The Vocational Calling of Female Primary School Teachers Teaching in Environments of Multiple Deprivation

Hettie van der Merwe
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0736-4611
University of South Africa
vdmerhm@unisa.ac.za

Abstract

A context of multiple deprivation poses challenges to teaching and learning. This article explores the vocational calling of female teachers teaching in multiple-deprived circumstances in South Africa. Based on a qualitative investigation, individual interviews were conducted with 12 female teachers from primary schools in Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and North West. The aim was to understand what the factors are that define female teacher existence in a school context of multiple deprivation. The findings show that female teacher conduct in such conditions relates to being a mother figure to the core, being a fundraiser to arrange resources for learners, and being a social worker in the parent community. These tasks are achieved through responding jointly to the learning needs of learners exposed to absolute poverty. The findings contribute to the discourse on teacher input to successful learning.

Keywords: ability goal; absolute poverty; habitus; holistic education; mastery goal; relational goal

Introduction

In South Africa, female teachers dominate the teaching profession in primary schools. How female teachers experience their teaching task differs from one society to another, as contextual circumstances influence demands and solutions. Multiple deprivation as a specific context poses challenges to teaching and learning. In the South African setting, this is exacerbated by the fact that 60 per cent of public schools are dysfunctional and are characterised by poor-quality education (Bloch 2009; Msila 2017). There are, however, notable exceptions of individual teachers, male and female, who are providing good-quality education in multiple-deprived environments (Lumby 2015; Smit 2014). In this article, the focus is on those factors that female teachers—who are teaching

exemplarily in primary schools within multiple-deprived environments—consider as defining their teaching conduct. Notwithstanding the focus of this article, the contribution of exemplary male teachers to teaching in multiple-deprived environments remains invaluable. I, therefore, regard this focus on identifying exemplary female teacher conduct as only a first step in ultimately understanding good-quality education comprehensively in primary schools located within multiple-deprived environments.

Literature mentions that successful learning consists of three main pillars, namely learners' own abilities, the influence of parents as primary educators of their children, and teacher input (Barnes and Horsfall 2010). Regarding teacher input, much research has been conducted on the factors that engender effective teaching (Butler 2012; De Jesus and Lens 2005; Skelton 2012; Wolters and Daugherty 2007) as well as the value of a professional learning culture to encourage effective teaching (Mathe et al. 2011; Vescio et al. 2008). This article contributes to the discourse on effective teaching by identifying the factors that contribute to exemplary teaching in a context of multiple deprivation. Considering the state of collapse of many schools in multiple-deprived environments (because of demotivated and absent teachers, among other reasons), I perceive identification of the approaches and attitudes of exemplary female teacher conduct as evidence of what is possible, and what can be pursued as good-quality education in these schools.

Social capital theory underlying teacher conduct, and theory on teacher goals engendering different teaching approaches and learning outcomes serve as the theoretical lenses for an empirical investigation involving 12 female teachers from primary schools in Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and North West. The 12 teachers were candidates for the national teaching award in the category of Excellence in Primary School Teaching for the period 2012 to 2016, presented by the Department of Basic Education. Discussions on the theoretical lenses are supplemented by comments on teaching and learning in conditions of multiple deprivation within the South African context. The article concludes with a discussion of the research findings from the empirical investigation into factors defining the teaching conduct of exemplary female teachers in primary schools where conditions of multiple deprivation prevail. This teaching conduct can serve as guideline for providing good-quality education in impoverished environments.

Social Capital Theory and Teacher Conduct

Teacher conduct, understood as I-teach-therefore-I-am, represents a vocational calling based on social capital acquired through interactive functioning between the individual and society (Bourdieu 1993). Societal functioning, which is accomplished through activity in multiple social spaces (of which education is one), is realised as social relationships focused on constructive interaction between the individuals working in that space (such as teachers teaching in conditions of multiple deprivation), to result in mutually acceptable performance. This performance relates to what Bourdieu (2005, 43) calls "habitus," namely "permanent manners of being, seeing, acting and thinking"

to represent "structures of perception, conception and action." The habitus of a determinate group of persons occupying a similar position in social space, such as female primary school teachers teaching in multiple-deprived environments, represents a "practical systematicity" in the sense that "all the elements of their behaviour have something in common, a kind of affinity of style" (Bourdieu 2005, 44). This style manifests as "a set of acquired characteristics which are the product of social conditions common to people who have been the product of similar social conditions" (Bourdieu 2005, 45). In this article, these conditions relate to multiple deprivation, in which some female teachers acquire characteristics of exemplary teaching. This teaching functions as habitus, which represents both "the generative principle of objectively classifiable judgements" and "the system of classification of these practices" (Bourdieu 1994, 405). The capacity to produce classifiable practices, namely teaching exemplarily in multiple-deprived environments, and the capacity to distinguish and appreciate these practices as exemplary, namely being nominated as candidates for national awards, represent habitus.

