

# Parental involvement in the education of Burkinabè children



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(Which means 'thank you' in Mooré, one of the local languages of Burkina Faso)

*Abstract - The involvement of Burkinabè parents in the education of children was examined through focus group interviews with parents and teachers at eight schools. These schools are enrolled in the sponsorship programme of the Christian Relief and Development Organization (C.R.E.D.O), which is a local development organisation working in Burkina Faso. Moreover, two in-depth interviews were conducted with an employee of the Dutch Embassy and the manager of C.R.E.D.O's Education Department. The results revealed that the parents are involved in children's education, but not as much as they would like to be. They experience many barriers regarding involvement activities to improve the parental involvement. Possibilities to improve these involvement activities are given.*

## INTRODUCTION

Burkina Faso is a landlocked francophone country in West Africa where the modern western type of education has been introduced under French colonial rule in 1900. It has one of the lowest ranking on the human development index (UNDP, 2010). After the independence in 1960 education, particularly basic education has been a priority for the government. Some significant results have been achieved during the past twenty-five years whereas the 16,8% school gross enrolment rate in 1983 jumped up to 72,5% in January 2008. According to Kouraogo and Dianda (2008) these results have been achieved due to a strong mobilisation of the state, its partners, such as Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) and the families.

The Christian Relief and Development Organization (C.R.E.D.O) is one of the many NGOs working in Burkina Faso, which are still trying to fill the educational gap (Michener, 1998). C.R.E.D.O's sponsorship programme ("Projet de Parrainage") was initiated in 1992 with 400 children in four cities/villages. In Spring 2011, 4509 children were sponsored in seventeen primary schools, from which seven in Ouagadougou (the capital of Burkina Faso) and its peripheral area, ten in rural areas and some of which are in the second cycle and university of Ouagadougou, Bobo-Dioulasso and Koudougou (C.R.E.D.O, 2009). The main objective of C.R.E.D.O's sponsorship programme is to empower school age children (boys and girls) from disadvantaged families by creating favourable conditions for their access to effective education. The aim of the programme is to assure the success of at least eighty percent of the sponsored children and to encourage the children and their parents to take (more) responsibility in their lives (Van 't Rood & Tientore, 2007).

In 2007 C.R.E.D.O's sponsorship programme has been evaluated by Van 't Rood and Tientore (2007). The results showed that the parental involvement in the programme is extremely low, which negatively reflects on the three objectives of the programme previously mentioned. Nevertheless, getting parents involved in children's education could possibly contribute to the success of C.R.E.D.O's sponsorship programme. Parental involvement has become a central topic in education research, in which it is suggested that this involvement has several benefits for the educational development of children. Therefore this study will examine how parents, teachers and key informants determine parental involvement in Burkina Faso, what barriers they face to get involved in children's education and how they think the involvement can be improved.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### **Parental involvement: a definition**

Parental involvement has been used in many different ways and with many different definitions. Despite its popularity parental involvement is not an easy term to define (Georgiou, 1997; Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski, & Apostoleris, 1997). According to Brito and Waller (1994) parental involvement refers to many different activities, which can be placed on a continuum ranging from very low (absent) to very active. Similar was the study of Marcon (1999), in which parents were grouped into active and passive parents. Christenson, Rounds, and Gorney (1992) add that parental involvement in children's education consists of involvement activities both at school and at home.

The most commonly used definition of parental involvement in educational research can be derived from the work of Joyce Epstein (1995). She suggested a framework of six major types of involvement, which can create greater understanding in partnerships between school, family and community.

### **Types of parental involvement suggested by Epstein**

In her framework of six types of parental involvement, Epstein (1995) proposes possible involvement activities for parents, schools and community to improve the parental involvement. The six types include parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and collaborating with the community. These six types will be further explained and used as a guideline in the present study.

The first type, parenting, consists of helping families establishing home environments that support children's education and behaviour. This means that parents should be assisted with child-rearing skills. On the other hand, the basic obligation of parents is their responsibility for children's health and safety (Epstein, 1995).

Communicating refers to the schools' responsibility to establish effective forms of communications between home and school about school programmes and children's progress. Related to this parents should inform the school about children's challenges and progress at home (Epstein, 1995).

Volunteering concerns the recruitment and organisation of parent help and support. In this way parents can learn to understand the teacher's job, the school comfort can be improved and school activities could be transferred to student's home (Epstein, 1995).

In the fourth type, learning at home, schools should provide information and ideas to families about helping children at home with their homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions and planning. In contrast, parents should be conscious about the fact that the child is a student and therefore appreciate the teachers' recommendations and skills (Epstein, 1995).

The type of decision-making includes parents in school decisions, develops parent leaders and representatives. The parental voice can be expressed through parent associations or advisory councils. Their input affects the learning conditions of children at school (Epstein, 1995).

The last type, collaborating with the community, implies that resources and services from the community should be identified and integrated to strengthen and support schools, students and families. As well as doing the same for the community by schools and families (Epstein, 1995).

## **The importance of parental involvement**

As previously mentioned, many studies in the educational research have shown a positive relation between the involvement of parents and children's education. Research findings from the meta-analysis of Fan and Chen (2001) showed for example a positive relation between parental involvement and learning achievements. Fantuzzo, McWayne, Perry, and Childs (2004) demonstrated that parental involvement correlated positively with children's learning. Results from McWayne, Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen, and Sekino (2004) noticed that parents, who encourage home-school activities and have direct and frequent contact with school, contribute to children's performances of positive behaviour regarding peers, adults and to a positive attitude towards learning. According to Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) the effect of parental involvement in primary school aged children is bigger than the effect of school quality. Moreover, Khan (1996) mentioned that the relationship between parents and school improves when parents participate in the school or a programme within the school.

Following Fantuzzo et al. (2004) and Izzo, Weissberg, Kaspro, and Fendrich (1999) participation in educational activities at home is the type of parental involvement from which children benefit the most. Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) suggest as well that educational involvement activities at home have the most positive influence on children's education. These activities include providing a secure and stable environment, encouraging the intellectual development, asking the child about his school day, being a good example to the child, appointing the importance of education and nourishing the high expectations of the child. Other activities that benefit the child as well, concern the contact and information exchange between the school, the participation of parents in school activities and the performance of duties for the functionality and board of the school (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003).

Parental involvement not only has positive influences on children's educational achievement, there is also evidence for an inverse relationship. Success in the educational development of the child seems to affect the parental involvement. Morrison, Gutman, and McLoyd (2000) found that parents of children who perform well in school are more involved than parents of children who perform less at school. Moreover, Hill and Taylor (2004) reported that parents' skills and information are increased when parents are involved in children's schooling. In this way parents are better able to support children in their school-related activities.

## **Barriers of parental involvement**

Difficulties are being experienced when parents want to become involved in children's education. These barriers will be discussed for each of the six types of involvement set by Epstein (1995).

### *Parenting*

Working and therefore a lack of time or energy is one of the reasons why parents do not pay attention to children's schooling and do not take responsibilities of caring for children. For example, parents may have non-flexible work schedules or have more jobs at the same time (Bauch, 1993; Benson & Martin, 2003; Eccles & Harold, 1993; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Mapp, 2003). According to Hill & Taylor (2004), parental involvement is also hampered by a lack of resources and transportation problems, which makes it impossible for parents of low-income families to meet the primary needs of the families, such as food and health care.

