University of the Witwatersrand

Faculty of Humanities

Master of Education

(Coursework & Research Report)

2020

Investigating the Nature of Community Engagement in a South African School and its Implications for Education Policy: *An Exploratory Case Study*

Module Name: EDUC7031A_Research Project

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Investigating the Nature of Community Engagement in a South African School and its Implications for Education Policy: *An Exploratory Case Study*

A mini dissertation in fulfillment of the requirement for the independent Research Module [Master of Education (coursework and research report) Degree] in the discipline of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (ELPS).

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

University of the Witwatersrand (Education Campus)

Supervisor: Dr B.J. Johnson

By

Kelly Robertson

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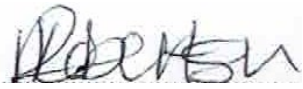
Signed:  **Date: 30/06/2020**

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Dedication

I dedicate this research project to my family, particularly my parents and grandparents, who support me even if they are not quite sure why I am still at university, and who will also never read this report.

Much love

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to the following:

Dr Johnson, my supervisor, for her guidance, patience, and availability throughout this process, without her help and support the project would not have been completed.

All the participants who took the time to participate in this research project, your time, and insights are greatly appreciated.

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INVESTIGATOR	Kelly Robertson
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR	WITS SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
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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.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ATP	Action Team for Partnerships
BLM	Black Lives Matter movement
GBV	Gender Based Violence
IDP	Integrated Development Plan draft
NECT	National Education Collaboration Trust
SASA	South African Schools Act
SGB	School Governing Body
RSN	Reform Support Network

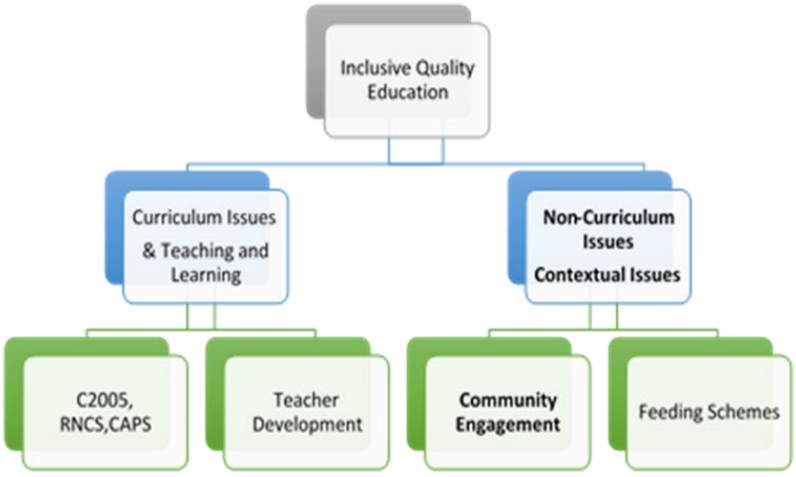
CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction to the Study

There appears to be widespread agreement that school-community partnerships are one avenue that can be used to address the challenges that a school (Myende, 2018) or a community (Prew, 2009) may be facing (Epstein, 2002; Sanders, 2002 & NECT, 2016), and in turn an avenue to improving the quality of education. As demonstrated by Lemmer (2007), "good school, family and community partnerships lead to improved academic learner achievement, self-esteem, school attendance and social behaviour" (p. 218).

This study operated with the underlying assumption that the goal of schooling should be to provide inclusive and quality education for all learners. With that, it is accepted that in order for schools to achieve quality education that is also inclusive, they need to understand and address that challenges of education that extend beyond the curriculum and classroom experiences, namely non-curriculum issues. UNESCO (2005b) supports the notion that quality education is influenced by various factors including the nature of the context in which schooling takes place. Figure 1 below illustrates that curriculum and 'non-curriculum' factors can contribute to the quality of education.

***Figure 1*: Factors that may Influence Inclusivity and Quality of Education Produced.**



Further, this study, focused more on the context of 'environmental issues' and enhancing the understanding of the context of the learner and the schools in order to

gain insights into community engagement in schools, thus going beyond the direct experience of teaching and learning in the classroom (Prew, 2009). Through doing so the study aimed to gain insights into how and why the school interacts with the members of the community, beyond its immediate internal community namely the parents of learners.

1.2 Focus of the Study

This study was an investigation into the nature community engagement by a school in *Johannesburg East* with its' community and what the possible implications for education policy as. This study explored the conceptualisations of community engagement, the experiences of community engagement within a South African school and what this means for engagement policies within the school. This investigation led to a deeper understanding of communities and the nature of community engagement, as well as "an area that has been identified as one which has the potential to impact education outcomes positively is that of… community involvement in children's education" (National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT), 2016, p. 6). Thus, this study was centralised around a school and understanding the role (or the conceived role) of the school within its communities' context.

1.3 Location of the Study

The Independent* Catholic School is located in the Johannesburg East district, which falls in the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality.

> *Where independent schools are "founded, owned, managed and financed by stakeholders other than the state" (Walton, Nel, Hugo & Muller, 2009, p. 107), provided that that are registered with the Head of Department and do not discriminate on admission on the grounds of race as well as do not offer an education inferior to public education (DoE, 1996, Section 46 (3)).

Table 1 illustrates the estimated race demographics of the population in the City of Johannesburg in 2020, this indicates that the City of Johannesburg is heterogenous society, with diversity in race and culture.

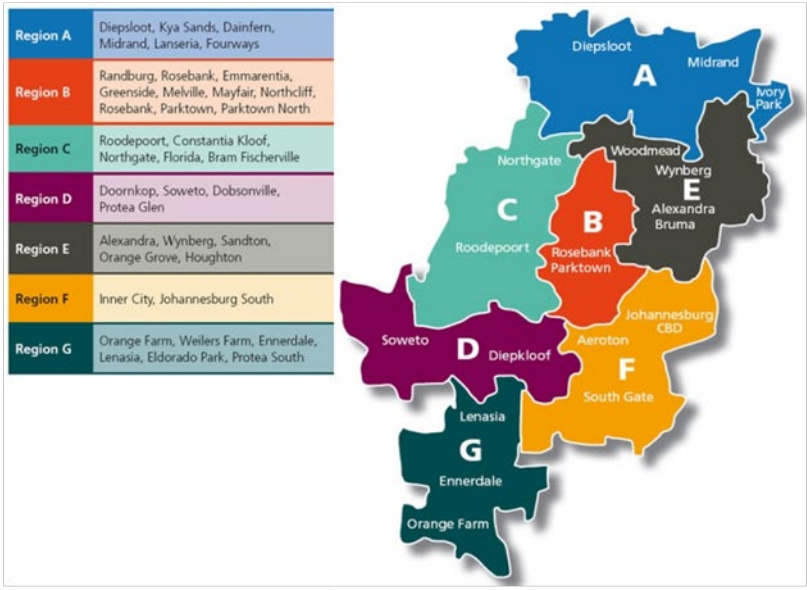
Table 1: **Estimated Race Demographic of the Population in the City of Johannesburg**

RACE PROFILE	PERCENTAGE OF JOHANNESBURG POPULATION (%)
Black African	76,4
Coloured	5,6
White	12,3
Indian/Asian	4,9

(Adapted From: https://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/johannesburg-population/)

Figure 2 is a simple map of the regions that make up the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality. The school is located in Region F of the City Metropolitan, which consists of the greater inner-city and Johannesburg South, in a suburb called Observatory, within the surrounding suburbs of Houghton, Yeoville, Berea, Hillbrow.

Figure 2: **An Illustration of the Regions in the City Metropolitan**



http://www.pikitup.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/jra-map.jpg

In 2017, Kamana (2017) claimed that the school had approximately 1,200 pupils from Pre-Primary to grade 12, generally catering to middle- and upper- income families. The demographics of the students in 2017 were approximately 30% white, 45% black and 25% Indian, Coloured and other ethnicities, indicating diversity within the school population. Kamana (2017) further describes the school as a "community [that] remains driven by Marist principles, a diverse, sanctuary-like school and is a microcosm of the positive possibilities of South African society" (p. 13).

The region is an area of contrasts, which consists of upper-, middle- and lower-income residential areas, thus the school exists within a context of a mixture of races, cultures, and residential incomes. Within this community's context there are huge gaps in residential incomes, resulting in a prevalence of inequality and social injustice. However, within this complex context the school, that was studied, has had a longstanding strive to achieve inclusive and high-quality education, as the preliminary document analysis indicated. The school has a long history of social engagement, in 1976 in insubordination the school opened its doors to all races, in spite of the apartheid regime policies and laws. "It has been [and continues to be] a beacon whose identity is wrapped up in its social justice activism" (Philip, 2017).

Today the strive for social justice and equality continues, where privilege and destitution exist within the same context, here the school runs the Three2Six project. The project was founded in 2008 and is a bridging educational project for refugee children (Perumal, 2013). This Three2Six project, a non-profit project, teaches (from 3pm-6pm) refugee children who have been denied access to mainstream schooling in South Africa. This programme attempts to help refugee children, transition to state schools. The project teaches mathematics, english and life skills, in accordance with CAPS so that these children "maintain basic learning until they can enter a mainstream school" ("Three2Six celebrates 10 years", 2018).

1.4 Background to the Study

Post-apartheid South Africa or schooling saw a surge of new (education) policies and policy changes, in an attempt to undo and redress the inequalities and disadvantages that were formed during the apartheid era (Christie, 2008). It is recognised that post-apartheid South Africa has made great improvements in equalising learners' access

(formal access for children born in South Africa) to education, namely having learners enrolled in a schooling institution (Jansen & Taylor, 2003). It may be further noted that education policy and education reform was centralised around the curriculum, teacher development and resource or fiscal (equity) distribution as well as access to education (Jansen & Taylor, 2003).

Despite, these various education reforms, aimed at improving the quality of education for all students and redressing the gaps formed during the countries apartheid era, great inequalities remain ever-present in schools, communities and in our society. In the face of being a democratic country for over 25 years, “Johannesburg [still] struggles with high levels of poverty and inequality, social exclusion and substandard levels of human development” (Integrated Development Plan draft (IDP) 2018/2019 Review, 2019, p. 16), many of the residents in Southern Africa, more explicitly in the City of Johannesburg, still live with the effects of the country’s past, this is evident the uneven growth of the city, where in 2017 more that 2 million people in Johannesburg were living in poverty (IHS Markit, 2018 cited in IDP 2018/2019 Review, 2019).

Contrastingly, in 2015 the City of Johannesburg, housed half of the countries of *high net worth individuals*, who obtain the title from having a net worth of US$1 million or approximately R12million in 2015. Where it was estimated that 23 400 high net worth individuals lived in the city of Johannesburg (*Where South Africa’s richest people live,* 2007). Thus the school exists in a complex and diverse community with extreme wealth and poverty co-existing side by side, which is a microcosm of South Africa society, reinforcing the complexity and diversity of the context of the school.

Consequently, it is argued that despite having policies and frameworks, that aim to safeguard the right to education of all children of the school going age, regardless of where they were born, many refugee children, have in reality been exclude from mainstream schooling. Indicating that lived realities and policies as texts are disjointed (Hlatshwayo & Vally, 2013). This study explored how the school addresses such contextual issues through engagement with its’ community It is contended that this project was developed to address the social issue, as outlined by Hlatshwayo and Vally (2013), who contend that:

> The South African Constitution and national education legislation as well as the Refugee Act, consistent with international treaties, guarantee the right to basic education for refugees and asylum seekers from all countries. Yet, this article draws evidence-based conclusions that violations of the right-to-education for refugees and migrants in South Africa are a pervasive problem. (p. 2)

1.5 Purpose and Rationale of the Study

While conducting my research project, as a Bachelor of Education with Honours student, which looked at the Policy on Learner Attendance and why learners may not be attending school, I came to realise that the context in which the learner exists contributes substantially to the learners' education, the learners realities impacted greatly on the day-to-day teaching and learning experience. I also noticed that 'education policy' has placed little focus on the learners' context and learners as more than just learners.

Similarly, my discussions with other professional teachers demonstrated that learners tend achieve better outcomes when they have resources, both material and human, outside of the classroom. The teachers acknowledge that learners with a support system outside of the classroom tend to do better than those without much external assistance.

Furthermore, the School-Parent-Community Engagement Framework (NECT, 2016) indicates that:

> …the general achievement of education outcomes remains poor, often below that of lower resourced countries. There are several reasons for this low level of achievement and government has identified improving the quality of education as a national priority. An area that has been identified as one which has the potential to impact education outcomes positively is that of parent and community involvement. [Where] currently the level of parent and community participation in education is low. (p. 6)

From the claims made by the government in the guidelines for School-Parent-Community framework (NECT, 2016), it is evident that there is a 'gap' in school and

community engagement, despite the possibilities for improving the quality of education in South Africa. This study focused on developing an understanding of school-community engagement, in an attempt to conceptualise what this means for developing quality and inclusive education and its' implications for education policy. Thus, it is contended that in order to improve teaching and learning, though education policy, one needs to go beyond the immediate classroom experience and look at learners holistically. Education policy ought to be developed with a "clear understanding that learners are individuals, with different aptitudes and learning styles and with personal attributes influenced by their home and social backgrounds" (Lubart cited UNESCO, 2005a, p. 143).

1.6 Problem Statement

This study explored how and why the school engages with its community to address the complexities and inequalities, of its' context, to support school and community development.

