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Corruption and trust in South African Education: Perceptions of teachers and school boards

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Corruption and trust in South African Education: Perceptions of teachers and school boards.

Abstract

South Africa's history of oppression and apartheid has led to great inequalities, and educational outcomes are generally poor. Corruption has been identified as one of the reasons for systemic failure to improve. This paper supports the idea of corruption as a cultural construct, 'its whole drama revealed in light of the existential insecurity which people feel towards it' (Taussig, 1992: ,p.4).Using documentary analysis of a key report on corruption in education, along with focus group data, the paper examines normative perceptions of corruption and how they undermine trust in educational processes & practices, asking: a) Which factors colour normative perceptions of corruption in education b) To what extent do these perceptions undermine trust in the education system. The paper concludes that educator corruption perceptions are powerful in undermining educators' sense of agency and self-efficacy and that distrust affects the way in which the education system operates.

Keywords: Corruption, trust , Education, accountability

Introduction

The concept of corruption is both historically and culturally created and situated, 'for example in European absolutist monarchies, the sale of public offices was once widespread – yet the proceeds from this sale went into the public treasury and the practice was not treated as corruption' (Friedrich 2002,p. 82). In the contemporary world, the sale of public offices is clear-cut corruption, at least in the context of Western administrative culture (see for example: Shore and Haller, 2005), yet in some cultures this is accepted practice (Buchan, 2012). The question of what is and is not corruption has been strongly influenced by Max Weber's theory of bureaucracy with its legal-rational and meritocratic basis (Rubinstein and Maravic, 2010). The norm of universalism based on Western political thought has heavily influenced how corruption is conceptualised, particularly in terms of cross-country comparisons. This, over time has led to an, 'erosion of the cultural underpinnings of the pre-modern political order, affecting the taken-for-granted legitimacy of particularism – the type of legitimacy that is the 'most subtle and the most powerful' as it is based on a collective presumption that the political order is 'granted' and 'alternatives become unthinkable' (Suchman 1995: 583). The challenges that universalism has created for societies, has infused cultures to such an extent that previous reliance on particular cultural ethics and norms, is now no longer a certitude (Drackle, 2005).

South Africa has a long history of oppression and apartheid that has led to great inequalities. Despite its classification as an upper-middle income country, learning outcomes are generally poor. Only the top 16% of South African Grade 3 children are performing at an appropriate Grade 3 level (Spaull and Kotze, 2015), and, three decades after the fall of apartheid, resources and capital are distributed unevenly across schools: Large performance gaps related to wealth, socio-economic status, geographic location and language of students are endemic. Corruption has been identified as one of the reasons for systemic failure to improve (Chisholm et al., 2005). According to research carried out by Corruption Watch in March 2017, corruption in South Africa's public schools is a., 'Major problem that stifles access to quality education for the majority of learners in the country.' (P, 42). Figures produced by Transparency International, (www.transparency.org) , an organisation set up to monitor and combat corruption internationally, show that South Africa ranks 71 out of 180 on the organisation's corruption index. The index which ranks 180 countries and territories by their perceived levels of public sector corruption according to experts and business people, uses a scale of

0-100 where 0 is highly corrupt and 100 is very clean. South Africa scored 43 on this index, indicating perceived high levels of corruption. In 2019 Corruption Watch reported that 22% of reported incidents of corruption were about education (CorruptionWatchSA, 2018). Yet how these figures are arrived at , along with the whole notion of whether corruption can be measured and by what means, is far from clear (Gephart, 2009). So too, the so called 'fight against corruption', which , according to some researchers, is a political tool, along the same lines as the politics of austerity; a means by which governments and cross cultural organisations , such as The World Bank, can gain legitimacy (Ivanov, 2007b).

The South African School System comprises several layers within its hierarchy , as illustrated in Figure 1. The Provincial Education Department is responsible for all schools within that province. Operational support is delegated to Circuits or districts who monitor and support schools within their area. Schools are funded according to a system of socioeconomic classification laid down by Section 35(1) of **South African Schools Act (SASA)**. Quintile 1 is the most deprived quintile, while Quintile 5 is the least deprived.
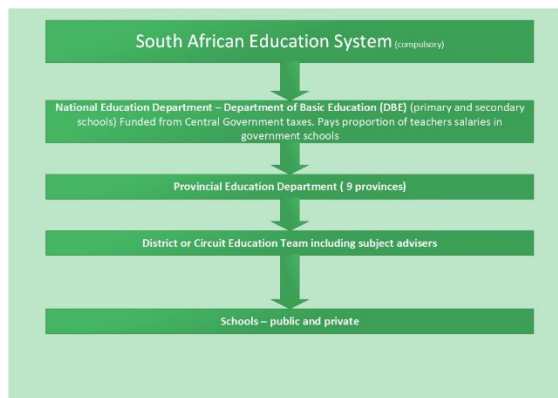

Figure 1 Structure of South African Education System

This paper uses documentary analysis of a major report on corruption in South African Education (Volmink et al., 2016) ,combined with focus groups with teachers and district officials to examine their normative perceptions of corruption. It examines how these perceptions work to undermine trust and create distrust in educational processes and practices in South African education, in examining: a) Which factors colour normative perceptions of corruption in education b) To what extent these perceptions undermine trust in the education system. It adds to the knowledge on corruption in focusing on its conceptualisation through discourse, and how this in turn creates distrust within the system, undermining capacity and trust.

The paper begins by conceptualizing culture, distrust and corruption, moving on to explain the context of South Africa. From there it moves to an explanation of our sample and approach, and analysis and discussion of our findings. The final section of the paper discusses to what extent these perceptions undermine trust in the education system. The paper concludes with an exploration of how responses to both research questions can be used to improve trust within the system.

