Challenges Influencing the Professional Context of the Foundation Phase Teachers in Rural and Township Schools in South Africa

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Abstract

South Africa is one of the most unequal societies in the world (Breetske, 2018), which also is visible in the schooling system, ranging from private, inner-city, township and rural schools. The general perception is that there is an ongoing crisis in South African education, and that the current system is failing the majority of South African's youth (Spaul, 2013). There is worldwide consensus that the quality of education should already be addressed in the foundation phase, spanning the first three years of formal education. This article explores the perceptions of 282 foundation phase teachers predominantly in rural and township schools on various aspects regarding the education system. Using the theoretical framework of Mockler (2011) to assess teacher professional identity, the first dimension of teacher identity, namely personal experience, was used as lens to conduct the empirical study. Four themes emerged, namely competence, relationships, school context and challenges. Findings indicate that foundation phase teachers in general have positive attitudes towards various education related matters, but their perceptions were associated with the types of schools where they were teaching. Lack of resources and overcrowded classrooms were highlighted as manifestations of inequality.

1.　Introduction and Background

The year 1994 announced the dawn of democracy in South Africa, which brought about important changes in all spheres of life. Education was one of the sectors which was radically transformed (Hannaway, 2013), as all institutions, once characterized by their segregated policies, opened their doors to the diverse learner population. Unfortunately, education in South Africa is experienced by the media and a number of education experts as being in a state of major crisis (Spaull, 2013). Reasons can be attributed to various factors such as teaching posts that had not been renewed, poor management, strikes that leave thousands of classes without teachers, learning material not reaching schools and consequently the low morale of teachers (Kamper & Steyn, 2013). A further stumbling block for teachers relates to is classrooms becoming more diverse in terms of language, cultures and subsequent learning needs. Adding to this discourse, Kubow (2018:162) dubs the South African schooling system as unequal, and coins it a "space divide" which is "demarcated physically (geophysical locale), emotionally (citizen well-being), epistemologically (knowledge preference), and culturally (value status)" (Kubow, 2018:162). Kubow (2018) further argues that the South African education system is catering for two distinct groups, the one group consisting of white learners who receive quality education and are therefore guaranteed of a career, as opposed to black learners who receives inferior education due to inadequate resources, and overcrowded classrooms, "resulting in unemployment or low wages

from one generation to the next".

Various studies refer to the inequality of the South African education system (Bantwini & Feza, 2017; Msila, 2017; Ebersöhn, 2014; Spaull, 2013). Bantwini and Feza (2017) explain that schools are divided according to funding allocation purposes. Schools are categorized into five quintiles, where Quintiles one to three (Q1-3) represent poor schools, Q1 being the poorest. These schools are classified as no-fee schools, and 60% of learners are educated in these schools, which are predominantly situated in rural and township areas. Quintile four and five schools are fee-paying schools, and are therefore catering for more affluent learners, and mainly located in urban areas. Spaull (2013: 5,6) further explains that the Quintile four and five schools cater for the wealthiest 20-25% learners, who then also receive a much better quality of education due to sufficient resources, the best teaching and exposure to various forms of education. "These two education systems can be seen when splitting pupils by wealth, socio-economic status, geographic location and language. (Spaull, 2013:5,6).

Teachers are in the ideal position to address these inequalities, but Msila (2017) reports that it recently came to lights that up to 4000 teachers quit the teaching profession annually due to frustration because of curriculum changes, teacher burnout, and an environment that Ebersohn (2014:569) describes as "intolerable due to poverty and poor service delivery".

Arends and Phurutse (2009:2) maintain that many countries are confronted by increasing problems in the provision of education. Ferguson and Johnson (2010:302) for example report that within the next three years, at least 25% of beginning teachers in the United States will leave the profession. The Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) in South Africa found in 2008 that about 30 000 teachers left the profession annually, and only between 6 000 and 7 000 completed their studies (Van Niekerk 2008:10). More than half of 20 000 former teachers indicated in an opinion poll that they left the teaching profession because of low job satisfaction as a result of workload, inadequate remuneration and lack of professional status and respect (Hall et al., in Kruss 2008). These findings are even more alarming in view of the development that the retention and training of teachers have not kept up with the growth rate of the school-going population (Hall et al., cited in Kruss 2008:112).