The habitus of exemplary teaching in multiple-deprived environments has a bounded generative capacity, in the sense that "the habitus generates inventions and improvisations, but within limits" (Bourdieu 2005, 46), where these limits pertain to the possession of individual social capital and personal history. Many teachers, who teach in multiple-deprived environments, have grown up in similar conditions, with the result that these teachers' "actions, words, feelings, and deeds stem from the confrontation between dispositions and positions, which are mutually adjusted" (Bourdieu 2005, 47) to engender an understanding for the specific teaching task. In this regard, the teaching environment in conditions of multiple deprivation is an "objective space," in which these teachers as social agents "have points of view which depend on their position within it," and in which "their will to transform it is often expressed" (Bourdieu 1994, 405). This expression as habitus, which is "internalised and converted into a disposition that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions" (Bourdieu 1994, 405), manifests in exemplary teaching, to arrange for good-quality education in multiple-deprived conditions. In this regard, exemplary teachers fulfil a directional role as social agents, to organise social interaction that is focused on successful learning. Social interaction within the classroom as social space is realised through social capital resources, which include all emotional, cognitive, spiritual, physical, financial and relationship-related support, which is available to a greater or lesser extent, to everyone present. Social capital resources inspire continued beneficial performance.

Teacher Goals Engendering Different Teaching Approaches

Teacher goals define and evaluate success and organise and regulate performance (Conley 2012). Deemer (2004) identifies four types of teacher goals, namely a mastery goal, an ability goal, a goal of hiding inability, and a goal of avoiding work. The interpersonal nature of teaching engenders the identification of a fifth type of goal, namely a relational goal (Butler 2012). These different teacher goals translate into

different approaches to teaching, resulting in different learning outcomes for pupils. In terms of the focus of this article on exemplary teaching in multiple-deprived environments, a mastery goal, an ability goal, and a relational goal with related teaching approaches and learning outcomes, are all relevant.

A mastery goal engenders the teaching approach of defining and evaluating effective teaching relative to task demands, thereby orienting teachers to construe difficulty as diagnostic of further empowerment for improved mastery (Deemer 2004). Teachers who are directed by a mastery goal do not shy away from challenging tasks, such as exposing their learners from multiple-deprived environments to holistic education. Rather, they respond to difficulty by seeking help and information to support successful learning. The result is that pupils are exposed to lessons that are presented in interesting ways, which prompts them to have engaged learning.

With an ability goal, teachers are oriented to define and evaluate effective teaching relative to that of their colleagues and to attribute teaching outcomes to ability (Deemer 2004). An ability goal is similar to a mastery goal in the sense that both are focused on improving teaching for the sake of advanced learning. The difference between them is that a mastery goal is related to an experience of self-realisation, while an ability goal is associated with a better-than-the-rest experience (Butler 2007). The implication for learning when a teacher is directed by an ability goal is that a normative assessment approach is applied to evaluate pupil performance relative to that of the whole group. Prompted by an ability goal, learning outcomes in multiple-deprived environments convey the message of success, regardless of family background constraints.

Teachers' genuine care for pupils facilitates a relational goal, which embodies socio-emotional support that involves acknowledging pupils' effort and progress and viewing pupils' mistakes as integral to learning (Butler 2012). In an environment of multiple deprivation, where primary caregiving is often lacking, socio-emotional support ensures pupil well-being in the sense that pupils experience emotional reassurance in the presence of their caring teachers, which interactively engenders teacher and pupil contentedness.

Teaching and Learning in a Context of Multiple Deprivation

Multiple deprivation, considered from a teaching and learning perspective, pertains to factors that inhibit successful learning. These factors are closely linked to pupils' socio-economic disadvantage, which includes conditions of severe poverty and the lack of an educationally stimulating environment at home (Maringe and Moletsane 2015). Poverty in itself is not necessarily an indicator of deprivation, but it leads to deprivation when it affects human dignity by limiting opportunities for self-development and by hindering people's chances of changing their own circumstances (Barnes et al. 2009). Deprivation arises, then, because of poverty-related factors that inhibit physical and psycho-cognitive development. Physical development is hampered by having to survive on a life-limiting income, having poor or no accommodation, lacking enough food, and being

exposed to a health-threatening environment. Psycho-cognitive development is hampered by illiteracy, a lack of morality, and limited exposure to knowledge and insight (Noble et al. 2007; Townsend 1987; Whelan et al. 2002).

The South African context of multiple deprivation is characterised by children being exposed to deprivation as absolute poverty, which Barnes et al. (2009) analyse by means of five categories, with indicators for each category. The category of material and income deprivation describes children who are living in households with no refrigerators for the safe storage of food, and no radio or television to access information. The category of deprivation due to unemployment includes children of households where no adults aged 18 or over are in employment. Educational deprivation pertains to households where children in the age group of 7 to 15 are not in school or are in the wrong school grade for their age. This category is countered by the provision of basic education to all learners, through the government policy of no-fee schooling for the poor and promotion to subsequent grades for learners who fail repeatedly. A lack of running water and electricity as well as crowded households, where children share sleeping space with several persons of different ages and genders, serve as indicators for the category of living-environment deprivation. The category of adequate care deprivation relates to children growing up in households where both the mother and the father are deceased, or where the mother and the father are not living with their children in the same household (Barnes et al. 2009).

