

High School Teachers as Agents of Hope: A Practical Theological Engagement

by

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements

for the degree of

Philosophiae Doctor

in the

Faculty Theology: Department Practical Theology

at the

University of the Free State

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November 2012

Declaration

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I declare that **High School Teachers as Agents of Hope: a Practical Theological Engagement** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Acknowledgements

Prof Jan-Albert van den Berg – Your belief in my vision right from the first conversation that we had has served as a great inspiration. Thank you for your enthusiasm in guiding me through this journey, always seeing another, more creative ways to approach aspects of the research. I stand in awe of the scope and depth of your knowledge!

Ds Gerrie Doyer – More than just my minister, but a true teacher. Thank you for sharing in my dream for the retreat and for joining us on that special weekend. Your wisdom and intimate relationship with the Lord guides me.

Annalie Odendaal – Thank you for my special painting. I am so grateful for your ability to see beyond my inadequate explanation of what I wanted; you saw my heart and put that on canvas.

Prof Flip Louw – My sincere gratitude for the interest that you have shown in this research and the significant contribution that you have made to the interdisciplinary nature of this dissertation.

A sincere thank you to every teacher that have joined me on this journey - May you always keep up the search for your own true voice, because in finding your voice you are empowering children to find their voices. And that is what teaching is ultimately about.

My utmost for His Highest – always.

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Chapter 1

A choir of different voices in my own head?

In her keynote address at the inaugural Pan Pacific Family Therapy Congress, Johnella Bird (2003) stated that she was standing on the edge of what she knew and what she did not know. She stood on this edge with all the knowledge that she has ever had, yet when she was faced with the lived experience of others she knew that all this knowledge was at risk of being changed. I too am now at risk of having all the knowledge that I have gathered so carefully throughout the years, altered.

Before I can share in an attempt to understand the stories of other South African teachers, I have to acknowledge the influence that they have had on my own life story and on the lives of the people this research is putting me in contact with. I am passionate about teaching and the plight of teachers in South Africa where their emotional state and the value that their relationship with God might have on their learners, are often overshadowed by expectations from their schools and government. I have, for a few years now, had the desire to capture on paper – through their words and mine – the essence and heart of Christian South African teachers in old model C high schools.

Before I could join the quest for giving such teachers who might feel marginalized a voice, I needed to find my own voice first. Therefore I had to journey through my own heart and mind to map out my roles, beliefs and epistemology within the fields of practical theology (Wolfaardt 1992:1; Ganzevoort 2004:53; Osmer 2008:4; Steyn & Masango 2011:149), education (Capper & Jameson 1993:427; Christie 1999:279; Wolhuter, Van der Walt & Potgieter 2012:178; Schoeman & Mabunda 2012:241) and psychology (Louw, Van Ede & Louw 1998:1; Griggs & Jackson 2011:electronic source).

Epistemology is the study of how people or systems of people know things and how they think they know things (De Lange 2007:44; Brownlee, Suy, Mascadri 2012:440). Thus there are many different voices prevalent in this text. I am, as a researcher, the loudest voice that you might hear. But there is a whole choir of other voices that forms part of this symphony of ideas. You will hear and get to meet Carolina the researcher, practical theologian and teacher. An equal opportunity to sing will be offered to the voices of participants and the harmonies of the literature about

research that has previously focused on the experiences of South African Christian high school teachersⁱ.

Another verse will be sung by the constant migration between praxis and theory within practical theology, postfoundationalist ideas, social constructionism, as well as in academic and professional discourses about teachers and stress in the South African Educational system. Such a point of view turns research into a “multivocal narrative” (Fox 1996:350). In order to give each of these voices a legitimate identity in the text, the content will thus vary between **my voice**, *the voices of the participants* and the academic voice of previous research and theory. These three voices will throughout the text be indicated in the three different fonts as indicated above to ensure that each voice is offered a justifiable and equal place. The names of the participants will also be indicated in italic to further accentuate the importance of their voices.

Because I believe in “authentic participation” (McTaggart 1997:28; Collins 2004:347) I asked each of the participants who took part in this research project to choose their own pseudonyms should they prefer to use them. A few participants chose to make use of this offer and selected their own fictitious names. The names that some chose expressed an emotion that they connected with teaching, for example “*Beswaard*” (directly translated as “being burdened”). Others selected a general reference to their chosen profession, like “*Onnie*” or “*Meneer*” (Afrikaans words used to fondly refer to a teacher). In order to respect the privacy of these participants I did not include into this dissertation an explanation as to how they have come to choose the pseudonyms that they use throughout this dissertation.

I also wanted to ensure that I did not privilege one participant’s voice over the other and I aimed for their voices to consistently be heard clearly in the text. Bochner and Ellis (1996:19) explains that writing in this way “breaches the received genre of realist writing that construes the author as a neutral, authorative, and scientific voice.”

ⁱ In this text I choose to refer to myself and my colleagues more as “teachers” than as “educators” to avoid the risk of reinforcing the discourse around “educator” being a word linked to Curriculum 2005 and Outcomes-based education (see 3.3.1.) In education, a teacher is one who assists students or pupils, mostly in a school, but it may sometimes include other contexts like family, religious or community settings. A teacher is generally seen as an acknowledged guide or helper in the processes of learning (Rundell & Fox 2002).

In the voice I speak with I identify with a postmodern, postfoundationalist approach to practical theology.ⁱⁱ I further position myself within a narrative and social constructionist framework and conduct research through a participatory action research methodology. In this way I prefer a multi-authored approach to research where space is not only created for my own voice, but also for the voices of the silenced and repressed.

Early during my graduate studies in psychology I realized that I was not comfortable with the rigid and modernistic practices of labelling people to fit a specific set of predetermined criteria and thus forcing them to live with such a label for the rest of their lives. I was at that time not at all clear on what the alternatives were, but I knew that I would search for it. Friends and fellow students could not seem to understand why I rebelled against the safety that such pre-set and fixed criteria offered.

After completing a postgraduate degree in psychology, life eventually led me towards teaching - a career path that I had never even considered following. But after I suddenly found myself emerged in this world, I just knew that it was where I belonged. And so my relationship with the system of education in South Africa commenced.

It has not always been an easy association; not only have there been times of disillusionment with the politics in the system and in the country, but also with the politics within the boundaries of the school and the staff room. Yet, through it all I always knew that teaching is what I was meant to do. Like my colleagues, I was excited at the beginning of each new year and had great hopes of making a difference in the lives of the children that sat in front of me day after day.

The initial experience of teaching has been one of many variables that have contributed to my still being in the profession more than a decade later. Certainly, my personality and willingness to undertake a challenge have been

ⁱⁱ A complete motivation for this epistemological belief will follow in 1.4 and 1.9.

significant factors too, but the gradual realization that teaching is “in my blood” could not be ignored. Despite the joy I found in teaching, I remained a silent rebel who could not understand why I was forced to spend so much of my time teaching a prescribed syllabus that did not necessarily add life skills or substance to children's lives.

The resolution to my trepidations and concerns about traditional psychology and education then came by mouth of Michael White and David Epston's narrative therapy (White & Epston 1990; Morgan 2000). I could relate to this postmodern approach because of the freedom that it allows for individual voices to be heard and the attention it gives to alternatives to being labelled. Another point of attraction was the sanction and authority it provides to individuals to accept responsibility for their own lives.

Being exposed to practical theology (Browning 1984:electronic source; Heimbrock 2011:153) and narrative therapy (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:25) opened up a whole new world where I could step back as the professional expert and join individuals in a journey to come to know themselves, their strengths and their alternative, preferred ways of being. During this process of discovery I also journeyed toward constructing an idea of what I believed about myself and where I positioned myself in three academic fields that could seem miles apart, but in reality overlapped in more ways than one.

I am still on this voyage to merge practical theology, education and psychology. It is an exciting process to experience how my epistemology is still growing, changing and expanding. As a result of this process of self-discovery and academic empowerment I have reached the place where I felt qualified and inspired enough to attempt the research project that is being journalled here.

I am an advocate for the better understanding of the plight of teachers in this country, not only because I also experience the same stressors that

they do, but also because I look at the situation of teaching in South Africa through a different academic lens. Empowering teachers toward a better comprehension of the role that their spirituality play in the way they handle stress and burnout might mean as much to me as to the teachers joining me on this journey. I am still growing and learning and I learn more about my chosen field and myself every day as I progress on this path. Researching the stories of teachers, the challenges they face and the confirmation of their calling to this profession, thus threatens to chance my life.

1.1. Dissecting the title of this dissertation

The title of this dissertation, “High School Teacher as Agents of Hope: A Practical Theological Engagement”, is comprised of three different elements:

- Firstly it refers to teachers as agents of hope.
- Secondly, the colon indicates that an explanation of this term is to follow.
- The third element is the words “a practical theological engagement” which refers to the nature of the relationship between teachers and practical theology.

Andrew Lester (1995) bases his book, “Hope in pastoral care and counselling” on two main characteristics of hope, namely that hope is a communal activity (Lester 1995:95) and that hope is defined within the future dimension of temporality (Lester 1995:59). Firstly, he claims that hope is a relational activity. Beavers and Kaslow (1981:125) concur when they state that hope “does not exist in a vacuum, but rather in shared experiences with others.” People that hope therefore form connections with a certain community with whom they identify and share an emotional bond.

It is within such communities that teachers feel safe enough to share their dreams and concerns for the future. In this context teachers become agents of hope for each other because “hope is essentially a shared experience, hoping with or for others, which transcends the lone individual and his or her ego needs. Community is the vehicle of hoping” (Carrigan 1976:49).

Secondly, it is important to acknowledge that hope is always embedded in time and context. Although many stories of hope have its roots in the past and even more stories are being acted out in the present, the essence of hope is captured in a human being’s capacity to hope for things

in the future (Lester 1995:59; Pergert & Lützen 2012:22). Louw (2008:238) concurs when he states that “the links between the future and the present are patience, perseverance and endurance. A mature hope is therefore characterized by an ability to wait.” Through being agents of hope, teachers accept responsibility for the history of hope they have been witness to, their present role in fostering hope in themselves and the children they teach, and foremost, in being a living reminder of the hope that believing in God creates for the future. Louw (2008:238) goes on to explain the conundrum that this might cause:

Hope is not something that can be taught. There is no technique by which one can teach another to hope. Hope is not a belief system which can be delivered in propositional form. Hope is a state of being which corresponds with the quality of our life and the character of ultimate goals. Hope reflects our basic attitudes, disposition and philosophy of life.

The third component of the title of this dissertation refers to “a practical theological engagement”. Taylor (2007a:67) captures the wonder of teachers acting as practical theologians as “not so much a theology of answers as a theology of engagement.” I consider an engagement between different entities to imply an active, not passive, relationship between the two. The relationship between teachers and practical theology is dynamic and evolving. As teachers become more comfortable with the idea of being practical theologians in their classrooms they will engage in this practice more and more, thus becoming agents of their own and other people’s hope. This idea will be conceptualized further in chapter four and five.

Before I can set practical theology as the foundation that this research is going to build upon, I have to motivate my reasons for stipulating it as the mouthpiece and baseline of my epistemological positioning. I have to incorporate the general history, as well as my own personal history with practical theology, into the song of this research if I aim to create a thick and accountable description of this research journey.

Since I want to remain accountable for my thoughts and be transparent in my epistemological presuppositions, a concise deconstruction of my interest in practical theology, the emotional and spiritual health of teachers and chosen discursive positioning will follow. But first I will offer a brief overview of the reality of being a teacher in South Africa in this day and age.

1.1.1. Hearing the first notes in my head

Many researchers (Lasky 2000; Colangelo 2004; Collie, Shapka & Perry 2012; Vos, Van der Westhuizen, Mentz & Ellis 2012; Strydom, Nortjé, Beukes, Esterhuysen & Van der Westhuizen 2012) have described the occurrence of the loss of hope and the prevalence of stress and burnout in teachers. Christina Maslach has devoted most of her professional life to exploring burnout and stress (Maslach & Jackson 1981; Maslach 1982, Maslach & Leiter 1997; Maslach & Goldberg 1998; Maslach 2003). Other studies have investigated various aspects of educator stress, including its prevalence (Brouwers & Tomic 2000; Adams 2001; Brown & Roloff 2011), effects (Jeena 1998; Van der Linde, Van der Westhuizen & Wissing 1999; Van Zyl & Pietersen 1999; Conley & Woosely 2000; Saptoe 2000; Olivier & Venter 2003) and the strategies that teachers use to cope with stressful situations (Benmansour 1998:13; Engelbrecht & Eloff 2001; Kaspereen 2012:239).

Many of the abovementioned researchers have made suggestions on the prevention and treatment of stress that do not fully resonate with a postmodern, postfoundationalist (Van Huyssteen 1998; 1999; 2006; Müller 2005:72-88; 2011:1), narrative and participatory approach to practical theology. Underlying all of the stressors that have been identified as contributing to burnout, I kept on experiencing that there was one missing piece to this puzzle. Other researchers have also expressed their suspicions about the individual voice of the teacher possibly being the missing piece that they have been searching for. In their paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association in 1994, Brown and Ralph (1994) identified the specific and urgent need for teachers to be actually heard by their colleagues, school management and the community.

There is a huge lack of communication and specifically a lack of listening within the South African educational system. McCarthy, Lambert and Crowe (2010:306) and Friedman (1991:330) clarify this when they state that teachers never get a chance to express their feelings. As Sutton and Wheatley (2003:327) concludes, there is “surprisingly little recent research about the emotional aspects of teachers’ lives.” This affects them not only on an individual level, but on a communal level as well, thus lowering the morale of the entire team of teachers.

Friedman and Farber (1992:28) affirms that “the job is made far more difficult by failure of others to understand the complexity, responsibility and stresses that are inherent in a teacher”. This statement encompasses the dominant story of teaching and recalls the importance of being truly

heard on a deeper level. It is easy for a single voice to get lost in the sea of work schedules, workshops, challenging pupils and uncooperative parents. Therefore, one simple fact remains: the teacher's stories need to be heard. This is where much of the research fail to hit home.

During this research journey two brave groups of teachers open their hearts and minds in an attempt to help the reader understand their joys and frustrations. They want their song to be heard. I was faced with the challenge of turning "real lives into writing" (Foucault 1977:192). Therefore the contributions that individual teachers have made to this research journey and to the song that we composed together are indicated in a different font than the text. It is also printed in bold lettering to emphasize the importance of and value that I place on their contributions.

1.1.2. The conundrum of teaching

Parker Palmer (1998:1) captures the emotional conundrums that teachers face every day:

When my students and I discover uncharted territory to explore, when the pathway out of a thicket opens up before us, when our experience is illumined by the lightning-life of the mind - then teaching is the finest work I know. But at other moments, the classroom is so lifeless or painful or confused - and I am so powerless to do anything about it - that my claim to be a teacher seems a transparent sham. Then the enemy is everywhere: in those students from some alien planet, in that subject I thought I knew, and in the personal pathology that keeps me earning my living this way. What a fool I was to imagine that I had mastered this occult art - harder to divine than tea leaves and impossible for mortal to do even passably well!