The state of poverty affects the mental health and self-perception of parents, through which they become stressed and this in turn, affects the school performance of children. Hill and Taylor (2004) and Inaba, Thoits, Ueno, Gove, Evenson, and Sloan (2005) argue that lower-income families experience higher levels of depression and stated that depressed mothers seem to be less involved in children's education. Earlier, researchers suggested that high levels of stress negatively reflect on parenting characteristics such as affection and responsiveness (Belsky, 1984; Roberts, 1989).

#### *Communicating and volunteering*

According to Berger (1995), Delgado-Gaitan (1990) and Mapp (2003) parents are supportive and want their children to be taught in many cases, yet they can experience problems with teachers, principals and schools to get involved in the educational system. Eccles and Harold (1993) reported that parents would like to receive better information and get more help to be better involved in the education of their children. However, in reaching this goal they encounter that teachers give them minimal opportunities to do so (Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Brissie, 1987). Often parents are only informed at the end of a period, for example about term results or when problems with the child at school occur (McLaughlin & Shields, 1986). This bad news often reinforces negative feelings toward home-school interactions (Henderson, Marburger, & Ooms, 1986).

The minimal opportunities given by the teachers may be due to the fact that teachers lack the skills and knowledge for interacting effectively with parents (Moles, 1993; Seeley, 1989) or the common belief from parents and schools that the education of children is the responsibility of the school only (Seeley, 1989). Related to this, certain teachers experience parents' involvement or opinions in the schools as a hindrance in their work (Konzal, 2001). Other teachers believe that it is too difficult to get parents involved, because parents are too busy or not interested. Teachers with these thoughts seem to actively discourage parental involvement in the classroom and at school. This is especially the case for parents with low incomes who are seen as the problem in the education of their children, rather than the resource (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1987).

Besides teacher behaviours school climate may prevent parents to get involved in children's education. According to Hill and Taylor (2004), parents living in low-socioeconomic status (SES) communities are less likely to be encouraged by schools than are those living in higher -SES communities. Therefore power relations between minority parents and teachers as professionals may arise (O'Connor, 2001), for example, teachers may speak to parents using educational jargon with which parents are not familiar and by which they are feeling intimidated (Chavkin, 1989; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1987). When parents profile themselves as subordinate or parents feel uncomfortable with the school setting, they are less involved than those who have developed a sense of equal partnership (Ritter, Mont-Reynaud, & Dornbusch, 1993) and they leave the accountability for the education of the children solely to the teachers (Liontos, 1991).

#### *Learning at home*

The work obligation of parents as a hindrance to get involved was already mentioned regarding the type of parenting. This obligation is also a problem parents experience to get involved in the involvement activities at

home. Due to work, the parents lack time and energy and they are often away from home, which makes them unable to check the school activities, such as homework, from the children.

The extent of parental involvement may also be influenced by parents' own perceptions, thoughts and beliefs. Confidence in their own intellectual abilities and the feeling that they can really make a difference makes parents more involved (Eccles & Harold, 1996; Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Brissie, 1992). This could be related to parents' own gained knowledge. In others words, parents may perceive themselves as incapable to help their children at home with their school activities, because of their own limited education (Carrasquillo & London, 1993; Eccles & Harold, 1996; Rasinski, 1989). Moreover, findings from Crosnoe, Mistry, and Elder (2002) indicated that low-income parents are less optimistic about children's education.

However, parental involvement can also be influenced by children's characteristics. Parents adjust their actions and efforts on the behaviour of the child (Maccoby, Snow, & Jacklin, 1984) and when this behaviour is perceived as difficult, parents are less involved (Grolnick, Weiss, McKenzie, & Wrightman, 1996). According to Mickelson (1990) it is really difficult for children to believe that their schoolwork will be rewarded in the future, because they grow up in working or lower class homes and neighbourhoods, so they only face with limited job opportunities.

#### *Decision-making*

According to McLaughlin and Shields (1986) many schools do not have a coherent and clear policy to involve parents in children's education. This is due to a lack of resources and time, or the fact that the school does not see this as their responsibility. Besides, nowadays teachers do not learn skills to communicate or work with parents. They are only trained to teach the children. However, Epstein and Dauber (1991) reported that parents are more involved in the educational system when they are aware of the fact that schools devotes time to them.

On the other hand, parents are afraid to join associations and involving themselves in school policies by feelings of low self-esteem and lack of understanding the school system (Petersen & Warnsby, 1992).

#### *Collaborating with the community*

Levin (1982) noticed that the participation of the community in the schools is low. This minimal participation may be ascribed to the different beliefs of parents, schools and community about the nature and objectives of the involvement, to a lack of skills of possible participants or intentionally keeping participants out of the school system.

Research findings from Orthner, Jones-Sanpei, and Williamson (2004) found that social support is low across low-income families. These families appear to have few friends, relatives and family members to whom they can turn in times of difficulties. This may result in high levels of autonomy within low-income families.

## **Possibilities for improvement of parental involvement**

### *Parenting*

Eccles & Harold (1996) reported that many parents are concerned about their ability to deal with several health issues. To assist parents in these matters, schools may offer educational programmes, for example informing them how they can detect potential dangers and how they can reach for help in their environment or the community. These programmes could inform them about good nutrition or the use of several drugs, but also about helping parents organise their time to help their children with a study and time schedule.

### *Communicating*

According to Mapp (2003), becoming acquainted with parents by building meaningful relationships can ensure that parents want to be involved to improve their children's education. These relationships may be improved by phone contacts to provide information or a personal invitation to participate in a school event. This makes parents aware about the fact that the school values parental involvement (Benson & Martin, 2003; O'Connor, 2001).

Earlier it was mentioned that teachers only inform parents when a problem with the child occurs. According to Lott (2001) and Simon (2004), a meaningful relationship between parent and teacher cannot be build with a negative contact. Instead, a note about the good results of a child provides opportunities to build a meaningful relationship. But as previously discussed, some teachers lack the skills and knowledge to communicate effectively with parents. That is why Eccles and Harold (1996) reported that training should be arranged for them. The school principal, parents, experts from the community or professionals from the work field can guide this training. The principal will have to consult with the teachers what training is most effective for his school and which one meet most closely the needs of the teachers.

Another way to increase the communication between parents and teachers is to make home visits. This allows building relationships with parents who cannot come to school (Amatea, Daniels, & Bringman, 2004). As Beder (1998) noted a couple of years earlier, home visits also help to reduce the power relationship between parents and teacher. They help overcome limitations of working parents and their transportation problems.

### *Volunteering*

Often parents do not know that their time and talents within the school are welcome. Therefore, Epstein (2010) proposes to recruit volunteers widely. Flexible schedules should be made to make sure that working parents could also participate in volunteering at school.

According to Eccles & Harold (1996), schools can give the opportunity to parents to share their career or life experiences during assemblies or a workshop for example. If the parents are not capable to do so, they can invite someone else from the community who can. It is also possible to involve parents in different activities. Parents may be invited to come and see the performances of their children in certain activities, such as sports and music. Another option is inviting parents, who can read, to participate in an afternoon reading to the children.

### *Learning at home*

According to Berkes and Folke (1993), the social skills of parents should be improved to support parents in the school-related activities of their children. When working with low-income families it is important for teachers to understand the community culture of these families. Raffaele and Knoff (1999) noted that teachers should recognise the contributions that parents can make to the educational process of the children, regardless their educational experiences. Teachers must start looking at the family strengths that can contribute to the school-related activities of children at home (Amatea, Smith-Adcock, & Villares, 2006). To increase the parental involvement principals should allow new and different ways of participation in the school setting (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002; Mapp, 2003). When parents' skills and knowledge will be accepted, their confidence in their ability and effectiveness of helping their children will improve (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). In addition, the children receive consistent messages at home and at school, when parents and teachers work together (McNeal, 1999). On the other side, parents must contribute useful information about the knowledge and learning evaluation of their children themselves (Konzal, 2001).

