

**UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL**



# Teachers' work in a context of adversity

**By**

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## DECLARATION

*I, Nadira Maharaj declare that;*

- (i) The research reported in this dissertation/thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research.*
- (ii) This dissertation/thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.*
- (iii) This dissertation/thesis does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.*
- (iv) This dissertation/thesis does not contain other persons' writing, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other researchers. Where other written sources have been quoted, then:*
  - a) their words have been re-written but the general information attributed to them has been referenced:*
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- (v) This dissertation/thesis does not contain text, graphics or tables copied and pasted from the Internet, unless specifically acknowledged, and the source being detailed in the dissertation/thesis and in the References sections.*

**Signature:**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study investigated the nature of teachers' work in a context of adversity at Shivta Primary School. The school is situated in an underprivileged rural township in KwaZulu-Natal known as Kalika.

Social constructionism was adopted as the theoretical framework for the study and the open systems theory and Morrow's formal and material elements of teachers' work were employed to examine the nature of such work in a context where students hail from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

A qualitative ethnographic approach was used to collect data. Interviews, focus groups and observation were used to examine the nature, complexity and demands of teachers' work in a context of adversity. While teachers are expected to comply with national norms as well as those formulated by school management, teaching in a context of adversity generates additional challenges.

The study's results revealed that teachers' work at Shivta Primary School is concentrated, complicated, emotionally challenging and demanding. Apart from their daily classroom activities, they are called on to provide social and emotional support to students due to the latter's socioeconomic circumstances.

The findings also indicate that the rhythm of teachers' work is constantly interrupted by counselling and social work; administrative duties and other incidental activities. This calls for the ability to constantly respond to new situations that are outside their normal duties.

The multiple interactions that constitute teaching reveal teachers' work as complex, demanding, emerging and intensified rather than permanent and coherent. Teachers at Shivta Primary School operate within a structure that requires that they attend to matters after the school day has ended. While this may be typical of many schools, the degree of adversity confronted by students at this school makes this study atypical. It is thus recommended that policies provide for support for teachers that work in a context of adversity.

## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

<i>ANA</i>	<i>Annual National Assessment</i>
<i>CAPS</i>	<i>Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements</i>
<i>DBE</i>	<i>Department of Basic Education</i>
<i>FP</i>	<i>Foundation Phase</i>
<i>ICU</i>	<i>Intensive Care Unit</i>
<i>IQMS</i>	<i>Integrated Quality Management System</i>
<i>KZN</i>	<i>KwaZulu-Natal</i>
<i>NATU</i>	<i>National Teachers' Union</i>
<i>NCS</i>	<i>National Curriculum Statement</i>
<i>NTP</i>	<i>Non-Teaching Period</i>
<i>RDP</i>	<i>Reconstruction and Development Programme</i>
<i>RNCS</i>	<i>Revised National Curriculum Statement</i>
<i>SACE</i>	<i>South African Council of Educators</i>
<i>SACMEQ</i>	<i>Southern and Eastern Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality</i>
<i>SADTU</i>	<i>South African Democratic Teachers' Union</i>
<i>SAOU</i>	<i>Suid Afrikaanse Onderwyse Unie</i>
<i>SAQA</i>	<i>South African Qualifications Authority</i>
<i>SPS</i>	<i>Shivta Primary School</i>



## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

#### *A day in the life of a teacher at Shivta Primary School<sup>1</sup>*

*Teacher, Mrs Masika Makandi<sup>2</sup> arrives at Shivta Primary School (SPS) at 7h15 every day. The battered minibus taxi in which she travels shares the meandering road to the school with a multitude of users, including tractors from the sugarcane plantations; wandering animals, donkey carts, commercial vehicles, rickety buses, light motor vehicles and pedestrians, all of whom have to dodge the huge potholes as they go about their daily activities.*

*On both sides of the road, community members navigate puddles left by heavy rain and long queues form at the community tap to collect water. Some wash their laundry at the standpipe.*

*Kalika Township where SPS is located mainly consists of low cost housing provided by the government under the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP)<sup>3</sup>. Since the launch of this housing programme, the township's population has increased considerably due to the small but liveable houses that cater for low income families.*

*As she approaches the main entrance to the school, Mrs Makandi passes numerous vendors selling unhealthy sweets and snacks, toys and stationery. High unemployment rates in this area have forced many to enter the informal sector in order to eke out a living. The disorganised ambience outside the school negatively affects students' attitudes. Some squat on the ground hastily completing their homework, whilst others style one another's hair and catch up on gossip.*

*Mrs Makandi is immediately confronted by a noisy squabble amongst students. Having resolved the issue, she is aware that she will have to produce a written report and fill in the incident book. After signing the register, she joins her colleagues to set up equipment, which has to be locked away each day due to constant burglaries. Recent losses include groceries*

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<sup>1</sup> Pseudonym

<sup>2</sup> Pseudonym.

<sup>3</sup>Read more at: [https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/a\\_p\\_j\\_abdul\\_kalam\\_717997?src=t\\_good\\_teacher3](https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/a_p_j_abdul_kalam_717997?src=t_good_teacher3) The democratic government provided low cost housing for families with a joint income of less than R3 500 a month. Householders range from squatters, to the unemployed, pensioners, state grant recipients, child headed households and disabled people that are dependent on financial support from the Department of Social Development.

*for the school feeding scheme, dishes, utensils and computers. The stock register will have to be updated to report missing inventory to the Department of Basic Education.*

*The school's administrative office is always busy in the morning. Apart from teaching, teachers are also expected to perform administrative tasks. The teacher on assembly duty for the week has to collect announcements from the principal whilst the communications coordinator is expected to brief students on upcoming events, including those held in partnership with neighbouring schools. A teacher also needs to be on duty at the office to oversee collection of school fees or other payments. While on ground duty, teachers are called on to administer first aid to students that are injured. They also perform prefect duty, relief duty and a variety of other administrative tasks. A weekly schedule assigns these and other duties to staff members.*

*Once a week, teachers meet in the staff room at 7.45 am for a briefing where important announcements are discussed that are then delivered to students at the weekly assembly. Unexpected crises such as a burglary alter the day's programme. Staff meetings are often interrupted by parents with complaints.*

*Teachers are also expected to meet with officials responsible for the feeding scheme, Department of Education personnel probing poor performance in national benchmark tests and Social Services agencies gathering information and following up on behavioural problems. They also have to interact with the school's administrative team that captures information to report to the educational authorities.*

*Apart from the demands of completing the structured national curriculum, teachers spend a substantial amount of time attending to psychological and social issues including behavioural problems and individual or family discord. They help local community members to complete grant applications and assist with their medical problems. They also prepare their students to participate in extracurricular activities and community projects.*

*After an eventful day, at 15h30, Mrs Makandi hurries to catch her taxi home. She is tired and hungry, having had little time to partake of any refreshments. In any case, most of her packed lunch was given to a child that felt faint in class because they had not eaten for 24 hours. At home, she will have to find time to prepare tomorrow's lessons, set a test and mark the*

*assignment her students handed in today. Tomorrow, the cycle will begin again as she does her best to serve the students and community of Kalika.*

### **1.1. Introduction**

Teachers' work has occupied centre stage in South Africa since the transition to democracy. In a changing society undergoing rapid transformation, teachers are seen as mediators between policy prescriptions and public expectations. They are hence assumed to be agents of change. This has made teachers popular or notorious, depending on how they respond to demanding societal contexts and extend their roles beyond the expectations of the official curriculum. The evidence (Day et al., 2006; Leithwood, 2006; Silva, 2009; Naylor et al., 2010; Berry, 2010; Sun & Leithwood, 2015) shows that teachers' work has not only become more complex, but also more multi-faceted.

The South African Constitution embraces human rights, equity, respect for the environment, and the right to health, social justice and redress. These values have become vital aspects of teaching and learning, adding complexity to teachers' work. Under apartheid, white schools were granted substantial resources to promote good teaching outcomes (Van der Berg & Louw, 2004), while so-called 'Bantu' education was designed to consign Black people to the lower rungs of the skills ladder. Black teachers received inferior training, with a direct impact on the students they served. While the democratic government merged the former racially divided education departments, the racial composition of the teaching and student population at previously segregated schools has remained largely unchanged (Sekhampu, 2013).

The new education policies adopted by the democratic government considerably altered teachers' work. While teaching has always required engagement beyond the school, in recent times, the emphasis on accountability, performance and evaluation has intensified such work (Morrow, 2007; White & Reid, 2008; Karmann & Lancman, 2013, p. 162).

The intricacies of teachers' work are compounded by a myriad of dimensions that differ from school to school as well as from one teacher to another at a specific school. This ethnographic study aimed to understand teachers' experiences of their students as well as their workplace. It is evident that teachers' work is not only affected by a lack of resources but by complex realities in specific contexts. At SPS, the problems confronting teachers include neglected

buildings, derelict classrooms, damaged windows, inadequate access to water, electricity and sanitation, and limited access to teaching and learning resources. As Alexander (2011) notes, these are typical of rural schools whose students come from low or no-income households.

In this study, attention is drawn to the context in which students live in order to provide a perspective on how teachers' work is sustained amidst relentless disruptions. The study site is similar to the Australian high school that was the focus of Mills and Gale's (2007) study. They painted a picture

“of an economically depressed community... high level of unemployment, high welfare dependency, a significant Indigenous population and teacher transience – firmly among these broader issues of the changing economic, political and cultural context within which schooling now operates (p.1)”

However, my study differs from that of Mills and Gale's in terms of how adversity is conceptualised. While it focuses on the multiple resource constraints which alter the core of what is expected from teachers, Mills and Gales (2007) focused on social inequalities in education. In the Australian context, injustices mean that some succeed due to their cultural experiences, social ties and economic resources. Mills and Gale (2007, p. 1) thus concluded that, “...education requires researchers to renew examination and explanation of its involvement in the construction of social and economic differences.”

This study examines the implications of adversity for teachers' work, drawing attention to the hardships and difficulties endured by the community, students, teachers and the school in Kalika. The concept of context has been interrogated by scholars to illustrate its various meanings as well as its implications. Semke and Sheridan (2011) refer to it as salient contexts while Ebersohn and Ferreira (2012) use the term low-resource environments. Although this study speaks of a context of adversity, there are other interpretations of the context of schools that are depicted as complex systems (King McKenzie, Bantwini & Bogan, 2013).

The context can refer to the specific geographical positioning, actual setting, social interconnection or interrelation, fiscal value or economics of a work space that determine the conditions in which work is undertaken. In a rural setting where socioeconomic conditions are unfavourable, the manner in which work is managed will differ from other places. This

study interrogates a rural context as a location where teachers' work is undertaken amidst poverty, inadequate resources and insufficient tools.

Ebersohn and Ferreira (2012) conceptualise the context as space constraints and as a place which causes teachers to reshape and recreate their work as agents. This geographic description highlights the barriers in a township context characterised by hardship and despair (Ebersohn & Ferreira, 2012, p. 30) Such hardships are characteristic of SPS, where rundown buildings, missing or cracked windows, water and electricity constraints and a lack of specialist rooms and libraries prevent teachers from providing optimal services to students. How these teachers' address the adversity that their context poses sheds light on whether the context impedes or promotes teachers' work.

For Salem (2011), a context refers to students' behaviour in the classroom that affects teachers' work. Teachers' work in this context is enacted where regulatory systems are adhered to, but effective teaching is hampered. In this contextual setting, teachers' work is measured in terms of appropriate behaviour by students and not by how the teaching system negotiates the education process (Salem al-amarat, 2011). Negative social behaviour thus challenges administrative codes of conduct, creating a variant contextual factor that impacts teachers' work.

The interconnectedness and inter-relations of context in teachers' work stem from stakeholders that are aligned to the teaching profession that design systemic quality education offered by the State. Semke and Sheridan (2011) highlight that the context significantly interacts with teachers' work in terms of cognitive or academic performance, where the students' families and the school are key players in determining models of work. The current study is in line with that of Semke and Sheridan (2011) since the township setting is examined in terms of context. However, their study focused on learning whereas I emphasise working. Although the one depends on the other, understanding teachers' work and how the family affects teaching influenced my data collection and findings to corroborate my arguments on a context of adversity. Students from low or no income households endure hardships that impact on the schools they attend, intensifying teachers' work and responsibilities.

In South Africa, a benchmark national examination is used to monitor students. Teachers at schools that achieve unsatisfactory results in the annual national assessments (ANA) are required to intensify their work to improve their students' performance. This remediation initiative is not only flawed, but one-sided because the regulatory authorities do not enquire why students are under-performing. Officials from the Department of Education are not au fait with the working conditions and demographics that confront some teachers (Mulkeen & Chen, 2008; Sekhampu, 2013). The performance of all state-employed teachers is measured by the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) which provides for remediation and self-inspection (Weber, 2008) regardless of conditions at their particular school.

## **1.2. Teachers' work**

While teachers' work has been the subject of serious concern for both society and policymakers in the democratic South Africa, it has not reflected changing international standards (King-McKenzie, Bantwini & Bogan, 2013). The transformation of education under a unitary government has indeed steered teachers in the right direction through the implementation of a national curriculum and assessment framework that is considered to be globally competitive. To advance this global agenda, provincial Departments of Education and school governing bodies were granted levels of autonomy unheard of under the previous regime. School governing bodies are mandated to ensure the efficient running of their schools in order to ensure that South Africa has an efficient education system that promotes achievement of the second Millennium Development Goal (MDG)<sup>4</sup> of universal primary education.

There are visible differences between the independent school sector and the State school sector in South Africa. Spaul (2013, p. 6) observes that, "The smaller, better performing system accommodates the wealthiest 20-25 per cent of pupils who achieve much higher scores than the larger system which caters to the poorest 75-80 per cent of pupils". The majority of South Africans hail from low socio-economic backgrounds. The lack of basic

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<sup>4</sup> The United Nations (UN) designated education as one of the three principal sectors for human development to advance basic human rights. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) highlight literacy, numeracy and science as key areas. Citizenship amongst youth is encouraged. Addressing poverty and unemployment is also included to redress imbalances in society.

services affects every aspect of communal life from daily living to their ability to form sustained relationships with schools. This has implications for teachers' work.

The teachers employed by the State are agents that promote education aimed at social upliftment. Agency is a distinctively human characteristic. In this case, it refers to teachers' capacity to "pursue self-determined purposes and goals through self-conscious strategic action" (Frost, 2008, p. 20). As agents, teachers' actions have a direct bearing on the services offered to the public in whichever context a teacher serves. As change agents, certain attributes are expected of teachers. They have to make decisions whilst executing their work and choose amongst limited possibilities to fulfil the obligations imposed on them by law. Teachers display practical agency or actions that demand purposiveness, deliberation, comparison, and choices.

Teachers' work has been described by King-McKenzie, Bantwini and Bogan (2013, p. 25) as complex because it requires them to achieve "unattainable goals" with "inadequate tools." De Vos (2010, p. 1222) describes teachers' work as acquiring certain technical skills where 'technical' means "a narrowly defined set of skills applied mechanistically irrespective of context." She adds that, due to the "vastly different sites of practice and the differing conditions under which teachers and schools operate" teachers require a "differentiated approach" (De Vos, 2010, p. 222). Both of these observations underline that teachers' are overextended when dealing with students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

King-McKenzie, Bantwini and Bogan (2013) note, that teachers are the executors of the national policy framework as well as the agents responsible to their particular agency, irrespective of whether teaching is undertaken in a rural or urban school. The responsibilities of the agents and the agency are set out in the Norms and Standards for Educators that draw on the regulatory frameworks formulated by the employer, the Department of Basic Education (DBE), the professional body, the South African Council of Educators (SACE) and the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). These standards set expectations of all teachers and have implications for teachers in rural township schools.

This tapestry of teachers' work (Little, 2013) consists of instructional work<sup>5</sup>, non-instructional work<sup>6</sup> and discretionary or invisible work<sup>7</sup> in terms of both their internal and external accountability to the national and provincial Departments of Education. The manner in which these activities are harmonized at the school creates concord in the actual work undertaken by the teacher. This study aimed to gain in-depth understanding of the demands that impact on teachers' work. The level of such demands at the research site imposes specific requirements on teachers. Therefore, the study investigated how teachers balance regulatory work while dealing with the adversities of their context.

### **1.3. Background and rationale for the study**

This study explored the nature of the work performed by teachers with students from low socio-economic backgrounds. The nature of teachers' work varies across schools and contexts, suggesting that several factors influence their work. While the regulatory framework sets out job descriptions and salary structures, suggesting that all teachers should be doing similar kinds of work, the reality is different as different contexts demand different kinds of responses (Day, 2006; Ramathan, 2010; Alexander, 2011; King-McKenzie, Bantwini & Bogan, 2013; Spaul, 2013,). Low-income schools are known to produce different working contexts (Webb, 2006; Goodpaster, Adedokun & Weaver, 2010; Khoza, 2010; Sediba, 2011; Miller, 2012). There is a disjuncture between the kind of work teachers are expected to do and the experiences of those working in low income areas. This study sought to explain this disjuncture, particularly in terms of how, in the context of adversity, teachers' performance influences student performance and school effectiveness.

In this instance, adversity can be described as the multiple resource constraints that students and teachers experience. In the setting in which my study is located, underprivileged youth grow up in an environment characterized by suboptimal physical situations such as a lack of access to water, food insecurity, poor nourishment, and disrupted family relationships. They

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<sup>5</sup> Consists of those activities that relate most directly to the core work of teaching in terms of instruction, planning, reporting/communication and assessment.

<sup>6</sup> Refers to meetings (parents, peers, officials), attending school functions, professional development, supervising students, professional advocacy and administration, and extra and co-curricular work.

<sup>7</sup> Activities and duties that teachers volunteer for and that often go unnoticed.



are often raised in households where the adults tasked with caring for them are under significant financial, emotional, and physical strain. Worldwide, studies have shown that such youth are more likely to attend low-quality, resource-constrained schools (Adams, 2008; Liu et al., 2009; Davidson & Adams, 2012).

Despite the South African National Department of Education's intensive efforts to integrate schools after 1994, the majority of Black children in impoverished communities are not receiving quality education. Teachers' work in rural schools is negatively impacted by poverty and resource constraints. While state regulations govern all teachers as well as their salary structures, they are not all doing the same work.

Mestry and Ndhlovu (2014) observe that, while there have been "substantial government interventions in the education system, equity has not been fully realised" (p.1). The Norms and Standards for Teachers (Mestry & Ndhlovu, 2014) and the Employment of Educators Act (Maarman, Steyn & Wolhuter, 2006) apply to all teachers employed by the State. However, they do not take into account the different conditions under which teachers' work, as school dynamics differ depending on the context. Those serving upper and middle class areas confront fewer challenges than schools that serve students from poverty stricken, low-income areas.

As a teacher who entered the profession more than three decades ago, I have been overwhelmed by the changes in the curriculum. I conceived of an enabling curriculum as a vehicle that would enable education to achieve more. However, teachers' work has been encumbered by over-regulation. The introduction of Outcomes Based Education (OBE) after 1994 resulted in the intensification of teachers' work, particularly the delivery of subject content which forms the core of such work. The new curriculum was supposed to be responsive to students' socio-economic backgrounds and experiences. OBE was reviewed in 2000 and replaced by the National Curriculum Statement (NCS). After some tailoring of the curriculum content, it was reconfigured in 2012, resulting in a curriculum that stipulates what content to teach on a daily basis from term to term for all grades from the Reception Year to Grade 12. This comprehensive document, together with the official Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS), also sets out student promotion requirements that

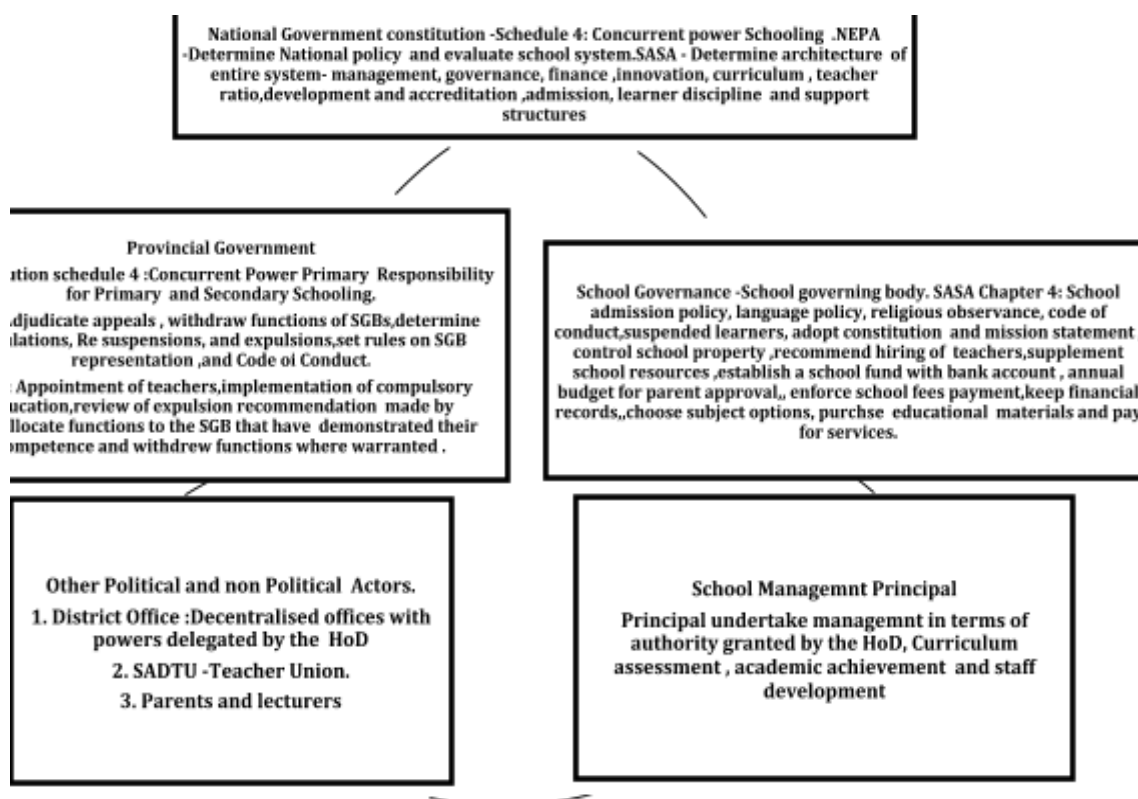
teachers are obliged to adhere to. However, the revised curriculum does not offer guidance on how to deal with different contexts and their concomitant demands on teachers' work.

In the South African context, regulatory policy homogenised all teachers into a general discourse on teachers' work. This study aimed to provide empirical evidence to argue against such generalisations by showing that these prescripts mean different things for teachers depending on where they teach.

There is a paucity of research on how the dynamics of context shape the work performed by teachers in South Africa. There is a marked difference between anticipation of what teachers' work should involve and the reality of such work that is not taken into account by regulators when gauging outputs using public benchmark assessment tools like CAPS and IQMS. This reality differs across different contexts, especially when students' come from poor and deprived socio-economic backgrounds (Naidoo & Muthukrishna, 2014).

Besides changes to the curriculum that impose new requirements on teachers, they are required to attend to many interdependent tasks within prescribed teaching time. Their actual work includes invisible work, working with relevant stakeholders and routine work that surfaces on a daily basis. Ingersoll, Merrill, and Stuckey (2014, p. 2) note that such multifaceted work is typical of the "bloated or ballooning" tasks that are characteristic of governmental educational institutions. According to Pitsoe and Letseka (2013), teachers manage their classroom in their contextual space using different ideas, teaching approaches and techniques to maintain classroom (school) order or "institutional equilibrium".

Schedule 4 of the Constitution of South Africa assigns responsibility to both Parliament and the Provincial Legislature to oversee teachers at primary and secondary schools. As illustrated in the diagram below by Woolman and Fleisch (2009), such responsibility cascades from the national education ministry to the provincial ministry, which in turn is divided into regional offices under which each school falls. Besides this external hierarchy, at primary school level, an internal hierarchy provides for managers in each teaching phase that supervise teachers' work in line with the demands of subject advisors. As chief executive officers of schools, principals are at the apex of this internal hierarchy. Teachers are thus agents that work on behalf of and on the instructions of different state structures.



**Figure 1: Primary institutions and actors determining education laws and policies**  
(Source: Woolman and Fleisch, 2009, p.11)

The aforementioned factors, my visual observation of conditions and the ranking of the school in this study as a quintile one school,<sup>8</sup> motivated me to explore this particular school by shadowing one teacher and using interviews and observation to gain deeper insight into teachers' work in a context of adversity as well as to explain why they work in the way that they do when teaching students from low socio-economic backgrounds.

#### 1.4. Problem statement

The problem addressed in this study is the nature of teachers' work with students from low socio-economic backgrounds. As noted previously, teachers' work varies across schools and contexts, suggesting that several factors influence such work. Scholars concur that teachers' working conditions matter because they impact both the individual and their professional

<sup>8</sup> Schools in South Africa are ranked by the Department of Education according to available resources. Infrastructure as well poverty levels are taken into account. A quintile one school is one where students are exempt from school fees and the State provides daily meals.

efficacy which, in turn, influences the quality and impact of their work (see Leithwood & Mcadie, 2010).

Four research approaches can be identified in the literature in relation to teachers' work. The first focuses on describing such work. Webb (2009) characterises teachers' work as a personal art that is irregular and context-reliant. Morrow (2007) describes this work from a workload perspective. He stresses that overloading of school teachers results from the failure to distinguish between the formal and material elements of teaching. This impacts on teachers' performance and students' results. Mohan and Shields (2014) describe teachers' work in detail in relation to the harsh realities of poverty affecting the youth in the context of homeless students.

The second approach to teachers' work investigates how unemployment and poverty affect education. Ozler and Hoogeveen (2005) and Grineski (2014, p. 206) note that "poor nutrition; social problems, including poor social skills, insecurities and self-consciousness" impact on teaching. Other studies investigated teachers' work in the context of support and the success of teachers and students in the US (King-McKenzie, Bantwini and Bogan, 2013). Bojuwoye et al. (2014) note that, in poorly-resourced settings, teachers and the school assist students at multiple levels and offer holistic support to improve the quality of their learning. Some schools that are economically stable with substantial assets provide academic, social and emotional support to students. According to McCombs and Whistler (1997), teachers' work means devoting time and energy to create conducive conditions in and outside the classroom.

The third approach focuses on the passion and motivation that underlie teaching. Teachers' work is complex, and emotionally and intellectually challenging (Day, 2005). In terms of motivation and being role models, teachers' professional duties extend beyond formal teaching (Waddar & Keni, 2015).

The fourth approach to teachers' work addresses the context or circumstances in which such work occurs (Shulman, 1983; Morrow, 2007). The findings of these studies point to the difficulty of fulfilling all the expectations placed on teachers. Morrow (2007) notes, that no distinction is drawn between the formal and material elements of teaching, which results in

overloading. From this perspective, teachers' work encompasses academic, social and emotional factors.

The manifold facets of teachers' work are described in terms of an "audit society" as well as an "evaluative society" (Lindgren, 2015, p. 44). An audit society refers to teachers being accountable to the regulatory authority for the quality of their work, while an evaluative one refers to both teachers and students being placed under scrutiny for their performance when tested using benchmark tests. Jacobsson (2010) proposes a regulative-inquisitive-meditative triptych that expands the idea of the multiplicity of teaching. In South Africa the IQMS introduced in 2010 evaluates and remunerates teachers accordingly, whilst the ANA is used to monitor teachers' service delivery and student performance. The IQMS regulates schools' internal organisational structures. The regulative activities include school rules and directives, while the inquisitive work (Jacobsson, 2010) is the additional work that arises at a school in line with socioeconomic conditions.

This study extended this thinking to explore teachers' work in a context of adversity at SPS in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, using an ethnographic method to gather information. It interrogated teachers' work to make sense of how teachers adjust, adhere to and adapt their work to suit learners from low socio-economic backgrounds in contexts of adversity.

### **1.5. Central questions**

Based on the focus of this study, which was to explore teachers' work in a context of adversity, the following critical questions were identified:

1. What is the nature of teachers' work in a context of adversity?
2. How do teachers work within a context of adversity?
3. Why do teachers in a context of adversity (as described), work in the way that they do?

### **1.6. Location of the Study**

This ethnographic study was undertaken in a school which is in straitened circumstances. Shivta Primary School is the nerve-centre of the community within which it is located. The community of Kalika and surrounding farms from as far as ten kilometres away send their children to SPS. The school's run-down buildings, unavailability of water and lights, limited access to libraries and clinics and the lack of technology mirror conditions in Kalika. Households in this area live in small RDP homes. The amenities available in urban spaces are not provided in this area. Kalika's plight is exacerbated by the fact that the State has to provide utilities and infrastructure in an area predominantly dependent on social grants. The area is characterised by low-income housing; high unemployment rates, child-headed households, children living with their grandparents<sup>9</sup>, a lack of proper sanitation, mismanagement of communal water, incomplete infrastructure, drug abuse and an increasing crime rate. Students at SPS are given free meals provided by the State. Teachers at this school are expected to embrace transformation amidst their own challenges.

### **1.7. Research design**

This study was framed from a social constructionism standpoint. This framework defined its aims, focus, research design and method as well as the participants selected.

The social constructionist perspective is based on the assumption that reality is constructed inter-subjectively with meanings and understandings moulded both experientially and socially in a particular setting. The interpretative paradigm relies heavily on naturalistic methods (interviews, observation and analysis of existing texts). Interpretivists contend that reality can be fully understood as "behaviour-with-meaning" through subjective interpretation (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p.17). This study employed social constructionism as a lens to determine what working with students from a low socio-economic background means for teachers, in this case at SPS.

A classical ethnographic methodological (CEM) approach was used whereby I as the researcher embedded myself in the study. Ethnography was employed to make meaning of teachers' work and to obtain tangible evidence of what teaching in a context of adversity means. A cultural systems paradigm was used to gather data and make meaning of the

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<sup>9</sup> Many learners live with aged grandparents.

phenomenon. Descriptions of teachers' work were obtained from eight participants who took part in three focus group interviews. Participant observation took the form of shadowing a teacher for a month and journal entries captured the observations that ultimately contributed to deeper understanding of teachers' work.

### **1.8. Limitations of the study**

The fieldwork for this study was conducted at a single site. An ethnographic study aims to provide deep insight rather than generalisations. The study's findings are also limited to the period of observation and fieldwork as schools are dynamic spaces that change constantly.

### **1.9 Structure of the Thesis**

This thesis is presented in seven chapters. Chapter one introduces the study while chapter two discusses the theoretical concepts employed to understand teachers' work, including interpretivism, the open systems theory and the theory of resilience.

Chapter three reviews the international and South African literature on the phenomenon of teachers' work. It examines the complexity and demands of such work and teachers' work in the context of adversity, in this instance, students from low socio-economic backgrounds.

The methodology employed to conduct the study is presented in chapter four.

Chapter five presents and analyses the data gathered to determine the nature of teachers' work in a context of adversity. Chapter six presents the findings arising from the data analysis and chapter seven provides an overall conclusion and recommendations.

### **1.10. Chapter Summary**

This chapter introduced the study by presenting the background and rationale for the study, the problem statement, the research questions and a brief discussion on the methodology.

The following chapter discusses the theoretical framework that underpinned this study.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **2.1. Introduction**

A teacher's primary obligation is to teach students to enable them to enter society as productive citizens, and to handle the responsibilities and difficulties they will encounter. Teachers are regarded as change agents who provide basic education that enables students to



acquire life-long skills. This chapter examines teachers' work using the lens of the systems theory. Ludwig von Bertalanffy proposed an expanded systems theory approach in 1937.

## **2.2. Systems Theory**

The on-going interactions between teachers and the community they serve are investigated in order to make meaning of teachers' work and provide a nuanced analysis of their agency. At SPS, teachers enter into intricate interactions and interrelationships whilst performing their regular duties. The organisation (the school) has its own planning and control system that suits its work environment. Since Shivta is a public school, the open systems theory (OST) is an appropriate framework to investigate teachers' work in a context where adversity is not spoken of, but manifests in a community characterised by poor socioeconomic conditions.

**2.3. Open Systems Theory (OST)** In order to make meaning of the world truth seekers jostled but created two stances of their interpretation. Firstly the descriptive approach voices theories of humans organise stimuli to try to understand it better. The second being the prescriptive approach which splits into two paths reductionism and systems theory. The former which basically implies that in order to understand a phenomenon is to understand the functioning or properties of its individual parts. However, the second which is applicable to this study is systems theory, which concentrates on the organisation and relation amid parts and also how they work together as a whole. This theory is a transdisciplinary because it offers a meta-language to address a problem irrespective of which field it belongs to.

Reductionism posits that, in order to understand a phenomenon we need to understand the functioning or properties of its individual parts. On the other hand, systems theory, which is applied in the current study, focuses on the organisation and relationships among its parts as well as how they work together as a whole.

