

## School Governing Bodies in Strengthening Democracy and Social Justice: Parents as Partners?

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**ABSTRACT** This paper reports findings of a qualitative multi-site case study of schools in two provinces in South Africa. Framed within theories of democratic governance and social justice, the aim of the study was to explore the role of school governing bodies, through parental participation in strengthening democracy and social justice. Data were collected through semi-structured focus group interviews and phenomenological steps for data analysis were followed. Findings suggest that the effective functioning of SGBs is influenced by the context within which schools operate. While parents are represented in SGBs, however; SGBs are fraught with difficult power relations, exclusionary practices and a disregard for social justice principles. The paper argues that all stakeholders have a role to play in entrenching democratic governance in schools. To this end, stakeholders should be assisted to develop the requisite democratic values, behaviour, skill and attitudes.

### INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The following section draws mainly from Mncube et al. (2011). The *South African Schools Act (SASA) No. 84 of 1996*, emerged from the White Paper on the organisation governance and funding of schools (Republic of South Africa 1996) and it became operational from the beginning of 1997 (16 years ago), mandated that all public state schools in South Africa must have democratically elected school governing bodies (SGBs) constituted of teachers, non-teaching staff, parents and, in the case of secondary schools, learners. While SGBs in South Africa were only legislated in 1996 and first implemented in 1997 (Mncube 2007), they were already in existence in England and Wales as early as in the 1980s (Farrell and Law 1999). Their primary function was the overall administration of schools on behalf of the local education authorities, with the assumption that SGBs would be better able to manage, and more accountable than, the latter could be (Farrell and Law 1999; Mncube et al. 2011).

In South African SGBs, parents are required by law to form the majority on SGBs, with the

chair of the SGB being one of such (Mncube 2007; Mncube et al. 2011). This was an attempt to give power and voice to parents as a way in which issues of democracy and social justice issues can be advanced in a country that was fraught with racism, oppression and authoritarianism. The functions of the SGBs, which are clearly stated in SASA, include, among others, determining both the language policy of the school and school fees, and recommending the appointment of educators and non-educator staff. The appointment of staff should take the following factors, *inter alia*, into consideration: the principle of equity; the need to redress past injustices; and the need for representivity (Republic of South Africa 1996). The implications of such requirements are that members of SGBs, including parents and learners, should be well informed about issues of school governance and of the legal requirements which are stipulated in SASA. The intention of such legislation is that issues of democracy and social justice should be taken into consideration but that this is also a way of enhancing school effectiveness (Mncube et al. 2011).

Brown and Duku (2008) contend that SGBs are fraught with social tension, and an ethos of rejection, domination, and psychological stress. Such an ethos leads to the isolation of those parents who have low socio-economic status, compromising their participation in school governance. Research also suggests that issues re-

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lating to socio-economic status sometimes stifle parental participation in SGBs (Deem et al. 1995; Ministerial Review Committee 2004). This view is corroborated by Mncube (2005), who highlights a number of factors leading to the lack of parental participation on SGBs, namely: unequal power relations; socio-economic status; different cultural expectations of diverse communities; lack of confidence and expertise caused by the absence or lack of training; poor sharing of information; the rural-urban divide; language barriers; poor organisation, and a high turnover rate of governors (Mncube 2005; Mncube et al. 2011).

The rationale for this paper is to examine the way in which parents should be utilised in SGBs as a way of strengthening democracy and social justice. Findings from Mncube (2005) suggested that school governing bodies (SGBs) contribute to democracy in the school and in wider South African society. Further, SGBs have contributed, to an extent in forging racial integration, tolerance, collective decision-making and rational discussion. However, the effectiveness of SGBs was found to be hindered by unequal power relations, socio-economic status, the rural-urban divide, lack of continuous governor training, different cultural expectations of diverse communities, language barriers, race, lack of expertise and confidence in parents, lack of time and transport which contribute to poor attendance at meetings, gender, poor communication of information, poor organisation and the high turnover rate of governors. This study is hoped to contribute to improving parental participation in school governing bodies so that democracy and social justice could be strengthened. Further, the study will contribute to national and international debates by offering some insights into the ways in which school governing bodies do and ought to operate in order to address issues of democracy and social justice in South African schools and society.