Not only the school must take action to increase parental involvement at home, parents should do it as well. According to Astone and McLanahan (1991) and Taylor (1996) children tend to have better school performances when they are involved in regular routines at home, therefore parents should supervise children's use of time (Ho & Willms, 1996; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). Moreover, parents should ensure that they are well informed about their children's activities at school and that they are aware of their school performance (Finn, 1993).

Homework is a manner in which parents can get involved as well. They can check if the child's homework is completed for example. Parents may also serve as tutors, although this requires some knowledge about subject matter and teaching strategies (Finn, 1993).

According to several researchers, higher school performances are achieved when parents discuss school experiences with their children (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Finn, 1993; Ho & Willms, 1996; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). Therefore, parents should discuss difficulties, but successes as well with their children. They also have to be supportive and encourage the child when schoolwork or contacts at school are problematic (Clark, 1983; Steinberg, 1996).

### *Decision-making*

Schools can involve parents in the school management to increase the parental involvement in the decision-making process. No distinction should be made between parents of racial, ethnic, socioeconomic and other groups at school (Epstein, 2010). First, Comer (1988) suggests that parents must understand and agree with the school objectives. In this way, they can also reinforce these objectives in the home environment. Once they are familiar with the school objectives they should become involved in the basic planning and governance of the school and then they will be able to contribute to the school objectives, which will improve a positive relationship between the parents and the school. Eccles & Harold (1996) say that the most common way for parents to be involved in the governance of the school is through Parent-Teacher Associations or Organisations (PTA or PTO)

According to Mapp (2003), another attempt to improve the parental involvement is the provision of a parents' room or nominating a parent coordinator in the school. The parent coordinator will act as an intermediary between the parents and the school. A parent room offers parents the opportunity to get to know the school and other parents. Here parents can meet with each other and share information and insights on school policies and practices, as well as activities outside the school.

### *Collaboration with the community*

Getting acquainted with families also means getting to know the community where the children live, which in turn means that leaders, such as spiritual leaders, can be identified. Jesse, Davis, and Pokorny (2004) whom investigated the characteristics of well-performing middle schools for Latino students living in poverty, showed that principals who communicated with community leaders and teachers who were familiar with the community contributed to the success of the school. According to Van Velsor and Orozco (2007), community leaders can provide useful information regarding the families and the challenges they have to deal with in their daily lives. But so-called parent leaders who are respected and function as an advisor and/or mediator for other parents may also provide valuable information about the community, for example about social networks of parents. Because their high status parent leaders may be able to connect school principals with other individuals in the community. After a relationship has been formed between the principal, the community and parent leaders, the principal may in turn connect the teachers with the leaders, for example by inviting the leaders in the school. This in an attempt to promote community-parent-school partnerships (Van Velsor & Orozco, 2007).

Getting familiar with the community, also means getting to know the companies in this community that deliver services to families. When the principal is better known with a company he can recommend or discourage using their services. This might save the families a lot of time, effort and money. If a referral is needed for example, the principal can act quickly upon it by the established network (Van Velsor & Orozco, 2007).

Building partnerships between schools and companies can also work in favour of educational experiences of children. It may be interesting for children to have a look into the workspace and already getting familiar with new communities, companies and career offers where they may be able to work later or for which they can follow a specific study (Eccles & Harold, 1996).

## METHOD

The current parental involvement in children's education and the barriers and possibilities for improvement were studied using focus group interviews, conducted with parents and teachers at eight primary schools throughout Burkina Faso, West Africa from February till April 2011. Moreover, in-depth interviews were held with two key informants in April 2011 at the Dutch Embassy in Ouagadougou and at the Education Department office of C.RE.D.O in Ouagadougou as well.

## Participants

The sponsorship programme supports children in seventeen primary schools within four regions in Burkina Faso (Table 1). Interviews with parents and teachers were conducted in eight primary schools spread over three regions. A distinction was made between schools in (peripheral) urban areas and in rural areas (Table 1).

The principals of all eight schools randomly invited between ten and twenty parents to participate in the interview. The number of parents who actually attended the meeting differed from eleven to twenty-seven parents, but there was no significant difference between the parents participating in the interviews in the (peripheral) urban and the rural areas.

The teachers in all eight schools were invited to participate in the focus group interview. The number of teachers who attended the interview varied from five to seven teachers, including the principal.

Beside the parents and the teachers, two key-informants were asked to participate in an interview. The first interview was held with an employee of the Education Department from the Dutch Embassy in Ouagadougou, where it took place as well. The second interview was conducted at C.RE.D.O's Education Department office in Ouagadougou with the manager of the Education Department. He is pastor as well.

Table 1. *Selected schools*

Region	Schools	(Peripheral) urban area	Rural area
Centre	Wendlasida	x	
	Gueswende	x	
	Wubiton		x
Centre-Ouest	Evangelique de Pô	x	
	Cren de Kayéro		x
	Evangelique de Koudougou	x	
	Tenado		x
Hauts-Bassins	Complexe Baraka		x
<b>Total</b>		<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>

## Procedure

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with parents, teachers and key informants. The parents who are involved in the sponsorship programme were questioned by means of focus group interviews. These interviews lasted for about one hour and mostly took place in a classroom or in the schoolyard. All the interviews were conducted in the presence of one interviewer and one translator. The parents spoke in their local language, either Mooré or Jula, which was subsequently translated into French by an interpreter. Focus group interviews were also used to question the teachers of the selected schools. Due to the fact that no translation was needed during the interviews because researcher and teachers spoke both in French, these interviews lasted for approximately forty-five minutes. Instead of an interpreter, a supervisor was present. Like the interviews of the parents, they mostly took place in a classroom. The two key informants were interviewed individually. Both interviews, taking an average of forty-five minutes, were taken only by one interviewer without the presence of a supervisor and were held in French.

The questionnaire used in the interviews was based on the six types of parental involvement set by Epstein (1995). Insights about current parental involvement, barriers parents face to become involved in children's education and possibilities for improvement of parental involvement were obtained.

To assure that the interview questions were understandable and not culturally sensitive, a pilot study was accomplished first. After two pilot interviews only small changes were made in the questionnaire and therefore data from these interviews was added to the present study.

All interviews were audio taped with the permission of the participants and started after an introduction of the present people and an explanation of the purpose of the interview.

### **Analysis**

All interviews were written out for the analysis, which was used to clarify the different thoughts of the parents, the teachers and the two key informants regarding parental involvement. The interviews of the three research groups were analysed separately. The answers for each question were categorised into the six types of parental involvement set by Epstein (1995). The data were analysed using the qualitative data analysis programme MAXQDA. This programme compares each item with the rest of the data to establish analytical categories, a method called constant comparison (Pope, Ziebland & Mays, 2000). The first step in the analysis was to label the answers given for each question. Second, was to define, organise and reduce the labels into core labels. In the third phase, integration and consistency between the core labels was established. Finally, the core labels were used to define the similarities and differences in statements between the parents, the teachers and the key informants.

## **RESULTS**

The results are described according to the six types of parental involvement set by Epstein (1995) in three sections. Within each section the different thoughts of parents, teachers and key informants will be presented. First, background information about the sponsorship programme will be given.