Culture, trust and corruption

Present conceptualisations of corruption are not only challenged by differing cultural norms, but also by new notions of corruption that have entered parlance via universalist policies, translated and implemented by cross national organisations such as The World Bank, the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) and the IMF (international monetary fund). Numerous

critique of the impact of globalisation and neo-liberalism as espoused by these agencies (amongst others) , argues that they promote, 'new forms of inequality, labour migration and new conditions of work,' (Scrase et al, 2003 in Clammer, 2012: :121) , and several studies point out a direct links between a decline in morality/ corruption and the infusion of capitalism within societies (Hefner, 1998). Clammer argues that there are three major factors in what he terms,

'the contemporary corruption environment": mal-development that produces new or increasing patterns of inequality and the parallel recognition of social injustice on the part of its victims; violence and the intense psychological risks, pressures and uncertainties that such a life context generates; and capitalist led neo-liberal globalisation' (Clammer, 2012: ,p.119).

The creation of corruption indices in order to provide international comparative tables of corruption is also riddled with challenge and ambiguity: Flaws in mechanisms used by, for example, Transparency International, have come to light, via number of high profile instances in which they appear to have failed: For example, for some time Iceland was at the top of Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI) as one of the 'least corrupt countries in the world', but the collapse of the Icelandic banking system in 2008 revealed that Iceland had forms of corruption not grasped by the CPI's methodology. These were subsequently revealed to be 'excessive informal relations between political, administrative, and economic elites, leading to cronyism and nepotism – one of the reasons behind its economic collapse'(Vaiman et al., 2011).

These issues have left researchers with considerable challenge in terms of investigating corruption and perceptions of corruption within societies. In addition, reporting corruption is also problematic, as locations with high reported levels of corruption may merely reflect , for example, anonymous reporting mechanisms which offer high levels of protection for whistle blowers (Misangyi et al., 2008).

Although there appears to be some consensus that corruption is a bad thing, the quest to combat it is also rife with political and economic agendas. A key difficulty is in the challenge of defining culture, pointed out by anthropologists, who argue that culture is a strategic device not an essence – in short , that culture too is a political construction (Fox and King, 2002).

The Anti- Corruption Agenda

The global anti-corruption agenda emerged in the mid-1990s, largely borne out of the US government's perception of foreign corruption as a commercial and security threat, 'economists seized on such quantifications of corruption (despite their problematic methodology), to produce econometric studies in support of the largely neoliberal global agenda'. (Billon 2008,p.28). Aligned with the idea of corruption in societies, the contemporary fight against corruption is in essence, a never-ending process and to a certain extent, a self-legitimising construct, in its ability to create new forms of corruption and justification for new areas for anti-corruption action (Bratsis, 2003). A number of anthropological researchers argue that the ontological distinctiveness of corruption is that the unintended consequences of global anti-corruption efforts actually construct corruption norms by attributing 'corruptness' to practices previously not seen as corrupt (Czepil, 2016). This raises the question of what impact such consequences have on the systems and societies in which they occur. In her investigation of constructions of the state in post-colonial India, Gupta found that the talk of corruption is part of a 'folkloristic inventory' and that the story of corruption can be heard more often than any other story (Gupta, 1995: ,p.173), rendering it a powerful influence on the ways in which societies conduct themselves. This is discussed in more detail later in this paper.

The difficulties of arriving at a single agreed upon definition of corruption, manifest in both national

and international projects designed to combat and root out the causes of corruption. As Ivanov points out, 'Corruption has been promoted to an,' all-encompassing explanation for all sorts of societal problems '(Ivanov 2007: 40). Many researchers in this area feel that the issue of culturally located understandings of corruption has not been given enough attention by theorists (De Maria, 2008; Gephart, 2009): Ivanov, for example, argues that a more contextualized analysis, which understands corruption as a social construct, would facilitate more successful anti-corruption efforts (Ivanov, 2007a: ,p.42). Gupta's work on the discourse of corruption in imaginations of the state in post-colonial India , (Gupta, 1995), , argues that discourses of corruption are a key arena through which, 'the state, citizens and other organisations and aggregations come to be imagined,' (p.376), viewing the discourse as a mechanism through which the state itself is discursively constituted. A point echoed by Bourdieu in his emphasis on quotidian practices (Bourdieu, 1977) as a means by which to study the effects of the state on everyday people. In the course of such imaginings, individuals also indicate the amount of trust that is placed in both the state and the workings of the state to be key within perceptions of corruption. In the next section we turn to the relationship between perceived corruption and trust.
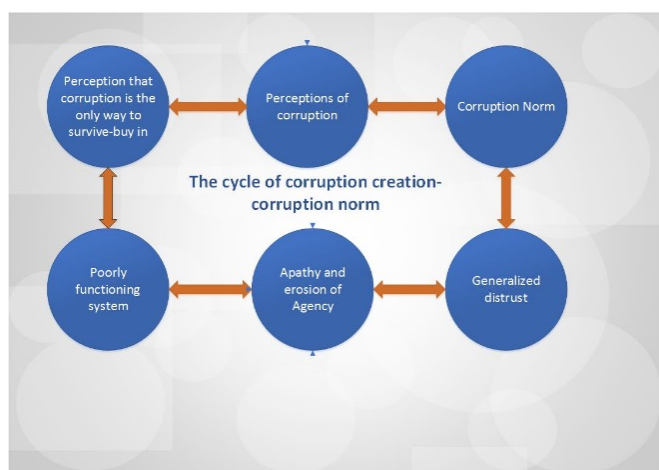
Corruption and Trust

Much of the work on trust and culture in societies can be drawn from the field of cultural anthropology and, from the field of social action; most notably Parsons and Durkheim. (Durkheim, 1956; Parsons, 1964). Durkheim considers the conditions under which individuals live along with the existence of certain, 'structures, which imply constraint, even coercion in the lived realities of individuals and groups. Following Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1979: ,p.34) we refer to the 'dispositions and practices' of groups and individuals as 'culture', 'an acquired system of habitual behaviour which generates (or /and determines) individual's schemes of action. In short, social structures produce culture, which, in turn, generates practices, which, finally, reproduce social structures. (ibid, p.81). Theories of culture are homogenous in their aim to resolve the tensions between structure and agency: the ability of individuals to act outside of and within the norms of their particular culture, yet as pointed out earlier in this paper, within cultural anthropology the term itself continues to be contested. Contemporary debates in anthropology consider the implications of a more phenomenological approach to the term. These discussions revolve around the idea not of culture but rather of culturing: Understood as an, ever ongoing, overt activity which reunites the body, the acting, feeling, and emotive aspects of self, with the thinking, language-knowing self (Sorge, 1982).
In the South African context, the location for this study, the political connotations of culture are particularly important. The postmodern approach posits that the subjective and the objective are equally political, and, that the grand narratives of Western Social science and ethics have been exploited as interests of power interest and exploitation. In the case of South Africa, nicknamed the, 'Rainbow nation', due to the myriad races, languages and ethnic origins of its people, the notion of culture is particularly problematic, not least due to the previous apartheid regime's project of progressive dissolution of indigenous forms of morality and the subsequent spread of economic globalisation and its concomitant consumerist ethic (Clammer, 2004).

