# Multi-grade teaching: A case study of a multi-grade primary school in a rural context in KwaZulu-Natal

**By**

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**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the degree of Master of Education University of KwaZulu-Natal**

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# ABSTRACT

Although a prominent feature of schooling in South Africa, multi-grade education has become an unwanted step-child of basic education. This is despite the constitutional promise, government's commitment and international conventions that guarantee everyone uninhibited access to and enjoyment of the right to a basic education. For children in multigrade classes, the experience of inequality and marginalisation has become an inevitable and uncompromising reality of life. Often, teachers in these contexts receive sub-standard support, resulting in a toxic concoction of social disadvantage. This study sought to understand experiences of teachers teaching multi-grade classes in a rural primary school. The study further sought to investigate the pedagogical practices teachers used in their classrooms as well as the manner in which these pedagogical choices enabled or constrained learning.

This study adopted a qualitative approach. A case study method was used to explore and study experiences of five teachers who were teaching multi-grade classes. In-depth semi-structured interviews and lesson observations were used to collect data. Semi-structured interviews were used to understand teachers' experiences of teaching multi-grade classes. Lesson observations sought to understand the pedagogic strategies teachers used. Locating the study within the critical paradigm provided a platform for participants to share experiences and reflect on their practices. Bourdieu's Theory of Practice was used to understand teachers' experiences. The forms of capital teachers possessed were understood using Bourdieu's theory of practice. In understanding the pedagogic practices teachers used, Bernstein's theory was used.

Findings revealed that teachers experienced challenges, with few positive experiences. Lack of support and inappropriate resources presented as challenges for teachers. However, despite the challenges experienced, teachers used their agency to create learning opportunities for learners. Teachers often did this without support from the Department of Education, universities or parents. However, positive experiences of multi-grade education were also reported, suggesting that multi-grade education is not absolutely inferior; it has positive aspects. Finally, the strategies teachers used, suggest that even though they were working in a difficult context, their learners were exposed to somewhat quality learning opportunities. Thus, teachers made the most of their situations to ensure access to quality education for their learners.

# DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, **Sebenzile Dladla,** declare that:

1. The work contained in this study, except where I indicated, is my own original work.

2. This study has not been submitted in any other institution for any degree or examination.

3. This study does not contain any other person's data, diagrams or graphs; if it does, it is acknowledged as being taken from other sources.

4. The words from other researchers have been used both as direct quotes and re-phrased. However, references and acknowledgement of others' work has been done.


_____          _____

**Sebenzile Dladla**                                       **Date**


_____          _____

**Dr Melanie Martin (Supervisor)**                         **Date**

# ETHICAL CLEARANCE

UNIVERSITY OF ™
**KWAZULU-NATAL**

**INYUVESI**
**YAKWAZULU-NATALI**

19 September 2017

Ms Sebenzile Dladla (209536636)
**School of Education**
**Pietermaritzburg Campus**

Dear Ms Dladla,

**Protocol reference number: HSS/0724/017M**
**Project title:** Multi-grade teaching: A case study of a multi-grade primary school in rural context in KwaZulu-Natal

**Approval Notification – Expedited Application**

In response to your application received on 07 June 2017, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE:  Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

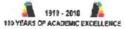/ms

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

# DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Nomusa Qoma, my father, Ntokozo, and my siblings. A very special dedication to all my nieces: Amanda, Syamthanda, Luhle, Zenande, Luyanda and Mihla, for allowing me to steal their time to pursue this journey and for supporting and understanding the importance of this dissertation to me.

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# ACRONYMS

| | |
|---|---|
| ELRC | Education Labour Relations Council |
| HEI | Higher Education Institution |
| LTSM | Learning and Teaching Support Material |
| KZN | KwaZulu-Natal |
| EFA | Education for All |
| ATP | Annual Teaching Plan |
| CAPS | Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement |
| FAL | First Additional Language |
| LoLT | Language of Learning and Teaching |
| DoE | Department of Education |
| DBE | Department of Basic Education |
| NCS | National Curriculum Statement |
| MDGs | Millennium Development Goals |
| SASA | South African Schools Act |
| SDGs | Sustainable Development Goals |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. |

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# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

*"Multi-grade teaching schools form the most neglected sector of the education system around the globe. As an important policy option for providing access to education for learners in remote areas multi-grade teaching needs to be recognized as such and be given the attention it deserves."*
(Taole, 2014, p. 95).

## 1.1 Introduction

This study sought to explore teachers' experiences of teaching multi-grade teaching in a rural primary school and the pedagogical practices that either enabled or constrained learning. According to section 29(1)(a) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, everyone has a right to a basic education (Republic of South Africa, 1996). However, often, learners and teachers in rural contexts find themselves in multi-grade classrooms, where access to quality education is questionable. As Taole (2017) suggests in the quotation above, multi-grade teaching and learning is often a neglected field, and this neglect calls for a more concerted effort to provide teachers with the required support in order for learners to firstly access education, and secondly, once at school to be allowed the opportunity to participate effectively. Teachers are pivotal drivers to ensuring quality participation. Using a case study approach, this study investigated the experiences of teachers who taught in a multi-grade school in the rural province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The study sought to delve into the diverse experiences of teachers, as well as explore their pedagogical practices as a key mechanism they used to provide quality access to education, given the multitude of factors that constrain or enable their practices.

In this introductory chapter, I contextualise the study by, firstly, providing the purpose and rationale for the study. The relevant concepts, which are necessary to understand multi-grade teaching and learning in this study, are then presented. Key research questions that guided and framed the conduct of the study are also presented. The conceptual framework is discussed and the epistemological and ontological positioning of the researcher explained. Finally, a brief

introduction to the methodological approach and an outline of the chapters of the dissertation is provided.

## 1.2 Background to the study

Little (2001) argues that pedagogical practice within multi-grade schools is necessary in developing countries, whereas it is pedagogical choice in developed countries. The notion of pedagogical practice as a choice suggests that the adoption of multi-grade teaching in contexts where this is the case may have some advantages. However, as this review of literature will show, multi-grade teaching has largely not been adopted as a choice within South Africa, which has elevated the importance of understanding the context that has forced necessity rather than choice in this instance. As pointed out above, multi-grade teaching is often common in rural schools in South Africa.

For South Africa, multi-grade teaching is often used as a mechanism to ensure that children from rural areas have the access to education (Taole & Mncube, 2014). However, literature has also revealed that, in most instances, such access has not necessarily translated into quality education for these learners. For instance, Taole and Mncube (2014) have observed that there is a significant discrepancy between the quality of education in rural and schools in urban contexts. This then calls into question why in South Africa, after so many years of democracy, a significant proportion of learners who attend school in rural contexts still do not have access to quality education. The question is critical because access to quality has been the constitutional, policy and legislative promise of government since the advent of democracy in 1994 (Department of Education, 1996; Department of Education, 2001; Republic of South Africa, 1996).

Taole and Mncube (2012) have pointed out that there are various issues that must be understood about multi-grade schools. One of the first issues is the failure of the Department of Education to administratively differentiate between multi-grade and monograde education through appropriate resourcing and management models. This deficiency suggests that right from the outset; learning and teaching are severely constrained. The absence of an appropriate resourcing model for multi-grade schools has compromised equitable access to the right to a basic education. For example, multi-grade schools are often subjected to chronic shortages of

resources, experience shortages of teachers and textbooks, with teachers not receiving training that is required to teach in multi-grade contexts.

Another area of concern is inadequate curriculum support, learning material that is relevant to multi-grade teaching, inadequate pre- and in-service teacher training (Little, 2001). All these factors influence and somewhat constrain what teachers can possibly do within multi-grade classrooms, especially in rural areas. For instance, a study conducted by Ramrathan (2016) in Ndwedwe has revealed that the Department of Education has not adequately supported teachers in multi-grade schools. This means that, for teachers in these schools, the struggle to cope with conditions and provide quality teaching and learning continue to go unanswered and unsupported. This apparent lack of support to these schools often results in marginalisation and disempowerment of both teachers and learners in these contexts. It is for this reason that multi-grade teaching has often been regarded as an abandoned child of the basic education sector in South Africa. For instance, Heather (2014) asserts that both teachers and learners in multi-grade schools are often relegated to the margins of the education system and are thus invisible to those who are responsible for planning, management and funding in the basic education system.

The above situation regarding the quality of education in multi-grade contexts suggests that the realisation of the goal of access to Education for All (EFA) must be closely investigated. In this regard, Ndhlovu and Mestry (2014) have argued that the purpose of education policies, legislation and international commitments and instruments, for example, EFA, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), whose intention was to redress inequalities and injustices in global education systems, has not been realised in multi-grade teaching and learning contexts in South Africa. In support of Ndhlovu and Mestry's (2014) argument, Taole (2014) has questioned the manner in which multi-grade schooling is practised in South Africa, arguing that the quality of education in these contexts has been consistently compromised.

This study seeks to explore and understand the experiences of teachers of multi-grade teaching. The intention is to explore both positive and negative instances that teachers experience in multi-grade contexts, as well as how their pedagogical practices enable or constrain learning in their classrooms. The study was conducted in a rural primary school, within the UThukela District, in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

**1.3 Rationale for the study**

The objective of this study was to explore teachers' experiences of teaching in multi-grade classes. To achieve this objective, the study critically discussed the diversity of experiences teachers encountered when teaching within a multi-grade context. In particular, teachers' pedagogical practices were investigated allowing for the exploration of whether their pedagogical choices enabled or constrained learning in the classroom.

The findings of this study, as shall be seen later, suggests that despite the efforts made by the South African government to provide all children access to education, the issue of access to quality education continues to compromise and undermine these efforts. It is for this reason that researchers in the field of multi-grade teaching have called for more research to be undertaken to delve into the multiplicity and complexity of issues regarding this much-neglected phenomenon (see for example, Blease & Condy, 2014; Taole & Mncube, 2012; Moletsane, 2012; Taole, 2014). According to the statistics gauged from the Annual School Survey (2014), the number of schools practicing multi-grade education is high especially in disadvantaged, rural communities in South Africa (Department of Basic Education, 2014). The province of KwaZulu-Natal, where this study was conducted, is mostly rural and has over 1 133 schools that are categorised as multi-grade (Department of Basic Education, 2014). However, this will be explored in depth in the following chapter. The high number of primary schools that have multi-grade classes has implications for how both learners and teachers from these schools experience such a context (Little, 2001; Taole, 2014).

One of the key issues is the extent to which quality education is achieved. The issues regarding multi-grade teaching, according to Condy and Blease (2017) and Taole (2014) include poor conditions of the multi-grade contexts as well as the performance of teachers and learners. Teachers and learners in multi-grade contexts are often underperforming compared to their counterparts in mono-grade contexts (Taole, 2014). This is where the greatest effects of inequity and marginalisation manifest. The injustices experienced by both teachers and learners in multi-grade contexts have been referred to in various studies in South Africa, such as that of Ngubane (2013) and Ramrathan and Mzimela (2016). The findings of these studies suggest that the challenges experienced by teachers, namely, inadequate support by the Department of Education in terms of in-service training and resources required to meet the demands of multi-

grade teaching. The issue of inadequate support to multi-grade teachers is a global phenomenon, not only evident in South Africa (Grimes, 2019).

The significance of the study is that it seeks to produce findings that will contribute to current scholarly debates and knowledge in the field of multi-grade teaching and learning. According to Taole (2014), multi-grade teaching, especially in rural areas, receives little or no attention from the Department of Education. This reality often includes inadequate curriculum support, limited access to learning materials and limited opportunities for teacher pre- and in-service training (Joubert, 2010; Taole, 2014). The importance of this study lies in the interest to explore and understand teachers' experiences of teaching in multi-grade contexts, with a view of influencing relevant stakeholders to support this field.

Furthermore, this study is of significance for research purposes, as there is a dearth of research in this area (Little, 2001; Taole, 2014). Therefore, this study seeks to make a contribution towards growing this body of knowledge. In addition to understanding the challenges teachers encounter when teaching in multi-grade classes, this study also explored the manner in which they (teachers) navigated the challenges and took advantage of the opportunities. Several studies see for instance, Little (2001), Taole and Mncube (2012) and Taole (2014) have expressed negative views towards multi-grade teaching. This suggests that existing research evidence has presented limited positive experiences of teachers of multi-grade teaching. I therefore decided that this study will not only focus on the negative aspects of multi-grade, but also seek to explore and understand its positive experiences. This is an additional aspect that that this study seeks to explore.

What motivated me to conduct this study were my personal experiences of working with teachers at orientation workshops in the district. In group discussions, teachers teaching in multi-grade contexts have often reported difficulties in implementing what has been learned from workshops, citing various challenges. I listened to their stories in which they reported to have tried to voice out their challenges to training facilitators, who often could not provide insight into how their ideas, planning and curriculum could be applied to and implemented in multi-grade contexts. For subject advisors, it was a one size fits all; the training was not differentiated to empower teachers from different contexts. The training sessions were

especially biased towards monograde contexts. This then piqued my curiosity and interest to investigate experiences of teachers who were teaching in multi-grade contexts. It was my hope that, in some small way, especially in giving feedback to the teachers who were part of my study, participation in the study would make them feel less invisible and silenced, and that the research findings would improve awareness, discussion and continued research.

## 1.4 Focus of the study

The focus of this study is on the multi-grade phenomenon. Its specifically focuses on the experiences of teachers who are teaching in the multi-grade classroom in rural areas. Both negative and positive experiences of teachers are adressed in this study, further more it looks at the pedagical practices that teachers use in their teaching practices whether it enable or constrain learners' learning.

## 1.5 Aims and objectives of the study

The purporse of this study is to understand teachers' experiences of teaching multi-grade classroom. Apart from understanding the experiences of teachers of teaching in the multi-grade context the study also aims at contributing to the body of knowledge of multi-grade teaching and learning. Little (2001) maintained that there is a little research on multi-grade teaching, the objective of this study then is to expand the knowledge and understanding of the multi-grade phenomenon as it does not only focus on the negative aspects of multi-grade but further looks at the positive experiences as well.

## 1.6 Research questions

To obtain insights into the teachers' experiences of teaching in the multi-grade classes, the conduct of this study was underpinned by the following key research questions:

- What are the experiences of teachers teaching multi-grade classes in a rural context?
- What are the pedagogical practices of teachers teaching multi-grade classes?
- How do their pedagogical practices enable or constrain learning?

**1.7 Clarification of key concepts**

**1.7.1    Multi-grade teaching**

Birch and Lally (1995) contend that multi-grade teaching is difficult to conceptualise, mostly because there are different definitions in different contexts. For example, in Nepal, multi-grade teaching is referred to as a situation where teachers teach more than one grade, regardless of whether they are taught in one classroom simultaneously or not (Birch & Lally, 1995). Little (2001, p. 482) contends that multi-grade teaching is often referred to as 'one-teacher' schools; providing and understanding that, in the instance of multi-grade teaching, one teacher assumes many roles and functions that are often carried out by several teachers within a mono-grade context. Ramrathan and Mzimela (2016, p. 2) refer to the pedagogy that exists in multi-grade schools as "multi-group, multi-class or combination group teaching", which implies a situation where one teacher takes on what could be done by several teachers within a monograde context.

Within the South African context, Du Plessis (2014) has defined multi-grade teaching and learning as a situation in which learners of different ages, abilities and different grades are all taught by one teacher at the same time in one classroom. In most instances, Du Plessis (2014) argues, there may be little in the way of curriculum differentiation. Du Plessis (2014) argues that having to teach and learn in this manner is often borne more out of necessity than choice, as education authorities scramble for ways to provide learners in remote areas access to basic education. The critical aspects of this view are the circumstances or conditions which lead to the adoption of multi-grade teaching (Little, 2001). In South Africa, the resource provisioning model does not adequately accommodate resourcing requirements for schools with declining learner enrolment, such as in sparsely populated and rural areas. Therefore, declining numbers of learners often lead to school in rural areas, for instance, where multi-grade teaching is most prevalent, switching from mono-grade to multi-grade teaching in order to continue to exist and provide access to basic education the remaining learners.

For the purposes of this study, multi-grade teaching, as defined by Du Plessis (2014), has been adopted.

### 1.7.2 Monograde teaching

Monograde teaching, also known as single-grade teaching, refers to settings in which children of the same grade and comparative age group are grouped and taught together in their classroom, not mixed or combined with learners from other grades (The Southern African Development Community, 2000). Within a monograde context, learners are taught the same grade curriculum content at the same time (Little, 2001), which means that the teacher is responsible for only a single than a combination of grades at any single time (The Southern African Development Community, 2000).

### 1.7.3 Pedagogic practices

Pedagogic practices are essentially about the relationships and interactions that occur between teachers and learners and their environment (Murphy, 2012). Basil Bernstein (2003, p. 196) contends that pedagogic practices are a "cultural relay" of curriculum content. The suggests that the issue is not only the 'what', but also 'how' the content is transmitted in a classroom setting. The relationship or interaction between the teacher and the learner is of importance; however, it must be borne in mind that such a relationship is an asymmetrical (Bernstein, 2000).

### 1.8 The conceptual framework of this study

In order to explore and understand the experiences of teachers of teaching in the multi-grade classrooms, I adopted Bourdieu's Theory of Practice, focusing specifically on the concepts of capital, field and habitus. Bourdieu (1991) defines capital as resources specific to the field, from which actors aim to benefit. For this study, the notion of capital was useful in understanding what forms of capital multi-grade teachers possessed and resources these teachers had access to, which enabled them to negotiate the complexities of teaching within a multi-grade context. Bourdieu (1989) distinguishes among different forms of capital, namely, economic, cultural and social capital. In this study, I focused on cultural and social capital to describe and understand the ways in which teachers make their teaching experiences less arduous. These concepts of capital, field and habitus enabled me to analyse and understand how teaching within a multi-grade context shaped teachers' actions and behaviours. In trying to understand how context influenced what teachers could do, I worked with the underlying understanding that the knowledge that this study would produce, is a contextual and subjective one, and based on how

participants in the study understood and engaged with their experiences of teaching within a multi-grade context.

The ontological view outlined above is influenced by the theoretical concepts of capital, field and habitus as explained by Bourdieu (1991). The extent to which teachers could use their social and cultural capital to adapt to and change, for example, their pedagogical practices or relationships with learners is associated with the multi-grade context. Thus, teachers in this study possessed a sense of agency. Using the theory in and literature reviewed for this study, I understood the social world of the teachers as structured by an unequal distribution of power, where the powerless and marginalised groups, such as teachers in the multi-grade context (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017) are made invisible (Zondi, 2017).

Bernstein's notions of classification and framing (Bernstein, 2000) were employed in responding to the key research question: What are the teachers' pedagogic practices? Bernstein provided me with the useful concepts of classification of knowledge, where the knowledge that teachers taught could be classified into horizontal and vertical knowledge and the extent to which curriculum needs of learners and the official curriculum were met (Bernstein, 2000). Through these notions, I could explore how teachers selected, organised, sequenced, paced and evaluated the knowledge that they transmitted to learners. Epistemologically, this study assumed that, to gain this knowledge, a particular kind of relationship must be forged with the teachers. This was based on the understanding that teachers' own understandings were important and valued. The understanding of how reality and knowledge is conceptualised and understood within the critical paradigm was crucial for this study (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Zondi, 2018).

## 1.9 Methodological approach

In order to explore teachers' experiences of teaching in a multi-grade classroom, case study inquiry was employed. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (1997) and Romm (2015) maintain that a case study is a research method that investigates real life phenomenon in its natural context and strives to portray what is it like to be in a particular situation. The case study was used within the qualitative approach with the purpose of exploring the realities as experienced by the participants. Case studies also allow in-depth rich data to be gathered that provide insight into

teachers' experiences. The richness of the data was revealed by the understanding that participants' voices of their experiences of teaching in the multi-grade context have enabled me to understand the challenges and benefits of multi-grade teaching. It also highlighted the assistance and support that is needed to transform the conditions of teaching in the multi-grade context. Whilst this small-scale study cannot be transformative it is hoped that the findings from this study contribute to a wider body of knowledge that can potentially effect change in the future. Data was gained from semi- structured interviews as well as lesson observation.

## 1.10    Introducing the participants

This section provides a brief insight into the experiences of teachers who agreed to be the participants in this study. They were five in total consisting of four female teachers and one male teacher in the sampled multi-grade school. Only one of the participants has grown and live in the area with the other four originated in Durban. All of the four participants rented houses in the community that surrounded the school. This was important as qualitative case study calls for an examination of participants in their natural environment. In this way I could understand and view how teachers for example felt about teaching in this rural context given that they had intricate and first-hand knowledge of the context.

The following is a brief introduction of these participants whom I developed a strong relationship with and who helped me by providing knowledge of their experiences of teaching in a multi-grade context.

### Zakes

Zakes is the school principal and also a full-time teacher. Being a full-time teacher meant he had a full teaching load. Zakes has to wear many hats – as the principal he is responsible for the entire school. He is also a representative of the Department of Education and has to also be a full-time teacher. He is required to attend principals' meetings which are compulsory in order to stay informed and updated. He is also a class teacher for Grade 7 and also a Mathematics teacher to Grade 4, 5 and 6. He is a long-standing teacher at the school first coming as a post level 1 many years ago. He indicated that initially the school was a mono-grade school but that over the years this changed.

### Ngubane

Ngubane has been in this school for more than 15 years. She also came to this school while it was still mono-grade and it changed to multi-grade in her presence. She has a great deal of information about the school and knows almost all the members of the community surrounding the school. She treasured her ties with the broader community because she felt this was important for her learners. Ngubane was born in the area, but later relocated to Durban for personal reasons. Ngubane is the Grade 2 and 3 class teacher (teaching them Mathematics, isiZulu, English and Life skills). She also teaches isiZulu and Life Orientation in Grades 4, 5, 6 and 7.

### Cekwane

Cekwane is the teacher who lives in the area in which the school is located. Like Ngubane, she knows all the community members and every child in the school. At present she is studying towards her Honours degree at a recognized institution. She is one of the funniest participants that I grew to know. She constantly made jokes and made all of us laugh. She is physically active. In my informal observation, I would find her playing with the learners especially during the Physical Education (PE) lesson. She was also very creative, often coming up with new activities. She has a good relationship with the learners. She has taught at the school for the past 5 years. At present she is teaching Grade R and Grade 1. During PE periods she groups all the classes from the Foundation Phase and teaches them in this way.

### Dlamini

Dlamini has been in this school since 2012 and came to the school straight out of university. She was placed in the school by the Department of Education. She teaches Social Sciences to Grades 4, 5, 6 and 7 and Creative Arts to Grade 7. She is also a sports convener. In informal discussion she talked about how she was trying to get used to teaching in a multi-grade context.

### Kula

Kula is the English teacher for the Intermediate and Senior Phase in the school. She is from Durban and rents a rondavel at the back of the school. She started teaching in 2014 in the multi-grade context. This was also the only school that she has been at. She said she is still new and

is still learning. She loves children and has a good relationship with them. She is keen on helping learners to be able to communicate in English. She always encourages learners to use English in her class *"I am trying but it's not easy, they don't want to speak English but I won't give up".* Kula believed that the context affected her learners negatively citing a lack of exposure to things that could improve their language skills.

## 1.11    Structure of the dissertation

**Chapter 1:** This chapter provides an overview and states the research problem in which the study is anchored. In this chapter, specific reference is made to rationale, focus and aims of objectives of the study, as well as the key research questions, which guided the conduct of the study. The chapter concludes by providing an outline of the chapters in order to provide the reader with a map of the dissertation.

**Chapter 2:** The first part of this chapter provides a review of both national and international literature on multi-grade teaching. This focused especially on the reasons for the adoption of multi-grade approaches, experiences of teachers in multi-grade contexts and the pedagogic strategies that either constrain or enable teachers' ability to teach in these contexts.

The second part of this chapter discusses analyses and contextualises Bourdieu's Theory of Practice and Bernstein's notions of classification and framing, as a lens through which the experiences of teachers of teaching in the multi-grade contexts were explore, analysed, interpreted and understood in this study.

**Chapter 3:** This chapter provides a description and discussion of the methodological and design considerations that the researcher considered ensuring the proper conduct of the study. The discussion includes paradigmatic considerations, research strategy, data collection processes and tools, as well as limitations for the study and how these were moderated and ethical considerations undertaken to ensure the respect and protection of the participants.

**Chapter 4:** This chapter provides a description and analysis of the key findings of the study. In doing this, the chapter provides a sense of what findings emerged and what these mean for teachers teaching in multi-grade contexts. This presentation of the findings is guided by

different themes and sub-themes, drawn from the data itself, key research questions for this study, literature reviewed for this study, as well as conceptual framework set out earlier regarding how the findings and discussions must be understood in respect of this study.

**Chapter 5:** This chapter consolidates and highlights the key insights gained from the findings and conduct of this study.  It also provides a reflection of the appropriateness of the research methods and conceptual framework of the study. In addition, a summary of the key findings of the study is provided as well as recommendations for future research, arising largely from those aspects that were relevant, but lay beyond the scope of this study.

## 1.12    Conclusion

In this chapter, I provided an overview of the different aspects of this study. I further presented the aims and rationale of the study, followed by the clarification of key concepts, which formed the foundations of this study's efforts to understand the experiences of teachers teaching in multi-grade contexts. This was followed by a brief discussion of the conceptual and the methodological underpinnings of the study. A short introduction to the participants who voluntarily participated in the study was also provided. Finally, the structure of the dissertation was outlined.

The next chapter provides a review of national and global debates regarding multi-grade teaching. In addition, the chapter provides a discussion of Bernstein's pedagogic theory and Bourdieu's theory practice as a lens through which the findings and discussions in this study must be viewed, interpreted and understood.

# CHAPTER 2

# LITRATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

## 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present a review of both national and international literature on multi-grade teaching. I begin this chapter, firstly with a discussion of the history of multi-grade teaching nationally and internationally. This is followed by a contextualisation of multi-grade teaching within South African policy. I draw on both international and national literature which focuses on the experiences of teachers of teaching in multi-grade contexts. Finally, I discuss two theories that I have used as the conceptual framework to analyse, interpret and understand multi-grade teaching within the research context chosen for this study. The two theories discussed are Bernstein's pedagogic theory and Bourdieu's theory practice. Bernstein's theory was used to understand the pedagogical practices of teachers who teach multi-grade classes, while Bourdieu's theory of practice was used to understand and investigate teachers' experiences of teaching in multi-grade classes.

Multi-grade teaching is a national and international phenomenon. In South Africa, the presence of multi-grade schools has increased over the years. However, Brown (2009) and Taole (2014) argue that there is a paucity of research into the experiences and practices of teachers in multi-grade schools.

## 2.2 Multi-grade education: Choice versus necessity

According Birch and Lally (1995), multi-grade teaching has a long and complex history, as it has been offered by various countries for different reasons. Little (2001) has pointed out that multi-grade teaching is often positioned as a choice versus necessity phenomenon. Historical texts that Birch and Lally (1995) have looked at provide evidence that multi-grade teaching was introduced in Europe many decades ago. In the context of a multi-grade class in Europe, a teacher often taught learners of different ages, in a one-roomed school (Birch & Lally, 1995). However, no achievement or entrance tests were administered. Instead, learner achievement was measured by the teacher as the year progressed. Birch and Lally (1995) report that it was

often difficult to determine if this was a case of choice or necessity, and surmise that this might have been used as means to provide education to children.

However, in countries such as China and Nepal, multi-grade teaching has been compulsory (Birch & Lally, 1995). Birch and Lally (1995) have attributed the introduction of multi-grade schooling in these countries to colonial rule. Ramello (2003) concurs and points to the ideological underpinnings of colonialism. For instance, colonialists at the time sought to 'civilize' indigenous people through the introduction of their type of education. Education under colonial rule was often used as an ideological tool to create a Western orientated identity, steeped in power relationships and specific cultural meanings of civility and dominance (Ramello, 2003). Thus, in these countries, multi-grade education may have been introduced, as a necessity, to reach communities in deep rural contexts through education.

However, elsewhere in Islamic countries, for example, multi-grade education was practiced in religious schools, whereby schools took a decision to offer multi-grade education, based on their curriculum needs and the need to advance religion. This according to Little (2005) and Taole (2014) suggests that multi-grade teaching may be understood as a context-specific choice, depending on the country's motivation for developing schools. Mulaudzi (2016) has found similar instances in the developed world, where the underlying beliefs about the practice of multi-grade teaching was introduced for a multiplicity of reasons, such as learners' social development, pedagogical benefits and classroom cooperation (Mulaudzi, 2016).

