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# **FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' WORK ENGAGEMENT**

**By**

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## **Abstract**

Many South African teachers are demotivated and have low levels of work engagement. A number leave the teaching profession. Others are frequently absent due to depression and ill-health. These factors all impact negatively on teaching and learning in schools. Work engagement can be described as a positive work-related disposition of fulfilment that is characterised by dedication, vigour and absorption. The aim of this study is to explore teachers' lived experience of work engagement. The objectives are to investigate teachers' lived experience of how selected schools promote teacher work engagement, identify teachers' lived experience of challenges in their work engagement and provide possible suggestions to enhance teachers' lived experience of their work engagement.

This study is underpinned by the interpretive phenomenology of Heidegger (1962). Semi-structured focus group interviews were used to generate the data. Three Gauteng schools from different contextual settings, viz a rural, urban and affluent suburb respectively, were selected for this study. The data generated were analysed using a set of phenomenological procedures.

The research indicates that several factors, such as making a difference, teaching as more than just teaching, teacher interaction, communication, workload and the role of the Department of Education, serve as mostly positive but also negative practical influences on teachers' lived experience of their work engagement. Psychological, i.e. emotional or cognitive, factors such as passion for the profession, strong commitment and the role of God also serve as strong drivers influencing teachers' lived experience of work engagement. The practical factors align with the fundamental principles of social exchange theory. However, the psychological factors go beyond the tenets of social exchange theory. The study concludes with potential practical implications of the findings and further research possibilities.

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<b>List of abbreviations</b>
DoE – Department of Education
SGB – School Governing Body
SMT – School Management Team

## **Chapter one: Orientation of the study**

### **1.1 Introduction**

The aim of this research study is to explore the phenomenon of teachers' lived experience of work engagement in the context of South African public primary schools.

This chapter introduces my study. I discuss the following aspects in this chapter:

- The historical context,
- The research context,
- Personal context,
- Aim and objectives,
- Introduction to the research methodology, and
- An overview of the dissertation.

### **1.2 Historical context**

Many teachers in South Africa are demotivated (Dehaloo & Schulze, 2013:238) and are likely to display low levels of work engagement. Teachers are unsatisfied with workloads, salaries, opportunities for career advancement (Maniram, 2007:4), unworkable policies (Kallaway, 2007) and poor interaction between the School Management Team (SMT) and staff (Dehaloo & Schulze, 2013:226). South African teachers who experience work disengagement might exit the teaching profession (Maniram, 2007:4), resign or leave on early retirement (Naicker, 2010:184), or be frequently absent due to stress, ill-health, or depression. They have poor engagement in the classroom which in turn results in poor teacher performance and unenthusiastic learners, portray a lack of passion and dedication to teaching, and experience frustration which lead to conflict with the SMT (Dehaloo & Schulze, 2013:236).

From a general Google, Google Scholar, National Research Foundation and library data bases search, it became evident that there is a lack of research investigating teachers' lived experience of work engagement in South African schools. Research on the work engagement of teachers in South Africa is needed (Dehaloo & Schulze, 2013:226). The following section gives a brief discussion of the research context.



### **1.3 Research context**

With the ever changing and increasingly competitive environment in organisations, including schools, they face considerable challenges in their strive towards success. Employee work engagement may be the answer to achieve a competitive advantage (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:3). Evans (2015:7) describes competitive advantage as employees who are engaged and willing to perform beyond what is set out in their job description. Bakker and Schaufeli (2008:147) state that engaged employees can make an essential difference when it comes to organisational performance, competitiveness, organisational success and innovation.

The focus of modern organisations is on the governance and administration of their employees (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008:147). In a quest to deliver high quality services, employees are required who are willing to go beyond the line of duty (Evans, 2015:8). Cleland, Mitchinson and Townend (2008:10) see engaged employees as the foundation of a well-managed working environment where the employees are ethical, accountable and industrious. Organisations expect their employees to show initiative and be proactive, to take responsibility for their own professional development, collaborate well with others and to be committed to top quality standards of performance (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008:147). Employees need to have high levels of energy, be dedicated and enthusiastic and be absorbed by their work (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008:210; Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008:147).

In his book "Human Resource Champions", Ulrich (1997:125) states that: "employee contribution becomes a critical business issue, because in trying to produce more output with less employee input, organisations have no choice but to try to engage not only the body, but the mind and soul of every employee." Leadership within organisations are encouraged to recognise this and refrain from leadership styles which could lead to the disengagement of employees who seek empowering and collaborative management and encourage a willingness to go beyond the line of duty and innovation (Bates, 2004:2; Evans, 2015:8).

The concept of employee work engagement is not new. The first mention of employee work engagement in academic literature came from Kahn's (1990) conceptualisation

of employee work engagement. Khan (1990) and Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001) provide the two earliest theoretical frameworks for understanding employee work engagement. Khan's (1990:694) framework focuses on how employees psychologically experience work and how the work context shapes the process of employees presenting and absencing themselves during the tasks they perform. Maslach et al. (2001:399) base their framework on a psychological syndrome based on job burnout in response to constant on the job interpersonal stressors. Saks (2006:600) conducted the first academic research to test and conceptualise an empirical model of the effects and antecedents of employee work engagement based on social exchange theory, which I draw on to inform my study. This theory is discussed in more detail in Chapter two. He was the first to provide an important link between early practitioner and academic theories of employee work engagement.

The effects of employee engagement are exactly what most organisations are seeking, employees who are less likely to be absent, less likely to leave the organisation, more willing to engage in voluntary efforts, are healthier, safer, profitable and productive (Schuck & Wollard, 2010:90). Organisations are encouraged to consistently treat the development of an engaged workforce as an organisational priority (Ketter, 2008:45).

Employee work engagement is a growing topic. It is conceptualised differently in different disciplines. For Macey and Schneider (2008a:4), the biggest challenge around employee work engagement is how it should be defined. There is no one clear and agreed definition of employee work engagement (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:5). Much has been written about the concept of employee work engagement, but very little rigorous academic research has been done (Shuck & Wollard, 2010:91). In the next section I discuss my personal context.

#### **1.4 Personal context**

The rationale for me venturing into this study on teacher work engagement is rooted in my own personal experience as a teacher, Head of Department, Deputy Principal, member of two SMTs and member of a School Governing Body (SGB). Being in the teaching profession for 21 years, public and private, I experienced many levels of work

engagement. I experienced many drivers of and barriers to work engagement. When I first entered the teaching profession as a teacher in 1998, I had no sense or understanding of work engagement, all I knew was that I had to work hard, that teaching is not your average 9-5 job and that you do not earn a lot of money. As I progressed through my journey in this profession, I developed a deep-seated passion for teaching. I started to experience teaching as a calling, as a way of life. I had my fair share of challenges along the way, with moments where I also actively disengaged from the profession. I never truly understood why teachers engage or disengage from their work until I was promoted to Head of Department and later to Deputy Principal at a neighbouring school, became a member of two different SMTs and became a member of an SGB. With these promotions I became part of the teachers' lives on a much higher level, influencing their experience of the profession – influencing their passion, emotions, commitment and dedication. This experience of reality and influence guided my venture into this study of teachers' lived experience of work engagement. The next section presents my aim and objectives.

### **1.5 Aim and objectives**

The aim of this study is to explore teachers' lived experience of work engagement.

The objectives are to:

- Investigate teachers' lived experience of how selected schools promote teacher work engagement,
- Identify teachers' lived experience of challenges in their work engagement, and
- Provide possible suggestions to enhance teachers' lived experience of their work engagement.

In the following section I give a short introduction to my research methodology.

### **1.6 Introduction to the research methodology**

I used the interpretive phenomenology of Heidegger (1962) as my preferred research method to explore the lived experience of teachers' work engagement. Three Gauteng primary schools from different contextual settings, viz rural, urban and suburb

respectively, were selected for the study. Forty-six teachers and SMT members with a variety of experience, gender and age participated in the study. I used semi-structured focus group interviews instead of traditional interviews which are conducted with only one participant and one interviewer. According to Bradbury-Jones, Sambrook and Irvine (2009:663), within the frame of a phenomenological study an individual's lived experience can be preserved in the context of a focus group. The data were analysed using a set of phenomenological procedures (Groenewald, 2004:50; Van der Mescht, 1996:61; Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015:11). The last section provides an outline of the dissertation.

### **1.7 Outline of the dissertation**

This dissertation is divided into six chapters.

#### Chapter one: Orientation of the study

Chapter one introduces the reader to my study on the phenomenon of teachers' lived experience of work engagement. I discuss the historical and research context, my personal rationale and the aim and objectives of my study. I also provide a short introduction to the research methodology and present an overview of the dissertation.

#### Chapter two: Literature review

In Chapter two I review research on employee work engagement from practitioner, academic and consultancy perspectives, the effects of employee work engagement on organisations and employees, variations in employee work engagement, drivers of and barriers to employee work engagement, employee work engagement measurement, how organisations can create a work engagement culture and employee work engagement research needs. I also discuss the theoretical framework of social exchange theory, that informs my study.

#### Chapter three: Methodology

In Chapter three I discuss the research design and methodological approach I use for my investigation. I discuss the research paradigm, the research method, participant selection, data construction, data analysis, ethical implications, trustworthiness of my research and I present a critique of my methodology.

Chapter four: Presentation and analysis of the data

Chapter four presents the data constructed from semi-structured focus group interviews with teachers and SMTs. In this chapter I present a brief discussion of the contextual settings of the participating schools, construction of the data, analysis of the data and a presentation of the resultant themes.

Chapter five: Discussion of findings

In Chapter five, I discuss the main findings which emerge from the data. This discussion is informed by my literature review and shaped by my research aim and objectives. In this chapter, I discuss the practical and psychological influences on teachers' lived experience of work engagement. I also draw on social exchange theory to provide a theoretical orientation to my findings.

Chapter six: Conclusion

In Chapter six, I provide a conclusion to my study on the phenomenon of teachers' lived experience of work engagement. I provide a summary of the dissertation where I emphasise the "answer" to my research question, suggest possible implications of my findings for schools that want to promote teachers' lived experience of their work engagement and offer further research possibilities.

### **1.8 Closing summary**

The focus of Chapter one is to introduce and orientate the reader to my study on the phenomenon of teachers' lived experience of work engagement. I start with presenting the historical context, the research context and my personal rationale. I then present the aim and objectives for this study. Next, I present a brief introduction to my research methodology. Lastly, I provide an overview of this dissertation. In Chapter two I present a review of the literature related to employee work engagement.

## **Chapter two: Literature review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The aim of my research study is to explore teachers' lived experience of work engagement. Due to the dearth of research on teacher work engagement, specifically in South African schools, I draw mostly on international business literature in my literature review. This review explores:

- Employee work engagement from practitioner, academic and consultancy perspectives,
- The effects of employee work engagement on organisations and employees,
- Variations in employee work engagement,
- Drivers of and barriers to employee work engagement,
- Employee work engagement measurement,
- How organisations can create a work engagement culture, and
- Employee work engagement research needs.

I also discuss the theoretical framework that informs my study.

### **2.2 Descriptions of employee work engagement**

As a concept, employee work engagement has developed over time and has been defined in several and sometimes inconsistent ways, so much so that the term has become ambiguous. It is rare to find two individuals who define it in the same way (Macey & Schneider, 2008a:3-5). This section considers descriptions of employee work engagement from practitioner, academic and consultancy perspectives.

#### **2.2.1 The practitioner perspective**

Employee work engagement in organisations is very important as this is where the theory of work engagement is ultimately put into practice. Practitioners in organisations offer great insight into how employee work engagement is viewed and used at grassroots level (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:6). The following are

examples of how practitioners define employee work engagement (these definitions are drawn from organisation websites):

The National Health Service sees work engagement as:

A measure of how people connect in their work and feel committed to their organisation and its goals. People who are highly engaged in an activity feel excited and enthusiastic about their role, say that time passes quickly at work, devote extra effort to the activity, identify with the task and describe themselves to others in the context of their task, think about the questions or challenges posed by the activity during their spare moments, resist distractions, find it easy to stay focused and invite others into the activity or organisation. (NHS National Workforce Projects, 2007)

The University of York suggests that:

Employee engagement goes beyond job satisfaction and is not simply motivation ... employee engagement is a combination of commitment to the organisation and its values plus a willingness to help out colleagues. (University of York, 2017)

These definitions reflect work engagement as something given by the employee to the benefit of the organisation. No mention is made of a mutual relationship between the employer and employee and what the organisation offers the employee to enable work engagement (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:9). These definitions mostly refer to the effort and time employees are willing to spend on their work, their attachment, commitment and loyalty to the organisation, by constantly finding ways to add value, showing pride in and support for the organisation. Employee work engagement is seen as a step higher than satisfaction or motivation (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:9). The next sub-section explores how employee work engagement is defined from an academic perspective.

### **2.2.2 The academic perspective**

Academic research on employee work engagement offers different perspectives seeking to apprehend the different characteristics of work engagement from its drivers

to the influence on the performance of the organisation. Macey and Schneider (2008a:5) propose that some researchers define employee work engagement in terms of an emotional or cognitive disposition, a psychological state, while others define employee work engagement in terms of the behaviour it produces. These divergent perspectives illustrate the different uses of the term employee work engagement in academic literature.

#### Work engagement as a psychological state

Khan (1990) is credited with the seminal definition of work engagement as a psychological state. A great deal of academic research on work engagement is influenced by his proposed definition. Khan (1990:694) defines employee work engagement as, “the harnessing of organisation members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances”. Through qualitative research with architects and summer camp counsellors, he examined the workplace environment in which employees may engage or disengage in the organisation. He found that emotionally and cognitively engaged employees, demonstrate a complete connectivity of themselves to their work role and the organisation. He proposed that engaged employees, are more willing to devote considerable personal resources, such as effort and time, to complete their tasks successfully (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:10; Saks, 2006:602). He states that work engagement is at its best when an individual is driving “personal energies into physical, cognitive and emotional labours” (Khan, 1990:700). Similar to Khan (1990), Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001:417) describe work engagement as a “psychological and emotional state” and as a “persistent, positive affective-motivational state of fulfilment”. For Rothbard (2001:656), work engagement is to be “intensely focused and absorbed in one’s work”. Czarnowsky (2008:6) defines work engagement as, “employees who are mentally and emotionally invested in their work and in contributing to their employer’s success”.

#### Work engagement as a behavioural outcome

As stated, some researchers define employee work engagement as a psychological state, while others define employee work engagement in terms of the behaviour it produces. With a focus on the outcomes of work engagement, Macey and Schneider (2008a:6, 14) define work engagement as “discretionary effort or a form of in-role or



extra-role effort or behaviour". According to them this involves adaptive and innovative employee performance and a willingness from the employee to go "beyond preserving the status quo, and instead focus on initiating or fostering change in the sense of doing something more or different" (Macey & Schneider, 2008a:24). Work engagement can be described as a mutual or two-way relationship between the employer and the employee, where both the employer and employee are willing to "go the extra mile" for each other (Lockwood, 2007:3; Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:11; Robinson, Perryman & Hayday, 2004:4).

Although academic definitions pay more attention to the psychological state of work engagement, they are consistent with practitioner definitions in that they also focus on the behavioural effect of employee work engagement (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:11). Academic definitions describe engaged employees as being charged with energy, focused, fully involved in their work, absorbed, doing something different, being innovative and fostering change (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:11).

Balain and Sparrow (2009:7) note that academic definitions are problematic in the sense that they do not provide a clear explanation of how employee work engagement is distinct from other concepts such as work commitment and job involvement. Hallberg and Schaufeli (2006:119-120) conducted research to ascertain whether measures of work engagement could differentiate between measures of work commitment and job involvement. They found that all three are separate constructs reflecting distinct characteristics of work attachment. Robertson-Smith and Markwick (2009:50) state that work commitment and work engagement are frequently used interchangeably. However, work commitment lacks characteristics, such as absorption and self-expression, which are generally associated with work engagement. May, Gilson and Harter (2004:12) propose that work engagement is conceptually distinct from job involvement. They suggest that work engagement includes emotional and physical elements, whereas job involvement is purely a cognitive act. They also argue that job involvement may be an outcome of employees being intensely engaged in their work. Work commitment and job involvement may be contained within work engagement as a concept and may be a result of work engagement, but work engagement is an individual concept and not a combination of work commitment and

job involvement (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:51). The following section focuses on how consultancies perceive employee work engagement.

### **2.2.3 The consultant's perspective**

Most definitions of employee work engagement are found in the consultancy literature. The following are examples:

The Ixia consultancy defines employee work engagement as:

Employees feeling safe and secure enough to be their best selves at work, to bring their “whole” selves to work, and to feel respected and valued for “who they are being” in their job role and responsibilities. It is also about feeling connected to something bigger by way of feeling part of something that matters and at the same time feeling that individual contribution matters, that individuals can and do make a difference to the bigger picture. (Cleland et al., 2008:4)

Towers Perrin believes that employee work engagement involves both:

Emotional and rational factors relating to work and the overall work experience. The emotional factors tie to people's personal satisfaction and the sense of inspiration and affirmation they get from their work and from being part of their organisation ... for instance ... having a strong sense of personal accomplishment from one's job. The rational factors, by contrast, generally relate to the relationship between the individual and the broader corporation; for instance, the extent to which employees understand their role, and their unit's role, relative to company objectives. (Towers Perrin, 2003:5)

Robinson et al. (2004:4) propose a comprehensive definition of employee work engagement:

A positive attitude held by the employee towards the organisation and its values. An engaged employee is aware of business context and works with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organisation. The organisation must work to develop and nurture

engagement which requires a two-way relationship between employer and employee.

As with the practitioner and academic definitions, consultancy definitions also define employee work engagement as an emotional or cognitive disposition with numerous positive outcomes for the organisation, but they also consider the role an organisation plays to enable work engagement. The role of the organisation is to help their employees feel safe and secure without fear of consequence and cultivate cultures that value, respect and encourage their employees (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:14).

From the literature reviewed, several definitions of employee work engagement exist. These definitions overlap, with some different emphases and some distinguishing aspects. This incoherent approach to define employee work engagement has lent itself to misconception and misinterpretation. Saks (2006:602) defines employee work engagement as: “a distinct and unique construct consisting of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components that are associated with individual role performance” within the organisation. Shuck and Wollard (2010:103) propose an “emergent” definition of employee work engagement. Similar to Saks’ definition, they regard employee work engagement as, “an individual employee’s cognitive, emotional, and behavioural state directed toward desired organisational outcomes”. Although there are significant differences and similarities in the understanding of what employee work engagement represents from the different perspectives, they also agree on some aspects. They all, to varying degrees, define work engagement by its outcomes (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:15). Macey and Schneider (2008a:4) argue that there exists a communality amongst all the different definitions of employee work engagement, irrespective of the perspective, which fundamentally portrays employee work engagement as a “desirable condition that has an organisational purpose and connotes involvement, commitment, passion, enthusiasm, focused effort and energy, so it has both attitudinal and behavioural components”. In the next section I review the effects of employee work engagement on the organisation and the individual employee.

