

# TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES IN AN URBAN COMMUNITY WHERE LOW INCOME LEVELS PREVAIL

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## DECLARATION

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## ABSTRACT

The contexts of the experiences of teachers in South Africa, particularly in communities with low income levels, seem to invite meanings of hopelessness. These meanings appear to be supported by dominant discourses that could determine and limit the practices or actions of these teachers. Within these contexts, however, there are teachers whose actions, reflections or motivations suggest the possibility of alternative or preferred meanings that may be marginalised or silenced by dominant discourses of hopelessness. The theoretical framework that provided the foundation for this study was social constructionism, which argues that meaning is constructed through social interaction and that there is no underlying or objective reality that can be revealed through observation or experience. An understanding of this social construction of meaning allows for the construction of alternative or preferred meanings by individuals or groups in contexts where dominant discourses do not serve their best interests. The aim of the research was therefore to explore and describe the meanings that the participants make of their experiences as teachers in a primary school in Cape Town in a community where low income levels are prevalent. The study further aimed to describe how these teachers experience contextual factors and how these factors contribute to their meaning-making. Furthermore, the purpose of the study was to explore local knowledge in the form of actions, motivations and reflections of the teachers that suggest possibilities for alternative or preferred meanings.

In keeping with the social constructionist nature of the study, a qualitative, interpretivist research approach was used. Participants were selected through purposive sampling and focus group discussions were used to generate data. Digital audio recordings were made of the group sessions, which were then transcribed and analysed using the constant comparative method.

The research findings indicated that the teachers who participated in the study experienced various contextual factors that contributed to their meaning-making. Their experiences of most of these factors were described in similar ways to comparable contextual factors as portrayed in the literature. Furthermore, these contextual factors were linked by the teachers, and dominantly in the literature, to meanings that could be summarised as hopelessness. However, alongside these

meanings, the teachers gave rich or detailed descriptions of a range of actions, reflections and motivations that suggest possible alternative or preferred meanings to the hopelessness that their context seems to invite, and that dominant discourses in the literature appear to portray. These findings led to recommendations that were centred largely on meeting some of the support needs of teachers and children in communities with low income levels.

Keywords: Teachers, low income levels, social constructionism, meanings, discourse, hopelessness, alternative or preferred meanings, Group Areas Act, gang violence

## OPSOMMING

Onderwysers se ervarings in Suid-Afrika, veral in gemeenskappe met 'n lae inkomstevlak, word belewe binne kontekste wat lyk asof dit die betekenis van hopeloosheid ontlok. Hierdie betekenis word blykbaar deur dominante diskoerse ondersteun, wat hierdie onderwysers se werksaamheid of optrede kan bepaal en beperk. Binne hierdie kontekste is daar egter onderwysers wie se handeling, nadenke of motivering die moontlikheid van alternatiewe of verkieslike betekenis aandui, maar wat gemarginaliseer of stilgemaak kan word deur die dominante diskoerse van hopeloosheid. Die teoretiese raamwerk wat die grondslag vir hierdie studie verskaf het, was sosiale konstruksionisme, wat daarop dui dat betekenis deur sosiale interaksie gekonstrueer word en dat daar geen onderliggende of objektiewe realiteit is wat deur waarneming of ervaring geopenbaar kan word nie. 'n Begrip van die sosiale konstruksie van betekenis maak voorsiening vir die konstruksie van alternatiewe of verkieslike betekenis deur individue of groepe binne kontekste waar dominante diskoerse nie hul beste belange dien nie. Die doel van die navorsing was daarom om die betekenis wat die deelnemers, as onderwysers in 'n laerskool in Kaapstad binne 'n gemeenskap met lae inkomste, aan hul ervarings heg, te verken en te beskryf. Die studie was verder daarop gemik om te beskryf hoe hierdie onderwysers kontekstuele faktore ervaar en hoe hierdie faktore 'n bydrae lewer tot hoe hulle betekenis skep. 'n Verdere doel van die studie was om plaaslike kennis in die gedaante van die optrede, motivering en nadenke van onderwysers, waardeur moontlike alternatiewe of verkieslike betekenis na vore kom, te verken.

Vanweë die sosiaal-konstruksionistiese aard van die studie, is 'n kwalitatiewe, interpretiewe navorsingsbenadering as navorsingsmetodologie vir hierdie studie gebruik. 'n Doelgerigte steekproef is gebruik om potensiële deelnemers te identifiseer en data is deur middel van fokusgroeponderhoude gegenerereer. Digitale oudio-opnames van die fokusgroeponderhoude is getranskribeer en is met gebruik van die konstante vergelykende metode ontleed.

Die navorsingsbevindings het aangedui dat die onderwysers wat aan hierdie studie deelgeneem het, verskillende kontekstuele faktore belewe wat bydra tot die betekenis wat deur hulle geskep word. Hulle belewenis van die meeste van hierdie

faktore is op soortgelyke wyse beskryf as vergelykbare kontekstuele faktore wat in die literatuur bespreek word. Hierdie kontekstuele faktore is verder deur die onderwysers en in die literatuur aan betekenis wat as hopeloosheid beskryf kan word, gekoppel. Naas hierdie betekenis het die onderwysers egter ook ryk of gedetailleerde beskrywings van 'n reeks handeling, nadenkings en motiverings gebied wat moontlike alternatiewe of verkose betekenis bied tot die hopeloosheid wat deur hulle konteks uitgelok word en deur die dominante diskoerse in die literatuur uitgebeeld word. Die navorsingsbevindings het gelei tot aanbevelings wat hoofsaaklik daarop gerig is om in sommige van die behoeftes aan ondersteuning wat deur onderwysers en kinders in gemeenskappe met lae inkomstevlakke ervaar word, te voorsien.

Sleutelwoorde: Onderwysers, lae inkomstevlak, sosiale konstruksionisme, betekenis, diskoerse, hopeloosheid, alternatiewe of voorkeurbetekenis, Groepsgebiedewet, bendegegeweld

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **CONTEXT AND RATIONALE OF THE STUDY**

#### **1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

More than fifty seven percent of children in South Africa live below the national poverty cut-off line (Schwabe, 2004, p. 1). The implications of this are that millions of children in South African schools are vulnerable to factors commonly associated with low income levels - hunger, malnutrition, poor health, dilapidated and overcrowded housing, and unsafe environments where substance abuse and violence are widespread. In addition to these factors, high rates of child abuse and neglect are prevalent (Atkins, Frazier, Adil & Talbott, 2007, p. 165; Biersteker & Robinson, 2000, p. 33; Bloch, 2009, p. 78; Chen, Nazerian, Karipineni & Limbos, 2008, p. 152; Evans, 2004, p. 77; Finnegan & Kandall, 2005, p. 809; Frumkin, Frank & Jackson, 2004, p. 198; Gottdiener & Budd, 2005, p. 69; Graham, 2006, p. 26; Johnson & Golub, 2005, p. 107; Msall, 2009, p. 303; Ratele, 2007, p. 219; Rousotte, Soderberg & Sowell, 2010, p. 376; United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2003, p. 1). Not surprisingly, these conditions are associated with children experiencing underachievement at school, high rates of absenteeism, a high risk for grade repetition and low rates of school completion (Atkins et al., 2007, pp. 167-168; Chen et al., 2008, p. 156; Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 2001, p. 52; Peterman & Sweigard, 2008, p. 23).

Dealing with the effects of the context of many school children's lives in South Africa thus provides a serious challenge for teachers. In addition, there are a number of other factors that contribute to the teaching climate in South Africa (Strauss, 2008, p. 3; Van Duuren & Schoeman, 2009, pp. 5-7). Teachers in South Africa are teaching in an educational culture which, since the inception of democracy, has been characterised by a flood of new policies and curriculum reforms (Jansen, 2001, p. 12). Not only do teachers have to adapt their teaching practices to incorporate these changes, but as teachers are at the forefront of the implementation of educational transformation, they are frequently blamed for this transformation not achieving the anticipated results (Robinson & Soudien, 2009, pp. 475-477; Weber, 2007, pp. 286-288; World Bank, 2008, p. 31).



Furthermore, educational policy in South Africa is situated within a global climate of educational reform that emphasises teacher accountability and performance, and reduces the value of education to measures of learner achievement in mathematics and reading (Ball, 2003, pp. 215-220; Bruns, Filmer & Patrinos, 2011, p. 142; Forrester, 2005, p. 272; Lambert & McCarthy, 2006, p. 44; Strain, 2009, p. 70; Weber, 2005, p. 66; Wentworth & Erickson, 2010, pp. 2-4; Wolverton, 2006, p. vii). International comparisons show that South African children's achievement in reading and mathematics is not only among the worst in the world, but also among the worst on the African continent (Bloch, 2009, p. 17; Makuwa, 2010, p. 1). As learner achievement is used as a measure of teacher effectiveness, these statistics have serious implications for teachers in South Africa, and more particularly, for teachers in areas with low income levels where learner achievement tends to be at its worst (Bloch, 2009, p. 156; Jansen, 2004, p. 51; Khosa, 2010, pp. 2-3; Weber, 2005, p. 63, 2007, pp. 286-288).

Additionally, the public image of teachers has been eroded as they are portrayed in a negative light in the media, with reports focusing on their incompetency and the poor achievement of South African learners (Fritz & Smit, 2008, pp. 155-156; Gernetzky, 2011, p. 1; Kruger, 2011, p. 10; Louw, 2010, p. 9; MacFarlane, 2011a, 2011b; Moeng, 2011, p. 2; Saunders, 2011a, 2011b; South African Council for Educators [SACE], 2011, p. 2; Steyn, 2011, p. 2; Strydom, 2011). According to literature, teachers across the world are not highly paid and are afforded little respect (Bloch, 2009, p. 83; Forrester, 2005, pp. 346-347; Hammett, 2008, p. 343; Kallaway, 2007, p. 42; Mulkeen, Chapman, DeJaeghere & Leu, 2007, p. 30).

The above mentioned factors often result in teachers feeling like failures, inadequate and disempowered (Strauss, 2008, p. 3; Van Duuren & Schoeman, 2009, pp. 5-7). When describing the present state of the teaching profession, literature portrays teachers as having lost their idealism and passion, and as being exhausted, over-extended, emotionally depleted and lacking in motivation. They are reported to have feelings of reduced personal accomplishment and negative self-evaluation, low self-efficacy and poor self-worth. In addition, they have been shown to experience discouragement, disillusionment, disappointment, isolation, hopelessness cynicism and a sense of futility, meaninglessness, and powerlessness. Teachers are further depicted as being frustrated and angry, with many of them leaving the profession or

expressing the desire to do so (Halpin, 2003, p. 10; Prinsloo, 2005a, p. 455). On both the international and national fronts, the work of teachers is seen to exist in a context that invites negative meaning-making which is characterised by hopelessness, particularly in communities with low income levels (See section 1.8.5 for an explanation of my usage of the term ‘hopelessness’).

## **1.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theoretical framework underlies all research and generates every aspect of the research process, from the original motivation for the study, to the conceptualisation of the research questions, the methods of data collection and analysis, as well as the interpretation and presentation of findings (Merriam, 2009, pp. 66-67). For this reason, I have provided an overview of the theoretical framework of this study at the outset. A more detailed description follows in chapter two (See section 2.2).

The theoretical framework that provides the foundation for this study is social constructionism. Social constructionists argue that meaning, or reality, is constructed through social interaction. There is, therefore, no underlying or objective reality that can be revealed through observation or experience (Burr, 2003, p. 3; Freedman & Combs, 1996, p. 16; Gergen, 1985, pp. 266-268, 2009, p. 6). Consequently, there are countless possible constructions or realities for any one specific object or event. Furthermore, meaning-making is influenced by, and takes place through, our daily interactions within a specific social, cultural and historical context (Burr, 2003, p. 4; Gergen, 1985, p. 267). This means that one understanding or meaning can be no nearer to the ‘truth’ than any other (Burr, 2003, pp. 64-65).

This meaning-making process is intricately intertwined with the social constructionist concept of discourse (Burr, 2003, pp. 55-64). Hare-Mustin (1994, p. 19) describes discourse as “a system of statements, practices, and institutional structures that share common values”. She goes on to say that it is “the medium that provides the words and ideas for thought and speech, as well as the cultural practices involving related concepts and behaviours” (Hare-Mustin, 1994, p. 19). Meaning-making is therefore integrally connected to action.

As discourses arise within a particular society, culture, or context, they have usefulness for different groups or individuals with the result that some discourses become more prominent than others (Burr, 2003, p. 79; Gergen, 2009, p. 10). The dominant discourses within a society become generally accepted as truth and are internalised by most members of the society, thereby governing how they make meaning, talk and act (Freedman & Combs, 1996, pp. 16-20; Hare-Mustin, 1994, p. 20; Winslade & Monk, 2007, p. 29).

An understanding of the social construction of meaning allows for the construction of alternative or preferred meanings by individuals or groups in contexts where dominant discourses do not serve their best interests. Discourse and meaning are intricately connected to action (Burr, 2003, p. 64). This means that the exploration of lived experiences that fall outside the domain of dominant discourse opens possibilities for alternative or preferred meaning-making that could be indicative of new actions to support these meanings (Freedman & Combs, 1996, p. 40). In addition, as discourses are not fixed, but change and evolve through social interaction, local or marginalised knowledge or meanings can influence dominant discourses (Freedman & Combs, 1996, pp. 43-44).

### **1.3 MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY**

The impetus for this research began during 2008 while I worked for the Western Cape Education Department. My job at the time, as an intern psychometrist, was to make recommendations to meet the educational needs of children who were experiencing difficulties at school. I was required to conduct psycho-educational assessments which involved, among other things, holding two meetings with the child's teacher and two meetings with the child's parent or care-giver.

Most of the schools I went to were in communities with low income levels. The schools were generally situated in areas where the housing consisted mainly of run-down government housing or informal dwellings constructed largely of wood and sheet metal. There was often garbage lining the roads and caught along fences. During the mornings when I visited the schools, I usually saw groups of adolescent boys as well as men of varying ages, some apparently under the influence of alcohol,

standing on street corners. There were frequently underweight dogs and sometimes unsupervised young children wandering the streets.

These schools I visited had feeding schemes as many of the children did not receive adequate nutrition at home. The children with whom I worked were often unkempt and wearing dirty clothing. When I assessed their scholastic functioning, I found that the difficulties they were experiencing were, on the whole, far more severe than those of the children I saw in more affluent areas. Furthermore, I experienced that sometimes the parents or care givers attended our meetings while under the influence of alcohol.

I was struck again and again during my interactions with the teachers, children, parents or care givers, and the context, by what a challenging task these teachers faced. They were teaching children who lived in contexts that seemed to have a dramatic and negative impact on their learning. At the same time, it seemed that they as teachers were being judged according to the measurable academic results that were being achieved in their schools and classes. Moreover, it appeared that they were being compared by these standards to teachers from more affluent areas where the academic achievement was much higher. I often sat talking with teachers who evidently had a deep care and concern for the children they taught. I thought that there must surely be more to a good teacher than someone who produces excellent academic results.

In 2009, a year after this experience, I registered for a Master's degree in Educational Psychology and encountered social constructionist theory for the first time. During that year I again worked in a school in a community with low income levels. It was then that I, coming from a social constructionist standpoint, realised the critical role of meaning-making in a context where it appeared to be very difficult, if not impossible, to effect change. At that time I was under the impression that dominant discourses concerning schools in areas with low income levels were deterministic and limiting for the children and teachers in those schools (Nthite, 2005, p. 4). It also seemed that the prevailing discourses concerning teachers in South Africa involved meanings of ineffectiveness, futility and despair (MacFarlane, 2005, p. 16; Maluleke, 2009, p. 10; Mecoamere, 2003, p. 9; Mills, 2001, p. 9).

I concluded that the construction of alternative or preferred meanings (See sections 1.8.6 and 1.8.7 for an explanation of my usage of these terms) is integral to a person's choice to act in refusal of the hopelessness that the context might seem to invite. Paolo Freire (1998, p. 9) puts forth that "one of the tasks of the progressive educator...is to unveil opportunities for hope, no matter what the obstacles may be. ...When we fight as hopeless or despairing persons, our struggle will be suicidal". It was at this time that I began to think that it could be worthwhile to work with a group of teachers on exploring, or researching, the meanings they make of their teaching experiences.

#### **1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The experiences of teachers in South Africa, particularly in communities with low income levels, exist in contexts which seem to invite meanings of hopelessness (Halpin, 2003, p. 10; Hammett, 2008, pp. 341-347; Prinsloo, 2005a, p. 455; Shalem & Hoadley, 2009, p. 119; Strauss, 2008, p. 3; Van Duuren & Schoeman, 2009, p. 4). These meanings appear to be supported by dominant discourses that could determine and limit the practices or actions of these teachers (Burr, 2003, p. 64; Frase, 2005, p. 430; Halpin, 2003, p. 10; Hammett, 2008, pp. 341-347; Hare-Mustin, 1994, p. 20; Holmes, 2005, pp. 1-26; Leithwood & Beatty, 2008, p. 75; Matier, 2007, pp. 25-31; Mulkeen, et al., 2007, p. 30; Shalem & Hoadley, 2009, p. 119; Streckas, 2008, pp. 5-9). Within these contexts, however, there are teachers whose actions, reflections or motivations suggest the possibility of alternative or preferred meanings that could be marginalised or silenced by dominant discourses of hopelessness (Burr, 2003, p. 79; Fritz & Smit, 2008, p. 156; Gergen, 2009, p. 10; Olivier, Wood & De Lange, 2009, p. 5; Reckson & Becker, 2005, p. 110).

For this reason there is a need for exploration into the teachers' experiences or understandings of the contextual factors that contribute to the meanings they make of their experiences. Additionally, within a context that could invite hopelessness, there is a need for the exploration of actions, motivations or reflections that could suggest alternative or preferred meanings. Furthermore, the process of highlighting these alternative or preferred actions and meanings could influence dominant discourses of hopelessness.

### **1.4.1 Aims of the study**

The aim of the research was therefore to explore and describe the meanings that the participants make of their experiences as teachers in a primary school in Cape Town in a community where low income levels are prevalent. In view of the important role played by the specific context in meaning-making, the study further aimed to describe how these teachers experience contextual factors and how these factors contribute to their meaning-making. Furthermore, because the research is framed within the theory of social constructionism, the purpose of the study was to explore local knowledge in the form of actions, motivations and reflections of the teachers that suggest possibilities for alternative or preferred meanings in a context that could invite hopelessness.

Finally, I recognise that any process of social interaction, including that of conducting research, will inevitably have an impact on, at the very least, the participants. I therefore formulated an ethical aim of the study, the purpose of which was to minimise any possible negative impact that the research might have. This aim was for the context-specific knowledge that is generated through the research process to contribute to the influence that local and marginalised knowledge or meanings can have on dominant discourses. This would firstly be achieved through the social interactions in the focus group discussions. Secondly, should descriptions of actions, reflections or motivations that possibly suggest alternative or preferred meanings emerge during the discussions, these could be reinforced or thickened by documenting the research in this thesis and then in an article in a journal or periodical.

### **1.4.2 Research questions**

I attempted to achieve these aims by using the following question to guide the study:

*What meanings do the participants make of their experiences as teachers in a primary school in Cape Town in a community where low income levels are prevalent?*

In endeavouring to answer this question within the theoretical framework of the study, I have broken it down into two further questions as follows:

*How do these teachers experience contextual factors, and how do these factors contribute to their meaning-making?*

*In a context that could invite meanings of hopelessness, what actions, motivations and reflections of the teachers suggest possibilities for alternative or preferred meanings?*

## **1.5 THE RESEARCH PROCESS**

The research process needed to ensure the selection of research methods that were best able to answer these questions and thereby achieve the aims of the study. This meant that the research paradigm or belief system that informed all aspects of the research process, including the methods used for data collection and analysis, had to be in agreement with the theoretical framework of the study. Furthermore, as it is my own way of seeing and being that shaped the research, the research paradigm had to represent my worldview as a researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a, p. 22). I found that a postmodern paradigm was best suited to answering these needs. According to Freedman and Combs (1996, pp. 20-21):

“Postmodernists believe that there are limits on the ability of human beings to measure and describe the universe in any precise, absolute, and universally applicable way. ...They choose to look at specific, contextualized details rather than grand generalizations, differences rather than similarity. While modernist thinkers tend to be concerned with facts and rules, postmodernists are concerned with meaning”.

Therefore, in keeping with the postmodern, social constructionist nature of this study, the research methodology can be described as being qualitative and interpretivist. This approach recognises that meaning is not derived from an objective truth waiting to be discovered, but rather that it is socially constructed as human beings interpret and give meaning to their experiences and interactions with their world (Merriam, 2009, pp. 8-13).

The methods that were used within this qualitative and interpretive approach included the selection of participants through purposive sampling and the use of focus group discussions to generate data. Digital audio recordings were made of the group sessions and then transcribed and analysed using the constant comparative method

(Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 101). The participants were then given the opportunity to read the findings after they had been written up and provide feedback before being finalised as chapter four of this thesis.

Chapter three provides an in-depth discussion of the research process and contextualises and clarifies the brief summary that appears in this section.

## **1.6 DECLARING MYSELF AS THE RESEARCH INSTRUMENT**

As this research is based within a postmodern, social constructionist paradigm, which recognises the value-laden nature of all research (Clegg & Slife, 2009, p. 33; Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 197), I found it necessary to reflect on myself as the research instrument. Amongst other things, this involved examining the self that historically, socially and personally creates the standpoint that I bring to the field (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 210). I have therefore attempted to provide a brief description of myself as the research instrument at the outset of this research. Within the categories and divisions that are commonly imposed upon us by the dominant discourses in our society, I technically fit into the category of an educated white, English-speaking, middle class, fifty-one-year-old South African woman. However, through the years of my childhood and into my adulthood, I did not fit precisely into the categories in which I was supposed to belong in many ways and have therefore experienced marginalisation. I have come to understand that my own, and other people's, lived experience is often complex and contradictory and I have developed a sensitivity to power relations and injustice. I consider myself to have true empathy, and recognise a tendency within myself towards altruism and a need to involve myself in processes of change and development. It was, from the outset, very important to me for every aspect of this research to be deeply ethical, and for me to ensure that I was conducting this research "as a moral person in this world" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005b, p. 183). My stance, as well as the implementation of the principles related to the ethics and morality that guided this study, is fully explained in chapter three which is largely an exposition of how my worldview (or the paradigm of the study) which framed every aspect of the research from an ideological point of view. However, I have highlighted just a few aspects of the ethical implementation of this study in the following section.



## 1.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In an effort to respect the autonomy of the participants, I explained the anticipated research process and focus to potential participants. In addition, I informed them of their right to refuse to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences to themselves. Being aware of an inherent power differential between the researcher and the participants, I tried to minimise the possible coercive nature of the power dynamics between the participants and me by proposing to the participants that, after they had volunteered, they could still choose to withdraw from the study without informing me of their decision. Of the seven teachers who volunteered, two took this option while the remaining five attended the sessions.

Furthermore, the research participants and I discussed whether they felt the need to protect their identities, or whether they would prefer to be identified with their voices in the text. After consideration, it was agreed that confidentiality and anonymity would be attempted as none of us could predict the possible outcomes if their identities were to be revealed. I therefore assigned a pseudonym to each participant, as I felt that giving them names, rather than calling them by a participant number, would better represent them as people with stories, identities and voices in the text. Additionally, I assigned a pseudonym to the community in which the research was conducted in order to protect the identities of the participants. This pseudonym was carried through to the reference list – where the name of the community appeared in the title of a document that was used as a reference, I changed it to the pseudonym. A further aim of using a pseudonym for the community was to not label or place limits through definitive descriptions of the community as a whole, or of the members of the community. I chose the name “Rose Valley” to represent the community in this text as I wanted to maintain the irony that is inherent in the picturesque names that the Apartheid government gave to many of its “racial dumping grounds” (Naidoo & Dreyer, 1984, p. 9). Rose Valley is situated in an area that is flat, sandy and windblown where it is unlikely that one would find any flower blooming.

Generally, those who contribute to the ‘scientific’ production of knowledge in our society tend to have power, position, privilege and education. Those ‘being researched’ often do not have these attributes. I recognise that I have certain

personal attributes - specifically age, race, language, perceived social class and educational level - that could result in a power differential between me and the participant teachers. I therefore attempted to reduce this power imbalance by being sensitive and responsive to the dynamics in the researcher-participant relationship. By working collaboratively and in consultation with the participants, I took care to ensure, to the best of my ability, that this power differential did not produce what Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 32) refer to as a 'colonizing discourse' of speaking on behalf of the 'other'. Rather, I attempted to make the research process and its outcomes co-owned by me and the teachers who participated in the study by ensuring that their voices were heard, and that, as far as possible, the research is not a case of the researcher speaking on behalf of the 'other'. In addition, I made provision for each participant to read and give feedback on the presentation of the findings to ensure that the representation was as close as possible to the meanings that were expressed in the discussions.

Furthermore, in recognising that scientific objectivity is not possible in research, and that even when attempts are made to present research scientifically and objectively, the voice of the author is "rarely genuinely absent, or even hidden", I decided to locate myself "deliberately and squarely within the text" (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 209). By writing in the first person to locate myself in the text, I did not distance myself from the research or make implicit claims to scientific objectivity, or the representation of truth. Rather, the text was clearly portrayed as my personal meaning. This meant that I was plainly responsible for what was written, and was forced into at least a degree of reflexivity in the writing (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 209).

Lastly, in endeavouring to ensure that the research process did not only benefit me as the researcher, but also the participants who are an integral part of the research process, I included an ethical aim within the aims of the research (See section 1.4.1).

## **1.8 EXPLANATION OF THE USAGE OF CERTAIN TERMS**

This section serves to clarify my choice of the usage of certain terms in this thesis, particularly where their contextual meaning may not be self-evident.

### **1.8.1 Low income**

Literature commonly uses the terms 'poverty', 'deprivation', 'the poor' or 'low socio-economic status' in referring to communities with low income levels, or the people who live in these contexts (Alderman et al., 2000, p. 5; Frumkin et al., 2004, p. 198; Ratele, 2007, pp. 219-221; UNDP, 2003, p. 1). I have preferred to use the phrase 'where low income levels are prevalent', or similar terms or phrases wherever possible. Such phrases are more particular, and seem to me to refer to a specific aspect of a community, rather than an all-encompassing term that can define the totality of the identity or lived experience of people or a community. Furthermore, I have also used the phrase 'with low income levels' as in 'a context with low income levels' although I am aware that a context cannot actually have low income levels. I have done this where the use of "where low income levels are prevalent" becomes too unwieldy to use.

In my opinion, labelling people as 'the poor' and using the term 'poverty', both imply a definition and determination of characteristics inherent to the people or the communities described. Similarly, I feel that the term 'low socio-economic status' firstly implies rank, standing or prestige through the word status, and secondly presupposes an automatic coupling between economic and social factors, where if the one is 'low', so is the other. It appears to me that the terms 'poverty', 'the poor', 'low socio-economic status' and other similar terms, leave no room for individual or community difference, exception or change.

My use of terms associated to low levels of income is not intended euphemistically to minimise the realities of people living in such contexts. Rather, my aim in using such terms is to respect the dignity of the people who live in these contexts by not labelling, and therefore limiting, them or their contexts and to thereby allow room for alternative or preferred meanings that can challenge dominant discourses.

Lastly, I have used the separate words 'low' and 'income' rather than the hyphenated term 'low-income' in this thesis. An example of this difference in usage is 'a community with low income levels' as opposed to 'a low-income community'. I have tried as far as possible to adhere to the first usage as this implies a community *with* low income levels as opposed to a community where low-income is definitive of, and inherent to, the context or community. I prefer this usage as, in my mind, it again allows for alternative or preferred meanings, or undefined possibilities within the context being described.

### **1.8.2 Teacher**

I have chosen to use the word 'teacher' rather than 'educator'. According to Sykes (2011, p. 1), the term educator is aligned with the terminology of Outcomes-Based Education, whereas the word teacher is more universally used and understood. Although 'educator' is now commonly used in South Africa, recent policy documents from the education authorities use either term (Department of Basic Education [DoBE], 2010a, p. 45; Parker & Green, 2011, p. 30). For the sake of consistency, when referring to policy documents that use 'educator', I have used the term 'teacher'.

### **1.8.3 Primary school**

According to recent education policies in South Africa, schooling levels have been divided into bands which are sub-divided into phases. However, public schools are still divided according to traditional primary and secondary phases. Primary schools consist of grades one to seven and generally serve children from six to fourteen years of age (DoBE, 2010b, pp. 8-9, 44).

### **1.8.4 Education authorities**

For the sake of simplicity and consistency, I have used the term 'education authorities' throughout this thesis when referring to the National Department of Education, the Provincial or Western Cape Education Department and the district offices of the Department of Education. This is because there is sometimes an

overlap in meaning between these terms in the contexts in which they are used in this thesis and for the purposes of this thesis differentiation is unnecessary.

### **1.8.5 Discourse**

For the purpose of this thesis, my use of the term 'discourse' refers to a social constructionist usage of the term which includes not only language, but action or practice as well (Burr, 2003, p. 64). I also take it to include "clusters of taken-for-granted assumptions that lie just beneath the surface of many conversations in a particular social context" (Winslade & Monk, 2007, p. 29).

### **1.8.5 Hopelessness**

The Oxford English Dictionary (Soanes & Hawker, 2008, p. 487) defines hope as an "expectation of something desired; desire combined with expectation". In contrast, hopelessness is defined as a "hopeless condition, want of hope, despair, state of being despaired of, desperateness" (Soanes & Hawker, 2008, p. 487). Although I have used the word 'hopelessness' in this thesis according to the above definition, I have taken it to mean more than this. From a social constructionist stance that recognises the relationship between language and action, I have assumed that meanings of hopelessness can inhibit actions that might suggest expectation or desire. In addition, I have used hopelessness as an umbrella term for other meanings that could inhibit similar actions such as, amongst others, futility, despair and helplessness.

### **1.8.6 Alternative meaning**

Within our society and in each of our individual lives, certain meanings, stories or discourses become more visible or dominant, while others are less visible and become subjugated or marginalised by dominant discourses. When talking about alternative meanings in this thesis, I am referring to those meanings that are less visible or those possibly subjugated by dominant meanings (Freedman & Combs, 1996, pp. 39-40).

### **1.8.7 Preferred meaning**

My usage of the term 'preferred meaning' in this thesis is linked to the explanation of alternative meanings, and refers specifically to an alternative meaning that could be preferred by the individual concerned, or that which could better serve the interests of that individual than the relevant dominant, or more visible, meanings. Furthermore, as meaning is intricately connected to action when viewed from a social constructionist standpoint, the term 'preferred meaning' also has connotations related to possibilities for action or practice that lie outside of the restrictions of dominant discourses or meanings (Freedman & Combs, 1996, pp. 39-40).

## **1.9 STRUCTURE OF THIS PRESENTATION**

This thesis is presented in five chapters as follows:

Chapter one provides an overview of the research project. The background and motivation for the research are described and the study is placed within a particular context and theoretical framework. Furthermore, the aims of the study are explained, as are the research questions that guided the process. An overview of the research process is then followed by an explanation of the usage of certain terms.

Chapter two consists of a literature review that includes a description of the theoretical framework of the study and explores contextual factors that could contribute to the meaning teachers make of their experiences. It also reviews meanings of teachers' experiences that are presented in the literature, as well as actions and motivations of teachers that suggest possible alternative meanings in contexts that could invite hopelessness.

Chapter three gives a detailed description of the research process, with particular emphasis on the research paradigm which stresses the axiological and ethical considerations that informed the study. It also describes the methods that were used for data collection and analysis and the presentation of the research.

Chapter four comprises a presentation and discussion of the research findings, and is portrayed in the form of the themes and categories that emerged during data analysis.

Chapter five consists mostly of a reflection that summarises the research findings, describes the limitations of the research, and presents recommendations based on the research findings.