The results from a survey on Foundation Phase teacher production done by Green et al. (2011) reveal that only 1.5% (2 out of 135) Black students were expected in the final (fourth) year of study at one of the largest former White universities in South Africa. Furthermore, the survey highlighted that only 13% (168 out of 1275) of all early childhood teachers trained in South Africa in 2009 were Black – this against an estimated need to replace 3275 Black early childhood education teachers which the education system would lose through attrition in that year (2009) (Green et al. 2011:116). Foundation Phase teacher production by public higher education institutions in South Africa falls short of national and provincial needs. Consequently, the training of African language Foundation Phase teachers (Black teachers) is particularly problematic, especially in the context of mother-tongue instruction in the early years. This, say De Villiers and Degazon-Johnson (2007), may be caused by school-leavers' perceptions about more attractive job opportunities, the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic on the teaching profession and the

emigration of numerous teachers to "greener pastures", often in the private sector.

Consequently, the question arises as to what the current state of teachers in the education profession is, and how aforementioned negative circumstances impact on the South African teacher's identity. To answer this question, the working conditions and educational settings in which the teacher operates, should be explored.

2. The Plight of the Contemporary Teacher

Brock (2012:233) points out that in the past two decades teachers "[have] been knocked off their pedestal by a whole range of new voices at a number of levels outside of education- such as politicians, policy writers, and even partners – but the definition of teachers' work has also been dramatically redefined". The educational role of the teacher has therefore out of necessity expanded to meet the demands of various sectors of society. In this regard Samuel (2008:9) points out that parents leave their children in the care of teachers, expecting the teachers to inspire and educate their children. Rademeyer (2008) is more forceful when she says that many schools are nothing more than education dumping grounds, where parents hope that teachers will be able to deal with their children educationally as best they can. Pretorius (2008:172) adds that education these days faces new challenges, namely to take on the responsibilities of institutions such as the church and family. Lovat and Nielsen (2009:126) attribute the additional moral responsibility of the teacher to the failure of the family to model values such as personal integrity, social development, self-reflection and moral and spiritual awareness.

Society also has certain expectations about teaching and the teacher. Zhao (2010:422) states that education, and therefore the teacher should aim at preparing today's children for being the future citizens, whereas declining economies are also pinning their hopes on education to bring about a turning point, and throughout the ages, governments have considered teachers as change agents. According to Samuel (2008:8), South African teachers are regarded as "service providers" who bear the responsibility of making a success of the aims and ideals of the state's transformation agenda.

Owing to unfulfilled transformation expectations, education systems worldwide are held accountable for social ills. Teachers are increasingly made scapegoats that are simply not able to realize the state and social objectives of education and the education system. The poor performance of learners is also simplistically blamed on the teachers' inabilities (Samuel 2008: 6). According to the policy document entitled Norms and Standards for Educators (Republic of South Africa, 2000), which sets out the teacher's roles and competencies, teachers are expected to do far more than classroom practices. Samuel (2008:6) states that teachers are expected to fulfil multiple roles which go beyond their classroom practices. The expected roles and identities related to the classroom responsibilities are: learning mediator, interpreter and designer of learning programmes, learning area/subject/discipline phase specialist, and assessor. The additional social responsibilities are leader, administrator, scholar, researcher and lifelong learner, and fulfilling a community, citizenship and pastoral role. Being efficient in these roles is a mammoth task, since the learning environment is often characterized as a place in which a

distorted concept of human rights dictates the rules (Steyn, 2008), causing learners to become largely untouchable. No wonder the expectations of parents and society regarding teachers can simply become too much for many teachers.

In summary, the considerable social pressure currently placed on teachers, leads to expectations and demands that border on the impossible. Nevertheless, the status and position of teachers in society is often regarded with skepticism, sometimes even disrespect. It is not surprising that a growing number of school leavers do not consider choosing teaching as a career, and that more and more teachers leave the profession. Samuel (2008:9) rightly attributes this to "the responsibilities being placed on teachers becoming increasingly unrealistic and unattainable". Bearing this in mind, the professional identity of the teacher – in other words teachers' perceptions about their work and how they do it (Zhao, 2010) should be debated. In this regard Royer and Moreau (2016:135) note that research has given "little attention …. to the subjective experiences of early childhood educators".

3.   The Professional Identity of the Teacher

Various researchers point to the fact that no single explanation or definition can be ascribed to the concept 'teacher identity' Ballantyne, Kerchner and Aróstegui, (2013:212) maintain that teacher identity is not something that is fixed nor imposed; but that it is established through experience and the interpretation of that experience. Mockler (2011:518) on the other hand asserts that the concept 'teacher professional identities' is used to refer to the way that teachers, both individually and collectively view and understand themselves as teachers. Whereas Cross and Hong (2012:958) note that teacher identity tends to shape the role of teachers in the classroom by determining how they interact with their learners, the instruction and learning goals they set and how they organize the teaching –learning situation to meet these goals. Trent (2011:529) points to the dynamic quality of teacher identity as a "process of becoming" and Marsh (in Trent, 2011) refers to the fact that teachers are continually involved in the "fashioning and refashioning" of their identities. Dang (2013:49) agrees when saying that identity is "an on-going process of negotiating and interrelating multiple I-positions in such a way that a more or less coherent and consistent sense of self is maintained through tout various participations and self-investments in ones 'working life".