## **2.3 Effects of employee work engagement**

Johnson (2004:1) states that “employee work engagement is a hard-nosed proposition that not only shows results, but can be measured in costs of recruitment and employee output”. Many of the sub-sections to follow lend themselves to a far deeper review of employee work engagement research, but due to the length limitations of this chapter they cannot be discussed in more depth.

### **2.3.1 Effects on the organisation**

#### Customer engagement

Robertson-Smith and Markwick (2009:17) suggest that employees who are engaged and experience a sense of happiness in their work are more likely to relay the same emotions to their customers and create loyal or engaged customers. Similar research findings by Bates (2004:2) state that where there is an emotional and mental connection between the organisation or employee and the customer; the engagement of the customer will be the effect.

#### Employee retention

Robertson-Smith and Markwick (2009:17) suggest that employees who are engaged and who experience a sense of happiness in their work are more likely to stay in the organisation. Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner and Schaufeli (2001:510) state that employee work engagement is positively related to the commitment of the employee towards the organisation.

#### Employee performance

Employee performance is positively affected by work engagement (Khan, 1990:692). According to Lockwood (2007:3) employees who are engaged are willing to work harder, are likely to be more devoted towards the organisation and are also more likely to “go the extra mile” for the organisation. From research done in several public service organisations, Sonnentag (2003:525) found that elevated levels of employee work engagement encourage employees to take initiative and pursue personal development.

### Promotion of the organisation

Research from the Scottish Executive Social Research (2007:23) found that engaged employees are willing to promote the organisation as a positive place to work. Engaged employees will actively promote the services and products of the organisation.

### Manager performance

Luthans and Peterson (2002:384-385) find that engaged employees within an organisation are more likely to respond positively to their managers, show good performance and achieve success. This in turn will help the manager to be more effective and increase performance. Managers become enthusiastic about their employees which enhances their performance and their ability to build an engaged work team.

### Organisational performance

Harter, Schmidt and Hayes (2002:268) state that by increasing employee work engagement and fostering a culture of support, it can significantly increase the possibility of business success. According to Robinson, Hooker and Hayday (2007:26) the employees who perform the best in an organisation tend to be those employees with the highest work engagement scores.

## **2.3.2 Effects on the employee**

### Expectations

The ever-changing environment in today's workplace has introduced a transactional proposal to the work relationship between employee and employer (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006:201). Where an employee once expected a job for life and promotion in exchange for their loyalty and commitment, employers now tend to offer higher salaries and increased skills development in exchange for the employee's efforts. This change in organisations has frustrated employees, who are questioning the significance or importance of their work and seek more fulfilment from their employment. Work engagement may serve as a solution to oppose this frustration and might provide employees with the opportunity to invest themselves in their work (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:20-21). The sense of self-efficacy within

employees has also been suggested as an effect of employee work engagement (Seijts & Crim, 2006:2).

### Well-being

Employee work engagement may lead to a positive attitude towards work and the organisation (Rothbard, 2001:662). Gallup (2001:3) suggests that the employee's level of support for the organisation will increase if the organisation is perceived as a healthy place to work: "engaged employees are more likely to view the organisation and job as a healthy environment and therefore more likely to support the organisation". In the next section I discuss variations in employee work engagement and why some employees are more likely to engage in their work than others.

## **2.4 Variations in employee work engagement**

How employees experience and perceive work engagement differs between individuals and is likely to vary daily within one individual (Khan, 1990:693; Sonnentag, 2003:518). This section looks briefly at aspects which may influence variations in employee work engagement.

Employee work engagement survey scores are influenced by biographical factors such as gender, age, disability and caring responsibility (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:24; Sinclair, Robertson-Smith & Hennessey, 2008:11-14). According to research done by Robinson et al. (2007:4-7), at eight different organisations over a range of sectors, the following was revealed:

- In some organisations women appeared to be slightly more engaged in their work than men.
- The highest work engagement levels were amongst those under the age of 20 years and those 60 years and older.
- Disabled individuals, in general, revealed higher engagement levels than those with no disability or medical defect.
- The lowest engagement levels were overall with those employees with caring responsibilities towards adults, but employees who both cared for children and adults reported the highest levels.

Balain and Sparrow (2009:27) state that employee work engagement levels vary according to biographical factors such as the age and gender of the employee, as well as work-related factors such as how new an employee is in the organisation, the work hours, the remuneration the employee receives and where the employee is geographically situated in the organisation.

Different values, different attitudes towards work, different demands and expectations employees have of their work and their employers, and individual attitudes and traits are also factors that can influence how likely employees are to engage (Macey & Schneider, 2008a:23; Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:25). Some employees may have personality traits which are work engagement orientated, such as being conscientious, proactive and having a self-motivated personality. These characteristics of an employee are likely to provide them with a tendency towards work engagement but may also cause the employee to experience hardship if they are prevented from engaging (Macey & Schneider, 2008a:23). Kular, Gatenby, Rees, Soane and Truss (2008:10) state that individual personality traits and differences impact work performance and work engagement. They argue that when employees experience different situations in their work environment, it is individual personality traits and differences that will determine the level to which employees will engage or disengage. They also argue that individual personality traits influence the perception process and personal perceptions of employees' physical and social environment, which will direct and shape the level of work engagement. Khan (1990:718) states that different emotional and cognitive levels can influence an employee's potential to either engage or disengage in their performance role, the same as these emotional and cognitive levels form and influence an employee's willingness and ability to become involved in or be passionate about their work. He also argues that employees might engage differently taking into account their personal experiences of how meaningful they see their work, how safe they feel at their work and how emotionally available they are in their work.

Emotional experiences and well-being can also be related to employee work engagement (May et al., 2004:12). Wilson (2004:99-100) argues that "feelings connect us with our realities and provide internal feedback on how we are doing, what we want and what we might do next ... Being in organisations involves us in worry, envy,

sadness, boredom, excitement and other emotions”. Emotions are an inherent part of all employees’ “psychological make-up” and not only affect their personal lives but also how they will behave at work (Kular et al., 2008:10).

Johnson (2004:4) states that with the changes in work environment, technology and employees’ lifestyle expectations, organisations need to be adaptable. Employees bind themselves to their chosen lifestyle and not the work they do. As work engagement begins with employees’ lifestyle and what they perceive to be worth investing in, work engagement is perceived to be something that is given by the employee and not taken by the employer (Johnson, 2004:4; Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:26). The next section explores drivers of and barriers to work engagement.

## **2.5 Drivers of and barriers to employee work engagement**

### **2.5.1 Drivers of employee work engagement**

To identify what drives employee work engagement and enables engaged behaviour is just as difficult as defining employee work engagement in a single definition (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:29). Many different employee work engagement drivers are suggested in the literature. A “one size fit all” approach towards the drivers of work engagement cannot be followed (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:40). Organisations differ from one another in aspects such as the culture of an organisation (Lockwood, 2007:4), the levels of trust, integrity and respect (Conference Board, 2006:6; Lockwood, 2007:4), the different individual personality traits of the employees (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:24), biographical factors (Sinclair, Robertson-Smith & Hennessy, 2008:11), the work itself (Conference Board, 2006:6) and the reputation of the organisation (Lockwood, 2007:4). According to Robinson et al. (2007:24-26), work engagement levels in an organisation are influenced by employee experiences, personal characteristics and job characteristics. Key drivers of employee work engagement follow.



### Nature of the work

The nature of the employee's work has an influence on their level of work engagement (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:40). It is important that the work be challenging and varied to utilise old and new skills (Cleland et al., 2008:6; Conference Board, 2006:7; Guest, 2014:151). Employees need to perceive their work to be creative and exciting (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006:203).

### Purposeful and meaningful work

To promote work engagement, employees must perceive their work to be important, having a clear purpose and meaning for others and for themselves (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:40; Robinson et al., 2004:21). Employees need to feel they make a difference and feel proud of their work (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006:204; Cleland et al., 2008:6; Conference Board, 2006:6). To promote purposeful and meaningful work, a clear understanding towards the importance of the employee's role to the success of the organisation is required (Guest, 2014:152; Seijts & Crim, 2006:3).

### Opportunities for development

Employees need to have equal access to growth and development opportunities to enable them to engage with their organisation (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006:204; Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:40). Development needs to be encouraged with continuous feedback structures to address development needs as they arise (Cleland et al., 2008:6). Employees need to have the necessary skills for their work to perform well, and their roles in the organisation should contain work for which they have the skills and knowledge, but with leeway to acquire new skills (Evans, 2015:31). Engaged employees display confidence and feel empowered in their work role and create opportunities to function at their best (Robinson et al., 2004:25).

### Reward and recognition

Receiving rewards and recognition is important for employee work engagement (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:41). Salary is important, but it rather prevents disengagement than promotes work engagement (Tietjen & Myers, 1998:227). Employees need to feel valued and appreciated in the work they do (Evans, 2015:32; Guest, 2014:152). Both reward, such as salary, and recognition are based on Herzberg, Maunser and Snyderman's (1959) motivation and hygiene factors.

### Good relationships

There should be good and mutual relationships among co-workers, and between employees and managers. Good relationships can be achieved by demonstrating trust and allowing autonomy (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:41; Robinson et al., 2004:26; Seijts & Crim, 2006:5). A key requirement for work engagement is mutual respect and trust between employees and managers (Cleland et al., 2008:6; Conference Board, 2006:7; Guest, 2014:153). Employees want to be respected and the culture in the organisation needs to support this (Lockwood, 2007:4-5).

### Good communication

Employees need to understand how their role contributes to the values and goals of the organisation (Evans, 2015:39). They need to feel well-informed about what is happening in the organisation (Guest, 2014:154). Through open two-way communication between employees and managers, such as “upwards feedback” without fear of repercussion, employees feel empowered (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006:204; Cleland et al., 2008:6; Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:41). Including employees in the decision-making processes enable them to be heard and instil a sense of ownership over the effects (Conference Board, 2006:6; Lockwood, 2007:5). This driver is strongly influenced by McClelland’s (1961) theory of (learned) needs.

### Effective leadership

Leaders are perceived to promote work engagement when they promote confidence, autonomous decision making, clear goals and accountability, while providing employees with constructive feedback (Lockwood, 2007:4-5; Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:41-42). Leaders, who adopt a collaborative management style and act with integrity, fairness and honesty, as well as fostering a sense of involvement and value, enable work engagement (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006:205; Cleland et al., 2008:6; Seijts & Crim, 2006:4). Leaders need to be visibly committed to the organisation and display genuine responsibility towards the wider community and their employees, especially in relation to their well-being (Evans, 2015:40; Guest, 2014:154; Robinson et al., 2004:26-27).

## Job and personal resources

Job and personal resources play a fundamental part in the work engagement of employees. Job resources function as an intrinsic motivator as these resources promote employees' development and learning. Job resources can also function as an extrinsic motivator as they are significant in achieving work-related objectives. Job resources can be described as the physical resources and organisational environment in which the employee works, with communal encouragement from co-workers, leadership assistance or coaching and constructive feedback on work performance. Job resources play a cardinal role when job demands become high. Job demands relate to pressure at work and the physical, emotional and mental demands of the work (Dehaloo & Schulze, 2013:226).

Personal resources are intrinsic and refer to the employees' level of confidence, strength, flexibility, self-efficacy and self-respect. These employee resources are not easy to change (Dehaloo & Schulze, 2013:226). Job and personal resources are intertwined as they can, to a lesser or greater extent, motivate an employee towards work engagement and positively impact work performance (Dehaloo & Schulze, 2013:227; May et al., 2004:18).

### **2.5.2 Barriers to employee work engagement**

Much of the reviewed literature focuses on work engagement drivers, but there are also barriers to employee work engagement. Two prominent factors in the literature are heavy workloads and bureaucracy. Lockwood (2007:9) states that bureaucratic behaviour from leadership within an organisation may severely impede the work engagement potential of its employees. Together with being over-worked, bureaucratic behaviour may increase an employee's vulnerability to stress and may become a barrier to employee work engagement.

Robertson-Smith and Markwick (2009:38-39) state that factors such as the encouragement and support of co-workers and managers, positive feedback and autonomy can promote work engagement, but factors such as poor communication, unfairness, little or no autonomy, poor administrative practices which lead to role ambiguity, job insecurity and work overload can become barriers to work engagement.

They also state that jobs with no room for diversity or progress, inflexible jobs which are particularly stressful, intimidation from managers, a lack of trust in management and long work hours with no or little break time can become barriers to work engagement.

An employee's emotional or cognitive availability at work is also seen as another factor that can create a barrier towards work engagement. When an employee's emotional or cognitive availability is low, work engagement is also low. Research done by May et al. (2004:18-19) indicates that activities which take place outside the workplace may have the potential to drain employees' vigour from their work and make them less emotional or cognitive available for their work roles. According to them, employees can only give so much of themselves to their varied life roles, and employees with a significant number of activities external to their work will find it more difficult to engage with their work than employees with fewer activities. Macey and Schneider (2008b:83) state that employees cannot use their energy at the highest level all the time. Employees need to recover and rest to ensure their continued well-being. If employees do not relax on a regular basis, they will find it progressively difficult to engage. To promote work engagement, it is important for organisations to ensure the well-being of their employees and encourage employees to foster a healthy balance between life and work (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:40). The next section considers how employee work engagement is measured.

## **2.6 Measuring employee work engagement**

Work engagement is a measurable construct. There are numerous employee work engagement measuring instruments available for organisations, to benchmark their levels of work engagement. Balain and Sparrow (2009:26) state that work engagement measuring instruments are used periodically and serve as a mechanism to encourage employee feedback and gauge the success of an organisation. However, due to the variance in the definition of employee work engagement and the different requirements of every organisation, there is likely to be a wide variation in what is actually measured (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:43). This section provides a brief snapshot of three current measurement instruments used to measure

employee work engagement. All of these instruments use a quantitative research approach.

### **2.6.1 Current measuring instruments**

#### Gallup Workplace Audit (q12)

The Gallup Workplace Audit is based on the work of Buckingham and Coffman (1999). They have derived 12 questions to measure employee work engagement from thousands of focus groups across 2 500 healthcare, business and education organisations. The questions address issues such as friendships at work, recognition and praise, being listened to, encouragement to develop, having the resources to perform well and understanding what is expected of you at work (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999:42-47).

#### Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES)

The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale is based on Maslach et al., (2001) engagement-burnout model. In this model work engagement is described as a work-related disposition of positive fulfilment that is characterised by dedication, vigour and absorption (Schaufeli, Bakker & Salanova, 2006:702). The UWES consists of three scales each of which measures the three constructs – dedication, vigour and absorption (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:46).

#### Workplace Insight Tool (WIT)

The Workplace Insight Tool, designed by Best Companies (2017), is a survey that measures employee work engagement. The focus of this instrument is to see how an organisation can improve work engagement levels in specific areas. The key focus areas are trust, listening and flexible working hours. Data from this survey is analysed to find a correlation between areas that need to change and employee work engagement (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:46). The following section looks briefly at how organisations can create a culture which is supportive of employee work engagement.

## **2.7 Creating a work engagement supportive culture**

Many organisations face considerable challenges to improve their performance. The question is, “How can this be done?” According to Robertson-Smith and Markwick (2009:3) part of the answer may lie in the promotion of employee work engagement.

In an attempt to address the challenges to improve organisational performance and to create an organisational culture which is supportive of employee work engagement, organisations are advised to become aware of the factors that have been found to enhance work engagement (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:53):

- Work engagement is a two-way relationship and commitment. Both the employer and employee are encouraged to understand, that to develop work engagement, requires a mutual relationship. Promoting employee work engagement necessitates commitment and dedication between both the employer and employee (Johnson, 2004:2). Organisations are encouraged to create cultures where employees are not scared to provide “upwards feedback” and have open and honest communication on all levels (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:54).
- Organisations are encouraged to understand their employees’ motivations, expectations and needs to promote employee work engagement. It is particularly important to clearly define the purpose and meaning of each role within the organisation. By doing this, the organisation can design jobs where employees are stimulated and challenged, are granted decision making autonomy, have access to job resources and have access to opportunities for development and growth (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:54).
- Organisations are encouraged to be dedicated to the well-being of their employees and the wider community (Evans, 2015:40; Guest, 2014:154; Robinson et al., 2004:26-27). Employees are more likely to engage if they see and understand that the organisation is committed in making a positive difference to their employees and the wider community (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:54).
- Leadership plays a vital role in enabling and promoting work engagement through the supply of ample support and development for employees.

Management is advised to be committed to fair and transparent policies and undergo adequate development in how to effectively implement these policies (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:54).

- Organisations are encouraged to relate the importance between organisational outcomes and employee contribution (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:54). Organisations are advised to communicate and explain the value of employee contribution to the success of the organisational outcomes to all employees with a coherent link between organisational outcomes and employee contribution (Guest, 2014:152; Seijts & Crim, 2006:3).

The next section identifies from the research literature, methodological gaps in employee work engagement research.

## **2.8 Future research**

Most research on employee work engagement has utilised a survey methodology, to identify overall trends from individual scores. Qualitative research approaches would offer in-depth insight into employee perspectives and a better understanding of the nature of employee work engagement (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:55). My qualitative study is intended to help fill that void. Very little is known about employee work engagement. For example, there are few models to conceptualise the effects and “antecedents” of employee work engagement (Shuck & Wollard, 2010:105).

Surveys tend to take snapshots of a phenomenon. There is a need for longitudinal research on employee work engagement, for example to identify links between employee work engagement and organisation performance. This is likely to determine long term effects and benefits of employee work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008:219).

The importance of organisation and group leadership in employee work engagement is clearly indicated in the literature. Effective leadership is an important work engagement driver and leaders potentially have the most influence on employee work engagement (Robinson et al., 2007:25). However, it is unclear from the literature how leaders do this and what is distinctive about such leadership. Such research might help identify what kind of leadership development could help leaders better engage

their employees (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:55). The last section looks at the theoretical framework which informs my study.

## **2.9 Theoretical framework**

There are two streams of research that can provide a theoretical foundation for employee work engagement. The first is Khan's (1990) theory on psychological conditions influencing employee work engagement. In his qualitative research with architects and summer camp counsellors, Khan (1990) examined the workplace conditions in which employees may engage or disengage in the organisation. According to his research there are three conditions related to work engagement or disengagement: emotional and cognitive availability, work meaningfulness and safety at work. He found that employees who are emotionally and cognitively engaged, experience meaningfulness in their work and feel safe at their workplace, demonstrate a complete connectivity of themselves to their work role and the organisation (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:10; Saks, 2006:602). May et al. (2004:12-13) did an empirical study to test Khan's (1990) theory and similarly found that emotional and cognitive availability, work meaningfulness and safety at work were notably associated to employee work engagement.