## **1.10 CONCLUSION**

Chapter one explained the motivation that lead to the research, provided the background to the study and placed it within the theoretical framework of social constructionism. This led to an explanation of the need for the specific focus of the research to be on the *meanings* of teachers' experiences, as well as the importance of context in the construction of these meanings. Stemming from this, the aims of the research were explained and the research questions that guided the study were formulated. This was followed by a very brief account of the process that was used in attempting to answer the research questions. Lastly, there was an explanation of my usage of certain terms within the text and an outline of the structure of the thesis.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

The aim of a literature review is to bring the reader up to date with previous research in the field of interest (Babbie & Mouton, 2001, p. 565). It thus places the research in the context of the body of knowledge that has previously been generated around the topic, and paves the way for the discussion and positioning of the research findings within this context (Kaniki, 2006, p. 19). In addition, the purpose of the literature review is to provide a contextual rationale for the particular focus of the research within the general topic being studied (Mertens, 2005, p. 88).

The literature review of this study first describes social constructionism as it forms the theoretical framework of the study. This puts into perspective why it is the meanings, and specifically the alternative or possible preferred meanings, of teachers that are being explored. It also highlights the importance of gaining insight into the context, and the role that research plays in these meaning-making processes. In addition, the context in which the research takes place has important implications for the transferability of the study.

Therefore, following a brief explanation of the theoretical framework of the study, I have attempted to represent the findings and descriptions from research and literature on contextual factors that could contribute to the meaning teachers make of their experiences.

The discussion will first focus on the context of teachers in South Africa. These include the official roles of teachers as defined by the education authorities; educational reform, with teachers being responsible for the implementation and outcomes of new policies; a growing culture of measures of teacher accountability; statistics portraying poor learner achievement in South Africa and the disparity in achievement between schools serving communities with high income and those with low income; and lastly, the social standing of teachers.



After illustrating factors related to the general climate of teaching in South Africa, I go on to describe factors related to contexts with low income levels, as these can contribute to the meaning that teachers working in these contexts make of their experiences. This section begins by reporting on the prevalence of low income in South Africa, the Western Cape and in the city of Cape Town. This is followed by an account from the literature regarding the implications and associations of urban areas with low income levels and the effect on children in such contexts, including the relationship between their contexts and their learning and education. Lastly, there is a description of the specific community context of the school where the research was conducted.

After having portrayed the above mentioned contexts, including the particular context in which the study was conducted, I have gone on to describe commonly depicted meanings of teachers' experiences as found in the literature. The literature review concludes by looking at meanings and actions that suggest possible or preferable alternatives to these commonly held meanings. This leads to a rationale for the focus of the study.

## **2.2 A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR EXPLORING MEANINGS OF TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES**

In chapter one I described the importance of a theoretical framework for this research and positioned it within the theory of social constructionism and explained its relevance to the focus of this study. In this section I attempt to explain social constructionism and its application to this study in greater depth.

### **2.2.1 Social constructionism**

Social constructionism is not defined by a single school of philosophy. There is no one authoritative account that represents all contributors to the ongoing dialogue from which social constructionist ideas emerge (Gergen, 2009, p. 2). However, while there is no single description or feature that can be used to define social constructionism, it is possible to identify an approach as being social constructionist if it is founded on one or more of the four key assumptions concerning the understanding and knowledge of the world (Burr, 2003, p. 2).

Firstly, “what we take to be experience of the world does not in itself dictate the terms by which the world is understood” (Gergen, 1985, p. 266). Social constructionism “begins with radical doubt in the taken-for-granted world and in a specialized way acts as a form of social criticism” (Gergen, 1985, p. 267). It invites us to challenge the assumption that “the nature of the world can be revealed by observation, and that what exists is what we perceive to exist” (Burr, 2003, p. 3). We are thus called to dispute the “objective basis of conventional knowledge” (Gergen, 1985, p. 267).

Secondly, “the terms in which the world is understood are social artefacts, [the] products of historically situated interchanges among people” (Gergen, 1985, p. 267). In the light of this, knowledge and common understandings about the world are culturally and historically specific. This means that one understanding can be no nearer the ‘truth’ than any other (Burr, 2003, p. 4).

Thirdly, understanding or knowledge about the world is formed and sustained, not as a result of its inherent empirical validity, but through social processes (Gergen, 1985, p. 268). This means that the “ways in which we describe and explain the world are the outcomes of relationship” (Gergen, 2009, p. 6).

Lastly, knowledge, or forms of negotiated understanding, is integrally connected to social action. Descriptions and explanations, or constructions, about the world serve to sustain or support certain social patterns or actions as well as to exclude others (Gergen, 1985, p. 268).

Freedman and Combs (1996) therefore explain the main premise of social constructionism as being that:

“the beliefs, values, institutions, customs, labels, laws, division of labour, and the like that make up our social realities are constructed by the members of a culture as they interact with one another from generation to generation and from day to day” (p. 16).

The role of language is paramount in the social construction of these realities. Social constructionism challenges the assumption that language expresses or reflects a reality that “predates and exists independently of the words used to describe it” (Burr,

2003, p. 46). Language is thus not seen to be a medium through which our thoughts and feelings can be made available to others, similar to a clear telephone line or a window through which one has a clear view (Burr, 2003, p. 48). Rather, language is seen to provide “us with a way of structuring our experience of the world and of ourselves and...the concepts we use do not pre-date language but are made possible by it” (Burr, 2003, pp. 47-48).

We have divided our experience into categories and divisions that are represented by words. Because our meaning is socially constructed through the social phenomenon of language, the concepts we use are represented by words and “are tied in with the kind of society we live in” and “the meaning we give [a] concept...does not reside in the concept itself” (Burr, 2003, p. 51). As language is seen as the “fount of the meaning of experience...if we are looking for explanations of the social world...we should...look out into the linguistic space in which [people] move with other people” (Burr, 2003, p. 54).

From this point of view, we realise that meaning is never fixed, but that language changes meaning over time, across contexts, and from person to person (Burr, 2003, p. 55). If language is in fact the place where ‘realities’ are formed, maintained or constructed, then language is intimately interwoven with action in the form of social practices and social structures. In other words, what individuals or groups do and the way society is organised and run (Burr, 2003, p. 56).

Social constructionism gives a specific meaning to the word ‘discourse’ through its understanding that different constructions of the world are embedded in language and are directly connected to different forms of action. Discourse is seen as a kind of activity where:

“the forms of language available to us set limits upon, or at least strongly channel, not only what we think and say, but also what we can do or what can be done to us. The term discourse here, then incorporates not just language, but practice too” (Burr, 2003, p. 64).

Foucault (1972) describes discourses as “practices which form the objects of which they speak” (p. 49). Burr (2003) explains that when considered from a social constructionist stance, “a discourse refers to a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together

produce a particular version” of reality (p. 64). Hare-Mustin (1994) portrays discourse as “a system of statements, practices, and institutional structures that share common values”. She goes on to say that “it is the medium that provides the words and ideas for thought and speech, as well as the cultural practices involving related concepts and behaviours” (p. 19). This means that if there are an infinite number of constructions of a particular event, object or person potentially available through language, then there are also countless possible discourses. Each discourse represents itself as reality or the truth (Burr, 2003, pp. 64-65).

As language gains its meaning from its utility in various practical and social conditions, so discourses have usefulness for different groups or individuals. Certain discourses become more prominent than others as they serve the interests of the relatively dominant or powerful in a society (Burr, 2003, p. 79; Gergen, 2009, p. 10). Thus, within a particular historical and cultural context certain discourses become dominant and are accepted as truth, while others become marginalised with certain phenomena or meanings being brought into sight, while others are obscured. Particular worldviews are sustained through the restrictive and expressive codes and conventions of discourses. “The way most people in a society hold, talk about, and act on a common shared viewpoint are part of and sustain the prevailing discourses” (Hare-Mustin, 1994, p. 20). Dominant discourses are so familiar that they become accepted truths that are assumed to represent a basic underlying reality shared by all. They become internalised by most members of a society and are then no longer recognised as discourses (Freedman & Combs, 1996, pp. 16-20; Hare-Mustin, 1994, p. 20). Winslade and Monk (2007) therefore describe discourses as “clusters of taken-for-granted assumptions that lie just beneath the surface of many conversations in a particular social context” (p. 29). Dominant discourses thus recede from view and function as lenses through which members of a society interpret, or make meaning of, their world (Freedman & Combs, 1996, p. 16; Hare-Mustin, 1994, p. 20).

From a social constructionist stance, people live and make meaning of their experiences within the discourses that are circulating in their local culture (which are historically and socially formed) and in the larger culture of their society. Meaning is therefore made within the interactions of the experiences that people are living out in their personal lives as well as the larger discourses into which they are born.

According to Winslade and Monk (2007), much of what we regard as being our individual meaning or subjective experience is in fact “produced out of the stories that float around in the cultural soup in which we swim” (p. 29).

Thus, according to the social constructionist worldview, the understandings that we take for granted are derived from social interchanges and do not stem from “the ways things are”. There are no transcendent foundations for beliefs that exist in knowledge, logic or morality. Rather, the foundations of these beliefs are culturally and historically formed through social processes. The meanings that we make are therefore the outcomes of relationships. “From this perspective, all that is held to be so could be otherwise; all existing constructions could be replaced by myriad alternatives” (Gergen, 2001, pp. 53-54).

What emerges here then is the possibility of the choice of alternative or preferred constructions, meanings, or discourses that differ from dominant discourses, and thus offer opportunities for action or practice that do not fall within the restrictive and expressive codes and conventions of dominant discourses. According to Freedman and Combs, by bringing forth particular and local stories of lived experiences that fall outside the domain of dominant discourse, new meaning can be made that “lets people inhabit and lay claim to the many possibilities for their lives that lie beyond the pale of the dominant narratives” (Freedman & Combs, 1996, p. 40). Furthermore, Burr (2003, p. 77) points out that the dominant position of prevailing discourses is not ensured for eternity. As discourses are not fixed, but change and evolve through social interaction, local or marginalised knowledge or meanings can influence dominant discourses (Freedman & Combs, 1996, pp. 43-44). Gergen (2009, p. 3) suggests that social constructionism therefore asks us to “rethink virtually everything we have been taught about the world and ourselves. And with this rethinking, we are invited into new and challenging forms of action”.

### **2.2.2 Social Constructionism as the theoretical framework of this study**

There are various aspects to the impact and relevance of a social constructionist approach to this research.

It is the *meanings* attached to teaching experiences that are being explored in this study as a social constructionist perspective precludes foundational truths regarding the nature of the world, or the nature of teaching experiences. These meanings are socially constructed within a particular context as well as within common or dominant discourses about this context. This relates to the concept of knowledge being culturally and historically specific. For this reason, I have used the literature review as a reflection of common or dominant understandings about the context of teachers' experiences as they appear in the literature. This is because these understandings, which are often sustained through public discourse, could contribute to the meanings teachers make of their experiences.

Social constructionism begins with radical doubt in the taken-for-granted world and recognises that "all that is held to be so could be otherwise; all existing constructions could be replaced by myriad alternatives" (Gergen, 2001, pp. 53-54). Thus one of the purposes of the study is to explore and recognise *alternative* or possible preferred meanings of teachers' experiences within a context that could invite hopelessness.

The assumption that knowledge is formed and sustained through social processes led to the decision for the data to be generated in focus group discussions. In this way alternative or preferred meanings could be jointly constructed and reinforced through a thickening of the stories of the participants.

Finally, the social constructionist recognition of the connection between knowledge and action is important to this study, as the meanings that teachers make of their experiences would support certain actions, and exclude or diminish others.

To me, framing this study within the theory of social constructionism allows for the recognition and legitimisation of the meanings of the experiences and perceptions of the teachers involved, particularly when these run contrary to the widely held 'truths' of teaching experiences in similar contexts. It also means that the dominant, and often deterministic and hopeless, constructions concerning children's learning and teachers' experiences in contexts with low income could be replaced by a myriad of other meanings. Social constructionism allows for framing the importance of the meaning of the teachers' experiences in a discourse that is not centred on the hopelessness of the context and the ineffectiveness of teachers. In exploring and

giving voice to the meanings of their experiences, teachers have the opportunity to form and modify their realities, and therefore their actions. It is with this in mind that the teachers and I explored actions that suggested alternative or preferred meanings in a context where dominant discourses can contribute to meanings of hopelessness. In addition, these preferred meanings could have an impact in altering these dominant discourses.

## **2.3 CONTEXTUAL FACTORS THAT COULD CONTRIBUTE TO MEANINGS OF TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES**

According to the above exposition of social constructionism, the context and its specific social, historical and cultural influences play a role in the meaning-making of teachers. In this literature review I explore contextual factors as they are presented in the literature and consider how these could contribute to the meanings that teachers make of their experiences.

### **2.3.1 The context of teachers in South Africa**

Discourses regarding the roles and identities of teachers form one aspect of the social, historical and cultural context that influence teachers' meaning-making. These discourses emanate from several sources, including formal policy documents embodying a culture of educational reform, and the influence of the implementation of new policies on teachers, school children, school management, education authorities and the public.

#### **2.3.1.1 *Educational policy on the roles of teachers***

According to the Concise Oxford Dictionary (Soanes & Stevenson, 2009, p. 1477), a teacher is "a person who teaches in a school". The word "teach" means to "give information", "to show someone how to do something" or "make someone realize, understand or be less likely to do something" (Soanes & Stevenson, 2009, p. 1477). These definitions portray the traditional role that is expected of a teacher and could influence the meanings that teachers make of their experiences. However, according to education policy in South Africa, being a teacher encompasses far more than this traditional role. The education authorities' views on what it means to be a

“competent” teacher are portrayed in the document *Norms and Standards for Educators* (Department of Education [DoE], 2000, p. 12). This document lists seven roles and their associated competencies and serves as a description of what it means to be a competent teacher. These seven roles include learning mediator; interpreter and designer of learning programmes and materials; leader, administrator and manager; scholar, researcher and lifelong learner; community, citizenship and pastoral role; assessor; and learning area/subject/discipline/phase specialist (DoE, 2000, pp. 12-14). These roles are described in table 2.1 below. In the document, the description of the seven roles is preceded by the following statement: “The seventh role, that of a learning area/subject/discipline/phase specialist, is the over-arching role into which the other roles are integrated, and in which competence is ultimately assessed” (DoE, 2000, p. 12). This indicates that education policy makers in South Africa appear to place greater importance, value and worth on this particular role than on the other six.

**Table 2.1: The seven roles of competent teachers**

Role	Description
Learning mediator	The teacher will mediate learning in a manner which is sensitive to the diverse needs of learners, including those with barriers to learning; construct learning environments that are appropriately contextualised and inspirational; communicate effectively showing recognition of and respect for the differences of others. In addition a teacher will demonstrate sound knowledge of subject content and various principles, strategies and resources appropriate to teaching in a South African context.
Interpreter and designer of learning programmes and materials	The teacher will understand and interpret the provided learning programmes, design original learning programmes, identify the requirements for a specific context of learning and select and prepare suitable textual and visual resources for learning. The teacher will also select, sequence and pace the learning in a manner sensitive to the differing needs of the subject/learning area and learners.
Leader, administrator and manager	The teacher will make decisions appropriate to the level, manage learning in the classroom, carry out classroom administrative duties efficiently and participate in school decision making structures. These competences will be performed in ways which are democratic, which support learners and colleagues, and which demonstrate responsiveness to changing circumstances and needs.



Scholar, researcher and lifelong learner	The teacher will achieve ongoing personal, academic, occupational and professional growth by pursuing reflective study and research in their learning area, in broader professional and educational matters, and in other related fields.
Community, citizenship and pastoral role	The teacher will practise and promote a critical, committed and ethical attitude towards developing a sense of respect and responsibility towards others. The teacher will uphold the constitution and promote democratic values and practices in schools and society. Within the school, the teacher will demonstrate an ability to develop a supportive and empowering environment for the learner, and respond to the educational and other needs of learners and fellow teachers. Furthermore, the teacher will develop supportive relations with parents and other key persons and organisations based on a critical understanding of community and environmental development issues. One critical dimension of this role is HIV/AIDS education.
Assessor	The teacher will understand that assessment is an essential feature of the teaching and learning process and know how to integrate it into this process. The teacher will have an understanding of the purposes, methods and effects of assessment and be able to provide helpful feedback to learners. The teacher will design and manage both formative and summative assessment in ways that are appropriate to the level and purpose of the learning and meet the requirements of accrediting bodies. The teacher will keep detailed and diagnostic records of assessment. The teacher will understand how to interpret and use assessment results to feed into processes for the improvement of learning programmes.
Learning area/subject/discipline/phase specialist	The teacher will be well grounded in the knowledge, skills, values, principles, methods, and procedures relevant to the discipline, subject, learning area, phase of study, or professional or occupational practice. The teacher will know about different approaches to teaching and learning (and, where appropriate, research and management), and how these may be used in ways which are appropriate to the learners and the context. The teacher will have a well-developed understanding of the knowledge appropriate to their specialisation.

Adapted from: DoE, 2000, pp. 13-14.

The reform that preceded this policy regarding the roles of teachers is discussed below.

### **2.3.1.2 Educational reform in South Africa**

In anticipation of, and following, the first democratic election in South Africa in 1994, a flood of new educational policies and curriculum reforms were introduced in an effort to transform education (Jansen, 2001, p. 12). The previous education system was an instrument of apartheid and was characterised by discriminatory policies which aimed to perpetuate the hegemony of white South Africans and the subordination of black South Africans (Baxen, 2008, p. 197). It consisted of nineteen separate education departments that enforced inequality in education throughout the country (Jansen, 2001, p. 13; Manganyi, 2001, pp. 25-26; Robinson & Soudien, 2009, p. 467). The new laws and policies that were instituted on the demise of apartheid aimed to create an education system that redressed the inequalities and injustices of the past, and to provide quality education to all school age children in the country (Republic of South Africa, 1996).

However, few tangible changes were visible several years into democracy. If anything, a deterioration in education was evident. The new South African education laws and policies were “widely acclaimed throughout the world”, but there was “a considerable distance between policy and practice” (Sayed & Jansen, 2001, p. 1). Reviews of the reform measures were instituted and resulted in ongoing revisions and changes to policies and the curriculum (Jansen, 2001, p. 12; Robinson & Soudien, 2009, p. 472).

New educational policies have been developed and enforced in a top-down manner. Throughout the reform process, teachers - who have not participated in policy-making processes - have been required to implement the new policies and curriculum changes. Furthermore, teachers have struggled with the implementation of curricular reform in their classrooms, and their needs for supportive cultures and structures have not been met (Weber, 2007, pp. 286-288). This is recognised by many as an undermining of teacher professionalism which results in a “demoralised state of the profession” (Robinson & Soudien, 2009, pp. 475-477).

In addition, as the new education system has fallen short in delivering the anticipated changes in the lives of South African school children, teachers, who are at the

coalface in implementing new policies, are held responsible for not achieving the desired learning outcomes (World Bank, 2008, p. 31).

### **2.3.1.3 *Teacher performance and accountability***

Educational transformation in South Africa is set in a context of global reform that Ball (2003, p. 215) describes as “permeating and reorienting education systems in diverse social and political locations”. According to numerous authors, these reforms as experienced internationally, increasingly embody a culture of performance accountability that is implemented through state regulation that measures quality in terms of quantifiable outcomes. Education and teacher value is thus reduced to measurable performance that can be evaluated in terms of statistical data. This is linked to the assumption that greater accountability improves performance, which results in teachers and schools being subjected to increasing accountability and answerability based on measurable performance. Teachers are constantly monitored by a steady stream of shifting demands and expectations. They are continually required to produce evidence that they are working ‘correctly’ and efficiently (Ball, 2003, pp. 215, 220; Bruns et al., 2011, p. 142; Forrester, 2005, p. 272; Lambert & McCarthy, 2006, p. 216; Strain, 2009, p. 70; Weber, 2005, p. 66; Wentworth & Erickson, 2010, pp. 2-4; Wolverton, 2006, p. vii). The locus of power is thus removed from the teacher as professional to policy-makers, statisticians and auditors who need know nothing about the profession of teaching (Drudy, 2008, p. 48). In addition, the role of local representatives of the education authorities changes as emphasis is put on ‘monitoring systems’ and the ‘production of information’ rather than on school and teacher support (Ball, 2003, p. 218).

It is argued that as performance becomes paramount and is measured in terms of learners’ results which are reflected in achievement-scores, teachers’ work is increasingly reconstituted in terms of outcomes (Forrester, 2005, p. 275). Measures of output come to represent the worth, quality or value of the individual teacher (Ball, 2003, p. 220). This emphasis on performance and accountability means that “moral values and purposes, implicated in educational processes and relationships, are obscured by the apparatus of performance measurement” (Strain, 2009, p. 75). The emphasis on attaining targets has altered the way teachers work (Eisner, 2005, p. 17; Forrester, 2005, p. 275). They lose authenticity in their practice and in their

relationships. Professional integrity, creativity and fun are sacrificed for adherence to performance plans (Ball, 2003, pp. 216-222). Forrester (2005, p. 275) states that as measurable activities or performance gain prominence, other teaching activities such as caring become less visible. Ball (2003) affirms that:

“performance has no room for caring...while we may not be expected to care about each other we are expected to ‘care’ about performances and the performances of the team and the organisation and to make our contribution to the construction of convincing institutional spectacles and ‘outputs’” (p. 224).

South Africa is no exception to this international trend with teachers being monitored and subjected to increasing measures of accountability. This is done through the imposition of external demands in the form of different levels of evaluation, including internal appraisals and external evaluations. As part of this scrutiny, teachers are required to produce a continuous output of documental evidence to prove the adequacy of their performance. At the same time, learner achievement is analysed and used as a measure of teacher effectiveness (Bloch, 2009, p. 156; Jansen, 2004, p. 51; Khosa, 2010, p. 2-3; Weber, 2005, p. 66, 2007, p. 286-288).

#### **2.3.1.4 *Learner performance in South Africa***

In both international and national research and literature, the success and effectiveness of education, and by implication that of teachers, is reduced to measures of learner achievement in mathematics and reading (Bloch, 2009, p. 17; Fleisch, 2008, p. 93). It therefore follows that in a climate where teacher performance and accountability is emphasised, the experiences of teachers are linked to the achievement of their learners in mathematics and reading.

International comparisons show that South African children’s achievement in reading and mathematics is not only among the worst in the world, but also among the worst on the African continent and is below the average of the Southern African region (Bloch, 2009, p. 17; Makuwa, 2010, p. 1). In addition, Bloch (2009, p. 17) points out that in South Africa there is a huge gulf between a small minority of schools that are performing adequately and the vast majority. In fact, 60 to 80 percent of schools can be classified as dysfunctional. Fleisch (2008, p. 2) speaks of an economic divide in

South African schooling. He describes a small percentage of well-resourced schools that enrol the “elite middle classes” and ensure that these children develop adequate numeracy and literacy competencies which are “comparable to those of middle class children anywhere in the world”. This is in contrast to the vast majority of schools that enrol the bulk of the country’s children who are described as being “working class and poor”. He states that although these children do learn at school, after seven years of schooling they emerge with literacy and numeracy levels that are barely functional.

These descriptions are consistent with the results of the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality [SACMEQ] Project II, a study completed in 2004 that researched education in primary schools across South Africa extensively. One of the conclusions of the study was that there is a strong relationship between “a learner’s socio-economic status and their level of achievement” (Moloi & Strauss, 2005, p. 194). SACMEQ Project III was completed six years later in 2010 and again found a discrepancy in achievement according to learners’ ‘socio-economic status’. When the reading levels of Grade six children in South Africa were compared, only 22 percent of children with ‘low socio-economic status’ could read with meaning compared to the 86 percent of children with high ‘socio-economic status’. A similar disparity based on ‘socio-economic status’ was found regarding learners’ competency in mathematics (Hungu et al., 2010).

According to Bloch (2009, p. 10), the story that emerges when using statistics or figures to back an argument depends on the ‘facts’ chosen, and the way they are arranged. However, he states that whichever way the figures are interpreted, stories of education in South Africa “attest to the single fact that the vast majority of South African schools are underperforming abysmally” (p. 10). In the present educational climate of performance and accountability, this has implications for evaluations of the success and effectiveness of teachers in South Africa.

### **2.3.1.5 *Social standing of teachers***

According to the SACE (2011), teachers are subjected to harmful publicity as media reports about the teaching profession are negative and fail to reflect the “good things done by our educators and the profession as a whole”. Fritz and Smit (2008, pp. 155-

156), who analysed South African newspaper articles over a two month period in 2007, found that of fifty one articles referring to education, teaching and teachers, not one portrayed teachers or teaching in a positive light. Articles reported on topics such as the inappropriate or violent conduct of teachers and their incompetency. A review of recent media articles shows a similar trend (Louw, 2010, p. 9; MacFarlane, 2011b; Moeng, 2011, p. 2; Saunders, 2011a, 2011b).

The public image of teachers is further eroded by media reports of primary school children's poor achievement in literacy and numeracy on various assessment measures (Gernetzky, 2011, p. 1; Kruger, 2011, p. 10; MacFarlane, 2011a; Steyn, 2011, p. 2; Strydom, 2011). Fritz and Smit (2008) contend that "currently in South Africa, no other profession receives such negative publicity as that of teaching" (p. 156).

Drudy (2008, p. 87) states that although media publicity is often sensational and superficial, it is "insidiously powerful" in influencing public opinion and values. She links this to a decline in respect for teachers. Other authors also report that there is a decrease in respect for teachers, that their status in society is falling, and that they lack recognition (Mulkeen et al., 2007, p. 30). This is attributed to a global shift away from respect grounded in social capital with teachers being seen as community leaders, to an emphasis on economic capital forming a new foundation for respect. Therefore, in a culture that values conspicuous consumerism, teachers - who are not highly paid - are afforded little respect (Forrester, 2005, pp. 346-347; Hammett, 2008, p. 343). However, the reverse of this is also argued: the low pay that teachers receive is a manifestation of the lack of respect and worth that they are afforded by society (Bloch, 2009, p. 83).

Kallaway (2007, p. 42) summarises the social standing of teachers in South Africa as follows:

"Teachers are the most maligned, frequently criticised, widely misunderstood and grossly underrated professional group in our society. They have not been given a substantive chance to be heard when it comes to establishing priorities and setting goals for policy reform. Yet they are blamed when things go wrong".

Discourses regarding the roles and identities of teachers form one aspect of the social, historical and cultural context that could influence teachers' meaning-making. The other aspect that is explored in this chapter relates to how contexts with low income levels, and particularly the context of Rose Valley, are portrayed in the literature.

### **2.3.2 Contexts with low income levels**

From a social constructionist stance, the social, historical and cultural components of contexts with low income levels shape the meanings that teachers make as their daily experiences interact with circulating discourses about these contexts. For this reason, the prevalence and extent of low income nationally provincially and locally can also have an influence, not only on the individual meaning-making of teachers, but also on prominent discourses about teachers in these contexts. While this would apply to teachers working in the community of Rose Valley, local discourses circulating about the specific community of Rose Valley can also contribute to the cultural soup out of which these teachers make their meaning.

#### **2.3.2.1 *The prevalence and extent of low income levels in South Africa***

According to latest statistics obtained from the government census in 2001, at that time 57 percent of individuals in South Africa were living below the 'poverty income line' which was set at R1290 for a household of four (Schwabe, 2004, p. 5). Although these statistics may reflect the seriousness and extent of low income in South Africa, they do not indicate just how far below the poverty line many South Africans are actually living. Some indication of this is given by the UNDP (2003, p. 1) which estimated that in 2002, 4,7 million people in South Africa were living on less than one dollar a day.

In addition, by comparing statistics taken in 1996 and 2001, it can be seen that the gap between the "rich and the poor" is widening, with those "living in poverty" sinking "deeper into poverty" (Schwabe, 2004, p. 1). Özler (2007, p. 487) confirms this trend, pointing out that household expenditure at the lower end of the economic scale has declined, while expenditure at the upper end has increased. He agrees that the poverty gap (indicating how far below the poverty line households are actually living)

is increasing. According to Oosthuizen and Nieuwoudt (2003, p. 69), “the gap between rich and poor in the country is one of the largest in the world.” While Poswa (2008, p. 3) states that “South Africa is classified as an upper middle income country by the World Bank, a huge proportion of its population are living in absolute poverty”. I shall therefore discuss the prevalence and extent of low income levels in the Western Cape as well as in the city of Cape Town.

### ***2.3.2.2 The prevalence and extent of low income levels in the Western Cape and in the city of Cape Town***

In the last national census the Western Cape was the province that showed the lowest percentage of people living below the poverty line in the country. Nevertheless, the figure was 32 percent (Schwabe, 2004, p. 1). Furthermore, there was a huge disparity between the income distribution and living conditions of those at the top of the scale with those at the bottom. This disparity is not quite as high as the national figure, but it is still one of the highest in the world on rating scales of inequality of distribution of income (Pauw, 2005, p. 10).

Although urban areas tend to have a higher average per capita income than rural areas, these statistics easily create the impression that those living in urban areas are comparatively well off. However, urban areas in South Africa show “concentrations of deep poverty” (South African Cities Network [SACN], 2006, p. 2-18). According to the City of Cape Town’s official website, 39 percent of the city’s population is living below the poverty line (City of Cape Town [CCT], 2011). In the urban areas of Cape Town, as in the rest of South Africa and the Western Cape, there is a huge disparity in income distribution between those at the upper end of the income scale and those at the lower end (Poswa, 2008, p. 3).

I am aware that using statistical data is a questionable way of portraying a context. However, I have cited these statistics knowing that they may not be an accurate representation, nor do they portray the individual meanings people make of their lives. The statistics were used in an effort to convey some understanding of the prevalence and degree of low income levels in South Africa, as well as in the Western Cape and the City of Cape Town.



### **2.3.2.3 *Implications and associations related to urban communities with low income levels***

Most simplistically, low income levels are related to deprivation in the form of insufficient income to satisfy basic, material human needs. However, long-term low income levels in a community are associated with numerous, pervasive and complex manifestations that are usually termed poverty (Ratele, 2007, pp. 219-221; UNDP, 2003, p. 1).

‘Poverty’ is commonly determined or measured by low income or minimum living level cut off lines (Ratele, 2007, p. 219). This means that, simplistically speaking, income below a certain level can be regarded as being synonymous with ‘poverty’ (Alderman et al., 2000, p. 5). As I have already explained in chapter one (See section 1.8), I prefer not to use the word poverty, and have therefore not attempted to define or explain this term. I have rather attempted to describe the possible associations or experiences of people living in a community with a low income level (often called poverty) as is portrayed in the literature.

The context of a community with low income levels can be associated with a complexity of factors. It is not my intention to imply cause and effect between low income and these associated factors, nor is it my intention to provide determining or definitive descriptions. My aim is purely to describe understandings and knowledge of the context as they appear in the literature, because these could contribute to the meaning that teachers make of their experiences.

International and national research associates urban areas with low income levels with a range of environmental and individual health-related and social problems. According to the UNDP (2003), these include “severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information” (p. 1). Additionally, communities with low income are linked in the literature to environmental pollution; a lack of facilities; dilapidated, overcrowded and sub-standard housing; unsafe environments; reduced lifespan and health risks including hunger and malnutrition, increased morbidity from illness, high rates of asthma, tuberculosis and HIV, and an elevated rate of AIDS-related deaths; as well as high levels of accidental injury and death. Furthermore, such areas are

reportedly characterised by low levels of education; high levels of unemployment; substance abuse; and domestic, community, and gang-related violence (Frumkin et al., 2004, p. 198; Gottdiener & Budd, 2005, p. 69; Peterman & Sweigard, 2008, p. 21; Ratele, 2007, p. 219).

According to a Cape Metropolitan Council report, people living in communities with low income levels frequently experience deprivation in the form of isolation and powerlessness, as well as vulnerability through exposure to risk and stress (Cape Metropolitan Council [CMC], 1999, p. 2). The UNDP (2003) describes people in these communities as experiencing “social discrimination and exclusion...[and] a lack of participation in decision-making in civil, social and cultural life” (p. 1). Literature reports that factors associated with low income levels compound and reinforce one another, leading to a cyclical nature of living in such a community. This makes it very difficult for an individual to break out of, or change, the nature of his or her living context (CMC, 1999, p. 2; Ratele, 2007, p. 224). Swanepoel and De Beer (2006, p. 5) echo this by citing Chambers (1983) who shows how interacting forms of deprivation associated with low income form a “deprivation trap” that prevents a family or a community from “rising out of poverty”.