Understanding multi-grade teaching in South Africa is a relatively complex endeavour. This is largely because of the history of apartheid, where access to education was often based on the perceived necessity for separateness. For instance, for Spaull (2015), this necessity for separateness was often based on racial grounds, with those at the lowest rung of the social ladder provided with low-quality education, characterised by poor cognitive demand. Within this framework of deliberate inadequate educational provisioning black communities in rural areas were forgotten and had no access to education. The remnants of this legacy still show in the disparities in educational provisioning today. Masinire, Maringe and Nkambule (2014) contend that, in South Africa, the democratic government, like its apartheid predecessor, continues to provide inadequate education to schools in rural contexts. Often, these schools are poorly

resourced, with poor infrastructure and lack of concern for quality education (Masinire, Maringe & Nkambule, 2014). This is often compounded by inconsistencies in policy and governance in these schools. Thus, disadvantage experienced by communities in remote areas during apartheid, in some cases, manifests in disparities in provisioning between multi-grade and mono-grade schools, which has exacerbated inequality to alarming levels (Taole, 2014).

Brown (2009) contends that, in South Africa, schools situated in rural areas have been disenfranchised more severely, owing to prolonged inadequate educational provision under the apartheid rule. For instance, in South Africa, rural areas are often an image of the histories and structures that have reinforced oppression, marginalisation, disadvantage and deprivation (Ababa, 2005). As pointed out by Little (2001), these are the areas where the majority of multi-grade schools are found. Over 8 million children of school-going age live in rural areas, with approximately 3 million in multi-grade classrooms (Joubert, 2010). Given severe manifestations of inequality in these areas, it is "unlikely that a learner in a multi-grade classroom will ever be able to compete with their peers in the towns and cities, they will never get even close to a tertiary institution and they will never become part of the country" (Joubert, 2010, p. 58). If anything, this suggests that a learner in a multi-grade classroom is likely to be confined to intergenerational poverty. This suggests that there is a need for significant investment in education in these schools in order to challenge embedded poverty in these areas and utilise access to quality education as a vehicle for providing a better life for communities in rural areas (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019).

However, it is important to understand that the democratic government has initiated interventions to respond to the crisis of education provisioning in multi-grade schools. With the demise of apartheid, one of the major priorities of the democratic government was to transform education (Department of Education, 1995). This commitment was demonstrated in the country's efforts to ensure that all its children had access to education as part of the Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) movement (Juvane, 2005). One of the ways in which government demonstrated this was through its decision to continue with multi-grade education as a means of ensuring access to education for children in remote areas (Taole, 2014). Thus, multi-grade teaching and learning in South Africa has been repositioned as a necessity as opposed to a choice (Birch & Lally, 1995; Little, 2001; Taole & Cornish,

2017). Whilst multi-grade teaching has been regarded as essential to government efforts of ensuring educational access, it has been marred with a myriad of challenges (Brown, 2010). For instance, geographical location, sparse populations and low pupil enrolments have often meant that schools cannot be resourced adequately through the current resourcing models. Instead, the current resourcing models have resulted in teachers being deployed away from multi-grade schools to more densely populated urban areas (Taole, 2014). This suggests that schools in rural areas, especially multi-grade schools, continue to be alienated, invisible and forgotten (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). This invisibility and alienation have resulted in a situation where very little has changed for learners and teachers in these schools, despite the constitutional promise of a better life for all.

## 2.3 Policy foundations for multi-grade teaching

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa guarantees access to the right to a basic education for everyone (Republic of South Africa, 1996). In South Africa, all education policies must be in line with the provisions of the Constitution. In addition, South African education policies have been influenced by a multitude of international conventions and agreements. According to Ndlovu (2014), the purpose of education legislation and policies in South Africa is to redress injustices and inequities and transform the education system into one that ensures access to education for all. In particular, the South African Schools Act of (1996) (SASA) seeks to ensure that schools are governed in a manner that expands access to education (Department of Education, 1996). This suggests that the aims and objectives of the SASA are to meet international policy intentions as well as ensure uninhibited enjoyment of the right to a basic education as enshrined in the Constitution.

The SASA of 1996 states that every child is entitled to access to quality education (Department of Education, 1996). This piece of legislation elevates the importance of quality education to the level above physical access to education. This Act provides a commitment to ensure that, no matter where the child is geographically, they have a right to access to quality education, not just physical access (Ndhlovu & Mestry, 2014). This is commitment is also evident in Education White Paper 6 on inclusive education, which articulates the commitment to ensure the early identification and removal of barriers to learning and development (Department of Education, 2001). For this vision of access to quality education for all, the role of teachers is crucial, for

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they are the ones who must ultimately provide access to this quality education at school level. However, despite this promise, education in multi-grade schools presents a contrasting picture, with very little towards access quality education, a matter that will be elaborated upon more comprehensively later in this dissertation.

The *Action Plan of 2014 – Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2025* recognises the challenges experienced by teachers in multi-grade contexts regarding inadequate guidance and support for effective curriculum implementation (Department of Basic Education, 2014). According to the sector plan, the design and organisation of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) poses challenges for multi-grade teachers, as it has been designed and organised for implementation in a mono-grade school context. The CAPS curriculum that is used by teachers in multi-grade context does not provide guidance on how it can be effectively mediate in multi-grade classrooms. Thus, appropriate guidance on curriculum implementation and provision of appropriate in-service training is vital if access to quality education must be a reality in multi-grade schools.

The Multi-Grade Strategy and Basic Education Sector Plan: Strengthening the provision of quality teaching and learning in multi-grade schools (Department of Basic Education, 2016), which provides a common direction recommends that national curriculum developers must differentiate curriculum and learning materials for multi-grade classes. According to the Sector Plan the differentiation of the curriculum and other teaching and learning materials is critically important for effective mediation by teachers in the multi-grade context.

## 2.4 Multi-grade schools in South Africa

The number of multi-grade schools, in the rural areas in particular, has increased significantly. According to the Report on the 2014 Annual Survey for ordinary public schools, there are approximately 5 153 schools with multi-grade classes in the basic system.

Table 1 below provides the number of schools with multi-grade classes per province.

| PROVINCE | PRIMARY SCHOOLS | COMBINED SCHOOLS | SECONDARY SCHOOLS | NO. OF SCHOOLS |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Eastern Cape | 1 008 | 758 | 45 | 1 811 |
| Free State | 282 | 30 | 4 | 316 |
| Gauteng | 33 | 1 | 0 | 34 |
| KwaZulu-Natal | 877 | 176 | 80 | 1 133 |
| Limpopo | 591 | 50 | 35 | 676 |
| Mpumalanga | 245 | 57 | 23 | 325 |
| Northern Cape | 138 | 10 | 1 | 139 |
| North West | 318 | 21 | 37 | 376 |
| Western Cape | 303 | 39 | 1 | 343 |
| TOTALS | 3 795 | 1 142 | 226 | 5 153 |

*Table 1: Number of public ordinary schools with multi-grade classes by province (**Source**: Annual School Survey 2014)*

The above table provides the number of schools that offer multi-grade education per province in South Africa. From the table, it is clear that there is a significant number of multi-grade schools in South Africa that has multi-grade classes. It is also a clear indication that the Department of Basic Education is aware of the number of multi-grade schools in the country. As pointed above, multi-grade education is a government response to ensure that learners in remote areas have access to a basic education (Ndhlovu & Mestry, 2014). In the table above, Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal have the highest number of schools with multi-grade classes, with 1 811 for the Eastern Cape and 1 133 for KwaZulu-Natal. Furthermore, the table shows that multi-grade teaching and learning occurs in both the primary and secondary schools. A possible explanation for the larger numbers of schools with multi-grade classes could be attributed to the fact that KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape are "rural provinces, with extreme pockets of poverty and agricultural activity representing a significant proportion of income" (Mulaudzi, 2016, p. 20).

## 2.5 The promise of access to quality education in  multi-grade schools

Despite the policy promises outlined above and the prevalence of multi-grade schools, Taole and Mncube (2012) have pointed out that the quality of education to which learners have access in multi-grade schools is questionable.  In their study that was conducted in multi-grade primary schools in the North West and Northern Cape provinces, Taole and Mncube (2012) have argued that multi-grade education compromises the quality of education. Whilst acknowledging Little's (2001) argument that often in remote or rural areas, multi-grade teaching is the only option available for providing access to basic education for learners, Taole and Mncube (2012)

and Mestry (2019) argue that physical access to education does not necessarily translate into quality education in these schools. That is, learners in these schools have physical access, but the quality of provisioning is often inadequate, resulting in the potential infringement of their right to a quality basic education (Mestry, 2019; Taole & Mncube, 2012). This situation is often exacerbated by the fact that many of these schools have been neglected and cannot be adequately resourced through the current resourcing models of the Department of Education.

Little (2001) and Msimanga (2019) have pointed out that failure by the Department of Education to differentiate multi-grade teaching from mono-grade teaching has resulted in negative repercussions for teachers who must work in these contexts. The inability of the Department of Education to understand and address the specific needs of these schools has translated into a lack of support for teachers who must teach in multi-grade contexts. According to Condy and Blease (2014), conditions in multi-grade schools have been brought about by the one size fits all approach that has been adopted by the Department of Education in resourcing and supporting schools and teachers. This inadequate provisioning is also as a result of the lack of support and unreasonable expectations, which have worsened by the evaluation of teachers' performance using criteria applicable to monograde contexts (Little, 2001; Ramrathan, 2016). For instance, within a multi-grade context, conditions often do not permit teachers to individualise teaching and this lack of clear guidance on the implementation of grade combinations has severely constrained the abilities of teachers to perform their duties effectively (Condy & Blease, 2014; Khan, 2016). According to Condy and Blease (2014), multi-grade education is a way of life for most rural communities, but that does not suggest that children's right to quality education must be violated. They then call for the Department of Education to assist teachers in these schools.

## 2.6 Factors influencing multi-grade teaching in South African

### 2.6.1 Geographical location

According to the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC), Resolution 4 of 1995, the pupil-teacher ratio in public ordinary primary schools is 1:40 (Education Labour Relations Council, 1995). This means that in order for the school to be allocated a teacher, there should be a minimum of 40 learners per class. If the number of learners is below 40, that school will not be entitled to a teacher. However, Haingura (2014) argues that for schools in rural contexts, it is

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almost impossible to have 40 learners for one grade. This has also been reported in the studies by Hargreaves (1999), Simpson (2016) and Taole and Cornish (2017), which found that in rural areas, a scarcity of learners in the area, overall low population density and a decreasing teacher-learner ratio, has imposed the introduction of multi-grade schools. For these reasons, multi-grade teaching, as Brown (2010) and Haingura (2014) indicate, is viewed as an option rather than a choice. This suggests that, in this context, children who live in these areas are provided access to primary education, especially in schools where the number of learners per grade does not entitle their school to an additional teacher. To be exact, the introduction of multi-grade education in these communities is the government's way of providing access to education. For this reason, Beihammer and Hascher (2015) have maintained that multi-grade teaching is a common feature of rural areas.

Rural areas are often inaccessible spaces, where households often stay far away from the school. As a result, some of learners must walk long distances to and from school (Taole & Cornish, 2017). Whilst some learners make the long journey to school, teachers do not find multi-grade teaching attractive. Thus, many multi-grade schools almost always experience shortages of adequately qualified teachers. Teachers often are reluctant to accept appointments in rural areas, as they feel that multi-grade teaching is excessive and over-burdening (Khan, 2016). Haingura (2014) and Condy and Blease (2014) have, based on this fact, argued that this could be the reason for the conditions in multi-grade schools. The experiences of both learners and teachers in rural contexts and the insurmountable realities make it difficult to ensure that every child has uninhibited access to the right to basic education, as enshrined in the Constitution (Republic of South Africa, 1996). Although government has provided and enabled access to education, such access often does not consider what occurs in reality, which often goes against the constitutional and legislative promises. The multitude of inequalities that plague schools in rural areas are still evident at present (Nkambule, Balfour, Pillay & Moletsane, 2011; Msimanga, 2017). Despite programmes that have been implemented by government to support rural education, up to this moment there has been no significant change in the issues evolving from rural education (Msimanga, 2019).

### 2.6.2   Economic factors

The practice of multi-grade teaching is further entrenched by of the socio-economic status of households (Beihammer & Hatcher, 2015). Often, parents in the rural areas are unemployed or under-employed, and have little or no income to send their children to urban schools or monograde schools, where they must fork out money for school fees and transport (Sampson & Condy, 2016). This has also been reported in study conducted in Asia by Jimmy and Melinda (2019), which found that children attending multi-grade schools were often those from socio-economically deprived contexts, isolated and financially challenged communities. Therefore, in these areas, multi-grade teaching is a normal feature of community life. Multi-grade education has often been viewed as a means for stabilising sizes of learning groups in areas with small populations and constant emigration to urban areas (Beihammer & Hascher, 2015; Molokoane & Ndadane, 2014). Beihammer and Hascher (2015) have made an additional point arguing that this was a preventative measure to ensure that schools in the rural areas are not closed.

## 2.7 Teachers' experiences of teaching in multi-grade classes

The literature reviewed suggests that teachers' experiences of teaching in multi-grade classes are largely negative. In this section, I present a review of aspects of both negative and positive experiences of teachers teaching multi-grade classes.

### 2.7.1   Challenges of teaching multi-grade

According to Heather (2014), challenges in multi-grade teaching do not exist because of multi-grade education itself. The challenges of multi-grade teaching are located within the education system that values mono-grade more than multi-grade teaching. For instance, within the South African context, there is no or very little support provided by the Department of Education regarding multi-grade teaching. This lack of support, according to Ramrathan and Ngubane (2011), compels teachers to rely on their agency. According Taole (2014), inequalities have been created between the two settings, where multi-grade is treated as if it does not exist, despite its critical contribution in ensuring that children in remote areas have access to education. The invisibility of being in a multi-grade context has implications for what teachers can do. For instance, such invisibility often means that the challenges teachers experience go unnoticed or unheard by the Department of Education and support for these teachers is non-existent

(Ramrathan & Ngubane, 2011; Taole, 2014). Not only is this experienced in relation to the human resources required in the form of expertise, knowledge and skills; it is also in relation to material resources (Moletsane, 2012).

A study conducted in the province of North West, South Africa, by Hlalele (2014) revealed that teachers in multi-grade contexts often feel neglected and forgotten. What is critical from the findings of this study was that teachers questioned their lack of visibility and support and why teachers in mono-grade schools received support, despite the fact that their contexts were much better (Hlalele, 2014). This persistent neglect by the Department of Education of the challenges facing multi-grade schools has contributed to the on-going marginalisation of the poor (Hlalele, 2014). Teachers in this study also reported that the kinds of support that were required were far different to those received by teachers in mono-grade contexts. The valuing of mono-grade teaching at the expense of multi-grade teaching has become entrenched, positioning it in quite contradictory ways: firstly, as inferior to mono-grade teaching; and, secondly, as a necessity to the provision of education for learners in rural areas, albeit lacking in quality and a necessity as opposed to no education. Thus, multi-grade teaching and learning must be understood as a complex issue requiring multifaceted response.

A study conducted by Grimes (2019) in Ireland revealed significantly high levels of dissatisfaction from multi-grade teachers who felt that they were not adequately supported by pre- and in-service programmes, offered by Higher Education Institutions (HEI). The study conducted by Grimes (2019) reveals that teachers often experience challenges when they are placed in multi-grade contexts, as the practice that is required to operate in multi-grade contexts is completely out of sync with the training they received at tertiary institutions. This challenge is often further escalated when the continuing teacher professional development programmes provided by the Department of Education is biased towards mono-grade contexts. Hence, the Multi-Grade Strategy and Basic Education Sector Plan (Department of Basic Education, 2016) recommends that pre- and in-service training must be designed and presented in such a way that multi-grade teachers are equipped with the requisite skills and knowledge.

It must be noted, however, that recently the Department of Education has recognised the fact that teachers teaching in multi-grade classes require additional support (Department of Basic

Education, 2014), and have since rolled out a strategic plan to improve the curriculum implementation in multi-grade schools in the form of a multi-grade toolkit. The Department of Education's Annual Report (Department of Basic Education, 2015, p. 65) presented the multi-grade toolkit as represented in Figure 1 below. With this toolkit, the Department of Basic Education intends to strengthen support for teachers who are teaching in multi-grade contexts.



*Figure 1: Components of the Multi-grade Toolkit (Source: Department of Basic Education Annual Report 2015-2016)*

In providing support to teachers in multi-grade contexts, the Department of Education has developed components of the toolkit, as illustrated in Figure 1 above, as a means to assist teachers to deal with the challenges they encounter when teaching multi-grade classes. The toolkit has specific teaching and learning resources designed to improve learning and teaching in multi-grade contexts. It is hoped that most of the challenges experienced by teachers will be eliminated, since the toolkit contains resources that are necessary for ensuring that teaching is effective and of a high quality (Department of Education, 2015). According to the 2015-2016 Annual Report of the Department of Basic Education, the implementation of this toolkit commenced with the training of the subject advisors and teachers (Department of Basic Education, 2016). The Report revealed that by 2015, there were 1 046 subject advisors and 1 251 teachers who received the training on multi-grade teaching and utilisation of the toolkit (Department of Basic Education, 2016). However, its success has yet to be explored as it has recently been introduced.

**2.7.1.1 Policy and practice nexus**

Currently, there is no curriculum policy that focuses directly on the implementation of multi-grade education. However, this is not peculiar to South Africa; it is a global phenomenon. Engin (2018) conducted a study in the Netherlands and found that teachers reported that they were not provided with adequate support and that the national curriculum tended to favour monograde or single-grade contexts. This had an adverse effect as it compelled teachers to implement an educational policy, which did not consider their contextual realities.

In the South African context, the same reality is true. The Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) and the previous National Curriculum Statement (NCS) assume a monograde classroom (Du Plessis, 2014; Joubert, 2010) and no mention is made of multi-grade contexts. This presents a huge challenge for teachers in multi-grade contexts (Ngubane, 2011). Hlalele (2014) concurs with Ngubane's (2011) contention, arguing that the imposing of the assumptions of the mono-grade curriculum on multi-grade contexts creates problems for teachers, as they have the burden of modifying and adapting it to the multi-grade context. Often, teachers in South Africa do not possess the skills and knowledge required to perform this task. This has to be done even though teachers have not been trained on how to do this and may thus find it difficult to implement the curriculum.

In the study by Hlalele (2014), on multi-grade teaching in the province of North West, South Africa, teachers reported spending significant amounts of time trying to reorganise the curriculum to suit their context. The result was that a significant amount of teaching time was used up attempting to redesign a curriculum that was not meant for implementation in their context. Taole (2014) has pointed out that, apart from a curriculum that is designed for a mono-grade classroom, teachers also faced a curriculum that considered an urbanised geographical location as the norm. This idea was also supported by Beihammer and Hascher (2015) and Brown (2010), who pointed out that having to redesign the national curriculum to suit the multi-grade context and their learners' educational needs burdened teachers unnecessarily and diverted them from the core of their work.

For ordinary teachers, this was challenging and unnecessarily complicated their work as they have not been trained as curriculum designers and there is no guidance on how to redesign and

contextualise the curriculum to their context. The repercussions of this for teachers' well-being are significant (Taole, 2014). For instance, the inability of teachers in the Eastern Cape to make sense of and adequately adapt the curriculum to meet their learners' educational needs often resulted in stress and anxiety (Taole, 2014). Their lack of knowledge of how to properly re-design and adapt the curriculum had often led to burnout and can also account for teachers' unwillingness to teach in multi-grade contexts (Taole, 2014; Titus, 2004).

Whilst Taole (2014) has conducted studies in South Africa, which is a developing context, stress and burnout were also reported in studies conducted in developed contexts, such as the Netherlands, where teachers in a study conducted by Engin (2018) reported that lack of access to necessary curriculum support was detrimental to their mental well-being. Burnout was also reported by teachers in the study conducted by Titus (2004) in the Netherland, where teachers could not make the required adaptations. This severely affected learning outcomes and achievement (Titus, 2004), which in turn influenced teachers' attitudes towards their work. This suggests that teachers teaching multi-grade classes may have been neglected marginalisation across the world, leading to the positioning of multi-grade teaching and learning as problematic rather than helpful.

A study by Ramrathan (2016) found that teachers did not receive the required support from the Department of Education and rendered what they were experiencing daily as invisible. Their struggles to cope and manage teaching and learning, therefore, continues to go unanswered and unsupported, often resulting in the further marginalising of learners and disempowering teachers. Heather (2014) concurs and maintains that both teachers and children in multi-grade context have been relegated to the margins of the education system and are invisible in the eyes of those who are responsible for planning, managing and funding education.

Studies conducted by, for example, Little (2001), Joubert (2010) and Hlalele (2014) report that the Department of Education has consistently been unable to provide teachers with the required support. This lack of support has manifested in the inadequacy of orientation or in-service workshops, whose purpose must be to provide educational support to teachers (Taole, 2014; Taole and Mncube, 2012). Often these workshops have not catered for the training needs of teachers working within multi-grade contexts (Engin, 2018; Grimes, 2019). Hence, teachers in

multi-grade contexts have often expressed dissatisfaction with pre and in-service training sessions conducted by the Department of Education.

The above discussion suggests that these teachers have almost always been left with a burden of a curriculum that has not been contextualised to the requirements of their contexts. This flies at the face of the promises of access to education that has been made in the Constitution and legislation such as the South African Schools Act. In a context marred by such challenges, access is necessary for both the learner and the teacher. It is for this reason that Taole (2014) argues for a national curriculum that acknowledges the differences between multi- and mono-grade educations, and consider these on the basis of contextual realities of each.

For teachers to be forced to implement a curriculum in a multi-grade context, a context that is experiencing such issues as shortages of teachers, resources and support, signals the poverty of the fulfilment of the aspirations of the National Curriculum Statement and the Constitution. It sadly points to the absence of the actualisation of the principles that underpin our democracy, namely, equality, human dignity and social justice (Republic of South Africa, 1996). Instead, the gap between the kind of education and schooling experienced by learners who attend multi-grade schools is vastly different to that offered in mono-grade schools.

In many instances, as can be discerned in the above discussion, this has resulted in both teachers and parents believing that multi-grade education is 'second class', the last resort for the poorest and something from which we must run away, as soon as we can (Khan, 2016; Razek, 2012; Taole & Cornish, 2017). The way teachers feel about being deployed to schools practising multi-grade teaching has often resulted in the teachers calling on their teacher unions to contest their deployment to these schools (Khan, 2016). The challenging conditions of teaching in multi-grade schools had resulted in teachers shunning rural schools. In the same vein, conditions in multi-grade schools are likely to lead to high turnover rates, with many teachers trying by all means not to stay for long time in these schools, or even find ways not to be appointed there in the first place (Hlalele, 2014).

Du Plessis (2014), Mortazavizadeh, Nili, Isfahin and Hassani (2017) and Engin (2018) have suggested that multi-grade teachers must be provided with specialised and particularised

support that is relevant to their context. According to Du Plessis (2014) and Mortazavizadeh et al. (2017), such kind of support will enable teachers to deal with the requirements of a changing curriculum, which will contribute to quality teaching and learning. Du Plessis (2014) contends that the lack of support for teachers in multi-grade may be as a result of the fact that subject advisors themselves do not have the required knowledge and skills to support teachers with multi-grade teaching That is, in the same manner that teachers have not been trained to teach multi-grade classes, so have subject advisors. The result then is a toxic mix that helps to systematise and institutionalise inequality (Du Plessis, 2014).

### 2.7.1.2 Parental involvement, participation and support

Within multi-grade contexts, parental support is often absent (Condy, 2016). This, according to Sampson and Condy (2016), is due to the environment in which these schools are located. In this study, conducted in Western Cape, parents were illiterate and were farm workers, working long hours (Sampson & Condy, 2016). Given this situation, for them, assisting their children with schoolwork was often a challenge, as they were tired and could not pay attention to their children's educational needs. In addition to this, Sampson and Condy (2016) found that some of the learners stayed with grandparents, who were often unable to assist them with their schoolwork. This, according to Du Plessis (2014), potentially results in the neglect of children's education.

Apart from the lack of support from parents for their children's education, Beihammer and Hascher (2015) and Khan (2016) have found that parents often do not support multi-grade education. They maintain that richer parents often make the decision to move their children to mono-grade schools, even though this may lead to additional costs related relating to, for instance, transporting their children to these schools. This suggests that some parents may have realised that the quality of education provided in multi-grade schools is inadequate and does not promote improvement. For this reason, they have developed negative attitudes towards multi-grade teaching (Khan, 2016). This decision has had adverse effects on learner enrolments at these schools, worsening their resource challenges. From this perspective, it is evident that multi-grade education is perceived as second best and is often the last resort for parents (Taole & Cornish, 2017; Mulaudzi, 2016).

**2.7.1.3 Teacher workloads**

Attempts to implement a curriculum meant for single-grade or mono-grade to a multi-grade context has led to many challenges for schools and teachers (Engin, 2018; Dewayne & Masson, 2018; Taole, 2014). One of the challenges is unreasonable teacher workloads, due to a more complex and often educationally unsound combination of grades teachers are expected to teach within a poorly-resourced multi-grade context. For instance, this issue of workload was reported in the study conducted by Du Plessis (2014) in schools in the Eastern Cape. When this happens, teachers often find themselves having to perform a greater number of duties associated with teaching and having to plan, prepare and teach educationally unsound combinations of grades (Engin, 2018; Dewayne & Masson, 2018; Taole, 2014).

Research conducted by Heather (2014) and Blease and Condy (2015) in the Western Cape found that multi-grade teachers were faced with challenges, especially when they had to plan for more than one grade. A significant amount of time was not spent on teaching and learning, but on re-organising and restructuring the curriculum, trying to understand the implementation of a curriculum meant for a mono-grade in a multi-grade context and developing materials that are supposed to have provided to make them suitable to a multi-grade context (Heather, 2014). Heather's (2014) findings reveal that having to re-organise the curriculum often leaves teachers stranded, overwhelmed and uncertain, since they have not been provided with any policy guidance or training in this regard. Teachers working in multi-grade contexts often work in isolation, away from other teachers, which compounds their feelings of uncertainty and weakened professional capability.

When teachers work in isolation, this results in them having to spend significant amount of time, after school and during weekends, trying to make sense of the curriculum to meet the educational needs of their learners. This increases the teachers' workloads and may lead to burnout, constant uncertainty and feelings of worthlessness, which negatively impacts their personal lives (Heather, 2014). Lack of support from subject advisors and other departmental officials often results in increased feelings of disempowerment and unpreparedness and the struggle to manage their work on their own (Du Plessis, 2014). This has been illustrated in Engin (2018) who has argued that multi-grade teachers often must work excessively, but never really achieve what anything worth their effort. The other issue of concern in these contexts is

the administrative work that teachers must perform in the absence of administrative support. There are consequences to the excessive teaching workload as illustrated in Kivunja and Sim's (2015) study, conducted in schools in Uganda, which reported that high levels of stress for teachers inevitably compromises the quality of teaching and learning.

Du Plessis (2014) further indicates that not only is greater teacher workload experienced, but multi-grade teaching itself consumes significant amounts of time. Teachers not only must prepare for many grades in one; they must also teach it within a specified time allocation of one period or 90 minutes, which undermines teachers' attempts to accommodate the diverse needs of learners. Teachers in the study by Du Plessis (2014) reported that time allocation made it impossible to teach a combination of three different grades effectively. This often resulted in content, knowledge and skills required for each grade being left out to keep pace with prescribed teaching plans. For the teachers in the study by Du Plessis (2014), teaching more than one grade presented as the biggest challenge, as it prevented them from dedicating sufficient time with each grade (Beihammer & Hascher, 2015). This inability of teachers to dedicate sufficient time to learners compromised the quality teaching and learning teachers could provide and this had severe consequences for learners' access to education (Beihammer & Hascher, 2015).

Apart from teaching multiple grades in one class, there are other roles that multi-grade teachers must perform, this applicable especially for principals. The shortage of teachers often results in principal of multi-grade schools assuming a full workload, in addition to their duties in respect of effective administration of the school (Gasa, 2016). For instance, principals of these schools often must attend to visitors, parents and attend departmental meetings, in addition to serving as subject teachers. According to Gasa (2016), these demands may negatively impact their ability to manage their schools and take care of the well-being of their teachers. When the attention of these principals is focused on these activities, their learners are likely to lose out on learning opportunities, when their principals, who carry the same teaching load as their teachers, are not there to teach them.