The relationship between corruption and trust is well recognised in the literature. For example, You's research in 2005, found that freedom from corruption (formal justice), income equality (distributive justice) and full and mature democracy as political equality (procedural justice), are, 'significantly positively associated with social trust across countries, while the level of economic development (per capita income), and ethnic, cultural factionalization were insignificant in controlling for corruption and inequality (You, 2005). He also found that corruption and inequality have an adverse impact on norms and perceptions of trustworthiness (page, 32). Perceptions of corruption can prove as inimical to trust within a society as the corruption itself, as Hall points out; even though over 90% of Africans believe that corruption is unacceptable, 'in many states people have anything but good experiences with the authorities when it comes to securing their and their families' basic needs.' He goes further in pointing out that in these countries people are often forced to give and receive assistance from relatives, friends or members of the community.' That, 'without good governance, without functioning, transparent public services equally accessible to all, giving gifts or money is often the

only way people can obtain health care, building permits, court decisions and so on.' (Hall, 2012: ,p.4).

Trust , distrust and corruption are , according to several studies , closely aligned. But a number of authors argue that in order to fully understand and conceptualise trust it is necessary to conceptualise distrust separately as trust and distrust are separate constructs (Lewicki et al., 1998; Van De Walle and Six, 2014). These authors situate trust as an organizing principal where distrust is articulated as a constraining element, leading to negative perceptions of others' behaviour, and limiting successful organisational outcomes. Distrust can be conceptualised in a generalised manner, or as part of interorganizational relations. It can also be conceptualised in a micro manner as part of an individual's natural (or learned) tendency.

Van De Wall and Six (2014: 6) argue that distrust has "a bases in reason, routines and reflexivity that lead to negative expectations towards the actions and intentions of more or less specific others:' In this paper we understand distrust as an actual 'expectation that another actor cannot be relied upon, and will engage in harmful behaviour' (page, 7). If distrust is characterised as, 'an actor's assured expectation of intended harm from the other' (Lewicki et al., 1998: ,p.446), then we may expect that a culture of distrust (at both organisational and system level), to be characterised by 'a pervasive, generalized climate of suspicion',(Dawson, 2019), leading to alienation and passivism.

Figure 2 cycle of corruption and distrust

Such cycles of distrust in education have been seen to permeate entire systems , creating climates of distrust and concomitantly high transaction costs (Ehren and Baxter, 2020).

Distrust can also have important implications in the creation of in group and out groups and result in cultural othering. Sitkin and Roth's work for example found that distrust was engendered when an "employee's beliefs and values do not align with the organization's cultural values: They found that a climate of distrust is created when an individual or group is perceived as not sharing key cultural values' (Sitkin and Roth, 1993: ,p.371). This is clearly problematic in the case of South Africa, due to the vast cultural differences (and languages), within the education system.

Corruption

Many of the definitions of corruption emerge from transnational organisations set up to combat corruption, such as Transparency International: They define corruption as 'the misuse of entrusted power for private gain (Watch, 2017). However Schefczyk amongst others criticized this definition stating that corruption cannot be separated from the regular democratic processes of a complex democracy, and that processes of fighting particularlistic interests are inevitable (Schefczyk, 2005: p, 103). Nye's definition of corruption in the public sector , has been used as a starting point by many in the field of anti-corruption action, stating that:' Corruption is behaviour which deviates from the formal duties of a public role because of private -regarded pecuniary or status gains; or violates rules against the exercise of certain types of private -regarding influence. (Nye 1967: 284). This view is

criticized for failing to imagine the frequent overlap between the public and the private and the 'cultural meanings of the term in the society in which it is placed', (Lazar 2005:223). Haller and Shore also argue that the term corruption has so far not been able to address daily routines which take place in the "grey area" between the public and the private "grey zones" between domains. They also stress that although the two areas may be codified within societies, officials within organizations, 'will always have discretion and room for manoeuvre—they could not fulfil their duties otherwise.' (Shore/Haller 2005: 6), and, that it is within these discretionary grey areas that covert corrupt activity resides. Robertson too talks about the grey area arguing that bureaucratic *efficiencies* reside within this area, rather than within official codified channels (Robertson 2006: 9). Within Klitgaard's well known corruption formula:$C = M + D – A$- Corruption equals monopoly plus discretion minus accountability,(Klitgaard, 1988).The area of discretion equates with the 'grey area' pointed out by Shore Haller and Robertson. Although the equation has been widely criticised since then- mainly due to its reductionist applications within political science, the area of discretion is useful in illuminating the culturally shaped division between the public and the private.

This study views corruption to be rooted in a, 'wider, inter-subjectively created normative framework, determined by the subjects located in different parts of the social structure.' (Granovetter, 2007: ,p.12). Granovetter also argues that many individuals are engaged in actions which they do not regard as corrupt, but which are recognized as corrupt by other people and organizations- linking to the idea of corruption discourses. This aligns with Shore and Haller's view that what is 'corrupt' is a result of interactions between meaning-producing social actors, and that corruption's different forms emerge within differing social and historical contexts (Shore and Haller, 2005). This paper therefore adopts a Foucaultian view of corruption as discourse that both constitutes and is constituted by corruption (Foucault, 1980).

Method and sample

This paper draws on data gathered during an international funded project examining the relationship between trust, capacity and accountability to improve learner outcomes in South Africa. The analysis draws on two sources of data: a) Thematic Analysis of a 285 page report into corruption in South African Education: Report of the Ministerial Task Team Appointed by Minister Angie Moeshekga to Investigate Allegations Into the Selling of Posts of Educators By Members of Teachers Unions and Departmental Officials In Provincial Education Departments (Volmink et al., 2016). B) data from focus groups with teachers, head teachers and district officials from a single province.