Hansen (2001:1) mentions another aspect of teacher identity when he says that the social identity of the teacher is formed on the basis of the broader community's view of the profession and this is echoed by Schepens, Aeltermann and Vlerick (2009:361) who maintain that the teacher's professional identity is influenced by "conceptions and expectations of other people" which may "conflict what teachers personally desire and experience as good teaching". Kamper and Steyn (2013) agree when maintaining that opinions about education, that is, opinions that people have about teachers and the profession, have implications for the professional identity of the teacher. These opinions influence teachers' perceptions about their work and how they do it; they also determine what is reported on in the media and in research; they play a role in the expectations that learners have of their teachers and they are indicative of how politicians and

policy-makers assess teachers. Teachers' perceptions about their work and how they do it are necessarily influenced by these societal opinions about teaching. "In short, conceptions of what teaching is, and of what it is for, make a difference in educational thought and practice" (Hansen 2001:1). Today teachers are only too aware of the low status they have in society. Arends and Phurutse (2009: 31) call this "teacher bashing" and attribute it to "negative public images of teaching". Samuel (2008) shows convincingly how a teacher's professional identity is formed on the basis of the community's perception of teaching as a career. Subsequently the professional identity of the Foundation Phase teacher will be discussed.

3.1 The Professional Identity of the Foundation Phase (Early Childhood) Teacher

Although it is widely recognized by educational researchers that preschool education is the basis for lifelong learning (Aidoo, 2008), and countries worldwide is recognizing the importance of early childhood development as preparing young children for their future responsibilities as citizens of a democratic society (Schoeman, 2005), Vrinioti (2013:151) notes that "the classic definition of *profession* and *professionalism* does not apply to the field of early childhood education and care" and therefore does not enjoy the same prestige and privileges of other professions. In this regard Lazzari reports that in Europe there is currently a growing interest in professionalization policies "grounded in an awareness of the crucial role played by the workforce in guaranteeing high-quality educational experiences to young children" (Lazzari, 2012:252). Stamopoulos (2012:42) agrees when saying that "no longer is their [early childhood teachers] role predominantly to teach children. Rather it is to lead with intent, mentor and advocate in their wok context in partnership with children and families, within community settings and in response to federal and state educational initiatives targeting children from birth to age eight years".

As with the concept "teacher identity", professionalism is also a multifaceted and broadly defined concept. Vrinioti (2013:158) maintains that all definitions "agree that the main feature of professionalism is the implementation of scientific knowledge towards solving today's problems by using reflective ability". As various countries and also various training institutions have their own curricula, it can be accepted that a general description of professionalism cannot be ascribed to the teacher in early childhood and consequently that the professional identity of the early childhood teacher will differ from county to country. For the purpose of this study, and specifically in the South African context, we also see identity as a "sociocultural construct that include all aspects of a teacher's life" (Bjuland, Cestari & Borgersen, 2012:405) and therefore take the stance of Brock (2012:28) who views professional identity: "as a complex changing phenomenon located in specific cultural and historical situations".

4. Theoretical Framework/Conceptual Framework

The concept "professional teacher identity" implies interrelatedness between "professionalism" and "identity" which means that the one cannot be understood without the other. For the purpose of exploring the identity of the South African Foundation Phase teacher, the model of Mockler (2011) is used as she distinguishes between three dimensions of professional identity,

namely "personal experience, professional context and the external political environment within and through which significant aspects of their work is constituted (Mockler, 2011:520). For the purpose of this article, the focus would fall on the second dimension of identity, namely professional context, as this represents the environment in which the teacher has to execute her/his teaching mandate.

4.1 Professional Context

Together with Brazil, South Africa shares the dubious distinction of having the biggest gap between very rich and very poor people in their populations (Patel, 2012). This discrepancy is becoming more distinct over time, accompanied by immense challenges regarding the provision of education. In South Africa a small group of privileged learners attend previously advantaged state schools or private schools where they receive good to excellent education. The majority of learners (about 80%) are however dependent on rural and township schools which are typified by poor management, deconstructive parent-school relationships (Mahlo, 2017) unqualified and reluctant teachers, overcrowded classrooms, no discipline and lack of facilities (Du Plessis & Sunde, 2017). These schools have been metaphorically described as traumatized schools – schools that actually need to be placed in an intensive care unit of a stabilizing auxiliary service, but instead are flooded with transformation initiatives. At any given moment in a typical township school, teachers will not all be present, some senior staff members (including the principal) will be attending to personal matters and there will be no set times for the opening or closing of school (Kamper, 2014). The essential educational handicap that learners experience at the beginning of their school careers are never rectified and this leads to the learners' shocking results in norm tests. For instance, South African rural learners in Grade 6 achieve far worse results in reading and mathematics tests than their peers in other countries in Africa (Spaull & Kotze, 2015). If, in South Africa, a situation exists in which 80% of the poorest learners at the age of eight experience a substantial educational handicap, the situation can be described as an immoral state of affairs. Bold, Filmer, Martin, Molina, Rockmore, Stacy, Svensson and Wane, in their report for the World Bank on education (2017) verbalize the educational predicament in South Africa: "we find that students receive about two hours and fifty minutes of teaching per day—or just over half the scheduled time. This is largely because teachers, even when in school, are not teaching. Furthermore, teachers' subject knowledge is strikingly low".