Using time allocations designed for mono-grade contexts makes it difficult for teachers to complete the curriculum, and learning that occurs is often weak and inadequate. The findings in Zuma's (2015) study, conducted in a farm school of KwaZulu-Natal, concur that teachers in

multi-grade schools do not have sufficient time to cover all the work for grades within a single year. According to Zuma (2015), this is because teachers often have too many responsibilities, such as preparing lessons for multiple grades, redesigning content to suit multi-grade contexts, and attending continuing teacher development workshops. Often engaging in some of these activities results in the closure of the entire school (Zuma, 2015). Departmental workshops are often held in the urban areas, far away from multi-grade schools, which suggest that often teachers must travel long distances to attend, which compels them to close the school as there are insufficient numbers of teachers left to look after the learners. This then affects the amount and quality of teaching and learning that eventually happens in these schools.

## 2.7.1.4 Continuing professional teacher development

Multi-grade teachers are often provided with inadequate and inappropriate professional development, based on the assumptions of mono-grade settings. Literature reveals (see, for example, Bantwini & Feza, 2017; Bantwini & Moorosi, 2017; Engin, 2018; Kivunja, 2015) that pre-service or in-service training to teach in multi-grade classroom is virtually non-existent. These studies, conducted nationally and internationally, point to the fact that teachers require formal training to equip them with the pedagogical skills, practices as well as strategies for teaching in multi-grade classrooms. The studies by Titus (2004) and Kivunja (2015) indicate that teachers in multi-grade context often must work without support and that their teaching lacks the essential methodological aspects required to support learners.

For instance, teachers in Bantwini and Moorosi's (2017) study expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of continuing professional development opportunities in this critical area (Bantwini & Moorosi, 2017). Findings of this study revealed that there are professional and personal repercussions for teachers who are not provided with adequate and appropriate professional development opportunities. On a professional level, teachers were held accountable for learner results as well as curriculum coverage. However, this led to teachers feeling as if they were failures, when they could not meet the professional demands of their work (Bantwini & Moorosi, 2017; Engin, 2018). Furthermore, teachers recognised the negative consequences of the lack of exposure to appropriate professional development programmes.

Teachers are aware of the negative effects, as reported by teachers in Zambia in Kivunja's (2015) study, this had on quality education received by their learners. For teachers in Kivunja's (2015) study, this meant that teachers' lack of access to appropriate professional development and their subsequent inability to provide quality education often meant that their learners could not compete effectively with their counterparts from mono-grade settings. The findings of this research study point to the importance of the points made in the *Sector Plan* and *Revised Five-Year Strategic Plan* of the Department of Basic Education that the professional development of teachers, which focuses on training teachers in relevant teaching methodologies, effective teaching approaches and assessment strategies, will benefit both teachers and learners (Department of Basic Education, 2015).

The lack of training and acquisition of skills necessary for multi-grade teaching is exacerbated, according to Heather (2014), by universities and colleges of education that do not train teachers for teaching in such contexts, despite the fact that almost 30% of schools in rural areas have multi-grade classes. The lack of training that Heather (2014) refers to has been reported in the study by Grime (2019), which sought to understand teachers' perceptions of multi-grade teaching in Ireland. The study revealed that newly appointed teachers often experienced difficulty working in the multi-grade contexts (Grime, 2019). This suggests that there is often a struggle to reconcile theoretical knowledge acquired at university with the realities of multi-grade settings.

The reason for the above is that often focus at universities and colleges is on pedagogical skills applicable to mono-grade contexts. Heather (2014) argues that limited teacher preparedness at universities has become a permanent and expected feature of education. Heather (2014) concludes that multi-grade teaching is, as a result, not respected and failure to respond to professional development needs of teachers in these contexts often renders multi-grade teaching invisible and less-than. This lack of support results in the further marginalisation of learners who are already vulnerable, owing to a range of other factors, for instance, their geographical location. These findings were evident in the Report of the Task Team for the Review of the Implementation of the Curriculum, which acknowledged that there had been no specific training that had been provided to multi-grade teachers (Department of Basic Education, 2009). In addition, the findings of this investigation also highlighted the fact that there was inadequate

policy guidance for teachers teaching in multi-grade contexts (Department of Basic Education, 2009).

Taole (2014) argues that a negative attitude towards multi-grade teaching is inculcated as soon as teacher training and other institutions do not prepare and empower teachers adequately for the realities of multi-grade classroom. This often manifests in teachers' unwillingness to be placed in schools located in rural areas, because they dread the challenges and realities of teaching multi-grade classes (Brown, 2009; Taole & Cornish, 2017). That is, they believe that teaching in multi-grade contexts is often characterised with difficulties and less satisfying (Kyne, 2004). The poor working conditions, compounded by challenges of geographical location, inadequate training and development opportunities, lack of support from parents and the Department of Education often fuels the negative attitude that teachers develop towards multi-grade teaching.

Kivunja and Sims (2015) point out that lack of adequate support for teachers in multi-grade context has resulted in some of them viewing multi-grade teaching as a swim or sink reality. This is exacerbated by the perceptions that teaching in multi-grade contexts often burdens teachers with unreasonable workloads and expects them to navigate this maze without the assistance of those who have the responsibility to do so. For teachers, lack of adequate support results in them developing hardened attitudes towards multi-grade teaching. Little (2001) has highlighted lack of proper training as a hindrance towards excellence for teachers teaching in multi-grade schools. Little (2001) argues that this is due to the lack of specific training, which will prepare and equip teachers with relevant pedagogical skills. This has also been highlighted by Taole (2014) and Du Plessis (2014) who argue that teachers are often unprepared for the realities they will face in multi-grade contexts. This lack of support, especially from the Department of Education, college and university training institutions, has repercussions for the quality of education children receive from multi-grade contexts.

### 2.7.1.5 Access to resources for multi-grade effective teaching

Lack of resources is another challenge faced by multi-grade teachers. Most multi-grade schools, according to Joubert (2010), are categorised as Quintile 1 schools. The Department of Education categorised schools according to five rankings, in which Quintile 1 schools are the

poorest schools serving poor communities, and Quintile 5 are the richest schools (Hall & Giese, 2009). Often, the quality of education in Quintile 1 schools is poor due to a range of reasons, for instance, lack of learning and teaching support materials (Bantwini, 2017; Moletsane, 2012).

Multi-grade schools, especially those in the rural areas, are often faced with a range of challenges, such as shortages of textbooks and inadequate infrastructure. These schools are also difficult to resource through the current models, and the funding they receive cannot meet their needs (Taole, 2014). This largely due to, for instance, the fact that the formula for the allocation to schools in terms of the National Norms and Standards for School Funding (NNSSF) is depends on learner enrolment (Department of Education, 1998). The fact that multi-grade schools have smaller learner enrolments means that their allocation is likely to be small and unable to buy them the necessary services and products. This reality was revealed in the study conducted by Bantwini (2017) in rural schools in Eastern Cape, where findings revealed that the school being studied had inadequate infrastructure and human resources provisioning. This lack of required resources worsens teacher attitude towards these schools (Taole & Cornish, 2017), as pointed out by Hlalele (2017) and Taole and Cornish (2017). For this study, not only did the schools reveal challenges with human resource provisioning and infrastructure; access to technology for these schools was inadequate. Not having access to technologies, such as computers and internet, meant that learners could not participate effectively in the world.

In South Africa, findings of studies conducted by Heather (2014) and Msimanga (2019) reveal that textbooks used in South African multi-grade classes are problematic since they are not designed and written for learners in multi-grade contexts. Taole (2014) and Ramrathan and Ngubane (2016) contend that, currently, materials used in schools have been designed for mono-grade settings. When teachers use materials that are designed for use in mono-grade settings in multi-grade contexts, this undermines the efforts of teachers to provide quality education for their learners. This, according to Ramrathan and Mzimela (2016), compromises the quality of teaching and learning, because teachers do not usually have knowledge of how to use these materials to teach effectively in these contexts. This implies that there is a need to recognise and appreciate the uniqueness and diversity of multi-grade contexts.

An additional factor that makes teaching difficult is that learning and teaching support materials (LTSM) provided to teachers in a multi-grade classes does not come with guidance on they must be used in these contexts. This silence is even more detrimental in that it does not provide teachers with direction on how to adapt materials to suit their context. This was revealed in a study conducted by Ramrathan (2016) in Ndwedwe, KwaZulu-Natal province, where findings of the study confirmed that these schools were under-resourced. This lack of resources often compels teachers to rely on their agency, especially when taking decisions on the use of appropriate materials and equipment to ensure quality learning and teaching. Msimanga's (2019) study, conducted in Free State, found that even though the availability of resources has improved significantly in rural schools, this was still insufficient. In addition, the issue of textbooks that are designed for mono-grade being used in the multi-grade context was also raised as a challenge in the study.

For teachers, the challenges they experience in multi-grade schools often prevent them from excelling and undermine effective teaching and learning (Msimanga, 2014; Taole & Hlalele, 2014). Thus, this may suggest that challenges in multi-grade teaching are troubling both teachers and learners.

### 2.7.2   Benefits of multi-grade teaching

Literature reveals that multi-grade teaching and learning often takes place in small village schools. Despite the challenges discussed above, Bruno (2013), working in Australia, argues that there are benefits to teaching and learning within a multi-grade context. These studies, however, have been conducted in contexts that are different from South Africa, namely, Australia and Canada. As discussed in the previous section, a significant body of literature has focused on negative perspectives on multi-grade education. Therefore, there have not been many studies that focus on the positive aspects or enabling experiences of multi-grade teaching and learning.

Some of the positive aspects of multi-grade learning and teaching have been revealed in the study by Heather (2014), who pointed out that multi-grade settings enabled learners to develop cognitive skills, due to the support they receive from their older peers within the same classroom. This was also reported in the study conducted by Checchi, Daniele, De Paola and

Maria (2017) who asserted that multi-grade learning benefitted younger learners who were in the same class as older learners who had done the grade(s) they are doing. However, they maintain that the older learners may be affected negatively if they are compelled to interact with those at the level of skills below theirs (Checchi et al., 2017).

The above is thus a tricky situation to negotiate. Being able to learn and develop cognitive skills from older peers may lighten the teacher's load and improve the performance of the learners concerned (Heather, 2014). Checchi et al. (2017) report that teachers in their study attempted to ensure that older learners were not disadvantaged by low cognitive demand, often providing them with work at their grade level. Heather (2014) further found that a multi-grade context potentially enabled learners to develop independence and assume responsibility for their own learning. One could then argue that when learners become independent, the teachers' feelings of being overwhelmed by a multitude of expectations in respect of curriculum, learners, parents and management for teachers may be lessened.

This idea has also been confirmed by Smith and Engeli (2015) in a study conducted in Australia, who point out that when younger and older learners work together on writing texts, older children tend to hone their understanding of writing skills through correcting younger peers work. The study conducted by Sampson (2016) in Western Cape, South Africa, has corroborated these findings. However, this study has, in addition, found that the level of literacy for younger children may be developed when learning within a multi-grade class. A further benefit has been in Quail and Smyth's (2014) study conducted in Ireland, which found that teaching multi-grade classes may provide teachers with an opportunity of getting to know their learners better. This is because a teacher often spends two or more years with the same group of learner's multi-grade setting. This then provides the teachers with extended periods of getting to know and understand their learner's individuality and develop sound ways to provide them with the necessary academic, emotional and social support.

Other advantages of teaching multi-grade classes, as reported by Smith and Engeli (2015), are that multi-grade teaching may make access to education possible, where it may be impossible to provide education in conservative ways. This is extremely important issue since countries globally are working towards EFA (Smith & Engeli, 2015). For millions of children, access to

education is through multi-grade education, as these schools are commonly found in disadvantaged and marginalised contexts, where mono-grade schooling is not feasible. Angela (2012) concurs that in these areas, it does not matter whether the school is multi-grade or mono-grade; what matters is whether there is a school or not. Thus, physical access made possible by multi-grade schools, benefits learners educationally.

The socio-emotional development of learners may also be enhanced in multi-grade classes. This is because learners often spend two or more years together, taught by single teacher. Therefore, it is easy for them to find study friends, which helps to improve their self-study skills and help each other (Little, 2001). Enayati, Zameni and Movaheidian (2016), in their study conducted in Mazandaran province, Iran, revealed that student's socio- emotional behaviour in a multi-grade context is often accelerated and their friendship patterns and personal and social adjustment becomes easier. This is because the approach that is often adopted in the multi-grade context is learner-centred. For these reasons, learners have the opportunity to develop their self-esteem and work closely with their peers, which may enable them to develop their social and emotional well-being.

## 2.8 Teaching methods used by teachers in multi-grade classrooms

In looking at the various methods that teachers use to ensure effective learning and teaching in multi-grade classrooms in Netherlands, Quail and Smyth (2014) revealed that one of the most important things to do is to encourage children to regularly work as individuals, contrary to mono-grade classes where teachers use mostly group work. However, Little (2001) has argued that in multi-grade classrooms, teachers must use a variety of teaching strategies and methods in order in providing support to learners. For teachers, using a variety of teaching methods will assist given the fact that their classes consist of learners of different levels in terms of age, abilities and grade. Regardless of a teacher's context, their role is always to ensure that teaching and learning is conducive and accommodating to all learners.

International studies, for example, Saqlain (2015), Quil and Smyth (2014) and Smith & Engeli (2015), provide insights into teaching methods that are useful for multi-grade classes. The effectiveness of these teaching approaches, for example, group work, paired work, individual work, learner centred strategies, however, reflects the amount and quality of support that multi-

grade schools receive. This then leaves multi-grade teaching in South African contexts questionable, as studies (see for example, Du Plessis, 2014; Taole, 2014); Taole, & Mncube, 2012) have reported lack of support for teachers. Findings of Brown's (2009) study in particular, have highlighted the importance of providing teachers with relevant skills to enable them to teach in multi-grade contexts.

According to Smith and Engeli (2015), the above reality suggests that teachers must do proper planning, since they are working with different grades. When this is done properly, the goals and outcomes for lessons will have a better chance of being achieved. Bruno (2013) supports the argument that it is essential for teachers to develop good lesson planning skills in order for their teaching to be effective and successful. In multi-grade classes, learning and instructions to learners promotes independence (Smith & Engeli, 2015). This suggests that the type of teaching and learning in this context is largely learner-centred, which means that learners are provided with ample opportunity to take decisions and do work on their own. This kind of thinking has reported in Akyeampong's (2017) study, conducted in Ghana, in which findings they pointed to the fact that teaching strategies are more learner- oriented and effective.

Below are the common teaching strategies that may be used in multi-grade classrooms, which have been suggested in different empirical studies.

### 2.8.1    Role of a teacher as a facilitator

Again, what arises is that there is a distinct difference between the roles that teachers take on within a multi-grade context internationally and within South Africa. In a study conducted by Smith and Engeli (2015) in Switzerland, it was revealed that one of the roles that teachers tend to adopt is that of a facilitator. A facilitator facilitates knowledge, rather than directly transmits knowledge. This finding has also reported in the study conducted by Becuwe, Tondeur, Roblin and Castelein (2018) in Belgium, where the role of teacher as facilitator has been defined as an internal designer, who thinks together with the team and guides them in their collective direction. This suggests that teacher's roles in this strategy is to guide learners more towards independence through the process of acquiring and constructing knowledge. According to Becuwe et al. (2018), facilitators assist learners in their efforts to determine their direction.

Teachers do this by providing learners with the pro-active support and assist them in outlining and driving their learning process.

Goodyear and Dudley (2015, p. 278) maintain that, when teachers adopt the role of facilitator, teachers shift "from being the sage on the stage to the guide on the side". In this pedagogical practice, information is more individualised. This is because the teacher as facilitator develops learners' capacities for independent thinking and working. Learners acquire skills of thinking creatively and problem solving. Teaching in this manner is the acknowledgement that, within education, contextual realities are key to enabling learning opportunities. Therefore, the one-size-fits-all strategy is obsolete.

One of the ways in which teachers in Smith and Engeli's (2015) study could do this was to provide opportunities for learners to assist one another, often with the older learners assisting younger ones. Older learners often assisted the teachers to support younger learners, largely on their own volition. This strategy reduced the demand on the teacher to be omnipresent (Smith & Engeli, 2015). However, the opposite is true for the South African context. Taole (2014) conducted a study in Free State, South Africa, and findings revealed that children in multi-grade context often received less direct instruction from their teachers, time on task was lower and peer tutoring was not used to any significant degree. This suggest a discrepancy between what is happening internationally and within South African context, where multi-grade education is demanded by the circumstances and where teachers do not have adequate knowledge and skills to successfully navigate multi-grade settings.

### 2.8.2   Curriculum mapping strategies

Another key strategy used in classes has been the use of a common timetable. According to Little (2001), Taole and Cornish (2017) and Mason and Burns (2018), in this approach teachers teach all learners the same subject at the same time. However, the activities that learners are given are age, grade and developmentally appropriate for their cognitive levels (Mason & Burns, 2018). This method is also supported by Smith and Engeli (2015), who have pointed out that this is one of the easiest ways in which to ensure learning. In this approach, teachers find common threads in their teaching materials, such as annual teaching plans (ATPs) and textbooks and then correlate these threads with the teaching and learning objectives for different

grades (Mason & Burn, 2018). Taole and Cornish (2017) refer to this process of finding common topics as curriculum mapping, which happens when teachers prepare to adopt whole group teaching strategies. In this process, teachers often engage with the curriculum to find the broad areas of commonality. Taole and Cornish (2017) have argued that one of the advantages of curriculum mapping is that it provides opportunities for consolidation and revision requirements.

### 2.8.3 Differentiated and individualised instruction

Within a multi-grade context, teachers must ensure that they provide all learners with access to a range of experiences, which can accommodate different learning styles and paces. The curriculum used in schools has different outcomes and performance standards that must be achieved by every learner. However, diversities within a multi-grade setting often makes it difficult for teachers to regard learners as deserving of equality (Proehl, Doughlas, Elias, Johnson & Westsmith, 2013; Smith & Engeli, 2014; Taole & Cornish, 2017).

It is for this reason individualised instruction must be used to accommodate all learners. Differentiating the curriculum requires that teachers in the multi-grade classrooms plan different activities for different groups and take into account diversities among learners. Thus, this suggests that a one-size-fits-all approach may not work in multi-grade or any other educational context, for that matter. Individualised instruction has also been observed in Condy and Blease's (2014) study, where teachers differentiated lessons and adopted progressive teaching approaches, such as providing learners with work that is relevant to their abilities, planning the activities for different groups, and organising learning materials that are appropriate to learners' academic needs. Thus, in this study, teachers ensured that tasks given enabled gifted learners to work at a higher cognitive level, whilst tasks set for learners who required more assistance were developmental to ensure they did not fall behind. Taole and Cornish (2017) have argued that different learners have different learning needs that teachers in multi-grade contexts cannot ignore. Understanding how teachers plan and cater for learners' needs have an important place in this study.

### 2.8.4 Flexible group work

Group work and peer learning is very important in multi-grade classroom since teachers may not have sufficient time for individual activities. This suggests that it is essential for teachers to encourage learners to work in small, collaborative groups (Smith & Engeli, 2015). In the formation of groups, Smith and Engeli (2015) have advised that it is important to group learners in small numbers to ensure that distractions are minimal and learners can work without interferences. The suggestion they put forward is for teachers to groups into 2 to 5 learners, which are often easier to manage. For peer learning, Taole (2014) points out that some learners may take over the task of assisting each other in the absence of a teacher.

Peer tutoring suggests that learners teach and learn from each other. An advantage of grouping learners in smaller groups to work on their own has been explained in the study conducted by Taole & Cornish (2017) in Australia as useful in assisting learners to take more responsibility and become more independent. For this reason, Taole and Cornish (2017, p. 5) have argued that group work or peer tutoring benefit both the "explainer" and the "receiver" of the information. According to Taole and Cornish (2018), peer tutoring mostly happens informally in the form of learners working together. However, teachers may also plan for it deliberately. Smith and Engeli (2015) and Taole and Cornish (2017) have argued that peer learning does not always takes place as structured or purposely planned. This suggests that it is less structured, often depending on the classroom and context of lessons. Learners are sometimes required to be proactive and group themselves with other learners, especially those with whom they may feel comfortable. Lastly, they have argued that structured collaborative situations may not always be beneficial for learning in such contexts. The role that learners play in in the role of explainer or receiver is important for this study.

### 2.8.5 Assessment and observation

Assessment and observation have been suggested as useful strategies in a range of teaching and learning settings. In a multi-grade setting, the importance of this approach lies to in its potential to enable both teachers and learners to measure the level of progress in the process of teaching and learning. It is also useful as it provides an opportunity to adopt new styles and strategies, if the results suggest that there is no progress. Formative assessment provides teachers with an understanding of the learner's individual learning and performance (Smith & Engeli, 2015).

Through formative assessments, it is where teachers and learners diagnose the learning difficulties and adjust to planning the next instructional steps. In terms of observation, multi-grade teachers must keep the records of learners' performance. According to Smith and Engeli (2015), this could be useful in monitoring progress of individual learners. After carrying out diagnostic assessment, teachers must find more flexible assessment practices based on individual learner performance, rather than performance in comparison to other learners.

## 2.9 Conclusion

In the section above, international and national literature was reviewed and discussed with a view of understanding experiences of teachers teaching in multi-grade contexts. The literature reviewed revealed various challenges that teachers encounter, namely, macro level challenges, where policy mat reinforce the disempowerment of teachers through to institutional factors that may be present at the level of a school. Furthermore, teachers' individual experiences were discussed. The section also revealed that there are benefits for both teachers and learners in a multi-grade classroom that could provide a useful mechanism for ensuring access to quality education. The next section discusses the conceptual framework that was used as lens to guide how issues and findings must be understood in this study.

## 2.10    Conceptual framework

In this part of the chapter, I discuss the framework that guided the analysis in this study. Two theorists were helpful in providing the concepts to understand teachers experiences of teaching in multi-grade contexts.  The first theory that is discussed is Bourdieu's Theory of Practice and his understanding of habitus, field and capital. This theory was used to understand teachers' experiences of multi-grade teaching and the various influences on their experiences. The second theory is Bernstein's Theory of Pedagogic Practice and his concepts of classification and framing, which assisted me in understanding the pedagogical practices of teachers. Both these theorists assisted me to analyse and understand the phenomenon of multi-grade, more especially the teachers' experiences of teaching in multi-grade contexts.

### 2.10.1  Bourdieu's theory of practice

Education is understood by Bourdieu (1986) and Sullivan (2002) as functioning in way that, rather than levelling the playing fields, creates and reproduces social class inequalities. His

theory proved useful in assisting me to understand how education in multi-grade contexts, which are steeped in historical inequality, influenced the practices and experiences of teachers who participated in this study. The unequal distribution of educational opportunities features quite strongly in the South African Education system (Barrett, 2011).

### 2.10.2  Habitus, field and capital

Bourdieu's three concepts of habitus, field and capital are interlinked and cannot be understood as distinct and delinked. However, for purposes of this dissertation, these concepts are discussed below.

### a)  The notion of habitus

**Habitus,** according to Bourdieu (1990, p. 53), is a system of "durable, transposable dispositions" that also fulfil the of a "structuring structure" function. This is because our habitus socialises or moulds us and enables us to experience the world in particular ways.  It is to some extent an unconscious, albeit conditioning, process as we are taught particular ways of understanding through various sources of influence, such as family, school and wider society, who socialise us into particular ways of thinking (Beams & Telford, 2013).

The literature suggests that multi-grade teaching is located in particular ways that are historical, namely, that in South Africa, the government has prioritised the necessity to accelerate transformation with a view to ensuring that all learners have access to education (Birch & Lally, 1995). However, literature (for example, Brown, 2009; Taole, 2014; Kivunja & Sims, 2015; Taole & Cornish, 2017) also points to the fact that multi-grade contexts are steeped in forms of equality, such as poverty, geographical isolation, poor water and sanitation. Such contexts are therefore not conducive for teachers and, therefore, make it difficult for schools to attract good and suitably qualified teachers. Harker and May (1993, p. 174) describes habitus as a "product of history which produces individual and collective practices", which makes the concept useful for this study, as it could be used to understand how the field shapes teachers' practices.

For Imrie and Edwards (2003) and Zondi (2017), habitus is acquired over time and is influenced by historical and cultural factors. It is through habitus that people learn, understand and naturalise dominant cultural and historical norms and values. Through our everyday

interactions, we internalise taken for granted understandings that shape and mould our practices and ideas. These everyday interactions and influences become taken for granted, as an individual interacts with other people in, for instance, the schooling space with, for example, teachers, community members, Department of Education and the broader society. Particular values and beliefs about multi-grade teaching can be consciously and unconsciously learned, and can then become deeply embedded. However, Bourdieu (1990) also challenges the belief that habitus is externally structured to such an extent that it paralyses action; instead, as far as he is concerned, agents have the ability to challenge and transform their behaviours. This is an important consideration in this study. For example, for this study, it was important to understand how the everyday experiences of teachers and their beliefs about teaching in multi-grade contexts had become internalised and conditioned their practices. However, the extent to which teachers challenge dominant discourses that structure beliefs that rural contexts and multi-grade schools are difficult to negotiate can be understood.

Bourdieu (1977) points out that the habitus also has the ability to compel people to act in particular ways. The extent to which teachers can display a sense of agency can be explained one that challenges and illustrates that, despite the myriad of challenges teachers faced, they did not give up their efforts to ensure that their learners had access to quality education.  In this way, one can relatively assess the value that multi-grade teaching and learning has and the forms of agency that teachers displayed in negotiating their challenges. However, in some cases, the deeply embedded nature of such ideas and ways of thinking continued to normalise and reproduce perceptions that multi-grade teaching could not provide learners with access to quality education (Martin, 2015). Contexts shape and influence the habitus, but the ability of people to adapt to the demands of the contexts can alter one's consciousness and is a "reflection of a changed habitus" (Zondi, 2017, p. 43). Embracing the idea that teaching can provide learners with access to quality education, that could benefit them through access to opportunities, can change perceptions, negating the dominant discourses that continue to characterise multi-grade teaching as invisible and unworthy.

### b) The notion of field

A **field** can be described as a relational space, where interactions occur between people and their everyday beliefs and practices. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) contend that a field

operates within certain rules and regulations that may or may not be explicit or codified. Fields are spaces of power and control, where meanings abound that indoctrinate the habitus of people. They are also places where there is constant contestation, mainly over the distribution of resources and forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1989). This is similar to the experiences of learners and teachers who teach in multi-grade contexts in rural areas, which are characterised by lack human and material resources. Martin (2015) argues that, in order to negotiate fields, actors must have knowledge of the rules and regulations that govern the field, such as a school, for an example. Learners from middle class contexts, as agents, have knowledge of the rules that govern schooling and so too do some learners within mono-grade contexts. This provides these learners with an unearned advantage, as knowing the rules enables them to access opportunities that are available in schools, for example, in relation to qualified and experienced teachers, who may be experts in subjects.

Research by Du Plessis (2014), Taole (2014), Dewayne and Masson (2018) and Engin (2019) discussed in the literature review suggests that power relations that exist in these contexts translate into various forms of inequality and differential power distribution. This inequality and inequitable access to power that manifest in, for example, lack of a specialised curriculum options, inadequate professional development and the invisibility that surrounds multi-grade contexts, are evidence of unequal power distribution. The concept of field, therefore, enabled me to understand how the lack of power evident in the ways discussed above, influenced and enabled what teachers could do. In addition, it enabled me to challenge the deficit understandings of rural contexts and multi-grade teaching and learning, based on the manner in which teachers negotiated the field and possessed agency.

### c) Capital

There are different kinds of capital that individuals have at their disposal, namely, cultural capital, economic capital, social capital and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1989). This study, however, focused on two forms of capital, namely, cultural, and social forms of capital, which were used as lens to understand teachers' experiences of teaching in multi-grade classes and contexts. Bourdieu (1989) argues that capital is related to power and that the more forms of capital one has, the greater will be their access to power. In simplifying this, Azaola (2007, p. 2) contends that individuals are located in society based on the "amount and structure of the

capital they possess". For individuals to compete effectively within various fields, for example, the school, they must have access to different forms of capital (Di Giorgio, 2009).