Post 1994, following democratisation, the country saw an influx of new education reforms and policy changes, in consequence of the government looking to undo and simultaneously redress the disadvantages and inequalities formed and developed during the apartheid era (Christie, 2008). These reforms were, predominately, limited to inside schools and were limited to curriculum issues and the immediate classroom experience. Supplementary, these reforms were developed with the underlying assumption that schools (and education systems) are stand-alone entities which operate independently from learners' families and even the communities in which they exist.

However, more recently it has been posited that reforms that are limited to the classroom experiences and immediate teaching and learning have had little impact on school improvement and learner development (Epstein, 2002), as it has been determined that schools alone cannot meet the needs of school children, this evident throughout the literature (Henderson, Marburger & Ooms, 1986; Epstein & Sanders, 2005; Lemmer, 2007; NECT, 2016 & Myende, 2018). Correspondingly, legislation, such as the South African Schools Act (SASA) has intended to make schools more

open and permeable to their given contexts (Naicker, 2011), through the integration of representative governing bodies within South African schools.

Consequently, there were raised expectations that school, and community relations would increase and create democratic leadership within schools, but this has not materialised (Naicker, 2011). Thus, it is contended that gaps have formed between the intended and the actual outcomes of these education policies and legislations. Despite, widespread agreement that school, family, and community partnerships can be beneficial to all stakeholders, provided they are genuine and sustainable (Epstein, 2002; Sanders, 2002, Prew, 2009; NECT, 2016 & Myende, 2018) and an "enabling policy environment that mandates democratic participation by parents and communities in schools as partners in both their children's education and in school governance and management" effective participation still remains low (NECT, 2016, p. 6).

Furthermore, Prew (2009) asserts that education policy and reforms , particularly in a developing country such as South Africa, ought to be highly contextualised, to ensure that the needs of the school and the communities are appropriately and effectively met. As a result, the responsibility to establish and drive school-community engagement, that is appropriate to the context, is ultimately that of the schools, where government acts as a supportive agent (NECT, 2016). Nonetheless, in spite of an 'enabling policy environment', there is limited literature on how and why schools can and should engage with their communities as well as how and why some forms of engagement are successful, and others are not, along with what this means for education policy. With limited evidence-based research established around the nature of community engagement in schools, particularly in South Africa (which is made up of complex and diverse communities) this study was conducted.

1.7 Significance of the study

This study hoped to broaden the knowledge base around school-community engagement given that this study had found inadequate literature in regard to school-community engagement, particularly in South African schools. While the field of community engagement in South African schools is limited there are some prominent studies which look at a relationship between schools and their communities, Lemmer

(2007) looks at parent involvement in their children's education, Prew (2009) investigates community involvement in school development and Myende (2018) explores the creation and sustainability of relationships between schools and their communities. These studies acknowledge that school-community engagement is one mechanism of addressing some of the challenges faced by the school, learner and community members, these are limited to specific contexts and do not delve into the implications of school-community partnerships for education policy, particularly in South African schools.

Thus, 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. To inform policy and in turn further create a more conducive policy environment, thus this study was an analysis *for* policy. Where an analysis for policy contributes to the formation and improvement of policy (Gordan, Lewis & Young, 1993).

1.8 Aims of the Study

This study aimed to develop an understanding of community engagement through the exploration of the conceptualisations and experiences, of community engagement found within a South African school, in order to gain insights into the implications for education policy. This was done as it is acknowledged by various authors (Epstein, 2002; Sanders, 2002; Prew, 2009 & NECT, 2016 & Myende, 2018) that school-community engagement may be one way of addressing some of the challenges faced by the school and by the community. Through doing so the study aimed to gain insights into how and why the school interacts with the members of the community, beyond its immediate internal community namely the parents of learners and determine what this may mean for education policy.

1.9 Research Question

What is the nature of community engagement in a South African school?

1.9.1 Critical Research Questions

This study is focused on the following research questions:

1. How is Community Engagement conceptualised and experienced in the school?
2. What drives the school to partake in Community Engagement? Or *Why is there Community Engagement in the School?*
3. What is conceptualised as the benefits and barriers of Community Engagement within the School?
4. What are the implications of Community Engagement (by this South African School) for education policy in South Africa?

1.10 Conclusion

This chapter offered an introduction and background to the study. This chapter conceptualised the study and provided an overview of the aims and objectives of the study as well as the key research questions. The study focused on understanding school-community engagement in a South African school and the implications of these partnerships for education policy.

Further this study accepted the goal of schooling should be to provide inclusive and quality education for all learners. With that, it is accepted that in order for schools to achieve quality education that is also inclusive, they need to understand and address that challenges of education that extend beyond the curriculum and classroom experiences.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviewed the literature around community engagement in schools. Through the examination of the literature, an understanding of what school-community partnerships are, how they are formed and what makes them successful was developed. This involved an analysis, which looked at gathering information that contributes towards education policy. Throughout the literature , there is emphasis on shared goals and vision as well as school-community partnerships that are mutually beneficial for all involved. These are deemed to be precursors to the functionality and sustainability of school-community partnerships. Lastly, this study was famed around Epstein's *theory of overlapping spheres*, which provided a lens into the nature of school-community partnerships and how these relationships are developed and sustained.

2.2 Conceptualising Community-School Engagement

The concept of 'community' may appear (deceptively) to be simple and easy to understand, however Myende (2018), Hands (2005) and Sanders (2002) agree that community is a multifaceted and a relative concept, where many authors offer their view of the concept.

The notion of 'community' has been contested and has evolved in terms of why communities form and what the purpose of forming/partaking in communities may serve. Pearson (1995) asserts that communities offer to individuals a sense of belonging, mutual concern and support, through "common activities and/or beliefs and who bound together principally to relations of affect, loyalty, common values and/or personal concern" (Brink, 2001, p. 8). Similarly, Durkheim argues that community is a result of collective conscious, where in his examination of functioning society, was "impressed by the importance of community relationships for equipping human beings with social support and moral sentiments" (Brink, 2001, p. 3). In other words, the norms and values of the community are dialectically instilled in and formed by those who form the community. Moreover, Durkheim understands that these interactions and shared norms and values are the base of for societal formation.

However, Pearson (1995) contends that common communities (ways of life) and shared groups does not necessarily equate to common beliefs, as he believes that individuals may form/join communities to serve their own individual needs without fully buying into the norms and values of the greater community. Further, it is important for one to note that different communities may hold different values and differing notions of morality, thus communities should be understood and be examined as plural- where individuals partake in various communities whose focal norms and values may differ. Therefore, it is accepted that one universally accepted definition cannot and will not be achieved, it is still useful to develop a broad and flexible overview of concept.

Henderson and Mapp (2002) define community in three ways, namely; “(i) the neighbourhood or the places around the school, (ii) local residents, who live in the area and may or may not have children in the school, but have an interest in the school and (iii) local groups that are based in the neighbourhood” (p. 15). While this definition is useful, one may argue that it is limited to the neighbourhood that the schools exists in. Given that this study was conducted in and for the South African context, this definition does little as the social and political history of the country has made the formations of communities (and school-communities) rather unique. Where within these communities there is great complexity as there is diversity in the communities (socially, culturally, economically, nationalities and family structures may differ greatly) particularly in urban areas (NECT, 2016).

Rather Myende’s (2018) illustration of the community concept is much more useful to this study as it is more comprehensive and is bound within the South African context. He postulates that one’s perception of community can be demarcated or limited to either the geographical or the social relational. Where the first perspective, geographical communities, refers to those within the location of the school (those who reside in immediacy to the school) additionally the second perspective, relational communities, refers to those with which the school has relations. In other words, the second perspective sees what the community of a school as being guided by commonalities, such as “common cultural heritage, language, social interactions and shared interests and vision by individuals and organisations” (Myende, 2018, p. 2).

Moreover, Schutz (2006) argues that instead of trying to define, and thus limit, a community, one ought to "seek to understand the often different ways that school-community engagement efforts conceptualise their local communities" (p. 693), simply put, communities ought to be understood in the local context in which local individuals or groups within their schools conceptualise communities, and their role (as a school) in their community. Similarly, Epstein (cited in Lemmer, 2007) offers a more general overview of community where she argues that community encompasses all stakeholders who are invested in children development in schools and families, be it individuals, institutions, or organisations. The definition presented by Myende (2018) and Epstein (2002) are useful in identifying what a community may be, but at the same time are broad and flexible enough to be true in different spaces and times, which is needed for effective education policy development and implementation. However, it is recognised that given the global Coronavirus pandemic, how communities are identified and conceptualised may need to be shifted and an additional layer complexity may be added what and how communities are conceptualised.

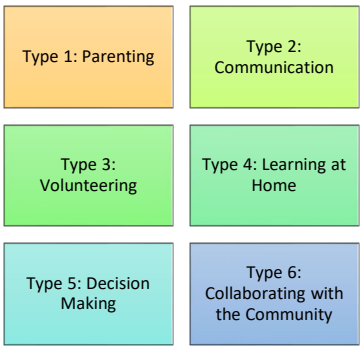
Much like the community concept, engagement may appear to be simple, but it is a densely packed and complex concept. It is important for one to note that there is a distinction between community *involvement* and community *engagement.*

As indicated by Valli, Stefanski and Jacobson (2014), who contend that:

> community and parental engagement replace the more traditional ideas of service provision and parental involvement…schools often reduce involvement to superficial levels and urges a more robust partnership that provides multiple opportunities and varied venues for parents and community members to become involved in decision making and interact with children in academic, social, and cultural contexts. (pp. 15-16)

This indicates that involvement may be limited to fiscal and material resources. However, it may be argued that this notion of involvement is oversimplified and limited to short term interactions. Epstein (2002) identifies six types of involvement, see figure 3. The six types of involvement may be used to guide the development of engagement practices in schools and may differ according to the needs in the context at a specific point in time or period of time. Thus, there is not fixed a process for developing and understanding family and community involvement in schools. Further, involvement may be seen as the base for school, community, and family partnerships, where the framework "helps educators to develop more comprehensive programmes of school and family [and community] partnerships" (Epstein, 2010, pp. 84-85), which leads to school-community engagement

Figure 3: Six Types of Involvement



Further, Gross et al. (2015); Sanders and Epstein (2005) illustrate that *engagement* and *partnership* are two terms that are used interchangeably and as synonyms of one another. They define partnerships as a reciprocal and mutually beneficial relationships and a mutual sharing of knowledge, skills, responsibilities, goals, and resources. Franklin and Streeter (cited in Chavkin, 1998) develop this further, where they note that these reciprocally beneficial relationships are formally planned and not done sporadically or randomly.

Thus, this study accepts that involvement is the basis of developing genuine school-community engagement/partnerships, that are, formally planned, reciprocally sharing resources, responsbilties and goals towards improving the development of children/students, socially, emtionally, phsycially and intellectually (Sanders, 2002).

Throughout the literature and from the discussion above, two commonalities become apparent in the conceptualisation of school-community engagement, namely; (i) shared responsiblities and goals and (ii) reciprocal and mutually benefical partnerships. These themes were explored in relation to the conceptualisation and sustainability of school-community partnerships.

2.3 Forming and Sustaining School-Community Partnerships

Through an analysis of the literature, an attempt was made to develop insights into how and why school-community engagement is formed and what contributes to the sustainability and functionality of school-community partnerships.

To start, it is important to note that schools have been identified as the drivers of school-community relations, where the role of the school, particularly the School Governing Body (SGB) is to develop a policy, according to the NECT (2016). Schools are expected to develop a shared understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders, with whom the form partnerships, as well as a shared vision and mission (that is determined collectively).

Although, Naicker (2011) noted that “many prospective school-community partnerships are doomed at the start because the goals and the process are not thoroughly considered before the start of collaboration and establishing connections” (p. 16). This indicates that the first step to forming school-community partnerships is a thorough investigation into the purpose/aim of the partnership and how this aim is going to be achieved.

However it is important for one to understand that forming and sustaining school-community engagement is not a neutral process, rather there are power relations and struggles constantly at play. Dempsey (2010) contends that “existing

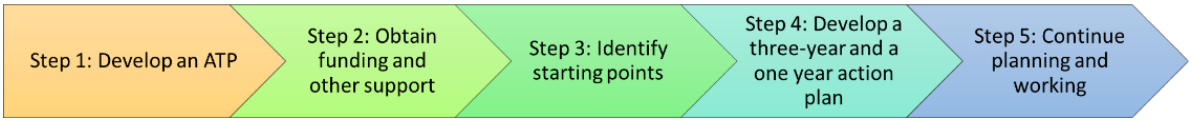
This is key to successful school-community engagement, if the aims and purpose of the partnership are not determined and clearly set out, tensions and conflicts are likely to arise, thus decreasing the likelihood of functional and sustainable partnerships (Epstein, 2002; Sanders, 2002; Hands, 2005 & Myende, 2018).

Furthermore, the purpose/aims can only be established if and when schools (school leaders) have a deep understanding of the needs and goals of the school and the community. Partnerships, between the school and community members, can be developed to address the needs within the local context, however if the needs are not (mutually) understood, the partnership responses may be inappropriate to the context and thus ineffective (Epstein, 2002). Alternatively, conflicts and tensions may arise if

the members within the relationship do not share the notion on what needs are to be addressed at that time. Thus, Hands (2005) claims that :identifying goals, defining the focus of the partnerships, and selecting potential community partners are key steps for building successful collaborations" (p. 67).