#### **2.3.2.4 *Children in urban communities with low income levels***

Living in urban contexts with low income levels is reported to have a detrimental effect on children’s health, as well as on their cognitive and emotional development and behaviour. There is reportedly a high prevalence of health problems among children who grow up in communities with low income levels (Bloch, 2009, p. 78). These health concerns include neonatal damage; low birth weight; under-nourishment and malnutrition; increased susceptibility to infection, such as recurrent diarrhoea resulting from unsanitary living conditions, and ear infections with subsequent hearing loss; susceptibility to parasitic infections such as worms; stress-related illnesses such as gastrointestinal distress and headaches; chronic physical conditions including a susceptibility to asthma; and unidentified or uncorrected problems with vision or hearing and untreated childhood illnesses. Children who grow up in contexts with low income levels are also more likely to experience the long term effects of prenatal exposure to the abuse of substances. Among many other physiological, psychological and health-related impacts, these include structural,

functional and metabolic effects on the brain and central nervous system (Bloch, 2009, p. 78; Finnegan & Kandall, 2005, p. 809; Johnson & Golub, 2005, p. 107; Msall, 2009, p. 303; Rousotte et al., 2010, p. 376).

Furthermore, these children reportedly grow up in environments that are often disorganised and impoverished with high levels of stress. Parents in contexts with low income levels are reported as being more likely to be tense, short tempered and volatile, resorting to arbitrary and punitive forms of discipline. It has also been found that there is a high prevalence of mental disorders among parents in low income contexts and a high incidence of child abuse and neglect. There are also higher risks of accidental injury and death, including traffic-related injuries and fatalities involving child pedestrians (Bauman, Silver, & Stein, 2006, p. 1322; Chen et al., 2008, p. 157; McWhirter, McWhirter, McWhirter, & McWhirter, 2007, pp. 24-31). Additionally, children living in contexts with low income levels are reportedly more prone to abuse substances at an early age, have a higher incidence of teenage pregnancy, and are more likely to experience, witness or become perpetrators of violent or aggressive acts. They are also at increased risk for mental health difficulties (Atkins et al., 2007, p. 166; Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 2001, p. 52).

In terms of learning and education, children in contexts with low income levels have been found to have little access to quality preschools or day care which can negatively influence subsequent learning and social development. Children growing up in families with low income levels reportedly receive little social, emotional and educational support or cognitive stimulation in their home environments. Research shows that these children are at increased risk for developmental challenges in communication, learning and social skills. Cognitive and behavioural problems are reportedly more common in children who live in communities with low income levels, as are learning difficulties, low scores on aptitude tests, and hearing, vision and speech difficulties. Furthermore, research has found that they have low school attendance rates and are at high risk for grade repetition and not completing school (Atkins et al., 2007, p. 166; Chen et al., 2008, p. 152; Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 2001, p. 52; Evans, 2004, p. 77; Msall, 2009, p. 300; Ratele, 2007, p. 223).

According to Chen et al. (2008, p. 151), “the effects of poverty increase over time and thus have a cumulative negative impact on [the] child, family and society. Detrimental

effects persist over time resulting in life-long risks". Grinspun (2004, p. 2) summarises the prevailing meaning-making processes concerning children in communities with low income levels as follows:

"Apart from compromising one's childhood - a time to be filled with play, exploration, and discovery of one's self and others - poverty at this early stage in life has enduring consequences for those who survive into adulthood. It condemns them to recurrent poverty spells or even a life full of hardship, increasing the chances of passing their poverty onto the next generation".

### **2.3.3 The community in which the research was conducted - Rose Valley**

As Rose Valley is only a small area (population of approximately 28 000) within the larger city of Cape Town (population of 2,8 million) (CCT, 2010), there is little literature available which is specifically focused on the community. However, there is some documentation on the history of Rose Valley (Dinan, McCall, & Gibson, 2004, p. 729; Naidoo & Dreyer, 1984, p. 9; New World Foundation [NWF], 2011; Western, 1981, p. 235), including two recent reports from the city administration concerning economic levels within the community (CCT, 2010; Romanovsky & Gie, 2006, p. 4-12). Although Rose Valley is so small, there have been numerous recent newspaper articles reporting on life in the community (Adams, 2011; Bamford, 2011b, p. 1; Barnes, 2010, p. 4; Bezuidenhout, 2011a, p. 4, 2011b, p. 4, 2011c, p. 3; Booie, 2011; Byram, 2010, p. 6; Claasen, 2010, p. 28; Cupido, 2010, p. 6; Davids, 2011, p. 8; De Vries, 2010, p. 6; Dolley, 2010a, p. 6; Maditla, 2011, p. 3; Maré, 2011, p. 9; Martin, 2011, p. 10; Merten, 2002, p. 24; Mtyala, 2009, p. 1; Nel & Swartz, 2011, p. 10; Peters, 2010, p. 15; Prince, 2011, p. 3; September, 2011; Slamdien, 2011, p. 6; Swart, 2010, p. 6; Witten, 2010, p. 8). I have used information from these articles in an attempt to paint a picture of Rose Valley. While newspaper articles are not academic or scholarly publications, I think that they can be used to provide some idea of circulating discourses that could shape the meanings made about the community.

### **2.3.3.1 History**

Following the establishment of the Population Registration Act and the Group Areas Act in 1950, all people living in South Africa were classified and registered under the 'racial' categories of 'White', 'Native' and 'Coloured'. Residential areas in and surrounding the city of Cape Town (as in the rest of South Africa) were allocated according to these 'racial groups' (Carter, 1958, pp. 81-85). The Group Areas Act resulted in many people being forcibly removed from their homes to areas demarcated for their particular 'race' (Naidoo & Dreyer, 1984, p. 9; NWF, 2011).

Rose Valley was established as a 'housing estate' for 'coloured' people during the implementation of the Group Areas Act (Dinan et al., 2004, p. 729; Naidoo & Dreyer, 1984, p. 9; NWF, 2011). The racial classification 'coloured' was applied to people of 'mixed race', but also included other racial sub-categories (Carter, 1958, p. 85; Dinan et al., 2004, p. 729). Inferior quality housing with serious damp problems was constructed in the area during the 1970s, and the people classified as 'coloured', who were forcibly removed from 'white' areas, were moved into the new housing. Most of these people came from District Six, Steurhof and Claremont where the majority had been property owners (Naidoo & Dreyer, 1984, p. 11; NWF, 2011). The government paid them out less than an eighth of the market value for their properties. With property in Rose Valley being sold at inflated prices by the government, these land owners were forced to become tenants in council housing. In addition, those people who had been tenants in their previous homes now had to pay rentals over four times higher than their previous rentals, for flats that were less than a quarter of the size of their previous houses (Naidoo & Dreyer, 1984, pp. 9- 24). This resulted, amongst other things, in over-crowding.

Prior to the removals, people had easy access to public transport, or lived within walking distance of their places of employment. They now had extra expense and time of travelling for long distances to get to work or to access health-care facilities (Western, 1981, p. 235). Higher rentals and increased travelling costs resulted in both parents having to work in families where the mother had previously stayed at home to care for the children. Parents had to spend longer times away from home due to the distances they had to travel to work (Naidoo & Dreyer, 1984, p. 25). The detrimental effect of parents being away from home for long hours on their children

was exacerbated by the fact that there were inadequate child care facilities in Rose Valley. Previously these parents had been able to send their children to crèches or pre-schools, but now younger children were often left in the care of their older siblings (Naidoo & Dreyer, 1984, p. 25). Families and supportive communities were split up and scattered during the forced removals and housing allocations (Naidoo & Dreyer, 1984, p. 28). In their previous home communities “everyone [in the neighbourhood] knew everyone”, now neighbours were strangers and crime flourished (Naidoo & Dreyer, 1984, p. 24). Western (1981, p. 235) found that the most common response to questions about life in the new Cape Flats group areas pertained to fear concerning physical safety.

In the face of these difficulties, some residents refused to give up hope and took action in their community (Naidoo & Dreyer, 1984, p. 29). Despite opposition from the government authorities, one woman started a crèche in 1977 (Naidoo & Dreyer, 1984, p. 29). A community centre with activities for preschool and school-going children, as well as elderly people, was established and run by residents. The New World Foundation was set up to “combine the efforts of caring individuals, churches and relief organisations as an answer to huge social and community problems” (Naidoo & Dreyer, 1984, p. 17; NWF, 2011). A residents’ association was formed in 1981 to campaign regarding matters of service delivery. It further aimed to bring residents together as there was friction and animosity between the people who, “having different frameworks of norms and values, were dumped together in blocks of flats” (Naidoo & Dreyer, 1984, p. 17). In addition, the residents’ association set up an advice office to assist residents with legal and employment related matters and started a clothing workers’ union, as large numbers of residents were employed in the garment making industry (Naidoo & Dreyer, 1984, p. 17). According to Naidoo and Dreyer (1984, p. 29), these residents took action, refusing to be “apathetic” in the face of adversity, believing that by being involved in community projects they could “alleviate some of the problems of the Rose Valley community”.

After researching the history of Rose Valley I found that there seemed to be a logical connection between descriptions of living conditions in the community - a direct result of this history - and the present day living context of the area.

### **2.3.3.2 Low income levels**

Rose Valley is reported as being one of the communities with the lowest levels of income in Cape Town. In 2006 the city administration categorised this community as falling into the lowest quintile of the suburbs of Cape Town in terms of its 'socio-economic status' (Romanovsky & Gie, 2006, p. 5). Statistics for the Rose Valley area paint a bleak picture, with 31 percent of people within the economically active age range being unemployed at the time of the most recent census. Of those who were employed, 69 percent earned R1600 or less per month (CCT, 2010). According to one journalist from the *Financial Mail*, 60 percent of residents in Rose Valley live on welfare grants (Claasen, 2010, p. 28).

Examples of the practical implications of the economic difficulties faced by the residents of Rose Valley are referred to in recent newspaper articles. According to one media account, most parents of children at the local high school are unable to contribute one hundred rand per year towards their children's school fees (Byram, 2010, p. 6). A residential facility for elderly people was reported to be facing closure as it was unable to meet its running costs (Peters, 2010). Another article states that for financial reasons, residents are unable to travel to the nearest police station to report crime (Swart, 2010, p. 6). A local priest is quoted as saying that for economic reasons, people in Rose Valley are forced to make decisions based on survival, rather than on "right and wrong" (Slamdien, 2011, p. 6).

Newspaper articles and statistics about Rose Valley paint a picture that has much in common with other descriptions of contexts with low income levels. Slamdien (2011, p. 6) states that:

"poverty is clearly visible in the area with dilapidated council flats covered in graffiti, and unemployed young men hanging around on street corners. There is a lack of resources, particularly for teenagers, which makes them easy targets for recruitment into gangs".

### **2.3.3.3 Gang activity**

A theme that emerges repeatedly from newspaper articles is the presence and influence of gangs in the Rose Valley area (Maré, 2011, p. 9; September, 2011).

Many articles report on how the Rose Valley community and its children are affected by, or involved in, gang activity. According to one article, there are children as young as nine in some of the gangs (Bezuidenhout, 2011c, p. 3). One article records a mother's sadness and lost dreams concerning her son who admits to being a gangster (Dolley, 2010a, p. 6). Although active gang activity tends to be seen as predominantly involving males, there are mothers in the area who provide early warnings of police raids to gang members in exchange for having their rent, household expenses, or children's school fees paid (Slamdien, 2011, p. 6). Gang activity largely revolves around control of the illegal drug trade in the community, with disputes being waged between rival gangs over the "ownership" of territories used to sell drugs (Bamford, 2011b, p. 1; Davids, 2011, p. 8; Dolley, 2010b, p. 1).

#### **2.3.3.4 Substance abuse**

Substance abuse, particularly that of alcohol, cannabis and methamphetamine (locally called *tik*), is described as being rife in the community (De Vries, 2010, p. 6; Slamdien, 2011, p. 6). This links to research findings which indicate that the prevalence of substance abuse in the Western Cape far exceeds that of the rest of South Africa (Baxen, 2008, p. 210). One article speaks of children as young as thirteen years old seeking help from the only rehabilitation centre in the area (Bezuidenhout, 2011a, p. 4). There are also accounts of parents and carers misusing alcohol and drugs (Slamdien, 2011, p. 6). Media reports document frequent incidences of children in both primary and high school being found in possession of illegal drugs while at school. Crime, and in particular robbery, are seen as being caused by the perpetrators' needs to support their drug habits. The concern of community members with regards to the trade and use of illegal drugs is also documented, as is the perceived need for a residential facility and more rehabilitation centres (Bezuidenhout, 2011a, p. 4).

#### **2.3.3.5 Violence**

Media articles frequently connect gang activity in Rose Valley with reports of crime, violence, shootings and deaths in the community. There are, at times, lulls in the shooting which are followed by flare ups where shooting takes place on a daily basis (Bamford, 2011b, p. 1; Bezuidenhout, 2011b, p. 3; Booi, 2011; Davids, 2011, p. 8;



Dolley, 2010b, p. 1; Maré, 2011, p. 9; Slamdien, 2011, p. 6). Fear in the community is a common theme in these articles, and tremendous sadness at gang-related deaths is reported (Bamford, 2011a, p. 5; Barnes, 2010, p. 4; Bezuidenhout, 2010, p. 6; 2011b, p. 4; 2011d, p. 6; Slamdien, 2011, p. 6).

### **2.3.3.6 Violence and school children**

The effect of this violence on the lives of school children in Rose Valley is also documented in the media. Children have been killed by stray bullets when they are caught in the crossfire between gangs (Bamford, 2011a, p. 5; Maré, 2011, p. 9; Slamdien, 2011, p. 6). Children are also recruited as members of gangs and used to sell drugs, or to act as gun runners (Bamford, 2011a, p. 5; Slamdien, 2011, p. 6). They are sometimes killed when conflict breaks out between gangs (Bezuidenhout, 2011b, p. 4; 2011d, p. 6). When police make arrests, these children are often put forward by the gangs as targets because they have no previous convictions (Davids, 2011, p. 8). Children are apparently often used for shooting because they are unlikely to be sent to jail (Barnes, 2010, p. 4; Davids, 2011, p. 8).

Many children who are not directly involved in gang activity witness shootings and violence (Davids, 2011, p. 8). They and others live in fear as a result. Children are reported as being “too scared to play” and “too scared to sleep” (Bezuidenhout, 2011c, p. 3). There is reportedly a high incidence of children bringing weapons, especially knives, to school (Bezuidenhout, 2011c, p. 3). Children also play dangerous games in imitation of the violence in the community, which in at least one case has resulted in one child killing another (Mtyala, 2009, p. 1). Children’s drawings and writing are often characterised by themes of violence, death and shooting (Bezuidenhout, 2011c, p. 3). Some children in the area have parents who are in gangs, or who are in prison for gang-related crimes (Bezuidenhout, 2011a, p. 4).

When gang fighting becomes severe, schools in the area close early and cancel extra mural activities so that the children can be home and off the streets as early as possible (Bezuidenhout, 2011a, p. 4; 2011b, p. 4). Teachers attempt to increase the children’s safety by ensuring that they leave school in groups and walk together (Bezuidenhout, 2011c, p. 3). Some teachers have the children draw and write about

what they see and feel (Bezuidenhout, 2011c, p. 3). One school is situated across the road from the 'battlefield' used for shootouts by rival gangs. According to the principal, the teachers have to rush to get the children inside during break times when shooting breaks out as gangsters sometimes run through the school when they are fighting. She states that children have even discovered the corpses of murder victims in the alley alongside the school (Davids, 2011, p. 8). Some parents are reported as wanting to keep their children away from school as they fear they will not return home safely (Bezuidenhout, 2011c, p. 3).

#### **2.3.3.7 *The role of the police***

Some media accounts report increased police patrols in the area and new strategies for dealing with gang activity (Adams, 2011; Bezuidenhout, 2010, p. 6; Dolley, 2010b, p. 1; Prince, 2011, p. 3; Slamdien, 2011, p. 6). However, there are also media reports of the ineffectiveness of police. Some problems identified include a slow response to situations, the lack of a police presence in the area, and the police station being far away thereby making it difficult for residents to report crime (Bamford, 2011b, p. 1; 2011b, p. 5; Davids, 2011, p. 8; Slamdien, 2011, p. 6; Swart, 2010, p. 6). In addition, there are accounts of residents not trusting the police, crime being committed by police in the area, and police corruption and involvement in gangs (Davids, 2011, p. 8; Martin, 2011, p. 10; Nel & Swartz, 2011, p. 10; Slamdien, 2011, p. 6; Witten, 2010, p. 8). Residents have reportedly expressed their dissatisfaction with promises for greater protection made by the police and a government member of the Executive Council for Community Safety (Davids, 2011, p. 8; Maditla, 2011, p. 3).

#### **2.3.3.8 *Child neglect and abuse***

Neglect, accidental injury or death, as well as physical and sexual abuse of children in Rose Valley has also been a topic in media reports. A relationship between these issues and substance abuse by the parents or carers is believed to exist (Bezuidenhout, 2011a, p. 4; Cupido, 2010, p. 6; Davids, 2011, p. 8; Slamdien, 2011, p. 6).

### **2.3.3.9 Actions in the community that could suggest alternative meanings**

Media accounts characterise Rose Valley according to its historic disadvantage, economic difficulties, gang activity, substance abuse, violence, and child neglect and abuse. However, occasionally a newspaper article appears reporting actions that highlight an alternative to these constructions that dominate media descriptions. Some of these actions are described below.

There are reports that some gang members are aware of the problems in the community and become part of community life by organising money for rent and school uniforms, providing free taxi rides to hospital, and sponsoring and running soccer tournaments (Merten, 2002, p. 24; Slamdien, 2011, p. 6). Some gangsters actively dissuade young people from becoming involved in gangs and drug abuse (Dolley, 2010a, p. 6). A social worker from the area has facilitated non-violent negotiation between gangs. He reportedly refuses to give up hope, petitioning the government, sometimes successfully, for the provision of services in Rose Valley (Claasen, 2010, p. 28). One mother's love for and pride in her son, who admits to being a gangster, is documented (Dolley, 2010a, p. 6). Another mother, who killed her son when she could no longer deal with the effects of his drug addiction, is reported to be raising money for a community centre for youth in Rose Valley (De Vries, 2010, p. 6).

There is reportedly a neighbourhood watch that is run by a group of women from the community who patrol the streets at night. They also assist residents with social and domestic issues, as well as with crime related problems (Swart, 2010, p. 6). Furthermore, there are accounts of residents mobilising themselves to take action regarding gang-related activities and violence. They organised a march to parliament and ensured that there was a significant turnout at a community meeting with the government member of the Executive Council for Community Safety (Maditla, 2011, p. 3). In April 2011, residents, police and the Community Police Forum of Rose Valley apparently banded together in a campaign called *Take Back Our Streets*, with the aim of working proactively while there was a lull in the violence (Prince, 2011, p. 3).

Lastly, there has been some positive publicity related to facilities for the elderly and schools in the community. Elderly residents at a facility in Rose Valley talked of how much they loved their home, and how well they were treated in spite of the facility's financial difficulties. There is a report of a city official who acted against orders by refusing to fulfil a mandate to cut off the electricity to the home for non-payment (Peters, 2010, p. 15). A primary school in Rose Valley received a special award from the World Wildlife Fund for its eco-programme (Potgieter, 2010, p. 10). There is also a report of an NGO providing a fully equipped library to the local high school (Byram, 2010, p. 6).

## **2.4 MEANINGS OF TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES**

International studies make a direct connection between contextual factors and the meanings that teachers make of their teaching experiences (Halpin, 2003, p. 10; Hammett, 2008, p. 341; Holmes, 2005, pp. 1-26; Leithwood & Beatty, 2008; Matier, 2007, pp. 25-31; Mulkeen et al., 2007, p. 30; Strekas, 2008, pp. 5-9). The context that they describe as being relevant to these meanings includes challenges associated with working in environments with low income levels; having to implement new educational policy that is introduced in a top-down fashion with little support; working in an era of performance measurement and accountability where teachers are answerable for the shortcomings of new policies, as well as the underachievement of the learners they teach; an increased workload; receiving comparatively low remuneration; being the subject of poor public opinion and declining respect; and being the target of negative media attention.

In describing the present state of the teaching profession, literature links these contextual factors to an all-time low in teacher morale which has taken the form of an array of negative meanings. Teachers are portrayed as having lost their idealism and passion and as being exhausted, overextended, emotionally depleted, and lacking in motivation. They are reported to have feelings of reduced personal accomplishment and negative self-evaluation, low self-efficacy and poor self-worth. In addition, they have been shown to experience discouragement, disillusionment, disappointment, isolation, hopelessness, cynicism and a sense of futility, meaninglessness and powerlessness. Teachers are depicted as being frustrated and angry, with many of them leaving the profession, or expressing the desire to do so (Frase, 2005, p. 430;

Halpin, 2003, p. 10; Hammett, 2008, p. 341; Holmes, 2005, pp. 1-26; Leithwood & Beatty, 2008, p. 75; Matier, 2007, pp. 25-31; Mulkeen et al., 2007, p. 30; Streckas, 2008, pp. 5-9).

Although these negative meanings are attributed to the contextual factors of teachers in general, they are even more evident among teachers who work in urban contexts with low income levels. In addition, these meanings are further entrenched and intensified when teachers see 'low socio-economic status' as predetermining poor learner achievement (Auwarter & Aruguete, 2008, p. 243; Frase, 2005, p. 431; Halpin, 2003, p. 10; Lowe, 2007, p. 148; Maguire, Wooldridge, & Pratt-Adams, 2006, p. 49; Wallace, 2005, p. 2).

South African research findings echo those of international studies. Hammett (2008, pp. 341-347) states that there is low morale among teachers in South Africa, with the majority of them considering leaving the profession. This is related to heavy workloads, low pay, poor working conditions, poor student behaviour and the resultant stress. He further emphasises that negative media coverage of teaching and teachers, as well as a decline in respect towards them, are key factors which affect teacher morale and the desire to leave the profession. These factors lead to teachers feeling insufficiently valued and lacking in status.

Shalem and Hoadley (2009, p. 119) support these findings, stating that there is mounting frustration and anger and a growing desire to leave the profession among South African teachers. These authors also attribute this to negative media coverage which features increasing reports of low teacher morale, their inability to cope, and poor schooling outcomes. Furthermore, they argue that past inequalities between schools and between teachers have been sustained through current government policies. They add that "these processes are shown to be set within a regulatory framework of teacher accountability that has reshaped teachers' work in ways that have weakened their control over the pedagogical process and thus deskilled them" (p. 120). They stress that teacher morale needs to be viewed within this context (Shalem & Hoadley, 2009, p. 120).

In South Africa, as in international contexts, research shows that negative discourses around teaching experiences are particularly prevalent amongst teachers who work

in urban communities with low income levels. These teachers are often faced with teaching children who are unlikely to reach the expected outcomes for their grade level. At the same time, teachers have to deal with the effects of the children's life contexts within vulnerable communities. These challenges often exacerbate other factors related to teacher morale, leading to teachers feeling like failures - inadequate and disempowered (Strauss, 2008, p. 3; Van Duuren & Schoeman, 2009, pp. 2-7).

The economic divide in South African schooling referred to by Fleisch (2008, p. 2) and Bloch (2009, p. 17) has already been described in this literature review (section 2.3.1.4). Shalem and Hoadley (2009, p. 120) take this theme further and link the "dual economy" of South African schooling to teacher morale. They speak of sixty to seventy percent of teachers being locked into teaching at "schools for the poor" that produce learner underachievement (p. 120). Furthermore they assert that educational policy reform does not affect all teachers equally, with those in less functional schools being more severely impacted. They state that teacher morale needs to be understood in the context of these inequalities within the South African schooling system.

Both internationally and nationally, the work of teachers is seen to exist in a context that invites negative meaning-making characterised by hopelessness, particularly in communities with low income levels.

## **2.5 ALTERNATIVE OR PREFERRED MEANINGS OF TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES**

Amid the plethora of literature representing the prevailing negative discourses that contextualise teaching (especially in schools with low income levels), there is evidence that points to possible alternative or preferred meanings of teaching experiences.

Palmer (2002) details teaching practices that challenge the hopelessness of teaching contexts and speak of a different kind of meaning-making:

"...but you will also witness teacher after teacher transcending these conditions and caring for young people in remarkable ways. You will see

teachers who bring sandwiches from home for youngsters who arrive at school hungry; who use their own money to buy unbudgeted classroom materials; ...who offer solace and encouragement to children and young adults who, for good reason, sometimes feel helpless and hopeless. They do all this in spite of everything, because they have a deep passion to help children learn and grow...Caught in an anguishing bind between the good work they do and public misperceptions that surround them, hundreds of thousands of teachers somehow keep the faith and keep going. Every day in classrooms across the land, good people are working hard, with competency and compassion, at reweaving the tattered fabric of society on which we all depend...teachers who, having heard the needs of others, ...reached out to connect with them, making both common cause and a difference in the world” (pp. xviii-xxii).

Teachers express their understandings of their motivations and actions in various ways. One speaks of her enjoyment in providing children with experiences that they would “otherwise be deprived of” (Maguire et al., 2006, p. 40). Another expresses his dedication to making school a sanctuary, saying “our kids have a great deal stacked against them...it can be wild out there. And schools can be a port in the storm.” He further conveys a commitment to “provide the best we can” for children for whom “life is already unfair”, ensuring that they do not “miss out on education too” (Maguire, et al., 2006, p. 42). Some teachers embody caring through “firm, fair discipline, high standards and expectations, and an unwillingness...to let students ‘slide by’” (Irvine, 2003, p. 43).

Furthermore, there are accounts in the literature which attest to the determination of teachers who refuse to give up on their students. There are stories of teachers who extend their work to include parents and communities, or who provide networks of strength and support each other in their vulnerable teaching contexts (Zepeda, 2008, p. 2). Maguire et al. (2006) describe teachers who deliberately choose to work in urban areas with low income levels because the “challenges are greater and the differences that can be made are greater” (p. 40). They quote one teacher as saying, “It’s really tough and really demanding, but...on a good day, I know that I make a real difference to someone else’s life. Now, where else would you get that?” (p. 40). A recently retired teacher explained that “teaching was not about making the world a better place, it was about making *their* world better, day by day” (Zepeda, 2008, p. 3). Another teacher talks of realising that, contrary to what she believed on entering the profession, she cannot “change the world”, but “can affect the future, one child at a

time” (Nieto, 2006, p. 464). Zepeda (2008) quotes Jacques Barzun who said that “in teaching you cannot see the fruit of a day’s work. It is invisible and remains so, maybe for twenty years”. This emphasises that although it may not be immediately evident, teachers “do touch lives in countless ways on a daily basis” (p. 2). She also talks of “exceptional teachers [who] are held in the memories and emotions long after the school year ends” (Zepeda, 2008, p. 4). Nieto (2006, p. 462) asserts that from her experience of working with thousands of teachers in the United States over many years, she is convinced that teachers who love their students, love what they do, and have a passion for teaching, can be found in all schools across the world.

South Africa is no exception. There are teachers in South Africa, who within the problem saturated context outlined earlier, and despite prevailing negative discourses, manage to “practice their profession with dignity, enthusiasm and professionalism” (Fritz & Smit, 2008, p. 156). Olivier et al. (2009) conducted research with eighteen teachers from various primary and secondary schools in the Eastern Cape (the province with the lowest income levels in the country) and described how these teachers were able to constitute hope in a “concrete and do-able way” (p. 5). They portrayed this as “persistence in the face of adversity”, a “stubborn refusal to give up” and imagining “a brighter future for the community”, “despite the dire social circumstances”. They saw teachers “reaching out beyond the traditional confines of their professional role, helping to clothe and feed learners, and providing love and comfort in place of absent parents” (p. 8). Reckson and Becker (2005, p. 110) similarly describe teachers in a “gang-violent” community in the Western Cape as assuming multiple roles in the lives of the learners they teach, including that of “parent”, “psychologist” and “doctor”. The teachers in the Eastern Cape, saw themselves as “agents of change” and were described as “seeing the potential in learners, parents and community members” and demonstrating “perseverance and determination” in exploring possibilities for turning this “potential into reality” (Olivier et al., 2009, pp. 19-23).

Wallace (2005, pp. 1-2) portrays many schools in urban communities with low income levels as inspiring places that are exciting to work in and present profound challenges. She states that the “numeracy and literacy tests by which schools stand or fall are almost a detail” in the greater work of teachers in these schools as their



efforts include equipping children with “confidence, compassion [and] courage”. She adds that these teachers are engaged in something “bigger than education”.

## **2.6 CONCLUSION**

The literature review began by placing this study within a theoretical framework of social constructionism. Thereafter I attempted to portray contexts of teaching experiences from the perspective of relevant literature and research, with the discussion having two parts. It first involved a portrayal of the dynamics related to teaching in South Africa. These included educational policy on the roles of teachers, a climate of educational reform centred on teacher accountability and performance, learner achievement, and the social standing of teachers. The second part comprised descriptions of contexts of urban communities with low income levels, with specific reference to the implications for children in these communities, and included a depiction of the prevalence of low income in South Africa and its associations for the community of Rose Valley. I then endeavoured to represent dominant meanings that are attributed to these contextual factors and to seek out and describe alternative meanings. These alternative meanings came in the form of understandings and practices that run contrary to the prevalent negative discourses of teaching experiences.

The conclusion that I drew from this literature review was that there is a need for research that explores and documents the meanings that teachers themselves make of their experiences in urban contexts with low income levels. This need is specifically highlighted as it is these teaching contexts that tend, above all, to invite meanings of hopelessness. Such research, when framed in social constructionism, would allow for particular attention to be given to the expression and construction of practices that speak of meanings that challenge prevalent negative discourses. These understandings can then be sustained through the social processes of the research inquiry and would thereby reinforce actions in support of these alternative and possible preferred meanings. Furthermore, it appeared from the literature review that dominant meanings related to teachers and contexts with low income levels, as well as to teaching in such contexts, has led to discourses of hopelessness. There is therefore a need to highlight alternative or preferred meanings as these meanings can modify dominant discourses.

The research documented in this thesis is therefore an attempt to answer the needs outlined above. The process of this research will now be described and discussed in the following chapter.