The second theory derives from Maslach et al.'s (2001) research on job burnout which illustrates employee work engagement as an effective "antithesis" to burnout. According to their research there are six aspects of work-life which may lead to employee work engagement or burnout: workload, control, reward, community, fairness and values. They state that employee work engagement is related to a workload that is sustainable, a sentiment of control and choice, relevant reward and recognition, a work community that is supportive, justice and fairness from management and work that is valued and meaningful. They argue that work engagement is required to link and mediate between these six work-life aspects and varied work outcomes (Maslach et al., 2001:413-416).

Even though Khan's (1990) and Maslach et al.'s (2001) theories both demonstrate the "antecedents" or conditions required for employee work engagement, they do not completely unfold why employees will react, in varying degrees, to these conditions of



work engagement. A more plausible theoretical argument for understanding employee work engagement can be found in social exchange theory (Saks, 2006:603). Social exchange theory is seen as one of the most influential conceptual paradigms to understand behaviour in the workplace (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005:874).

Social exchange theory contends that commitment is initiated through a sequence of interactions between people who are in a position of mutual interdependence. One of the fundamental principles of social exchange theory is that relationships between people develop over time into mutual, trusting and loyal commitments. This will happen as long as both parties follow particular rules of exchange (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005:874-875). These rules of exchange normally include restitution or reciprocity rules such that the efforts of one party, leads to the efforts or reaction by the other party. As an example, when an employee receives financial and “socio-emotional” resources from the organisation, the employee feels obligated to react in kind and remunerate the organisation (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005:874-875). This is similar to Lockwood (2007:3), Robertson-Smith and Markwick (2009:11) and Robinson et al.’s (2004:4) interpretation of employee work engagement as a mutual or two-way relationship between the employer and the employee.

Their level of work engagement is one way for employees to remunerate the organisation. In reaction to the resources employees receive, they choose – to varying degrees – to engage themselves to the organisation. A very ardent way for employees to react to the efforts of the organisation is for employees to bring themselves completely into their work role and devote considerable amounts of physical, cognitive and emotional resources (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:10; Saks, 2006:603). For employees it is more challenging to change their work performance levels taking into account that work performance is frequently assessed and applied as the premise for remuneration. Employees are more inclined to exchange work engagement for resources provided by the organisation (Saks, 2006:603).

Social exchange theory renders a theoretical framework explaining why employees choose to become engaged or disengaged in their work and the organisation. Both Khan’s (1990) and Maslach et al.’s (2001) theories on the “antecedents” and conditions of work engagement can be seen as the financial and “socio-emotional”

exchange resources within social exchange theory. In receiving these resources from the organisation, employees feel obligated to react and remunerate the organisation with higher levels of work engagement. Viewed from Khan's (1990) definition of work engagement, employees feel obligated to bring themselves fully into their work role as remuneration for the resources received from the organisation. If the organisation fails in providing these resources, employees will become more inclined to disengage from their work role and the organisation. The amount of physical, cognitive and emotional resources employees are willing to devote towards the performance of their work roles are conditional on the financial and "socio-emotional" resources provided by the organisation (Saks, 2006:603).

## **2.10 Closing remarks**

The goal of this chapter was to systematically review the literature on employee work engagement and create a better understanding of its complexity within organisations. Bakker and Schaufeli (2008:147) recommend that work engagement in organisations be put on the research agenda. There is a dearth of studies investigating teacher work engagement in South Africa and research is needed to investigate factors that could influence teacher work engagement (Dehaloo & Schulze, 2013:226).

A lack of teacher work engagement translates into negative behaviour. Many South African teachers experience work disengagement and leave teaching (Maniram, 2007:4). They indicate a wish to resign or leave on early retirement (Naicker, 2010:184), are frequently absent due to stress, and suffer from depression or ill-health. They have poor classroom-engagement which result in poor teacher work performance and unenthusiastic learners, portray a lack of dedication and passion in their teaching and experience frustration which leads to conflict with leadership (Dehaloo & Schulze, 2013:236). Teachers are unsatisfied with heavy workloads, poor salaries, little opportunity for career advancements (Maniram, 2007:4), unworkable policies (Kallaway, 2007) and negative relationships between the staff and leadership (Dehaloo & Schulze, 2013:226).

Work engagement is defined as a positive work-related disposition of fulfilment that is characterised by dedication, vigour and absorption (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008:209).

Instead, many teachers in South Africa are demotivated and have low levels of work engagement (Dehaloo & Schulze, 2013:238). With the ever-changing environment in schools, schools face considerable challenges in their pursuit towards success. The promotion of teachers' lived experience of work engagement may be part of the answer in managing these challenges and pursuit towards success (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:3). In Chapter three, I describe the research design and methodology I use in this study.



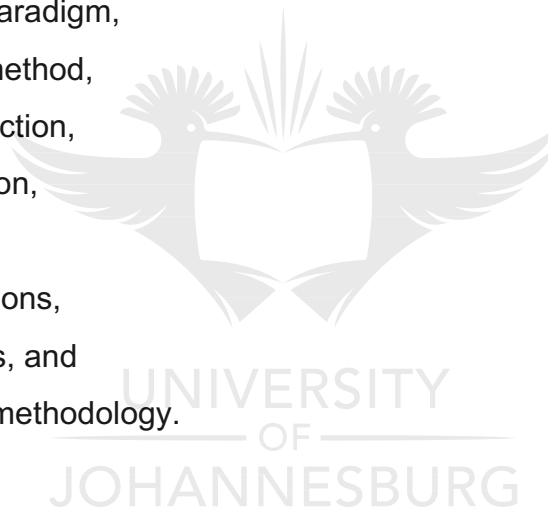
## **Chapter three: Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The aim of my study is to explore teachers' lived experience of work engagement. My objectives are to investigate teachers' lived experience of how selected schools promote teacher work engagement, identify teachers' lived experience of challenges in their work engagement, and provide possible suggestions to enhance teachers' lived experience of their work engagement.

The focus of this chapter is on the research design and methodological approach I used for my investigation. The following aspects are discussed:

- The research paradigm,
- The research method,
- Participant selection,
- Data construction,
- Data analysis,
- Ethical implications,
- Trustworthiness, and
- Critique of the methodology.



### **3.2 The research paradigm**

Mackenzie and Knipe (2006:193) state that the term paradigm can be used to describe the “worldview” of a researcher. This “worldview” consists of the beliefs, thoughts, thinking or perspectives that inform the interpretation or meaning of the research data. The research paradigm intrinsically reveals the beliefs that a researcher has about the world in which he or she lives.

Based on the article “Understanding and applying research paradigms in educational contexts” by Kivunja and Kuyini (2017:26-28), a research paradigm contains four essential elements: “epistemology, ontology, methodology and axiology”. It is

important to understand these elements, as they contain the primary beliefs, assumptions, values and norms of the paradigm.

### Epistemology

The epistemology of a research paradigm is focused on the very foundation of knowledge. Epistemology in research is used to describe the nature and form of knowledge, how knowledge can be gained and how knowledge can be communicated. Epistemology focuses on the essence of human knowledge and how the researcher can acquire this knowledge to gain a deeper understanding of the research phenomenon (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017:27).

### Ontology

The ontology of a research paradigm is concerned with the essence of reality or existence, the assumptions human beings make to believe that something is real and how things relate to each other. Ontology examines the underlying belief system of the researcher. Ontology helps to conceptualise the essence and form of reality and what can be believed to be known about that reality (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017:27).

### Methodology

The methodology of a paradigm refers to the research design, method, procedures and approaches used in the study. Selection of participants, data construction and the analysis of the data are all parts of methodology. The focus of methodology is to communicate the flow and logic of the processes used in conducting a research study to acquire knowledge about the research phenomenon (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017:28).

### Axiology

Axiology addresses the question of ethical behaviour in research and refers to the ethical implications that need to be observed during the research process. Axiology includes understanding, evaluating and defining aspects of behaviour that are either right or wrong to the research. Axiology contemplates the value the researcher will assign to the individual facets of the research, the data, the participants and the reader to which the results of the research will be reported (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017:28).

There are several dominant research paradigms that have been presented by researchers, namely positivist, interpretive, critical and pragmatic (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017:30). Due to my study being located in the interpretive paradigm and embracing interpretive assumptions about epistemology, ontology, methodology and axiology, I will only briefly discuss the interpretive paradigm.

### Interpretive paradigm

The primary aim of the interpretive paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience (Cohen et al., 2007:21). The interpretive paradigm aims to interpret and understand what the participants are thinking and what meaning the participants give to their experiences in its context. Focus is placed on understanding every individual participant and how they interpret the world in which they live (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017:33).

In relation to the study of how individuals experience and perceive the world in which they live, an interpretive paradigm goes further than just a mere explanation of primary concepts. It looks for interpretations rooted in day-to-day life practices. The focus of an interpretive paradigm is not on what individuals know but on what they experience (Lopez & Willis, 2004:728).

There is a significant connection between a research paradigm and the research methodology. The choice of paradigm has methodological implications. It permeates the research method, the participant selection, the research questions, the data construction and the data analysis.

Phenomenology is not only a philosophy, but also a research method. There are several styles or perspectives of phenomenology. These styles or perspectives have some commonalities, but they also have distinguishing characteristics. These styles or perspectives of phenomenology, locate their diverse character in the positivist, post-positivist, interpretive and constructivist paradigms (Dowling, 2005:131). In the next section I will discuss interpretive phenomenology of Heidegger (1962) as my preferred research method.

### **3.3 The research method**

Heidegger's phenomenology focuses on human experiences as they are lived (Dowling, 2005:133). The primary focus of Heidegger (1962:29) is on the relation of individuals and their "lifeworld". The realities of individuals are inevitably guided by the world in which they live (Lopez & Willis, 2004:729). Heidegger (1962:78) used the term "being-in-the-world" to accentuate that individuals cannot dissociate themselves from the world in which they live.

Van Manen (1984:37) describes phenomenological research as the "study of the lifeworld – the world as we immediately experience it, rather than as we conceptualise, categorise, or theorise about it". He states that the focus of phenomenological research is to move closer to a "deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of everyday experiences". With interpretive phenomenological research, the researcher examines the sense participants make of their experiences within the context of their individual, cultural, social, historical and political background (Van der Mescht, 2004:2; van Manen, 1984:40).

Understanding that phenomenology is not only a philosophy, but also a research method. It has a different meaning to different individuals, especially the "subjective and qualitative character of phenomenological research", which led researchers to assign any qualitative or interpretive research as phenomenological. This generic use of phenomenology is particularly problematic when distinguishing other qualitative perspectives, such as participatory or ethnographic research which is also predominantly interpretive orientated, from phenomenology (Van der Mescht, 2004:2). As a research method, interpretive phenomenological research has unique characteristics which distinguish it from other qualitative perspectives:

- Interpretive phenomenology includes concepts such as reduction, intentionality, essences and description (Ehrich, 2005:3) with description being fundamental to construct a "holistic picture" of the phenomenon (Van der Mescht, 2004:3).
- The aim of interpretive phenomenology is to construct understanding "into human experience" (Ehrich, 2005:3).

- The “self” may be used as a starting point, relying on other sources or others to construct data (Ehrich, 2005:4).
- Interpretive phenomenology focuses on the “lived experience” and how participants “language” their intellectual, emotional and physical “being-in-the-world” (Van der Mescht, 2004:2-3).
- With interpretive phenomenology the researcher focuses on the “dialogue of individuals with their contexts” and not on the participants or the phenomenon, as the “reality” of the participants is not explicitly available to the researcher (Van der Mescht, 2004:2).
- The outcome of an interpretive phenomenological research study is a piece of writing unfolding and capturing the essence of the experience of the phenomenon (Ehrich, 2005:3).

With my research I aim to explore the lived experience of teachers’ work engagement rooted in their day-to-day life practices. In an attempt to address this aim, an interpretive phenomenological research approach appeared to be an appropriate method. The next section looks at how I selected the research participants.

### **3.4 Participant selection**

Understanding that this is an interpretive phenomenological study, purposive selection was used to select the schools and participants. I deliberately selected these schools and participants, as they portrayed characteristics and features which enabled me to explore and understand the central theme of my study (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003:78). The aim or central theme of my study is to explore teacher work engagement. The selected schools were primary schools performing well academically, based on the latest published Annual National Assessment results. Additionally, sport and cultural levels were considered, based on the latest league and competition results.

Three schools, from different contextual settings viz a rural, urban and an affluent suburb respectively, in Gauteng, were selected for this study. From these three schools forty-six teachers and SMT members participated in the study, with a variety in experience, gender and age (See table 1 for detail). With assistance from the



principals at the three schools, participants were selected focusing on constructing focus groups with an adequate spread and balance in experience, gender and age.

<b><u>Participants</u></b> (6 focus groups with 46 participants)	<b><u>Experience levels</u></b> (Between 1-40 years of work experience)	<b><u>Gender groups</u></b> (34 female and 12 male participants*)	<b><u>Age levels</u></b> (Between 23-63 years of age)
School A: Teacher focus group	Between 1-31 years of work experience	9 female and 1 male (10 participants)	Between 23-54 years of age
School A: SMT members focus group	Between 8-38 years of work experience	3 female and 3 male (6 participants)	Between 36-61 years of age
School B: Teacher focus group	Between 5-33 years of work experience	7 female (7 participants)	Between 28-56 years of age
School B: SMT members focus group	Between 14-40 years of work experience	3 female and 4 male (7 participants)	Between 39-63 years of age
School C: Teacher focus group	Between 3-21 years of work experience	7 female and 1 male (8 participants)	Between 26-44 years of age
School C: SMT members focus group	Between 16-36 years of work experience	5 female and 3 male (8 participants)	Between 41-59 years of age
* The female to male ratio is uneven with 34 female and 12 male participants who participated in the study. Official statistics released by the Department of Basic Education (RSA, 2011:17) indicated that there are 2.6 female teachers for every one male teacher in public schools in Gauteng.			

Table 1. Details of participants

Next, I discuss the data constructing methods I used for this study.

### **3.5 Data construction**

I gathered data of the research phenomenon in context, using semi-structured focus group interviews (Kothari, 2004:7, 97; Shenton, 2004:64-65). Semi-structured interviews give the advantage of obtaining in-depth data, also allowing more flexibility to restructure questions and the adaptation of the interview language (Kothari, 2004:97-99). Two interviews of approximately 90 minutes each with two focus groups, one with teachers and one with SMT members, were scheduled at each school. With the intent of making the participants feel comfortable and to encourage them to speak openly, the interviews with the focus groups were conducted at their respective schools and in the language of their preference, which was Afrikaans.

My interview questions were structured and guided by research done by Seidman (2006) in his book "Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences". The focus of the interview questions was to understand the lived experiences of the participants and what meaning they give to their lived experience of teacher work engagement (Seidman, 2006:9). I structured the interview questions in a manner that enabled the participants to reconstruct their own lived experience of teacher work engagement within the context of their school (Seidman, 2006:15). I used my interview questions as a heuristic, rather than a series of questions. I used four open ended questions divided into three parts. The first part placed the participants' lived experience in context and focused on their life history. In this part I asked the participants how they came to teaching as a profession and to talk about their past teaching experiences. In the second part I focused on the participants present lived experiences in their teaching profession. Here I asked the participants to reconstruct what they actually do in their work and what is it like for them to do what they do every day. The last part focused on how the participants understand their lived experiences and to reflect about the meaning of their experiences in the teaching profession. Here I asked the participants to tell me what the teaching profession means to them, what drives them and what could enhance their work engagement (Seidman, 2006:17-19).

I used focus group interviews instead of traditional interviews which are conducted with only one participant and one interviewer. According to Bradbury-Jones,

Sambrook and Irvine (2009:663) within the frame of a phenomenological study an individual's lived experience can be preserved in the context of a focus group. They argue that focus groups are compatible with a phenomenological study and propose that focus group interviews are favourable to phenomenology. They state that focus group interviews open up new perspectives and stimulate discussions. Focus group interviews use group interaction as a method to encourage participants to talk to each other, exchange stories and ask questions. Group interaction, during focus group interviews, is especially useful for probing participants' lived experiences, "exploring not only what they think, but how they think and why they think that way" (Kitzinger, 1995:299). The focus on interaction between participants sets focus group interviews apart from other forms of interviewing (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2009:665). Focus group interviews can present a wider understanding of the phenomenon studied (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2009:663). Focus groups are simply group interviews, capitalising on communication between participants (Kitzinger, 1995:299), with the primary intention being to gather data where the phenomenon under study is placed at the centre of the dialogue in the group (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2009:665, 667). The main advantages of focus group interviews based on research done by Bradbury-Jones et al. (2009:666-667) are: They

- Allow participants to share and elaborate on issues raised.
- Provide a setting in which participants are encouraged to interact and clarify dialogue, which can be seen as a means to enhance the credibility of the research.
- Allow participants to hear the ideas of others and help them to construct their own views which enable participants to elaborate on their views or defend them if challenged (Kitzinger, 1995:299).
- Allow participants time to reflect while other members are speaking, before adding their own perspectives.

I chose to use focus group interviews in an attempt to gain a richer and deeper understanding of the participants' lived experience of teacher work engagement.

With my focus group interviews, the relationship between myself as researcher and the participants was jointly constructed. I shaped the interviews, but I was also shaped by the participants and the research process. With an interpretive phenomenological

methodology, I became engaged in a process of mutual interpretation with the participants (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2009:666-667).

During my focus group interview sessions at the three schools I experienced the participants talking to each other and not only answering my questions. The participants shared their “lifeworld” with me and the group. They shared stories and openly discussed issues or matters that came up, asking questions where necessary to clarify statements. I experienced the atmosphere during the sessions with the teacher groups as positive, relaxed and open, while the sessions with the SMT were also positive and open, but slightly more formal. In all the sessions I experienced a strong sense of pride, passion and emotion in relation to the teaching profession and work engagement.

During the sessions I observed the participants listening to each other and sometimes even changing their original statements, after hearing what other participants had said. I observed participants folding their arms and leaning back in their chairs, frowning and shaking their heads when not agreeing with a statement made. I observed participants moving to the edge of their chairs, barely containing their excitement to make a statement or comment on something that was said. I observed emotions such as laughter and even crying when talking about certain issues. In conclusion, I can state that all participants participated in these sessions, even those that were reluctant to be part of the dialogue at first or felt they had nothing to say. The following section provides a short description of the steps I followed in analysing the data.

### **3.6 Data analysis**

Based on the work done by Giorgi (1997), the data I recorded via audio recording of the focus group interviews were transcribed. I then translated the transcripts from Afrikaans to English, as Afrikaans was the language of preference for all the participants. I followed a process of phenomenological reduction and researcher reflexivity (bracketing), where I set aside my own predispositions and prejudgments towards the phenomenon. In this process I read through the data repeatedly to gain an intuitive and holistic understanding of the phenomenon (Groenewald, 2004:50; Holroyd, 2001:2; Van der Mescht, 1996:60; Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015:10). I focused on

understanding what a person was saying, rather than what I expected the person to say (Cohen et al., 2007:471).