At a seminar at the University of Chicago, von Bertalanffy expanded his theory by noting that an organisation comprises of various levels that are manifestations of natural systems (Laszlo & Krippner, 1998). This theory dates back to the philosophy of Hegel who stated that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. There are two varieties of systems theory. The first is the closed systems theory (CST) which emanated from classical physics and the

modern version of CST known as cybernetics. The second is appropriate for this study. Its origins lie in von Bertalanffy's OST that was formulated in the 1940s.

Public schools are open systems because all those within the organisation work together in a synchronised manner to achieve the common purpose of providing education to students to enable them to enter the world of work (Norlin, 2009). However, their interaction with their environment varies. The four main principles of the OST provide an appropriate lens for this study. Firstly, OST focuses on the interchange between the system and its environment. Secondly, it is concerned with a set of interrelationships. In the third place, OST anticipates errors before they arise and adopts suitable remediation measures. Finally, the theory is concerned with constant development rather than mere stability. Open Systems Theory is thus said to reach dynamic equilibrium (Von Bertalanffy, 1973).

Schools are open systems that constantly communicate with their environment and design suitable structures to deal with the impact of external forces (Lunenburg, 2010). An open system is made up of five basic elements, namely, inputs, a transformation process, outputs, feedback and the environment (Lunenburg, 2010, p.1).

In a school, four types of inputs or resources determine the success of the system. These are physical resources, information resources, human resources and financial resources.

Teachers' work is transformative in that it enables students to make a positive contribution to society at large. It includes the internal operations and organisation of the school. The outputs are the techniques or methods adopted to achieve the school's mission and vision. Assessment results and the school's participation in activities in and outside its immediate environment form the basis of its output. Feedback is essential in assessing successes and challenges that the school experiences. It reflects the social, political and economic forces that impact directly on the school (Lunenburg, 2010, p.3). This environment plays a significant role in an open system in terms of policies and laws that teachers have to abide by in the execution of their work. Schools are thus required to run their internal operations in an efficient manner while simultaneously monitoring their environment as well as anticipating and responding to "external" demands (Lunenburg, 2010, p.3).

The principle feature of the OST theory that rendered it this appropriate for this study is the concept of equifinality<sup>10</sup> (Ansari, 2004, p.6). This refers to teachers' position within a system that attains that same end product despite various initial inputs. Ansari refers to this as 'many one' behaviour which means the teachers' work should always achieve the same goal, which is to deliver the curriculum and comply with regulations.

## **2.4. Social Constructionism: A Meta-perspective Theory**

The social constructionist approach is built on the premise that all knowledge is socially constructed. This includes our construction of knowledge that confirms our reality. This was an appropriate lens through which to examine teachers' work in a context of adversity in a rural school in South Africa.

In an educational context, constructivism can be described as understanding that emerges as a result of a learner's mental activity (Walker & Shore, 2015, p.2). Individuals such as teachers or learners actively construct their own knowledge through interaction between them and their social world. Therefore, Bruning, Schraw and Svoboda (1995) advocate that teaching needs to encourage knowledge formation and foster skills development, including judgment and organization. This view is supported by Walker and Shore (2015, p.2), who note that teachers primarily act as coaches or facilitators, rather than as mere information transmitters. Wortham and Jackson (2008) note that this approach is thus useful in determining the outcomes of educational processes. Constructionists regard social identification, learning and social organization as resources that people, groups and systems use to accomplish multiple ends.

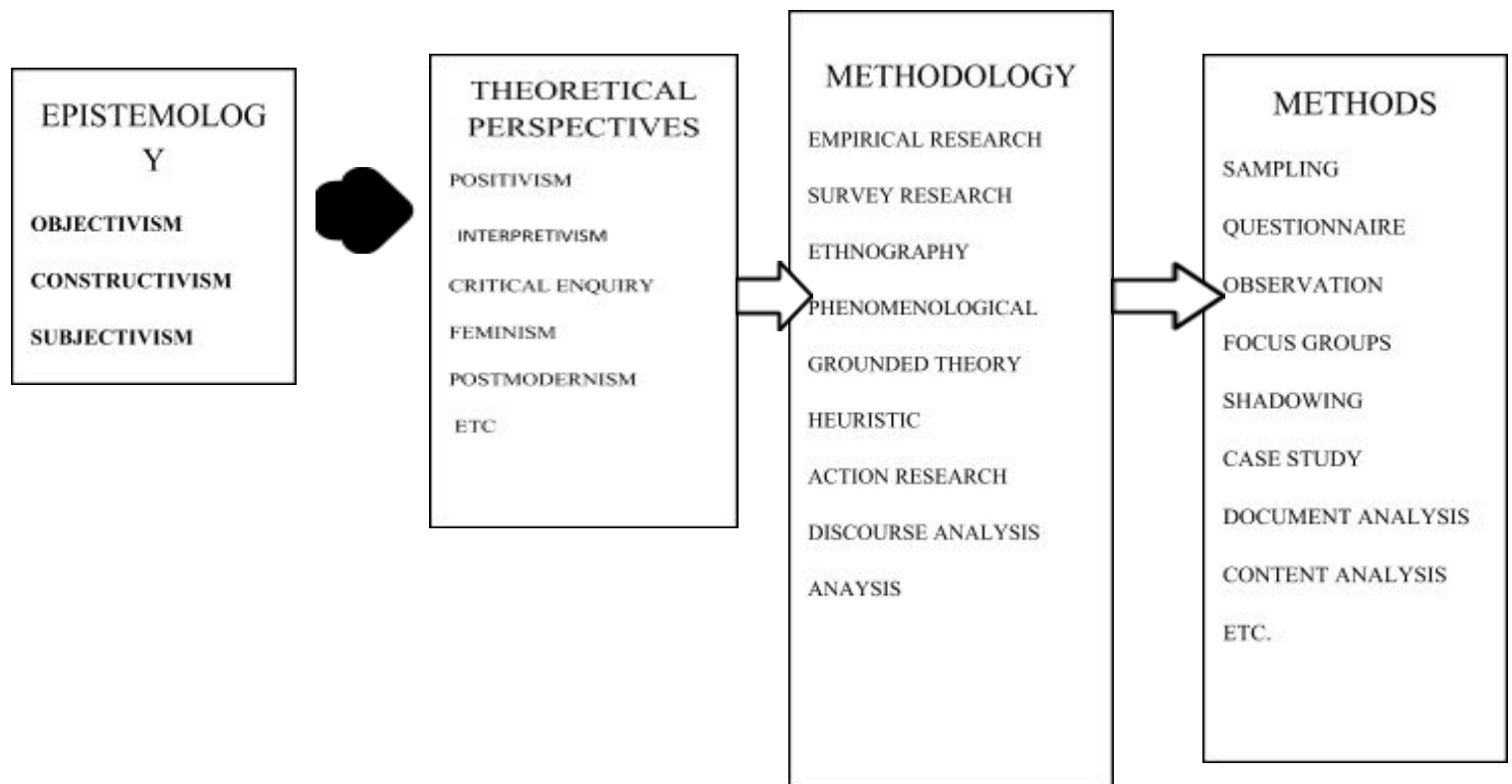
## **2.5. Social Constructionism: A Theoretical Perspective to Capture Teachers' Work**

Teachers support students to cope with the demands of life. Theoretical perspectives ranging from interpretivism, to symbolic interactionism, social constructionism and postmodernism

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<sup>10</sup> Equifinality is the principle that in open systems, a given end state can be reached by many potential means. The term and concept are attributed to developmental biologist, Hans Driesch. They were later applied by Ludwig von Bertalanffy, the founder of General Systems Theory. [www.definitions.net/definition/equifinality](http://www.definitions.net/definition/equifinality)

can be used to underpin a study. In the social sciences, a suitable theoretical approach is required to capture the subjective meanings of experiences.



**Figure 2: The relationship between epistemology, theoretical perspectives, methodology and research methods** (Adapted from Gray, 2013, p.6)

Interpretivism is situated in an anti-positivist paradigm which is in search of "culturally derived and historically situations of the social life-world" (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). Interpretivism is based on the belief that natural and social reality is different; therefore the method used to describe them should be different. In the natural sciences, a nomothetic method of searching for consistency in data, the ideographic method which is situated in interpretivism, is applied to the actions of individuals. This study uses a naturalistic enquiry as an interpretivist lens.

Interpretivism is an appropriate approach to understand how teachers' work in a complex context. Social constructionism posits that knowledge is 'constructed' by humans rather than being passively received by them (Ritchie et al., 2013)

Many scholars have influenced the development and thinking of the discourse of social constructionism ( Berger & Luckmann, 1991; Mead, , ; Schwandt (2003); Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Cognitive constructionism and social constructionism are the two main approaches within this perspective. The former focuses on the importance of the mind in learning, while the latter concentrates on the key role played by the environment and interaction between individuals (Schcolnik, Kol & Abarbanel, 2016).

Drawing on the work of Lev Vygotsky (1997), most social constructionist studies in education describe more than one object and/or rely on more than one type of mechanism (Wortham & Jackson, 2008, p. 12). They examine the phylogenetic, socio-historical, cultural and situational resources for and constraints on learning. In each context, teachers' work necessarily involves attention to socio-cultural and environmental aspects that may or not constrain students' ability to progress to the next level. These factors vary depending on the social location of teachers and students (Wortham & Jackson, 2008, p.30). Schcolnik et al. (2016) used constructivism in theory and in practice. Their findings revealed that learners use their cognitive abilities to interpret the environment ( p. 13). In doing so, they assimilate new information into their existing cognitive schemas. At the same time, learners' cognitive structures change as they interact with the environment. It is thus important to emphasise the role of individual cognitive structures in learning. Schcolnik et al. (2016) drew on Vygotsky (1997) who argued that the interpersonal social aspects of learning precede individual, intrapersonal aspects. This emphasises the social origins of reasoning and the effects of social interaction on learning. Duit (1996) examined the insight that could be gained by applying social constructionism to science education, while Scardamalia and Bereiter (2014) used this approach to study knowledge building and knowledge creation. Knowledge creation was considered as a socio-cognitive process in which individuals' tacit knowledge plays a central role both as a source and as outcomes (p. 1). Zhang et al. (2011) found that teachers themselves undergo on-going principle-based knowledge building. Knowledge building has also been used to study parallel stories to contextualize teacher insights (Craig, 1999). Craig (1999) noted that it is important to understand how teacher knowledge takes shape over time and across multiple situations and environments. Finally, Santos and Jacobi (2011 p. 269) found that teachers explored innovation and constructed teaching practices, among other things, in response to the reality in which the school is immersed.

Social constructionism posits that “all other aspects of humanity are created, maintained and destroyed in our interactions with others through time” (Owen, 1995, p.161). People are caught up in cultural, political and historical evolution at specific times and places. Reality is created amidst an individual’s interaction with cultural, historical, and institutional contexts (Steffe & Gale, 1995). Thus, social constructionists assume that social-cultural settings should be given analytical priority. While they note that it is also important to recognise individual mental functioning, it should be located within the sociocultural context from which it emanates.

As applied in this study, social constructionism involved an examination of the social, economic, environmental and cultural constraints that influence or explain teachers’ work in a context where schools construct their own knowledge, taking into account their prior knowledge and understanding of communities.

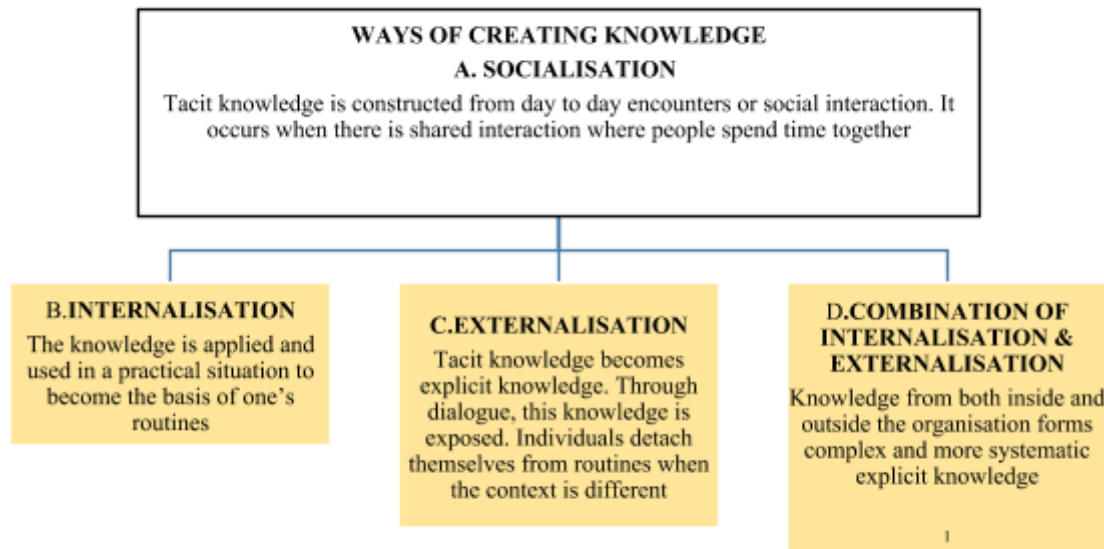
## **2.6. Conceptualisation of knowledge**

Constructionism involves a particular way of conceptualising knowledge and knowledge acquisition (i.e., learning) (Duit, 1996 p. 41) based on the theory of knowledge. The key to understanding the knowledge-creating process is dialectic thinking and acting, which transcends and synthesizes contradictions (Nonaka & Toyama, 2003. p. 2).

Nonaka and Toyama (2003) regard knowledge creation as a transcending process through which entities (individuals, groups, organizations, etc.) transcend the boundaries of the old to create a new self by acquiring new knowledge (p. 4). Knowledge is not regarded as a true copy of features of the outside world, but as an individual’s construction (Duit, 1996, p. 41). Duit (1966) emphasised that, in terms of social constructionism, every individual constructs knowledge for her or himself. The process of knowledge construction always has a social component as knowledge is constructed within a certain social setting.

According to Nonaka and Toyama (2003, p. 4), social action should be understood in terms of social structure and human agency, and their interplay in defining and reproducing each

other. Knowledge is created through such interactions between human agency and social structures.



**Figure 3: Four ways of creating knowledge** (Adapted from Nonaka & Toyama 2003, pp. 4-5)

The above four modes of knowledge creation resemble a scrolled form that amplifies the interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge (Duit, 1996, p. 6). Nonaka and Toyama add that the knowledge-creating process is necessarily context-specific in terms of time, space, and relationships with others. Furthermore, human agency and social structure are important in understanding action. The separation of the two types of knowledge (tacit and explicit) provides the basis for continuous interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge (p. 9).

Drawing on figure 3, according to Nonaka and Toyama (2003), the individual teacher is compared to the “dynamic interaction” (p.2) that exists between organisations as well the context in which the organisation is situated. Teachers at work are understood as interactive beings that should be analysed using a synthesizing and self-transcending process, as opposed to the logical analysis of structure and action (Nonaka & Toyama, 2003, p.2).

## 2.7. Theories of knowledge in social constructionism

Social constructionism is associated with phenomenological theories of knowledge, such as social constructionism, social constructivism, and the social construction of reality (Duit, 1996, p. 40). In seeking to make sense of the social world, social constructionists view knowledge as constructed as opposed to being created.

*In constructivism, the familiar and inaccurate metaphor of the mind as a container waiting to be filled is replaced by the metaphor of the mind as an agent actively seeking to satisfy its curiosity and resolve troubling issues... Knowledge under constructivism is not seen as a commodity to be transferred from expert to learner, but rather as a construct to be pieced together through an active process of involvement and interaction with the environment (Schcolnik et al., 2006, p. 12).*

Schwandt (2003) is of the view that knowledge and truth are created rather than discovered by the mind. As such, he maintains that realism is consistent with constructionism. Scholars such as Berger and Luckmann (1991) and Hammersley (1992) posit that reality is socially defined and they define it as the subjective experience of everyday life. They thus focus on understanding of the world or how it is understood rather than the objective reality of the natural world. This involves an examination of the emergence or conceptualisation of knowledge and its impact on society.

According to these authors, society is both an objective and subjective reality (Andrews, 2012). In terms of the former, people's interaction in the social world causes certain actions to be reproduced and become familiar (Andrews, 2012). When something becomes routine, it forms part of the general store of knowledge. Andrews (2012) concludes that future generations experience this type of knowledge as objective, which is continuously reaffirmed in their interaction with others. Creswell (2013, p. 37) states that social constructivists believe that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. He argues that they develop subjective meanings of their experiences which are directed to certain things or



objects. He thus emphasises the importance of concept creation and concept clarification in relation to interaction among individuals. Creswell (2013) adds that social constructivists focus on the specific contexts in which people live and work in order to understand their historical and cultural settings (p. 37).

On the other hand, subjective reality emerges as a result of primary and secondary socialisation. Andrews (2012 p3) indicates that subjective reality comprises concepts that can be easily shared with others. Berger and Luckmann (1991) note that socialisation occurs through others that mediate the objective reality of society. They argue that those who mediate provide meanings that are internalised by members of society. This view is supported by Andrews (2012) who notes that everyday conversation among people reveals shared meanings and understanding that assume a reality which is generally not scrutinised. Walker and Shore (2015, p. 2) add that understanding and knowledge are under constant construction and reconstruction.

## **2.8. A Conceptual model for the ethnographic study of Cultural Systems**

Investigating teachers' using systems theory will reveal deviations and discrepancies as a result of culture, beliefs or values. This calls for analysis from an emic perspective using appropriate theoretical and methodological approaches. The choice of a sociocultural lens to examine teachers' work in a context where students come from low socio-economic backgrounds enabled the researcher to highlight the holistic, flexible and inconsistent culture and its interconnected components in which these teachers operate. The study thus adds to the body of knowledge in this field.

The Cultural Systems Paradigm (CSP) was adopted to make meaning of the data obtained from interviews, observations and field notes, as the interpretive paradigm is concerned with understanding the world from the subjective experiences of individuals. Interpretivists employ meaning (versus measurement) oriented methodologies, such as interviews or participant observation that rely on a subjective relationship between the researcher and subjects, whereas the social constructionism paradigm is a theory of knowledge in sociology

and communication that examines the development of jointly constructed understandings of the world that form the basis for shared assumptions about reality. The three representations I selected work together to offer significant insight and understanding as they address the facets of a subjective, jointly constructed and emic perspective of teachers' work.

The CSP that emerged in the 1980s offers a lens to address two methodological issues in relation to ethnography. Firstly, it provides a model to interpret data in a particular setting and secondly, participants' descriptions provide more information than that which is expected from the research question. This unexpected data deepens one's understanding of the phenomenon.

The three broad principles that unfold from this model are discussed in the following chapter. They include the principle of a universal human cultural category (CSP-P1), the principle of paradigmatic flexibility (CSP-P2) and the principle of the interrelationship between sociocultural contexts, processes and meaning (CSP-P3). Using these principles, the study unearthed new knowledge on the nature of teachers' work.

## **2.9. Conceptualisation of teachers' work**

The work of teaching refers to the activities in which teachers engage, and their responsibilities to teach content, both inside and outside the classroom (Ball, 2016). This is referred to as the knowledge that teachers require to effectively engage with their respective context. Craig (1999) conceptualises teachers' knowledge in terms of three forms, namely, their professional knowledge landscapes, the narrative authority of teacher knowledge and teachers' knowledge communities. She notes that these forms are interlocked and originate from a philosophical view of knowledge.

Craig (1999) adds that teachers' personal and professional knowledge meet. Using the metaphor of a landscape, she observes that professional knowledge deeply connects teachers' personal practical knowledge with the contexts of teaching. Similarly, Lingard, Hayes and Mill (2003) state that teachers' work takes into account "teachers" as the "subjects" rather

than the “objects” of policy discourse; this approach considers teachers’ practices and desirable outcomes.

Table below highlights seven categories of teachers’ knowledge.

No	Categories of knowledge
1	General pedagogical knowledge, with special reference to the broad principles and strategies of classroom management and organization that appear to transcend subject matter
2	Knowledge of learners and their characteristics
3	Knowledge of educational contexts, ranging from the workings of the group or classroom, to governance and financing of school districts, and the character of communities and cultures
4	Knowledge of educational ends, purposes, and values, and their philosophical and historical grounds
5	Content knowledge
6	Curriculum knowledge, particularly understanding of the materials and programmes that serve as “tools of the trade” for teachers
7	Pedagogical content knowledge - the amalgam of content and pedagogy that is uniquely the province of teachers and is their own form of professional understanding

**Table 1: Seven categories of teacher knowledge**  
Source: Shulman (1987, p. 8); Ball et al. (2008, p. 391)

Ball et al. (2008) point out that content knowledge for teaching must include the content that students are supposed to learn, knowing how to unpack, represent, and make that content

learnable, knowing how students think about the specific content and knowing ways to teach the specific content (Ball et al., 2008). On the one hand, it is based on the subject matter which includes common content knowledge, horizon content knowledge and specialised content knowledge, and on the other, it embraces pedagogical content knowledge, which includes knowledge about students' educational growth (didactics), knowledge of content and teaching and knowledge of content and curriculum. This view is premised on a practice-based theory (Ball & Bass, 2003) that describes the content knowledge involved in the teaching of a subject. The authors stress that the theory is constructed on the basis of work inquiry.

Penrice's (2008) study in New Zealand noted that during the process of social interaction, one can generate new actions and judgments which are described by Foucault (1988) as "technologies of the self" (Penrice, 2008, p. 105). Actions and judgements can also stimulate collaboration and integration among people, knowledge, disciplines, and methodologies. Lingard et al. (2003) examined contextual pressures on teachers' work in contemporary educational policy, educational systems and within schools. They found that individual teacher practices contribute more to variation in student outcomes than whole school effects. Craig (1999) makes reference to the narrative authority of teachers' work and asserts that schools require a different view of knowledge that considers it as entrenched in teachers and fixed in the contexts where they work. These contexts have different implications for teachers' work; in the case of this study, in a context of adversity, teachers make meaning of their perceptions of teaching students from a low socioeconomic background. Furthermore, Craig (1999) conceptualises knowledge communities as a safe haven within a professional knowledge landscape that is a place of negotiation and renegotiation of meaning with others. Thus, teachers' work occurs in an environment in which teachers learn how to work within the constraints and constrictions presented by each landscape.

Craig (1999) refers to Clandinin and Connelly's (1995) landscape metaphor which "allows us to talk about space, place, and time" (Craig, 1999). This metaphor offers a sense of expansiveness and the possibility of being filled with diverse people, things, and events in different relationships. She characterises the landscape as a place where teachers work face-to-face with students, and as all other communal and professional places, including, "the in-classroom place and the out-of-classroom place" (p. 398). Instead of 'place of work',

Santos and Jacobi (2011, p. 268) define a school as a space for dialogue between different types of knowledge, and for the construction of knowledge. It is in such contexts that these authors describe a process of action-reflection. The work pattern that is developed resembles an intentional meter or rhythm of school activities within the inherent difficulties of daily school life. This implies articulation between theory and practice, ideal and real, and individual and collective possibilities and limits, in a process of action-reflection (p. 268). It creates significant possibilities for the education of critical and participative teachers and pupils. Santos and Jacobi (2011) argue that understanding this process enables one to better understand the reality of the school. It contributes to more sound conceptions of teachers, pupils, knowledge, and teaching and learning.

Research on school effectiveness has focussed on the centrality of teachers to student outcomes within contextual constraints. Some scholars have investigated improvement of the whole school through building a school learning community (Lingard et al., 2003). These authors argue that this approach takes into account the social and intellectual outcomes of schooling through productive pedagogy. However, focussing solely on teachers, fails to acknowledge the limitations on and possibilities of achieving goals.

Viewed through this theoretical lens, teachers' work can be understood by means of their own perspectives on the reality of their work. Their claims and assumptions describe the phenomenon from an ontological perspective. Teachers also describe how they procure knowledge of their work. Mack (2010) states, that the most appropriate methodological approach is the theory of the knowledge or reality that is "embedded in a theoretical perspective" (Mack, 2010, p. 5).

This meaning-making cyclical process rests on a paradigm of teachers as public intellectuals. It acknowledges that teachers have increasing public responsibility, and are thus subjected to new forms of accountability as part of the culture of performativity (Lingard et al., 2003 p. 402). Education discourses, and diverse responsibilities, school structures, cultures and contexts all affect pedagogical practices. Lingard et al. (2003) add that the language of pedagogy links teachers' work and student learning. It mediates the curriculum and assessment and places pedagogy at the centre of educational discourses (p. 405). This

conceptualisation of teachers' work sees conversations taking place "in educational policies, in schools as organisations, in teacher education and in on-going teacher development".

The notion of a conversation can be used within school communities to set achievable common goals. Adler explains that as (2007, p. 1718), "new work relations emerge, tasks and their complexity change, and vice versa. For example, new work relations often necessitate greater interactive and social skills." Therefore, it is self-explanatory that if one wants to understand the changing nature of work relations and of skills more generally, it is imperative to understand the changing forms of interdependence.

*The technical element of skill hence expands and changes in form. And in its social dimension, skill now means mastery of one's role in a considerably broader and more complex structure of interdependent cooperation (Adler, 2007, p. 1223).*

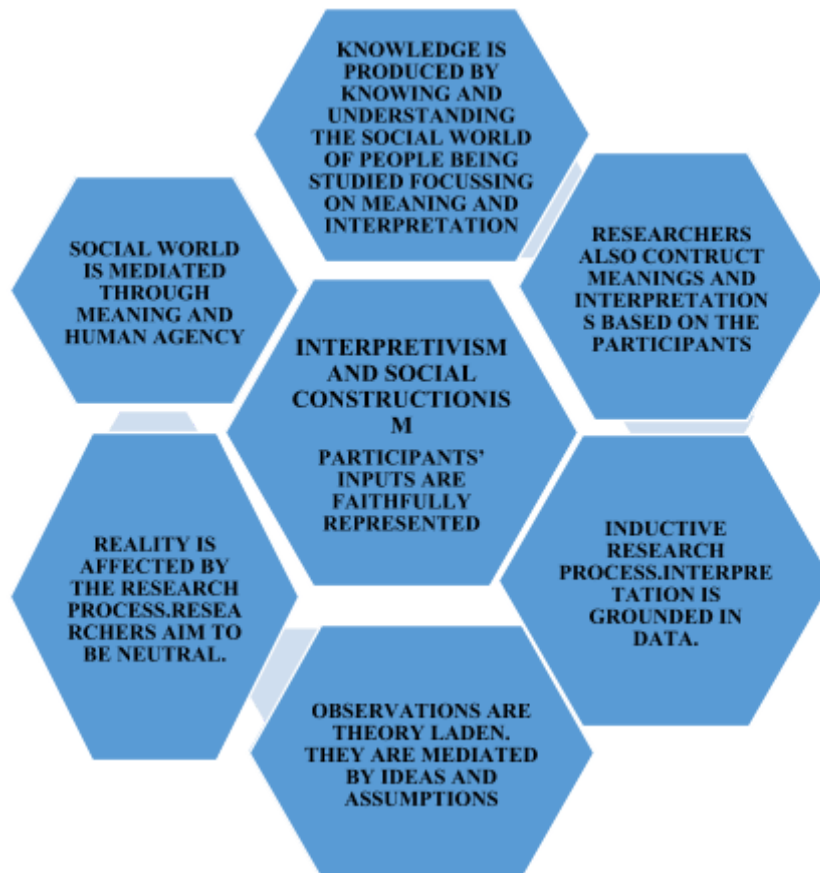
## **2.10. Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the theoretical framework that underpinned this study on teachers' work. The systems theory and OST were discussed. The chapter also highlighted concepts relevant to social constructionism such as an organic configuration of the phylogenetic, socio-historical, cultural and situational resources for the technical and social skills of teaching.

The notion of the in-classroom place and out-of-classroom place enables new insights into the phenomenon of teachers' work. This theory seeks to make sense of the sociocultural world of teachers as they interact with others. In so doing, it examines how they execute their duties, which represents their own construction of their work.

The cultural systems model employed in this study takes into account each teacher's self-knowledge to create a holistic picture of teachers' work. Social constructionism explores the conceptualisation of knowledge (presented in the figure below), the conceptualisation of

teachers' work and knowledge conceptualisation in education in order to describe and explain teachers' work.



**Figure 4 - Interpretivism** (Bryman, 1988; Holloway & Wheeler, 2010; Lincoln & Guba, 1985 ;Willis, 2007) and **Constructionism** (Blaikie, 2007; Crotty, 1998)

The following chapter presents a review of the international and South African literature on teachers' work.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

The previous chapter presented the theoretical framework that underpinned this study. This chapter reviews the international and South African literature on teachers' work in general, and more particularly in contexts of adversity. The review focuses on teachers' work in terms



of their personal; professional and situational characteristics related to individual agency and analyses the ecological context where their work is undertaken.

Studies on teachers' work cover four broad themes. The first focuses mainly on the nature of teachers' work (Harrison & Killion, 2007; Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2009; Cervone & Cushman, 2012) while the second investigates the complexity of such work (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2009; Leithwood & Mcadie, 2010; Nichols & Parsons, 2011). The third broad theme is the demands of teaching (Leithwood & Beatty, 2008; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010; Penrice, 2011; Cervone & Cushman, 2012; Lepida & Veniopoulou, 2017) and the fourth, which combines the aforementioned themes, explores teachers' work in contexts of adversity (Harrison & Killion 2007; Vanderbilt, Adriance & Shaw, 2008; Cervone & Cushman, 2012; Durlak et al., 2011; Hunter, 2012).

In terms of the structure of teachers' work, the literature notes that this includes, but is not limited to teachers as "technicians", teachers responding to context-specific demands and teachers having to cope with complexities and challenges beyond academic concerns. As technicians, teachers are called upon to respond to problems that emerge whilst executing their duties. Their training and knowledge do not always prepare them for the complex and challenging demands imposed by working in adverse contexts. Furthermore, the cultural and structural composition of each school is different in line with the type of community, students, infrastructure, and support structure and operational features. This results in considerable variations in geographical settings, and social and cultural capital. Teachers' work is thus complex and multifaceted, requiring individual agency whilst complying with statutory regulations.

The following section explores teachers' work drawing on an array of theoretical and empirical perspectives. Besides highlighting the intricacy of teachers' work, variations in the context are revealed.

### **3.2. The international context of teachers' work**

Teachers' work is regarded as a sociological act. Hence, a key focus of this study is to explain social action that generates structure-agency outcomes and how this achieved in the

context of adversity. Of particular interest is how teachers shape their responses to contextual circumstances and how they manage structural constraints at their particular school.

The literature in this area includes the work of Sun and Leithwood (2015); Wiebe and MacDonald (2014); Gur (2014); Silva, Caetano and Zhou (2012); Ghahremani and GholiGhourchian (2012); Fullan (2011); Devlin and Shea (2011); Penrice (2011); Feng, Figlio and Sass (2010); Silva (2009); Hong (2008); and Stevenson, Carter and Passy (2007).

### **3.3. Nature of teachers' work**

Numerous studies have been conducted on teachers' work in the international context (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000; Day, 2000, 2012; Richardson & Watt, 2006; Harrison & Killion, 2007; Mpokosa & Ndaruhutse, 2008; Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2009; Berry, 2009; Cervone & Cushman, 2012). Day (2000) observes that traditional definitions of teaching, including enactment of the curriculum, mutual respect, mutual trust, autonomy and life-long job security are now contested. According to Gur (2014), teachers require appropriate skills because they are responsible and accountable for education-related decisions in the classroom and beyond. Harrison and Killion (2007) note, that the many roles performed by teachers include those of resource provider, curriculum specialist, learning facilitator, mentor, data coach and catalyst for change.

As facilitators and coaches, teachers take their students' circumstances into account and intervene and assist in cases of adversity. Such students are motivated to work hard and produce better results. From a critical sociological perspective, Day (2012, p. 7) describes teachers as "victims of policy-driven imperatives as bureaucratic surveillance and new pervasive forms of contractual accountability...". However, Day (2012) adds that teaching is undertaken by "teachers who remain skilful, knowledgeable, committed and resilient" (p. 7).

Richardson and Watt (2006) focused on why people choose and remain in teaching as a career. According to Day et al. (2006) those that choose to teach have "an enduring belief that they can make a difference to the learning lives and achievements of students" (p.10). They add that teachers' agency involves cognitive and affective endeavours to make a difference in students' lives by enacting the curriculum laid down by the education authorities. Newman

and O'Brien (2013, p. 127) support this view and highlight that people also practice "impression management" where they seek to control and manipulate information about them in order to influence the impression that society forms of them.

A sociological contradiction occurs in teachers' world of work in that they live in a society that reveres personal accomplishment but derides individualism. Sun and Leithwood (2015) identify four types of teachers whom they refer to as "school leaders travelling along four paths" (p. 567) and note that conditions in the school and classroom have a direct bearing on agency.