In light of the discussion above, an empirical study was conducted with Foundation Phase teachers in South Africa.

5. Methodology

As part of the Asian-Africa project (AAD) in which ten countries participate, this article focuses on Foundation Phase teachers' perceptions of their circumstances in schools and how their professional context is experienced in rural and township contexts. In the South African context, Foundation Phase refers to learners aged six-nine years, who are in Grade 1 – 3. As part of their training, fourth year Foundation Phase student teachers are expected to primary schools

for a six-month period in order to gain practical experience. During their practice teaching period in 2015, students were given an assignment which required them to distribute questionnaires to teachers at the schools where they did their practice teaching. Topics such as teachers' professional identities, career profiles and experiences were included in the questionnaire.

A sample of 282 questionnaires were completed. South Africa was the country of origin of 268 (95%) of the teachers, while eight were from other countries and six did not answer the question. The vast majority of teachers in the survey were female (275 (97.5%)). The years of experience of this group varied from one to fifty years, with an average of 16.67 years and a standard deviation of 10.913 years.

The frequency distribution according to highest level of qualification in teaching for the group appears in Table 1. Table 2 shows the distribution of schools in terms of their location. A number of private schools were also included in the survey.

Table 1: Highest qualification level of teachers

Qualification	n	%
Certificate	6	2.1
Diploma	89	31.6
Degree	97	34.4
Degree with diploma/certificate	42	14.9
Post graduate qualification	40	14.2
Did not answer	8	2.8
Total	282	100

Table 2: Type of school

Type of school	n	%
Private	62	22.0
Inner city	117	41.6
Rural	46	16.3
Township	51	18.1
Did not answer	6	2.1
Total	282	100

A large proportion of the teachers (170 or 63.5 %) were in possession of at least a degree in teaching. Schools were categorized into four categories: private, inner city, rural and township schools. Inner city schools were the largest category (117 or 41.5 %. Rural and township schools were more or less equally represented (46 or 16.3 % and 51 or 18.1 % respectively). Six respondents did not indicate the type of school where they teach. For the purpose of this article, two themes were explored, namely the teaching environment, as well as obstacles in the work environment.

5.1 Teaching Environment

This analysis focused on the associations between school type and the values and perceptions of teachers regarding their work environment. One of the questions in the questionnaire investigated the values and perceptions of the teachers regarding their work environment. This section consisted of a total of sixteen statements (items) and the respondents had to indicate the level of agreement on a four-point Likert scale (Strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), agree (3), strongly agree (4). The means per item were calculated for each type of school to give an indication of the center of gravity of the Likert scale and that enabled the researchers to rank the sixteen items as rated by each school type. A high mean implied a larger degree of agreement. For example, for the rural schools the statement "I respect my principal" had a mean of 3.62 which was the highest rank according to teachers from rural schools. The four highest means per school type are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Perceptions regarding work environment - The four statements with the highest ranks per type of school

Statement	Private schools	Inner city schools	Rural schools	Township schools
V34.1: Teachers have the right to voice out their opinion in order to improve their salaries			3.41	3.56
V34.3: I believe that my head of department is competent	3.51			
V34.4: The management at my school is good			3.35	
V34.5: I respect my principal	3.56	3.60	3.62	3.73
V34.7: My principal values and supports my professional development				3.10
V34.10: Administration staffs at the school are competent		3.55		
V34.13: My classroom is sufficient for teaching and learning	3.60	3.56		
V34.15: I feel proud to be a teacher at my school	3.65	3.60	3.50	3.08

Teachers from all four types of schools agreed that they respected their principals and that they felt proud to be a teacher at their school. Teachers from rural and township schools felt strongly that they had a right to voice their opinions in order to improve their salaries, while teachers at private and inner-city schools perceived their classrooms as sufficient for teaching and learning.

