

The parent-teacher relationship as partnership: a conceptual analysis

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Abstract

Parent involvement has substantial benefits for the family and the school. From a Christian perspective parent involvement is essential to ensure that the child's formal education is in harmony with Christian principles. In spite of the endorsement of the importance of parent involvement by educationists, the concept of a parent-teacher partnership is not fully understood. The purpose of this paper is to define and clarify the parent-teacher relationship expressed as a partnership using concept analysis with particular reference to the implications for the Christian teacher and parent. Rodgers' systematic approach to concept analysis was adopted as an appropriate tool to analyse the complex, multifaceted parent-teacher partnership. An electronic search of interdisciplinary databases comprising English-only journal articles published in the fields of education, including the sub-disciplines of religious, theological and Christian education, sociology, family studies and psychology for the period 1995 to 2010 was carried out. The keyword "partnership" occurring only in the title, combined with "parent", was used to produce a final sample obtained by simple random sampling. Authors' use of the concept "parent-teacher partnership" was discussed according to defining attributes, antecedents, consequences, context, related terms and implications for practice, inductively derived from the citations analysed. Findings

are that the teacher-parent partnership evolved in the context of the democratisation of education. Its antecedent is a school-initiated outreach to parents to establish partnerships enacted in diverse activities aimed at the child's wellbeing. Partnership attributes are identified according to partner, relationship, activity and resource characteristics. The direct consequence of partnership is the enablement of parent and teacher to contribute optimally to the child's development. Common related terms identified in the literature are only partially effective in describing the parent-teacher partnership. It was found that the concept of parent-teacher partnership is in harmony with Christian principles and teachers and parents with a Christian commitment have a responsibility to realise strong partnerships as described through the concept analysis, with a view to the child's education. Thus, the clarification of the concept of the parent-teacher partnership can contribute to the improvement of school practice based on more precise research in the field of home-school relations.

Key concepts

partnership, schooling, parents, families, teachers, schools, Rodgers' concept analysis

Die ouer-onderwyser-verhouding as vennootskap: 'n konseptuele analise

Opsomming

Ouerbetrokkenheid bied groot voordele vir die gesin en die skool. Uit 'n Christelike perspektief is ouerbetrokkenheid van kardinale belang om te verseker dat die kind se formele onderrig in harmonie is met Christelike beginsels. Ondanks die onderskrywing van die belangrikheid van ouerbetrokkenheid deur opvoedkundiges word die konsep van 'n ouer-onderwyser-vennootskap nie ten volle verstaan nie. Die doel van hierdie artikel is om die ouer-onderwyser-verhouding wat as 'n vennootskap uitgedruk word te definieer en te verduidelik aan die hand van konsepanalise met spesifieke verwysing na die implikasies vir die Christen-onderwyser en -ouer. Rodgers se sistematiese benadering tot konsepanalise is gebruik as 'n toepaslike instrument om die komplekse, multigefasetteerde ouer-onderwyser-vennootskap te analiseer. 'n Elektroniese soektog vir die periode 1995 tot 2010 van interdisiplinêre databasisse wat

bestaan uit slegs Engelse tydskrifartikels wat gepubliseer is in die veld van onderwys, met insluiting van die subdissiplines van religieuse, teologiese en Christelike onderwys, sosiologie, gesinstudies en sielkunde is uitgevoer. Die sleutelwoord “vennootskap” wat net in die titel voorkom, gekombineer met “ouer”, is gebruik om ’n finale steekproef te produseer wat verkry is deur ewekansige steekproefneming. Outeurs se gebruik van die konsep “ouer-onderwyser-vennootskap” is bespreek deur kenmerke, voorgangers, gevolge, konteks, verwante terme en implikasies vir die praktyk te definieer, wat induktief afgelei is van die aanhalings wat geanaliseer is. Daar is bevind dat die onderwyser-ouer-vennootskap ontwikkel het in die konteks van die demokratisering van die onderwys. Die voorganger daarvan is ’n skool-geïnisieerde uitreik na ouers om vennootskappe daar te stel wat uitgevoer word in diverse aktiwiteite wat gerig is op die kind se welsyn. Vennootskapenmerke word geïdentifiseer volgens vennoot, verhouding, aktiwiteit en hulpbronnekenmerke. Die direkte gevolg van vennootskap is die instaatstelling van die ouer en onderwyser om optimaal tot die ontwikkeling van die kind by te dra. Algemene verwante terme wat in die literatuur geïdentifiseer is, is slegs gedeeltelik doeltreffend in die beskrywing van die ouer-onderwyservennootskap. Die bevinding was dat die konsep van ouer-onderwyser-vennootskap in harmonie is met Christelike beginsels en onderwysers en ouers met ’n Christelike verbondenheid het ’n verantwoordelikheid om sterk vennootskappe te realiseer soos beskryf deur die konsepanalise, met die oog op die kind se onderrig. Die verheldering van die konsep van die ouer-onderwyser-vennootskap kan dus bydra tot die verbetering van skoolpraktyk wat gebaseer is op meer indringende navorsing in die veld van huis-skool-verhoudings.