In analysing the data, I followed the following phenomenological steps:

- Delineating units of meaning

In this step I summarised the raw data from all the participants to find “Natural Meaning Units” (See Appendix 2 for a sample of the explication of the NMUs). I identified parts with relevant meaning for the phenomenon and extracted these statements. I then carefully scrutinised the relevant units of meaning and eliminated statements that were overlapping, repetitive or irrelevant to the phenomenon (Cohen et al., 2007:471; Groenewald, 2004:50; Holroyd, 2001:2; Van der Mescht, 1996:61; Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015:11).

- Grouping units of meaning to form themes

In this step I identified units that have only one meaning and have significance towards the phenomenon. I then grouped these units together to form unique or central themes (Cohen et al., 2007:471; Groenewald, 2004:50; Holroyd, 2001:2-3; Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015:11-12).

- Contextualise themes

In this step I wrote a textual descriptive narrative of the participants’ lived experiences of the phenomenon within their lived context. (Cohen et al., 2007:471; Groenewald, 2004:51; Holroyd, 2001:3; Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015:12). These descriptive narratives aim to provide a life context to the participants’ lived experience of the phenomenon and give “uniqueness of the phenomenon” as it is experienced by the teachers’ collective lived experience (Van der Mescht, 1996:98).

- Synthesis of the themes

In the last step, I synthesised all the narratives from the groups as a whole, to construct an in-depth interpretation of the participants’ lived experiences of the phenomenon. The objective of this last step was to capture the essence of the lived experience of the phenomenon (Ehrich, 2005:3; Holroyd, 2001:3; Van der Mescht, 1996:99; van Manen, 1984:41; Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015:12-13).

The next section looks at the ethical considerations concerning my study.

### **3.7 Ethical implications**

One of the criteria for a research design includes the adherence to research ethics. In any research study there are ethical implications that need to be considered. With the nature of qualitative research sometimes raising unanticipated issues, ethical implications have a distinct “resonance” in qualitative research studies (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003:66). Ethical implications relate to accepted rules and principles that guide research. Ethical implications consider and place an emphasis on the sensitive and humane treatment of participants (Strydom, 2011:122). Willis (2007:112) states that requirements in research ethics stem from three principles, “autonomy, non-maleficence and beneficence”. This implies that I, as researcher, have to fully explain the intent of my research and protect and respect the rights of the participants. As a qualitative researcher I need to be sensitive to ethical rules and principles, due to the focus of my research topic, my data construction methods and my relationship with the participants. The ethical guidelines I followed included: informed consent, confidentiality, briefing of the participants, voluntary participation, avoidance of harm and avoidance of deception.

In conducting my research in an ethical manner to ensure quality and trustworthiness, I applied for ethical clearance from the Faculty of Education at the University of Johannesburg. I was granted permission and awarded an ethical clearance number (Ethical clearance number: Sem1 2018-004). I also had to obtain permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct my research at the three schools. I also obtained permission from the principals of the three sample schools. I met with the principals to explain the purpose of my study and to discuss any concerns regarding my research. During these meetings I assured the principals of the steps I will follow to ensure anonymity and confidentiality during and after completion of my research.

#### **Informed consent**

For me to obtain informed consent from the principals I had to provide them with adequate and relevant information on what my research will entail. I provided them with information such as the possible advantages of participating in this study, the procedures I would be following, the expected duration the participants would be involved in my research and my integrity as a researcher. To ensure that the principals

fully understood the details of my research I provided them with a copy of my proposal and ethics clearance documents. I discussed these documents with them and gave them the opportunity to ask questions. After the discussion an informed consent form was signed by each principal.

### Confidentiality

At the beginning of my research I explained to the participants that all the data I gather would be treated with the necessary privacy. I assured the participants that all the data constructed would be kept private and only used for my study. I requested from the participants to respect one another's confidentiality. This would help build trust among the participants, especially when it comes to dealing with delicate issues among staff. How the data would be used was also communicated to the participants. I explained to the participants that one of the objectives of this paper is to provide possible suggestions to enhance teacher work engagement. I ensured personal privacy by not using any real names of the participants, I instead use pseudonyms where applicable. I also withheld the names of the schools to ensure the protection of their identities. I only referred to the schools as school A, B or C.

### Briefing of participants

Before I started with my focus group interviews I had a short briefing session with the participants to provide them the opportunity to ask questions or raise any concerns regarding my research. During this session I encouraged the participants to talk freely about their perceptions and experiences of teacher work engagement. I requested from the participants to also respect and value one another's perspectives and experiences. I explained to the participants that they would have access to the findings of my research and they could contact me if they had any questions or concerns after our interview sessions.

### Voluntary participation

Participation in this research was voluntary. I explained the possible advantages or impact of my research to the participants and informed them that their participation in this research is voluntary. This provided an opportunity to the participants to withdraw from the research.

### Avoidance of harm

I explained to the participants that they may experience unintentional emotional or psychological discomfort during our focus group interviews due to the nature of the questions asked. I ensured the participants that none of the interview questions were intended to embarrass and harm them, or cause any fear, anxiety or distress. I asked the participants to inform me if they experienced any emotional discomfort or distress at any point during the interviews, so that I could adjust the line of questioning accordingly.

### Avoidance of deception

At no stage during my research process did I mislead any of the participants by intentionally manipulating facts or withholding information through verbal instructions or actions, in an attempt to ensure participation by the participants. The data constructed, presents a true reflection of what emerged during my focus group interviews. The following section provides a description on how I ensured trustworthiness in my research.

## **3.8 Trustworthiness**

To ensure trustworthiness of my research, Lincoln and Guba's (1985, 1989) criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability and authenticity were used. To apply these criteria, I first explain what trustworthiness refers to. The primary intent of trustworthiness is for the researcher to convince the reader, including him- or herself, that the findings of the study are important enough to pay attention to or interesting enough to take account of (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:290). To establish trustworthiness, Lincoln and Guba (1985:290) state that the researcher should convince the reader of which arguments can be presented, which criteria can be cited and which relevant questions were asked that would be persuasive in this study.

From a traditional positivist research paradigm perspective, criteria such as reliability, validity, generalisability and objectivity are used to assess research quality (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005:6). Conventionally, researchers will ask the following four questions regarding the quality of their research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:290):



- What is the “truth value” (validity) of the findings and how can confidence be established in the responses from the participants within the context in which the study was carried out?
- How can the findings of this specific study be applicable (generalisable) to other participants or in a different context?
- How can the “consistency” (reliability) of the findings be determined if the same study was to be repeated or replicated with the same participants within the same context?
- How can the “neutrality” (objectivity) of the findings be determined, based only on the responses from the participants within the context in which the study was conducted and not on the perspectives, interests, biases or motivations of the researcher?

Taking into account that my study on teachers’ work engagement is located in the interpretive research paradigm, the qualitative analysis of the data differs from the traditional positivist research paradigm in its basic presumptions, research intentions and deduction processes, making the standard criteria inappropriate for assessing the quality of the research (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005:6). Referring to the opening sentence of this section Lincoln and Guba (1985) offer credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability and authenticity (1989) as criteria to assess the quality of an interpretive research study.

### Credibility

Credibility refers to how the researcher establishes accuracy in the research process by communicating detailed descriptions (Morrow, 2005:252) of the “constructions of the social world under study” (Bradley, 1993:436). Credibility corresponds to validity in positivist research (Pandey & Patnaik, 2014:5746). To promote credibility, continual debriefing sessions with my supervisor were scheduled to discuss and test my ideas and interpretations, and to examine or reflect on my own biases and predispositions (Morrow, 2005:252; Pandey & Patnaik, 2014:5748; Shenton, 2004:67; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005:6). To further promote credibility, I continuously checked my data analysis against the raw data I collected (Morrow, 2005:252; Pandey & Patnaik, 2014:5749; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005:6).

### Transferability

Transferability refers to which extent the findings of the study can be applied to a different context by the reader (Morrow, 2005:252; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005:6). Transferability corresponds to generalisability in positivist research (Pandey & Patnaik, 2014:5746) and naturalistic generalisability (Stake & Trumbull, 1982:2). To promote transferability, I provide the reader with an ample “thick description” of the phenomenon in context (Morrow, 2005:252; Pandey & Patnaik, 2014:5750; Shenton, 2004:70; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005:6).

### Dependability

Dependability refers to how clear, detailed and repeatable the findings derived from the data are (Morrow, 2005:252). If the research was repeated with the same participants, using the same research methods and performing the research in the same context, equivalent results may be constructed (Bradley, 1993:437; Shenton, 2004:71). Dependability corresponds to reliability in positivist research (Pandey & Patnaik, 2014:5746). To promote dependability, an “audit trail” of detailed descriptions of my research design, data gathering, data analysis and a reflective critique of my methodology are provided for examination by external examiners or other research experts (Morrow, 2005:252; Pandey & Patnaik, 2014:5750; Shenton, 2004: 71-72; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005:7).

### Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the extent to which the quality of the data and research findings are not unduly or unknowingly influenced by the personal theories, biases or beliefs of the researcher through researcher reflexivity (Bradley, 1993:437; Morrow, 2005:252). Confirmability corresponds to objectivity in positivist research (Pandey & Patnaik, 2014:5746). Data was collected from focus group interviews. The same examination through an “audit trail”, used to promote dependability, can be used to promote confirmability (Morrow, 2005:252; Pandey & Patnaik, 2014:5751; Shenton, 2004:65-66, 72; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005:7). Chapter four, which presents the data, and Chapter five, where the data is interpreted, form part of the process to promote confirmability.

## Authenticity

In later work Lincoln and Guba (1989) also propose authenticity as criteria to assess the quality of an interpretive research study (Morrow, 2005:252; Seale, 1999:468). Authenticity incorporates “fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity and tactical authenticity” (Morrow, 2005:252). “Fairness” refers to how a researcher can demonstrate that a variety of individual realities are represented. In “ontological authenticity” the participants are guided to develop a more refined comprehension of the phenomenon. “Educative authenticity” asks the participants to value the perspectives of other participants and not only their own. “Catalytic authenticity” encourages some form of action and “tactical authenticity” empowers participants to act (Morrow, 2005:252-253; Seale, 1999:468-469).

In promoting “fairness” and “ontological authenticity” the participants talked to each other and not only answered my questions during these sessions. The participants shared their “lifeworld” with me and the group. They shared stories and openly discussed issues that came up, asking questions to clarify statements. I observed the participants listening to each other and even changing original statements, after hearing what other participants said. I observed participants folding their arms and leaning back in their chairs, frowning and shaking their heads when not agreeing with a statement made. I observed participants moving to the edge of their chairs, barely containing their excitement to make a statement or comment on something that was said. I observed emotions such as laughter and even crying when talking about certain issues. There was a rich participant voice during these sessions with the participants getting beyond the head to the heart. To promote “educative authenticity” I requested from the participants to respect one another’s perspectives and experiences, during my pre-interview briefing sessions.

Seeing that this study is done as a minor-dissertation I am unfortunately not able to provide evidence in my research to promote “catalytic authenticity” or “tactical authenticity”. To provide evidence for “catalytic authenticity” and “tactical authenticity” I will need to do longitudinal research, as stated in Chapter two. If time allowed over a longer period, doing a second or even a third focus group session with the same participants, I might have been able to provide evidence of how the participants were

encouraged to take some form of action and how the participants were empowered to act. The last section provides my critique of the methodology I used.

### **3.9 Critique of the methodology**

Acknowledging that no method is perfect, I provide a critique of my methodology looking at potential limitations. I have identified four factors that could be perceived as such.

The first of these factors is my competence as a researcher. Wiersma (2000:148) states that for researchers to undertake a proposed research study they are obligated to ensure that they are honest, sufficiently skilled and competent. When researchers are not sufficiently equipped or qualified, their research can fail and they may construct results that are invalid (Wiersma, 2000:159). I have not specifically been trained in research data collection methods, but I have successfully completed modules in qualitative and quantitative methodology during my MEd course work. I also worked closely with my supervisor during my data construction and analysis.

The second factor was time limitations during interviews. Although interviews of approximately 90 minutes were scheduled and arranged with the principals, the majority of the interviews did not last longer than 60 minutes. In most of the interview sessions, regardless of whether it was the teachers or the SMT members, the participants became anxious to finish the interview session the closer we moved to the 60-minute mark. Being in the teaching profession for 21 years this reaction was not unexpected due to the workload and expectations of the day-to-day operations at a school. This might have had an impact on the data constructed for my research study, as further rich data may have emerged with more time.

The next factor that can be perceived as a potential limitation was the hidden dynamics of the focus groups. During all the interview sessions I conducted, I observed and perceived the participants as open and honest when answering and discussing my questions. Seeing that I have used focus group interviews instead of the traditional interviews which are conducted with only one participant and one interviewer, the hidden dynamics of the focus group plays a vital role. As an outsider to the group, I

am not aware or privileged to the hidden dynamics of the group and these hidden dynamics might have had an influence on how the participants answered my questions and what data they provided me with.

The last potential factor is my relationship or acquaintance with the participants. This factor relates to a lesser extent to the teacher participants, than to the SMT participants. Most of the teacher participants were unknown to me, but most of the SMT members were known to me. I have also worked closely with several of these SMT members in the past. Knowing that I am part of a SMT at a different school might have influenced how these participants answered my questions and what data they provided me with.

### **3.10 Closing summary**

In this chapter I provided a layout of the methodology used for my research which is located in the interpretive paradigm. I used an interpretive phenomenological research methodology which I deemed the most suitable method for my research. Three schools were selected from different contextual settings in Gauteng where a sample of 46 participants were drawn. I used semi-structured focus group interviews as my data constructing method. The data I gathered was analysed by a set of phenomenological steps I followed. Research ethics were observed throughout my research process. I ensured trustworthiness of my research process by applying Lincoln and Guba's (1985, 1989) strategies of credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability and authenticity. Finally, I critiqued my methodology with an understanding that no method is perfect. In Chapter four, I provide a presentation of the data I constructed during my research.

## **Chapter four: Presentation and analysis of the data**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The aim of this interpretive phenomenological study is to explore the lived experience of teachers' work engagement. The objectives are to investigate teachers' lived experience of how selected schools promote teacher work engagement, identify teachers' lived experience of challenges in their work engagement and provide possible suggestions to enhance teachers' lived experience of their work engagement.

This chapter presents the data constructed from semi-structured focus group interviews with teachers and SMTs. The following aspects are presented:

- A brief discussion of the contextual settings of the participating schools,
- Construction of the data,
- Analysis of the data, and
- A presentation of the resultant themes.

### **4.2 Contextual settings of the participating schools**

#### Context

The selected schools are all ordinary public primary schools, with long and rich histories. Two of the schools are situated in Krugersdorp and one school in Randburg. School A was originally set in a semi-rural area surrounded by farmland, but as development progressed over the years the setting changed to that of a suburban area. As the setting of the school changed, so did the school. The original purpose of the school was to cater for the small number of students from the surrounding farms, but as more of the land was sold for middle- to high-income housing, the school grew and changed to cater for the growing number of students from these families. School B is set in an urban area and School C in an affluent suburb. Although all of the schools are controlled by the Department of Education they operate, to a certain extent, like private schools, due to funds from parents allowing these schools to do things, such as appointing additional teachers and having smaller classes. These additional funds

also allow these two schools to offer more sport and cultural activities, as well as making the use of school related technology available in all the classrooms.

### Culture

All three schools have a Christian ethos and function on a strong value-based system, focusing on aspects such as respect, honesty, self-control, responsibility, determination and conscientiousness. The language of learning and teaching at all three of these schools is Afrikaans and English is only offered as a second language subject. These schools have a high focus on academic performance, but also participate in sport and cultural activities on a highly competitive level. The staff and students are all very proud to be associated with the school.

### Staff

All three schools have an all-white Afrikaans teaching staff, which is predominantly female. The administrative staff members are all female. The minority of the staff members are employed by the Department of Education, while the rest of the staff members are employed by the respective School Governing Bodies. In several of the classes, there is a teacher with an assistant in each class. The ages of the teaching staff at these three schools, range between 23-63 years of age. At all three schools the teaching staff is reasonably experienced regarding teaching, as the teaching experience is between 1-40 years. The teaching staff is also well qualified as the majority of its members have bachelor's degrees with several teachers also having honours degrees, Master's degrees or Doctoral degrees. There is a strong focus from the staff to use technology as learning aid within the teaching environment.

### Student demographics

The students in these schools consist of predominantly white Afrikaans students. The student numbers in the schools are between 700-1000 students ranging from Grade 00 to Grade 7. The class sizes are small in comparison to some of the other surrounding schools, with an average of 30 students per class. Most of the students come from a middle to high socioeconomic background with ample parental support and involvement. The three schools have a strong achievement orientation, which is supported by the parents, with an emphasis on academic, sport and cultural

performance. There is a strong familiarity amongst the students in relation to the use of technology and global technological development.

#### Community demographics

With all three schools, the surrounding communities are a mixture of white and black inhabitants. The home languages are a mixture of Afrikaans, English and several African languages. The socioeconomic status of the communities predominantly consists of middle- to high-income families, with a smaller number of low-income families. There is a strong undertone and striving towards financial growth and well-being. The communities are actively involved with the schools by means of initiatives linking the schools to several businesses in the surrounding areas. The following section provides a description of how I constructed the data.

#### **4.3 Construction of the data**

I gathered data of the research phenomenon in context, using semi-structured focus group interviews (Kothari, 2004:7, 97; Shenton, 2004:64-65). Semi-structured interviews give the advantage of obtaining in-depth data, also allowing more flexibility to restructure questions and the adaptation of the interview language (Kothari, 2004:97-99). Two interviews of approximately 90 minutes each with two focus groups, one with teachers and one with SMT members, were scheduled at each school. With the intent of making the participants feel comfortable and to encourage them to speak openly, the interviews with the focus groups were conducted at their respective schools and in the language of their preference, which was Afrikaans.

My interview questions were structured and guided by research done by Seidman (2006) in his book "Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences". The focus of the interview questions was to understand the lived experiences of the participants and what meaning they give to their lived experience of teacher work engagement (Seidman, 2006:9). I structured the interview questions in such a manner that the participants could reconstruct their own lived experience of teacher work engagement within the context of their school (Seidman, 2006:15). I used my interview questions as a heuristic, rather than a series of questions. I used four open ended questions divided into three parts. The first part



placed the participants' lived experience in context and focused on their life history. In this part I asked the participants how they came to teaching as a profession and to talk about their past teaching experiences. In the second part I focused on the participants' present lived experiences in their teaching profession. Here I asked the participants to reconstruct what they actually do in their work and what is it like for them to do what they do every day. The last part focused on how the participants understand their lived experiences and to reflect about the meaning of their experiences in the teaching profession. Here I asked the participants to tell me what the teaching profession means to them, what drives them and what could enhance their work engagement (Seidman, 2006:17-19).