### Theoretical Framework on Democracy and Social Justice

The research reported in this paper is undergirded by two theories, namely democratic school governance and social justice. This is because of equity, social justice and democratisation being among key objectives of the post apartheid education system. SASA is considered as a mechanism which is aimed at, *inter alia*,

redressing past exclusions and facilitating the necessary transformation to support the ideals of representation and participation in the schools and the country as a whole (SASA 1996). By its enactment of SASA, the South African government aimed at fostering democratic school governance, thereby introducing a school governance structure involving all the stakeholder groups of education in active and responsible roles, in order to promote issues relating to democracy, including tolerance, rational discussion and collective decision-making (Department of Education 1997; Mncube et al. 2011).

Mncube et al. (2011) inform us of several authors who have different opinions regarding the functioning of SGBs in South Africa. For example, the Ministerial Review Committee (2004) regarded the SGBs as a unifying factor at schools, despite some researchers having rejected such a view (Karlsen 1999; Sayed and Soudien 2005).

Bush and Heystek (2003) argue that, despite the significant difficulties facing the educational system in South Africa, SGBs provide a good prospect of enhancing local democracy and of improving the quality of education for all learners. Conflict among SGB members has been found to be central to the experience of school governance. The many tensions that exist in SGBs can partly be blamed on such bodies being predominantly middle-class in identity, with class-related norms regarding parental participation prevailing (Brown and Duku 2008). SGBs tend to assume that parents have the resources, including the time, to spend on school activities (Mncube 2005; Mncube et al. 2011; Sayed and Soudien 2005).

There is vast amount of literature that supports the need for greater democracy in education both nationally and internationally (Harber and Davies 1997; UNDP 1995; UNICEF 1995). The section below draws mainly from Mncube et al. (2011).

While there many different definitions of democracy (Davies 2002), in terms of the current research democracy is seen as composed of five basic principles:

- ♦ **representation**, in terms of which individuals are represented on issues affecting their lives or the lives of their children;
- ♦ **participation**, in terms of the involvement of individuals in the decision-making process;
- ♦ **rights**, comprising a set of entitlements which are protected and common to all individuals;

- ♦ **equity**, pertaining to the fair and equal treatment of individuals and groups, and
- ♦ **informed choice**, with tools being provided for decision-making which is based on the provision of relevant information and the application of sound reasoning (Davies et al. 2002; Mncube and Harber 2010; Mncube et al. 2011).

Mncube et al. (2011) contend that there are two main sets of arguments and evidence suggesting that democratic schools are also more effective schools. There is, for example, evidence that suggests that listening to parents, encouraging their participation and giving them more power and responsibility (that is, greater democratisation) can enhance school effectiveness and facilitate school improvement. The effective school culture includes many of the core values associated with democracy, such as tolerating and respecting others, participating and expressing views, sharing and disseminating knowledge, valuing equity and equality and the opportunity for students to make judgements and choices. An empirical study of the practice of pupil democracy in Denmark, Holland, Sweden and Germany concluded that

*'It seemed to everyone clear that when pupils had a voice and were accorded value, the school was a happier place; where pupils are happy and given dignity, they attend more and they work more productively...There was far more evidence of pupils taking responsibility for their own learning...The link between legislation (for democracy in schools) and pupil achievement is an indirect but powerful one'* (Davies and Kirkpatrick 2000: 82)

Research suggest that schools that give a large proportion of students responsibility had better examination results, better behaviour and attendance and less delinquency (Rutter et al. 1979). Trafford in his detailed study in one British school in the mid-1990's and Hannam in his study in the early 2000's of twelve schools which could manifestly demonstrate a claim to describe themselves 'student participative' found that there was a significant effect on both A level and GCSE examination grades, in Hannam's case a judgment also supported by OFSTED (Mncube et al. 2011; Trafford 2003).

In terms of developing countries, Harber (1993) found in interviews with Tanzanian teachers and pupils that they felt that greater pupil participation in decision-making improved communication in the school reduced discipline prob-

lems and increased the confidence and discussion skills of learners (Mncube et al. 2011)