The rational path refers to teachers' instructional practices, while the emotional path describes the degree of trust teachers have in education stakeholders. The collaborative nature of teachers' work fits into the organisational path and finally, parents' hopes for their children are referred to as the family path. Teachers are also expected to fulfil the expectations of impersonal, bureaucratic institutions and adhere to regulatory demands (Dieltiens & Meny-Gilbert, 2012). Shulman's (1987) description of teachers as "technicians" is relevant in situations where they react to the demands of others. However, as noted in chapter one, classroom dynamics might not fit with the perceptions of those that are not intimately involved with the school.

As an organization, a school is more than simply a structure; rules, policies, goals, job descriptions, and standard operating procedures describe how teachers are expected to work. Each school, and each division within it, develops its own norms, values, and vocabulary. This is generally described as the organizational culture. While the organizational culture is persistent and embedded, teachers find ways to exert some control over their lives within the boundaries of the school (Ghaemi & Yazdanpanah, 2014).

Besides the regulatory work and self-efficacy shown by teachers, Day (2012) bases his perspective on the work on Judyth Sachs (2003) who conceptualised teachers as "activist professionals" (p. 7). This is due to the fact that, firstly, they are expected to make a difference in the lives of their students, and secondly, while they confront "bumpy moments" (Day, 2012, p. 8) along the way, they uphold their obligation to teach to their best ability.

Mpokosa and Ndaruhutse (2008, p. 6) identify three basic requirements for a functional education system, namely, sufficient staff, a workforce comprised of competent and

dedicated professionals, and networking and collaboration between teacher unions and the government. Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2009) describe teachers' work as akin to a masterpiece, which mediates the recurring aggregates of duties, laws and responsibilities. They emphasise that teachers' daily work reflects "complexities, paradoxes and tensions" (p. 1). Such challenges are exacerbated by the "paradox of decentralised systems (that is local decision-making)" (Day, 2012, p. 9).

### **3.4. Complexity of teachers' work**

Teachers' work is shaped by "context specific interactive activity" (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2009, p. 3). They are required to execute tasks on time and fulfil their statutory responsibilities.

Teachers are highly likely to bring about change based on their experiences and the knowledge they acquire in the context of their practice (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2009, p. 4). The manner in which they adapt to their environment provides an understanding of how contexts influence their work. This study draws on the research participants' actual experiences to shed light on the distinctiveness of the demands placed on teachers when dealing with students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

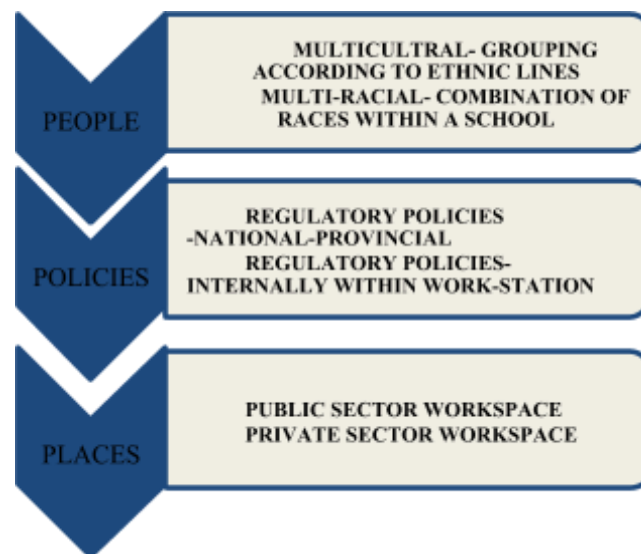
The multifaceted elements that influence information, feedback and the modification of teachers' work highlight the complexity of teaching. Such work is too complex to be measured by a single metric. Scholars like Ridley et al. (2008) and Leithwood and Mcadie (2010) thus call for a range of tools and metrics to measure what teachers are accountable for at their place of work. Any examination of teaching also needs to consider the roles of policymakers, administrators, parents, students and the community at large (Leithwood & Mcadie, 2010, p. 42). Dieltiens and Meny-Gilbert (2012) add that the subjective experience of poverty in a context of poor material, financial, and living conditions also impacts on teachers' work.

Florian's (2012) research on Scottish rural schools notes that poor socioeconomic conditions are a global phenomenon that impacts on teachers' work. Nichols and Parsons (2011) examined how teachers deal with setbacks and challenges, as well as the manner in which

they harness institutional power in such adverse circumstances. There can be no doubt, however, that poor working conditions undermine teachers' work.

Traditional models of teaching assume that, teachers that are able to effectively harness their students' academic aptitude and motivate them to perform better (Cervone & Cushman, 2012, p. 2). However, they are also required to assist their students to cope with social, emotional, and cultural issues. This is particularly true of teachers that operate in a context of adversity.

The New Work of Teaching's (TNWoT, 2012 p. 12) case study on the work life of teachers in Calgary, Canada, notes that when teachers' work increases in terms of volume and/or complexity, tasks and expectations are intensified. Honig (2006) and Tek (2014) described how people, policies and places interact to impact on the implementation of educational policy. This is illustrated in the figure below.



**Figure 5 : Dimensions of education policy implementation**

Source: Adapted from Tek (2014, p. 2)

White and Kline (2012) focus on teachers' work in the context of diverse, multicultural and multi-racial cultures in a rural community. The current study focused on teachers who may or may not be prepared for a diverse context. As noted in chapter one, despite the adoption of various educational reforms aimed at redressing inequality, gaps persists among schools in the democratic South Africa. Students whose parents can afford to do so have migrated to

private and previously advantaged schools that are well resourced, while the majority continues to attend under-resourced schools.

Moreover, Devkota (2005, p. 13) maintained that primary school teachers working for the State seem to care little about the effect of their performance on student achievement, as “whether they teach or not, they are paid” (Devkota, 2005, p. 13). Private school teachers receive higher salaries and undergo performance appraisal, which motivate them to achieve higher standards. The gaps between different kinds of schools are thus exacerbated. Furthermore, White and Kline note that highly qualified teachers are reluctant to teach in rural areas (2012, p. 36). Poor internal management, teacher absenteeism, inefficient use of time in class, and ineffective teaching methods add to the challenges confronting many South African schools. While these are not peculiar to this country and are indeed, experienced in developed countries such as the United States and Australia, such conditions negatively affect teachers’ work. It is for this reason that White and Kline (2012, p. 36.) call for a “re-conceptualisation of teacher education curriculum and a more integrated approach between coursework and the rural professional experience (practicum).”

### **3.5. Demands of teachers’ work**

According to Lepida and Veniopoulou (2017, p. 19), teacher professional development focuses on technical, reflective and critical skills that comprise the basic teaching competencies. The State requires teachers to focus on implementing the curriculum and emphasises the application of scientific knowledge and critical thinking (Vougioukas, 2011). Teachers are expected to set fair and achievable benchmarks for students. This requires “just in time” feedback by the teacher-coach, who offers on-going encouragement as students develop and test new skills and knowledge in practice (Cervone & Cushman, 2012, p. 30).

Cornelius-White (2007, p. 113) applied a constructivist approach and found that both the classical model (teacher non-directivity, empathy, warmth, and encouraging thinking and learning) and contemporary models are transformative. The study revealed a correlation between positive teacher-student relationships and positive student outcomes. This means that teacher-student relationships have a positive impact on students’ development and growth. According to Harrison and Killion (2007), teacher are leaders who assume a wide

range of roles to support the school and student success. This can occur in formal and informal settings that aim to build, capacitate and improve the school.

This implies that, as noted previously, teachers' work cannot be measured using a single metric because different levels and aspects of teachers' enthusiasm and commitment combine to reveal the level of their professional ability. Smith (2005) noted that, in the era of managerialism, teachers' work is assessed by means of students' results in standardised tests, and is rewarded by performance-based salary incentives. While it might make sense to measure service delivery from a regulatory position, this ignores the effort required to support students that are distracted from studying due to their poor socioeconomic circumstances.

Harmon, Gordanier, Henry and George (2007) are also of the view that high quality teachers will produce excellent results. These studies imply that teaching is merely about imparting pedagogy and exclude the contextual challenges and setbacks that confront teachers in terms of institutional capacity as well as students that hail from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds.

According to Jeffries (2017), it is expected that, "teachers will continue with education and training." At same time, there is a "lack of new and diverse teaching and professional development opportunities available for transformative education which has a serious impact on teachers' work" (p. 12). Given that teachers are called on to fulfil their academic duties as well as address contextual issues, Jeffries (2017) states that self-care is important to avoid burnout.

Teachers that are conscious of the need to adopt a positive approach to their work and engage in self-care are more likely to fulfil the requirements of the core curriculum. All teaching staff is expected to maintain records that demonstrate compliance with regulations and legislation. Their work is intensive and includes planning, implementation, observation and reflection. However, teachers' professional development focuses on the required competences and skills, with little reflection on the socio-economic contexts in which they operate (Lepida & Veniopoulou, 2017, p. 23).

Teachers also confront increasing external pressure at circuit and provincial levels. Bascia and Osmond (2013) explored the relationship between teacher unions and government and highlighted the cultural, political and structural factors which contribute to the intensification

of teachers' work. Global trends demand that they engage in on-going professional development as well as cope with the demands that educational transformation impose.

Leithwood and Beatty (2008) and Penrice (2011) identified six emotional triggers that influence teachers' work, namely, job satisfaction, stress levels, burnout, organizational commitment, commitment to change and a sense of individual/collective efficacy. Penrice describes the "in school intensification experience" (p. 104) and notes that, managerial structures, diverse cultures, individual relationships at school, self-imposed expectations and an increasing workload bear heavily on teachers.

Burchielli, Pearson and Thanacoody (2005) describe work intensification as "employees working more than they have before" (p. 95). There are two dimensions to this experience. The first is doing more or taking on additional roles, more tasks and bigger workloads (Burchielli, Pearson & Thanacoody, 2005, p. 96). The second dimension involves coping with a reduced workforce, either due to downsizing (layoffs), staff attrition (where staff that leave are not replaced) or not hiring new staff.

The socio-spatial structure of classrooms increases demands on teachers. The number of learners and school infrastructure varies. While some schools enjoy state-of-the-art teaching and learning facilities, many are under-resourced. This results in teachers functioning as isolated individual practitioners. The sequential structure of disconnected lessons interspersed by tests (Schwarz & de Groot, 2011, p. 261) and ensuring compliance with the regulations increases their workload. Penrice (2011) concludes that changes in "teachers' daily work have resulted from ver-increasing control being exerted over teachers through curriculum, pedagogical, assessment, and school management" (Penrice, 2011, p. 104).

Intensification can be defined as an increase in teachers' workload, often "accomplished without sufficient resources or time" (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2008, p. 47). Penrice (2011, p.104) notes that it involves an increased number of tasks, including administrative work, accountability challenges within the classroom and the magnitude of work outside the classroom. Penrice (2011) adopts a Foucaultian perspective to show that rural teachers' work is a discourse of power and resistance. These teachers develop "technologies of the self" (p. 105) because they have to adjust their work due to the lack of proper parameters.



Eppley's (2009) study examined the historical and political framework of the No Child Left Behind Policy in the US. While the policy aimed to transform teaching, she notes that teaching in a rural school differs from other contexts. A balance is thus required between the curriculum and experiences in the classroom (p. 2). In rural township schools, teachers' work is also determined by parents and students' level of involvement. The internal demands of their work and external regulators' expectations impose severe strain on teachers. Social realities such as teaching in a context where students come from a low/no income home add to their burden.

All teachers are expected to come to grips with the social relations in their work environment as well as cope with the demands of the core work and regulatory requirements. The level of flexibility they demonstrate to cope with the multitude of tasks renders them either resilient or inelastic.

Teachers are wedged between high expectations from the communities they serve (Macbeath, 2012, p.14) and the demands of a multifaceted curriculum. Local, national and global developments impact on teachers' professional independence. When teachers exercise their agency beyond the classroom, with colleagues, parents, other agencies or with policy, they exercise leadership. As noted earlier, some school environments are better than others in fostering the capacity to deal with the challenges of teaching (Manik, Maharaj & Sookrajh, 2006; Day & Gur, 2010). Failure to deal with challenges results in a loss of direction in terms of funding and budgeting, curriculum development, teaching and learning strategies, discipline, staff-pupil relationships and school-community relationships (Day et al., 2011).

Caspersen (2013, p. 10) refers to a "strong normative aspect of professional practice where teachers have to perform many normative, discretionary acts in their work". He emphasises that teachers have to make judgments in many situations, constantly think on their feet and make quick, practical decisions while considering values and dilemmas. Caspersen (2013) described decision-making as a basic teaching skill "because classroom work is multidimensional, simultaneous, immediate, unpredictable, public and cumulative" (p. 10).

Karaagaç and Threlfall (2004) explored Turkish teachers' beliefs and practices in the context of their work setting. The work-setting is crucial to the conflict between a teacher's beliefs and his/her actions (Karaagaç and Threlfall, 2004, p. 141). Engeström's (1993, 1999) activity

theory, consisting of a 'triad', is extended to include elements of the social context. The triad comprises of three essential elements that are linked to reiterate their interdependence.

The activity theory is insufficient for this study because it deals with the formal elements of work. It focuses on mediation efforts, the division of labour and the rules. Another triad composed of the teacher, the community and teaching tools or techniques intersects this triad. However, the activity theory fails to take into account that some teachers confront an overload of material elements that are not considered by educational policy-makers.

In the South African context, it becomes difficult for teachers to seamlessly adopt the imperatives of the Department of Education since they operate in different contexts. Lemmer, Meier and Van Wyk (2006) note that, many sacrifices are required to ensure that all citizens receive equal, quality education. The South African government's commitment to democratic participation, dignity, equality and social justice and empowerment of all citizens calls for teacher reskilling and retraining in order to ensure that they are adequately equipped to support social and economic transformation.

While teachers generally lack support from stakeholders, school evaluation causes much discontent. Bangs and Frost (2012, p. 20) state that, school inspections, along with the publication of 'league tables', have been cited as a major cause of unhappiness among teachers. In the United Kingdom (UK), self-evaluations (IQMS) are moderated and evaluated by inspectors. While teachers play a key role in their self-evaluation, they feel excluded from the external evaluation and inspection and are of the view that inspection should be controlled by an outside agency (Bangs & Frost, 2012, p. 21). This notion is opposed in countries like Denmark, Turkey, Egypt and Greece. For example, a participant in Bangs and Forst's (2002) study proposed

*Assessing teachers based on their performance and competence rather than years of experience, and penalising those who do not do the job well* (Workshop Facilitator, Egypt in Bangs & Frost, 2012, p. 21).

### **3.6. Deskilling of teachers' work**

According to Collins and O'Brien (2011, p. 135), deskilling refers to the process whereby a division of labour and technological development lead to a reduction in the scope of an individual's work to one, or a few, specialised tasks. Gur (2014 p. 890) is of the view that deskilling has resulted in teachers losing control over their own labour, manuals, textbooks, lesson plans and measuring tools. This negatively affects their capacity to tailor their programmes to the local context and students' demands or needs. Reflecting a need to control the teacher's every step, this approach regards education as a set of processes and materials that even an inexperienced teacher can easily follow. Teacher deskilling thus entails differentiation and intensification of their work (Gur, 2014).

This implies that, while teachers have less time to prepare than before, they are overloaded. According to Gur (2014), in the past, the education system focused on the need for high quality teachers. Increasing bureaucratisation of the education system blended with various measures to render teachers more qualified and to transform teaching into a professional occupation. On the other hand, the traditional approach to teaching was compromised by changes introduced to fit with the unitary education system. While teachers' work has increased, there is also increasing control by external decision makers (Gur, 2014).

Gandin and De Lima (2015) expand on how teachers' work has been reconfigured in South Africa. Reskilling and deskilling have occurred as a result of the transformation of the education system and the unitary control of education that came about after 1994. Gandin and De Lima (2015) add that, in terms of CAPS, teachers' work no longer involves planning activities and programmes for their learners. Secondly, teachers cannot accommodate learners with specific barriers to learning. In the South African system, teachers are expected to constantly reskill to keep up with curriculum changes. This not only means that their work becomes more intensive, but it requires teachers to "constantly display results" (Gandin & De Lima, 2015, p. 675).

### **3.7. Teachers' work in contexts of adversity**

Are there really differences in what constitutes "exposure to high levels of adversity" (Hunter, 2012, p. 6)? Several risks and exposure to risk might be more significant than any

one risk factor, with students experiencing the highest multiple levels of risk (e.g., chronic poverty, child malnutrition) less likely to show positive outcomes than those experiencing lower levels of risk (Luthar, 2006; Vanderbilt, Adriance & Shaw, 2008). The American Psychological Association's (APA) *Dictionary of Psychology* (2007, p. 871) notes that:

*Socioeconomic status is the position of an individual or group on the socioeconomic scale, which is informed by a combination or interaction of social and economic factors, such as income, amount and type of education, kind of prestige and occupation, place of residence and in some society's even ethnic origin and religious background. Researchers use SES and social class interchangeably while some see it as two different terms. If one looks at the definition of social class you will notice that it tends to contain similar characteristics as SES. Social Class for example is defined as, 'a major group or division of society that shares a common level of status, income, power, and prestige' (APA, 2007, p. 862).*

The seminal *Coleman Report* by James Coleman (1966) not only made mention of race differences in terms of spending time on education, but uncovered the significant impact of low socioeconomic backgrounds on teachers' work. Dieltiens and Meny-Gilbert (2012) explained that 'absolute poverty' refers to households living below the minimum standard necessary to sustain subsistence (p. 130).

Harrison and Killion (2007) described the complexity of teachers' work at Houston Community College's new Alief campus, which enables low-income students to earn college credits while still in high school. The Internationals Network of Public Schools in the Bronx has a successful record of assisting students from low-income countries with English language challenges as well as financial support, enabling them to earn a regents diploma (Cervone & Cushman, 2012). It offers "a core curriculum, along with a multitude of special courses and learning opportunities before, during, and after school and on weekends" (Cervone & Cushman, 2012:8). Students that have completed the programme demonstrate preparatory skills, personal growth and career pathing, including internships (Cervone & Cushman, 2012).

Situated in a rural setting in southern Maine, Noble High School serves the towns of North Berwick, Berwick, and Lebanon. It has been lauded for its student-centred learning

approaches (Cervone & Cushman, 2012, p. 9). Collaboration among the school principal, teachers and local families enables it to focus on students. Delpit (1996) and Ladson-Billings (1995) found major disparities in both resources and results in different low socioeconomic communities.

Mulkeen's (2005) case study of parents in a rural context found that they value teachers' work, but are unable to assist their children due to the fact that they are uneducated. A lack of resources such as electricity in these areas also negatively impacts parental support in terms of accessing information for their children.

In an environment of diversity and adversity, teachers and students use impromptu communication which enhances learners' growth and development. This could include "a teacher stopping a student in the hall to ask about how a college visit went; a student at a computer, snagging a passing teacher to check out a question she had; a teacher and a student striking up an animated conversation as class ended" (Cervone & Cushman, 2012, p. 14). Durlak et al. (2011) also found that teachers' intervention has a positive impact on learners' growth and social-emotional accomplishments.

Comber and Nixon's (2009) ethnographic study examined high school teachers' experience of curriculum delivery to learners from low socio-economic backgrounds in South Australia. The study investigated the impact of teachers' identities and biographies on their work. Working in rural schools is widely regarded as being considerably more difficult than teaching in an urban area, mainly due to poor living and working conditions.

Simon and White (2008, p. 1) suggested that Australia should address "recruitment and retention of high quality teachers for rural schools". The authors note that in many rural areas, the school becomes the "traditional heart of its community" (Simon & White, 2008, p. 2). This applies to the school in the current study.

Adams (2012, p. 2) examined teachers' work in a rural setting in northwest China that is home to a "resource constrained community". The results show that experience, motivation, interpersonal skills and commitment enhance teachers' work and the reputation of the teaching profession. Adams draws attention to the "unevenness" and dissimilarities in teacher quality across regions, within societies, and even within schools (2012, p. 3). Thus, the

context in which teachers work affects the manner in which they carry out their tasks and responsibilities.

Over and above these dimensions of teachers' work, Nix-Hodes and Heybach (2014) describe the school as a "safe haven" (p. 155) where the homeless child receives comfort and is assisted to survive. This resonates with the current study that was conducted in a school where homeless children and children that face adversity due to socio-economic challenges place undue demands on teachers' work. Thus, while teachers are expected to impart knowledge by ensuring curriculum delivery, they are also required to refine their approach to suit their students' needs.

Jeffries (2017) notes that many learners not only receive support from their teachers but are assisted to socialise with the local community. Teachers build students' capacity to learn in multicultural classrooms (p. 12) and play an important role in helping them to acquire language skills that are the springboard for socialisation.

### **3.8. Teacher resilience in contexts of adversity**

Teachers require resilience if they are to find joy in their work and remain in the job (Rizqi, 2017). Resilience refers to a person's ability to withstand or recover quickly from difficult conditions. It is a necessary condition to sustain commitment (Day et al., 2006, p. xviii). Worldwide, in both urban and rural schools, teachers who display adaptive or proficient functioning despite exposure to high levels of risk or adversity can be considered resilient.

The notion of resilience also features in the fields of psychology and psychiatry. It describes a person's ability to achieve well-being and thrive regardless of significant adversity. Teachers serves multiple communities and those that work with students from contexts of adversity have to adjust to these challenges.

In a context of diversity and stressful working conditions "teachers have to take their work home which is ironically not recognized as a paid hour" (Rizqi, 2017, p. 24). Some are vulnerable, while others are more tenacious and regard stress as a positive force. The latter build resilience. Endurance can be built using positive emotions such as joy, interest,

contentment, and love. These characteristics enable teachers in a stressful environment to cope with the situation in order to enact their main role, which is teaching.

Rizqi (2017) notes that there are 11 official languages in South Africa. English is not the mother tongue of many students. This requires teachers to be equipped with appropriate skills. He adds that teachers' need to develop the capacity to protect themselves from negative and highly pressured environments (Rizqi, 2017). Thus, "to be considered resilient, an individual should be surrounded by stressors that might threaten his/her development" (p. 24).

In cases where students come from low socioeconomic backgrounds, such as in the current study, resilience cannot occur without the presence of two essential factors, namely, capacity to adapt, and willingness to be exposed to risk or adversity. A well-functioning teacher who has not faced high levels of adversity, would not be considered resilient (Vanderbilt-Adriance & Shaw, 2008). "... Resilience is not static, it is not a trait, and it is not a construct that can be directly measured. Resilience is a 'superordinate' construct that is indirectly inferred from two component constructs subsumed under its definition: risk exposure and 'good' adaptation" (Kim-Cohen, 2007, p. 272).

### **3.9. Timing and teachers' work**

Naylor and White's (2010) quantitative study in Vancouver examined the work-life of 563 teachers in 2009. It found that they spent an average of 14.4 hours a week preparing, marking and engaging in other administrative tasks as well 7.1 hours on additional work. A similar study in Manitoba by Dyck-Hacault and Alarie (2010) found that only 28% of the participants agreed that their workload was manageable. Seventy-three per cent stated that stress and overwork were affecting their performance.

Work intensification resulted because teachers had to do more work in the same amount of time. Dibbon (2004) and Akkari et al. (2009) concluded that teachers spent 52 hours on actual work and 14.9 hours on assessment, reporting, preparation and testing. The three major

concerns cited were the excessively complex nature of the curriculum, dealing with learners' diverse needs and having to wait long periods to have special-needs learners assessed and referred. Dibbon (2004) notes, that, when teachers have insufficient time to plan, learners requiring remediation and special teaching suffer the most. The study revealed that supervising learners is a waste of the teacher's time and recommended that paraprofessionals be employed to handle non-core teaching activities.

Penrice (2011) examined teachers' work from the angle of pastoral care and noted that rural teachers' plight needs to be taken into account. She suggested that, firstly, the same professional standards should be applied for teacher assessment. Secondly, colleagues should offer care and assistance through social cohesion, networking, *Ubuntu* and collaboration, and experienced or 'old hand' teachers should support their colleagues. Mentoring and scaffolding among the teachers at a particular school will raise standards and enhance the profession's reputation.

Gunter et al.'s (2004) study in the UK that was commissioned by Price Waterhouse and Cooper concluded that "teachers work more intensive weeks than other comparable managers and professionals" (p. 3). It found that, on average, teachers work 52 hours per week while other professionals work an average of 44 hours per week. Many employers compensate additional work with overtime pay or a bonus, but this does not apply to State-paid teachers. The study participants commented that the "pace and manner of implementation of change has added significantly to their workload" (p. 7). Similarly, Smaller et al.'s (2006) investigation of Canadian teachers' work and their professional development found that the study participants spent 42 hours per week at school working directly with learners and undertaking related tasks such as preparation, marking, supervision, and administration and an additional 10 hours completing school work at home (p. 25).

### **3.10. Regulatory work**

Teachers are the guardians of knowledge power because schools are the medium to transmit knowledge. According to Alexander (2011, p. 11) teachers' regulatory work is becoming distorted because of teachers' attitudes towards dealing with race and socio-economic status



at their schools. Eppley (2009) adds that, regardless of the context, teachers should produce the desired results set by external benchmarks for both teachers and learners (Eppley, 2009).

Hultman (2008) notes that teachers are also affected by “contextual loyalties and dependencies” relating to actors outside the organisation such as parents (p. 21). Teachers’ work construction occurs locally. Knowledge construction is generated in this context and is measured by it; goals are created by the local situation and notions of what makes a good teacher and a good school (p. 22) are constructed by tradition and in interplay with the surrounding environment.

Schick and McNinch (2013) presented the findings of a study on teachers by the Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation which concluded that the complexity of teachers’ time has not been fully appreciated. It has been viewed through a narrow lens, resulting in a restricted understanding of the political, social and professional context within which teachers work. Teachers work overtime because of the additional chores and tasks that encroach on actual teaching.

Bangs and Frost (2012) describe teaching by stating that teachers have the poise, proficiency and time for curriculum development in their schools. Although teachers’ work is regulated externally, their actual work is generated within the parameters of the school and the classroom. The internal accountability system at each school deals with regulatory compliance and is mainly supervised by management. However, external subject supervisors conduct assessments based on an external curriculum and planning process (Taylor, 2008).

Internally, teachers’ work has a variety of dimensions including organisational work, tasks and events besides the lesson structure and filling in forms. There is a policy dimension to the problem of time management. Taylor (2008, p. 8) notes that teachers spend considerable time during school hours completing forms which appear to serve little purpose other than bureaucratic requirements. These include planning documents, and extensive assessment reports on the performance of single learners, sustained by complicated paper trails.

This suggests that, in order to make the best use of teaching time, tasks such as planning, preparation, setting and marking assessment exercises, and other administrative and extra-curricular activities should be done outside of school hours. Drawing on the findings of

Taylor's study, it is clear that the participants perceived changes to the curriculum as the major source of their stress.

### **3.11. Summary of the section**

This section reviewed the international literature on teachers' work. It described the context of teachers' work in different countries and noted that the literature focuses on teachers' work as well as their students whose results are used to measure the effectiveness of such work. While students obviously play a significant role in a teacher's life, insufficient attention has been paid to the diverse responsibilities that are added to teachers' work over and above teaching. As the agents of the State that implement the curriculum, teachers take on many responsibilities.

The review revealed differences in the level of effort and sacrifices among teachers in coping with students with different demands. Cultural diversity among students and a multifaceted curriculum add to their responsibilities.

Teachers are also required to plan, implement, observe and reflect as well as support education transformation. While their professional development emphasises the special competences and skills required, the socio-economic context in which they operate and its incongruities have been neglected.

The literature review also highlighted the differentiation and intensification of teachers' work across countries, which put pressure on teachers. Contexts of adversity require teachers to become resilient.

Finally, it was noted that teachers are required to impart knowledge by ensuring curriculum delivery, while also refashioning their approach to work to suit their students and the school. The literature review highlighted that teachers spend more hours working than other professions as they put in many hours of unpaid overtime at home.

### **3.12. South African perspectives on teachers' work**

Teachers' work is a platform to enact policies and procedures governing education. As employees of the State, they are governed by regulatory requirements. This section of the literature review considers relevant theories and scholarly work that address teachers' work within the South African context as well as transnational and global studies. These include Matete (2016); Oswald and Perold (2015); Kuranchie (2013); McKenzie, Bantwini and Bogan (2013) Dieltiens and Meny-Gilbert (2012); Ebersohn and Ferreira (2012); Spaul (2012); Adedeji and Olaniyan (2011); Alexander (2011); Christie (2010); Taylor and Yu (2009); Msila (2009); Saloojee (2009); Weber (2008); Mulkeen and Chen (2008); Smit and Fritz (2008) and Morrow (2007).

### **3.13. Nature of teachers' work in South Africa**

Christie (2010) categorises the additional work besides teaching performed by South African teachers as administrative and organisational. The landscape of teachers' work has been influenced by the introduction of many policies since the ushering in of democracy in 1994, aimed at pursuing a transformational agenda. After the demise of apartheid, there was an influx of students from township schools to previously privileged, better-resourced schools (Msila, 2009, p. 81). However, the majority of students still attend under-resourced township and rural schools.

The nature of teachers' work is both invisible and non-invisible. According to Alexander (2011), visible and non-visible factors consist of personal characteristics that include background, culture, personality and work-style as well as race, disability, gender, religion and beliefs, sexual orientation and age that the South African Constitution outlaws as grounds for discrimination. Teachers engage in many professional activities outside their classrooms in order to maintain the school organization and to ensure that the students' experiences are coherent and productive (Leithwood, 2006, p. 10).

Given that all children below the age of 16 are compelled to attend school, teachers are confronted by the unpredictability of their students' lives. Day (2012) explains that teachers' work in a postmodern society where reforms have been ushered in diverse ways at varied

paces, requiring teachers to embrace change by adopting “political, organisational, economic, social, and personal flexibility and responsiveness” (p. 9). Day argues that, teachers’ working conditions are symptomatic of the “paradox of decentralised systems” (p. 9), where, amidst greater societal scrutiny and external accountability, government requirements increase teachers’ workload.

Migration to better-resourced schools is not a uniquely South African phenomenon. African-American families in the US took similar action to access quality education, impacting on how communities are shaped. Since education is the key to empowering disadvantaged students, this responsibility ultimately falls on teachers and how they construct their roles in enhancing the role of the State. Msila (2009) also notes that in post-apartheid South Africa, parents tend to choose one school over another in the same historically challenged geographic location because they believe that their child will receive greater benefits (p. 83).

### **3.14. Complexity of teachers’ work in South Africa**

In South Africa and its neighbouring countries, politicians and professional teachers have focused their attention on urban education, leaving many to assume that all is well in schools in rural districts. Very little attention has been devoted to understanding how teachers in those areas go about their daily duties and tasks (Adedjei & Olaniyan, 2011). The dynamics of geographical positioning differ from school to school where space and social life interact and shape each other, compounding teachers’ work when learners come from low socio-economic backgrounds.

Schools in both rural and urban areas have their own set of challenges in terms of social and economic realities. When people move from rural areas to squatter camps in the midst of urban dwellings, there is a drift of students into urban schools. Tregenna and Tsela (2008) note that there are two distinct economies in South Africa and where one is located determines job prospects and local economic activity.

Spatial inequality creates many complex challenges not only for teachers’ work but for people’s lifestyles in general. Growth in human capital has a direct impact on health and education. Provision of RDP housing places the previously disadvantaged, the unemployed and those that depend on state grants in a single community. This community in turn

produces a population of students that attend schools in the area; how this affects teachers' work is the focus on this research study.

While ecological space shapes teachers and their teaching space, the reverse is also true. The type of work done today (or what is not done) shapes the current and future society. Regulation of teachers can therefore, have a positive or a negative impact on society; teachers' work may change a rural township context.

According to Bangs and Frost (2012), the invisible nature of teachers' work refers to work that is undertaken by teachers, but is unseen by the regulators of the profession. Books and Ndlalane (2011) cite moral development: creating a love for school and cultivating affection for learning by bringing out learners' humanness as invisible work. Drawing on the work of Bernstein, Reeves (2005, p. 2) identified two types of pedagogical styles of teachers' work, referring to them as both visible and invisible. He described a pedagogical palette in which elements of visible and invisible (performance and competence) pedagogies are combined to suit existing conditions.

Branson and Zuze (2012) note that, inequities in teachers' work persist in the democratic South Africa. While international policies and standards were adopted, no consideration was given to contexts with severe socioeconomic challenges or to how teachers in these areas have to adjust their approach to meet regulatory requirements. The impetus for educational transformation in line with global imperatives derives from the conviction that education is the backbone to grow the knowledge economy and prepare workers for a new era (Christie, 2010). The Netherlands provided R213 million over a period of four years to enable the South African Department of Education to empower teachers (Ramdass, 2009).

Teachers working in contexts where students come from low socioeconomic backgrounds require support. South Africa took on board the challenges of globalization and educational policy became peppered with globalization jargon such as inter-relatedness, innovation, on-going learning, the network community and the borderless world, to name but a few. In keeping abreast with trends, educational reform became synonymous with progress and modernization in response to the pressure to "globalize or fossilize" (Vongalis-Macow, 2008, p. 172). However, the 75-80% of students that come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Spaull, 2013) do not benefit as much as those from higher levels.

