be learning. But maybe it’s necessary, but I, ja, that subject I don’t know if it is always... And I suppose obviously it is your society, but (my daughter) in grade 5, she has already learnt about hijacking and sexual abuse and physical abuse, and I feel that if she wasn’t at school she wouldn’t have even heard about that kind of thing (Bparent4).

The above situation is an example of how the national curriculum designers (C2005) have attempted to meet a wide variation of needs and community contexts in order to prepare South African children for the ‘average’ set of social situations that they are likely to meet. In Community B, the level of crime and instance of abuse is relatively low compared to other communities according to national census data (Gie, 2009). This could in turn contribute to the above parent’s perception that the content of LO seemed foreign to children living in this social context. This is compared to the context of Community A where the level of crime is much higher and where education about physical and sexual abuse is unfortunately relevant to

the lives of many of the children as explained by parents, community workers and through the presence of the social worker's office located at the school.

6.3. Values in Community A

During interviews with participants from Community A on the other hand, there seemed to be an awareness of a difference in values encouraged by the home and school. The school was often spoken about in terms of teaching their children values concerning their human rights and the value of independence. Education and the ability to be self-reliant were values strongly associated with the school's role in ensuring the later employment and economic success of their children:

(Translator) They send children here to school to make sure that they are educated, and to be self-reliant, and to get employment, and just like be self-reliant and work for themselves, and be independent, that's why they send children to school (Aparent1).

As explained by the parent above, this understanding seemed to be strongly connected to the fact that with an education, children would be able to find a job which would put them in a financially independent situation in relation to their parents. With an education children would no longer be relying on their families to support them and thus be independent. The economic agenda of schooling is seen to again be prioritised and any cultural agenda which is promoted must support the child in achieving future employment and economic success (Serpell, 1993). In the majority of the families interviewed, only the mother had a stable income and provided for at least three children, if not more. In the cases where a husband was present and was working, he only provided a temporary or inconsistent income.

While this was largely seen as the values promoted by the school, parents then saw their responsibility as being to teach their children about their own traditional values, practices and history at home – 'home education' as was discussed in the previous chapter:

Yes, because the school cannot know about my traditional stuff. I must teach them [the children] and tell them that 'in our tradition we do this and this and this'. They must know that. When you are grown up you must know that there is something you must do in your age. Yes, so I must teach them. And I must show them how to do and what to do, and how do they do it.
... They don't know in the schools. Sometimes there are black teachers at the school but they don't go so far to teach the kids, no. You must teach them even at the house, they must know here at home (Aparent5).

As opposed to the parents in Community B, parents in Community A did not confront the school about these differences and complain about the school not focusing on teaching about the traditional culture and values. As the parent above clearly states, ‘they don’t know in the schools.’ Here again the difference in the types of knowledge taught in the school and at home are apparent, but also seemingly accepted. This separation in responsibility and values was explained previously when the parents’ perceptions of the home and school responsibilities was discussed, comparing the separation between knowledge systems to the ‘wisdom of the nation’ taught in the school, and the ‘traditional wisdom’ taught at home (Serpell, 1993). Despite a lack of recognition of cultural values and practices by the school, parents seemed to accept this difference in roles, and support the school in the values they taught. Their perception of the school’s role is again complete in preparing their children for their economic future, while the home and community focus on preparing children for their social and moral roles in society.

Taking one step further, the acceptance that parents seemed to have of the culturally foreign school must be questioned. Why do parents from Community A not challenge this situation, when parents from Community B clearly expressed their willingness to ‘speak up about’ situations that concerned the school acting in a way different to that of the home? It is possible that this is a practical example of the balance of power that favours the school institution in South Africa. Even to the degree that elements of what Freire (1993) referred to as ‘cultural invasion’ can be identified. The parents’ acceptance of a foreign system speaks of the internalization of a standard and definition of education based on values and principles apart from their own. In this case, the western culture of the education system has not only been implemented, but accepted by both Community A and B. In the case of Community B, the values and culture are both familiar to the home and the school, but in Community A, the difference is simultaneously recognized but nevertheless accepted. Freire (1993) explains the concept of cultural invasion, by pointing to this acceptance as a sign of its ‘success’:

For cultural invasion to succeed, it is essential that those invaded become convinced of their intrinsic inferiority. Since everything has its opposite, if those who are invaded consider themselves inferior, they must necessarily recognize the superiority of the invaders. The values of the latter thereby become the pattern of the former. The more invasion is accentuated and those invaded are alienated from the spirit of their own culture and from themselves, the more the latter want to be like the invaders: to walk like them, dress like them, talk like them (Freire, 1993, p. 134).

In comparison to the interviews with parents however, an interview with one of the community workers in Community A did reveal conflict between the home and school values

in the community. The community worker differentiated between the culture of the school and the home, but also emphasised that in the same way as the knowledge of the school was being prioritised, so too was the culture of the school and the accepted language, behaviour and values being given priority over that of the home:

Children go to the circumcision schools and they come back to school and the principal tell them they must take off their circumcision clothes at school because that is not a place for that. That teacher is coming from the same culture you know – that he would allow a modern child in the school to wear all the modern wear, but to not let the one that is coming from his culture, so the life is being seen as backward in the schools. It is not a place to promote our life, it is a place to just shape us and cut us away from our backgrounds and introduce us to a new culture which is the urban life (Aworker1).