Previous research, like those of Collie et al. (2012), Vos et al. (2012) and Strydom et al. (2012) have been quantitative and full of fixed theories and rigid conclusions. Teachers were spoken about as objects, with no insight or expertise into their own daily circumstances. Other people and academic experts knew better about their lives, emotions and situations. Qualitative research in practical theology, on the other hand, motivates researchers to not merely overlook the fact that teachers are individuals with particular and exclusive needs; it urges the researcher to spend a moment listening to individual stories, to see the heart of the person behind the red pen and piece of chalk.

Most teachers can honestly say that they will most likely not become rich before retirement; they will also readily admit that they chose this occupational path not for financial gain, but for the benefit of others, because such work "has meaning" (Cherniss 1995:7). They do not expect their professional lives to be without hardships; they know that hardships and frustrations come with the territory. But they do at least expect the path they chose to "be walkable" - to be to the benefit of the children sitting in front of them year after year.

It is becoming more and more evident that most teachers feel that their loads are becoming mysteriously heavier while support from the Department of Education have become less and less every year. Even as veterans, they are often shocked by the issues they see surfacing in schools. They are being confronted with more and more children entering their classrooms with more serious and significant problems at an earlier age. They are afraid for their learners about the choices they are making and concerned for the future they foresee for many of them.

These teachers see the flaws in the educational system and can identify the places where adults are failing our children, where we are not meeting the needs that are presented to us every day. They are willing to put all their energy into reforming the system and adapting to current situations to still work towards meeting expectations and goals they set for themselves. Most teachers want all the children they teach to make a success of their high school careers and their lives. Yet they feel that they might be failing some children because they do not always feel that they are coping with everything that is expected of them.

If then, teachers are committed to playing their part in creating a society of well-adjusted and balanced citizens, why do they feel like they are not succeeding? If they are strongly committed to their jobs, why does the effort leave these individuals feeling so drained and empty?

1.2. Passion and perspective: two dimensions of teaching

It is clear that many different factors, including cognitive, emotional and spiritual aspects, contribute to teachers feeling as if they have lost the enjoyment and emotional rewards that teaching used to hold for them. Their perspective on their occupation and on their lives in general has been altered by the frustrations and dissatisfaction they face every day and they feel overwhelmed by this public musical performance that they are part of.

As previously explained, these negative discourses are not only intrinsic, but can also be enhanced by external sources. Throughout modern day literature, metaphors and anecdotes

about teachers are abundant. Whether or not educators consciously design or choose their own comparisons, the work of teachers is continually portrayed in a variety of metaphorical terms. Through their research Provenzo, McCloskey, Kottkamp and Cohn (1989:551) found that this phenomenon might even be more prevalent in teaching than in any other profession.

1.2.1. Being keepers of the faith

Cultural discourses often portray and define teachers through a dominant cultural metaphor as “keepers of the faith.” This allegory paints teachers as saints or shepherds ministering to a troubled and sometimes apathetic and lethargic flock (Carter 2009:61). One of the fathers of modern day Practical Theology, Seward Hiltner, defines “shepherding” as coexisting with two other perspectives, namely “communicating” and “organizing” (Hiltner 1958:20; Jinkins 2012:314). Teachers “care” for their students and want to “make a difference”, but exactly what that difference should be and what the rules for organization and communication are is often left undefined. They are widely expected to channel all-but-divine resources of patience and affection to allow them to “help” or “save” even the most difficult student.

In the light of such discourses and public expectations of what a teacher should be, it could seem reasonable for the public to expect teachers to “work miracles” and then to blame them should those miracles somehow not take place. This difficult expectation may be central to the overall public disregard revealed by both teacher salaries and by the rhetoric with which teachers are periodically blamed for the failings of education. *Bekommerd* explains:

Parents expect miracles. They don't know how to discipline their children, but they expect me to do it.

Jack adds that some parents expect him to discipline other children, but just not theirs. He laughs:

You will not believe how many times I have heard the words “My child would never do that!” or “it is because of the wrong friends that force him to do things.”

Many teachers share the concern that such parents who expect them to be miracle workers do not support them in their disciplinary and academic efforts to help children. *Helmine* explains:

Many parents have the ability to shift the responsibility of the child's behaviour and academic results to teachers, instead of expecting the children to own up to their actions.

When teachers do well, their virtues come from some innate or divinely given quality or calling that is only slightly related to practice, experience, or learnable skills. When they do not do well, they are easily accused of not “caring” enough. Carter (2009:61) captures this when he writes:

To grasp the implications of constructing teachers as saints or angels or even clergy, imagine a construction manager saying, or having it said about him, that his building project came in under time, or under budget, as the result of his ‘caring’, of his personal charm and enthusiasm, or, simply, of ‘a miracle’, rather than through skill, experience, knowledge, or labour. Would we expect him to feel flattered?

1.2.2. The legacy of the movies

Another factor playing into the public perception of teachers as keepers of the faith, or even as saints and miracle workers is public media. Ortiz (2007:85) states that popular media, like films, have become a critical lens through which viewers can glimpse different ways of living and be exposed to the portrayal of various religious values. Films, in the same way, offer the opportunity to recognize factors common to the viewers’ own lives.

Parents’ approval or disapproval of teachers is often rooted in a sentiment fostered by popular representations of teaching they get from blockbuster films. Good teachers, according to most films about teachers and schools, are almost always inspiring students through their passion for the subject, their non-traditional pedagogy and their enigmatic personalities. Their profound caring, which somehow transcend changes in the system, shortages of books, chalk, or training. Good teachers, we hear regularly, “make a difference.”

The teachers in such films open minds and reach past apathy to find sensitive souls and they do it all for love. They never seem overworked or burnt out and only talk with the greatest devotion about their daily tasks. Just think of Mr. Miyagi (played by Pat Morita) in “The Karate Kidⁱⁱⁱ” or the charismatic Mr. Keating (portrayed by Robin Williams) in “Dead Poets Society.^{iv}”

ⁱⁱⁱ The Karate Kid. 1984. Directed by John G. Avildsen. Columbia Pictures.

Many of us grew up admiring these heroic characters and most people will agree that they all represent something that is noble and right in teaching. Teachers want to emulate these characters and it is definitely not because they symbolize immense wealth or great political power, but because they inspire children to find themselves and in the process create heroes that can take up the baton and carry forth their legacy (Holloway 2005:150).

1.2.2.1. "O Captain, my Captain"

The movie poster for the 1989 smash hit "Dead Poets Society" displays the slogan, "He was their inspiration." One of the most common verbs used with regard to teaching is the word "inspire", which Latin root means "to breathe into" (Wolhuter et al. 2012:179). Just as God did to man in Genesis 2:7, the "inspirational" teacher breathes life into students so that they may become living souls, possibly overlooking the likelihood that students already are living souls, or that inspiration might not be their primary need (Bawer 1989:39). Never is any mention made of the need that children might have skills or academic knowledge. Or that some of them might have extreme behavioural or academical challenges that surpass their need for creative inspiration.

Mr. Keating's (Robin Williams) personal charisma is presented as extraordinary; he incites his students to tear pages from their textbooks and to always question authority. Heilman (1991:417) notes that nowhere in his actual pedagogy viewers see Keating's knowledge of poetry or his actual classroom technique. The moment he walks in the door, inspiration is instantly provided.

He requires that his students write poems to express themselves but never addresses the thorny issue of dealing with those students that might not feel as passionate about poetry as he does and therefore not complete their homework or even pay attention in his class. Mr. Keating is simply sketched as someone who is relentless in his quest to inspire young minds, regardless of a series of difficult events that culminates in the death of a student and the termination of Mr. Keating's contract with the prestigious private school. Not much attention is given to his emotional state or the amount of stress that these experiences might have caused in his life.

At the end of the film his curriculum of inspiration is ultimately validated. As he exits his classroom for the last time, the remaining students stand on their desks and salute him with, "O Captain, my

^{iv} Dead Poet Society. 1989. Directed by Peter Weir. Touchstone Pictures.

Captain.” The viewer is left with the belief that inspiration is apparently enough to justify a teacher’s work, even when that work is interrupted by tragedy.

While the film *Dead Poets Society* superficially praises a good teacher in a cruel world, the deeper implications need to be questioned. Is the only success in teaching that of “inspiration”? Is a good teacher one who can imitate funny voices and keep up a running comedy routine in the manner of Robin Williams? If a teacher’s noble work is so inspiring, why do the viewers not get a realistic view of Mr. Keating’s day? Why do many “normal” teachers feel so disillusioned after watching the movie? Why do they feel that there are so little about Mr. Keating that they can associate and identify with?

1.2.2.2. “How am I supposed to be everything for everybody?”

In the 1995 feature film, “*Mr. Holland’s Opus*”^v, Richard Dreyfuss plays the role of Glenn Holland, a composer who is forced to start teaching music as a “fallback” job. At first he struggles with student apathy and with the time consuming aspect of teaching. Unlike Mr. Keating, Holland has financial problems and does spend his time marking tests when he would rather be composing music. He quickly learns that one does not simply possess the tools needed to be a good teacher, you learn through experience and that a whole range of emotions is paramount in the lives of effective teachers.

The lengthy film also details several quarrels between Holland and his wife and son caused by the time he puts into teaching. His wife asks, “Why is every other child more important to you than your child?”

“I’m a teacher,” he responds.

“How am I supposed to be everything for everybody? I do the best I can, okay?”

His wife is quick to judge, “Your best isn’t good enough, so go ahead, write your music.”

Holland captures the essence of the frustration that many teachers face when he replies, “Write my music? Write my music? When do I have time to write my music?”

^v *Mr. Holland’s Opus*. 1995. Directed by Stephen Herek. Hollywood Pictures.

At one point in the movie the principal reprimands Holland for not wanting to serve on a school committee in addition to the seven hours a day he spends in the classroom and the extra hours he spends preparing for lessons and grading papers at home. Martin and Russel (2009:319) also identify this issue of a teacher frequently being addressed as if he “had no life of his own, no body, no inwardness.” They are likely to be defined by the role they are expected to play in a classroom. The numerous realities, in which they exist as a living person and thereby their personal biography, are often overlooked.

1.2.3. Reality speaks louder than the movies

It is almost certain that most teachers cannot, and probably should not, be the infamous Mr. Keating. Most teachers are more likely to relate to Mr. Holland, trapped by the demands to accomplish the impossible, to make sacrifices in terms of their own families, and to proclaim all the while that it’s worth it because of personal feelings of intrinsic satisfaction (Carter 2009:80).

At the culmination of Mr. Holland’s Opus, all the children that have through the years been touched by him show up for a performance of the symphony that took him years to complete, fittingly called Mr. Holland’s Opus. As he stands on stage one successful former student after the other testify to the positive influence that he had on their lives. In the expression on Mr. Holland’s face the slogan of the movie comes alive: “Of all the lives he changed, the one that changed most were his own.” Not many teachers have the privilege to experience what Mr. Holland did on his retirement day, not many of them will hear firsthand the differences that they had made in people’s lives. Most teachers just keep doing what they are doing year after year, despite the many factors that diminish the positive influence that they do have on children’s lives.

Maybe teachers might enjoy less job stress and more job satisfaction once they understand the discourse that movies often promote teachers as saints. Several research studies have found that teachers facing the demand for miracles are much more tempted to leave the profession because they feel overwhelmed by the expectation created by these popular discourses (Ingersoll, Han & Bobbit 1995; Darling-Hammond & Sclan 1997:67; Kelly 2004:195).

For many teachers the expectations created by the movies about teaching are thus unreachable goals. Neither of the movies discussed pay homage to the spiritual life of teachers, although for many teachers, their Christianity is intrinsically part of their identity as a teacher. As previously mentioned, not many movies or resulting dominant discourses show teachers as Christians and

explore the difference that having God standing next to them in the classroom makes in their experiences of stress and burnout.^{vi}

The weight of the responsibility that Christian teachers on ground level, those who are not acting in movies and who have to deal with the real life circumstances in South African schools, have to bear often becomes unbearable. *Margaret* honestly shares:

If it was not for my Christianity, I would have left teaching a long time ago.

For many teachers God has, throughout all of this, become a silent partner in their teaching experience. They know that they are Christians and that they have a personal relationship with the Lord that might play a role in the way that they do their work. They fulfil all their roles and sometimes they pray for guidance for themselves and for their learners. They pray for wisdom for their students to make the right decisions. They wish for success in all their school's undertakings. They are grateful for their school's accomplishments.

Yet, not many of these teachers actively question and evaluate the role that God does play in their classrooms every day. They take it for granted. They also take as a given that they will experience a certain amount of stress every day. Most of them may not be able to verbalize it, but they know that, behind all the stress and frustration, there is a reason why they are still teachers.

1.2.4. "I do it for the children"

There are few things that recharge a teacher's batteries as much as a simple "thank you" (Cherniss 1995:23). These types of intrinsic rewards can motivate a teacher for years. One of the participants on this research journey, *Margaret*, captures this perfectly:

The light that you see in a child's eyes when he suddenly grasps a concept, the joy on the face of a boy who for the first time got good marks for a test, the trust if a child confides in me about a problem, the sincere compliment that comes from the heart... That is what makes it all worthwhile.

^{vi} A movie that does portray the human side of a teacher, who is an outspoken Christian in his personal and professional life, is "Facing the giants" (Facing the Giants. 2006. Directed by Alex Kendrick. Samuel Goldwyn Films.)

Dries recalls an experience he had some years ago when one of his grade eleven learners ran away from home. A concerned parent phoned the school and reported that she saw the girl hitch-hiking on the main road. *Dries* immediately got in his car and went to pick her up:

I had such a long and serious conversation with her on the way back. It really changed her life. She completed her matric with us and came back years later to thank me for that day. I will never forget how much that meant to me.

But unfortunately, such signs of appreciation are few and far between when compared to the amount of critique and conflict teachers have to deal with every day. *Piet* captures the enormity of this situation:

I am convinced that, despite all the conflict and confrontation that teachers engage in every day, there is not a single teacher who has not at some time or other asked him/herself “Why do I do this work?” and honestly searched his/her heart for the answer. Irrelevant of the type of day that they had, good or bad, they always end up with the same answer: “I do it for the children.”

The silent heroes of our society, the people who often neglect their own children for the sake of other people’s children, all share the same dominant story of feeling tired and overworked. Most teachers will share the feeling of never finding the time to even work through this array of compliments and criticisms. They rush through day after day just to get everything done and to somewhere in between find time for their own families. Kenneth Gergen argues that the complex roles and demands on individuals today are producing “social saturation” which pulls people “in myriad directions, inviting us to play such a variety of roles that the very concept of an ‘authentic self’ with knowable characteristics recedes from view” (Gergen 1991:7).