According to Epstein (2002) while there are complexities and differences between and within different contexts, there are five guidelines that schools can follow when developing a partnership, as indicated in the figure below:

Figure 4: Epstein's (2002) Guide to developing functional partnerships



Furthermore, Epstein (2002) contends that the investigation and policy development process should be done by an appointed 'Action Team for Partnerships' (ATP), where this team "guides the development of a comprehensive programme for partnerships, including all six types of involvement, and integration of all family and community connections within a single unified plan and program" (p. 18). Where the ATP are deemed an essential structure required for partnership development, consisting of various role players to ensure a variety of perspectives and needs are heard and taken into consideration during this time.

Once the ATP has been established the goals, vision, and mission, in relation to the school-community partnerships ought to be collectively defined, the next step is to obtain funds and other forms of support, according to Epstein (2002). A modest budget, time and social support is required to guide and support the action team. Correspondingly, the Reform Support Network (RSN, 2014) argues that the first step to developing school-community engagement is making engagement a priority and establishing an infrastructure to enable the commitment to engagement.

Thereafter, Epstein (2002) suggests that the starting point ought to be identified. This process includes the ATP "collecting information about the school's current practices of partnerships, along with the views, experiences and wishes" (p. 20), of the various

stakeholders, namely gain insights into one's context, to appropriately work together. Again, this is done with a diverse group of representatives to ensure the multifaceted nature of school-community partnerships are addressed. However, if there is a lack of representativity in the ATP, genuine and effective/functional partnerships are unlikely.

From there, Epstein (2002) argues that a 3-year outline and one-year plan is developed, where there is a yearly evaluation and focus around the goals and vision, which indicate a need for flexibility within the everchanging context.

Lastly, Epstein (2002) contends that the ATP ought to continue planning and working, this is due to the formation of effective partnerships are not once off and immediate event but rather partnerships are an ongoing process, where role players are consistently looking for methods or strategies to improve and develop the ways in which they interact and engage with one another. If this is not conceptualised and practiced as an ongoing process, the partnership is likely to become stagnant.

With these five steps in mind, the focus now shifts toward the functionality and sustainability of school-community partnerships that have been established, where the work of Myende (2018) becomes particularly useful. He argues that there are four key factors in for school-community partnerships that are sustainable and functional, namely (i) collaborative planning and decision making, (ii) effective communication, (iii) challenging inferiority and superiority complexes and (iv) the creation of a school culture that supports participative leadership.

(i) Collaborative planning and decision making:

Naicker (2011) note that "collaboration is different form cooperation and coordination" (p. 18), given that collaboration involves a shared vision and common goals, where stakeholders are mutually and sincerely driven towards the successif the partnership. Moreover, developing collaboration is a grocess, where "establishing a collaborative climate provides a contextual scaffold which mediates activity that will help bridge the divide between the school and the community and bring them closer to forming a full blown partnership" (Naicker, 2011, p. 19). Thus collaboration is a series of ongoing events that allow members to develop bonds and allow for mutual respect and trust.

Myende (2018) found that it is essential that the various role players are involved in the planning and decision-making process (much like Epstein's call for ATP that are diverse in the representativity), which requires a welcoming and friendly environment. Myende (2018) contends that shared responsibility leads to a shared sense of commitment and feeling of belonging, provided the partnerships are genuine and not simply for the sake of compliance. Thus, partnerships are not developed or driven by an individual but rather a group of people who have a shared interest and commitment "to sharing of risks and benefits encountered" (p. 9).

This notion coincides with Epstein's *theory of overlapping spheres*, where it is argued that when these spheres closely interact and interrelate, there is a more positive effect on learners and an increase in the possibility of sustainability of the partnership (Myende, 2018).

While it is argued that, through collaboration a sense of belonging and commitment towards the success of school-community engagement is developed, this is only so if the collaboration embarked on is genuine and honest and not simply for the sake of compliance. Interactions for the sake of compliance may result in a lack of interest and ownership in planning and decision-making (Myende, 2018). Additionally, Myende (2018) determined that "addressing issues of communication would help to deal with issues of collaboration and inclusion" (p. 10).

(ii) Effective communication

Throughout the literature, effective (two-way) communication is cited as essential to effective school-community engagement (Epstein, 2002; Sanders, 2002; Hands, 2005; Lemmer, 2007 & Myende, 2018). Myende (2018) claims that the communication "needs to be of a nature that influences the recipient buy-in and commit to partnership ideas" (p. 10). Where this communication is honest and open, through two-way communication, shared visions and goals can be established, along with the establishment of the partnership parameters. Moreover, Gross et al. (2015) posit that effective community engagement, authentic and trust-filled relationships which are developed through communication- where listening and sharing are involved.

However, stakeholders may be reluctant to communicate with ‘partners’, particularly in South Africa, due to a language barrier or because they feel what they have to say is not important (even though it may be). It is contended that “lack of communication leads to schools isolating themselves from their communities and *vice-versa* because collaboration is dependent on knowing what is going on” (Naicker, 2011, p. 23). This in turn may lead to conflicts and tensions, where stakeholders shift blame and avoid collaboration.

It is further contended that there is a dialectic relationship between communication and collaboration, where a lack of communication results in a lack of collaboration and *vice versa*, whereas and an increase in the quantity and quality of communication the greater the collaboration. Therefore, communication is a key factor is in establishing and sustaining school-community partnerships.

(iii) Challenging inferiority and superiority complexes

Moreover, it is contended that “existing discussions of community engagement downplay the complexity of community, abstracting and dissolving important divisions and power structures in the process. As a result, they misleadingly assume a unity and homogeneity that rarely exists” (Dempsey, 2010, p. 360). It is acknowledged that schools exist in complex and unequal contexts and if these complexities are ignored or taken for granted, the result may be a reproduction of the communities’ inequalities, despite the intention to address these issues. Dempsey (2010) further contends that communities consist of power struggles, which may impede on how partners communicate and collaborate.

Equally, Myende (2018) cites power struggles, due to the hierarchies in schools and communities, as a barrier to initiating and sustaining effective school-community engagement, consequently, school and community members have differing levels of power, authority, and status. Where conflicts (and a lack of collaboration) arise subsequent to member inferiority or superiority complexes. If superiority complexes are present, it is improbable that members will readily negotiate power. Contrastingly, if members in the relationship have inferiority complexes that are unlikely going to initiate a struggle for power. The result of this is compliance for mandates and a lack of productive communication and collaboration.

Therefore, the emphasis is placed on shared leadership and responsibility, namely participative leadership. The nature of functional and sustainable school-community partnerships is that of teamwork. Where there is representativity in the views and voices of all partner groups. This is achieved through effective communication and collaboration, as well as results in effective communication and collaboration.

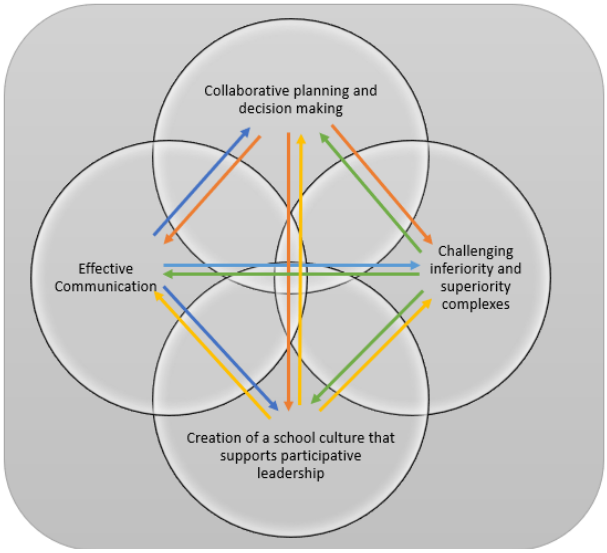
(iv) Creation of a school culture that supports participative leadership.

The literature (Epstein, 2002, Sanders, 2002 & NECT, 2016) indicates principal leadership is essential to school-community engagement, however principals cannot lead partnerships independently. Sanders (2002), Naicker (2011) and Myende (2018) argue that “there is no need to overburden the school principals, where, instead, all stakeholders should be afforded an opportunity to lead partnership activities” (Myende 2018, p. 13). Thus, there is a call for participative/democratic leadership. Participative leadership entails a school culture that allows stakeholders to have a meaningful and representative role to play (Harber & Muthukrishna, 2000), which requires trust and respect. This notion correlates with Epstein’s (2002) *theory of overlapping spheres*, which emphasises the importance of sharing goals and responsibility. Thus, the notion of ‘one to rule the all’ is rejected.

Moreover, Naicker (2011) contends that participative leadership is a “collective process where the school and the community work towards a common vision to deal with their collective needs and collective future”, however this may only be achieved through open and honest collaboration and communication have been achieved as well as inferiority and superiority complexes have been addressed.

Form the discussion above it becomes quite clear that (ii) Effective Communication, (iii) Challenging inferiority and superiority complexes and (iv) the creation of a school culture that supports participative leadership are interrelated. Subsequently, each factor entails the other three factors and at the same time result in improvement for the other three factors. In other words, there is a dialectic relationship between these enabling factors (see figure 5). For instance, an increase in the quality and quantity in communication may result in an increase in an eagerness to address power issues and *vice versa.* Thus, these components are completely reliant on one another and when all four factors are present and well executed, functional and sustainable school-community partnerships are developed (Myende, 2018).

Figure 5: Dialectic relationship between factors that enable sustainable and functional school-community engagement



2.4 Challenges to Forming and Sustaining School-Community Partnerships

An analysis of the literature gave insights into how and why school-community partnerships are formed and what contributes to the sustainability and functionality of these partnerships. Furthermore, the literature indicated that all partnership practices are bound to encounter challenges, which need to be understood and addressed to successfully form and sustain longstanding school-community engagement.

It is claimed that the traditional view of school and community engagement as being separate and distinct entities is problematic, as schools close themselves off to the communities and community members do not feel welcome in schools (Naicker, 2011). Similarly, the NECT (2016) asserts that “non-inclusive school practices and attitudes further erect barriers to participation by minority groups within schools. ‘In many South African schools, assimilation remains the dominant model of integration, which means that the values, traditions and customs of the dominant group frame the

social and cultural context of the school" (p. 7). This in turn makes effective communication and collaboration impossible, particularly within a heterogenous so society, such as South Africa. However, the SASA (DoE, 1996) aims to address such exclusionary practices through the establishment of a more decentralised, democratic decision-making process.

Furthermore, a gap in the perspectives on what is needed or what is wanted is claimed to be a major barrier to effective and withstanding school-community engagement. Schools often visualise community and parent involvement in terms of material and fiscal support, which limits how much a school and its community interact. Where teachers often view school-community engagement (beyond fiscal support) as additional work that they are mandated to participate in (Naicker, 2011).Similarly, according to Epstein and Sanders (2002) conflicts and tensions within partnerships may be a consequence of "unfamiliarity with each other's goals, beliefs, and efforts", which in turn results in stakeholders playing the 'blame-game' instead of shared responsibility, when/if the education system/learner fails.

Hands (2005) also cites more logistical barriers to school-community engagement, such as a lack of funds, transport, and time. Where job pressures and family life leave limited time and energy for real and active collaboration and face-to-face discussions and communication.

The literature indicates that numerous barriers may disrupt the formation, functionality, and sustainability of school-community engagement. These barriers ought to be addressed in order to ensure successful partnerships. However, this study is of the impression that most challenges arise due to a lack of communication, collaboration, a reinforcement of inferiority and superiority complexes (power struggles) and in turn a climate that is not supportive. Therefore, it is contended that enabling factors may become barriers if not enabled judiciously and appropriately.

2.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.5.1 Introduction

This study located itself in developing insights and information, for education policy, in relation to school-community engagement. Epstein's *theory of overlapping spheres of influence* was used as a lens to view the nature of school-community engagement.

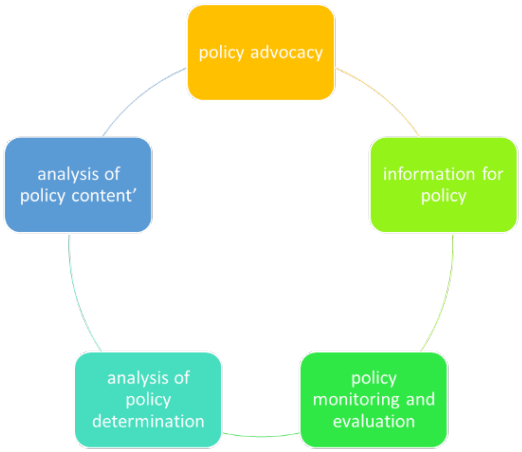
2.5.2 Analysis *for* Policy

This study intended to develop insights into the implications for education policy, through the exploration of school-community engagement conceptualisations and practices. However, a review of the literature and a document analysis found limited knowledge and evidence-based research around community engagement in schools, particularly in developing countries, thus this study set out to do an analysis *for* policy.

Gordan et al. (1993) offer a typology for policy analysis which draw the distinction between analysis *of* policy and analysis *for* policy. Analysis for policy "contributes to the formulation of policy and takes two forms 'policy advocacy' and 'information for policy'" (McLaughlin, 2000, p.449). Whereas analysis of policy evaluates/examines a policy that has been formulated already, this takes form as 'policy monitoring and evaluation', analysis of policy determination' and 'analysis of policy content'. Gordan et al. (1993) argue that the distinction is key to location the purposeof analysis and discplinary issues effectively.

Gordan et al. (1993) futher contend that these distiontions exist within a continuum of the policy process:

Figure 6: The policy process as a continuum



This study located itself in developing insights and information around a phemonenma inorder to being to reach a deeper understanding what the implications for the conceptualisations, experiences and practices within this context for education policy (development).