I used focus group interviews instead of the traditional interviews which are conducted with only one participant and one interviewer. According to Bradbury-Jones, Sambrook and Irvine (2009:663) within the frame of a phenomenological study an individual's lived experience can be preserved in the context of a focus group. They argue that focus groups are compatible with a phenomenological study and propose that focus group interviews are favourable to phenomenology. They state that focus group interviews open up new perspectives and stimulate discussions. Focus group interviews use group interaction as a method to encourage participants to talk to each other, exchange stories and ask questions. Group interaction, during focus group interviews, is specifically useful for probing participants' lived experiences, "exploring not only what they think, but how they think and why they think that way" (Kitzinger, 1995:299). The focus on interaction between participants sets focus group interviews apart from other forms of interviewing (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2009:665). Focus group interviews can present a wider understanding of the phenomenon studied (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2009:663). Focus groups are simply group interviews, capitalising on communication between participants (Kitzinger, 1995:299), with the primary intention being to gather data where the phenomenon under study is placed at the centre of the dialogue in the group (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2009:665, 667). Based on research done by Bradbury-Jones et al. (2009:666-667), the main advantages of focus group interviews are: They

- Allow participants to share and elaborate on issues raised.

- Provide a setting in which participants are encouraged to interact and clarify dialogue, which can be seen as a means to enhance the credibility of the research.
- Allow participants to hear the ideas of others and help them to construct their own views. This also allows participants to elaborate on their views or defend them if challenged (Kitzinger, 1995:299).
- Allow participants time to reflect while other members are speaking before adding their own perspectives.

I chose to use focus group interviews in an attempt to gain a richer and deeper understanding of the participants' lived experience of teacher work engagement.

With my focus group interviews, the relationship between myself as researcher and the participants was jointly constructed. I shaped the interviews, but I was also shaped by the participants and the research process. With an interpretive phenomenological methodology, I became engaged in a process of mutual interpretation with the participants (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2009:666-667). The next section provides a short description of the steps I followed in analysing the data.

#### **4.4 Analysis of the data**

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In analysing the data, I followed the following phenomenological steps:

- Delineating units of meaning. In this step I summarised the raw data from all the participants to find “Natural Meaning Units” (See Appendix 2 for a sample of the explication of the NMUs). I identified parts with relevant meaning for the phenomenon and extracted these statements. I then carefully scrutinised the relevant units of meaning and eliminated statements that were overlapping, repetitive or irrelevant to the phenomenon (Cohen et al., 2007:471; Groenewald, 2004:50; Holroyd, 2001:2; Van der Mescht, 1996:61; Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015:11).
- Grouping units of meaning to form themes. In this step I identified units that have only one meaning and have significance towards the phenomenon. I then grouped these units together to form unique or central themes (Cohen et al., 2007:471; Groenewald, 2004:50; Holroyd, 2001:2-3; Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015:11-12).
- Contextualise themes. In this step I wrote a textual descriptive narrative of the participants’ lived experiences of the phenomenon within their lived context. (Cohen et al., 2007:471; Groenewald, 2004:51; Holroyd, 2001:3; Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015:12). These descriptive narratives aim to provide a life-context to the participants’ lived experience of the phenomenon and give “uniqueness of the phenomenon” as it is experienced by the teachers’ collective lived experience (Van der Mescht, 1996:98).
- Synthesis of the themes. In the last step, I synthesised all the narratives from the groups as a whole, to construct an in-depth interpretation of the participants’ lived experiences of the phenomenon. The objective of this last step was to capture the essence of the lived experience of the phenomenon (Ehrich, 2005:3; Holroyd, 2001:3; Van der Mescht, 1996:99; van Manen, 1984:41; Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015:12-13).

The next section provides the presentation of the resultant themes constructed from the research data.

## 4.5 Presentation of the resultant themes

In presenting the themes I follow a similar structure to how I structured the interview questions, with four open ended questions divided into three parts (See Appendix 1 for the questions). This study is interested in the phenomenon of teachers' lived experience of work engagement. As my focus is on the phenomenon of teachers' lived experience of work engagement, I do not distinguish among the three schools. Rather, I integrate the data from the three schools. The sections below provide situated descriptions of each of the themes with a few selected illustrative quotes.

### Part one

In this part I place the participants' lived experience in context and focus on their life history. I asked the participants how they came to teaching as a profession and to talk about their past teaching experiences. The following themes emerged from the data:

- Passion for the profession.
- Making a difference.

#### Passion for the profession

The participants portrayed a strong feeling of passion towards teaching as a profession. They experienced a strong engagement towards the teaching profession before even entering the profession. The participants experienced this passion to engage in the profession as intrinsic, with some moving beyond passion and experiencing it as part of a higher calling.

Joan expresses her experience of passion and early engagement with the following: *"Since I was a little girl, it was my desire to just become a teacher, so it's a little girl's passion. I played school-school. I had a black board in my dollhouse. So, this is me... who I am, from early on I wanted to be a teacher. It's a passion, still, it's a love."*

Odette offers a similar experience but also expresses it as a dream: *"Yes, I too, as a little girl... it was a passion. It was a dream. It was like everything I wanted to be. This and a mom. It was becoming a teacher and a mom. It was my passion."* Similar to Odette, Vicky also expresses her lived experience as a dream, but also as something

intrinsic gained from her parents: *“Since I can remember I wanted to become a teacher. It was a dream of mine since childhood. I grew up in a house with teachers, my mom... my dad...”*

Minah also experiences the passion to engage in the profession as something which stems from her childhood:

*I come from a family of six children and we were at a farm school. If something happened at school, the whole community was there. So, I had been involved in school from a very early age. And then the Grade 1 teacher I had, I admired her and wanted to do what she did someday. After school I always came home and played school-school with my dolls. It was nothing else than teaching for me.*

As with Vicky, Alta also experiences passion towards the teaching profession as intrinsic - “in the blood”:

*My mom was a manicurist and later worked at one lady’s house. Her daughter and I always played school-school. She was the teacher and I was the student in class. From then on, the seed was planted and my mother returned to teaching after being a manicurist for a while. And I have three older sisters and all three are teachers. It is in our blood. I chose the right path, to go into teaching right away.*

Leani experienced a life changing event which triggered her passion towards the teaching profession:

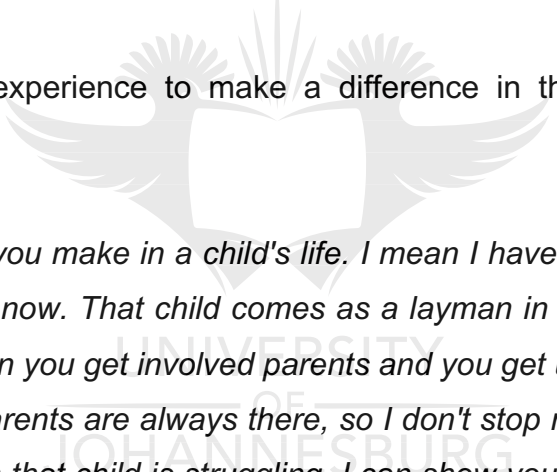
*I actually applied for medical selection to become a doctor specialising in pediatrics. I became ill with cancer and I was turned down. Then I thought but why not education, and I have to say to this day I'm not sorry I followed that direction. I have some background regarding teaching. I have an aunt who is also a teacher, but I never thought that teaching would be my next step. In the end, I went to study education and I'm not sorry to this day. It's absolutely my passion.*

Similar to several of the participants, Erna also experiences passion towards the teaching profession and early engagement as a passion and intrinsic, but also as a higher calling: *“In hindsight, I can also say what they said. I think it's in one's blood. My mother was actually a good teacher, my dad wanted to be one and I... yes, I became one by chance. I believe there was a Higher hand involved that got me to where I am. I also believe it's my passion.”* From these quotes it is evident that the participants experience a truly deep-seated passion for the teaching profession.

### Making a difference

To make a difference in people's lives emerged as a pre-driver towards engagement. Some of the participants expressed a willingness to engage in the profession in order to foster this drive to make a difference. To engage, not only in the classroom and on the sports field, but also on a personal level.

Joan expresses her experience to make a difference in the classroom with the following:



*The difference you make in a child's life. I mean I have been with Grade 1 for many years now. That child comes as a layman in your class and can do nothing. Then you get involved parents and you get uninvolved parents. The involved parents are always there, so I don't stop making a difference especially when that child is struggling. I can show you. A mother sent me a message yesterday evening. Her child is so happy, they have two children in School P. There was no room for the other one. Then he came here, he couldn't speak English or Afrikaans, he still can't. If I tell him to sit, he first looks what the others are doing, then he sits. He is now starting to become a little more fluent in Afrikaans. So, I think, this makes teaching worthwhile - that difference. If I can make a difference in just one child's life, I'm in heaven.*

Richard relates his experience of making a change to coaching and mentoring:

*I didn't want to become a teacher at all. My dad then talked to me about my career choice I wanted to follow, and then from my sport segment, education began to appeal to me. I realised that the teaching profession is where I could do good for others and only after my first practical during my studies, I realised that I wanted to be part of this profession. Then if I can think back to teachers, not so much the teachers of schools where I was, but on sport level and the coaches. I found mentors and saw that as the example I would like to pursue. This is how I ended up in education and from there I built on my building blocks to finally get to that new dream.*

Rachell experiences making a change as life lessons on a personal level: *“The coaching. I think to develop someone better than he was and then to see someone grow. I think through sports, you can also teach a lot of life lessons to someone in a very short time - so that specifically.”* For the participants to make a change in a person or child’s life, may it be in the classroom, on the sports field or on a personal level, is the ultimate goal to achieve in teaching.

The aim of part one was to place the participants’ lived experiences in context, focusing on their life history and how they came to teaching as a profession. The themes which emerged from the data were: passion towards the teaching profession and making a difference. The next part focuses on the present lived experiences of the participants in their current teaching profession.

## Part two

In this part I focus on the participants’ present lived experiences in their teaching profession. I asked the participants to reconstruct what they actually do in their work and what is it like for them to do what they do every day. The following themes emerged from the data:

- Teaching is more than just teaching.
- Workload.
- Teacher interaction.

- Strong commitment.
- Role of the Department of Education.

Teaching is more than just teaching

Teaching is more than just teaching is a dominant theme in the data. During the interview sessions I observed strong emotions from the participants concerning this theme. The participants expressed their lived experience of the changing expectations and demands placed on them as professionals due to changing perceptions of the profession by parents and society. The changing expectations and demands placed on teachers as professionals also have an impact on their work-life balance and recovery time from work.

Joan expresses her lived experience of teaching is more than just teaching with the following:

*I think it has changed a bit over the past few years where you could get up in the morning, enjoy your cup of coffee. It changed, because by the time you get up you already have a reasonable amount of WhatsApp messages to answer from parents and staff and so on. And it's not necessarily stuff you can always ignore. There's stuff you need to address. For example, we had one this morning of a netball player who can't play tomorrow, because she was hurt. So, you already start to sort that out. I think the moment you enter the school grounds your responsibility starts, because then you notice who is playing where, in the wrong places, which is dangerous. So, your eyes are constantly open to the children's safety and what's going on at school and of course if you are on playground duty, you start earlier and you know that responsibility to look after the children... and then when your class starts...*

*I think some people have a misconception of you going into school and you see the teacher's cute table and you give beautiful lessons. It doesn't work like that, because there are a 1000 different things that happen in a day which you didn't plan for. So, I think, teaching today is an absolute "think on*



*your feet” job, it's innovative, you're constantly making plans and figuring stuff out, because then someone got hurt or someone is sick, and somebody is nauseous, and then maybe you need to fill in your register that you do not have yet, because it is still in the office. Take in money, be responsible for finances, you are an organiser, you have letters that you need to write and type and send and make sure that each one is received on the other end, because the technology sometimes also lets you down and between all that you sometimes also teach.*

Joan continues her experience of teaching is more than just teaching and the impact this has on the work-life balance and recovery time of a teacher:

*For example, if I just take sport. The distance we travel to attend sporting events these days. We're going to Fochville. We drive to Vereeniging. We drove to the East Rand. We are going to Pretoria at some stage for public speaking. So, our area is so wide and we do it, it is not seen as part of your normal working hours. You seem to be doing it for the love of the game. And you know if you leave here at the end of the day it doesn't show on the system what you're doing out there. Whether you come back from sport seven o'clock in the evening, or whether you were at a Super-series on a Saturday. You know, it doesn't show anywhere. But that's it, it's extra time and in the end of the day, if you come back from that day, you're a zero on a contract. For your family and your children, you mean nothing at all. You know it demands more of you than just the hours. No one sees the hours after that. No one sees just how long it takes for your body to recover and get back to it again, and again. I think the impact it has on a person and on a teacher isn't seen out there. And the only people who really see what impact it has are the people who stay with you. It's your children and your husband and wife. So, the hours are bad for me. Even if we have a fundraiser, we take many hours to plan. It's a lot of preparation long before the time. It's extra hours and then the day of the fundraiser also happens, which is also a long day outside your normal working hours. And between all that stuff, your schoolwork still needs to be done.*

Odette offers a similar experience to that of Joan, specifically focusing on responsibility and the changing expectations and demands from parents:

*I think teaching has changed so much or has not changed - let me reconstruct my sentence to say what I want to say. Our responsibility is getting so much bigger, because parents are no longer involved. In other words, the child is being dropped off, you are his mother, his father. I often tell my children, now look at mom, because then I am no longer a teacher, because then they do not want to listen to me. So, now I'm your mother, now you have to listen to me.*

*So, I think our responsibility just gets bigger. That is, what Zoe says, you are involved all day and tonight when you go home you still remember, yes, that child has never had food today, you never remembered to still check if he had a sandwich. I think our teaching job is just getting bigger, because our parents are completely uninvolved. There are parents who just don't feed their children, because they know there is a soup kitchen that gives their children food. So, the parents... we are raising a spineless generation which will go to these children's children too. So, the child, for example I think of my years that I studied, we play a big role in children's lives. The daddy figure is missing, so yes, you are daddy, mom, doctor, counsellor, you do everything, and if I... I mean if a child is not well, then you have to look after him, I mean we sometimes have to get Joan to work with these children. Sometimes the circumstances are that the daddy no longer has a job. So, it's like Joan says, it's daily, it's a challenge, you get into your class then something happens to a child; Grandpa passed away and Grandpa played a big role in the child's life. There was never a daddy. So, I think that's what makes education completely different. It's not that you are just the teacher anymore. You're everything.*

Similar to Joan and Odette, Laurin refers to the changing "role or job description" of a teacher:

*Yes. So, we are no longer just educators teaching our subjects, we now have to present stuff, we need to offer shows, we need to offer features, we need to raise funds, we must... the more stuff we have or offer at our school, the better it looks to the outside world, and at the end of the day it comes back to the people working here, and it's not just the teaching staff, it's the admin people too. So, the... your role or job description you once had, is no longer what it was.*

Bruce experiences teaching is more than teaching as a “distorted perspective of teaching” where parents and society do not have a clear understanding of the expectations in teaching as a profession:

*The perspective of teaching is distorted. I don't think they have an idea; they don't understand the reality of what everything is about and what you really do, things you need to handle. I think for them it's that you're in teaching, because it's an easy way out. And it's short days, not many though. We're going to do sport like I do, I have a lot of free time. Four holidays a year, but they don't have that... the perception of... it's actually a huge and straining job.*

From the participants' experiences stated above, referring to parent and societal expectations, work-life balance and recovery time, these aspects have a significant influence on teacher work engagement. These aspects have such an influence that they have the potential to either promote work engagement or create a feeling of disengagement.

### Workload

The second dominant theme that emerged is workload. The participants experienced workload as negative and experienced it as a barrier towards engagement. Workload is perceived as becoming a prisoner or hostage of work.

Joan expresses her experience of workload as a positive driver and feels that a teacher should always be “progressive” and seek for opportunities to implement new ideas:

*My husband says I volunteer to do everything at school. He really has a misconception of things. But I think if I look at myself as a human being, I like to be busy. So, I always look where an opportunity presents itself where I can do something else. You know... one always wants to be progressive and just a little ahead and show other schools, at our school there is something new that we do. And I mean if you don't... then it comes back to what Alex said, the school is now a business, because you have to seek new ideas. If you have tunnel vision, and you don't look to the future, you are going to stagnate. One has to be... I don't know about the others, but this is my view. I always think, where can I renew or where can I do something else or where can I make a difference, do you understand? So, if you don't do that, then you'll stagnate, and become that 9-5 worker. You just do your basic job. But I think here at School A we stand no chance of that, because one is always on the go.*

Even though Joan expresses her lived experience of workload as a positive driver, she also experiences it as a negative and sees it as a barrier to engagement:

*... I who have been in education so long, I am so busy, I can't think of a place where I've been really achieving something right now, because you're so busy allocating your time to all the stuff you need to pay attention to and I don't really think I can tell you I'm achieving something here or here, or I really achieved something there... because my workload is just too much. You know, at this stage I'm just trying to get to everything, but, so for me personally, I don't really have achievements. It's just an achievement for me to get through the week.*

Rachell, similarly to Joan, also experiences her workload as a barrier towards engagement and sees many of the work that needs to be done as “senseless”:

*... we also of course get a lot of pressure from the department. We need to complete documents. We need to write reports. We need to do a certain amount of work. We... there's an incredible amount of admin we really know*

*is senseless, but needs to be done, because in the end you work for the Department of Education. This makes your job extra loaded. Considering that with all these things we have said, we haven't mentioned anything about all the assessments we need to set up, which we also need to mark. You just need to understand the practical stuff in education itself...*

Odette experiences her workload as becoming a “prisoner” or hostage of her work and similar to Rachell, also experiences many of the work that needs to be done as “senseless” and not the “true purpose of teaching”:

*Mmm, yes. If you do leave early, then you are behind and the pressure becomes so much bigger and you will eventually end up with too much things to do. And now, the forms and all the stuff that needs to be filled in, it is time spent on something that you could rather spend on a child. I think many things are done in a rush and not done properly, because there are numerous things already happening. You have 1000 things that hang in the air and everything is left incomplete. And, that's what's being handed in. It's not the true purpose of teaching.*

For the participants the “true purpose of teaching” is lost due to “senseless” work that needs to be done, creating a feeling of imprisonment. But there is also a clear understanding that a substantial workload is required to promote progress within the teaching profession.

#### Teacher interaction

Positive teacher interaction, which include relationships, trust, respect, and communication between co-workers and the SMT, emerged from the data. The participants experienced these as strong drivers towards teacher work engagement.