Data collection from researcher facilitated focus groups with teachers, district representatives and heads of education in (between 18 and 24 participants over 3 sessions), took place during a field work visits in February 2019. The sessions were based in a conference centre and delegates were selected by the provincial Department of Education in collaboration with our local education partner. Four researchers facilitated the focus groups: one based in the province, one based outside of the province but within South Africa and two from European Universities. During these sessions, delegates were asked to identify which elements they felt were responsible for failure of the system to improve pupil outcomes. They were then asked to create diagrams in which they presented the group's shared understanding of the interactions creating pathways to account for poor learning outcomes, attributable to a variety of factors defined by the group. Facilitation of the focus groups was carried out according to an adapted version of Hovmand et al's (2012) script, developed and tested to support groups in building visual illustrations of whole systems (Visscher and Coe, 2003).This approach supported by corruption researchers such as Clammer (2012,p.114), who argue that a systems approach is one that discards the notion that corruption is not just 'an epiphenomenon of forms of social organisation that are manageable by better policing, moral education or institutional adaptation, but is key to understanding the nature of social disorganisation in [….]and how to think about the nature of that disorganisation in fresh ways that will advance our understanding of the endemic occurrence of corruption and point beyond more limited solutions to more systemic ones.'

The sessions included two rounds of discussions in small groups, facilitated by a member of the research team:

Discussion 1: brainstorming variables that constitute the group's shared understanding of the causes of the performance gap between schools in quintile 1-3 versus quintile 4-5.

Discussion 2: discussing sequences: how do variables lead to performance gaps over time?[1]

The outcomes of the sessions were presented in posters and, after the sessions drawn out as causal diagrams in Vensim ® simulation software. The diagrams present a map of a system with all or some of its constituent components and their interactions. 'System' refers here to all the primary schools in South Africa, in a single province within the hierarchy of district, province and national government. A causal diagram presents the group's shared understanding of the causes of the performance gap between schools in quintile 1-3 versus quintile 4-5 and the sequence of variables over time. Ethics clearance was sought and gained from the district and provincial officials, by our partner organization in Johannesburg. The participants were contacted after the event, in order to agree the model and its conclusions, as an accurate report of their discussions. Prior to the activity they also signed ethics agreements in relation to a) Their guaranteed anonymity b) what would be done with the data.

It is important to state that we did not , at any point introduce the idea of corruption to our participants. Where this emerged was purely in relation to the questions in step 1 and 2 above.

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[1] The sessions present sequences of cause and effect to explain performance gaps, but do not include causal feedback loops. In this report we therefore talk about causal diagrams, instead of the causal loop diagrams which are commonly generated as a result of Hovmand's group model building script.

Narratives were then analysed using themes emerging from the core report on corruption (Volmink et al., 2016). As Gupta points out , the discourse of corruption,[..] is mediated by local bureaucrats but cannot be understood entirely by remaining within the geographically bounded area of a sub-district township,'(Gupta, 1995: ,p.376). The advantages of using this report is that it contains an extensive media analysis of reports on corruption in a number of provinces which helps to locate the research within wider national and international discourses on corruption (Volmink et al., 2016). It also draws on extensive testimony from witnesses, which is reveals not only perceptions of the matter in question – the selling of posts of educators by members of teacher unions and departmental officials- but also key discourses around corruption in education more widely. In adopting these methods we investigate a) Participant perceptions of corruption b) Whether perceptions of corruption were also leading to generalised distrust amongst participants.

Factors colouring normative perceptions of corruption in education.

Part 1- Documentary Analysis -Volmink Report

Published in 2016 this 285-page report was commissioned by Minister Angie Motshekga to investigate allegations into the selling of posts of educators by members of teacher unions and departmental officials in provincial education departments. The members of the Ministerial Task Team (MTT) are listed in Appendix 02. It is important to note that the teacher unions specifically asked for this format of investigation, as opposed to a judicial investigation (Volmink et al., 2016: ,p.11), however the inclusion of forensic investigators from an audit firm was thought to lend a certain level of impartiality to the task. The extensive list of evidence collated is located in Appendix 03. In order to carry out their work the MTT was guided by the Prevention and Combating of Corrupt Activities Act 12 of 2004. The general offence of corruption is defined in section 3 of the Act as: *the giving or accepting of any gratification, in order to act in an improper exercise or performance of a power or a duty* (p.18). Furthermore *gratification* is defined by the Act (section 1) to include *any valuable consideration or benefit of any kind, including: money, property, office or honour, employment, service or favour, vote or abstention from voting, forbearance, release from obligation.*

The analysis of evidence contained within an official and extensive report on corruption revealed a number of key discourses of corruption, discussions were prompted by media reports which set a certain tone to the interviews. Key words were extracted from the medial analysis in order to align these terms with the analysis of the discourses of corruption reported by individuals. The number of cases in the report are located in the figure 3 below

Table 1: Cases Investigated by Forensic Team					
PROVINCE	NO. OF SCHOOLS IN PROVINCE AS % OF NATIONAL	NO. OF CASES FINALISED	FURTHER INVESTIGATION NO. OF CASES	WRONGDOING NO. OF CASES	TOTAL NO.	% OF ALL CASES INVESTIGATED
Eastern Cape	23	11	3	1	15	18.5
Gauteng	8.5	1	2	1	4	4.9
KwaZulu-Natal	24.6	7	8	4	19	23.5
Limpopo	16.3	19	1	0	20	24.7
Mpumalanga	7.3	4	0	1	5	6.1
North West	6.4	7	4	7	18	19.8
TOTAL	86.1	43	22	16	81	100

Figure 3 Cases investigated by province. (Taken from Volmink et al, 2016,p:11)