Sleutelkonsepte

vennootskap, onderrig, ouers, gesinne, onderwysers, skole, Rodgers se konsepanalise

1. Introduction

The family is an educational community which has primary responsibility for the child’s instruction and nurture. Parents are the child’s primary educators and entrust the formal aspects of the

child's education to the school as social structure specialised for this task. However, the family should never be excluded from the child's education. Christian parents are obliged to participate in and support all aspects of a child's schooling and thereby ensure that the spirit and character, aims, content, teaching methods and management thereof are reconcilable with their Christian principles (Bourg, 2004; Van Schalkwyk, 1990). In principle, Christian families should seek engagement with educators and Christian educators should encourage family involvement. However, the influence that religious commitment and affiliation has on the quality and frequency of the involvement of Christian parents with the school has not been extensively investigated (Bartkowski & Xu, 2000; Wilcox, 2002). Indeed literature dealing with parent involvement in the school from a Christian perspective is scant, although there is an abundance of literature dealing with Christian parenting (Grana, 2002). An examination of studies dealing with the benefits of community volunteering have suggested a positive relationship between churchgoing Protestants and civic participation in community organisations, including the school (Park & Smith, 2000; Smith & Sikkink, 1997). Smith and Sikkink's (1997) study made a further distinction between parental support for secular public schools and parental support for Christian-affiliated schools. A higher intensity of parent involvement was observed among churchgoing Protestant parents whose children attended Christian schools in comparison to churchgoing Protestant parents whose children attended public schools. Loury (2004) found that participation in and support of faith-based schools by committed churchgoing parents, both Protestant and Catholic, was positively linked to children's regular school attendance and the reduction of school dropout. This illustrates the benefits of the active involvement of the Christian parent in the school as institution (Anthony, 2001; Halverson, 2000; Post, 2000).

Furthermore, whether Christian parents choose to place their children in Christian schools or secular public or private schools, their responsibility to support the school as educational institution remains unaltered. Education is a high stakes public issue and, as such, the Christian has a moral obligation to engage in public concerns such as education (Post, 2000). Post (2000) argues that the Christian family should not refrain or neglect engagement with

the school as civil institution, if it is to make its voice heard and its influence felt for the good of all children.

The argument for the robust involvement of Christian parents in the school is backed up by substantial evidence in the general literature which demonstrates conclusively that parent involvement produces a range of positive child outcomes (Epstein, Sanders & Sheldon, 2009). Since the late 1960s, the concept of the parent-teacher partnership to improve the child's life chances has interested policymakers, researchers and practitioners in Western education systems (Gestwicki, 2000), and more recently, in other parts of the world (Zaoura & Aubrey, 2011). The parent-teacher partnership as a panacea for educational problems has broad intuitive appeal for educationists and wider society, irrespective of any religious or political affiliation. Despite consensus about its importance and the considerable body of literature recommending that teachers and schools should engage parents as partners in education (Hiatt-Michael, 2006), the notion of the parent-teacher partnership remains vague and ambiguous (Patrikakou, Weissberg, Redding & Walberg, 2005). A common definition of partnership is hard to find; the term literally means 'different things to different people'; consequently, the term is frequently applied uncritically to all school situations involving parent cooperation (Bray, 2001). Thus, Christian educators and families alike would benefit if their respective roles and responsibilities within a partnership are more clearly articulated. De Wolff, Miedema and De Ruyter (2002) argue that the more diffuse and vague the Christian identity and the attendant responsibilities of the key participants in the child's schooling – the teacher and the parent – the weaker is the probability that the aims of Christian education will be realised.

Against this background, the purpose of this paper is to reach a more precise conceptualisation of partnership in the context of the parent-teacher relationship, with particular reference including a Christian perspective. To examine the term, Rodgers' (1989; 2000) evolutionary method of concept analysis was adopted. The parent-teacher partnership was reviewed through a formal analysis of articles using "partnership" and "parent" in the titles of the English-only interdisciplinary literature between 1995 and 2010. The purpose was to discover how various authors used the term and to analyse its defining attributes, antecedents, consequences, context,

related terms and implications in order to reach a clarification of the concept of the parent-teacher partnership with a view to enhancing research and practice in home-school relations. As such, the article addresses a palpable gap in Christian scholarship on parent involvement as well as in the general scholarship on the topic.

2. The study according to Rodgers' concept analysis

Rodgers' (1989; 2000) evolutionary method of concept analysis is more common to theory building in nursing science than in education and thus requires some explanation here. This method should not be confused with the literature review which typically foregrounds an empirical study and aims to assess the status of existing research on a topic (Toftthagen & Fagerstrom, 2010). Research method texts (Neundorf, 2002; Weber, 1990) and numerous journal articles with content analysis as primary method (Elo & Kyngas, 2008) attest of its validity and rigour as valid research method. In this genre, Rodgers' concept analysis is a recognised methodology informed by the philosophical assumption that concepts are created through cognition and that conceptual meaning is acquired through language (Toulmin, 1972). Examining language for common features when a concept is used can therefore assist in clarification of the concept (Gallant, Beaulieu & Carnevale, 2002). Rodgers' method follows systematic and clear-cut phases of sampling and analysis of selected documents and stresses the dynamic and contextual nature of concepts, which evolve over time in association with various intra-profession and broader social factors. Adopting an inductive stance, the researcher searches for common use and meanings of the concept with a view to identifying associated attributes. Its methodological rigour lies in the steps of analysis which include specific strategies for conducting a credible investigation with dependable results (Rodgers & Cowles, 1997). Rodgers' (2000) steps for concept analysis are: Identification of the concept and related or surrogate terms; identification and selection of appropriate setting and sample; data collection and management; data analysis; and the identification of implications and hypotheses for further development of the concept.