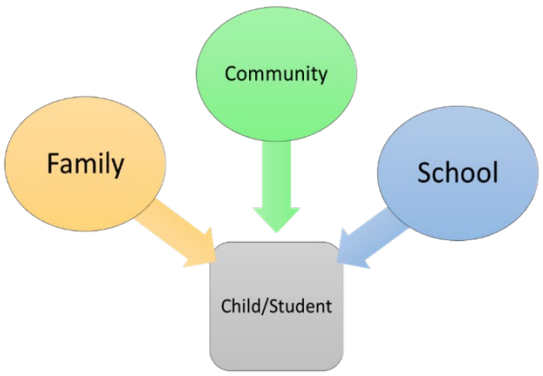
2.5.3 Shared Responsiblities & Goals & Vision for Partnerships

Hands (2010) posits that schools are expected to provide education that is reflective of the context, communities and society, as schools do not exist independently or in isolation from their given context (families and communities which they exist in), rather they exists within “an ecology with a web of role players who may directly or indirectly influence the educational experiences of a child both in and outside of the school environment” (Myende, 2018, p. 3). Namely, there are interpersonal and interrelations interactions (be it superficial or in-depth interactions) between various stakeholders in the education system which are referred to as partnerships. Epstein (2002) identifies three key role players that directly influence student learning and development; that is school, family and community as the context of these interactions. She refers to these role players as the spheres of influence. Epstein (2002) proposes that there are three ‘spheres’ have great influence on the student/child in terms of academic performance, attitude, behaviour and development, these spheres include school, family and community.

Further, Epstein (2002) and Lemmer (2007) argue that these spheres may be understood as separate or combined/shared, depending on how their roles and

responsibilities are conceptualised within the education system. Similarly, Ndahayo and Gaikwad (2004) contend “education is a dynamic process moved by three wheels—school, family and community. This process would move efficiently and in the desired direction if the three wheels synchronized and shared the ‘load’” (p. 59)

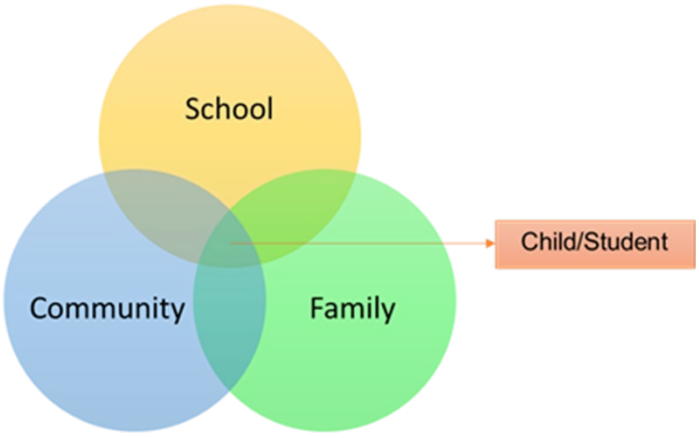
Figure 7: Separate Spheres of Influence



Separate, looks at the idea that schools, families, and communities are seen to occupy different spaces and serve different purposes, they exist as silos, as indicated in Figure 7*: Separate Spheres of Influence* alongside (Lemmer, 2007). While each sphere influences, albeit positively, student learning and development of the student, they do it separately and independently- with different goals and interests. As a result, there is little to no interaction and communication within or between the spheres.

It is, thus, argued that education reform and policy is limited to the school and the only the influence, responsibilities, and goals of the school sphere. Consequently, education policy may limit school improvement and education reform to issues such as teaching and learning, namely curriculum issues. Moreover, it is contended that this separated understanding and experiences of the spheres may lead to conflict, incompatibility and incoherence between families, schools, and communities (Lemmer, 2007).

Figure 8: Shared/Overlapping Spheres of Influence



Combined/Shared: Involves the notion that schools, families and communities occupy a shared space and have common interest, responsibilities and goals- given that each sphere is interested in socialising the child and are invested in

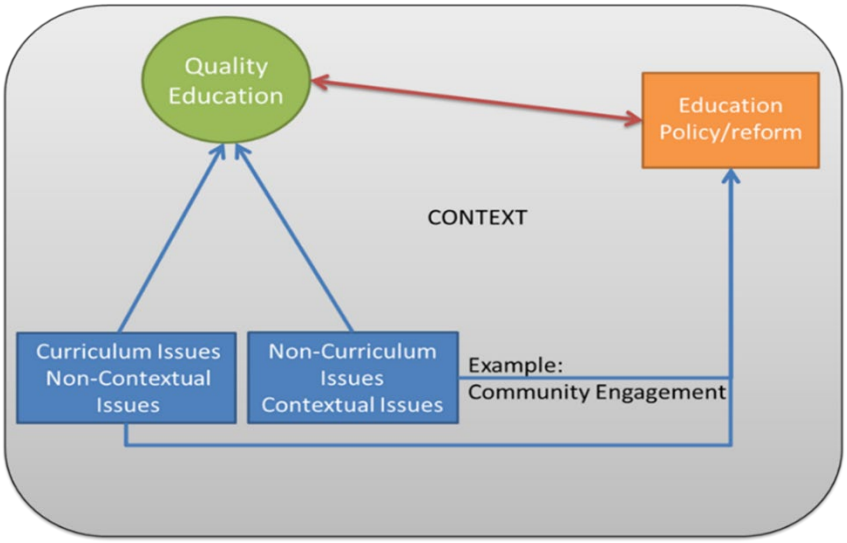
enabling high achievement and the development of the child, emotionally, physically and socially (Epstein, 2002; Sanders, 2002 & Lemmer, 2007). Resulting in an overlap of responsibility as indicated in Figure *8*, hence Epstein's' *theory of overlapping spheres of influence*. This framework indicates in-depth and intersecting interactions and communication, resulting is co-operation and co-ordination and thus a more positive influence on student learning and development. Myende (2018) contends that the "greater the interactions among the spheres, the more enhanced the learning among learners will be" (p. 3). Simply put, schools, families and communities are most effective when they overlap and share responsibilities, goals, and missions, through high-quality and frequent communications and interactions.

More explicitly, Epstein (2002) identifies two models within the *theory of overlapping spheres*, (i) the External Model and (ii) the Internal Model. Within the *external model*, it is acknowledged that the three spheres of influence, "may be drawn together or pushed apart" as there "are some practices that schools, families and communities conduct separately and some that they conduct jointly to influence children's learning and development" (p. 8), this movement may be a result of philosophes, policies or activities within a given context (Epstein cited in Myende, 2018). The *internal model* "shows where and how complex and essential interpersonal relations and patterns of influence occur between individuals at home, at school, and in the community" (Epstein, 2002, p. 8). The internal and external models illustrate that school, family and community interrelations/partnerships are fixed or static but are rather dynamic and are in constant movement on a continuum, where stakeholders are continually working to improve interactions and communication.

Consequently, the *theory of overlapping spheres,* indicates that education policy that is focused on improving the quality and inclusivity of education in a school, should be aimed at the child, and improving the child's learning outcomes, and not necessarily only the school. It is accepted that various factors influence what learner learn, that go beyond the classroom and the school gates, based on their context (Prew, 2009).

2.5.4 School-Community Engagement Understood as Contextually Bound

Figure 9: Curriculum and Non-Curriculum Issues Affect Education Quality and Inclusivity



As illustrated in Figure *9: Curriculum and Non-Curriculum Issues Affect Education Quality and Inclusivity,* that quality education may be influenced by curriculum and non-curriculum factors, contextual factors- that are not directly linked to the teaching and learning process (Prew, 2009). This is demonstrated by Prew (2009) who is insists that school development ought to be "guided by a novel, highly contextualised response based on the needs of the local communities and schools" (p. 825), thus school development (and policy) should aim to improve the quality and inclusivity of education through understanding the local needs, in turn this focus on the local communities and schools in their own contexts will have momentous influence on how education policy is conceptualised, formulated and implemented.

Figure 9, aimed to demonstrate the notion that policy is influenced by issues, contextualised or not, that have been identified as important and that need to be addressed to enable quality education. However, it is to be acknowledged that there is complexity within and between each of the elements represented in figure *9*- which is a simplistic overview, these complexities cannot be ignored or taken for granted, thus each element ought to be examined extensively in order to develop a conceptual understanding of the nature community engagement in schools and its implications for education policy.

Thus, one cannot understand the nature of community engagement without delving into the local context and the meaning people associate with community-school

engagement. Hence, Schutz (2006) contends that “if educators, scholars, and policymakers are truly interested in improving school-community relations, then they will need to become more deeply informed about community forces and structures” (p. 691), in other words for community engagement to truly and meaningfully take place, in schools, various role players need to, not only understand but work with their community, their context, in a profound way.

Correspondingly, Prew (2009) claims that developing countries ought to move away from “the norm of a school-parent engagement over pedagogical issues in the West” and replace the ‘norm’ with “imperatives based on full community involvement in the school on the local communities own terms” (p. 824), In other words we, as a developing country, need to move away from this ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to improving (and achieving quality) education, which Prew (2009) associates with Western ideologies, and move in the direction of understanding and working with the local, specific contexts and ‘objective’ realities. Likewise, it is acknowledged in the School-Parent-Community Engagement Framework guideline, that there is complexity in achieving community engagement in schools, in South Africa, due to the diversity in the country. The framework states that, South African “communities are heterogeneous: socially, politically, linguistically, culturally and economically. Diverse urban and rural context...School communities reflect this diversity, both within and between schools” (NECT, 2012, p. 12), thus the way in which schools interact with their communities cannot be generic and the same for all school. Rather this engagement ought to be suited for the school and its’ diverse context.

2.5.5 School-Community Partnerships as Mutually Beneficial and Reciprocal

Along with shared interests/goals and responsibilities, a mutual vision and understanding. as discussed previously, the literature indicates that all stakeholders that participate in school-community partnerships ought to some kind of benefit from participating in the school-community engagement process, as without mutual benefits partnerships are unlikely to be developed or sustained (Hands, 2005).

Bryan (2005) notes that “partnerships among schools, families, and communities create avenues by which relationships or networks of trust can be formed among administrators, teachers, family and community members” (p.221), which refers to

individuals or groups of individuals gaining benefit from being part of various social networks and thus improving their social capital. Social Capital, as stated by Ball (2003)“realised through social networks providing direct support and relevant and valued resources” (p. 83), namely, social capital is concerned with the resources available through the relationships and networks an individual or group of individuals have. Additionally, one may be interested in “the resources that can accrue to individuals as a result of these relationships and how these resources or ‘assets’ are able to help individuals and groups to achieved their goals” (Vincent & Hlatshwayo, 2018, p. 120).

Likewise, Ball (2003) contends that social capital is a complex concept to work with as it is subject to interpretation. He argues that there are three main sites in which social capital can be located, the first site is within the work done by Coleman; whose notion of social capital is “embedded within families, in the relationships between children and parents and the structure and organisation of the family itself and family life” (Ball, 2003, p. 80). The second site involves the work done by Putnam, who according to Ball (2003), develops a ‘more general’ understanding of social capital, in terms of communities, focusing on “three aspects of social and institutional relationships: networks, knowledge and shared norms” (p. 80).

The third site, in which social capital is located, that Ball (2003) identifies, is within the work of Bourdieu. Bourdieu contends that social capital “works within social groups and networks in the form of exchanges, social obligations and symbols, to define group membership, fix boundaries and create a sense of belonging” (as cited in Ball, 2003, p. 80). Thus, for Bourdieu (and Ball), for one to holistically understand social capital, a recognition that social capital goes beyond forming and maintaining relationships and networks is needed.

Therefore, this study acknowledged and worked with the notion that relationships and networks will result in resources becoming available to all those that are partaking. This, in turn, will shape the way various group members interact with one another. For instance, if school-community partnerships are limited to community members providing material resources, with little in return, schools may become heavily reliant on this aid and may forget the importance of community-building, consequently

community members may be reluctant to form and participate in school-community engagement projects (as they are gaining little benefit from partaking). Where the partnership should allow for those community members “to jointly influence the education of their children and build their own social capital” (Naicker, 2011, p. 28).

Thus the notion of a mutually beneficial and reciprocal partnership network involves developing all stakeholders social capital through the dispersal of knowledge, skills and resources as well as the opportunity to develop new skills and gain new knowledge and resources from the networks form part of. Thus, effective partnerships, according to Naicker (2011) include, “mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organisations to achieve common goals driven by the understanding that they might find it challenging to do it on their own” (p. 18).

2.6 Conclusion

Epstein’s (2002) *theory of overlapping spheres of influence* offers understandings and insights into the nature of school-community partnerships, in relation to how and why these partnerships came to be. Myende (2018) develops this further, through a discussion on how and why some school-community engagements are stable and functional and others are not. The prospects of shared goals and mutually beneficial outcomes are key to the initialisation of the partnerships and (i) collaborative planning and decision making, (ii) effective communication, (iii) challenging inferiority and superiority complexes and (iv) the creation of a school culture that supports participative leadership, enable the sustainability and functionality of school-community engagement.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This study was a qualitative, exploratory case study design, which adopted social interpretivism as a research paradigm, to contribute towards education policy. Explicitly, this study acknowledges numerous people have a variety of conceptualisations and experiences within the same context.

3.2 Research Paradigm

Hatch (2002) argues that a research paradigm reveals “sets of assumptions that distinguish fundamentally different belief systems concerning how the world is ordered, what we may know about it, and how we may know it” (p. 11), thus researchers, when conducting research, ascribe to a particular world view which contains various assumptions and knowledge based ideologies that are formed within a particular paradigm.