Severe socioeconomic challenges are experienced across the African continent. Chika and Schoole (2011) note, that, financial and social deprivation has negative implications for what happens at schools. Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds affect teachers' work at different levels because of the poor learning standards they have been exposed to. Many areas in sub-Saharan Africa, including South Africa, are "severely inflicted with poverty, therefore they are significantly disadvantaged globally and in terms of their national priorities by the poor performance of the education sector" (Chika & Schoole, p. 121).

Following global trends in education without addressing poverty creates imbalances that impact negatively on teachers. Teachers play complex social, educative and professional roles but do not have the power to critique or contest policy changes. The policy objectives of global agencies, which determine the work of teachers, assume that teachers have limited capacity to interrogate the assumptions underlying globalised reforms; instead they are reframed as being in compliance with international standards (Mackenzie et al., 2013).

### **3.15 Employment and recruitment of teachers**

The South African Qualifications Framework was introduced in 1996. The Department of Education's national policy framework included "More teachers; Better teachers" (2006). This was informed by other policies such as SACE<sup>11</sup>, ETDP-SETA<sup>12</sup>, SAQA<sup>13</sup> and HESA<sup>14</sup>, which were designed to train teachers appropriately from the novice stage to more advanced phases (p. 4).

The national policy framework for training teachers addresses the needs of student teachers (p. 4). The principles underlying the policy are expressed in the Norms and Standards for Educators (2000). Since 1994 teacher training institutions have prepared students to come to terms with the "rationalisation of the teaching community into a single national system, the introduction of new curricula, which emphasise greater professional autonomy" (Department of Education, 2006, p. 6).

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<sup>11</sup> Policy for the South African Council for Educators. Registration with SACE is the teacher's licence to teach

<sup>12</sup> Policy for national teacher unions; Higher Education South Africa

<sup>13</sup> Policy of the South African Qualifications Authority

<sup>14</sup> Policy on Higher Education in South Africa

As a result of the regulatory changes since the birth of democracy, there is a dislocation between the current training approach and how teachers were trained prior to 1994 (Onwu & Sehoole, 2011; Modisaotsile, 2012). During the transformation of education in South Africa, teacher training institutions were closed and restructured. It was posited that teachers in state schools would be the drivers of achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and radical changes in educational policy to address the legacies of imperialism, colonialism and apartheid (Taylor, 2008; Naidoo & Muthukrishna, 2014).

Lauwerier and Akkari's (2015, p. 2) study on teacher training in sub-Saharan Africa notes that the policies adopted focused on reducing labour costs by crafting new teacher categories ("contract", "community" and "voluntary" teachers), and avoiding compliance with international recommendations on the field of teaching. This has become the new norm in South African schools, with school governing bodies employing such teachers to reduce the salary bill and to ensure that students are taught in line with the curriculum.

Under apartheid, South Africa had 19 different education departments divided along the lines of race and geography. The transformation of education resulted in a unitary Department of Education. Student teachers obtain their theoretical training at higher education institutions, but conclude their practice teaching at schools under the Department of Basic Education. While trainee teachers are exposed to theory and practice in learning to teach, they are not directly exposed to the contextual disparities that exist among schools. Trainee teachers need to be made aware of the fact that teachers' work is not restricted to teaching and learning to teach, but can be described as "complex, multifaceted, value-laden enterprises against the global backdrop of the knowledge society" (Caena, 2011, p. 2).

Morrow (2007) focuses on two dimensions of teacher education, namely, "access to the institution" and access within an institution. He adds that trainees access the "goods that it distributes" (2007, p. 39). Institutional policy is highlighted to show both the change in the number of teachers trained as well as "epistemological issues" (Morrow, 2007, p. 39) or knowledge. Similarly Bakker and Demerouti (2008) define teachers' work as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication, and engagement (p. 209).

Energy and mental resilience exhibit ‘vigour’ whilst involvement and experiences create a sense of significance or challenge. Absorption describes concentration, being engrossed and fully committed to work.

Teachers’ work varies from the point when novice teachers are employed at schools. The Department of Education has adopted an Educational Management or Teacher Information Systems (ETIS) which offer teachers ‘due diligence’ from the employer. All teachers are required to be accredited by the South African Council of Educators (SACE). When the governing body of a school employs a teacher, he/she must sign a contract on arrival, which binds him/her to adhere to the regulations.

However, not all schools have the same working conditions. How each teacher adapts, adjusts or acclimatises determines the quality of their working life.

The changes in teachers’ work in South Africa in the democratic era are aligned with the values and rights set out in the country’s new Constitution. However, this does not take into account differences in students’ socioeconomic circumstances. Regardless of their working conditions, teachers are expected to fulfil their statutory responsibilities. Those that underperform in IQMS or students’ benchmark test results are required to adopt interventions to improve their performance. Some schools are shamed in the media, and are kept under close scrutiny by officials that continually adjust teachers’ work programmes.

Students have a direct bearing on teachers’ service delivery and work. Witte (2015) found that students from rural contexts have an increased risk of behavioural problems due to “insufficient mental health infrastructure and cultural differences” (p. 1). Similar demands are placed on some teachers in the US. Such challenges are applicable to some but not all the teachers in KwaZulu-Natal that are employed by the State.

Witte (2015) concludes that, the contexts in which homes and schools are situated influence teachers’ work. Some parents depend on the school to assist them in applying for welfare and grants.

### **3.16. Teachers’ work and the law**

The guiding principles of any professional work are set out in policies and laws. Globally, teachers’ work is controlled by uniform strict policies and laws. However, the literature



shows that there is inconsistency between policies and laws in terms of expectations of the sum total of teachers' work (Epperly, 2009; Bangs & Frost, 2012; Yui & Adams, 2012).

In South Africa, the Constitution, the South African Schools Act (SASA) and various education policy documents state that all learners should have access to the same quality of learning and teaching, similar facilities and equal educational opportunities (Woolman & Fleisch, 2006; Gardiner, 2008). This is not the case in reality. Besides infringement of policies that affect all teachers, some scholars accuse current policies of short-changing teachers with regard to preparation for their work. Books and Ndlalane (2011), Jansen (2006) and Bloch (2008) explain that basic education reforms and restructuring did not address the imbalances of the past. White teachers with better qualifications and well-resourced schools maintain an edge over teachers and schools that were disadvantaged under apartheid.

The Norms and Standards set out seven roles that a teacher has to fulfil. A teacher is expected to be a specialist in a particular learning area or phase; a specialist in teaching and learning; a specialist in assessment; a curriculum developer; a leader, administrator and manager; a scholar and life-long learner; and a professional who plays a community, citizenship and pastoral role. According to Morrow (2007), these roles can be separated into material and formal elements of teachers' work because they involve regulated as well as incidental and invisible work. What is not specified in this policy is the volume and permutations of expectations with regard to the material or invisible/additional work as well as the demands of the formal elements that encompass regulated work.

In terms of the Norms and Standards, a teacher who fulfils these roles will be an agent of change that keeps up with the transformation of education. Furthermore, the redress and equity plan amplifies teachers' work to ensure that students are developed holistically. However, teachers have not been furnished with the relevant tools to fulfil this mission and vision and the lack of support structures slows the pace of transformation.

### **3.17. Bureaucratic demands on teachers in South Africa**

As noted previously, job satisfaction, stress levels, burnout, organizational commitment, commitment to change and a sense of individual/collective efficacy influence teachers' work (Leithwood & Beatty, 2008; Penrice, 2011). In the South African context, teachers have to abide by the Norms and Standards (Act No. 27 of 1996). However, this regulatory framework

does not provide effective support for each of the seven roles that teachers are expected to play.

Manik et al. (2006, p. 13) suggest that the teaching profession confronts the same challenges all over the world. Internationally, the status of the profession has declined. Teachers are still bureaucratically controlled and are answerable to an array of stakeholders, including management, school governing bodies, parents and politicians. While they are expected to perform many duties, they are regarded as mere workers, or what Carrim (2003, p. 333) refers to as “executioners of tasks”.

### **3.18. Teachers’ work and educational change**

A search of the literature revealed a dearth of studies on teachers’ work in rural contexts and learners’ from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Silva (2009) and Alexander (2011) note that changes and challenges should be examined in investigating the design and dynamics of schools. While there have been major changes in the state of South Africa’s schools, there are also deep continuities with the past. In 2009, Limpopo, the Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal were the poorest provinces in the country. Daniel, Southall and Lutchman (2005) note that, the former homelands were part of these provinces and that the current state of schools reflects the legacies of apartheid education policies. Thus, the South Africa education system is embedded in the tensions, stresses and strains of a society where there is a continuous contradiction between its intentions and outcomes. This combination of history, contemporary dynamism and the character of the new education system itself inform the nature of education.

In seeking to transform the education system, the democratic government focused on three fundamental issues. Firstly, justice and human rights were addressed by ensuring uniform spending on each learner. Secondly, teachers’ salaries were standardised and, finally, the democratic government had to ensure that funding was injected into historically disadvantaged schools. However, the communities served by township schools remained unchanged (King-McKenzie, Bantwini & Bogan, 2013).

Changes in education impose additional pressure on teachers. A good example is on-going curriculum change since 1994. Implementation of such change is resource-intensive and adequate school buildings and resources may be critical for its success. However, the key driver in successful curriculum change is teacher development (Bantwini, 2009, p. 180).

Swanepoel (2009) observes that, given that teachers' work is affected by educational change, school-based management should manage such change (p. 462). In schools with insufficient resources, teachers need to solicit resources; increasing their workload.

All over the world, teachers adjust their teaching from time to time. They develop an 'interpretative framework' during their career that is shaped and reshaped through interaction with the social, cultural, structural and political conditions which impact their day-to-day work (Kelchtermans, 2009, p. 260). This framework controls teachers' interpretations and actions in particular situations (context) and is modified as a result of meaningful interactions (sense making) with that context. This is both a circumstance for and a result of the interaction, and represents the preliminary 'mental sediment' (Morrow, 2007; Kelchtermans, 2009, p. 260) of teachers' learning and development over time.

Weber (2008) noted that while South African schools were desegregated after 1994, they did not necessarily all become productive. According to Bangs and Frost, distributed leadership "gives teachers the responsibility for leading in particular areas of pedagogy, development of the curriculum and in responding to the social, emotional and wellbeing needs of pupils, unlocks innovative and untapped potential in teachers" (2012, p. iii).

The type of leadership required of South African teachers is informed by the national curriculum. This curriculum strives to provide subject content that addresses the imbalances of the apartheid era (Bangs and Frost, 2012; Williams, 2015). While government control applies across the global arena, change in South Africa has led to intensified control.

### **3.19. The intensification of teachers' work**

Ballet, Kelchtermans and Loughran (2006, p. 212) state that teachers' work can be defined as "the multiple sources of intensification". Within the school, administrative and organisational structures impact their leeway to interpret and negotiate (Ballet, Kelchtermans and Loughran,

2006, p. 214; Veriava, 2010). Furthermore, Penrice (2011, p. 110) comments that, teaching in rural areas “tends to emphasise the compassionate ...in pedagogical practice”. MacDonald et al. (2010, p. 67) cite Pinaar’s (2003) ‘complicated conversation’ study set in a Canadian high school context.

*Today was a busy day at work. During class time I was reviewing material for exams, and during my prep I was working on my exams, photocopying review sheets, and looking up phone numbers of students with outstanding work” (MacDonald et al., 2010, p. 67).*

*I’ve got all this time to do my other duties, and feel like time out of class is diminishing my working relationship with the kids in class and even when I’m with them, after the rush to get all my paperwork under control (not to say finished—it’s never that) I feel so rushed, just a little less prepared than I feel I should be and it leaves me feeling even more, or newly, like I’m not performing to the best of my abilities, according to my own standards” (MacDonald et al., p. 80).*

Alexander (2010) identifies another dimension of teachers’ work in the form of “sites of cultural convergence” (p. 10) which refers to learners with poor language skills, in dealing with subject matter content. Teachers’ work is intensified in such contexts due to “cultural conflict amongst learners; racial misunderstandings, lack of enthusiasm, confusion and low self-confidence among teachers facing schools in rural communities” (Alexander, 2010, p. 10).

In South Africa, the intensity of teachers’ work is exacerbated by the fact that the blame for unsatisfactory results (such as poor performance in ANA and the dismal annual Grade 12 results) is laid at their door. The Southern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) is a consortium of ministries of education in southern Africa. Since education is a dynamic and multifaceted social initiative, its quality is measured against prescribed indicators, including social-economic aspects, schooling arrangements, administrative and legislative instruments, the national curriculum, teachers and financing. In the SACMEQ scores for mathematics at Grade 6 level, South Africa was outperformed by

eight countries, including Mozambique, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania which are much poorer. Kenya and Mauritius also outstripped quintile 5 schools in South Africa (Taylor, 2008, p. 2).

Teachers' work is also intensified when teacher unions engage in negotiations to protect their members' welfare and influence policy and other important decisions relating to education. When unions hold meetings during school hours, this reduces the time available for curriculum delivery. Teachers in the country can belong to one of the following: the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU), National Professional Teacher's Organisation in South Africa (Naptosa), National Teachers' Union (NATU) and the Suid Afrikaanse Onderwyse Unie (SAOU). One of the primary functions of a teacher union is to act as a vehicle to bring its members' concerns about teaching and learning conditions to the attention of policy makers (Bascia & Rottmann, 2011). However, the unions intensify teachers' work when "schools shut down" (Modisaotsile, 2012, p. 2) at odd times during the year, sometimes when examinations and assessments are scheduled.

Teachers are required to prepare students to pass a grade to meet promotion requirements. When teaching time is encroached on, curriculum delivery is not only compromised but narrowed. Strike action, which is sometimes not legally sanctioned, consumes as much as 10 days a year (5% of school time) and interferes with teachers' work. This is often the norm in township schools (Modisaotsile, 2012, p. 4). The State adds to the dilemma by overburdening teachers with administrative and invisible work.

Karmann and Lancman (2013, p. 164) speak of the voice as an instrument of labour. Teachers have made their voices heard in order to address the challenges that confront them. Changes in work organization and an increased workload are some of the demands made on teachers. Worldwide, many professionals have found that they are required to put increasing time and effort into their jobs. Burchielli, Pearson and Thanacoody (2005) note that this involves "doing more", or having "extra roles, increased tasks and bigger workloads" (p. 96).

Burchielli, Pearson and Thanacoody (2005) identify two main dimensions of work intensification. The first involves 'doing more', or taking on additional roles, amplified tasks and bigger workloads. The second dimension relates to 'coping with less staff' due to lay-offs, staff attrition (where staff that exit the profession are not replaced), or failure to

appoint new staff. From a musical metaphor, this is like the polyphony of many melodies; the multifaceted tasks assumed by teachers equate to the rhythmic and harmonic aspects of a musical piece, combined to shape the overall quality of teachers' work. In instances when teachers cannot cope, attrition is common, further increasing the workload of those that remain behind (Burchielli, Pearson & Thanacoody, 2005, p. 96).

Ebersohn and Ferreira (2012) explored the co-existence of reality within realities of context (p.30). This describes the variance of contexts of the schools which requires interrogating in order to understand such dynamism. The main reason for excessive workloads among teachers is the non-teaching tasks imposed on them, acting as social workers and excessive paperwork (Butt & Lance, 2005).

Consequently, there can be "multiple sources of intensification" (Ballet et al., 2006, p. 212), that derive from external regulations and the pressure imposed by policy makers and internal forces such as the principal and teaching colleagues, or self-imposed (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2008). The impact of intensification tends to vary from teacher to teacher (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2008) reflecting the different ways teachers interpret the calls made on them.

### **3.20. Transformation of teachers' work**

Teachers have been confronted by many challenges both during and after the apartheid era. Pre-1994, the education system was defined in racial terms. In the democratic period, teachers are called on to embrace globalisation and create a knowledge society. In order for democracy to flourish, teachers' work means tackling the many apartheid legacies as well as the educational reforms designed by managers, experts and technocrats.

While schools have opened their doors to teachers and students from all race groups, prior to 1994, spending on White learners was four times that for a Black African learner (Msila, 2009). The schools attended by the latter thus lack support material, facilities, and classrooms. While parity in teachers' salaries resulted in some benefitting monetarily, transformation has had far-reaching implications for teachers' work as they were not part of the process and have not received proper training to bring standards up to par.

According to Wiebe (2012), the task of homogenising teachers' work is a mammoth one as "team planning ignores the differences created within classes (climate/abilities etc.) and

differences with teacher styles (p. 14)". Wiebe adds that teachers execute their professional duties according to their own efficacy, for example in the manner in which they handle curriculum needs and interact with the various stakeholders to whom they are accountable.

For some teachers, transformation has not changed the work they did before 1994, but it has added more work by introducing a host of curriculum changes. Naidoo and Muthukrishna (2014) note that the urgent quest to identify a suitable curriculum to transform South African education after 1994 (p. 271) led to much chopping and changing. The incongruences of the OBE curriculum and assessment were noted by education planners, leading to the adoption of the National Curriculum Statement (NCS). The NCS was subsequently reviewed and the Revised National Curriculum statement was introduced which led to a new CAPS in 2012 (p. 272).

Curriculum changes demand "training and retraining of teachers" as well as the "development of new materials and preparing curriculum facilitators" (Onwu & Sehoole, 2011, p. 124), with significant implications for teachers' work.

### **3.21. Teachers' work in the context of adversity in South Africa**

Contextual differences among South African schools are not readily apparent as they are either described in official statements as mixed in terms of demographics and socioeconomic status or as under-resourced with poor infrastructure.

Other perspectives reveal the diversity of school contexts. Paxton (2015, p. iii) noted that, if structural adversity among schools is not addressed, work equity is unlikely to be achieved. Joubert's (2010, p. 59) study on teachers' work in rural communities highlighted multigrade teaching, while "Emerging Voices", a report of the ministerial committee on rural education, also examined schools in such areas.

Bangs and Frost (2012, p. 13) note that, teachers who work in a rural area operate beyond the designated boundaries of teaching and professional responsibility. Alexander's (2011) mixed-method study on rural poor learners interrogated the nature of teachers' work. The study was undertaken in the Northern Cape, and its findings are similar to those of research conducted in provinces like KwaZulu-Natal, the Eastern Cape and Limpopo.

Aldridge, Fraser and Laugksch (2011) administered a questionnaire to 50 secondary school teachers in a school in Limpopo to assess the adequacy of resources, parental involvement and collegiality. The findings support Morrow's description of teachers' work as composed of "material elements and formal elements as agency that is 'impossible'" (Morrow, 2007, p. 3).

Alexander (2011) paints a picture of the plight of rural poor students in the Northern Cape. The study notes that teachers' work is inconsistent. While they are expected to apply a uniform curriculum, many teach in contexts with impediments that cause them to reconfigure and repattern their work.

Besides structural adversity, Semke and Sheridan (2011) note that, relationships between parents and the school are significant in defining teachers' work. Parents' involvement in the school harnesses community resources that support teachers' work and complement the roles of stakeholders in the system. However, as in other parts of Africa, many communities in South Africa live in extremely adverse conditions. Joubert (2010, p. 58) notes that only a third of students will complete primary school education. The author adds that eight million children receive their education in rural classrooms across South Africa.

Students from low/no income households confront multiple difficulties and challenges, especially when parents are absent. The growing gap between the rich and the poor in the country is leading to growing social inequality (Alexander, 2011).

While teachers' efficiency is important, collaboration among staff at the school as well as the nature of the community determine success or failure. Different locations pose different contextual challenges. Hargreaves and Fullan (2005) highlight that, teachers should be mentored at all stages of their careers. Studies by Salleh (2008) and Kelchtermans (2004) emphasize the need to balance individual autonomous work and collegial collaborative work. In the South African context, where many teachers confront challenges, teamwork enables scaffolding and mentoring to cope with adversity.

Griffith and Smith (2005), Semke and Sheridan (2011) and Morrow (2007) examined teachers' work in primary school classrooms and observed that teachers sought to impart the self-care and social skills required for student success. However, Griffith and Smith point out that such work is unevenly distributed since teachers who work in a context of adversity do



not receive sufficient support. Teachers at schools in deprived and working class neighbourhoods spend more time on such skills than the academic curriculum that is the focus of schools in affluent neighbourhoods.

Silva (2009) observes that the typical design of teachers' work does not reflect its complexity. Rather than content expertise and people skills, time management is often the key determinant of a teacher's success. De Silva et al. (2012, p. 16) noted that "lateral relationships with other individuals situated in the same stratum of an organizational hierarchy and with whom one executes tasks and has routine interactions increased as flatter organizational structures and team-based work have become widespread." De Silva (2007, p. 4) also concluded that "most teachers' work is isolated and fragmented, with no defined pathways for career development, few mechanisms for feedback, and a schedule that is disconnected from the reality of what teachers actually do and what students actually need."

According to Akkari et al. (2009), during their first two years of teaching, novice teachers come to understand that teaching is more complex than they envisaged and that they lack the knowledge required for their new role in the school. Teachers are challenged by the many and varied aspects of the job. The profession is subject to the demands of the curriculum on the one hand and to local and institutional constraints on the other. Every teacher has to make a place for themselves in the establishment, ensure that they are heard by their colleagues, learn the vocabulary used by the senior teachers, keep up with the rhythm, know how to start the first lesson and plan a few weeks ahead.

### **3.22. Teachers' work as 'overwork'**

Akkari et al. (2009) note that, teachers draw on a number of competencies in their daily work. Some are partially acquired during initial training and are developed, updated, and renewed throughout their career. These include the practical competencies that are acquired in the classroom through coming into contact with learners. Akarri et al. (2009) add that teachers need to develop organizational skills, pedagogical strategies and teaching routines or techniques. They need to fit into a subject team and to seek support from the school administration or more experienced colleagues when necessary.

Leithwood (2006) concurs that teachers that work in a context of adversity can be overworked and that this can be attributed to a “lack of resources, crowded and depressing physical facilities, too much paperwork, disruptions to instruction, impossible numbers of curricular expectations, excessive marking” (p. 7).

Barnhart and Barnhart (1982) define overwork as working too much or too hard (p. 1487). Books and Ndlalane (2011) blame the apartheid government for the failures in education that are one of the greatest challenges confronting the government of today. Teachers have to deal with behavioural issues, a lack of prospects, early school dropouts, slow learners, a lack of social and emotional as well as financial resources in their schools, malnutrition, and the failure of curriculum implementation (Books & Ndlalane, 2011).

Teachers in South Africa are compelled to meet curriculum demands while simultaneously addressing the socioeconomic challenges in contexts where students endure physical, mental and emotional hardships. One of the challenges students face is a home environment that may not be supportive of their studies, for example, their parents’ lack of involvement in their school work because they themselves did not have formal education or sufficient education to keep up with the changing system. Furthermore, in terms of CAPS, students have to take two languages and many are taught in their second additional language.

This creates additional work demands for both the teacher and the learner; ensuring that students perform according to regulatory requirements adds to the burden of teaching. Teachers are required to play different roles at different times, including teacher, social worker, financial pundit and so on. These roles are played out within a bureaucratic environment where line managers and the principal monitor their work. Resilience and a positive attitude are required to survive in such an environment.

As noted previously, while teachers are the drivers of educational transformation in South Africa, structural support is often lacking. While they learn from experience, the lack of support creates more work.

Xaba (2011) notes that the SASA sets the requirements for funding and staffing of schools, with the former allocated according to the number of learners enrolled. If the school is a section 21 school, the State transfers the funding allocation into the school’s account to cover day-to-day running costs. Parents are also encouraged to raise funds and pay school fees.

Other resources are provided by the State. While learners at many schools are exempt from school fees, these schools experience long delays in the delivery of textbooks and stationery, especially when they are located in rural areas, adding to the burden of teachers' work.

Teachers' workload has also increased due to the number of workbooks they are required to use. According to Motshekga (2013), around 114 million full-colour national workbooks were distributed to schools as part of the drive to improve literacy and numeracy levels.

### **3.23. Biographical background and teachers' work**

Day et al. (2006) explored variations in teachers' work, lives and effectiveness. Teachers come from different backgrounds and their personal history is blended with their professional roles. They have diverse cultural beliefs, values and priorities and their reasons for entering the profession differ. How each teacher adjusts to teaching is dependent on their ability to adjust and acclimatise to policies and rules.

Teachers also train or qualify at different institutions and the manner in which they impart their knowledge will vary. The combination of different personalities and efficacy results in multiple dynamics that each school has to deal with (Branson & Zuze, 2012).

While the choice of career is a major concern for any workforce, it plays a vital role in teaching because teachers constitute a "systemic agency" (Ebersohn & Ferreira, 2012, p. 32) that is entrusted with preparing and transforming students for the world of work.

Teachers' personalities influence how they deal with work not covered in the descriptors that regulate the profession as well as how they respond to particular types of students. The term 'intrinsic career-value' implies that teachers have a natural passion for teaching. According to Balyer and Ozcan (2014), teachers choose their career based on personal rather than economic and social factors. Some teachers see their role as uplifting children and influencing the younger generation (Kelly, 2012; Lawver & Torres, 2011). Balyer and Ozcan (2014) also found that, teachers' perceptions of their career is based on the respect the profession commands, money and social benefits.

Kelchtermans (2005) explains that teachers have to adjust to the context due to differences in their cultural background or socioeconomic circumstances and they may feel vulnerable in the school context. Teachers' sense of self-identity has not been extensively explored in the literature. When novice teachers enter a appointed school for the first time, the boundaries between themselves and their role as teachers may be blurred. They may reconfigure or re-pattern their work or continue to use methods that they learnt during their training.

Leana (2011) notes, that, teachers possess human and social capital that they draw on in their work at school. She measured the three aspects that comprise teachers' work or professional capital, namely, human capital (individual talent); social capital (the collaborative power of the teachers at a school) and decisional capital (the wisdom and expertise to make sound judgments about their work that is cultivated over many years).

Professional capital assists teachers to deal with learners from a context of adversity in order to achieve their primary function, which is to teach. On the other hand, Elmabruk (2008) points out that many teachers come from different backgrounds. Cochran-Smith (2008) states that several interpretive frameworks are useful in this regard, including understanding teachers as potential proxies for social change and that all teachers have manifold identities and life histories structured by race, class, culture and other aspects of systems of privilege and oppression.

Each teacher has a different biography. In executing their work, they are expected to be 'objective'. Alexander (2011, p. 11) observes that "many white educators have low expectations of their non-white learners, simply because of their belief that 'Black students have less innate potential than their white counterparts'". One of the key findings of Day et al.'s (2006, xiii) study was "extreme wavering whereby teachers' lifestyle has an impact on their work. This could include domesticated challenges from family (personal), discipline problems with learners (contextual) and regulatory challenges in terms of professional demands."

In the South African context, some teachers were part of oppressed groups in the past, while others were previously advantaged. Some teach at mission schools, while others are based in in public, township and rural schools, or elite institutions. These different schools have different levels of facilities and infrastructure.

Ebersöhn (2015) observes that, “different contexts require a cognizance of pluriversality and geopolitical variance as a result of unequal development” (p.1). The life-world theory of communities is an appropriate framework to understand the situation in poor rural schools. People form a bond with a particular space over and above its geographical positioning and cultural identity. In some places, there is innate connectivity among individuals. Ebersöhn (2015) speaks of “chronic and cumulative adversities” (p. 4) in South African schools which create challenges for teachers. The significant disparities among schools in South Africa account for the different dynamics of teachers’ work (Gardiner, 2007).

In rural communities, students are expected to perform chores before and after school. They may go to bed and come to school on an empty stomach, which means that they are unable to focus on the lesson. They do not complete their homework or study at home, resulting in poor examination results. Teachers have very little or no communication with the majority of their parents. There are also instances where parents are uneducated and unable to supervise their children’s homework. Despite this, some parents draw negative comparisons between their child’s school and the smooth running urban schools (Gardiner, 2007).

Children that perform poorly at school are at risk of dropping out of school, and are exposed to social ills like substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, stealing and prostitution.

### **3.24. Summary of the Section**

This section reviewed the literature on the global and transnational context of teachers’ work. It examined the nature and complexity of teachers’ work at the global level; employment and recruitment of teachers; teachers’ work and the regulatory framework; demands on teachers’ work in South Africa; teachers’ work and educational change; the intensification of teachers’ work; transformation of teachers’ work; teachers’ work in the context of adversity; teachers’ work as ‘overwork’ and biographical backgrounds and teachers’ work.

The review revealed that teachers engage in visible and nonvisible work. Socio-economic challenges affect what happens at schools. Teachers play complex social, educative and professional roles. However, they are framed as classroom practitioners, with no capacity to critique policy. Teachers’ work is not restricted to teaching and learning to teach but can be

defined as “complex, multifaceted, value-laden enterprises against the global backdrop of the knowledge society” (Caena, 2011, p. 2).

Teachers’ work in South Africa is controlled by strict policies and laws and bureaucratic management. While the status of the teaching profession has declined, teachers engage in many professional activities in and outside their classrooms.

It was also noted that the many changes in educational policy have placed additional burdens on teachers. Moreover, teachers’ work in the context of adversity, especially in rural settings, appears to be undervalued. Just as teachers’ personalities and background differ, so do the characteristics of the school and the context in which they operate.

### **3.25. Chapter Summary**

This chapter commenced by examining teachers’ work across different continents. It focused on the nature of teachers’ work; the complexity of such work; demands in teaching and teachers’ work in the context of adversity. Teachers’ work is about teaching, and effective teaching requires that they want the best of their learners, have the right skills to perform their tasks and are responsible and accountable for education related decisions in and outside the classroom and the school.

The chapter highlighted the differences and similarities in the development of teachers in international and local contexts, particularly in relation to low socioeconomic backgrounds. It was observed that teachers are required to self-direct their teaching by adapting, adjusting and acclimatizing to their work context.

Furthermore, it was noted that as the primary institutional agents responsible for implementing State educational policies, teachers play a significant role in the realization of the government’s goal to improve the quality of rural education. Teachers who work with learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds are isolated from other teachers yet can be said to belong to the specific community that they serve. Learners also come from different home and learning backgrounds. Thus, teachers adapt their teaching to local conditions and challenges.

Work undertaken at school is internal work and the regulatory framework does not take into consideration what it means for a teacher to work in a setting where the students come from

low socioeconomic backgrounds. This study thus investigated the nature of teachers' work in a context of adversity in a school is situated in an underprivileged rural township in KwaZulu-Natal.

The following chapter presents the research methodology and design employed to conduct this study.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN**

#### **4.1. Introduction**

The previous chapter presented a literature review on teachers' work, especially in contexts of adversity. This chapter discusses the research design and methodology employed to conduct this study.

Teachers' work is a multidimensional phenomenon which can be explored from many perspectives. This study focused on such work in a context of adversity, taking into account the complex, multifaceted demands that impact teaching today. I was interested in exploring whether teachers' work is determined by the context in which they teach or whether they create their own set of resources in responding to their work environments. In addition, the interpretative perspective was used to explore how teachers' work is socially constructed in a context of adversity.

As noted in chapter two, this study drew on social constructionism, which revolves around concepts such as the phylogenetic, socio-historical, cultural and situational resources for and constraints on learning. Social constructionism seeks to make sense of the social world by examining everyday interactions among people and how they use language to construct their reality. Teachers' work is socially constructed because conduct, thought, and reasoning are shaped by an explicit set of preceding social interfaces. Actions are socially positioned, in the sense that they are reactions to the institutional context in which teachers enact their work.

Social constructionism is built on ontological beliefs about "the extent to which different 'truths' are available to human observers, the level of abstraction at which 'truths' are to be formulated and the extent to which these 'truths' can be generalized across contexts" (Porta, 2008, p. 202). This study focused on teachers' work, and I aimed to understand its complexity by investigating the relationships among the factors that direct teachers in the execution of their work, noting the regulatory requirements imposed on them by the State.



This chapter expands on the OST that enables deeper insight into the material and formal elements of teachers' work, and in particular, adaptability, and acclimatisation to working in a context where students experience multiple challenges and complexities.

A qualitative research methodology was employed, which is an overarching descriptor for methodologies such as ethnographic, naturalistic, anthropological, field, or participant observer research. It is described as a naturalistic approach whose main data-gathering and analysing techniques consist of participant observation and interviews using open-ended questions (Astalin, 2013). The interconnectedness of qualitative research methods has been referred to as a bricolage or a set of practices that is pieced together in order to solve specific problems (Nelson, Treichlar & Grossberg, 1992). This makes the qualitative researcher the bricoleur, a "do it yourself person" (Levi-Strauss, 1996, p.17). Blending qualitative research methods "adds rigor, breadth and, depth to any investigation" (Flick, 1992, p.192).

This study is situated in an interpretivist paradigm. The table below lists the characteristics of interpretivism. This paradigm was used to illuminate the nature of reality (ontology), the nature of knowledge and the relationship between the inquirers and inquired-into (epistemology) and the methodology employed to arrive at the end product of producing new knowledge.

