Perspectives of learners and teachers on school dysfunctions in South Africa

Manfred Max Bergman
University of Basel
Visiting professor at the University of Johannesburg and the University of the Witwatersrand

Zinette Bergman
University of Johannesburg

Corresponding author
Max Bergman
Deparament of the Social Sciences
University of Basel
Petersgaben 27
4051 Basel, Switzerland
E-mail: max.bergman@unibas.ch

Abstract

The aim of this article is to develop and test a systematic framework for conceptualising and analyzing dysfunctions in schools. Based on the Explanatory Model of School Dysfunctions (EMSD) developed by Bergman, Bergman and Gravett (2011), dysfunctions as experienced by teachers and learners were analysed. Data for this research are non-representative and include 40 essays written by teachers and approximately 1 500 open-ended responses by recently matriculated students. It was found that the EMSD is suitable for modelling the problem domains experienced by teachers and learners. Perceived causes and consequences of dysfunctions relate to their proximal contact zone, i.e. the agents and behaviours with which they are most familiar. This article includes a discussion on theoretical and empirical limitations, recommendations for future research in this field, as well as policy recommendations to address some of the problems experienced by teachers and learners in South Africa.

Key words: Dysfunctions, learners, proximal contact zone (PCZ), South African schools, teachers.

Introduction

> *I did not sign up for this. I just want to teach. I am not here to be a parent, social worker, psychiatrist and psychologist to these kids. I love my subject, I love to teach and I was very excited to become part of the school that I attended as a boy, but really! I am at my wits' end.* (VJM)

Teacher education in South Africa includes methodology modules (focusing, for example, on teaching methods, curriculum, education policy, classroom management, subject methodology) and subject content modules (e.g. accounting, biology, English, geography,

mathematics, physics, etc). Teachers also acquire teaching experience from a practical component (also referred to as teaching practice, school experience, and so on), usually lasting between six and 12 weeks, in which they put into practice, in schools, what they learnt in their coursework. Despite a training period of four years, most novice teachers are unprepared for the harsh reality of teaching in South African public schools. This is due, in part, to the economic, political, cultural and historical context of the country and community, and in part to the institutional realities and professional demands that go beyond what is covered in teacher training modules. The lived day-to-day reality in a school and a classroom diverges considerably from the lectures, textbooks, and the often naive expectations of novice teachers.

This article explores problems encountered by learners and teachers in primary and secondary schools in South Africa. It aims to analyse and explain the variety and interrelatedness of problems in schools, based on non-representative samples of 40 teachers' essays, and more than 1 500 open-ended survey responses reflecting the experiences of matriculants. The Explanatory Model of School Dysfunctions (EMSD; Bergman, Bergman & Gravett, 2011) serves as a heuristic framework with which to systematically classify the problem sets, their antecedents, and their consequences faced by many learners and teachers. A conceptual framework on school dysfunctions, developed and tested in a South African context allows for a more systematic understanding of dysfunctions, and, more broadly, assists in empirical research, interventions and policy making in this field.

Contextual background

South Africa's primary and secondary schools perform poorly, even among African countries. Grade 8 learners scored lowest of 46 countries in mathematics and science in 2004 (Reddy 2006; UNESCO 2006). These results hide the fact that black and coloured schools fare much worse than predominantly white and Indian schools (Christie 2008; Van der Berg 2008), prompting experts to conclude that historically black schools have not improved significantly since the end of apartheid (Fleisch 2008; Van der Berg 2008).

While shortcomings relating to school management, leadership and teaching are partially to blame for these results, they certainly do not account for the national crisis in education. In terms of infrastructure, for example, the National Educational Infrastructure Management Systems report (Department of Basic Education, NEIMS 2009) found that many schools do not have access to electricity, running water, flush toilets, libraries or computer facilities. Other frequently encountered problems include multi-grade classes and class size exceeding 60 learners (Department of Basic Education 2010, 2011). Unsurprisingly, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation found that 'close to 80% of South Africa's schools are essentially dysfunctional' (Taylor 2006:65).

Other contributing factors to the national education crisis are problems encountered outside of schools, termed extrinsic factors. Learners are often hungry, ill, lack parental support, appropriate clothing, means of transportation to school, and so on (Kamper 2008; Maree 2010). In addition to being exposed to crime and violence, many learners lack a suitable home environment that is conducive to learning. Finally more than two million learners were single or double orphans in 2008, and nearly 50 000 learners were reported pregnant by

their school principals, of which approximately 70 per cent were in grade 9 or below (Department of Basic Education 2010). As the highest HIV population worldwide, 5.6 million people residing in South Africa are estimated to be infected, and 410 000 new infections were estimated for 2010, of which 40 000 are children (Statistics South Africa 2010). It is the combination of problems arising from deficiencies in infrastructure, the home and school environment, and the national social fabric, which creates complex and interrelated problem sets that are exceedingly difficult to address with national education policy, school management, or teacher training programmes.

Conceptual background

The overall objective of this article is to identify the problems encountered by learners and teachers, and to assess the degree to which these problems fit within a previously developed model (EMSD; Bergman, Bergman & Gravett, 2011). EMSD was developed by considering (a) the scientific literature on organisational dysfunctions in the fields of industrial and organisational psychology, sociology of work and organisations, and the management and organisational sciences; (b) elements in this literature that provide explanations of organisational dysfunctions relevant to schools in a systematic manner; and (c) a subsequent refinement of the model components by assessing their coherence with 80 essays written by primary and secondary school principals and their representatives. The emergent model presents an explanatory and structural typology of dysfunctions in schools.