This study ascribed to the world views and assumptions as proposed by the *interpretivist* paradigm. The interpretivist paradigm accepts that people are meaning-making beings and that the construction of meaning is developed through their existence within a given context, this construction of meaning is how the context is understood/interpreted.

Additionally, this study accepted that this meaning-making “is always social, arising in and out of interaction with a human community” (J. Creswell & D. Creswell, 2018, p. 8), thus this study set out to explore the social interactions within the context, to develop insights into how the participants engage with their world and each other to make sense of what they are experiencing.

According to Scott and Morrison (2007) “epistemology refers to how educational researchers can know the reality that they wish to describe. This needs to be distinguished from ontology, which refers to the nature of this reality” (p. 86), the research will gain access to ‘reality’ through the examination of participants conceptualisation and experiences of a complex ‘reality’, the school site.

This study aimed to gain an insight into various stakeholders, conceptualisations and experiences in terms of community engagement with the school. Through doing so it aimed to inform policy. This study looked at how the conceptualisations and experiences of school and community engagement, in their contexts, of the various parties played a role in improving education, therefore this study had adopted an interpretivist approach.

3.3 Research Design

Yin (2008) identifies three types of case studies, namely (I) exploratory, (ii) descriptive and (iii) explanatory, this study made use of the exploratory research design.

This study espoused an exploratory case study research design, where is accepted that a case study is an in-depth exploration of a single entity (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Thus, study intended to do an in-depth and thick descriptive analysis of the context in which the school-community engagement exists. Further, Baxter and Jack (2008) give an indication of what this means, by claim that “this qualitative case study is an approach to research that facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources” (p. 544), thus the aim of this study was to explore the phenomena of school and community engagement, intensively, through exploring the participants ‘voices’.

Given the limited literature around community engagement in schools, particularly South African schools this study was an exploration into a phenomena in order to gain a conceptualized understanding of the nature of school-community engagement at a single site. When investigating the single cases, to develop thick description the focus was on open-ended exploration that sought to contribute to something under-examined and extend the knowledge around this phenomenon- namely school-community partnerships in a South African school (Cohen, et al., 2007).

3.4 Research Methodology

The implication of this study adopting an interpretivist approach was that this study had an intensive, qualitative research methodology (as opposed to an extensive,

quantitative study). Meaning that this study focused on “seeing the world through the eyes of those being studied” (Scott & Morrison, 2007, p. 182).

This study made use of a qualitative research approach, which points to “exploring and understanding the meaning individuals and groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (J. Creswell & D. Creswell, 2018, p. 4), thus how people or groups of people perceive a phenomenon is largely dependent on their contexts and experiences. Through this assumption, this study developed insights into how the ‘real world’ was perceived with in the South African school context. Explicitly, this study acknowledged that numerous people have a variety of conceptualisations and experiences within the community-school engagement process. This study aimed to form insights into these conceptualisations, experiences, roles and responsibilities; in order to ensure that an understanding of each stakeholder is accounted for, as these conceptualisations, experiences, roles and responsibilities are assumed to effect and be valuable in the development (and in turn implementation) of policy.

3.5 Research Population

The setting of this study was in a Catholic Independent school, this was the context in which the conceptualisations and experiences of community engagement was explored, as well as how this community engagement programme was developed and sustained over the last decade.

Scott and Morrison (2007) contend that “purposive, focused and judgement sampling are all terms that apply to researchers who make theoretically informed decisions about whom or what to include in their sample” (p. 221). This study made use of purposive sampling in choosing the school to conduct the study with. This school was sampled for two reasons, namely, it exists within a very complex and diverse community, where members of the community are associated with both the geographical and relational understanding of community and the school has developed and sustained a programme, Three2Six, (among others) of community engagement for over ten years and thus viewed as a resource for rich information and insights.

Further, this study intended to make use of snowball sampling technique within the school and its' community, where "a snowball sample is one which the researcher collects data on the few members of the target population who can be located" thereafter, these members "should be able to locate other members of the population whom they know" (Lumadi, 2015, p. 236), in other words the initial participants that the study engagements will, should direct the research to other potential participants to engage with.

However due to the constraints caused by the 2020 Coronavirus pandemic and access constraints, the research sample was much smaller than intended. That being said, the research sample consisted of:

- Interviewee 1 (I1): the former school- principal and director of the school-community engagement programme, Three2Six
- Interviewee 2 (I2): the Three2Six manager,
- Interviewee 3 (I3): one parent
- Interviewee 4 -6, respectively (I4), (I5) & (I6): four learners from the school
- Interviewee 7 & 8 (I7) & (I8): Volunteers from the school-community engagement programme (Three2Six)

While limited, all participants offered unique and valuable insights into the conceptualisations and experiences of community engagement in schools.

3.6 Gaining Access to Study Site

Gaining access and negotiating entry with participants is a key aspect of any empirical study (Cohen, et al., 2007). This is a process that requires practicality and requires the research to avoid as much disruption for the school and the participants involved in the study.

Before approaching the school and its' associated Three2Six project, I applied and received ethical clearance and permission to undergo this study from the Faculty of Humanities at Wits University (see preliminary page vi). Thereafter, I liaised with the school Principal and the Three2Six Project manager about conducting this study at the site (see Appendix A). Following the permission gaining process, participants were

required to provide consent to participating in the proposed study. In order to ensure that the participants understood what this study may have required off them, they were provided with a comprehensive information letter, which outlined the purpose of the study and reassured participants that they could withdraw their permission to partake in this study at any time without any penalty or prejudice (see Appendix B).

3.7 Data Generation Methods

The methods used for data generation included: individual 'semi-structured' interviews, documentary analysis and observation. This method allowed the researcher to delve into the participants: (i) conceptualisations of community engagement, (ii) and experiences in dealing with community engagement processes and (iii) the challenges and strategies in achieving community engagement.

3.7.1 Semi-structured interviews

This study made use of semi-structured interviews, which were the primary sources of data, to allow for an in-depth discussion where participants shared their ideas and point of views abound the phenomena being studied. Through this the researcher could explore the 'voice' of the participants in a focused manner.

The interviews were audio-taped, if the participant agreed, to ensure that what was said could be transcribed, verbatim, to allow the researcher to reflect on the 'semi-structured' interview method as well as the voice of the participant(s) (Wellington, 2000).

3.7.2 Document Analysis

Alongside the semi-structured interviews, a document analysis was conducted. This document analysis aimed to yield deeper insights into the school-community engagement programme. Documents, such as newspaper articles, websites, scholarly articles, and blogs, were used to provide further data around the school and community context and the school-community engagement programme (Bowen, 2009). Therefore, the documents provided additional data, where the "information and insights derived from the documents can [and were] be valuable additions to a knowledge base." (Bowen, 2009, p. 30).

3.7.3 Observation

During the course of this study, the researcher volunteered in the Three2Six holiday programme, a school-community engagement programme. Where the researcher gained insights that may have been difficult to ascertain through the interviews and document analysis, through having a first-hand experience (Scott & Morrison, 2007). Further, fieldnotes/observations were recorded in an unstructured manner given the exploratory nature of the study. This allowed for flexibility when undergoing an exploration into the phenomena being studied, namely community engagement in a South African school. However, it was acknowledged that there were risks of biases in the observation process, as it is asserted that observers tend to view phenomena with particular values and purposes in mind (Scott & Morrison, 2007). Hence, there was a need for multiple data generation methods.

3.8 Data Analysis

This study was a qualitative exploratory case study that made use of inductive reasoning. Where the context and the phenomena within the context was examined to generate data, “from the detailed particulars” rather than with a hypothesis or theory to prove, top down (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014, p. 347). The purpose of the use of an inductive data analysis was to make sense of the data that had been accumulated (Vithal & Jansen, 2008).

The data analysis process involved four main stages and was guided by the work of Vithal and Jansen (2008) and J. Creswell and D. Creswell (2018), these stages included: (i) Prepare and organise the data, (ii) Begin the coding process, (iii) Through coding, categories/themes with described and generated and (iv) Represent data according to themes

i) Prepare and organise the data

Raw data was collected in the form of interviews, document analysis and observation, this raw data was then prepared for analysis by transcribing the interviews verbatim and arranged according to source. Thereafter the data was reread to identify any “incomplete, inaccurate, inconsistent and irrelevant data” (Vithal & Jansen, 2008, p.

27) as well as examined for any obvious or preliminary trends, which could have been groups/chunks of data.

ii) Begin the coding process

Coding of the data involved sorting and breaking down the data to form segments, which are parts/pieces of data that can standalone, this was done manually, by hand, by the researcher (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014).

iii) Through coding, categories/themes with described and generated

Subsequently, these codes were evaluated for similarities, patterns and discrepancies which were grouped to form categories/themes (Vithal & Jansen, 2008). Thus, the focus was on the major ideas of the data. This was a process, where categories were reworked and redefined regularly.

iv) Represent data according to themes

The last stage involved representing the themes (and data) according to the descriptions and themes to create “meaningful summaries of the large amounts of data” (Vithal & Jansen, 2008, p. 28).

3.8.1 Reflecting on the Data Generation and Analysis Process

Generation and analysis of the data was a messy, ongoing, and dynamic process. Given the nature of this study, which was a qualitative research design that adopted a social interpretivism paradigm, it was important for me to reflect on my role as a researcher and as a participatory observer as I was immersed in the situation and in the phenomena being examined, through observations and interviews (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). To avoid taking the stance of the research participants and embracing their perspectives without critical examination, I critically self-examined/reflected on my observation notes and interrogated my role as the researcher throughout the research process (J. Creswell & D. Creswell, 2018).

3.9 Ethical Issues

The importance of research ethics was considered throughout this study, consequently the researcher conducted herself in a professional and respectful manner that focused on openness, trust and cooperation as well as acknowledging the rights and value of a participants.

Prior to conducting the interviews, participants were invited to partake in the study, where they (through an information sheet that was provided to each of them), if they agreed to participate in the study, they were asked to complete a consent form, thus giving their informed consent.

Furthermore, it was accepted that “researchers have a dual responsibility: to protect the individuals’ confidences and to protect the informants from the general reading public” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014, p. 363). Simply put, the research had the responsibility to recognize and address the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants.

In terms of the confidentiality, it was ensured that unless the participant requested otherwise, that it was only myself and my participant in the room in which the interview is taking place. Additionally, it was ensured that the audiotapes taken during the interview can only be accessed by me, to ensure the confidentiality of my participants.

In relation to the anonymity, the study has attempted (as much as possible) to safeguard the identity of the participants and the site in where the study was conducted by not disclosing the names of any of the participants in the study. The name of the school at which the participants are associated will not be disclosed under any circumstances.

Additionally, now that the research report is completed all raw data (both hard and soft copied), namely the audiotapes and transcriptions, will be kept by me for three years. Where the hard copies of the data stored in my office in my personal desk which will remain locked at all times and soft copies of the research data will be stored on my computer and cell phone, which are both password protected, and there after will be destroyed and deleted.

3.10 Issues of Trustworthiness

When undergoing any form of research, it is essential that one looks at issues of trustworthiness are considered and that the study is both reliable and valid. Validity is "based on determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers account" (J. Creswell & D. Creswell, 2018, p. 199), this indicates the need for the study and its' findings to be corresponding with the real world phenomena and the participants realities (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014).

Validity was safeguarded by making use of multiple data generation methods, namely triangulation. Which allowed the researcher to determine whether or not there was congruency throughout the data. Moreover, the study used the participant language and verbatim accounts for participants for honest and reprehensively, as not to distort the data and findings (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014).

While reliability is more associated with quantitative and not qualitative research studies, one ought to note that reliability is aimed at consistency or stability of the account of the phenomena produced in the research study (J. Creswell & D. Creswell, 2018). Similarly, McMillan & Schumacher (2014) indicate that multiple methods of data generation may improve the reliability of the study, where internal and external consistency is measured through the congruence of the items in a study and other studies of a similar nature, respectfully.

Moreover, dependability refers to the usefulness of the research and its findings. As stated previously, there appears to be a gap in the literature with regards to community engagement in schools, a gap which this study aimed to start closing, to allow for teachers and principals to better understand the phenomenon and for 'policymakers' to deepen their understandings of community engagement for education reform.

3.11 Limitations of the Study

There were two main limitations to this study, both limitations may have resulted in the sample findings lacking in representativity. Firstly, due to budget and time constraints (as consequence to the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic), a small sample of one school was used; a bigger sample size may have indicated different findings. Secondly, due to the vastness and complexities in understanding communities and community engagement within schools, this study limited its focus to community engagement in terms of scope, to one school. Thus, there may be no representation of all schools, engagement with their communities and schools of different kinds in this study.

3.12 Conclusion

The research design and methodology was explained in this chapter. This study examined the qualitative research approach and interpretivist paradigm and the exploratory inquiry approach adopted in the study. This chapter discussed the appropriateness of the methodological approach, the generation and analysis of data. It further discussed issues of trustworthiness and ethical issues that were considered/encountered during the research process.

CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the study data, which was generated through, interviews, document analysis and observations. There were eight interview participants, who will be referred to as I1 through to I8. This study investigated the nature of community engagement in a South African school. The school was purposefully selected due to its' longstanding relations with its community and it strive for inclusive quality education as indicated in the preliminary document analysis.

The study sought to understand school-community engagement in a complex and diverse urban setting, through the exploration of (i) how community engagement is conceptualised and experienced in a South African school, (ii) what motivates and drives this school to engage with its community and (iii) what are the possible barriers and challenges faced when partaking in school-community partnerships. This was done to develop an understanding of how and why school-community engagement is initiated and sustained and in turn gain insights into the possible implications for education policy.