Several themes arose from the analysis of the report; they are illustrated in figure 4. The textual analysis identified five main discourses of corruption within the taskforce report. The first concerned processes and systemic forms of corruption, this included terms such as : bias, unclear systems (lack of clarity in systems and processes), undue influence; human ingenuity- suggesting that this was used in order to circumvent systems and processes; terms associated with lack of professionalism, such as : absenteeism; failure to honour and contravention (this , suggesting the deliberate breaking of rules). The second discourse was one of collusion and patronage, this included terms such as: poor systems (encouraging this); nepotism; undue interference (suggesting that individuals and groups were interfering in processes that were not within their ambit); desirable positions – linking these with higher incidences of collusion; bribery; opportunity- suggesting that when opportunity presented, groups and individuals were unlikely to turn it down; jobs for cash- this derived from a newspaper headline within the report and is used frequently throughout, and finally, manipulation. The third discourse is one of conflicts of interest and poor governance (accountability). This discourse was strongly linked to unions and a narrative which suggests that where process and systems are weak, unions tend to fill the power vacuum; this was associated with negative outcomes in terms of corruption: Lack of professionalism was linked to this discourse as well as the one pertaining to process and systemic issues, this was also associated with the term dubious behaviour/s and the need for stronger deterrents to make up for this apparent lack of ethical behaviour. The fourth discourse was one around power; although this permeated all five major discourses it is worthy of a distinct category due to the powerful language contained within. Terms such as : tricks; ploys; violence; intimidation; tip offs and scams; suggest a dangerous and fear infused system in which whistle blowers are at great personal risk should they choose to uncover issues. The final issue concerns capacity, or lack of capacity. This discourse is infused with terms such as chaos; offences; lack of knowledge; safeguarding and lack of cooperation.

Together the five powerful discourses reflect corruption in both distinct and overlapping terms. The language used within them draws on both media and legal lexicon, with intrinsic rather than extrinsic reference to personal/professional values and ethics permeating all five. The results of the textual analysis form a robust basis to inform analysis of the focus group data.

Figure 4 Most common words associated with key discourses

Part 2- Focus groups

The next element within the study involves focus group exercise with teachers and district officials, as described in the previous section. In order to inform our analysis of the focus group data , we drew upon the five themes emanating from the report (Volmink et al, 2016), in order to inform our analysis of perceptions of corruption : Process and systemic; Collusion and patronage; Conflicts of Interest and poor governance; Power; Capacity issues. Two copies of the diagrams are provided below , for illustrative purposes, the remaining four diagrams are in appendix 01.

District group analysis :

The three sessions with district advisers illustrated differing facets with some overarching and overlapping discourses reflected within them. Figure 5 illustrates perceptions of officials from the district (who include advisers and officials responsible for supporting and monitoring quality of schools and teaching), of reasons for the performance gap. According to this group discourses of low teacher morale infuse the system, these are both cause and effect of issues within the system , some of which linked into particular corruption discourses. They felt that payment for posts and Son of Soil appointments[2] effectively means that; an overall perception that accountability means little, with teachers adopting a 'tick box' approach to compliance, known locally as *Giamfundo,* combined with a lack of monitoring and meaningful feedback on teaching performance combine to create a powerful discourse of teaching as a low status, ill-disciplined activity, with low teacher morale and high absenteeism. Multi-phasing is highlighted as a key issue, with teachers teaching many grades in the same class-this is due in part to the way that schools are funded, and partly because having to practice multiphase teaching is detrimental to quality of learning and teacher morale.
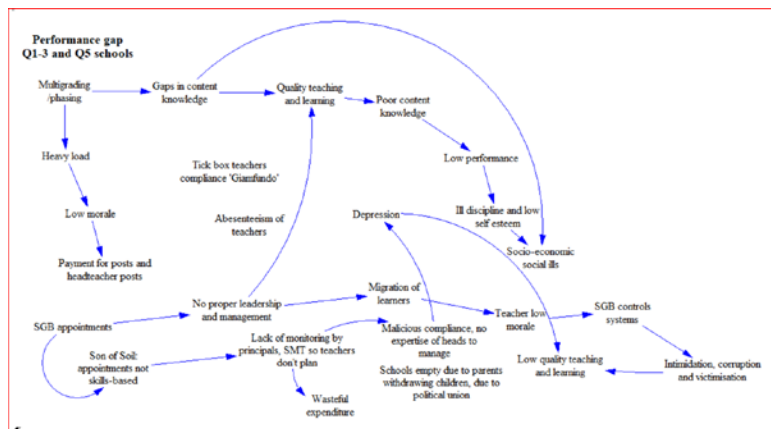

Figure 5 Distrust and corruption District official focus group 1

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[2] Someone who lives in the area is given the job over other applicants who may be far more skilled than the appointed individual
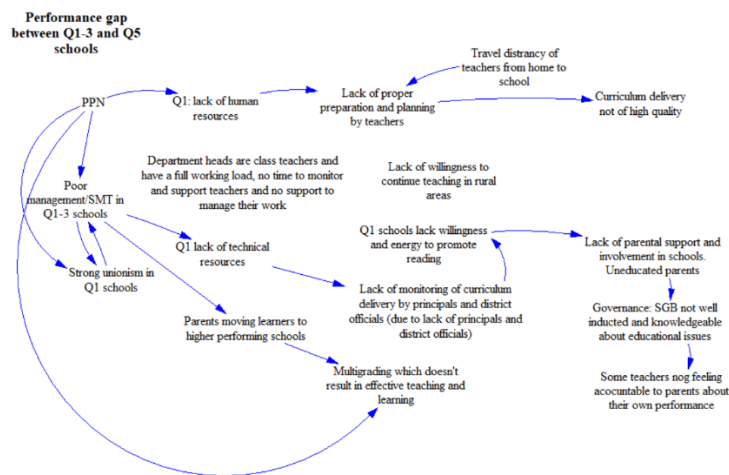
Figure 6 Distrust and corruption: District Focus group 2

Figure 6 tells a similar story , with officials attributing many problems to the funding system (PPN : Post provisioning norms),[3] which result in poor staffing levels for the poorest schools and those located in rural areas (Singh, 2015). This, they believe, results in overload for head teachers, who , as a result have no time to adequately monitor and evaluate/ give feedback to teachers on their performance. As the diagram shows, when schools are deprived of human and material resources, parents are likely to remove children, and go in search of better educational provision. This then reduces funding, which is calculated per child, which then results in more multi-grade teaching, poor learning and further withdrawal of learners.