While referring to the different cultures present in the home and school, he also refers to how these different cultures have different rules attached affecting the way people behave, or are expected to behave in the different spheres. As with the example of different ways of communicating in different languages, the school is associated with a specific language, dress code and behaviour. Those who conform to this implicit and explicit cultural code are able to reap the benefits of mastering the rules of the game or accepted habitus (Breidlid, 2003) whereas those who don't, find it difficult to navigate the school system and in many cases find it alienating:

In general, the greater the degree of alienation between the culture of a child's socialization at home and the culture of schooling, the greater the resulting discrepancy between their goals (Serpell, 1993, p. 2).

While parents in Community A did not directly remark about this alienation and separation between the home and the school, there were apparent consequences to the difference in focus which point toward the process of de-socialisation and re-socialisation explained by Darnell and Hoëm (1996, p. 271). One of the parents spoke about disciplining her children, and the fact that the focus on children's rights at school had resulted in her eyes, in a lack of respect for her authority in the home sphere. She explained that instead of accepting her authority, her children had started to question her decisions referring to their 'rights.' She continued to comment that:

In my house I have the rights, – if you have rights it means you are an adult and then you can move out (Aparent5).

This opinion was also later added to by one of the community workers who expressed dissatisfaction with the school's focus on 'rights' without the appropriate focus on

simultaneous ‘responsibilities’ and respect, two values that are very important for the community:

The education system as well is just like theory, it’s just, it’s not like education is supposed to be, being responsible. The school just teach them about their rights and not the whole responsibilities. Lacking values and norms in these schools. So I am just trying to say that the education system is poor – especially the government schools (Aworker1).

As the parent and community worker from Community A explained above, the school is seen as focusing on teaching children their rights and not necessarily their correspondent responsibilities towards members of their community. This can be experienced as resulting in a lack of respect for authority for the older generation. A short story was given as an illustration by one of the community workers to illustrate the tension between the modern values promoted by the school and resultant ‘de-socialisation’ away from the children’s traditional value background (Darnell & Hoëm, 1996):

These human rights they clash sometimes with the cultural values of the individuals you see. Because some of these human rights they are telling you something different.

Like for instance here in Xhosa culture, we as children or the youth, we have to respect the elders. But then you will find out now that you are in the train going to Cape Town, travelling to Cape Town. You see an old man standing right next to you, or by the door, and then the child is sitting on the chair. You will hear really that ‘I have got a right, I have paid for this.’

And then in those old days, you won’t let an old person stand by his own feet to Cape Town. Just imagine from here to Cape Town. I think it is an hour to Cape Town. So the whole hour that old parent is standing, and then you as the younger person are sitting.

So that’s where I think it will become a clash or there might be something (Aworker2).

Once again the story points to the new value system associated with the school as promoting the rights of the individual over the respect for adults and those older members of the community. With an increased focus on independence comes a decreased awareness of reliance on community and simultaneous respect for others. Inherent in the understanding of human rights is a focus on individualism, central to any discussion on tradition and modernity (Breidlid, 2003).

Key concepts here are the individual, rationality and ‘progress.’ The emphasis on individualism, on the individual’s right to be creative, to be free and critical and to exercise individual capabilities, is of paramount importance. The emphasis on individual autonomy had far-reaching consequences because it meant breaking away

from traditional, communitarian bonds and the establishment of universal values and universal discourses at the expense of communitarian discourse (Breidlid, 2003, p. 88).

This is seen very practically as coming into conflict with what is often pointed to as a traditional value for collective responsibility and acknowledgement for the needs of members of your community above your own. Here the cultural agenda or what Soudien and Baxen(1997) refer to as a 'script for modernity' that the school is built on guides the behaviour and interaction of children with members of their community as opposed to the values taught by their parents.

From the discussion above it is possible to see how the school and home represented in Community A and B explicitly and implicitly, actively teach and support a certain cultural agenda and its associated values. These values in turn affect the relationship and interaction between the school and parents, and the way schooling is perceived. While the home and school in Community B teach and support relatively similar values, there is a marked separation and difference in culture between the school and home in Community A. This not only reveals something about the values underpinning Community B, but also the values underpinning the school. The values associated with the school in both communities have been described as inherently 'modern,' affecting their reception and application within a community dominated by a 'traditional' value system such as Community A. Despite a relative separation and difference in values between the school and home in Community A, education and schooling are still valued and supported by community members. The economic agenda of schooling is seen to receive priority over the cultural agenda, affirming what Serpell (1993) described as a tendency of communities to accept and value the culture of the economically successful segment of society, even if it is seemingly to the detriment of their own.

The extent to which certain values taught in the school have started to affect relations in the community will be explained shortly as questions of respect and responsibility are confronted, but firstly, a more detailed discussion of the language of learning will be given, where the connection between home, school, language and culture in Community A and B is further explored. In the following section, the language of learning in South African schools as a key carrier of culture and example of how the national school system implicitly promotes a modern set of values and culture despite the context within which the school is located.

6.4. English as the Language of Learning

While the actual content and values contained in C2005 can be argued to have a specific cultural agenda attached, the language that is used to teach or deliver education has equally important consequences for the degree of cultural integration with the community and inherent prioritisation of values in education. Language is very closely linked to, and is a marker of culture, representing not only a means of practically communicating, but also a way of living out and demonstrating cultural values and norms (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1986).

According to the Bill of Rights in the South African Constitution (1996), all eleven national languages are afforded equal rights which are extended into the operation of the education system. During an interview with a community worker in Community A, this was acknowledged as he explained how language was connected to culture, and how these cultural values were expressed through the way people interacted and communicated in isiXhosa and English. In the example given it is explained how there can be misunderstandings between parents and children if the children are taught in English at school and then come home to parents who they must communicate with in isiXhosa. In this example the community worker clearly shows how language is connected to culture and different cultural practices and values. He illustrates through an example of a child and adult speaking together and how different this seemingly simple interaction would be depending on what language is spoken and what culture represented. In Xhosa culture, a child would show respect to the adult by looking down and not straight at the adult, as opposed to in the English culture where respect is shown by the child looking straight at the adult to demonstrate that he or she is listening to what is being said:

As our constitution of this country says, in this country we have got about 11 official languages and it respects all those official languages. So each and every language has its own culture and values and norms. So in Xhosa if we say for instance you are speaking with me as a mother and a child, then there are other ways that I must address you as a parent and then there must be some other ways that you must address me as a child.