Feature	Description
Purpose of research	Understand and interpret students and teachers' perspectives on the factors that could impact on the effective use of learning and face-to-face instructional approaches in a way that they complement each other.
Ontology	There are multiple realities as each teacher's experience of work has unique aspects that lead to unique experiences and cannot be challenged by the experiences (truths) of others.
Epistemology	The relationship between the ethnographer and the participants is based on mutual respect and trust. Participants are not objects of study; instead, they are treated as co-constructors and contributors to understanding. The ethnographer is a participant observer and is guided by the realities of participants. The methods of data production are naturalistic in nature – borrowed from everyday interactions (e.g. conversations, embeddedness).

**Figure 6 -Adapted from Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011**

The qualitative methodology enabled me to obtain thick descriptive data that incorporates rich evidence about teachers' work experiences at SPS in Kalika Township. In unveiling teachers' work as complex (Cohen, Manion & Morris, 2011), a qualitative research method was appropriate to elicit deep and nuanced understandings and analyses.

This exploration consisted of the following three key phases:

- **Phase A** - preliminary ethnographic fieldwork to determine the suitability of the interview questions and approach, which was much like a conversation. This phase related to the first research question: *RQ1 What is the nature of teachers' work in a context of adversity?*
- **Phase B** - ethnographic mapping of teachers' work which used the data obtained from focus group interviews, observations and an individual interview. This phase directed itself to the second research question: *RQ2 How do teachers work within a context of adversity?*
- **Phase C** - ethnographical representation of teachers' work undertaken within the school context. This explored the third research question and the secondary questions that were associated with examining teachers' work: *RQ 3 Why do teachers in a context of adversity (as described) work in the way that they do?*

## **4.2. Ethnographic Research**

This study probed the multifaceted, complex and demanding nature of teachers' work. An ethnographic approach was adopted to make meaning of the complexity and multiplicity of teachers' work especially in a context that is economically and socially fractured.

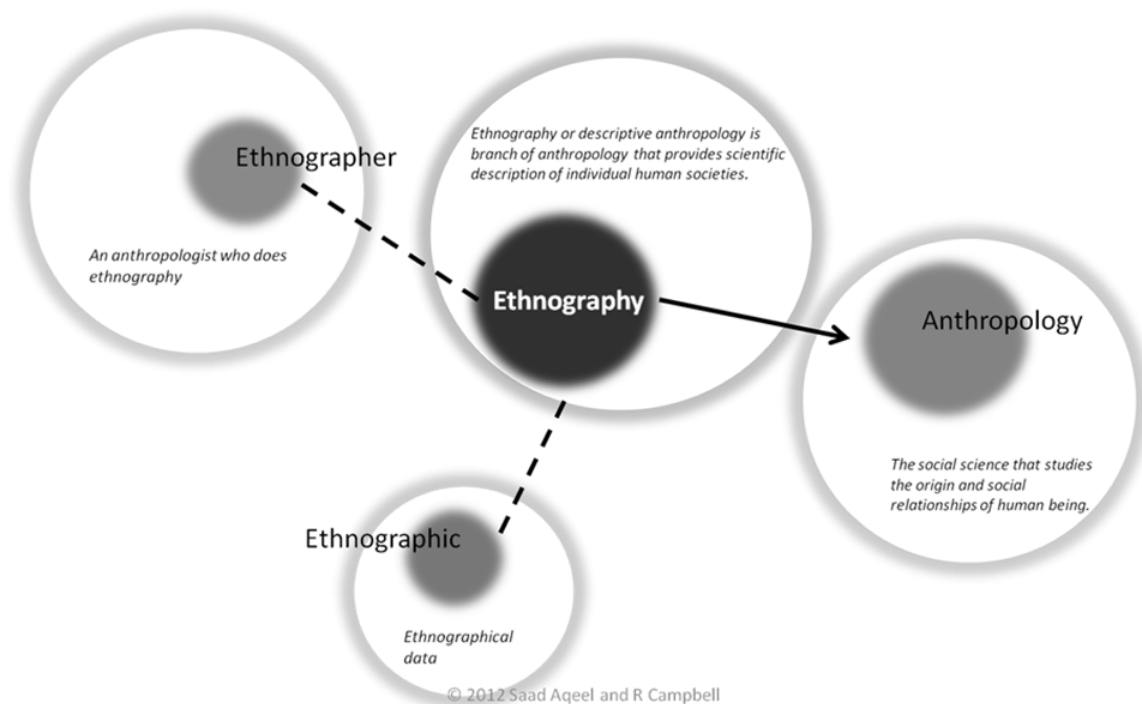
Ethnographic research appeals to many researchers because of its potential to disclose nuances and subtleties to which other methodologies pay little or no attention. By observing things as they are, one is able to obtain a more accurate and authentic picture. A key strength of ethnographic research is that it provides a much more comprehensive perspective on behaviours that are best understood by observing them within their natural environment.

Ethnography focuses on natural, ordinary events in natural settings and thus unveils the latent, hidden or non-obvious aspects of people's behaviours, attitudes and feelings. It uses

multiple data collection methods to study the cultural aspects of people over a reasonably sustained period, so as to reveal the complexity of how and why things happen. Given ethnography's emphasis on people's lived experiences, it is well suited to determining the meanings people place on the events, processes, and patterns in their lives (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

This ethnographic study focused on sociocultural interpretation of teachers' work in a context where learners come from low socioeconomic backgrounds. It included shadowing a teacher for a month, as well as observations and focus group interviews to shed light on the nature of teachers' work in a context of adversity.

In exploring teachers' work in a context of adversity, the enquiry focused on the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem within a school. This is described as a hermeneutic process, because disclosed meanings are interpreted. Empirical data is collected in its naturalistic setting. An insider perspective of the participants' standpoints enables the development of theory. Thus, ethnography is used both to record primary data and to interpret its meaning. While the graphic below was produced in 1995, it remains an apt description of the tools used in an ethnographic study.



### Figure 7: Complex connections

Source: Saad, Aqeel and Campell (2012)

An ethnographic approach was appropriate for this study because it is naturalistic. It seeks to work with society and does not attempt to influence or control it. The goal was to understand activities in their habitual context, as opposed to an abstract or laboratory setting, and to interpret how teachers give meaning to their experiences (Bray, 2008, p. 301). Ethnographic research encompasses an “exploration of a society’s cosmogony”, of the manner in which people make sense of the world they live in and how, acting on the foundation of their beliefs, they relate to one another and to people unlike themselves. Through descriptive overviews and the expansion of descriptive understandings about how societies work in specific contexts and time spans, it seeks to find reasons for the commonalities and variations among societies and their paths over time (Bray, 2008).

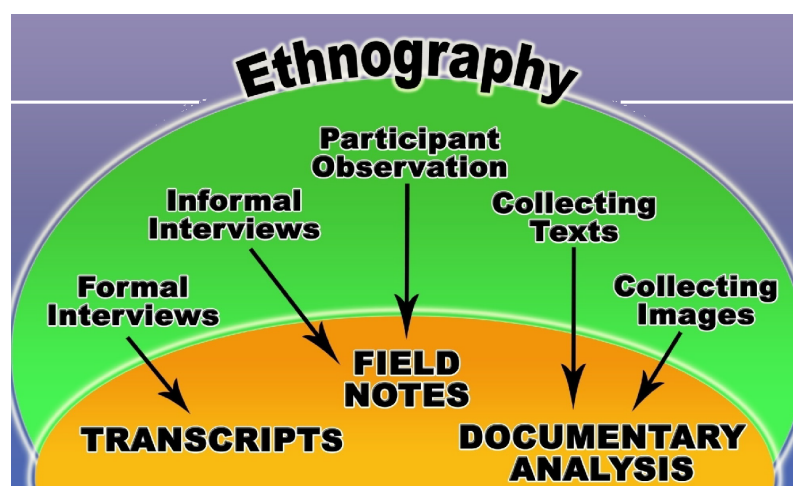


Figure 8: Description of research tools an ethnographic study

Source: Hamersley and Atkinson, 1995, *Ethnography*, p.45 (Reproduced from Junker, 1960)

Interpretative qualitative research aims to understand events by uncovering the values people place on their actions in the external world. The focus is not on discovering laws about causal relationships between variables, but on understanding human nature within the context of the diversity of societies and cultures. According to Tacq (2011, p. 264), Weber’s school of social science is connected to social constructionism. It aims at to understand (*Verstehen*) the

impetuses that lie behind human behaviour, an issue that cannot be reduced to any predefined constituent but must be located and contained by a cultural perspective, where the philosophy denotes a web of shared meanings and values (Keaton & Porta, 2008, p. 26).

The ethnographic approach to research involves three essential steps: initial formulation of the research subject and identification of the object of research, data-gathering; and writing up and analysis of empirical material. Collectively this is called ethnography.

In the first step, the focus is on so-called 'sensibility concepts' on the part of the researcher (Bray, 2008, p. 303). This involves explaining the intended direction of the study. In the data-gathering phase, the researcher works out the object of study. Any preconceptions of the object that the researcher may have had are reconsidered and the processes of participant observation and interviewing are adapted accordingly. Bray refers to this as the "particularity of ethnographic research compliance to the object" (Bray, 2008, p. 304) during information gathering.

The ethnographic approach also demands continuous attention to the presence of the researcher in data gathering and analytical processes. The researcher's culture and upbringing will affect his or her relationship with the informants. The researcher cannot escape feeling empathy with the cultural, social and historical contexts of the groups to which (s)he belongs, any more than the individuals that (s)he is studying can separate themselves from their groups.

## **4.3 Ethnographic methods**

### **4.3.1. Interviews**

Interviews lend themselves to deepening the researcher's knowledge of the community under study. The interviews added to participant observation in that they enabled me to determine what people believe or claim they do alongside what they actually do. The interviews were mainly open-ended, either discursive or semi-directed using a conversational tone and approach. Discursive refers to the researcher's freedom to select what is important and

relevant in answering the research questions. Individual interviews and three focus group interviews were conducted.

#### **4.3.2. Observation**

In an ethnographic study, observation is a field method that enables the researcher to get closer to the participants. This is essential to familiarise oneself with the participants in their natural setting and to obtain factual information and correct descriptions when reporting. It is also imperative to obtain the viewpoints of the participants in the domain under observation.

Participant observation is an integral part of an ethnographic study as it provides an insider view of the phenomenon under study. The intimacy of being in the setting with participants enables better insight into the life activities undertaken. Participant observation and shadowing a teacher allowed me to immerse myself in the school community to gain a deep understanding of the intricacies and inner workings that could not be obtained from the literature or second-hand information.

Participant observation yielded insights into teachers' lives and customs that would not necessarily have been forthcoming on asking. Being amidst the teachers for a period of four weeks within the actual context that represented the student populace of this school was an eye opener. Maintaining relationships with people, participating in community activities, and taking extensive and elaborate notes on the experience enabled me to experience the culture without imposing my own social reality. My four weeks of research lead to months of analysis of the recordings, written journal entries and field notes to arrive at the research findings within the theoretical context (Orcher, 2005).

As noted previously, participant observation is also useful in gauging the difference between what people do and what they say they do. The information obtained from the focus groups and my observations on site as well as the literature review enabled me to arrive at my interpretation of what teachers' work entails in a context where students come from low or no income households.

#### **4.3.3. Ethnographic analysis and writing**

Ethnographic analysis of data adopts an ‘emic’ approach. The researcher interprets the data from the perspective of the participants under study, which in this case, focused on teachers’ work in a context of adversity. Data generation comprised field notes and quotes from the participants; my own diary recordings; and descriptions of events and participants’ conduct, all self-reflectively explained.

After the notes were captured I ‘cleansed’ the material obtained by writing coherent descriptive notes and interpretations. This helped in achieving a fair-minded evaluation of the data. The results of the emic approach are expressed as though they are being expressed by the subjects themselves, often using local language and terminology to describe phenomena.

#### **4.3.4. Selection of participants**

Goffman (1968, cited in Cohen Manion & Morrison, 2011, p.229) describes “total institutions” which implies that in a perfect world, it is easy to study a group in its entirety. Since this is difficult in current times, it is necessary to select a way to engage participants according to the appropriateness of the research questions, since ethnographic research rules out statistical sampling because the individualities of the broader population are anonymous or unknown.

Therefore, convenient selection was adopted in this ethnographic study, which explored teachers’ work in a context where learners come from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Participants were selected from among the teachers that were available at SPS. The number of participants is determined by the ethnographic style bearing in mind the cost, time constraints, challenges, administrative support and resources available (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 145). In my case I had limited time to undertake the study at this school. Had I been given more time, further observations would have revealed considerably more information.

Since this was a reflective research project, the study initially involved three sets of teachers that contributed data for each of the focus group interviews. I also spent a day shadowing one teacher from the morning until the end of the school day. Including these three groups of

teachers was intended to establish whether their different contribution levels would result in different findings.

However, attempts to find participants were fraught with problems. I had to first convince the principal and teachers that their names would not be used at any stage. The teachers only agreed to participate after receiving the assurance that the information would not be made available to departmental officials for any reason.

The second challenge was agreeing on times and dates for focus group meetings at the school. The safety of the participants had to be protected. To facilitate the process, an informal meeting was convened a month before the study commenced and it was mutually agreed that the teachers would spare an hour immediately after school.

Some teachers that participated in the study were not employed on a permanent basis. They included governing body employees, those that were serving the school on a voluntary basis and temporary teachers who were not suitably qualified. Some teachers raised the question of payment for their contribution as well as transport challenges. I addressed this situation by making arrangements for the teachers to be dropped off at a taxi rank which was a safe place where public transport was readily available.

To address safety risks, I also asked the security company that patrols the neighbouring area to be vigilant during the times I was meeting with the participants to give them peace of mind. The cost of this service was borne by me.

Therefore, the study involved teachers who willingly availed themselves to participate. In a qualitative study, sustained interaction with participants is important as it strengthens its trustworthiness. Fortunately, the volunteer teachers participated without any reservations once they understood the reasons for the study and the significance of the information they could provide.

The participants comprised of eight teachers. I decided to first focus on the teacher who agreed that I could shadow her for a month at this school in order to conduct an in-depth study of the relevant phenomena. Secondly, I drew on the information obtained from the shadowed teacher, to create the content information for the focus group interviews.



The scope of this research extended across a single site. Nonetheless, this enabled me to make comparisons across a range of teachers and classrooms within that context, in order to identify patterns and to frame the themes of the study.

The small number of participants enabled an in-depth study and made it possible to accumulate and process the data within the fixed time frames. At the same time, it allowed me to maintain a reasonable number of participants in the event of participant attrition. However, the participants are not representative of the entire population and the study's findings cannot be generalised, but are transferable and may be extended to new, similar contexts (Bryman, 2004; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 157).

#### **4.4. Data Access**

##### **4.4.1. Obtaining Permission**

Atkinson (2007) notes, that, gaining access requires the researcher to draw on his or her interpersonal resources and strategies. It also requires him/her to be aware of the obstacles to access and to find effective means of overcoming them by understanding the social setting.

Before my initial visit to SPS, I sought permission from the Umlazi District Office (see Appendix B) to use the school to pilot this study on teachers' work in a context of adversity since this was an appropriate context at the epicentre of a low cost housing project in Kalika Township. This quintile 1 school fitted the aim of my research. An official from the education department contacted the school head and thus opened the door for me to interact with the teachers.

However, obtaining permission from the Department of Education was simply 'getting my foot in the door'. Gaining adequate access to the classroom requires one to determine who controls the setting and has the power to grant access.

##### **4.4.2. The Participants**

The participants' teaching experience ranged from six months to 32 years. Their teaching experiences also varied widely. Most had taught within the area but two teachers had experience of working for many years in other provinces in South Africa.

The pseudonyms assigned to the participants were Athika, Masika, Salis, Nessa, Yogi, Ranjis, Kishaab, and Lysie. They represented the multi-racial teaching force. Athika volunteered to be shadowed for the month that I spent at her school. She also contributed to the focus group interviews. Her qualifications require her to serve in the intersen phase<sup>15</sup>. She worked at three different schools over a period of six years before she obtained a permanent post at this school, but she is teaching in the foundation phase (FP)<sup>16</sup>. She graduated from university with a bachelor's degree in education.

Masika was a novice teacher who had graduated four years previously from a university. She stated that was the first year that she was placed in a rural school and that she was therefore dependent on colleagues to mentor and support her. Interestingly, this teacher travelled by public transport from a neighbouring township with some of the learners at the school.

Salis had been teaching for 26 after training at a College of Education and obtaining a Junior Primary Education Diploma in 1985. She started her teaching in an élite school but moved to this township school 21 years ago. At the time of the study she was acting as the foundation phase head of department.

Nessa had taught for seven years at Shivta Primary after qualifying two years previously with a National Diploma in Education from a correspondence college. She began her career serving relief at SPS when teachers were absent, for a wage of R35 a day. She joined the permanent staff at SPS as her first appointment.

Ranjis is a veteran teacher who had been teaching for 32 years in different provinces after graduating from a College of Education with a Senior Primary Education Diploma. He moved from Gauteng 25 years previously and had been at Shivta Primary for 22 years.

Kishaab had been appointed at this school for the past six months as a governing body teacher. He graduated with an Honours degree in Education from a university four years

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<sup>15</sup> Teaching from Grades 4 to 7. This phase incorporates teachers that taught in these classes.

<sup>16</sup> Teaching from Grades 1 to 3. This phase incorporates teachers that taught in these classes.

previously. He was awaiting a permanent appointment at Shivta after having worked at three other schools in the area.

Yogi had been teaching for 15 years and was appointed as Head of Department in the intermediate/senior (intersen phase) two years previously. He came to the rural school from the urban suburb of Sipping on promotion. He was in charge of both academic and administrative work undertaken by all teachers who teach in the intersen phase.

Wasilla was a volunteer teacher who lived close to the school and was paid by the governing body. She had no qualifications or teaching experience but was placed as a form teacher in the foundation phase. This teacher was working to pay off her child's school fees. Management was forced to place her in a class because the appointed teacher absented herself for a long time and then took a teaching post closer to home which is a long distance from the school.

Lysie was a relief teacher who was called on when teachers attended meetings, and were absent or when there were functions at school. She did not receive any remuneration but kept records which she submitted to the supervisor. She also helped with the feeding scheme.

In this and the following chapter, these eight teachers are referred to as participants or respondents, to distinguish them from teachers in general.

In order to familiarise myself with focus group interviews, I set up a mock focus group session at the school where I taught. This provided insight into how to handle the dynamics of this technique in order to obtain data to gain insight into what constitutes teachers' work, especially when one focuses on a specific context. These teachers volunteered to participate and it was used as a professional development programme on collaborative learning. No analysis or report was compiled, but it enabled me to plan my fieldwork that was undertaken a few weeks later.

#### **4.4.3. Phase A - Data sources**

This phase of the study sought to bring to light the 'collective minds' of the group of teachers that made up the participants. It was necessary that participants represent all learning phases in this school, including the foundation phase (Grades 1-3), intermediate phase (Grades 4-6)

and senior phase (Grade 7). A profile of the area in which this school is located is presented below.

Shivta Primary School is located in a township in a rural part of KwaZulu-Natal on the South Coast. This background information focuses on the challenge of the eco-social<sup>17</sup> sustainability of the community. The area was developed during the RDP soon after the dawn of democracy in South Africa (White & Reid, 2008).

Kalika has dilapidated homes comprising of sheds and huts. The inhabitants are all Black South Africans that work in agriculture, and in factories as semi-skilled machinists. The population includes retired people, geriatrics and the unemployed. An article from an international source that describes another context describes this ethnographic site as though the researchers were visitors to the town:

*The ...sight that I was confronted with was the symphony of activities that were undertaken ... visible early in the morning. The shoddy homes that one sees right from the arterial road through the township reflect a conspicuous amount of neglect in this area. When a town is in decline with the access to employment shrinking social problems multiply and there is little incentive and support for learners to endure these hardships and break the poverty succession (White & Reid, 2008).*

As in the above description, my intention was to establish how teachers at this township school work with the challenges and complexities emanating from this particular context.

Despite the low socioeconomic background of community members, the heartbeat of the township is the school that is a beacon of support. As the largest establishment in this area of Kalika, SPS is a rallying point when the community is under strain.

The walk to school is the conduit between home and ‘formal’ education. In the mornings, children proceed to school across hills and through valleys, fields and dongas, rivers and streams, over potholed or muddy rural roads and past tall bushes. Almost all learners walk to school, while some travel long distances in minibus taxis. In many instances, learners have to cross rivers to get to school.

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<sup>17</sup> The income and social level of survival of the householders in this area.

The movement of cattle carts and tractors amidst the heavy duty sugarcane trucks and numerous bare-footed pedestrians typifies the lifestyle of the people in this area. Green fields punctuated by tall trees lie on the west side of the township and the remaining three sides are packed with unicellular low cost houses provided by the State that are referred to as *vezinyahu*.<sup>18</sup>

The sound of wheels grating on the gravel road, and the noise of donkeys, cows, goats and cattle form a pleasant concerto that fills the air, while bare-breasted women wash clothes in a stream or next to a community tap. This beauty is overpowered by the smell of sewage overflows that pervades the township, including the school.

While SPS has water from tanks, and electricity, the community it serves does not have electricity and water. This affects teachers' work due to the manifestations of the hardships that learners endure at home.

#### **4.4.4. Phase B - Data sources**

The study drew on multiple sources of data. Multiple data strengthens the validity of both the data and the findings (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Data was generated from various sources, including school documents, teachers' documents, websites, community newspapers, informal discussions with staff, formal interviews and an interview with the principal. A document was prepared to brief the school on the study (Appendix C).

This school has a daily plan that is set in line with the regulatory requirement of notional time according to curriculum for the various grades. The timetable is rigid and is carefully monitored, with much emphasis on teachers getting to their classes on time at the beginning of each period, especially if there was movement to another grade or class.

Below is a schedule of how this timetable was segmented to incorporate intervals for meals and ablutions.

A DAY AT SHIVTA PRIMARY SCHOOL		
TIME	ACTIVITY	DUTIES
7H30-7H45	TEACHERS REPORT FOR DUTY	MEETING/SETTING UP EQUIPMENT

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<sup>18</sup> This is a derogatory term; the literal translation is that the home is so small that one's leg sticks out of the door.

7H45-8H00	<b>LEARNERS BEGIN SESSION 1</b>	
8H00-8H30	<b>ASSEMBLY</b>	<b>ABSENTEES /RELIEF LEARNERS SENT</b>
8H30-9H00	<b>REGISTRATION PERIOD 1:</b>	<b>CONTACT SESSION</b>
9H00 -9H30	<b>PERIOD 2</b>	<b>CONTACT SESSION</b>
9H30-10H00	<b>PERIOD 3</b>	<b>CONTACT SESSION</b>
10H00-10H30	<b>PERIOD 4</b>	<b>CONTACT SESSION</b>
	<b>PERIOD 5</b>	<b>10H15 SETTING UP FOR FEEDING SCHEME</b>
10H30-10H50	<b>BREAK</b>	<b>FEEDING LEARNERS/GROUND DUTY</b>
10H50-11H20	<b>PERIOD 6</b>	<b>CONTACT SESSION</b>
11H20-11H50	<b>PERIOD 7</b>	<b>CONTACT SESSION</b>
11H50-12H20	<b>PERIOD 8</b>	<b>CONTACT SESSION</b>
12H20-12H30	<b>BREAK</b>	<b>GROUND DUTY/PREFECT DUTY</b>
12H30-13H00	<b>PERIOD 9</b>	
13H00-13H30	<b>PERIOD 10</b>	<b>LEARNERS DISMISSED/TEACHERS ADJOURN TO STAFFROOM</b>
13H.30-14H30	<b>Administration &amp; Phase meetings</b>	<b>Conducting staff development programmes / attending/feedback from meetings</b>

**Table 2 : A schedule of the timetable at Shivta Primary School**

#### **4.5. Data generation procedures**

##### **4.5.1. Ethnographic interviews**

One of the most important characteristics of ethnography is the explorative technique to stimulate data (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). The reason is the vagueness surrounding the range of conceptions and the manner in which they may relate to one another (Svensson, 1994). The researcher has to choose a data generation method that is flexible so that participants can contribute to conceptions in both a general and specific manner. A sensitive stance is necessary in order for both their experiences and their articulation of phenomena to be insightful and contribute to the study.

An ethnographic interview is defined by its focus and purpose. Bruce (1996, pp5-21) identified three distinctive characteristics of ethnographic interviews:

- The purpose, which uncovers variation in how the participants understand the phenomenon under study.
- The focus of the interview, which is not the person being interviewed but the relationship between the subject and the phenomenon.
- The focus on how the participant interprets the phenomenon.

The essential characteristic of an ethnographic interview is that questions should be as open-ended as possible. In some instances, different sets of questions might be used for different interviews, and they may follow “somewhat different courses” (Marton, 1986, p.42). The essence of an ethnographic interview is how the participant understands and interprets the selected concept. The researcher can use clarifying questions like ‘can you elaborate?’; ‘what do you mean?’ or ‘do you want to add a bit more?’ These types of questions help participants to expand on their conceptions of the phenomenon under study. The role of the ethnographer is to make thinking as explicit as possible. Therefore, meaning in an ethnographic interview is dependent on the interaction between the researcher and the participant (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). The interview resembles an engaged dialogue that promotes open responses with the ethnographer providing the assurance that there is no underlying intention in probing a phenomenon.

#### **4.5.2. Phase A - Testing the proposed questions**

This study used three focus group interviews that addressed questions planned by the researcher. The interviewer’s position at this meeting was straightforward; only a brief introduction and the conclusion allowed for interactive participation. Each focus group question (FGQ) was put to the participants and the discussion and input unfolded naturally. While the duration of the interviews varied, the participants offered valuable information that revealed their conceptions of teachers’ work. The reason for this stance is that ethnography depends heavily on the data collection method. The following questions were directly posed to participants and transcripts were produced later.

*FGQ 1 - What is the nature of teachers work?*

This question enabled the participants to move away from external conceptions of teachers’ work. The individual teacher positioned him/herself ‘with a public face’ to a more intimate

conception of teachers' work. The actual experiences of the teachers were revealed from their personal interactions with students which gave an intimate account of what it meant to teach students that emanated from low socioeconomic households.

*FGQ 2 - How does the context impact on teachers work?*

*FGQ 3 - Why do teachers' work in the way that they do to meet up with regulatory requirements?*

These questions enabled the participants to share their own ideas and beliefs after being exposed to working in this particular context. The order of the questions also helped the teachers in the focus group to become familiar with the focus of my study. In keeping with the ethnographic methodology suggested by Cohen, Manion and Morris (2011), as each participant offered their viewpoints others endorsed, elaborated or gave their own viewpoints. This helped to obtain clarity and verify certain actions that were observed.

An ethnographic enquiry is useful in obtaining data from the questions posed to the participants during fieldwork. The resulting data and analysis presented in the following chapter validate the appropriateness of the questions because the thick and rich data that emanated from the interviews significantly assisted the ethnographic analysis stage. The information that was unearthed and the understanding as well as the knowledge gained through the preliminary fieldwork influenced Phase B of the study.

Below is a snapshot of the information that this yielded:

<b>DATE</b>	10 OCTOBER: MONDAY
<b>BEFORE SCHOOL</b>	Teachers welcomed by principal and the activities of term three were refreshed. Ground duty roster was discussed. Feeding scheme programme given to teachers. Learners standing in rows outside the classrooms. Teachers have to walk to class. Learner rings a bell and other learners scurry to class. Outside the gates learners make purchases of sweets from vendors that hog the drive-way. No lock up gate at the entrance of the school. Teachers park their cars close to entrance and incidents of hi-jack have occurred at the school. Teachers report to school between 7:25 & 7:45
<b>SESSION ONE</b>	8am AJ enters class greets learners and begin taking the register. Lots of excitement because learners explain that Tutho's* parents were robbed at gun point yesterday outside their home. 2 learners gave detailed account of how their houses were flooded & they were living with relatives in "Dark City" Teacher interrupted. HOD to inform that the Annual National Assessment (ANA) from National Education Department is at school. Learners from the HOD (3A) split and 14 learners sent to AJ. There was an interruption by the caretaker for AJ to fill info for visitors. Principal visited class and asked learners to co-operate with department officials. Teacher began oral discussions at 9:16 about the holidays. A father died in Crookes hospital during holidays. Only 3 learners visited outside Kalika-3km to Spar to do shopping. Cook enters class to take roll call
<b>BREAK</b>	Learners are fed beans and rice by AJ using a spoon to transfer food in learners containers brought from home. Sharing among learners is prevalent because parents did not send lunch tin. Some learners are supervised by their elder siblings who attend school themselves. 10:50 teacher eats her lunch in a room used by the cook to prepare meals.



<b>SESSION TWO</b>	The HOD visits the class to inform teacher that the officials are coming to her class and they will require the reading file and language records to be scrutinised. Charts for Maths will be supervised. Teacher did Maths addition of 2 digit numbers and learners seemed very hesitant for they forgot concepts taught before holidays,
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**Table 3: The observational schedule**

The data from the focus groups were incorporated with the observation schedule and the information was analysed using the ethnographical map that was framed in Phase B. Questions similar to those used in the focus groups were posed to the principal. Contextual subtleties are essential for an ethnographic study and as such the culture and context of the school were inferred from the interviews as well as observations and discussions on site.

In summary, this study used observations, interviews and individual shadowing of a teacher in all three phases. All these methods were extremely valuable in gaining an in-depth understanding of what constitutes teachers' work in a rural context where students come from low socioeconomic backgrounds. As noted previously, teachers' work is multifaceted and complex. The data design thus aimed to stimulate intricate, messy and rich data for analysis.

#### **4.6. Data analysis**

Since the data for this ethnographic study arose from observations, the observation schedule and interviews, its analysis required laborious sorting and coding of many interviews.

##### **4.6.1. Ethnographical analysis**

Like the ethnographic interview, ethnographical analysis is focussed on the participants informing the study and the phenomenon. However, in the ethnographical analysis the researcher depended on the transcripts and what they reveal about teachers that work in a context that serves students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The ethnographer's intention is to determine the essential categories of depiction and the relationships between these categories from the data.

The interviews with various teachers who teach at a school that serves a low-income community enabled me to gain a profound understanding of teachers' work in the context of adversity.

#### **4.6.2. Phase A - Data Analysis**

Data analysis for this phase can be systematic. Becker and Geer (1960, cited in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p.554) explain the process:

- Matching the responses given in interviews to observed behaviour.
- Calculating frequencies of occurrences and responses.
- Assembling and providing sufficient data that keeps raw data separate from analysis.

This is a reflexive interaction between the researcher and interpretations of the social encounter (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p.554). The aggregate set of meanings in play rather than how these meanings are evident in the interviews becomes the focus of the analysis. Each interview revealed different conceptions of teachers' work. This method made it possible to unravel diverse conceptions over and above the dominant public ones. For example, one teacher stated that she starts her work as soon as she leaves home in the public transport on her way to school and noted that parents meet her at the gate before she enters the school premises. Her unrelated conceptualisations of teachers work included her sacrificing her time to board the only transport that could bring her to school. This example illustrates the miscellany of conceptions that were embedded and identified in the focus group interviews.

Therefore, the analysis hinged on constructing position accounts that depict the various ways that individual teachers' conceptualise their work. This not only reflected the diverse nature of each participant's conceptions of their work but also revealed the commonalities between various teachers. The participants' contributions were distilled to create and arrive at a conceptualisation of teachers' work.

After completing the initial analysis, I realised that there were links with conceptualisations identified in previous research by Day et al. (2006) and Adeji and Olaniyan (2011) on the work-life tensions of teachers who work in rural areas. Day et al. (2006) elaborate on

variation in teachers' work whilst Adeji and Olaniyan (2011) focus on work-life in a rural setting.

Throughout the analysis I declared my conceptions of teachers' work as they emanated from the transcripts as I was wary of superimposing my own notions onto the data or using prescribed classifications from the literature. Therefore, I deemed it fit to use the route of 'bracketing' (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). I chose to work with the raw data that I obtained from the participants as opposed to turning to current literature on teachers' work or including my individual opinions. The conceptions and descriptions that stemmed from my raw data was used for the analysis of teachers' work in a context that serves students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Many of the teachers spoke of the demanding nature of their work, how complex their work had become, the time investment required, their inability to divorce school from home and the multifaceted nature of their work.

As each interview progressed, the participants moved from preparation and behaviour and added their individual value systems and philosophies of education and teaching to the mix. One participant positioned himself as follows:

*"I have taught in different provinces, different areas .This is nothing like what I taught previously but as an experienced teacher we have to adapt, the country is changing the syllabus is changing regularly".*

Another noted that, *"because they (students) come with so many issues, you got to be a mother, a father, a social worker, for these kids"* (Ranjis).