In this article, these steps are applied as follows:

2.1 Identification of the concept and related or surrogate terms

A semantic definition of 'partnership' renders it as: "a relationship between individuals or groups that is characterised by mutual cooperation and responsibility, as for the achievement of a specified goal" (*American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 2011). The term occurs in many contexts beside education (e.g. law, business, social welfare and nursing) to describe real or idealised relationships. However, a simple definition of partnership eludes most authors in the interdisciplinary literature; instead they prefer to list specific qualities or features that mark a partnership (Hook, 2006). Thus, partnership can be most aptly described as a concept, "an abstraction ... with a cluster of critical attributes ... necessary to and sufficient to delineate the domain and boundaries of the concept" (Rodgers, 2000:77).

The discourse dealing with partnership as the desired relationship between the school and other social structures, such as the home, non-governmental and governmental organisations and business, figures prominently in international protocols, such as UNESCO policy documents (Bray, 2001; UNESCO, 1998; 1999), particularly in the areas of special needs education, early childhood education and family literacy education. Such documents do not move beyond a dictionary definition and the nature of partnerships in education described therein is highly variable (Bray, 2001). The notion of partnership with parents is also striking in national legislation and policy in the United States, United Kingdom, Australasia, Europe and other parts of the world. Similarly, partnership is only loosely defined in these documents (Dom & Verhoeven, 2006). Substantial reviews of trends in the general home-school literature lack a proper definition of partnership. For example, during the period 1980 to 1995, two comprehensive reviews of the published literature on partnerships in schooling were conducted by Chavkin (1998; 2001). Although her aim was not concept analysis, her categorization of journal articles produced during this period into three groups – opinion, descriptive or evidence-based – demonstrated a striking absence of an operational definition of partnership by authors. Likewise, Fen and Chen's (2001) meta-analysis of quantitative research, which explored the relationship of parent involvement to student achievement, corroborated Chavkin's finding (Fen & Chen,

2001:3). The implication of these reviews is that parents and teachers remain confused about their exact role as partners in education and the parent-teacher relationship in practice is often marked by tension and discomfort (Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008). Related terms for partnership, such as parent participation, parent involvement, parent collaboration and parent engagement, have done little to illuminate this state of affairs as they are used inconsistently, are seldom defined and often indicate different levels of parent commitment (Bray, 2001). Further, when these terms are used interchangeably as surrogate terms, also with partnership, they create even greater ambiguity. Moreover, theories of home-school relations also fail to contribute to a more precise conceptualisation of partnership. To illustrate, the widely recognised typology of Epstein (1994), which identifies six types of home, school and community partnerships, predominates the literature but still falls short of any definition of partnership; instead partnership is described in terms of areas and kinds of parent activity. Similarly, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995) theoretical framework of parent involvement lacks definitions of key elements. The conundrum for scholarship is that a poorly defined concept, such as the case in point, may result in faulty construction of research methods used to investigate the phenomenon of partnership (Morse, 1995), an argument corroborated by Chavkin (1998:95).

2.2 Identification and selection of an appropriate setting and sample for data collection

An appropriate setting or context and credible sample for data collection must be identified and selected for analysis. The setting refers to the period of time chosen and the types of literature examined during the analysis (Rodgers, 2000). In this study the period 1995 to 2010 was selected because it presents an acceptable length of time (15 years) to identify the evolution in conceptualisations of partnership in parent-teacher relationships. After determining the time period, a decision should be made as to which disciplines should be included: those with an interest in and frequent use of the concept under discussion (Rodgers, 2000). In this study, the following disciplines were deemed appropriate: education, including the sub-disciplines of religious, theological and Christian education, sociology, family studies and psychology.

Rodgers (2000) acknowledges the impossibility of identifying the entire population of required literature through printed indexes and/or computerised searches; however, the use of judiciously chosen databases can clearly identify the total population of literature searched and is thus an important improvement over completely accidental or convenience samples. Moreover, appropriately chosen databases yield an indication of how concepts are institutionalised within a discipline over the determined time period. In this study, I sought the advice of an expert in information retrieval to identify the most comprehensive computerised databases considered most representative of the aforementioned disciplines and usable for the study. These were: Proquest (Education and Psychology); Academic Search Premier (Multidisciplinary); Educational Resource Information Centre [ERIC] (Education); Family and Society Studies Worldwide (Family science, human ecology, human development and social welfare); and Sabinet (South African publications). Other databases contained in the EBSCO host webpage, which appeared appropriate (i.e., Family Studies Abstracts, Teacher Reference Centre, Gender Studies Abstracts) were also searched but yielded nil citations.

The initial search strategy was limited to the keywords “partnership” combined with “parent”, in titles and abstracts of full-text, peer-reviewed English-language journal articles including online journal publications. This produced an unwieldy number of citations (e.g., 800+). Thereafter, the search strategy was limited to the same keywords occurring only in titles. This produced 391 citations; a further systematic review of citation titles eliminated articles dealing with sexual relationships (e.g. partners in marriage or co-habitation) and partnerships between parents and organisations other than educational institutions (e.g., parents and the courts and parents and welfare organisations), as this literature was not consistent with the focus of the study. Duplicate citations (i.e. titles appearing in more than one database) were also eliminated. Finally, a total of 279 citations relating to the parent-teacher partnership in the context of the school were retained. These were distributed as follows: 123 citations (Proquest); 62 citations (Academic Search Premier); 156 citations (ERIC); 48 citations (Family and Society Studies Worldwide) and three (3) citations (Sabinet), using the criteria for credibility as recommended by Rodgers (2000) and