In this article we will, first, assess the fit of the EMSD by exploring the dimensions of dysfunctions from learner and teacher data; second, identify the main dysfunctions experienced by learners and teachers in South African schools; and, third, present the substantive and structural differences of dysfunctions between teachers and learners.
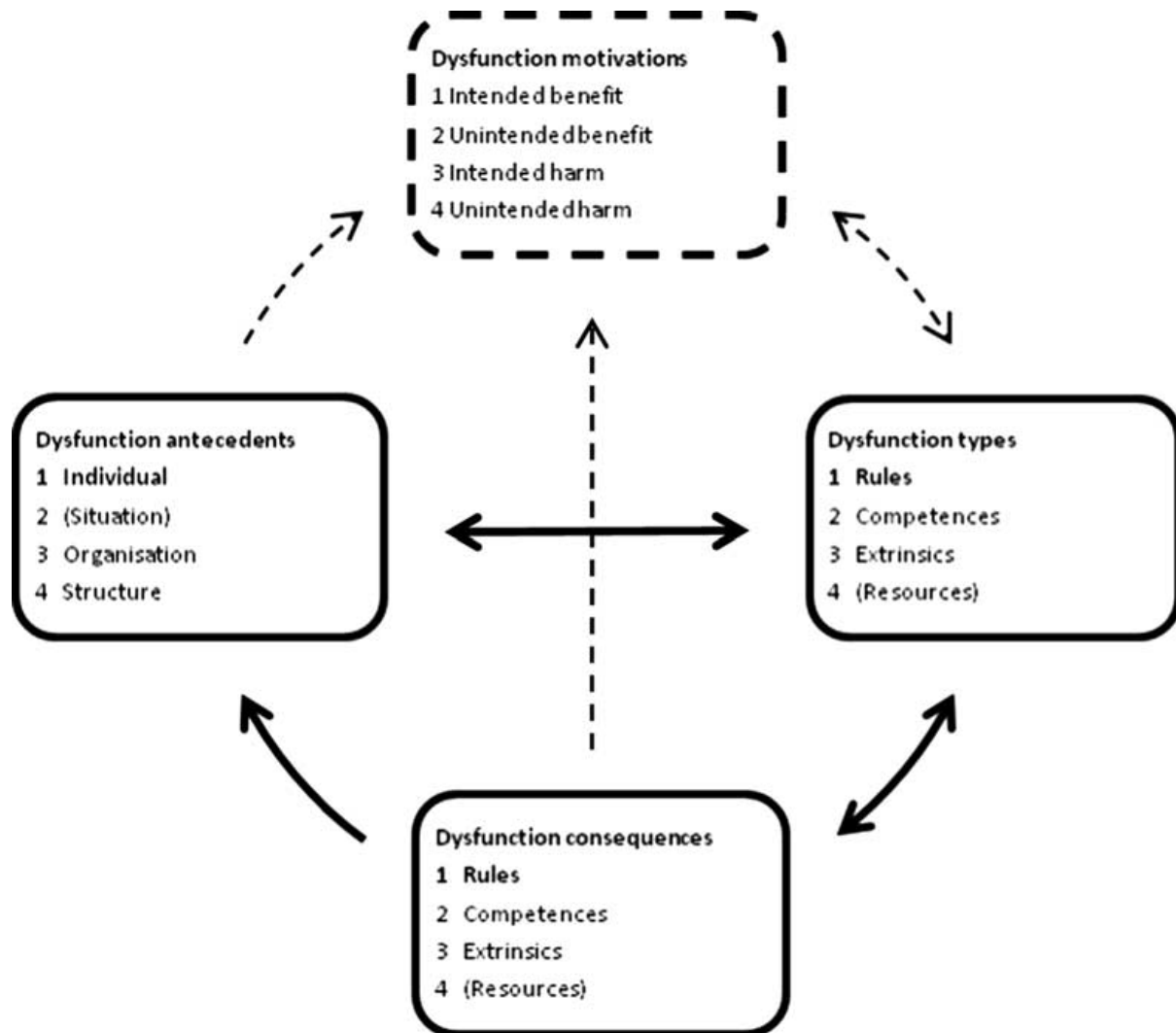
Dysfunction motivations
1 Intended benefit
2 Unintended benefit
3 Intended harm
4 Unintended harm

Dysfunction antecedents
1 Individual
2 (Situation)
3 Organisation
4 Structure

Dysfunction types
1 Rules
2 Competences
3 Extrinsics
4 (Resources)

Dysfunction consequences
1 Rules
2 Competences
3 Extrinsics
4 (Resources)

Figure 1: The EMSD of principals

The following figure presents the EMSD:

The four main components of the EMSD are: antecedents of dysfunctions, motivations for dysfunctions - a subcategory of antecedents that was added to the model because of its importance to the understanding of dysfunctions (Robinson 2008; Vardi & Wiener 1996) - dysfunctions, and consequences of dysfunctions.

Antecedents refer to phenomena that lead either directly or indirectly, via causal or correlational linkages, to dysfunctions. Examples of antecedents to dysfunctions in schools are poverty, stress, alcholism, aggression, arbitrary supervision, and so on.

Motivations form a subcategory of antecedents. They refer to ambitions, drives, urges, inclinations or intentions toward achieving a goal. Motivations are intrinsic (i.e. engaging in activities for their inherent worth) or extrinsic (i.e. engaging in activities for an outcome that is separable from that activity) (see Ryan & Deci 2000). In the EMSD, motivations are

currently conceptualised in relation to dysfunctions arising from intended benefit, intended harm, unintended benefit and unintended harm.

Dysfunctions in schools are defined as intentional or unintentional actions or positions by individuals, groups or institutions that impede (either partially or wholly) the functioning of a school, or some of its parts, by violating its organisational goals, norms or societal standards in a context relevant to the school.