The final focus group identifies an issue, not so much with corruption but with teacher training, which the group feel, does not adequately equip teachers for the challenges they face in schools. This group felt that poor teaching methods and lack of knowledge on appropriate pedagogies resulted in poor learner behaviours and disruption. Teacher lack of insight into their own performance was partly accountable for the lack of development in this area, and rather than admitting areas of weakness teachers simply did not turn up for work. This, the group felt, was due to a distrusting environment in which parents, governing bodies and senior staff would blame rather than support, struggling teachers. This then set up a cycle of poor performance.

Teacher Focus groups (1 , 2 and 3) (diagrams located in Appendix 01)

Teacher focus groups were focused far more on the effects of poverty on the education system: They reflected particularly on the effects of rural poverty and urban migration, on the education system. Again, the system of PPN appeared not only to be inadequate in rural areas, but in their view , fuelled a cycle of deprivation that in turn, created fertile ground for corruption. A lack of productive accountability from parents and school boards, due to lack of knowledge and poor education, combined with many child headed families ,(due to urban migration, disease and drug, alcohol issues), created trenchant and intractable social problems that consume teachers and heads , leaving little capacity to fully implement the prescribed curriculum. Posts in rural schools , riddled with socio economic issues and poor discipline of learners, become unattractive to teachers, leaving many posts

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[3] PPN is an assessment made by the department of education relating to staffing requirements at a school. The policy essentially aims to adequately proportion teachers and pupil numbers.

unfilled. This then leads to more multi-phase teaching, and erodes quality of teaching and learning , along with teacher morale. Teachers explain how the teaching colleges, proving initial teacher training were closed and how teachers now choose a university subject and additional generic programme with little training in teaching methods (e.g. pedagogy, didactic skills). As a result, the current cohort of teachers have not purposefully chosen a teaching career and often enter the profession for reasons other than to teach (e.g. stable job). The lack of adequate teaching skills leads to issues in curriculum and discipline leading to widespread disruption and in some cases , conflict between school staff and communities, conflict that can spill over into intimidation , physical violence and in extreme cases, death of teachers or head teacher. Corruption is manifest in terms of malicious or tick box compliance with norms and standards by head teachers (who lack the capacity to lead) and teachers , who feel under supported and de motivated. Malicious compliance also emanates from an overcrowded curriculum in which teachers are held to an inflexible timetable of delivery by a Jika Mfundo tracking system. This drives teaching to a pure delivery mode in which all but the most able learners are left behind, as teaching, driven relentlessly by tick box compliance , becomes increasingly didactic. In cases where a teacher falls behind with curriculum, they are asked to provide a recovery plan in which they outline how they intend to make good the backlog. This not only places teachers under untenable pressure, but reduces teaching to nothing but a meaningless exercise.
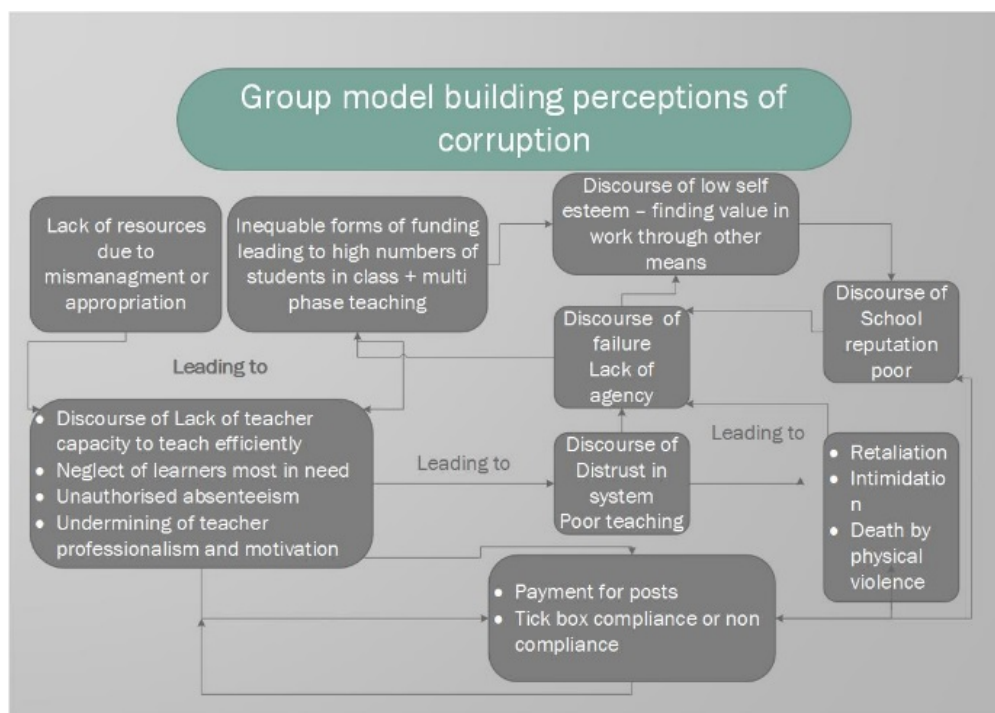
Summary and conclusions.

Figure 7 Focus group Perceptions of Corruption Summary

The focus group sessions illustrated the ways in which perceptions of corruption by teachers led to further discourses that infuse thinking around the ways in which the system is functioning. A key discourse circulating amongst respondents is that of the unfairness of funding and resources within the system; a system which appears corrupt in its ability to provide best for those schools that are already thriving. The funding system is articulated as a form of corruption in its ability to further denigrate struggling schools, leading to : high numbers of students in class; multi-phase teaching, (teaching of multiple ages/different stages of learners in the same class); poor building and premises provision and maintenance; unauthorised absence of teachers and undermining of teacher professionalism and