There must – that kind of a conversation it must show who is older and who is younger. So I think that in English, some of the other things they (Xhosa parents) don't understand clearly you see. They just think that maybe if for instance we are talking with me as a child and then I just look straight into your eyes you just take it as a disrespect for them, but then that is in their Xhosa culture, but then it is something normal or right to check or look someone in their eyes just to show that you are listening what he or she is saying to you (Aworker2).

When transferred into the school context, it is possible to see how the language used in the school, will have consequences for the cultural values and practices promoted and officially represented. This in turn can be understood as making up a part of the cultural agenda of the school (Serpell, 1993).

In line with the Constitution, the South African Schools Act (1996) stipulates that the School Governing Body (SGB) representing the parents in each school, has the power to decide what the school's language policy will be, according to the needs and wishes of the parents and community. This is in conjunction with the assumption that every child has the right to receive instruction in the language of his/her choice (WCED, n.d.). In South Africa, the majority of parents choose English language based schooling for their children, despite it being a recognised right in South African law that the parents may choose their home language for their child's schooling (wa Kivulu & Morrow, 2006). A task team looking into the revision of the South African school curriculum discussed the use of English in schools, emphasising the priority given to English as the language of Learning as opposed to the Home language:

While the Home Language plays the primary role in developing literacy and thinking skills and is of importance in enhancing the protection and further development of the indigenous language, the Language of Learning (in particular English) is the one in which students must master educational concepts, and provides a platform to participate and engage meaningfully in the information age on a global stage (Dada et al., 2009, p. 41).

While explicitly stating that the development of literacy and critical thinking skills is achieved primarily through the student's home language, it seems almost contradictory then that they go on to emphasise that English should however be prioritised. The value of mastering English is motivated by the need to prepare students for their participation in a globally competitive South African economy which implies that the values and culture associated with English are given greater utility value than those of the local community in which parents and children have their daily reality. This is a clear example of the influence of the global architecture of education as explained by Jones (2007) and what Tucker (1999) argues as a promotion of a western conception of economic development and interaction grounded on the modern value system and cultural agenda assumed to be necessary. While parents in Community A have been shown to perceive a separation between the home and school sphere, it is understandable as this attitude seems to be present right up to the national policy level. Interpreting this national education policy perception in its global context, it is possible to see

how the South African education and language policy is therefore influenced by the global education context or architecture of education which prioritises English as the primary language of education and therefore of international economic trade and development:

Global knowledge requirements imply fluency in the English language, high level groundings in western science and mathematics, and state-of-the art mastery of information and communications technologies. Of far lesser significance for global competitiveness is other curricular content, notably that which is grounded in local culture and circumstances (Jones, 2006, p. 62).

Education, and success in education, is here directly linked to a student's mastery of the English language, and by implication of the discussion above, mastery of the English culture. It is therefore not surprising that with this encouragement and rhetoric coming from a national policy level, that parents in local communities seem to make decisions on language policy so seemingly contradictory to their children's best learning interests.

In addition to this global level of analysis when it comes to the parents' choice of language policy, it is also possible to interpret this choice in the national context of the apartheid language in education policy. Previous language in education policies did not leave the choice of language of instruction up to the communities, but as in so many other policies, used language to further entrench separation amongst the different South African communities. Education in English was reserved for the 'white' population and used as a means of promoting the hierarchy of knowledge and power given to this section of South Africans (wa Kivulu & Morrow, 2006). Where before, the majority of black South Africans were forced to receive education in their home language and not allowed to learn English, freedom in the new system to choose has seen most parents choose English for their children, as the status and economic value of the language is still seen as ranking above those of the indigenous African languages (Breidlid, 2003). With this in mind, parents see the English language as having economic value and providing the tools to equip their children with the cultural code in society to achieve success. As the South African Social Attitudes survey confirmed:

English is the language of perceived potential upward educational mobility amongst almost all black Africans (wa Kivulu & Morrow, 2006, p. 187).

When interviewing research participants in Community B, it was evident that the majority of parents choose to send their children to schools where the language of instruction is the same as the home language (generally English or Afrikaans). The topic of language in school in fact did not often come up during interviews, but seemed rather to be understood as an

assumed fact that the children received their education in their home language. From the parents own experience themselves at school this had always been the case, and there was therefore no reason for them to consider another situation. Only once did a parent mention the topic of language in relation to her children who were attending a school where both English and Afrikaans were offered. In this case it is possible to see how importance is placed on the school utilising the language of the home:

That is one criticism that I have, it is an English school with predominantly English children, so I don't feel that they must use so much Afrikaans. It will help them, but to me, if there is important stuff, they must do it in English. .. (Bparent4)

From this comment it is possible to see that the parents assume and expect the language of learning to be the same as the home language, understanding that their children will be at a disadvantage if this is not the case, not being able to fully understand or grasp important information. This expectation of the parents can be understood as representing a part of their cultural agenda for schooling, forming a part of their understanding of the purpose of schooling in passing on the language and culture of their community (Serpell, 1993).