Consequences are outcomes of dysfunctions that have direct or indirect effects on an organisation, some of its parts, or members associated directly or indirectly with the organisation. Primary consequences are those that are directly associated with dysfunctions. Secondary consequences are knock-on effects caused by primary effects. For example, the direct effect of inconsistent supervision as a dysfunction may lead to an increase in frustration in novice teachers. Secondary effects of this primary effect - frustration – may culminate in absenteeism or premature termination of a teaching career.

The four components of EMSD can only be separated conceptually because, as will be shown, the primary causes or correlates of dysfunctions are often other dysfunctions. Thus, inadequate supervision or absenteeism, for example, can be antecedents, dysfunctions, or consequences of dysfunctions. Accordingly, their placement within the model is relative to the narrative that pertains to a particular dysfunctional episode.

The dashed frame around motivations in Figure 1 implies that motivations are relatively rare or only implied in the narratives. The thickness of the arrows in the model implies the strength of association between the components: a bold arrow signifies a strong relation, while a dashed arrow refers to a weak relation. A double arrow means that the components thus connected form a reciprocal relationship, i.e. that dysfunctions, for instance, create changes in antecedents to subsequent dysfunctions. Bold subcomponents signify frequent mentions, while subcomponents in brackets signify infrequent mentions in the narratives.

Methods

The learners' perspective is represented by responses to open-ended survey questions of undergraduate students in their first few weeks of teacher training at the Faculty of Education at the University of Johannesburg, in 2010 and 2011. Approximately 1 500 respondents evaluated their former teachers as positive or negative role models. Data pertaining to the teachers' perspective were collected from teachers who were asked to write an essay about a concrete teaching problem, crafting cases that were to be utilised in a teaching case textbook. In total, 40 essays were collected as part of an assignment relating to problems encountered in their school. As we are explicitly focusing on various dysfunctions in schools, we only selected essays and responses that pertained to examples of dysfunctions. Neither here nor elsewhere would we argue that schools in South Africa are dysfunctional. Instead, we argue that nearly all schools in South Africa, Switzerland, or elsewhere foster different forms of dysfunctions. Thus, our focus is explicitly centered on dysfunctions. In this regard, Robinson (2008) observes that many researchers on organisations shy away from explicitly addressing, and systematically analysing, organisational dysfunctions. Selective reporting and omissions, however, do not make

dysfunctions go away; in some situations, omission may exacerbate the kinds and degree of dysfunctions. An academic bias toward a positive social science may be due, in part, to a misplaced ideological humanism, and in part to sensitivities toward the main funders of research and evaluation in organisations.

None of the data is representative of a target population, i.e. despite the considerable sample size of the data sets, the non-probabilistic sampling procedure precludes population inference. Revealing as the data may be, care should be taken to avoid over-interpretation of the findings. It is difficult to assess whether the situations and actions presented in the narratives are based on actual events, or whether they are imbued with subjectivity and fabrication. Nevertheless, subjective experiences are of importance here, because novice teachers will also only perceive their teaching environment subjectively. Thus, understanding how teachers are perceived by learners, or how teachers perceive their teaching environment (both inevitably subjective) is revealing in itself.

Surprising in the learners' responses is the small number of learners who reported not having experienced problem teachers. The ratio of learners who did not experience a problem teacher or who listed problems that were considered trivial (e.g. boring subject, unfashionable dress style, lack of humor) is 1:50.

Three analyses were conducted for this study. First, dysfunctions, their antecedents and their consequences, as recounted by learners and teachers, were analysed within the EMSD. Second, subcomponents of the EMSD were identified from the narratives in order to understand the nature and structure of dysfunctions. Third, components and subcomponents were compared between principals
(assessed in Bergman, Bergman & Gravett, 2011) and learners and teachers, and order to identify similarities and differences of dysfunctions between groups in degree and kind.

All analyses are based on Content Configuration Analysis (CCA), a systematic, qualitative analysis method for non-numeric data (Bergman 2011). It is related to qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis, but it goes beyond these in the following ways: (1) CCA explicitly and continuously relates context to the analytic process in relation to either the historical, political, cultural and social conditions of both the research context and data production, or the interconnectedness of data elements within the body of text. In this article, for example, reported dysfunctions were interpreted in light of the contemporary socio-political context of education in South Africa, as well as with other text elements within the same essay. (2) CCA is embedded in modern ontological and epistemological considerations, while concurrently emphasising its practicability within empirical research. Within limits, it can accommodate different ontological and epistemological positions. For this article, we chose an ontological and epistemological position associated with a constructivist perspective, in which we emphasise the subjective meaning constructions and interpretations of experience of the narrator. (3) If one could consider a continuum, of which the goal of qualitative analysis is to identify the actual content embedded in a text on the one hand, and an analysis that aims to construct the meaning of a text based on the subjectivities of individual researchers on the other, then CCA occupies the space where these two positions overlap. Hence, the EMSD and its embedded taxonomies are not naturally occurring in the narratives, and they do not originate merely in the authors' minds; instead, they emerged from iterations between inductive and deductive analytic approaches,