Toftthagen and Fagerstrom (2010:24). These authors maintain that: each database included in the study should be represented by approximately 20% of the total number of references included or 30 studies. Using a technique of simple random sampling, a final sample of 83 articles (from the 279) was compiled as follows: Proquest (25); Academic Search Premier (13); Eric (32); Family and Society Studies Worldwide (10). All three articles occurring in Sabinet were included to provide a South African perspective. As mentioned, the search had included databases which, among others, accommodate articles published in journals of religious, theological and Christian education. However, no articles which examined the teacher-parent partnership from a Christian lens were identified. In this case, Rodgers (2000) and Rodgers and Cowles (1997) suggest that the researcher should identify any other relevant publications and add them to ensure that he/she has covered a specific focus adequately. Accordingly, I carried out a further online search of the contents of five prominent peer-reviewed journals dedicated to religious education, theological education and Christian education for the designated period. This deliberate inclusion also failed to yield a single title which included the key words “parent” and “partnership”. This finding was in itself significant as it illustrated the lack of Christian scholarship on the topic and highlighted the hiatus that I had set out to address.

2.3 Data collection and management

After the selection of the final sample, the documents were (downloaded and printed from the electronic databases), organised and labeled by database. After retrieval, all documents were read at least twice: the initial reading provided an overview of the article; during the second reading (or multiple readings, in many cases), documents were examined for specific issues with a view to categorisation (Rodgers, 2000).

2.4 Data analysis

An inductive data analysis of the concept of the parent-teacher partnership was conducted in order to categorise the data under the following rubrics as proposed by Rodgers (1989; 2000): antecedents, attributes, consequences, context, surrogate terms and implications. During second or multiple readings of the articles,

words, sentences or passages (data units) were marked using coloured pens and labelled for easy reference. Next, articles were grouped and labeled according to the specific categories of data sought in this study – attributes, antecedents, consequences, context, related terms and implications – that they addressed. The final paper was read by a recognised expert in the field of home-school relations to review and critique the interpretation made of the sampled literature.

3. Findings

Consistent with the method employed, the primary finding of concept analysis concerns a definition of the concept expressed as its characteristics or attributes (Rodgers & Cowles, 1997:1050). This analysis enabled the tentative formulation of a definition of the concept of parent-teacher relationship as the purposeful relationship between parents and teachers marked by mutual empowerment, power-sharing and egalitarianism and focused on a joint objective, the education of the child. The establishment of partnership is not spontaneous but requires an outreach from school to parents within a democratic environment and partnership is enacted in an open-ended range of activities. The consequences of partnership are generally positive and seen in the enhanced ability of parent and teacher partners to act to improve the child's well-being and education. (These elements in the definition are expounded further in the ensuing sections, 3.1-3.6 and the implications for a Christian perspective on the parent-teacher are included in each section).

A secondary finding, and perhaps the most expected, was the great diversity of ways in which the concept of parent-teacher partnership was used by authors working in a range of education systems (e.g., Australasia, the United Kingdom, Europe, the US, the Middle East, East Asia and South Africa) and sub disciplines of education (e.g., special needs education, literacy education, management and governance, early childhood education, school guidance and counseling). Authors in the sample omitted an actual definition of partnership with the exception of those who cited the reference to partnership used in various acts or policies to mandate desirable relations between state, the family and other stakeholders in a variety of social and legal contexts (O'Connor, 2008). Partnership

as a concept was not critically examined and was used interchangeably with several related terms in the same text, sometimes in the same paragraph. Authors often slipped from one term to another without making any distinction between them, thus, conflating all terms in a presumption of general reader understanding. However, as Bray (2001) and Cuttance and Stokes (2000) point out, related terms for the parent-teacher partnership, such as parent participation and parent involvement, are not synonyms; each conveys a different degree of partner engagement respectively. Most commonly, authors resorted to a description of specific behaviours enacted by parents and/or teachers to define partnership. Thus, the inquiry itself corroborated the conspicuous inconsistency in usage and interpretation of the concept and the absence of a definition of parent-teacher relations in the general literature and the literature devoted to religious and Christian education.

A third overall finding was that the majority of authors in the sample motivated their research by referring to the benefits of an ideal partnership between parent and teacher. To do this, the term partnership was often qualified by a variety of modifiers: effective partnership, true partnership, authentic partnership, meaningful partnership or active partnership. Strikingly, authors used these modifiers to distinguish partnership from so-called 'non-partnership' (i.e., the absence of partnership in the face of powerful systemic, organisational, social, cultural or individual barriers which impeded partnership and were marked by adversarial relations between parent and teacher).

3.1 Attributes of partnership

Concepts are abstractions that become associated with particular sets of attributes through repetition in the discourse (Rodgers, 2000). The aim of concept analysis is to identify the concept's defining attributes or primary characteristics (Rodgers & Cowles, 1997:1050). Even considering the very wide variety of ways that the home-school partnership is enacted, consensus emerged among the authors in the sample regarding the attributes of partnership. The attributes of the home-school partnership are discussed under the rubrics: partner attributes; relationship attributes; activity attributes and resource attributes.