Regardless of the differences between individuals, all teachers have something in common. No matter which roles they are playing or which combination of stressors are rapidly eating away at any particular educator and burning out their will to teach, creating the chance for their voice to be heard is the only honest place to start a healing and rejuvenating journey. Attempting research with teachers is therefore a larger endeavour than just giving them the opportunity to tell their stories.

Only voicing opinions, feelings, concerns or satisfaction anonymously for an objective research study still leaves teachers without support, not feeling as if they have really been heard. Through creating the time for them to truly be heard, through identifying, naming and voicing stories of their stress, teachers can lessen the hold these stressors have on their lives and as a result create the opportunity to be turned into agents of their own and other people's hope.

David Epston (2008:4) proposes that hope can be encouraged and inspired in those who experience hopelessness. He describes people engaging in these activities as the "guardians of other's hope." Julian Müller (2002:1) also used the phrase to coin pastors as "guardians of hope" in an article about stories of hope in church leaders.

Through this study I want to, like Müller, move away from the metaphor of trying to "pin down and probe" teachers as objectives of an academic enquiry. So often in their schools they are blamed for so many of the failures of parents and children, these accusations often from people that do not even know their names and simply refer to them as "that Maths teacher" or "that man". This study will rather focus on using the principles of narrative therapy and metaphorical language through postfoundational practical theology for telling open and relational stories (McWilliam 1994:148) about teacher stress and burnout. My philosophy is to deconstruct discourses rather than create them, raise questions rather than give answers, provoke ideas rather than try to prove them.

1.3. Listening for more voices

This research study is an interdisciplinary approach to viewing the world of Christian teachers in old model C high schools^{vii} in South Africa. It would easily have been just as viable to conduct this study with teachers from any other type of school in South Africa. Whether teachers show up at school, have sixty learners in one class or whether they have sufficient resources to effectively do their jobs, all teachers in South Africa can relate to a study about stress and the influence that their Christianity have on their classroom experiences. I have however decided to focus my study on two groups of Afrikaans-speaking high school teachers in Mpumalanga.

^{vii} Model C schools refer to schools that are partially responsible for supporting themselves financially. Even though it is not an official term anymore, both the department of Education and the media still refer to these schools as "old model C schools." In layman's terms old model C schools often refer to Afrikaans schools, most of which have transformed to parallel or double medium schools after 1994.

My motivation for this decision was twofold. Firstly, because this is a study of limited scope, it was a feasible idea to focus on teachers sharing common circumstances and discourses. Factors like cultural background, ethos of the school and language do indeed play a large role in defining the *habitus* of a study. Therefore I have chosen to limit such differential factors by choosing teachers that mostly share the same background and working conditions. In a quantitative study such diverse factors could add depth to the study, but in a qualitative study that places emphasis on personal experiences, an understanding of the exact circumstances in which the participants function, are crucial.

Secondly, research about teachers and schools in previously disadvantaged communities and the challenges they face are readily available and well documented (Travers & Coopers 1996; Ngidi & Sibiya 2002; Olivier 2002). Articles in newspapers and on the Internet about their lack of resources and the desperate need for more qualified and committed teachers in previously disadvantaged schools are a familiar sight (Jansen 1999a; Joseph 2000; Naylor 2001; Swanepoel & Booysse 2003).

As I was preparing for this research journey and reading available literature I started wondering how many researchers placed their focus on the quandary of the teachers that do get the good matric results, teachers that spend all their afternoons on the sport field, who spend their evenings and holidays doing lesson preparation and marking books. These teachers are confronted with a different kind of stress than their colleagues in more rural and previously disadvantaged schools. But, regardless of their levels of stress and feelings of being burnt out, they stay in the profession year after year. They struggle through the administrative mountain and enormous workloads they are confronted with and still find time to be there for children.

I used to listen to colleagues in the staff room of the old model C school where I teach and I found myself wondering if there was any better way in which we could support and mentor one another, thereby forming a community of care? Was there a more effective way in which we could stand together against burnout? Might that eventually lead to more people becoming guardians and agents of hope? I wondered how many of us had the same reasons for still being there, and I wondered how many of us were even aware of what those reasons were?

I found myself contemplating the possibility that we, as teachers, could in fact be practical theologians in our classes every day. I wondered about the role that God and our Christianity played in the decisions we made every day. Could we actually unknowingly be acting as stewards for the Kingdom of God?

At that moment, a dream was born. The first notes of the song that we were to sing together were sung. I asked myself if I could, by journeying with teachers - through their stories, their hearts and their lives - identify those factors that motivated them and that gave them enough emotional and spiritual rewards to keep them coming back year after year.

1.3.1. Research questions

McTaggart (1997:28) explains that authentic participation in research means sharing the way research is conceptualized, practiced, and applied to the lived world. This implies accepting ownership of generated knowledge above just being a passive participant in someone else's endeavour. It is further proposed that in this form of research teachers are not "merely studied in an effort to learn about them; indeed, they are invited to share in the creation of knowledge" (McTaggart 1997:28). This makes the participants in this research journey co-authors of the research and not only subjects of a scholarly study.

The elastic nature of qualitative research makes it possible to adapt, change and redesign the next step in the research process to suit the social constructions and meaning that is being made as the research journey progress (McTaggart 1997:27). The goals of the study were therefore to be negotiated throughout the process as the research progressed. Therefore I, as initial creator of this research concept, only had a few tentative suggestions as to what we might choose to explore. By allowing the participants to choose the research questions that best addressed their needs, they were being validated as equal co-searchers on this journey and in this way a multiplicity of voices were being offered a platform from where they could be heard. The following options as tentative and possible research questions were presented:

- What do teachers consider to be the sources of stress and burnout in their lives?

- Can a narrative pastoral approach facilitate a situation where teachers can identify, question and interview dominant discourses and share stories that cause stress and frustration?
- How can we assist these teachers in empowering themselves to make their voices heard by speaking about their preferred realities?
- To what extent do teachers still consider themselves to have a calling to teach?
- In what manner could exploring the possibilities of being practical theologians and stewards for the Kingdom of God influence the way teachers perceive their jobs and the related stress they are subjected to?
- How could this research strengthen teachers' preferred identity and their desire to live out their calling?

All the above mentioned research questions can be summarized in two main objectives, namely, the way in which the experience of stress and even burnout can affect the spirituality and emotional health of a teacher, and the opposite, yet just as important question, how being a Christian, who has a sense of calling, can influence a teacher's perception of experiencing stress in his and her daily endeavours.

In this study I will aim to collaboratively create a context where teachers can find an audience to witness the stories of their lives. Rather than a communal effort that continues to enshrine the individual, we will aim to create a forum where the story of each of the participants can be linked around shared beliefs and collective commitments. Reconstituting and linking stories will be a key aspect of the work that the participants in the two groups of this study will do together.

In planning this journey I have been influenced by Sharon Welch's understandings of this, when she states that "the function of telling particular stories of oppression and resistance is not to find the 'one true story' of subjugation and revolt, but to elicit other stories of suffering and courage, of defeat, of tragedy and resilient creativity" (Welch 1990:39). Working from a framework of a postmodern, feminist discourse empowers us to construct our research journey in a way that best deconstructs the "truths" and "believes" that authors and authenticates the stories we live by.

1.4. The stage that we sing on

1.4.1. Towards a postmodern discourse

The word “postmodern” has evolved into a phrase worthy of contemplation and debate. It is applied so frequently across various disciplines as diverse as art, architecture, music, history, sociology, philosophy and theology that it has become impossible to pin down and define. This trend fits perfectly into aficionados of the postmodernist dialogue’s claim that it defies all set truths and perimeters.

It is, however, inevitable to get caught up in and confined within the limits of language when we attempt an explanation of this discourse. Some see it is an intellectual movement while others see it simply as the time following modernism. To my mind postmodern discourse embodies the re-thinking of generally accepted social and political discourses.

A postmodern stance can therefore also be seen as characteristically one that continues with the modern values of creativity and critique whilst at the same time resisting what is deemed to be an unsustainable concern for neutrality and universality. The one trait that all followers of a postmodern discourse have in common, irrelevant of the academic discipline they represent, is the assumption that there is never only one privileged means of constructing knowledge about the world. Jean-Francois Lyotard (1984:37) refers to this phenomenon as an “incredulity towards meta-narratives.”

If one considers the postmodern approach in this way, you are awarded the freedom to believe that stories and contexts can change and evolve when people are prepared to converse about and re-think that what they deem to be truths. With such an approach, a postmodern discourse can challenge the traditional, Western conception of objective, individualistic and historic knowledge.

Through referring to *postmodern discourse* rather than *postmodernism* I acknowledge that it is not another powerful theory or meta-narrative created to overshadow and overpower any other, but it is an ongoing discussion that is dynamic and open to transformation. Before one can claim to understand such radical changes in thoughts, perceptions, worldview and frame of reference it is important to acknowledge the paradigm from which this shift happened. It can be considered as a methodological move from an objective approach to knowledge to a subjective and personal narrative and context of reality.

I will now briefly discuss the modernist paradigm that led the way to the development of the postmodern way of thinking.

1.4.1.1. A child of modernity

This study presupposes that both the concepts of modernism and postmodern discourse are social constructions.^{viii} Therefore it is impossible to understand the principles of postmodern discourse in isolation, it should rather be considered against the backdrop of modernism.

Graham (1996a:16) explains that modernism transpired after the pre-modern times where people believed that the earth was flat and they had no scientific knowledge or proof that invited them to start thinking in a new and different way. From the beginning of the 16th century, different developments suggested the birth of the era of Enlightenment (Miller 2004:96). This was a time where many influential individuals initiated and promoted the development of the new modernist era. Some of the most important role players included Copernicus who, in 1514, claimed that the sun was stationary and that all the other planets revolved around this heavenly body. In 1637 René Descartes coined the well known phrase *cogito ergo sum* (I think therefore I am) and with this opened the path for people to be self-confident and independent (Dueck & Parsons 2004:23; Niemandt 2007:16).

Charles Darwin then published his *Origins of the Species* (Darwin 1859) in which he presented and discussed his theory of evolution. Later prominent thinkers such as Marx (Mehring 2003:75) and Nietzsche (Doel 2010:88) came to the fore and were very outspoken about their doubt regarding the rational explanations of the existence of God. In the field of human sciences, Sigmund Freud and Karl Jung made notable contributions to psychology that offered great insight into people's behaviour.

These developments in Europe sparked a new found optimism about the intellectual and technological capabilities of man. All these contributions just affirmed that modernism was also socially constructed through time. "It is important to emphasize the complex and multi-dimensional nature of historical passage to modernity. It is best regarded as the outcome of several related processes: political, economic, social and cultural," confirms Graham (1996a:15).

^{viii} The social construction discourse is discussed in detail in 1.5.

Modernism thus personifies the belief that a rational, scientific process can promise mankind security and control over the world that they live in. Knowledge thus consists in rational, logical coherence, discerned by a detached, disinterested, disembodied mind. In summary, modernists believe that all knowledge thus comes from what is experiential, empirical and factual (De Lange 2007:44).

The modernist epistemology further proposes that true knowledge and understanding can be obtained through objective observation and deliberation. The results of such observations became known as fixed truths. My own interpretation is that these truths have the following characteristics:

- The observer can always be separated from whatever they are observing (Naudé 1993:98).
- It is not flexible; it is a rigid and fixed idea.
- These concepts are objective, rather than contextual ,and
- It is true in all contexts and is thus universal (Dueck & Parsons 2004:23).

1.4.1.2. Modernity and the church

Du Toit (2000) contemplates the influence that modernism and its definition of truth had on theology and the church. He explains that modernism provided logical explanations for events and situations. This stood opposed to the notion that God is in ultimately in control and thus the church was suddenly confronted with a battle threatening between theology and modernist science.

The influence of theology was traditionally confined to personal relationships and had little influence over modern world, but the evolution of modernism attempted to create systems of faith that met the standards of modern rationality and objectivity. In the meantime, postmodern ideas were already emerging in the world of literature and art and it was inevitable that it would filter through to science and eventually to theology.

As more prominent postmodern ideas came to light, it brought about a new context in which the church and the individual could develop free from the rationality and boundaries prescribed by modernism. It is not surprising that the dialogue between theology and science has not been left untouched by the postmodern discourse. This debate has not only given rise to a quest for a new understanding of the relationship between science and theology, but has also opened our eyes to

the multi-layered nature of reality, in the process engendering a renewed energy for trying to fathom these multiple layers (Schilling 1973:47-48).

1.4.2. Aspects of the Postmodern discourse

After reading some of the work done by Cochrane, De Crunchy and Peterson (1991:21), Freedman and Combs (1996:22), Adams (1997:4–10), Bosman (2001:14–21) and Vanhoozer (2003:9–20), I have identified several aspects as important guidelines in understanding the postmodern discourse. These different characteristics are to be considered on equal footing, and thus the order in which they are presented in this text does not bear resemblance to their importance.

1.4.2.1. Knowledge is local, plural and contextual

In a postmodern take on the world, attention is focused on local, rather than generalized knowledge. Due to the contextual and relative nature of knowledge, the knower helps to constitute that what is known. This also makes knowledge plural and diverse in nature, because authority is giving to a multitude of voices. In a modernistic society, individual voices can easily lose sight of their own contexts and get caught up in a system where those with the most power tend to have the loudest voices. In a school system, the principal and management team can readily become the creators of knowledge and of thus the authors of discourses and meta-narratives that end up being the dominant ones in their society, thereby silencing the voices of teachers who have plenty of local knowledge to share.

1.4.2.2. A discreditation of meta-narratives

A critical stance toward taken-for-granted knowledge implies that one should be suspicious of (modernist) assumptions about fixed truths and meta-narratives. Those individuals or groups with the loud and prominent voices often maintain these meta-narratives that marginalize and silence others.

A postmodern discourse does not uphold and honour such meta-narratives that dictate people's thoughts and actions and thereby overpower creativity, pluralism and individuality. Bosman (2001:15) would rather prefer to view a postmodern discourse as consisting of many mini-narratives that stand next to each other on an equal footing. In this way the focus will be on local knowledge and narratives rather than universal and global concepts. A choir of teachers will thus stand next to each other as part of one choir, but yet each one will be appreciated, honoured and

celebrated as having his/her own local knowledge (Elden & Chrisholm 1993:133) that testifies to their strengths and rebellion against dominant discourses.

1.4.2.3. A critical stance toward objective truths

Rather than promoting objective and fixed truths about identity, the postmodern discourse sees the self and identity not as fixed, but rather as continuously constructed in a dynamic interaction with culture and language. Where modernism placed emphasis on independence, a postmodern framework accentuates a network or web of interaction and interdisciplinary thought. In such a situation, knowledge and truths are continuously constructed within a context and as a result of interactions between people. Our choir of teachers taking part in this research journey will therefore always be questioning the songs they are being forced to sing. They will also evaluate the influence that these truths that they are expected to sing will have on their lives.