in which theory, data and themes are identified and elaborated. (4) CCA can be applied flexibly, in that it can be used on all non-numeric data, including textual, audio and visual data. Here, we used narratives by teachers and learners, but it could also be used beyond narratives, i.e. on photos or children's drawings. (5) CCA has several starting points which are conditioned by the goals, foci or theoretical frameworks of the research design, as well as the preferences of the researcher. Our starting point was an analytic framework that we developed based on a large body of literature on dysfunctions in organisations (Bergman, Bergman & Gravett, 2011) that, after exploring various possibilities in the data, yielded the EMSD. Subsequently, we conducted a comparative qualitative analysis between teachers, learners, and - in a previous article - principals, in order to assess the adequacy of the EMSD for this data and context. (6) CCA is always associated with substantive theory, whether theory guides analytic processes from the beginning, whether it is integrated during analysis, or whether CCA is used for theory building. Most formative for this article were constructivist approaches from a methodological perspective, which were present at the beginning of the analysis, and theories relating to the literature on dysfunctions in organisations, which entered the analysis process step wise (see Bergman, Bergman & Gravett, 2011). (7) CCA is a distinct method within the qualitative research domain. Its results do not necessitate additional quantitative or qualitative research. Accordingly, we do not subject the results of the analyses presented here to other qualitative or quantitative analyses. (8) While not programmatic, different forms of analytic procedures within CCA are, nevertheless, explicitly described, as presented here and in the results section. (9) The degree of complexity of CCA is research-and researcher-defined. It can be conducted in a fairly simple manner on a small sample of data, but it can also deal with multi-media data sets, large samples, and complex, multi-dimensional phenomena. More detailed analyses of the dysfunction cluster on rule breaking, for instance, will be presented in a follow-up article. (10) In many circumstances, the results of CCA may be used for additional research, including other qualitative research methods, quantitative methods, as well as within a mixed methods framework. The results from this and related qualitative research may become part of a large-scale study on school dysfunctions in a South African school district.

Results 1a: Dysfunctions from the learners' perspective

Rule bending or breaking was the most dominant dysfunctional subcomponent mentioned by learners, outnumbering all other subcomponents by a ratio of 8:1. Of these, the most prevalent are absenteeism, inebriated teachers in class, corporal punishment, favoritism, and sexual improprieties. The following are examples of the aforementioned subcomponent:

> *He always comes to school drunk, smoking, and insult learners and having affairs with them.* (NONA)[1]

> *He was not a good role model because he was in love with young school children. He also slept with them and two of them fell pregnant.* (EQESAA)

> *He was in love with corporal punishment and he did not focus on teaching. He also dated one of the girls in my class.* (EV)

An interesting group of the subcomponent 'rule breaking' is not teaching at all, as illustrated by the following excerpts:

> *Mrs S., my CAT teacher, she was always absent, she was always on Facebook, she did not teach us anything, hence we all failed and she ran away with our portfolios before our prelims.* (ANAP)

> *It was my grade 9 EMS teacher. She always came to class and talked for a few minutes, then give us work, then she eats or sleeps in class always.* (OKEBAP)

> *Mrs T. hated teaching us. We felt the same because the lessons were always the same. Read from page 1 to 80 and give me a essay on it tomorrow. Nothing ever changed.* (TVCMYW)

> *My accounting teacher was always absent on Mondays and never came to class in time, and he couldn't explain the class activities and we had to form study groups so that we can help one another to understand. Most students failed the class.* (ESUX)

The second-most prevalent subcomponent of dysfunctions associated with teachers, from the learners' perspective, relates to competence, i.e. perceived incompetence in either teaching or subject knowledge, which occasionally links to 'not teaching'. The following are examples of competence issues in relation to teaching techniques, subject knowledge, or both:

> *She read from the text book. I doubt she understood what she taught us. We were not equipped for higher grades after leaving her class.* (YHEL)

> *He didn't understand the subject he was teaching. He always supplied wrong answers to the task. If he didn't like a chapter, he would not do it.* (IMRT)

> *She wasn't clear. She couldn't explain. She didn't have answers to our questions. She was unprepared all the time.* (YMLK)

> *My geography teacher was horrible. He was lazy, always drinking tea and hotcakes and did not do his job properly . . . . and never, even for once, taught us anything to do with geography.* (EHESAE)

The third subcomponent of dysfunctions, as experienced by learners, relates to extrinsic factors, i.e. problems extrinsic to the school, but which impinge on the teaching and learning environment. This group of subcomponents is rare, but appears nevertheless to have an effect on teaching. The most frequently mentioned extrinsic dysfunction by learners relates to teachers' excessive alcohol consumption.
Occasionally mentioned are psychological instabilities, aggressive personalities, and stress or frustrations due to personal problems. The following are examples of extrinsics:

> *My physics teacher, he used to drink, come to class drunk, never marked our class tests, he will give us notes and never explain about them and he used to beat us.* (NONA)

The bad teacher I had was my geography teacher. He always beat us up, took his stress out on us, and if he doesn't like you, he will make sure that you fail his subject. He had relationships with school girls. (ATERECEN)

My business studies teacher was the leader of a trade union and left school any time of the day. Whether we get him or not. (AFEC)

Antecedents are infrequent, but this may be due, in part, to the fact that the survey did not provide the space for the learners to elaborate on their answers. Nevertheless, the most frequent antecedents to particular dysfunctions are excessive alcohol consumption, frustration with the lack of progress of students, aggression, or boredom. The following are examples of how learners presented the relationship between antecedents and dysfunctions:

He was a lazy person. Whenever he did not know a solution to the problem we had in class, he would walk out and come back tomorrow. He was not a good role model because most of the learners were failing his subject and he did not care. (AMYSAPOK)

Mr S. was a drunkard. He did not teach, he was always reading newspapers. (ESOS)

'Motivations' as a subcategory of antecedents to dysfunctions are rare in the learners' responses, but the following excerpt illustrates this EMSD component:

He didn't like working with children. He even said that he doesn't like students. He is just doing it for the money. He didn't teach us and always used corporal punishment. (NONA)

Consequences of dysfunctions, as suspected, were often other dysfunctions, as illustrated by the following excerpt, in which lack of organisation, the teacher's insecurity, lack of students' understanding of the lesson and failing the subject are linked:

My physical science teacher lessons were never organised, he had wrong calculations most of the time. He was never certain about what he taught. Most students failed his subject because they never understood anything during his lessons. (SP)

Based on the analysis of the open-ended survey questions from learners, we found that the EMSD adequately represented the components and subcomponents relating to dysfunctions identified in the principals' essays in Bergman, Bergman and Gravett (2011). Interestingly, resource-related problems were not mentioned, which may be due to the focus of the questions that produced the narratives, as well as the fact that the problems learners reported outweighed any concerns relating to an inadequate infrastructure at their school.