The second set of arguments and evidence concern the issue of the ultimate goals of education. If education aims to create democratic citizens and a democratic society then it must be organised to do so to operate effectively and achieve effective (that is, democratic) outcomes. In the context of this paper, effectiveness refers to when governance policies, processes and relationship are democratic and based on socially just principles. For governance purposes, a school is considered effective if all SGB members can participate freely and equally in shared decision-making. The outcome of such processes should be just and benefit all stakeholders alike. So, does experience of more democratic forms lead to people with more democratic skills, values and attitudes? While there is a reasonably substantial literature on the theory, problems and practice of democratic education in relation to developing countries, empirical research on the impact of more democratic forms of education is not common, but it does exist (Mncube et al. 2011). There are some research findings from the United States and the United Kingdom which suggest that more democratic schools can contribute to both participatory skills and the values of operating democratically (Hepburn 1984). Interestingly for present purposes, the school effectiveness literature not only suggests that more democratically organized schools are more effective schools but that an important element in both democratic participation and school effectiveness is an enhanced role for parents (Harber 1998; Mncube et al. 2011).

According to Apple and Beane (1995), there are conditions upon which democracy depends and which can be considered foundations of a democratic way of life. These, among others, are:

- ♦ the open flow of ideas, regardless of their popularity;
- ♦ the use of critical reflection and analysis to evaluate ideas, problems and policies;
- ♦ concern for the welfare of others and the common good; an understanding that democracy is an idealised set of values that must be lived and guide the life of people; and,
- ♦ the organisation of social institutions to promote and extend the democratic way of life.

These conditions suggest that the democratic way of life is distinct from undemocratic practices and is not a social given. It has to be created and nurtured. Promoting a democratic way of life is likely to be more challenging to the SGB given their diverse membership and the history of school governance in South Africa. In the past, learners and educators were excluded from governance structures. Although parents were involved in School Committees, their participation was mere tokenism. Recent studies in South Africa also found that different members of the SGB were still marginalised in some way (Heystek 2004; Mabovula 2009; Magadla 2007; Mncube 2008, 2009; Van Wyk 2004, 2007). Notwithstanding evidence of such undemocratic practices, Grant-Lewis and Naidoo (2004) found that most stakeholders in SGBs seemed to deny the existence of school politics or diverse and competing constituent interests, values, and demands. This explains why the tendency of school principals to dominate decision-making on both management and governance matters may continue in the SGB if it is not specifically targeted for eradication. Similarly, if stakeholders are not taught how to be democratic and question the status quo, relationships in the SGB may be characterised by power relations that result in those that are usually marginalised in the broader society being afforded no voice and being further marginalised in schools. To this end, section 19 of SASA makes provision for provincial departments of education to provide training to SGBs to enable them to fulfill their functions.

Hyttén (2006) argues that since democratic societies are ideally just, social justice is an integral feature of democratic life, where equity, self-determination, and freedom are pursued. Social justice refers to when a society values principles of equality and solidarity, understands and values human rights, and recognises the dignity of every human being (Zajda et al. 2006). In concurrence, Murrell (2006) adds that while social justice involves recognising and eradicating all forms of oppression and differential treatment inherent in organisational practices and policies, it forms the core of participatory democracy as the means of bringing this envisaged end. These explications of social justice suggest that it cannot just be an espoused ideal but must be experienced in practice. Structures, processes and relationships must be experienced in distinctly different ways from how they are experienced in unjust societies.

In practice, a just school would, according to Carlise et al. (2006) promote inclusion and equity, hold high expectations for all learners, develop reciprocal community relationships, involve a system wide approach and have a direct social justice education and intervention. Marshall and Gerstl-Pepin (2005) illustrate the inextricable link between transformation, democracy and social justice in schools. They maintain that for leaders to further entrench social justice advocacy in schools they must be critically pluralist and democratic, transformative, moral and ethical, feminist or caring, and spiritually or culturally responsive. This may, however, not be easy given that schools tend to be sites of cultural politics that serve to reproduce and perpetuate some inequities, and to confirm and legitimate some cultures while other cultures are marginalised (Quarts et al. in Shields 2010). Given this challenge, Shields (2010) argues that transformational leaders, in this case the SGB, must learn to diminish undemocratic power relationships and use their power to transform present social relationships, the inappropriate use of power and the resultant inequity and injustice. This requires the SGB to create conditions that will promote and nurture democracy and social justice. Bogotch (2000) notes, in this regard, that participants must experience the environment as socially just in terms of its processes, relations and programmes. In addition, educational outcomes that are based on, and promote social inequalities must be eradicated (Bogotch 2000).

The study purported to answer the following questions:

1. Do school governing bodies contribute to strengthening democracy and social justice in South African schools?
2. How should parents be utilised in school governing bodies function in order for issues of democracy and social justice to be honoured?
3. How have parents been prepared to participate effectively in school governing bodies?

