

Abstract

This study attempted to broaden the knowledge base around school-community engagement given that limited literature in regard to school-community engagement was found, particularly in South African schools. Through an exploratory case study, guided by Epstein's *theory of overlapping spheres*, this study looked to develop information and insights into the nature of community engagement in a South African school, to begin to bridge the gap between intended and actual policy outcomes. The study was located in an interpretivist paradigm, which made use of interviews, a document analysis and observation to generate data.

Further, this study operated with the underlying assumption that the purpose of schooling should be to provide inclusive and quality education for all learners, it has been argued that school-community partnerships is one mechanism in which this can be attained. With that, it was contended that quality and inclusive education requires education policy to extend beyond classroom matters, as the challenges faced by learners, families, schools, and communities extend beyond teaching and learning.

This study found that school-community engagement is broad, multifaceted and complex concept, and that the ways in which partnerships are developed and sustained is very much dependent on the context, in terms a deep understanding around the complexities within their context. This study has identified that school may be able to establish successful school-community partnerships that are both functional and sustainable if it has a clear understanding of the context in which it exists and as a result has formed appropriate means to and forms of engagement.

Moreover, a key finding of this study was that, for school community partnerships to be functional and sustainable they ought to be mutual and reciprocal in nature. Namely, when relations are formed, they should result in benefits for all in the partnership and if the benefits were not reciprocal, the relationships tended to be short lived.