The association between each one of these statements and the type of school where the

teachers were employed was then evaluated by performing Fisher's Exact test. Standardized residuals were computed for each cell and cells with residuals of 1.8 or more were discussed. For this exercise, the Likert scales "Strongly disagree" and "Disagree" were combined. The scales "Agree" and "Strongly agree" were combined in a similar fashion. The results appear in Table 4.

Table 4: Results of Fischer's exact test to test for associations between aspects of work environment and school types

Statement	Fisher's Exact test statistic	p-value
V34.1: Teachers have the right to voice out their opinion in order to improve their salaries	2.916	0.409
V34.2: At my school the majority of teachers are passionate about the profession	10.876	0.011*
V34.3: I believe that my head of department is competent	1.465	0.712
V34.4: The management at my school is good	4.764	0.188
V34.5: I respect my principal	0.436	0.981
V34.6: The classes at my school are overcrowded	43.283	<0.001**
V34.7: My principal values and supports my professional development	7.107	0.062
V34.8: Teachers are often absent at my school	2.835	0.418
V34.9: Management at my school is not supportive	5.618	0.127
V34.10: Administration staffs at the school are competent	10.192	0.008**
V34.11: Teachers not doing their work are disciplined at my school	0.281	0.973
V34.12: There are sufficient resources at my school to assist me in teaching	20.292	<0.001**
V34.13: My classroom is sufficient for teaching and learning	21.771	<0.001**
V34.14: There is enough space for learners to play during break time	6.554	0.085
V34.15: I feel proud to be a teacher at my school	9.627	0.015*
V34.16: My school provides an effective environment for teaching and learning that contributes to my professional status	7.313	0.052

*: Significant at the 5% level of significance

**: Significant at the 1% level of significance

There existed significant associations between the type of school and the following six statements: the majority of teachers at the school are passionate about their profession; the classrooms are overcrowded; the administrative staff at the school are competent; there are sufficient resources at the school; the classroom is sufficient for teaching and learning and the

teacher feels proud to be a teacher at the school.

More teachers in inner city schools disagreed with the statement that the teachers at their schools are passionate about the profession, than was expected under the model of independence between type of school and the statement.

Regarding the statement that the classes at their schools are over-crowded, more teachers in private schools disagreed than was expected under the model of independence between type of school and the statement. Fewer teachers in township schools disagreed with the statement than was expected under the model of independence between type of school and the statement. On the other hand, fewer teachers in private schools agreed with the statement than was expected under the model of independence between type of school and the statement. More teachers in township schools agreed with the statement than was expected under the model of independence between type of school and the statement.

More teachers in township schools disagreed with the statement that the administrative staff at their school are competent than was expected.

On the other hand, more teachers at rural schools disagreed with the statement that there are sufficient resources at their schools to assist them in teaching, than was expected under the model of independence. Fewer teachers at inner city schools disagreed with the statement that there are sufficient resources at their schools than was expected under the model of independence. Lastly, more teachers at rural schools disagreed with the statement than was expected under the model of independence.

Fewer teachers at inner city schools disagreed with the statement that their classrooms are sufficient for teaching and learning than was expected under the model of independence. More teachers at rural and township schools disagreed with the statement that their classrooms are sufficient for teaching and learning than was expected under the model of independence.

Regarding the statement that they feel proud to be teachers at their schools, more teachers in township schools disagreed with the statement than was expected.

5.1.1   Exploratory factor analysis

An exploratory factor analysis was performed using Principal Axis Factoring extraction and oblique rotation. Items 34.1, 34.6 and 34.8 were excluded from the final analysis since they had communalities less than 0.3. Two factors were identified. The factor loadings and their descriptive statistics appear in Table 5. The items included in a factor are printed in **bold**.

Table 5: Exploratory factor analysis

Statement	Factor Competency	Factor 2: School context
V34.4: The management at my school is good	.844	-.514
V34.7: My principal values and supports my professional development	.767	-.375
V34.5: I respect my principal	.641	-.274
V34.3: I believe that my head of department is competent	.614	-.403
V34.9r: Management at my school is supportive	.568	-.319
V34.2: At my school the majority of teachers are passionate about the profession	.426	-.328
V34.11: Teachers not doing their work are disciplined at my school	.338	-.227
V34.13: My classroom is sufficient for teaching and learning	.344	-.817
V34.15: I feel proud to be a teacher at my school	.641	-.766
V34.16: My school provides an effective environment for teaching and learning that contributes to my professional status	.665	-.765
V34.14: There is enough space for learners to play during break time	.382	-.667
V34.12: There are sufficient resources at my school to assist me in teaching	.386	-.621
V34.10: Administration staffs at the school are competent	.540	-.556
Cronbach alpha	0.783	0.848
Eigenvalues	4.948	1.019
% of variance explained	38.063	7.842
Mean	3.2338	3.3711
Standard deviation	0.48501	0.55022

The factor scores for each one of the two factors were computed for each participant. The median factor scores were then compared across school type by performing non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis tests. The descriptive statistics for the two factor scores and the results of the Kruskal-Wallis test appear in Table 6.