### **Background information**

#### *Sponsorship programme*

The main objective of C.RE.D.O's sponsorship programme is to empower school age children (boys and girls) from disadvantaged families by creating favourable conditions for their access to effective education. The aim of the sponsorship programme is to assure the success of at least eighty percent of the sponsored children and to encourage children and their parents to take (more) responsibility in their lives (Van 't Rood & Tientore, 2007).

Disadvantaged children are eligible for the sponsorship programme when they are between five and twelve years old and already have been enrolled in primary school. This means that the fees of the first school year have to be paid by the parents themselves. It is the schools' principal who then selects and recommends a child for possible sponsorship. Among disadvantaged children are orphans, children of unemployed or disabled parents, children of parents suffering from an illness and children of families who generate an income

lower than the minimum wage (A. Zongo, personal communication, May 11, 2011). The legal monthly minimum wage is 30,684 CFA Francs (€46,77), which was last adjusted in 2007 (SSPTW: Africa, 2009). Although the official age limit for sponsoring is twenty-two, there are older students who are being sponsored (A. Zongo, personal communication, May 11, 2011).

### *Parents*

Practically half of Burkina Faso's population has no access to basic social services, such as drinking water, health-care and education (Ki & Ouedraogo, 2006). These people live on less than US \$1 per day, which is below the national poverty threshold (CIA World Factbook, 2010). The parents of the sponsored children belong to this part of the population and that is the reason why the financial and material contribution of parents, for example for the canteens at school, is limited (Kouraogo & Dianda, 2008).

### *Teachers*

The living and working conditions of teachers in Burkina Faso are inadequate. Appropriate housing is lacking, the school environment is unattractive, the teaching materials are inadequate (Ki & Ouedraogo, 2006), the salaries are low and the classes are overcrowded (Kouraogo & Dianda, 2008). Moreover, the quality of the teaching-skills is low because the training of primary school teachers decreased from two to one academic year (Kouraogo & Dianda, 2008).

### *Key informants*

Both key informants, the employee of the Dutch Embassy and the manager of C.RE.D.O's Education Department, are high educated and studied respectively in Belgium and Switzerland, which means that they belong to the privileged few that had the opportunity to go to school. Besides gathering knowledge, educated people are tightly linked to status and identity in Burkina Faso. The expression widely used by the non-educated people is that they are intellectuals. Literally and figuratively seen, those with an education are supposed to leave the illiterates behind (Hagberg, 2002).

## **Current parental involvement**

### *Parenting*

The parents revealed only one activity that they are currently doing regarding this type of involvement. At six schools they told they are trying to take care of the children and try to provide them with food. One mother stated: *"My first role is to wake up my child and prepare him: feeding and taking care of him and bringing him to school."*

At one school the teachers appointed that parents accompanied their children to school and that they care for the children at home. At another school the teachers said parents are primarily involved in children's welfare by enrolling them into school and paying tuition fees.

The first key informant, the employee of the Dutch Embassy, did not brought up any activities parents accomplish at the moment to get involved in children's education. Instead, the manager of C.RE.D.O's

Education Department, the second key informant, confirmed that parents are trying to take care of their children and to provide food for their families.

### *Communicating*

Regarding the second type of involvement parents at seven schools said they visited the school once in a while to inform about the status of their child. Parents also said to participate in supporting meetings, but this was only the case in two schools.

The teachers mentioned many involvement activities regarding the type communicating. At all schools the teachers said that some parents visit them at school, but that it is not the case for all the parents. As a teacher illustrated: *“There are some parents who visit the school to see how the child works, but it doesn’t concern all the parents.”* Furthermore the teachers told they convoked the parents themselves, to improve the parental involvement (five schools). They do so for example if there is a problem with the child. Once the parent visits the school the teacher tries to raise awareness about the fact that the parent should come by more often and that his involvement benefits the education of the child. Four teachers spread over four schools pointed out that they are doing home visits to increase the communication with the parents.

Concerning this type of involvement the employee of the Dutch Embassy told about strategies that are created on primary and secondary schools, the parents associations and the mother associations. Such an association establishes an agency that is involved with children in difficulties. They are the connection between the teachers and the parents at home and play a vital role in the social mobilisation of parental involvement.

The manager of C.RE.D.O’s Education Department had no comment on this type of parental involvement.

### *Volunteering*

The parents mentioned two activities they did regarding the third type of parental involvement. They said they did voluntary work, such as sweeping the schoolyard, mowing the grass or assisting in a sport project (six schools). Moreover, six fathers at five schools reported their membership of the parents association.

This type was well represented according to the teachers, although they considered more could be done. At seven schools the teachers mentioned that the parents contribute products or wood to the school canteen, that they clean school classes and schoolyards or that they built all sorts of things for the functionality of the school. A quoted explanation of one teacher: *“They have to contribute a little bit, to know that they should be involved in children’s schooling.”*

Both key informants did not mention any activities regarding the type volunteering.

### *Learning at home*

The parents seemed to be most involved in the activities regarding this type of involvement. At all schools the parents pointed out that they inform, advice and encourage their children, and eight parents even mentioned that they are checking the workbooks of their children, whether they can read or not. Only at one school parents mentioned that they are asking the children questions regarding their schoolwork, for example how

their school day had been and what they exactly had been doing at school. Furthermore the parents mentioned that they introduce the children with the craftwork they are doing themselves (three schools), that some parents are paying tutoring or summer courses organised at school, that they arrange teachers or siblings to tutor the child, that they provided light and that they had a routine/schedule for the children's learning at home. Last four activities were every time mentioned at two schools.

The teachers broadly annotated this type, although each activity was not mentioned in more than three schools. Teachers said that parents give advice to the children, that parents ask the child about his school activities when he comes home, that few parents have the knowledge to tutor the child, that certain parents may hire a tutor and that a couple of parents ensure that the child is going to learn his lessons.

Regarding the type learning at home the employee of the Dutch Embassy mentioned that certain parents, most likely intellectuals with a small salary, hire a tutor for the support of their child.

The manager of C.RE.D.O's Education Department explained that there was always an older sibling or family member, who was able to check the workbook of the child at home to follow him during his study.

### *Decision-making*

At five schools parents mentioned that they are able to contribute to the decision-making process of the school through the parent associations. Four of these are official associations and in one school the parents of the students come together on their own initiative.

At six schools the teachers appointed there was a parent association, through which the parents have the opportunity to participate in the decision-making of the school.

Again, both key informants did not mention any involvement activities concerning this type of involvement.

### *Collaborating with the community*

At three schools the parents said that they found a person in the neighbourhood who could check the workbook of their children. Another activity that was mentioned at one school concerned the work of a pastor once a year on voluntary basis.

The teachers did not mention any activities regarding this type of parental involvement.

The activity cited by the employee of the Dutch Embassy has been presented before. He told that parents without having children at school are still members of the parent or mother associations.

Like the teachers, C.RE.D.O's manager did not mention any activities regarding this type.