Pivotal to these conditions of absolute deprivation is the fact that many children, who are raised in poverty, are less likely to enjoy the crucial benefits of a reliable primary caregiver, who provides unconditional love and support, harmonious and reciprocal interactions, and enrichment through personalised and increasingly complex activities (Jones and Schipper 2015). The different types of deprivation, combined with a lack of sound primary caregiving, result in children entering school without being prepared to learn (Bloch 2009; Kamper 2008). These children need exposure to a structured learning environment, a work ethic and consistent caregiving arranged by concerned teachers who believe that children's lives are changed through education, where ultimate outcomes are dependent on learners taking ownership of their life decisions (Barnes and Horsfall 2010; Bloch 2009).

Teaching in a context of multiple deprivation requires the ability to focus on learners' needs through collaborative teamwork approaches (Maringe and Moletsane 2015). Bearing in mind the well-being of learners in need, teachers teaching in conditions of absolute poverty must have compassion for their deprived learners and passion for their upliftment through good-quality education (Lumby 2015). Having compassion for one's deprived learners implies having empathy for the struggle of learners to survive and having respect for learners' human dignity, thereby engendering consideration of learners' personal circumstances (Kamper 2008; Weeks 2012).

Passion for learners' upliftment entails that teachers are willing to empower their learners in a holistic manner for possible social mobility (Smit 2014). The ideal scenario for such an empowering endeavour relates to a focus on teaching and learning, where learner progress is monitored carefully and individually, with immediate action to correct problems. However, this scenario is challenging to achieve within the South African education context of overcrowded classes, demotivated and absent teachers, limited resources, and many learners experiencing barriers to learning because of family background constraints (Bloch 2009; Msila 2017). Motivated by the approach of doing what is possible within constrained contexts, teachers must pursue identifying and acquiring resources for teaching and learning through partnerships and networking (Barnes and Horsfall 2010; Kamper 2008). Actions executed in these schools should be motivated by an unshakable belief in the potential of learners exposed to multiple deprivation to excel—regardless of constraints.

Methodology for the Empirical Investigation

In order to understand what female teachers who are teaching exemplarily in a context of multiple deprivation consider as the factors that determine their teaching vocation on a daily basis, I proceeded from an interpretivist/constructivist research paradigm. Accordingly, I interpreted the lived experiences and meaning-making of participants to construct knowledge on exemplary teaching in multiple-deprived environments. In accordance with Henning et al. (2004) as well as Denzin and Lincoln (2011), I selected a qualitative research approach, where I used individual interviewing to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation of those involved, and the meaning they derived from their situation. Based on convenience in terms of accessibility (Cohen et al. 2011) and purposive sampling (Toma 2011), I selected 12 participants from public primary schools in Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and North West. Purposive selection of participants firstly entailed that they had to be teaching at a school in an environment of multiple deprivation. In this regard, learners at the schools where the participants were teaching were exposed to absolute poverty, where the majority lived in informal settlements, with their parents subsisting through informal trading and part-time employment.

The 12 participants, who were all candidates for the national teaching award in the category of Excellence in Primary School Teaching for the period 2012 to 2016, presented by the Department of Basic Education, had a minimum teaching experience of 10 years at the specific school. I regarded 10 years of teaching experience at a school situated in a multiple-deprived environment as a convincing criterion to understand and explain teaching in a context of absolute poverty. The fact that the participants qualified as candidates for a national teaching award implied their adherence to the general and specific criteria for excellence in primary school teaching. The general criteria with which candidates had to comply, include: engaging learners creatively with the curriculum; contributing to learners' development through communication and learning support; and adapting teaching and learning strategies to the needs of learners (Department of Basic Education 2018). Specific criteria relate to balancing curricular

needs and the context of the learner, providing opportunities for learners to link curricular activities, and organising space to enable all learners to be engaged in learning. These criteria are challenging to achieve, considering the situation of overcrowded classes typical of schools in multiple-deprived environments. The following races were represented in the participant group of 12 female teachers: black, Indian and white.

In line with the suggestions by Toma (2011) on rigour in the research approach, I triangulated the data in terms of participant response to the same question asked. All 12 interviews were guided by the same question, formulated as follows: "How do you understand your vocational calling in an environment of multiple deprivation?" With follow-up prompts for increased clarity arranged through intensive engagement (each interview lasted at least one hour), I was able to determine the participants' opinions of what they had observed over an extended period of time as their teaching vocation in conditions of multiple deprivation. After approaching each participant to confirm the accuracy of the transcript, the analysed data enabled me to form an understanding of what it means to teach exemplarily in an environment of multiple deprivation. Although the participants held different perceptions of what is crucial to effective teaching in multiple-deprived environments, their different perceptions served to represent a comprehensive understanding, from the perspective of female teachers, of what good-quality education entails in multiple-deprived conditions. This understanding, culminating in research findings, serves as guideline for the provision of meaningful education in impoverished environments.