Table 6: Kruskal-Wallis test results

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Median	p-value
Competency: Private schools	3.31	0.48	3.29	
Competency: Inner city schools	3.26	0.45	3.29	0.183
Competency: Rural schools	3.22	0.48	3.14	
Competency: Township schools	3.10	0.54	3,14	
School context: Private schools	3.51	0.44	3.50	
School context: Inner city schools	3.51	0.46	3.67	<0.001*
School context: Rural schools	3.21	0.55	3.17	
School context: Township schools	3.03	0.68	3.17	

*: Significant at the 1 % level of significance

The median scores for the competency factor did not differ significantly across the four school types, but the median scores for School context differed significantly at the 1 % level of significance. Post hoc multiple comparisons were performed (Table 6) to determine where the medians differed significantly (Table 7). There were highly significant differences between the median scores for factor 2 between the township and rural schools; the township and inner-city schools, and rural and inner-city schools. Rural and private schools' median scores differed at the 5 % level of significance.

Table 7: Dunn's multiple comparison results for school context

School context: Sample 1 – Sample 2	Test statistic	Standard error	Standardized test statistic	p-value	Adjusted p-value
Township - Rural	16.56	16.08	1.03	0.303	1.000
Township – Inner city	60.44	13.31	4.54	<0.001	<0.001**
Township - Private	60.56	14.96	4.05	<0.001	<0.001**
Rural – Inner city	43.88	13.71	3.20	0.001	0.009**
Rural - Private	44.00	15.32	2.87	0.004	0.024*
Inner city - Private	0.13	12.38	0.01	0.992	1.000

*: Significant at the 5% level of significance

**: Significant at the 1% level of significance

5.2 Obstacles in the Work Environment

Another question in the questionnaire dealt with the obstacles that the teachers may experience in their work environment, with a specific focus on the associations between school type and values and perceptions of teachers regarding obstacles in their work environment. This section consisted of a total of thirteen statements (items) and the respondents had to indicate to which extent an item was an obstacle on a four-point Likert scale (No obstacle at all (1), minor

obstacle (2), medium obstacle (3), serious obstacle (4)). The means for items were also calculated per school type to give an indication of the center of gravity of the Likert scale and enabled the researchers to rank the thirteen items. A high mean implied a larger obstacle. For example, teachers from rural and township schools ranked the statement "too much work" as the largest obstacle in their work environment. The four highest means per school type are summarized in Table 8.

Table 8: Perceptions regarding obstacles and relationships in the work environment - The four statements with the highest ranks per type of school

Statement	Private schools	Inner city schools	Rural schools	Township schools
V40.1: Too much work			2.89	3.00
V40.2: Classes too big		2.55	2.67	2.64
V40.3: Poor quality of information & Communication Technology		2.55	2.71	
V40.4: Poor quality of general social infrastructure		2.60		
V40.5: Insufficient salary			2.71	2.69
V40.6: Low prospects for promotion				2.54
V40.7: Lack of communication with other teachers	2.72			
V40.8: Conflict with colleagues	2.68			
V40.9: Conflict with school management	2.58			
V40.10: Conflict with educational authorities	2.58			
V40.11: Insufficient number of in-service training opportunities	2.60			
V40.13: Great disparities between my practical problems and the issues addressed at training activities		2.59		

Teachers at private schools rated conflict in different contexts and insufficient in-service training opportunities as minor to medium obstacles, while teachers at inner city, rural and township schools, felt that the classes were too big. Inner city and rural schools felt that information and communication technology was of a poor quality. Insufficient salaries were ranked second highest by teachers from rural and township schools.

The association between each one of these statements and the type of school where the teachers were employed was evaluated by performing Fisher's Exact test. Standardized residuals were computed for each cell and cells with residuals of 1.8 or more were discussed. For this

exercise, the Likert scales "No obstacle" and "minor obstacle" were combined. The scales "Medium obstacle" and "Serious obstacle" were combined in a similar fashion. The results appear in Table 9.