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

### Research Approach

The study reported here is part of a major project conducted by one of the two authors in 2009; as such there would be some similarities in

this and other papers extracted out of this project. The study is qualitative in nature and explored the perceptions and experiences of stakeholders in a school in relation to SGBs. The qualitative data in the current study were generated by means of the use of focus group interviews. The interviews concerned capitalised on the communication engaged in between research participants in order to generate data, with the researcher relying on in-group interactions and discussions for the generation of rich data. The rationale for the researchers' use of focus group interviews was congruent with the contention that the use of said method could facilitate access to people's knowledge and experiences, and could also be used to examine not only what people think, but also how and why they think in a certain way. The researchers ensured that the number of participants in the groups surveyed fell within the standard range of focus groups, comprising between four to eight research participants.

### Sample

The sample surveyed comprised the principal and three focus groups drawn from each school. The focus groups in each school consisted of between four and six parents, between four and six learners, and between four and six educators. Of the sample, two parents, two learners and two educators had to be currently serving on the SGB. Two observations per SGB were conducted in each school. Four secondary schools were selected for the study from both the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal so that, in all, eight schools were involved. The schools were purposively selected to provide a range of remote rural, rural, township and urban schools in each province, so that views could be obtained from those who had a role to play in schools that varied markedly in terms of their physical condition, facilities, available space, access to social amenities, and local community infrastructure and poverty levels.

### Ethical Issues

Approval for the research to be conducted in the relevant schools was first obtained from the two provincial Departments of Education concerned. The informed consent of the participants was sought and they were given the normal guarantees regarding privacy and the right to withdraw from the study if a need arises. The following ethical issues were honoured:

**Informed Consent :** The participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their participation. The participants were also informed that their participation was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw their participation at any time.

**Confidentiality and Anonymity:** In order to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, the identity of the schools and participants were kept anonymous. To this effect schools were given fictitious names. It was also necessary to delete the names of schools on documents that were attached to the research report.

**Permission:** was sought from the school principals to allow the use documentary materials related to school governance matters

### Data Analysis

Data consisted of interview transcripts and notes taken during interviews. The analysis of the transcripts followed the phenomenological steps suggested by Giorgi et al. (1975) as outlined below:

- Firstly, each transcript was read to gain an overall sense of the whole;
- Secondly, the transcript was read to identify what transactions could be seen to have occurred during the interview;
- Thirdly, any redundancies identified in the units of meaning were eliminated and the remaining units were interconnected;
- Fourthly, the participants' language was transformed into the language of science;
- Fifthly, the insights that had been gained from conducting the study were synthesised into the description of the overall experience of leadership practices (Mncube and Harber 2010);
- Sixthly and finally, the analysed data were categorised into themes that emerged from the findings.

### Issues of Quality

The study used focus group interviews and observations as such; it is high on validity and reliability.

## 3. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As Mncube and Harber (2010: 616) suggest "the use of respondents' voice in research is al-

ways very powerful and for this reason, selections from the transcripts of interviews have been used to ensure that stakeholders' voices are heard", in terms of parental participation in SGBs. This section presents the themes that emerged from the data analysis, and the data produced was sought from the following questions:

- ♦ The role of the SGBs in promoting democracy
- ♦ Parental involvement in governing bodies and school effectiveness
- ♦ Training of the SGBs for effective participation
- ♦ Working relationships between SGBs and SMTs: the missing link?

This section reports on the main findings of focus groups from the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. It presents responses of educators and principals regarding their experiences on the functioning of the SGB in promoting democracy in schools. Selections from the transcripts of interviews have been used to ensure that the voices of principal and educators on issues of democracy and how this can lead to effective schooling are heard. The problem formulation of the research directed the research aims of the study. Themes that emerged from the data analysis are discussed next.

### **The Role of the SGBs in Promoting Democracy**

The need for democracy in schools has been emphasised. This means promoting values such as transparency, fairness, tolerance, equity, justice and openness. In line with the democratic tenets of SASA, School Governing Bodies were meant to be entities for addressing issues of democracy and social justice in South African schools.