Results 1b: Dysfunctions from the teachers' perspective

Also, the teachers' narratives connect well with the subcomponents of the EMSD. The most common subcomponents again are dysfunctions relating to rules (rule dysfunctions, rule bending and rule breaking), but here in relation to students' behaviour. These include misconduct, lack of discipline, and disruptive or destructive behaviour, as the following examples illustrate:

> *The kids are rude and unmannerly, they do not want to work, they disrupt my classes and they do not respect me. They act as though they are doing me a favour to attend my class . . . It seems it is the kids most in need of education are the ones least likely to excel. This is not what I signed up for . . . this is not what I thought teaching was all about.* (LMNJAV)

> *He first met his principal when he went to grade 2 and spent many hours in her office because of misconduct at school. By the time he reached grade 4 he was renowned for stealing, swearing and bad-mouthing his teachers. In grade 5, he was caught after stealing stationary from a teacher.* (Anonymous)

However, students are not the only agents that teachers experience as the source of dysfunction. Teachers also report corporal punishment by other teachers, conflicts between teachers and mentors, and conflicts with their principals. The following are examples of teacher-related dysfunctions:

> *He swore at the class, shouting repeatedly 'you f . . . girls', banged on the desks, almost tossing one across the room, and stamped his feet as he strode stormily up and down the aisles, unable to regain control of himself. The girls of 11x, fearing what might come next, sat motionless.* (OCAA)

> *[The teacher and his student] decided to write an anonymous letter to both the principal and the Department of Education, so that they could deal with T. [another teacher] once and for all [by falsely accusing him of having sexual relations with a student]. He was a common enemy. They knew that most likely the principal would not buy the story, or even if he would buy, T. could possibly escape with just a light warning. The anonymous letters would be dispatched the next day. They also planned to incite the other learners to stage a demonstration, demanding the removal of T. from the school, if no immediate action was taken. This would be the last nail in the case.* (Anonymous)

Sharing second place with extrinsic factors, competence issues are most likely named in relation to students' lack of academic competence, followed by the incompetence of teaching or teachers. An interesting subcategory of the latter relates to competence issues and power struggles between novice and senior teachers. The following is an excerpt of competence problems mentioned in the essays:

> *After a month of teaching she was very despondent; she felt that her university training had not prepared her adequately for teaching second language learners, and her senior mentor teacher was not of much help. Although she tried to use the ideas she had learned at university such as group work and collaborative learning and employing alternate resources for teaching, her mentor teacher, Mrs. S. did not*

approve. Mrs. S. had more than 20 years of experience and she advocated her own tried-and-tested methods such as placing learners in rows, with the teacher reading aloud to class and providing notes on the chalkboard. She argued that this way it was easier to keep order in the classroom. (NASCNPEN)

Another interesting subcategory of competence relates to teachers being overwhelmed by the complexity of the school's problems, and the demands of other teachers, the principal, the curriculum, the school policy, the parents and the learners. This is particularly apparent with initially optimistic or naive novice teachers. A good example of this can be found in the epigraph to this article.

The least prevalent group of dysfunctions in the teachers' data relates to resources, which can be grouped into under-resourced or poorly maintained schools, an increase in student numbers and a perceived decrease in teachers, as well as a lack of qualified teachers. Here are examples of dysfunctions pertaining to the resources subcategory:

The school was in a general state of disrepair. The bathrooms were dirty, there were virtually no audio-visual aids in any of the classrooms and in some parts the surrounding fence had fallen apart. The school however had a well-stocked library but it was usually locked . . . . Mrs. J. [the librarian] said: 'It's a waste of time taking these children to the library. They are not interested in reading . . . . They anyway just leave a mess that I have to clean.' (NASCNPEN)

The school had gone for two terms without a science teacher . . . . This problem was not pertinent to them. Every time they went to the Department of Education, they were shown a long list of schools waiting for the same delivery, the science teacher. (Anonymous)

As the second most prevalent subcomponent of dysfunctions in the teachers' data, extrinsics relate to poverty; physical and sexual abuse; neglect at home; substance abuse on the part of, and general neglect by, the main care provider; gang activity; death in the family; unemployment; and others. The following example illustrates this subcomponent:

Things have also become difficult at home because my husband sometimes accuses me of neglecting him, and he complains that the school and students demand all of my time and energy leaving little for him and our relationship. (LMNJAV)

As in the previous analyses, dysfunctions seldom occur by themselves and rarely have simple cause-and-effect structures. It is difficult to identify their origin, and the end of a dysfunctional episode is often beyond the narratives of the learners and teachers.

Results 2: The nature of school dysfunctions for learners and teachers

For learners, the main agents of experienced dysfunctions are teachers. This is due, in part, to the form of data collection, in which students were asked to recount their experiences with problem teachers. However, in part this is also reflective of the frequency of contact with teachers during an ordinary school day. The subcomponent resource is rarely

mentioned, as are issues relating to the curriculum, management, and school or educational policy.