Odette observes:

*I think social media made it that way. If I think, we have a staff WhatsApp group. If someone has a birthday and you may have forgotten, they said happy birthday to that person early in the morning and I think it means a lot*

*to someone just to hear that, people really care. If someone is sick, you hear that person is sick. It's easy to send a message quickly. So social media also makes it easy to know more about things as well. I... that's what I think.*

*And this helps us to be more interactively involved as well. I think we have been teaching together for so long, that we know each other. The fact that we went through so much, how close we became, and I think we supported each other so much. You know what, we are a group. We stood and prayed together. I mean, we're a Christian school. It also makes it... we care about each other. I just think we have a close bond. I've also taught at many other schools, the bond here is just tighter and the fact that we have smaller classes also enables you to be extra involved with your children. You know them.*

Nicole experiences the school staff as being part of a “family”: *“Family, as it feels to me the teachers are family. Other schools we've seen, and we've seen many schools, you sit there, students and assistants sit there... other teachers there... they make groups. Here, everyone is talking to everyone. If you do not, someone will come to you and ask you how you are today. And I like it.”*

For Penny, too, the school means being part of a “family” with a unique “close bond”:

*Very in depth and not just school related, family, history, circumstances, so yes. I think we form a close bond here. I think especially with our school, I think we see each other's uniqueness and you know how people sometimes react and we give them their space for it, we are very supportive. Once something happens to someone, everyone is there, knowing, everyone is working together and we can pray together and we can support that person. So, I think we know one another in such a manner that you end up leaving room for their personalities.*

Lynette feels that she is part of a “very supportive” team with good relationships, which allows differences, but “sort things out” in a professional manner:

*I think at our school our staff is very supportive and they support you during your lows and your highs. They are happy with you, they are sad with you, and I think that makes our school so special. And so yes, there are differences, not all of us are the same, but like Charlie said, to act professionally and sort things out, but also... I also think our staff is great and it's nice to be part of this team. You take everyone into consideration and sort out challenges. You are also the one who needs to follow at times. And then as a leader, you must set the example. But I think here at our school, the relationships with each other, parents and children are very good.*

Hester appreciates the respect the teachers have towards one another:

*I can also say, it is respect. I think respect for each other. Our former principal always said, good manners. And I think if you leave this out of a school, then you suffer, then the school is about to fail. That respect, that care. So many teachers who left School C, are now begging to come back. Many can't come back, because of circumstances, but express that we don't know what we have in School C. Unfortunately, you will only find that out once you are gone. So, I think that's the big thing, we are sitting in an oasis here and we often don't realise it, and many times after it's gone, then you realise what you had.*

Chris, similar to Lynette, experiences this theme in relation to good relationships, but particularly refers to the good relationships between the teachers and the SMT:

*There is a good relationship between management and the post level one teachers. If I can say that. Yes, there are conflict situations, yes there are many times that they think we are unfair. There have been statements made that they feel we are out to show them on their mistakes, but yet on a social level there is a very good relationship. We also mingle with the post level one teachers and they are also... they can boldly come and sit next to you to talk to you. So, there are no different levels such as post level one, beginner, senior, management team or whatever the case. One tries to form*

*a unit. It's a big thing we strive for, being a unit, as there is no separation, for example you're a junior and I'm a senior or whatever.*

From the quotes above, it is perceptible that the participants experience their co-workers and the management teams as a “family”. Often with conflict, different opinions and different personalities, but still part of one “family”, one team, working together.

#### Strong commitment

Most of the participants experience a strong sense of commitment, sometimes obsessively so, to their profession, regardless of the challenges they experience.

For Zoe:

*It even starts before you get up, because with all these different learning problems we have in the classes... I sometimes wake up at night to think what I can do to keep these children from doing poor in their schoolwork. Thinking about this one's mom who doesn't care, what can I do to put in extra time with this child. I will probably lie awake from two o'clock in the morning to half past five thinking about everyone in my class who's experiencing problems and what I can do for them, after which I sleep again for half an hour and then get up for work.*

Similarly, for Mary: *“I think, first is the class that is in front of you. The last thing in the evenings before going to bed, you think of that child who is struggling. When you come to school, you wonder if all the books are marked, is the class right, am I prepared? The children in your class is your first priority.”*

Jackie experiences strong emotional commitment: *“Your emotional involvement with the children... and later you think is that child okay? What happened? Emotionally, you are constantly involved and you take this home.”*

Lynette expresses her experience as “a way of life”: *“My husband always says it's a way of life. It's a way of life, it's your life, that's what you do. It's not just a job. School is your life.”*



Similar to Lynette, Tersia also experiences strong commitment as something which is part of your life:

*I told somebody the other day that weekends are there to catch up with your overdue work, to do your overdue marking, and so also with school holidays. My husband does not know what it is like to braai, without me sitting at the table on the patio, marking books or capturing marks on the computer. What's nice is that you have flexi time, but that you work on weekends and holidays is for sure. You are so focused on school, when you read the newspaper you will see an article you can use or you think, here is a piece of writing you can use as a comprehension test. You are always focused on schoolwork and think of papers to be set.*

Gert experiences strong commitment regardless of the challenges he experiences in the profession. He expresses this experience as the “sweet and sour” of the profession:

*You often have the sweet with the sour. You get the sour part where a parent confronts you next to the rugby field and scolds you relentlessly, but that same afternoon you also get a message from another parent who says thank you very much for the practice today, my child came to tell... the sweet fulfilment is worth more than the sour. It is always. So that's why, it's nice if you can sit back and see there was some sour, some bad, but from it all you got the work done and that's the better part, the sweet.*

In contrast to the above, some participants experience periods of distance accompanied by despondency, a sense of disillusionment and exploitation.

Odette experiences times of despondency:

*For me the netball, you know it's very nice to play netball, but there is a difference between playing and coaching netball. So now, I'll try to achieve something during netball coaching and everything, but then maybe things aren't necessarily going so well. Then a parent will come screaming at you,*

*because you have done something wrong, something you thought was right and still think is right. But they think, because you are coaching netball, you are the best in netball and you have to be some Springbok netball player before you can coach netball and they judge you on that. But actually, you're just a teacher who is placed there and you try to do your best, but parents do not always understand it, and sometimes they can make you a little negative or a little bit crazy, because you thought that what you were doing was right, but clearly it is wasn't necessarily so...*

Sara, similar to Odette, experiences despondency: *"The fun of teaching is no longer there. Many times, I really think I can just teach, because it's nice and because I want to teach. But sometimes when I lie down on my bed, I think the fun of teaching has been taken away. I just want to teach children."* Sara continues and also expresses a feeling of exploitation: *"I just want to join in, I think if you are that way, then the school... there is someone who will always exploit you on it too. So, if you do something, then you have to do everything."*

Nicole is disillusioned:

*... for me now, when I started at this school, I thought you are in your class all the time, you just do what you plan, and that's it. Well then reality hit me, then it's admin and this and... I get a register. I don't even know how to fill it in. I have to learn all that as well, I don't know how a money book works. The office must occasionally come and say Nicole remember about this, remember about that...*

This theme moves from merely doing my work to the best of my ability, to a very deep emotional experience. The participants experience a strong sense of commitment, regardless of times or moments of despondency, disillusionment or exploitation. Seeking the "sweet" rather than the "sour".

## Role of the Department of Education

The last theme that emerged for part two is the role of the Department of Education. The participants experience the Department of Education as the dominant factor in creating a feeling of disengagement.

Regarding the Department of Education, Rachell observes:

*You should rather ask my children, when do I not take books home. They ask when I am not busy with books, because to them it feels as if I only mark books every weekend. And do lesson preparation. They will ask, "but mom when can we do something?" So yes, and even holidays. Laurin and I, during this holiday, had to do new preparation again. We had to come to school and sit down for days to do preparation, otherwise we would not have been ready for the new term. Because stuff from the department came back and everything changed again...*

Mary expresses a similar lived experience to that of Rachell:

*I think it has been mentioned to the department at meetings with teachers and principals. The department is constantly requesting more paperwork, but they are trying to make the systems easier by requesting submissions online. Unfortunately, they still need a hard copy or two or three and sometimes the process doesn't end after the cut-off date. There is always more to come, for example confirmation documents four weeks after the governing body elections. Yesterday a memo came requesting documents to verify again what has been submitted already. This also makes the costs of administration expensive, not even to mention the strain on the staff. It is not a nice feeling if you have really given in a good piece of work and here comes another request for the same thing. It almost feels at times that your submissions were lost and that is why you should do it a second time. I grew up to say if you made a mistake you have to do it over and start again. Sometimes there is a small mistake somewhere from the department's side, then you have to start again and do everything over. There are lots of administrative repetition. This puts pressure on management.*

Minah has bad experiences with the policies that need to be followed:

*Apart from all the classes one has to teach, if you have a free period, you always have admin to do. I never have a break. Suzette and I are re-examining, because I have children in the Grade 7 group who are failing their tests, because Maths is a subject that is failed quite often. So, we let them rewrite their tests to see if we can help them pass. I don't just give them marks as the Education Department says we should give them. And there is always administrative work to do here in the afternoon or in the evenings or over weekends. The biggest part is the setting of tests, the marking and the processing of marks. That's the biggest part. You always have to follow the policies of the Education Department that prescribe how many marks you need per term. Then you have to mark all that stuff, you can't mark everything in school time. You always bring work home to mark. Setting up a test is not just an afternoon to set up, it also takes a long time.*

For Sonet, the Education Department undermines professional engagement by removing the focus from what teachers are supposed to do:

*I don't feel bad, because our main focus is teaching. That's true, that's what you've heard. That's everyone's passion. That's what you want to get to. I understand the other things are all needed to keep the machine moving, but it takes a lot of time. Like, for example, admin takes the focus away from what we are here for. Our passion. What we really are here for, our main goal. So, no it doesn't always feel good.*

Similar to the theme of workload, the participants experience that the Education Department undermines their professional engagement with an overload of administrative requests and sometimes unworkable policies. The participants also experience the constant changes, from the Education Department, as barriers to their work engagement.

Part two places the participants' present lived experiences in context, focusing on how they currently experience their own teaching profession by reconstructing what they

actually do in their work and what it is like for them to do what they do every day. The themes which emerged from the data were: teaching is more than just teaching, workload, teacher interaction, strong commitment and the role of the Department of Education. The last part of the data presentation focuses on the participants' understanding of their lived experience of their professional engagement and the meaning they attach to it.

### Part three

In part three, I focus on the participants' understanding of their lived experience of their professional engagement and the meaning they attach to it. I asked the participants to tell me what the teaching profession means to them, what drives them and how they think their work engagement can be enhanced. The following themes emerged from the data:

- The role of God.
- Communication.

#### The role of God

The participants experience teaching as a higher calling, something more than just a job or work that needs to be done. This relates to some of the themes in part one and part two, particularly to the themes of passion for the profession and strong commitment.

For Sara:

*The passion of teaching and how it started, and those that tell you your path has actually been carved out for you so beautifully. No matter how many mountains there are on the road and how hard it is. At the end of the day you have to touch someone. And to me it is to touch someone. His mother might not have given him a sandwich this morning. Or his mother couldn't tell him this morning she loved him. You as a teacher might be there for that child and say to that child, "I actually love you and it doesn't matter if I fight with you or I reprimand you, I'm really fond of you, there is someone on this earth who cares." When a child comes to you and asks you, "why am I here?"*

*Why did the Lord put me on the earth if my parents didn't even love me?" Then you realise, sorry... [crying] then you realise that you were placed here as a teacher for a reason. Not for anything else, but to make a difference in that person or that child's life, because it's hard to hear that there are parents who don't love their children and I think this drives me. To tell those children, "but do you know what, if mom or dad isn't there for you, your teacher is here and the school and the other children and the teachers love you and we love you and that's why the Lord put you in our school to be there for you."*

Jackie spoke of a divine calling:

*To see how the children, evolve from where you start and where you end and for me personally, if I have to sit in front of a computer every day, I won't be able to do it. Every day there is something else, not one day is the same as the previous day. Your children, you can see the same list four or five times in 20 years but every day there is something else, there are new challenges and there are... you become what you do. It's not always easy, many times you are despondent, but in the end, it is your divine task and you want to live it out, because you have been chosen to be here. You ask many times, should I be here, am I in the right place, you might feel you are not in the right place, but if you sit down and think about it, you realise, if the Lord did not want you here, He would move you elsewhere. Yes, I think each day is just different and there are many challenges. Every day you develop and change and become adaptable. You have to be very adaptable.*

The calling keeps Lynette "humble and grateful":

*The children drive you, but not always just to experience their successes. Children are also those that keep you humble, that make you realise how much you have to be grateful for, because their circumstances are not always the best. At our school we have a variety of children, from those who come from wealthy homes, to those coming from foster care and all the*

*sadness that comes with it. I think that keeps you on your knees, keeps you humble and grateful, and to be successful is a bonus.*

Richard referred to a “heart calling”:

*I think one should look at the profession, it is not a job, it is a way of life. I want to convince the young guys to become teachers, not just because it is your last resort to get a qualification. This is now the last resort. If it's not a passion, then don't become a teacher. I think we should identify children at high school, for the next few years, who want to become teachers, have conversations with them first and then with their parents. It is very important that these guys are clear on why they want to go into this profession, because if you want to be here it should be a heart calling. It is not a measurable thing, you need to want to become a teacher, if not, don't even think of going into teaching. I think many braai conversations will rather say don't become a teacher. But then those teachers come, it's a passion, it is a way of life. That is what's meant by saying we don't go to work we go to school. This is part of your lifestyle.*

Leani expresses her lived experience in relation to this theme as something more than just a job or work that needs to be done:

*I don't know, I think it fills us. I'm actually in the privileged position of not having to work. My husband always wants me to come back home. But I tell him, to be here and work with these children, it fills me. At home I didn't experience that. Oh, it really brings everything together. You have friendships you build here. You make a difference in other people's lives, in the children's lives, in your own life, you grow as a human being. I see that I grow; I see myself growing. I give back so much and I don't know, that is what this profession means to me. It is absolutely everything to me. It has its challenges, but I come here every day with that smile no matter what happens in class. You come to school positive, you're ready for the day and everything. In the end, I fall into my bed tonight, I'm full. That's what my passion is, that's why I'm on earth. That's why I'm here.*

For the participants teaching is not just a job or work that needs to be done, but rather a calling, a “heart calling”, a “higher calling”. They experience teaching as an expression of who they are as human beings.

### Communication

The second theme that emerged in part three is communication. This theme links with the theme of teacher interaction in part two. The participants experience communication as a driver of engagement. But poor communication can provoke disengagement.

In Sara’s experience:

*I think it's very difficult to sometimes talk. If you could talk and get things in the open and talk about things that are bothering you or talk about things you are worried about, without being told that you are not positive. You maybe just want to talk about you as a person, you might want to make things easier or just say, but I don't understand this. You want to be able to talk about it, but not be condemned for it. That you don't... that it just... that you can just open your heart, because sometimes there are things that bother you and then you feel that you can't discuss it with management, because they think you're negative. And then you're not negative at all, you might have a better plan, because you're in that situation. Because you're busy all day with that stuff. It's very important to me, if one could do that, talk.*

Joan desires open communication between the teachers and the SMT:

*I... you know what I feel about our school management. I think our management is really good, but then, you know what, we who are in the profession, that are on the netball field. I, who am in the classroom, I, who have to do all the admin, I think sometimes it will be good to sit down and talk to them. What are you experiencing? What do you suggest? They don't have to do everything we say. They just need to hear us out. Just hear what is going on in our classes. Hear what we are feeling right now, because they*



*are working with such a lot of staff, who all really feel different. Sometimes it is necessary to get into smaller groups, because not everyone has the confidence to talk to a lot of people. Sometimes it is necessary to get into smaller groups, just say to us, "how do you feel these days?" "How are you?" "Are there problems?" And I know we do it at the end of the year when we discuss our marks. But for me it is just a bit too late. To get in touch with each other continuously, and many times the people who are practising in the profession are the people with the good plans and ideas, because they already know what is going to work. And with that, I'm not saying that the SMT is not also practising in the profession, but they are in the classes less than us and that type of stuff.*

From these responses it is noticeable that the participants experience a need for open and unbiased communication, especially with the SMT. There is a need from the participants to express their experiences and to be heard.

In this last part, the focus is on the participants' understanding of and reflections on their lived experiences in the teaching profession and what meaning they attach to it. From the data the following themes emerged: the role of God and communication.

#### **4.6 Closing remarks**

This chapter presents the data constructed from my focus group interviews. The interviews were directed at the participants' lived experience of work engagement. In Chapter five, I discuss the main findings which emerged from the data. This discussion is informed by my literature review (Chapter two) and shaped by my research aim and objectives.

## **Chapter five: Discussion of findings**

### **5.1 Introduction**

In Chapter four, I presented the data constructed from my semi-structured focus group interviews with teachers and SMTs on their lived experience of the phenomenon of teacher work engagement. In Chapter five, I discuss the main findings using factors which emerged from the data. This discussion is informed by my literature review and shaped by my research aim and objectives. The aim of my study is to explore teachers' lived experience of work engagement. My objectives are to investigate teachers' lived experience of how selected schools promote teacher work engagement, identify teachers' lived experience of challenges in their work engagement and provide possible suggestions to enhance teachers' lived experience of their work engagement.

The following factors emerged from the data presented in Chapter four: passion for the profession, making a difference, teaching is more than just teaching, workload, teacher interaction, strong commitment, the role of the Department of Education, the role of God and communication.

In discussing my findings, I group the above-mentioned factors in two groups – practical or extrinsic factors and psychological or intrinsic factors. Practical factors or influences are those aspects that are experienced, on a day-to-day basis, as either drivers or barriers influencing work engagement. The factors that I group under practical influences are: making a difference, teaching is more than just teaching, teacher interaction, communication, workload and the role of the Department of Education. Psychological factors or influences are those aspects that influence work engagement in terms of an emotional or cognitive character, a psychological state (Khan, 1990:694; Macey & Schneider, 2008a:5). The factors that I group under psychological influences are: passion for the profession, strong commitment and the role of God.

## **5.2 Practical influences on teachers' lived experience of work engagement**

In this section I discuss the practical influences on the research participants' daily lived experience of their work engagement. These influences are either drivers of or barriers to their work engagement. Most are experienced as drivers, but there are a few that are mainly experienced as barriers to work engagement.

### **Making a difference**

The data reveal that to make a difference in people's lives is a pre-driver of the teachers' work engagement. The research participants refer to the deep significance they attach to teaching life lessons through personal engagement with pupils in and outside the classroom. They also refer to the satisfaction of seeing their pupils mature over time.

To promote work engagement, employees must experience their work to be important, having a clear purpose and meaning for others and for themselves (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:40; Robinson et al., 2004:21). The teachers feel that they make a difference for others and themselves, which in turn promotes their work engagement.