Research Findings

To ensure the confidentiality of participant disclosure and authenticity of interpretations, participant teachers' verbatim excerpts constituting the findings are distinguished by means of the labels T1 to T12. Four major themes emerged from the interviews with the participants. These themes pertain to: i) being a mother figure to the core; ii) being a fundraiser to arrange resources for the learners; iii) being a social worker in the community; and iv) belonging passionately and contentedly to the group within the specific context. I emphasise again that the invaluable contribution of male teachers to primary education is not negated by this research on exemplary female teaching in multiple-deprived environments. Male teachers acting as father figures, fundraisers, social workers, and passionate members of the teaching community contribute crucially to good-quality education. Exemplary male teacher conduct must, therefore, be explored to understand the extent of gender similarities in conduct, and possible differences between gender actions and perceptions for an ultimate comprehensive understanding of exemplary teacher conduct in multiple-deprived environments. A comprehensive understanding of exemplary teacher conduct can then serve as a blueprint for good-quality education in impoverished conditions.

Female Teachers as Mother Figures

From the interviews with the participants, the mother-figure teacher—with unquestionable ethics and good relationships with learners, fostering trust and approachability—was a theme strongly and equally emphasised by all 12 participants. This trust and approachability resulted in learners being attached to their teachers as if they were their mothers. The black participants pointed out that their learners even call them "Mummy." As with a normal mother-child relationship, learners confide in their "mummy teachers," knowing that their most sensitive personal problems will be addressed as best a mother can. Even after learners have left school, their trust and attachment to their teachers mean "Ma'am remains Mummy" (T7) when they meet each other by chance. The black participants explained that an essential part of this mummy role is to "know what is happening in each one of their homes" (T2), and "to know about their diseases" (T5) in order to understand the child and be able to convey the message of "You know what, my child? You are not alone in this" (T6).

Apart from physical necessities related to food and clothing, psychosocial support, which learners growing up in absolute poverty need, involves additional assistance with mastering sociocognitive knowledge and skills as well as support with morality ownership. Participant T11 pointed out that with many of their learners, "their literacy levels are so poor, because they come from totally impoverished situations," with the result that extra input is required with reading, "to try and bring them up to scratch." Coming from a white family background where the love of reading was fostered and the importance of reading was stressed from a very young age, participant T11 explained that the extra support with reading is provided after school while learners wait for the bus or the taxi to take them home. In many instances, poor literacy levels are accompanied by poor knowledge of proper social conduct, which demands that teachers equip learners with a moral code of respect, honesty and courtesy. By being exemplary in terms of integrity and having consideration for others, mother-figure teachers foster the philosophy that "it does not cost you anything to smile and say 'hello' to somebody, to be honest, to help around" (T9). In this regard, referring to her schooling as an Indian at a formerly Indian school, participant T8 emphasised her educative teaching calling, based on her experience that "we were taught that respect, to value certain things, and we try to teach the same thing to our learners."

As mother figures who are well accustomed to absolute poverty, due to their having similar backgrounds to those of their learners, the black participants pointed out that as teachers they are able to emphasise in a convincing manner the importance of obtaining an education, as the only hope for possible social mobility. Participant T1 explained that she is "from a very, very poor family," and that it is, therefore, easy for her "to impart the importance of an education to the learners and their parents." The occurrence of "teenage pregnancies" (T2), which are especially prevalent in multiple-deprived environments, intensifies the need for support with morality ownership and valuing the life-saving potential of an education to end fatalistic lifestyles. As teachers fulfilling the role of a mother, the black participants emphasise on a daily basis "what Madiba told

us, what Oliver Tambo told us: 'you must have an education; it is basic'" (T1). Part of obtaining a proper education is completing homework, which is seen as enriched engagement with the subject content. The black participants are empathically aware of their learners' impoverished circumstances of having to fulfil daily after-school chores, such as fetching water and wood because of a lack of electricity and running water. Participant T1 assigns homework, and she arranges for that homework to be completed during break, because "I am not lowering my standards. My learners must not look foolish when they go to high school."

Regarding what Jones and Schipper (2015) say about reliable primary caregiving, it was clear that the vocational calling of exemplary female participants teaching in multiple-deprived environments related to compensating for learners' lack of maternal support and a maternal role model at home. Relying on their social capital acquired at home and through schooling, and inspired by a combination of a mastery goal and an ability goal (Deemer 2004), these participants arrange a school and classroom environment in which learners from impoverished environments are exposed to habitus (Bourdieu 1993), gaining knowledge, skills and behaviour to provide them with the opportunity to change their life circumstances.