Teachers' work thus not only entails the regulated formal elements of teaching but encompasses material elements. The participants also exhibited flexibility in terms of how they executed their work. One stated: *"This school I feel is the life in this community. It helps the learners because there is something here to focus their attention on or they will be only on the streets."* Another pointed out with pride that, *"Even though we don't have funds we work extra hard for sponsorships."*

#### **4.6.3 Phase B - Data analysis**

As noted previously, ethnography involves a “rigorous empirical exploration of qualitatively different ways in which people conceptualise and experience different phenomena” (Marton, 2000, 103). The analysis of the raw data from the interviews and observation was done manually. The preliminary fieldwork confirmed that the initial proposed question could set the stage for appropriate conceptions and categories. Hence, the data analysis of Phase B closely followed that of Phase A.

#### **4.6.4. Phase C - Data analysis**

The ethnographic site was a specific school in a rural area where teachers work was analysed in depth. In this situational analysis three focus groups and the shadowed teacher’s perceptions of what signifies teachers’ work were sought. These views were considered together with informal interviews, close observation of teachers, parents and students, and document study, including official minutes of meetings, and documents displayed at strategic points at the school. Combined, these data offered rich insight into the phenomenon of teachers’ work. Phase C of the study employed an interpretive approach to explore teachers’ work through the lens of the outcome space for Phase B and drew on multiple data sources.

The coding revealed how the teachers conceptualised their work, including internal factors such as self-efficacy, identity, values, and beliefs and external issues relating to the school philosophy, the principal’s leadership qualities and the school culture or ethos. The interpretative approach enabled the coded information to become a narrative discourse of teachers’ work at SPS.

Data analysis in an ethnographic study is laborious because of the high volume of raw data to process in order to produce meaningful and trustworthy conclusions with conclusive evidence (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). The outcomes derived in Phase B were used as a framework to interpret the ethnographic interview data. Other data included a reflective journal, observational schedule notes and copies of school documents. The reflective journal and observations that I collated in the form of a schedule are discussed below.

#### **4.6.5. The Reflective Journal**

My judgments, frustrations, successes, opinions and personal reactions to events throughout the field work were captured in a reflective journal. Throughout the research process, I

maintained such a journal in which I recorded my thoughts, failures and successful plans, and frustrations. This added my personal voice to the research procedure as I was an active participant in data gathering and analysis. Since I was working in the qualitative paradigm, I could not be an objective onlooker. As stated previously, in qualitative research, the researcher is an engrossed party who should be involved and whose worldview influences the interpretation of actions. I thus concede that the reality of my interaction with the participants and my interpretation and analysis of the events is constructed in terms of my worldview.

The journal became my constant companion, my confidante and my wailing wall. The meta-notes aimed to harness the contextual dynamics that were not in the verbal interaction, such as body language, posture and tone, as well as my views and interpretations, because the respondents' expressions rarely provide a full picture. The purpose was to harvest the fruit of the non-transcribable script. The rich data from the journal reflections was used to strengthen the findings by validating or challenging data from the other three instruments.

#### **4.6.6. Lesson Observation**

I observed all lessons across the foundation, intermediate and senior phases where the shadowed teacher taught, focussing on the regulatory and additional work enacted by the teacher.

All aspects of the participants were studied, especially before school, during breaks and after school which added to the dynamics of teachers' work. After each category, I blended the information in a narrative which also comprised inference data. This was exposed to global analysis, a procedure that involved reading the narratives to identify shared themes and emerging patterns of teachers' work in a context of adversity. The purpose was to determine the configuration of practice or labour and to conclude what teachers' work in a context of adversity really involved. The results were integrated in the presentation phase where the convergence of findings was elucidated in order to firm up the study's conclusions.

This data enabled me to probe teachers' work and gain a thick description of such work at this specific ethnographic site. After the initial stage of analysis, an iterative process ensued amid the data and promising major signposts. I reflected on the data and identified what I deemed suitable phrases to elucidate and justify their insertion in my analysis. This yielded

significant findings on the factors that are integral to how teachers discuss their work and the constructed relationship between their work and the school.

This data from the ethnographical study has deepened my understanding of how schools in an open systems context shape teachers' work. However a similar study undertaken internationally by Simons (1996) offers a very comparable conclusion.

In summary, the data analysis in all three stages was dependent on the raw material or data obtained from the transcripts of the focus group interviews and the observational schedule. Ethnographic analysis focuses on the relationship between the phenomena and the participants in a study.

However in an ethnographic analysis the researcher relies on the transcripts and what they indicate about the phenomenon being explored. This study explored the core categories of descriptions and the relationship between the categories using Burns' (1994) three stages of analysis. The data analysis in Phase C was founded in the field of ethnography, although it explored the phenomenon of teachers' work within a specific context.

#### **4.7. Trustworthiness**

Many qualitative researchers have embraced Guba's Model of Trustworthiness (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). This notion underlies the whole research process, from the preparation of the field work and design of instruments to the collection and analysis of data and impartial reporting of findings. It differs from quantitative data research which looks at figures and statistics.

- **Dependability:** Collecting data from different sources promotes dependability as it compensates the likely flaws of one research tool with the strengths of another. However, as Puttick (2011) states, "qualitative inquiry is not so much concerned with the so called reality of these truths as with lived experience of the realities" (p. 54).
- Since I dealt with human subjects, at times I found that the research deviated from what had been anticipated, which influenced its dependability. This required that I account for the varying conditions. To address this issue, I sought to obtain in-depth

explanations during the data collection procedure and made the analysis as transparent as possible.

- **Conformability:** To ensure that the data collected was unbiased and impartial, the audio tapes of interviews, record sheets of lessons and the observational journal entries were retained for checking if necessary.

#### **4.8. Ethical Considerations**

According to Hammersley and Atkinson (2007), since qualitative research involves sustained contact between the researcher and participants, it is necessary to conform to appropriate ethical standards. In the case of this study, the participants were assured of anonymity and were assigned pseudonyms. The name of the school is also not disclosed. I also undertook to ensure that no harm was done to the participants and that they were not exploited in any way during my fieldwork and after compiling my report on this study.

As part of my preparation for the study, I sought permission from the Department of Education to visit the school (Appendix D). Informed consent was obtained from the principal and the participants, who were made aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without negative consequences.

As the ethnographer, I made an initial visit to the school during which I informed the principal and staff about the research, and stipulated its intentions, value, and duration, as well as what would be expected of them. This was an important step in creating a connection and establishing trust which is the cornerstone of significant researcher-participant rapport. I assured the participants that I would treat them justly and with respect, work with them within the specified time frames, and make the results of the study accessible to them.

#### **4.9. Chapter Summary**

This chapter outlined the research design and methodology employed for this study. The methods adopted by anthropology were used to examine the actions of teachers who create and recreate their work whilst working with learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

The chapter also presented the context of study and provided a detailed discussion on the two research paradigms and the justification for selecting a qualitative approach. The main purpose of the qualitative research design of ethnomethodology was explained to provide an appropriate description of each of the different qualitative methodologies and what they entail. The three data collection instruments were presented and described, as well as the data analysis process. This chapter also discussed how ethnography was used to develop an understanding of what constitutes teachers' work in a context of adversity.

This study used an ethnographic approach to explore the multidimensional work of teachers and map the connections that these dimensions have with one another, especially where teachers' work is executed in a school where students come from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Ethnography takes different views of the world and constructs 'abstract' categories or maps them. This research method aims to identify the logical ways in which these experiences and understandings connect with one another, leading to a description or an 'outcome space' of the concept of the phenomenon explored (Marton, 1994).

This study combined shadowing a teacher, focus group interviews, a reflective journal and observation to explore the phenomenon of teachers' work in a naturalistic setting. This multi-method approach was carefully selected due to its ability to investigate complex real life situations in an evocative and all-inclusive way. The strength of an ethnographic study is that it presents a thick description of a phenomenon, in this case teachers' work in a specific context (Stake, 2000).

The use of focus group interviews and observation as data collection methods was discussed. Deliberations on data analysis were outlined, emphasising the relationship between the researcher and what emerges from the transcripts on the participants' conceptions of the phenomenon of teachers' work.

The three major phases of the study included Phase A, the ethnographic preliminary fieldwork that investigated the proposed question; Phase B, the ethnographic mapping of teachers' work and Phase C, the focus group interviews and observations that explored teachers' work within a context where students came from disadvantaged backgrounds. The



analysis procedures applicable to phenomenological fields suggested by Burns were also outlined.

As such, this chapter presented the qualitative multi-method approach selected as the methodological orientation of this study. It showed how focus group interviews, ethnographic mapping, shadowing a teacher and observation were utilised to interrogate the research questions.

The following chapter presents and analyses the data on the nature of teachers' work in a context of adversity.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DATA PRESENTATION**

#### **5.1. Introduction**

The previous chapter presented the research design adopted to analyse the fieldwork data on teachers' work in a context of adversity. This chapter answers the research questions: RQ1- *What is the nature of teachers' work in a context of adversity?* RQ2 - *How do teachers' work in a context of adversity?* RQ3 - *Why do teachers in a context of adversity work in the way that they do?*

This chapter presents the participants' experiences of teachers' work with students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The categories of description that emerged from the data analysis strategies described in chapter four guide the discussion. It should be noted that these categories not only apply to teachers' work but also to the manner in which the participants experience their practice and the phenomenon (Bowden, 1994). The chapter also presents the final outcome space and expands on the relationships between the ethnographic conceptions.

#### **5.2. Presentation of findings**

Researchers, particularly those embarking on an ethnographic study for the first time, encounter many challenges. Hence, it is important at this juncture to discuss how and why the findings are presented in the way that they are. Entwistle (1997) explains the difficulty of following the sequence of analysis from the interview transcript through to claims of categories and makes a number of suggestions to consolidate the findings on the phenomenon under study.

In line with Entwistle's (1997) recommendations, short extracts from the interview transcripts are used to show the range within the identified conceptions of teachers' work. These extracts were carefully selected to "delimit the meaning of the category fully and also to show, where appropriate, the contextual relationship that exists (Entwistle, 1997, p.132)". This reveals the different ways in which the participants conceptualised teachers' work and facilitates the reader's understanding of the conclusions reached.

Entwistle (1997) also proposes that extracts should be selected that enable inferences to be drawn and make explicit the connections between the selected extract and the summary description of the category that is recognised. Although the summary description of the category identifies the significant focus of each category, the supporting interview extracts elucidate the various fragments of teachers' work that intersperse to construct the greater category of description. The full meaning of the abstract category thus "resides in the essence of the comments from which the category has been constituted" (Entwistle, 1997, p.132).

The selection of the interview transcripts is central in enabling readers to understand the research conclusions without overwhelming them with lengthy quotations. Through the use of relevant interview excerpts, the participants' experiences are communicated to the reader.

Entwistle (1997) notes that, the summary descriptions should move beyond mere narratives and include a critical discussion of the nature of the extract and its relevance to the categories. This stance is supported by Svensson (1997) who states that the "more extensively the role of the general in a specific case is described, the better is the validity for the generalisation and theory development" (p.170). Both Entwistle (1997) and Svensson (1997) state that the researcher has to make the analysis clear for the reader by making strong connections between the selected excerpts and the categories identified.

Within this analysis, I also need to indicate clearly what teachers' work is and how I identified the various fragments of conceptions that interlock to create the full category of description (Marton, Dall'Alba & Beaty, 1993). The *referential aspects* or what the phenomenon of teachers' work is, and the *structural aspects* that show how this phenomenon is delimited from the background (the external horizon) reveals the variations and relations between the conceptions (internal horizons) that are explicitly discussed in the analysis.

This section presents the findings as follows:

- Identify the ethnographic categories;
- Illustrate and discuss the range within each conception by selectively choosing excerpts from the data;
- Identify the referential features that clearly explain each category of description that explicates teachers' work ;
- Identify the structural aspects that validate the ways in which the conceptions delimit teachers' work from the background (external horizon) and the components (internal horizons); and
- Summarise the key factors from each conception.

In order to assist the reader in interpreting the analysis, the definitions of two ethnographic terms, "categories of description" and "conception" are presented. *Categories of description* are abstractions that signify my attempts to formalise the participants' understanding of the conceptions (Marton et al., 1993). As such, they represent the various fragments of conceptions that I brought together to construct a description that is removed from an abstraction of the phenomenon of teachers' work. *Conceptions* refer to the participants' personal conceptualisations (Marton et al., 1993).

### **5.3. Categories of discussion**

This section focuses on the themes generated from the fieldwork that formed the basis for organising the data. Information extracted from observation is labelled (O) and the day of occurrence is added (e.g., OD13, means that this took place on day 13 of the fieldwork). The

participants' contributions are indented and the name/s and the focus group where the response was tabled appears in brackets, e.g.:

*I am[a] level one educator. I basically educate children. I teach them not only about content but about good moral values and things like... (FG/T1).*

The purpose of this study was to explore the various ways that the participants at SPS conceptualised teachers' work. The study used the following stages to make meaning of the phenomenon, teachers' work (Burns, 1994):

- Identification of relevant quotes from the transcripts;
- Clustering of these meanings into 12 draft themes;
- Grouping the themes into three categories; and
- Constructing an outcome space that signifies the connexion between the categories of description.

The interview transcripts were comprehensively scrutinised and read numerous times. After constantly engaging with the data, I identified the following 12 broad categories:

1. Theme One: *Teachers' routine work*: This portrays the unchanging responsibilities that have to be undertaken for smooth operations.
2. Theme Two: *Teachers' regulatory work*: Regulatory work is the obligatory work that has to be undertaken in accordance with rules laid down by the State and executed by the Department of Education cascading from the provincial level to internal school management.
3. Theme Three: *Teachers' emotional and pastoral care work*: This includes teachers' efforts to support and address problems that both their students and colleagues experience at school level.
4. Theme Four: *Teachers' counselling and social care work*: This work is magnified when teachers have to engage external interventions and involvement to help resolve problems.
5. Theme Five: *Teachers' mentoring work*: Teachers are required to mentor novice permanent teachers entering the profession, novice subject teachers that are permanent employees teaching a subject for the first time, teachers

employed by the governing body, volunteer teachers, relief teachers and teachers that are learning to teach that are part of the staff complement of the school.

6. Theme Six: *Teachers' extra-curricular work*: This comprises of sports coaching, upkeep of the feeding scheme, providing transport when necessary and running school projects.
7. Theme Seven: *Teachers' time based work*: Besides abiding by the timetable adopted to execute the curriculum and assessment policy statement (CAPS), some aspects of teachers' work have to be carried out before school, after school, during breaks, over weekends and during the holidays.
8. Theme eight: *Teachers' work related to academic roles and functions*: Teachers are obliged to hold internal workshops at school after representing their school at public (departmental) or private sector workshops.
9. Theme nine: *Teachers' co-curricular work*: Teachers' engage their students in competitions, presentations and external examinations programmes related to curriculum enhancement by doing additional work.
10. Theme ten: *Teachers' work related to academic roles*: Teachers assume leadership roles at various levels and structures.
11. Theme eleven: *Teachers' administrative work*: Official records of summative and formal assessment have to be collated and be kept up to date on site. Besides assessment, lesson preparation, learner profiles, incident reports, minutes of meetings and filing of documents are administrative tasks that teachers are required to do in order to meet official education standards.
12. Theme twelve: *Teachers' work is disrupted*: Teachers' primary work is to ensure that the students are engaged in instruction as stipulated in curriculum prescriptions. However, when other tasks, interruptions, demands and overload impinge on teaching time, teaching is disrupted.

#### **5.4. Categories of teachers' work**

These 12 themes can be synthesised into three categories of teachers' work: *teachers' work is complex* (teachers' work is disrupted, teachers' co-curricular work and teachers' emotional

and pastoral care work), *teachers' work is demanding* (teachers' routine work, teachers' administrative work, teachers' work related to academic roles and functions, teachers' regulatory work and teachers' time based work) and *teachers' work is multi-faceted* (teachers' work related to academic roles, teachers' mentoring work, teachers' counselling and social care work, teachers' extra-curricular work and teachers' work is disrupted).

This reveals how teachers at this site socially construct their work. The manifestation of these challenges and complexities affects teachers' work directly since shaping their actual work in accordance with regulatory demands requires tremendous resilience.

D1.Teachers' work is complex	D2.Teachers' work is demanding	D3.Teachers' work is multifaceted
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers' work is disrupted</li> <li>• Teachers' co-curricular work</li> <li>• Teachers' emotional and pastoral care work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers' routine work</li> <li>• Teachers' administrative work</li> <li>• Teachers' work related to academic roles and functions</li> <li>• Teachers' regulatory work</li> <li>• Teachers' time based work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers' mentoring work</li> <li>• Teachers' counselling and social care work</li> <li>• Teachers' extra-curricular work</li> <li>• Teachers' work is disrupted</li> </ul>

**Table 4: Socially constructed work at Shivta Primary School**

The labelling and naming of each of the conceptions of teachers' work enable swift communication with the reader by introducing the range of meanings connected with the phenomenon by the participating teachers (Bruce, 1996). These categories of description are further expounded and illustrated in subsequent sections through the use of extracts from the interview transcripts. Each comment is indicative of the participants' comments in general. I also use the participants' names (Salis/FG1) and focus group numbers (FG1/T1) interchangeably in order to personalise contributions and explaining certain aspects.

However, the chosen comments explain and illustrate rather than define the categories with the various conceptions that they enclose. Some comments may also be applicable to other themes and may be repeated.

I now turn to a detailed discussion of the categories. This is followed by a discussion on the themes and the substantiating evidence obtained from the participants at SPS where this ethnographic study was undertaken.

## **1. Category one: Teachers' work is complex**

This category explains how teachers' work is a merging of many structures which includes students, the school administration; society and education watchdogs. The combined effect of co-curricular work and emotional work, inclusive of pastoral care, makes teachers' work complex.

### **1.1. Teachers' work is disrupted:**

This theme intersects with teachers' work as being complex and teachers' work as multifaceted. Teachers' work is chiefly is to sustain curriculum as agency and ensure that students are engaged in the curriculum in line with notional times. However, when other tasks, interruptions, demands and overload impinge on teaching time, teaching is disrupted. The supporting data that teachers offered in the focus group interviews as well as the observational schedule provides corroborating information.

Teachers' in this category stated:

*"While marking the register we are getting disturbed because parents came to fill those forms for social grants ... grants and now you find yourself failing because you cannot complete marking your register."*  
(FG1/T2)

*"As you enter school there are parents waiting for you .They got SASSA forms to fill and then they got complaints."* (F1/T3)

Teachers' work entails taking the register to furnish official statistics or to assist the cook preparing meals for students. However, parents arrive at the start of the day without an appointment, not to discuss academic work or concerns relating directly to a student's welfare, but to request assistance in completing applications for social grants. Teachers have no choice but to assist due to their students' low socioeconomic backgrounds. However, this encroaches on the extra 15 minutes built into the programme before the commencement of teaching for registration and marking of homework.

A comment by one of the participants (participant 3 in focus group 1) seems to points to how the school could redefine the notion of 'curriculum' beyond what is taught in the syllabus to

what is deemed valuable for survival in rural communities. Frequent requests to complete SASSA forms and other issues intensify teachers' work in SPS.

Some participants commented that their work is disrupted, especially during the first few periods, by students arriving late at school. They thus miss out on teachers' curriculum work:

*"...they {students} are late all the time and when you ask them for reasons they do not give you reasons."*  
(F1/T1)

*"...The other one is the punctuality problem, the children come late to school every day... some of the children come at quarter past nine or half past nine."* (F1/T5)

*"...We find that many children come late to school so, they are late for assembly .This causes major disruptions because we have to wait for these latecomers..."* (F1/T3)

Students that constantly arrive late for class, interrupt teachers' work as this prevents the absorption of skills and concepts that are taught in the morning. During my observations I found that Mathematics and reading take priority each morning. The culture of being late has a ripple effect both on their pedagogy and keeping up with announcements at assembly.

Teachers' work is disturbed when parents come to their classrooms during the course of the day without prior notification. They have to attend to these parents in order to establish the reason for their visit and even if it is not urgent, the time lost cannot be regained, resulting in teachers' work being compromised.

*"...parents are always waiting to attend to them... They always got some story or the other. Some want to borrow something; they are selling something, and they come when we are marking..."* (F1/T1)

*"...After school we also find that the time is very limited, there as well because parents also come at that time. While we are at our meetings sometimes we have to excuse ourselves and or sometimes they have to wait for us..."* (F1/T3)



Besides being disrupted in the morning, teaching time is disrupted when parents visit during class time to ask for assistance or to borrow or sell something. They also disrupt meetings after school.

*"...And disruption comes when through our broken windows all of a sudden you find a bird flying and the kids will be screaming and running around the class and goats, goats also just walk in and the teacher will start screaming and the children will have to help the teacher." (F1/T3)*

Teachers work also encapsulates classroom organisation and management. As illustrated by the above excerpt, defective or imperfect infrastructure disrupts activities and planning.

### **1.2. Teachers' co-curricular work:**

Teachers are compelled to involve their students in competitions, presentations and external examinations programmes connected to curriculum enrichment. This involves additional work. The subsidiary data from teachers that endorse this theme is:

*"...we cannot complete our assessments within that time frame. But amidst all this our kids still feature in speech contests and shocking this year for the first time in the history of ...{SPS }... one of our learners featured in the Mahatma Gandhi Speech Contest and I think this is an excellent achievement for her. She actually came second."*

Co-curricular work enhances curriculum and build students' self-worth and confidence. However, it is an additional burden on teachers.

### **1.3. Teachers' emotional and pastoral care work:**

Teachers' emotional and pastoral care work involves addressing the difficulties that both their students and co-workers experience at school:

*"... before school we have to make sure all the learners are in school because some of the learners loiter out of school..." (FG1/T3)*

*"Burglaries, you expect to come to school everything should be in order as in previous areas my previous experience..." FG1/T5*

*“By them stealing the stuff we have children that are hungry and they could not concentrate. We had to go to Patcho<sup>19</sup> (Shop in the area) and quickly ... get stuff from them..... Rice and Dhal and potato curry for them {students} which was not their menu for the day ... so we salvage the situation for that one day.”(F1/T3)*

*“...we do have a lot of problems with vendors... they still come and also the things that they sell are not healthy for the system. It is very unhealthy stuff. I think it is just about making money.”(FG1/T3)*

*“...some parents at 25-30 are collecting child support grants but I don't know what is wrong with them...”*

While one may argue that a school does not experience burglaries on a regular basis and that their occurrence should not be overstated, each burglary (there were five in a year) renders this increasingly under-resourced. When inventory items are stolen, teachers' work is intensified because the stock register has to be updated, teaching has to be undertaken with fewer resources and fund-raising activities have to be organised after school hours. The feeding scheme must continue to function as usual despite the lack of funds.

These extracts also reveal that teachers have to support students that abscond from classes or absent themselves by loitering on the roads that run parallel to the school. This negatively impacts curriculum delivery and leads to poor ANA results, with adverse effects on the overall performance of the school.

Continual burglaries at this school create emotional distress as well as extra work for teachers. When groceries for the feeding scheme and utensils provided by the State are stolen, teachers have to improvise and use teaching time to organise meals so that their students can focus in class. This cuts into the time that should be devoted to curriculum delivery.

Furthermore, it was noted that vendors at the school add to teachers' work because the quality of the goods sold to students has to be evaluated. This reflects the socioeconomic circumstances in this community as, on the one hand, socioeconomic hardship causes the vendors to sell poor quality goods while, on the other, students support them because this is all that many can afford.

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<sup>19</sup> Pseudonym to protect the identity of the school

I also observed that while teachers are taking the register, students interrupt to recount their challenges. For example, while a teacher was engaged in this task, \* Thuto<sup>20</sup> began to howl:

*“Miss we were robbed at gun point last night. The men had their face covered and they had many guns. He put the gun on our heads because they were looking for .....things.”*

The other learners give a detailed account of the police at this house until the early hours of the morning:

*“Shots were fired in the air making many very scared...”* O/D1

Such interruptions cannot be anticipated or prepared for, rendering teachers’ work more complex. In this scenario, the teacher had to think on her feet to resolve the anxiety and angst of both the victim reporting the problem and the curiosity and panic amongst other students. Another observation was that when students are reprimanded for not paying attention in class, they explain themselves in ways that are compound and intricate:

*“Mam I am hungry. I ate my last tasty meal on Friday at school. We had no food because my father is on short-time. Can I drink some water?”*

The teacher gave her fruit from her bag to eat outside.

In a Mathematics class, the teacher explained the addition of two digit numbers. The teacher asked the learners to use their bonds to solve the problem. The class was given an exercise to work on in their books (A4). When Linda\* was reprimanded for being restless, she said:

*“I must go home to give granny medication she is very sick and very old ... life is so “dark” because Ma has no food.”*

The teacher has to record this information in the child’s file. She has to bolster the child and continue with her teaching, pretending that she is unaffected. Students struggling with

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<sup>20</sup> Anonymity observed to protect the student.

addition were brought to the table and re-taught how to work from left to right at a slower pace.

When the teacher asked the child when she had her last “tasty” meal she said:

*“...Mm at school on Friday. ..I ate some bananas at the temple near our farm but there was no money to buy bread or jam....Mum is on short-time....Faze has no orders for work in his factory”(O/D4)*

The observations set out below show that in SPS, teachers’ work is significantly affected by the reality of the splintered society around them.

*A few learners are called in by the HOD to explain the fights they got into during the breaks in the grade six blocks... Three grade 7 boys were caught stealing from the vendors and they are called up by the principal who is probing the incident. (O/D3). Besides these students, two grade three students from the same household Duduzo and Simphiwe (O/D2) are fighting over a gift in the form of a box of crayons that Duduzo has not received from a visitor. The injury to the student has resulted in physical fighting with severe bleeding.*

*Athika has to help the social worker regarding a welfare grant for her four students as they have no family support. Their father abandoned the family in 2003(O/D1)*

A common problem is the lack of parental support in completing homework. Salis, Nessa, Masika and Ranjis observed that students have to care for themselves and thus do not do their homework:

*“And when their parents come late at home at night almost at 8 or 9 then they are looking for their kids, so they got no parental guidance, they are actually neglected...” (Salis/FG2)*

*“They have lots of personal issues which disrupt teaching and it is very difficult for us as teachers who have not been exposed to situations like this before and sometimes we ourselves don’t know how to handle it, and we got to get help from our peers...” (Nessa/FG2)*

*“...Being in this school for so many years I have grown to love the children, the community... I have also learnt to handle the parents. In fact I do feel very happy when parents do have problems they come to me... “ (Salis/FG3)*

The issues confronting students prompted Athika to get involved with stakeholders outside the school which is official business because the principal has instructed teachers to keep reports updated:

*“They {students} cannot concentrate on their school work and they [are] unable to do their homework because they have chores to do at home and there is nobody at home to help them. This causes a major disruption in the class. Because they come with so many issues, you got to be a mother, a father, a social worker, for these kids. You have to understand what they are going through. You have to be there for them.” (Athika/FG2)*

This input demonstrates the extent to which teachers’ work has to be shaped and reshaped from time to time. Besides delivery of curriculum, teachers have to respond to the severe emotional and social challenges that students endure.

One participant pointed out that her teaching comprises many things. She has to be a teacher-like-substitute for a mother or father even though she is single with no children of her own. She also plays the role of a social worker, because many students come from fragmented homes and require emotional support to succeed in the classroom.

The participant added that in her 11 years of teaching, she had to come to terms with the students’ hardships and to deal with their stresses. This made her resilient and she was able to become effective and efficient.

### **5.5. Summary of teachers’ work as complex**

The central concepts in the construction of my analysis and argument are that teachers’ work is complex. This is illuminated by segments of the data obtained. The disruptive work, co-curricular work and emotional and pastoral care that teachers have to perform provides fitting evidence to conclude that teachers’ work is complex.

Teachers’ routine work refers to the regular course or procedure of teaching. The routine matters of teachers’ work that are arranged prior to the start of the school day involve additional curricular and co-curricular duties. At Shivta Primary these duties are compounded because the community surrounding the school has to be accommodated

amidst a demanding workload. Although ground duties are not peculiar to teachers in a rural school, due to the small staff complement, teachers are on duty more frequently.

At this school, ground duty is divided into litter duty, line-up duty<sup>21</sup> and dealing with vendors and hawkers who sell goods at the school entrance. Shivta Primary School has no support staff or general caretaker to clean the school. Petty thieving is common, adding to teachers' routine work. They have to write copious reports that are filed by the principal because the majority of the perpetrators are under the radar of social welfare.

The participants emphasised the routine work of filling attendance forms, preparing for fun walks and other exercises. Furthermore, as per the observations, every Wednesday all the teachers and learners gather in front of the foundation phase building, adjacent to the principal's office. The assembly area at SPS is a central zone where staff and learners converge for regular meetings and assemblies with some being absent or even absconding from this essential communication platform.

The data presented in this study focuses on the influence that these complexities have on teachers' work. The complex or intricate work that is discussed is over and above the curriculum coverage stipulated in the CAPS document. It thus constitutes extra work that renders the professional work of teaching much more complex.

## **2. Category Two: Teachers' work is demanding**

Teachers' work merges with a host of other facets of work, illustrating the demanding nature of teaching. The combination of routine and administrative work and various tasks attached to the academic roles and functions of the teacher, regulatory work and work done before school, after school, during weekends and school holidays places enormous demands on teachers.

Teachers who work with students from fractured homes have unique experiences and how they deal with the setbacks and demands of their work is worthy of note. Lacking the instructional and practical skills that are essential to deal with the challenges of students

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<sup>21</sup> Getting learners to stand in line once the bell is sounded to be ready for assembly.

from low socioeconomic backgrounds, such circumstances overwhelm teachers and intensify their work.

The combination of themes that I grouped into categories in D2 confirms that teachers confront many demands whilst executing their work. These include:

### **2.1. Teachers' routine work:**

Teachers' routine work is depicted in terms of the unchanging everyday tasks that have to be undertaken in order for the school to run smoothly. The participants recounted their experiences to illustrate this point.

Teachers' routine daily work at Shivta is a combination of operational work that follows policy set out by management and the actual sequence of their teaching set by the policymakers and overseers. The operative or routine work imposed by internal school policy is demanding. Teachers' work entails adhering to rules. They are required to sign the staff register and circulars are essential in collating information that must be on hand when officials visit or phone the school.

My observations revealed that every teacher must follow routines in the morning, during breaks and after school. In the morning the staff register must be signed in the presence of the clerk. The clerk assigns each teacher their bookkeeping duties in relation to personal and class information within specified time-frames. In some cases, a specific student's records and information have to be updated. The teachers also perform duties during breaks, including supervising students, getting them to pick up litter, protecting students from outsiders that lure them alongside the fences and reporting incidents in writing to the principal.

Teachers are on ground duty for a week every month and they have less than five minutes to eat something whilst students are lining up outside their classrooms. When a student gets into trouble, even teachers that are not on duty have to assist if the student is from their form class. Vendors tempt students to buy cigarettes during breaks and teachers thus have to be constantly vigilant.

The safety of students takes precedence at this school. When there was a hijacking incident and the runaway assailant being chased by the police ended up on the easily accessible school grounds, teachers had to cut back on their lunch times to revert to an emergency programme of “take cover”. Students were spontaneously steered to their classrooms and were asked to lie flat on the floor. The teacher had to take roll call and report students that did not come back to class.

Some students increase teachers’ workload because they sneak home to bring in the washing, check on or administer medication to their ailing grandparents or simply to socialise. The teacher has to search for these students in order to ensure their safety.

After school teachers, have to ensure that students do not loiter as pilfering and damage to property have occurred in classes where teachers are absent for the day. Teachers are also required to monitor the absent teacher’s class.

All of the above occurs on a daily basis. During the morning there is a briefing from the principal and subject and staff meetings take place after school. During my observation I found that the Department of Social Welfare held community meetings at the school and the parents’ committee also met after school. This collaborative and interactive meeting lasted up to two hours.

Whilst the class engaged in daily news the caretaker brought a notice from the office to collect letters from five learners for the social worker (O/D1). The caretaker also came in to take roll call (O/D1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8). Three students lost their returns claims and the teacher had to write a note to these parents (O/D1).

“While marking the register..... You have to run to office for school stamp and principals signature.”(F1/T2)

*“The teachers have a roster that we got to follow in conjunction with the litter duty and ground.”(F1/T5)*

*“Once a month for a week we go on duty. Ground duty. We have to supervise the learners outside. We have to make sure that ...that they are well behaved; there is no fighting taking place. ... Before we actually enter the classroom we have lots of duties that that have to be done. Also we hand in. worksheets that have to be run out for the lessons to our clerk ... Sometimes in the morning we also sit out and type or sort out our worksheets” (F1/T1)*



*"We have to do our photocopying we have to hand it to our clerk who has to run it out for us. Sometimes it is needed for the same day but it is not ready in time because we have so many things to do." (F1/T4)*

Routine work also encompasses preparing resources for lessons before entering the classroom. There are two reasons for this rule in this school. The first is the dire shortage of paper; worksheets have to be shared with other subjects and grades. Only activities with pictures, graphs and tables can be printed and other material must be written on the chalkboard for students to copy.

In SPS the routine comprises of the range of ways of acting and how actions are accomplished. Teachers have to exhibit skills and coping strategies. They have to draw up daily schedules with students and management and adopt appropriate behaviour whilst executing this work.