Table 9: Results of Fisher's Exact test

Statement	Fisher's Exact test statistic	p-value
V40.1: Too much work	20.179	<0.001**
V40.2: Classes too big	2.963	0.400
V40.3: Poor quality of information & Communication Technology	3.115	0.376
V40.4: Poor quality of general social infrastructure	3.798	0.287
V40.5: Insufficient salary	5.508	0.139
V40.6: Low prospects for promotion	0.730	0.870
V40.7: Lack of communication with other teachers	24.268	<0.001**
V40.8: Conflict with colleagues	16.863	0.001**
V40.9: Conflict with school management	12.453	0.006**
V40.10: Conflict with educational authorities	5.147	0.162
V40.11: Insufficient number of in-service training opportunities	1.988	0.588
V40.12: Low prospects of securing study leave to pursue further studies/training	1.749	0.630
V40.13: Great disparities between my practical problems and the issues addressed at training activities	4.058	0.254

**: Significant at the 1% level of significance

Statistically significant associations occurred between school type and the following four statements: Too much work; lack of communication with other teachers and conflict with colleagues and school management.

More teachers in private schools considered the statement that they have too much work as no or a minor obstacle in their work environment. Fewer teachers in private schools considered the statement that they have too much work as a medium to serious obstacle in their work environment.

More teachers in township schools considered the statement that there is a lack of communication with other teachers as no or a minor obstacle in their work environment. Fewer teachers in township schools considered this statement as a medium to serious obstacle in their work environment.

More teachers in rural schools considered the statement that they experience conflict with their colleagues as no or a minor obstacle in their work environment. Fewer teachers in rural schools considered this statement as a medium to serious obstacle in their work environment.

More teachers in rural schools considered the statement that they experience conflict with school management as no or a minor obstacle in their work environment. Fewer teachers in rural schools considered this statement as a medium to serious obstacle in their work environment.

5.2.1 Exploratory Factor Analysis

Exploratory factor analysis was also performed on these thirteen items using Principal Axis Factoring extraction and oblique rotation. Based on the criterion of minimum eigenvalues greater than 1, three factors were identified. The results were not satisfactorily and the factor analysis was repeated, this time forcing two factors. The factor loadings and their descriptive statistics appear in Table 10.

Table 10: Exploratory factor analysis of items dealing with relationships and obstacles

Statement	Relationships	Challenges
V40.8: Conflict with colleagues	**.861**	-.009
V40.9: Conflict with school management	**.858**	.073
V40.10: Conflict with educational authorities	**.829**	.134
V40.7: Lack of communication with other teachers	**.804**	.124
V40.4: Poor quality of general social infrastructure	**.764**	.256
V40.11: Insufficient number of in-service training opportunities	**.740**	.370
V40.12: Low prospects of securing study leave to pursue further studies/training	**.690**	.384
V40.13: Great disparities between my practical problems and the issues addressed at training activities	**.633**	.464
V40.3: Poor quality of information & Communication Technology	**.592**	.386
V40.5: Insufficient salary	.127	**.755**
V40.6: Low prospects for promotion	.339	**.635**
V40.1: Too much work	.031	**.546**
V40.2: Classes too big	.316	**.480**
Cronbach alpha	0.921	0.696
Eigenvalues	5.496	1.598
% of variance explained	42.276	12.294
Mean	2.4273	2.4988
Standard deviation	0.86389	0.78726

Factor scores were computed for each one of the two factors for each participant and the median scores were compared across school type by performing non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test. The descriptive statistics for the two factor scores and the results of the Kruskal-Wallis test

are reported in Table 11.

Table 11: Kruskal-Wallis test results

	Mean	Std Dev	Median	p-value
Relationships: Private schools	2.60	0.89	2.61	
Relationships: Inner city schools	2.56	0.86	2.56	0.032*
Relationships: Rural schools	2.21	0.88	2.00	
Relationships: Township schools	2.25	0.77	2.22	
Challenges: Private schools	2.32	0.74	2.25	
Challenges: Inner city schools	2.47	0.75	2.50	0.045*
Challenges: Rural schools	2.64	0.82	2.75	
Challenges: Township schools	2.70	0.83	3.00	

*: Significant at the 5 % level of significance

The median scores for Relationships and Challenges differed significantly across the four school types at the 5 % level of significance. However, the Post hoc multiple comparisons did not indicate any significant pairwise differences in medians of the relationships factor scores (Tables 12 and 13).

Table 12: Relationships: Dunn's post hoc multiple comparisons

Sample 1 – Sample 2	Test statistic	Standard error	Std test statistic	p-value	Adjusted p-value
Rural - Township	-4.547	16.052	-0.283	0.777	1.000
Rural – Inner city	29.183	13.670	2.135	0.033	0.197
Rural - Private	35.400	15.331	2.309	0.021	0.126
Township – Inner city	24.636	13.263	1.857	0.063	0.379
Township - Private	30.853	14.969	2.061	0.039	0.236
Inner city - Private	6.217	12.381	0.502	0.616	1.000

For the Challenges factor the median scores differed at the 10 % level of significance between Private and Township schools (p-value = 0.064).