1.4.2.4. All knowledge is socially constructed

As previously mentioned, the postmodern discourse pays no heed to the ideas that there are any absolute truths or knowledge. Cochrane et al. (1991:22) writes about a “hermeneutics of suspicion” in the following way: “If we have any critical discernment, we no longer simply accept as true that which we have received on authority as having been handed down to us, even if this happens to be an interpretation of Scripture.”

All knowledge about the religious and the secular world is therefore socially constructed and maintained through language and narratives (Freedman & Combs 1996:22). For the choir metaphor this would imply that such a group of teachers would never sing the same song twice. Every time the lyrics or the melody might be different, depending on how the context has changed.

1.4.2.5. Space for narratives and language

Language is an important tool in these relations and is central in the creating of knowledge and in sustaining discourses. Bosman (2001:20) researched the difference in the use of language in the modernist and postmodern discourse:

- In a modernistic framework words have fixed meanings and definitions, in a postmodern discourse language are considered to be a network of different signs.

- Followers of the postmodern discourse propose that language is a social phenomenon where each language symbol has a multitude of potential meanings, whereas modernists see language as a set product of history.
- In modernism each language symbol has only one function, whereas in the postmodern discourse these functions are socially constructed within a certain context.

1.4.2.6. Listening for silenced voices

It is the objective nature of the modernistic worldview, with its emphasis on facts, replicable procedures and generally applicable rules, says Freedman & Combs (1996:21) that discards and ignores the subjugated local knowledge of individuals. When this happens in research, the idea that individuals are passive, powerless and on the receiving end of someone's expert knowledge are reinforced. Elden and Chrisholm (1993:121) concurs when they state that, "in fact, local knowledge is considered by most participatory action scholars as necessary for valid scientific sense-making as the outsider researcher's technical expertise and abstract general knowledge."

With a postmodern approach to research it is affirmed that, because there are no absolute truths, there are no absolutes in research either. This frees the participants and the researcher from expectations and opens up the opportunity for the research to grow and develop organically instead of artificially and according to a prescribed design. In addition, the emancipatory dimension of listening is also promoted by such a postmodern approach. Through creating an opportunity for individual stories to be heard in a way that participants feel comfortable with, marginalized and silenced voices can speak to the space of transformation and personal empowerment.

In our music metaphor it will mean that our research will be an "unplugged jamming session" instead of a well-rehearsed, well-practiced musical recital. In such an endeavour the choir will produce voices and harmonies that come from the heart, rather than just from someone else's pen.

1.4.2.7. Deconstruction

Caputo (1997:30) proposes that the significance and meaning of deconstruction is to show that texts, institutions, discourses and beliefs do not have single, definable and definite meanings. It should rather be seen as so much more than what can be encompassed in one definition. These actually "exceed the boundaries they currently occupy" (Caputo 1997:31).

He further emphasizes that deconstruction should be seen as a positive process of opening up new meaning and new possibilities, not as the negative process of breaking down perceptions that might traditionally have been assigned to a word (Caputo 1997:32). The very idea then is to create and conceptualize new knowledge and possibilities, to question, to discuss, to contemplate what could possibly happen. Michael White (1991:21) is of the same mind:

According to my rather loose definition, deconstruction has to do with procedures that subvert taken-for-granted practices; those so-called ‘truths’ that are split off from the conditions and the context of their production, those disembodied ways of speaking that hide their biases and prejudices, and those familiar practices of self and of relationship that are subjugating of person’s lives. Many of the methods of deconstruction render strange these familiar and everyday taken-for-granted realities and practices by objectifying them. In this sense, the methods of deconstruction are methods that ‘exoticise the domestic’.

1.4.2.8. Temporary and always transforming

As mentioned earlier, the flexible nature of the postmodern discourse makes it difficult to pin down and give it a specific placement within the practical theology. Due to the significance of context when work is undertaken in this field, it is crucial to remember that as soon as a context changes, new challenges are presented that practical theologians have to address. In his article, “Theology in a postmodern context: ten challenges”, Rossouw (1993:894-907) identifies ten challenges that this paradigm shift within the practical theology had created.

I found myself wondering how many of these challenges have been met in the nineteen years since this article has been written. Although practical theologians might have been working for almost two decades to overcome and conquer these challenges, the context of teaching in South Africa can now still resonate with most of these challenges as first listed by Rossouw. I had to wonder how it still echoes within my context as a teacher and how it therefore translates into the educational framework and the context of this research. In this way, Rossouw’s article stays very relevant, regardless of the age thereof.

This research is built upon a postfoundational approach to practical theology^{ix} that opens up a line of thinking where the progress that practical theology has made in resolving these challenges can provide teachers and the greater field of education with tools to address their own challenges. This article thus serves as an overview of the historical value of the work done by practical theologians and a view into the future of teachers and the challenge that they face in the specific context in which they find themselves. The postmodern approach to thinking further reminds me that we can never reach a place of equilibrium where we do not have any challenges facing practical theology and teaching as individual fields or in the interface between these two academic disciplines. I will therefore, in the table below, critically reflect on the initial ten challenges set by Rossouw in the current context of the merger between the worlds of teaching and practical theology in South Africa. The table offers a bird's eye view of the individual challenges that will be deconstructed and conceptualized in greater detail throughout the remaining chapters of this dissertation.

Table 1: Ten Challenges to practical theology

ROSSOUW'S TEN CHALLENGES FOR PRACTICAL THEOLOGY	THESE CHALLENGES APPLIED IN THE TEACHING CONTEXT
Critical self-reflection – To stay accountable for your thoughts and actions.	Teachers should be accountable and transparent about their motivation for staying in teaching, their stress levels and the role that Christianity plays in their lives at school.
Being involved in the debate about moral issues – Postmodern discourse opens up space for new narratives and debate where the stories of both sides of a moral issue can be heard.	In a modernistic society parents were the primary educators and schools were merely responsible for the intellectual development of children. In a postmodern world there has been a shift towards parents and society looking towards schools and teachers to be the primary educators of their children. Teachers now have to balance their academic workload and the extra responsibility of educating children about moral issues, relationships and about live.

^{ix} Postfoundational thinking as advocated by Van Huyssteen (1999; 2003; 2004) advocates an interdisciplinary way of working where the specific context becomes the leading voice in the contribution of different academic material. The postfoundational discourse will be discussed in greater detail in 1.9. and 2.6.

<p>Working towards a spirituality of wholeness – Postmodern discourse is a holistic endeavour that aims towards transformation in communities, rather than only transforming individual lives.</p>	<p>If schools are responsible for more than only imparting academic knowledge, they are also responsible for the emotional health and spiritual wellbeing of children and teachers. The challenge lies in creating a community of care where teachers not only care for children, but care for themselves, their colleagues and ultimately their communities too.</p>
<p>Aiming towards a theology build on narratives – Creating space where individual stories to be validated and authenticated.</p>	<p>It is challenging for teachers to find time and search for opportunities in a busy school system to create space for individual stories and to validate local knowledge in order to promote the development of alternative stories.</p>
<p>Working towards a new style of communication – Honouring the social construction of language where words and symbols can have multiple meanings.</p>	<p>Teachers are tasked with learning to communicate on different levels. They have to acknowledge that language carries meaning and that they have the responsibility to also listen for the not-yet-said.</p>
<p>Building character - A migration from asking “what we believe” to “who we are”, a move from meta-theories and methodologies to a search for personal agency.</p>	<p>Postmodern discourse encourages the move away from the generic definition of a teacher and the conventional roles that the secular world expects them to play towards a new understanding and spiritual characterization and identity of being a teacher.</p>
<p>Towards understanding the marginalized – Giving a voice to the silenced and repressed in our societies.</p>	<p>Recognizing that the needs of children are becoming increasingly more demanding and that many children consider school the only safe space they have. Teachers are also burdened with giving themselves and their colleagues a voice in a society where they are easily overlooked or bombarded with critique and negative feedback.</p>
<p>Moving away from “being” right to “doing” right – Because there are no fixed truths people have an obligation towards an ethical way of being.</p>	<p>A postmodern line of thinking encourages teachers to critically evaluate that what Government and the powers that be promote as truths and rules that they have to adhere to. They are challenged to be accountable for their thoughts, decisions and actions.</p>

<p>Seeing faith as personal but not private – Postmodern discourse opens up space for a person’s own story with God but still consider it to be part of the social construction of religion.</p>	<p>Teachers need to choose to be practical theologians in their classrooms and to turn their religion into praxis in their professional as well as their personal lives. Their career then awards them the opportunity to actively live out their faith.</p>
<p>Re-discovering of own identity – Identity is constructed in context as people go along. The postmodern discourse promotes the notion that there is no distinction between the knower and the known, but that they are interactive and inseparable.</p>	<p>The challenge is to find the time and the energy for teachers to create alternative stories of their own identity as a teacher and to merge that with the story of their relationship with children, colleagues, family and especially with God.</p>

1.5. Social construction discourse

Although now considered part and parcel of the postmodern worldview, it is important to also further investigate the eminent role played by the social construction discourse in the development of the postmodern worldview and the discipline of practical theology. The evolution of this discourse has made an extensive contribution to the way followers of both these academic hypotheses believe that knowledge is created. Therefore it will be discussed here as a noteworthy and significant part of my discursive positioning.

1.5.1. Through the looking glass

The foundation of this epistemological approach is that people and societies construct the lenses through which they interpret the world. These provide the looking glass through which people choose the beliefs, practices, words and experiences that make up their lives and constitute their selves. Therefore, social construction is, according to Hoffman, “a lens about lenses” (Hoffman 1990:2).

This implies that a person and his/her beliefs, values and commitments do not somehow arise “from the depths” (Callahan 2001:4). All aspects of a person are situated in a historical-, political-, social- and cultural context from which they will interpret the world (Hoffman 1990:4). Davies and Gergen (1997:5) explains that “central to the social constructionist position is the view that ‘facts’ are dependent upon the language of communities that have created and sustained them.”

Accepting the title of “teacher” can thus be considered a “socially bestowed identity” (Burr 1995:30) rather than as the essence of a person who just happens to teach for a living. This issue will be explored further in chapter 5. Such a socially created identity is also then only one of many identities that a person has. Paré (in Freedman & Combs 1996:20) believes that these identities, contexts, stories and realities we inhabit are those we continuously negotiate with each other. Social construction discourse thus also implies that no single story can ever sum up all the different meanings that people attribute to their lives and in this way the perception of all knowledge remains an interpretation thereof (Allen 1997:17). We therefore need to constantly question our beliefs about the events that have shaped the stories of our personal and professional lives.

It is not that social constructionist ideas annihilate self, truth, objectivity, science and morality. Rather, it is the way in which we have understood and practiced them that is now thrown into question. In the end, social constructionism allows us to reconstitute the past in far more promising ways (Gergen 1991:33).

1.5.2. Knowledge is sustained through social processes

It is through their daily relations with each other that people collaboratively construct knowledge. As a result all knowledge is a social construction about a social construction. “What we therefore regard as ‘truth’ is a product not of objective observation of the world, but of the social processes and interaction in which people are constantly engaged with each other” (Burr 1995:4). This social construction of knowledge and meaning takes place primarily through the use of language to re-invent and recycle previous knowledge.

It is impossible to find any place in the world where you can escape the influence and impact of language. Words and linguistic concepts are intrinsically part of our network of thoughts, actions, dreams and beliefs. We use language to confirm ideas, to escape realities and to newly conceptualize situations and contexts.

A good example is the multiple meanings and contexts ascribed to the word *love*. Love is probably one of the most important words in the English language but at the same time, one of the most confusing. Thousands of sources, like books, songs, magazines, and movies are jam-packed with the word. Numerous philosophical and theological systems have made a prominent place for love in its vocabulary. Jesus Christ proclaims love as one of the distinguishing

characteristics of His followers. Psychologists have concluded that the need to feel loved is a primary human emotional need.

If we can at least agree that the word *love* permeates most human contexts, both historically and in the present, we must also agree that it might just be the most perplexing. We use it in a thousand different ways. We talk about loving activities, animals, objects, nature and we also use the word to explain religion, behaviour, all kinds of actions and some of the most intense emotions known to man. The same meaning cannot be attributed to someone saying “I love blue” than to someone saying “I love my wife.” The social construction of the word is therefore undeniably dependent on the context and it is crucial to always consider context when deliberating meaning and deconstructing conversations and situations.

1.5.3. A social construction about social constructions

I too live through stories and my stories are also sculpted by the cultural, professional and religious contexts in which I live. White (cited in Freedman & Combs 1996:32) explains that we are “born into cultural narratives”, but “we construct personal narratives.” My narratives are therefore constructed through the language of the stories that I tell. Who I am, what I think of myself and of the world, are all products of language. Therefore my story, sense of personal agency and identity are constantly changing, depending on whom I am with and what the circumstances and reasons for our interactions are. Any change in beliefs about myself and others, my relationships and even feelings of self-worth or self-contempt must then inevitably involve a change in the language I use (Freedman & Combs 1996:29).

Because the personal is always political and I am not a “blank slate” (Freedman & Combs 1996:46), I enter this assignment with my own self-narrative filtered with assumptions and discourses fuelled by the social construction of language. I seek to situate my story in the context of this study and to examine how my story might be similar to and different from the stories of the teachers that join me on this journey. Because I, as the researcher, am the lens through which the data for this research study is gathered and interpreted, my biography and life issues are therefore very relevant. Gergen (2001:45) is of the same mind when he says that “the voice of the researcher/writer is never absent in a social constructionist project.”

My own story is dependent on all the people that have played a role in my life in one way or another. It is also dependent on silences and on language, on what I have learned not to say and what I have been taught is acceptable to say. It further depends on speaking of my past not in

terms of deprivation, but in terms of possession, not in terms of what I lack, but in terms of what I had been given, or as Childers writes, “what is said is both interesting in itself and shadowed by what is not said” (Demarse 2005:210).

Imposing my own ideas instead of listening to those of the participants might duplicate certain undesirable aspects of their situations or their lives. Anything I therefore say about their emotions or their professional circumstances is a social construction about a social construction. Combining the idea of language being a powerful tool in creating the dominant stories of our lives with the concept of the postmodern discourse, leads me to see that as the observer of certain discourses, I might at the same time also be the creator thereof. Gergen (1991:164) agrees by referring to a study like this one as a “sociography”, because together the teachers on this journey narratively construct the truth of the worlds as they experience them.

1.6. Narrative approach to pastoral care

1.6.1. The story behind the narrative story

The narrative approach to pastoral care and therapy grew in popularity in the 1980’s with the social constructionist movement and other interpretive approaches to the social sciences. This brainchild of Michael White and David Epston developed within the family therapy tradition at a time when therapists started giving more attention to the meanings that people themselves were attributing to life events.