Students are introduced to routines like explaining absences, putting books away after each subject and preparing for the forthcoming lesson, excusing themselves from the classroom for ablution purposes, washing their hands after ablutions, delivering notices and hand-outs to parents and ensuring that the message is received at home or bringing information back to school, preparing for physical education lessons in terms of attire, preparation for technology lessons in terms of repurposed resources for projects and many other routines that ensure effective running of the classroom.

At SPS the feeding scheme imposes significant routine work on teachers. The participants observed:

*"... I think the parents have to teach these children a lot of responsibility..." (F1/T5).*

*"...With regards to the feeding scheme I dish out the food for the learners in my class..." (F1/T4)*

*"...Before we dish out the food we have to make sure that the containers have been washed and in my class I do not allow them to eat without a spoon and a container with a lid so that when the feeding time is over they are able to cover that and put it away... Some learners come with their containers that are absolutely dirty so that we got to send them out of the class to wash the containers. Some of them come without a spoon so they eat with their hands and so then they have to go and wash their hands which then again cuts across the teaching time" (F1/T1)*

The two routines at SPS that are most challenging are problems that arise sporadically like washing containers and hands and what is expected of students like packing away books, and preparing for other subjects that form the continuum of classroom procedures. Teachers repeat and uphold routines so that these habits are internalised.

## **2.2. Teachers' administrative work:**

This concerns compliance with statutory requirements or administrative work like taking the attendance register, assessment, and disseminating pedagogy.

A participant reported that:

*"...also in the morning before school we have to make sure all the learners are in school because some of the learners loiter out of school and that also takes up a lot of our time. We have to go to the gates and direct them back into school... In the beginning marking the register with the little ones is time consuming because most of them don't even know... their correct names... Then parents are always waiting [and you have] got to attend to them. They [have] always got some story or the other. Some want to borrow something; they are selling something, and they come when we are marking even when we are having assembly they come. There are quite a few issues. There are many issues before we can get down to ....marking the register..." (Salis/FG1)*

The first responsibility of the class teacher is to take the register and present the statistics to the office. At every school, the register is regarded as an official document and it is compulsory for the principal to have an up-to-date attendance register for many reasons other than officials calling on the school. Sometimes parents/guardians come to the office and do not know the name of their child's form teacher or, in some cases, which grade the child is in. I observed parents talking to teachers and stating "the standard three teachers". 'Standards' is a term that was used during the apartheid period but it continues to be used by parents that are not aware of recent changes.

The excerpt above illustrates how a simple task like taking the register is difficult to achieve, because of constant interruptions by parents or the fact that children do not know their correct names. The work rhythm is thus constantly disrupted

Athika added that:

*“...we also get our children prepared for any special talks or sketches that need to be done in assembly...”*  
(FG1/T1)

Salis concurred:

*“...and also [for] assembly ... we have to prepare sketches, we have to prepare talks. Every week there is something - Arbour week, Dental Week, Water Week, this week that week and you know there is always something and there is Freedom Day, Workers Day, and...”* (Salis/FG1)

Life skills are a compulsory part of the curriculum for all South African students. They include social awareness, which can be around public holidays, social well-being, guidance, social ills and awareness campaigns to induct learners into the dynamics of the broader society. Besides responding to curriculum demands, teachers have to prepare students to deliver talks at assembly. While this boosts students’ self-confidence, teachers’ work becomes overwork because research is required to prepare for such talks and the school lacks resource material. Students identified to represent their class also have to be trained in public speaking outside teaching time.

Ranjis noted that absenteeism and late-coming affect curriculum delivery:

*“...some of the [other] classes get good attendance but where we get poor attendance we cannot do anything even when we give out notes [and even] with the full class the results are bad. So we got to chop and change our method. We have to do a lot of oral work and do as little written work as possible so that [those] who do not come to school because of the [inclement]weather do not lose out or get disadvantaged...”* (FG1/T5)

Teachers have to adjust their work to cope with this situation. Since the primary method of disseminating curriculum is through oral work at this school, students that come late miss out on the lesson, negatively impacting their performance in tasks and activities.

*“... Children [coming] late disrupt the class [and] make it very difficult for us...”* (FG1/T5)

### **2.3. Teachers work’ related to academic roles:**

Teachers take on many leadership roles at different levels and structures that add to their supplementary work. The academic roles that teachers assume are part of both internal and external policies. Leadership positions are another facet that add to teachers' work.

As noted previously, SPS is under-resourced. Worksheets for classwork or assessment have to be completed two days in advance and given to the administrative clerk for duplication. Due to the shortage of paper, one worksheet was used for up to four grades. As a teacher completed her work in one class, the worksheet was collected and sent to the next teacher. Observation revealed that students were required to do a lot of writing and oral work and that the number of textbooks was limited.

The teachers therefore maximised the use of workbooks supplied by the Department of Education. Athika used her own charts and models to enable her students to visualise through the use of pictures. It was interesting to note that, in her class and various other classes that I attended, many projects that were undertaken using recycled material. Arts and Crafts and Life Skills projects used such material.

*"...In December I do a few weeks' preps and November and the first term I do two or three. In July I do a week's work I [do] all my preps and... especially this year I am jammed because of CAPS it's no more the History and Geography together. It is History /Geography separately. I do a rough copy of my lessons and assessments then I check it up and I check the marks, levels of the assessments and I type it out and I make adjustments [wherever] possible ...Though in ANA we were in ICU we got out of it but we going to get worse than ICU this time because the Department has raised its standards for English from 35% to 50% without discussing the content with the teachers..." (Ranjis/FG3)*

The above excerpt succinctly describes the demands of teaching. Changes in assessment standards increase the volume of work for both teachers and students. Firstly, assessments from teachers, as well as their work content, have changed, which increases the workload. There are also more assessments, increasing students' workload. Furthermore, teachers are expected to obtain professional support from teachers in the area that have attended workshops and meetings to keep abreast of information from the Department of Education. They need to visit the municipal library in the nearby village to obtain research material and make photocopies. The material and resources they develop themselves are potentially more relevant to students because they derive from and are relevant to their life worlds as

opposed to the disembodied materials in textbooks that are removed from students' experiences.

These types of work encroach on teachers' home life. School vacations are used to pre-plan lessons. In terms of being prepared for professional work, the teachers ensure that they are adequately tooled. However, due to the contextual situation, SPS students' performance in ANA has been poor. The school was labelled an under-performing one and a structured remediation programme was adopted. This intervention, which is monitored by departmental officials, drastically increased teachers' workloads.

*"With regard to assessments it is very difficult because we find that most of the times learners cannot cope with assessments because most of the children are living with their grandparents and their grandparents are illiterate and .... They cannot complete their assessments. We find that we have time frames that we have to work by and that we cannot complete our assessments within that time frame. ...." (Kishaab/FG3)*

*"...planning and assessment, this is a bit hectic..." (Ranjis/Fg3)*

Officials can arrive at any time to undertake inspections and ensure that the catch-up programme is adhered to and that a concerted effort is being made to develop learners' skills and knowledge.

Ranjis noted that, besides ANA performance, CAPS has increased promotional requirements and sufficient preparation has to be done in advance so that the resources required are at hand. Although other schools suffer similar shortfalls, it is not known how their students performed in the ANA benchmark tests.

*"(after breaks)... concentration span of the learners become a big problem... with all these activities they forget basic things like going to the toilet, washing their hands.... We are definitely going to be in ICU<sup>22</sup> this time (ANA results); even the other learning areas were 35% they made it 40% without consent from us." (Ranjis/FG1)*

*"The first time we wrote ANA we were in the ICU department. That was very bad for us but we worked hard and we out of that now so we have now recovered." (Salis/FG3)*

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<sup>22</sup> The intensive care unit in a hospital admits patients that are in a critical condition and require special care.

On the first day of term, officials from the National Department of Education arrived at the school with a task team to inform the principal that because of poor performance in the first ANA benchmark tasks, Shivta Primary would have to embark on a ‘Catch Up’<sup>23</sup> programme. The participants stated that:

*“...with regards to marking some of them are done in the afternoon.... Sometimes when my kids are busy with maths I mark their English books or when they are busy with their English I go around and mark their Maths books. Whatever task has been done for the day I just go around and I mark. With assessments - with regards to assessment for CAPS it is very stressful....The learners cannot cope with these assessments because they are too demanding. And there is a lot of paperwork that needs to be done.” (Athika/FG3)*

The participants were thus of the view that assessment is stressful and demanding for students and teachers. Catch up programmes are initiated that take place during the afternoon periods. Teachers’ work is assessed not only by their teaching in class but by assessments and administration. Athika explained that, in order to keep her marking up to date, she takes work home.

#### **2.4. Teachers’ time based work:**

Some aspects of teachers’ work have to be carried out before school, after school, during breaks, over weekends and during school holidays:

*“Before we actually enter the classroom we have lots of duties that that have to be done.”(F1/T1)*

*“It is time consuming to take out a computer and connect it and therefore sometimes we get delayed before we reach the class and we also have to do get ready” (F1/T4)*

*“We also have to go back in the morning to see if any new announcements that have to be made, basically it is the announcements of what is taking place in the week” (F1/T3)*

These excerpts point to factors that delay teaching and render teachers’ work demanding.

In this particular context the community relies on the school and teachers to help complete forms such as grant applications. This places a further burden on teachers. They have to leave their class unattended and go to the office to get the grant application authenticated with the school stamp in the presence of the principal. One they return to the classroom,

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<sup>23</sup> Complete the tasks suggested by the team and come up with their own plan of action to improve learners’ performance in Mathematics and Literacy.

they have to recap their work and either encroach on the time that should be devoted to another subject or rush through the work in order to move on to the next lesson.

### **5.6. Summary of Teachers' Work as Demanding**

Teachers in SPS hold regular meetings to plan, prepare, and update programmes that have a direct impact on the school and students. This implies that their work revolves around many aspects before and after school. Furthermore, they are tasked with ensuring students' safety and creating a conducive learning environment.

The demands of internal and external policies enshrined in the conditions of service as well as in the Norms and Standards for State employed teachers intensify teachers' work. The time specified for curriculum delivery has to be negotiated to meet the additional challenges and demands on teachers.

### **3. Category Three: Teachers' work is multifaceted**

Teachers work becomes multidimensional when there is multi-layered interaction with different role players, including students, parents, and related government departments that assist the community served by the school. Students' low socioeconomic backgrounds compound the problem. This category includes the changing dynamics of teachers' work after 1994 in terms of mentoring and academic roles, playing the role of a counsellor and social worker, having their work disrupted and teachers' extra-curricular work.

Athika, the shadowed teacher who was trained at university to teach in the intermediate phase (Grades 4-6) obtained a permanent post at SPS in the foundation phase (the Grade 3 class) but also taught in the senior phase (Grade 7) in order to make up the time stipulated in the conditions of service.

#### **3.1. Teachers' work related to academic roles and functions:**

Although this theme was touched on under the theme of teachers' work is demanding, more information is added to flesh out this conception. Teachers that represent SPS at public (departmental) or private sector workshops are required to hold internal workshops at the

school. The participants provided interesting information on how teachers' work is dependent on academic roles and functions.

The participants in this study comprised of teachers who shared a broad identity as members of staff. They can also be considered as agents of the State entrusted with disseminating the curriculum and fulfilling the country's vision for education. The teachers in this group were connected to one another and were part of the same economic, political, or social interactions and networks because they experienced the same demands posed by internal and external policies. It was clear that their work extended far beyond the classroom:

*"...Every week there is something Arbour Week, Dental Week, Water Week, this week that week and you know there is always something and there is Freedom Day, Workers Day, and Women's Day. Everything we have to and all the religious holidays and Ascension Day so we have to actually do the CAPS documents plus we have to have those themes and we have to get them prepared and as a Grade one teacher it is a bit too much for my little ones but we do try our best..." (FG1/T3)*

*"...I also have to go through words I have taught through the week every morning because I have to drill it into them so that they are able to understand ..." (F1/T1).*

*"...And also assembly is eh... we have to prepare sketches, we have to prepare talks..." (F1/T3)*

*"In fact every Sunday afternoons I do not even have a life. I only do schoolwork and my husband complains about that because Sunday afternoon is family time. But if I don't do my work on a Sunday afternoon how do I cope the whole week?" (FG3)*

According to Ranjis, Shivta teachers also spend two full weeks on average during the summer break doing at least one school-related activity because of insufficient time at school and to keep up with the demands of the CAPS work schedule that is regulated nationally.

In addition to the time spent travelling, teachers related that they had to carry over work to weekends and after school. Tasks that are set by school policies need to be accomplished before and after school.

### **3.2. Teachers' mentoring work:**

The participants also noted that mentoring novice permanent teachers entering the profession, novice subject teachers that are permanent employees and teaching a subject for



the first time, those employed by the governing body, volunteer teachers, relief teachers and teachers that are learning to teach takes up much of their time:

*“During teaching there are many disruptions. Firstly we have teachers that GB teachers and they need a lot of help. While we are teaching they come to class because they need to know what they must do next. It’s good to help but in-between my teaching time. I take up a lot of my time trying to help others.”*  
(Salis/FG1)

Foundation phase elbow marking<sup>24</sup> is required in order to ensure that feedback and remediation takes place timeously<sup>25</sup>. Given the many interruptions, Kishaab noted that he had to complete this task after school. Salis, who taught in the foundation phase, also experienced other types of interruptions:

*“I do provide pencils, sharpen[ed] pencils for the learners however they keep breaking the [points of the] pencils and they want me to keep sharpening them and this actually is very, very annoying as it is we are fighting for time and the kids [are] very slow [they work] in completing their tasks, their daily tasks. You [have] got to be behind them all the time. [The] attitude of children [is] a major problem because the work doesn’t run very smoothly because [of] their attitude....That [is] another disruption. And also the attention span of the learners is very short. You [have] got to be busy with them all the time you [have] got to be with them all the time...”* (Salis/FG1)

Salis was an acting Head of Department and as such was expected to provide on-going feedback to her upper line management about teachers’ execution of work in her phase. The learning area specialist from the Department ensures that the work is consistent at each school so as not to disadvantage students. This meant that Salis had to assist Wasila after school and on weekends to comply with the demands of CAPS documents which have strict regulations for day-to-day work and set work for each period of the learning area.

### **3.3. Teachers’ counselling and social care work:**

The counselling and social care work from the previous category expands when teachers have to engage external interventions and involvement to resolve problems. The participants shed light on how counselling and social care work impacted on their workplace:

*“The learners from SPS are very different from learners from other schools eh...”* (F2/T3)

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<sup>24</sup> This is where the teacher assesses or marks work while learners are busy completing activities or tasks.

<sup>25</sup> The teachers give feedback to learners after the completion of a task or activity.

*“During the break... I am in my classroom in the break so when there is a problem, the learners come to me... Some of their grandparents are very sickly but their grandparents are bringing them up. Because of this they come to school with a lot of problems...” (F1/T2& F3/T4)*

*“Even though the time is to go home (after school) we’ve got to see (attend) what the parent [needs] and [listen to] their stories. Because the houses are so near the school, the kids take the problems home and immediately after school the parents are here with their kids. They feel they can come any time to discuss the problem...” (FG1/T3)*

Salis related how she takes it upon herself to offer guidance to learners during break as no psychological support is readily available for students, parents or teachers in distress. The above excerpt also shows how teachers’ care and concern create more work as it impinges on their personal time.

*“...as an experienced teacher we have to adapt. The country is changing, the syllabus is changing regularly. Everything has to change... so even our lives have to change. This is a challenging situation. We don’t want to teach the way we want to... Whatever we want to teach we have to integrate it adapt modify... They (learners) have lots of personal issues which disrupt teaching and it is very difficult for us as teachers who have not been exposed to situations like this before and sometimes we ourselves don’t know how to handle it and we got to get help from our peers.” (Masika/FG2.)*

This suggests that professionalism requires the development of new skills. This occurs during meetings after school. It enables learning area heads to come up with new knowledge to improve teachers’ work or inject fresh ideas. The excerpt above suggests that, regular changes in the syllabus create more work. The participants related that they had to integrate, adapt and modify their work in order to teach students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Incidental and sporadic work renders teachers’ work multidimensional and disrupts teaching:

*“Learners have lots of personal issues which disrupt teaching and it is very difficult for us as teachers who have not been exposed to situations like this before.” (Masika/FG2)*

In this context of disruption, teachers have to adjust and acclimatise to the additional work that alters the rhythm of teaching students content according to curriculum demands.

Lack of parental support in completing homework was noted by Salis, Nessa, Masika and Ranjis:

*“And when their parents come late at home at night almost at 8 or 9 then they are looking for their kids, so they got no parental guidance, they are actually neglected...” (Salis/FG2)*

*“They have lots of personal issues which disrupt teaching and it is very difficult for us as teachers who have not been exposed to situations like this before and sometimes we ourselves don’t know how to handle it, and we got to get help from our peers...” (Nessa/FG2)*

*“...Being in this school for so many years I have grown to love the children, the community.... I have also learnt to handle the parents. In fact I do feel very happy when parents do have problems they come to me...” (Salis/FG3)*

Parents and learners’ personal problems interfere with teaching time. Teaching is disturbed when parents interrupt class to seek help and counselling. While the participants indicated that they try their best to assist, this does interrupt and delay their work. A participant noted that:

*“...I will like to say although it is challenging to be in ...SPS... I look forward to coming to school every day for I feel I can bring out something positive from the learners ...” (F3/T2)*

This constructive approach to their work makes teachers’ work multifaceted because not every teacher can handle the challenges effortlessly and efficiently.

### **3.4. Teachers’ extra-curricular work:**

Extra-curricular work involves sports coaching, running the feeding scheme, providing transport when necessary and running school projects. The data presented here is but a fraction of the large volume of information that teachers provided about the nature of their additional tasks at SPS:

*“After school we engage co-curricular activities, sporting activities, staff meetings, and many other things like clerical work whatever we have missed out on. We catch up on whatever we have to do for the following day we prepare,, we have to catch up on that as well....” (FG1/T5)*

*“...we find that these kids are not exposed to the outside world” (F2/T4)*

*“...at the meetings we have there is so much more because in the afternoon when we make a list of the things we have 10 more 20 more things that we still have to do even though today’s things are not finished.”*  
(FG1/T3)

Tasks are not completed because there is simply not enough time. Students and parents assume that teachers will find solutions to their problems, even during staff meetings. Attending to parents and learners consumes the time available for preparation, teaching, breaks, and meetings. The participants stated that this makes it impossible for them to finish the agenda for the day. Family time has to be utilised to ensure that all regulatory requirements are complied with.

There is noticeable task differentiation in the teachers’ work which includes addressing social problems, safeguarding resources and ensuring that students with problems are assisted.

### **3.5. Teachers’ work is disrupted:**

As noted above, this theme intersects with teachers’ work being complex. Teachers’ primary work is to deliver the curriculum according to regulatory notional periods. However, teaching is disrupted when additional tasks, interruptions, demands and overload impinge on teaching time.

A typical workday at SPS involves a myriad of activities that begin before school officially starts and spill into actual teaching time. This section focuses on the combination of teaching and the disruptions that encroach on the framed period of a class lesson.

Whilst the class teacher was busy teaching, I observed that a teacher representative called on teachers to meet outside the Grade six classes to determine the number of teachers willing to attend a union meeting that was scheduled during teaching time. The meeting was deemed urgent and was condoned by the school management team in order to ensure that a letter could be drafted to parents to keep their children at home (O/D4). This school does not have the luxury of employing relief teachers due to insufficient funds. While teachers’ right to attend union meetings is accepted, other teachers are forced to take on additional work:

*...we have a problem of overcrowding and because we have very few teachers to serve relief. We have a problem where we have no voluntary parents to help us.” (F1/T3)*

Besides teachers’ routine work, sporadic work occurs unexpectedly. Teachers are thus required to attend to other tasks while teaching. This is termed non-formal work that is in addition to formal teaching in order to meet the requirements of the school. Relief teaching is non-formal, but requires tremendous effort. Teachers have to accommodate the relief students, keep them occupied and account for them in terms of official documentation. Furthermore, unexpected events happen throughout the day:

*“... and we also had burglaries here which also affected us very badly... Somebody fell, somebody hurt, somebody bleeding... You got to leave your lunch; you got to come to the office, you got to take the First Aid kit. You check to the learners and then you got to fill in the incident book, write a report” (Masika/FG2)*

As noted previously, lack of parental support in completing homework is a common problem. Ranjis and Salis also reported that learners are lethargic due to a lack of nutrition.

Excuses made by learners for not doing their homework included:

*“We have no electricity card... my granny was sick and she did not take me to her sister to use table to write my sums and daily news.... Nobody could understand the work at home to help me complete my composition...” (OD4)*

Whilst the teacher was taking the register, Thuto<sup>26</sup> began to howl in the Grade 3 class on the first day at school:

*“Mam I am hungry. I ate my last tasty meal on Friday at school. We had no food because my father is on short-time. Can I drink some water?”*

The teacher gave her fruit from her bag to eat outside.

*“Mm at school on Friday...I ate some bananas at the temple near our farm but there was no money to buy bread or jam....Mum is on short-time.... Faizel has no orders for work in his factory.” (OD1)*

## **5.7. Summary of teachers’ work is multifaceted**

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<sup>26</sup> Pseudonym

The final category that expands on teachers' work shed light on the multifaceted nature of such work. It covered their work related to their academic roles, teachers' mentoring work, teachers' counselling and social care work, their extra-curricular work and teachers' work is disrupted. The selected excerpts from the participants and participant observation deepen our understanding of teachers' work.

### **5.8. Summary of ethnographic field notes**

Despite efforts to transform the South African education system since 1994, teachers at SPS confront many challenges over and above their primary responsibility of teaching students. There is interference from the public domain, including other state departments that work with the Department of Basic Education. There is constant interaction and collaboration between the Departments of Social Welfare, Public Policing and Health in schools. Teachers are called upon to help solve problems that are either family related or directly affect a student, partly because residents in this area have no street addresses and do not have access to postal services. While there are named roads in the township some children come from farms as far as 30 kilometres from the school that have no postal address.

In addition to completing subject matter, Athika was called on to assist parents that are typically farm workers to fill in forms, cutting into teaching time. State departments call on the school unannounced. Although these teachers have been trained to teach, their work becomes multifaceted as they serve as untrained agents for other government departments. When there is fighting at the school gates involving schoolmates or the community members that constantly loiter around the school, teachers play the role of the police or doctors. Athika thus had to balance her obligation to complete subject content that is expected from her as an agent of education and additional work that has to be undertaken simultaneously.

The participants in this study comprised teachers who shared a broad identity as members of staff. They can be considered as agents of the State entrusted to disseminate the curriculum and fulfil the official vision for education. These teachers were connected to one another and were part of the same economic, political, and social interactions and networks because they complied with the same internal and external policy demands. From observations, it is clear that teachers face a barrage of demands before the school day even begins. Besides the

morning tasks and complaints and demands from learners, their parents and the school, they confront non-curricular burdens throughout the school day.

Signing the staff register precedes the routine morning briefing whilst teachers on duty prepare for assembly. Ranjis and Kishaab were also tasked with ensuring that the computers, photocopier, duplicating machine, telephone and cooking utensils that were stored in a vault overnight were assembled and ready before the secretary and cook organized the work schedule for the day.

The duties of class teachers escalate when prearranged auxiliary duties are imposed on them because students have to be trained and supervised for assembly presentations. There is also additional work in the mornings when teachers who take on extramural activities help their students to prepare for concerts and inter-school speech contests or shepherd latecomers from the public road that runs parallel to the school fence. The teachers have to undertake all of these duties outside of their daily contact time that is stipulated by policy. This involves self-sacrifice.

Ideally, teachers should arrive at school, present themselves at assembly and complete registration before moving into teaching. I observed that this did not happen because taking the register is a vexing task. Teachers are not only disturbed by parents with queries about their state grants or complaining about incidents of theft and violence, but by the caretaker bringing notices to be signed. The situation becomes worse when management interrupts the class by bringing in relief students who must be reallocated because their teachers are absent. The classroom becomes overcrowded and additional work must be set for the relief students while the set work continues with the regular class.

There were instances of teachers chasing stray dogs that entered the courtyard and classrooms, causing panic or a disturbance. I also observed feeding scheme officials walking into a classroom demanding statistics on meals provided to students. Five burglaries had already taken place at the school in the year the study was conducted. Utensils and groceries were taken, which meant that teachers were involved in additional administrative work as well as ensuring that students were taken care of since departmental

officials have to travel long distances to provide meals on time. Salis and Kishaab recounted that they asked local businesses for donations of groceries and fresh produce.

Thus, what is meant to be a day devoted to teaching becomes a time punctuated by disturbances. During my observations of Athika, I found that she spent a significant amount of time performing non-teaching activities. Salis and Athika also explained that there was insufficient time to teach important subject matter.

Besides the extraneous work that teachers undertake at school, their family time is sacrificed to complete administrative and organisational work. Incomplete work has to be done at home. Salis and Athika stated that their work could be completed in a day because many other things compromise their actual teaching work. Athika stated during a focus group discussion that administrative work takes almost two hours to complete at home. This additional work is over and above marking and collating assessment portfolios for students. Compiling the comprehensive statistics that the education authorities require involves data capturing that has to be done at home since one computer is shared by the entire staff.

During the fieldwork, it became clear that curriculum changes rendered teachers' work more complicated, demanding and multifaceted. Their work has intensified in terms of preparation, planning and assessment in terms of the CAPS and teachers who work in a context of adversity are forced to reconcile curriculum demands, policies and laws and their contextual challenges. Although the work is excessive, teachers who are committed to their profession continue to succeed amidst limited support and adverse conditions.

In addition to what was described by the participants, the literature notes regular changes in the syllabus, resulting in new ways to prepare teaching materials, and more time spent teaching and evaluating learners and the work itself. It follows that changing the syllabus or curriculum intensifies teachers' work at SPS. Administrative work, and counselling and social work also make teachers' work more complex, especially in a context of adversity with learners from low-socio-economic backgrounds.

A number of the participants cited learners coming to school late as a challenge to fulfilling curriculum requirements. I observed from Athika's class that some learners that lived on the



periphery of the school grounds could not come to school because their uniforms were either wet or had not been washed.

Teachers also noted that parents do not volunteer to assist in the governance of the school. However, while I was at the school the chairperson of the School Governing Body, who happened to be the grandfather of a learner, visited a few times to fix a broken door and to cut the grass with the help of learners during school hours. While the chairperson is tasked with overseeing operational matters like staffing, resources and infrastructure and behaviour matters the absence of the chairperson was noticeable, especially when serious problems arose at the school during my month long stay at SPS.

Furthermore, parents expect the school to attend to their needs such as complaints about their children, filling in forms for SASSA and selling their goods at the school and the school gates and to teachers. Poverty and unemployment result in young parents collecting social grants and community members turning to vending as a means to survive.

Coming to school late is a common occurrence in South African schools. While schools set rules, when these are not followed, teaching is disrupted. Parents and learners also raise personal problems during teaching time. While it was clear that the teachers at SPS were more than willing to assist, this interrupted their work.

Both Ranjis and Salis proudly recounted their learners' achievements despite limited resources. They compared their performance in sport to that of more affluent schools. Ranjis was proud that this school performed better than a school in another province where he taught. This suggests that learners are committed and enthusiastic.

During ground duty, when students should be at play or eating their lunch, I observed that, as a result of a car-jacking, police and emergency vehicles stormed into the school, creating mayhem. Because there is no gate anyone can invade the premises. Teachers on duty are further burdened by stray animals continually ambling on the grounds in search of food spilled by students. In some instances, teachers have to sacrifice their free time and attend to children during breaks.

Shivta Primary School is very under-resourced and visibly deprived. The derelict buildings have broken windows and cardboard is used a buffer against the rain, cold and wind.

Students are provided with a daily meal.. Donations of audio-visual material and technology often have a very short life-span at this school because they are stolen. The school is in close proximity to the community and delivery of food or other goods is very visible. The teachers complained that the little that they managed to acquire was stolen.

Few vehicles frequent this town and when any vehicle enters the school it stands out. I noticed parents pitching up minutes after welfare workers came to the school. They stated without inhibition that they saw the vehicle and decided to come and raise their queries.

Teachers' work is demanding in that in the foundation phase elbow marking<sup>27</sup> has to take place so that feedback and remediation is timeously provided<sup>28</sup>. Kishaab stated that, given the many interruptions, he had to complete this task after school. Teachers' competence is gauged not only by their actual teaching in class but also their assessments and administration. Athika explained that she took marking home to ensure that she was up to date.

Ranjis also stated that the time set aside for preparation and professional development after school has to be negotiated to address parents' concerns. It was evident that the teachers prioritised co-operation with the community over the execution of policies.

The support given by these teachers to parents and students is clearly driven by care and concern even though it creates more burdens as it impinges on personal time. Salis noted that a teacher has numerous daily jobs besides teaching and despite their best efforts, tasks remain unfinished. Family time is used to comply with regulatory requirements.

These participants' experiences reveal the multiplicity of their work. In engaging with students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, they are required to address social and moral issues. The fact that parents arrive home as late as 9pm not only explains why homework is incomplete, but why so many of the girls from their school fall pregnant or are raped.

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<sup>27</sup> This is where the teacher assesses or marks work while learners are busy completing activities or tasks.

<sup>28</sup> The teachers give feedback to learners after the completion of a task or activity.

The participants' clarification of their work at SPS indicate that, not only do they respect the regulations set by the Department of Basic Education, but they also display a positive mind-set in the face of severe adversity and on-going challenges.

There are also language barriers and literacy problems at SPS. Students whose home language is not English struggle with language and reading. In cases where the home language of the child is not the language<sup>29</sup> adopted at school, teachers' work becomes very complex. The lack of parental supervision at home also compromises students' performance.

Social problems also manifested themselves at SPS. Single parent struggled to bring their children to school on a regular basis and learners from a single-parent household often came late to school. This adds to teachers' work as they have to provide emotional support.

The data highlights the hardships facing families in Kalika. The growing financial and other hardships endured by students are distressing to the teachers at SPS and intensify their work.

Examples included learners called in by the HOD to explain the fights they got into during breaks in the Grade 6 blocks. Three Grade 7 boys were caught stealing from vendors and were called to the principal's office. Two Grade 3 learners from the same household, Duduzo and Simphiwe<sup>30</sup> (O/D2) were fighting over the gift of a box of crayons that Duduzo received from a visitor. Athika had to help the social worker organise a grant for four learners whose mother was the sole breadwinner. The father abandoned the family in 2003 (O/D1).

The most common points raised by the participants were their negative experiences of teaching in a setting of adversity and the challenges they face in attempting to assist learners. Such a setting of adversity not only affects learners' performance, but impacts on teaching. This is also true of other schools in South Africa. These challenges create a complex teaching environment where teachers are unable to fulfil their mandate. They also

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<sup>29</sup> The medium of instruction chosen by the school.

<sup>30</sup> Pseudonyms

undermine the quality of education at SPS and schools in other low socioeconomic areas in South Africa.

In summary, teachers' work includes their professional work as well as a commitment to the parents of their students during school hours. This intensifies the demands placed on these agents of the State who have the responsibility to fulfil its educational vision.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS**

#### **6.1. Introduction**

The previous chapter presented the data and the analysis of the nature of teachers' work in a context of adversity at SPS. This chapter presents and discusses the findings in line with the research questions. The key findings are drawn from chapter five and linked to the theoretical framework and reviewed literature.

Using ethnography as an interpretative methodology to understand the phenomenon of teachers' work from an individual perspective, I investigated interactions among participants in the focus groups, including the historical and cultural contexts within which the teachers'

work is performed. As Cohen et al. (2007, p. 22) suggest, “Events are not reduced to simplistic interpretations; new layers of understanding are uncovered as a phenomenon is thickly described. Interpretive theory is usually grounded (inductive), being generated from the data, not preceding it”.

The two overarching research questions were: what is the nature of teachers’ work in a context of adversity and how do teachers work within a context of adversity?

Teachers’ work in South Africa and in particular in SPS emerges within a framework of interaction, collaboration, fixed individual focus and interfacing at four levels. The highest level is the national education department that filters down to the provincial Department of Education which is divided into districts that evaluate, monitor and provide scaffolding to principals. This top-down approach imposes many demands on teachers, especially those whose students come from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

The fieldwork undertaken at SPS revealed that teachers battle to merge their formal and informal work. The multi-faceted work that teachers undertake and the choices they make whilst doing so, are complex and demanding and provide a nuanced perspective of what it means to work with state officials, education specialists, colleagues and students. The resilience displayed by the teachers at SPS enables them to balance regulated work and uncontrolled work. This cohesion of the material and formal elements portrays the reality of teachers’ work in a school where students come from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

## **6.2. The Outcome Space and the intensification of teachers’ work**

The intensification of teachers’ work refers to an overload of tasks and duties within a context of adversity in the face of resource limitations. This delays the teaching process and subjects teachers to additional work. Consistent with this finding, Ballet and Kelchtermans (2008) found that an increase in teachers’ workload reduces the time available to accomplish their tasks.