Female Teachers as Fundraisers

The participants from the Indian community agreed that although money "is not the be-all and end-all" (T4), schools have goals to achieve for which finances are needed. Ensuring the holistic development of learners within a context of multiple deprivation poses a challenge, in that "a very poor parent community" (T9) implies "a set of kids who are not capable of raising funds" (T12). The Indian participants, therefore, understand that they themselves have to obtain the money needed for adequate teaching and learning through sponsorships. For this reason, the Indian participants teaching in multiple-deprived environments know that an essential part of their vocational calling is having "the skill and energy to be a professional beggar" (T3), in the sense that they have to approach multiple potential sponsors after formal school hours, by writing letters or through face-to-face encounters. In seeking donations, the Indian participants rely "on the goodness of people's hearts who want to see an education happen" (T4) and who are convinced by "teachers showing interest" (T12) in obtaining what learners need. An important part of sustained sponsorship is a properly functioning school as a persuasion measure, because "you cannot go to businesses, saying: 'Look, I want sponsorship', and when they visit the school, they can't see any product there" (T3).

Money from sponsorships is used to improve the teaching and learning environment, such as sealing off classrooms' old wooden floors at a formerly Indian school, which had developed huge holes, with legs of chairs, pens, and pencils going through and learners complaining "Ma'am, I have lost my stuff" (T8). A black participant explained that sponsorship money at her school is used to enable volunteers from the community to improve the school's vegetable garden, in order to supplement the daily feeding scheme with "cabbage, spinach, beetroot, baby marrows and carrots" (T6). For many

learners, this feeding scheme meal is their only meal for the day, with the result that they are "only able to concentrate fully once they have received their meal" (T5). Teachers' fundraising endeavours are inspired by the impoverished circumstances of their learners, because "we know what they are not exposed to, what they do not get, so we try our level best to provide these things to them" (T2). In pursuit of a holistic education for their learners, and to counter an apathetic approach to life, associated with "home-background greyness" (T6), the participants are constantly seeking sponsorships to expose learners to experiences such as "a meal at a restaurant" (T1), sponsored by local restaurants, such as Wimpy and Spur, "an excursion to the movies" (T3), sponsored by Ster-Kinekor, and "a visit to the zoo" (T12), sponsored by well-doers, such as the bird-watching club in one community. Fostering an appreciation for beauty, resulting in unconsciously experiencing improved quality of life, is arranged through donations of fresh flowers for the classrooms by a local florist, where the flowers donated are the ones "which people did not buy" (T6). Participants attributed their success with obtaining sponsorships to benefit learners' development to their attitude of negating the apathetic mindset of "we cannot do it, it is too difficult" (T8). A salient message conveyed by this Indian participant was that dedicated attempts to arrange resources through sponsorships result in positive outcomes, because "once you try, there will be someone who helps" (T8) with donations to contribute to a holistic schooling for learners from deprived environments.

Regarding what Deemer (2004) and Butler (2012) say about being directed by a mastery goal and a relational goal, to improve their performance with fundraising endeavours to benefit learners, the female participants teaching in multiple-deprived environments are continually refining their skills in obtaining sponsorships for the well-being of their learners. In pursuit of exposing their learners to the best holistic schooling possible, the sponsorships that the participants obtain contribute to learners' exposure to social capital of a physical and psychosocial nature. In this regard, and in line with Bourdieu (2005) on the sharing of social capital resources, habitus for deprived learners relates to "ladies [that] have a weakness for style" (T4) in the sense of developing their learners through caring, and wanting to share this style by exposing their learners to life conditions associated with a caring existence.

Female Teachers as Social Workers

From the interviews conducted with all the participants, the desperate situation of absolute poverty prevailing in their schools' parent communities became clear. Participant T1, who grew up in similar impoverished conditions, sketched the situation in her school's catchment area of a single-mother family consisting of five children, two of which are the unemployed mother's own children, and three of which are her deceased sister's children, where two of the five children are living with HIV/Aids. Participant T6 referred to an incident where they found a learner sleeping next to the closed school gate on a cold Saturday morning early in August. When asked why she had slept there, her answer was: "Ma'am, we did not have food at home, so I thought the only place where I can get food is at school." Participant T8 explained incidents that

frequently occur at their school, where learners' homes burn down, leaving learners and their caregivers with a complete lack of necessities. All the participants raised the matter that substantial numbers of learners are living with their aged grandparents, because "lots of parents leave their kids in the care of grandparents. The grandparents are very old, so they [the learners] have to take on additional responsibilities" (T4). These conditions of absolute poverty are accompanied by HIV/Aids, which the white participants acknowledged as "a tough plague" (T11), resulting in "a tough life" (T10) for many learners.