Michael White was a senior social worker at a psychiatric hospital in Adelaide when he attended the Second Australian Family Therapy Conference in 1981 (Epston & White 1990). There he met David Epston, a Canadian living in Auckland (Epston & White 1990) who was presenting a workshop that White attended. They spoke afterwards and found that they shared many ideas and practices. This is where the narrative therapeutic movement was born and placed, at least initially, firmly within the tradition of family therapy.

From 1981 onwards Epston and White, although geographically separated, collaborated and subsequently came together to host workshops around the world. Epston’s most outstanding trait, story-telling, formed the basis of this technique, while White added the dimension of deconstructing the complexities and contributions of language in the narrative process. Both men advocated egalitarianism, thereby putting the client and therapist on an equal footing, a concept that until then was unknown and unheard of in psychology and the social sciences.

1.6.1.1. Learning from the master scholars

By their own admission neither Epston nor White came to their life work uninformed by other opinions of other significant scholars (Epston & White 1990). They both wished to acknowledge, honour and celebrate the influence that those who had gone before them had on their own ways of thinking. Kazdim (2000:388) listed the following theoreticians and therapists as being influential in creating narrative therapy as we know it today:

- Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) proposed that knowledge is a structuring and relative process where human beings play an active role in creating their own realities. In his 1781 work, “The critique of pure reason” (Translated by Kitcher & Pluhar 1996:14), he states that “all our knowledge begins with the senses, proceeds then to the understanding, and ends with reason. There is nothing higher than reason.” Later, narrative therapists would build their therapeutic practices on their clients’ abilities to construct and author their own narratives.
- Alfred Korzybski (1879–1950) came up with the idea of a linguistic map of experience from which people could navigate their world. “Two important characteristics of maps should be noticed. A map is not the territory it represents, but, it has a similar structure to the territory, which accounts for its usefulness... If we reflect upon our languages, we find at best they must be considered only as maps” (Korzybski 1958:58). This now famous metaphor forms the backbone of narrative therapy and explains the important role that language plays in this therapeutic methodology.
- George Kelly (1905–1967) postulated in his famous work “The psychology of personal constructs” (Kelly 1955) that a client’s sense of self and of the social world might be lived out differently if they could have an alternative view thereof. Narrative therapy advocates multiple perspectives on a client’s life and then campaigns for the construction of an alternative story that better suits the dreams and aspirations that a person might have.
- Gregory Bateson (1904–1980) suggested that a person’s assumptions could prevent them from seeing other possible solutions while dealing with problems (Bateson 1972). Michael White used Bateson’s ideas to identify the underlying beliefs and discourses that keep people stuck in their usual patterns of behaviour. These ideas that Bateson presented also inspired the therapeutic technique of prompting individuals to remember a time

before a problem was evident in their lives and to investigate the ways in which they have showed competence and strength to overcome this problem-filled situation (White 1988:7). The realizations that come from these conversations are known as unique outcomes and they form the basis for the creation of a more positive, alternative story.

- Jerome Bruner (1915-), a highly esteemed psychologist, noticed that the knowledge that people have were born from their own experiences, but that the understanding of these experiences came about through the sharing of these in the format of stories. White expanded on this idea with his concept that these dominant stories can never encompass the richness of all lived experience, but through telling and re-telling people can create an alternative story that they can choose to live by.
- Michael Foucault (1926–1984), a French philosopher, suggested that an individual mode of expression that is generally known as “free will” was more likely a result of the dominant knowledge in a specific culture (Foucault 1969, 1980). These social constructionist ideas of Foucault had contributed to a great extent to Epston and White’s ideas of dominant stories and discourses that inform our individual stories on an unconscious level. Foucault proposed that knowledge and power were synonymous and directly proportional to each other. This implies that the individual who “possessed the knowledge”, also “possessed the power” to change his own perceptions (Monk 1996:41). White saw Foucault’s ideas as empowering, rather than disempowering, because this promoted the idea that people had the ability to transform power relations in society and challenge the taken-for-granted discourses that play into the stories they live by.
- Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) brought the concept of deconstruction to the table of narrative therapy. Initially, Derrida (1967) defined deconstruction as “the effort to take this limitless context into account, to pay the sharpest and broadest attention possible to context, and thus to an incessant movement of re-contextualization.” White (1991:27) elaborated on that definition and coined deconstruction as “procedures that subvert taken-for-granted realities and practices. These so-called ‘truths’ disembodies ways of speaking that hide their biases and their prejudices and those familiar practices of self and of relationship that are subjugating people’s lives.” Through deconstructive listening and deconstructive questioning a context can be created in which the re-authoring of problem-saturated stories can occur. The deconstruction of dominant stories and discourses implies that stories have many different meanings, and that therapists and researchers

have to use their skills to search for the “not-yet-said”, the unique outcomes and the alternative stories that people might not be aware of as yet.

1.6.1.2. Narrative therapy, pastoral care and practical theology

In summary, narrative therapy have evolved to a dynamic form of therapeutic interaction that presented the potential to act as a suitable vehicle for postmodern pastoral care. Ganzevoort (2008:9) refers readers to one of three definitions of practical theology, as initially set out by Hunter. His second definition states that “the practical theological discipline is concerned with the theory and practice of pastoral care and counselling.” Thus narrative therapy, practical theology and pastoral care have in common the seeking of a respectful, non-blaming approach to conversations and counselling, which centres people as the experts in their own lives.

White and Epston (1990:10) explains that “in striving to make sense of life, people face the task of arranging their experiences across time in such a way to arrive at a coherent account of themselves.” It further views problems as separate from people and assumes that people have skills, competencies, beliefs, values, commitments and abilities that will assist them in reducing the influence of problems in their lives (Morgan 2000:2).

Narrative therapy thus postulates that all people live with a dominant story about their history, their selves and their lives. White (1991:11) explains that there are always “feelings and lived experience not fully encompassed by the dominant story.” We often “prune, from our own experiences, those events that do not fit with the dominant evolving stories that we and others tell about us. Thus, over time, and of necessity, much of the stock of our lives goes “unstoried” and is never told or expressed” (White 1991:12).

1.6.2. A new song for the choir

As explained above, the narrative approach seeks to collaboratively re-author dominant self-narratives. To re-author means to be on the lookout for and take up those thin traces, those sparkling moments in a conversation that does not fit with the dominant problem story and then to weave them into a more complete and useful alternative story and preferred identity. This can promote the development of a thicker description of a person’s experiences and his/her interaction with discourses.

The question then lingers, had we, as teachers, chosen other stories and events, how different would the dominant stories of our stress have been? How could we have differently interpreted the events and emotions in our lives and our classrooms? Would some stories be validated and others be discredited or simply disregarded? How would my concept of myself, my Christianity and that of those around me be influenced by accentuating other parts of my life story? How has my history and experiences as a teacher played into the dominant story of my life?

1.6.2.1. Looking and listening for the “not-yet-said”

The research process involves many of the stories of those involved: the clients; the families; the therapists; the patients; the church members. But the research process is not only a mere reflection on those stories; it is always a new writing. Research creates its own story with new possibilities. Therefore, narrative research doesn't end with a conclusion, but with an open ending, which hopefully will stimulate a new story and new research (Müller 2003:15).

Doing research that is guided by such a methodology allows me to take a step back and create space for the making of new meaning and the privileging of experience of the participants, rather than allowing my expert academic knowledge to take centre stage. Therefore I had to start the research journey with a mindset of not-knowing, rather than one of being an expert on people's lives.

It is crucial to always be aware of the influence of discourses on the new knowledge that is being created by re-authoring these stories. This is strengthened by constantly looking for the “not-yet-said” (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:37) in the dominant stories of the participating teachers, as well as being open to identify the not-yet-said in my own story about research, teaching and burnout. Anderson and Goolishian (1992:38) concurs when they explain that “it is this curiosity and not-knowing that opens conversational space and thus increases the potential for the narrative development of new agency and personal freedom.”

This gives everybody that participates in this study a sense of ownership and accomplishment. It transforms the participants from studied specimens into powerful co-travellers on the journey. On this endeavour we will be examining the use of subjugated, local knowledge of the participants to re-author their stories. The end result will hopefully be an alternative story that speaks of hope and care that will leave us with a choir where the unsung melodies of each individual voice will be heard above the objectified truths (Collins 1994:102) that have become part of our dominant

stories. We will be singing a new song that free people from the stories that imprison them and trap them within the limited visions they have of themselves. Our new melodies will tell of sparkling moments, unique outcomes and alternative stories of hope.

Such an approach to life and research not only changes personal stories, but has the potential to change the discourses that communities or groups of people live by. The result is social transformation and one cannot think of social transformation without linking narrative therapy and social construction discourse to the principles of feminist theology.

1.6.2.2. Being accountable and reflexive

The fact that this study was conceptualized from my own teaching experience means that I, in the words of Reinharz (1992:259), merged the “private” and the “public” and I found myself, as a teacher doing research on teachers, working from an “epistemology of insiderness.” My own narrative becomes part of the process; my voice gets heard on an equal stage as those of the participants. I become a part of the choir and thus our narratives become a shared construction that will get reconstructed through the research inquiry (Clandenin & Connely 1991:265).

I thus felt justified in pursuing this research interest by embracing the ideas of Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule (1997) who wrote of “women’s ways of knowing, which distinguishes between connected and separated knowing. Separated knowing adopting a critical eye and playing the ‘doubting game’, while connected knowing starts with an emphatic, receptive eye, entering the spirit of what is offered and seeking to understand from within.”

Situating myself firmly within a stance of “connected knowing”, I might probably be more equipped to understand some of the dominant stories of teachers’ lives and the challenges they face every day.

Hall (1996:38) highlights the danger of revealing the self in research as the contribution could be seen as self-serving or narcissistic. It is therefore important to always be accountable and reflexive in my approach to this study.

Not only must I seek the individual voices in the stories that are shared with me, but I must also honestly evaluate my role in the interpretation of these stories. I must also remain conscious of the fact that my story should not be the only lens through which I view the participant's narratives. This will safeguard the authenticity and credibility of a study in which I am also a participant.

Hall (1996:29) claims that a researcher is reflective if

his/her evidence is derived from authentic data, resonating the life experiences of the researched and the researcher, relations between the researched and the researcher and the participants proceed in a democratic manner, and the researcher's theory-laden view is not given privilege over participant's views.

Accountability encompasses both the acknowledgement of my own context and the power afforded by my position. The importance of such self-reflexivity is part of a feminist ethic of risk that emphasizes both the subjugated nature of knowledge and the interrelatedness between the knower and what is known. Tamasese and Waldergrave (1994:66) goes into more detail when they explain that

an accountability that fosters commitment to actions makes a difference to the lives of those who suffer. It lies in the bedrock of values like humility, reciprocity, love and sacredness. There is a mutual learning process that can take place, both for those who call for accountability and those who respond.

To be accountable for what I am writing, I have to remember that my experiences, although similar, are not the same as those of the participants. Working toward egalitarian values is promoted by constantly checking the direction of the research, acknowledging the expertise of the participants, and conceding to the effects those conversations have on me.

White (1995:36-37) encapsulates such an accountability when he challenges researchers to be guided by egalitarian values in their work. He clarifies when he says that we should work "behind" people who consult with us. He further explains that

it's very easy for us to get ahead of the people seeking our help. And people can't see ahead with any clarity if we are standing in the way blocking their view. So, it is more appropriate to be standing behind those people, or even perhaps alongside them, not specifying how things should be in their lives, not prescribing a direction for their lives (White 1995:36-37).

1.7. A participatory mode of consciousness

Through a participatory mode of consciousness the act of knowing becomes an ethical act (Heshusius 1994:19) that requires an attitude of profound openness and receptivity in order to free ourselves from the categories imposed by the notions of objectivity and subjectivity. There is thus an equal power-sharing relationship between the researcher and the people involved in the process (Conde-Frazier 2012:241) that fosters an awareness of a deeper level of kinship between the knower and the known (Heshusius 1994:15-16).

Kotzé (2002:6) clarifies that knowledge that is created within such a participatory consciousness is quite different from knowledge discovered as a product of applying our theories to uncover an understanding of what is.

Research now becomes a “participatory, ethicizing adventure” (Kotzé 2002:28) where the researcher should continuously ask him/herself who will benefit from such a process. Through using the practices of practical theology and narrative therapy, opportunities are created where alternative stories can be explored. An investigation into the dominant stories of teachers in old model C schools in South Africa might tell of stress and burnout, but the process of participatory research could reveal stories that can develop into rich descriptions of preferred realities of Christian teachers.

From this the demands of participatory ethics with specific relation to this study can be derived:

- Joining teachers in a quest to reclaim their voices because some might feel as if they no longer have a voice in their work situation.
- Talking “with” people rather than “to” people (Freire 1993:30; 1994:26). As teachers and practical theologians in postmodern times, we must strive to stop speaking “to” people and start speaking “with” people. This kind of engaging implies respect for the knowledge of the lived experience of all people.

- Investigating and discussing the discourses that teachers consider to be prominent sources of oppression and stress in their professional lives.
- Deconstructing these prevalent discourses and asking who really benefits from the existence of those specific discourses.
- Creating alternative stories that validate and celebrate individual voices and the preferred realities of Christian teachers.
- Empowering teachers to act as agents of hope for themselves and for their colleagues.

If we take the time to look, we might be privileged to see the manifestation of the love of God through the social constructions and interactions that are created as part of a participatory consciousness between people. I see participatory research as an intricate system of inquiry into social issues, educational concerns and public actions. This approach places such research firmly within the realm of practical theology because the shared aim of both research and practical theology is often to nurture and care for people, to give of a voice to the silenced and marginalized and to promote an accountable and ethical mode of consciousness.

This engagement and interaction can be considered as part of practical theological research because it has to do with the power of story and metaphor in offering up possibilities for human action and feeling. This relationship can discover connections between the self and other, as well as penetrate barriers to understanding. In this way the reality of teachers' lives might become clearer, the stress they experience might be deconstructed and the song that they are singing, might find a platform where it can be heard.

1.8. Composing the soundtrack for our story

“The qualitative researcher is like the choreographer who creates a dance to make a statement... the story told is the dance in all its complexity, context, originality and passion” (Janesick 1994:218). Janesick then goes on to explain that one of the key concerns of research should always be to ensure that the participants remain the primary beneficiaries of this process. They should be the leading characters in the dance, the melody line of the song we are composing. In order to accomplish this, the researcher needs to strive towards the distortion of the boundaries between researcher and researched. He warns that researchers can easily become disengaged or detached and that somehow manages to lose the human and passionate element of research.