Partner attributes: Authors used a myriad of adjectives to describe the characteristics of the teacher and the parent as partner. Parent partners are active (Johns, 2008), informed about their rights and responsibilities as primary educators and knowledgeable about statutory policies, school practices and programmes (Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008) and informed about their child's progress (Duncan, 2007). They are confident, concerned and committed to partnership with the school and appreciative of the teacher's role (Swick, 1997). Teacher partners (including principals and school administrators) are responsive to parents (Xu & Gulosino, 2006), non-judgmental, respectful, helpful, appreciative of the parental role (Obeidat & Al-Hassan, 2009) and sensitive to cultural and socio-economic diversity and alternative family structures (Johnson & Anguiano, 2004). Although no author used these attributes in a deliberately Christian sense, the identified partner attributes mentioned above are in harmony with the Christian character which should be marked by love, care, warmth, accountability to others and a cooperative attitude.

Relationship attributes: The partnership relationship is an egalitarian relationship which depends on regular two-way communication and mutual knowledge-sharing, power-sharing and joint decision-making (O'Connor, 2008); it is purposefully directed at a common goal – the support of the child's total development (Bray, 2001). Partnership is distinguished from other forms of parent-teacher relationships by the degree of equality enjoyed by both partners (Sykes, 2001) and the degree in which power is shared between them (Patrikakou, Weissberg, Hancock, Rubenstein & Zeisz, 1997). The teacher partner does not regard his/her role as professional expert superior to that of the parent partner; instead, both partners acknowledge the unique expertise of the other as equally valuable to the child's wellbeing (Todd & Higgins, 1998). Power is equally distributed between partners and information freely shared so that joint decisions and actions are taken in the child's best interests (Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008). In Christian context, partnership attributes, such as reciprocal willingness to communicate, collaborate and share knowledge and influence on the part of teacher and parent, calls to mind the Pauline injunction to mutual submission in relationships in the interests of a higher good, in this case, the child's well-being. Shotsberger (2011) argues

that the adoption of this kind of caring mutual relationship shifts parents and teachers from a hierarchical model to one where authority and decision-making is more distributed. This, he maintains, is essentially biblical and reflects the principles of Christ's kingdom.

Activity attributes: The sample overwhelmingly demonstrated that the parent-teacher partnership is enacted through an open-ended range of diverse activities which can take place at home, in the school or in the community. The nature, scope and duration of such activities are time and context bound, that is, they are determined by the child's age, developmental level, general needs, the school phase and the particular context of the school. To the Christian parent and educator, this breadth and versatility in partnership activities does not only accommodate secular pursuits but allows for those activities which are beneficial to the child's moral and spiritual development and which may not otherwise form part of regular school/home programmes.

Resource attributes: Resources to enable partnership should be present in the school (e.g., suitable venues and earmarked funding for parent-teacher endeavours; the scheduling of partnership activities in the school programme; availability of communication media; parent education programmes and in-service teacher education programmes for partnership) (Sobel & Kugler, 2007); expertise (e.g., teachers trained to partner with parents and appropriately skilled parents) (Flanigan, 2007); information about partnership (e.g., dissemination of relevant legislation and policies) (O'Connor, 2008); and personal resources (e.g., sufficient time available to parents and teachers to expend on partnership activities) (Lazar & Slostad, 2007). Without resources, partnerships seldom get off the ground. Thus, Christian teachers and parents should be willing to devote school, family and individual resources unselfishly and even sacrificially in an attitude of servanthood with a view to enhancing the child's education.

3.2 Antecedents of partnership

Antecedents are those events which take place prior to the occurrence of the concept (Rodgers & Cowles, 1997). All the works examined in this study suggested strongly that the primary antecedent or situation preceding the concept of partnership was an

outreach through a purposeful invitation **from** the school **to** the parent aimed at engendering a partnership with the child's interests as mutual goal. The objectives of the invitation, that is the opportunity which would encourage partnership, mentioned by authors in the sample, were myriad: parent-teacher conferences and meetings; home-school contracts; individualised education plans (IEPs); parent volunteering; fundraising; school leadership/governance; home literacy or maths programmes, to mention but a few. Other invitations focused on activities beneficial to the parent him/herself, such as, parent education or skills-based classes. Similarly, the communication medium for the invitation differed widely: written, electronic, word of mouth or telephonic invitations, as did the format: fliers, posters, newsletters, home-to-school diaries, progress reports, SMS messaging, web-based invitations and so forth. The analysis also identified other possible antecedents as precursors to partnership, such as enabling legislation/policy (Salas, Lopez, Chin & Menchaca-Lopez, 2005; Dom & Verhoeven, 2006), teacher training for partnership (Flanigan, 2007), a welcoming school culture (Swick, 1997) and positive teacher dispositions (Xu & Gulosino, 2006). However, further analysis revealed that the existence of these possible antecedents alone do not establish a partnership; rather teachers, as primary decision-makers and agents concerning relations with parents, must issue an explicit invitation to parents to join them in a partnership which can be enacted in any number of school initiatives. The evidence derived from the sample literature confirmed that it is uncommon and far more difficult for a parent-teacher partnership to be established by virtue of a parent initiative (Ouellette, Briscoe & Tyson, 2004; Westergard & Galloway, 2010). Parents normally make overtures to the school only after a school has communicated to them that their advances are desired and will be sympathetically received (Dunlop & Fox, 2007). Consequently, the antecedent of the school-issued invitation subsumed all the other antecedents presented in the literature. Furthermore, the kind of invitation most often mentioned was one which related directly to the interests of the parents' own child rather than to the general welfare of the school.