The dysfunctions experienced by teachers are mainly pedagogical, particularly in relation to the learners' academic performance, problems between novice and senior teachers, as well as incongruent teaching and disciplining styles. These dysfunctions connect to the most prevalent subcomponent, rules, as well as the second most prevalent subcomponent, teaching competence, which is frequently associated with extrinsics. The least prevalent source of dysfunctions relates to resources. Physical infrastructure or teaching aids are rarely mentioned as impeding teaching or learning. Instead, they are used as descriptive indicators of the condition of the school environment. The resources mostly associated with dysfunctions relate to human capital, including lack of teachers, lack of teaching skills, problems with principals or parents and lack of support.

Results 3: The EMSD from the perspectives of learners, teachers and principals

Figures 2 and 3 capture the structure of dysfunctions from teachers and learners' perspectives, respectively, within the EMSD:
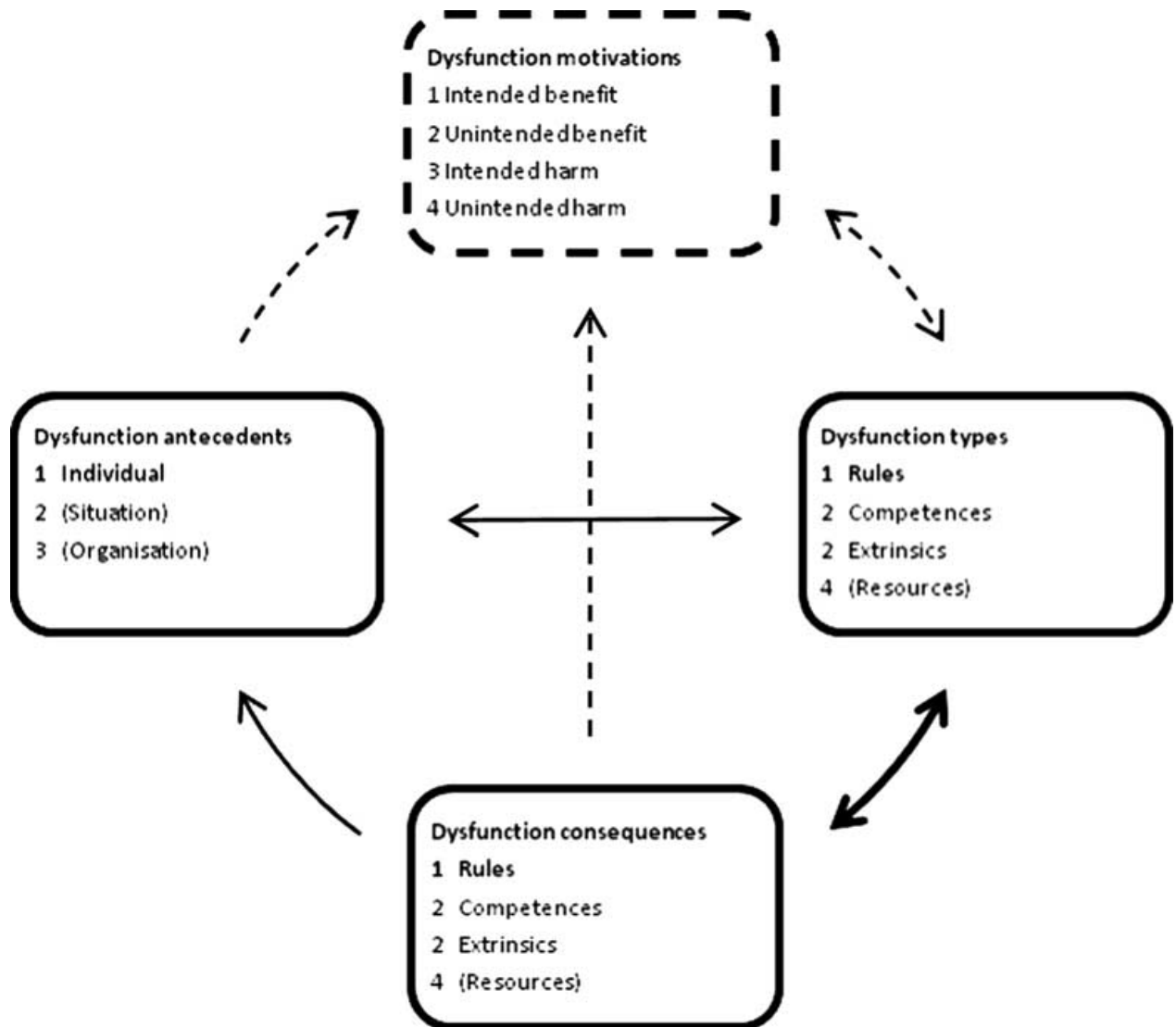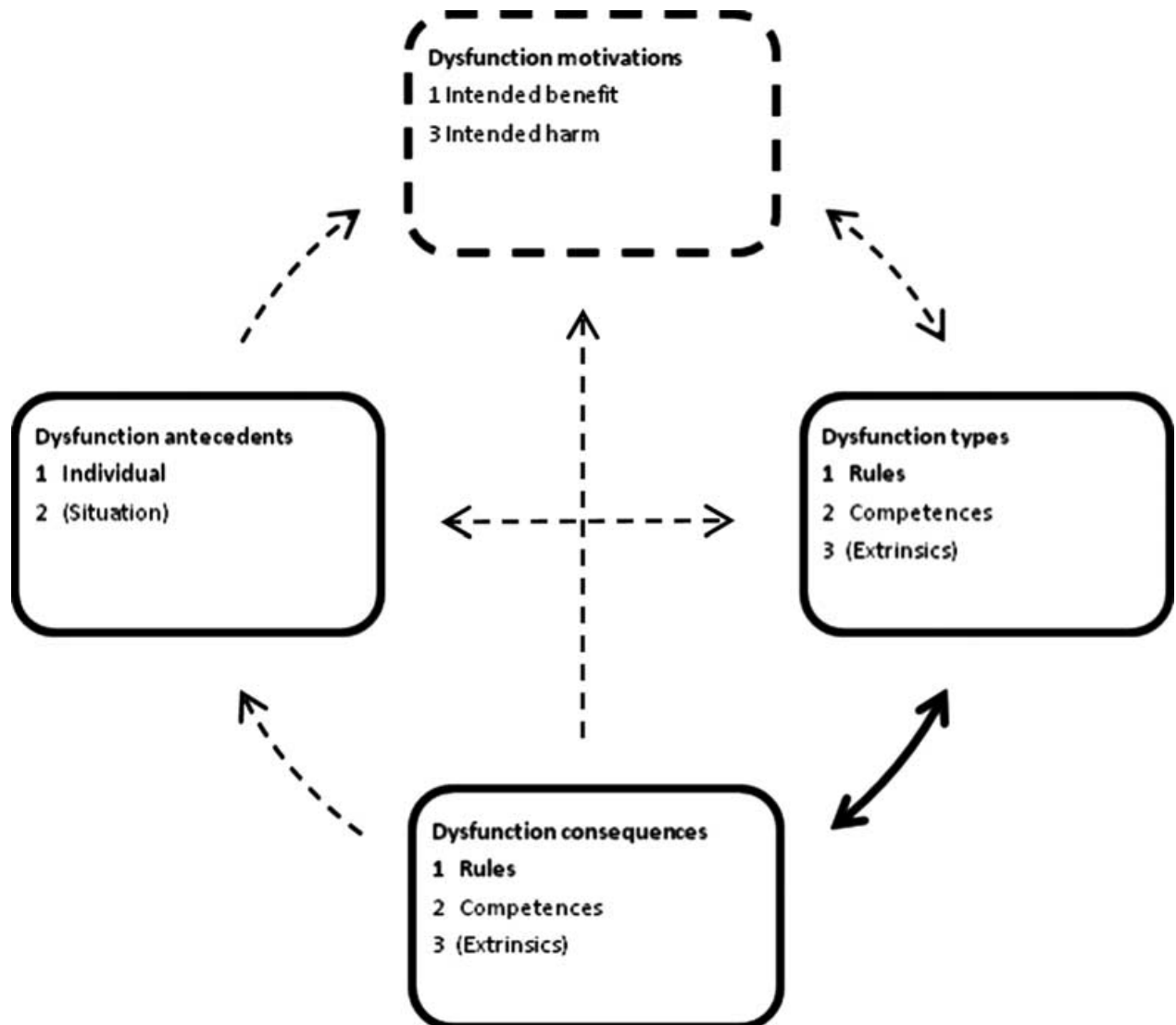
Figure 2: The EMSD of teachers