Generally, the children in Community B are taught in their home language all the way through their primary school, while learning a second language parallel to their home language. In this way, parents from Community B automatically assumed that the language of the school and working environment would be the same as that of the home and had never really experienced anything different. This continuity between the language associated with school and the language spoken at home can be seen as aiding cultural integration and symmetry between the home and school spheres. Not only in terms of language, but the values and culture that the language represents is also then continuous and stable between the home and school in Community B (Darnell & Hoëm, 1996).

In Community A on the other hand, the majority of children have isiXhosa as their home language and yet receive the majority of their schooling in English. Both schools interviewed in Community A had a language policy whereby the children were taught in isiXhosa first, and from grade 4 to 7 were taught in English. When asked about the wide spread use of English at a school where the large majority had isiXhosa as their home language, school representatives defended the policy by explaining that it was supported by the parents and had been decided through their participation in the SGB:

We designed the policy concerning the medium of instruction for the school, the parents becomes part and parcel of the policy, because at the end they sign, they know

what is taking place at the school. As a result, we encourage them to buy English books for the learners, and to even take their children to the libraries and we also encourage them to speak English with their learners at home. And if, like for instance those that are domestic workers, they can even ask books from their bosses to bring to their children and sit with them and read with them and ask their children to read for them as well, that is motivating the learners to be part and parcel of speaking English. By that way they will be assisting the educators as well (Aschool3).

While the quote above demonstrates the parents' involvement in the creation of the language policy, it also clearly shows that while English is the language of instruction at school, it is not the language that is normally used at home. In order for their children to excel and succeed in English, the school encourages the parents to speak in English at home, and buy their children books to help them practice reading. Through this emphasis, the school explicitly associates education and schooling with the English language, while implicitly giving value to English above the language used at home, resulting in further separation between the home and school spheres in Community A. As Serpell (1993) explains, children with a home language different to English are at a clear disadvantage, as they are forced to learn concepts and new pattern of thinking in a new language. The standard for 'intelligence' is literally written in a foreign language for them, making it more difficult than their counterparts in schools in Community B for example. This association of 'school knowledge' and a measure of intelligence related to the school's standard was explained during one of the interviews as a community worker pointed out that if you did not have English as your home language, you would always feel like you were not free to express yourself under the same conditions as those who did, and would therefore be at a disadvantage:

Because you are writing quote according to his language and you are not free to write according to your language. That means that he is educated more than you because of his writing in his comfortable language. You know just editing your work and then that means he is brilliant more than you. That's the problem. South African education teaches us to be translators and secretaries. So it is a problem even to us that even if you are educated (Aworker1).

The fact that English is considered the language of the 'educated' reflects the institutionalisation of specific cultural capital and institutionalised standard for education in South Africa. The 'rules of the game' are inherently to the advantage to the English speaking section of the population resulting in their increased chances of successful travel through the education system and qualification into the job market and economic success:

The South African school system functions as a good illustration of Bourdieu's theory, where the school system recreates the socio-economic profile of the nation, by using the habitus of the dominant ideology as a basis (Stephens, 2007, p. 128).

6.5. Entitlement and Accountability

The following section will now attempt to demonstrate the connection between parents' perceptions of education, the culture of the home and the school, and the way parents are involved and interact with the school. Examples of interaction and experiences shared by parents will highlight especially the aspect of power dynamics that play a role in the interaction and relationship between the school and parents.

Listening to parents from both Community A and B talk about their involvement and experience with their children's school, it was interesting to note how they spoke about the school when there was a disagreement, if there was a feeling of entitlement, and the extent to which they held the school accountable. As Lemmer and van Wyk (2004a) also found in their research into parental involvement:

Merely to invite parents into schools is easier than overcoming subtle and powerful barriers to effective parent involvement on the part of teachers and parents (Lemmer & van Wyk, 2004a, p. 260).

Research carried out by Singh et al(2004) in historically disadvantaged schools similar to those in Community A, explained that one of the reasons for low parental involvement levels at these schools, was that parents' did not feel comfortable at the school. Due to their poor economic situation combined with a low level of formal education, they were explained to feel that they were 'not negotiating from a point of strength' (Singh et al., 2004, p. 301). When moving from the home sphere to the school sphere, parents seemed not to feel a level of authority needed to relate and interact with the teachers, and possibly hold them accountable for their actions and performance:

Even in the cases where parents are extremely knowledgeable about their rights, the findings show that parents do not always use their rights, e.g. the right to ask more questions about underperforming educators (Mncube, 2009, p. 100).

This was illustrated by one of the parents from Community A as she complained about the performance of her child's teacher at school who, according to her, was not fulfilling his responsibilities:

But I also got a problem with his class teacher. He is so lazy, he maybe goes once a week at school, or a month, three days a month. He doesn't go to school, and I call the principal. And I tell her, and they say we must look after the kids books and school works, and last year in grade 5, his class teacher was a very nice lady, and all the time she marks the books and she signs. But this one – there is no marks, there is no signs, its blank. And I told her, I am not happy. But she said she will talk to him and she will come back to me but she never comes back (Aparent4).

Through the illustration, it was clear that the parent knew her 'rights' in terms of the teachers performance at school, and was able to compare his performance with that of her child's teacher the previous year. In this way, despite not having completed school herself, she was closely monitoring her son's performance at school and clearly following up on his classroom tasks and homework book. She even went as far as to contact the principal to complain and expressed an intention of going into the school personally to speak to the teacher if she could find out what day that he was actually going to be present. However, when asked further about the situation it was explained that she was now hesitant to follow up the teacher or contact the principal again as she was afraid that her son would be victimised by the teacher and get into trouble. Despite this being a clear violation of her rights and that of her child, it is possible to see how the power of the school and the teacher's authority in the school sphere is greater than that of the parent. While indignant and expressing frustration about the situation while at home, the parent felt helpless in confronting the school further.