This description of the antecedent to a partnership places a formidable onus on the school's leadership team and the teaching

staff who propagate a Christian ethic of care towards children and families. The key to transforming a school into a Christian community where families are welcome and parents are authentic and respected partners is by inviting them to step forward and participate in the educational endeavour. This invitation may take diverse forms but it provides the veritable mustard seed that precedes the large tree which will support life in its branches (Shotsberger, 2011).

3.3 Consequences of partnership

Consequences are the result of the use of a concept in a practical situation (Rodgers, 2000; Toftthagen & Fagerstrom, 2010) In view of this, when parents and teachers understand the true values that partnerships can offer, they bring about change (consequences) in the home and the school. In the sample studied, teacher-parent partnerships were generally associated with very positive consequences for the members of the partnership, the parent and teacher.

The positive consequences for the parent partner included personal empowerment and greater satisfaction with the school. Parent partners were empowered by becoming more informed about their child: his/her progress, individual needs and how to assist learning (McBride, Bae & Rane, 1998). They became better acquainted with their rights and responsibilities, as articulated in education legislation and school policies (Kim, 2004), as well as becoming better informed about school programmes, the curriculum and the child's vocational options. Parent empowerment was accompanied by improved confidence and self-esteem (Ford, Follmer & Litz, 1998). This was striking in the case of culturally diverse and/or lower-income parents whose marginalisation and disenfranchisement in education is well documented (Quezada, 2003; Ouellette *et al.*, 2004). Partnership often led to the parent's acquisition of new skills (e.g., parenting and leadership skills, computer or literacy skills), which were intended to benefit the child but which frequently also increased parents' self-efficacy and even their employability (Sobel & Kugler, 2007). Parents acquired knowledge about the decision-making processes in the school which enhanced their power and status and reduced feelings of helplessness, frustration and inferiority.

The positive consequences for the teacher as partner included greater professional satisfaction (Patterson, Webb & Krudwig, 2009); decreased feelings of isolation through access to shared expertise and greater support (Ford *et al.*, 1998) and increased empathy for and rapport with all parents, particularly with culturally diverse and/or lower-income parents (Sobel & Kruger, 2007; Johnson & Anguiano, 2004). The mutual sharing of information between parent and teacher around the child's needs meant that teachers were better equipped to deal with a child's learning (Lazar & Weissberg, 1996), behavioural and health issues (Elias, Bryan, Patrikakaou & Weissberg, 2003) and this enhanced confidence, professional esteem and self-efficacy. With an ally in the parent, teachers felt less alone and isolated in the educational enterprise as their responsibility for the child was shared with the parent (McBride *et al.*, 1998).

Further, this analysis demonstrated unequivocally that authors maintain that the parent-teacher partnership has a positive impact which extends beyond the benefits to the parent-teacher as partners. It extends to the children whose well-being is, in the first place, the justification, the goal and the driver of the partnership. The parent-teacher partnership is pre-eminently forged to benefit a third party, the child, and is not, in the first instance, a partnership forged for the benefit of the partners themselves. This understanding of partnership was dominant in the authors' thinking: without exception they referred, albeit in degrees, to the expected or actual benefits for the child as rationale for the parent-teacher partnership. Positive outcomes of partnership associated with children in sample studied included: (i) higher academic achievement (Bryan, 2005); (ii) improved self-esteem and identity development (Elias *et al.*, 2003); (iii) better school attendance (Plunkett, 1997); (iv) positive attitudes to school and behaviors (Dunlap & Fox, 2007); (v) readiness to do homework (Trahan & Lawler-Prince, 1999); (vi) increased time spent with parents (Ford *et al.*, 1998); (vii) better performance in niche areas, such as literacy (Lazar *et al.*, 1996) and numeracy (Du Toit, Froneman & Maree, 2002); and (viii) enhanced well-being and performance by special groups of learners, for example, disabled learners (Dunlap & Fox, 2007) or gifted learners (Riley, 1999).

These positive consequences for parents, teachers and children were well documented in the different national contexts represented

in the sample and were consistently mentioned over the 15-year period (1995-2010). However, a small but significant number of authors referred to less desirable consequences of partnership. Partnerships may cause a degree of discomfort to both parents and teachers and disruption within the school community. Katyal and Evers (2007) pointed out that some parents do not necessarily prefer a partnership with teachers above the traditional parent-teacher relationship. Hodge and Runswick-Cole (2008) argued that efforts at partnership may lead to resistance by embattled teachers who wish to protect professional boundaries from any power-sharing in spite of school policy to the contrary. As traditional school hierarchies are challenged by parental power-sharing, teachers experience pain, frustration and powerlessness (Todd & Higgins, 1998). Price-Mitchell (2009) eschewed a functionalist approach, whereby it is argued that the parent-teacher partnership mechanistically produces positive consequences in the school, and highlighted the complexity of the parent-teacher relationship in which parties must negotiate identity boundaries in order to succeed. Sil (2007) argued that parent partners who enjoy strong social capital can influence a school to take decisions which only benefit certain groups of students to the detriment of other students.

What are the implications of this evidence documenting the overwhelmingly positive outcomes of partnership for the Christian educator and parent? If, as Riesen (2002:42), Christian philosopher, educator and school principal, reasons, “education, if not the most important, is nonetheless among the most important gifts society can give”, then parents and teachers committed to Christian beliefs should unhesitatingly aspire to realise their partnership in an exemplary manner in the interests of their common charge, the child. The possibility of less desirable outcomes which may occasionally arise in partnership should not discourage the Christian. The history of the early church as found in Acts and the many problems addressed by the writers of the epistles show that the Christian should have a realistic approach to interpersonal conflict, intolerance and even resistance. These do not present excuses to avoid parent-teacher collaboration but rather challenges to be overcome (Ramirez, 2012).