### **Teaching is more than just teaching**

How teachers identify themselves within their lived work experience, is a dominant theme in the data. The nature and expectations of the employee's work has an influence on their professional identity and the consequent level of their work engagement (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:40; Tsakissiris, 2015:25). The participants experience a changing professional identity due to changing expectations and demands placed on them as professionals. They ascribe it to the changing perceptions of the profession by parents and society. The teachers reported having to be social workers, caregivers, psychologists, nurses, fund-raisers, event organisers and administrators, none of which they are prepared for. These added expectations and demands make for a great deal of unpredictability in a teacher's life. Teaching is no longer even mainly about teaching.

In addition to changing their professional identity teachers' expanded and unpredictable work experiences impact their work-life balance and recovery time from

work. Macey and Schneider (2008b:83) state that employees cannot use their energy at the highest level all the time. Employees need to recover and rest to ensure their continued well-being. If employees do not relax on a regular basis, they will find it progressively difficult to engage.

The teachers' changing professional identity due to changing parent and societal expectations has the potential to either promote work engagement or create a feeling of disengagement. For the participating teachers, depending on contextual factors such as their state of health, energy levels, home support, time of year and so on, it does both.

#### Teacher interaction

The research participants' experience of their social interaction consists of several factors that influence their work engagement. These factors include relationships, trust, respect and communication with co-workers and the SMT.

The teachers and the SMT describe themselves as a trusting and caring "family" with a close bond. Although they have conflict, different opinions and different personalities they are still part of one "family". Their relationships are resilient.

The participants appreciate the supportive respect that exists among the teachers and between the teachers and the SMT. The teachers detail experiences of support during their moments of "lows and highs". They experience this support as being professional and considerate of individual opinions.

Positive social communication strongly influences the teachers' work engagement. The teachers associate their social communication with caring for one another's well-being. The teachers reported sending and receiving birthday wishes and get-well messages via social media. They experience this social communication as a means of becoming more "interactively involved" with each other.

Strong work relationships can be achieved by demonstrating trust (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:41; Robinson et al., 2004:26; Seijts & Crim, 2006:5). Mutual respect between employees and managers is also a key requirement for work engagement

(Cleland et al., 2008:6; Conference Board, 2006:7; Guest, 2014:153). Employees want to be respected and the culture in the organisation needs to support this (Lockwood, 2007:4-5). The research shows that the participants experience their open, trusting and respectful relationships as strong drivers towards their work engagement.

### Communication

The communication discussed under teacher interaction above relates to the teachers' lived experience of their social interaction, albeit in a work context. In this section, the teachers' specifically work-related communication is discussed. In contrast to their positive communicative experience in their social interaction, the teachers' work-related communication is experienced as negative. It provokes their disengagement.

The research participants experience a need for open and unbiased communication, especially with the SMT. The teachers feel that it is sometimes difficult to talk about aspects of their work-life which trouble them, without feeling condemned or being seen as negative. They want their contrary and critical views to be heard and to share their experiences and views. They express a need to sometimes just openly vent and talk about their feelings and their problems. There is a desire from the participants for continuous open two-way communication to express their experiences.

Sound work-related communication enables employees to understand how their role contributes to the values and goals of the organisation (Evans, 2015:39). They feel well-informed about what is happening in the organisation (Guest, 2014:154). Through open two-way communication between employees and managers, such as "upwards feedback" without fear of repercussion, employees feel empowered (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006:204; Cleland et al., 2008:6; Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:41).

The last two factors I discuss in this section are workload and the role of the Department of Education. Both are experienced as barriers to teacher work engagement by most of the participants. Much of the literature I reviewed in Chapter two focuses on work engagement drivers, but there are also barriers to work engagement. Two prominent factors in the literature which are viewed as barriers to work engagement are heavy workloads and bureaucracy. For the purpose of this discussion, the term bureaucracy relates to the role of the Department of Education.

## Workload

Participants experience their workload as a barrier towards their work engagement. A number of teachers referred to wanting to be innovative, to experiment with new ideas. Others are on the look-out for opportunities to do things differently. They have no qualms with being busy. On the other hand, others find the work demands overwhelming. The must-do's outweigh the want-to-do's to such an extent that they feel that they achieve little of education value. They feel imprisoned by their workload.

## Department of Education (DoE)

The participants experience the DoE as a dominant factor in creating a feeling of disengagement. An overload of administrative requests and sometimes unworkable policies undermine the teachers' professional engagement in their work. For most of the participants the "true purpose of teaching" is lost due to the "senseless" administrative work that needs to be done.

In addition, the participants experience the constant changes in the DoE's expectations as a barrier to their work engagement. They invariably have to use their recovery and family time during school vacations to redo already completed teaching preparation to address DoE changes in curriculum and assessment and so on for the following term. This all extinguishes the teachers' passion for teaching.

Being over-worked, together with bureaucratic management demands, may increase an employee's vulnerability to stress thereby adding a further barrier to employee work engagement (Lockwood, 2007:9). Robertson-Smith and Markwick (2009:38-39) state that work with no room for diversity or progress, inflexible jobs which are particularly stressful, intimidation from managers, a lack of trust in management and long work hours with no or little break time can become barriers to work engagement.

The factors discussed in this section extrinsically influence the lived experience of teachers' work engagement as either drivers or barriers. The next section discusses the psychological influences on the teachers' lived experience of their work engagement.

### **5.3 Psychological influences on teachers' lived experience of work engagement**

In this section I discuss the psychological factors which influence teachers' lived experience of their work engagement. These psychological influences are those factors that influence work engagement in terms of an emotional or cognitive character, a psychological state (Khan, 1990:694; Macey & Schneider, 2008a:5). The psychological factors are: passion for the profession, strong commitment and the role of God. The research shows that these three factors are experienced by the participants as intrinsic and positive influences on their lived experience of work engagement.

#### Passion for the profession

The participants experience a strong feeling of passion for teaching as a profession. The data shows that the participants experienced a strong engagement towards the teaching profession before even entering the profession. For the participants to become a teacher was an intrinsic desire and passion from childhood.

A number of the participants express their lived experience as a dream but also as something inherited – “in the blood” – both of which stem from their childhood or were gained from their parents. Experiences of teacher role models or their parents being teachers themselves during their childhood, evoked a growing passion for teaching as a profession. Becoming a teacher became their life goal creating their purpose and meaning, and a sense of fulfilment.

The participants experience the passion to engage in the teaching profession as intrinsic, with some moving beyond passion and experiencing teaching as a higher calling. Several of the participants believe that there was a “Higher hand” involved, which led them to follow the route of teaching as a profession. From the data it is evident that the participants experience a truly deep-seated passion for the teaching profession. For them teaching is an expression of who they are as human beings.

Vallerand, Blanchard, Mageau, Koestner, Ratelle, Léonard and Gagné (2003:756-757) describe passion as an intense desire towards an activity that an individual likes, which they experience as significant and in which they are willing to invest their time

and energy. They believe that the concept of passion provides a sense of fulfilment in the lives of people. According to them “passion can fuel motivation, enhance well-being, and provide meaning in everyday life”.

### Strong commitment

Most of the participants experience a strong sense of commitment, sometimes obsessively so, to their profession, regardless of the challenges they experience. Several of the participants referred to experiences of waking up at night emotionally engaging in work-related matters, while others experience a constant emotional engagement up until they go to bed in the evenings. They are so strongly committed to their work that they constantly think about new ideas to improve their work. The participants acknowledge that the teaching profession is challenging but for them the fulfilment or “sweet” they receive from teaching outweighs the challenges or “sour”.

The participants experience strong emotional commitment and experience the teaching profession as “a way of life”. For them teaching is part of their lives, their focus. Being a teacher is who they are and how they identify themselves in society.

In contrast, the participants also experience periods of distance accompanied by despondency, a sense of disillusionment and exploitation. A few of the participants experience despondency where they feel the fun of teaching is sometimes smothered due to a number of extrinsic factors. They also express a feeling of disillusionment because of roles they need to fulfil which they are not prepared for. They experience a feeling of exploitation at times where their willingness to engage in activities becomes a task of doing “everything”.

For the research participants, commitment is more than merely doing one’s work to the best of one’s ability. It includes a deep emotional experience. The research participants experience a strong sense of commitment, regardless of periods of despondency, disillusionment or exploitation. Seeking the “sweet” rather than the “sour”.

Personality traits which are work engagement orientated, such as being conscientious, proactive and having a self-motivated personality (Macey & Schneider, 2008a:23)



promote a sense of strong commitment. These characteristics of an employee are likely to provide them with a tendency towards work engagement but may also cause the employee to experience hardship if they are prevented from engaging which may cause the experience of distance accompanied by despondency, a sense of disillusionment and exploitation.

#### The role of God

The participants experience teaching as a “divine calling”, or a “heart calling”, something which keeps them “humble and grateful”. They express a feeling of fulfilment being a teacher. Several of the teachers referred to teaching as the reason why they were placed on earth. To them, they fulfil a specific role in the eyes of the Lord.

The participants experience teaching as more than just a job or work that needs to be done. They experience teaching as an expression of who they are as human beings within God. The following quote from the Bible (Colossians 3:23-24) summarises the participants' experiences: “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ”. This is a factor not reported on in the literature I reviewed.

Passion for the profession, strong commitment and the role of God are closely related to one another. Khan's (1990) perspective of work engagement is helpful here. Khan (1990:694) defines employee work engagement as, “the harnessing of organisation members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances”. In his research he found that employees who are emotionally and cognitively engaged in their work, demonstrate a complete connectivity of themselves to their work role and the organisation. He proposes that employees who are engaged, are more willing to devote considerable personal resources, such as effort and time, to complete their tasks successfully (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:10; Saks, 2006:602). He states that work engagement is at its best when an individual is driving “personal energies into physical, cognitive and emotional labours” (Khan, 1990:700).

The factors discussed in this section are experienced as intrinsic. The research participants' lived experience of their work engagement is generated by the individual

self and not through any extrinsic factors, such as with the practical influences discussed in the previous section. The next section theorises the findings in the light of social exchange theory.

#### **5.4 Theorising the findings in the light of social exchange theory**

One of the fundamental principles of social exchange theory is that relationships between people develop over time into mutual, trusting and loyal commitments. This will happen as long as both parties follow particular rules of exchange (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005:874-875). These rules of exchange normally include restitution or reciprocity rules such that the efforts of one party, leads to the efforts or reaction by the other party. When an employee receives financial or “socio-emotional” resources from the organisation, the employee feels obligated to react in kind and reward the organisation (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005:874-875).

#### **Practical influences on teachers’ lived experience of work engagement**

From the research, one can adduce that the practical influences on teachers’ lived experience of work engagement follow the “rules” of social exchange theory. When analysed through the lens of social exchange theory, the research reveals the following:

- When the school makes the importance of the teacher in the success of the school clear, thereby promoting a feeling of purposeful and meaningful work, teachers reward the school with positive levels of work engagement.
- When the school provides teachers with “socio-emotional” resources which equip them with the required skills to deal with the challenge of their professional identity change, this can promote positive work engagement in exchange. Also, to promote work engagement, it is important for schools to ensure the well-being of their teachers and encourage them to foster a healthy balance between life and work (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:40).
- When a school provides “socio-emotional” resources, such as positive relationships, trust, respect and sound communication practices, teachers will feel obligated to reward the school with higher levels of work engagement.

- If a school fails to provide open two-way communication, teachers will become more inclined to disengage from their work and the school. The amount of physical, cognitive and emotional resources teachers are willing to commit towards the performance of their work are conditional on the “socio-emotional” resources, such as open two-way communication, provided by the school.
- If the Department of Education fails to provide more manageable workloads and workable policies, teachers will become more inclined to disengage from their work and the teaching profession.

### Psychological influences on teachers’ lived experience of work engagement

One can argue that the factors which I grouped under the heading of psychological influences do not theoretically fit within the framework of social exchange theory per se. There is no exchange of resources or rewards between the organisation (the school) and the employees (the teachers). The factors under this heading cannot be interpreted as financial or “socio-emotional” resources provided in exchange for positive work engagement. These factors are experienced as intrinsic by the participants. The drive to engage in their work is generated by the individual and not through any extrinsic factors, such as with the practical influences. Compared to the factors discussed under the heading of practical influences, which follow the “rules” of social exchange theory, the factors discussed under the heading of psychological influences, do not follow these same rules. These factors go beyond the transactional rules of social exchange theory.

### 5.5 Closing summary

The data discussion in this chapter is informed by my literature review and shaped by my research aim and objectives. Nine factors emerged from the data presented in Chapter four. In discussing my findings, I grouped these factors into two groups – practical influences and psychological influences. Practical influences pertain to those factors that are experienced, on a daily basis, as either drivers or barriers influencing teachers’ lived experience of work engagement. Psychological influences pertain to those factors that influence teachers’ lived experience of work engagement in terms of an emotional or cognitive character, a psychological state. This chapter also

theorises the findings through the lens of social exchange theory. In Chapter six, I present a summary of my study. I also present some practical suggestions to enhance teachers' lived experience of work engagement and identifies further work engagement research possibilities.



## **Chapter six: Conclusion**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The focus of Chapter six is to provide a conclusion to my study on the phenomenon of teachers' lived experience of work engagement in the context of South African schools. The following aspects are discussed in this chapter:

- A summary of the study,
- Practical suggestions to enhance teachers' lived experience of work engagement, and
- Further teacher work engagement research possibilities.

### **6.2 Summary of the study**

In Chapter one, I introduce the reader to my study on the phenomenon of teachers' lived experience of work engagement. In this chapter I present the reader with a historical context of teacher work engagement in South African schools. I continue with a research context and also briefly discuss the concept of work engagement from an international perspective. I present the reader with my personal context or rationale for venturing into this study on teacher work engagement. I provide the reader with a short introduction to my research methodology and introduce the reader to the aim and objectives of my study. The aim of my study is to explore teachers' lived experience of work engagement. My objectives are to investigate teachers' lived experience of how selected schools promote teacher work engagement, identify teachers' lived experience of challenges in their work engagement and provide possible suggestions to enhance teachers' lived experience of their work engagement.

The focus of Chapter two is to review the literature on teachers' lived experience of work engagement. Due to the dearth of research on teacher work engagement, specifically in South African schools, this chapter draws mostly on international business literature. In this chapter I explore employee work engagement from practitioner, academic and consultancy perspectives. This chapter also explores the effects of employee work engagement on organisations and employees, variations in

employee work engagement, drivers of and barriers to employee work engagement, employee work engagement measurement, how organisations can create a work engagement culture and employee work engagement research needs. I also present and discuss the theoretical framework of social exchange theory, that informs my study.

Chapter three focuses on the research design and methodological approach I used for my investigation. In this chapter I discuss the research paradigm, the research method, participant selection, data construction, data analysis, ethical implications, trustworthiness of my research and I present a critique of my methodology. I used the interpretive phenomenology of Heidegger (1962) as my preferred research method to explore the lived experience of teachers' work engagement. I used semi-structured focus group interviews instead of traditional phenomenological interviews which are conducted with only one participant and one interviewer. The data were analysed using a set of phenomenological procedures (Groenewald, 2004:50; Van der Mescht, 1996:61; Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015:11).

In Chapter four, I present themes which emerge from the data, that are relevant to the phenomenon under study and the aim and objectives of my study. The following themes emerge: passion for the profession, making a difference, teaching is more than just teaching, workload, teacher interaction, strong commitment, the role of the Department of Education, the role of God and communication. In this chapter I also present a brief discussion of the contextual settings of the participating schools.

In Chapter five, I discuss the main findings which emerge from the data. This discussion is informed by my literature review and shaped by my research aim and objectives. I group the above-mentioned factors into two groups – practical or extrinsic factors and psychological or intrinsic factors that influence teachers' lived experience of their work engagement. Practical factors or influences are those aspects that are experienced, on a day-to-day basis, as either drivers or barriers influencing work engagement. The factors that I group under practical influences are: making a difference, teaching is more than just teaching, teacher interaction, communication, workload and the role of the Department of Education. Psychological factors or influences are those aspects that influence work engagement in terms of an emotional

or cognitive character, a psychological state (Khan, 1990:694; Macey & Schneider, 2008a:5). The factors that I group under psychological influences are: passion for the profession, strong commitment and the role of God.

Chapter five provides various “answers” of how selected schools promote teacher work engagement. This chapter also identifies challenges in teachers’ work engagement. Factors such as making a difference, teaching is more than just teaching, teacher interaction, passion for the profession, strong commitment and the role of God promote teachers’ work engagement. While factors such as communication, workload and the role of the Department of Education are experienced as challenges in teachers’ work engagement.

Chapter six provides a conclusion to my study on the phenomenon of teachers’ lived experience of work engagement. In this chapter I provide a summary of the dissertation where I emphasise the “answer” to my research question, provide possible suggestions from my findings to enhance teachers’ lived experience of their work engagement and offer further research possibilities. The following section presents practical suggestions to enhance teachers’ lived experience of their work engagement.

### **6.3 Practical suggestions to enhance teachers’ lived experience of work engagement**

Many organisations, including schools, face considerable challenges to improve their performance. The question is, “How can this be done?” According to Robertson-Smith and Markwick (2009:3) part of the answer may lie in the promotion of employee (teacher) work engagement.

In an attempt to address the challenge to improve schools’ performance and to create an organisational culture which is supportive of teachers’ lived experience of work engagement, schools may learn from the factors that have been found in this study, both in the empirical data and in the literature, to enhance work engagement. Following are some suggestions to enhance teachers’ lived experience of work engagement:

- Teachers attach a deep significance to making a difference through purposeful and meaningful work. To enhance teachers' lived experience of work engagement, schools need to promote this feeling of purposeful and meaningful work by acknowledging the value of each individual teacher in their role within the context of the school.
- In dealing with the challenge of professional identity change schools need to provide their teachers with relevant training, equipping them with the required skills.
- To enhance teachers' lived experience of work engagement, schools need to ensure the well-being of their teachers. Teachers need to be encouraged to foster a healthy balance between their personal life and work.
- Schools need to promote positive relationships, trust, respect and sound communication practices.
- Schools need to foster and develop open two-way work-related communication where teachers are heard and can voice their opinions without being judged. Unbiased open two-way communication between the teachers and the SMT should be encouraged and honoured.
- To alleviate teachers' workloads, schools are encouraged to find ways to appoint additional staff. These appointments should not only include additional teachers or teacher assistants but also specialists such as social workers, psychologists, nurses, etc.
- An open dialogue between the Department of Education and teachers should be initiated where teachers can voice their opinions regarding their workloads and policies.

The following section identifies further teacher work engagement research possibilities.

#### **6.4 Further teacher work engagement research possibilities**

Most research on employee work engagement has utilised a survey methodology. Qualitative research approaches would offer in-depth insight into employee experiences and a better understanding of the nature of employee work engagement



(Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:55). My qualitative study is intended to help fill that void. Very little is known about teachers' lived experience of work engagement. For example, there are few studies that conceptualise the effects and "antecedents" of teachers' lived experience of work engagement (Shuck & Wollard, 2010:105).