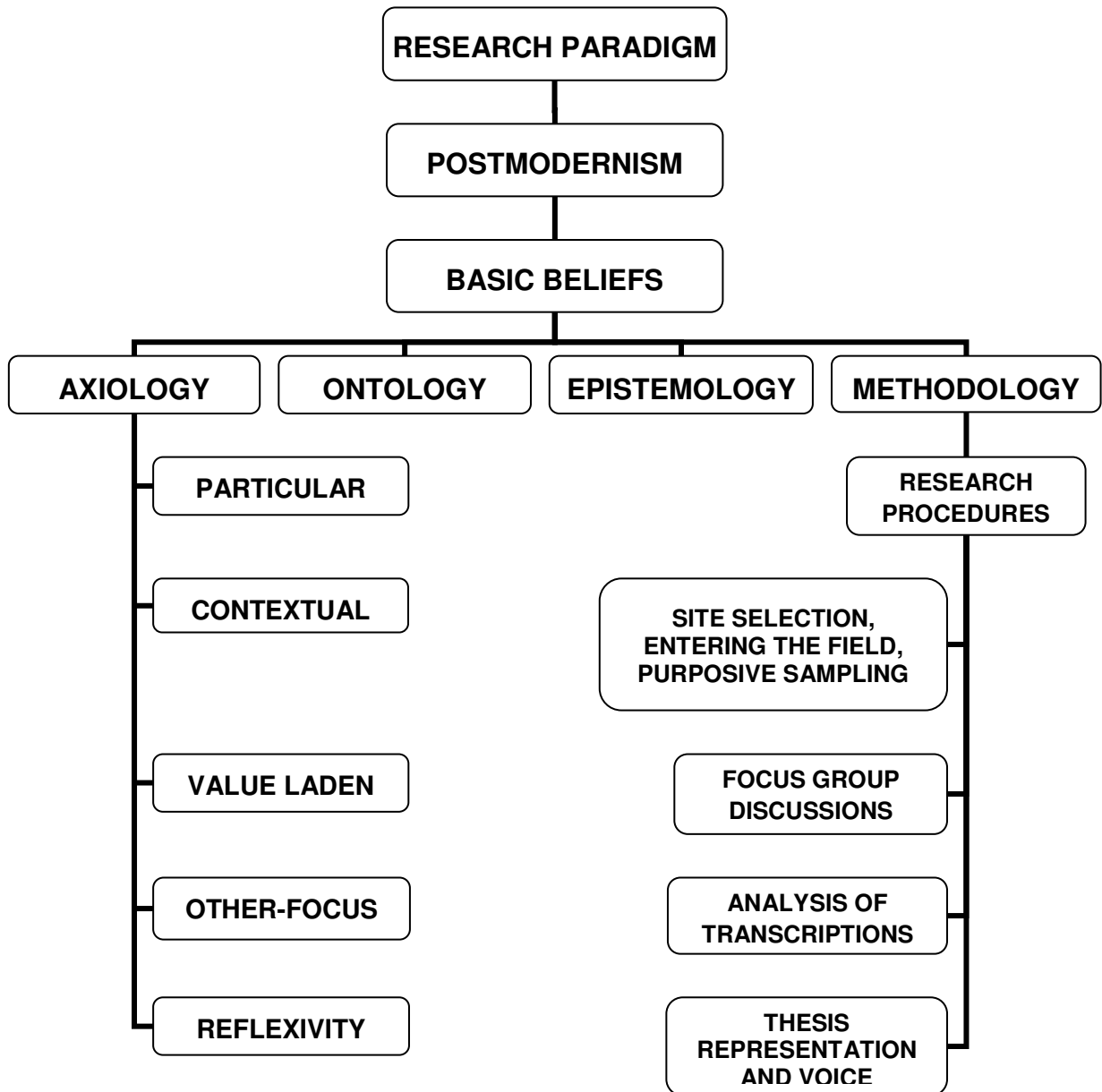
## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THE PROCESS OF INQUIRY**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter aims to explain the process of this research study, from its inception, to its presentation in the form of this thesis. As the research is based within a postmodern paradigm, which recognises the value-laden nature of all research (Clegg & Slife, 2009, p. 33), it was important for me to describe my own worldview as researcher, as this affected every aspect of the research. In addition to this, I felt that the moral implications of my research had to be carefully considered. This meant that each facet of the research had to be theoretically and practically defensible, morally and ethically, in terms of how it might affect the lives and realities of the people involved. An essential part of this moral defensibility also related to the necessity that the research should have inherent worth in terms of its quality and trustworthiness.

I have therefore attempted to explain and describe the theoretical underpinnings of the study in this chapter, with a focus on the research paradigm and how it informed the axiology, ontology, epistemology and methodology of the study. There is also a discussion regarding the quality, or worth, of the research and the ethical considerations made. Lastly, the research procedures are described and linked to the research paradigm where necessary. The process of inquiry is summarised in figure 3.1, below.



**Figure 3.1: A schematic representation of the process of inquiry**

### 3.2 THE RESEARCH PARADIGM

The research process that gave rise to this thesis started with my own subjective experience of a need, and followed a course with me as the driving force behind it. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005a, p. 22), *all* research is interpretive as it is guided by the beliefs and feelings that the researcher holds about how the world should be understood and studied. It is therefore, in my opinion, of the utmost importance to describe my worldview, or the paradigm from which the research was conceived and conducted, comprehensively.

Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2006, p. 6) also emphasise that the social science researcher should have an understanding of the wider social and political forces that shape the formation of new knowledge, as well as of the major paradigms that influence the practice of research in the social sciences. They describe a paradigm as an “all-encompassing system of inter-related practice and thinking that defines for researchers the nature of their inquiry” (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006, p. 6). Guba (1990) defines a paradigm as a “basic set of beliefs that guides action” (p. 17).

It was thus by attempting to gain an understanding of these wider forces that shaped the major paradigms influencing research practices, that I was able to identify postmodernism as the paradigm that best represents my world view. Therefore, the belief system that guided my actions in this research is postmodernism.

### **3.2.1 Postmodernism**

Hebdige (2002, p. 181) talks about the difficulty of clearly defining the term postmodernism due to “its currency and varied use within a wide range of critical and descriptive discourses”. Accordingly, it becomes increasingly difficult to:

“specify exactly what the term refers to as it is stretched in all directions across different debates, different disciplinary and discursive boundaries, as different factions seek to make it their own, using it to designate a plethora of incommensurable objects, tendencies, emergencies” (Hebdige, 2002, p. 181).

Similarly, Clegg and Slife (2009, p. 23) argue that there is even a problem from a postmodern viewpoint in attempting to define postmodernism, as “postmodernists resist the closed, totalizing conceptions of things” and any definition is a value judgement with “ethical and political implications”.

Therefore, I am aware that in describing my understanding of the aspects of postmodernism that are significant to this study, I am representing only one small and incomplete explanation of the possible discourses around it. I do, however, feel justified in describing the concept as it relates - in a very specific, localised and contextualised way - to this particular study. According to Freedman and Combs (1996, pp. 20-21):

“postmodernists believe that there are limits on the ability of human beings to measure and describe the universe in any precise, absolute, and universally applicable way. ...They choose to look at specific, contextualized details rather than grand generalizations, differences rather than similarity. While modernist thinkers tend to be concerned with facts and rules, postmodernists are concerned with meaning.”

Freedman and Combs (1996, p. 22) describe four ideas regarding reality from a postmodern worldview. Namely that realities are socially constructed, they are constituted through language, they are organised and maintained through narratives, and there are no essential truths.

Central to the postmodern worldview is the precept that everything constituting social or psychological reality is created through social interaction over time. This means that people's realities are constructed by people together as they live their lives (Freedman & Combs, 1996, p. 23). This understanding logically leads to the theory of social constructionism, which forms the theoretical framework of this study (See section 2.2).

### **3.2.2 Basic beliefs**

Denzin and Lincoln (2005a, p. 22) refer to a paradigm as an interpretive framework that contains the researcher's beliefs about ontology (the nature of reality and the nature of human beings in the world), epistemology (the relationship between the inquirer and the known), and methodology (the best means of acquiring knowledge about the world). However, later in the same book, Denzin and Lincoln (2005b, p. 183) add that axiology (ethics or values) forms the first guiding principle in any research venture. They therefore talk of a paradigm as encompassing *four* basic beliefs, rather than only three, with axiology (or ethics) “How will I be as a moral person in the world?” The authors explain that as epistemology asks, “How do I know the world?” or “What is the relationship between the inquirer and the known?”, it follows that every epistemology “implies an ethical-moral stance toward the world and the self of the researcher” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005b, p. 183). Mertens, Holmes and Harris (2009, p. 87) also speak of axiology being the first of the four basic beliefs that define a paradigm. Similarly, Guba and Lincoln (2005) speak of the “...embeddedness of ethics within, not external to, paradigms” (p. 200).

Therefore, in attempting to locate and define a paradigm that could adequately represent my worldview as the foundation for this research, I looked not only at how a paradigm could frame the ontology, epistemology and methodology of the research, but most importantly, how it could assist me in understanding how I, in the conception and implementation of the research, could be “as a moral person in the world” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005b, p. 183). The paradigm that most appropriately allows for this is postmodernism.

To me, therefore, the relevance of postmodernism to this study, lies in how the values of the researcher can be represented through postmodern ethical considerations, or an axiology framed by postmodernism. This section therefore begins with a discussion of a postmodern axiology, and is followed by how a postmodern paradigm informed the ontology and epistemology of the research and thereby determined the methodology of the study.

### **3.2.2.1 *Axiology***

The term axiology refers to the branch of philosophy that studies values (Babor, 2006, p. 143; Ryan & Cooper, 2010, p. 293). According to Guba and Lincoln (2005, p. 197):

“values feed into the inquiry process in ways such as choice of the problem, choice of paradigm to guide the problem, choice of theoretical framework, choice of major data-gathering and data-analytic methods, choice of context, treatment of values already resident within the context, and choice of format(s) for presenting finding.”

The axiology of the study leads to questions about what can be considered to be ethical or moral behaviour in the context of the research. In other words, how the research can uphold the values of social justice and the maintenance of human rights (Mertens et al., 2009, p. 88).

My aim in discussing the axiology that lies behind this study is to provide some discussion of the concepts I encountered, and grappled with, in reading postmodern texts on ethics, as well as to reflect on their practical implications for my research.

This revolved around how I, as the primary researcher, could be as a moral person in the world through the research I was conducting. Therefore, the assumptions I made about the nature of ethical behaviour impacted on every aspect of the research process, from its inception to the presentation of the findings.

Rather than providing clear-cut guidelines on ethics, postmodern thought provides the impetus for challenging, instructive and transformative dialogue, as well as reflection, concerning the ethical implications of research. The resemblances between different threads of postmodernism characterise a general ideological trend that can be used to derive a discussion around postmodern ethics. These do not, however, lead to a “set of postmodern ethical guidelines per se, as such an outcome would be inconsistent with the non-directionist, non-foundationalist sensibilities of the postmodernist” (Clegg & Slife, 2009, p. 27).

In their discussion on postmodern ethics, or axiology, Clegg and Slife (2009, p. 27) identify what they call four “family resemblances” (from the many possibilities) in the axiological assumptions that underlie postmodern research. These are the particular, the contextual, the value laden and the other-focus. I have added reflexivity as a fifth resemblance (King & Horrocks, 2010, p. 125), and have organised my discussion of the axiology that informed this study around these five resemblances. This seems to be the most coherent way of representing the complex and multifaceted concept of a postmodern axiology, without attempting to structure a set of postmodern ethical guidelines.

### **3.2.2.1.1 *Particular***

Postmodern research emphasises the concrete and the particular, rather than attempting to uncover generalisable, or universal, laws and principles. Thus, postmodern research does not subscribe to an independent or objective knowledge-advancing tradition (Clegg & Slife, 2009, p. 30).

Throughout this research process I have attempted not to use universals, power or expertise as the means to the research ends, but rather to allow myself less certainty, and more humility, about the knowledge I have and its use. By taking the particular as a fundamental research value, I have experienced myself, in attempting



an ethical research practice, to be “an uncertain researcher perpetually struggling with the obligations and responsibilities of a particular situation, to a particular community and to a particular participant” (Clegg & Slife, 2009, p. 30). In adhering to this principle, I have referred to the participant teachers involved in the study as *the* teachers, rather than assuming to generalise the research findings to *teachers* in general.

### **3.2.2.1.2 Contextual**

Postmodern research values the importance of context to the uniqueness and autonomy of research participants, and therefore, the dependence of meaning on context. In addition, from a postmodern perspective, the use and presentation of any form of knowledge is an ethical issue in which the research participant is intimately involved. Furthermore, there are implications related to power relations and dominant discourses that dictate which unique contextual factors count as knowledge and what information should be marginalised (Clegg & Slife, 2009, p. 32).

In an attempt to express the value and importance I place on context, I have specifically referred to context in the title of the study, as well as in the research question. In addition, a rich description of how the participants experience their context is one of the aims of the research.

### **3.2.2.1.3 Value laden**

According to Clegg and Slife (2009, p. 33):

“For the postmodernist, the subjective and the objective are inseparable, and together constitute any given meaning. In this sense, all meaning - all experience - is inherently and inescapably interpretive, and bias is not only inevitable, but also a basic element of all knowledge practices. To say that all knowledge is biased is to claim that any meaning-making activity is directed by values and interpretive contexts. Fact and value are inseparable.”

It is by acknowledging that *all* research is value laden that I have attached importance to describing the axiology of this research. In addition, I realise that rather

than being avoided, values and bias should be accepted as fundamental to the research, and should be made as explicit and transparent as possible (Clegg & Slife, 2009, p. 33).

For me, the significance in this is the recognition that, from its inception, this study has been value-laden. The research topic was selected out of my values as researcher, and relates to my own history of experience and meaning-making. Furthermore, as I was the research instrument during the study, throughout the process I attempted to be as aware as possible of my own values, biases and prejudices. While involved with the participants, and in processing and presenting the data gathered, it was necessary for me to continually ask myself, “Who am I that is listening, and what is the nature of my relationship with the speaker?” (Jones, 2001, p. 147). This leads directly to the need for a discussion of my relationship with the research participants, or the need for an other-focus to my research.

#### **3.2.2.1.4 *Other-focus***

The other-focus of postmodern research stems from a sensitivity to the importance of not reducing the “other”, or the research participant, to a depersonalised “subject”. This occurs when one forms relationships in which the research participants “are the passive, powerless recipients of our knowledge and expertise” (Freedman & Combs, 1996, p. 21) who have research done “on” them (Clegg & Slife, 2009, p. 34). Postmodernists recognise that there are implications of control, dominance and power in the relationship between the researcher and the participant (Clegg & Slife, 2009, p. 35). Therefore, sensitivity to the power relations inherent in the research process relates to how researchers subject participants to their studies.

According to White and Epston (1990, p. 22), all humans are caught up in an entanglement of power relations as we concurrently experience the effects of power exercised upon us, and bring power to bear on others. These issues of power relate to “power between persons and power relations connected to institutions, historical circumstance, economics, gender, social location, race class, sexual orientation, cultural backgrounds and experiences, actual location, and a ‘market logic of relations’” (Lincoln, 2009, p. 152). I realise, therefore, that since it is impossible for me to act independently of this web of power relations, I cannot view my actions or

practices as benevolent, or as stemming solely from my own motives. Hence, I had to work on developing an awareness and critique of my research practices, the relations with the research participants, and how these were formed. This involved identifying the context of ideas (and values) in which my practices are situated, and exploring the history of these ideas. This enabled me to assess the effects, dangers and limitations of these ideas and practices in relation to the research participants more easily (White & Epston, 1990, p. 29). At the same time, in recognising the inherent power differential between myself and the participants, I realised the importance of endeavouring “to make power relations as explicit as possible, and to reveal, rather than obscure the unique constructive contexts of research participants” (Clegg & Slife, 2009, p. 36).

The other-focus of postmodern research therefore recognises that the status of the participant is particularly important. As postmodern research is an activity of meaning-making *with* the participant, the valuing of the other is the starting point for the research (Clegg & Slife, 2009, p. 35). Steps I took to accomplish this are discussed further on in this chapter in connection with trustworthiness and ethical considerations (See sections 3.3.1 and 3.4). In addition, I focused this research on the particular and specific stories of the participants in the study, giving them the opportunity to speak about what was important to, or held value for, them. One of my aims then in doing other-focused research was to provide a research environment which would allow for the generation of rich participant narratives where “the respondents become active agents, the creators of the worlds they inhabit and the interpreters of their experiences (Maracek, Fine, & Kidder, 2001, p. 34).

The importance of valuing the other in research is further emphasised, and the dynamic relationship between power and knowledge becomes apparent, when we raise questions about the knowledge we produce from our research. Kotzé (2002, p. 8) raises the following critical questions: “Whose knowledges are these? For whose purposes? To whose benefit are these knowledges? Who is silenced or marginalised by these knowledges? Who suffers as a result of these knowledges?” He then highlights the importance of discourse, and of working in a participatory manner *with* people who are often marginalised or disempowered, and who seldom benefit from the ethics of the discourses of the powerful and the knowledgeable. It is this emphasis on the possibility of research participants and communities being further

marginalised and disempowered through my research processes that has driven my concern with the axiology of this study. It has therefore led to a more comprehensive discussion of axiology than was afforded to any other aspect of my research paradigm.

Lincoln (2009, p. 155) adds the ethical dimension of caring to the above self-other relations. She states that there is no way to catalogue all aspects of these relations, but that they may include “neighbourliness, reciprocity, reflexivity, mutuality, empathy, and genuine...rapport”. These serve as evidence of caring research relationships that form “a basis in genuine exchange, interdependence, mutual responsibility, and communitarianism.” She argues that these conceptions of ethical behaviour may act as a corrective to the distanced and objective stance of modernist research. My research emanated from a caring stance as it considered the possibility of unrecognised challenges in the teaching context of certain teachers in South Africa, as well as the need for acknowledgement of their alternative or preferred practices and experiences as teachers. I have endeavoured to concretise this origin of caring through the implementation of this study, and as part of this, in my relationships with the research participants.

#### **3.2.2.1.5 Reflexivity**

Much of what is deliberated in the above four axiological considerations relates directly to an understanding, and practical application, of reflexivity. King and Horrocks (2010, p. 125) describe reflexivity as being extensively complex and implying “reflection and thoughtfulness”. They emphasise the impact reflexivity has on both the theoretical understandings that underpin research, and the practicalities of the research, saying that “reflexivity...specifically invites us to look inwards and outwards, exploring the intersecting relationship between existing knowledge, our experience, research roles and the world around us” (p. 125).

Guba and Lincoln (2005, p. 210) state that “reflexivity is the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher, the human as instrument”. This connects to the value-laden nature of research which includes how my individual morality, comprising my understandings, feelings, positions and principles, impacts on every aspect of the research. It also refers to the “the multiple identities that represent the fluid self in the

research setting". These identities relate not only to the self we bring to the field, but also to how the self is created in the field. These "many selves we bring with us fall into three categories: research-based selves, brought selves (the selves that historically, socially and personally create our standpoints), and situationally created selves." Reflexivity demanded that I interrogate each of my selves, in connection with how my research efforts were formed around the "binaries, contradictions and paradoxes that form" my own life (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 210).

I found it helpful to reflect on these selves in terms of the first four axiological assumptions that were discussed in this section. At the same time, when considering the influence of my "brought self" on my relationships with the participants, and its impact on the nature of this research, I found that I had to consider the shaping of that self in terms of language, ability, education, class, status, cultural, racial, ethnic and national origins, gender, gender identity and age. This brought self then impacted on the forming of my situationally created self in relation to every aspect of this research.

The postmodern and social constructionist underpinnings of this research also led to another very important aspect of reflexivity in connection with the selves that I bring to the research process. This relates to the other-focus of the research and revolves around how these selves contribute to the construction of the realities of the research participants. "The local, interpersonal, moment-by-moment effects of our stands and practices, and the ripples that those effects send into the world at large" therefore need to be considered (Freedman & Combs, 1996, p. 265).

#### **3.2.2.1.6 Reflections regarding axiology**

As research is regarded from a postmodernist outlook to be an inherently ethical enterprise, it is problematic to attempt to form a distinct or separate ethical list of guidelines. "There is no moment in the conceptualisation, design, execution, or presentation of research that is not fundamentally ethical" (Clegg & Slife, 2009, p. 36). Therefore, "ethical decisions do not belong to a separate stage...but arise throughout the entire research process" (Kvale, 1996, p. 110). Any discussion of postmodern research ethics relates to the axiology of a study, and is directly connected to questions of morality and values. "Moral research behaviour is more

than ethical knowledge and cognitive choices; it involves the person of the researcher, his or her sensitivity and commitment to moral issues and action” (Kvale, 1996, p. 117). As a result, a very particular dedication is necessary to “both an insistent ethical self-examination and an unflinching sensitivity to our relation with the other” (Clegg & Slife, 2009, p. 36).

### **3.2.2.2 *Ontology and epistemology***

As the explanations of postmodernism and social constructionism relate to ideas regarding the nature of reality, they can be understood as an explanation of the postmodern ontology that informs the study. However, if realities are socially constructed, then it becomes meaningless to attempt to separate ontology from epistemology, as knowledge also is socially constructed, and the nature of reality is determined by our knowledge of reality. According to Kincheloe and McLaren (2005, p. 320), “the design and methods used to analyse this social fabric cannot be separated from the way reality is construed. Thus, ontology and epistemology are linked inextricably in ways that shape the task of the researcher”, and it is only through epistemology that we are able to define our ontological beliefs or assumptions (Zajicek, 2005, p. 1). Thus, the brief description of ideas relating to reality from a postmodern worldview, described above by Freedman and Combs (1996, p. 265) (See section 3.2.1), are as applicable to epistemology as they are to ontology.

From a postmodern view, there is a recognition then of the socially constructed nature of reality and that there can be no representations of general truths about basic underlying reality that we all share. Therefore, in asking the epistemological questions, “How do I know the world?” or “What is the relationship between the inquirer and the known?”, we come to an understanding that we know the world and our relationship to the known is through our social constructions.

### **3.2.2.3 *Methodology***

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005b, p. 183), methodology relates to the best means of acquiring knowledge about the world. It is the process through which the philosophical and theoretical positions underlying the study are used to understand,

select and justify the use of particular research methods, and can be described as an approach with expectations regarding how research is undertaken (King & Horrocks, 2010, p. 6; Nilsen, 2008, p. 82).

Methodology is the step that leads from the theoretical and philosophical considerations of a research paradigm, to putting it into motion (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a, p. 25). Although methodology is determined by all aspects of the research paradigm, to me the relationship between axiology and methodology is of particular importance as the question is then, "What means can I use, as a moral person in the world, to acquire knowledge about the world?" Therefore, in keeping with the postmodern, social constructionist nature of this study, the nature of the methodology was qualitative and interpretivist.

Broadly defined, qualitative research is "any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 17). However, qualitative research is "difficult to define clearly" in terms of what it is, rather than what it is not (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a, p. 6). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005a, p. 2):

"a complex interconnected family of terms, concepts, and assumptions surround the term *qualitative research*. These include the traditions associated with foundationalism, positivism, post-foundationalism, post-structuralism, and the many qualitative research perspectives and/or methods connected to cultural and interpretive studies...There are separate and detailed literatures on the many methods and approaches that fall under the category of qualitative research."

For this reason, I have not attempted a discussion around qualitative research as such, but have centred my discussion on a qualitative, interpretivist approach which I found to be most appropriate in translating a postmodern paradigm into research methods.

Denzin and Lincoln (2005a, p. 22) posit "that all anthropological writings are interpretations of interpretations", and that a paradigm is in fact an *interpretive* framework (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a, p. 22). A qualitative, interpretive framework recognises the inherent interpretive nature of every step of the research process. This approach sees human behaviour as the product of how people interpret their

worlds (Babbie & Mouton, 2001, p. 271), and recognises that meaning is not derived from an objective truth that is waiting to be discovered. It is rather socially constructed, as human beings interpret and give meaning to their experiences and their interactions with their world (Merriam, 2009, p. 8). It seeks to obtain knowledge about how people “construct the world around them, what they are doing or what is happening to them in terms that are meaningful and that offer rich insight” (Kvale, 2007, p. x). It allows for an understanding of how knowledge and reality are created through social processes (Barbour, 2008, p. 11), and “is of specific relevance to the study of social relations, due to the fact of the pluralization of life worlds” (Flick, 2009, p. 12). This recognises truth as being relative and the existence of multiple voices, which it “seeks to capture” rather than record a single, “definitive view” (Barbour, 2007, p. 33). It therefore follows that the goal of studies using this approach is to describe and understand, rather than to explain or develop hypotheses or theories about human behaviour (Babbie & Mouton, 2001, p. 270).

It can be seen from the above that a qualitative, interpretive research methodology is based on a postmodern, social constructionist perspective of what constitutes reality, and the relationship between knowledge and reality. In addition, the particular emphasis of this approach allows for the meeting of axiological considerations concerning the particular, the contextual, the value-laden, the other-focus and reflexivity.

### **3.3 THE WORTH OR QUALITY OF THE RESEARCH**

Merriam (2009, p. 165) states that “choosing a qualitative research design presupposes a certain view of the world that in turn defines how a researcher...approaches issues of validity [and] reliability”. Validity, reliability and generalisability are the criteria used to ensure the quality of research done from a modernist paradigm (Merriam, 2009, p. 209). However, “postmodernists do not seek a universal set of truths, nor do they subscribe to an independent or objective knowledge-advancing tradition.” As from a “postmodern perspective we do not live in the realm of the abstract and general,” the relevance of these criteria is limited (Clegg & Slife, 2009, p. 29).



### 3.3.1 Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 290) introduced the term “trustworthiness” as the determining criterion for good qualitative research. In essence, the question of trustworthiness relates to whether the findings of a study are worth consideration (Babbie & Mouton, 2001, p. 276), or whether the results of a particular social inquiry can be trusted sufficiently that they can be safely acted upon (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 206). Although this question can never be conclusively answered, the criteria of *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability* and *confirmability* can be used to determine trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 296). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005a, p. 24), these constructs, if viewed from a postmodern perspective, replace the criteria of internal and external validity, reliability, and generalisability. As this study is rooted in a postmodern paradigm, and is involved in documenting the socially constructed meanings and realities of the participants, it made sense to me to use the four criteria constituting trustworthiness as my yardstick for measurement of quality.

Transferability relates to the degree to which the findings of the study can be applied in other contexts, or with other participants (Babbie & Mouton, 2001, p. 277). Through the particular and contextual nature of the study and its findings, I have aimed to make it possible for the reader of the study to use his or her discretion to transfer my findings to a receiving context (Babbie & Mouton, 2001, p. 277). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 124), in order for the results of the study to be transferable, it is necessary for the presentation of the findings to be in the form of solid descriptive data, or what Patton (2002, p. 437) calls a “thick description”. I have therefore attempted, in the presentation of the findings of this study, to provide thick descriptions of both the contexts and meanings, or realities, of the participants. This was done not only as a means of honouring the voices of the participants, but also with the aim of facilitating the possibility of transferability (Gobo, 2008, p. 197). In addition, transferability can be further enabled through purposive sampling. I used purposive sampling in the study as, amongst other things, it is based on particular and contextual information about the setting and the participants (Babbie & Mouton, 2001, p. 277).

According to Babbie and Mouton (2001, p. 277), credibility, dependability and confirmability are interconnected and interdependent. Credibility relates to whether there is compatibility between the realities experienced by the participants, and what is attributed to these realities in the presentation of the findings. Or, according to Merriam (2009, p. 213), “how research findings match reality”. Dependability relates to whether the study would yield similar results if it were to be repeated. Lastly, confirmability relates to the degree to which the findings of the study are in fact the product of the focus of the inquiry, and cannot be attributed only to bias or the interpretation of the researcher (Babbie & Mouton, 2001, p. 277).

Among the strategies suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 308) for improving the credibility of a study are peer debriefing and member checking. Peer debriefing includes “exposing oneself to a disinterested peer...for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit in the inquirer’s mind” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308). During the course of this study this was done through consultation and supervision sessions with my two supervisors, and included discussions on the philosophical underpinnings of the study, the resultant methodology and research methods.

Member checking provides the opportunity for participants to verify data and check interpretation and presentation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301). During the course of data generation, each group session began with my presenting a summary of my understanding of what had been said by the participants in the previous session. This gave the participants the opportunity to verify that my understanding was in fact a representation of the meanings they had expressed during the previous session. In addition, the data was presented in summary form to the participants for their comment after I had finished with the data analysis. Each of the participants was given a copy of chapter four (the research findings) of this thesis so that I could obtain feedback from them, and make changes before the thesis was completed.

King and Horrocks (2010, p. 163) refer to the process of member checking as “respondent feedback” and draw attention to the fact that it is not only an issue of quality, but also an ethical one. This is because it provides participants with a “stronger voice in how they are presented than would otherwise be the case”. For me, the importance of member checking was partly an issue of quality, but mostly an

issue of ethics. This was based on the understanding that the socially constructed realities of the participants may have altered between the last group session and the opportunity for member checking. This opportunity therefore allowed for changes in the presentation of the findings, and can also be regarded as part of the data generation process (King & Horrocks, 2010, p. 163).

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 210), the establishment of dependability involves an examination of each stage of the process of the study, and includes an analysis determining whether the process was applicable and appropriate to the research. Confirmability can be established through a record of the process of inquiry, as well as through the accessibility of the data during all stages of processing and analysis. They specify two means of assisting with the establishment of confirmability and dependability. These are the keeping of a reflexive journal by the researcher, and the “keeping of adequate records” of each step of the research process, or in other words, an audit trail.

In an effort to allow for the establishment of confirmability and dependability, in this chapter I have attempted to describe the paradigm, and its various aspects, on which this study is based. I have also described how the methodology and the research process stemmed from this paradigm. In addition, I have attempted to explain every aspect of the process, including how I went about each stage, and how the method related to the overall paradigm. Records of the process of inquiry have been kept in the form of copies of the audio recordings of all discussion sessions, and electronic copies of the transcripts made from these recordings. These are stored on a password protected computer and will be kept for three years before they are destroyed. I have included a summary of the chronology of the process of inquiry in the form of an audit trail in an addendum to this thesis (Addendum F). In addition, an excerpt from the reflective journal that I kept throughout the research process is attached as Addendum H. Lastly, I have included an excerpt from one of the transcripts which shows the process of coding that was used for the data analysis (Addendum G).

### 3.3.2 Authenticity

Guba and Lincoln (2005, p. 205) see validity as relating to trustworthiness because validity questions whether the findings of the research are sufficiently authentic to allow a person to trust themselves to act upon their implications, or even to “construct social policy or legislation based on them”. They therefore see validity as a form of authenticity, and refer to specific forms of this authenticity as criteria that are the “hallmarks of authentic, trustworthy, rigorous or ‘valid’...inquiry” (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 207). Although these criteria cannot conclusively answer questions relating to whether we may feel safe in acting upon the findings of a study, they can assist in making such judgements about a specific piece of research.

These principles of authenticity include five fundamental dimensions, namely, balance, or fairness, ontological authenticity; educative authenticity; catalytic authenticity; and tactical authenticity (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 207; Lincoln, 2009, p. 153). These principles were developed for the purpose of providing criteria that can be used in the judgement of the processes and outcomes of inquiries, rather than the application of methods. They were “framed in the light of revised researcher-researched relationships”, and were therefore based on self-other relations (Lincoln, 2009, p. 153). This means that they are as much ethical criteria as criteria for judging trustworthiness or adequacy (Lincoln, 2009, p. 153). They further point to the dependence, from a postmodern viewpoint, of the quality of a study on its ethical nature. Although my efforts to uphold these principles would perhaps be better described under the heading *axiology* or *ethical considerations*, I decided to include them in relation to judgement of quality as this fits the purpose for which Guba and Lincoln (2005, p. 207) originally developed the constructs. I have attempted to adhere to these five criteria in the process of this research. I do, however, recognise that because of the limited scope of this study, I was only able to apply some of the principles in a very small way, using them as seeds for further possibility.

Fairness, or balance, refers to the efforts of the researcher to involve all stakeholders in decisions regarding the research. It further includes efforts to prevent marginalisation by representing all voices in the text, and not focusing findings “for the benefit of funders, program managers, administrators, local governmental officials, and others who hold fiscal or political power over research participants”

(Lincoln, 2009, p. 155). By using an interview guide, rather than a structured and predetermined interview schedule, the participants were involved in shaping the research as they determined the nature of the discussion during the interview sessions. Because my intention was to present the realities and meanings of the participants as the research findings, I attempted to ensure that their voices were heard loudly in the presentation of the findings. Working from a postmodern paradigm, and having an awareness of power dynamics in the research process, I specifically endeavoured to present voices, meanings and realities that might be at risk of marginalisation by dominant discourses that operated in the broad context of the study (See sections 1.1 and 2.2). As this research was not funded by any person or body that had vested interest in the nature of the findings, and the research was not done under the auspices of those holding political or fiscal power over the participants, I did not experience pressure to focus the findings to the benefit of any such person or body.

Ontological authenticity refers to the capacity of the inquiry to bring new levels of awareness and knowledge in terms of the social constructions of the reality of the participants (this may involve eliciting constructions that the participants were unaware they held), and is seen as the first step towards taking meaningful action (Lincoln, 2009, p. 154). As this study looks at *alternative* meanings of teaching experiences, and is based on the social construction of these realities, I feel that this principle was an inherent part of the study.