Participants respond to the debilitating conditions in which their learners grow up by fulfilling a social-worker role, in the sense of attending to the broader community by arranging food and clothes in acute cases of impoverishment. In this regard, participant T2 succeeds in her black community to "get food hampers for the really needy [which] is not going just to the learners; it is going to the family." In order to obtain these food hampers, participant T2 has obtained the cooperation of chain stores such as Checkers, Pick 'n Pay, and Woolworths, which donate food with imminent expiry dates. The teacher arranges for pick-up and distribution to the needy families. Similarly, in close collaboration with churches in her black community, participant T7 succeeds to "do a drive for old clothes and blankets" (T7) to attend to the clothing needs of the poorest of the poor. Apart from distributing food and clothes obtained through donations and sponsorships, vegetables from the school's vegetable garden are distributed to needy families on a weekly basis. Participant T1, who still remembers her childhood days when she had to function on an empty stomach, explained that the neediest cases at her school are determined on a weekly basis, where a vegetable hamper consisting of "onions, cabbage, beetroot and a bunch of spinach" is sent home with the learner for the weekend.

In many instances teachers as social workers attend to dire needs in their parent communities by donating from their own pockets. This was especially notable in the interviews conducted with the Indian participants and the white participants. Participant T12, an Indian teacher, shared the incident of a mother of a Grade 6 learner who was diagnosed with cancer and who had to travel to town for chemotherapy. She approached the school for help as she lacked money for transport. Motivated by participant T12, the teaching staff collected the amount of R400 among themselves for the mother, "who was so grateful, because she could go for those trips for chemo for that month." Similarly, another Indian teacher, participant T8, explained the continual support offered to the needy in their community by assisting families of former learners, such as a Grade 12 learner whose father had had a massive stroke and whose mother had had to resign from work to attend to her husband. She explained that among themselves "we ladies undertook to pay the learner's transport money" of R300 per month from May to November, to enable the learner "to finish her matric, at least." Participant T10, who represents the white community, explained the care for and involvement with the community in her school's external environment, as "we [the teachers] are in touch," which makes the parent community respect the teachers. The empathy of participant T1

with her impoverished community, as someone who had had an impoverished childhood, was clear from the following statement: "I have walked into all kinds of shacks and all kinds of homes. I have gone when there has been death in the family, or some kind of crisis. I have been in the community."

Regarding what Townsend (1987) and Whelan et al. (2002) say about deprivation as a global concept, and the analysis of poverty according to the categories of Barnes et al. (2009), the female participants teaching in multiple-deprived environments are faced with the absolute poverty of their learners. Inspired by a relational goal of caring (Butler 2012), the participants respond to their learners' impoverished conditions by providing extended socio-emotional support in the broader community. Their endeavours pertain to "structures of perception, conception and action" (Bourdieu 2005, 43), resulting in sponsorship contributions, to provide emotional, physical and financial support to their learners and parent communities in an attempt to ameliorate debilitating misery.

Female Teachers Acting as a United Front

The participants explained that they contribute to a shared sense of purpose at their schools. Black, white and Indian participants noted that apart from being well acquainted with the circumstances of their learners, they know each other well, resulting in their "being there for each other and for the learners" (T11). In their pursuit of the best for their learners exposed to absolute poverty, the participants are inspired by the receptiveness of their pupils. In this regard, participant T11, who represents the white community, pointed out that the cohesion of her school's teacher corps, which includes males and females, is motivated by the specific qualities of their learners, which relate to "the receptiveness and appreciation of the children here. I would not swop these children for any other." Teacher cohesion among the Indian participants, which is based on being female, in the sense of "you know, ladies can be very thorough" (T4), results in these women assisting each other with meeting important deadlines, such as examination marking. In this regard, and in line with the ubuntu concept of showing humanity towards each other, "nobody is holding themselves back" (T3), and the prevailing attitude is not one of "it is your work" (P8), but it is rather an approach of "it is our work" (T8) to complete set goals jointly in a competent way.

At the school of participant T6, who represents the black community, the feeling of professional belonging is expressed by dress code colours and dressing arrangements. Participant T6 explained their professional belonging through dress code as follows: "Monday we are all in black and white, Tuesday we are all in black and red, Wednesday we wear jeans with T-shirts, Thursday black and pink, and Friday then it is our dress-to-kill day, when everybody can wear whatever she likes." A shared sense of belonging is also reinforced by humour, as was confirmed by participant T12, an Indian participant, who acknowledged that "you know, we ladies we laugh a lot." She admitted that at her school the teachers instinctively try to find humour in their situation in an empathic way, because, considering the disheartening effect of their learners'

impoverished circumstances, "if you cannot have a good laugh from time to time, it is going to be pretty miserable" (T12).

An important factor, contributing to the sense of belongingness and being tuned in to each other and to their learners, is prolonged involvement at the specific school. Participants concurred that the fact that they have been teaching at the same school for a significant period of time, with many of them being locals from the community, equipped them with knowledge and skills to function competently in the specific environment. This competency pertains to knowledge of "the bad guys, where they come from, know their problems, know how to handle them, because we know their background" (T3). This prolonged involvement also resulted in a constructive sharing of ideas for improved knowledge of teaching and support to learners through fundraising endeavours. In this regard, and based on constructive interaction, teachers as a united group, which includes males and females, "come with their plans, come with the problems and the solutions" (T1) in pursuit of the best education possible for their learners who are exposed to absolute poverty. Constructive sharing and gaining knowledge are also realised through networking with neighbouring schools, with the aim of determining "what is it that you are doing that we can maybe apply at our school" (T6) to ensure improved teaching and learning.