### i. Cultural capital

Cultural capital, according to Bourdieu (1989), is a source of power that is located and passed on through families and cultures. A person who has cultural power has access to advantage and power. Bourdieu (1989) contends that cultural capital has three forms, namely, embodied, which are dispositions evident in body and mind, but has cultural value; objectified, which are found in the possessions one has and finally institutionalised capital, which is capital that one gains from certificates. Cultural capital is linked to status within a field and thus understanding, for example, why particular groups of teachers and learners have or do not have access to cultural power because of their status was important for this study. Bourdieu (1989) and Bernstein (2000) argue that cultural capital is highly valued within schools, but that often this capital is associated with middle class. One may ask, then, whether learners from working class contexts, who do not have adequate access to cultural capital often experience a sense of value and belonging.

### ii. Social capital

Social capital refers to all the relations of solidarity, support and recognition within social groups. It also refers to the "creation of social networks as well as exchanges among its members" (Azaola, 1997, p. 7). For this study, I believe that a teacher's access to social capital can be determined by the relationships they have with their colleagues, teachers from other schools as well as with Department of Education. Bourdieu (1989) contends that, in order to access this form of capital, one must share the same sets of beliefs and values. Access by Multi-grade teachers to social capital may be determined by the complexity and extent of networks that have been set up by the Department of Education and also initiatives by principals and members of management. These networks will potentially provide teachers with social capital and help them to manage and navigate multi-grade contexts as well as recognition of what they can contribute. If they feel accepted and have sense of belonging in their networks, this would point to the fact that they have access to this form of capital and will be explored more comprehensively in this study.

For this study, I focused on habitus, field and capital to explain and understand the teachers' experiences of teaching in the multi-grade classroom.

## 2.11    Bernstein's theory of pedagogic practices

So, how does Bernstein's theory of pedagogic practices inform the teaching in multi-grade contexts? Bernstein, (1990) theory demonstrates that what occurs in the classroom, through pedagogic practice, be it mono-grade or multi-grade classroom is not value-neutral. Bernstein (1996) contends that one of the key principles towards social justice is participation in education. Thus, for him, a teacher's practice must produce a particular outcome, namely, participation in education. However, Martin (2015) has argued that the ability to participate in education may be constrained by the realities that schools face. For instance, in this study, the complexities of a multi-grade context made it difficult for the democratic principles of participation to be achieved.

Martin (2015) argues the expressions of democratic principles in the lives of learners are dependent on whether schools and teachers can provide them with the opportunities and abilities to participate. When this is absent, as was discussed in the section above, then participation cannot be fully achieved. Bernstein's theory was useful in understanding how the social relations in the classroom were relayed through distribution, contextualisation and evaluation of knowledge, as well as the various forms of knowledge (Taylor & Francis, 2008). The notions of classification and framing used in Bernstein's work (2000) provided me with useful tool that helped me to gain insights into two research questions, which focused on teachers' pedagogical practices and how teachers' practices were constrained or enabled in their work within multi-grade contexts.

### 2.11.1   Classification of knowledge

For Bernstein (1999), schools tend to reproduce unequal relationships in the manner in which knowledge is understood and transmitted in the classroom. The question of whether multi-grade schools can provide learners with access to the required official or vertical knowledge is interrogated in this study. Knowledge is classified into two categories, namely, it could be horizontal and vertical. Both these forms of knowledge are important, but Bernstein (1999)

contends that horizontal and vertical knowledge are valued differently in different contexts. In this study, multi-grade teaching and the strategies that teachers used when teaching content in the curriculum, that is, vertical knowledge, formed the basis for understanding how learning was made accessible for learners.

### a) Vertical discourse

Vertical knowledge is more "systematically structured, coherent, explicit and hierarchically organized" (Bernstein, 1999, p. 159). Here, the vertical discourse takes place in a "form of a series of specialized languages with specialized modes of interrogation and specialized criteria for the production and circulation of knowledge" (Bernstein, 1999, p. 159). Within the context of the school, vertical knowledge would be the knowledge found in the Curriculum, Policy and Assessment Statements (CAPS). In this form of knowledge, special rules and modes are evident in each subject that is specific to that subject example, rules related to mathematics or the acquisition of language in isiZulu and English. Bernstein (2000) contends that vertical knowledge contains strong distributive rules regulating access. In this study, understanding distributive rules as regulating access suggests that some groups have more access to vertical knowledge, while 'others', namely, the marginalised in this study, were not fully accessing the knowledge.

At the micro level of the classroom, multi-grade teachers were expected to use the official, prescribed curriculum, namely, CAPS. However, Bernstein (1999) has argued that not everyone has access to vertical knowledge. Empirical studies, such as those of Taole (2014), Du Plessis (2014), Blease and Condy (2016) and Ramrathan and Ngubane (2016), suggest that teachers within multi-grade contexts often find it difficult to use the CAPS curriculum, as its design is premised on the features of a monograde context. A multi-grade context requires a teacher who can adapt the curriculum so that it can be taught across grades. This suggests that teachers require knowledge of grade-specific content and subject-specific content, which has its own internal logic. Teachers would then be able to select sequence and pace this knowledge to ensure conceptual articulation across grades. Knowledge increases in complexity, as one progress through grades (Ramrathan & Mzimela, 2012). Vertical knowledge when taught by teachers who have the required skills should provide learners with the ability to think in abstract, critical and analytical ways. The extent to which teachers in this study can make pedagogical decisions

about knowledge across various grade in order to provide learners with access was important in this study.

**b) Horizontal discourse**

Horizontal knowledge is described as the knowledge of everyday, 'common sense' knowledge or knowledge that is available to everyone. In saying that the knowledge is "common", this means that "it is accessed and applied by all and has common history" (Bernstein, 1999, p. 159). This means that inside the classroom, both the transmitter (teacher) and acquirers (learners) have access to this knowledge, since it is context-based. According to Bernstein (1999, p. 159), horizontal knowledge can be "oral, local, context dependent and specific", and has a different internal value to vertical knowledge. School knowledge or official curriculum knowledge is different from horizontal knowledge in that horizontal knowledge is about acquiring competence important for outside schooling context, whilst official knowledge is usually an evaluated or graded concept (Bernstein, 1999).

Bernstein (1999) further argues that schools and teachers should provide learners with a specialised knowledge, but that some portions of horizontal knowledge must be recontextualised into school subjects. This happens when a teacher uses horizontal knowledge or everyday knowledge as a resource to facilitate access to vertical knowledge or to use such knowledge in ways that provide opportunities for making meaning (Bernstein, 2000). Bernstein (2000) has pointed out that, within classification, three relationships exist that provide understanding of the bounded nature of particular subjects. These are, inter-disciplinary, where knowledge from other subjects of learning areas is used to enable learners to understand concepts. Intra-disciplinary classification explores the extent to which a teacher uses conceptual knowledge from within the subject to ensure acquisition of knowledge and skills. Inter-discursive classification refers to the extent to which a teacher uses horizontal or everyday knowledge and makes links with the official curriculum. Classification helps us to understand how strongly bounded subject areas are and denoted by C++; C+ C- to denote how strongly or weakly bounded subjects were (Morais, 2002).

### 2.11.2 Framing of knowledge

Bernstein, (2000) refers to framing as the transmission of knowledge through pedagogic practices. In other words, it refers to *who* controls *what* (Bernstein, 1996, p. 27). It is the "degree of control that teachers and students possess over classroom content, communication and interaction" (Barrett, 2017, p. 126). Within the classroom, the teacher is positioned as a transmitter of knowledge and learners as acquirers of knowledge. Framing has been defined by Morais (2002) as the level of control teachers possess in the selection of information, the sequencing, pacing and evaluation of knowledge.

*Selection*: Within the South African context, knowledge is externally framed in that it is found in the CAPS. Teachers use the CAPS document to select the content to be taught. As indicated previously, vertical knowledge is embedded in the CAPS and within the different subjects. Teachers are expected to select the knowledge to ensure that learners obtain the minimum requirements for a specific grade. Selection in this study refers to the fact that teachers decide what knowledge must be transmitted to learners. Hoadley (2003) maintained that what influenced teachers to select what to teach is the knowledge and understanding of what is best for the learners. This idea will be useful in this study to understand which knowledge teachers chose for their learners and what informed such a choice.

*Sequencing o*r scaffolding refers to the order in which lessons are presented to learners to enable them to grasp content and acquire skills. Sequencing is the 'building blocks', and if learners have been exposed to strong building blocks, they can understand, learn and retain information effectively (Martin, 2015). Teachers, whether they are in a monograde or multi-grade context, are regarded as authorities on pedagogy and knowledge. How teachers sequence knowledge that they have selected in order for learners to acquire the necessary grade competencies and outcomes was important for this study (Barrett, 2017). In South Africa, when teachers do not have the required pedagogical content knowledge, they often struggle to sequence the knowledge. This then has the negative consequences for learners' acquisition of content (Bernstein, Hoadley & Barret, 2017). The concept of sequencing can be used to understand pedagogical knowledge that teachers in this study acquired. Furthermore, this sequencing assisted me in understanding whether learners in the multi-grade contexts were exposed to strong or weak blocks.

Bernstein (2000) conceptualises pacing as the speed or the rate at which curriculum is taught by teachers and acquired by learners. He maintains that pacing can be either weakly framed or strongly framed. When learning is weakly framed, learners have control over the rate at which they acquire content, whereas strong framing is where the teacher maintains control over the rate with which the lesson proceeds. Bantwini and Moorosi (2017), Kivunja (2015) and Hoadley (2008) contend that pacing may become problematic when teachers are under pressure, for example, in state-regulated curricula, such as the CAPS and high stakes testing contexts (Barrett, 2017). CAPS is highly regulated and prescriptive, providing outcomes to be met each term and evaluation of content. In such cases, pacing would be seen as rigid for curriculum expectations to be met. However, in a multi-grade context, where the teacher must take pedagogical decisions based on knowledge acquisition across grades, rigid pacing may not be possible and, if anything, may not support learning of learners who mostly require it (Barrett, 2017). Therefore, understanding how teachers manage the curriculum and pace learning and knowledge acquisition was important for this study.

*Evaluation* refers to the criteria used to assess whether learners have acquired the necessary knowledge. Here, teachers can determine their own criteria. However, the CAPS have explicit evaluation criteria against which teachers are required to measure learner's knowledge. Hoadley and Muller (2009) argue that when teachers clearly tell learners what is expected of them during the lesson and clarifying all the concepts, then evaluation is explicit. When evaluation is explicit, it means it is strongly framed (F+) for the learners. On the other hand, when learners are left without a clear sense of what is expected of them, then evaluation criteria are implicit, and it is thus weakly framed for them (F-). During evaluating or assessing learners, teachers may use explicit or implicit criteria. However, Bernsteinian researcher, Barrett (2017), argues that evaluation criteria should be made visible to learners, especially in unequal and inequitable contexts, such as multi-grade contexts, as this has potential to aid academic success.

A concept of framing was valuable for this study as I could use this to explain processes of selection, sequencing, pacing and evaluation that teachers used in multi-grade classrooms. In doing this, I could ascertain the extent to which learners were able to acquire cognitive benefits of schooling. For this study, I used strong (F+) and weak framing (F-) in understanding how

teaching and learning took place. Learner participation in the lessons was also analysed using these criteria. Framing is present in the pedagogical relationships that exists between the teachers and learners and is the message of power (Bernstein, 2000).

## 2.12 Conclusion

In this chapter, relevant literature, which informed and provided theoretical foundations for the study, was reviewed. The purpose of reviewing existing literature was to understand aspects of the scholarly conversation regarding what other researchers have found about multi-grade teaching and education. A theory underpinning this study, which is Bernstein's theory of pedagogic practices, was also discussed and the purpose of using it was to understand the teachers' pedagogical practices. In understanding teacher's experiences, Bourdieu's theory of capital was used. This provided me with an understanding of the types of capital to which teachers had access.

# CHAPTER 3

# RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

## 3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter reviewed literature on multi-grade teaching and learning, and provided the conceptual framework that was used as a lens to understand teachers' experiences of teaching in a multi-grade context. The main focus of this chapter is to provide a description and analysis of the research methodology and design that guided the conduct of this study. In doing this, I begin by, firstly, discussing the paradigm within which the study is located; and secondly, the methodological approach that informs this study. I then discuss the various ways in which data was collected as well as the contextual and sampling choices I made. Lastly, the ethical considerations related to the conduct of the study are provided.

## 3.2 Research paradigm

Wahyuni (2012), Jonker and Pennink (2010) and Lemley and Mitchell (2012) define a research paradigm as a set of beliefs and assumptions on how people understand the world in which they live, as well as the meanings that individuals make in their daily interactions with their worlds. A paradigm serves as a 'thinking framework', to guide the behaviour and thought process of the researcher in conducting the study (Wahyuni, 2012). The purpose of this study objective was to understand the experiences of the teachers who are teaching multi-grade classes. To this end, the study was located within the critical paradigm, which is qualitative in nature, as the intention was to critically examine the realities of the participant's experiences.

My ontological positioning in this study was that the experiences of teachers, as well as their practices, are based on their social positioning. Rural contexts and multi-grade classrooms in which this study was conducted can be described as marginalised socially, economically and politically. This then influenced the manner in which teachers in this study experienced their reality in specific ways. By using the critical paradigm in this study, I could interpret forms of inequalities and injustices that the teachers reported they were experiencing in the multi-grade context. This line of thinking was influenced by Bourdieu's theoretical concepts of capital, habitus and field. I found these concepts useful in understanding the forms of capital these

teachers possessed, as well as the manner in which the field, which was a multi-grade context, shaped their choices, decision-making and practices. This was useful for obtaining an understanding of inequalities that marked multi-grade teaching.

Scotland (2012) contends that epistemology is essentially about what the researcher wishes to achieve in the study, which influences how the research process should unfold. Ontologically, I understood that the manner in which teachers viewed and experienced their realities was subjectively based. Within a multi-grade context, teachers and learners are positioned as marginalised subjects for a variety of reasons, namely, geographical location in which historical inequalities are embedded; the silences that exist within their experiences of learning and teaching, as it occurs and the unwillingness and/or lack of knowledge of how to provide educational support within such a context. However, despite these challenges, I sought to position teachers as having a sense of agency and to reveal the manner in which they attempt to negotiate their contexts and classrooms.

Kivunja and Kuyini (2015) and Cooksey and McDonald (2011) assert that epistemology is used to describe how we come to know something about reality and what constitutes knowledge within the world. Romm (2015) argues that within the critical paradigm or the transformative paradigm as it is also known, epistemological assumptions are based on the researcher-participant relationships and the awareness of power dynamics. As a critical theorist, I kept this in mind during the process of drawing up the questions as well as during the observations. My intention was to explore and understand teachers' experiences and ideas without being judgmental. Epistemologically, I was influenced by Bourdieu and Bernstein theories. For example, the concepts of habitus, capital and field illustrated that teachers in multi-grade contexts may be constrained by various challenges, which are structurally determined. However, the forms of capital that they sometimes possessed enabled them to negotiate their challenges. In this way, teachers could use their power associated with their social positioning to provide learners with access to quality education, debunking negative discourses that abound regarding multi-grade teaching and education (Guba, 1995).

The critical paradigm focuses specifically on unearthing and challenging power relationships in research and in relationships (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2013). This study sought to

identify the injustices and inequalities that are experienced by teachers in multi-grade contexts. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (1997), a researcher who works within the critical paradigm provides participants with the opportunities to voice their thinking about their reality. This means that the experiences and understandings of the teachers in this study, who are teaching multi-grade classes, were central in this study. The critical paradigm seeks to transform and redress the inequalities by promoting freedom and democracy (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 1997). Gemma (2018, p. 10) asserts that "critical theory seeks to challenge world views and the underlying power structures that create them". The potential of this small-scale study to transform, challenge world views and redress is, however, unlikely to occur. It is hoped that, instead, teachers, through the research process, could reflect on their practices, beliefs and ideas and change, adapt and transform in order to meet the goals of quality education and make a difference, however small, in the lives of learners that they teach.  In doing so, they can make a positive difference in the lives of those who need it most.


## 3.3 Qualitative approach

The study employed a qualitative approach. According to Golafshani (2003), a qualitative study is one that deploys naturalistic approaches to understand phenomena. It is thus a means to understand participants in their natural environment or context and, in this case, multi-grade classrooms in rural areas. Golafshani (2003) points out that in a qualitative research the data or findings are not presented in statistical formats or any other quantitative means, but are largely presented textually (Teheran, 2015).

The adoption of a qualitative design was useful as it enabled the use of a variety of tools for collecting data, such as interviews and observations (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The data gathered by interviewing teachers about their experiences as well as observing them in their classrooms was later transcribed into textual data. The data collection process enabled me to gather in-depth data about teachers' experiences and the pedagogic practices they deployed.  In this way, the qualitative design enabled me to gather in-depth and rich data.

Guba (1995) contends that one of the advantages of qualitative study is that humans are not treated as physical objects, where the the findings are presented without reference to the meanings ascribed by humans' actions. Thus, teacher's experiences and pedagogical practices

were investigated with them and not on them. For instance, the teachers participated and provided rich insights into, for example, the difficulties they experienced with multi-grade teaching, how they challenged these barriers, and how they created rewarding experiences for themselves and their learners. In this, I could view and understand their struggles and joys through their eyes. One could say that the qualitative approach enabled a more layered understanding of the realities of multi-grade teachers, who were participants in this study.

Whilst the qualitative approach had the above described benefits, as a novice researcher, using this approach was complicated and difficult. I constantly questioned whether I was following the tenets of qualitative data. I found that I had to read and re-read to ensure that I was and this proved time consuming and stressful. Despite the pressure and stress, I believe that it has helped me to gather rich complex data.

## 3.4 Case study methodology

This research study employed case study methodology. Cohen et al. (1997) and Romm (2015) define a case study as a research method that investigates real-life phenomena in their natural contexts, and strives to portray how it is like to be in a particular situation. Through the use of the case study, I sought to understand their reality and provide a thick description of lived experiences, their thoughts and feelings for multi-grade teaching (Romm, 2015). I found this relevant to my study as I sought to understand teachers' experiences of teaching in multi-grade contexts in their context, which was the school in which they were teaching. This understanding of case study has been supported by Rule and John (2011, p. 135), who describe it as "a systematic and in-depth investigation of a particular instance in its context in order to generate knowledge". Here, the phenomenon of multi-grade teachers' experiences was investigated within a particular context, which was a rural school. Multi-grade teaching and learning is a phenomenon uniquely found in rural contexts in South Africa and generating knowledge about it is important, not only for research, but to hopefully provide support for teachers.

Baxter and Jack (2008) point out that, in order to identify a case, the researcher must ask themselves whether the purpose is to analyse individuals, programmes or processes. In this study, experiences of teachers teaching multi-grade classes were investigated. The unit of analysis was the phenomenon of multi-grade education and the intention was to provide deeper

meaning and knowledge of the teachers' experiences of teaching in the multi-grade context. Lastly, one of the advantages of using case study for my research was that it enabled me to use multiple data collecting methods, which assisted me in ensuring that the study had depth and enabled me to maintain the validity of the study as pointed out by Romm (2015).

Baxter and Jack (2008) contend that case study methodology should be considered when the researcher seeks to understand, for example, teachers' experiences of teaching in a multi-grade context, in greater depth and engaging with data as provided by participants. This suggests that, within case study methodology, participants have a level of freedom to talk about their experiences, without the researcher's bias or attempting to manipulate their responses. In this study, participants were allowed freedom to share their experiences of teaching in multi-grade context, without input and/or interference from the researcher. Yin (2003) and Wahyuni (2012) contend that case study methodology involves responding to why and how questions. These questions then lead one to the understanding that experiences of teachers teaching in multi-grade contexts are multi-faceted and complex involving relationships for example with learners, parents, the department of education and so forth (Rule & John, 2011).

One of the criticisms of using case study, according to Yin (2003), is that it takes too long and end up with unreadable documents since it gathers copious amounts of data. This really was also experienced in this study since the approach produced large amounts of data. In addressing this issue of copious amounts of data I ended up having; I ensured that I kept revisiting the critical research questions which guided me during the coding and theme formation process. Following all the steps of data reduction was helpful in producing the relevant and accurate data for this study.

Another limitation of using the case study method was that the data could not be generalizable to other contexts as it is case and context specific. However, it must be noted that I did not aim to generalise findings but rather to get a situational understanding of what was occurring at that multi-grade school. In addressing this limitation in 3.5 below I did try to provide a rich description of the context where the study was conducted for other researchers to make decisions as to whether the findings from this study could be applicable elsewhere with the same contextual realities.

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**3.5 Research design**

    **3.5.1    Context of the study**

The study was conducted at a small primary school within the uThukela District in KwaZulu-Natal province. This is a small village school situated in a deep rural area and is classified as a Quintile 1 school according to the Departmental norms (Little, 2001). According to the departmental norms, the school is a no-fee paying school. A no-fee paying school is a school where learners are admitted without having to pay fees and for textbooks. The school itself is under-resourced and experiences a shortage of teachers. The shortage of teachers is due to the decline in the number of learners who attend the school. This is because when learner numbers decline, the school loses teachers since the resourcing model used is based on teacher-learner ratio of 1:40.

The infrastructure at the school is inadequate. The school does not have electricity, running water, a library, or sufficient textbooks. Many learners are beneficiaries of the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP). The school runs from Grade R to 7, with an enrolment of 90 learners, who mostly must travel long distances to and from school. Learners walk to and from school as their parents do not have any money to carry their transport costs. The school caters for both boys and girls. There are five members of staff, including the school principal. The principal is responsible for teaching as well as administration work, as there is no administration clerk. There is also a Grade R teacher. All teachers at the school are professionally qualified. Because of the small learner enrolment, the school is entitled to 4 teachers, inclusive of the principal. It has thus become a necessity to practice multi-grade teaching, because there are not enough teachers to teach all the grades. Multi-grade education is the only means to ensure that all learners are provided with access to education.

The school is surrounded by a few mud houses without electricity and running water. Moletsane (2009) indicates that people living in rural areas in South Africa often face marginalisation and are often surrounded by poverty, unemployment, and low levels of education amongst parents and community members. This was also the case for the school chosen for this study. The area in which the school is situated is sparsely populated, as most households have migrated to areas closer to bigger towns, because of lack of service delivery and for employment purposes. Those

that have remained are largely dependent on social security grants, as there are no few jobs opportunities in the area, and they cannot sustain their livelihoods.

### 3.5.2 Sampling of the participants

Gentle, Charles, Ploeg and Mckibbon (2015) describe the notion of sampling as the process of selecting participants who are most representative of the target population, for purposes of collecting data essential to the research. In this study, the five participants who provided the data were all teachers at the school, including the school principal. This included the Grade R teacher, who taught a combination of Grades R and Grade 1 learners. The second participant taught a combination of Grades 2 and 3. The third and fourth participants taught Grades 4, 5, 6 and 7. Grade 7 was the only grade treated not combined with any other grade. Teachers from the Intermediate Phase (i.e. Grades 4-6) also teach certain subjects in Grade 7 and vice versa. The fifth participant was the school principal. The school principal was part of the study as he also taught mathematics in the Intermediate and Senior Phase of the General Education and Training (GET) Band (Grades R-9).

Purposive sampling was used to select the participants of the study. Cohen, et al. (2007) describes purposive sampling as a feature of qualitative research. They further maintain that researchers often choose this sampling strategy for specific needs and purposes. Rule and John (2011) also indicate that, with case study research, a researcher chooses participants who can enable the generation of thick rich data. Thus, the teachers chosen for this study had to be teachers who were teaching in a multi-grade school. They had to be teachers who had experience in teaching multi-grade classes in order to observe their pedagogical practices and the manner in which they adapted to the multi-grade classroom. Teachers thus had to have been teaching in a multi-grade school for a minimum five (5) years to be able to gain this understanding. This meant that they had the relevant knowledge and experience in relation to multi-grade teaching (Rule & John, 2011).

While doing this, I kept in mind that the chosen participants did not represent the wider population of all teachers teaching in multi-grade schools (Cohen et al., 2007). I also purposively chose the school as it is close to my place of employment. This made visits to the school easier and I made arrangements to meet teachers for interviews after school and observed

their classes at a convenient time for both the teachers and myself. Therefore, my sampling of the participants was also based on convenience. In negotiating issues of access to the school, I obtained permission from the principal of the school (See Appendix A). In my initial meeting with the school principal, I informed him of the purpose of the study. Permission to conduct the research at the school was also sought from the School Governing Body (SGB) as well as the teachers (See Appendix B and C). Permission to conduct the research was also obtained from the Department of Education (Appendix D) as well as the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Ethics Committee (See Appendix E). Once permission was received, I then proceeded to collect data.

## 3.6 Data generation process

In qualitative research, the researcher is expected to collect verbal data and transcribe it into textual data (Jackson, Drummond & Camara, 2007). Jackson et al. (2007) further assert that the main purpose of qualitative study is to listen to the voices of the participants as well as observe their actions and behaviours. This had implications for the manner in which I collected data and ensuring that the data collected was textual. In doing so, I kept in mind the fact that as researcher I had ensure that I improved the techniques of data collection in order to provide valid data and ensure that data produced accurately reflected what participants had indicated (Harrell & Bradley, 2009).

Gill, Stewart, Treasure and Chadwick (2008) have highlighted the fact that there are various methods of collecting data in qualitative inquiry. In generating the data for this study, I used two methods, which I thought were the best to use for the study of this nature. This decision was also in keeping with case study methodology, which indicates that researchers should employ "a variety of data collection methods", which can also be determined by the "purpose of the study" (Rule & John, 2011, p. 63). Thus, two methods of data collection were used, namely, semi-structured interviews, which were used with the purpose of understanding teachers' experiences of teaching multi-grade classes; and secondly, classroom observations with the purpose of understanding teachers' pedagogical practices.

### 3.6.1 Semi-structured interviews

Harrell and Bradley (2009) define interviews as discussions to gather information on specific topics or issues. Interviews are usually one-on-one or face to face discussions between the

interviewer and the participant (interviewee). According to Gill et al. (2008) and Harrell and Bradley (2009), the three types of interviews are: structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews. However, all these types of interviews have their own advantages and disadvantages.

In this study, two face-to-face in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with all the five educators, who were teaching in the sampled multi-grade school. Wahyuni (2012) and Boieje (2005) contend that the semi-structured interview is a useful tool for collecting primary data, collected for a specific reason and suits the phenomenon under investigation. In this research, the first semi-structured interview gathered data on teachers' experiences of teaching multi-grade classes data was collected from the teachers who had the required knowledge and understanding of multi-grade teaching. This interview enabled participants to talk freely about any issues that were raised during the interviewing processes and attempted to answer the first research question.

From the above, it could be discerned that a semi-structured interview is, therefore, a data collection method that could be regarded as flexible. Wahyuni (2012) contends that the semi-structured interviews are appropriate for case study research, as it allows in-depth questions to be answered. Thus, the decision to use semi-structured interviews was appropriate, given the fact that the approach in this study was a case study approach. Harrell and Bradley (2009) also indicate that interviews are appropriate where there is very little research conducted around a phenomenon, such as for example multi-grade teaching. As a researcher, my intention was to gather in-depth data about the experiences of multi-grade teachers in order to add to the limited research in this area.

Harrell and Bradley (2009) and Gill (2008) indicate that semi-structure interviews should be guided by an interview schedule, which should allow various crucial ideas to be explored by the researcher. In doing this, I considered the aim and the objectives of the study and developed interview questions that would provide appropriate responses to the study's key research questions. This required me, as a researcher, to develop open–ended questions that would provide participants with the opportunity to discuss their experiences of teaching in multi-grade classes. Open-ended questions are defined in Harrell & Bradley (2009) as the type of questions,

which require more than a yes or no as a response. In these questions, participants were given an opportunity to provide a detailed response. I therefore decided to begin the interviews with asking them about their experiences of teaching at the school. Within case study approach, flexibility in interviewing is the key to capturing the uniqueness that is pertinent to teachers teaching in a multi-grade context (Rule & John, 2011). This way of conducting the interviews provided a non-threatening atmosphere for the participants, and enabled me to ask probing questions regarding their personal feelings about teaching in a multi-grade context.

Another important issue regarding interviews, raised by Wyhumi (2012), is the importance of respecting participants' decisions when it comes to time and venue. Wyhumi (2012) asserts that the location and time must be suitable for participants. I considered this when negotiating details regarding time and venue with my participants. Most of them preferred to be interviewed in their homes after hours and I respected that given the fact that they were almost always busy at school and the level of noise was also always high. Others kept postponing appointments, which caused a great deal of stress on my part as the researcher, given the fact that I was also working within the tight time frames of the study. However, I always endeavoured to ensure that the needs of participants were foregrounded.