Educational authenticity relates to raising awareness through the accessibility of all data to the participants. This allows the data to become the property of the community involved, rather than allowing only privileged access to those in positions of power (Lincoln, 2009, p. 154). In this study, educational authenticity was ensured as the participants had the opportunity to examine the presentation of the research findings and give feedback on it. In addition, I intend to present each participant, as a co-constructor of this thesis, with a copy of it.

Catalytic and tactical authenticity refer to the degree to which the study engenders “sufficient interest, consequence and weightiness to prompt...some positive action” and involves the training of “participants on how to speak the truth to power and how to utilize recognised policies and procedures to make their wishes known to those in

authority” (Lincoln, 2009, p. 154). In looking at the alternative meanings that teachers make of their teaching experiences, preferred practices or actions were brought to the fore. The stories of these practices were then thickened by the descriptions of the teachers. These descriptions, and the recognition of the value of these practices, by the teachers was a means to strengthen their action in terms of preferred practices. This also contributed to the participants experiencing their value as teachers in their specific context. In this way, I think the study had a certain degree of catalytic authenticity, although the participants were not involved in community or political activity as such. In addition, there is the possibility of a small degree of tactical authenticity in the study as the experience of their own value as teachers in their context could redress the construction of power imbalances to a certain degree. However, I do recognise that there was no training for social or political action involved in the implementation of the study.

Thus, by paying careful attention to the various aspects of trustworthiness and authenticity, I have endeavoured to ensure that this research, as far as possible, meets criteria that can be used to judge it as being of sufficient worth to be taken account of and to justify using the findings as a basis for action.

### **3.3.3 Rigour**

I have decided to include a brief discussion on rigour as I feel that this will contribute to an understanding of the methods used for this study. Rigour in research has value because it is associated with the worth of the research (Burns & Grove, 2005, p. 55). According to Lincoln (2009, p. 153), from a postmodern research perspective, the criteria for rigour are based on “revised researcher-researched relationships” and not only on method. These revised relationships relate to self-other relations (See section 3.2.2.1.4) and authenticity (See section 3.3.2) (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 205; Lincoln, 2009, p. 153). Rigour in method has to do with trustworthiness or credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Carpenter & Hammell, 2000, p. 110; Lincoln, 2009, p. 153), as has been previously discussed (See section 3.3.1).

Rigour in method is also often seen to be achieved through the process of triangulation - the use of different methods for the generation of data - which is a strategy used to promote the quality of qualitative research and relates to validity.

Triangulation allows for the validation of data gathered by comparing results obtained from individual methods. It is also a particularly important strategy for ensuring the soundness of theory construction (Flick, 2009, p. 444). However, Flick (2009, p. 446) explains that triangulation is not suited to every qualitative study. I argue then, that as this particular study recognises the existence of multiple realities that are socially constructed and therefore continually changing, it is not possible to validate data gathered at a particular time, in a particular context, by attempting to compare it with data gathered in a different (or the same) context, at a different time. In addition, as the generation of theory is contrary to the aims and underlying paradigm of this study, I have decided not to attempt to use the process of triangulation for the study. The process of crystallisation, as proposed by Richardson (2005, p. 963), more aptly portrays the data generation process of this research which was achieved through multiple focus group discussions with the same participants, and fits with the paradigm of the research. Richardson (2005, p. 963) proposes that:

“the central imaginary for ‘validity’ for postmodernist texts is not the triangle - a rigid, fixed, two-dimensional object. Rather, the central imaginary is the crystal, which combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach. Crystals grow, change and are altered, but they are not amorphous. Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colours, patterns, and arrays casting off in different directions. What we see depends upon our angle of repose.”

### **3.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Denzin and Lincoln (2005a, pp. 14-21) have divided the history of qualitative research, from the early twentieth century to the present and beyond, into nine moments or phases. Although these moments are distinct and historically situated, the authors state that as real problems in real fields are faced, and bring with them “real and material practices”, many moments circulate simultaneously. Therefore, “researchers are spread out, to varying degrees, over nine moments, often moving between moments” (Lincoln & Denzin, 2005, p. 1116). In discussing the ethical implications of this study, I have found it necessary to move between the fifth, or postmodernist moment, and the second, or modernist, moment. This allows for a blurring of genres which constitutes the third moment. Bhattacharya (2009, p. 106)

explains the third moment as encompassing “a wide range of paradigms, strategies and methods.”

I am aware that many recent postmodernist, qualitative studies refer to a list of ethical guidelines which are rooted in modernist thinking. The research policy of Stellenbosch University stipulates that “research involving direct interaction with human subjects or the capturing of any personal information should go through a process of ethical clearance” (Senate Research Ethics Committee, 2009, p. 5). It was therefore necessary for me to obtain ethical clearance before I was permitted to begin this study. This involved a process where I discussed how I would, in my research practice, adhere to certain ethical guidelines. Although, as is evident from the earlier discussion on axiology, I have preferred to use postmodern thought on ethics as the guiding principle for this study. This does not, however, mean that I think that I should disregard modernist guidelines. My point of view is that modernist ethical guidelines are still relevant, but they are inadequate on their own for application in a postmodernist study because they tend not to explore the deeper and wider questions that emerge from postmodern thought. I have therefore chosen to include a short discussion on how I have attempted to ensure that I have adhered to such guidelines in conducting this research. In an effort to use these guidelines as a means to assist me in conducting the study with integrity, the steps as detailed below were taken to ensure that the basic ethical principles of autonomy and respect for the dignity of persons, non-maleficence, beneficence and justice were, as far as possible, not violated (Flick, 2009, p. 37; Wassenaar, 2006, pp. 67-68).

Allan (2008, p.128) refers to autonomy as “people's right to *freely* and *voluntarily* make *informed* decisions pertaining to their lives”. By adhering to this principle, the researcher demonstrates respect for the client's dignity in deciding on, and taking risks. Although the principle of autonomy sounds reasonably straight forward, it is in fact inherently problematic as “freely and voluntarily” is not a clear-cut concept (Allan, 2008, p. 128). Due to the nature of the researcher-participant relationship, there is a strong probability of an imbalance of power which may lead to participants feeling pressured or obliged to volunteer to participate.

Informed consent involves informing participants about the purpose of the study, as well as of the possible benefits they might gain and risks they may encounter (Kvale,



2007, p. 27). In an effort to ensure that consent was as informed as possible, I explained to the potential participants, to the degree to which I could predict it, exactly what the research would entail. In addition, I informed them of their right to refuse to participate, or to withdraw from the study at any time, without any negative consequences to themselves. In trying to minimise the possible coercive nature of the power dynamic between the participants and me, I proposed to the participants that after they had volunteered, they could decide to withdraw from the study without informing me of their decisions. Of the seven teachers who volunteered, two took this option, while the other five attended the sessions.

The principles of confidentiality and anonymity are also “operational expressions” of the principle of autonomy and respect for dignity (Wassenaar, 2006, p. 67). Theoretically, anonymity and confidentiality were ensured as transcripts were stored in a password protected computer, and pseudonyms were used for the participants. In addition, all identifying details of the school, the community and the individual participants were altered in the presentation of this thesis, and will be similarly altered in any other dissemination of the research results. However, it is often easier to identify a context and the people in that context, or a participant, in qualitative research than in quantitative research, due to the detailed and thick descriptions which result from the research (Flick, 2009, p. 42).

There is a further ethical dimension to the principles of confidentiality and anonymity (Zeni, 2009, p. 258), as “the qualitative research community...seems to have decided that the subjects of its enterprises need protecting, and that there are certain ways in which this is to be done (which apparently seldom, if ever, involve consulting the researched)”. “The notion of protection then presupposes an unequal relationship between researcher and the people she or he claims to be researching *with*” (van den Berg, 2001, pp. 84-85). For this reason, the research participants and I discussed whether they felt the need to protect their identities, or whether they would rather be identified by their voices. We also discussed the possibility that, even if every effort was made to ensure anonymity and confidentiality, these might be breached. Although the participants initially indicated that they would prefer to be identified with the study, after consideration it was agreed in the group that confidentiality and anonymity would be attempted as none of us could predict the possible outcomes if their identities were revealed.

Furthermore, in order to respect the autonomy and dignity of the participants, the research was, as far as possible, a collaborative effort. Joint decisions were made concerning the process, and what would be documented in the thesis, or in any further dissemination of the research results, was agreed upon (Winter, 1996, p. 16). This was achieved by giving the participants the opportunity to read the research findings and give me feedback before the findings were presented in this thesis.

Generally, those who contribute to the 'scientific' production of knowledge in our society tend to have power, position, privilege and education. Those 'being researched' often do not have these attributes. I recognised that I have certain personal attributes - specifically age, ethnicity, perceived social class and educational level - that may result in a power differential between me and the participant teachers. I therefore attempted to exercise reflexivity in order to be sensitive and responsive to the dynamics in the relationships between me and the participants in an effort to adhere to the principles of non-maleficence and justice. Through working collaboratively with the participants, I took care to ensure that, to the best of my ability, this power differential did not produce what Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 32) refer to as a 'colonizing discourse' of speaking on behalf of the 'other'. Rather, I have attempted to make the research process and its outcomes co-owned by me and the teachers who participated in the study, by ensuring that their voices were heard and that, as far as possible, the research is not a case of the researcher speaking on behalf of the 'other'. In addition, care was taken to ensure that it was not only the dominant voice that was heard or documented (O'Leary, 2005), which is why the study focuses on alternative meanings. There was therefore careful listening for voices and stories that might have been marginalised.

In this process of hearing and documenting the stories of the teachers, the principles of beneficence and justice were followed. Social constructionism is based on the premise that our realities are shaped by the dialogues and discourses that we have with others. This means that the questions we focus on in the research setting influence each of our realities. "And so the seeds of change are implicit in the very first questions we ask" (Watkins & Mohr, 2001, p. 28). It is by this means that I attempted not only to benefit myself as researcher through this research, but to make benefit to the participants an integral part of the research process. Additionally, in an

effort to adhere to the principle of beneficence, I included an ethical aim to the research.

Overall, the study was guided by the understanding that “the search for new knowledges relates to living in ways that will be to the good of all, and will not only benefit some at the expense of others” (Kotzé, 2002, p. 26). I am aware that this discussion on ethics and the guiding axiological principles of this study are ideologically positioned, and difficult to live up to. However, I do believe that only in attempting to conduct my research as a moral person in the world, can I move closer to the ideal of ethical research.

### **3.5 RESEARCH PROCEDURES**

#### **3.5.1 Sampling, site selection and entering the field**

In an attempt to find an information-rich setting where the processes being studied were most likely to occur, purposive sampling was used to select a school in a city in the Western Cape, situated in a community with a low income level.

Purposive-, rather than random-sampling is a method that allows the qualitative researcher to seek out a setting and individuals where the processes being studied are most likely to occur (Merriam, 2009, p. 77; Silverman, 2010, p. 141). This gives the researcher the opportunity to select an information-rich site or context for the study. An information-rich setting is one from which a great deal can be learnt about issues pertaining to the purpose of the study. In qualitative research, purposive sampling can be regarded as a strength, with the power and logic of this method lying in the possibility that the studying of an information-rich site could yield insights and an in-depth understanding of specific individual’s experiences within a specific context (Patton, 2002, p. 40).

As I have lived in Cape Town for most of my life, and have worked in communities where low income levels are prevalent, I knew of many such communities within the city. One limitation concerning the selection of a research site was that my Xhosa is not sufficiently fluent for me to conduct the research in an area where the teachers were likely to be Xhosa-speaking. I was aware that if the research was conducted in

English, a language that was not the participants' first language, meaning might be lost. I therefore only considered settings where differences in language proficiency between the researcher and the participants were not likely to complicate the research process.

While considering various contexts for the research, I discussed possibilities with an outreach worker at the Schools Development Unit at a university in Cape Town. Based on this discussion, we focused on a particular community which I then visited. As I drove through the area, I observed that it was similar to the areas in which I had worked some years ago that had provided the impetus for this research. The housing consisted mainly of government housing in the form of run-down blocks of flats and informal dwellings built of wood and metal sheeting. There were groups of teenage and adult men standing on street corners. The school situated in the neighbourhood had coiled barbed wire along the tops of the perimeter fencing, and a security guard monitoring access.

As there was evidence of the more easily observable effects of the prevalence of low income and its accompanying social difficulties, I determined that the area concerned appeared to meet the research need. I therefore telephoned to speak to the principal of the school. She was forthcoming with information and confirmed that the community within which the school is situated does have low income levels. She said that there is a high rate of unemployment in the area, and many of the children come from homes supported by welfare grants. There is also a feeding scheme at the school. She was very willing for me to conduct research with some of the teachers and organised for me to have access to the teachers.

It was necessary, for the purposes of the study, that participants should be selected on the grounds of common characteristics that would relate to the topic of the research which would be explored in the focus group interviews (Krueger & Casey, 2009, p. 2). The criterion used for the selection of the sample was that the prospective participants had to be teachers working in a primary school in a community where low income levels were prevalent. As all the teachers in the school met this criterion, as a group they formed the purposive sample for the study.

The proposed study was presented to the teachers in a meeting on an afternoon after school where I entered into dialogue with them regarding the research. My goal was to gain their trust and ensure that a process was begun in which the participants' right to influence the work was recognised (Winter, 1996, p. 16). The teachers' proposed roles in the research were described and discussed in detail. The teachers were then given the opportunity to volunteer to participate in the research. Although nine teachers volunteered, due to scheduling constraints related to some of the teachers' involvement in other activities, it was only possible for seven of these teachers to commit to participating in the research. A further two teachers did not attend the focus group discussions (See section 3.4) with the result that five teachers participated in the study.

According to usual demographic categorisation, four of the participants were female and one was male. Their ages ranged from thirty-six to sixty years old. Afrikaans was the home language of three of the teachers, and English of the other two. At the time of the study none of the teachers lived in the community of Rose Valley. The overall years of teaching experience of each of the teachers ranged from thirteen to forty years and the length of time that they had taught in the particular school where the study was conducted ranged from seven to thirty-two years. Two of the teachers taught classes in the foundation phase, one teacher taught in the intermediate phase, and two taught in the senior phase. I have included these demographics in the study, as I realise that the contexts of people's lives and experiences influence the meanings that they make. However, I recognise that from a social constructionist perspective people's experiences of themselves are individual and contextual, and that demographic categories may have significantly different meanings for different individuals.

### **3.5.2 Generating data - focus group discussions**

Kvale states (1996, p. 1) "if you want to understand how people understand their world, their life, why not talk with them?" As my research focuses on the meanings that teachers make of their teaching experiences, it seemed logical to access these meanings through conversations with teachers. Within the possibilities presented by the use of conversation to generate data, I decided that focus group discussions were most appropriate for my research topic. Barbour (2007, p. 2) speaks of the

difficulties involved in defining a focus group, and explains that the terms 'focus group', 'group interview', 'focus group interview', and 'focus group discussion' are frequently used interchangeably, although each suggests a process different from the others. For the purposes of this research, I have decided to use Kitzinger and Barbour's (1999, p. 20) definition which states that "any group discussion may be called a focus group as long as the researcher is actively encouraging of, and attentive to, the group interaction". I have used the term 'focus group discussion' as it most aptly fits the group process that was used to generate data for this research. Amongst other things, this definition relates to the role of the researcher in ensuring that, during the focus group discussion, the participants talk among themselves and don't only interact with the researcher (Barbour, 2007, p. 2). This relates directly to the two reasons I chose focus group discussions for this research. The first concerns the possibilities presented by group interaction, and the second concerns addressing power dynamics in the research setting.

The interaction of people in a group setting is likely to stimulate members' recollections as other members recount their experiences, as well as to encourage the elaboration of individuals' opinions. Being part of a group can facilitate the re-evaluation of participants' existing positions on topics, and their views are often amplified, modified, or contradicted in the process of the discussion (King & Horrocks, 2010, p. 62). Thus, data generation through focus group discussions is a process of active social construction of meaning and reality (Barbour, 2007, p. 37; Merriam, 2009, p. 94). This means that how the inquiry was conducted, and the questions asked, played a part in the meanings that teachers made of their experiences, and therefore had some influence on the reality of the teachers involved. In choosing a method of data collection I did not want to underestimate the potential power of the questions asked, or of the dialogue generated (Watkins & Mohr, 2001, p. 28).

In addition, the importance of the contributions of the group members in socially co-constructing the realities of the individuals in the group had to be recognised. White (2007, p. 179) speaks of the contribution of an audience in verifying a narration that expresses alternative meanings to those held by the dominant social order, as this can contribute to "building a sense of solidarity with regard to the values and aspirations for life reflected in these personal narratives". He states further that this

can be “highly sustaining in circumstances that could otherwise diminish any story development that might be at odds with what was expected”. As the research concerned looked at *alternative meanings* of teaching experiences, the focus group was important as a support in the construction of meanings that may otherwise have been marginalised. I was further aware of an ethical responsibility concerning the social construction of realities through the research process.

Recognition of the inherent power dynamics in research processes played an important role in my decision regarding the selection of a method of data generation. The second reason I decided to use focus group discussions was because of their possible value as a method that could reduce the imbalance of power between the researcher and the participants. (Barbour, 2007, p. 12; Culley, Hudson, & Rapport, 2007, p. 104; Madriz, 2000; Mkandawire-Valhmu & Stevens, 2010, p. 688). According to Pollack (2003, p. 461), focus groups “have the potential to shift power from the researcher to the participants” and are thus particularly suited to use with marginalised groups. In other words, I used focus groups in an effort to minimise the power imbalances of the research situation, because group interaction was the most effective and suitable means of data generation, given the aims of the research and its paradigm. The decision to use focus group discussions was thus based on both practical and ethical considerations.

As data from focus groups is generated for different purposes depending on the research being done, there are many different uses for focus groups which depend on the functions of the data generation (Barbour, 2007, p. 5). In the case of this study, my aim in using focus group discussions was to generate data to examine the participants’ lived experience and the meaning that they made from this. The purpose was therefore to generate detailed and in-depth descriptions (Roulston, 2010, p. 16). In order to achieve richness and depth to these descriptions, I listened for, and asked questions that explored particular words, ideas or themes, and invited the participants to expand on what they had said (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 13). Many times, however, the participants themselves engaged in spontaneous discussion that elaborated on themes and ideas, without questioning on my part being necessary. In keeping with the postmodern paradigm of the study, the aim of the group discussions was not to arrive at a single perception of reality (Merriam, 2009, p. 92), but rather to attempt to hear and document the voices and realities of the participants.

According to Roulston (2010, p. 14), interviews in social science research range across a continuum, from structured, tightly scripted interviews with closed-ended questions, to open-ended interviews, loosely guided with little or no pre-planned structure. The process I used was “relatively unstructured and open-ended” and was guided by few interview questions which were of an open-ended nature (Roulston, 2010, p. 17). This meant that the often comprehensive and extended considerations stimulated by the questions led to discussions around concerns and issues that were of importance and significance to the participants, rather than closely following an agenda provided by me as the researcher (Barbour, 2007, p. 32).

### **3.5.3 Data management**

#### **3.5.3.1 *Recording and transcribing***

According to Merriam (2009, p. 109), verbatim transcriptions of recordings are the best database for analysis. With the permission of the participants, digital audio recordings were made of the focus group discussions. The recordings were transcribed verbatim into digital text that was then printed and used for the data analysis (Bernard & Ryan, 2010, p. 49).

#### **3.5.3.2 *Analysis of data***

The constant comparative method of qualitative analysis was used to analyse the transcripts that were taken from the recordings of the focus group interviews. This method was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967, p. 101) and originated in grounded theory which aims to discover theory from data (p. 1). Although this method originated in grounded theory, it is now more widely used as a method of data analysis across different methodological perspectives in qualitative research (Bernard & Ryan, 2010, p. 160; Glaser, 1965, pp. 437-440; Mabry, 2008, p. 218; Rangahau, 2010, p. 1).

The analysis entailed “classifying, comparing, weighing and combining materials from the interviews to extract the meaning and implications to reveal patterns or to stitch together descriptions of events into a coherent narrative” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p.



201). Accordingly, it was possible to give voice in this text to what the participants had said based on this analysis, thus answering the research questions.

The first phase of the analysis involved finding, refining and elaborating on concepts, themes, meanings and events from within the transcripts. The second phase then involved coding the transcripts in order to retrieve what the participants had said about these concepts, themes, meanings and events (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 201). It was then possible to compare or combine concepts, themes and meanings across interviews in order to answer the research questions.

### **3.6 REPRESENTATION AND VOICE**

The final consideration, from a methodological and ethical point of view, related to how I, as the researcher, represented my own voice and the voices of the participants in this text. Denzin and Lincoln (2005a, p. 3) call this the “crisis of representation” and even accord it a particular moment in the history of qualitative research. I have decided to briefly discuss the issue of representation here in order to explain why I represented myself and the participants in the way I did.

In recognising that scientific objectivity is not possible in research, and that even when attempts are made to present research scientifically and objectively, the voice of the author is “rarely genuinely absent, or even hidden”, I decided to locate myself “deliberately and squarely within the text” (Guba & Lincoln, 2005b, p. 209). This decision was an ethical consideration as well as a practical one. By writing in the first person and locating myself in the text, I did not distance myself from the research, or make implicit claims to scientific objectivity or the representation of truth. Rather, the text was clearly portrayed as my personal meaning. This meant that I was plainly responsible for what was written, and was therefore forced into at least a degree of reflexivity in the writing (Guba & Lincoln, 2005b, p. 209).

Representation of the participants in the text has other-focus implications, and is thus also an ethical issue. There is the possibility of entrenching the inherent power differential between the researcher and the participants as the researcher speaks on their behalf (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a, p. 1). I have therefore attempted to allow the participants to “speak for themselves” (Guba & Lincoln, 2005b, p. 209) by including

direct quotes of the exact words of the participants wherever feasible. In addition, I made provision for each participant to read and give feedback on the presentation of the findings, so as to ensure that the representation was as close as possible to the meanings that were expressed in the discussions.

### **3.7 CONCLUSION**

This chapter began by explaining that postmodernism was the paradigm that guided this study. As a postmodern paradigm allows for multiple realities, and postmodern research does not seek ultimate truth, I found it necessary to explain the theoretical justification for the research process in detail. What became apparent in writing this chapter was the degree to which every aspect of the research interconnects as a moral and ethical endeavour. Furthermore, the ethical considerations and criteria for judging the quality or worth of the study have their basis in its axiology, as do the procedures and the presentation of the findings. After explaining the research paradigm, which included the basic beliefs that guided the study, and discussing the worth of the research and the ethical considerations, the chapter concluded with a description of the research procedures. Chapter four now discusses the research findings that emerged from the research process as was described in this chapter.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

As was discussed in chapter one, this research aimed to answer the following question:

*What meanings do the participants make of their experiences as teachers in a primary school in Cape Town in a community where low income levels are prevalent?*

In order to best answer the research question within a framework of social constructionism, it was broken down into two further questions as follows:

*How do these teachers experience contextual factors, and how do these factors contribute to their meaning-making?*

*In a context that could invite meanings of hopelessness, what actions, motivations and reflections of the teachers suggest possibilities for alternative or preferred meanings?*

An exposition of the research findings is presented in this chapter in an attempt to answer these research questions. In order to present the research findings, it was necessary for me to group the data into themes and categories during data analysis. As far as possible, the themes and categories that naturally arose from the data have been used. However, because the data emerged in the context of focus group discussions where conversation flowed freely, it did not lend itself to precise categorisation easily. The conceptualisation of the themes and categories is thus of my own making and there may therefore be an overlap between themes, or where data are presented that only fit very loosely within a specific theme. The data are presented according to these themes and then discussed in the light of existing literature. A summary of the themes and categories that were conceptualised during data analysis is presented in Figure 4.1.

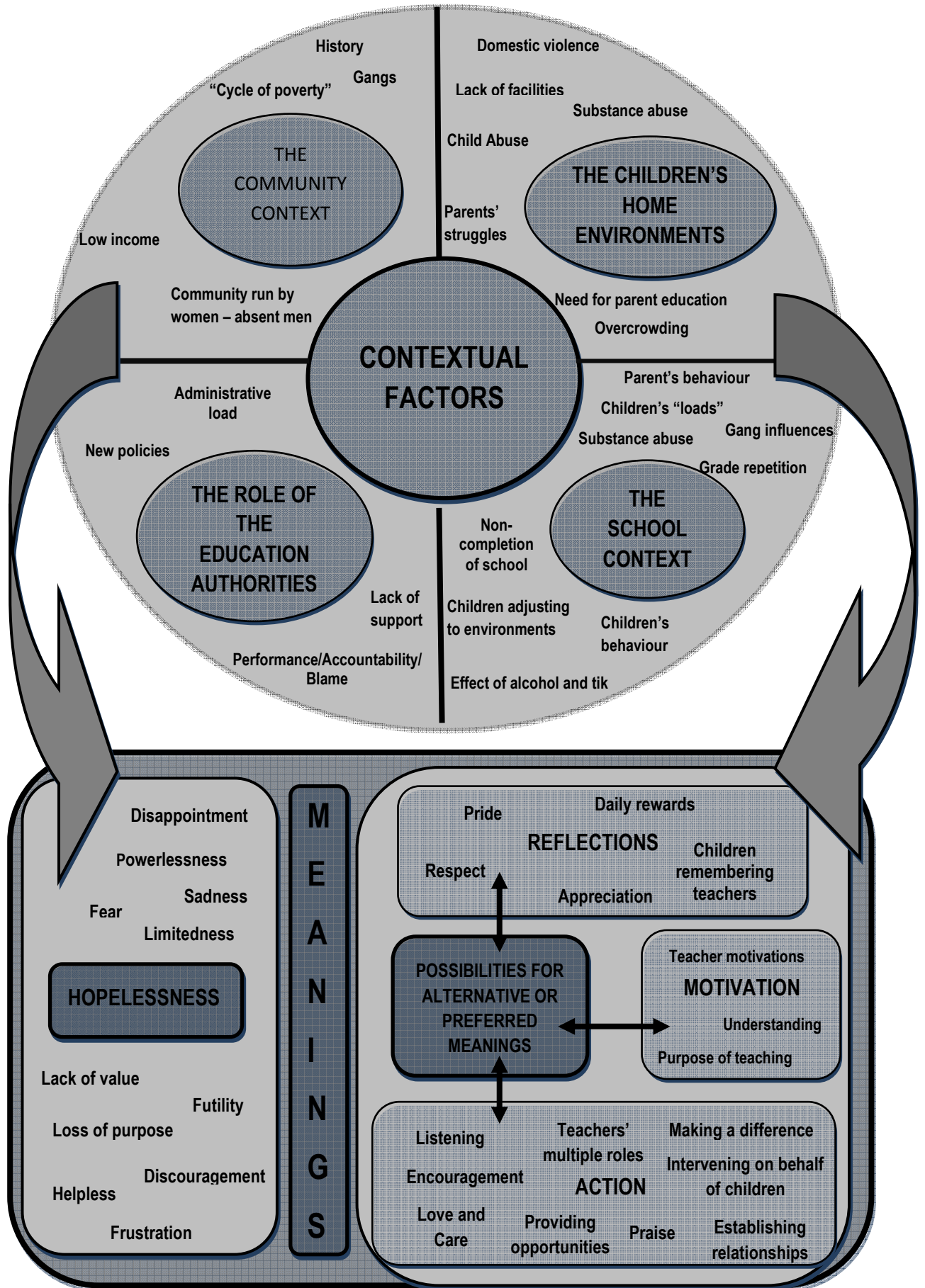


Figure 4.1: Diagrammatic summary of the themes and categories

## 4.2 EXPOSITION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

The research findings will be presented under the following main headings: *Teachers' experiences of contextual factors*; *Meanings that could suggest hopelessness*; and *Actions, motivations and reflections that could suggest alternative or preferred meanings*. I have used these themes to portray, as far as I am able, the understandings of the teachers who participated in the study. The narratives in this chapter were taken from the data generated during the data collection process which consisted of five focus group discussion sessions and one feedback session where the participants had the opportunity to read and modify this presentation of the findings.

### 4.2.1 Teachers' experiences of contextual factors

I have divided this theme into four parts. The first relates to how the participants described the community setting of Rose Valley. The second part looks at what the participants expressed regarding the home environments of the children they teach. Thirdly, I have attempted convey the participants' portrayal of what happens at school, given the context of the community and the family life of the children who attend the school. The last part involves a description of the role played by the education authorities in the teachers' experiences.

#### 4.2.1.1 *The community context – Rose Valley*

Some of the participants reflected that the quality of present day life in Rose Valley is a direct result of the history and origins of the community. Helen expressed this as follows:

“I also feel that what is happening in this particular community over here, for me, [is] a legacy of our Apartheid, and the people coming from different walks of life, being thrown together on the Cape Flats in little houses.”

Furthermore, the participants spoke of the difficulty involved in attempting to redress the injustices left by the Apartheid regime. Helen put it in the following way: “Our Apartheid government, what they did has really far reaching effects. ...This that they

created is still continuing, and how do you right that major wrong?" She added that people have internalised the identities that were given to them by the Apartheid government:

"They've created a community like this, in so many different places. That is why our people still have a certain way of thinking about things, a certain way of doing things. It is ideas and things that happen inculcated into your brain. This is who you are, and this is what you're supposed to be doing."

While talking about the history of the community, the teachers depicted individuals and the community as being caught in a cycle of poverty:

"Especially over here where you're constantly staring poverty in the face. So you know you're never getting out of that circle so...you think, 'I can't even try that because it's not going to work.' It's just that whole cycle. And that is what is happening here in our area." (Helen)

They described how many of the people in the community live on welfare grants and do not have enough money for basic necessities. Furthermore, some of the teachers expressed that "here in this area, the men don't work...you get them on the street..." (Grace) and that "you have strong women who run the community" (Helen).

Most of the teachers pictured the men in Rose Valley as commonly belonging to gangs. The presence of gangs in the community was frequently referred to during the focus group discussions. On one occasion Aaliyah spoke of how gang fights and shooting tend to move from one area to the next in widening circles. Grace drew attention to how frequently shooting occurs in the community. Helen explained the significance of gang membership as follows:

"With gangs, it's a family. If you're not getting attention and love, and all the things you need in your own family setup, you are going to look for family somewhere else, even if it's a bad family, because that family is promising you something in some way. They're promising you protection. They're going to look after you."

The teachers went on to discuss how the need for belonging and acknowledgement is so strong that people will become gang members despite them having seen other members being shot for displeasing their gang bosses.

Apart from speaking about the community of Rose Valley, the teachers described aspects of the home environments of children in the community.

#### **4.2.1.2 *The children's home environments***

In describing the children's home environments, the teachers discussed various facets of their home lives that seemed to be linked to the larger context of Rose Valley. They talked of a lack of facilities, with some families having to share an outside tap as their only source of water. They portrayed many homes as being overcrowded with Helen speaking of "ten people" in one room. Grace put it that: "hulle slaap almal in die kamer, almal deurmekaar" [everyone sleeps in the room, everyone mixed up together]. According to Helen, this over-crowding results in children wandering around the streets when they should be bathed and in bed.

Parents were pictured by the teachers as frequently struggling to raise their children. Helen spoke of the ages of the parents: "...because they're so young. They're children themselves, and they're trying to educate their own children. Or they're trying to bring them up in the way they think is right." Women were depicted as hard-working and often being the breadwinners for their families. Some mothers were portrayed as working such long hours that they barely saw their children. Grace explained, "Die kinders slaap al as sy kom. Die kinders sien haar nie in die oggende nie. Sy gaan vroeg werk toe. Sy kom weer donker huis toe." [The children are already asleep when she comes home. The children don't see her in the mornings either. She goes to work early and comes home again when it's dark].