4.2 Conceptualisation of school-community engagement

This theme found that conceptualising school-community engagement is neither easy nor straight-forward, given its complex and multifaceted nature, this is due to the numerous and diverse roles players that make up the school and the community. This study found that 'community' within this context is conceptualised through many role-players where this conceptualisation includes but also transcends those who ate around the immediate perimeter of the school. These various role-players include the local immediate community, learners families who attend the school as well as learners families who attend Three2Six, additionally a network of local and international support from individuals are organisations, such as "Misereor, Miseo, Misean Cara, Mary Oppenheimer and daughters, Jesuit Refugee Services, Marist Brothers, Kindermissionwerk, The Breadsticks Foundation, Anne Frank House, JSE, HCI Foundation, Toms, DGMT, Australian Aid and many individual donors" ("Three2Six celebrates 10 years", 2018). Within the school context, this became

evident where the community was conceptualised in two ways; loosely linked to the geographic location around the school and the relations a school's forms, regardless of geographic location. When discussing community engagement with the participants, all the participants alluded to the school being set on a boundary between, where on one side a community of wealthy 'elite' (generally those who attended the school) and on the other side, a very poor, marginalised community that was mostly made up of refugees and asylum-seekers.

While there was agreement amongst the participants, I2 summarised the boundary most comprehensively:

> *The school is in quite a well-off area…and the idea was to look at the other side of the street and that is when they realised that there was a whole community, a very poor community living there. So, on one side of the road you had very fancy cars and all that and then on the other side you had refugees living, sharing a flat and four families sharing a flat.*

The various participants mentioned to the divide and the complexities of their school's context, where a 'wealthy upper middle class' school is located and exists within a poor and marginalised, refugee community. Further, each of the participants described school-community engagement as identifying and addressing the needs within the poor refugee community, as I1 contends:

> *So it [engaging] was about the needs of the local community, so we looked around us, specifically on the other side of the street which…and sort of clouted out with the question what is our biggest need in this area, we discovered quite a large refugee community where there was little or no access to education and that basically decided our decision as to, reach a need within our project.*

Similarly, I3, I7 and I8, noted that the Three2Six programme has established a culture of working with the community to find solutions to their contextual issues. As I3 demonstrates:

I think that community engagement is looking at the broader community that you're in and seeing the needs that they have, okay, and finding ways of solutions and to help the nearby community so what they need, how you can serve them in some way, but also engage with the people who are there. So, like, talk to those people and get a feel for who they are as well. It is not just about you handing something out, it that you are with them together.

Likewise, the history of the school (as found on the schools' main website) illustrated the conceptualisation of community engagement through exploring and understanding the community:

When challenged in 2007, the school started a process of dialogue and exploration in its local community to see who and where were the disadvantaged children of the modern day in their neighbourhood. After wide ranging discussions and consultation, the answer was clear, the most disadvantaged children in the school's neighbourhood were refugee and asylum seeker children. These children were (and still are) living in conditions of great poverty and exclusion in the nearby suburbs. These are inner city suburbs which experienced significant urban decay and have been sites of significant xenophobic violence during attacks on foreign residents.

The participants demonstrated that their conceptualisation of the school-community partnerships is deeply dependent on how they have come to understand the complexities and intricacies of their context. Through their responses, one can see that they have come to understand that they, as members of the school community, are in a position of privilege while at the same time, exist in a very unequal society. Consequently, this understanding and engagement with the context has led to more socially aware school members, who, without relations with the community may be 'shut-off' to the social issues that surround them. Thus, school members become more driven to engage in debates around social justice and equality, which can often be uncomfortable for those in a position of privilege.

Similarly, Prew's (2009) argument that understanding one's context, one's community, particularly in a developing country like South Africa, is key to effectively conceptualising school-community partnerships, that is primarily focused on community engagement. This is to ensure that strategies and initiatives actually resonate with what is intended and does indeed meet the needs of the various role players (NECT, 2016).

Further, Prew contends that "real community involvement is not about whether the community members are physically present, but about the way community members relate to the innovation and conceptualise it in relation to their normal lives" (2009, p. 828). Simply put, genuine and effective school-community partnerships transcend simply being in attendance and shorth term relations. Rather partnerships are conceptualised as long-term communications, with shared beliefs and responsibilities in the governance and management of the school (Epstein, 2002). Furthermore, these partnerships are developed through a deep understanding of the realities (which guides how the partnerships take form) where the partnership may be limited and superficial, resulting in little impact or change.

Literature around school-community engagement is limited, particularly around school-community engagement where communities are in need and schools are financially wealthy. Sanders (2002) briefly discusses this as community-centred activities, which have the community and its' citizens as the primary focus. She argues that this takes shapes as "community beautification, student exhibits and performances, charity and other outreach" (p. 32). While this is limited to simple outreach (giving out), it is useful when conceptualising school-community involvement (which is distinct from engagement), that is explicitly focused on community development.

Similarly, three of the participants and the documentary analysis indicated that the conceptualisation of the school's engagement with its' community is not limited to the school simply addressing the needs of an impoverished community or limited to giving.

As I2 indicates:

And the thing that is important that my father talks about is that we're not the concept of a community engagement project is not outreach, outreach implies you are reaching out with something to give, and they are coming like this. Okay? And that's the only contact.
There's no really good word for what the concept is, dad calls it in reach. The idea that it's a mutually beneficial relationship, and it's not just about you helping, but they help you too, I guess, but not necessarily in the same way.

Rather, the partnership is a relationship that results (or should) in engagement that is mutually beneficial (this will be addressed in more detail *4.5* Benefits of school community engagement). Consequently community engagement is conceptualised as more than community simply handing out or serving the community, rather school-community engagement shifts away from outreach (school to community) towards understanding the in reach (community to school), and in turn partnerships result in an give and take to and from the community (Crowson & Boyd, 2001).

4.3 Experiences of community engagement in the school

The participants address various experiences in relation to how the school engaged with its' community, particularly around the Three2Six programme. Which entails the educating of the young 'community' (where the young community consist of refugee and asylum-seeker children who cannot access education mainstream, despite being of school going age). These activities include community members outside of the refugee community, volunteering and school and community members partaking in activities together, i.e. masses and sporting events.

I1 contends that educating the refugee community is the main community-school engagement:

Our engagement is an educational one, where we engage through education, but I wouldn't say that there is much other types of engagement with our community. Obviously, we have parents' meetings with their kids… but it is generally structured around school and around learning and most of our engagement with our community

However, I2 discusses parent volunteerism in relation to school community engagement:

> *The feeding scheme, the food parcels was started by the school parents, so at first the campus coordinator was trying to collect food from Woolworths, PicknPay for the children for them to bring home and for various reasons she had to stop and that is when the parents of The Flower College stepped in and they started that feeding scheme.*

Through the diversity of the responses one may argue that there is diversity in the ways in which the school engages with its community, and the numerous role players within the community. Thus, the multifaceted responses in relation to how school-community partnerships have been experienced by the various role players corroborate with Epstein's' (2002) external and internal model of the *overlapping spheres,* in that there is a continuum of involvement, where there are shifts in accordance with the needs and wants for and from the partnerships at a given point in time, in the given context. As Penfold and Magerit (2020), illustrate through there consensus that:

> *We have to be resourceful and resilient and keep pushing to provide for people who need us. That is the lesson the Three2Six project has shared for the last 12 years and it is more evident now, during the Covid-19 chaos, than ever.*

Epstein (2002) and the NECT (2016) argue that school-community partnerships are not one size fits all, nor are they static or fixed, given the depended on the context of school, community and family (which are in constant motion and are ever changing). Thus school-community engagement may result in differences in the underpinning forces and factors of the context (in relation to practice, needs and involvement) may result in the school and community (and family) role players conducting practices and activities separately, as with the parent volunteerism or in conjunction with each other, as with sporting events.

Additionally, Hands (2005) advocates for 'partnership activity flexibility', where school-community partnerships and activities associated with the partnerships ought to be adaptable to the growing skills and changing needs of the community children (both

the in-school and the school-community programme children). Furthermore, Hands (2005) asserts that “ecological communities remain resilient, surviving disturbances and adapting to the changing conditions around them, in part due to their flexibility” (p. 73). Put simply, the interpersonal relationships (networks formed to initialises as well as result from the school-community engagement, need to be flexible enough to adapt to the changes or disturbances (e.g. through the coronavirus pandemic) within the contexts, in which these contexts exist, in order to remain functional and sustainable.

Thus, this study determined that how the school and community interact and interrelate to each other is everchanging and dynamic. The relationship is developed through partners addressing the needs of the context at a given point in time, thus indicating that schools and community members need to work to maintain their relationships.

4.4 Drivers of school-community engagement

Within this theme, it was seen that the views of the participants coincide with Epstein’s (2002) *theory of overlapping spheres*, particularly in relation to caring at the core of these *overlapping spheres*. It is understood that there are various factors that may drive a school to engage with its’ community, where two participants (I4 & I6) cited financial and marketing gains as the primary driver for this school community engagement, it has been seen that while it is possible a benefit, it is a driver of the school-community partnership. Rather, it is more likely that, the driver of the engagement, as demonstrated by I1, is from a religious and morals standing, where the project aims to provide quality education based on the Marist (Catholic) values. Along with a drive for social justice, within in a very unequal context. This drive for social justice, within a deeply unequal context. As I1 contends:

> *I can tell you that it is the Marist Ethos for one thing… so we are a Marist Brothers school and our founders to teach the poorest boys in South of France, to give them an education, so you know… community that was designed in education and developed in that movement to provide education for those children, very set in those ideologies.*

Similarly, The Three2Six volunteer participants, namely I7 and I8, as well as one learner I4 notes that it is the religious principles that guide the programme and that also encourage them to participate in the programme. I4 notes:

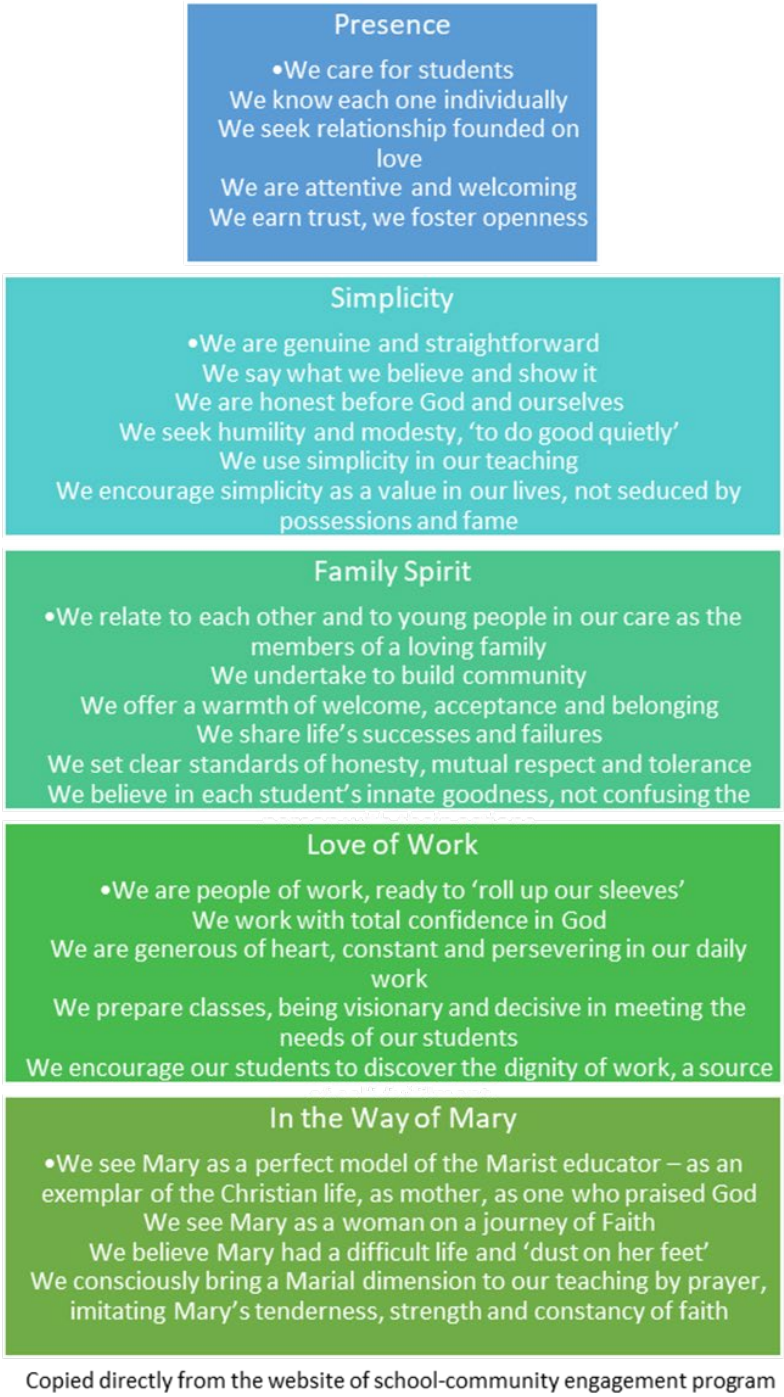
> *Like I know with Three2Six, it's the religious background that guided it well. It's the thing that is right. Religion gives you a mark, it gives you your morals in some sort of way.*

Additionally, I7 claims that:

> *I am quite religious and Three2Six makes me feel like I am doing something meaningful, that helps others, but at the same time I feel like it helps me to be a better person, which is good.*

Figure 10 illustrates the Marist values, which the school community engagement is said to be driven by:

Figure 10: Marist Values that Drive the School-Community Partnership



Copied directly from the website of school-community engagement program

Similarly, Epstein (2002) claims that the core of the school-community partnerships is caring, where the school, family and community are deeply invested in the child's education and development.