Regarding what Bourdieu (2005) says about habitus, the participants have developed conceptions and actions through their long involvement with each other and with the specific school environment, enabling them to have competent and optimistic conduct at schools in multiple-deprived environments. Their constructive interaction, perfected by prolonged acquaintance with each other and with the school and extended networking, is directed by a mastery goal of not shying away from challenging tasks (Deemer 2004). This enables them to engage in creative problem solving for competent and empathic assistance to their impoverished learners.

Concluding Discussion

The vocational calling of exemplary female teachers teaching in an environment of multiple deprivation relates to creating habitus (Bourdieu 1993) for their learners through a process of group-related cooperation to provide social capital as a group-related benefit. This habitus is achieved through a mastery goal (Deemer 2004) of not shying away from challenging circumstances, such as learners' lack of cognitive capacity and physical care due to limited attention from primary caregivers (Jones and Schipper 2015). Through habitus as conceptions and actions (Bourdieu 2005), underlined by a strong moral purpose and collaborative teamwork approaches (Maringe and Moletsane 2015), exemplary female teachers arrange a holistic education for their deprived learners in an empathic way, as inspired by a relational goal (Butler 2012). In this regard, four features manifest as exemplary female teacher conduct: namely to be mother figures, fundraisers, social workers, and members of a closely functioning unit within the specific context of multiple deprivation.

Acting as mother figures, exemplary female teachers compensate for the social capital needs in terms of emotional, cognitive and relationship-related support of their impoverished learners. These learners, according to the poverty categories identified by Barnes et al. (2009), grow up in households where a mother figure and a father figure are absent. Drawing on their own social capital gains, exemplary female teachers equip their learners with morality ownership and an understanding of the importance of an education for possible social mobility. As fundraisers, they are directed by the importance of exposing their deprived learners to a holistic education and to experiences that their learners would otherwise not enjoy. In order to obtain sponsorships, exemplary female teachers develop the competencies to approach possible sponsors convincingly. Catering for the needs of their learners for sufficient food and extended knowledge and insight (Noble et al. 2007), exemplary female teachers, through persevering in fundraising attempts, arrange eating-out treats and interesting excursions of an educative nature for their learners.

Based on the analyses of deprivation and absolute poverty (Barnes et al. 2009; Townsend 1987), exemplary female teachers teaching in multiple-deprived environments are alert to the conditions of total impoverishment to which their learners and the broader community are exposed. They respond to these conditions by acting as social workers directed by a relational goal of caring (Butler 2012), to provide prolonged support to the needy community. Their support pertains to social capital resources of an emotional, physical and financial nature, where in many cases the financial support is through their own personal contributions. Functioning competently as mother figures, fundraisers, and social workers, exemplary female teachers are inspired by their shared sense of purpose and belonging at the specific school as a social space. They contribute to acting as a united front, which is brought about by prolonged engagement with each other and the specific school. In line with Bourdieu's (2005) theory of habitus as perceptions, conceptions, and actions, this prolonged engagement has resulted in interactive influence directing teacher conduct to equip deprived learners with the most holistic schooling possible.

The findings contribute to knowledge on exemplary teacher conduct within a context of multiple deprivation as perceived from a female perspective. This knowledge serves as guideline for good-quality teacher conduct in impoverished conditions. It is crucial that further research be conducted to identify the equally important conduct of exemplary male teachers teaching at primary schools in multiple-deprived environments, so as to ensure a comprehensive understanding of good-quality education at schools in impoverished settings. Finally, research should be conducted on the influence of the conduct of exemplary teachers on the lives of their deprived learners. Considering that 60 per cent of South African schools are considered dysfunctional, the views of learners exposed to absolute poverty regarding the influence of exemplary teacher conduct on their chances of self-development and changing their life circumstances, should be heard. The findings can then result in a comprehensive understanding of the essence of providing good-quality education in environments of multiple deprivation.

References

Barnes, H., M. Noble, G. C. Wright, and A. Dawes. 2009. "A Geographical Profile of Child Deprivation in South Africa." *Child Indicators Research* 2 (2): 181–199. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12187-008-9026-2.

Barnes, J., and P. Horsfall. 2010. "It's Your Life: Developing a Community of Learners to Combat Social Deprivation." *Education Review* 22 (2): 17–26.

Bloch, G. 2009. *The Toxic Mix: What's wrong with South Africa's Schools and how to Fix It*. Cape Town: Tafelberg.

Bourdieu, P. 1993. *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Bourdieu, P. 1994. "Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste." In *Social Stratification: Class, Race, and Gender in Sociological Perspective*, edited by D. B. Grusky. San Francisco: Westview Press, 404–429.