This situation where parents in Community A felt unable to confront the school with their complaints is compared with experiences shared by parents in Community B, where very often there was a tendency for parents to very quickly complain to the school if there was something that they did not agree with. Complaints could range from perceived unfair treatment of their children by staff, inconvenient sports practice times, low grades of their children on tests, perceived inappropriate projects or even disagreement about content and activities at school. Here it is clear that parents felt entitled and at the same time were empowered with the authority to confront the school about their concerns. As the following excerpt demonstrates, the parents seemed to also associate being involved in the school with having the right or ability to complain when they did not disagree:

But I would say parents here are a lot more involved, in kind of the day to day things, parents will not hesitate to complain about the slightest thing. If there is one incident where the child has not been treated fairly, then the parents will not hesitate to come in. If there is extra sports practices, or choir or something and it is interfering with, or it is in the evening, and they will say actually I don't agree with that... Whereas I think in our days they just did what they were told, you know, so I think there is this kind of right or entitlement that the kids also have, that wasn't there when we were at school (Bparent5).

In this way the parents were confident of their position and role in their children's education, and able to confront the school when there was something they did not understand or disagreed with. This seems to be a clear example of the perception of Community B parents of the shared role of the school and home in educating their children, and with this perception

of their joint role as ‘educators’ comes a sense of authority to intervene in their child’s schooling. In one sense this assertive behaviour by parents can be seen as a result and fulfilment of the national policy objective to empower parents in schools and implement a real ‘partnership’ between all the stakeholders (Heystek & Louw, 1999). This tendency to intervene can also be recognised in the way that the school has adapted and built up a communication policy to follow when interacting with the parents. While expressing their desire to have open communication and an ‘open door policy’ with parents, the schools also often had a strict structure and procedure for handling parent communication which they described as helping to ‘protect’ the teachers and principal from unnecessary disruptions from parents. When interviewing some of the school administration staff at a school they emphasised this fact:

We try and protect the staff as much as possible, so we take most of the calls or we take messages down (Bschool2).

Opening up communication with parents also places the responsibility of the school to respond to the parents’ enquiries and this was demonstrated by the following incident where the school provided an exam workshop to help explain the school examination process to parents who were frustrated about their children’s results:

They gave us suggestions about how to help our children learn, because they were saying parents were complaining that they were studying with their children who knew the work and then they would get a bad mark. And so they tried to show us how the questions are phrased and so on. So that helped, they did do that this year (Bparent4).

Another parent described this same event, emphasising the school’s response to complaints by the parents and the behaviour of some of the parents towards the teachers. In this case, the school is defending their authority in the education of the children, and asking the parents to help support this role and encourage their children to respect the role of the teachers by speaking to and about the teachers at home in a respectful way:

And from the outset they said, please don’t ask any questions, let us just do our presentation – next week are the parent teacher conferences, that’s where you put your questions in. It was the most extraordinary evening, because it was like lights went on. Unfortunately it wasn’t very well attended as most school meetings are, but it made so much sense, and right at the end, I will never forget, the grade head for the senior phase said – if you come and see us, just watch your tone of voice – you could have heard a pin drop – and she just said, we are only human – we don’t make mistakes, just understand that we are there for your kids and we want to help. But don’t come in there and just tear us to pieces, and don’t go home and break us down in front of your children – and it was such an extraordinary thing to say, but that is the bottom line (Bparent1).

This situation demonstrated clearly how the sense of entitlement of some of the parents in the school in Community B appeared to go beyond a sense of ‘partnership’ for the children’s learning, to an ultimate sense of authority. While parents in Community A generally considered the school to be ‘competent enough’ to handle the children’s school education, this was not always the case in Community B and reflected by the comment by the senior phase teacher who requested parents to remember to be respectful in their interaction with teachers, and representation of the school and its authority at home.

6.6. Responsibility, Values and Time

Previous discussion has pointed to the different conception of roles, responsibilities and values of the parents and school, as contributing to the relatively high level of parental involvement in Community B, and lower level of involvement in Community A. While these relationships cannot be denied, it is important as this chapter concludes, to heed the advice of previous researchers such as Vincent and Martin (2002) who urge readers not to overlook the similarities and contradictions that do not neatly fit the pattern:

Despite the way in which parents’ possession and use of particular resources differentiates their experiences, and orientations to school, there are also areas of shared experience and perception across the parental body as a whole (Vincent & Martin, 2002, p. 113).

While parental involvement was indeed higher in Community B, and understood as being higher than in previous generations, almost all the parents interviewed referred to ‘other parents’ who were perceived to be less and less involved in their children’s school and were seen as handing over more of their responsibilities to the school. Reasons for this ranged from the necessity for mothers to work longer hours, to an increasingly self-centred generation of parents and lack of time spent with children:

If you think of some kids, they get dropped off at school at 07.30; they are at school till 2:15. They go straight to after care. That child is being raised by people other than their immediate family. You don’t know what their values are, I mean, most of the teachers are sound, responsible adults, but it’s those core values, it’s just, it’s quite heart sore to think that those kids are being raised by people that aren’t their own parents. Just because of the amount of time they are spending at school and away from the home (Bparent1).

I think it is because more parents are separating, and more mothers are having to work, and I don’t think parents, and I include myself, are giving the kids all the attention that they need. And not just in terms of checking up on their homework, that’s a given, but

they don't ...we don't have the time, for whatever reasons, because, we need to get to the gym, or we need to (...), it's all about – it's all about me, what I need, my time, and it's affecting the kids, there a things that are surfacing now that before just wasn't an issue because mom stayed at home (Bparent5).