I am very vigilant of the danger that research can easily become merely an intellectual activity where researchers aim to obtain degrees or receive academic acknowledgement based on the suffering of others (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:9). In such cases the people involved very often do not benefit from the process, they are merely seen as objective research subjects.

I am committed to conducting research in a participatory way that will primarily be to the advantage of the participants and the members of our teacher choir. This will also require a different kind of commitment from me, as a participatory researcher, towards the co-researchers joining me on this journey. Janesick (1994:217) warns that “becoming immersed in a study requires passion: passion for marginalized people, passion for communication, and a passion for understanding people who strive towards transformation.”

I prefer a qualitative approach because its main focus is on the processes of making new meaning rather than an impersonal, quantitative gathering and analyses of empirical data. This approach is in line with a postmodern social construction discourse because it moves away from hypotheses, statistics, reliability and objectivity that could lead to marginalization due to not meeting rigidly set evaluation criteria.

Furthermore, qualitative research is open-ended and it reduces the power imbalance that is created in a traditional researcher-as-the-knowing framework. In this way local knowledge is validated and space is opened up for individual voices to be authenticated and heard in the research rather than an expert voice prescribing the path that the research will follow.

1.8.1. The soundproof wall of theory

A researcher should always be heedful to the danger of falling into a modernistic theoretical trap. Callahan (2001:3) refers to this as walking into a theory wall, where theories and accepted discourses act like a force field so that the researcher’s questions, assumptions and conclusions are arranged in a linear, one dimensional way and only according to a prescribed pattern. The researcher then only hears what he/she expects to hear. This could very easily lead to the demise of surprise and curiosity in a conversation.

The temptation that is presented by working with proven theories is also directly related to being in control, to be focused on the desire to know in advance where the conversation and research are going. This produces “a discourse that is thin, generalized, statistical and that, in the end, really applies to no one in particular” (Callahan 2001:3). The postmodern paradigm frees us of this

temptation as it replaces control with collaboration and co-construction, thereby releasing the researcher from the responsibility of having to be the expert and the authority on the issue at hand.

This assists postmodern researchers in focusing on side-stepping the wall of theory and encouraging conversations that are “a woven cloth, at times bewildering in its colours and patterns” (Callahan 2001:3). One could then even consider replacing the word “research” with the term “co-search” to illustrate the collaborative and participatory approach to a study. It must be noted that during collaborative research the aim is not to establish a series of steps that can be reproduced. During qualitative co-search aims are tentatively set, possible plots are outlined and continually revised as the process progresses (Clandinin & Connelly 1994:422).

1.8.2. The I in the research – hearing my song

The quest for offering teachers a voice in a marginalizing society threatens to also change my life because “research is an interactive process shaped by [my] personal history, biography, gender, social class, race and ethnicity, and those of the [participants] in the setting” (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:3).

In recalling my childhood, adolescence, my undergraduate and postgraduate study, I have found much of my story similar to many of the other stories that teachers in this study shared. But my story is also different because I am undertaking this journey not because someone asked me to become part of research and thus enabled me to do some introspection, but because my dream paved the way for these questions to be asked. In this I might have created a kind of “otherness” that in a way separate me from the others in this study.

The deconstruction of my own narrative and discourses about being a member of the teaching community where we so often refuse to acknowledge our own voices and alternative stories, also reminds me of what teaching should actually be about. Nothing can describe it more precisely than these words of Martin Heidegger (quoted by Kotzé 1994:105):

Teaching is more difficult than learning because what teaching calls for is this: to learn. The real teacher, in fact, lets nothing else be learned than – learning. His conduct, therefore, often produces the impression that we properly learn nothing from him, if by learning we now suddenly understand merely the procurement of useful information. The teacher is ahead of his apprentices in this alone, that he has still far more to learn than they – he has to learn to let them learn. The teacher must be capable of being more teachable than the apprentice.

Reinharz (1992:26) accentuates this self-reflexive nature of participatory research and emphasizes that reflection and transformation is compulsory if we want to guard against imposing meaning on phenomena rather than construct meaning through negotiation with participants. That implies that the researcher consciously abandons control and adopts openness, mutual disclosure and shared risk. Research thus evolves into the development of a collaborative multi-voiced, multi-centred discourse that says more about the relationship between the researcher and the researched than about some object that can be captured in language.

According to Maykut and Morehouse (1994:2), when the researcher chooses a qualitative research approach, they should give their motivation for doing so, especially if he/she wants to defend their work as a transparent, ethical piece of scholarship. I would therefore give my reasons as follows:

- A qualitative approach fits well with a feminist ethic of risk (Welch 1990) as a paradigm to research because it postulates that although there are no guarantees all the individuals involved are still prepared to give their all in the process. They do this in the hopes that the process can possibly give a voice to the marginalized.
- There is also enough room in this proposed way of doing research for the stories of participants to be heard and their local knowledge to be validated.
- There will be ample opportunities to be transparent about my own biases (e.g. in terms of the educational systems in South Africa) and my own discourses (e.g. about being a Christian teacher).
- I am concerned with ensuring that the journey is a respectful one – respectful to the participants, but also to the larger educational and practical theological context.

- It is also important for me, within my preferred approach to research, namely participatory action research that the participants remain the principal beneficiaries of the process (Maykut & Morehouse 1994; Janesick 1994:219).

1.8.3. Participatory action research

Through involvement in the action research process, we not only submit other's accounts to critique, but also our own. We note not only the contradiction in the viewpoints of others, but also the contradictions and possibilities for change in our own. Because this research story takes place in the context of my own, larger life story, as a researcher I am observing myself in "participation with participants." It is even possible that I am a participant and that the "study in question is an autobiographical one" (Clandenin & Connely 1994:414). In the postmodern paradigm, Gergen (1991:164) would propose such a study to be a "sociobiography", because together, as teachers, we construct the chronicle of the research and of the world as we experience it.

Berge and Ve (2000:129) considers the following reasons why participatory action research is an appropriate approach to a research journey:

- "Action research is about learning from actions" (Berge & Ve 2000:129). We embark on this journey to learn more about ourselves and the way we construct the realities we live in. We hope to identify our dominant stories and to re-author them until it that has a positive impact on our actions and confirms our preferred realities as Christian teachers.
- "In action research the participants aim to achieve equality in relationships" (Berge & Ve 2000:129). This entails working towards equality at school and at home, as well as striving towards equality between the researcher and the participants.
- "One important method in action research is self-reflection" (Berge & Ve 2000:129). Throughout this journey I have to be transparent and accountable about my own ideas, biases, discourses and the ideas that I bring to the story of this research.

As I am formulating a clear idea of what I consider participatory research to be, there are also a few points that I realize I do not consider it to be. In line with McTaggart's views (1997:39-40), I do not consider action research to be:

- “An attempt to solve a problem” (McTaggart 1997:39). Because this research is enveloped in a postmodern discourse, it will not be an attempt to find answers to universal questions, but rather aim to ask questions about questions and to create social constructions about social constructions.
- “Research done by an expert on some subject” (McTaggart 1997:39). A postmodern approach and a theology from below suggests that research is done “with” people, not “on” people.
- “An effort to change policy” (McTaggart 1997:40). The aim is to change people’s lives; it is definitely not to reinforce the hierarchy of power and the feeling of powerlessness that is inherent to the South African educational system. The aim is to create a safe place where power-sharing opens up space for new stories and skills to emerge.

Authentic participatory action research thus means that sharing takes place. Participants share ownership of the research (McTaggart 1997:28) because they have been part of the conceptualizing and structuring right from the start. McTaggart (1997:31) goes on to explain that participatory action research is therefore a group activity in which people of different levels of power, status and influence work together towards the transformation of themselves and the situations that they share.

Conde-Frazier (2006:321) also reminds us that researchers should evaluate the progress of their research by constantly looking toward the impact that it will have on the daily lives of their participants. I should therefore relentlessly remind myself that academic research is not only about the knowledge generated but it is about who controls that knowledge and to whom it is made accessible.

By asking myself if such newly generated knowledge are in any way valuable and if it can lead to new policies and structures being put into place that will be liberating and hopeful to the participants, another interface is created within the framework of participatory action research where participants can grow and nurture their newly conceptualized ideas in a practical manner.

Multiple reflexive conversations, as suggested by Gergen (1994), Kotzé (1994) and Roux (1996) assist us in reflecting on how and where the research journey is bringing about this preferred transformation in our lives and relationships. These conversations will hopefully establish a platform from which we can deconstruct our narratives and the way we use our local knowledge

to deal with the impact of stress and burnout on the lives of teachers. According to De Roux (2003:105) this can free the participant's "pent up knowledge, in so doing liberate their hitherto stifled thoughts and voices, thus stimulating their creativity and developing their analytical and critical capacities." These types of conversations will also make us liable for our own perceptions, actions and emotions and encourage us towards ethical behaviour and the living out of our Christian beliefs in classrooms and playgrounds around the country.

1.9. A postfoundational approach to practical theology

Qualitative research is an inquiry into the personal world of others that, if one is fortunate, becomes a journey into oneself. This allows social constructionists to step into the worlds of others, to portray these worlds through the authenticity of their voices and to, with integrity and accountability, attempt to understand these worlds. Being exposed to the constantly evolving worlds of social construction discourse, practical theology, narrative pastoral care and postmodern ideas opened my mind to the possibility that my epistemology ought to also be dynamic and flexible.

This allows for a "moment of praxis" (Müller 2004:293) within my own epistemology that functions as a meeting place between the social construction discourse and postfoundationalist ideas. Although this line of thinking will be explored in greater detail in chapter two, a brief discussion of postfoundational thinking will follow to situate it firmly within my epistemological positioning.

After reading the work of Van Huyssteen (2006), Müller (2009) and Van den Berg (2010) I came to the realization that I could not attempt this research journey without offering a primary voice to the postfoundationalist discourse. The father of this paradigm, Van Huyssteen (1999:4), explains it in the following way:

A postfoundationalist theology wants to make two moves. First, it fully acknowledges contextuality, the epistemically crucial role of interpreted experience, and the way that tradition shapes the epistemic and non-epistemic values that inform our reflection about God and what some of us believe to be God's presence in this world. At the same time, however, a postfoundationalist notion of rationality in theological reflection claims to point creatively beyond the confines of the local community, group, or culture towards a plausible form of interdisciplinary conversation.

Müller (2009:208) further encapsulates this line of thinking when he explains that “although we sometimes may have the illusion of a unique understanding of reality, it is always *received*. Therefore not constructed in an individual and subjective sense, but socially co-constructed.” Through thinking in this way, it becomes clear that our understanding of reality, and therefore rationality, is a combined product of a broader community and not simply an invention of our own minds. It is philosophical and phenomenological in that it believes that we never see material “reality” as it is in itself; but only as our minds allow us to see it. Believing this, many of us no longer have full confidence in the old foundations, namely the meta-narratives or root metaphors, as an explanation for the societies that we live in. We are far more dependent on the knowledge we make together and the context that we create this knowledge in.

This new knowledge that is made together is cyclical in that it forces the creators thereof to always keep rethinking the content and context of the meaning that is made. This participatory action research project is therefore also a cyclic and recurring hermeneutical event as we evaluate the past and use that knowledge to not only inspire and shape the future, but also to re-invent our alternative stories of the past and identify and deconstruct the discourses that play into those stories.

Richard Osmer (2008:4) identifies four core tasks that research in practical theology can be built upon. I have chosen this research methodology as set out by Osmer as foundation for this research endeavour because I see congruencies between the ideas of Osmer and that of postmodern and postfoundational thinking.

Although the research paradigm on which this research is built is conceptualized around these four questions as set out by Osmer (2008:4), the contribution of Louw (1999:132) and Dingemans (1996:78) in structuring my thinking cannot be ignored. Dingemans (1996:78) sees research in practical theology as conceptualized through three actions, namely the analyses of praxis, the evaluation and deconstruction of praxis and then followed by strategic planning. Louw (1999:132) also identifies four different phases in the process of working towards change and transformation.

Firstly, a relevant situation is described after which a critical analysis of that situation will indicate possible interfaces with theology. Thirdly, the results of the analysis are evaluated and interpreted in the face of transformation. This questions the narratives and discourses that play into the choices that people make. In the last phase new theoretical models are created that have a direct impact the praxis of people through initiating changes in this praxis.

Regardless of the congruencies between the three models, I found myself attracted to the Osmer model and therefore chose the paradigm as the foundation of this research study. The focus placed by Osmer on specific context, the freedom offered to the voices of different academic disciplines and the notion of transversal rationality where places in time and space are identified where concepts, ideas and disciplines intersect, intrigued me. This leads to research that creates new knowledge and transformation that is facilitated in the situations and contexts where participants feel safe as well as threatened. This research project on the dynamics of the choir of Christian teachers in old model C schools is thus organized around a methodology based on Osmer's four core questions, namely:

- What is going on?
- Why is this going on?
- What ought to be going on?
- How might we respond?

These four essential tasks in practical theological interpretation will now be discussed with specific reference to the proposed research journey of this study.

1.10. The methodology behind the research song

1.10.1. The descriptive-empirical task (What is going on?)

The first task of interpreting practical theological knowledge is concerned with gathering information for detecting patterns and dynamics in particular episodes, situations or contexts. Many of these events cause stress in teacher's lives and in turn steal their voices and silence their songs.

1.10.1.1. Who wants to sing along?

Müller (2004:296) reminds us that "practical theology cannot function in a general context... it is always local, concrete and specific." Because this is a study of limited scope I will be focusing my attention on the experiences of stress and calling in teachers employed at old model C schools. My personal experience is that most Government and media attention is centred upon previously disadvantaged communities and on schools that are not performing as expected. But somehow the old model C schools are overlooked, possibly, because judged on face value, they are extremely functional. They deliver the goods; they have the great academic results, the well cared

for school grounds and the national sportsmen and -women of the future. But in the end, teachers at these schools are experiencing the same, and perhaps even more, stress than their colleagues at rural schools. These teachers also need a chance to have their concerns voiced and their stories told.

Throughout this research study one of the primary goals will be the establishment of a community of care where teachers can share their stories in a safe environment. Through telling their stories of stress, anxiety, fears and the emotional rewards they get from teaching, they author new stories. They become part of not only gathering data for a research study, but also of finding a solution to a shared concern and thereby be a part of the transformation, of the new song that the choir will sing.

1.10.1.2. Creating a safe space to sing: In-context experiences are listened to and described

When I, as a researcher, am listening to other people's stories, I am always searching for opportunities to make new meaning. To my mind, the very first requirement for entering into a respectful relationship is to make a movement towards the other instead of expecting the other to move towards you. Dirk Kotzé agrees with this:

Those who have a voice and power have an ethical obligation to use the privilege of their knowledge\power to ensure participation with the marginalized and silenced, to listen *to* them, but not to decide *for* them, and to engage in participatory solidarity *with* them (Kotzé 2002:18).