Bourdieu, P. 2005. "Habitus." In *Habitus: A Sense of Place*, 2nd edition, edited by J. Hillier and E. Rooksby. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 43–49.

Butler, R. 2007. "Teachers' Achievement Goal Orientations and Associations with Teachers' Help Seeking: Examination of a Novel Approach to Teacher Motivation." *Journal of Educational Psychology* 99 (2): 241–252. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.99.2.241.

Butler, R. 2012. "Striving to Connect: Extending an Achievement Goal Approach to Teacher Motivation to Include Relational Goals for Teaching." *Journal of Educational Psychology* 104 (3): 726–742.

Cohen, L., L. Manion, and K. Morrison. 2011. *Research Methods in Education*, 7th edition. London: Routledge Falmer.

Conley, A. M. 2012. "Patterns of Motivation Beliefs: Combining Achievement Goal and Expectancy-Value Perspectives." *Journal of Educational Psychology* 104 (1): 32–47. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0026042.

De Jesus, S. N., and W. Lens. 2005. "An Integrated Model for the Study of Teacher Motivation." *Applied Psychology: An International Review* 54 (1): 119–134. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.2005.00199.x.

Deemer, S. A. 2004. "Classroom Goal Orientation in High School Classrooms: Revealing Links between Teacher Beliefs and Classroom Environments." *Educational Research* 46 (1): 73–90. https://doi.org/10.1080/0013188042000178836.

Denzin, N. K., and Y. S. Lincoln (eds). 2011. *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 4th edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Department of Basic Education. 2018. *The Nomination Guide for the 18th edition of the National Teaching Awards*. Pretoria: Department of Basic Education.

Henning, E., W. van Rensburg, and B. Smit. 2004. *Finding your way in Qualitative Research*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

Jones, S., and Y. Schipper. 2015. "Does Family Background matter for Learning in East Africa?" *Africa Education Review* 12 (1): 7–27. https://doi.org/10.1080/18146627.2015.1036540.

Kamper, G. 2008. "A Profile of Effective Leadership in some South African High-Poverty Schools." *South African Journal of Education* 28 (1): 1–18.

Lumby, J. 2015. "Leading Schools in Communities of Multiple Deprivation: Women Principals in South Africa." *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* 43 (3): 400–417. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143214558571.

Maringe, F., and R. Moletsane. 2015. "Leading Schools in Circumstances of Multiple Deprivation in South Africa: Mapping some Conceptual, Contextual and Research Dimensions." *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* 43 (3): 347–362. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143215575533.

Mathe, H., X. Pavie, and M. O'Keeffe. 2011. *Valuing People to Create Value: An Innovative Approach to Leveraging Motivation at Work*. Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Co. https://doi.org/10.1142/8220.

Msila, V. 2017. "Leaving a Sinking Ship? School Principals in Flight, Lessons and Possible Solutions." *Africa Education Review* 14 (1): 87–104. https://doi.org/10.1080/18146627.2016.1224575.

Noble, M. W. J., G. C. Wright, W. K. Magasela, and A. Ratcliffe. 2007. "Developing a Democratic Definition of Poverty in South Africa." *Journal of Poverty* 11 (4): 117–141. https://doi.org/10.1300/J134v11n04_06.

Skelton, C. 2012. "Men Teachers and the 'Feminised' Primary School: A Review of the Literature." *Educational Review* 64 (1): 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2011.616634.

Smit, B. 2014. "An Ethnographic Narrative of Relational Leadership." *Journal of Sociology and Social Anthropology* 5 (2): 117–123. https://doi.org/10.1080/09766634.2014.11885615.

Toma, J. D. 2011. "Approaching Rigour in Applied Qualitative Research." In *The Sage Handbook for Research in Education: Pursuing Ideas as the Keystone of Exemplary Inquiry*, 2nd edition, edited by C. F. Conrad and R. C. Serlin. Los Angeles: Sage, 263–280. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483351377.n17.

Townsend, P. 1987. "Deprivation." *Journal of Social Policy* 16 (2): 125–146. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279400020341.

Vescio, V., D. Ross, and A. Adams. 2008. "A Review of Research on the Impact of Professional Learning Communities on Teaching Practice and Student Learning." *Teaching and Teacher Education* 24 (1): 80–91. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2007.01.004.

Weeks, F. H. 2012. "The Quest for a Culture of Learning: A South African School Perspective." *South African Journal of Education* 32 (1) 1–14. https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v32n1a565.

Whelan, C. T., R. Layte, and B. Maître. 2002. "Multiple Deprivation and Persistent Poverty in the European Union." *Journal of European Social Policy* 12 (2): 91–105. https://doi.org/10.1177/0952872002012002101.

Wolters, C. A., and S. G. Daugherty. 2007. "Goal Structures and Teachers' Sense of Efficacy: Their Relation and Association to Teaching Experience and Academic Level." *Journal of Educational Psychology* 99 (1): 181–193. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.99.1.181.