motivation. This is a discourse of systemic corruption is the exigis as to why deprived schools are further denigrated by a system of funding and accountability that is designed to favour those schools that are already effective. This in turn creates a discourse of generalized distrust in the system, and discourse of demotivation not only amongst teachers, but attributed to them by individuals at district level. This 'discursive construction' of the education system (Gupta, 1995: ,p.375), is accompanied by additional sub-discourses which appear to align with the main discourse of privation and a systemic lack of parity: The sub-discourses appearing through the group model building processes refer to generalised feeling of lack of accountability at all levels of the system. This manifests alongside a discourse of insecurity and the threat of impending violence in reports of selling of posts and concomitant lack of capabilities in senior post holders. The totality of the group model building exercise, designed as it is to capture a snapshot of the system as seen through the eyes of those operating within it , contains a number of discourses of corruption which mirror Gupta's observation that this is a, 'key arena through which the state, citizens, and other organizations and aggregations come to be imagined.'(P, 377). These discourses of corruption and systemic distrust can be viewed as a, 'mechanism through which "the state" itself is discursively constituted' (p.377). Through the focus group work, a feeling of lack of agency of teachers and district officials manifests a relatively passive acceptance of the status quo. A feeling that individuals must make sense of their work whilst working within the confines of a system that fails to support them, and, in many cases, only seeks to apportion blame for its failure to improve the lives of its most vulnerable learners.

The paper set out to investigate which factors colour normative perceptions of corruption in education and to what extent these perceptions undermine trust in the education system. The paper concludes with an exploration of how responses to both questions and can be used to improve trust within the system.

The study viewed corruption as discourse that both constitutes and is constituted by corruption, and distrust as an actor's assured expectation of intended harm from the other' (Lewicki et al., 1998: ,p.446) then with the expectation that a culture of distrust (at both organisational and system level) will be characterised by 'a pervasive, generalized climate of suspicion',(Sztompka, 1998), leading to alienation and passivism. This way of viewing corruption as discourse offered insights into the myriad conceptualisations of what is understood by corruption within this particular context and to gain an understanding of systemic issues that ,either lead to differing forms of corruption as an unintended consequence of the way in which they were set up, or are constructed in such a way as to encourage it. Of the five key factors that were used to analyse the focus group work, three key factors emerge as strong elements within discourses of perceived corruption: The first is the way in which key processes of the education system are set up. Issues around funding and the way in which funds are distributed, both play a key role in exacerbating inequalities and inequity in resources. This then leads to perceptions of power imbalances and lack of trust in the system, as individuals look to maximise opportunity to gain power over scarce resources. This supports You's (2015) argument that corruption and inequality have an adverse impact on norms and perceptions of trustworthiness. The power of school governors, combined with their frequently powerful positions in the community, appear to lead to suspicion and perceptions of possible malpractice. This, combined with the system for making appointments in schools, emerged as a source of deep distrust for respondents. As Gupta (1995) reported in her anthropological study, the discourse of corruption appeared to engage district officials more readily than teachers : The former more willing to discuss the 5 key themes that emerged from the analysis of the Volmink report. The district groups were more active in creating and imagining the state, and the key part it plays in undermining education in South Africa .The format of the group model building allowed participants to create pathways that storified the reasons why learning outcomes were so poor, in this way the constituted a rationale that drew on a number of discourses of both corruption and distrust, bringing both together in ways that one to one interviews cannot. Understanding the ways in which power influences both discourses of corruption and those of distrust,

it is helpful to draw on Foucault's work on power in developing countries (although SA does not strictly fall into this category , it possesses many of these characteristics, given the relatively short time that it has been free of apartheid) . In writing about a new economy of power, he identifies three types of struggle: 'a) Against forms of exploitation (which separate individuals from what they produce). B) Against forms of domination (social ethnic, sexual etc.) c) Against modern forms of subjection – those forms which tie an individual to himself and submit him to others as an individual,'(Escobar, 1984: ,p.377).) As part of the group model building, focus groups made material, a discourse around the effects of perceived domination of the system by certain individuals and groups – unions and governing bodies for example- and in so doing, created a discourse of distrust in which the particular conditions of its existence were dictated by the system in which it appears to flourish. However this discourse may only be partially understood by those who both constitute and are constituted by it, as in the case of teachers who may not be privy to the same level of information available to district and circuit officials, yet who tap into various forms of the national discourse on corruption and distrust, melding and adapting it to fit their particular set of circumstances. In this way these discourses constitute a picture of the context in which the individual is operating.

The distrust that these discourses of corruption provoke did reflect in dialogues of marginalisation throughout the narratives and lead to feelings of lack of agency, or alternatively the creation of new discourses in which work of the individuals is valued. This, in turn contributes to a discursive logic for failure, and in turn leads to new understandings and rationalisation of work roles (Potter, 1987).

The implications of this study for knowledge are twofold : Firstly , the use of group model building sessions constitutes a discourse which brings together the two variables : corruption (and how it is constituted) and trust /distrust, in such a way that lends valuable insights to those tasked with looking to improve pupil learning outcomes. It enables an understanding of the broad conditions in which work in education is being carried out. However, it does not reveal how individuals are managing and manoeuvring in such a system- in order to interrogate this, individual interviews allow for more forensic levels of investigation. The historical context of education in South Africa- as an instrument of oppression and apartheid; understandably infuses current discourses – for example; the unions that were instrumental in bringing the present government to power, continue to exert powerful influences within education, and featured consistently in the Volmink report (2016), were barely mentioned in the focus groups, which were far more focused on systemic issues and processes and how they negatively affect the system, and the working lives of those within it. This emphasis is important for policy makers in examining how these systemic issues can be addressed in order to offer more agency and parity, which in turn will render organizational and systemic climate, far less conducive to the infusion of corruption in all its forms.