This perception of less and less time available to spend with children, can then be also viewed in relation to how the school in Community B is more and more focused on 'developing the whole child' and investing more and more resources into providing social support for the children. Despite the agreement by both representatives from the school and from parents that it was the home that was responsible to teach the children social and moral values, it seems that in practice that the increased pressure for parents to work, combined with the knowledge that the school is teaching the same values, has resulted in the parents handing over more responsibility to the school that goes beyond what was before considered 'school education.'

In Community A, it was also noted that a trend existed for parents to be less involved and seemingly less supportive of their children's schooling in terms of time spent with the children due to the need to work.

The generation of today is not like the generation then. The other thing that I can say has changed is motivation from home. The non-parental involvement – yes our parents they do attend the meetings but you know we used to feel that the parents are also assisting at home, doing their best. But now, the parents are very busy, sometimes they work and sleep in, the learners are left alone at home, the sisters and brothers are also busy with their things, and there is no support. Then there was support, but now it seems as if there is a lack of support somewhere somehow (Aschool3).

Here the parents in Community A can therefore be understood as handing over, by necessity, some of the responsibility for their children's 'home education' to the school:

Yes, yes, because teachers is like parents at school. Sometimes you don't teach her everything, but when they come from school and they come and ask you something. 'Hey mother' something like this and this and this, my teacher asked me like this. So you don't hesitate to tell him – tell him yes, your teacher is right (Aparent5).

While the socio-economic context of Community A is indeed starkly different to that of Community B, and parental involvement is relatively much higher in Community B, it is nonetheless important to see that a lack of time affects parents in both places, and ultimately their ability to be involved in the school. While the culture and values of the home and school are from previous analysis, understood to be similar in Community B, this is not the case in Community A. This difference in values, combined with the perceived responsibility of parents in a child's social development would seem to amplify the effect of a lack of time

available to spend with their children. In addition to having an impact on the level of parental involvement in school, it can be reasoned that the de-socialization effect referred to by Darnell and Hoëm (1996) away from the parents' home culture is increased.

6.7. Chapter Summary

Through the analysis of the school as a site of socialisation, this chapter has attempted to highlight the underlying 'modern' values of the national school curriculum, and the impact that these have on parent-school relations when implemented in different community contexts. Through interviews with parents from Community B, it is suggested that the cultural agenda, in terms of the values and language operating in their homes, was very similar to that of the school, providing a strong sense of cultural integration and continuity between the Home and School sphere. This continuity in turn was seen to work together with the general perception of the partnership between the school and the home, resulting in a sense of entitlement on behalf of the parents and increased authority when interacting with the school. As opposed to weakening the identity of the children, it was expressed that this support and involvement of parents in schools in Community B, served to increase the confidence of the children and enable them to achieve more than previous generations:

I think the parental involvement has given our children a whole new confidence to be able to handle the world.... We are dealing with a whole confident generation that can get up there and say their opinion, what they think, and be able to cope with things in a different way so and that is to do with the fact that their parents are behind them. ... and I think there has been a support that parents have given their kids which has been amazing, that has enabled them to achieve far greater than we achieved (Bworker).

In Community A on the other hand, a distinction was seen to be understood by parents between the cultural agenda of the parents and the school, connected to the strong economic focus of the education discourse discussed in the previous chapter. The values taught by the school as well as the language in which they were taught, all worked towards equipping the children in Community A with the cultural capital and skills that the parents felt they were not able to give, and yet were deemed necessary in providing for the future economic progress and success in society. Parents supported and encouraged their children in their schooling in order to satisfy their economic needs, while taking responsibility for the cultural and social education of their children at home. Authority in both the Home and School sphere was established in terms of perceived ability and this in turn affected the tendency of parents to remain seemingly 'uninvolved' in their children's schooling. While this disconnection and

lack of cultural integration was stark in comparison to Community B, the influence of national education rhetoric and belief in its value and place in society seemed to dispel any outright expression of dissatisfaction by parents. This being the case, it was possible to see how in conjunction with a decreasing amount of time available for 'home education' due to the economic circumstances of the parents, the cultural agenda of the school education was resulting in what Darnell and Hoëm (1996) describe as a 'de-socialisation and re-socialisation of children away from their patrimonial background' (1996, p. 271).

7. Conclusion

Throughout the process of preparing and writing this thesis, the aim has been to gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which parents' perceive education, linking this understanding to the way parents are involved in the local schools. Fieldwork carried out in South Africa, attempted to go beyond an evaluation of current parental involvement levels, to understand how parents' understanding of education was influenced by personal experiences, the community context, as well as the inherent values and culture prioritised by the national and global education system.

7.1. Main findings

Education systems and policies are designed, and inherent in this statement is the fact that there are certain agendas that have been identified and prioritised. What these 'aims' or 'agendas' for education in South Africa are, and which receives most focus or priority has a clear effect on the value individuals place on education and the priority it is given. In short, education is not a 'neutral' process, and any analysis of its conception, implementation or reception, must be willing to take this into account. From the global down to the national and local community level, the importance of, and priority given to the economic agenda of schooling (Serpell, 1993), in terms of preparing children for later employment and effective participation in the national economy, was found to be central.

While Serpell's (1993) interpretation of the economic agenda of education and schooling was found to be prioritised by both policy designers and parents, the 'universal' aim of ensuring employment for the community's children was also found to be a culturally loaded experience. For Community B, a relative continuity and cultural integration (Darnell & Hoëm, 1996) between the School and Home culture is argued to have put children in an advantaged position. The 'cultural code' (Soudien & Baxen, 1997) or cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) necessary to navigate the education system is reinforced and initiated in the home environment, creating a smooth overlap between the Home and School sphere. The case is not necessarily as simple for children in Community A, where even though some of the parents had completed the full 12 years of basic schooling, a difference in home language (i.e. other than English) as well as epistemological and cultural background contributed towards a

relative dislocation, as opposed to a reinforcement between parents and their children, and consequently also towards the school.