## **Barriers of parental involvement**

### *Parenting*

Parents at five schools noticed that they do not always have the opportunity to take care of the child due to a lack of resources. Time and bad living circumstances, mentioned at four schools, are other reasons why they cannot take care of the children. If they do not work, they cannot provide their family with food after all. As one father explained: *"We have no clothes to give to the children and at the same time to provide them with food, it is difficult. We want to, but it's hard."*

At all schools the teachers reported that a lack of resources is the biggest barrier that parents experience for taking care of the child, for buying food and for the transport of children. Furthermore the teachers in two schools confirmed that the children are not accompanied when they are going to school. An element related to this is a lack of motivation of children, which was mentioned at two schools as well. Due to the fact that they are not accompanied to school, certain children do not go to school instead they go playing in the streets. As a teacher illustrated: *“Children are difficult. Certain children get up in the morning and to let their fathers believe that they are going to school, they pack their school bags. But instead of putting schoolbooks in his bag, he puts a big stone in it. He does not go to school, he disappears somewhere else. The child can fool people easily. This is a problem, but it is a problem of the student. The pupil is difficult as well.”* Finally at one school it was said that children are not supervised at home, because parents spend most of their time working.

The employee of the Dutch Embassy was very clear about the fact that Burkinabè people live from day to day, especially in the villages. Every day the parents have to find resources to buy food, mostly for large families. Because they are very busy working, they have little time to accomplish other activities.

The manager of C.RE.D.O’s Education Department did not brought up any barriers regarding this type of involvement.

### *Communicating*

Barriers concerning the type communicating were only mentioned at one school. Here one father told that parents are not well informed by the teachers about activities occurring at school.

At four schools the teachers believed that parents do not visit the school because they had no time associated with work. As one teacher explained: *“I think many parents do not have the time to drop by. Some parents work 100/200 km away from here, so it is possible that parents do not come home for a couple of days. This ensures that parents are not in the opportunity to visit the school and inform about the status of his child.”* Another remark why parents do not visit the school when the teachers call them is the fact that parents think they have to go to school due to outstanding school fees (four schools). Another example why there is a miscommunication between parents and teachers sometimes: *“Usually we instruct a child to go get his father. But the child won’t call him, because he knows what he’s done. One day we command a child to call his father because the teacher wanted to speak him. So the child got out of the class and once arrived at home he said to his father that a teacher passed away and that they were sent home. But the father did not see any other children in the neighbourhood who came home, so he decided to go to school and here he discovered that the child had some problems at school. So the parents should visit the school regularly to ask about the status of their child.”*

A barrier that the employee of the Dutch Embassy mentioned concerned the motivation of the teachers. He felt that a transmission between the parents and the teachers has to take place. However, teachers have no time anymore to establish home visits and to instruct the parents about the status of their child at school and what his difficulties are. He explained: *“Nowadays the teachers are not familiar with this fundamental communication anymore. They are no longer a teacher because they love to, but because of the unemployment. As a result, the teachers are less motivated and complain that they are poorly paid and that the children live far away.”*

The second key informant found it difficult for teachers to fully involve themselves in the education of the children, for example by doing home visits. Due to the overcrowded classes, with approximately sixty

to hundred students per class, it is difficult for the teachers to spend their time on other activities than teaching and reviewing work.

### *Volunteering*

The three research groups did not mention any barriers regarding this type of parental involvement.

### *Learning at home*

The activities in which the parents experienced the most barriers regarded this type of parental involvement. At six schools the parents mentioned that they could not check anything, such as homework, due to a lack of capacities or the fact that they are illiterate. Related to this, at five schools it was mentioned that they would like to hire a tutor, but that they do not have any resources for it. The parents at two schools also mentioned that they do not have appropriate learning conditions at home. An explanation regarding the last mentioned barrier: *“We have no money to buy a new lamp. Therefore, the children are required to leave the house and to go to town to study under the streetlights. And in the case many children are already there, they spend their time chatting instead of studying. So by this aspect, the lack of electricity and resources, we, the parents, suffer a lot.”*

According to the teachers there were three barriers why parents cannot imply themselves in the type of learning at home. First, teachers at five schools said parents are mostly illiterate, through which they cannot check the homework of their children. Second, parents have no resources for learning conditions at home, such as buying textbooks, hiring a tutor or provide lighting (three schools). Finally, teachers at three schools mentioned that the parents have no idea which benefits education can bring to a child. They are not aware of the value of education.

The first key informant appointed two barriers. First he said that approximately thirty percent of the population above fifteen years is literate, especially in the villages the illiteracy is a major problem. As previously described, the everyday life is a problem for the parents, not the education of the child. The parents are not aware of the benefits of children’s education, because they have never been to school themselves. Therefore, the education of the child is especially left to the teachers. Related to this, he mentioned that in consequence of the illiteracy the parents are obliged to hire a tutor. However, this is not attainable for the majority of the population due to a lack of resources.

Regarding the type learning at home the manager of C.RE.D.O mentioned that parents are not aware of the benefits that are brought when a child is educated. Related to this, there is no clear action plan for the parents how they could involve themselves in the education of the child. It is hard for the parents to give something, which they have never received themselves. Furthermore, the manager said that an illiterate parent is not able to follow the child’s homework. He may encourage the child, but certain children are not working and this cannot be checked. The final aspect discussed concerned the reforming of the school system: *“We have to stop secluding the craft work and start integrating this part into the school curriculum. The school has become very intellectual. There is no manual work anymore. At the same time the child comes home and finds nothing intellectual at home. Here it is about everyday life, but there is nothing intellectual to find. The school system we have is not adopted to social reality.”*

### *Decision-making*

Barriers regarding this type of parental involvement were not mentioned by any of the participants.

### *Collaborating with the community*

Only the two key informants reported any barriers parents face to become involved in this type of parental involvement. The employee of the Education Department mentioned the concept of educational partnerships, which means that the education of children is not only a responsibility of the school and the parents, but from the whole community. The employee was convinced about the fact that this concept benefits the education of the children, but he stated that the population in Burkina Faso is not yet familiar with this concept and that they have to be sensitised first regarding this concept.

The manager of C.RE.D.O's Education Department confirmed that the third type, collaborating with the community, was still extraordinary for the mentality of Burkina Faso. He explained why: *"It's a remote. You are coming from a pretty philanthropic/compassionate society, where you have been taught to care for one another. That's part of the education. Here, it's not the case. The Burkinabè people live in a context of survival, real survival and I'm not exaggerating. That the cycle repairer will say at the end of the day...his turnover is not even enough to maintain his family. Therefore it is impossible for a cycle repairer to say: "You know what, I will make a small price for all the students at your school." No, it's not feasible in this context."*

A final element that prevents parents from getting involved, but which is not covered by one of the six types of parental involvement, is the fact that some parents have orphans under their supervision, which makes them responsible for several children, besides their own children. This problem was mentioned at two schools.

## **Possibilities for improvement of parental involvement**

### *Parenting*

The parents mentioned four involvement activities. They felt that C.RE.D.O should provide food (two schools) and bicycles (three schools) to improve the living conditions of the children. The parents of the sponsored children also experienced the view that they could save some money to buy a bike themselves, that they should try to improve the care of the child and that they should accompany the child to school. All three activities were every time mentioned at three schools.

To improve the involvement activities for the type parenting teachers in two different schools mentioned that C.RE.D.O could provide the canteen for the children at school, which will relieve the parents financially. Another possibility was that parents could accompany the children to and from school more regularly. An illustration: *"The parents don't support their children. They learn their lessons or not, it's not their problem. The child can leave the house, saying that he goes to school, but he doesn't. If the parent had followed him, he would have known whether or not he arrived at school. The problem is that children are not being accompanied."*

Concerning this type of involvement the first key informant was very short: parents need to adapt and meet the needs of the child, they must care for the child, but they have a security role as well.

The second key informant did not mention any possibilities to improve parental involvement.