The second semi-structured interview was conducted once I had transcribed the first interview and had completed classroom lesson observations. The second semi-structured interviews served two functions. Firstly, it was a means for participants to verify whether what had been captured accurately reflected what they had said and to make changes if they so desired. Secondly, it provided teachers with the opportunity to explain and justify their choices regarding their pedagogical practices. Upon receiving feedback from the participants, I was advised that they had not made any changes to the data.

Whilst Harrell and Bradley (2009) indicate that it is prudent to provide participants with the interview questions prior to the interview to enable them to familiarize themselves with the question, I chose not to. This was because I believed that whatever information I would obtain had to reflect true experiences, feelings and emotions about multi-grade teaching. My major concern was that in giving them the questions prior to the interview, it could cause participants

to discuss the questions with one another and provide me with the same responses. Instead, I wanted to delve into their reality as understood by them.

### 3.6.2 Observations

Observations were used to analyse teachers' pedagogical practices in multi-grade classes. Observation was also guided by Bernstein's theory of classification and framing. Two lessons per teacher were observed in the selected school. Each lesson was video-recorded. This took approximately two weeks, because I had to familiarise the teachers with my presence until they felt comfortable with me being in their classrooms observing their teaching. Decisions about what lessons and times of the lessons were solely at the request of teachers. Urquhart (2015) and Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2013) provided analytical strategies that guided the observation. Urquhart (2015) points out that this is a very useful method of data collection, as it enables the researcher to gather data in a natural setting. Cohen et al. (2013) has described observation as a tool that enables the researcher to collect data from various settings viz the physical setting, human setting, interactional setting and programme setting.

According to Cohen et al. (2013), using these four criteria will enable the researcher to focus on events that are taking place inside the classroom and understand the classroom space in-depth. These criteria ensured that I observed in a well-planned manner in order to obtain a clear picture of what was happening inside multi-grade classrooms and the manner in which the participants organised their classrooms and their teaching strategies. Thus, in addition to the video recording of lessons, I also made observations in the form of field notes following the criteria indicated by Cohen et al (2013). I observed how teachers physically arranged their classrooms, their desks and equipment. I also observed how learners were arranged and whether teachers encouraged group work or individual learning, and how this was managed. I also observed how the teachers classified and framed the knowledge they transmitted to learners, paying particular attention to how teachers selected knowledge, what kind of knowledge were selected and the manner in which they sequenced, paced and evaluated learning in order to understand their classroom pedagogical practices. This required careful observation of interactions between the teacher and the learner. The resources available and the manner in which they were used were also observed.

Observations were useful in understanding the classroom context that participants had described during the interviews. This was in line with what Patton (1990) has pointed out that observational data enables researchers to enter and understand situations with more coherence. As a researcher, I could observe the classroom and pick up on issues that participants did not discuss or raise in the interviews. This was then discussed with participants. Observations were a helpful data collection strategy, as I could collect first hand and live data as it occurred in the classroom (Cohen et al., 2013). As a researcher, I had the opportunity to look directly at what was taking place in multi-grade context by observing teachers in practice rather than relying on what participants told me only. The usefulness of observations has also been pointed out by Robson (2002) who have argued that what people say during interviews may be different from actual practice. However, for this research study, the purpose of observations was not to search for the truth, but to understand.

## 3.7 Data analysis

"Qualitative data involves organizing, accounting for and explaining the data, making sense of data in terms of the participants' definitions of the situation, noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities" (Cohen et al., 1997, p. 480). When analysing qualitative data, there isn't a definitive blueprint on how to do this. However, the researcher must abide by the requirements for fitness and purpose (Cohen et al., 1997). This made me realise and endeavour to uphold the importance of knowing what exactly I wanted to do in analysis the data collected. Osman (2009) provides the stages a researcher must complete after gathering qualitative data. The stages include transcribing, coding and generating themes (Osman, 2009). Given the fact that this study followed a qualitative research strategy, I used these stages as a mechanism for guiding the conduct of the study and ensure trustworthiness in the analysis of the findings. Thus, firstly, I transcribed audio-recorded interviews and video-recorded observations into visual text verbatim. At first, I thought this was going to be the easiest part of my study. However, as time passed, I soon realised that this was the most strenuous and time-consuming aspect of the study. Nevertheless, I had to do it properly, because it was important aspect of the study and, as such, the data analysis process had to be credible and trustworthy and reflect a true picture of what was happening in the multi-grade classes.

After I had finished transcribing, I moved on to coding the data. During this stage, I read and re-read the interviews and lesson observations transcripts with a view to familiarising myself with the data, which required getting close to the data to obtain a fuller understanding (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006; Rule & John, 2011). Thereafter, I began to identify patterns from the data. I developed codes using relevant words and phrases. During this stage, I checked all the codes within and across the data groups and grouped together similar ideas in order to come up with relevant categories. This enabled me to organise the data more effectively as, initially, I had developed far too many codes. Reducing codes into categories resulted in better organisation of the data into more manageable units. During the last step, I checked all the categories and continued to refine them even further where I could see similarities and differences, and eventually came up with manageable themes. The themes that I eventually settled on sought to address and answer the key research questions that guided the conduct of the study.

The process of organising the data more efficiently assisted me in minimising copious amounts of data gathered. This enabled me to not only to get closer to the data, but to obtain a better understanding of what was emerging in respect of the teachers' experiences of teaching in a multi-grade context. The analysis of the data, as pointed out in Chapter 2, was also informed by literature reviewed and Bourdieu's and Bernstein's theoretical lens, which also helped me to identify relevant themes in line with what was emerging. A more comprehensive presentation and discussion of the themes that I finally settled on is in the following chapter.

### 3.8 Issues of credibility and trustworthiness

Lub (2015) contends that a qualitative researcher must demonstrate that his/her research findings are valid. In doing this, there are several procedures that the researcher must go through before the findings are said to be valid. Anney (2015) argues that the notions of validity, reliability and objectivity are irrelevant for assessing the trustworthiness of a qualitative study. This is because these notions are largely relevant for quantitative studies. Maxwell, Delaney and Kelley (2017) concurs with this argument, but views validity as the broad sense of trustworthiness for all research. Thus, qualitative researchers have developed the concept of trustworthiness and authenticity in terms of methodology and approaches. Qualitative researchers, such as Lincoln and Guba (1985), have proposed concepts that are relevant for

qualitative studies, which I used as a guide for this study, and which I will discuss more comprehensively in the section below.

In this study, in order to ensure the trustworthiness, the concepts developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were used based on the fact that this was a qualitative research study. The concepts that were used in this study were credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Below, I provide a description of how the concepts were deployed to enhance credibility and trustworthiness in the study.

Credibility is defined by Anney (2015) as a degree of confidence that one could ascertain the 'truth' of the research findings. Anney (2015) further asserts that credibility can be established by ensuring that the findings represent the information produced from participants is their 'truth'. As a critical researcher, I placed the participants in the centre of this study by, for instance, recognising their voices and making sure that their views remained paramount. Conducting semi-structured interviews was appropriate in giving voice to teachers who took part in this study. For them, being interviewed enabled them with the voice as well as the space to share their experiences of teaching the multi-grade classes, independently without coercion (Zondi, 2017).

Anney (2015) further maintains that, in a qualitative research, credibility answers the question of how congruent findings are with reality. In addressing this, I relied on the data which was generated from the participants who were functioning within a multi-grade teaching context. The multi-grade teaching context was their reality in respect of their roles as teachers. To ensure the congruency to which I have made reference, I worked closely with my supervisor in the selection of research methods, who guided me throughout the conduct of this study.

The phenomenon of working closely with my supervisor has been raised by Anney (2015), who has described it as peer debriefing, in which a researcher seeks support from other more experienced professionals and utilise their feedback and guidance to improve the quality of their research findings. In this study, my supervisor's input and guidance was helpful in providing support and feedback required to strengthen the quality of the processes used in conducting this study. In addition, I also employed a process known as triangulation of data, which involved

the deployment and utilisation of multiple mechanisms of data collection, namely, semi-structured interviews and lesson observations. This was important for providing a mechanism for corroborating the findings and enhancing credibility and trustworthiness.

Rule and John (2011) have described the transferability as the extent to which findings of a qualitative research study can be transferred or generalised to other contexts. This, according to Anney (2015), requires that a researcher to provide a detailed description of the inquiry and participants. In order to ensure transferability, a researcher must consider utilising a probability sampling design in selecting participants (Cohen et al., 2013). However, given the fact that this study adopted a qualitative research approach, the issue of generalisability was not a primary concern. Therefore, it was not the intention of this study for findings to be generalisable to other context. This means that, for this study, the findings were regarded as context-specific and usable to only understand dynamics and issues in that particular context. That is why I provided the thick description of the context to enable judgments about how the research context relates to similar contexts (Li, 2004).

To address the issue of confirmability, I used data triangulation. This was achieved by using two data collection methods, namely, semi-structured interviews and lesson observation. Maxwell, Delaney and Kelley (2017) asserts that confirmability can be achieved only when consistency and dependability have been addressed. In support of this argument, Morrow (2005) and Anney (2015) have also pointed out that, in ensuring the conformability, a researcher must ensure that findings are a true reflection of the experiences and ideas of the participants, rather than the preferences and preconceptions of the researcher. In ensuring that what I presented in this study as findings is real and represents what the participants shared with me, I shared with them interview scripts and video recorded data for them to go through it and confirm if it was what they had shared with me. For this, the participants were invited to make changes to the data if they so desired. Although this was time-consuming for me, I believed that it was an important step for ensuring that the research process was credible and trustworthy.

In ensuring the dependability of the study, I kept the documents stated below in order for cross-checking of the research process. Raw data, which constituted the participants' voice recordings during the interviews; and video recordings, which were generated during the lesson

observations. Greaves (2020) points out that dependability and confirmability are quite close in meaning. However, Greaves (2020) indicates that one of the ways in which to ensure dependability is through providing a detailed explanation of the research process, including the methodology used and the data collection methods. This is what has driven the conduct of this study throughout.

## 3.9 Ethical considerations

Ethics has to do with what is considered right or wrong. In a research context, it is important to consider ethics, especially where such research involves human beings (Cohen et al., 2013). Damanakis and Woodford (2015, p. 708) contend that "qualitative researchers are aware of the factors that might consciously or unconsciously influence the process of their study as they strive to respect the participants' multiple truth(s)". The view adopted in this study was that ethical research conduct must be a concern for all researchers. Therefore, the conduct of this study was governed by ethical procedures and principles as discussed below.

Both procedural ethics and ethics in practice were adopted in this study. Guillemin and Gillam (2007) have defined procedural ethics as a typology of ethics that involves obtaining approval of conducting research from the relevant ethics committee, while ethics in practice is defined as every day ethical issues that arise during the process of conducting research. Before starting my journey for this study, I applied for ethical clearance from the University of KwaZulu-Natal Research Ethics Committee. After obtaining ethical clearance from the University's Ethics Committee (See Appendix E) and the Department of Education (See Appendix D), I then proceeded with processes required to initiate data collection. Firstly, the nature and purpose of the study was shared with prospective participants, including what they were expected to do. Hereafter, they were requested to participate in the study. Informed consent was obtained, through written form, from those who were willing to participate in the study. This constituted the first step in my efforts to respect and protect the rights of the participants. The sharing of the nature and purpose of the study, including what they were expected to do, if they decided to participate, helped them in deciding whether to participate in the study.

As part of the process of obtaining informed consent, I explained to the participants that their anonymity would be upheld. This was achieved through the use of pseudonyms throughout the

research process. Pseudonyms were devised by the participants who were asked to provide names by which they would like to be called. The rationale for the use of the pseudonyms was to protect participants' identities. Damianakis and Woodford (2015) maintain that it is the part of the responsibilities of a researcher to protect participants during and after the conduct of the study. This, according to Damianakis and Woodford (2015), must be done by not disclosing who the identities of the participants. Damianakis and Woodford further asset that hiding participants' identities is mostly important where studies involve participants from vulnerable and marginalised communities. This was relevant for this study, as literature reviewed suggested that teachers who are teaching in multi-grade contexts may be marginalised.

Lastly, I also pointed out to the participants that their participation was voluntary and that they had a right to withdraw without any penalty, should they feel uncomfortable. I further explained to them that if there were questions with which they were uncomfortable, they had a right to request not to respond. The rationale for doing this was to ensure that participants were not coerced to the aspects that they were unwilling to share.

## 3.10   Conclusion

This chapter discussed the methodological and design considerations of the study. In this chapter, I provided the rationale for adopting particular procedures and stances. For instance, I provided a rationale for the adoption of the qualitative research approach and the critical paradigm and the implications that this had for the study. I further discussed the case study methodology adopted in this study and provided a justification for its use. The rationale and choice of the context as well as the participants were described. I also discussed the manner in which access to the school and participants was negotiated. Data generation tools used in collecting data were also discussed as well as justifications thereof. Lastly, ethical considerations important to the study were explained and discussed.

The following chapter presents, discusses and analyses the findings that emerged from the study and endeavours to make sense of the findings in line with the key research questions of the study.

# CHAPTER 4

# DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

## 4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the research methodology and design that underpinned the study. This chapter presents and discusses the findings emerged from the data generated through the semi-structured interviews and classroom lesson observations adopted in the study. Bourdieu's Theory of Practice and Bernstein's theory of pedagogic practice frames were used to analyse and make sense of the data generated. Bourdieu's theory of field, habitus and capital was used for understanding teacher's experiences of teaching multi-grade classes. Bernstein's theory of pedagogic practices was used to analyse teacher's pedagogic practices and the extent to which this enabled or constrained learning. The following key research questions guided the analysis of the findings:

- What are the experiences of teachers teaching multi-grade classes in a rural context?
- What are the pedagogical practices of teachers teaching multi-grade classes?
- How do their pedagogical practices enable or constrain learning?

This chapter is divided into two sections, with each section analysed in relation to the key research questions of the study.

The first section (section 4.2) addresses the first key research question: Here, I analyse teachers' experiences of teaching in a multi-grade context. Teachers' personal reflections reveal that, for the most part, teachers in this study experienced their contexts as negative. Under the theme, factors that contribute to the teachers' experiences of teaching multi-grade classrooms, I discuss, firstly, what the challenges are and the source or sources of these challenges. For example, I discuss context and inadequate support from various stakeholders and how this influenced teachers' experiences. The study also attempted to interrogate and challenge deficit understandings of multi-grade contexts, by focusing on some of the positive experiences of teaching multi-grade classes, which constitutes the second theme. In this section, I explored

teachers' sense of agency and the relationships that they had developed with their learners with a view to assisting them negotiate their difficult context.

Section 2 (4.3) responds the second and third research questions, where I examine teachers' pedagogical practices and what constrains or enables their teaching. Under the theme, teachers' pedagogical practices as strategies for access to quality education, I used Bernstein's theory to make sense of the nuances in their teaching and the ways in which they worked to provide their learners with access to education, albeit it in difficult circumstances. For the most part, teachers could successfully read their context, their learner's cognitive ability and diverse needs and use their pedagogical practices to help learners. Whilst mostly successfully, one area of concern was the low cognitive demand apparent in their questioning techniques.

## 4.2 Factors affecting teachers' experiences of teaching in multi-grade contexts

This section provides a discussion on the understandings of the teachers' experiences of teaching in multi-grade contexts, and responds to the first key research question. Data revealed that teachers who teach in multi-grade contexts experienced their environment and teaching in both positive and negative ways.  In this section, I firstly discuss the negative experiences that teachers encounter in their teaching and learning context. I position teachers as possessing forms of agency to negotiate negative experiences and sustain their positive experiences. The theoretical concepts of habitus, field and capital were used to understand teachers' experiences of teaching within multi-grade contexts.

The challenges that negatively impacted teacher's experiences and practices were experienced as unfair and could be regarded as unjust. In this study, participants' negative experiences or the challenges they encountered occurred in various ways. For example, multi-grade teaching positioned teachers' experiences as gruelling, taxing and demanding, with resultant psychological effects, inadequate support from key stakeholders within education (universities, Department of Education, subject advisors and parents); teacher marginalisation and heavy workloads. The findings from this study concur with findings highlighted in the literature review section as will be pointed out below.

### 4.2.1 Multi-grade teaching: Emotionally gruelling, demanding and taxing

Teachers in this study experienced multi-grade contexts as challenging and emotionally arduous. The following participants reported the following about teaching in their schools:

**Dlamini**: *"There are lots of things that I am experiencing in multi-grade school. It is not easy working here comparing to the conditions I used to work under when the school was still mono-graded. There is a huge difference between multi-grade and mono-grade".*

**Kula**: *"There are lots of challenges. Teaching multi-grade is challenging teachers a lot because there is nothing that we are using as a guide. There is no policy that directly speaks to us as multi-grade teachers, I think this makes multi-grade teaching a bit challenging since all the challenges lies on the teacher to deal with them accordingly".*

**Zakes**: *"Hhaa (exclaimed) multi-grade ayidlali phela (multi-grade is not a joke). You get headache the moment you enter the classroom. Chaos, not easy to discipline, not knowing which grade to start with as they are all here waiting for you. We really need assistance here, asikhoni (we are not coping)".*

**Cekwane**: "*Multi-grade is a two-face education programme. On the other side we have to treat it as a single class and on the other hand we need to differentiate these classes".*

**Ngubane**: "*Oh my God no! You want me to tell you something….? There is no way one can say she/he has an experience in this kind of teaching. Every day everything is new here. Every day I encounter new problems which are always difficult to deal with".*

These responses clearly highlight the difficulties that teachers experience in the multi-grade context. All the above participants positioned teaching within multi-grade teaching as difficult and arduous, as it was "*not easy"* and "*not a joke".* It is a context where as a teacher encounters "*new problems which are 'difficult to deal with".* What the participants are saying here could be understood in two ways. Firstly, it suggests the instance of psychosocial effects that multi-grade contexts attend on the teachers. For example, being uncertain about what to expect,

getting headaches, and experiencing stress from struggling to cope and encountering problems daily. These have an effect on them psychologically and emotionally.

Secondly, this points to the extent to which teachers' value multi-grade education, often manifesting in positioning it negative ways (Imrie & Edwards, 2003). When this occurs one can assume that this exacerbates teachers' inability to cope with the demands of a difficult multi-grade context. Thus, for these teachers, there were many challenges that made their teaching difficult. The distinction that Dlamini is making between his experience of teaching in a mono-grade setting and in a multi-grade context: "*there is a huge difference between multi-grade and mono-grade*" has grave consequences for multi-grade education. For instance, Dlamini points out that it was easier to navigate challenges within the mono-grade contexts, and that working within a multi-grade setting was laborious. For him, multi-grade contexts are replete with "*chaos*", a lack of discipline: "*not easy to discipline*", uncertainty: "*not knowing which grade to start with as they are all here waiting for you*" and continuous problems that teachers are expected to navigate: "*I encounter new problems which are difficult to deal with*".

The above challenges and difficulties result in teachers experiencing emotional distress and physical discomfort– *"you get a headache the moment you enter the classroom', Oh my God no! You want me to tell you something… This kind of teaching...*". According to Hargreaves (2000), emotions are interwoven into teaching and learning. For the participants in this study, psychological and emotional consequences result in them feeling that all they encounter are problems. The negative discourses that surround teaching in a multi-grade context influence how teachers experience their daily lives. This has the potential to lead to stress, as evident in the case of Zakes and Ngubane, in the form of headaches and other emotional discomforts.

What Zakes is going through has been reported in Kivunja and Sims (2015), who point out that the stress that teachers experience is disempowering and hinders teachers' ability to perform effectively and provide quality teaching and learning. For Cekwane, this serves as a push factor, something that triggers the feeling to leave the school: *"If I would get another school which does not practice multi-grade I would go there"*. This response suggests how teaching in a multi-grade context is emotionally exhausting for the teacher. It also suggests that Cekwane is physically there, but emotionally and psychologically, she is somewhere else *"if I would get*

*another school…".* Dlamini is also struggling with teaching multi-grade classes. She prefers mono-grade teaching to multi-grade, which is eloquently captured in her response "*It is not easy working here comparing to the conditions I used to work under when the school was still mono-graded".*

Their failure to expose their learners to quality education is particularly disconcerting; especially for Cekwane who indicates "*Multi-grade is not and will never provide the quality education … The education that I offer is not of a quality. … I am not feeling good about being a multi-grade teacher. I just wish that I can move to other school that is not multi-grade. Doing something that you not sure of is not good and it makes me feel guilty. Like I said that I feel like I haven't done enough".* Cekwane's response echoes deep-seated hopelessness, characteristic of anyone feeling defeated by their circumstances.

Cekwane's understanding that quality education is absent in multi-grade contexts echoes findings from Taole's (2014) study. Cekwane has internalised the perpetual existence of her inability to provide learners with "*quality education",* despite knowing that the factors that account for this are outside her sphere of control. She feels guilty and uncertain and constantly questions her professional identity and crucifies herself as a teacher who has not "*done enough*." Zembylas (2003) pointed out that emotions are powerful and can influence the development of teachers' identities. Here, Cekwane questions who she is as a teacher and her inability to reconcile the material conditions of her context with that of her professional identity causes her to think of moving '*to other schools that is not multi-grade*". This suggests negative experiences that surround teachers' practices within a multi-grade school and feelings of being inadequate, which could lead to her leaving the profession.

Further, the institutional expectations from the Department of Education causes teachers to experience teaching as pressurised because:

 **Bhengu**: "*There are a lot of challenges. Teaching multi-grade is challenging teachers a lot because there is nothing that we are using as a guide. There is no policy that directly speaks to us as multi-grade teachers. I think this makes multi-grade teaching a bit challenging since all the challenges lies on the teacher to deal with them accordingly".*

The above responses from teachers suggest that teaching in a multi-grade school is gruelling, taxing and demanding and affects them emotionally, psychologically and professionally. It causes them to question and doubt their abilities and who they are as teachers, including whether quality education is possible in multi-grade contexts. Teachers' responses position and characterise their teaching context as a pool of challenges.

### 4.2.2 Support from stakeholders

#### 4.2.2.1 Support at university level

All the participants were in possession of a university qualification. Some of them were participating in continuing professional development activities, furthering their studies in higher education institutions. However, during interviews, their responses suggested that even though they possessed relevant teaching qualifications, this had not equipped them with the required knowledge, skills and resilience necessary to navigate the complexities of a multi-grade context. Heather (2014) and Ramrathan and Mzimela (2016) have questioned the failure of higher education institutions to provide teachers with the requisite skills, knowledge and resilience for teaching in a multi-grade context. For Ramrathan and Mzimela (2016), this emphasises a lack of recognition of multi-grade teaching as a recognised vehicle for ensuring access to quality education. The effect of this is that it exacerbates the stigma apportioned to and associated with multi-grade education as deficient.

**Kula**: *"I was not trained to teach for multi-grade teaching at university; I was only trained for mono-grade".*

**Dlamini***: "My training became irrelevant to the context I am currently working in. So… the training is no longer helping me anymore".*

The first response refers to the invisibility of multi-grade at an institutional level of the university. It shows the failure of the universities to prepare teachers for different teaching realities, "*I was only trained for mono-grade*". The institutionalised cultural capital associated with power and gained from an institution such as a university fails to provide them with the social capital required within their context (Bourdieu, 1989). The lack of access to cultural

capital universities are supposed to provide suggests that they may be 'irrelevant'. This implies their many years of study, the degrees and training they have obtained have not translated into advantage and power for them (Bourdieu, 1989). Instead, there is a disconnection between what they have learned, their contextual realities and their practices.

In the second response, where Dlamini reports that "*my training became irrelevant to the context I am currently working in. So… the training is no longer helping me anymore",* points to the possibility that the training that she has received is not context-relevant. This means that it does not provide her with any enabling mechanism for the realities she is facing in her context. According to Bourdieu (1989), this constitutes the struggles that are carried out in different social arenas. The inadequate training that she has received is disempowering and becomes a debilitating factor that undermines her to access cultural capital. Institutionalised capital embodied in certification should mean that one is qualified and competent for the job. However, within a multi-grade teaching context, certification and competency is worthless. Grime (2019) has questioned the validity and worth of pre-service training in preparing teachers for the realities of their teaching contexts. This could also be viewed as a form of symbolic violence, as failing to prepare teachers adequately for multi-grade contexts. When this happens, there is always a double bind, which results in a failure to "*offer quality"* (Cekwane), affecting learners most marginalised by the schooling system (Taole, 2014).

Bhengu, Zakes and Cekwane point to the idea that multi-grade teaching is invisible in higher education institutions:

**Bhengu**: *"Oh no! The training I obtained was specific to mono-grade teaching. I am saying that because I never heard of multi-grade during my training. I was not trained for this".*

**Zakes**: "*If I was given opportunity to choose ngangingeke ngilokothe" (*This is a saying from IsiZulu, which means I wouldn't dare).

**Cekwane**: *"Doing something you not trained for is difficult, I am not even sure whether what I am doing is right or wrong".*

From these responses, it could be concluded that multi-grade contexts are invisible in the curricula of higher education institutions. This failure of higher education institutions to provide them with the required training and knowledge has affected Zakes and Cekwane severely. The fact that Cekwane has not being trained to teach in a multi-grade class, impacts her practice and creates uncertainty as she is not even sure whether what "*I am doing is right or wrong*". This idea concurs with what Taole (2014) has found, that being inadequately prepared constrains what these teachers can do for learners in a multi-grade class.

However, this inadequate preparation by the university means that teachers such as Bhengu, Zakes and Cekwane are marginalised and cannot participate effectively in the teaching profession. Young (1999) has argued that marginalisation is one of the worst forms of oppression, as people are excluded from participating in society. Marginalisation, in the instance of this study, affects teachers' emotions, causing teachers such as Zakes to believe that if they had a choice they "*ngangingeke ngilokothe*", which means they would not dare. This manifests in their feelings of isolation and hopelessness. Zakes' response, however, also suggests that an alternative understanding of multi-grade teaching is required. Whilst from a political point of view it is necessary symbol of transformation, on a personal level of teachers and learners, multi-grade teaching has not translated to any transformative effect, because it is imposed on him and "*if I was given the opportunity to choose*" he would not.

### 4.2.2.2 Support from Department of Education

Findings in this study revealed that lack of support was not only from higher education institutions; it was also from the Department of Education. Participants complained of the lack of support from the Department of Education that, in their own view, reproduced inequalities and within multi-grade education. When asked about the kind of support they received from Department of Education, teachers said:

**Kula**: "*I cannot say there is support I get from department because even the workshops that are conducted every year are not helping as they are not speaking to multi-grade teaching, support materials does not belong to us, we are not even trained on how to use mono-grade textbooks on multi-grade context*".

**Cekwane**: *"I feel very bad because in some schools they are not doing what we are doing here. In our neighbouring schools they are not multi-grading like us. So, this makes me feel different from other teachers… It would be better if I have support or proper guidance as to how exactly must I do when teaching multi-grade class. Right now, I don't know what I am doing I wish I have full support just like other teachers".*

Both Kula's and Cekwane's responses reveal the apparent disparities between multi-grade and mono-grade teaching and inadequate support for them to be effective in their contexts. Teachers teaching in multi-grade contexts feel marginalised, different and socially devalued. Bourdieu (1986) argues that education is a power laden space. The differential access to power evident in the devalued status of multi-grade schools results in the Department of Education, whose role function is to assist all teachers, failing to provide the required support. For Kula, the lack of support in the form of irrelevant workshops that do not "*speak to multi-grade teaching*"; support material that "*does not belong to us*" as well as training associated with multi-grade teaching could be understood as symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 2008).

There is a conscious perception promoted that multi-grade teaching and learning is unimportant and thus the much-needed support, training and resources are absent. Fixing teachers, learners and schools in these ways, classifies and defines them and shapes their world view of multi-grade teaching in undesirable ways (Bourdieu, 1995). What Kula and Cekwane are experiencing could be characterised as injustice and inequality, compared to what their counterparts are receiving in mono-grade schools. The fact that workshops conducted by Department of Education do not equip them for contextual demands in multi-grade schools and renders multi-grade teaching further invisible and makes them feel that they are "*different*". This supports findings by Ramrathan and Ngubane (2011). Being rendered invisible reinforces and reproduces inequality and devalued status that is experienced by teachers such as Kula and Cekwane.