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Appendix 01

Additional diagrams – causal factors.
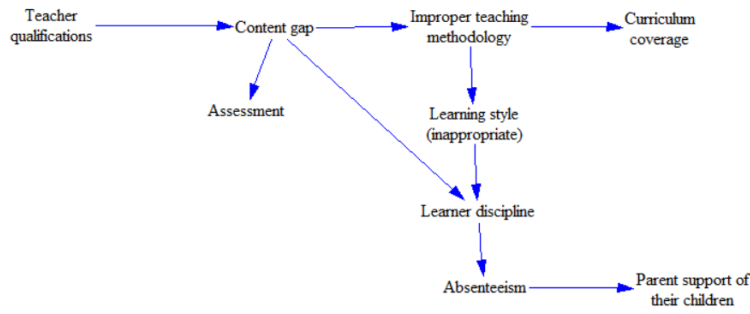
**Performance gap
Q1-3 and Q5 schools**

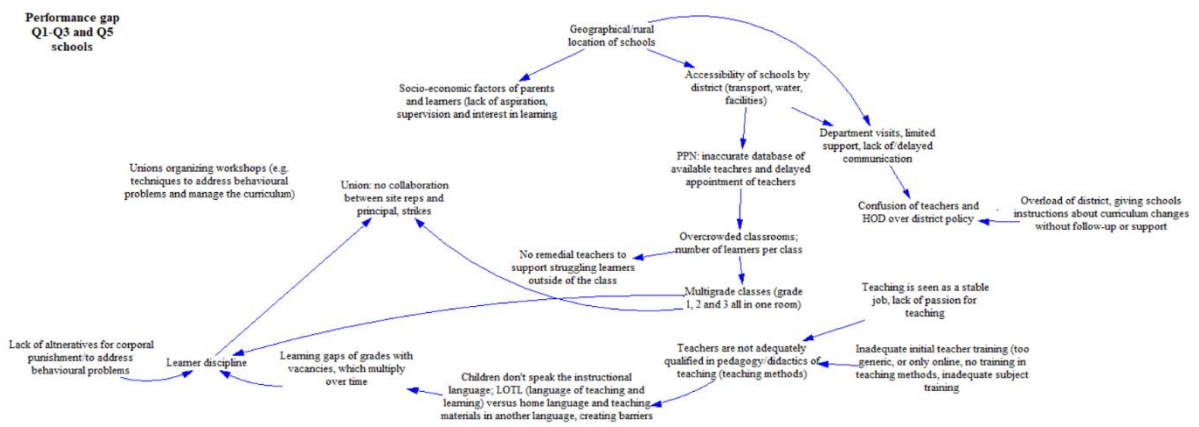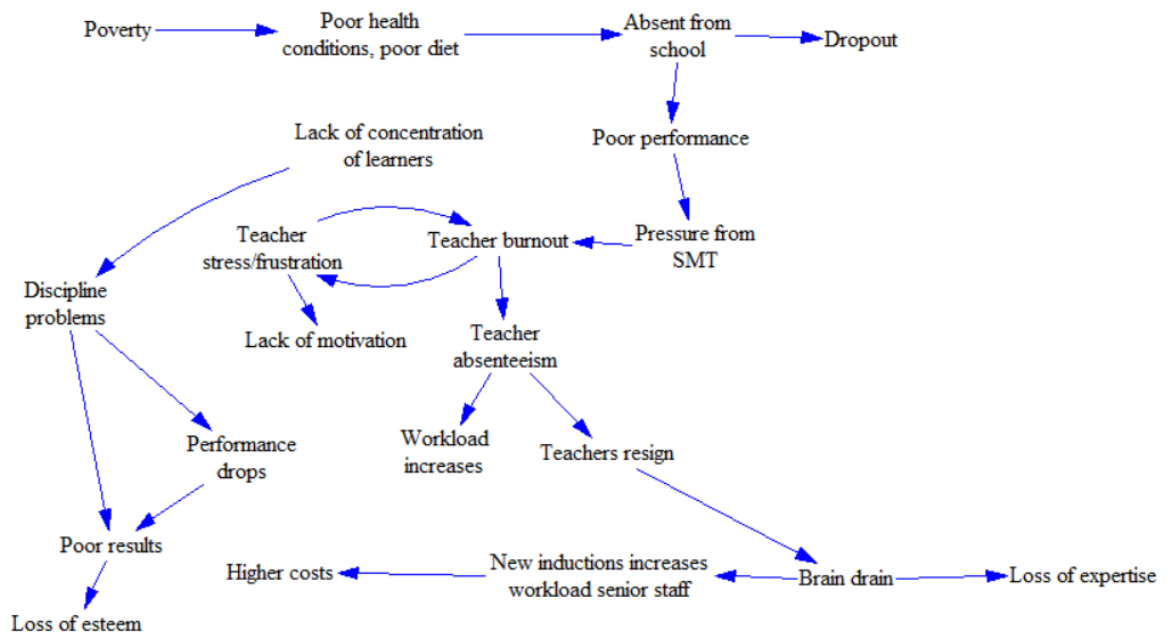*Figure 8 Distrust and Corruption District Focus group 3*

Figure 9 Teacher group 1
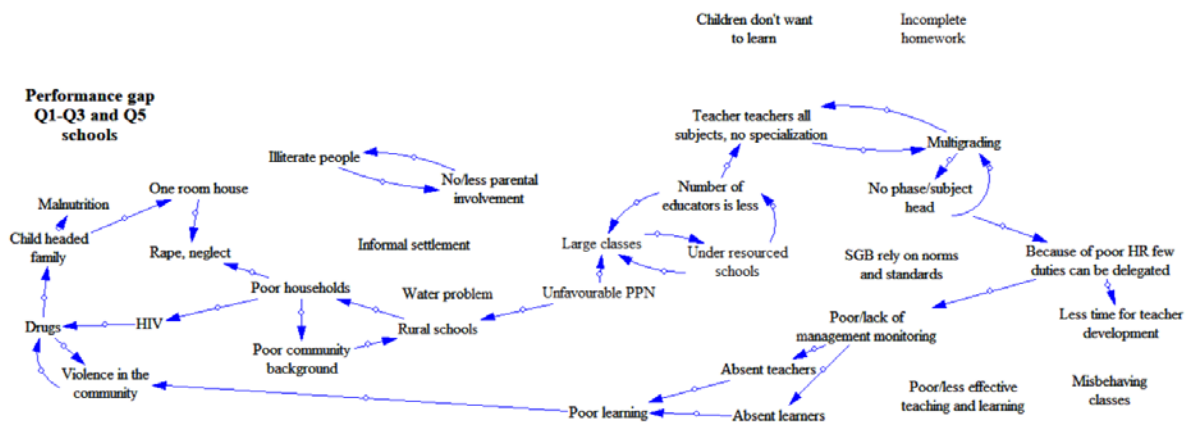
Figure 10 Teacher group 2

Figure 11 Teacher group 3