### *Communicating*

According to the parents five activities could be improved. At seven schools the parents mentioned that the teachers should call them when problems with the children arises: *“For example, if the child is doing bad things at school...if the teacher doesn’t inform us, we don’t know this. So, while the child is doing bad things, they have to tell us, inform us.”* In contrast, the parents in six schools proposed to take the initiative themselves and to visit the teacher more often to inform about the status of the children. Furthermore, it was suggested that the school should organise an information meeting for the parents (two schools). At two schools the executions of home visits by C.RE.D.O as well as the teachers were the last mentioned activities.

Teachers at seven schools shared the opinion that parents, especially fathers, should visit the school more often. Another frequently mentioned activity in six schools was to organise information and sensitisation meetings by C.RE.D.O or the teachers. Furthermore the teachers themselves said they could call the parents when a problem occurred with the child (two schools), they could do home visits (one school) and at one school the teachers said that they should respect and encourage the parents to speak to them.

The employee of the Dutch Embassy mentioned most about this type of involvement. He said that parents have to follow their children’s schoolwork by visiting the teachers more often. On the other hand he felt that it is also a task of the teachers to call the parents to visit the school. Furthermore, he appointed that NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisation) play a fundamental role in the sensitisation of the parents for a better involvement. They are in the position to move from village to village and to explain to the parents, raise awareness, why they should involve themselves in the education of the children.

Regarding this type the manager of C.RE.D.O’s Education Department mentioned sensitisation meetings for the parents have to be organised. The parents should be made aware of the benefits of education. Moreover, the teachers could call the parents to visit school.

### *Volunteering*

The parents talked short but powerful about this third type. At three schools the parents said that they could accomplish more voluntary activities to improve the functionality of the school, such as sweeping the schoolyard or building a fence.

First, the teachers at two schools appointed that the parents could participate more in activities for the functionality of the school. Second they said that it would be positive to initiate a mother association, because the mothers are more interested in children’s educational success (one school).

Another possibility to improve the parental involvement according to the interviewee at the Dutch Embassy: *“If we want to build schools for example; NGOs such as ‘Aide Action’ and ‘Plan Burkina’ directly involve the parents in building schools. Thus, the construction of the building is also a matter of the parents.”*

The activities previously discussed by C.RE.D.O’s manager in the type of communicating work also in favour of this type of parental involvement. By convoking parents and involving them in volunteer activities, they get better involved in children’s education and the functionality of the school.

### *Learning at home*

According to the parents the activities for this type of involvement were the ones that could be best improved. First, the parents in five schools believed children should be encouraged and advised. One activity that was mentioned many times in four schools, concerned the wish to hire a tutor. At two schools the parents suggested that C.RE.D.O could help them by paying a tutor. Other options that were appointed concerned the wish to pay summer courses or reinforcement lessons, literacy courses for the parents provided by C.RE.D.O and the fact that children should not be burdened too much with household tasks and thus ensure that they have the opportunity to complete their school duties. An example given by a mother: *“What parents could do to help their children...once the child comes home from school, we must follow the school activities of our child. Watch what he has learned in class. We must do everything to ensure that they learn their lessons, rather than watching a movie in the night.”* All three activities were every time mentioned in two schools. A final activity that was named in one school concerned the acquisition of schoolbooks by C.RE.D.O.

The main activity reported by the teachers to improve the type learning at home was to watch and support the school tasks of the children (seven schools), in other words make sure that the child finishes his homework and for example asking him what he did at school today. The teachers at five schools also mentioned that parents would be able to supervise the child if C.RE.D.O would organise literacy courses. In that case the parents did not have to pay a tutor or reinforcement lessons/summer courses anymore. These two activities were both proposed in two schools. Furthermore, four schools suggested that parents should advice and encourage their children more often.

The employee of the Dutch Embassy did not appoint any possibilities for improvement.

The second key informant talked once again about the sensitisation of the parents regarding this type of involvement. The parents should gather an idea of the given teaching methods at school so that they could support the children better at home. Another solution to support children with their school activities at home is arranging literacy courses for the parents. Once the parents are literate they can help the child with his homework and verify it.

### *Decision-making*

None of the interviewees mentioned any involvement activities that could be improved to increase this type of parental involvement.

### *Collaborating with the community*

The type collaborating with the community was mentioned at two schools by the parents. The illiterate parents in these schools suggested asking a person in the neighbourhood who can read and will be able to check the workbook of their children.

Only at one school teachers suggested that parents could ask neighbours or children in the neighbourhood to help their child with his homework or check his workbook.

The employee of the Dutch Embassy told about educational partnerships as an improvement for parental involvement, in which for example a nurse may come to school to give information about malaria, or a mayor of the village can inform about specific things from the environment. The school is not only the responsibility

of the teachers and the parents, but of the entire community. The school must be open to the whole community and be the central point in this environment. However, it should be mentioned that educational partnership is a new term and not yet known in Burkina Faso.

Concerning this type the second key informant said that children should be put in contact by the parents with others who have a higher teaching level than the child does, for example a child of the neighbour. Furthermore, the manager told about his church where he serve as a pastor, which started sponsoring fifteen children in the neighbourhood to go to school. However, the pastor mentioned that it is the choice of the church itself if they want to start a project like this. Perhaps they prefer to spend their money in evangelisation.

Besides the already mentioned activities that can be divided into the six types of parental involvement, the parents have suggested four other activities that could contribute to an improvement of parental involvement. First, the parents said resources or a credit should be generated for them (five schools). Second they wanted their profession to be supported by providing ingredients for example (three schools). At one school they also wished employment guarantees to be provided for the students after their education and in order to facilitate this they wished a reopening of boarding schools. Finally they would like the care of the orphans to be taken over, for instance by opening orphanages (one school). According to the parents all four activities should be provided by C.RE.D.O.

The last general activity mentioned by teachers in three schools concerned supporting the profession or establishing learning centres for the parents by C.RE.D.O.

## CONCLUSION and DISCUSSION

C.RE.D.O is a local development organisation working in Burkina Faso (West Africa), one of the poorest countries in the world. The main objective of C.RE.D.O's sponsorship programme is to empower school age children of disadvantaged families by creating favourable conditions for their access to effective education. Despite the positive relation between the involvement of parents and children's education, the parental involvement in the sponsorship programme is very low. Therefore the current parental involvement, the barriers parents face to become involved in children's education and the possibilities for improvement of parental involvement were investigated following the six types of parental involvement set by Epstein (1995): parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and collaborating with the community. During February till April 2011 focus group interviews were conducted with parents and teachers at eight primary schools throughout Burkina Faso and in-depth interviews with two key informants were held at the Dutch Embassy in Ouagadougou and at the Education Department office of C.RE.D.O.

The interviews revealed that the parents are involved in all six types of parental involvement, but that they experience barriers to become involved in children's education regarding the types of parenting, communicating, collaborating with the community and especially learning at home. Possible improvements regarding these four types of parental involvement and the type volunteering are given.

## **Limitations**

Several limitations need to be taken into account when considering the results of this study. First, a cultural bias between the researcher and the parents and teachers could have influenced the interview outcomes. This may be due to the Western culture of the researcher, which is different from the African Burkinabè culture. The researcher may have interpreted the behaviours and answers from the parents and the teachers in a wrong way. However, after setting up the interview questions they were reviewed with an employee of C.RE.D.O. This precautionary measure was taken to ensure that questions would be clear to parents, teachers and key informants and that they would be appropriate in the African context. Besides, in the relation between the Western researcher and the parents and teachers as much equality as possible was evoked through the participation of an employee of C.RE.D.O.