Figure 3: The EMSD of learners

The analysis between these models goes some way in explaining the kinds of dysfunctions learners and teachers are confronted with. The most apparent differences are that the learners' EMSD seems to be a substructure of the teachers' EMSD, in that the sense-making of dysfunctions, in relation to motivations or antecedents, is much less developed among learners, compared to the narratives of the teachers. Comparing the teachers' EMSD with that of the principals, in Figure 1, we observe that the teachers' model fits into the principals' EMSD. This means that, first, principals experience a greater scope of dysfunctions compared to teachers who, in turn, experience a greater scope of dysfunctions, compared to learners. Second, principals are part of an experiential system of dysfunctions that is more comprehensive than that of the teachers. In other words, they connect dysfunctions more clearly to antecedents, motivations and consequences, and they also understand the structure of dysfunctions as part of feedback loops and dysfunctional episodes within a complex network of actors and domains. By contrast, the learners' foci tend to be limited to a particular dysfunction. These connect directly to teachers and to a much lesser extent to other dysfunctions (e.g. alcohol consumption or laziness). In terms of

complexity, the experiential system of teachers is located between these two models. However, while learners focus mainly on teachers, teachers' narratives on dysfunction focus to a large extent on learners and other teachers.

If we combine the results from 1a, 1b and 2, we can deduce that the source of dysfunctions for principals, teachers and learners depends on what we call the Proximal Contact Zone (PCZ). Within the space and the roles accorded to principals, teachers and learners, the main source of dysfunction derives from the main agents of contact. For learners, the main source of contact -and thus the most proximal in the zone of contact - is teachers. Thus, the main sources of dysfunctions for learners are teachers. Teachers have a greater PCZ in that their accorded space and roles relate not only to learners, but also include principals, parents and other teachers. Thus, the kinds and degrees of dysfunctions involve these additional agents. Finally, principals' PCZ includes the greatest number of agents: administrators, teachers, school committees, local communities, education policy, maintenance staff and infrastructure, and so on. Given their roles as managers and leaders, it is unsurprising that they also comprehend dysfunctions in relation to complex constellations of agents, power structures, resource limitations and interest domains. Although teachers (and, to an even lesser extent, learners) do not experience the same dysfunctions as principals - in kind, degree or interconnectedness - they may nevertheless be affected by them indirectly, because of the hidden or indirect causes of secondary dysfunctions, which may indeed be the main cause of the experienced primary dysfunctions. But this is not merely a problem of perspective. Instead, dysfunctions are also created by the different perspectives within divergent PCZs. Limited and skewed by their PCZ, all actors experience and act within a particular and reduced version of the greater structure of dysfunctions in their schools.