Surveys tend to take snapshots of a phenomenon. There is a need for longitudinal research on teachers' lived experience of work engagement, for example to identify links between teachers' lived experience of work engagement and school performance. This is likely to determine long term effects and benefits for teachers' lived experience of work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008:219).

The importance of school-as-organisation and group leadership in employee work engagement is clearly indicated in the literature. Effective leadership is an important work engagement driver and leaders potentially have the most influence on employee work engagement (Robinson et al., 2007:25). However, it is unclear from the literature how leaders do this and what is distinctive about such leadership. Such research might help identify what kind of leadership development could help leaders better engage their employees (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009:55).

The role of God, as discussed under the psychological influences on teachers' lived experience of work engagement, is not reported on in the literature I reviewed. The influence of the role of God on teachers' lived experience of their work engagement offer a further research possibility.

All three schools in this study are ordinary public primary schools with very similar contextual settings, as discussed in Chapter four. A further research possibility is to repeat this same study at different types of schools e.g. high schools, independent schools, "disadvantaged" schools, home school centres, etc. The data constructed from this research could then be compared to create a broader understanding of the phenomenon of teachers' lived experience of work engagement within the context of South African schools.

## **6.5 Closing summary**

Chapter six presents the conclusion of my interpretive phenomenological research study on the phenomenon of teachers' lived experience of work engagement. This chapter presents a summary of the study, practical suggestions for schools to enhance teachers' lived experience of work engagement and identify further teacher work engagement research possibilities.



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## **Participant interview questions**

### **Part 1:**

1. How did you come to teaching as a profession?
  - Talk about past experiences that led you to your teaching profession.

### **Part 2:**

2. What is your work (as a teacher)?
  - Take me through your day from waking up to falling asleep at night.
  - Talk about your time devoted to school related stuff – weekends, vacations, breaks, time arriving and time leaving.
  - Discuss doing extra tasks that is not set out in your job description.
  - What draws you to your school?
3. What is it like for you to do what you do?
  - Talk about your relationship with your students, parents, peers, SMT.
  - Discuss the quality of communication, respect and trust within your school.
  - Do you feel influential, effective and that you make an impact in your school?
  - Discuss achievement, attainment of realistic but challenging goals, and advancement in your school and the profession.
  - Discuss the SMT's role in your work – fostering confidence and autonomy to make decisions, setting clear goals and accountability, providing support and constructive feedback.
  - If you were to draw a picture that captures your school experience, what would you draw?

### **Part 3:**

4. Now that you have talked about how you came to your work, and what it is like for you to do your work, what does it mean to you?
- What drives you?
  - Would you invite others into the profession – showing pride and support towards teaching?
  - Talk about doing something different, being innovative and fostering change.
  - Discuss feeling connected to something bigger by way of feeling part of something that matters.
  - How would you enhance teacher work engagement?



Appendix 2

**School A1: Teacher Transcript – NMU’s**

**Part 1:**

<b>Line/s:</b>	<b>Original transcript:</b>	<b>Exploratory comments:</b>
37	Joan: It's a passion, still, it's a love.	<i>Passion towards teaching.</i>
62	Joan: It comes back to that passion, that... that passion.	<i>Passion for the profession. Influence engagement?</i>
75, 83-84	Joan: The difference you make in a child's life. ... So, I think, this makes teaching worthwhile. That difference. If I make a difference in just one child's life, I'm in heaven.	<i>Want to make a difference in the profession. Will engage to foster that drive to make a difference.</i>
43-46	Penny: I think the influence of good teachers and bad teachers has made me want to be a teacher. Like, I didn't want to be like the bad teachers, I didn't want to be as unfair, and then I had many good teachers who motivated me and influenced me to go into teaching.	<i>Influence of teachers. Influence to engage or disengage. Motivate.</i>
50-52	Penny: They were not unfair, it was a big thing for me, because I don't like injustice. I want to be like them, they were very loving and cared for people. They were willing to put much more effort into you than other teachers.	<i>Injustice, to care for the wellbeing of others. Influence on engagement?</i>

58-60	Odette: Yes, I too, as a little girl... it was a passion. It was a dream. It was like everything I wanted to be. This and a mom. It was becoming a teacher and a mom. It was my passion.	<i>Relation between passion for the profession, engagement in work and family life.</i>
64-67	Rachell: I think the influence your children have, if you think back in your life. It's life, that's what everyone is talking about, even if you're 50 or 70. Everyone goes back to school years and teachers and like the influence they had and then I think sports as well. I really have a passion for sports, so that part of teaching is also very good.	<i>Positive influence of teachers and sport coaches, creating a drive towards work engagement.</i>
71-73	Rachell: The coaching. I think to develop someone better than he was and then to see someone grow and I think through sports, you can also teach a lot of life lessons to someone in a very short time, so that specifically.	<i>Engage with work, not only in the classroom and sports field, but also on a personal level. Influence on engagement?</i>
112-114	Alex: Great passion for children, that development and to see how they improve and how they grow and just the difference you can make in their lives.	<i>Relation between passion and engagement. Passion overcoming all the negative aspects of the profession.</i>

**Part 2:**

126-128	Joan: I think the moment you enter the school grounds your responsibility starts, because then you notice who is playing where, in the wrong places, which is dangerous.	<i>Responsibilities and engagement. Do I only do what I do, because it is my responsibility or do, I truly engage?</i>
134-136	Joan: So, I think, teaching today is an absolute “think on your feet” job, it's innovative, you're constantly making plans and figuring stuff out...	<i>Role of the teacher. Expectations. Influence on engagement?</i>
282-287	Joan: But that's it, it's extra time and in the end of the day, if you come back from that day, you're a zero on a contract. For your family and your children, you mean nothing at all. You know it demands more of you than just the hours. No one sees the hours after that. No one sees just how long it takes for your body to recover and get back to it again, and again. I think the impact it has on a person and on a teacher isn't seen out there.	<i>Demands placed on the teacher. Recovery time. Influence on family live. Doing work that is not in job description. Influence on engagement?</i>
305-307	Joan: So, I always look where an opportunity presents itself where I can do something else, you know... one always wants to be progressive and just a little ahead and show other schools, at our school is something new that we do.	<i>Achievement motive. A factor in our unequal school system. Cultural values.</i>
477	Joan: We have a manual but it doesn't say a lot.	<i>Communication. Influence on engagement?</i>



620-626	<p>Joan: I am so busy, I can't think of a place where I've been really achieving something right now, because you're so busy allocating your time to all the stuff you need to pay attention to and I don't really think I can tell you I'm achieving something here or here, or I really achieved something there... because my work load is just too much. You know, at this stage I'm just trying to get to everything, but, so for me personally, I don't really have achievements. It's just an achievement for me to get through the week.</p>	<p><i>Workload. Recognition of achievements. Need to feel valued. Influence on engagement?</i></p>
144-145	<p>Zoe: I sometimes wake up at night to think what I can do to keep these children from doing poor in their schoolwork.</p>	<p><i>Strong engagement?</i></p>
146-148	<p>Zoe: I probably will lie from two o'clock in the morning to half past five and think of everyone in my class who has problems and what I can do...</p>	<p><i>Related to stress or sub-conscious engagement. Psychological explanation?</i></p>
740-742	<p>Zoe: So, I... it's really so, that's why I say, my picture will basically just be school. There is not much... there will be such a small house at the bottom. Yes, a very small house, you will need a magnifying glass to see it.</p>	<p><i>Relation between family life and work engagement. Powerful image.</i></p>
152-153	<p>Odette: Our responsibility is getting so much bigger, because parents are no longer involved.</p>	<p><i>Responsibility and influence of external factors on engagement.</i></p>

170	Odette: It's not that you are just the teacher anymore. You're everything.	<i>Changing role of teachers. Influence on engagement?</i>
245-246	Odette: Mmm, yes. If you do leave early, then you are behind and the pressure becomes so much bigger and you will eventually end up with too much things to do.	<i>Prisoner/hostage of work. Recovery time. Influence on engagement? Disengage?</i>
418-419	Odette: The fact that we were through so much, how close we came and I think we supported each other so much.	<i>Role of time together and engagement.</i>
607-614	Odette: Then a parent will come screaming at you, because you have done something wrong, what you thought was right, still think it's right, but they think, because you are coaching netball you are the best in netball and you have to be some springbok netball player before you can coach netball and they judge you on that, but actually, you're just a teacher who is placed there and you try to do your best, but parents do not always understand it, and sometimes they can make you a little negative or a little bit crazy, because you thought what you are doing is right, but clearly it is not necessarily...	<i>Despondency. Feel a need to disengage? Measured on skills that you don't have or were not trained in. Create negativity. Can lead to stress or depression?</i>
186-188	Alex: Meanwhile, you sit with your children who need more attention than you realise so I just feel that our teachers' children are	<i>Work-life balance/integration. A</i>

204-205	<p>suffering from how education is working today.</p> <p>Alex: Yes, and a school is no longer just a school, we have become a competitive business.</p>	<p><i>dilemma. Guilt feelings. Feel a need to disengage?</i></p> <p><i>School culture. Identity change.</i></p>
242-243	<p>Alex: You can't afford not to work even if someone says you can go home or you may have an early afternoon.</p>	<p><i>Prisoner/hostage of work.</i></p>
195-197	<p>Rachell: We... there's an incredible amount of admin we really know is senseless but what needs to be done, because in the end you work for the Department of Education.</p>	<p><i>Workload. Doing tasks that have an obvious relevance. Doing something that is important or senseless? Influence of external factors on engagement.</i></p>
258-259	<p>Rachell: Because stuff from the department came back and everything changed again...</p>	<p><i>Undermining professional engagement (DoE). Sabotage.</i></p>
371	<p>Rachell: Yes, safe haven.</p>	<p><i>Metaphor.</i></p>
211-212	<p>Laurin: So, the... your role or job description you had, is no longer what it was.</p>	<p><i>Changing professional identity. Influence on engagement?</i></p>
746-747	<p>Laurin: If I have the perfect picture without all the problems and stuff, then it is just me and my class with my children.</p>	<p><i>Engagement regardless of problems and "stuff".</i></p>

223-225	Sara: The fun of teaching is no longer there. Many times, I really think I can just teach, because it's nice and, because I want to teach. But sometimes when I lie down in my bed, I think the fun of teaching is taken away. I just want to teach children.	<i>Disillusionment. Wants to engage, but feel the need to disengage?</i>
316-318	Sara: I just want to join in, I think if you are that way, then the school... there is someone who will always exploit you on it too. So, if you do something, then you have to do everything.	<i>Exploitation. Pareto principle. 80/20 rule.</i>
235-237	Nicole: To join them, for me now, when I started at this school, I thought you are in your class all the time, you just do what you plan, and that's it. Well then reality hit me, then it's admin and this and... I get a register. I don't even know how to fill it in.	<i>Disillusionment. Lack of training. Create a need to disengage?</i>
332-335	Nicole: Family, as it feels to me the teachers are family. Other schools we've seen, and we've seen many schools, you sit there, students and assistants sit there... other teachers there... they make groups. Here, everyone is talking to everyone. If you do not, someone will come to you and ask you how you are today. And I like it.	<i>Metaphor.</i>
340	Tanya: I think it's a, if I may say so, a farm school atmosphere.	<i>Metaphor.</i>

366-367	Tanya: Something different happens in this school than other schools.	<i>Being part of something important. Part of group/team that makes this profession unique. Influence on engagement?</i>
404-406	Penny: I think especially with our school, I think we see each other's uniqueness and you know how people sometimes react and we give them the space for it, we are very supportive.	<i>Time together. Teacher interaction. Influence on engagement?</i>

**Part 3:**

774	Odette: I think like the positivity you provoke in the children...	<i>To make a difference – driver for engagement.</i>
811-819	Sara: When a child comes to you and asks you why am I here? Why did the Lord put me on the earth if my parents didn't even love me? Then you realise, sorry... [crying] then you realise you as a teacher was placed here for a reason. Not for anything else, but to make a difference in that person or that child's life, because it's hard to hear that there are parents who don't love their children and I think it drives me. To tell those children, but do you know what, if mom or dad isn't there for you, your teacher is here and the school and the other children and the teachers love you and we love you and	<i>See herself as part of the whole. Part of what makes a difference.</i>

981	<p>that's why the Lord put you in our school to be there for you.</p> <p>Sara: You want to be able to talk about it but not be condemned for it.</p>	<p><i>Open communication without repercussions. Influence on engagement?</i></p>
851	Joan: Because it's nice to me. I love it.	<i>Love for the profession drives engagement.</i>
902-903	Joan: They do not know what they want to do, then they become teachers.	<i>Engagement and the "right" people.</i>
911-914	Joan: One should look at a standard again. Can't they look and say you know what, if you want to go into education or teaching, you should at least fall into that slot, so that we can raise our standard again.	<p><i>Quality teachers for quality education. Promote engagement in the profession/work – "right" people in the job. Role of DoE?</i></p>
956-959	Joan: I think sometimes it will be good to sit down and talk to them. What are you experiencing? What do you suggest? They don't have to do everything we say. They just need to hear us out.	<p><i>Open two-way communication between SMT and teachers. Influence on engagement?</i></p>
857-858	Tanya: It is true. There are people who say you are here for the outcome and not for the income.	<p><i>Engage with work regardless of income – Theoretical framework (social exchange theory).</i></p>

874-878	<p>Rachell: I feel they are pushing you where they can and, in the end, you divide your attention like that. So, at the end of the day I can't be the best I am in class. I can't be the best I can be on the netball field and can't be the best at, for example, the choir because my attention is so divided that I don't have that much time per day and in the end I can't excel anywhere.</p>	<p><i>Divided attention. Lack of focus creates uncertainty. Might lead to disengagement.</i></p>
888	<p>Alex: Yes, education does not draw the right people to it.</p>	<p><i>Get the "right" people for and in the profession.</i></p>
895-896	<p>Alex: I think, many times schools are training people but with little knowledge of what's going on in the world outside.</p>	<p><i>Training needs of the teachers. Are they abreast of changes happening in the world. Forth industrial revolution?</i></p>
920	<p>Laurin: Take away all that extra stuff.</p>	<p><i>Clear job descriptions. Create clear expectations. Influence on engagement?</i></p>



## **ETHICS CLEARANCE**

Dear Frederick Klopper

**Ethical Clearance Number: Sem 1 2018-004**

**The role of school management teams in teachers' work engagement.**

Ethical clearance for this study is granted subject to the following conditions:

- If there are major revisions to the research proposal based on recommendations from the Faculty Higher Degrees Committee, a new application for ethical clearance must be submitted.
- If the research question changes significantly so as to alter the nature of the study, it remains the duty of the student to submit a new application.
- It remains the student's responsibility to ensure that all ethical forms and documents related to the research are kept in a safe and secure facility and are available on demand.
- Please quote the reference number above in all future communications and documents.

**The Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee has decided to**

- Grant ethical clearance for the proposed research.
- Provisionally grant ethical clearance for the proposed research
- Recommend revision and resubmission of the ethical clearance documents

Sincerely,

Dr David Robinson

**Chair: FACULTY OF EDUCATION RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**

23 May 2020





# GAUTENG PROVINCE

Department: Education  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

8/4/4/1/2

## GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

<b>Date:</b>	<b>09 May 2018</b>
<b>Validity of Research Approval:</b>	<b>05 February 2018 — 28 September 2018 2018/58</b>
<b>Name of Researcher:</b>	<b>Klopper F.</b>
<b>Address of Researcher:</b>	<b>P.O Box 3052 Randgate 1763</b>
<b>Telephone Number:</b>	<b>072 611 6592</b>
<b>Email address:</b>	<b>klopmy@gmail.com</b>
<b>Research Topic:</b>	<b>The role of school management teams in teachers' work engagement.</b>
<b>Type of qualification</b>	<b>MEd Education Leadership and Management</b>
<b>Number and type of schools:</b>	<b>Three Primary Schools</b>
<b>District]s/HO</b>	<b>Gauteng West, Johannesburg North.</b>

### Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research

This letter serves to indicate that approval is hereby granted to the above-mentioned researcher to proceed with research in respect of the study indicated above. The onus rests with the researcher to negotiate appropriate and relevant time schedules with the school/s and/or offices involved to conduct the research. A separate copy of this letter must be presented to both the School (both Principal and SGB) and the District/Head Office Senior Manager confirming that permission has been granted for the research to be conducted.

The following conditions apply to GDE research. The researcher may proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met. Approval may be withdrawn should any of the conditions listed below be flouted:

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Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management

1. The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s concerned must be presented with a copy of this letter that would indicate that the said researcher/s has/have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.
2. The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s must be approached separately, and in writing, for permission to involve District/Head Office Officials in the project.
3. A copy of this letter must be forwarded to the school principal and the chairperson of the School Governing Body (SGB) that would indicate that the researcher/s have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.
4. A letter/ document that outline the purpose of the research and the anticipated outcomes of such research must be made available to the principals, SGBs and District/Head Office Senior Managers of the schools and districts/offices concerned, respectively.
5. The Researcher will make every effort obtain the goodwill and co-operation of al/ the GDE officials, principals, and chairpersons of the SGBs, teachers and learners involved. Persons who offer their co-operation will not receive additional remuneration from the Department while those that opt not to participate will not be penalised in any way.
6. Research may only be conducted after school hours so that the normal school programme is not interrupted. The Principal (if at a school) and/or Director (if at a district/head office) must be consulted about an appropriate time when the researcher/s may carry out their research at the sites that they manage.
7. Research may only commence from the second week of February and must be concluded before the beginning of the last quarter of the academic year. If incomplete, an amended Research Approval letter may be requested to conduct research in the following year.
8. Items 6 and 7 will not apply to any research effort being undertaken on behalf of the GDE. Such research will have been commissioned and be paid for by the Gauteng Department of Education.
9. It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain written parental consent of all learners that are expected to participate in the study.
10. The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her own research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes and telephones and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.
11. The names of the GDE officials, schools, principals, parents, teachers and learners that participate in the study may not appear in the research report without the written consent of each of these individuals and/or organisations.
12. On completion of the study the researcher/s must supply the Director: Knowledge Management & Research with one Hard Cover bound and an electronic copy of the research.
13. The researcher may be expected to provide short presentations on the purpose, findings and recommendations of his/her research to both GDE officials and the schools concerned.
14. Should the researcher have been involved with research at a school and/or a district/head office level, the Director concerned must also be supplied with a brief summary of the purpose, findings and recommendations of the research study.

The Gauteng Department of Education wishes you well in this important undertaking and looks forward to examining the findings of your research study.

Kind regards



Mr Gumani Mukatuni

Acting CES: Education Research and Knowledge Management

Date: 10 / 05 / 2018

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Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management

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