The language barrier may also have affected the interviews. Mainly during the interviews with the parents, which had to be translated from Mooré or Jula into French by an interpreter. Translating the responses of the parents may have ensured that the original answers are influenced, but it is likely that most of the answers are well understood. Especially because the researcher spoke fluent French and therefore no additional translation in English had to be conducted. The interviews with the teachers and the two key informants were held in French. By pre-checking the questionnaire with a member of C.RE.D.O it can be assumed that all questions were clear to the teachers and the two key informants.

Parents participating in the focus groups may have been interpreted as a form of parental involvement. Parents who do not get involved in children's education may also stay away from the meetings, which means that the parents who attended the meetings perhaps were the parents who are already more involved. This could imply that the answers given by the parents can be approached more positively.

Interestingly, the parents did not mention any barriers regarding the type of volunteering and decision-making, although they did mention possible improvements for the type of volunteering. The participants did not always give comments, barriers or possible improvement regarding the six types of parental involvement. This may be due to a lack of knowledge because the research groups are not familiar with the factors that maintain this. For example, the fact that parents are not much involved in volunteering may be due to the fact that they feel intimidated by the teacher. They may know that this hinders them from contacting the teachers, but possibly not that it hinders them as well in volunteering at school. In following studies this problem may be undermined by quantitative research. In that case, the extent to which parents accomplish several involvement activities regarding the six types of parental involvement can be measured more specifically on a point scale.

However, using multiple methods to obtain information on the same subjects attempted to enhance the validity of the study (Robson, 2002). This strategy is also known as triangulation and increases interpretability because consistency of findings when using different methods reduces the probability that the results were influenced by the unique method chosen (Denscombe, 2003). In this present study parents, teachers and key informants were interviewed and therefore the findings of these interviews could be compared. Despite the limitations mentioned above, the teachers, parents and key informants presented similar issues, barriers and possibilities concerning parental involvement. These findings are valuable for this study and that is why the conclusions of this present study are adopted.

The conclusions are presented concerning the current parental involvement, barriers parents face to become involved in children's education and possibilities for improvement of parental involvement. These three sections will determine the different thoughts of parents, teachers and key informants regarding the six types of parental involvement set by Epstein (1995).

### **Current parental involvement**

The results regarding the current parental involvement showed that the parents themselves reported that they are involved in all six types of involvement. According to the teachers the parents were involved in all the types, except collaborating with the community. For this type parents mentioned that they found a person in the neighbourhood who could check the workbook of their children, however the teachers did not confirm this. The employee of the Dutch Embassy reported that the parents are involved in three types, namely communicating, learning at home and collaborating with the community. The second key informant, C.RE.D.O's manager, stated that the parents are involved in two types only, parenting and learning at home.

### **Barriers of parental involvement**

As mentioned above, the parents in the sponsorship programme appear to be involved in all six types of parental involvement, which benefits the education of the children. Despite their current involvement they cannot be as much involved, as they would like to be. They experience barriers to become involved in children's education related to the types of parenting, communicating, collaborating with the community and especially learning at home. A common mentioned barrier was the illiteracy or a lack of capacities from the parents to help the child with his homework. Because they cannot check the child's homework themselves or they cannot help the child when he does not understand something, the parents would like to hire a tutor, but they have no money. However, according to Fantuzzo et al. (2004), Izzo et al. (1999) and Desforges and Abouchaar (2003), the involvement in educational activities at home is the type of parental involvement from which children benefits the most. Unfortunately, the parents are being hampered in accomplishing involvement activities regarding the type learning at home. The parents themselves said that they have not the ability to provide good living and learning conditions due to a lack of work, time and money. Findings from Hill & Taylor (2004) confirmed that parents from low-income families are unable to meet the primary needs of the families, such as food and health care. Because the parents in the sponsorship programme spend a lot of time working, they are not able to give a good example to the children. But this could also be explained by parents' own perceptions, thoughts and beliefs. Parents can consider themselves as incapable to help their children with their schoolwork because of their own limited education (Carrasquillo & London, 1993; Eccles & Harold, 1996; Rasinski, 1989). In interviews with teachers and both key informants it was said that parents have no awareness of the benefits that education can bring to a child because they have never been to school themselves. Related to this, C.RE.D.O's manager reported that no clear action plan is available for the parents through which they can learn or know how they should involve themselves in children's education.

Eccles & Harold (1993) concluded that parents certainly would like to receive better information and get more help. However, according to Hoover-Dempsey et al. (1987) the teachers give them minimal opportunities to become better involved. This may be due to the fact that teachers lack the skills and

knowledge for interacting effectively with the parents (Moles, 1993; Seeley 1989). Both key informants confirmed this finding. The manager of C.R.E.D.O's Education Department appointed that the teachers have little time for other activities to involve parents in the school, such as home visits. Teachers face with overcrowded classes what makes them checking much homework and which swallows all their available time next to the teaching hours. The first key informant, the employee of the Dutch Embassy, stated that the teachers lack motivation. They are not familiar with the communication that is necessary and that should be achieved between parents and teachers. Due to the unemployment Burkinabè people are obliged to do any work and they do not feel the desire anymore to perform this specific profession. As a result, they have lost time and motivation to accomplish essential activities, such as home visits. Besides the teachers who make little effort to integrate the parents into the school, the parents can be blamed too. In four schools the teachers complained that parents did not visit the school because they had no time due to work. The teachers at four other schools said that parents did not drop by at school because they think they are being called for outstanding school fees.

These outstanding school fees are due to a lack of work and this in turn, is a major problem for the parents. As it was mentioned in the example of a teacher, some parents work far away. So the parents leave the home for a couple of days and there is little surveillance of the child. Similar were the findings of Bauch (1993), Benson and Martin (2003), Eccles and Harold (1993), Hill and Taylor (2004) and Mapp (2003) who stated that working and therefore a lack of time or energy is a reason why parents do not pay attention to children's schooling and do not take responsibilities of caring for the children. According to Hill & Taylor (2004), parental involvement is also hampered by a lack of resources and transportation problems. The teachers, who stated that parents have transportation problems, confirmed this problem. Another problem is the lack of motivation of children to attend school. Due to the lack of time, money and transportation, the children are not accompanied to school by their parents. This problem has been illustrated by the example with the child that put a big stone, rather than schoolbooks, in his bag.

Further barriers were also experienced in the type collaborating with the community. However, these barriers were not experienced by the parents themselves, but by means of both key informants. The first key informant talked about educational partnerships with which the population in Burkina Faso is not yet familiar. The second key informant explained that this is partly due to the fact that people in Burkina Faso live in a context of survival, which means that Burkinabè people do not have the opportunity to spend time or money on other activities except working. In 1982, Levin already noticed that community participation in the schools is low.

### **Possibilities for improvement of parental involvement**

All participants presented many different opportunities to improve the parental involvement. Especially improvements for the type of learning at home were reported. But also the four other types, except decision-making, could be improved.

First of all, parents should encourage and giving advice to their children and more importantly, they should watch and support the school tasks of children. This seems to be beneficial because children tend to have better school performances when they are involved in regular routines at home (McLanahan, 1991;

Taylor, 1996). To support children's education parents had the wish to hire a tutor or pay reinforcement lessons/summer courses. Generating literacy courses for the parents was an option as well. The parents had this proposal because most of them are illiterate and are not able to support their children's schoolwork. That is why the second key informant suggested to organise sensitisation meetings for the parents, so that they can be informed how they can help their children even though they are illiterate. For example, Astone and McLanahan (1991), Finn (1993), Ho and Willms (1996) and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) presented that higher school performances are already achieved when parents only discuss school experiences with their children.