Table 13: Challenges: Dunn's post hoc multiple comparisons

Sample 1 – Sample 2	Test statistic	Standard error	Std test statistic	p-value	Adjusted p-value
Private - Inner city	-14.967	12.319	-1.215	0.224	1.000
Private - Rural	-31.571	15.284	-2.066	0.039	0.233
Private - Township	-38.090	14.921	-2.553	0.011	0.064
Inner city - Rural	-16.605	13.676	-1.214	0.225	1.000
Inner city – Township	-23.123	13.269	-1.743	0.081	0.488
Rural - Township	-6.519	16.059	-0.406	0.685	1.000

6. Discussion

This study set out to investigate the factors that influence the professional context of Foundation Phase teachers in rural and township areas, or to put it differently, how these teachers perceive their working environment. In the model Mockler (2011) developed for professional teacher identity, she sees professional context as relating to "those aspect of their experience which are framed within an education context" (Mockler, 2011:4). This model was developed for a first world context, where the author sees professional context as "professional learning and development experience".

For the purpose of this study, this concept refers to the working environment of the teacher, as research indicates a strong correlation between working or teaching environment and identity, job fulfilment, productivity, attrition rate and so forth. Knoblauch and Chase (2015:104) refers to teachers' sense of efficacy, which they define, in the words of Tshchannen-Moran, Hoy and Hoy (1998) as "the teacher's belief in his or her capability to organize and execute courses of action required to successfully accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context". In other words, teachers' perceptions depend on how they assess their teaching contexts and to what extent they believe they are willing or capable of fulfilling their career responsibilities, given their working conditions. In the South African context, Du Plessis and Sunde (2017:133) refer to "complex teaching situations" when discussing the physical circumstances under which teachers have to teach, whereas Maringe, Masinire and Nkambule (2016366) allude to "multiple deprivation" which is a measurable concept that relates to a collective of poverty indicators and the impact thereof on people's lives.

Findings indicated significant differences between the experiences of rural and township schools, as opposed to private and inner-city schools which are supported by literature that verifies the division of the schooling system in South Africa. The Draft Rural Policy by the Department of Basic Education (DBE, 2017: 13) admits that "isolation, disconnectedness, shame and distrust, as well as lack of development" is often associated with schools in rural areas. Ebersöhn (2014) mentions poverty, societal violence, health problems and education infrastructure as the social ills that teachers are daily confronted with in rural and township schools. "These circumstances can be considered cumulative and chronic stressors in the everyday world-of-work of South African

teachers" (Ebersöhn, 2014:570).

On a more logistic level, Bantwini and Moorosi (2017) refer to the lack of support that is provided both to principals as well as teachers by the Department of Education: "Our findings in this regard suggest lack of critical resources for the delivery of instruction and relevant support, the absence of passion driving the vision towards successful curriculum delivery in schools (Bantwini & Moorosi, 2017:7).

The problem is that a lot of teachers leave the system. As one of the participants in Msila's study remarked: The teachers today have lost the passion. They no longer teach with passion and only see teaching as a mere job. You find no one after 13:45 at the school, all teachers flee to town (Msila, 2017:95).   The question that should therefore be posed, should center not so much on teacher attrition, but on improving the quality of the remaining teachers. Barrett, Cowen, Toma and Troske (2015:2) aptly remark that the improvement of teacher quality should be focusing on the professional development of teachers who are dedicated to their classrooms and schools".

Addressing rural and township education in South Africa is therefore not as much an issue of attracting teachers, but to work with those in the system that want to be there. In this sense working with them will mean developing these teachers professionally – creating a career path within education for them, and rewarding them for working amidst difficult and trying circumstances.

The Draft Rural Policy (DBE, 2017:18) also point to the difficulty to recruit and retain qualified teachers in rural schools and ascribe this challenge to "distances of schools from towns, poor infrastructure and limited service delivery. According to this policy, a way to address these challenges requires:

1) "Creating a package of teacher incentives that goes beyond finance and includes teacher development, career progression, transport, accommodation, recreation and other essential services.
2) Offering teachers incentives on the basis of the classification of rural schools".

7.   Conclusion

This article focused on two types of schools in South Africa, namely rural and township schools, where more than 60% of learners receive their education. These schools also present with the most challenges, not only with regard to infrastructure, lack of resources and overcrowded classrooms, but also with regard to unmotivated teachers, and where the attrition rate of teachers is the lowest. Although many initiatives are in place to address learning and teaching in rural and township areas, drastic measures need to be taken on all levels to remedy the situation. A starting point would be the training of teachers at teacher training institutions, where student teachers should be prepared to deal with schools that are poverty stricken and lack resources. Universities should refrain from exposing student teachers only to ideal circumstances, and start focusing on the teaching environments where the majority of South African learners receive their basic education.

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