In talking about the challenges faced by many parents, Helen expressed concern that teachers "concentrate a lot on the children" in the community, but that "we should really go to the root of the problem - and that is the parents." The teachers agreed that it is the parents in the community who really need education. Several of the teachers spoke of mothers having to cope with many children. They described the impact that these mothers who struggle to cope have on their children. Helen put it that, "Here they have to be little adults. They have to look after their families. Some of them have to cook and clean and look after the little brothers or sisters." Aaliyah agreed and added:

“They have to do everything, but the mother will never come and say, ‘Oh, thank you my boy, thank you my girl, you did well today.’ They must just go on and on and never get that love from the parents.”

Although many parents were depicted as struggling, each of the teachers spoke at some point about how numerous parents in the community “don’t care”. These parents were described as not caring for, or about, their children, not being interested in their lives, nor giving them love at home. Grace described how many parents are at home all day, but still do not manage to wash their children’s school uniforms. Others added that the parents don’t have any time for their children, and that when they speak to them, “every second word is a swear word” (Grace).

Related to this, according to a number of the teachers, many parents engage in substance abuse. Grace stated that “the parents are alcoholic, the parents do tik and that stuff at home.” She described how in one child’s house the blankets have caught on fire on a number of occasions when the father fell asleep smoking while under the influence of alcohol or other substances. Furthermore, according to some of the teachers, children’s family members are sometimes involved with gangs or crime. Grace described one grandfather as having been to Pollsmoor (the main prison in Cape Town) several times for selling drugs.

The topic of domestic violence frequently came to the fore during the focus group discussions while discussing children’s family environments. Carmen told us that a large number of children in her class experience violence within their families. She reported that when she discussed it with her class, she was inundated by children telling her of their experiences: “‘My mommy hit my daddy’, ‘My daddy hit my mommy’, ‘My father hit his girlfriend’...even in interval they kept coming to tell me.” Other teachers spoke of children in their classes as also experiencing domestic violence. Helen referred to one family saying, “They had to lock themselves up in a room because he was trying to get at the mother. She showed me the marks on her legs and arms.” Grace described a child in her class telling her, “My pa slaan my ma amper elke aand en dan as ons huil, dan kom hy en dan wil hy vir ons met die mes steek.” [My father hits my mother almost every evening, and then if we cry, then he comes and wants to stab us with a knife].



In addition to domestic violence, several of the teachers stated that they had had experiences of children in their classes being physically abused at home. Grace told the story of a child in her class who, after being absent for two weeks, had come to school with fading bruises on his face. He told her, “Juffrou, my pa het my so getrap met daai boots wat hy werk toe dra - die yster boots.” [Teacher, my father stamped on me with those boots that he wears to work – the iron boots]. The teachers further described the children they taught being subjected to other forms of abuse. Aaliyah spoke of children who engage in prostitution in order to enable their families to survive. Most of the teachers said that they had experienced more than one incident of a child in their class having been sexually abused. The abuse was described as occurring within their households, or having been perpetrated by a member or members of the family. Grace described an incident that happened to an eight year old girl in her class:

“...en die broer vra vir haar, ‘Wil jy saam met ons games speel?’ En toe sê sy, ‘Nee ek wil af gaan en gaan speel saam met die ander kinders.’ En die suster sê vir hom, ‘Verkrag haar!’ Hulle neem haar in die kamer, op die bed...en hul sit Sellotape oor haar mond, en hy’t haar verkrag.”

[...and the brother asked her, ‘Would you like to come and play games with us?’ And then she said, ‘No, I want to go down and play with the other children.’ And the sister said to him, “Rape her!’ They took her to the bedroom, on the bed...and they put Sellotape over her mouth, and he raped her.]

While discussing the domestic violence and abuse that occurs in some of the children’s families, Aaliyah, Grace and Helen said that in many cases women endure physical abuse, or do not intervene when they know that their children are being physically or sexually abused. They said that this was due to fear, or because the family was financially dependent on the person responsible for the abuse. Aaliyah explained a typical pattern as follows:

“...The poor mother, she expects the money from her husband. He starts with the beating - when things go wrong, they take it out on the wife. The wife is so shy. The children are just standing like that with those eyes. They see, they look, they hear, they just stand like that. They’re too scared to say anything. The mother would hide for a day or two, the blue face, the blue marks - no police; [it’s] family business. The woman gets so strong

that the beating doesn't hurt anymore. 'You can beat me, my children are provided for. We're not out in the street.' It goes on for years. She complains to her mother. Her mother says, 'Hullo, if you say goodbye to your husband, who's going to take you in, with five kids, seven kids?' She's so low, her ego's so low."

Helen added that: "There are a lot of women like that in the community who are abused constantly by their husbands or their partners. And they are so scared that they don't leave them." Helen referred to one particular mother of a child who was abused and said: "But after she knew what he had done, she still allowed him to stay on in the house. It also wasn't the first time he had done something like that." Grace, while talking about the story quoted earlier about the child who was raped, said, "Maar die ouma, toe sy die ding agtergekom het, toe maak die ouma asof sy niks weet nie." [But the grandmother, when she found out about it, behaved as though she knew nothing]. Furthermore, the teachers reported that even when a charge is laid with the police, it is often withdrawn before it goes to court, or when the school gets involved, the parents take their children and move away. Helen spoke about the powerlessness of women who are not educated, lack confidence and are financially dependent on their partners. Aaliyah elaborated:

"You're working on the top of a wound. You're just covering and cleaning the wound, but the inside of the wound is already infected ...They hide a whole lot of things in their closet. ...They just cover it up because they all benefit from this bad thing happening. They benefit out of it. So if you come and you open up this can, everything will just jump on you and you just make the thing worse. That is their way of life. And to us we want to be prim and proper, but you're only visiting. You go away. You say goodbye. They're there - twenty four hours they're there in the situation. We can go out of here, out of Rose Valley, but they're in Rose Valley and they have to survive with the circumstances. They're in their houses with themselves, and to survive, they put on different covers and different coats. That is how they survive."

Helen also talked of the powerlessness experienced by parents who do care. This introduces a theme that is in contrast to the picture that has been painted thus far, which is that, according to the teachers, some parents really do care. Helen expressed the significant difference it made when a child in her class who was abused "had a very supportive family". Aaliyah also described how some mothers will fight to protect their children:

“But her pride is in her children. You never know the pride of a mother, and when it comes to a push, when he starts lashing out on the children, that mother becomes like a hen. She charges. So sometimes there is a spot in that mother that needs to be pushed to get where she should have been. And so forget about culture: to protect her children that woman becomes so strong she overpowers him.”

#### **4.2.1.3 *The school context***

When speaking about the Rose Valley community and the family life of the children, the teachers elaborated on how these influence the children and their own experiences as teachers at their primary school. One of the influences on the children and teachers is violence in the community, which overflows into the school. Helen spoke of shootings in the area and added that one of the learners from the school next to theirs had been shot. According to Grace, during one gang fight “a teacher was standing here. The bullets went past her through the door.” She went on to say that the teachers had had to go for trauma counselling at that time. Grace described a specific day at school: “The time that they shot, the children just went out for interval. They came running back, ‘Miss, miss they’re shooting! They’re shooting here!’ And they had to stay in the class.” She spoke of how the children were scared and crying and said, “But we are also afraid.” She went on, “and you must just be brave, you mustn’t show that you fear also, for the child’s sake, because that child must now go walk home.” The teachers explained that the children cannot stay after school to catch up on work, or for extra tutoring, as they have to leave school punctually and walk home in groups for safety reasons. Grace conveyed her feelings about not being able to help children after school, “I’m really disappointed in that because I loved doing it for them.” She also described some experiences of the children walking home, “Bullets surround him and whatever. ‘Miss, they shot that man! They shot that child, and the bullets just go here! I just move that way and that way!’”

For part of the period during which the teachers and I were researching their experiences, gang warfare in the area increased and the teachers described outbreaks of shooting in the vicinity of the school. During this time, according to the teachers, school closed early on most days in order for the children to be home and off the streets before the shooting intensified in the afternoons. Our focus group

discussions (held in the afternoons) had to be suspended for a month and a half. When we met again, the teachers related gang associated incidents that had occurred since our previous meeting. A schoolchild's father had been killed during shooting between gangs, and a child in Grade one witnessed someone being shot in the head on her way to school and was so traumatised that "she was vomiting all the time" (Carmen).

The prominence of gang activity was further described as influencing the behaviour of children in the community. According to Aaliyah,

"The children here are small *skollies* [gangsters]. When you ask them to draw, they will draw a flag...to identify themselves they've got a flag. And underneath their clothes, they've got something on to identify themselves. They take off their school clothes in the afternoon and then they're part of that group. And, I mean, it's a way of surviving. We pull them away, but they're part of that group. They belong to the group and go back."

The teachers said that some learners smoked, drank alcohol or abused other substances. Aaliyah described how a Grade six girl had spent a school morning in the sick bay a few days earlier, suffering from the after effects of alcohol abuse the night before. Mark added that:

"I had one kid who actually worked at a 'shebeen' [local liquor outlet], and dropped out [of school], came back again, dropped out, came back and then eventually when he came back, they told him he's too old because he was seventeen, going on eighteen."

Apart from speaking about the effects of community life on the children's and teachers' experiences at school, the relationship between the children's home environments and their experiences at school were described by the teachers. In talking about how many parents at the school rely on welfare grants, Grace said that most of these parents were unable to contribute even a hundred rand a year towards school fees. Some of the teachers spoke about parents' behaviour when they visited the school. Carmen reported her experience of parents sometimes attending meetings with her while under the influence of alcohol. Grace recounted an event of a father who came to school with the intention of beating his child:

“Toe kom die pa skool toe met ‘n belt met ‘n buckle omgedraai om sy hand...en die seuntjie het die pa gesien, en hy kruip toe onder ‘n bus weg. Toe hardloop hy en trek daai kind onder die bus uit en hy wil hom slaan.”

[Then the father came to school with a belt with a buckle wound around his hand...and the little boy saw the father, and he hid away under a bus. Then he ran and pulled the boy out from under the bus and wanted to hit him.]

In addition to describing the behaviour of parents at school, the teachers also talked about other ways in which the children’s home environments affected them at school. Helen described how some of the children are unable to do their homework because of over-crowding in their homes, or because they have to keep out of the way of abusive parents. Carmen spoke about how, as teachers, “we sit in class with the children and we do not know what happened the night before, or that morning. And they come from abusive homes.” Grace gave the example of a child whose father was arrested for assaulting his mother who had been admitted to hospital the day before school. She said, “Ja, nou sulke dinge gaan elke dag deur die kinders se gedagtes. Dan sit ‘n kind daar en soms weet hy ook nie of hy ‘n stukkie brood gaan kry om te eet nie.” [Yes, now these things go through the children’s thoughts. Then the child sits there, and sometimes he also doesn’t know if he will get a piece of bread to eat]. She went on to say, “Daar’s baie probleme wat die kinders beïnvloed.” [There are many problems that influence the children]. Aaliyah confirmed this by saying, “It is pitiful how those children walk around and we never know their load.”

The teachers also mentioned that there are very many children in the school whose mothers were “tikking” (abusing methamphetamine) or abusing alcohol while pregnant. Aaliyah related that a doctor had said that prenatal exposure to tik affects the brains of children and said, “With the tik child, there’s really nothing to be done...That child will never get there.” Mark also commented that many of the children have learning problems.

In talking about the children’s behaviour at school, the teachers described how some of the children “do nothing, they don’t even talk” (Carmen). “They are the silent ones just looking” (Aaliyah). Grace spoke of a child who had been sexually abused saying, “Sy was lewendig, maar nou is sy so slaperig. Sy reageer nie. Sy is net so dood, sal ‘n mens sê.” [She was lively, but now she is so sleepy. She doesn’t react. One could

say that she's just so dead]. They also spoke of children being disruptive or aggressive, and Aaliyah pointed out, "We just think it's a naughty child, and it's all that anger coming out in different ways. They lash out at children, because at home they are treated like that." She drew attention to the case of one child in her class who was conceived when his mother was raped. She pictured him as being "full of hatred" saying that, "Even early in the morning, he's in that mode of hitting and lashing out."

While discussing the children's experiences at school, Aaliyah expressed how surprised she had been when she discovered that "only two children out of my [Grade four] class have never repeated. That was a scary feeling." Grace added that she used to "get twenty or twenty two children who were repeating in Grade one. So more than half the class had repeated already. There were maybe only five or six who went straight from Grade one to Grade two." Carmen explained that she thinks there are so many grade repetitions because most of the children "haven't got a preschool background." Mark spoke about how some children who had repeated several grades do not achieve academically at school, but do achieve in sport. He said that they attend school only in order to participate in sport, and that they leave school once they are too old to conform to the age categories for competition at primary school level. He commented that "the sad part is that it's a reality that kids drop out afterwards and just roam around outside."

In the light of the many challenges that the children in Rose Valley experience, Aaliyah and Helen expressed wonder at how these children learn to adjust their behaviour to meet expectations at school and to survive in their community:

Aaliyah: To survive, they put on different covers and different coats.

Helen: To protect themselves.

Aaliyah: The child is covered from eight o'clock until two o'clock. But that same cover doesn't work when he goes home. He needs a different cover. And the way they switch from that skollie language to being a school child is wonderful.

Helen: Mm, it is wonderful.

- Aaliyah: Because every second word is a swear word out there and it's okay. And here we come and we want it prim and proper, everything in a line.
- Helen: We're just wanting something that they're not.
- Aaliyah: [Laughing] They try hard, and when the word just pops out, we shout. And if they don't speak like that, they'll be called different names and be categorised differently.
- Helen: I think it becomes tiring for them after a while.
- Aaliyah: To keep their guard up, not to say the wrong thing.

Furthermore, as part of the portrayal of their experiences of the school context, the teachers described the role played by the education authorities in the context of their experiences.

#### **4.2.1.4 *The role of the education authorities***

The teachers spoke of various factors which relate to the role of the education authorities in the context of their experiences. The teachers frequently described a lack of support from the education authorities. This lack of support was specifically mentioned with regard to the placement of children in special schools. In some cases, the children had become too old for the primary school and would have difficulty at a mainstream high school. Grace spoke about a child who she felt should have been placed at a special school. She asked, "Now why is it that this child is here after five, seven years?" Helen explained that it was due to the inefficiency of the educational psychologist serving their area, saying "I think the reason given was that...the school psychologist...didn't write out any report. And because of that, there is no evidence that he needs to go. So they're not going to accept him." Helen expressed her frustration at the inefficiency of the authorities in helping her to find a suitable high school for a particular child in her class:

"She has a learning disability. This is her second year with me now, and I've been trying really hard to get her into a different kind of school because she cannot function in this type of school. And she has nowhere to go for high school next year. I made an application for her last year to go to a School of Skills, and my application was sent back and forth. I was handed the application back at the end of the year, and I was told that I

should hand it in at the beginning of this year, which I did. Eventually, I got the application back and I was told that the child is too old, and why did I not apply for her last year. So all the paperwork [for the application to special schools] has been shifted onto our laps over here, and all the responsibility. You do it, and then you stop to think well, what are they doing over there? They're just receiving your paperwork and sending it on. You have to do everything...I know that what I do during the day, I cannot sit on the phone all the time phoning schools. Somebody, somebody else should be doing that...You know the issue that I really had a problem with was that the applications go to someone that's got no idea who these children are. They haven't seen them. They haven't spoken to them. They haven't interviewed them. All they did was look at her paperwork and her age and they said she's too old. There was nothing else considered."

Helen referred to another child who had been on a waiting-list for many years, and now, at the age of sixteen, is too old for the school that he should have been sent to. She summed up the problem as follows:

"What I find lacking in our system over here is that we have these children with these problems. And I know we're expected to do wonders with them, but when we identify that these children have a problem, we don't get the necessary support from the department. So we try to help the child go as far as we can, but we always come up against a stone wall. You know we can only go so far, but we need these other people to take it a step further."

Grace pointed out that, "The remedial teachers only take four children out of the forty children, but there's another ten that should have gone." She further questioned, "Why is there only one [special school] in our area? Ja, shouldn't you make a way and build some other schools also?" Mark, in speaking about support structures from the education authorities, and the school psychologist in particular, said, "We're supposed to be using these people, but we can't get hold of them." Helen added, "We don't see our school psychologist at any time of the year, except [once] at the end of the year. Now we can't get those children the assistance and help that they need." The teachers also spoke of inappropriate interventions when assistance or support was given by the education authorities:

"One example I might give is the problem we have with discipline. We took it up with EMDC [district office of the education authorities] and they had a workshop for us here. I didn't actually find it useful. Most of the questions



that we also raised, we couldn't get proper answers for because they didn't have the answers as well. (Mark)

"Yes, and what Mark was saying, this person from the EMDC came in with this attitude that we were not doing the proper thing in terms of discipline. And her attitude was that she was going to show us how it was done. I really felt insulted that particular day when she did that with us. It was a total waste of our time when we could have been doing something else."  
(Helen)

In addition to a lack of support from, or inappropriate interventions by, the education authorities, the teachers expressed difficulty with the implementation of new policies. Helen spoke about the problems that she sees with Outcomes Based Education (OBE):

"...our OBE system, I just don't think it works, and specifically not here in our community. I taught before the OBE system came out, and I can see the big difference between then and now. I can see the big difference - the number of children who could read and write before, the number of children that can read and write now. I just think that they brought something from somewhere else and they didn't look at it properly. They tried to fit it into our context over here. They just tried to implement it, come what may."

Aaliyah and Grace both expressed difficulty with new policies which limit the number of grades a learner can repeat. Aaliyah argued:

"In the old days, if the child didn't conquer or complete the work in Grade one, they kept the child till the foundation was really built up strong. Now ...it doesn't work. A child can only repeat once in a phase, and they never get back what they're supposed to really get back to fill up their empty bucket."

A further point that the teachers raised was class sizes. They said that certain classes are over-crowded, with some having over 60 children in one class. The teachers also spoke about their increased administrative workload and how this detracts from their teaching time. Mark explained:

"But it is a problem for me, the admin that we must do. I mean, it wasn't even so [bad] five or six or seven years ago. You could mark your books,

play outside with the kids, you could do a lot. Now I can't even mark books anymore...so I don't know what changed so dramatically in teaching."

Helen added:

"All the other things that we're doing nowadays, it's just not teaching, for me it's just not part of teaching. It's all the administration work. For me, that is not what I am supposed to be doing. I'm supposed to be in the class teaching and forming relationships with my children. I'm not supposed to be running around typing out this, typing out that, filling in this form, filling in that form..."

Another topic that the teachers raised was the emphasis placed by the education authorities on children's academic performance. Helen stressed that, "It's always about statistics. You know, and how many children have what percentage in mathematics. They don't see those little things..." Grace agreed that "some children need more than all this stuff in maths and in Afrikaans. They need other things ..." Aaliyah commented that "they [the education authorities] must always think that something bright is happening in your class, they think you didn't cover what they want." Grace added that, "The thing that they want is not what you're really doing." Helen shared the same opinion, adding that teachers are frequently blamed by the education authorities:

"You know, you're either not doing things the right way, or you're not doing things the way they should be... If something doesn't work, they point a finger at the teachers, 'It must be you, you've done something wrong or you're not doing something right.' I know that our WCED and the powers that be seem to put the blame on the teachers."

She also talked of the importance that school management and the education authorities place on making good impressions, but said that this was being done at the expense of learners:

"People don't like to admit that there are problems. They like to give the impression that their school is perfect, especially from a management point of view. Because you want your school to look good, so you're not always going to say what is happening...A lot of people are not teaching for the love of it. Some people are just in it for either status (not an ordinary teacher, but *you* know what I mean). And money maybe, and maybe the affirmation they get for doing things. That is where it seems to be going these days ...Those are the very same people...that somehow seem to get a promotion on the job. They haven't thought about the children. They don't seem to think about that. And they get away with

getting these jobs. A lot of them are in the Western Cape Education Department and circuit managers. Sorry, but this is true. This is absolutely true. Ordinary teachers, who do absolutely nothing in their classrooms, go on to be deputy principals, principals, circuit managers, area managers.”

In speaking of the context of their experiences, including the community setting of Rose Valley, the home and school contexts of the children and the role of the education authorities, the teachers sometimes expressed meanings that I have summed up as possibly being suggestive of hopelessness.

#### **4.2.2 Meanings that could suggest hopelessness**

The teachers expressed an array of feelings or meanings in connection with various aspects of the context of their experiences. I have grouped these within the theme ‘meanings that could suggest hopelessness’.

Some of the teachers said that they felt scared when shooting occurred at the school. Grace spoke of her disappointment at not being able to do extra work with the children after school. At times the teachers spoke of feeling limited, or helpless. Aaliyah expressed feelings of futility regarding attempts to educate children who had had prenatal exposure to methamphetamine. Carmen talked of teachers being limited without the help and support of the children’s parents: “We can only do a certain amount that’s in our power...but we really need help. If we could get more assistance from the parents, it would make our task so much easier.” Mark expressed feelings of helplessness to do with children who abuse alcohol or other substances: “I think there’s nothing that we really could do in nearly all the cases I was involved in, so we were a bit helpless.” Helen and Aaliyah also referred to times when they felt discouraged or hopeless. Aaliyah’s words were: “There really are days when you’re down and out - the children do get to you. Or when certain things happen, like with the strike, some people felt very low.” Helen said, “There are moments when you deviate from that road. Something happens in the course of your day which affects one of your children, and then you feel hopeless.” Later, in referring to the administrative workload of teachers, she stated:

“It’s when all the other things are getting you down that you can lose sight of what you initially wanted out of teaching. This is initially what you

wanted to do, and all of those other things just get in the way...I think sometimes when we become bogged down with so many things like paperwork, we forget why we did it in the first place. And we also maybe forget the good moments that we've had, and the children who have been successful, along the way."

Feelings of frustration, sadness and powerlessness were expressed numerous times when the teachers spoke of not receiving adequate support from the education authorities in meeting the needs of certain children. This applied in particular to children who had become too old to attend their school, and would thus end up wandering the streets with no school to go to. Helen said:

"That really set me back, because I'm a teacher - I'm supposed to be able to help this child. I'm supposed to make a difference for her...That is essentially my problem as a teacher - feeling in that sense disempowered, because I know that I can try everything, and then I get stopped right there and I know that there's no other alternative. And it's not the first time that this kind of thing's happened to me...But that is always on my mind. I always have it on my mind. Even if it was years ago. I have that on my mind that I couldn't help that child."

On another occasion she expressed similar feelings:

"And at that moment, I actually felt like crying. Because, you know, I really want to do something for this child, I don't want to see her just walking around. And at that moment, those moments, you feel that you are actually powerless. You're supposed to have the power to help that child, you know. But you're sort of caught up in a system over here that you can't do anything about."

Helen also described how in a demanding setting, where teachers feel that they do not always meet the expectations placed on them by the education authorities, they often feel as if they are not valued. During part of the period in which the research discussions were held, teachers were striking for pay increases, leading to one of the focus group discussion sessions being postponed. Aaliyah mentioned that teachers do so much, yet they struggle to get an eight percent pay increase from the government. Helen spoke about the need for teachers to have school management "make you feel valued as a person and also as an educator." She added:

“In our cases where we’re working in environments like this, we need to be uplifted all of the time. So we don’t need people in our top structure putting us down. We need people to say to us, you know, “Well done for the day’s work.” or “Yes, we know that you’re working in a difficult environment, but you’re doing a great job”, so that you go home at the end of the day and you don’t feel taken down even further.”

Within a context where the teachers who participated in the study sometimes experienced meanings of frustration, futility, fear, sadness, powerlessness and hopelessness, they nevertheless also spoke of actions, motivations and reflections that could point to alternative or preferred meanings.

#### **4.2.3 Actions, motivations and reflections that could suggest alternative or preferred meanings**

For the sake of the presentation of this thesis, I have divided this theme into three categories, namely actions, reflections and motivations. As was discussed in chapter two (Section 2.2.1), action, reflection and motivation are intimately interwoven when viewed from a social constructionist perspective. There is therefore considerable overlap between these sections.

##### **4.2.3.1 Actions**

In this category I have included various forms of action or behaviour in which the teachers chose to engage. These suggest to me possible preferred or alternative meanings to hopelessness.

On various occasions the teachers spoke about how they or other teachers intervened on behalf of children who were being mistreated. Grace spoke of more than one occasion where a child had been sexually abused and she took the child to either the police station, the hospital, or went to the child’s house to investigate. Her account of one such incident follows:

“Ons het toe maar nou direk aan die polisieman gesê dat ons gaan die ou nou haal en opsluit. Toe kry hy die polisiewa en ‘n kar om saam te gaan. Ons gaan toe na die flat toe en vra waar die man is. Die man stry op die dood dat hy het dit nie gedoen nie. Maar toe op die ou end het hulle hom

geneem en daar by die polisiestasie, so in 'n hokkie gesit...Daarna moes ek haar omtrent so elke Vrydag hospitaal toe neem.”

[Then we said directly to the policeman that we were going to fetch the man now and lock him up. Then he got the police van and a car to go with us. Then we went to the flat and asked where the man was. The man argued to the death that he did not do it. But eventually they took him and locked him in a cell at the police station...After that I had to take her to the hospital almost every Friday.

In another account she said, “The husband abused the two children. So we went to visit the house with the principal and the secretary, and then the social workers took the children away.” In the description that was given earlier of a father coming to the school with the intention of hitting his child with a belt, she related how she had physically intervened: “Maar ek hardloop, ek gryp daai kind en ek sê, ‘Slaan aan hom, slaan jy aan my!’ [But I ran, I grabbed the child and I said, ‘Hit him and you hit me!’]”

The teachers also told of times when they had visited children at home, taken children and their parents to see a psychologist, or attended the funerals of parents who had died. Helen described how the teachers “try to work with the community as much as we can”, and gave an example of teachers running “parenting classes”. Aaliyah similarly spoke of holiday programmes that were run at the school, saying, “Holiday times the children need occupying and certain teachers must also be part of that. There was a lunch served and the children were safe.” Helen talked about protecting children who are not part of their school: “We are actually protecting those children. We’re taking them into our school grounds and looking after them.”

Furthermore, the teachers described actions they took that had exposed the children to opportunities they would ordinarily not have experienced. Mark pointed out that:

“Although there are all these difficult circumstances, you see the opportunities created by the teachers...We take them out where we expose them to, cable cars and camps, and all the sports. And the sad reality is we have kids that actually are just here for that part...It is something good, because the teachers expose them. Mostly at our own expenses, we have to drive the kids in our own cars, or some of the times with our own petrol because sometimes there isn’t money. Most of the

teachers here take out of their own pockets to buy something for the kids to eat as well.”

He described his involvement with the children’s sport and how they have become used to “the small things” the teachers do for them:

“So when we’re busy with athletics, I must buy them fruit. They’re so used to it now, because it’s happened for a couple of years. They’ve gotten used to small things, even with the girls that are at football, I need to come pick them up here and bring them home at night as well. I think it’s something that they’ve also become accustomed to, that there will be someone, a teacher or a person will be there to do it.”

He said that teachers drive children to talent identification events and to sports’ school, and recalled one particular event:

“We had two girls (they matriculated last year). They missed the bus that they had to take to Beaufort. I had to drive after the bus, and I got the bus just before the tunnel on the N1! [About an hour and a half’s drive]. That story they will always recall. All the stories, it’s quite interesting to listen when they tell them. A lot of stories also of Mrs Samsodien [Aaliyah], I mean she used to feed them ‘curry bunnies’ [balls of bread dough deep fried with a filling of curried beef mince] and many of them have left school, but they always remember and they always talk about it. It’s an experience for them.”

Mark also talked of teachers taking children to the park on their way to or from sports events: “We had a race the other day, and Mrs Samsodien stopped at the park and some kids went down to the water and...” Aaliyah continued the story for him: “Yes, why must I ride past the park? They’ll never get there again, but I made sure they would take that memory with them. Somebody allows them the experience just for that minute in their lives.” Grace added,

“I think the outstanding theme of that is the freedom. Because if they play here, then there are guns or shooting coming or knives or whatever. They don’t feel free here in their community. Ja and they felt safe that time.”

Helen agreed:

“The children over here have so much that they have to put up with. They’re not really children. So when you take them out and you take them to places that they haven’t seen and so on, they get a chance to play and to be children, not having to worry about other things, because there’s an adult that they know they can trust looking after them. So they can entirely give themselves over to being children.”

She also reflected that:

“We’re sort of teaching them that, how you’re behaving is only part of a small thing, because Rose Valley is not the whole world. There is another way of behaving, and another way that is accepted out there. So they learn the difference as to when they can behave in a certain way and when they’ve got to behave differently.”

Grace talked of organising for children to bring their old uniforms for peers who did not have a clean change of clothes. She also mentioned making herself available to take telephone calls from parents after nine o’clock at night. Helen recounted that she had sometimes taken a child home to give him the opportunity of using her computer, or going for a drive. Mark talked of playing cricket with the children during interval, saying, “It’s the small things, but I think in a way it makes a difference.” Helen pointed out that Mark is taking on the role of a father figure for many of the schoolchildren in a community where the fathers are generally absent. Grace pointed out that “you assume the care person and mother and father figure.” The teachers explained on more than one occasion that they fill multiple roles in the lives of the children in their school: “Ons onderwysers moet verpleegster wees, ons moet counsellor wees en ons moet ‘n lawyer wees. Ja, ons is ook ‘n social worker...and a judge” [We teachers must be a nurse, a counsellor and a lawyer. Yes, we are also a social worker...and a judge] (Grace).

Grace also spoke about how she praises the children and gives them another chance when they don’t manage their work:

“Oh, and then I praise the child and the child gives you that smile, and I can see he feels happy then. Or if he got all his maths, or only one sum, right, you just give him a hug and then the child feels, ‘I want to be at



school. I want to do my work...’ ‘n Kind wil gepraise wees, en wat hy ook nie goed doen nie, ons prober weer môre.” [A child wants to be praised, and what he doesn’t do well, we’ll try again tomorrow.]

Helen spoke of encouraging the children as follows:

“I think everyone tries to encourage the children and we are always pointing out to them that there’s more to life than what they see around them. We also try to advocate how important their education is, that they cannot get anywhere without it. And I think everybody also shows the children love because we know they’re coming from homes where those things are not happening for them. I allow my children to hug me. Also, I will joke and tease them, try to make them feel at home - at home and comfortable. They can also see me as a person that they can talk to if they do have any kind of problems, or if anything is bothering them. That is what I do during the day. Like I said, I know the others also show that extra care and love and give encouragement to the children”.

Carmen, Aaliyah and Grace also reflected on the understanding that the teachers have for the children, and how they give “that extra love and care” because “we do not know their load”, or “what happened the night before or that morning.” Carmen agreed with Helen, “We love the children. They know we love them. Like Helen was saying, we hug them when they want a hug, and we’re concerned about them.” Grace spoke of being “soft speaking and loving and caring” with the children, otherwise they get “too energetic”. She went on, “If you speak loudly the child doesn’t even hear what you’re saying. But if you call them and look in their eyes and speak very softly to them, then they get on.” Aaliyah talked about having a positive attitude: “With that positive attitude, you make it so they feel so good, and then those small stars will find somewhere to shine brightly.” Grace said, “Daar’s ‘n goeie ding in elke persoon. Jy moet dit net raak sien. Ons moet net daai lig straaltjie sien.” [There’s something good in every person. You must just recognise it. We must just see that ray of light]. Helen spoke of boundaries and rules being part of caring:

“They must also know that you care about them and love them, and they do want boundaries and they do want rules. They want you to set those things for them and say, ‘No, but this is not allowed at this time.’ And my children know that very well. They can joke with me and play and we will laugh. Then we’ve joked, but now we need to get on with our work. But you’ve got to first establish a relationship...”