Gergen (1994), Kotzé (1994) and Roux (1996) discuss the advantages of using multiple reflexive conversations in research: "Multiple reflexive conversations used in the postmodern discourse acts as ways of deconstructing the power/knowledge relation." In this way the number of interpretations is expanded and "subjects" are made "participants", co-producing research, training and therapy (Kotzé & Kotzé 1997:11; Müller, Van Deventer & Human 2001:76).

Barnard (quoted in Reinharz 1992:29) describes how she realized that she "had to be trusted if she hoped to obtain information about people's lives." Two separate groups of teachers entrusted me with the stories and information about their lives that are used in this research journey. The first group was made up of teachers from several different old model C high schools, while the

second group of twenty teachers are all employed at Rob Ferreira High School in White River. The sampling for the first group was done through the use of a Facebook group and email messages that was sent to fifty high schools that invited teachers to complete the questionnaire and in that way, become part of this study.

This initial group of participants completed a questionnaire focusing on causes and results of stress and burnout in their lives. The questionnaire also included questions on their personal relationship with God and the impact, if any, that their Christianity had on their professional lives. These participants came from different schools in different towns because I wanted to ensure that a variety of school contexts were covered. Often the individuals and context at a school could lead to specific stress inducing situations, so through adding participants of different schools, the general discourses of teachers in old model C high schools could be identified and explored.

The second group of teachers who became part of this research journey, are all teachers at Rob Ferreira High School in White River, Mpumalanga. The idea was attending a weekend retreat had been in the pipeline at that specific school for many years and this research journey offered the perfect opportunity to present such a retreat. All thirty-two teachers on staff were invited to the retreat, and twenty decided to attend a weekend-long retreat where different factors that cause stress and burnout in their lives were explored in greater detail. Conversations were also had about their conceptualization of having a calling to teach and the responsibilities that having such a calling entailed. The role that God plays in their classrooms and the identity that they, as Christian teachers, embrace were also deconstructed. The details of the retreat are discussed in more detail in chapter 5.

1.10.1.3. The effective move from “listening to experiences” to “describing the experiences”

Listening to the experiences and stories of other people’s lives requires an intense and connected way of listening that opens up the meaning of the experiences. My aim was to identify, listen to and try to understand the current behaviour as being influenced by dominant discourses. Such listening makes a researcher sensitive to listening for the skills, talents, creativity, methods of care and support of the participants. To get beyond ordinary listening and to hear more than just meanings, the discussion needs to be focused to obtain more depth and detail on a narrower range of topics than you could in ordinary conversations (Rubin & Rubin 1995:8).

I have to admit that I undertook the research with a certain amount of assumptions and pre-set discourses about where the journey was headed. I expected to encounter teachers that spoke of high levels of stress and burnout, people that would leave teaching tomorrow should another opportunity arise. Although I knew that there were many teachers that, like me, felt compelled to stay in this profession, I did not however expect the intense enthusiasm and commitment that I came across as I worked through the questionnaires. The results were a testimony to a deliberate desire to be the change they wanted to see in education. In that moment I experienced a paradigm shift about the course of this research journey. Instead of it being a desperate report on the levels of stress of the people that had to implant in our children a hope for the future, it became an invigorating exploration of calling and passion. I have become privy to the stories of teachers who remain in education because of a powerful sense of belonging there and a resilient and zealous belief that they are meant to be teachers. They truly believe that God has wants them to stand in front of those learners, regardless of the amount of stressors they are confronted with on a daily basis.

1.10.2. The interpretive task (Why is this going on?)

During the execution of this task, practical theologians look towards other disciplines in the sciences and the arts to further interpret the patterns and dynamics that had been identified in the first task. Stress and burnout have been a popular topic of research study in psychology and other academic fields for decades. Taking some of the insights that these researchers came to and applying them to research in the field of practical theology can broaden our scope of study and theological understanding.

As previously discussed, a postfoundationalist approach to research also promotes a multi-disciplinary approach. The analysis of the data of this research journey will therefore also be done in such an interdisciplinary way. Van Huyssteen (2000:430) explains that

while we always come to our cross-disciplinary conversations with strong beliefs, commitments and even prejudices, epistemological postfoundationalism enables us to identify the shared resources of human rationality in different modes of knowledge and then to reach beyond the boundaries of our traditional communities in cross-disciplinary conversation.

My epistemological positioning also allows me to make use of non-theological evidence and to balance this with theology. According to van Huyssteen (1998:2) “postmodernity challenges us to deal with a complex but important relationship between theology and science in a contextual situation. We relate to our world through interpreted experience, and according to postmodern relativism science is just one more belief system.” Lyotard (1984:4) also reminds readers that narratives add a certain kind of knowledge that cannot be added in any other way. “This narrative knowledge can also function as a legitimation of scientific knowledge instead of the grand meta-narratives that previously legitimated science in the modern world” (Van Huyssteen 1998:14).

The opinions of other disciplines cannot simply be accepted in an unconditional and uncritical manner. Reflecting on and testing of these opinions against the local knowledge of the participants is therefore an integral part of the process. “The researcher has to listen carefully to the various stories of understanding and make an honest effort to integrate them into one” (Müller 2004:303). To be able to integrate different academic disciplines, I made use of different literature studies and the findings of other previous academic research.

I am, as a researcher, not only interested in the literature I read or the subjective experiences of the participants, but also in their own interpretations of these experiences. In accordance with the social construction discourse we are searching for meaning together, rather than collecting quantitative and empirical data. We are on a journey to make new meaning with the participants that is on this exploratory and interdisciplinary journey with us.

1.10.2.1. Taking our old songs apart

In this section of the dissertation the sources of stress in teacher’s lives are named and deconstructed. It will also not be possible to comprehend this present stressful situation of teachers if we do not step back into history and lay the foundation to the context they are confronted with every day.

Because people are individuals, no two teachers will experience stress and burnout in exactly the same way. It is therefore crucial to always keep the individual in mind when the modernistic models of stress are examined. Due to the postmodern nature of this research, I have to remind myself that any theory underscored by human reason offer just an approximation of the truth. All theories are thus not set in stone, but rather fallible and always subject to individual interpretation.

Again, the focus is placed on the understanding that participations have come to about their own sense of reality and the situations they face at school. It is not possible to only investigate the causes of stress and burnout and not look at the other side of the coin. What keeps teachers coming back year after year, regardless of all the curriculum changes and educational transformations they are confronted with? What causes work engagement in some and leads to burnout in others?

It quickly became clear that this research journey thus had to concern itself with a reflection on the spiritual and religious aspects as it is understood in the specific context of a teacher. The stories of participants and their relationships with God will therefore play a major role in understanding their motivation.

1.10.3. The normative task

Osmer (2008:4) describes the normative task as using theological concepts to interpret particular episodes, situations and contexts, constructing ethical norms to guide responses and learning from these responses. Through investigating the strategic lines of thinking in terms of God's role in teachers' lives, we can understand the role that God play during times of change or crises.

This research study explores the possibility that teachers are actually practical theologians in their daily endeavours. They might even be stewards for the Kingdom of God and that could turn out to be the driving force that keeps them coping in times of duress. The realization that this brings about, opens up new stories and possibilities for singing with a clearer voice as part of the choir of teachers.

1.10.3.1. Becoming aware that God has always been part of the choir

Postfoundationalist practical theology centres its actions on a reflection of praxis. As a researcher I listen to the stories of participants as they unpack the events of their lives and share how they

gradually become aware of the presence and role of God in those situations. This creates ample opportunities to then identify and thicken the local wisdom that develops from these contexts.

The postfoundationalist approach recognizes knowledge as an understanding that can only develop from a local context. “This way of thinking is always local and contextual, but at the same time it reaches beyond local contexts to transdisciplinary concerns” (Demasure & Muller 2006:417). I was interested in how the participants currently regard the role that their faith has played in their experiences in the past and in the present. In my capacity as practical theologian and researcher I am intrigued by the ways in which faith is contextually interpreted and experienced by co-researchers (Müller, van Deventer & Human 2001:76). Attentive listening can reveal how faith and context work together to create such an understanding of their spirituality and their experiences of God.

I am writing this dissertation firstly as a practical theologian, and secondly as a teacher and pastoral therapist. Therefore, I could not but offer a leading voice to the presence and influence of God in the thickening of each of the participant's stories.

I wanted to create an opportunity where the participants in this study could do more than fill in answers on a questionnaire. I wanted to initiate and facilitate conversations that would invite teachers to think differently about their lives and the roles they played. The dream grew into a feasible reality when a brainstorming session with my local minister and a friend produced the idea of a second group of participants attending a spiritual retreat.

The dream was to create a stage where teachers could sing the songs that were in their heart, where they could share hope and healing as members of the same choir. There they could encourage each other to take part in conversations and thereby grow in their relationship with themselves, with their colleagues and with God.

1.10.4. The pragmatic task (How might we respond?)

Thus a group of twenty teachers from Rob Ferreira High School in White River, Mpumalanga, attended a weekend retreat at a picturesque venue in Sabie. My dream for this weekend was for it to be a memorable event for all who attended. I wanted to create a safe space where they could let their voices be heard. It was my hope that the conversations of this weekend would remind them why they were still teaching and that it would nurture the hope and passion for teaching that they might have lost as a result of all the stressors that played into their lives. I also wanted to create a platform from where they could define and evaluate the role that God played in their classrooms.

Many years ago Arthur Jersild (1955) already invited teachers to face themselves. The challenge remains as vital today as when Jersild first set it. Like Jersild, Palmer (1998), is concerned with the wellbeing of teachers and their search for meaning through teaching. He recognizes that teaching is often a lonely work that produces in some teachers feelings of hostility, stress and burnout. Decades ago Jersild (1995:83) had already argued that for teachers to help pupils to have “meaningful experiences” in school the teacher must first “face the problems of his own life.” He continues to explain that “a teacher’s understanding of others can only be as deep as the wisdom he possesses when he looks inward upon himself” and they must then have “the humility to accept what [they] may find” (Jersild 1955:83).

In his fourth question, Osmer wonders how we can effectively and faithfully respond to the stressors in our current day lives. Per implication this advocates a search for strategies and actions that can be undertaken to empower teachers to deal with their daily events and situations. At the same time it urges the taking into consideration of a larger context than just the classroom so that a new reality can be created in which teachers can become not only agents of their own, but also of other people’s hope.

When reporting his/her findings, the researcher has an ethical responsibility to also pay attention to the aftermath of the research. This research journey works with “real” people and not merely with “theory” (Clandinin & Connelly 1994:422). I therefore owe care and responsibility to the participants and to how the collaborative process will influence and shape their lives. It is also imperative that this research creates new questions in practical theology and opens up opportunities for further study and research. It must also be stressed again that during collaborative research the aim is not to establish a series of steps that can be duplicated. Because

research questions and plots are outlined and continually revised as the process carries on (Clandinin & Connelly 1994:422) it would be impossible to replicate the process.

In a postmodern and participatory process such as this one the researcher does not know what the final outcomes are going to be. At the beginning I was curious to see which songs we eventually would be singing, but I quickly came to see that I had to be patient enough to wait till the end of the process.

I also had to be open enough to let the process and the participants guide me to where we were meant to go and towards the discoveries we were meant to make. I had to rest assured in the knowledge that I did not need to be the conductor of our song; the symphony was being composed by the process.

Lamott (1995:60) compares this to a Christmas tree. According to her, a researcher will often end up having all the decorations for the tree, but find himself without a tree! Everything is there, but at the beginning of the research he has no idea how it is all going to fit together to create the perfectly decorated Christmas tree.

1.11. The order of the songs

As already mentioned, much has been written about teachers and the stressors they are confronted with every day. Some of the scholars' work have been well received, while others have been perceived as over-critical or even as totally irrelevant comments made by people who were not part of the system and therefore had no insight into the everyday lives of teachers.

This research song is composed with the voices of a variety of contributors, specifically teachers, and it is my hope that all the meaning that we make together will eventually be useful to a larger audience than ourselves. I hope that the story of our journey will inspire more searches for a new approach to addressing burnout and stress. I want to empower more teachers to also see themselves as practical theologians and do pastoral care in their classrooms and staff rooms.

Part of doing feminist practical theology includes the desire to assist people in working through a state of powerlessness to a place where they can step out of the traditional roles assigned to

them by discourses. My aim is therefore also social transformation and a political understanding of the issue at hand. In this way I aim to situate individual stories in a wider social context that can encourage new models of practice that embody and share the same vision.

The chapters in this dissertation will map out my exploration of burnout, practical theology and pastoral care in postfoundationalist times. It will also give an autobiographical and socio-biographical account of how stories can be re-authored and about how discourses that shapes our lives and our identities as teachers can be deconstructed. Each chapter will conclude with a brief synopsis of the content of that specific chapter while the following chapter will start with a brief overview of the issues addressed in the chapter. In the spirit of a postmodern discourse and narrative approach to writing, these overviews and summaries will not necessarily be indicated with headings such as “introduction”, but rather with headings that strengthens the metaphorical nature of this research endeavour.

Chapter 1 gave a brief description of the plot and elaborated on the research questions that could be developed throughout this journey. A concise look into the motivation for this study is also included. This was followed by a clarification of my own epistemological positioning, including the rationale to include the postmodern discourse, social construction discourse and the narrative approach to therapy and pastoral care. The chapter is concluded with an outline of the four core tasks of theological interpretation that serves as a framework for structuring the rest of the research.

In chapter 2 the introduction to practical theology is given with specific reference to the importance of acknowledging contextual factors. The history and story of the development of practical theology will make sketch the background and different approaches to practical theology are also briefly discussed. The climax is reached in the critical evaluation of postfoundationalist practical theology as my preferred approach. In the conclusion of the chapter the growing role of public theology in the local educational system is accentuated.

Throughout this dissertation there is a dynamic interaction between pastoral care and practical theology. These two concepts thus form the core of the research action, background and development towards a climax. The ending becomes part of the next beginning and of any action that could flow from this research. This opens up the perspective that research in practical theology is not a dormant and stationary undertaking, but rather a dynamic journey that ends up also editing the autobiography of the researcher herself.

Chapter 3 is a voyage through the recent history of education in South Africa and the major events that have shaped the realities that teachers face in current times. The educational and political goals of Government and old model C schools are also put under scrutiny. Subsequently, stress as a certainty in teachers' lives is conceptualized and different models of interpreting and defining stress are investigated. Burnout is a reality for some teachers and it is therefore crucial that all teachers are familiar with the definition, warning signs and symptoms thereof. The latter section of this chapter postulates that the presence of God in a teacher's life can change the way that a person will cope with stress and anxiety, as well as reduce the possibility of experiencing severe burnout.

In chapter 4 the role that God can play in being the antidote to stress and burnout is discovered. The traditional understanding of having a calling is defined and explored and the question is asked whether this traditional concept of calling is still relevant to the lives of modern day teachers. This concept of calling is then broadened to include teachers who might consider their occupation to be more of a profession than a vocation.