The cultural capital and official standard on which the definition of parental involvement is grounded upon, was found to favour the situation and profile of parents in Community B. Recognising the symbolic value given to education, parents in Community A supported their children's attendance in school but their lack of involvement was often interpreted by the school as a lack of interest. This simple interpretation masks what can be argued to be a considered decision, perception of ability, and trust given by parents to the school to 'take care of' the task of educating their children, while they chose to focus on their responsibility for the cultural and social education of their children at home. High levels of parental involvement in Community B on the other hand, in conjunction with a sense of entitlement and ability to be involved in the schooling of their children, is supported and managed through a complex parent involvement structure in schools.

It is argued that the way the school perceives the parents, affects in turn how the parents perceive the school. This could be seen in the way parents responded to this apparent discrepancy in ability, often lacking the sense of authority and confidence in communicating and confronting the school on issues relating to their children.

7.2. Zone of proximal credibility

From the analysis of the national curriculum and interviews with research participants, it is clear that 'education' is valued in both communities, and that the knowledge, language and skills associated with the school are prioritised, whether this inherently means acknowledging and reinforcing the values and knowledge system of the home or not. The main explanation given by parents for this was the primacy of ensuring their children's future place in an extremely competitive South African job market. The 'credibility' of this strategy for education was therefore based on future economic security and success.

When speaking to community workers in Community A, as well as school representatives in Community B however, the observation was made that, despite a general 'belief in education,' there is a growing awareness of the number of young people finishing school, and even completing higher education, that are not able to find employment. Acceptance of a national curriculum and school system, which in effect educated the community's children away from the community values and culture, has up until now been accepted in favour of

ensuring economic success and independence and in some cases ‘liberation’ from poverty in the post-apartheid context. How long will this acceptance last however, if the aims that parents have for their children’s education are not in fact achieved?

Expressed in another way, Stephens (2007) comments on the priority of the economic agenda of schooling and the focus of education in terms of equipping the population with ‘value-free’ numeracy and literacy skills:

The ‘rationality’ and value-free logic of economists and their predominance over other disciplines has only one drawback or conditionality. It must work. As long as development powered by classical Western economics provided the ‘returns on investment’ ... many, particularly the very poor...are willing to forego cultural considerations....(Stephens, 2007, p. 38).

The implication of this statement is therefore – what will then happen if this conditionality is not met? The symbolic value of education discussed previously was in many ways based on the expectation that gaining a formal education would later result in a job. With the current state of unemployment in South Africa, it is reasonable to ask: How large is the ‘zone of proximal credibility’ for the South African education system? (Harley & Wedekind, 2004) Will the symbolic value of the institutionalised academic qualification be able to survive a clear failure in terms of what it set out to achieve? And how will this ultimately affect society’s willingness to take part in education, including parents’ decision to set aside time to be involved in the current home-school structures?

7.3. Recognition of agenda and ability to choose

The analysis in this thesis has also pointed to the fact that the national curriculum both represents and prioritises a cultural agenda that emphasises and legitimises a set of values and epistemology above that which forms the basis of many South African homes (Breidlid, 2003; Soudien & Baxen, 1997). While the Department of Education seeks to educate the South African people in order to prepare and equip them for participation in the global economy (Department of Education, 2000), the question must be asked whether this education should not prioritise their participation in their local community first?

As the quote from Soudien and Baxen (1997) illustrates below, children and parents should be able to recognise the cultural code and view point from which the curriculum is based, as one of many view points, and valuable in equipping young South Africans for their participation in an increasingly connected world. The ‘empowering’ value of education, as a means of

providing choice and opportunity, is relatively hollow however, if students are not at the same time able to learn and acknowledge their own cultural background, and most immediately their parents, taking this into consideration as they lead the South African nation forward in the generations to come:

There is undoubtedly merit in OBE as it seeks to make young people literate in the ways and habits of modernity. At the same time, South Africa's youth need to be able to recognize the proposed educational reform script for what it is: a text for a very particular understanding of the world. They also need to be able to insert their own epistemologies and ontologies into the process by which they determine who and what it is they and their nation choose to become (Soudien & Baxen, 1997, p. 458).

In this way, it is not posed as an 'either/or' scenario between the economic and cultural agenda of schooling. Rather it is put forward that it is a choice; a choice that can only be made once the implicit assumptions and values of the current education system are adequately recognised and acknowledged by both national authorities and the individuals that make up and take part in the system on a daily basis. Looking back to the Freedom Charter, adopted by the Congress of the People in 1955 (Congress of the People, 1955), it is possible to see that the awareness of a need to balance between a recognition of different education agendas was addressed. Within the Freedom Charter, it was recognised that the children of South Africa needed to be equipped with the skills needed to participate with all 'mankind,' but this was to be built firstly on the recognition and acknowledgement of their own people and values:

All the cultural treasures of mankind shall be open to all, by free exchange of books, ideas and contact with other lands;

The aim of education shall be to teach the youth to love their people and their culture, to honour human brotherhood, liberty and peace (Congress of the People, 1955).