Interestingly, the researcher identified:

> *Through partaking in the school-community engagement, I came to understand that the school had broadened its community through this school-community partnership, where the partnership was no longer limited to the school and its' local community(s), but rather there was a developed system of donors and volunteers (local and international) as well as a network of alumni and support from those who ascribe to the Marist beliefs and values.*

The Marist values and beliefs may have guided the initiation and progress of the partnership, where it is evident that the school and community members (local and international) are invested and influential (directly or indirectly) in the child's development and education and as such caring really is at the core of this engagement, as suggested by Epstein (2005).
Furthermore, the school is driven by a need for social justice, equality and inclusivity within the community and the larger society. Through developing school-community partnerships the school and its' engagement projects aim to ensure that the children living in their community, regardless of their country of origin, have access (of some sort) to education as well as easing the transition of when and if they get access to 'mainstream' schools, through the Three2Six programme.

Through observation and a culminating document analysis, it was evident to see that the engagement programme surpassed simply educating learners who had been denied access to mainstream schooling. This schools engagement with its community concentrated on developing a community that is just with equal opportunities for all. As indicated during the lockdown period due to the coronavirus outbreak, the Three2Six team worked tirelessly to support their learners and their learner's families not only in terms of teaching and learning but also provided food relief and emotional support. Penfold and Magerit (2020) indicate:

> *The programme provides love and comfort to children and families who have to navigate the winding paths of bureaucracy around refugee and asylum-seeker status in South Africa…The week before the project's campuses closed, a nurse came to explain to the children what Covid-19 is*

and how we can stop the spread of the disease. The children took this information home with them but, because of the lockdown, were cut off from their regular schooling hours. If other schools managed to move to distance learning, Three2Six could not, as its learners have limited or no access to technology at home.

The team at Three2Six had to come up with a back-up plan as they could no longer provide afternoon programmes during lockdown. Families received food vouchers, but this didn't make up for a lack of knowledge development for the kids. The answer came in the form of radio education. Three2Six partnered with the Catholic radio station Radio Veritas to record lessons for the children to listen to. Radio is still the easiest and cheapest way to get information across to those who are not fortunate enough to have Wi-Fi, smartphones, laptops, or tablets.

While also reinforcing the flexibility and willingness to adapt to new contextual issues, when needed, the comment demonstrates that the programme operates with love and support. From this notion, Epstein (2002) and Sanders (2002) argue that there are three spheres that influence student/child education and development, namely the school, family, and community. Epstein (2002) further contends that these spheres are most influential and more positive they ought to work in conjunction and there is overlap in relation to practices and beliefs, hence her *theory of overlapping spheres*.

Moreover, Sanders (2002) and Hands (2005) noted that in and between these spheres there numerous and complex networks of people of group of people who are invested in the development of the child (and the community). Where, resources and social capital are gained from the social networks formed from the partnerships the school develops (Hands, 2005), it may be argued that one of the key outcomes of these networks is the refugee children and their families can begin to feel safe, secured and cared for, which relates back to the core of caring (Epstein, 2002 & Sanders, 2002).

4.5 Benefits of school-community engagement

This theme indicated that benefits (intended and unintended) were plentiful. Throughout the literature (Epstein, 2002; Lemmer, 2007; Sheldon, 2007; Prew, 2009 & Myende, 2018) there is evidence and support on relation to the benefits gained through school-community engagement practices, in terms of improved academic performance from learners. The participants appeared to agree around two key benefits of the promotion of social awareness/consciousness among the 'elite' community. I4 encapsulates indicates the development of social awareness through the community-school partnership:

> *I think it can be used to ground your learners because everyone's coming from like a rich background and doesn't have any interaction, like they're just stuck in a bubble, it just kind of opens up the world a bit more and also kind of puts people who have very different life experiences to you right there so you kind of have to think about their situations as well.*

While I3 (and I8 with similar remarks), indicates the benefits towards the broader community through partaking in these engagement practices:

> *It's about building the primary education so, that it boosts the rest of the community because the children go home and they teach their parents to read as well as learning to read, you know, so it helps the broader community while helping them as well.*

The three images below (taken from the schools Facebook page) illustrate the critical social awareness of the school learners as well as their commitment to address social issues (that go beyond the exclusion of many refugee children from education), the learners are addressing social issues around Black Lives Matter movement (BLM) and a call the end of Gender Based Violence (GBV) and thus advocating for social justice.

Figure(s) 11: School Learners Drive for Social Justice and Equality

Margot Bertelsmann Doherty
10 September 2019 ·

I'm not good at bandwagony displays because the inner cynic intrudes and says, what for? too often. But this morning I drove to school to drop off my children and a row of boys - like, 30 or 40 of them - had lined up with protest placards against gender violence, and I thought, what a beautiful display of masculinity. Knowing them, they organised this themselves. I love this school, and teenagers, who mitigate against premature ageing.

Today 11 September 2019 - #WithoutUs was a success with our High School boys marching for men to be accountable for their actions, for boys & men to call out their friends when they have done something wrong, especially against women.

Boy will not be boys - Boys will be held accountable for their actions!

As we celebrate #YouthDay on this cold and damp day, it is incredibly important that we salute our Youth, for standing and fighting up for what is right and just, for being pioneers and leaders of movements.

The [redacted] Matric Class of 2020 along with the teachers and Grade 8 students who were at school wore black to stand in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement.

We stand against the discrimination that takes place as a result of racial injustice. Along with this public stance that we are making, the Matric group has also ensured that awareness surrounding racial discrimination is made readily available throughout the school.

Through initiatives such facilitating discussions with junior Grades and teachers, as well as reassessing the Code of Conduct's stance on racism, they are determined to put measures in place to ensure that racism is dealt with effectively.

#NoJusticeNoPeace
#BlackLivesMatter
[redacted]

While the direct beneficiaries of this school-community partnership is the child (and indirectly the family/community members of the child), of the refugee community, who are benefited in terms of resources (food parcels, uniforms, stationary), knowledge and skills as well as some feeling of safety and security (Epstein, 2002).

The school and the more privileged community, that make up most of the schools' student and parent body gain from these partnerships as well, particularly in terms of social consciousness. Role players in the school are able to conceptualise their position of privilege. They become aware of the social injustices within their community, which in turn gives them the power and opportunity to address the issues that exist within our South African society. Thus, there is a shift form outreach (school to community) towards understanding the in reach (community to school) (Crowson & Boyd, 2001).

This key insight into the heightening of critical awareness, results in school-community partnerships going further than simple community service and towards a mutually beneficial school-community programme. Where a 'win-win' situation is developed (Gross et al., 2015; Sanders, 2002 & Hands, 2005), although 'wins' are different for different partners.

4.6 Barriers to forming and sustaining school-community partnerships

This theme discusses the challenges to the formation and continuation to effective school-community partnerships, however it has been found that when the factors that enable effective partnerships, such as collaborative planning and decision making, effective two way communication, participative leaderships and a supportive school culture, were not done or were done poorly, these factors become barriers that the school would have to address before genuine and sustainable community engagement was established (Epstein, 2002).

Looking into this theme, it was found that there are several possible barriers to the development and functionality of school-community partnerships. This may be due to the multi-faceted and complex nature of school-community engagement. One of the major barriers to the school-community partnerships identified within this study was stakeholder buy-in, particularly from those who make up the student body; teachers,

parents and learners, as well as differing perspectives within and between the school and community members. The participants indicated various challenges related to ensuring unity and collaboration between these two spheres of influence.

Barriers to the formation of school-community engagement take shape in role players being distrustful and disconnected from each other, this may be the result of perspectives, values and beliefs not shared. I3 points to conflicting beliefs and views between the school and the local community members:

> there's very, very distinct gender roles within their families…The idea is that there are things boys do and the things girls do. And then there's also things about homophobia that is very distinct in that community.

Moreover, I1 contends that the local refugee community may be closed off to partnerships with the school given the challenges they face as refugees and asylum seekers living in a South African society.

> *a refugee community is a survival community, they are a community of survivors, they are not an easy community to work with necessarily… lots of them, we have found quite a commitment to their child's education, but we've seen a lot problems where children are mistreated, and abused and you know and sometimes mistrust because of their circumstances. I also think that Xenophobia is a growing concern within our country, child can't get into any sort of public schools it becomes harder and harder.*

It may be argued that the mistreatment of refugee communities in South Africa has resulted in a self-isolating community, where xenophobia and xenophobic violence is one of the key attributors to the school and community not engaging effectively. Despite the community, families and the school having a shared interest in the Childs education (Epstein, 2002). However, it is not just the local community who may be reluctant or sceptical of developing and particularly, sustaining school-community engagement programmes, as I1 demonstrates:

> *After a while students and parents and staff start to take the project for granted and start to assume the 'claim to' the building and xenophobia*

came out in that context. Where a challenge is the *internal marketing of the project, which I think is a growing problem that we have, the challenge of consistency in aptitude towards that project, I suppose would be another challenge that we have had and we have to do something to work around that to make sure that, the school does see the project continuing to see value in our project. Because I think it is very easy to say that the project becomes a burden and not beneficial to the school and seems to be more of a hinderance to the school than a help*

Similarly, I6 notes that she feels that forcing partners to engage with their communities, particularly learners may decrease one interest in engaging, in spite of the possible benefits:

you did not really get a chance to know the kids and it didn't feel, because it was forced, it wasn't the best like kind of interaction, I guess…

Thus, despite various (mutual) benefits identified, some school and community members are still reluctant to partake in school-community engagement, these include the learners, teacher and parents that form the internal school community, as these partnerships are viewed as a burden rather than a sources of community development and school improvement.

Further, even when partnerships have been developed the sustainability becomes difficult, I3 contends that even if there is stakeholder buy-in initially, these partnerships may run the risk of becoming stagnant, as they are 'normalised' or forgotten within and between the school and community:

I think that for our school in particular, our barrier is that it's now kind of normalized as a place. So, the project is now part of the school, it doesn't feel like it's community engagement anymore, even though it is because it's just now there. And so, it becomes part of the periphery again, in a different way. Because it's kind of just like oh it's the project, rather than it being this is about us helping children who are marginalized because of this and this, it is just part of the furniture now. It is like a bit of complacency.

While it is accepted that these school-communities partnerships ought to be institutionalised for the longevity of the engagement, it is argued that institutionalisation and normalisation should not translate into complacency, rather school and community members ought to work together, through honest and consistent communication (Hands, 2005). Henderson et al. (1986) argue that barriers to effective school community engagement can either be due to the attitudes of role player or logistical barriers.

In terms of attitudes, they argue that parents and schools (and in this case community members) engage in a 'turf battle' which is often a result differing beliefs and values which is exacerbated "by negative, inaccurate stereotypes of one another"(p. 51). Correspondingly, Gross et al. (2015) attributed low levels of school-community engagement to territorialism, which is "the most pervasive impediment to collaboration between schools and community partners" (p. 26), which indicates that role players do not want to open or give up the boundaries of the spaces in which they exist Thus one of the challenges of the formation of school-community partnerships is ensuring that the barriers between the school and community are permeable, further the school and community as existing entities may become compromised if they not flexible enough to adapt to their everchanging contexts (Crowson & Boyd, 2001). Further, non-inclusive practices and attitudes further constrains the partnership practices within and between the school and community. As I1 indicates, schools engaging with its community(s) may be considered more of a burden than a necessity, where it distracts from the teaching and learning within the school., where educators are overworked and have difficulty in finding time to meet and engage with community members, developing and sustaining liaisons with community members exceptionally difficult (Hands, 2005).

Contrastingly, Hands viewed that "the school personnel and their community collaborators understood the value of the partnerships and were receptive to either approaching potential partners or being approached by others" (2005, p. 79), where logistical barriers limit the ways in which this engagement is developed. As indicated by the Hands (2005) there are that numerous barriers to school-community engagement, that go beyond differing perceptions and attitudes, these factors include: a lack of time, transport and funds, as well as work and family obligations.

However even with these barriers Hands (2005, p. 79) found that “community partners appreciated feeling like they were valued and welcome members of the school community”, thus a welcoming environment for community members, regardless of where they have come from and their education and socio-economic levels, may encourage productive engagement between the role players. Further, there is widespread agreement that developing and encouraging participation is the responsibility of the school (Epstein, 2002; Sanders, 2002; Hands, 2005 & NECT, 2016), where Myende (2018) cites open and honest communication as a cornerstone to school-community engagement that is functional and sustainable.

Moreover, Epstein and Sanders (2002) argue that most schools “lack an explicit, written philosophy, policy and plan of whether and how they will inform invite and involve all families and the community in the life of the school” (p. 414), this may in turn challenge how effective a school-community project may be. For instance if a school is not clear and concise what is expected from the relations and what they are expected to do to form said relations the partnership, conflicts and tensions may arise (Sanders, 2002) thus a clear vision, mission and policy is essential for functional and sustainable school community engagement.

Thus where school leadership is invested in developing partnerships through open and honest communication and well as community partners being made to feel valued and welcome and clear and concise goals and visions, partnerships are more likely to be found (Epstein, 2002).