Multi-grade teaching is marked as different and 'othered' (Bourdieu, 1986). One can conclude that the institutional habitus reflected in the stance that the Department of Education has taken, is underpinned by dominant values, norms and beliefs and value that has historically being assigned to multi-grade teaching and learning (Heather, 2014; Grimes, 2019). Furthermore,

teachers, such as Kula, cannot access social capital, which Bourdieu (1986) argues is crucial for providing individuals with a sense of belonging and membership. Moreover, findings of this study suggest that the prestige that is accrued through attainting social capital was absent for these teachers.

However, the acute distinction between mono-grade and multi-grade education means that teachers struggled to share common ideologies and values. This from Kula's and Cekwane's case, who struggled to share the same values and ideas, as they supported the notion that teachers from mono-grade are advantaged by the Department of Education and had access to all the necessary support required to teach successfully. On the other hand, these teachers, especially Cekwane, struggled alone with no one to support her. She experienced a sense of powerlessness regarding what she *"...must do when teaching multi-grade class. Right now, I don't know what I am doing. I wish I have full support just like other teachers*".

The failure by the Department of Education to provide teachers with the required symbolic elements, such as skills and knowledge required for teaching, excludes these teachers from acquiring cultural capital required for being a resilient teacher. If anything, this becomes a source of social inequality, in which mono-grade education is often associated with prestige and value and legitimises inequality (Heather, 2014). For instance, they are unable to acquire habitus of a professionally recognised teacher. The lack of recognition resulted in further demoralisation for these teachers, because her self-esteem and commitment to her teaching practice was questioned "*I believe if I had full support I would be motivated"*.

The lack of support from the Department of Education, for these teachers, exacerbated the prominence of an unfair bias towards mono-grade education. This implies that, in the instance of these teachers, equality between multi-grade and mono-grade education is a utopian notion. There are no networks for Kula and teachers from other schools, as they do not share anything in common: *"I don't benefit any information from other colleagues who are teaching in mono-grade schools because they know nothing about multi-grade teaching"* (Kula).

Due to her different context, Kula does not share common values with teachers from mono-grade contexts. This results in her having limited access to social capital (Bourdieu, 1976). And

understanding her teaching context as unfair and unjust towards her "... *not qualified to teach such classes…. Never heard of the word multi-grade before …. Yet I feel I am forced to teach these classes…. envy to work in mono-grade school…. They are supported and valued".* Kula perceives working in a multi-grade context as unfair and unjust. Being qualified for mono-grade education and finding herself having to teach in multi-grade class is problematic, as her pre-service training has ill-prepared her for teaching in a multi-grade class.

For her, she is being forced to teach this class. Being *forced* reveals power imbalances and being without an alternative. The absence of equality and fairness in Kula's experiences also manifests in "*envy to work in mono-grade School…They are supported and value*". This has been reported in Little (2001), Taole and Cornish (2017), where working conditions resulted in teachers losing interest in working in multi-grade schools, largely because they were aware that "*once you are there you are on your own*". The envy that Kula had was because she knew that teachers in multi-grade schools were not treated as equals with mono-grade teachers. She envies the support and value accorded to her counterparts in mono-grade schools. The challenging context of a multi-grade school prevented her from accessing the required cultural capital.

### 4.2.2.3 Support from subject advisors

Subject advisors are departmental officials whose responsibility is to visit schools and provide curriculum support to teachers. Their support is vital as they assist in helping teachers with unblocking challenges they encounter with the implementation of the curriculum. Subject advisors also visit schools to monitor curriculum coverage. However, in this study it was evident that even subject advisors who come to visit teachers were unable to or reluctant to assist teachers with the challenges they encounter in teaching multi-grade classes. The following responses from the participants provide some insights into the support provided by subject advisors to the teachers:

**Kula:** *"Subject advisors often come. When they come they tell us that they are here for support however, it turned out as if they are here to judge and criticize every piece of work without even trying to understand the context we are in".* She further said, "*They use to compare our work pace with mono-grade and when we ask them to assist us they say they don't know multi-grade. It is our burden since no one knows about it".*

**Ngubane:** *"...even people who supposed to help us only come to ask how we are coping ...they also know nothing about multi-grade"*

Kula's responses suggest a lack of knowledge of multi-grade teaching by subject advisors who are supposed to support teachers. This finding has been supported by Taole and Mncube (2012). Instead of receiving support, Kula feels she is *criticised* for her efforts and *judged* by subject advisors *without even trying to understand the context we are in".* This response shows the unfairness that teachers were exposed to and the ignorance of how contextual realities affected teachers' work. According to Bourdieu (1989), fields such as a multi-grade school are shaped by structural inequality and inform what teachers can or cannot do. For subject advisors, not considering the factors contributing to Kula's practice is unfair and unjust.

The lack of support and understanding of how context influences their practices, according to Ngubane, undermines the quality of teaching. She describes the experience of quality as follows: *"the word quality is not for us; it is for single-grade teachers". This is because there seems to be very few people who are able to help them".* The lack of knowledge and skills extend to both departmental officials and teachers. It would seem that multi-grade contexts are spaces where a lack of knowledge and skills flourish with no-one knowing how to challenge this understanding. It would seem that subject advisors tend to pressurise teachers who are already overburdened, instead of helping and supporting them (Malaudzi, 2016).

Learners in the above context are also adversely affected. This is because they are exposed to second-class education (Taole & Mncube, 2012). Learners were also exposed to inadequate learning achievement *"Our learners always write the cluster papers which are set by teachers from mono-grade context"* (Zakes); *"… They do not consider our learners when developing these tasks…"* (Ngubane). These experiences may perpetuate patterns of inequality. This is in line with Barrett's (2011) argument that the unequal distribution of educational opportunities is significant in South Africa and reiterates Joubert's (2010) findings that learners from a multi-grade context will not be able to compete with learners from mono-grade contexts.

Zakes and Ngubane's concerns explain how multi-grade education and learners in multi-grade are relegated to the margins of the educational system. Bantwini and Feza (2017) contend that the inability to provide the required cultural capital and resultant power to teachers reinforces the mismatch between the different fields of education, namely multi-grade and mono-grade education. The focus of subject advisors on criticising and asking questions that little help undermines the teachers' abilities to acquire the necessary cultural capital and understand the 'rules of the game' (Bourdieu, 1986). When support is not forthcoming, teachers cannot acquire knowledge, behaviours, beliefs and attitudes that would imbue with values. They cannot participate fully in their lives as professional teachers and are alienated from their work, resulting in a disconnection between the Department of Education and teachers (Ho, 2009).

The one size fits all disposition undermines the provision of quality education for learners, especially those from marginalised contexts. Instead they are marked as different and subject to cultural and social exclusion (Bantwini & Feza, 2017). Failure to recognise strenuous conditions could be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, that subject advisors have inadequate knowledge skills required to support teachers. Secondly, inability to support teachers may be perceived as a lack of caring about teachers' experiences of multi-grade contexts. This reinforces an institutionalised lack of caring, that is difficult to respond to for teachers who teach here. It deflects blame for lack of quality education that learners' experiences onto teachers instead of the Department of Education. Instead, all they experience is continued criticism, lack of support, value and recognition (Mulaudzi, 2016).

### 4.2.2.4 Support from parents

Bantwini and Feza (2017) and Beinhammer and Hascher (2015) assert that the role of parents in the lives of children learning in multi-grade contexts is crucial. The findings from their respective studies suggest that teachers believed that parents did not value the education that their children received and often did not provide the support that was required by the school. This was also evident in the findings of this study. Teachers reported that the lack of support from parents in their community occurred when parents were moving their children from a multi-grade school to the neighbouring mono-grade schools. In relation to support received by teachers in multi-grade teachers from parents, some participants said:

**Dlamini**: *"Some parents had decided to move their children to neighbouring schools that are not multi-grade"*.

**Kula**: *"Multi-grading teaching is not valuable; we see this when parents are keeping on taking their children"*.

**Zakes**: "*…they don't tell us the reasons but all we know is that there are vans that transport learners who supposed to come to this school to schools that are not multi-grade"*.

Here, it could be deduced that the value that is supposed to be found in multi-grade schools by communities is inadequate. If parents move their children to mono-grade schools, it could be argued that it is because they do not view multi-grade education as suitable and useful for their children. The underlying message that is conveyed by the act of taking children out of this school is that multi-grade education is regarded as inferior to mono-grade education. That is, this implies that parents may be finding multi-grade education socially and educationally unacceptable. Parents perceive multi-grade education as inferior and would prefer to incur additional costs for transport, despite their own meagre income in order to move their children to mono-graded schools, which are viewed as better schools.

For Ngubane, the lack of value in multi-grade schools is reflected in the inadequate quality: "*Parents have no faith in the school... They compare their children's work with those of learners from mono-graded schools then conclude by saying the quality of teaching and learning is poor. Then they take their children to mono-graded schools"*. Contrary to what has been reported by Beihammer and Hascher (2015) and Khan 2016), which suggests that parents do not value education or do not understand the importance of education, findings of this study suggest that conditions within this school point to the fact that teachers believed that there was not much value in multi-grade education. Thus, it can be deduced that parents understand the constraints facing multi-grade schools in respect of quality education. For this study, this often manifests as parents preferring to send their children to schools where they can receive better learning opportunities (Mills & Gale, 2004).

Teachers who participated in this study, however, questioned parents' commitment to the school, as could be deduced from Ngubane's response, who believes that parents do "*have no faith in the school*". The lack of capital associated with a challenging field such as a multi-grade school, implies that teachers' practices are often scrutinised by the community they are serving, seeing it as one where "*the quality of teaching and learning is poor*". For Ngubane, not only is multi-grade school negative; so are the teachers in the eyes of the parents. For this study, parents did not have faith in the teachers, which means that their value was questioned by the community members. Bourdieu (1989) points out that cultural goods are valued and fought over, but here the cultural goods normally associated with schooling often lack symbolic value and power.

Symbolically, for this study, it merged that multi-grade education was not valued and had no power to provide both parents and learners with the required skills and knowledge to participate effectively in education. Reducing multi-grade education to a lack of quality, where the quality of teaching and learning is poor, can have the adverse effect, namely, teachers who do not have a sense of community, belonging and commitment. This lack of community is relayed by Zakes who says "*they don't tell us the reasons but all we know …. Not multi-grade*". Teachers' inability to construct a positive image of a multi-grade teacher is exacerbated by the lack of support from multiple corners, the Department of Education, the geographical space, the subject advisors and parents. What was found in this study was that it was difficult for these teachers in these contexts to challenge these deficit understandings.

### 4.2.3   Geographical issues: Teacher isolation

The school where the study was conducted is located in a deep rural area, with access that is very poor condition. Literature depicts rural areas as those wracked by severe levels of socio-economic deprivation, and which are, as a result, often portrayed in negative ways (Moletsane, 2012). This was highlighted in Zakes' response when asked about the challenges of teaching in a multi-grade school: *"Last week I missed the very important meeting that was called by Department of Education. What happened was …. I did not get the circulars on time due to distance between here and the circuit offices which are in town*". This response shows how the context affected Zakes, making it difficult for him negotiate the challenges of being a teacher in such a context. The geographical location of the school isolated Zakes from participating in

important departmental activities, which could have been useful in development and advancement of the school. This view of rurality has been supported by Balfour, Mitchell and Moletsane (2008) who argued that rurality is mostly concerned with isolation, poverty, marginalisation and exclusion. In the case of Zakes, such isolation and exclusion manifested in difficult access to important communication and messages, such as departmental circulars, which undermined the efforts of teachers to improve their school. For Zakes, for instance, being unable to attend the meeting suggests that he could build networks with teachers and other key individuals experiencing similar challenges the common values and ideas with some other agents (principals) from other schools.

Zakes went on to point out the impact of other challenges experienced:

> *"You saw how we struggled to get the transport that is coming by this side. We always undergo this challenge of not having proper transport to bring us in school on time. Being in a context like this is very difficult because sometimes we arrive very late at work due to transport problem and we lose lot of time trying to get something to get us to school".*

The context has impacted teachers' practices, as reported in Bourdieu (1989) who contends that field affects how individuals act within particular situations. According to Bourdieu (1989), it is within the cultural fields that habitus develops. From Zakes' response, it could be deduced that the field or context of the school had enabled undesirable practices and norms such as late coming. Contextual factors that were beyond teachers' control had led to late coming becoming a norm in this study. This had resulted in teachers "*arrive[ing] late*" and subsequently "*lose[ing] a lot of time*" for teaching. Thus, a toxic combination of inadequate transport, geographical isolation and poor road infrastructure resulted in teachers losing teaching time and learners on opportunities to learn.

Usually, if teachers have lost on teaching time, a school or teacher concerned must develop and implement a curriculum recovery plan to ensure that what was supposed to have been taught is taught. However, in the instance of this study, circumstances such as the geographical location of the school, in which learners had to walk long distances to and from the school, teachers

found it difficult to implement such a plan. When asked about how she recovered the lost time, Dlamini responded: "*There is no recovery plan that is on place. These learners are young and I cannot hold them back in the afternoons for extra classes since they walk long distances to and from their homes. Should anything happen to them on their way I will account*".

The above response illustrates how context prevents effective teaching and learning in this multi-grade school. In this instance, the context of the school presented as a barrier for her to execute her professional duties and ensure that learners did not lose out on valuable learning. Beam and Talford (2013) view field as a social context, which comprises rules and practices that engender particular ways of being and thinking. For Dlamini, her learners cannot remain behind because of the long distances that they must walk to and from school. She could read her context, knowing that afternoon classes will not be feasible for her learners.

Unfortunately, the fact that extra classes were not feasible meant that she could not recover time lost and that her learners had to lose out. Lack of transport and the location of the school in remote area presented as a barrier and raised issues of safety for her learners and subsequently prevented her from using her agency to navigate circumstances. Moletsane (2012) and Khan (2016) have pointed out that those who live in marginalised contexts, especially in remote rural areas, are often subjected to systematic challenges, which manifests as, for instance, lack of transport, in the context of this study, making it difficult for Dlamini to exercise her agency. As much as she was willing to recover time lost, the complex circumstances of her school blocked. What is significant in the case of Dlamini is that she recognised and understood that, as a teacher, she will be liable for the possible educational damage that doing nothing could attend to her learners.

For this reason, teachers such as Dlamini often find themselves in an ethical dilemma, knowing that they need to do something about the situation, but having to consider the costly consequences of doing so. The result is that teachers' agency is often paralysed by the circumstances that are beyond their control. This has grave consequences for both learners and teachers. The internal conflict that teachers experience under such conditions is unfathomable. On the other hand, the damage to the lives of learners is immeasurable. This implies that

inequality may in the DNA of the context of multi-grade schools. A situation such as this one sets limits for what teachers can achieve in multi-grade schools.

### 4.2.4    Positive influences for teaching in a multi-grade school

Findings of this study revealed that not every aspect of the experience of teaching in multi-grade school may be negative. Such a view was also reported in the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. During interviews for this study, teachers reported some positive experiences of teaching in multi-grade schools. For this, findings revealed that the positive experiences of teachers in multi-grade schools were located in two areas, namely, teacher agency and teacher-learner relationships. These are discussed in more detail below.

**4.2.4.1 Teacher agency as a device for transformation**

Teachers who participated in this study displayed agency against all odds that they were up against in their school and classrooms. For instance, findings revealed that although the topic combination of the elements of teaching in a multi-grade school was debilitating for teachers, they continued to deploy their knowledge and skills to ensure that their learners had access to education. This suggests that they still viewed and conducted themselves as agents and beacons of change in their context. The following excerpts from participants suggest that teachers in this school deployed their capital, which according Bourdieu (1986) is related to how they used their power, to face the daily configurations and demands of their situation:

**Zakes**: "*Even though I am in a hectic context but I try to apply the knowledge I gained during my training at university and adapt it to fit within the context*".

**Cekwane**: "*I am the one who decide on how to teach them or group them. I also see by myself to teach them similar topics and assess them according to their cognitive demand*".

**Kula**: "*… it allows me to be more strategic…I apply various methods in my teaching practice*".

**Dlamini**: "*…I decide to teach them as mono-grade instead of multi-grade*".

These responses reveal the extent of control and power teachers had in their classroom contexts. Both Cekwane and Zakes could take decisions on how to provide opportunities to learn for their learners. In this instance, teachers used their academic and professional capital to select ways in which they were going to ensure that their learners had access education of a reasonably good quality, despite the fact that the continuing professional development activities to which they had access was largely not applicable to the context of a multi-grade class. This suggests that the teachers possessed some resilience and adaptability to navigate the difficult context of multi-grade education. For instance, despite the lack of support from the Department of Education officials, participants still reported that: "*I try to adapt and apply the knowledge I gained during my training and adapt it to fit within the context*". This illustrates the argentic responses of teachers to their situations to ensure that their learners had access to opportunities to learn.

The above finding supports what has been reported by Ramrathan and Mzimela (2016) that since teachers do not receive relevant training on multi-grade teaching; teachers rely on their agency to ensure that their learners have access to education of reasonable quality. Ramrathan and Mzimela (2016) argue that agency refers personal attributes that enable individuals to pursue their intentions despite the odds that are against them doing so. This was the case in this study: agency "*... allow[ed] me to be more strategic...I apply various methods in my teaching practice*". Kula's response, for instance, suggests that even though she experienced difficulties with teaching a multi-grade class, she still viewed it as an opportunity to *be more strategic* and to try different techniques in order to create opportunities for her learners to learn. This also indicates how habitus shaped and influenced Kula's actions as she responded to the challenging factors associated with multi-grade teaching.

The above finding suggests that teachers continued to devise strategies that contributed to effective teaching and learning. This, according to Bourdieu (1986), could point to the degree of symbolic power to which they had access. The field also enabled some degree of flexibility for the teacher to do something within their power to improve their and learner's situation: "*I apply various methods in my teaching practice*". The struggles for these teachers within the field enabled them to improve their standing and use their sense of agency to respond (Bourdieu, 1989). According to Bourdieu (1977), habitus compels individuals to act in certain ways, often

influenced by their contexts. In the above responses, it can be deduced that the field demanded that teachers apply new and adapted techniques to ensure that teaching and learning took place.

For the participants in this study, agency influenced a more meaningful and transformative habitus, that was responsive to the needs of learners and their context. The fact that all the teachers had received training at recognised higher education institutions enabled them to gain access to the required capital, which, for this study, was reflected through their skills and knowledge. Zakes, for example, finished "*my degree four years ago*". This institutionalised capital sourced from their qualifications ensured that they were institutionally recognised as trained with specific "*majors*" (Kula). This made it possible for them to experience a sense of agency. The recognition that they were qualified teachers also equipped them with the means to be transformative.

**Kula**: *"I always keep myself trying to find some solutions to the problems that I am experiencing".*

**Dlamini**: *"... we only assist each other within the school and we are not trained. So, no one has clear knowledge of multi-grade teaching it's just that just that we support each other based our experiences".*

The support Dlamini obtains within the school reveals that even though teachers did not have networks with agents from outside their context, but within the field they had strong networks. Within the school context, Dlamini could communicate and share her experiences with other teachers, who could understand her struggles as they shared common values. It is this sense of agency that enabled teachers to obtain various forms of capital.

### 4.2.4.2 Teacher-learner relationships

Positive teacher-learner relationships are key to effective teaching and learning, as they benefit both teacher and learner. Firstly, through these relationships, teachers have the opportunity to understand individualities, such as the strengths and weaknesses of each learner. Secondly, through these relationships, teachers can understand learning needs of each learner. Learners

can also communicate their needs freely and openly. Social justice values are promoted in this way, as the discourse enables them participate fully in the teaching and learning processes.

Findings of the study conducted by Quil and Smyth (2014) point to the fact that in multi-grade classrooms, teachers develop a strong relationship with their learners, given the fact that multi-grade classes usually have small numbers. When asked about the positive things about teaching multi-grade classes, Ngubane responded as follows:

> *"What is empowering me in my teaching practice is that I am working with the same group of learners for more than three years in each phase. And this gives me an opportunity to bond with them and understand their individual needs. This is very difficult to do in a period of one year, so... by spending long time with them also assist them to understand and get used to my teaching methods. I can tell you their weaknesses and strengths because I know them. They are like my own children now".*

Relationships are an important aspect of teaching and learning. Understanding learners' needs is important as it enables teachers to choose the most appropriate pedagogical methods and approaches to help their learners acquire knowledge and skills (Bernstein, 2001). Ngubane, for instance, reported her teaching practices as "*empowering*" and that working with the *"same group of learners for more than three years"* allowed *"me an opportunity to bond with them and understand their individual needs".* The above teacher might be effective when selecting teaching methods to be used in these learners as she is clear about their needs. This may work to the benefit of both teacher and learner.

Ngubane finds it easy to diagnose the needs of learners in her classroom and can provide them with the suitable support relevant to their learning needs. This could be viewed as evidence of individualised instruction and support, which has been reported in studies by Condy and Blease (2014), Smith and Engeli (2014) and Taole and Cornish (2017). Learners, on the other hand, through these relationships, are enabled to understand and overcome what they do not know. Furthermore, positive relationships are extended because learners become *"like my own children now".* In this way, she is able to maximise learning opportunities for her learners (Quil

& Smyth, 2014). Kula's response confirms the existence of positive teacher-learner relationships that were reported in this study:

> *"I am like their mother now. I know each and every one of them; I know how to assist them if they have challenges. I also understand those who easily learn when they are paired with their peers".*

Both Kula and Ngubane's responses suggest that teaching learners in multi-grade schools had its positive aspects. Multi-grade teaching, for Kula, enabled her to individualise learning, as she knew all her learners individually and had developed specific ways of working with them (Smith & Engeli, 2015). In this perspective, both teacher and learner benefited, which implies that a degree of effective teaching and learning was taking place. This was possible as the teacher applied a one size does not fit all curriculum approach and adapted and shaped her teaching to place her learners at the centre of her teaching.

In the section above, I explored teachers' experiences of teaching within a multi-grade school. The findings of this study support what has been found by previous studies in this area, namely, that teachers experience their context may be challenging, which could affect their emotions; that barriers or challenges often manifest in the lack of support from various stakeholders within education. Whilst acknowledging that barriers exist, this study found two factors that enabled teachers to negotiate their contexts relatively successfully, in the form of the positive experiences of teaching in the multi-grade context. For this study, teachers achieved this through exercising agency and through the development of positive relationships with their learners.

The next part of this study will present and discuss the pedagogic practices used by teachers in ensuring that their learners learned.

## 4.3 Teacher's pedagogical practices for access to quality education

This section presents and discusses teachers' pedagogical practices. It assesses the extent to which teachers' pedagogical practices constrained or enabled learning. Thus, this section responds to the second and third key research questions of this study

In this study, teachers used various strategies to provide learners with access to knowledge and skills, and learning in general. Sometimes, these were successful and contributed to learners acquiring the necessary and grade-appropriate knowledge and skills. On the other hand, teachers' pedagogical practices constrained effective learning. For this study, teachers attributed this to the contextual realities embedded in multi-grade education. I have identified six key influences that shaped teachers' practices in this study, namely, code switching as a bridge to learning; pacing of content; teaching according to cognitive levels of learners; curriculum coverage; curriculum content grouping; and questioning as disabling or constraining to learning. These are presented and discussed in detail in the section below.

### 4.3.1   Code switching as a strategy for learning

From the lessons observed, data revealed that, in almost every lesson, teachers used code switching as mechanism for ensuring that learners had access to the curriculum.  This, according to Ncoko, Osman and Cocroft (2000), is what teachers do with the intention of facilitating both communication and learning.  Teachers' code switched as the language of teaching and learning (LoLT) was English, which was not the home language of their learners. According to the Language in Education Policy, in the Foundation Phase (i.e. Grades R-3), learners must be taught in their home language. However, in the Intermediate (Grades 4-6) and Senior Phase (Grades 7-9), the LoLT changes to English First Additional Language (FAL).

My observations, however, revealed something different in the context of how teachers responded to this in the context of this study. Despite English being the LOLT in the Intermediate Phase, teachers mostly used a mixture of English and IsiZulu to clarify concepts.

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**Teacher:** Bukani-ke manje selinjani....... (Look how it is now).  The teacher cuts the page into half to show the concept of half.  Yes, Bonga
**Bonga:** Ohhafu ababili (it is two halves)
**Teacher:** Ok... let me make an easy example for you. (The teacher has 3 cakes on the table. He points to them and cuts each cake up into equal pieces for example:  Cake One was cut into 8 equal pieces; Cake Two was cut into 12 equal pieces and Cake three was cut into 16 equal pieces).
**Teacher:** Let's say uGrade 4 owu-8 angithi, uGrade 5 owu 12 noGrade 6 owu 16 banamakhekhe ebirthday bonke……. Now, you tell me which class has the biggest pieces of cake?
**Learners:** Grade 4
**Teacher:** Can you tell me why?
**Learner:** Ngoba bancane (there are fewer numbers of learners)

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The following is an example of the lesson observed on 17 January 2019, where Zakes, the Mathematics teacher, who taught Grades 4, 5 and 6 used code switching as their teaching strategy to ensure access for their learners.

Through the visual representations of actual products such as cakes, Zakes made it easier for learners to understand the concept of fractions and, in particular, the idea of equivalent pieces. However, it is in the manner in which he used the isiZulu, the home language of learners, that learners could provide an answer to the question of which grade received the biggest pieces of cake. The use of code switching was important for Zakes because he believed that *"if I see they don't understand in English I switch to their home language to help them learn because there are here to learn. I find it not helping them to use the language that they don't understand…language is a barrier to them"*.

Furthermore, it is evident how horizontal knowledge, associated with cakes, has been recontextualised to provide a means for learners to access vertical, specialised or official curriculum knowledge regarding fractions (Shalem & Hoadley, 2009). Code switching was a key strategy for most of the teachers that I observed teaching. When asked about why they used code switching, Kula and Dlamini provided the following justification:

**Kula:** *"What is happening is that the grade 4s is their first year in intermediate phase and it's their first time having to learn all their subjects in English except for isiZulu. Then, I do code switching because I understand the burden they are carrying…… after giving them hints using their home language the work is perfectly done"*.

**Dlamini: "***…I do use IsiZulu to help learners understand. I often use their home language when I see they don't understand"*.

Kula's, Zakes' and Dlamini's responses highlight the issue of language as a barrier in rural context. From their responses and from the lesson observations conducted in this study, it is clear that English presented as barrier which prevented learners from acquiring the required knowledge transmitted in the classroom (Bernstein, 2000). For this study, teachers had read their context and changed their practice to ensure that their learners learned. Kula, for example,

understood that English presented as a problem for Grade 4 learners, as it is their "*first time having to learn all their subjects in English*". On the other hand, Zakes and Dlamini used their professional knowledge of their learners and their context to decide when to code switch, *"I see they don't understand"*. In addition, they also used code-switching to ensure that acquisition of knowledge by learners as "*they are here to learn. I find it not helping them to use the language that they don't understand"*. These findings concur with what Martin (2015) has found that where teachers had acquired the necessary pragmatic ways of responding to the context where communication with learners in isiZulu was a means to social justice for learners.

Hoadley (2012), in her study conducted in a South African school, reported that learners struggled with reading with meaning. It is for this reason that Zakes and Dlamini respond to the barrier that English presents to acquiring knowledge by using code-switching, which encouraged them to switch to the learners' *"home language to help them learn" (*Zakes). Both Zake's and Dlamini's responses for using isiZulu in their pedagogic practices justified their concern of helping learners learn. For both Dlamini and Zakes, this influenced what knowledge they used to teach.

I analysed the mathematical content knowledge that Zakes selected to teach as strongly classified (C++). He used only mathematical knowledge constructs in his teaching. However, their usage of isiZulu did not detract from meaning and, instead, enabled acquisition of understanding for learners. Code switching was useful for both teachers and learners for transmitting and acquiring subject content (Ncoko, Osman & Crocroft, 2002). Learners still had to acquire vertical knowledge or official knowledge (Bernstein, 2000), albeit through the medium of isiZulu. In the example of lesson observation, however, Zakes used everyday knowledge associated with a cake to provide a conduit for specialised knowledge acquisition of mathematic concepts of fractions and equivalent parts.

### 4.3.2   Pacing as a strategy for learning

Hoadley (2003, p. 265) asserts that exposing learners to opportunities to learn is "*dependent on pacing*". However, within a multi-grade context, pacing of instructional time was not an easy or simple matter, and opportunities were not realised in traditional ways. Within this school, time allocation for each lesson was dependent on the teachers. No bell rang to indicate change

of lessons or break time. Teachers tended to follow the flow of lessons as they saw fit and break time was determined by when other teachers had let their learners out. During observations, lessons time varied. When learners across grades were taught simultaneously on the same concept, then lessons were shorter (that is, 30-35 minutes). For example, a poetry lesson took 35 minutes, as all learners had been given the same poem, regardless of their grade (lesson observation dated 14 August 2018, Poem titled *The New Beginning*). In mathematics for Grades 4, 5 and 6, fractions were taught across all grades and the lesson lasted for approximately 35 minutes (17 January 2019; 18 January 2019).