3.4 Context

The context of a concept may be practical or theoretical, that is, it may lie in either (or both) the external environment or in the prevalence of

theoretical propositions, which support the development of a concept (Rodgers, 1989). The socio-political background to the parent-teacher partnership frequently identified by authors was the democratisation and concomitant decentralisation of education which has taken place in the US (US Department of Education, 2001), UK (Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008), Europe (Dom & Verhoeven, 2006) and Australasia (Onsman, 1996) and, more recently, in other parts of the world, such as Korea (Kim, 2004), Singapore (Khong & Ng, 2005), Hong Kong (Katyal & Evers, 2007) and South Africa (Bojuwoye, 2009). Authors in the sample often prefaced a discussion of partnership with references to federal or national legislation or district policies emanating from legislation which advocated partnership. Examples of legislation or policy mentioned were the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) (the US); the Warnock Report (1978) and Children's Act (1989) (UK), the Participation Law (1991) (Belgium) and the South African School's Act (1996) (South Africa). These acts recognise the democratic rights of parents in education enterprise and promote greater egalitarianism and mutual accountability between the school and the home. The assumption is that children's education is optimised by the cooperation of the primary educator and the professional educator and the state's burden of ensuring the efficacy of formal education is alleviated by the contribution of the parent as partner. Certain legislation, such as the South African Schools Act (Bojuwoye, 2009) and the Participation Law in Belgium (Dom & Verhoeven, 2006) focuses more narrowly on the role of the parent partner in school governance; other legislation, such as the NCLB (2001), takes a much broader view of the possible engagement of the parent as partner. Another element embedded in the context in which partnership is promoted is the parent as client/consumer of educational services (Sykes, 2001). The increased financial contribution of parents through taxation or school fees means that parents as consumers are entitled to exercise school choice, scrutinise educational provision critically and raise questions of quality on behalf of their children (Gale, 1996). In his discussion of a Christian worldview and civic responsibility, Post (2012) argues that the Christian should welcome an orderly civil society which allows him/her to live according to biblical principles without undue conflict. Thus, legislative contexts that acknowledge the rights and role of the parent as primary educator and promote principles of partnership in education should be especially appreciated.

Another contextual feature detected in the sample studied was the radical changes in family demography during the last 15 years. Greater cultural and socio-economic diversity and the emergence of alternative family structures have presented unprecedented challenges to teachers, who are compelled to establish partnerships with parents who differ radically from the mainstream parent body to which teachers have been accustomed (Khong & Ng, 2005). In terms of this diversity, the mandate of the Christian teacher remains unaltered: to demonstrate the Christian ethic of care without prejudice. The teacher cannot refuse or avoid collaboration with families which differ in any way from the Christian norm; in this case the well-being of children who are in their care is paramount (Shotsberger, 2012).

3.5 Related concepts

Related concepts are words that have something in common with the concept yet do not possess the same characteristics (Toftthagen & Fagerstrom, 2010). As noted in the section entitled: *Identification of the concept and related terms*, various terms, such as parent participation, involvement, connections, linkages and engagement, have been employed, often uncritically and without adequate definition, as synonyms or substitutes for the concept 'partnership'. Careful examination of these terms suggests subtle differences in their meaning as well as differences in the way in which individual authors defined or understood these terms. For example, parent participation was frequently understood to refer to the parents' role in school governance (Onsman, 1996); parent involvement often referred to a whole range of 'softer' issues, such as parents as audiences at school events, parents as fund raisers, parents as volunteers or parents supporting a child's learning at home, which do not require or effect any change in the parents' status or experience of power-sharing in the school (Bray, 2001). These terms arguably share a close relationship to partnership and all denote cooperation between parent and teacher; however, there is a clear difference in the attributes of each associated concept. This interchange of terms, most commonly without definition by authors, adds to the confusion in this area and detracts from the effectiveness of the ways that aspects of the parent-teacher relationship can be characterised. Further, it is argued that

partnership, as described by the attributes identified in this article, expresses a more advanced and sophisticated level of parent-teacher cooperation and should not be used unless this meaning is intended.

3.6 Implications for the practice of home-school relations

A further aim of concept inquiry is to identify some implications for practice and suggest directions for the additional development of the concept, if appropriate. This section highlights implications for the functioning of schools and for further research on partnerships in education, with particular reference to Christian education.

Regarding the functioning of schools, the definition of partnership derived from this analysis may help policy-makers and practitioners to identify partnership attributes and differentiate partnership behaviour from other related forms of parent-teacher relationships in schools. The concept of partnership as clarified in this paper is not at odds with Christian principles; rather the concept has highlighted the collaboration, care and mutual respect which one can expect in a relationship unselfishly directed at the fulfillment of a biblical mandate, the child's optimal development. A significant observation is that partnership cannot be identified solely by the existence of an activity involving the cooperation of parents and teachers. Although a sizeable body of literature has evolved since the 1980s which documents a very long 'laundry list' of parent-teacher endeavours (Chavkin, 1998), authors have neglected to distinguish it from other forms of parent-teacher relations. The highly variable and individualised nature of the activities in which parents and teachers may engage indicates that the identification of partnership is best based on the (i) antecedent of a school-initiated outreach to parents to establish a partnership and (ii) attributes of power-sharing and egalitarianism inherent in parent-teacher partnership. With regard to (i), the existence of enabling conditions (e.g., legislation, positive school ethos and teacher dispositions) in the school are insufficient to "kick start" (Khong & Ng, 2005) a partnership. Establishment of a partnership requires a purposeful opportunity involving an unmitigated invitation to parents to enter into an appropriate relationship with the school. This invitation must be repeated and sustained as new and diverse cohorts of parents come into contact with the school through their children year after