Conclusions

The EMSD represents a suitable analytic framework for the problem sets encountered by learners and teachers in primary and secondary schools in South Africa. No components or subcomponents needed to be added to the model elaborated by Bergman, Bergman and Gravett (2011), although they markedly differed in kind, degree and interconnectedness, relative to the group under investigation. Furthermore, the learners' EMSD is a substructure of the teachers' EMSD which, in turn, is a substructure of the principals' EMSD.

Rule breaking, competence issues, abuse of power and dysfunctions extrinsic to the school, which impact on the teaching and learning environment, are regular occurrences and are experienced by all three groups. Interestingly, neither learners nor teachers complain significantly about the lack of educational resources. All other forms of dysfunctions are interconnected to a greater or lesser degree, depending on the PCZ. Our results also show that inadequacies of the curriculum or educational and school policy seem unrelated to the prevalent school dysfunctions, as described by learners and teachers, although they may play an indirect role - especially if instability is introduced through overly ambitious, culturally insensitive or constantly changing policy and curricula. Instead, the bulk of dysfunctions in schools from the perspectives of principals, teachers or learners - derive from rule breaking, incompetence and extrinsic factors. Considering this interconnectedness as shown here, these types of dysfunction are difficult to address in educational policy, school management or teacher training courses.

One way forward in the short term would be to integrate into the curriculum teaching cases and demonstrations that address these types of dysfunctions. A more ambitious way to deal with some of the problems identified in this article would be to create a monitoring system that can reward and punish systematically and predictably all actors involved in schools. Another ambitious redress would be to create a support system for novice teachers where they can obtain independent advice and counsel, including the option of an independent ombudsman to help clarify roles and address conflicts between actors. Finally, a web-based information center that includes the most frequent problems teachers are likely to encounter, and a set of recommendations to deal with these, as well as a web blog where actors can discuss their problems, would go some way toward alleviating the shock many novice teachers are likely to experience.

All actors in the school arena seem to know about the main problem and its cause, even though the problem sets and solutions vary widely. Due to their relatively restricted PCZ, learners do not reflect on teacher-related problems in a wider socio-historical, political or economic context, even making the teacher responsible for the inadequacies of the curriculum. A distant second may be their home environment. The teachers' perspective is broader, but remains caught within the bounds of their own PCZ. In addition to their extensive training and practicum, an awareness of such perspectivism (e.g. how teachers may be perceived by learners and principals as potential causes of dysfunctions) may prepare novice teachers as they enter the reality of day-to-day teaching in a public school in South Africa.

Endnote

[1] In all excerpts presented in this article, spelling mistakes were corrected to improve readability. All other idiosyncratic style elements, especially relating to grammar and punctuation, were reproduced. The capital letters in brackets are internal references associated with a respondent.

References

Bergman, M.M. 2011. StudyCube. St. Gall: University of St. Gall.

Bergman, M.M., Z. Bergman and S. Gravett. (2011). The development and application of an explanatory model of school dysfunctions. South African Journal of Education 31: 461-474.

Christie, P. 2008. Opening the doors of learning: Changing schools in South Africa. Johannesburg: Heinemann.

Department of Basic Education. 2009. National educational infrastructure management systems report. Available at: http://www.education.gov.za/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket_p8%2F3b6jxko0%3D&tabid_358&mid_1263 (Accessed on 13 April 2011).

Department of Basic Education. 2010. Report on the annual school survey 2007/2008. Available at: http://www.education.gov.za/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket_n87v%2BFQAYT0%3D&tabid_93&mid_1131 (Accessed on 16 May 2011).

Department of Basic Education. 2011. Report on the 2008 and 2009 annual surveys for ordinary school. Available at:

http://www.education.gov.za/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket_EM0CsHBX%2F8g%3D&tabid_422&mid_1261 (Accessed on 16 May 2011).

Fleisch, B. 2008. Primary education in crisis. Cape Town: Juta.

Kamper, G. 2008. A profile of effective leadership in some South African high-poverty schools. South African Journal of Education 28(1):1-18.

Maree, K. 2010. Critical appraisal of the system of education and prospects of meeting the manpower and developmental needs of South Africa. Africa Insight 40(2):85-108.

Reddy, V. 2006. The state of mathematics and science education: Schools are not equal. In State of the nation: South Africa 2005-2006, eds. S. Buhlungu, J. Daniel, R. Southall and J. Lutchman, 392-416. Cape Town: HSRC Press.

Robinson, S.L. 2008. Dysfunctional workplace behavior. In The Sage handbook of organizational behavior, eds. J. Barling and C.L. Cooper, 141-159. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Ryan, R.L. and E.L. Deci. 2000. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: Classic definitions and new directions. Contemporary Educational Psychology 25:54-67.

Statistics South Africa. 2010. Mid-year population estimates, 2010. Statistical release P0302. Available at: www.statssa.gov.za (Accessed on 20 June 2011).

Taylor, N. 2006. School reform and skills development. In Money and morality: 2006 IJR transformation audit. Cape Town: Institute for Justice and Reconciliation.

United Nations Cultural and Scientific Organisation (UNESCO)/EFA Global Monitoring Report. 2006. Literacy for life. Regional overview: Sub-Saharan Africa. Available at: www.unesco.unesco.org/images/0018/001865/186526e.pdf (Accessed on 1 July 2011).

Van der Berg, S. 2008. How effective are poor schools? Poverty and educational outcomes in South Africa. Available at: www.ideas.repec.org/p/sza/wpaper/wpapers20.html (Accessed on 10 November 2011).

Vardi, Y. and Y. Wiener. 1996. Misbehavior in organizations: A motivational framework. Organizational Science 7(2):151_165.