However, when teachers were teaching concepts per grade, the lesson took longer (at times 3 hours) or until the break time (17 August 2018). This was observed in a lesson where Kula taught an English comprehension lesson. Each grade had a different comprehension passage (for example, Grade 4 had a comprehension passage on "*Hip Hop Pantsula*", Grade 5 on "*Tunuki Primary School*" and Grade 6 "*Endangered animals*"). Time allocation was left to the discretion of the teacher. Thus, pacing was described as a combination of weak and strong classification, depending on the knowledge or content that teachers sought to teach and the grade that which was their focus for that particular lesson.

The lessons were analysed in terms of how fast and slow pacing both teachers and learners adopted. I used codes (F+/ F-), presented by Bernstein (2000) in analysing the pacing for the lessons conducted during the observations. Pacing, according Bernstein (1990), is the rate at which the instructional material is introduced to students and the rate at which they acquire it. The following is an extract from a Social Science lesson, presented by Dlamini, which used the whole class teaching approach. The focus of the lesson was Geography and the purpose of the lesson was for learners to understand lines of latitude and longitude. Whilst lines of latitude and longitude (map work) are in the Grades 4-6 syllabus, the level of understanding is different. Here, Dlamini had pitched the lesson at the level of Grade 4. According to Hoadley (2003), what Dlamini did could be classified as weak differentiation pacing. This is because Dlamini made no distinction between the subject content and the learners' needs.

Understanding the issue of pacing here is complex. This is because pacing moves between being strongly framed to being weakly framed. I coded the lesson as strongly framed (F+), because Dlamini had strong control over the sequencing, pacing and selection of knowledge, and her learners have limited control over this. However, the pace of the lesson was slow (F-). The lesson itself took approximately 40 minutes. Dlamini's response about why the lesson moved at such a slow pace, with a great deal of repetition was *"It is disturbing when you think that learners understood your lesson and you find that they didn't understood at all and by that time it's late to go back and re-teach that topic. So, I was repeating this so that they will have a clear background as the entire chapter is based on the today's information"*. Dlamini repeated the same aspects covered in this lesson in the second lesson. In the second lesson, the same information covered in the first lesson took half the lesson. However, the repetition of the same

knowledge within the lesson and with the second lesson was intentional. Dlamini regarded this as an effective teaching strategy, as she believed that it assisted learners to acquire the knowledge taught. However, in attempting to evaluate the substance of the content taught to learners, all learners were required to do was shout one word answers or yes or no.

Dlamini "*Doing this comes with lot of challenges. I guess you noticed how much time it took me to complete my lessons. It consumed lot of time*".

Dlamini's response provides evidence of her reasoning for the repetition of content lesson. She believes that learners must be taught at their own pace and level of knowledge acquisition and not at the pace of the curriculum or teachers. She believed that her learners must be afforded a chance to thoroughly understand the current work before moving on to new knowledge. This was evident in her response when asked about the time*: "… we choose the styles that we think best work for our learners because it is about them at the end of the day. It is not about completing the curriculum but what they have learnt in class".* This suggests that Dlamini may be having the interests of her learners at heart and worked with what she thought was *'best for our learners …. They have learned in class".*

However, using whole class approach, Ramrathan and Mzimela (2016) argued, may result in limited differentiation to cater for the different cognitive levels of the grade five and six learners. This means that whilst the teachers' intentions were to work for the '*best*' and ensure that their learners were provided with access to quality education. The supposed benefits of repeated subject-specific content (Mzimela, 2019) does not always enable learners to acquire grade-appropriate knowledge. The evaluation of the lesson can, therefore, be coded as weak. Not only was it difficult to evaluate if learners had acquired the necessary knowledge of map work, but the legitimacy of positioning the content at a Grade 4 was also questionable.

### 4.3.3   Accommodation of different learning needs

Four out of five teachers in the study adopted a teaching strategy that regarded learners as homogenous. By this I mean that teachers did not differentiate their teaching in accordance with the learner's abilities or cognitive levels. However, Ngubane showed some understanding of her learners' cognitive levels. She acknowledged their learning needs and attended to them

separately when teaching isiZulu. The strategy used by Ngubane is linked to Bernstein's (1990) concept of differentiated pacing. Hoadley (2003) also used this concept in her analysis of grade 3 teachers and found that when using differentiated pacing learners' individual cognitive needs are attended to. Like the teacher in Hoadley's (2003) study, Ngubane provided specific content at the cognitive level of the learners. The offshoot of this meant that she could also use differentiated pacing where learners who acquire content quicker can move through activities quicker and learners who struggled can be aided by the teacher which means the pacing of knowledge acquisition will be slower.

In the lesson below, the complexities associated with multi-grade teaching became evident. In this lesson, Ngubane was teaching paragraph writing to Grades 1, 2 and 3. Her knowledge of the abilities of her learners was illustrated by how she recognised that learners had different abilities and came from Grade 1 to 3. She thus grouped learners Grade 1, 2 and 3, but ensured that each group comprised learners who were working at almost the same cognitive level. In addition, she also recognised that some of her learners were struggling with sounds and spelling and grouped them together. These learners were a mixture of Grade 1 and 2 and 3. This approach to differentiate groupings showed that the 'quicker' learners required different learning content and the teaching time spent with them could be quicker, whilst the 'slower' learners required more individualised attention and slower pacing.

The lesson above shows strong differentiated content as well as pacing (Hoadley, 2003), where learners are learning based on their individual needs. In the lesson, Ngubane has differentiated both the pace of the lesson and the content learners are required to learn. In this lesson, the teacher controls the pacing of the lesson, but this is intricately bound up with the cognitive level of learners

Working within a multi-grade context meant that Ngubane had to change her lesson content as well as pacing because she as shown in the excerpt below:

> *"I help both highly gifted and those who are struggling to do work that match their abilities... my learners are not equally gifted. There are those who are fast learners, moderate and those who are struggling .... I think it is helping them because some*

*learners find work of their grade too heavy for them while those who are highly gifted get bored when giving them easy tasks they want something more challenging…. I don't hold back those who already know the letters. Like you saw that others were still trying to get their letters right while those who are learning fast were busy with writing paragraph".*

This response suggests that Ngubane understood her context as well as her learners' abilities. This concurs with the findings by previous studies about the extent to which teachers who work in multi-grade contexts know their learners and meets their needs (Quil & Smith, 2014; Heather, 2014; Checchi et al., 2017). This response suggests that, in this class, learners who acquire knowledge quicker, namely, *"highly gifted",* are provided with different learning opportunities to ensure that they are *"getting bored"* by giving them "*challenging*" work.

Thus, at the heart of her strategy was the intention to challenge the gifted learners and provide support to those who might be lagging behind to ensure that access for all learners. In order to ensure access for all learners, Ngubane spent over 45 minutes with the group that was "*struggling*". This illustrates the extent to which Ngubane ensured that the needs of all learners were met. Often, multi-grade contexts require teachers who can think on their toes, a quality that was evident in the case of Ngubane, who moved from group to group, ensuring that learners were on task and actively involved in learning. Ngubane was flexible in her planning of lessons. Taole and Cornish (2017) and Mason and Burns (2018) have argued that teachers who teach in multi-grade contexts must be aware of the cognitive abilities of their learners. Through this, Ngubane showed understanding of the fact that one size does not fit all when it comes to the learning needs of learners.

Another important strategy adopted by Ngubane in her lessons has been described by Hoadley (2003, p, 267) as "disengaged instruction", in which a teacher lets learners work independently whilst they are busy with other activities. As Ngubane leaves one group to work on their own, while busy with others, this suggests she disengaged herself from this group, while engaging with the other group that required her support. This strategy for teaching learners to become independent is similar to what Ramrathan and Mzimela (2016) and Taole and Cornish (2017) have argued for, namely, that one of the benefits of multi-grade teaching is that learners can

develop higher levels of thinking and independence. This was at the centre of how Ngubane worked with her learners. In this case, it could be argued that the constraints of a multi-grade setting somehow compelled Ngubane to approach her teaching innovatively to ensure that her learners had access to learning. For instance, Ngubane made a conscious decision to leave her 'gifted learners' to work on their own, while dedicating the rest of her time with learners who needed her most in "engaged instruction" (Hoadley, 2003, p, 267). In this instance, she assumed the role of a facilitator of knowledge, as argued by Smith and Engeli (2015) and Becuwe et al. (2018).

Instructions given by Ngubane were simplified for both slower and gifted learners. Learners knew from the outset what was required of them, which suggests that Ngubane used explicit criteria of evaluation (Bernstein, 1990). Using explicit criteria of evaluation meant that lesson outcomes and expectations were made explicit to learners from the beginning the lesson. The extract below shows how Ngubane used explicit evaluation criteria to meet the needs of her 'gifted learners' who she knew could cope independently. This allowed her time to work with learners who required her more.

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**Paragraph writing for the 'gifted learners'**
**Teacher**: …remember each paragraph is made up of six lines.
**Learner**: Yes
**Teacher**: Some things that you need to include in your paragraph are to firstly mention the name of the school. That is the important thing …
**Teacher**: After telling us the name of the school, give us details on where it is located. You can mention that it is between the two mountains which are known as Hlathikhulu and Mkhalampofu. It is between the two rivers Ncibidwane and Mancenge. That sort of thing. In the second paragraph you can tell us how many buildings your school has? How many classes do we have?" Is it for boys or girls only or it is for both? Are there playgrounds? Which sports is your school known for? How many teachers are there in your school? I hope you have a clear picture now of what you have to do in this activity.

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The above extract shows the depth of the complexities of teaching in a multi-grade setting, which requires teachers to split their time and their efforts to ensure the individual learning needs of learners are taken into account. Through the explicit explanation of what was required, learners were then left to work on their own to complete the two paragraphs. This is the strategy that she used in order to cater for learners who required more of her time and guidance. Ngubane did this to provide her learners with the opportunity to gain the necessary cultural capital associated with gaining knowledge to negotiate their learning context.

### 4.3.4 Curriculum coverage in a multi-grade setting

Bernstein (1993) asserts that learner achievement is parallel to what they are taught (content) and the skills they are exposed to. This means that opportunities to learn that learners' access in the classroom often determines their achievement. Taylor (2008) maintains that low curriculum coverage in South African schools is the most important factor that affects the quality teaching and learning. This often happens when teachers spend more time to teaching one or two aspects of the content to learners (Taylor, 2008). This was also evident in this study. However, the complexity of multi-grade classroom prevented curriculum coverage from occurring in the manner that Taylor (2008) has proposed. When interviewing teachers about curriculum related issues, they raised the concern regarding the fact that they could not complete the curriculum they were expected to finish within a prescribed time. The following reasons were put forward by teachers as hindrances that prevented or constrained their work and resulted in them not finishing the curriculum.

**Kula**: "*We found ourselves having to spend more time trying to make it fit in with the context we are working in. This consumes a lot of time and I end up using teaching time planning to fit the mono-grade curriculum to multi-grade context*".

**Cekwane**: "*We are using the curriculum with the mono-grade schools, having same assessment programme. We are assumed to be at the same level with mono-grade schools. It is assumed that everything is at the same as mono-grade but practically we are always far behind with the curriculum coverage compared to mono-grade teachers*".

The responses above suggest that both Cekwane and Kula experienced challenges with curriculum coverage. This was largely due to heavy duty loads that they had had been allocated. For Kula, being a multi-grade teacher meant that she had to spend more time trying to adapt a mono-grade curriculum to a multi-grade context. This is a challenge that researchers Taole (2014), Hlalele (2014) and Mortazavizadeh et al. (2017) have reported in their studies, often resulting in bigger teaching workloads (Dewayne & Masson, 2018).

The long time spent on adapting the curriculum erodes their instructional time and becomes a road block towards adequate curriculum coverage. However, the need to adapt a mono-grade

curriculum to suit a multi-grade setting, for this study, could be regarded as a consequence for working within this context. However, different to the studies mentioned above, teachers who participated in this study used their agency to adapt a curriculum not designed for them in order to ensure that their learners were not excluded. Findings of this study revealed that most teachers in this study did not hasten to cover the curriculum. That is, they believed that it did not assist their learners to rush to cover the curriculum, while learners have not acquired any knowledge: *"I find myself behind with the curriculum coverage"* (Kula).

Above, Kula expressed her daily experience of being behind with curriculum coverage, which could mean that her learners may not have the required knowledge for the next grade. This may also be linked to the workload that participants were required to take, which often resulted in them not finishing the work, as mentioned by Dlamini: "… *It always happens even this term I won't finish"*. The conditions that prevail in a multi-grade context often mean that teachers must make difficult pedagogical choices in order to provide learners with some opportunities to access learning. This was the case in this study. For teachers in this study, the inability to cover the curriculum had become an accepted and inevitable consequence for teaching in a multi-grade setting.

The above was compounded by the fact that teachers were held accountable externally by the Department of Education, which expected them to use a curriculum intended for mono-grade schools. Dlamini knew that, despite her efforts to try to cover all the work, it would be in vain as power differentials were evident in the lack of support in the form of curriculum support. Bourdieu (1986) asserts that both field and habitus shape practices. Thus, Kula and Dlamini had accepted that curriculum coverage was impossible in their context and had, to some extent, shaped their approaches towards teaching and learning. The challenges or constraints that the teachers encountered with teaching multi-grade classes had resulted in them deciding to ignore external framing conditions, such as prescribed departmental curriculum policy) and, instead, focus on ensuring that learners acquired the necessary skills and knowledge (Bernstein, 1981).

**Kula**: *"…I told myself that it is not always about me rushing to finish the curriculum while learners haven't acquired anything. So, I will rather not finish the curriculum as long as I am satisfied that learners gained something"*

**Ngubane**: *"...Rushing to complete the curriculum is only benefiting me as a teacher and for record purposes but disadvantaging learners"*

Both Kula's and Ngubane's responses suggest that teachers in the multi-grade classes are in control of selecting what knowledge to teach learners and how that knowledge must be taught. This point the agency that teachers had in their classrooms, where they made decisions based on what and how to teach their learners. Their practices challenged deficit understandings that abound in multi-grade contexts. Teachers acknowledged the fact that learners were central to their teaching pedagogy and decision making was based on what they believed was best for their learners, for who they were accountable. These informed their pedagogical decision making (Hoadley, 2003). Thus, these teachers' lessons were strongly classified (C+) in terms of selection and sequencing.

Hoadley (2012) has argued that slow curriculum coverage is common in working class settings. However, for this study, slower curriculum coverage was however as a result of complex decision making that considered learning needs of learners. Whilst acknowledging that slow pacing made curriculum coverage difficult, accommodating learner needs, having to juggle different grades and abilities around compelled teachers to make hard choices. In the opinion of the participants, *"Rushing to complete the curriculum"* benefits the teacher, but not the learners. Thus, it is on this principle that Ngubane refused to allow her practices to be determined by the Department of Education or the curriculum imperatives. The negative consequence of this was that learners proceed to the next grade with knowledge gaps, which undermines their progress in subsequent grades and ability to compete effectively with their counterparts in mono-grade contexts (Hoadley & Muller, 2009; Menditereza, 2014). The trade-off is difficult, but inevitable and points to the disempowerment that teachers and learners faced in such unequal contexts (Taole, 2012). However, it is worth elevating that teachers' agency was useful for them to challenge not only policy imperatives, but also by responding to learners needs.

### 4.3.5 Curriculum content grouping as a teaching strategy

During the first interviews, teachers indicated that a key strategy that they used to enable learning was grouping similar content topics across all grades together and teaching them using the whole group strategies (Ramrathan & Mzimela, 2012).

**Zakes**: "*I checked the CAPS document first before giving learners work. If grades are expected to do same topic there is no need to differentiate I only give them different work if they are not required to do same work*".

**Cekwane**: "*I just group similar topics for both grade R and Grade 1 and teach them simultaneously and afterwards give them different assessment to accommodate their different cognitive levels*".

Both Zakes and Cekwane used the strategy of grouping similar topics for all grades and teach them simultaneously. According to them, this saved time and made their work easier. Although this saved instructional time, Zakes and Cekwane also ensured that assessment or evaluation of work was at an appropriate grade level. The above response suggests that both Zakes and Cekwane used the prescribed curriculum content in different grades to teach learners. Despite the fact that the curriculum they were expected to use was not designed for a multi-grade context, this did not stop them from doing their best to mediate it in order to make learning meaningful for their learners. Zakes' and Cekwane's decisions were based on the need to provide their learners with access to the prescribed official curriculum (Bernstein, 2000). Thus, selection of knowledge in this case was strongly classified (C+).

Although the strategy of grouping similar topics across the grades was reported by participants as the best option teachers had for teaching multi-grade classes, data gathered during lesson observations revealed that teachers tended to focus on teaching to the higher grade in their classes with the lower grades sometimes getting lost. The extract below illustrates an instance of a lesson where only learners in higher grades dominated the lesson for the lesson observation that took place on the 13 August 2018 for Grades R and 1.

> **Teacher**: Can you remind me how many days we have in a week?
> **Learner** Grade.**1**: There are seven days in a week
> **Teacher** then introduces the lesson that deals with words with letter 'z'
> **Teacher**: Give me all words that have letter 'z'
> **Learner 1 Grade1**: izeze
> **Learner 2 Grade 1**: zula
> **Learner 3 Grade 1**: zuma
> **Learner 4 Grade 1:** zimile
> **Teacher**: I haven't heard anything from grade R. Sihle (she called a learner from grade R)
> Sihle: (silent)
> **Learner 5 Grade 1:** zula
> (The teacher tries to continually ask the Grade R for a response but learners are silent. She continued with those who were fully participating (grade 1)

In the above lesson, Cekwane tried to involve all the learners in the lesson, but Grade R were silent and not participating actively. Grade R learners became often bored and distracted, especially when lessons became too formal. Grade one learners, however, were actively involved and participated by providing answers as well as asking questions. This suggests that grouping Grade R and Grade 1 could be detrimental to learning. For instance, in this lesson, Grade R learners could not access learning opportunities, as Cekwane could not include them effectively. Younger learners remained passive, while the older learners were actively involved in the classroom.

During the second interview, Cekwane provided justification for the strategy she used in her teaching:

> *"...That one is very difficult and impossible to do ...I try every lesson with rhyme which is more relating to grade Rs. For the main activities I change the style to be formal to accommodate grade 1s because at the end of the day they all have to benefit" .... ...grade R get very bored when I am teaching them formally. They don't even know what is happening...".*

These responses reveal that Cekwane understood that her learners belonged to the different age group and so had different learning needs. She also recognised that formal learning was more applicable to the Grade R, with rhyme accommodating the interests of Grade R. Findings of the research study by Garbutt (2019), conducted in New Zealand, revealed that one of the

advantages of teaching the same content was that all learners acquired the same content, often pushing younger learners to acquire knowledge at a faster rate. In this instance, Cekwane was unsuccessful. She could show flexibility in vacillating between formal and informal learning and teaching. In teaching formal curriculum content, she was unable to include the Grade R learners. Cekwane struggled to use her agency to support learners from both grades. Thus, findings in this study contradict previous research regarding the benefits of using the grouping of topics together (Ramrathan & Mzimela, 2012).

## 4.4 Teachers pedagogical practices

Schools must provide opportunities that will enable learners to acquire higher order thinking skills (Assly & Smadi, 2015; Gallagher, Wyse, Baumfield, Egan, Hayward & Hulme, 2012). Hoadley (2012) asserts that the acquisition of higher order thinking skills is critical to increased and effective learner participation. This was also part of what was expected from the teachers who participated in this study. For this study, I analysed the types of questions asked by teachers in the two lessons observations, using Bloom's Taxonomy. Bloom's Taxonomy is the most commonly used taxonomy of cognitive levels globally (Ulum, 2016). The table below presents the levels of questioning used by teachers who participated in this study.

Before starting with the analysis of the teachers' questions, a brief recap into the taxonomy is necessary. Martin (2015) in her study conducted in KwaZulu-Natal provided a useful description of the six levels of questioning, derived from Bloom's Taxonomy. The description provided by Martin (2015) is presented below for purposes of moving towards its application in the subsequent section.

1. **Knowledge:** The knowledge level is the lowest level. At this level, learners are expected to recall information.
2. **Comprehension:** At comprehension level, learners are required only to interpret information in different format.
3. **Application:** At this level, learners are expected to apply known facts, principles and generalisations to solve the problems.
4. **Analysis:** A question at the analysis level asks a learner to identify and comprehend elements of processes, communication or series of events.

5. **Synthesis:** At this level of questioning, learners are asked to engage in original creative thinking.

6. **Evaluation:** This is the highest questioning level, in which learners are expected to determine how closely a concept is consistent with standards or values.

The table below shows the level of questioning that occurred across all ten lessons I observed.

| | KNOWLEDGE | COMPREHENSION | APPLICATION | ANALYISIS | SYNTHESIS | EVALUATION |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cekwane | 20 | 5 | 2 | 5 | 1 | - |
| Ngubane | 45 | 1 | 1 | - | - | - |
| Kula | 44 | 7 | 2 | 6 | 1 | - |
| Dlamini | 37 | 4 | - | 3 | - | - |
| Zakes | 39 | 1 | - | 3 | - | - |

*Table 2: Questioning levels that were used across lessons that were observed*

In Table 2 above, it can be noticed that questioning used by the participants was mostly at the first level, which required learners to recall knowledge. In terms of the description provided by Martin (2015), this level of questioning is requiring low order thinking skills. From the classroom observations conducted in this study, these questions required that learners recall information and often required 'yes or no' responses. This level of questioning, according to Hoadley (2008), is often characterised by learners chanting and repeating the teachers' words. Although these questions are useful, they are inadequate for developing learners into critical thinkers (Chris, Caram & Davis, 2015). Therefore, the questioning used by the teachers who participated in this study is unlikely to lead to the development of critical thinking among learners.

In the follow up interviews, teachers were asked about the above observation regarding the low level of questioning, and they responded in the following ways:

**Ngubane**: *"Oh no! You know, I know about cognitive levels. They are there in our policy documents but I don't know how I forgot them".*

**Dlamini**: *"I am not aware that I did not use them in my lessons".*

**Kula**: "*I only realise now that I don't use them in my teaching, but during examinations I try my best to include all levels when setting the paper*".

**Cekwane**: *"Sometimes I feel like I am overloading them (learners) with higher order level of questions but I sometimes try to use them here and there"*.

Teacher's responses suggest that even though they were not using all the cognitive levels in their classrooms, they knew about them and were familiar with Bloom's taxonomy levels for questioning. However, the lessons observed showed no evidence of the application of the different kinds of questioning. This may point to the under-utilisation of the knowledge and skills that teachers learned in higher education. This defeats the mantra of education as preparation for life in several ways. For instance, life requires critical thinking skills as it is rarely a repetition. Thus, for learners taught by these teachers to develop these skills, they need to be afforded opportunities in the lessons taught by these teachers.

The lesson below is an example of the questioning technique used throughout the English FAL class for Grades 4, 5 and 6 by Kula (Lesson observation on 14 August 2018.

**Teacher**: Ok today we are going to learn about the poem. We did this poem before am I right?
**Learners**: (in unison) Yes
**Teacher**: eh?
**Learners**: Yes
**Teacher**: Ok (she gave them notes handouts and asked "Do you all have the papers"?
**Learners**: Yes
**Teacher**: …. I think last time we learnt about features of the poem. We have two features of the poem I don't know if you still remember the features. Who can tell me the features that we talked about? I said we got (mh)_____ and (mh)_____ (waiting for learners to finish)
**Learner 1**: Internal feature
**Teacher**: We have what we call the internal feature (she wrote it on the board)
**Learner 2**: External feature
**Teacher**: What things we need to identify under the external feature?
**Learner 4**: Rhyming words
**Teacher**: … nice try Musa but we are talking about external feature (doing hand gestures) isakhiwo sangaphandle (code switching).
**Learner 5**:  The stanzas
**Learner 1**: Title
**Learner 3**: Author
**Teacher**: (keeps writing the answers on the board)
**Learner 5**: Lines
**Teacher**: Ok now I want you to tell me what we should look under the internal feature
**Learner 6**: Rhyming words.
**Teacher**: Yes, what else
**Learner 9**: Simile
**Learner 2**: characters
**Teacher:**  But this is a poem.  We normally have characters in stories.  Try Musa
**Musa**:  Commas
**Teacher**:  Do you remember metaphors
**Learners:** (in unison) Yes
**Teacher:**  Alright now read the poem that is in front of you please

The entire lesson comprises of knowledge and comprehension questions that with limited cognitive and knowledge complexity (Hugo, Bertram, Green & Naidoo, 2008) required for active engagement at grade-appropriate level and for the content and knowledge of poetry. The lesson is characterised by learners chanting or chorusing after the teacher or providing one word or yes/no responses (Chris, Caram & Davis, 2005). Chris, Caram and Davis (2005) contend that 'yes and no' questions may encourage learners to respond without fully understanding or thinking through the subject taught. Thus, questions must be designed in such a way that stretch learners' thinking, invite their curiosity and provoke their thinking (Chris, Caram & Davis, 2005).

Hoadley (2012) refers the method of teaching in which teachers do not differentiate between learners who are operating at lower and higher cognitive levels as a communalised method of teaching. This communalised method of teaching is common in multi-grade classroom, (Hoadley, 2012). In line with this finding, the above lesson showed very little or no evidence of learner initiative or control by learners. For this instance, I coded the selection, sequencing, pacing and evaluation of the lesson as strongly framed F++ (Bernstein, 1999). The entire lesson was remained in the control of the teacher, who decided on the lesson content as well as how the knowledge would be taught.

While the pacing of the lesson was slow, it was still, to a large extent, in the control of the teacher. These findings are similar to those reported by Martin (2015). This finding suggests that Kula experienced a challenge with applying the sequence of her questioning and assist her learners to develop critical thinking skills, as her lesson lacked wait time (Vogler, 2005). Waiting time provides learners with the opportunity to think with the intention of coming up with an answer (Vogler, 2005). In the above lesson, Kula, instead, pushed through without waiting for learners to think about possible answers and hence could not to ask probing questions to invite learners to deeper thinking. This deficiency in sequencing in the lesson resulted in it becoming less effective, becoming a mirror of rote learning (Vogler, 2005). Hoadley (2012) asserts that the reason for teachers to resort to rote learning is often because of learners' poor linguistic development, as they are experiencing a sudden transition from mother tongue to English as LoLT. As could be discerned from the previous discussion of this matter, this was the case for this study as well.

## 4.5 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to present, discuss and analyse findings based on the key research questions that underpinned the study. The findings above provide a glimpse into the experiences of teachers teaching multi-grade classes in a rural primary school. Teachers reported that their experiences were mostly negative, largely because of the complexities of teaching within a multi-grade setting. However, despite the challenging realities of multi-grade education, teachers who participated in this study showed a degree of resilience and agency to negotiate the complexities of their context in order to ensure that their learners had access to basic education.

Responses of participants in this study also revealed the various ways in which they used their pedagogical practices to positively influence the provision of quality education in their classes. Findings reveal that teachers did this in the midst of these difficult contextual realities. However, while teachers tried their best to ensure that their learners were included, some aspects of teaching were sometimes deficient for providing learners with real opportunities to learn. The inadequate support at an institutional level made it difficult for the teachers to challenge the range of systemic barriers that they encountered. The positive experiences and pedagogical practices that made a difference signal the possibility that teachers understood and valued their learners as individuals (Quil & Smyth, 2014). Other positive aspects of multi-grade classes revealed in this study were that teachers took initiative to adopt their own instructional or pedagogical practice, as there was no guidance provided on how they could teach within a multi-grade setting. It was in the discussion of their pedagogical practices that contribution could be made to knowledge of multi-grade teaching. Bernstein's theory enabled me to understand the nuances of teachers' practices, replete with tensions and the active ways in which teachers negotiated a context that was constraining for them to adequately meet the educational needs of their learners.

The next chapter presents the reflections, implications and conclusions on the key issues that emerged from the study.