When asked whether the SGBs contribute to, or promote the development of democracy in South African schools respondents who were citing appointment practices gave conflicting views. On the one hand, the SGBs were viewed as transparent, fair and extending equal employment opportunities to all. One respondent from the Western Cape said:

*Yes, they have just promoted democracy by just allowing all educators without just concentrating on the colour of the skin, race, creed. In fact, they employ everyone who has got the required skills of just doing the job by not say-*

*ing this one is a foreigner (ikwerekwere). But if he/she possesses the required skills like Mathematics and Science, then is fine. Of course our governing bodies are well aware that sometimes highly skilled educators can be found in any races. So they employ those educators and by so doing I think they are promoting democracy by not discriminating other educators because of their race.*

A contrasting view was that some SGBs were undemocratic, manipulative and engaging in practices that bordered on preferential treatment and corruption. One educator's response to the same question was this lamentation:

*Not at all. The main thing that I have seen SGBs doing in our schools is doing appointment of staff, which, most of the time, has been coupled and flawed with many disputes. There are many cases in my area, especially where I teach where teachers were actually buying from the SGB members – giving money. If I want to be a principal, the SGB members will decide whether this vote is going to be R5000.00 or so. So, as a potential candidate, I have to pay upfront R5000.00 and then I know for sure I will be in the job. Everybody will be called for interviews but you will know for a fact that so and so is actually earmarked for this post because he has paid some money to a certain member of the SGB. So you can see it never achieved the purpose for which it was intended [which is democracy].*

The perception that SGBs are generally undemocratic and corrupt was in the minority. The majority of the respondents perceived SGBs as being democratic in their conception and function. Emphasis in responses was placed on the SGBs being representative of various stakeholders and giving them, especially parents, more voice and freedom of expression. In addition, the SGB was viewed as a forum that facilitates collaboration between the school and the community. An educator from KwaZulu-Natal noted in this regard:

*Yes, I would say of course they have contributed a great deal simply because if we look at the structure of the governing body when we compare the governing bodies with the School Committees that used to govern the schools. There is a good representation of the various stakeholders like learners, the parent component, as well as the teacher component. So, all*

*these people are there to see to it that the school is functioning effectively.*

The SGB has a role to play in helping clarify misconceptions about democracy held by different stakeholders in schools. Too often learners, parents and educators tend to emphasise their rights while ignoring associated responsibilities. An educator from KwaZulu-Natal expressed support for the view that the SGB helps to develop the culture of democracy in schools thus:

*Yes, my belief is that the way governing bodies are formed; they are a structure that is meant to promote democracy. Because, amongst others democracy means whatever I do, should be mine. It should be what I want to see happening... For each and every stakeholder there is nothing that prevents them from airing their views. So really, they do contribute to promoting democracy*

The majority of respondents agreed that there were challenges and barriers that inhibited SGBs from contributing to the development of democracy in schools. In the main, these included:

- ♦ Lack of training on democratic governance;
- ♦ Short terms of office that ends before members understand democratic practices;
- ♦ Low literacy levels, notably of parents; and
- ♦ Power relations and the manipulation of the process by those with higher literacy levels like educators.

Given the centrality of democratic practices to school effectiveness, the existence of such barriers and perceptions of undemocratic practices of SGBs are unacceptable. In line with the provisions of SASA, the SGBs should co-opt members of the community who are more skilled and more experienced on democratic governance issues. Parents should be empowered through capacity building programmes that extend beyond basic literacy. This concern and the proposed measures give credence to the contention of many commentators who suggest that that leadership and the performance of school principals and educators in terms of governance have recently received more attention than educational reforms.

### **Parental Involvement in Governing Bodies and School Effectiveness**

Respondents were asked whether they perceived the involvement of parents on SGBs as

working in schools. They also had to indicate whether they considered parents to be effectively involved in the SGB. The majority of respondents expressed the view that there was merit in involving parents in the SGB. Much value was placed by respondents on consultation as an aspect of democracy. One educator from the Western Cape commented:

*Of course, it is working sir. Yes it is working. Take for instance if/when a great need make for instance a security. We used to first of all start just negotiating with the governing body. Thereafter, we convene a meeting for the parents just to go and ask for a mandate and plead for them for a need of security at school. What can we do because we have got no money because we are not allowed even just to pay the security by using norms and standards? We have just to use those donations by parents. So we ask mandate from them just placing the needs of a security.*

A similar sentiment was shared by an educator from KwaZulu-Natal thus:

*In my opinion I can say yes the SGB have been able to lead to effective functioning of the school. Because the SGB is the key or the umbrella of the school, which means most of the things that are in the school started from the SGB. The I can say yes the SGBs have been able to promote democracy in South African schools in such a way that each member has a right to come out with the ideas about the things that they need to talk about and things that they need to do. So that is why I say the SGBs have been able to promote democracy in SA schools.*

The majority of respondents, however, had the perception that the involvement of parents was poor and ineffective because of a number of reasons. These included, among others, the illiteracy of parents; lack of compensation for SGB work and consequent reluctance to participate; other members usurping the participatory power of parents and making them feel marginalised; and, inability of the SGB to enforce participation. Some of the comments that outline barriers to the meaningful participation of parents are outlined in the comments below.

An educator from KwaZulu-Natal argued:

*There is very poor involvement of parents due to some reasons. I wasn't there when parents were elected. As far as I look parents are not well educated they are just there for formality. On the involvement and suggestions, there*

*is nothing from the parents' side. They just stand there; they sit back and listen to the meeting that is conducted by the chairperson. There are no views from the parents' side. I suggest it will be better if there is development for parents in a sense that they are taught or educated on how to participate in the SGB. I think if there can be something like workshops or kind of training when parents as the stakeholders will go and try to capacitate themselves on how to participate in SGBs and that will be a brilliant idea, so as to get the school working. It is obvious that the school needs the parental involvement because they are within the community. For example, there are some of the activities that occur in community, take place in the school while in the school we do not understand what is happening outside the school premises or maybe it's the holidays. Then the parent members will then go and unlock/open the school.*

A related observation was made by a principal from the Western Cape:

*Parents are a working species so because there is no remuneration as you can well imagine. They are not very keen to do too much but you have the others that have more time and become more involved in getting things done. Fortunately for us here at school we have a community and there are no storms which may be in the process of blowing over and people can now see the worthiness of other persons at the school. You find that they are willing to contribute in all types of ways. We had Poitjiekos (traditional curry) last week Saturday and it was done completely by parents outside here. They are busy with fundraising for the school. Learners are participating while parents are encouraging learners. They give them money to buy and contribute whatever fundraising we have at the school. School fees are coming in better so there is the understanding of the financial obligation to the school. So parents wish to become involved it is how you actually attract them to school.*

It is interesting to note that educators and principals do not perceive the poor involvement of parents in the SGB as a hopeless situation. The majority of respondents share the view that meaningful participation of parents can be enhanced through relevant capacity building programmes. This is consistent with the argument of Mncube and Harber (2010) that stakeholders in a democratic school are prepared to abide by

democratic principles through the acquisition of suitable knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours. Provision for this is made by SASA. Bush and Heystek (2003) contend that SGBs provide a good prospect of enhancing local democracy and improving the quality of education for all learners in a school.

### **Training of the SGBs for Effective Participation**

People are elected to serve on SGBs not necessarily because they know about the role of the SGB or anything about democracy. Some parents may also be illiterate or semi-illiterate. Thus, Tsotetsi et al. (2008) maintain that training must be provided for the SGB to enable them to function efficiently. Respondents shared the view that training in the form of seminars and workshops is important for the SGB (Ngidi 2004). They, however, expressed some reservations about the quality of the training that is provided and the attitude of some SGB members to the training. An educator from the Western Cape lamented one SGB chairperson's lackadaisical attitude to training thus:

*Irrespective that we went for training organized by the department, the chairperson only attended one training session and when it came to the most important session, he did not attend the meeting that was very important.*

Training is unlikely to be beneficial if it is not taken seriously. Not all respondents perceived the training that is provided as serving the intended purpose of adequately preparing SGB members for their roles. In this regard, the following responses are noteworthy:

*... Yah, although they (parents) have been trained, the legacy of being uneducated remains there. (KwaZulu-Natal educator);*

*Now one must look at how you view training...that type of training takes place in a very sterile environment and has very little interaction with one another. Even the social event you know is not nice as there is no gel of avenues and so on. So it is most probably to do with the way it is presented... (Principal); and*

*Parents are not sufficiently trained to participate in the SGB. They do not know exactly what to do. If maybe they can get through training, they will know what to do in their portfolios and thus they will know how to perform their duties. Due to the fact they are not trained that*

*is why they become shy to share their ideas when we have meetings, they always think only educated members will come up with the correct ideas* (KwaZulu-Natal educator).