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter was an exploration the complex context of a South African to gain insights into the nature of community engagement, through an examination of (i) how community engagement is conceptualised and experienced in a South African school, (ii) what motivates and drives this school to engage with its community and (iii) what are the possible barriers and challenges faced when partaking in school-community partnerships. Through doing an understanding of how and why school-community engagement is initiated and sustained was developed and in turn gain insights into the possible implications for education policy.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION POLICY

5.1 Introduction

This study was a qualitative, exploratory case study design, which adopted social interpretivism as a research paradigm, to contribute towards education policy. The study utilised semi-structured interviews, document analysis and observation to collect data. This study explored the nature of community engagement in a South African school, to gain insights into how it is conceptualised and how and why school-community partnerships are formed and are sustainable. This study gained these insights from one school-community partnership, in the form of the Three2Six project, in the urbanised setting of Johannesburg.

5.2 Conclusion

Naicker (2011) asserts that “key education priorities such as the formation of school-community partnership are not being achieved” (p. 5). Thus study intended to develop insights into the implications for education policy, through the exploration of school-community engagement conceptualisations and practices, in a South African school, thus this study set out to do an analysis *for* policy.

The study was conducted with the underlying assumption that the ultimate purpose of schooling should be to provide inclusive and quality education for all learners. 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. Thus, it was argued that policy makers ought to understand and address that challenges of education that extend beyond the curriculum and classroom experiences, namely non-curriculum issues, and one mechanism to do this is through school-community engagement.

School-community engagement is conceptualised and experiences as a multifaceted and relative phenomenon. This study found that the ways in which partnerships were developed was strongly dependent on how the school understood its roles within its context. Illustrating that a deep understanding around the complexities within their

context, through their responses they have acknowledged that they members of the school community are in a position of privilege while at the same time, exist in a very unequal society. 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.

Further this study determined that school-community engagement is conceptualised as mutually beneficial and reciprocal. As encapsulated by Gross et al. (2015), who contend that:

> School–community partnerships play an essential role in successful schools, often providing supports and resources to meet staff, family, and student needs that go beyond what is typically available through school. Reciprocally, community partners benefit from their relationships with schools, including learning about schools' inclusive culture (p. 9).

This study indicated that despite possible contrasts and complexities within a context, when relations are formed, they result in benefits for all, be it (learners, parents, community members (local, geographical, religious, or donors). It is was found that when relationships one sided and limited to 'outreach' they tend to be short lived. Additionally, it is acknowledged that these benefits are not limited to fiscal, resource or material gains, as indicated in the study school members gains in terms of social awareness. Thus, a key finding is that for school community partnerships to be functional and sustainable they ought to be mutual and reciprocal in nature.

Moreover, this study determined that factors that were deemed to enable and promote the initialisation and sustainability of effective school-community, such as effective two-way communication, clear vision and policy development through participative leadership (Epstein, 2002 & Myende, 2018), were found to be challenging/constraining if left examined or if addressed insufficiently. Thus, it is claimed that a key to schools engaging with their communities effectively is determining and addressing the possible challenges that may 'disable' how schools engage with community members.

Therefore it was contended that from the responses from the participants and the discussion that followed, school-community engagement is complex and achieving effective engagement is not an easy feat but through mutual understanding and respect community engagement can be formed and functional. Further it is evident that school-community relations are not formed spontaneously or on their own, rather these relations need to be set out purposefully, with a shared vision and mission that is mutually agreed upon, which should be set out in a clear policy statement.

5.3 Recommendations

Given that this study has established that school-community engagement is beneficial in terms of community development as well as school improvement within a given context, it is recommended that school-community partnership guidelines are further developed in relation to understanding and addressing contextual issues as a key to forming and sustaining school-community engagement. It is recommended that the context of the schools' existence guides and informs the focus of the issues around which partnerships are developed. As a result, the starting point of developing school-community relationships understanding and engaging around the contextual issues.

Moreover, this process of identifying the contextual challenges requires partnership role-players to engage in a dialogue and share their views and perspectives, to ensure that there is representativity and mutual agreement in relation to what is identified as contextual issues. While, this study notes that not all participants are/will be equally invested or interested in the formation and sustainability of community engagement programmes in the school, it is believed that through the creation of awareness and dialogues, that are honest and open, buy in is achievable.

As discussed in the findings, establishing and sustaining functional school-community relationships are ongoing process, indicating the that school-community partnership guidelines focus on the need for school-community partnerships to be monitored, with partners examining the sustainability and functionality of the programmes. While at the same time partners need to be discussing ways in which relations can be further developed and adapted to address new or everchanging contextual issues.

It is also recommended that school-community engagement guidelines further explore and develop the benefits of inreach as a consequence of outreach. As this study found that those who initiated a school-community engagement programme set out to give to the community primarily, but in turn developed their social awareness and thus their outreach become mutually reciprocal and beneficial.

5.4 Conclusion-Implications for education policy

The study has developed insights into the nature of community engagement in a South African school and some possible policy implications for education policy have been determined. However it is accepted that the scope and depth of this study is limited and as a result the findings may not be representative of other contexts, but this study is viewed as a starting point in the exploration of the nature of community engagement in South African schools.

The NECT (2016) has provided a fairly comprehensive framework for schools, in relation to developing and sustaining school-community engagement, yet this study found that the emphasis remained largely on schools engaging with families, with limited depth in relation to school engagement with their communities, hence the need for the study.

This analysis *for* policy determined that school-community partnerships are successful it they are appropriate to the needs and complexities of the context in which they exist as a result, it is contended that the state and policy-makers cannot and should not develop an universal, blanket policy, rather the state and policy-makers ought to act as a supportive agent, who helps schools develop and initiate plans and strategies that allow for the formation and continuation of school-community engagement (NECT, 2016). Furthermore, this study identified that in South Africa, through the constitution and the SASA, an enabling policy environment is indeed present, yet implementation is problematic (Naicker, 2011).

Moreover, it was determined that these strategies and plans, initiated by the school but developed as sustained through various stakeholders, need to have clear and concise visions and goals for the partnerships as well as mutually beneficial outcomes for functionality and sustainability (Epstein, 2002). The visions and goals ought to be

agreed upon to establish shared ownership and open and honest communication and collaboration. This may result in a supportive, vibrant climate for relationships to be developed and sustained. It is essential that this is a process embarked on purposefully, where action and implementation are key.

Key to this study and key to education policy is that school-community partnerships are a mechanism in which contextual and social issues, such as BLM, GBV, social exclusion can be addressed to develop communities and improve schools and in turn to improve the quality and inclusion of education and equality and social justice in South African societies.

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Appendices

Appendix A: The permission letter to the school's principal

LETTER TO THE PRINCIPAL

My name is Kelly Robertson; I am a full time Maters of Education (MEd) student at the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand.

I am doing research on the nature of community engagement in a South African school and the possible implications for education policy may be.

My research involves investigating the nature engagement by a school in *Johannesburg East* with its' community and what are the possible implications for education policy. Through exploring conceptualisations and experiences of community and community engagement, the practices of community engagement within a South African school and what this means for teaching and learning within the school. By doing so this study aims to develop a deeper understanding of communities and the nature of community engagement, in order to inform education policy.

Additionally, this will be done through the use of interviews as I think it will be the easiest way to delve into the teachers, principals and a government official understanding community and community engagement. Along with the interviews, audiotaping will take place (if the participant comfortable with it), for the function of reflection and 'objectivity'. The audio-taping will be done to allow me to reflect on what was said both, as well as to ensure that the data generation and analysis is as accurate as possible, however the audiotapes will simply be used for writing the report and will not be handing in with it.

The reason I have chosen your school is because of the Three2Six programme, which you are part of.

I am inviting your school to participate in this research study. Furthermore, I am inviting you, ----------, to participate in this research study.

The research participants will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way. Please be reassured that you can withdraw your permission at any time during this project without any penalty. There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study. The participants will not be paid for this study.

The names of the research participants and identity of the school will be kept confidential at all times and in all academic writing about the study. Your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

All research data will be destroyed between 3-5 years after completion of the project.

Please let me know if you require any further information. I look forward to your response as soon as is convenient.

Yours sincerely,
Kelly Robertson
891376@students.wits.ac.za
011 913 3028 0836503768

Appendix B: The informed consent letters

Dear Learner

My name is Kelly Robertson; I am a full time Master of Education (MEd) student at the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand.

I am doing research on how your school engages with its' community and what this might mean for education policy.

My research looks at what community engagement means, my study aims to determine the understandings of community and community engagement, the practice of community engagement within your school and the strategies and challenges in achieving community engagement. Thus, this study aims to enrich the knowledge base around school and community engagement.

You are invited to participate in a group interview, with four of your peers, where audiotaping will be used (if all participants, namely you, are comfortable with it). The audiotapes will allow me, as the researcher, to accurately analyse and report the responses of you and your peers to the interview questions. Please note that the audiotapes will simply be used when writing the research report, they will only be listened to by me, the researcher, and will not be submitted for marking.

Remember, this is not a test, it is not for marks and it is voluntary, which means that you don't have to do it. Also, if you decide halfway through that you prefer to stop, this is completely your choice and will not affect you negatively in any way.

I will not be using your own name; I will make one up so no one can identify you. All information about you will be kept confidential in all my writing about the study. Also, all collected information will be stored safely and destroyed between 3-5 years after I have completed my project.

Your parents have also been given an information sheet and consent form, but at the end of the day it is your decision to join us in the study.

I look forward to working with you!

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Thank you

INFORMATION SHEET PARENTS FOR CHILD DATE:

Dear Parent

My name is Kelly Robertson; I am a full time Master of Education (MEd) student at the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand.

I am doing research on the nature of community engagement in a South African school and the possible implications for education policy may be.

My research involves investigating the nature engagement by a school in *Johannesburg East* with its' community and what are the possible implications for education policy. Through exploring conceptualisations and experiences of community and community engagement, the practices of community engagement within a South African school and what this means for teaching and learning within the school. By doing so this study aims to develop a deeper understanding of communities and the nature of community engagement, in order to inform education policy.

Your child, along with four of his or her peers, is invited to participate in a group interview, where audiotaping will be used (if all participants, the learners and their respective parent, as comfortable with it). The audiotapes will allow me, as the researcher, to accurately analyse and report, the responses of the learners, including your child's responses, to the interview questions. Please note that the audiotapes will simply be used when writing the research report, they will only be listened to by me, the researcher, and will not be submitted for marking.

Your child will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way. S/he will be reassured that s/he can withdraw her/his permission at any time during this project without any penalty. There are no foreseeable risks in participating and your child will not be paid for this study.

Your child's name and identity will be kept confidential at all times and in all academic writing about the study. His/her individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

All research data will be destroyed between 3-5 years after completion of the project.

Please let me know if you require any further information.

Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Kelly Robertson
6 Mikro Street, Parkrand, Boksburg, 1459
891376@students.wits.ac.za
011 913 3028 0836503768

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

My name is Kelly Robertson; I am a full time Master of Education (MEd) student at the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand.

I am doing research on the nature of community engagement in a South African school and the possible implications for education policy may be.

My research involves investigating the nature engagement by a school in *Johannesburg East* with its' community and what are the possible implications for education policy. Through exploring conceptualisations and experiences of community and community engagement, the practices of community engagement within a South African school and what this means for teaching and learning within the school. By doing so this study aims to develop a deeper understanding of communities and the nature of community engagement, in order to inform education policy.

Additionally, this will be done through the use of interviews, to delve into various role players conceptualisations of community and community engagement. Along with the interviews, audiotaping will take place (if the participant comfortable with it), for the function of reflection and 'objectivity'. The audio-taping will be done to allow me to reflect on what was said both, as well as to ensure that the data generation and analysis is as accurate as possible, however the audiotapes will simply be used for writing the report and will not be handing in with it.

Your name and identity will be kept confidential at all times and in all academic writing about the study. Your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

All research data will be destroyed between 3-5 years after completion of the project.

You will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way. Your participation is voluntary, so you can withdraw your permission at any time during this project without any penalty. There are no foreseeable risks in participating and you will not be paid for this study.

Please let me know if you require any further information.

Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,

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Appendix C: The interview schedule for all participants

Interview Schedule- Manager Members and the Principal

5. What do you understand by community engagement?
6. Who do you regard as your community?
7. How do you/does your school engage with your community?
8. What do you think motivates your school to engage with its' community?
9. What have you experienced as the benefits of community engagement?
10. What, do you think, are the possible barriers that could hinder community engagement?
11. What are the drivers/enablers of community engagement?
12. Given your experiences and practices of community engagement, what recommendations do you have for policy?

Interview Schedule- Members of the Community

1. What do you understand by community engagement?
2. Who do you regard as your community?
3. How do you, as a community member engage with the school?
4. How does the school engage with your community or you as a community member?
5. What do you think motivates a school to engage with its' community?
6. What do you think motivates the community and those in the community to engage with a school?
7. What have you, if any, experienced as the benefits of community engagement?
8. What, do you think, are the possible barriers that could hinder community engagement?
9. What do you think are the drivers/enablers of community engagement?
10. Given your experiences and practices of community engagement, what recommendations do you have for policy?

Interview Schedule- Learners

1. What do you understand by community engagement?
2. Who do you think makes up your community?
3. How do you/does your school engage with your community?
4. Why do you think schools engage with their communities?
5. What do you think are the advantages of schools engaging with their communities?

6. What, do you think, are the possible obstacles that could hinder community engagement?
7. What are the drivers/enablers of community engagement?
8. Given your experiences and practices of community engagement, how do you think schools can improve their engagement with their communities?