A possible improvement for the type parenting was that parents, with help of C.R.E.D.O, should be provided with food and bicycles. In this way, they can take better care of their children. Furthermore, according to Eccles and Harold (1996) parents seem to be confused about their actions towards their children. To learn for example how parents can detect potential dangers in the environment of their child, to know more about good nutrition or to get more confidence, information meetings should be organised.

These meetings about parenting characteristics are not only beneficial to improve the type of parenting, but also the type of communicating and volunteering. Receiving personal invitations to participate in a school event or volunteering, may build meaningful relationships between parents and school. This makes parents aware about the fact that the school values parental involvement (Benson & Martin, 2003; O'Connor, 2001). The communication between parents and teachers can also be improved with home visits (Amatea et al., 2004). The parents and teachers both proposed to improve this involvement activity. These home visits would also benefit the power relations between parents and teachers (Beder, 1998) and is a method to respect and encourage parents. By encouraging and respecting parents they will feel welcome to visit the school. Other proposals made were visiting the school more often by the parents, especially fathers and frequent callings from the teachers to the parents to visit the school.

Although the parents did not mention any barriers regarding collaborating with the community, one father did mention an improvement. This possible improvement was also suggested by teachers at one school and by both key informants. He stated that parents could ask a neighbour who can read to help their child with his homework. Moreover, building educational partnerships was mentioned as a possible improvement as well. A study of Jesse, Davis, and Pokorny (2004) showed that partnerships between a principal, teachers and the community contributed to the success of the school. Conversely, this may also provide better services from companies to the families (Van Velsor & Orozco, 2007) and it may work in favour of educational experiences of children (Eccles & Harrold, 1996).

## **Recommendations**

Based on the results established in the present study an overview of recommendations for each type of parental involvement will be given. These suggestions may be valuable to improve the parental involvement in children's education and thus in the sponsorship programme.

### *Parenting*

The results showed that parents have to work a lot, but that they still live in poor circumstances. Possible improvements regarding this type should especially concern improving the living conditions of the families. Proposals given were the provision of food and bicycles by C.RE.D.O. But it would be advantageous if C.RE.D.O not only supported the education of the child, but also his environment. The child can perform well at school, where he found himself in better learning conditions, but once arrived at home his living environment has negative effects on his learning conditions. This is the case when a child has to go the city for example, to learn his lessons under the streetlights. Instead of learning, he will prefer to play with his peers.

But C.RE.D.O only should provide in long-term solutions. By giving money to the families, the problem will be solved temporarily.

### *Communicating*

First, parents and teachers have to change their attitudes towards each other and recognise the benefits of an educational partnership. Teachers have to understand that parents can contribute to children's education wherever possible and that they are not here to criticise their teaching skills. Parents and teachers should appreciate each other despite any social class or cultural differences because each individual's knowledge and expertise can make a contribution to the education of the child and the functionality of the school. To build these educational partnerships the teachers must be given time to plan and organise involvement activities. Many teachers work overtime and have no time for other activities except for teaching and reviewing work. Therefore the school board should give teachers more time so that they can plan involvement activities, such as information meetings, but also an informal meeting where parents encourage their children during a sporting event.

There is a possibility that the parents that are less involved, are still not showing up when an information meeting is organised. First, the information meeting should be at a time that is favourable for most of the parents. Second, it is a big investment, but if C.RE.D.O or the school will provide a warm meal for the parents during the meeting, it is most likely that the parents will come.

### *Volunteering*

The involvement activities just described regarding the type of communicating can also be interesting for the type volunteering. To improve the communication between parents and teachers, parents should be invited at school. Besides an information meeting, they could also be invited to do certain voluntary activities at school. This is not only beneficial for children's education, but also for the functionality of the school. Often parents want to do something, but they do not know what to do or what is expected of them. When activities are planned, teachers should ask about the interests of each parent because their contribution will be better when their needs are met. Besides, alternative meeting times when planning these activities have to be taken into account as well. Finally, the parents must be well informed about what they could do and how they should do it. Then parents will feel very welcome and confident about themselves to participate in several activities.

It takes much time and energy for a school to set up an action plan, a schedule and arrange the involvement activities, but eventually everyone and especially the school, will benefit from the voluntary activities.

#### *Learning at home*

As was stated in the present study, often parents do not know that their involvement is valuable. Parents are trying to take care of their children and to provide them with food at home. It was stated that this is everything they can do, because they are illiterate. They have the wish to hire a tutor or pay reinforcement lessons/summer courses, but more activities could be done to provide the learning conditions of the child at home. During information meetings parents could be informed about such activities. For example, only discussing with a child about his school day is already beneficial for his education or having regular routines at home. But the school can make it easier for the parents as well. For example by letting the children write in their workbooks with a different colour pen every day. In this case, parents can check if the child wrote that day at school. Again, it is beneficial to build educational partnerships. Parents and teachers should come together and find a way, based on both their strengths and weaknesses, to make the education as good as possible.

The example of providing parents with a warm meal, can also concerning this type of parental involvement, ensure that parents will visit the school during an information meeting.

#### *Decision-making*

Interestingly, no barriers and possible improvements were mentioned regarding this type of involvement. Maybe therefore, the most improvement activities could be achieved concerning the decision-making process of the school. Possibly, parents are afraid to join associations by feelings of low self-esteem and lack of understanding the school system. First, parents have to gain confidence by invitations from the school to participate in school events and the communication between parents and teachers have to be improved (see part *recommendations – communicating*). Parents can also get more familiar with the school and with other parents by the means of a parent's room. They will not only learn more about the school, but parents can learn from each other as well, in an informal way. This exchange between parents can benefit all five other types of parental involvement, but especially parenting, because they can share their experiences on the development of the child and everything that goes with it. In any case, by spending more time at school parents will learn more about the school objectives and understand what they can do and what is expected from them. In this way, they will be able to contribute their skills and knowledge to the Parent-Teacher Associations (PTA).

In this case, the teachers could cause a problem because they do not want the parents to interfere with their teaching methods or because the teachers themselves lack the knowledge and skills to communicate effectively with the parents. Therefore, training lessons should be provided for the teachers so that they can learn how to involve parents in a proper and respectful way into school's life.

#### *Collaborating with the community*

Involving the community in the school is beneficial. Schools should get acquainted with the families, but also with the community where their students live. Principals and/or teachers can contact spiritual leaders or

village chiefs. In this way, the principal and teachers can learn more about the families, for example about social networks of parents. Building partnerships with companies can be beneficial as well. But it is difficult to build mutual relationships. It will take a lot of the principal's time to set up a partnership, but the two following recommendations will make the process a little easier.

General assemblies could be organised several times a year, in which all companies and community partners who are concerned about students and their families, such as PTAs or spiritual leaders, come together. Appointments can be made regarding a mission they wish to achieve together. A work plan can be made with specific interventions, along with evaluations in between to ensure that all stakeholders stay satisfied.

Second, during information meetings it is not only beneficial to invite the parents, but also companies. In this way, companies are part of the school's life and perhaps an employee of the company has the opportunity to give a workshop or mini-course about a specific topic from which parents and/or teachers can learn.

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