year. As the burden of responsibility for the first steps in establishing the partnership lies unequivocally with the school, the Christian principal and Christian teacher should continually devise ways to initiate appropriate action through both deed and attitude. Regarding (ii), partnership denotes a relationship in which power and status are levelled to a large degree so that the boundaries between the teacher as expert and the parent as layperson are permeated. This is essentially an epistemological matter: historically the teacher's professional knowledge has been privileged above the parent's intuitive and experiential knowledge. For a partnership to be realised, the different 'knowledges' must be mutually valued and shared so as to benefit the child. Thus, it is argued that partnership, as emerging from this analysis, is far more demanding a relationship than other forms of parent-teacher relations, which are described by related terms (subsec. 3.5), in terms of the partner, relationship, activity, and structural attributes required for its realisation (cf. subsec. 3.1). In this regard, it relates to the notion of Christian submission which does not depend on social position, role or gender but should be cooperative, voluntary and mutual in all human relations (Kittel, Bromiley & Friedrich, 1964) .

With regard to scholarship, the direct consequences of partnership for the persons involved – parent and teacher – provide new directions for school-based research, most particularly in thinking about Christian education where the lack of attention to this topic is glaring. The positive consequences embodied in the dispositional and behavioural changes which are effected in partners, such as parent empowerment and amelioration of teacher isolation (cf. 3.1) offer a basis for the evaluation of school practices. This stresses the need for future research to develop means or tools that are precise enough to measure dispositional changes in parents and teachers engaged in partnership (cf. 3.1); to identify the risks or potential negative consequences also inherent in the partnership relationship which schools should avoid (cf. 3.4); and to measure the degree to which policies for partnership are implemented in reality (cf. 3.4). Regarding the latter, the consequences of partnership identified through this analysis provide direction for research intended at evaluating how far policies to democratise education have penetrated school practice. As mentioned in 3.5, some authors in the home-school literature in this sample may

narrowly limit the evaluation of partnership policy to a focus on parent participation in school governance bodies. Research to ascertain the success of partnership policy implementation in the broader life of the school community would increase understanding of the efficacy of educational policy in school reform. Research on partnership in schools and colleges of education which espouse a Christian worldview (Shotsberger, 2012) can evaluate the extent to which the biblical value placed on the family is realised through school practice or whether it remains mere rhetoric (Ramirez, 2012).

Attention should also be focused on the use of related terms identified through this analysis. The frequent interchange of partnership and related terms has contributed significantly to the existing confusion surrounding the concept. Similarly, it has created difficulties in developing precise research instruments to measure or explore partnerships. This viewpoint was endorsed by Chavkin (1998) more than a decade ago and more recently by Fen and Chen (2001). It is important to realise that many related terms can be used effectively to address specific kinds of parent-teacher relationships and to indicate the progression of parents or teachers as they move from a 'softer' form of parent-teacher relationship into the more demanding and sophisticated relationship required by partnership. Clarification of associated terms, especially the frequently used parent participation and parent involvement, would be a major step in advancing knowledge of parent-school relations and improving practice in both secular and faith-based schools.

Finally, the results of this analysis do not offer a conclusive or static answer to what constitutes the parent-teacher partnership. According to Rodgers (1989), concepts are "not timeless, acontextual entities but reflect a changing world and continuing alterations in their use". Rodgers' method of analysis as used in this article has been limited to the use of partnership in the period 1995 to 2010 and to a particular sample. However, as Rodgers (2000: 80) points out, the intention of her approach is not a final conclusion but a suggestion as to the direction that the further development of the concept should take. Given that parent-teacher relations are undeniably integral to successful child development, this study should promote further productive moves towards useful and necessary concept clarification in the field of education and the sub-disciplines of religious and Christian education.

4. Conclusion

This paper aimed to demonstrate how Rodgers' approach to concept analysis can prove relevant for developing knowledge in the area of home-school relations in general and in Christian education in particular. The method's strength lies in that it is systematic, founded on clear phases of analysis and contributes to the clarification, description and explanation of central concepts in a specific body of literature. The application of Rodgers' method to the home-school literature, by analysing how the concept of parent-teacher partnership has been used, may prove useful to researchers interested in using the method to clarify other concepts used imprecisely and variously in education. Further, the argument is put forward that parents and teachers can only embrace and fulfil a partnership when the concept is fully understood and incorporated into the relations between home and school. This is particularly pertinent in terms of the way the Christian parent perceives his or her responsibility towards the school as social institution irrespective of whether it is public or religiously-affiliated. Similarly, it is important regarding the way Christian teachers fulfil their responsibility toward all families. Families are a rich source of social capital in any community (Ellison & George, 1994) and where the Christian parent and teacher engage with each other in partnership, they can better ensure that this capital is shared (Uslaner, 2002:239). Where the nature of the home-school partnership is more precisely understood, the unique resources, strengths and benefits that the family can bring to the school and the school to the family can be effectively mobilised (Beyerlein & Hipp, 2006).

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