Life skills are a compulsory part of the curriculum in South African schools. It takes the form of promoting social well-being, addressing social ills, and awareness campaigns and

guidance to enable learners to understand the dynamics of the broader society. The findings show that teachers at SPS take such skills into account in their teaching.

The results also show that besides completing curriculum demands, teachers at SPS are called upon to perform many other duties such as helping learners to prepare talks to present at assembly. In the classroom, the rhythm of teachers' work is continually interrupted by counselling and social work among parents and learners. It is also disrupted by administrative work such as organising groceries for the feeding scheme when food is stolen and maintaining a paper trail on students that are monitored by officials of other state departments. Furthermore, there are constant changes in the curriculum.

Teachers' work increased, intensified, and expanded in response to national, provincial and internal policies. These findings are consistent with the literature on the state of teaching in schools in South Africa and other countries. For example, McNinch (2013) points to the intensification of teachers' work in Canada where teachers are exposed to increasing external pressure. Karmann and Lancman (2013) found that difficult working conditions and the organisation of schools as well as an increase in the workload intensifies teachers' work in South Africa.

The study's findings also revealed that the new curriculum has resulted in teachers' work becoming more complicated, demanding and multifaceted. Teachers have to adjust, update and modify their work in order to respond to new demands. More work is required to prepare, plan and conduct CAPS assessments. Teachers who work in a context of adversity thus have to reconcile curriculum demands and policies and their contextual challenges. Burchielli, Pearson and Thanacoody (2005) also found that teachers take on additional roles that increase their tasks and workloads.

Changes in curriculum have introduced new ways of preparing teaching materials, and increased the time spent teaching and assessing learners. In contexts of adversity such as SPS where learners come from low socioeconomic backgrounds, counselling and social work impose additional complex demands. The literature indicates that regular syllabus changes have a significant impact on teachers' work (Onwu & Sehoole, 2011).

### **6.3. The outcome space and complexity of teachers' work**

The previous section noted that teaching is compounded by various additional tasks. This section focuses on how work becomes complicated in addition to being multifarious.

Chika and Sehoole (2011) note that, working amidst severe socioeconomic challenges increases the complexity of teachers' work. This is consistent with the current study's findings. An example is what should be the simple task of taking the register at SPS. The results revealed that this task is rendered difficult due to constant interruptions by parents with queries and the fact that some children do not know their correct names. Strict attendance records are necessary to safeguard learners' safety.

Comber and Nixon (2009) found that teachers confront many challenges when they operate in a context of adversity. In SPS and many other South African schools, the need to provide pastoral care complicates teachers' work. Furthermore, socioeconomic challenges negatively impact the quality of education. Thus, the combination of routine, sporadic and incidental work renders teachers' work demanding and complex.

The analysis revealed that teachers develop responsive teaching strategies in such contexts. When students lose out on teaching time, this increases demands on teachers. Balfour et al. (2008) and Ball (2016) found that teachers take on responsibilities to teach content both inside and outside of the classroom.

#### **6.4. The outcome space and the emotionally charged demands of teachers work**

This study found that teachers at SPS provide extensive support to both students and parents, which is driven by care and concern. This impinges on the time allocated to teaching tasks and on their personal time. This is in contrast to the work of Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2009) that focuses on tasks on time and time on tasks that teachers have to attend to. At SPS, teachers' work was repeatedly rerouted to catch-up time.

The analysis shows that teachers who are dedicated to their work believe that they are there to make a difference to their colleagues, the community, regulators and most of all their learners. Furthermore, their work reveals the interplay of individual initiative and professionalism in the face of adversity.

Alexander (2011) and Books and Ndlalane (2011) refer to teachers' work as invisible and non-invisible which revolves around personal characteristics. Cervone and Cushman (2012) found that teachers who touch on social, emotional, and cultural aspects assist learners to develop a positive identity.

### **6.5. The outcome space and teaching in a context of adversity**

The analysis indicates that teachers at SPS adopt innovative patterns and trends to deal with their daily work. They are required to comply with regulatory demands, but also offer counselling and social assistance to learners and parents. This calls for coping skills and resilience. These findings are consistent with the work of Alexander (2007) and Christie (2010) who show that, through institutionalised situations and daily exchanges, one can create new knowledge.

The Alberta Teachers' Association (2012) also describes the multiple tasks that teachers have to undertake when working with students that are very dependent on their teacher. Swanepoel's (2009) comparative study of teachers in South Africa and six other countries reached similar conclusions.

The data presented in this thesis draws on daily conversations and interactions between the researcher and the participants to explore the nature of teachers' work. Their work was categorised into three groups. The first dealt with complexity of teachers' work under the themes: teachers' work is disrupted, teachers' co-curricular work and teachers' emotional and pastoral care work.

The second category analysed the demands of teachers' work which include teachers' routine work, teachers' administrative work, teachers' work related to academic roles and functions, teachers' regulatory work and teachers' time based work.

Finally, the third category elaborated on the multifaceted work of teachers, which embraced teachers' work related to academic roles, teachers' mentoring work, teachers' counselling and social care work, teachers' extra-curricular work and teachers' work is disrupted. The analysis resulted in three key findings: the intensification of teachers' work; complicated teachers' work and emotionally charged and demanding teachers' work.



These findings are in line with those of Harrison and Killion (2007), and Cervone and Cushman's (2012) studies in South Africa. Harrison and Killion (2007) found that teachers are resource providers, curriculum specialists, learning facilitators, mentors, data coaches and catalysts for change. The current study showed that teachers at SPS provide services to learners and their parents and take on additional teaching responsibilities.

The findings provide insight into what it means to teach learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Mulkeen (2005) notes, that, the fact that parents in rural areas are unable to support their children's schooling does not mean that teachers are unable to help them learn. Durlak et al. (2011) also observed that teachers who give of their time and resources to learners make a difference in enabling them to achieve their goals.

Onwu and Sehoole (2011) and Naidoo and Muthukrishna (2014) state, that, curriculum changes have made the work of South African teachers complicated, demanding and multifaceted. The participants at SPS agreed that their work had intensified in terms of the preparation, planning and assessment required by CAPS. Furthermore, given that they work in a context of adversity, they have to reconcile curriculum demands and policies with their contextual challenges.

#### **6.6. Key findings on the nature of teachers' work at Shivta Primary School**

Teachers' work occurs before, during, and after school. The first key finding of this study is that the participants remained committed to the school over the years despite setbacks and limited resources. This is an indication that the teachers at SPS showed resilience amidst the complex and demanding nature of their work. The principle of universal human culture is applicable because these teachers come from areas outside Kalika Township and each has their own biography and individual characteristics. The fact that they have been able to adapt is strong evidence of their allegiance to SPS.

The second finding is that the teachers networked and worked in partnership with one another at the school in order to cope with the complex nature and demands of their work. This finding is in line with Whitehead's (2005) conceptual model for the ethnographic study of cultural systems which highlights interrelationships between sociocultural contexts. The findings also resonate with the OST because the teachers at SPS also interact with other

systems like SASSA and the South African Police Services (SAPS) to undertake additional or unannounced work. The outcome space of teachers' work reveals the passion and commitment that teachers as agents at SPS display to the welfare and wellbeing of their students.

A third finding is that the teachers at SPS were both experienced and lacked experience. The former were required to mentor the latter, causing delays and interruptions in teaching. Echoing the principles of the cultural systems paradigm, the institutional dynamics reveal the interrelationship between sociocultural contexts within SPS of veteran teachers, novice teachers, assistant teachers and relief teachers. These teachers have introduced a process of mentoring their colleagues and offering scaffolding to those that require support in order to comply with the regulations. This lends itself directly to the norms and standards of teaching that address the contextual knowledge required by teachers and incorporate the internal and external micro and mesosystem related to their work, even if it means subsidiary work. This represents the interchange between the system and teachers' work within the environment.

In terms of the fourth finding, the literature on teachers' work identifies four categories: the nature of teachers' work; the complexity of teachers' work; demands in teaching and teachers' work in the context of adversity. It was highlighted that teachers' work is about teaching. This means that seek the best from their learners; have the right skills to perform their tasks; and are responsible and accountable for education-related decisions in and outside the classroom and the school. Furthermore, it was noted that in a low socioeconomic context, teachers self-direct their teaching by adapting, adjusting and acclimatizing to their work context. Finally, the literature review revealed that the vast number of tasks teachers may have to undertake at school indicates that their work is demanding and arduous.

A fifth finding is that teachers' work is regulated externally but the actual undertaking of this work is generated by them internally within their school. The context in which the work is undertaken is inherited by teachers at SPS that has low social, cultural, and economic capital. The balancing act that teachers display reveals their mettle as agents of educational change. While most teachers are equipped with pedagogical knowledge prior to entering the profession, they determine the methods and strategies they select to deal with inherent complexities or demands. However, the chosen method cannot ignore the delivery and

planning required by the regulations. This description of teachers' work reveals a compound set of interrelationships of interpreting and enforcing regulations and policies.

This sixth finding is that the transformation of teachers' work in South Africa from its racially segregated past means that many policies have been adopted to redress inequalities and inconsistencies. The legislation and policies are the cornerstones of teachers' work.

The study revealed that SPS lacks basic facilities such as a suitable playground, a library and resources. Teachers are called on to assist parents to apply for social grants. The school has been burgled on numerous occasions. The fact that SPS lies within the heart of the township gives parents and community members easy access to the premises. Indeed, the discussions and observations revealed that the community relies on the school. This finding is in line with the OST as teachers' work is constantly developed and not merely stabilized to suit the environment. Teachers create and recreate their work to adjust to challenges and demands.

Assisting parents cuts into teaching time and compromises teaching efficiency. Teachers have to focus on what is required for people to survive in rural communities as much as on the syllabus. This fits with the principle of *Ubuntu*<sup>31</sup>. The process and manner in which teachers work illustrate the dynamic equilibrium of formal work and material work.

The seventh finding is the socioeconomic setting in which SPS finds itself, makes this school vulnerable to unexpected demands on teachers. In executing their teaching duties, they are called on to construct their own knowledge of the dynamics of their students' backgrounds. The social distance between SPS and both the community of Kalika and the surrounding areas is complex.

Some learners come from homes in the township with low or no income, while others live on farms and walk long distances to school. Teachers have to manage a working relationship between the school and the community. Their work cannot be compared to that at schools that operate in a safe and secure environment. Instead of preparing to teach, these teachers have to ensure that teaching resources are secure and protected day in and day out. They are also called on to protect learners and promote learning despite constant interruptions.

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<sup>31</sup> *Ubuntu* is an Nguni term that means humanity towards others. It means to serve society unselfishly. (Wikipedia, 2017)

The eighth finding is that teachers are compelled to follow up on homework due to a lack of parental supervision, the fact that caregivers lack education and that learners are expected to perform household chores. Furthermore, many households lack electricity. Failure to complete homework means that this work has to be undertaken in class. While this may not be an ideal way of handling the situation, it is also a constructive way of helping students that have been absent.

This finding resonates with the principles of the cultural systems paradigm in that it focuses on the many interrelationships between teachers and students whilst work is executed and on how teachers adapt and adjust their work to suit students that come from disadvantaged homes. The interchange between the system and the environment is clearly reflected in the multifaceted tasks that teachers have to undertake to execute their work.

The ninth finding is that teachers develop skills after school during meetings. These occasions also assist learning area heads to come up with ways to address teaching challenges or to inject fresh ideas. This means that external sources also impact on teachers' work.

Regulatory demands mean that work has to be marked on time so that feedback and remediation can occur. The South African school curriculum has shifted from Outcomes Based Education (OBE) to the current CAPS. These systemic changes affect teachers' work at SPS both mentally and emotionally.

In addition to their other work, teachers have to ensure that stationery and resources are available in order to obtain good results in ANA and IQMS. These measures rate teaching at schools irrespective of the demands that teachers face.

Overall, this portrait of teachers' work in a rural township school shows that, their workload is different both in nature and in terms of the extent of de facto demands. In such situations, teachers' work tends more towards the moral and professional rather than to the contractual or formal aspects of work. The main reason is the reality of the environment in which the school is located.

The data presented in the previous chapter revealed the multifaceted demands on teachers in complying with the internal and external policies enshrined in the conditions of service as well as in the Norms and Standards for State employed teachers. The complexity of the

burdens imposed on teachers further intensifies what teachers' work constitutes in this particular context.

Teachers' work becomes overwork when a stock inventory has to be conducted to update records for the Department after each burglary at the school. At the time of the study, when the school year still had many months to run, it had experienced five break-ins. Furthermore, theft decreases the already sparse resources available.

While such conditions no doubt apply at most schools in low socioeconomic contexts, the study enabled me to make meaning of how students that live under difficult conditions reconstructed the work of teachers at SPS. It provided a new perspective on the composition of teachers' work as well as the institutional dynamics of a school that serves a community that is socially and economically disadvantaged.

### **6.7. Inferences on the nature of teachers' work at Shivta Primary School**

The rhythm of teachers' work is transformed due to continual interruptions and disruptions. In order to make the most of the time available, teachers have to negotiate time carefully. As agents of the State, they serve the communities under their care. How they choose to show their loyalty as representatives of the State will influence their work.

If 'effective evidence-based teaching' is to be the goal of SPS, teachers will have to be released from other non-instructional, time-consuming duties. Teamwork involves reflection and, under the current circumstances, teachers are not allocated time to collect, sort and analyse substantial learner data; this is a significant drain on their school and personal time. This data is essential for reflection. If additional staff were to be assigned to manage data, teachers would have more time during the school day.

Furthermore, the time taken to correct bad behaviour cuts into already limited instructional time, preparation time, and opportunities for collegial collaboration. Providing teachers with the resources and support to reduce classroom interruptions would add precious minutes to instructional time. Mandated learner assessments appear to be crowding out instructional and creative planning time. Scaling back on standardized testing would increase the time dedicated to student learning.

Teachers are required to do a great deal in many diverse areas and there is a high probability that they are not able to master new tasks and job requirements because there is too little time to learn. In order to ensure that the numerous and diverse school initiatives are implemented effectively in response to district mandates, teachers should be provided with more time to learn the programme essentials.

The time demands on teachers threaten the opportunities they have to care for the social and emotional needs of their students. Partnering with community organizations to address social-emotional issues and bringing additional resources into the school (i.e., hiring more psychologists, counsellors, and social workers) would relieve teachers from having to multitask while responding to students' emotional needs. Teachers arrive at school early and leave after the time stipulated in the regulations.

## **6.8. Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented and discussed the study's findings on teachers' work in a context of adversity in SPS. The results of the analyses set out in chapter five reveal that teachers' work at this school is intensified, complicated, multifaceted and emotionally demanding. The discussion focused on the nature of teachers' work in a context of adversity and how teachers work within such a context.

The findings show that the rhythms of teachers' work are interrupted and disrupted by multifaceted demands from learners, parents and the school to provide counselling, social work and administrative work.

The results also illustrate the manner in which teachers undertake their work. They show how they act as well as react to the complexity and challenges that learners present. Constant interruptions render teachers' work complex, demanding, emerging and intensified rather than stable and coherent.

The findings also point to the internal and external challenges facing SPS which impact on teachers' work. Common challenges were a lack of parental support for learners and coming late to school. It was found that the teachers offer emotional support and care to learners.

The work of teachers at SPS is thus intense, complicated, emotionally charged and demanding. While this may be true of many schools, the degree of intensity is peculiar to a school in a rural setting, resulting in heightened adversity.

The following chapter presents an overall conclusion as well as recommendations arising from the study's findings.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **7.1. Introduction**

As a teacher for the past 30 years, my career was heterogeneous as I have taught learners from urban settings as well as township settings on the South Coast of KwaZulu-Natal. Having moved through these various schools, I noticed that socio-economic and geographical settings have a major impact on the types of education offered as well as the work that a teacher has to execute.

“There is a direct relationship between socioeconomic development, the eco-technical complexity of a community and the development of its educational systems. Urban environments are characterised by multiple stressors, including aspects like poverty, violence, crime and gangs, with very few resources available to counter the pressures associated with these stressors (Anderson et al, 2007: 347). Therefore this relationship has direct implications for education as a community” De Wet & Marike, 2009, p. 303-304).

I had to consciously create and sustain a professional identity which was a daunting social and psychological process. I was thus keen to find out more about the intensity of teachers' work with learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds. I wanted to establish whether the pedagogic approach of these teachers was the same as any other teacher in the state education system. Above all, I aimed to identify the primary factors that enabled these teachers to function on a daily basis.

This study explored teachers' work in a context of adversity at SPS in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. It aimed to explore and document the phenomenon of teachers' work in a context of tribulation and to establish how they succeed at educating their students. While much is known about the teaching process, there is a paucity of work on the tasks involved. I thus sought to determine how teachers shape, adjust and adapt their work in a township environment where there is a shortage of teaching and other resources.

Following a review of the literature on the nature of teachers' work, narrative discourse analysis, based on a qualitative research approach with an ethnographic foundation was adopted to conduct this study. Shadowing a teacher, focus group interviews and observations were used to obtain data on what constitutes teachers' work.

Chapter one presented an introduction to the study, the problem statement, the purpose of the research, and the study's objectives and central research questions and located the study within the literature.

Chapter two presented the study's conceptual and theoretical framework and chapter three reviewed the literature relevant to the topic. It discussed the complexity of teachers' work, demands in teaching, and teachers' work in the context of low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Chapter four presented the methodology employed to conduct the study, including data sources and data collection as well as data analysis.

Chapter five presented and analysed the data gathered and chapter six presented and discusses the study's findings. Finally, chapter seven presents an overall conclusion, recommendations arising from the findings and suggestions for future research on the nature of teachers' work.

## **7.2. Summary**

Four themes emerged from the review of the literature on teachers' work, namely, the nature of teachers' work; the complexity of teachers' work; the demands in teaching and teachers' work in the context of adversity. Social constructionism was adopted as the theoretical framework for this study, which focused on teachers' constructions of the socio-historical, cultural and situational resources used to make meaning of their work in a context where the students come from low socioeconomic backgrounds.



The literature also identified six roles of teachers, as resource providers, curriculum specialists, learning facilitators, mentors, data coaches and catalysts for change. These roles are the foundation of what constitutes the nature of teachers' work. A critical interpretive perspective was employed to establish the heterogeneity in the risks experienced by teachers working in a context of adversity and to shed light on how teachers at this ethnographic site created and recreated their work to fit the dynamics of their work context.

The exploration of teachers' work from the study participants' perspectives revealed an autotelic teacher and the buoyancy of teachers' work in moving from pressure to positive tasks as agents of transformation in education. The review also highlighted differences in socioeconomic backgrounds. Furthermore, teachers make different efforts to impart knowledge to learners. The participants' accounts included stories of individual champions who succeeded despite impediments.

Teachers work with learners from diverse cultural backgrounds as well as a multifaceted curriculum. The literature review revealed that demands on teachers centre on planning, implementing, observing and reflecting, and contributing to the transformation of teaching. Furthermore, differentiation and intensification of teachers' work was noted across countries. At SPS, teachers demonstrated resilience despite their incongruent workload. They thus displayed positive agency in fulfilling their responsibilities.

The literature review revealed that teachers' work can be visible and nonvisible in relation to personal characteristics, which brings out learners' humanness. It also pointed to the fact that socioeconomic challenges affect what happens at schools. Thus, teachers occupy complex social, educative and professional roles in education systems. The teachers at SPS transformed rather than reproduced educational differences in a fractured context that made their work demanding, complex and multifaceted.

The literature on South Africa noted that teachers' work is controlled by strict policies and regulations. While the teaching profession's status has diminished, teachers are still bureaucratically controlled and accountable for non-performance. It was also noted that there have been major changes in the state of South Africa's schools as a result of the lack of support for teachers' work. Teachers' workloads have increased and those that work in a

context of adversity, especially in rural settings, confront further challenges, with their learners deprived of proper education. The differences in teachers' work situations are frequently 'misrecognised' in terms of teachers' output. Teachers' affinity to their work in poor socioeconomic environments is overlooked. Furthermore, teachers' efficiency can be attributed to their individual autotelic forte rather than the different working conditions under which they serve.

Data were generated from relevant key participants at SPS. The findings revolved around three concepts, namely, intensification of teachers' work, complexity of teachers' work and emotionally charged and demanding teachers' work. The results revealed that, firstly, besides completing curriculum demands, teachers attend to many other tasks, including preparing learners to present talks at assembly and counselling and social work directed towards parents and learners. Administrative work, additional regulatory work, sporadic work and incidental work also disrupt their teaching. At SPS, the complex rhythms that are constructed as a result of this complexity, demands and multifaceted work are handled with accuracy and flexibility. Time taken from regulated work according to CAPS to attend to other work requires that teachers adjust their tempo by speeding up some work and slowing down when necessary.

This monaural connotation of teachers' work highlights the rhythm where teaching is continually interrupted by parents, feeding scheme officials, Social Welfare officials, and the community at large as well as constantly changing curriculum demands. Teachers' work has thus increased, intensified, and expanded in response to state, provincial and internal policies. Given the punctuated rhythm, one cannot deny that teachers work is complex and demanding.

Thus, teachers' work at SPS has intensified in terms of preparation, planning and assessment in terms of CAPS, and the context of adversity forces them to reconcile curriculum demands, policies and laws into an ensemble to suit their contextual challenges. Furthermore, the changing curriculum introduces new ways of preparing teaching materials, time spent to teach and time spent to assess learners and the work itself. It follows that changing the syllabus or curriculum intensifies teachers' work at SPS. The analysis also confirmed that changing the syllabus regularly causes teachers at SPS to integrate, adapt and modify their ways of teaching. Counselling and social work constitute indirect demands and increase the

complexity of teachers' work in a context of adversity with learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

The multifaceted work described above means that teachers in low socioeconomic contexts require distinctive consistency and organisation compared to other contextual settings. These teachers have to construct their own battery of skills and competencies to perform their work to meet the demands and expectations imposed by government policies.

Secondly, from the perspective of the complexity of teachers' work at SPS, the findings revealed that teachers' potential to innovate in a context of adversity leads them to develop more learning schemata. It was found that learners lose out on teaching time, negatively impacting the quality of their education in a poorly resourced school and increasing demands on teachers who have to make up for lost time. These teachers have to ensure that academic standards are upheld as well as allow student input. The teachers at SPS have created a chain of command of capital so that their work becomes equal if not better than their co-workers.

Thirdly, it was found that teachers are driven by care and concern and make a difference to their colleagues; community members, regulators and most of all to their learners. Despite the complexity and demands of work in a context where students come from low socioeconomic backgrounds, these teachers demonstrated an admirable degree of accountability in terms of pastoral care at various levels of the open system in which their work is situated.

Therefore, the nature of teachers' work at SPS is complicated, demanding and multifaceted. The many interruptions render this work complex, demanding, emerging and intensified rather than perpetual, permanent and coherent.

### **7.3. Objectives of the research revisited**

The main objective of this study was to investigate the nature of teachers' work in a context of adversity at SPS in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The specific sub-objective was outlined and analysed, including the conceptualisation of teachers' work through the use of a framework of social constructionism. This was covered in chapters two and three, with emphasis on the learners and the teaching environment. Chapter four presented the methodology employed to explore the nature of teachers' work. Interpretative discourse was used to analyse the data and report on the themes arising from the analysis. An additional

sub-objective focused on teachers' regular work and this was addressed in chapter five that highlighted the sporadic and incidental work of teachers and how interruptions increase their workload. This addresses their negative experiences of teaching in a context of adversity and the challenges teachers face in attempting to assist learners. Teachers revealed their emotional entanglement in providing care. They are forced to reconcile curriculum demands, policies and contextual challenges. A further sub-objective was why teachers work within contexts of adversity in the way that they do. This was addressed in chapters five and six. The findings revealed an emphasis on moral and professional rather than contractual or formal aspects of teachers' work. These teachers perform their work with passion, care, concern and emotion. Finally, chapter 7 presents the conclusion and recommendations based on the findings in chapters five and six.

#### **7.4. Conclusion on the nature of teachers' work**

The study's findings are regrouped in four facets to indicate the final results. The first touches on the intensification of teachers' work, the second facet deals with complicated teachers' work, the third analyses the emotionally charged and demanding nature of teachers' work and the fourth facet analyses teaching in a context of adversity.

This study adopted an interpretive perspective to establish the heterogeneity in risks experienced by teachers working in a context of adversity and to shed light on how teachers at this ethnographic site created and recreated their work to suit the dynamics of their work context. The results revealed a clear distinction between regulatory expectations and the pragmatic reality of the structural and institutional characteristics of this study site. The evidence from the participants showed that the rhythm of teachers' work is constantly interrupted by different tasks, including counselling and social work; administrative work; and sporadic and incidental work.

It was found that teachers fashion a pattern of responses characterized by creatively adapting and adjusting their work in a context where incidental work surpasses the formal elements of regulated work. Moreover, the multiplicity of interactions that make up teaching reveals teachers' work as complex, demanding, emerging and intensified rather than permanent and

coherent. As a consequence, teachers at SPS constructed a structure of individuals within the school to operate after work to respond to pending matters.

Furthermore, the results revealed that it is difficult to take the register because of constant interruptions from parents and learners. Teachers also expressed their emotional difficulties in addressing the type of challenges they face on a regular basis. Two factors stand out in the manner in which these teachers work with learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The first is how they act and the second is how they react to the complexity and challenges that learners present by means of the behaviour they manifest at school. Teachers intervene with empathy in most of the classes at SPS to situations resulting from a lack of parental support. Therefore, the work of teachers at Shivta is intense, complicated, emotionally charged and demanding.

The participants also reported that providing basic academic and instructional programmes for students is intertwined with pastoral care to address behavioural problems that complicate their work as well as offering scaffolding to enable students to acquire social skills to deal with setbacks at home. While it could be argued that this is the case in most schools in South Africa, the degree of intensity is peculiar to a school in a rural, adverse setting.

### **7.5. Implications for the nature of teachers' work**

The first implication of this study's findings is that the everyday world of teachers who work in a context of adversity has to be adaptable because of its complexity, demanding nature and high likelihood of disruption. Regular interruptions occur due to the need for counselling, and social and administrative work. If there are regularities within the social domain, they are derived from the collective features of individual agency and institutions, and common processes of teachers' work.

Teachers play an important role in schools in a context of adversity such as SPS. The way in which they perform their work forms the glue that binds the community together. They are the heart of the community, ensuring that the demands of the State are met irrespective of the contextual challenges they face.

Learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds place demands on teachers' work due to repeated interruptions. Such work requires an intellectual investment that draws upon personal and professional capacities and experience. The advocacy and demonstrated efficacy of teachers at SPS show that, despite the complex and demanding nature of their work due to educational reforms, they are genuine agents of change in the democratic era.

Teachers assume a number of roles in their work in schools and classrooms. The profession has always adapted classroom instruction and out-of-classroom practices in response to changing educational trends and policy demands. The strong control of teachers' work exerted by the State involves deskilling and reskilling to accommodate curriculum transformation.

Teachers working in a context of adversity need to adapt to what can be intense pressure that take a toll on their emotions, and on their stamina as well as hampering their actual work, which is to teach. Teacher interactions with students and colleagues extend beyond conventional classroom practice. Their experiences and intentions on the one hand, and administrative and collegial expectations on the other, shape teachers' work at SPS.

Student behaviour, the level of disadvantage, school leadership, and support and feedback all inform the situational dimension. The personal dimension is situated in life outside school and is related to family and social roles. Teachers' work comprises interactions between professional, situated and personal dimensions. The professional dimension reflects social and policy expectations of teachers' work and the educational ideals of the teacher.

It is evident from how teachers work at SPS that they face a continually increasing workload that includes counselling, and social and administrative work apart from teaching. They thus have to constantly exercise control in terms of constructed rather than constituted work. Such reskilling impinges on actual teaching but illuminates teachers' work as the mining of additional abilities that from their autotelic self.

In the case of this ethnographic study, non-teaching experiences by far outweigh what the teacher is actually required to do according to the National Framework for Teachers or the Norms and Standards for Teachers. National policy is silent on teachers who work in contexts

where learners are from low socioeconomic backgrounds. However, it stands to reason that teachers' work cannot be measured by means of a single metric.

### **7.6. Challenges in teachers' work in a context of adversity**

The focus group interviews revealed the ways in the teachers at SPS address the complex nature of their work demands. Firstly, the teachers deal with a multiracial, multi-ethnic, and multilingual learner population. The adversity that prevails forces them to make sacrifices and adjustments to fine-tune their work in this school so that its formal elements accord with the norms and standards outlined in national policies.

Secondly this particular context can present many challenges and opportunities for teachers. They experience educational challenges associated with disadvantage as well as restricted classroom space. Teachers also have to provide assistance to parents when problems arise.

Thirdly, teachers working in a context of adversity acclimatise themselves to the conditions of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds. Their work constitutes what Rock calls the "dance of deception" (2006) because of the interrupted rhythm and unexpected modifications to their routine to deal with learners' personal, emotional, intellectual and social problems. For instance, the feeding scheme which is designed to provide nutrition for learners imposes a burden on teachers because time is misused in the implementation of the scheme and this infringes on their work.

Besides the curriculum and societal demands that intensify teacher's work, teachers perform duties after school which are not supervised or recognised by the employer.

### **7.7. Recommendations**

The constructionist paradigm posits that reality is socially created, which means that there are various ways of seeing the world and of generating perceptions, attitudes, opinions and knowledge. Regulatory policies that adopt a 'one size fits all' approach are inequitable, unfair, unjust and discriminatory. Based on the study's findings, recommendations are offered to address the inequitable rating of teachers' work. The participants' complex

experiences could be tested against other areas and provinces in order to inform measures to address the differentiated nature of teachers' work.

Besides reviewing policies and systems, there should be a concerted effort on the part of the State to revisit teacher training as well as training for novice teachers. Teachers' conditions of service should also be reviewed to pave the way for the IQMS which could be a benchmark to ensure that the State benefits optimally from its agents.

### **7.8. Suggestions for further research**

Future studies could focus on:

- Teachers' work in a context of adversity in an urban area, working with students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. This would provide a more comprehensive picture of what teachers' work entails.
- Studies that involve more participants on how the relative poverty of students amplifies teachers' work while meeting regulatory requirements.
- Supplementary work to develop psychological support to teachers in the form of workshops, conferences and seminars both nationally and internationally in order to ensure that the dynamics of working in a rural school are recognised and understood.

### **7.9. Recommendations for professional advancement**

The following recommendations are offered for practitioners in the field of teaching:

- Funding should be injected into rural township schools across the country to promote quality education, especially for historically disadvantaged learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds. This could be used to support for relief teaching and professional support for teachers to meet the CAPS requirements.
- Policies should be context-sensitive and aligned with the different demographics of schools in the democratic South Africa, and teachers' working conditions should be taken into consideration.



- The national feeding scheme should be dealt with by a separate department outside of school hours. Furthermore, it should be extended to nutritionally deprived students in all state schools.
- Townships schools that cater for learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds should be granted additional funding to support students that are not supported by social grants, and to provide psychological support, counselling and social work. Furthermore, readily accessible structures should be available to provide psychological and emotional support to teachers and to train them to deal with students with challenges due to their home backgrounds.

### **7.10. Concluding Remarks**

*“Although we face many problems and challenges at our school I look forward every day to come to school and be with my kids. I feel that I can help them to turn their lives [around] and I can have a positive impact on them and I find that teaching is a very fruitful profession” (Salis, FG1).*

This excerpt eloquently expresses the attitude of a teacher who has reconciled the dissonance between the ideal and the real and who has achieved work satisfaction despite the challenges and complexity that the context presents.

This chapter began by revisiting the research questions and discussing the study’s results. It clarified, interpreted, discussed, and explored teachers’ work in a context of adversity in line with the study’s theoretical framework. The difficulties confronting teachers were noted, such as top-down bureaucratic control.

The Fit-Choice framework discussed in chapter two supports the conclusion that teachers’ work is a combination of multiple tasks that take place irregularly. The study found that such work involved regulated work, created work and recreated work. The choices that a teacher makes whilst working with learners from a low socioeconomic background involve balancing the requirements set out in their job description and going the extra mile to justify their career choice.

Besides the Fit-Choice framework, teachers' work takes on a new dimension that is revealed in the patterns of work that each teacher chooses to display. The ways in which teachers presented their work led to it being classified as administrative, academic, professional, and altruistic, inspired by *Ubuntu*, conforming to the regulatory demands of the curriculum, or simply a means of being employed.

The recommendations set out in this chapter would promote a bottom-up approach to refashion the associated work that arises in teaching. It is hoped that they will assist policy makers to evaluate, update and customise teachers' work to suit the socioeconomic and cultural context of particular teaching environments. This would, hopefully, also result in unbiased appreciation of teachers' work and appropriate and more equitable rewards, benefits and conditions of service that move beyond the 'one-size-fits-all' mentality.

### **7.11. Limitations of the Study**

This study focussed on teachers' experiences of their work in a context of adversity and did not include management's opinions on the work of teachers at their school.

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