Time to reflect upon the inherent structures and values which are recognised in society is important, before the values and agenda of education can be adequately acknowledged, re-evaluated or confirmed. While this thesis has centred on the thoughts and experiences shared by individual members of Community A and B, these parents and school representatives help to illustrate the practical reality of home-school interaction on a local community level in South Africa. A clear separation and difference in understanding of roles and responsibilities needs to be adequately addressed by education policy in South Africa before any change in parental participation in schools can be expected. Recognition of the narrow standard for parental involvement and school's conception of community resources needs to be prioritised so that the benefits of meaningful home-school interaction may be experienced by more than only a few advantaged South African communities.

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Appendices

Included below are the information sheet, consent form and interview guide provided to parents in taking part in the research. While different forms were created for the school representatives and community workers according to their needs, they were similar enough that it was considered only necessary to include the examples applicable to parents.

A: Parent Information sheet

B: Parent Consent Form

C: Parent Interview Guide

A: Education Research Project - Information Sheet

Who and what?

My name is Lauren Auditore and I am a Masters student at Oslo University College in Norway. As a part of my studies I am writing a project about the ways that parents from different income level communities understand and are involved in the school system.

What is involved?

To do this, I would like to interview parents of children in Grade 4 to 6 to find out about their experience with school, and their child's education. Taking part in the project is completely voluntary and will mean taking part in an interview with me of approximately 45 minutes, at a place and time which suits you (preferably before 5 September).

During the interview we will talk about your experience with school yourself as well as at the Primary school where your child attends. You will also be able to look over the interview afterwards and make any necessary changes or comments to my notes. There will be no consequences if you choose not to participate and you can withdraw at any time. I will use a voice recorder during the interview.

Information Security

All information will be treated confidentially and stored safely. This project has been approved by the WCED Research Directorate as well as the Norwegian Social Science Data Service (NSD). I will travel back to Norway when all interviews are completed. This means that also the data will be transferred to Norway. The audio recordings, name lists and other identifiable data will be deleted by project end, no later than December 1st 2012.

Interested?

If you are interested in taking part in the project, or would like any more information please don't hesitate to contact me on the details below:

Cell phone: 0712712990

Email: lauren.auditore@gmail.com

I look forward to hearing from you!

Kind Regards

Lauren Auditore
Masters student



B: Parent Consent Form

I, _____ a parent at _____ Primary school have been informed about the research project by Lauren Auditore and agree to participate in an interview with Lauren Auditore as a part of her research project.

I understand that my response will be confidential and all information given will be made anonymous in any transcription or written report.

I understand that the interview session will be voice-recorded only to ensure accuracy and all voice recordings will be deleted at the end of the project. The only individuals to have the information I give will be the researcher (Lauren Auditore) and the translator (if needed). I also understand that I am free at any time to withdraw from the interview or research project.

Signed

Place/Date

C: Interview Guide for Parents

Aim: To look into the perceptions and attitudes of parents towards education and the South African school system, in order to better understand the relationship between parents and the school in different socio-economically defined communities.

- How do parents understand the school/role of the school in South African society?
- What was the parents experience with the school when they were a child?
- What expectations do parents have for their children with regards to schooling?
- What values are learnt at school and at home?
- Is there a difference in 'culture' between school and home?
- What kind of interaction is there between the school and home?

Brief introduction of the project

Consent form confirmation

Start voice recorder

Introduction: Background and description of parent

- How long have you lived in this area?
- Does your extended family live close by?
- What do you do for a living?
- Income/tax bracket
- Are you married/divorced/single etc?
- How many children do you have?
- How old are you?

Parent's education

- Did you go to school? (Did your parents go to school?)
 - If yes, how many years did you complete?/where did you go to school?
 - Can you tell me about your first day at school
 - What do you remember most about school when you were growing up?
What is your best/worst memory from school?
 - Can you tell me what it was like when you went to school?
 - Why do you think your parents sent you to school?
 - How do you think school has changed since you were a child?
 - If no, why not? (what are the circumstances around this decision)
 - How did people feel about school when you were a child and do you think that people think differently about school now?
 - How do you think school has changed since you were a child?
- What did you want to be when you grew up? (was school an essential part of this goal?)

Values of school and home

- To what extent is education and school important? And why?
- What is the most important thing that children learn at school?
- What kind of values do you feel are important to teach your children? Is it the job of the family or the school to teach these values?
- Are there things that you feel the school does not teach your children that you would like them to learn? Can you explain?
- Are there things that you think the school teaches the children that you don't like or don't agree with?

Culture of school and home

- What languages can you speak? And what language do you usually use to speak with your children?
 - o What language does your child speak mostly at school?
 - o Does your child learn any other languages at school?
- In what way does the the school teach about the traditional practices of the community?
 - o Do you think they should focus on this more or less/in a different way?
- Do you think that some children do better at school/find it easier to fit into school than others? Can you explain why you think this way? (What is it that makes these children fit in better?)

Interaction with school and home

- How often do you get information from the school?
- How often do you attend meetings at the school?
- What do you think about the School Governing Body (SGB)?
 - o What is their main role at the school
 - o Would you like to be a part of the SGB? Can you explain why?
- Do you feel that you it is easy to come into contact with the school/teacher if you need to discuss your child's education?
 - o What do you think the school could do to improve this?
- Is there someone at home who usually helps your son/daughter with his homework?

Experience and expectations for your children at school

- How many children do you have, how old are they and do they go to school?
- What is your child's favourite thing about school? What does he/she talk about the most?
- Do you feel that your child is doing well at school? Can you explain?
- How much school/many years of school do you want your child to complete?
- What would you like your child to work with one day?
- Can you describe for me what you would like your child's future to look like?
- Do you think that this situation is likely to happen? Why or why not?
- What do you think could help/make sure your child achieves his/her goals?
- What do you think could potentially get in the way of your child achieving his/her goals?