# CHAPTER 5

# REFLECTIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

## 5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I presented a discussion and analysis of the various ways in which teachers experienced teaching in a multi-grade setting. Findings revealed both positive and negative experiences and teachers were both successful and unsuccessful in using their pedagogical practices to meet learners' needs. In this chapter, I present a summary of the key issues that emerged from the study. Firstly, I reflect on the appropriateness of the theoretical and the methodological framing of the study. I then discuss the key findings, based on the key research questions of the study. This is followed by a discussion of the implications and concluding comments on the study as well as the suggestions for future research directions regarding multi-grade education.

## 5.2 Purpose and significance of the study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the teachers' experiences of teaching in the multi-grade classrooms. This study sought to contribute to the body of knowledge on multi-grade teaching and, in particular, provide insights into the agency displayed by teachers in this setting. Teachers, despite being confronted with a multitude of problems that are structurally determined, found ways to afford their learners opportunities to learn; thus contributing to access to quality education. The study also centralised the voices of the teachers and in so doing created awareness of the contextual realities and lived experiences of teachers who are required to teach and deliver the same quality of education as teachers who teach in mono-grade contexts. This revealed how teachers taught in ways that were responsive to their learners' needs. It is hoped that in the process of sharing their experiences, participants could reflect on themselves as well as their pedagogical practices in transformative ways capable of catering for their learners' needs.

To achieve the objectives as set out above, the following questions were used to guide the conduct of the study:

- What are the experiences of teachers teaching multi-grade classes in a rural context?
- What are the pedagogical practices of teachers teaching multi-grade classes?
- How do their pedagogical practices enable or constrain learning?

Both negative and positive experiences of teaching multi-grade classes were significant in this study. However, it must be noted that whilst more negative experiences were identified compared to the positive experiences; positive experiences were also reported in the study. Findings revealed that even though teachers experienced challenges such as lack of support by relevant stakeholders, lack of support from parents; geographical issues which contribute to teacher isolation, they continued to find ways to ensure that their learners had access to basic education. However, the capability of teachers emerged as a significant factor to challenge literature that suggests that multi-grade teaching and learning is wholly steeped in the negative. Teacher capability was evident in their abilities to negotiate their context, adapting and changing curriculum, working at the level of learners' cognitive ability and developing positive relationships with their learners, were some of the key ways in which teachers ensured access to quality education. This was mostly evident in the last part of the analysis, where teachers used a range of teaching strategies to meet their learners' learning needs.

One of the teaching methods and techniques that were mostly used in the multi-grade classrooms in this study was code switching. When applying this technique, teachers mostly used learners' home language to facilitate and enhance the understanding of concepts. Therefore, the reason for code switching was to assist learners to acquire knowledge transmitted. According to the teachers, using code switching in their classrooms benefitted both their learners and themselves, as it provided learners with an opportunity to learn. However, the benefit for teachers was that their learners understood the content faster than they did when they were being taught using LoLT only, which was in this case English.

The literature reviewed revealed that education in rural areas is often unequal when compared to education urban settings. Moletsane (2012) argues that this is mostly due to the unequal distribution of resources between schools in rural and urban or semi-urban areas. The instance of inequality is a lived reality in multi-grade schools in South Africa. This is supported by Barrett (2011), who points to the unequal distribution of resources in the education system. This

was also found in this study, with instances of injustice and inequality experienced by teachers. Teachers in this study felt that the support provided to them was significantly inferior to that afforded to their counterparts in mono-grade schools. This, teachers argued, resulted in them being treated unfairly, often with expectations that assumed sufficient and adequate support had been provided.

## 5.3 Conceptual framework and methodological issues

In this section, I review the conceptual framework and research methodology that was used in this study. Two theories contributed to the conceptual framework in this study. The first theory that was used in this study was Bourdieu's Theory of Practice. This theory was used to analyse teachers' experiences of teaching in multi-grade contexts. Bourdieu's three concepts of habitus, field and capital enabled me to understand the structural barriers that influenced what could occur within multi-grade schools. This was mostly because teachers did not have the required forms of capital to successfully challenge the barriers that existed in their context. The marginalisation and exclusion that teachers reported played a significant role in shaping teachers' habitus.

The second theory used was that the Theory of Pedagogic Practice by Bernstein (2000). The Pedagogic Practice Theory highlighted the pedagogic strategies that teachers employed in their classrooms. The concepts that were relevant in this study were classification and framing of knowledge. When it comes to classification of the knowledge, findings of the study revealed that teachers used CAPS as a key instrument through which they selected sequenced, paced and evaluated knowledge and content transmitted to learners. It was in the use of these concepts that I could understand the various ways in which the teachers assisted their learners to acquire knowledge and skills as an aspect of accessing quality learning.

This study was underpinned by the critical paradigm. The critical paradigm is concerned with issues of power, injustice, oppression and marginalisation of the individuals. Its aim is to empower, transform and redress all the injustices by redressing issues of power imbalances (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). By using this paradigm, both marginalisation and inequalities were revealed in the teacher's responses on their experiences of teaching in multi-grade classes. Issues of inequality, injustices and marginalisation revealed in this study

discussed in the Chapter 4 were, *inter alia*, lack of support for teachers in the multi-grade context, which suggests that they were often left to find ways of working on their own. This reinforced the invisibility of multi-grade teachers, reinforcing lack of value as the norm for these contexts. Secondly, literature reports that multi-grade teaching is not prioritised. For this study, this was evident in the fact that there were limited materials designed specifically for teachers in multi-grade schools.

For instance, the national curriculum does not differentiate between multi-grade and mono-grade teaching. According to teachers in this study, this has rendered multi-grade teaching even more difficult as they have to redesign the curriculum and develop activities to accommodate their learners. Although teachers in the study experienced marginalisation and were treated unjustly compared to their counterparts in mono-grade schools, they used their capital to negotiate the challenges they were experiencing. In this way, it could be argued that this study highlighted the teachers' agency and transformative understandings of their contexts. Despite the challenges the teachers faced, this study provided the teachers with a platform to share and reflect on their experiences of teaching in multi-grade settings.

The use of the qualitative approach was useful as it enabled me to work closely with and understand participants' experiences. Participants and their voices in this study were positioned as 'central' (Zondi, 2017). Baxter and Jack (2008) points out that in a qualitative approach; participants are studied in their natural context. To understand teachers' pedagogical practices of teaching in the multi-grade context, teachers' experiences were studied in their natural context, which was the school in which they were working as well as classrooms in which they were teaching. In doing this, two lessons for the five teachers were recorded and second interviews were conducted with a purpose of obtaining clarity on some of the key issues that emerged during lesson observations. Both interviews and observations used as data collecting tools generated textual data, which is a feature of the qualitative approach. The idea of a qualitative study generating textual data was thus evident in this study (Martin, 2015).

Case study inquiry was used to understand the lived experiences of the teachers in the multi-grade context as reported in Romm (2015). The case study approach used in this study was useful as it enabled me to understand the experiences of teachers. In this way, I was further

enabled to understand teachers' feelings and emotions. Various complex occurrences, such as lack of support and the influence this had on teachers' practices could be understood. Therefore, adopting a case study approach was a good choice for this study.

For data collection, this study used semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. Semi-structured interviews enabled participants to talk freely about issues that they were experiencing. Therefore, for this study, the semi-structured interview provided a flexible mechanism for collecting data. Wahyuni (2012) asserts that the use of semi-structured interviews is appropriate for case study research, as it allows for in-depth questions to be answered. Thus, the decision to use semi-structured interviews was appropriate, given the fact that this study adopted a case study research approach. Observations were used to analyse teachers' pedagogical practices in multi-grade classes. In doing this, I was guided by Bernstein's theory of classification and framing of knowledge. Patton (1990) maintains that observational data enables researchers to enter and understand situations with more coherence. It was the use of this data collection method through which insights into the pedagogical practices of teachers were obtained.

## 5.4 Summary of key findings

This section provides a summary of the key findings, as encapsulated in the themes that emerged in this study.

The first section of the findings from this study responded to the first key research question, which sought to elicit an understanding of the experiences of teachers teaching multi-grade classes. The broad theme emerged, namely, factors that contributed to teachers' experiences of teaching multi-grade. This theme was further divided into sub-themes, which revealed that these were mostly negative experiences with a few positive experiences. Findings of this study are consistent with existing literature on multi-grade education.

The negativity that surrounded teaching within multi-grade contexts was highlighted in various ways. Some of the negative experiences significant to the participants was the lack of relevant support by the Department of Education, subject advisors, higher education institutions as well as the parents. The lack of support in the form of training, required guidance for curriculum

planning and failure to provide a differentiated curriculum approach reinforced negative feelings about teaching in such contexts, but also reproduced the inequality that is prevalent in these contexts. Failure to respond to the needs of the teachers often resulted in learners losing out on opportunities to access quality education. Teachers questioned the thinking that what they were doing could be regarded as quality provision. This made them feel even less valued and unimportant among their peers. This lack of recognition of multi-grade teachers has been reported extensively in literature on multi-grade education (see, for instance, Du Plessis, 2014; Little, 2001; Taole, 2014; Taole & Mncube, 2012). Multi-grade education and the associated invisibility have serious repercussions of perpetuating inequality between teachers in multi-grade contexts and their counterparts in the mono-grade contexts. These findings concur with those found in literature on multi-grade education. For instance, teachers who participated in this study pointed to the unfairness, where their counterparts in mono-grade contexts were provided with all relevant support while they were not.

For this study, this was exacerbated by the understanding that even though they were left to struggle on their own, they were still expected to perform on par with their counterparts in mono-grade contexts. For these teachers, this further highlighted unjust treatment, marginalisation and symbolic violence. In addition to the lack of support, geographical issues contributed to severe teacher isolation. This was evident in teachers' responses, where they complained about working in remote areas. This isolation contributed to the inability of teachers to acquire sufficient social capital. Failure to reach the offices of the Department of Education resulted in them experiencing inadequate access to information and left behind with out-dated information, which prevented them from working effectively.

Whilst the findings of the study revealed that teachers' experiences were mostly negative, it was also found that there were some that were positive and contributed to a better environment for providing education for learners. This key finding revealed that, despite the challenges these teachers faced, they could exercise agency in navigating the challenges. Data also revealed that teachers in the study made important decisions to ensure that their learners were provided with opportunities to learn. In using their agency teachers adapted and used teaching and learning materials that had been designed without adequate support to ensure successful implementation. In ensuring that their learners learned, the teachers accepted it as their responsibility to redesign

the material they were using to suit conditions within a multi-grade context. Another positive aspect of teaching revealed in this study was positive teacher- learner relationships. Teachers in this study reported that working in a multi-grade context strengthened relationships with their learners. This was largely because learners spent a significant number of years with one teacher. This, teachers claimed, afforded them more opportunities to understand their learners, which has been supported by literature on multi-grade education.

The second part of chapter four responded to the second and third key research questions that focused on the pedagogical practices of teachers teaching in the multi-grade classrooms. It further explored how these pedagogical practices enabled and constrain teaching and learning. This section enabled me to understand the various ways in which teachers helped learners to succeed. The use of the Bernsteinian concepts of classification and framing was important in capturing these nuances. It is here that the study made contribution. It refutes current literature and discourse of deficiency that showed in teachers' practices and ways in which they contributed to learning. Whilst their pedagogical practices were not perfect, teachers made various adaptations in order to ensure that learners learned. Teachers achieved this in various ways. Code switching, which is one of the ways, helped learners to understand the content taught. Despite the Language in Education Policy of the school, which expects teachers to use English as LoLT, teachers' understanding of their context as well as their learner's needs, required blending of English with the learners' home language to help them understand the content. The practice of code-switching was observed to a large extent in Mathematics, English and Social Sciences.

Another finding was that pacing of content and learning to ensure acquisition of knowledge in the multi-grade context contradicted existing literature in multi-grade education. When faced with challenges such as time allocation for lessons and across various grades, teachers made decisions in keeping with their contextual realities. For example, the length of lessons varied, which largely depended on the strategy the teacher used. Teachers made decisions regarding the extent to which they could pace the lesson, teach the same content to all grades and paced lessons. However, when content had to be taught separately and was dependent on grade knowledge, lessons were often long as teachers tried to ensure that no learner was left behind. In certain instances, teachers tended to regard grades as mono-grade classes. This was revealed

in the English lesson, where the duration of the lesson took almost the entire morning. These strategies sometimes enabled learning, although they sometimes constrained learning.

The third significant finding was on teachers' pedagogical decision making skills. When faced with a curriculum designed for a mono-grade setting, teachers used their agency to ensure that teaching and learning took place in their classrooms. Curriculum content grouping as a teaching strategy was used significantly by all the teachers who participated in this study (Ramrathan & Mzimela, 2012). According to the participants, this strategy is not a policy for teaching multi-grade classes, but it was the decision that they had taken as a school to enable effective teaching and learning. This way of teaching using various forms of capital enabled them to make important decisions and shaped not only their pedagogical practices, but also their habitus as well (Bourdieu, 1986). By grouping curriculum content, teachers did not lose the opportunity to teach the official curriculum to learners. Instead, findings reveal that they were intimate with the vertical knowledge as prescribed in the CAPS policy (Bernstein, 2000). Although this teaching strategy enabled teaching and learning, opportunities to learn for some learners at the lower grades were often lost. This could attribute to the fact that teachers tended to focus more in the higher grades, and learners in the lower grades were left behind. This was the challenge of which teachers were aware, although they had not come up with alternative ways of ensuring that learners in lower grades had access to what was being taught and learned.

Data gathered in this study also revealed inadequate curriculum coverage. This has also been reported in Taylor (2008) that curriculum coverage in South African schools is inadequate, which negatively affects the quality of teaching and learning. In this study, however, findings revealed teachers could not complete the curriculum as specified for each grade, because a significant amount of time was spent on redesigning a monograde-oriented curriculum for implementation in a multi-grade context. Teachers reported that this exercise was often time-consuming, which resulted in them falling behind with their annual teaching plans. This, however, could be understood in two ways. Firstly, these teachers, like any other teacher, could not complete the curriculum. Secondly, this could be understood as teachers trying to create opportunities for learners without relevant support from authorities. This, however it is understood, therefore, points to the need to provide a curriculum designed for implementation in multi-grade schools.

The last theme in this study was teachers' pedagogical practice of questioning that constrained effective learning. Findings in this study revealed that teachers did not apply the relevant questioning levels according to Bloom's Taxonomy. The type of questions that were often asked by teachers during lessons belonged to Level 1. According to Blooms Taxonomy, questions in this level require learners to recall the information only; they do not lead to the development of critical thinking skills among learners. As such, the lower order questions observed during lesson observation did not encourage effective learner participation or provoke or stretch learners' thinking.

In this section, contribution to knowledge of the various ways in which teachers assessed their difficult context, adapted their ways of working and navigated challenges in order to ensure access to education for their learners, was highlighted. The discussion points to the fact that teachers were not always successful in their efforts, but the ways in which they worked with their context provides a critical contribution to the body of knowledge on multi-grade education.

## 5.5 Implications of the study

This study has implications for education as a whole, training of teachers working in multi-grade contexts, provision of relevant resources for multi-grade schools and directions for further research. This study revealed significant disparities between multi-grade and mono-grade teaching contexts. The issue of inequality between the two practices was also highlighted by the studies reviewed in this research. The challenges experienced by the participants in relation to invisibility presented as a blockage towards the fulfilment of constitutional promise of access basic education for all. This also applies to teachers who were teaching in the multi-grade context. For these reasons, findings suggest that much focus should be given to multi-grade teaching in terms of relevant and appropriate support. Ensuring that multi-grade teaching is not treated as an appendage of mono-grade education will improve the quality of education received by learners in this setting. In addition, this will also improve teachers' self-esteem and their perceptions about teaching in the multi-grade context. Once their self-esteem is improved and their way of thinking about multi-grade is positive, they will be better placed to contribute to the improvement of the quality of education offered to learners. However, findings indicate that the key to this success may lie in the provisioning of context-relevant support to teachers.

Providing teachers in a multi-grade context with the relevant support, including relevant resources must be considered. The support that teachers require must be based on the methods, strategies and approaches they must employ when planning, managing, teaching and assessing learners in the multi-grade contexts. This will provide them with sufficient understanding of what is expected of them as well as equipping them with the relevant skills and knowledge of teaching the multi-grade classes. Social justice will also be address by valuing multi-grade teaching as a mechanism for ensuring access to education for communities in remote contexts. By addressing the issue of injustices experienced in the multi-grade context, it will not only be teachers who are practising multi-grade teaching who will benefit; learners in multi-grade schools will also benefit.

Findings of the study also revealed the importance of focusing on the capabilities and abilities of these teachers who teach in challenging circumstances. Research on multi-grade education and teachers' experiences must focus on what teachers can do in order to counteract negative perceptions about multi-grade education. This has implications for the role of higher education institutions and the Department of Education who must provide required support. This is one way the injustice that has been normalised in multi-grade contexts could be challenged and reversed.

## 5.6 Limitations of the study

This is a small-scale study that was conducted in one school and in one district. Furthermore, only five participants who taught in multi-grade classes in a rural primary school within UThukela District participated in the study. The limitation is that findings from this study cannot be generalised, unless, in an unlikely scenario, the context in which generalisations can be made has the similar factors and issues. However, it is hoped that the detailed description of the context, data collection methods and the manner in which I have analysed data, succeeds in the test of trustworthiness. In this regard, it must be noted that the purpose of the study was to obtain deeper insights into the experiences of teachers teaching in multi-grade contexts and not to generalise findings to other contexts.

Another limitation was that the study was limited to the experiences of teachers. Therefore, findings in this study only represent teachers' experiences. Other stakeholders, such as learners and parents, who are exposed to multi-grade education from this school, were not involved in this study. This makes the findings applicable to teacher's experiences and perceptions only. Again, this was the intention of this study, and this aspect of multi-grade teaching may be pursued in future research directions.

I observed teachers in the classroom and this could have influenced the manner in which teachers taught on a particular day. Teachers' pedagogical practices, therefore, may not be a true reflection of how they usually teach. Brown (2010) contends that teachers when are observed teaching, they often act in ways that are not usual. However, it must be considered that the intention of the study was not to find the 'truth', but the intention was to understand what was true for the participants in respect of their experiences of teaching within a multi-grade context.

## 5.7 Recommendations for future research directions

The following recommendations are made based on the key findings of this research study:

- The Department of Education to design workshops in such a way that teachers from multi-grade schools are accommodated. These workshops should focus on the areas which teachers in this study reported as desperately needed. For example, curriculum differentiation is one of these areas. Subject advisors must also be trained so that they can provide relevant support to teachers from multi-grade schools.

- Currently, the Department of Education has developed a multi-grade toolkit to support teachers teaching in this setting. Research into the effectiveness of this toolkit will enable allow authorities to evaluate if it is meeting the needs of teachers and learners. This is a critical area of research, especially with regard to the effectiveness of the curriculum.

- Research into the perspectives of learners and parents may need to be conducted with a view to obtaining a more holistic understanding of multi-grade education. Researching learners' experiences will most likely enable the Department of Education to develop

relevant approaches to teacher training and support. Furthermore, obtaining an understanding of the social and emotional aspects of learners may be a necessary consideration, given the implications of the experiences of teachers in this regard.

- The voices of learners will prove invaluable insights regarding the inclusion of learners. Obtaining understandings on parents' perceptions and experiences of their children attending multi-grade schools must also be explored. In this way, relationships can be built between schools and communities with the purpose of improving the quality of education in multi-grade schools a mechanism for social justice in education for all.

## 5.8 Concluding thoughts

The study helped me to obtain a deeper understanding of the experiences of teachers teaching multi-grade classes. Their experiences highlighted such injustices as marginalisation, inequality as well as symbolic violence they were experiencing in their contexts. Furthermore, findings of the study further revealed that, despite the challenges teachers experienced, they could exercise their power, capital and agency to ensure that their learners, largely from remote areas, had access to basic education, as enshrined in the Constitution. From conducting this study, I also learned that by having multi-grade practice in our education system, the EFA goal is, to a certain extent, met. However, there is a great need for the Department of Education to bring multi-grade education on par with mono-grade education. This can be done through ensuring that teachers in this context are provided with relevant support to equip them with the knowledge and skills to provide quality education.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Principal's form

1113 Town View

Bruntville

Mooiriver

3300

Date ………………

Dear Sir/ Madam

My name is Sebenzile Dladla. I am a student at the University of KwaZulu- Natal Pietermaritzburg doing a research for The Master's Degree in Education foe Social Justice in 2016.

I am conducting a study on the Experiences of Teachers Teaching Multi-grade Classes. The purpose of this research is to understand teachers' experiences of teaching in a multi-grade context as well as understanding their pedagogical practices that enable or constrain learning. To achieve this, I need five willing participants to form part of the study.

Each participant will be interviewed and share his/her experiences of teaching in a multi-grade classroom. Two lessons per each participant will be observed to gather data on pedagogical practices that are used in the multi-grade context.

Participants are not forced to take part in the study. Those who agree to take part will be requested to share their experiences and probing questions will be asked guided by interview. Participants are however free to refuse answering questions they are not comfortable with. They are also free to withdraw anytime should they feel they no longer willing to be part of the study.

The will be no financial or any benefits to participants for this study and participation is voluntary. However, the research will contribute to the body of

knowledge. It is also hoped that the participants' voice will bring change to their experiences as well.

All the names and identities of the participants will be kept confidentially. At the end participants will be given the chance to check the information they have shared if it truly reflects what they said without distortions.

I, _____, Gatekeeper/principal/ School governing body have read and understood the contents of this document. I grant permission to _____ who is my authority to participate in the study mentioned above.

Date_____

Signature_____

**My contact details are as follows:**

Email: dladlapwe83@gmail.com

Cell. Number: █████████

**My supervisor's contact details:**

Dr. Melanie Martin

Cell Number: █████████

Office Number: 033 260 6189

**Appendix B: SGB consent form**

<div style="text-align: right">

1113 Town View

Bruntville

Mooiriver

3300

Date ………………

</div>

Dear Sir/ Madam

My name is Sebenzile Dladla. I am a student at the University of KwaZulu- Natal Pietermaritzburg doing a research for The Master's Degree in Education foe Social Justice in 2016.

I am conducting a study on the Experiences of Teachers Teaching Multi-grade Classes. The purpose of this research is to understand teachers' experiences of teaching in a multi-grade context as well as understanding their pedagogical practices that enable or constrain learning. To achieve this, I need five willing participants to form part of the study.

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All the names and identities of the participants will be kept confidentially. At the end participants will be given the chance to check the information they have shared if it truly reflects what they said without distortions.

I, _____, Gatekeeper/principal/ School governing body have read and understood the contents of this document. I grant permission to _____ who is my authority to participate in the study mentioned above.

Date_____

Signature_____

**My contact details are as follows:**

Email: dladlapwe83@gmail.com

Cell. Number: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

**My supervisor's contact details:**

Dr. Melanie Martin

Cell Number: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

Office Number: 033 260 6189

**Appendix C: Teacher's consent form**

<div align="right">

1113 Town View

Bruntville

Mooiriver

3300

Date ………………
</div>

Dear Sir/ Madam

My name is Sebenzile Dladla. I am a student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal Pietermaritzburg doing a research for The Master's Degree in Education for Social Justice in 2016.

I am conducting a study on the Experiences of Teachers Teaching Multi-grade Classes. The purpose of this research is to understand teachers' experiences of teaching in a multi-grade context as well as understanding their pedagogical practices that enable or constrain learning. To achieve this, I need five willing participants to form part of the study.

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knowledge. It is also hoped that the participants' voice will bring change to their experiences as well.

All the names and identities of the participants will be kept confidentially. At the end participants will be given the chance to check the information they have shared if it truly reflects what they said without distortions.

I, have read and understood the contents of this document. I agree that I will take part in the above mentioned study.

Date_____

Signature_____

**My contact details are as follows:**

Email: dladlapwe83@gmail.com

Cell. Number: ███████

**My supervisor's contact details:**

Dr. Melanie Martin

Cell Number: ███████

Office Number: 033 260 6189

## Appendix D: Letter from Department of Education

**education**

Department:
Education
**PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL**

| Enquiries: Phindile Duma | Tel: 033 392 1041 | Ref.:2/4/8/1240 |
|---|---|---|

Miss S Dladla
PO Box 617
Mooiriver
3300

Dear Miss Dladla

### PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **"TEACHING MULTI-GRADE CLASSES: A CASE STUDY OF A MULTI-GRADE RURAL PRIMARY SCHOOL IN KWAZULU-NATAL"**, in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the Intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 01 June 2017 to 07 November 2019.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Miss Connie Kehologile at the contact numbers below
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

Ncibidwane Primary School

Dr. EV Nzama
Head of Department: Education
Date: 06 June 2017

*...Championing Quality Education -Creating and Securing a Brighter Future*

**KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**
**Postal Address:** Private Bag X9137 • Pietermaritzburg • 3200 • Republic of South Africa
**Physical Address:** 247 Burger Street • Anton Lembede Building • Pietermaritzburg • 3201
**Tel.:** +27 33 392 1004/41 • **Fax.:** +27 033 392 1203• **Email:** Kehologile.Connie@kzndoe.gov.za/Phindile.Duma@kzndoe.gov.za •**Web:**www.kzneducation.gov.za
Facebook: KZNDOE....Twitter: @DBE_KZN....Instagram: kzn_education....Youtube:kzndoe

**Appendix E: Interview questions**

**A.    TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES**

1. Why did you come to teach at this school?

2. Where you trained to teach in multi-grade school? What sort of training did you get? Or if you did not get training where have you learned to teach the learners then? Are you happy with what you have learned (how and why)?

3. Tell me a bit about your experiences of teaching in this multi-grade school? Why and How?

4. How do you feel when you are teaching?

5. Why do you think that this school is multi-grade school? why can't you teach just one class? what will happen? How and why?

6. Describe the kind of education that children get here? Why? How do you feel about this?

7. What are some of the challenges you experiencing by being a teacher in a multi-grade context? How and why is it a challenge?

8. How do you deal with these challenges?

9. Where do you get support from? (Probe – to find if it is in the school or from parents, department of education and what kind of support do they get) If there is no support, who do you think is supposed to provide you with the support? What kind of support? And how do you think it is going to assist you? What are you doing if you are not supported?

10. What are some of the strategies that you use when teaching the learner- does it work- why or why not?

11. If the strategies you use to teach do not work, what do you do?

12. Do you feel empowered by teaching in this context? Why/why not and how- what do you do to empower yourself?


**B.    PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES**

13. How do you choose which aspects to teach for the day since you are teaching different grades simultaneously?

14. What challenges you encounter in doing that?  How do you deal with those challenges?

15. If there are no challenges, tell me about the strategies you use and are they helpful?

16. Do you use same methods of teaching in every subject? Explain how/ why are you doing it

17. How do you adapt language in order to accommodate learners of different ages?

18. Which resources are available in your classroom, how is it used? Do you find them helpful? Why?

19. Do you think that your pedagogical practices are working and useful in helping you learners learn? Explain how or why not.

20. After teaching your learners, how do you assess them? Explain why/ why not?

21. Do you have programme of Assessment that is specifically designed for multi-grade teaching and learning? How do you find it useful?

## Appendix F: Certificate from Language Editor

# Ntwintwi

Proofreading and Editing Solutions

Date: 05 December 2020

**CERTIFICATE OF LANGUAGE EDITING**

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to certify that the thesis bearing the provisional title *Multi-grade teaching: A case study of a multi-grade primary school in a rural context in KwaZulu-Natal*, to be submitted by **Sebenzile Dladla** has been edited for language correctness and spelling, consistency style, formatting, accuracy, logical flow, coherence, transitioning, readability and completeness of the list of references and cited authors, by Ntwintwi Proofreading and Editing Solutions. Neither the research content and substance nor the author's intentions were altered in any way during the editing process.

Ntwintwi guarantees the quality of English language in this dissertation, provided our editor's changes are accepted and further changes made to the thesis are checked by our editor.

Yours sincerely,

**JABULANI NGCOBO**
**NTWINTWI PROOFREADING AND EDITING SOLUTIONS**
**DATE:** 05 December 2020

**Appendix F: Originality report**

## Masters Thesis

ORIGINALITY REPORT

| 6%<br>SIMILARITY INDEX | 4%<br>INTERNET SOURCES | 2%<br>PUBLICATIONS | 3%<br>STUDENT PAPERS |
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| 3 | Labby Ramrathan, Thanda I Ngubane. "Instructional leadership in multi-grade classrooms: What can mono-grade teachers learn from their resilience?", Education as Change, 2013<br>Publication | 1% |
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