The teachers also expressed the importance they place on listening to the children and taking them seriously. Grace put it: “Maar as jy vra so, ‘Is alles in die haak?’ So rol jy vir hulle in dat hulle moet uitkom met die ding waaroor hulle wil praat.” “But if you ask, ‘Is everything okay?’ You reel them in like that so that they must come out with the thing they want to speak about.” Aaliyah explained that when she sees a problem with a child’s behaviour, she calls them to her and encourages them to speak about “what is wrong”. Grace said that if the child realises that you’re interested in her then “she will tell you things.” Helen added that “they know instinctively when someone is being sincere with them, or when they’re putting on a big show and not really caring. That makes the difference of them really appreciating you and remembering what you’ve done for them.” She described establishing sincere relationships with the children that can last long after they have left the school:

“Most definitely, children always remember, especially if they know a teacher has been sincere with them and that the teacher really cared about them. And that they take with them into their lives and into other things that they’re going to do afterwards, and they relay that, of course, to others...With my class, you know when they are with me, in Grade seven, I always tell them, ‘You know, it doesn’t matter what you do when you leave here, I will still always be interested in you, I still want to know what happens with you. So come back and tell me what you’re doing, how you’re getting along, if you’re having trouble at school.’ And I generally do have some children who have kept coming back through the years, who have said, ‘Oh yes, I’m having trouble, or I’m persevering and it’s difficult.’ So I also think it’s for you to show that interest, and let them know that the chain is not broken once they leave here - that you haven’t forgotten them once they’ve gone. And I think that matters a lot to children. And then it is going to make a difference to what they do afterwards, because they are going to think, ‘Somebody is still interested in me. Somebody is still caring about me back at that school, so I’m going to try that little bit harder.’ That’s my perception of things.”

“For me your job as a teacher never ends - it doesn’t matter how old the children become. You know, once they’ve left your class and they’re fifteen, sixteen years old, twenty one, whatever, but I always believe that you try to maintain that contact with the children so that the relationship that you develop between yourself and a particular child or children grows. So that even when they’re out of school, they can still come to you and talk with you and discuss certain things with you. I was just talking to a child that was in my class two years ago, who I still see on a regular basis.

And now he comes back to ask me to help him with subject choices, because he is going into Grade ten. So you know, there I am still his teacher. It didn't stop the moment he left the class."

In addition to their own actions or behaviour that could point to alternative or preferred meanings of their experiences, the teachers reflected on their experiences of the behaviour or action of others that to me, also spoke of the possibility of alternatives to hopelessness.

#### **4.2.3.2 Reflections**

The reflections of the teachers that I have included in this section centre on their descriptions of being acknowledged, appreciated or remembered for their actions. They also include the pride that they expressed when they met some of their past pupils as adults. Grace described how in more than one case, years after she had intervened when a child was being abused, she had by chance met a member of the child's family. The family member thanked her and expressed her appreciation for what Grace had done for the child and her family. Carmen and Aaliyah spoke about the children being grateful to them after they had grown up, and Aaliyah explained that, "After leaving school, they appreciate it. Why? They appreciate what you've put in for them because you put in extra out[side] of the class[room]. And you took notice of them."

Some of the teachers said that they were highly respected in the community. Grace related how past pupils of hers who now work in the supermarket, or the café, greet her with the utmost respect. She said that even gangsters respect their teachers: "As ek deur die dorp loop, dan sal hulle sê, "Los daai vrou, sy was my juffrou. Sien dat daai juffrou veilig by die huis kom." [If I walk through the town then they will say, 'Leave that woman, she was my teacher. See that that teacher gets home safely.'] The teachers spoke of the pride that they felt on encountering their past pupils who still remembered them. Grace recounted:

"Early this year, this woman was sitting over there against the wall during a meeting. And when the meeting was done, she came to me and said, 'Juffrou, as juffrou net weet, juffrou was een van my beste juffrou's

gewees.’ [Miss, if you just knew, you were one of my best teachers.] But it makes us proud, that that person can recall.”

Aaliyah added:

“This was last year. I had to take the first train and I was so scared. It was still pitch dark. But when I got to the station, the driver was standing outside the train. And when I went nearer he came to me, ‘Hallo Juffrou!’ En ek sê, ‘Nou weet ek dat ek veilig is. Dankie Dawie, dat jy die driver is!’ [‘Hullo Teacher!’ And I said, ‘Now I know that I am safe. Thank you Dawie, that you’re the driver!’] Some of them do remember – at five o’clock in the morning!”

Grace described the incredible pride she felt one day when she was in hospital and the doctor who treated her, recognised her as his teacher. She also expressed her pride in another of her pupils who became a Catholic priest. Helen spoke of her pride in a child who had been in her class who went on to complete an Honours degree in biochemistry. In addition, while speaking about another child that she used to help, she said:

“And so we are making a difference in that we’re teaching them that there’s another way to behave. You know, and that there is a bigger world out there. But he’s turned out marvellously actually, I just heard from him a couple of months ago, and he’s turned out very differently, and I’m very happy about that, very happy about that.”

Speaking of the “extras” that teachers do for the children, Mark said “they always remember and they always talk about it.” Helen agreed:

“I have met many of my pupils a couple of years later, a lot of them are say, twenty five or twenty eight years old now, and they remember what you’ve told them. They remember if you’ve encouraged them and motivated them. And I see some of them having gone and studied further. There are quite a few actually who’ve done so. You always think you’re not getting anywhere, but a couple of years later you see it. And whether it’s one child or two children’s lives that you touch, they are going to have families and they are going to relay that to their children. And so the circle will grow a little bit bigger. But it just takes a really long time to see the effects of what you’ve done. Most definitely, children always remember, and especially if they know a teacher has been sincere with them and that the teacher really cared about them. They take that with them into their

lives, and into other things that they're going to do afterwards, and relay that to others."

Furthermore, in reflecting on their teaching experiences, the teachers spoke about the daily rewards they received from the children in the form of smiles or happy responses to the teachers' words or actions. Grace said, "And when that child gives you that smile, then my day is made." Aaliyah spoke about the day she took the children to the park: "It was fantastic to see their faces man, that minute, lighting up while they were enjoying themselves on the slide." Carmen talked of a time when she helped a child who had never spoken, start to speak, and said:

"That child came out of that, and he started talking. So every time I look at him talking, I give myself a smile. That is your day. This one comes out of his shell and you did something and just helped him, like planting a tree with a stick to make it stand up straight."

#### **4.2.3.3 *Motivations and purposes***

This section explains some of the teachers' motivations for choosing to become teachers, as well as their reasons for staying in teaching. It also very briefly describes what the teachers see as the purpose of teaching or education.

In describing her motivation for becoming a teacher, Helen said:

"I made up my mind to be a teacher in primary school already. And the reason was that I looked at the relationships between my teachers and the class, and the fact that we were always scared. And then my whole thing was, 'One day when I become a teacher, I'm not going to do the same thing. I'm not going to have that type of a relationship.' And that was the only thing that was on my mind until I went to college. For me it was all about, not just imparting knowledge, but also to give of myself, and that is what I wanted out of teaching. And I think that today, I still try to do exactly the same thing. To give a little bit more of myself, not for them just to see me as that teacher and that's it, but for them to see me as a person also and somebody that they can relate to and talk to about other things beside book knowledge. That is what I hope I am living out and that my children see it in that way."

Mark spoke of his reasons for choosing to be a teacher as follows:

“My motivation for teaching would probably be some of my own experiences when I was at school. We didn’t have a lot of money, and my mother used to move around all the time. I ended up at my granny, and my brother dropped out, and I was the first one who matriculated in our family. So the role the teachers played was important to me. I had a teacher who actually got me a tuxedo and a car for my matric ball. And I had another teacher who bought me my equipment for the end of year woodwork project. Teaching wasn’t really on my mind, but it was mostly the teachers who got me there. They came to fetch me at home to do an interview and they made me fill in the forms, and applied for bursaries as well. They actually motivated and supported and encouraged me, because I had no clue about what to do or which way to go. So they actually directed me as well. So they went the extra mile for me, and I think I then wanted to be a teacher from that experience...Also knowing what the kids go through, because it’s something similar to what we had to go through as well. And I still have a lot of family in the area as well, so you know the situation at home, and you know how to - sometimes - motivate them and just give them something extra.”

In speaking of her motivations, Grace described her love of teaching and explained why she prefers to teach in Rose Valley, “En so het die liefde vir onderwys maar net gegroei en gegroei. Omdat ons so swaar gekry het as kinders, weet ek wat die kinders hier ook deurmaak.” [And that’s how the love of teaching just grew and grew. Because it was so difficult for us as children, I know what the children here also go through]. Helen spoke about the importance of focusing on her reasons for teaching, and how small actions make a difference:

“Sometimes we just need to take a step back when we’re feeling overwhelmed, and just think to ourselves, ‘This is why I’m doing it. This is what makes me happy.’ And I think then we can carry on again afterwards...I think we sometimes get caught up with trying to change the world and you know, we forget that the small things also help. You know, I fall prey to it all of the time because you want to change everything, and you forget that you are actually changing certain things. Even by planting a little seed in that child, in that little mind over there, you don’t know what the positive effects might be. So ja, we need to consider that we do actually help our children. We do actually make a difference. We are doing the little bit that we can, and that is also important for us to remember - especially when we become disillusioned. Maybe I don’t see it now, but in a couple of years I might see that child again and know that what I did back then, that little seed I planted, this is the result of it.”

In reflecting on the pride that they feel in the long term difference they make in children's lives, some of the teachers said:

Mark: And it's all worth it.

Grace: And it's all worth it, yes.

Helen: And it's all worth it that it makes you go on.

Grace: Yes, that's the thing. And I decided that I never want to stop teaching, I can be eighty, eighty whatever, but I never want to stop.

Occasionally, while reflecting on their actions, or on the difference they make as teachers, the teachers spoke about what the purpose of teaching or education should be. Helen, in referring to the emphasis that the education authorities put on statistics concerning the academic performance of learners, said:

"Those little things, where you're actually bringing that child from that point where they wouldn't be talking, to that point where they are now communicating, that for me, is all part of education. Although it's got nothing to do with figures and all of that, for me that is what it's all about."

Aaliyah agreed, "What do they think we're there for? To develop the child. That is what teaching was supposed to be." She added later that teaching includes "upliftment" and "building the personal stuff" of the child. That it is not just about performance in mathematics and language. Grace stated that what makes a good teacher is being able to see the good in every person. Helen talked about teaching being more than "imparting knowledge", but that it has to do with building relationships. She also pointed out that "your job as a teacher never ends", saying that teaching continues even when the learners reach adulthood.

## **4.3 DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS**

### **4.3.1 Introduction to discussion**

I have attempted to guide this research in its entirety with the use of a social constructionist theoretical framework. The discussion of the research findings will thus be presented from this world view. The focus of this discussion is to summarise

the research findings, while placing them in the context of existing literature from a social constructionist perspective. In discussing the research findings, it is first necessary to view the problem statement within the context of the study's theoretical framework. This study aimed to explore and describe the meanings that the participants make of their experiences as teachers in a primary school in Cape Town, which is situated in a community where low income levels are prevalent. In view of the importance of the specific context to meaning-making, the study additionally aimed to describe how teachers experience contextual factors, and how these factors contribute to their meaning-making. Furthermore, by framing the research within the theory of social constructionism, the purpose of the study was to explore local knowledge in the form of actions, motivations and reflections that speak of the possibility of alternative or preferred meanings in a context that could invite hopelessness.

Social constructionism recognises the importance of context in meaning-making, and acknowledges that meaning-making is local and specific and occurs within the cultural soup of circulating discourses (Winslade & Monk, 2007, p. 29). I have therefore tried, in placing the research findings in the context of existing literature, not to attempt to use the literature to verify or support the findings, or to make generalisations. I rather attempted to portray what the literature says in respect of the participants' descriptions of their understandings or meanings, realising that the literature could represent some of the discourses that make up the cultural soup out of which teachers make their meaning.

A discussion of the research findings follows in this section. Concluding remarks, reflections and recommendations that arose from the research findings will be presented in chapter five.

#### **4.3.2 The meanings that the participants make of their experiences as teachers in a primary school in Cape Town in a community where low income levels are prevalent**

Findings from the focus group discussions revealed how teachers experience contextual factors and how these factors contribute to their meaning-making. Actions,



motivations and reflections of the teachers that could suggest possibilities for alternative or preferred meanings were also depicted in the findings.

#### **4.3.2.1 *The teachers' experiences of contextual factors***

The data from the study suggest that teachers described their experiences of contextual factors in terms of the community of Rose Valley, the children's home environments, and the relationship between these contexts and the children's experiences at school. They also described their experiences of the context as the interface between the role of the education authorities and the specific community setting of their experiences.

The teachers described present day life in Rose Valley as a legacy of the injustices of Apartheid. They reflected on the difficulties of attempting to redress the effects of the "major wrong" that created Rose Valley, saying that people in the community have internalised the identities that were given to them by the Apartheid government. This ties in with historical accounts of forcible removals when Rose Valley was established as a "housing estate" for "coloured" people under the Group Areas Act (Dinan et al., 2004, p. 729; Naidoo & Dreyer, 1984, p. 9). Furthermore, the teachers depicted individuals in the community as being caught in a "cycle of poverty", with many of them living on welfare grants and being unable to afford basic necessities. Literature also refers to the cyclical nature of living in a community with low income levels, and how this can form a "deprivation trap" that prevents families and communities from "rising out of poverty" (CMC, 1999, p. 2; Ratele, 2007, p. 224; Swanepoel & De Beer, 2006, p. 5).

Furthermore, the teachers perceive the community as being run by "strong women". Media also reports women as taking leadership roles in the community (Swart, 2010, p. 6). According to the teachers, most of the men in the community do not work and commonly belong to gangs. Related to this, they described how gang fights and shooting are frequent in the community and tend to spread in widening circles between neighbouring areas. Community- and gang-related violence is highlighted in international literature on communities with low income levels, and reports of gang activity dominate media accounts of Rose Valley (Bamford, 2011b, p. 1; Bezuidenhout, 2011b, p. 3; Davids, 2011, p. 8; Dolley, 2010a, p. 6, 2010b, p. 1;

Frumkin et al., 2004, p. 198; Gottdiener & Budd, 2005, p. 69; Maré, 2011, p. 9; Peterman & Sweigard, 2008, p. 23; Ratele, 2007, p. 219; September, 2011, p. 1; Slamdien, 2011, p. 6). The reason for the prevalence of gang membership was explained by the teachers in terms of the sense of belonging provided by gangs for people who do not receive sufficient attention and love in their families.

As well as describing their understandings of the community context of Rose Valley, the teachers illustrated their conceptions of the home environments of the children they teach. They talked of over-crowding, a lack of facilities including easily accessible running water, and parents who struggle to raise their children. International literature also links over-crowding to communities with low income levels (Frumkin et al., 2004, p. 198; Gottdiener & Budd, 2005, p. 69; Peterman & Sweigard, 2008, p. 23; Ratele, 2007, p. 219). The history of forced removals to Rose Valley explains the origin of over-crowding in this community (Naidoo & Dreyer, 1984, pp. 9, 24). The teachers described some parents as being so young that they are almost “children themselves”, but with many having to cope with several children. Literature similarly reports a high incidence of teenage pregnancy in areas with low income levels (Atkins et al., 2007, p. 166; Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 2001, p. 52). Some mothers were portrayed by the teachers as having to work such long hours that their children barely see them. According to Naidoo and Dreyer (1984, p. 25), this situation arose in families when they were forcibly moved to Rose Valley and is linked to detrimental effects on the children. The teachers similarly described children in Rose Valley as having to take on so many family responsibilities that they had to be “little adults”. They further expressed the need for parenting education in the community.

Each of the teachers spoke about how many of the parents in the community “don’t care” for, or about, their children, have a lack of interest in them, do not show them love or see to their physical needs, and speak to them rudely or swear at them. Literature similarly reports that in areas with low income levels parents are more likely to be tense, short tempered and volatile, and that there is a high incidence of child neglect (Bauman et al., 2006, p. 1322; Chen et al., 2008, p. 157; McWhirter et al., 2007, pp. 24-31).

High levels of substance abuse in communities with low income levels are reported in the literature, as is the increased risk of accidental injury or death of children

(Bauman et al., 2006, p. 1322; Chen et al., 2008, p. 157; Frumkin et al., 2004, p. 198; Gottdiener & Budd, 2005, p. 69; McWhirter et al., 2007, pp. 24-31; Peterman & Sweigard, 2008, p. 23; Ratele, 2007, p. 219). Substance abuse, especially the abuse of methamphetamine and alcohol, is reportedly extremely prevalent in the community of Rose Valley (De Vries, 2010, p. 6; Slamdien, 2011, p. 6). The teachers also said on several occasions that parents abused methamphetamine, alcohol and other substances, which resulted in danger to the children in their care. Furthermore, according to some of the teachers, family members of the children they teach are sometimes involved with gangs or crime and spend time in jail.

Domestic violence was reported by the teachers as being common, with several of the teachers stating that children in their classes had been physically or sexually abused at home. According to literature, domestic violence and child abuse are prevalent in communities with low income levels (Bauman et al., 2006, p. 1322; Chen et al., 2008, p. 157; Frumkin et al., 2004, p. 198; Gottdiener & Budd, 2005, p. 69; McWhirter et al., 2007, pp. 24-31; Peterman & Sweigard, 2008, p. 23). The teachers said that in many cases, women endure physical abuse, or do not intervene when they know that their children are being abused, because of fear or due to financial dependence on the person who perpetrates the abuse. In addition, family members were portrayed as frequently being unsupportive of a woman who wants to leave her husband. The teachers stated that charges of child abuse are frequently withdrawn before the case goes to court, and that when the school gets involved, some families take their children and move away. One of the teachers spoke of the powerlessness of women who are not educated, lack confidence and are financially dependent on their partners. However, in contrast to the parents presented so far, the teachers said that there are some parents who do care - and this makes a very big difference for their children. One teacher described how some mothers will fight to protect their children from abuse.

In speaking about the Rose Valley community and the family life of the children, the teachers elaborated on how these influence the children as well as their own experiences as teachers at the primary school in the community. Violence overflows from the community into the school and its effects on teachers and children are extensively reported in media accounts pertaining to Rose Valley (Bamford, 2011a, p. 5; Bezuidenhout, 2011c, p. 4; Maré, 2011, p. 9; Slamdien, 2011, p. 6). The

teachers similarly spoke about violence from the community overflowing into the school, with shooting occurring on the school property which frightens the children and the teachers. They reported that a boy from a neighbouring school had been shot. Children were described as having to dodge bullets on their way home from school, and as being unable to stay after school to do extra work because they had to leave punctually to walk home in groups for safety. During a recent intensification of shooting in the area, the school had to close early every day. A child's father was shot, and another child was physically ill after witnessing a shooting on the way to school.

The teachers and the media report that children are recruited into gangs at a young age (Bamford, 2011a, p. 5; Slamdien, 2011, p. 6), with the teachers explaining that gang membership is a "way of surviving". They also talked of children who abuse or sell alcohol and other substances, and how this sometimes results in high rates of absenteeism, or children suffering from the after-effects of the abuse at school, or "dropping out" of school altogether. Prevalence of substance abuse, high rates of absenteeism and non-completion of school among children are depicted in international and national literature on areas with low income levels (Atkins et al., 2007, p. 166; Chen et al., 2008, p. 152; Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 2001, p. 52; Evans, 2004, p. 77; Msall, 2009, p. 300; Ratele, 2007, p. 223). Particularly high levels of substance abuse among children in Rose Valley are reported in the media (Bezuidenhout, 2011a, p. 4).

The relationship between the children's home environments and their experiences at school were also talked of by the teachers. They spoke of how many parents live on welfare grants and are unable to pay school fees. According to government reports, Rose Valley is one of the communities with the lowest levels of income in Cape Town (Romanovsky & Gie, 2006, p. 5). Media reports state that 60 percent of residents in Rose Valley live on welfare grants. According to one account, most parents are unable to contribute to their children's school fees (Byram, 2010, p. 6; Claasen, 2010, p. 28). Some parents were described as being under the influence of alcohol, or as behaving violently, while visiting the school.

Furthermore, the teachers said that they do not know what the children are going through at home, or what they are thinking or feeling when they sit in school. They

stated that there are many children who had prenatal exposure to alcohol or methamphetamine. National and international literature highlights an increased risk of long-term effects from prenatal exposure to substances among children in contexts with low income levels (Bloch, 2009, p. 78; Finnegan & Kandall, 2005, p. 809; Johnson & Golub, 2005, p. 107; Rousotte et al., 2010, p. 376). One of the teachers commented that many of the children have learning problems. Some of the children are perceived as being silent, unresponsive or aggressive at school. It was reported that there is a high rate of grade repetition among the children which was attributed to most children not having attended preschool. One teacher explained that children who repeated grades frequently, but achieved in sport, ended up leaving school entirely when they became too old to compete in sport at primary school level. Similarly, international and national research shows that children in contexts with low income levels have little access to quality preschools, and are at increased risk for social, behavioural and learning difficulties. They are also at high risk for grade repetition and not completing school (Atkins et al., 2007, p. 166; Chen et al., 2008, p. 153; Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 2001, p. 52; Evans, 2004, p. 77; Msall, 2009, p. 300; Ratele, 2007, p. 223). In addition, a lack of preschool facilities is specifically connected to the history of the Rose Valley community in the literature (Naidoo & Dreyer, 1984, p. 25).

In the light of the many challenges experienced by children in Rose Valley, the teachers expressed wonder at how these children learn to adjust their behaviour to meet expectations at school and survive in their community.

As well as portraying their experiences of the context of Rose Valley, the teachers spoke of their experiences in the context of their relations with the education authorities. They frequently described a lack of support from the authorities, particularly when assistance was needed in having a child placed in a special school. Difficulties were also experienced when such a child had become too old for their school, but would not be accepted by a mainstream high school. Furthermore, the teachers expressed difficulty with the implementation of new policies, and said that they found Outcomes Based Education to be detrimental to the learners in their specific context. They described an increased administrative workload that impacted negatively on their teaching. Furthermore, they stressed that the education authorities place an inappropriate emphasis on children's academic achievement as

a means to represent the value of their education. The blame is then placed on the teachers when “something doesn’t work”. The teachers also spoke of the importance that school management and the education authorities place on making good impressions, saying that this is often done at the expense of learners for status or promotion. These experiences of the teachers tie in with literature accounts of national and international reform in education. According to literature, teachers commonly struggle with the implementation of reform in their classrooms and increased administrative workloads (Bloch, 2009, p. 156; Jansen, 2004, p. 51; Khosa, 2010, pp. 2-3; Robinson & Soudien, 2009, pp. 475-477; Weber, 2005, p. 63, 2007, pp. 286-288). Furthermore, in a climate of teacher performance and accountability, the value of education is reduced to measures of children’s academic achievement with teachers being blamed when the desired outcomes are not achieved (Ball, 2003, p. 220; Bloch, 2009, p. 17; Fleisch, 2008, p. 2; Forrester, 2005, p. 275; World Bank, 2008, p. 31). Forrester (2005, p. 275) states that as prominence is given to measurable activities or performance, other teaching activities such as caring become less visible. Ball (2003, p. 224) affirms that “performance has no room for caring.” Additionally, teachers’ needs for support are seldom met as the role of local representatives of the education authorities changes from school and teacher support, to monitoring and the production of information (Ball, 2003, p. 218).

In speaking about the contexts of teachers’ experiences, both the teachers who participated in the study and literature accounts made connections to meanings that could suggest hopelessness. These are described in the next section.

#### **4.3.2.2 *Meanings that could suggest hopelessness***

Teachers said that they experienced fear when shooting occurred at the school, and expressed disappointment at not being able to work with the children after school. They also spoke of feeling limited without the assistance of parents, and helpless in the face of children who are involved in substance abuse. One of the teachers expressed feelings of futility regarding the education of children who had had prenatal exposure to methamphetamine. They referred to days when they lost sight of their purpose and events which left them feeling discouraged or hopeless. They especially related this to being overwhelmed by “paperwork” and the administrative load. Feelings of frustration, sadness and powerlessness were expressed numerous

times when the teachers spoke of not receiving adequate support from the education authorities in meeting the needs of certain children. This applied particularly to children who had become too old to attend their school anymore, and would therefore end up “wandering around” with no school to go to. The teachers described feeling unvalued in a demanding setting where they do not always meet the expectations placed on them by the education authorities. They also spoke of recent teacher strikes related to pay increases. Additionally, they pointed out the need for teachers, especially those in “difficult environments”, to be encouraged and acknowledged for their work, and for school management to make them feel valued as people and as educators.

Similarly, the contexts described by international and national studies as being relevant to the meanings that teachers make of their experiences include challenges associated with working in environments with low income levels, as well as the impact of educational reform. This includes the implementation of new educational policies, increased workload, little support, and a climate of performance and accountability. These contextual factors are linked in the literature to meanings that are similar to those expressed by the teachers in the study, namely discouragement, disappointment, a sense of futility, powerlessness and hopelessness (Halpin, 2003, p. 10; Hammett, 2008, p. 341; Holmes, 2005, pp. 1-26; Leithwood & Beatty, 2008, p. 75; Matier, 2007, pp. 25-31; Mulkeen et al., 2007, p. 30; Strekas, 2008, pp. 5-9).

#### **4.3.2.3 *Actions, motivations and reflections that could suggest alternative or preferred meanings***

Within a context where the teachers who participated in the study sometimes experienced frustration, futility, fear, sadness powerlessness and hopelessness, they also spoke of actions, motivations and reflections that could point to alternative or preferred meanings. Literature (cited in the relevant places below) speaks of teachers both across the world, and in South Africa, who engage in practices similar to those described by the teachers who participated in this study.

The participant teachers described how they, or other teachers, intervened on behalf of children who were being sexually or physically abused, sometimes by taking extreme action. They spoke of attempting to work with the community as far as

possible, which included running parenting classes and holiday programmes for the children. Similarly, there are stories in the literature of teachers who extend their work to include parents and communities (Zepeda, 2008, p. 2). Furthermore, the teachers reported exposing the children to opportunities that they would ordinarily have been unlikely to experience, such as outings, camps and involvement in sports. They also spoke of providing the children with food, and letting the children enjoy themselves and have fun in the freedom and safety of the care of an adult they can trust. Again, research describes teachers who provide children with food and experiences they would “otherwise be deprived of” (Maguire et al., 2006, p. 40; Palmer, 2002, pp. xviii-xxii).

One of the teachers in the study reflected that they are teaching the children that there are other possibilities beyond the world of Rose Valley. The teachers described their actions as the “little” or “extra” things that make a difference in the lives of the children they teach. On more than one occasion they referred to themselves as taking multiple roles in the children’s lives, including parent, carer, nurse, counsellor, lawyer, social worker and judge. Reckson and Becker (2005, p. 110) also describe teachers in a “gang-violent” community in the Western Cape as assuming multiple roles in the lives of the learners they teach. Olivier et al. (2009, p. 5) portray teachers in the Eastern Cape in the same way. However, of the ‘official’ seven roles used by the education authorities to describe what it means to be a competent teacher, only one somewhat matches the roles the teachers describe themselves as assuming. The community, citizenship and pastoral role is an attempt at regulating ‘caring’ in terms of measurable outcomes, and appears to me to be a far cry from the practices of the teachers who participated in the study and who are portrayed in the literature.

For the teachers, building sincere relationships between themselves and the children was important. This included praising and encouraging the children, giving them “extra love and care”, speaking to them gently, having a positive attitude towards them, seeing the good in every child, providing boundaries and rules, listening to them and taking them seriously.

The job of teaching was seen as establishing relationships that last for years after the child has left the school. The teachers described experiences of being remembered and acknowledged for the roles they played in children’s lives, and being appreciated



or treated with respect in the community and by their past pupils. This experience is in contrast to literature which reports that teachers lack respect and recognition in society (Bloch, 2009, p. 83; Drudy, 2008, p. 87; Forrester, 2005, pp. 346-347; Hammett, 2008, p. 343; Mulkeen et al., 2007, p. 30). Furthermore, the teachers spoke of their pride when they met children they had taught and who had “turned out marvellously” as adults. They said that it takes a “really long time to see the effects” of what they’ve done, but that the difference they make in a few children’s lives is relayed to others as they grow up and have families. This understanding is voiced not only by the teachers in Rose Valley, but also by teachers in other parts of the world. Zepeda (2008; p. 2) quotes Jacques Barzun saying, “In teaching you cannot see the fruit of a day’s work. It is invisible and remains so, maybe for twenty years”, and emphasises that although it may not be immediately evident, teachers “do touch lives in countless ways on a daily basis”.

The teachers also spoke about the daily rewards they receive from the children in the form of smiles or responses to their teachers’ words or actions. Some of the teachers reflected that their motivation as teachers came from the actions of their own teachers, their own experiences of hardship giving them an understanding of the children in Rose Valley, or a deep desire to build worthwhile relationships with the children. They stressed the importance of taking a step back when they feel overwhelmed and focus on their enjoyment of teaching, their reasons for teaching, and on the “little things” that they do that do make a difference, rather than attempting to “change the world”. These words are echoed in literature, where Nieto (2006, p. 464) quotes a teacher as saying that she cannot “change the world”, but that she “can affect the future, one child at a time”. Olivier et al. (2009, p. 5) similarly describe how teachers in the Eastern Cape are able to constitute hope in a “concrete and do-able way”. In the light of this, the teachers agreed that “it is all worth it”. They also spoke of teaching being more than “imparting knowledge” or producing “statistics” concerning academic performance. Instead, it is “all about the little things” that develop the child, such as seeing the good in every child, “uplifting” the children and building relationships. Wallace (2005, pp. 1-2) similarly states that numeracy and literacy tests “are almost a detail” in the greater work of teachers in schools in urban areas with low income levels, adding that these teachers are engaged in something “bigger than education”.

### 4.3.3 Reflection on findings

In reflecting on the meanings that the participant teachers made of their experiences it seems apparent to me that there was a strong link between the impact of the community context on how and what the teachers taught, the official job description of what it is to be a teacher in South Africa, and the systems for evaluating the worth of teachers. Related to this, the particular emphasis of dominant discourses about teaching seemed to be directly linked to teachers experiencing meanings of hopelessness, with the possibility that an alternative emphasis could give greater value to the actions of teachers in communities where low income levels prevail, encouraging meanings that would speak of hope rather than despair.

The data obtained from the participants indicated that their experiences as teachers were divergent from the dominant discourse represented in the dictionary definition, that to teach is to “give information” (Soanes & Stevenson, 2009, p. 1477). In the policy document on the roles and associated competencies that describe what it means to be a competent teacher, the seventh role of learning area/subject/discipline/phase specialist is given greatest importance and is seen to be “the over-arching role into which the other roles are integrated, and in which competence is ultimately assessed” (DoE, 2000, p. 12). However, when I considered the teachers’ experiences and meanings in the light of this document, it became evident that for the teachers in the specific community of Rose Valley, the context demands that caring take precedence, indicating that for these teachers the community, citizenship and pastoral role could possibly be seen as the over-arching role into which the other roles are integrated.

Thus in an educational climate of performance and accountability, borne out by policy emphasis on the seventh role as the ultimate measure of teacher competence, teachers for whom a different role takes precedence are likely to be seen as incompetent. (Literature supports this as media reports portray teachers in a negative light (Fritz and Smit, 2008, pp. 155-156; Gernetzky, 2011, p. 1; Kruger, 2011, p. 10; Louw, 2010, p. 9; MacFarlane, 2011a, 2011b; Moeng, 2011, p. 2; SACE, 2011; Saunders, 2011a, 2011b; Steyn, 2011, p. 2; Strydom, 2011)). In addition, these teachers could experience meanings of hopelessness as they struggle to meet

expectations and are judged on criteria that would seem not to fit what their specific context calls for in a teacher.

The teaching context of Rose Valley would seem, especially in the light of dominant discourses, to predict and determine meanings of despair. However, although the teachers did make meanings of hopelessness and despair, juxtaposed against this were their actions, reflections and motivations demonstrating alternative or preferred meanings that run contrary to dominant discourses and point to the importance of their personal values.

#### **4.5 CONCLUSION**

From the analysis of the data, it appears that the teachers who participated in the study experienced various contextual factors that contributed to their meaning-making. These included the community context of Rose Valley, the children's home environments, the school context and the role of the education authorities. Their experiences of most of these factors were described in similar ways to comparable contextual factors as portrayed in the literature. Furthermore, these contextual factors were linked by the teachers, and dominantly in the literature, to some meanings that can be summarised as hopelessness. However, alongside these meanings, the teachers gave rich or detailed descriptions of actions, reflections and motivations that suggest possible alternative or preferred meanings to the hopelessness that their context seems to invite, and that dominant discourses in the literature appear to portray.