For democracy to work, those entrusted with implementing it in schools must understand what it entails and how it works. To this end, they need to be trained to learn about and experience democracy (Harber and Serf 2006).

### **Working Relationships between SGBs and SMTs: The Missing Link?**

Although SASA spells out that school governance is the competence of the SGB and professional management of school is the responsibility of the principal, Heystek (2004) points out that there is some uncertainty about the roles, as the legislated functions do not provide a clear distinction between the two. While there are some overlaps between some roles, some parents tend to insist on being involved in the professional management of schools simply because they have children at the school. Such blurred boundaries and resultant encroachment in the roles of others may engender conflict and tension that may impact on how parties affected promote democracy in schools. An apt comment in this regard was from a Western Cape educator:

*So for me it is very important to note that from the onset it is very important to have a clear distinction between what is governance and what is management. You often find that because governing bodies seem to have that function of governance, they seem to think because they have children at the school they can just come and do your work as the manager of the school. There need to be some kind of boundaries, but you know the vagueness in the boundaries can create confusion and hostilities. So for me effective governance has not taken place completely at our school and there is always this rift that governing bodies seem to have personal agenda against the management of the school.*

For democracy to flourish a positive working relationship must exist between all role players. Such a spirit of cooperation and tolerance is required in both the deliberative process that generates decisions and in the implementation of those decisions. The working relationship was experienced differently in different schools.

Some reported it positively while others experienced it negatively and as stifling the democratic spirit. One educator from the Western Cape commented:

*...the chairperson had certain people that were his spokesperson or who agreed with him. So he only gave them a chance to speak and if we wanted to put forward something he would say that we must write a report or a letter. It's like he does not hear what we want to say...the chairperson is a good person but he does not work hand in hand with us.*

Arguing against negative relationship between different stakeholders, Heystek (2004) contends that the principal must support the members of the SGB in their governance functions, and that the SGB, in turn, must support educators in their professional functions. It is only once there is such cooperation that different stakeholders can, collectively, contribute to the development of democracy in schools. It is therefore, unacceptable that some stakeholders are marginalised in meetings and are not allowed to have a say.

### **CONCLUSION**

The current investigation explored SGBs in relation to issues of democracy and social justice. The findings suggest that the context within which a school operates has been found to play a major role in the effective functioning of SGBs. School governing bodies were found to be contributing to strengthening democracy and social justice in South African schools. The general view of most of the SGBs from both the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal provinces was found to be that, in the former Model C schools, the functioning of the SGBs had led to the effective functioning of the school, whereas the opposite case was found to have held true in the black schools. The general opinion of the KwaZulu-Natal SGBs was that such bodies have made a positive contribution to the development of effective schooling, despite some problems and challenges, such as the illiteracy of some parents, having been encountered which have limited the ability of some members of SGBs to make a meaningful contribution in the running of their schools.

The situation in Western Cape schools was found to be markedly different from that prevailing in the KwaZulu-Natal schools, with the partic-

ipants from SGBs in that province expressing a belief that the involvement of parents in such a body had not resulted in the effective functioning of the school, but, rather, that such involvement had exacerbated the situation in schools, due to SGBs being fraught with corruption and having their powers usurped. In addition, SGBs were found to be fraught with contests for power between some parent governors and school management teams. Coupled with such contests for power were found to be the social exclusion of some chairs of SGBs by the school principals concerned

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings suggested several ways in which parents could be utilised in school governing bodies in order for issues of democracy and social justice to be honoured. The participants in the present research proposed certain ways in which parents could be encouraged to participate more fully on SGBs, including the payment of those parents who are SGB members, and the establishment of regulatory mechanisms to discipline lazy or uncooperative members. In addition, the participants are of the opinion that the following would contribute to the effective functioning of the SGBs: the co-option of parents with relevant skills; the valorisation, recognition and appreciation of those parents who are school governors; the election of parents with relevant skills, even if such parents do not have children in attendance at the school, and the effective training of members of the SGBs.

They also affirmed their belief that, once parents are members of the SGBs, they should receive ongoing training on issues pertaining to the functioning of the SGBs. The findings suggest that the involvement of the media (specifically the newspapers and national television) can play a pivotal role in the training of members of the SGB. The participants held that the general public needs to be informed about, and trained in, the functions of the SGBs, even before general elections are held for such bodies in schools.

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