Chapter five presents a conclusion to the research findings and recommendations that arose from the research process. It also includes a discussion of the strengths and limitations of the study, suggestions for future research and concluding reflections.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **CONCLUSIONS TO FINDINGS; RECOMMENDATIONS; LIMITATIONS AND STRENGTHS OF THE STUDY**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

This study aimed to explore and describe the meanings that the participants make of their experiences as teachers in a primary school in Cape Town, situated in a community where low income levels are prevalent. In view of the importance of specific context to meaning-making, the study also aimed to describe how these teachers experience contextual factors, and how these factors contribute to their meaning-making. Furthermore, the purpose of the study was to explore local knowledge in the form of actions, motivations and reflections that speak of the possibility of alternative or preferred meanings in a context that could invite hopelessness. The research was therefore framed within the theory of social constructionism.

In addition to the above, the ethical aim of the study was for the context-specific knowledge that was generated through the research process to contribute to the influence that local and marginalised knowledge, or meanings, can have on dominant discourses. This was to be achieved primarily through the social interactions in the focus group discussions. This would be further achieved by reinforcing, or thickening, the descriptions of actions, reflections or motivations that could suggest alternative or preferred meanings which emerged during the discussions by documenting the research in this thesis, and then as an article in a journal or periodical.

A qualitative interpretivist study, framed within a postmodern paradigm and a theoretical framework of social constructionism, was used to answer the research questions as a means of achieving the aims of the study. This was achieved through a series of focus group discussions held with five teachers in a specific primary school in Cape Town, situated in a community where low income levels are prevalent.

This chapter offers a conclusion to the research findings and presents recommendations as they emerged from reflections on the findings. The limitations and strengths of the study are also discussed, and suggestions for future research are made.

## **5.2 CONCLUSION TO THE FINDINGS**

The focus group discussion process which was used for the research allowed the participants to explore and describe the meanings that they make of their experiences in a primary school in Rose Valley. They described their experiences of contextual factors in terms of the community context of Rose Valley, the children's home environments, the school context and the role of the education authorities. The way that they experienced most of these factors, and the contributions made by these contextual factors to their meaning-making, were described in similar ways to comparable contextual factors identified in the literature.

In explaining how they, as teachers in Rose Valley, experienced contextual factors, the teachers described the community as being a legacy of the injustices of Apartheid. They portrayed individuals in the community as being caught in a "cycle of poverty", with most men being unemployed and commonly belonging to gangs. Community and domestic violence, as well as child abuse, were described as being widespread. The result of which is violence overflowing into the school, and affecting the teachers and children. The prevalence of gang membership among children and adults was connected to the sense of belonging provided by gangs, with membership also being seen as a way for children to survive. Substance abuse was reported as being common among adults, as well as present among primary school children. Many schoolchildren were reported as showing the effects of prenatal exposure to substance abuse, as not having their physical or emotional needs met, and as being endangered in their home environments. Parents were depicted as being young and as often struggling in over-crowded conditions with a lack of facilities. Some women in the community were described as being uneducated, lacking in confidence and powerless. The teachers expressed a need for parent education in the community. However, in contrast to the picture painted so far, there were also portrayals of "strong women" running the community, or caring and fighting for their children.

The teachers described many of the children at school as presenting with learning problems, with some children being silent and unresponsive, while others being aggressive and acting out on their emotions. Furthermore, they spoke of children who carry emotional and/or physical loads of which the teachers are unaware. High rates of grade repetition were described, with one explanation for this being the children's lack of access to preschools. Concern was expressed about children whose needs are not met at the school, and who eventually become too old for the primary school and discontinue their education altogether as mainstream high schools will not accept them. In the light of the many challenges that the children in Rose Valley experience, the teachers expressed wonder at how the children learn to adjust their behaviour to meet expectations at school and to survive in their community.

As well as portraying their experiences of the context of Rose Valley, the teachers spoke of their experiences in the context of their relations with the education authorities. They frequently described a lack of support from education authorities, particularly in terms of children whose needs they felt were not being met at their school. They expressed difficulty with the implementation of new policies, describing an increased administrative workload that has impacted negatively on their teaching. Furthermore, they stressed that there is inappropriate emphasis on children's academic achievement, with teachers being blamed for the failure of new policies. They linked the need of certain teachers to make good impressions to promotion and status, with this often being done at the expense of the children.

These contextual factors were seen by the teachers as contributing to meanings of hopelessness, fear, disappointment, limitation, futility, discouragement, helplessness, loss of purpose, frustration, sadness, powerlessness and lack of value. I have summarised these meanings as meanings of hopelessness. The teachers also expressed a need for teachers, especially those in "difficult environments", to be encouraged and acknowledged for their work, and made to feel valued as people and as teachers.

However, alongside these meanings, the teachers gave rich and detailed descriptions of actions, reflections and motivations that suggest possibilities for alternative or preferred meanings to the hopelessness that their context seems to

invite, and the dominant discourses the literature appears to portray. The teachers described actions they took with the children and in the community, and spoke of intervening on behalf of the children, the importance of providing them with opportunities, as well as with “love and care”. They believe these actions make a difference in the lives of the children. Furthermore, they talked of building sincere relationships that last beyond the children’s school years. The teachers also described being remembered, acknowledged, appreciated and respected for the roles they played in the children’s lives. They reflected on the daily rewards of teaching, and on the pride they felt when they met past pupils as adults, expressing that it takes a long time to see the difference that they make in children’s lives, but that this difference is relayed to others as these children grow up and have families. Some of the teachers also reflected that their motivations for teaching related to an understanding of the children’s experiences, and a deep desire to build lasting relationships with them, combined with their enjoyment of teaching. Furthermore, the teachers described teaching as being more than “imparting knowledge” or producing “statistics”. Teaching is rather “all about the little things” that develop the child, such as seeing the good in every child, “uplifting” the children, and building relationships. In addition, they stressed the importance of reflecting on their enjoyment of teaching, their motivations for teaching, and on the “little things” they do that make a difference, as opposed to trying to “change the world”. In the light of this, the teachers agreed that “it is all worth it”.

From a social constructionist perspective, where meaning and action are closely interrelated, I have interpreted the actions, motivations and reflections that are suggestive of alternative or preferred meanings as ‘doing’ by the teachers. This is in contrast to ‘being’ hopeless. I have taken this doing to indicate *meanings* that would further support doing that is contrary to meanings of hopelessness. The process of exploration in the focus group discussions made this doing of the teachers visible. To me, this is indicative of the teachers local or marginalised knowledge or meanings (or doing) having an impact on the dominant discourses of hopelessness that could permeate their lived experiences. In addition, this doing - in the form of the teachers’ actions, motivations and reflections - is documented in this thesis and was discussed with the participant teachers in a follow-up session. I thus feel that the study has gone a long way towards achieving its ethical aim, which can be further achieved by the potential publication of the findings in a journal or periodical.

The above concluding comments provided a summary of how the research aims were met. In conclusion, the research questions were answered in that the participants' experiences of various contextual factors were described, and were found to contribute to some meanings that were summarised as hopelessness. In addition, within this context that could invite meanings of hopelessness, a range of actions, motivations and reflections that suggest possibilities for alternative or preferred meanings were also described.

### **5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS**

In this section I make recommendations based on the needs that were expressed by the participant teachers and my own reflections on the research findings.

5.3.1 I recommend that the education authorities give special consideration to the support needs of schools in communities where low income levels are prevalent. The participant teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the level of support that they receive from education authorities regarding the placement of children in special schools. With the high rates of grade repetition and non-completion of school described by the teachers, it appears that the education that is being offered is not meeting the needs of many learners. According to Prinsloo (2005, p. 28), "poverty" constitutes a barrier to learning. With more than 57 percent of children in South Africa living below the national poverty cut off line (Schwabe, 2004, p. 1), it is unlikely, even with the best support possible, that there will be enough places in special schools to accommodate all learners whose needs are not being met in mainstream classrooms. My suggestion is therefore for the National Department of Education to do an in-depth investigation into how best to align the education that is being offered in South African schools, to the needs of South African children.

5.3.2 In addition, I recommend that the support role of educational psychologists employed in the services of the education authorities be revised. The work of these psychologists should move away from the traditional model of individual learner support, and rather involve the support and development of whole school communities. This would include these psychologists offering support to schools and teachers in accommodating learners inclusively (in other words, in mainstream



classrooms). This is as opposed to their support taking the form of assessments aimed at placing learners in special schools - which is, according to the participant teachers, currently ineffective.

5.3.3 Moreover, this support needs to include the formulation of classroom strategies that provide learners with a sense of belonging at school. This could possibly provide a viable alternative to the sense of belonging that they gain through gang membership.

5.3.4 Furthermore, the psychologists who offer intervention or support programmes to schools need to work collaboratively. This involves planning with teachers so that interventions teachers find useful can replace inappropriate interventions which have been administered in a top-down fashion.

5.3.5 The number of educational psychologists available for the support of school communities, particularly in contexts with low income levels, needs to be increased. I recommend that intern educational psychologists should be required to serve paid internships, and then do compulsory community service within the Department of Education, as is the case with clinical psychologists in the Department of Health.

5.3.6 The participant teachers expressed a need for acknowledgement and recognition of the work that they do - and this applies especially to teachers working in "difficult environments". Again, I recommend that the educational psychologists working for the education authorities play a role in working on whole school development. This would be aimed at enabling the schools concerned to develop school climates in which teachers are acknowledged and feel appreciated and valued by school management.

5.3.7 Finally, the approach of using the narrative metaphor in group sessions with teachers provides a useful way of working towards the above-mentioned sense of appreciation and of being valued, with the resultant emergence of possibilities for preferred identities (Freedman & Combs 1996; White, 2007).

#### **5.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The scope of the study was limited to one group of five teachers in a single primary school. Although it is common to use small samples for qualitative research, it may have been beneficial to conduct similar focus group discussions with a second group at the same school, as the interactions in a different group may have yielded very different meanings.

In addition, the research was limited in that it was a qualitative interpretivist descriptive study. If the methodology of the study had been one of action research, this may have allowed for a greater emphasis on the immediate benefits to the participants and have been more suited to the nature of the study.

Additionally, the study was limited to the meanings that teachers made of their experiences in a specific context. It may have enhanced the study if it had been taken a step further and included an exploration of teachers' recommendations in the light of the meanings they made.

#### **5.5 STRENGTHS OF THE STUDY**

The nature of the research process and especially the data gathering method of focus group discussions held with the same group of participants on a number of occasions promoted the building of trust and rapport within the group that allowed for an in depth exploration of the research topic. This then yielded rich, detailed descriptions in answer to the research questions.

Furthermore, the participants expressed that the process was beneficial to them in that it gave them the opportunity to support each other by sharing their experiences and being heard within the group. They also pointed out that the process benefited them in that it provided them with the opportunity to reflect on their reasons for becoming teachers, and for continuing in the teaching profession, which gave them renewed purpose and motivation.

## **5.6 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

In the light of the above-mentioned limitation of a descriptive study, I would suggest that a similar study be undertaken with a participatory action research methodology. Similar research conducted with teachers in a high school in a community where low income levels are prevalent, may contribute to understandings regarding teachers meanings in contexts where low income levels are prevalent.

It emerged from the research findings that there is a need for research into the support that can be offered to address the needs of teachers working in communities where low income levels are prevalent.

## **5.7 CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS**

During this research process, I found it awe-inspiring that there are teachers in the field whose actions tell us that they have refused to give up hope in dire contexts that could easily paralyse them into hopelessness. I was struck that these teachers keep on 'doing', day in, day out - no matter how difficult their contexts, and no matter what the education authorities, the people of their country, or the world have to say about them. What is more, I realised that there must be thousands of teachers across the country who similarly refuse the invitation to hopelessness in contexts that are beset by adversity. What started for me as merely a research project, necessary for the completion of a Master's degree, has culminated in a realisation that we - as the people of South Africa - need to make an effort to find out what our teachers are actually doing. We need to join forces in acknowledging and supporting them as we shape discourses together to portray teachers as people who act every day to make a difference in the lives of the children of our country.

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## **ADDENDUM A**

Navrae  
Enquiries **Dr RS Cornelissen**  
*IMibuzo*  
Telefoon  
Telephone (021) 467-2286  
*IFoni*  
Faks  
Fax (021) 425-7445  
*IFeksi*



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**Wes-Kaap Onderwysdepartement**

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**Western Cape Education Department**

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**ISebe leMfundo leNtshona Koloni**

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Verwysing  
Reference 20100614-0053  
*ISalathiso*

Ms Julie Megaw  
8 Madison Road  
CLAREMONT  
7708

**Dear Ms J. Megaw**

**RESEARCH PROPOSAL: EXPLORING ALTERNATIVE MEANINGS OF TEACHING EXPERIENCES: CO-CREATING REASONABLE HOPE.**

Your application to conduct the above-mentioned research in schools in the Western Cape has been approved subject to the following conditions:

1. Principals, educators and learners are under no obligation to assist you in your investigation.
2. Principals, educators, learners and schools should not be identifiable in any way from the results of the investigation.
3. You make all the arrangements concerning your investigation.
4. The programmes of Educators are not to be interrupted.
5. The Study is to be conducted from **13<sup>th</sup> July 2010 to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2012.**
6. No research can be conducted during the fourth term as schools are preparing and finalizing syllabi for examinations (October to December).
7. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey, please contact Dr R. Cornelissen at the contact numbers above quoting the reference number.
8. A photocopy of this letter is submitted to the principal where the intended research is to be conducted.
9. Your research will be limited to the list of schools as submitted to the Western Cape Education Department.
10. A brief summary of the content, findings and recommendations is provided to the Director: Research Services.
11. The Department receives a copy of the completed report/dissertation/thesis addressed to:  
**The Director: Research Services  
Western Cape Education Department  
Private Bag X9114  
CAPE TOWN  
8000**

We wish you success in your research.

Kind regards.

Signed: Ronald S. Cornelissen  
for: **HEAD: EDUCATION**  
**DATE: 15<sup>th</sup> June 2010**

## **ADDENDUM B**



UNIVERSITEIT•STELLENBOSCH•UNIVERSITY  
jou kennisvenoot • your knowledge partner

28 June 2010

Tel.: 021 - 808-9183  
Enquiries: Sidney Engelbrecht  
Email: [sidney@sun.ac.za](mailto:sidney@sun.ac.za)

Reference No. 340/2010

Ms J Megaw  
Department of Educational Psychology  
University of Stellenbosch  
**STELLENBOSCH**  
7602

Ms J Megaw

#### APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL CLEARANCE

With regards to your application, I would like to inform you that the project, *Exploring alternative meanings of teaching experiences: co-creating reasonable hope*, has been approved on condition that:

1. The researcher/s remain within the procedures and protocols indicated in the proposal;
2. The researcher/s stay within the boundaries of applicable national legislation, institutional guidelines, and applicable standards of scientific rigor that are followed within this field of study and that
3. Any substantive changes to this research project should be brought to the attention of the Ethics Committee with a view to obtain ethical clearance for it.

We wish you success with your research activities.

Best regards



*Sidney Engelbrecht*  
MR SF ENGELBRECHT

Secretary: Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Non-Health)



## **ADDENDUM C**

**STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY  
PRINCIPAL'S PERMISSION FOR RESEARCH**

---

I, ..... principal of ..... School, hereby consent to the research that Julie Megaw, MEd Psychology student, from the Department of Educational Psychology at Stellenbosch University intends to carry out at .....School.

I understand the nature of the research and that the participant teachers will be involved in a participatory process that will not be intrusive or invade their privacy in any way.

I understand that all information obtained during the research will be treated confidentially and the anonymity of the school and the participant teachers will be ensured.

I am also aware that the participants may refuse to participate in any aspect of the research process and that they may withdraw from the study at any time, with no adverse consequences.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**DATE**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**DATE**

## **ADDENDUM D**

**STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY  
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

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**EXPLORING ALTERNATIVE MEANINGS OF TEACHING EXPERIENCES:  
CO-CREATING REASONABLE HOPE**

You are asked to participate in a research study to be conducted by Julie Megaw, MEd Psychology student, from the Department of Educational Psychology at Stellenbosch University. The results will contribute to a thesis. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because it requires the participation of teachers within a single primary school that serves children from an area with a low-income level.

**1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this research is to provide a holistic, in depth description of a single process of doing reasonable hope. The process will use narrative practices to make new meanings of teaching experiences and will be facilitated by the researcher in collaboration with a group of teachers in a school in the Western Cape. Furthermore, the purpose of the study is to generate knowledge on how this process can be used for teacher development.

**2. PROCEDURES**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, I would ask you to do the following things: Participate in an interactive focus group discussion that will revolve around exploring alternative, and preferred meanings of your teaching experiences. The focus group discussions will be held at your school in the afternoons at times that are convenient to you. The process will take a total of approximately 6 hours of your time spread over a period of 3-6 weeks. You might also be asked to make short journal entries after each session. As this is a participatory action study, the exact nature of the research will be determined with you as participants as the process evolves. This will mean that together, you, with the other participants, and I as the facilitator will determine what will or will not be included in the process.

**3. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

There are no foreseeable risks, discomforts, or inconveniences that this study presents.

**4. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

Dealing with the effects of the life context of many school children in South Africa, particularly those from areas with low-income levels, provides a serious challenge for teachers. Many teachers working in such settings are reported to have low morale, coupled, in some cases with feelings of professional inadequacy. The proposed participatory action research aims to benefit you as a participant teacher by engaging you in a process of doing reasonable hope, that holds the possibility of assisting you in having the power of agency in your life as a teacher and the ability to construct a new reality and take action in what was previously seen as, at best, a problematic situation, or worse, as a situation of hopelessness and desperation.

**5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION**

The participant will not receive payment for participating in the study.



## **6. CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of storing the data securely on the researcher's personal computer where it will be encrypted with a password. The researcher and her supervisors are the only people who will have access to the data. The data obtained during the study will be recorded on a digital voice recorder and will then be transcribed verbatim by the researcher. You will have access to the digital recordings of the process so that you may verify or change anything that you said. These recordings and transcriptions will be kept for 3 years and then they will be destroyed. The names and identifying details of the participant teachers and the school will not be used in the resulting thesis or any publication.

## **7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to participate in any aspect of the process, and still remain in the study. The researcher may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant her doing so.

## **8. IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS**

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact:

Julie Megaw (Principal Researcher)  
021 674 1593  
084 410 6610  
[juliemegaw@gmail.com](mailto:juliemegaw@gmail.com)

Dr Andrew Lewis (Supervisor)  
021 808 2313  
[LewisA@sun.ac.za](mailto:LewisA@sun.ac.za)

Ms Mariechen Perold (Co-supervisor)  
021 808 2307  
[mdperold@sun.ac.za](mailto:mdperold@sun.ac.za)

## **9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS**

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims or rights because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact Mrs Maléne Fouché (021 808 4623) at the Unit for Research Development.

**SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE**

The information above was described to me by Julie Megaw in English and I am in command of this language. I was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to my satisfaction.

I hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Name of Participant**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Participant**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

**SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER**

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to \_\_\_\_\_.

He/she was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions. This conversation was conducted in English.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Researcher**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

## **ADDENDUM E**

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

The focus will be on the teachers' stories of their teaching experiences. The sub-themes that will contribute to this will be:

1. The context of the teachers' teaching experiences
2. Societal /governmental expectations/perceptions of teachers
3. The challenges faced by the teachers
4. Stories of these challenges and how they affect the teachers' experiences
5. The teachers' reasons for becoming teachers
6. The ideals/morals/values/principles that influence the teachers' experiences
7. The teachers' behaviour/actions in the light of the challenges they face
8. Stories of their teaching experiences that have made the teachers feel that their teaching experiences were worthwhile
9. Stories about helpful/respectful practices of other teachers in the group
10. Anti-problem practices that the teachers have developed during their careers
11. Stories of instances that illustrate points 6 to 10 above
12. The small actions that teachers take in order to do something rather than everything that needs doing in the face of a challenge.

As these will be focus group discussions this list is not intended to meet the criteria for an interview guide. This list is not exhaustive and every item will not necessarily be included. It serves only as a starting point for a process that will evolve and change as the research progresses.

## **ADDENDUM F**

<b>SUMMARY OF AUDIT TRAIL – CHRONOLOGY OF RESEARCH PROCESS</b>	
<b>DATE</b>	<b>ACTION</b>
2 March 2010	Thesis proposal submitted to Department of Educational Psychology
14 April 2010	Ethical clearance application submitted to Ethics Committee of Stellenbosch University
22 April 2010	Consultation with representative of Schools Development Unit of local university to obtain suggestions for a suitable research site
June 2010	Negotiating entry - telephone call to principal of school
7 June 2010	Meeting with prospective participants – all teachers attended a short presentation after school Aims of research, research process and participants' roles and their right to withdraw were explained Teachers were given the opportunity to volunteer Nine teachers volunteered, but only seven could commit due to time scheduling constraints Principal signed permission for research to be conducted at the school Seven volunteers signed informed consent forms Volunteers were given the opportunity to withdraw before the first session
10 June 2010	Application for Western Cape Education Department (WCED) permission to conduct research was submitted
15 June 2010	Permission to conduct research was obtained from WCED
28 June 2010	Ethical clearance was received from Ethics Committee
22 July 2010	First focus group discussion was held with five teachers (two took the option to withdraw before the first sessions): Aaliyah, Carmen, Grace, Helen, Mark
5 August 2010	Second focus group discussion was held with Aaliyah, Carmen, Grace, Helen, Mark
12 August 2010	Third focus group discussion was held with Aaliyah, Carmen, Helen, Mark (Grace absent from school)
19 August 2010 - 23 September 2010	Sessions cancelled due to gang activity - shooting in the vicinity of the school
14 October 2010	Fourth focus group discussion was held with Aaliyah, Grace, Helen, Mark (Carmen absent from school)
28 October 2010	Fifth and last focus group discussion was held with Aaliyah, Grace, Helen, Mark (Carmen absent from school)
11 August 2011	Member checking was held with Aaliyah, Grace, Helen, Mark and Carmen

## **ADDENDUM G**

EXCERPT FROM A TRANSCRIPT	CODING	
	CATEGORY	SUB-CATEGORY
<p>A: Whatever they do is cover up. Only certain people, those real mamas will allow you to open up and tell you really what the real problem is. Then that is actually where you should be starting out but now you're working on the top of a wound. You're just covering and cleaning the wound, but the inside of the wound is already infected, but you should really get there, and they are covering as much as they can because sometimes they hide a whole lot of things in their closet. That's why I'm saying they just cover it up because they all benefit from this bad thing happening. They benefit out of it. So if you come and you open up this can, everything will just jump on you and you just make the thing worse. That is their way of life. And to us we want to be prim and proper, but you're only visiting. You go away. You say goodbye. They're there - twenty four hours they're there in the situation. We can go out of here, out of Rose Valley, but they're in Rose Valley and they have to survive with the circumstances. They're in their houses with themselves, and To survive, they put on different covers and different coats.</p> <p>H: To protect themselves.</p> <p>A: The child is covered from eight o'clock until two o'clock. But that same cover doesn't work when he goes home. He needs a different cover. And the way they switch from that skollie language to being a school child is wonderful.</p> <p>H: Mm, it is wonderful.</p> <p>A: Because every second word is a swear word out there</p>	<p>Children's home environments</p> <p>Teachers' actions</p> <p>Teachers' actions</p> <p>Community context</p> <p>[Action to protect themselves – doing rather than being victims]</p> <p>School context</p> <p>[Amazing – children acting to survive]</p>	<p>Multiple roles</p> <p>Parent's struggles</p> <p>Child abuse</p> <p>Domestic violence</p> <p>Intervening on behalf of children</p> <p>Gang influence on children</p>



<p>and it's okay. And here we come and we want it prim and proper, everything in a line.</p> <p>H: We're just wanting something that they're not.</p> <p>A: [Laughing] They try hard, and when the word just pops out, we shout. And if they don't speak like that, they'll be called different names and be categorised differently.</p> <p>H: I think it becomes tiring for them after a while.</p> <p>A: To keep their guard up, not to say the wrong thing.</p> <p>O: I think it becomes tiring after a while,</p> <p>F: Keep their guard up not to say the wrong thing (laughter)</p> <p>H: I've you know um, I had a boy years ago and he was ah, he looked as though he was going to go the wrong way this boy, very nice boy though. And I had a soft spot for him so, Barry and I used to take him home with us, let him play on the computer. He would, you know go out with us, wherever we went, for a drive and then we'd bring him back here. And with us he was fine. If I spoke to him he would cry very, very quickly. He was a big boy, he would cry. Well we dropped him here one day and we just watched him as he walked away, and it just, it happened so very very slowly, just walking like normal and all of a sudden we saw the walk starting to change. He was back in his own environment you know, and we said to each other, just look at that. He knows what works in what situation. And he doesn't want to, they're clever because you know, and I think this is where we come in also because we sort of teaching them that, how you're behaving is only a small, its part of a smaller thing. Because Rose Valley is not the whole world there is another way of behaving and another way that is accepted out there. So they do know the difference as to when they can behave in a</p>	<p>School context</p> <p>Teachers' actions</p> <p>Teachers' actions</p> <p>Community context</p> <p>Teachers' actions</p>	<p>Children adjusting to environments</p> <p>Children's behaviour at school</p> <p>Establishing relationships</p> <p>Love and care</p> <p>Exposing children to opportunities</p> <p>Children's behaviour</p> <p>Children adjusting to environments</p> <p>Exposing children to opportunities</p>
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<p>certain way and when they've got to behave differently. And so we are making a difference in that we're teaching them that there's another way to behave. (Laughter) You know, and that there is a bigger world out there where certain things aren't acceptable. And I really thought... but he's turned out marvellously actually, I just heard from him a couple of months ago, and he's turned out very differently and I'm very happy about that. Very happy about that.</p> <p>M: It makes me think about what we were talking about just now, um, my motivation for teaching would probably be some of my own experiences when I was at school. We didn't have a lot of money, and my mother used to move around all the time. I ended up at my granny, and my brother dropped out, and I was the first one who matriculated in our family. So the role the teachers played was important to me. I had a teacher who actually got me a tuxedo and a car for my matric ball. And I had another teacher who bought me my equipment for the end of year project woodwork project. Teaching wasn't really on my mind, but it was mostly the teachers who got me there. They came to fetch me at home to do an interview and they made me fill in the forms, and applied for bursaries as well. They actually motivated and supported and encouraged me, because I had no clue about what to do or which way to go, so they actually directed me as well. So they went the extra mile for me, and I think I then wanted to be a teacher from that experience.</p> <p>J: Mm, mm. and d'you think then that when you talk about, um, earlier on you were talking about doing things for the children here, taking them on outings or providing for them. Do you think that you choose to do that because of what your teachers did for you?</p>	<p>Teachers' actions</p> <p>Teachers' reflections</p> <p>Teachers' motivations</p> <p>Teachers' reflections</p> <p>Teachers' Motivations</p>	<p>Making a difference</p> <p>Pride</p> <p>Motivation for teaching</p> <p>[Teachers motivated by actions of their own teachers]</p>
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<p>M: Mostly yes, Also knowing what the kids go through, because it's something similar to what we had to go through as well. And I still have a lot of family in the area as well, so you know the situation at home, and you know how to - sometimes - motivate them and just give them something extra. So when we're busy with athletics, I must buy them fruit. They're so used to it now, because it's happened for a couple of years. They've gotten used to small things, even with the girls that are at football, I need to come pick them up here and bring them home at night as well. I think it's something that they've also become accustomed to, that there will be someone, a teacher or a person will be there to do it.</p> <p>J: And maybe they wouldn't have experienced someone there to help them and be there for them in their lives at all if it wasn't for that teacher? And when you talk of your memories, OK, like you say you're largely here because of those teachers, and you have memories of those teachers and what they did for you. Do you think there are going to be children from this school who, when they look back when they're adults are going to remember back to you, this teacher and what he did and what he said to them?</p>	<p>Teachers' motivations</p> <p>Teachers' actions</p> <p>Teachers' actions</p>	<p>Understanding children</p> <p>Encouraging children</p> <p>Love and care</p> <p>Love and care</p>
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## **ADDENDUM H**

## EXTRACTS FROM REFLECTIVE JOURNAL

**14 October 2010**

Went back to the school today after ages. These teachers and children have really been through difficult times. But they just keep pulling through and the teachers amazingly just keep doing and doing for the children. They take all the violence in their stride, even though it obviously distresses them. There were bullet holes all over the outside of the walls of the prefab where we meet which I hadn't noticed before. (No not all over, just about five or six of them). I immediately assumed that they were from the recent shooting, but actually when I looked at them more carefully they were old, maybe they were from previous incidents. It strikes me how one can so easily make assumptions, and almost dramatise something that is actually horribly dramatic enough. So I assume them to be bullet holes, maybe they just look like bullet holes and I assume them to be from recent shooting because that happens to be what I know about. Of course for everyone else their reality is different and in this context they're not trying unwittingly to tie everything to the tiny contextual factor they know.

I think these teachers should receive danger pay. Or maybe what they do should not be translated into monetary terms. It is worth so much more. But they do need acknowledgement, and they really do need all kinds of support as they were saying. Interesting though, they don't seem to focus on the support that they need. What really bothers them is the support they don't get from the district office, so there are children whose needs are really not being met. It seems to me that then these children so easily become gang fodder. I think the district teams really need to look at how they are supporting the schools. Individual assessment and individual therapy will never be able to meet the needs, unless we have millions of psychologists. Also inclusive education really needs to be implemented. We need to look at the curriculum also so that we can meet the needs of South African children, really.

Just thinking about all the violence in the community. I can't think about some of what has been going on, have to kind of not dwell on it or it is overwhelming. Just wonder how it is for teachers who are in it all the time, and seeing little distressed children every day. I think all that you can do to stop the despair is to keep doing something. Then at least you can focus on what you are doing. This is a very tough environment to work in. I think all one can do is focus on individual's and the little things one can do. With so many people struggling in communities where violence and child abuse etc are rife, it is better not to think about the whole country or the whole community. But I do believe that schools can actually make a difference. We really need to change the focus of our education though.

### **16 October 2010**

After the session on Thursday, I have been thinking about the children's need for a sense of belonging. I had thought before about gangs providing that need, but had not thought that schools can fulfil that role. This all ties in to the Circle of Courage. Had thought about that to do with children's behaviour in school, and that if they have the four elements of the Circles sorted out then they will have less need to misbehave. I just never put all three things together – Circle of courage, need for belonging, gang membership and schools providing an alternative. Maybe someone should have good talks with the Department of Education and teachers about how to have our schools fulfil these needs. Think it all starts with the tiniest ways of the teacher. But these teachers are doing these things and the children, so many of them, still end up in gangs. But maybe even more of them would if they didn't have those teachers. Also it's clearly very important to have these teachers stories of their actions thickened. The actions they do are just, I think, way more important than any of us realise.

### **25 November 2010**

After trying for a long time to get the school on the phone, I went there today to speak to Helen. (Had some info about a possible place for the sixteen year old girl in her class to do a learn-and-work paid job) It turned out their phone has been out of order for a while – even things to do with expected infrastructure in a school in Rose Valley are difficult. Do power relations even affect whether you get your phone fixed? I don't think middle class schools wait for ages to have their phones fixed. Also I don't think middle class children end up being sixteen in Grade 7 and then having nowhere to go the next year. Mostly middle class parents have the clout to sort things out for their children. Thinking a lot about power relations and marginalisation today after speaking to Helen. She was saying that the people in the community just do not have the confidence to push through with things for their children. She was also talking about the power dynamics related to and my advantage in being white and English speaking *and* having a middle class kind of an accent. She says that the people in Rose Valley are automatically intimidated when they have to deal with someone who speaks English and even more so if they are white. It makes it hard for them to fight for their children. Anyway, one good thing is that it seems that she might have found a place for the girl to go to.