My personal journey of trepidation with this term and all the expectations that are attached to it opened up the question whether other teachers might also feel marginalized by this discourse. Therefore, alternatives like stewardship and servant leadership are investigated and participating teachers share their own perceptions of these concepts.

The retreat gave teachers the opportunity to take part in a series of conversations about the role that God plays in the different areas of their professional lives. Chapter 5 elaborates on the preferred identities that teachers chooses to embrace and how living out such an identity can influence their relationship with the systems they form part of, their colleagues, themselves and their relationship with God. Teachers further share stories of how they came to be in education and then testify to what still keeps them in teaching regardless of all the frustrations they have to deal with.

The participants then conceptualize the characteristics of a school that is driven by a calling to be stewards for the Kingdom of Christ, and again commit themselves to strive towards creating such a school at Rob Ferreira High School where they are all employed.

The last chapter is dedicated to a reflection on this whole journey. I not only reflect on the impact that this research project had on the lives of the participants that joined me on this journey, but

also on my own experience of teaching and personal growth. Through the use of a painting that symbolizes the choir metaphor that is prevalent in this text, the research methodology and contribution to the larger world of practical theology are also explored.

1.12. Who will remember our song?

It is time to care for those who care for others. We cannot take teachers out of the system they work in or out of the educational context they form part of. But I hope to create a situation where they can re-author their dominant stories and become guardians and agents of each other's hope. Where they can support one another, share knowledge and ideas, care for one another, experience with one another and be role models for each other. Where mentoring becomes a practical and public theology that is being lived in our schools. Where teachers can share their wisdom and ethics, as well as be available as a community of concern that shares in the notion of caring and doing hope.

Chapter 2

The evolving voice of practical theology

To live in a world without becoming aware of the meaning of the world is like wandering about in a great library without touching the books (Brown 2009:1).

Chapter 1 offered a quick glance at the medley of components involved in this research journey. In writing up research it is crucial that the readers become comfortable and familiar with the theoretical and ethical epistemology that the research is built upon. In the following chapter, the history of practical theology is therefore explored and the current exciting developments in the field are mentioned. Discourses playing into my own understanding of the different approaches to practical theology are deconstructed and the influence and incorporation of a feminist theology of praxis and ethic of risk in the song that I am singing are discussed. Throughout this chapter my following of a postfoundationalist approach to a practical theological discourse that places emphasis on an interdisciplinary way of working and respect towards the context in which the research takes place, will become clear. A lucid understanding of my epistemological positioning will thus enable the reader to envision and become part of the context in which the research questions came about and were subsequently investigated.

2.1. The inevitability of context

In line with my research curiosity, McLachlan (2007:46) also wonders whether teachers, who did not study theology, can contribute to practical theology, and by association, practical theological research. Müller (2005:73) gives a possible answer to this question when he states that practical theology occurs “whenever and wherever there is a reflection on practice, from the perspective of the experience of the presence of God.” Practical theology is therefore an evaluation of and critique to the praxis in society.

It should be noted that because the scope of this praxis is much broader than just the actions of church leaders and theologians, it also reflects on the practices of all communities of faith. Forrester (2000:7) defines praxis as the “integral interaction between theory and practice.” It is therefore a constant investigation into the ways in which we encounter God in our everyday lives.

Ganzevoort (2007:1) concurs when he explains that practical theology matters because it has the ability to “communicate beyond the theological department and beyond the church.” That makes

practical theology much more than an academic discipline; it is a practical expression of experience, wisdom and caring, and as such very appropriate to teachers and the educational context. The aim of such a practical theology is to find common ground between praxis and theology. This connection happens firstly in the field of pastoral care through paying attention to the emotional wellbeing of people, as well as being concerned with their physical welfare. Ganzevoort explains this as “a form of theological reflection in which pastoral experience serves as a context for the critical development of basic theological understanding” (Ganzevoort 2007:1).

McLachlan (2007:46) was thus right in assuming that a degree in theology is not necessary to be a practical theologian. Because teachers are constantly confronted with the positive and negative influences that societies bring into their classrooms they are ideally suited to undertake this task to comment upon and influence praxis. By being aware of the presence of God in their work, through creating communities of faith in their schools and in being critical towards societal influences outside of the church, teachers act as practical theologians. This empowers them and declares them competent and able to be leading voices on research in this field.

Apart from practical theology being a useful tool to empower teachers, it is also a powerful vehicle in this research journey. Through an accountable, ethical “doing” of theology I will attempt to convey to the other participants that we enter into the research with equal voices. This study aims to create a basic appreciation of the lives of teachers and the role that theology and practical theology can play in their daily situations. Many schools function as communities of faith that spend a lot of time on the emotional and spiritual welfare of their learners. Teachers can therefore be active as practical theologians even if they might not have yet come to that realization.

2.2. Where the song started

Although it is generally accepted that the term practical theology was coined by Schleiermacher during the 18th century (Browning 1984), it seems to have already had its origin within the medieval theology. The role and impact of Schleiermacher must however, be honoured. His *Brief Outline of Theological Study* (Schleiermacher 1811) is one of the more enlightened forerunners to the further development of this field. His radical propositions were based on the conviction that theology should not only be located and practiced within universities, but also, critically incorporated within communities of faith.

At the time, the German research university model was being born and the work of theology was being broken up into what was called the "Theological Encyclopaedia." The volumes in that encyclopaedia included 1) Biblical studies, 2) Systematic theology, and 3) Church history. Schleiermacher proposed that a fourth discipline be added, namely "Practical Theology" that would develop "rules of art" for Christian life and ministry (Browning 1984:electronic source).

In saying this, Schleiermacher called attention to the far more complex range of intellectual judgments which practical theology entails, rather than merely to the simpler yet more prestigious theological and historical disciplines. Because Schleiermacher attempted to make practical theology the crown of the theological disciplines, gave it a philosophical character, related it to ethics, and saw it as the theory of practice, he clearly elevated the discipline to an independent and mature branch of learning.

At its inception, the subject matter of practical theology was identified as general Christian (or human) praxis. Its task was to formulate norms for this praxis. In other words, it was moral theology (Maddox 1991:161). This demarcation changed throughout the course of the nineteenth century when the focus started to fall upon dealing with the praxis of human faith. While the Church has always been a part of this subject field, it was no longer identified as the centre of all God's work in the world. Rather, attention was being directed to the moral/religious dimensions of general human culture. The goal of practical theology then became the development of a "public" account of proper action in the world (Maddox 1991:168).

Browning (1991:7) explains that since the middle of the 20th century, there had been another renaissance in the world of practical theology, spurred on by the University of Chicago Divinity School, the Universities of Princeton, Emory and several other European academic institutions. During this time, practical theologians had already staked their claim as doing constructive theology and not merely applying the findings of other fields of study. What eventually set practical theology apart from the other three disciplines in theological education (and what I find most compelling) was that it was a *grounded* theological reflection (Browning 1991:6).

In other words, practical theologians moved beyond only solving abstract theoretical problems and started to deal with issues that were a part of life in general. David Tracy (1975:280), one of the founding fathers of modern day practical theology, captures the essence of being caught up in the development of such a new field when he explains that they often only reached more questions rather than answers in their search to define the parameters of this paradigm. Academic thinkers

like Browning and Tracy also strived towards making practical theology more critical and philosophical, more public (in the sense of being more oriented toward the church's ministry to the world rather than simply preoccupied with the needs of its own internal life), and more related to an analysis of the various situations and contexts of theology (Pattison 2000:8).

2.2.1. The song that practical theology has been singing throughout the years

Practical theology is a specialized field that has been forced to justify its existence as a separate area of study within theology as well as being a credible scientific discipline. From Biblical times, theology has sought to be both practical and theoretical, but practical theology has received varying degrees of recognition throughout history of the Church. For the most part, it was simply seen as the application of theoretical theology.

Throughout the years, practical theology has become known as the "translation of core insights from true theology to praxis" (Ganzevoort 2007:2). This lodged this discipline firmly in between the systemic, Biblical theology on the one side, and pastoral theology in praxis on the other. Further developments in the field shifted practical theology more towards a reflective position where its task was the "integration of these praxis-oriented theological disciplines with social sciences in combined effort to improve the praxis of the church" (Ganzevoort 2007:2). By accepting this stance, practical theology became a potential connective point between the systematic theology and the social sciences. Pattison (2000:8) are in accord when he defines practical theology as being

theological in two ways. In the first place, it takes the insights and resources of the Christian religious tradition of belief and practice, such as the Bible, theology and liturgy, as primary resources for its understanding and activity. Second, it aims to make a contribution to Christian theology and understanding. Thus, practical theologians may be able to help alter, deepen, or even correct theological understandings.

Seward Hiltner was instrumental in this expansion of practical theology from being a mere technique to it having a more scientific footing. Its practice was now rather based on the development of theory through reflection upon experience (Wolfaardt 1992:8). As Hiltner himself said:

Pastoral theology is defined here as that branch or field of theological knowledge and inquiry that brings the shepherding perspective to bear upon all the operations and functions of the church and the minister, and then draws conclusions of a theological order from reflection on these observations (Hiltner 1958:20).

Hiltner should be commended for seeing practical and pastoral theology as disciplines in their own right and as legitimate sources of theological insight and truth. He understood the importance of experience and viewed it as playing an important role in theological method. On the other hand, Hiltner had a too restricted understanding of experience and a too simplistic and elementary view of what is involved in gaining theological insight from experience.

As practical theology settled into being a valid and independent field, the focal point shifted more from simply assisting in planting and expanding churches to a dynamic reciprocal action between praxis and theory where experience is deconstructed and where that process, through caring, eventually transforms people's lives.

A postmodern approach to the world and to research promotes the investigation of different approaches to creating knowledge and the acknowledgement of various perceptions of the truth. Therefore, focusing on only one approach to practical theology poses the danger of being one-dimensional and falling into a modernistic trap of believing in only one version of the truth. Through discussing and evaluating different approaches to practical theology, I offer myself the chance to create a unique approach that resonates with my relationship with God, my interpretation of the role of the Bible as well as with the way in which I journey with the voiceless teachers that share this research endeavour with me.

2.2.2. Different sides of the same coin

Practical theology aims to explain the way in which God deals with humans and humans deal with each other as inspired and dictated by their relationship with God. Van Wyk (1995:85) and Louw (1999:74) explore three different approaches to practical theology that have played an important role in establishing practical theology as a legitimate and academic discipline worthy of attention. Throughout the past two decades the postfoundationalist approach to practical theology^x has

^x The postfoundationalist approach to practical theology is discussed in detail in 2.6.

evolved from these original approaches as set out by van Wyk and Louw. In this approach the importance of a localized context and the value of interdisciplinary conversations are emphasised. The challenge that practical theologians are now facing involves finding a common ground where all these approaches can be awarded a rightful voice in the world of practical theology. This might even create a tension of sorts within academic scholars because the question continuously needs to be asked how their preferred approach can honour the contribution of other approaches, including the postfoundational, feminist and liberal approach to practical theology.

Although the postfoundational approach forms the foundation of my own epistemology, it is thus crucial to also acknowledge the contributions and strengths of the other approaches to practical theology. As a postmodern scholar, I am forced to critically evaluate each of these approaches and identify not only that which I might not resonate with, but more importantly, identify the areas that do concur with my epistemology and research methodology. I will now give a concise summary of each of these three approaches (Louw 1999:125-127) as well as my own interpretation thereof.

Followers of the confessional approach considers the Bible to be the only factual and exact source of knowledge and truth, whilst those hanging onto the correlative approach attempts to find common ground between the Bible and secular existence. Lastly, the group of academic minds promoting the contextual approach aims to find a connection between religion and specific situations in everyday live.

2.2.2.1. Confessional approach

Scholars of this approach believe that theology is constructed by God and therefore cannot be fundamentally challenged by humanly constructed knowledge. Although they argue that there is one single unified gospel story, they see Christianity as the interpretation of that story in various cultures and contexts. God's revelation is a primary discourse for shaping the beliefs of the people. They also offer a voice to challenge dominant oppressive discourses in our society and empower individuals to resist.

This approach to practical theology has been criticized and labelled as being one-dimensional and not open to conversation with other disciplines. This fundamentalist approach limits the possibilities of pastoral care and journeying with other people, because the focus is solely on one version of the truth, namely the Bible and Christian laws. The central focus of theology is thus the church and church activities and no other field is offered any justifiable voice.

Gerkin (1986:15) warns that it should be kept in mind that now this approach has merely become one of many languages that God and the church speaks. This voice of practical theology was, however, the leading voice in the church choir for a long time and therefore its contribution should not merely be discarded. The duet between the church and the sciences have developed and evolved so much that practical theology was forced to also adapt its voice to stay current and relevant to the discourses that was developing in theology.

Seward Hiltner, Paul Johnson, Carroll Wise and Wayne Oates are also renowned for investigating the influence of psychology on the advancement of practical theology (Wolfaardt 1992:6-12). It was up to distinguished scholars like these to rise to the growing challenges of ethics, hermeneutics and contextual issues such as race, gender and power.

Don Browning, one of Hiltner's students, first recognized the pressures of pluralism and thus made significant contributions to the field of practical theology in terms of ethical considerations. He was also the first to argue that morals and ideals should shape our vision for humanity (Browning 1990:36). This implied that the practical theologian had a valuable contribution to make while working alongside other disciplines. The evolving debate between theology and the sciences posed the challenge that the Bible could now not be considered as the single source of theological data. This realization prompted the advancement of more approaches to practical theology, such as the correlative and contextual approach.

2.2.2.2. Correlative approach

This approach acknowledges the interdependence between theology and other secular fields by endorsing interdisciplinary conversations. Sallie McFague (in Birch, Eaken & McDaniel 1990:201) captures the essence of such an interdisciplinary approach:

Theology, I believe, has special responsibility for the symbols, images, and the language, used for expressing the relationship between God and the world in every age. The sciences are also concerned with interpreting reality - the universe or universes, if you will - although cosmology means different things to scientists than it does to theologians. Nonetheless, here is a meeting place, a place of common interest, to scientists and theologians. David Tracy and Nicholas Lash have called recently for a 'collaborative' relationship between science and theology in order to 'help establish plausible mutually critical

correlations not only to interpret the world but to help change it' (Tracy and Lash 1983:91). They note that relations between science and theology are not only those posed by a recognition of analogies between the two areas on methodological issues but, more pressingly, by a common concern with the cosmos. Thus, a focus on the cosmos with the intent both to understand it better - and to orient our praxis within it more appropriately - is one collaborative effort for science and theology in our time.

There was thus an interactive relationship that was to develop between theology, social sciences and the natural sciences. Such a reciprocal affiliation between praxis and theory is possible where the principles of the Bible are used to determine how the knowledge from other academic disciplines is to be incorporated into pastoral care. The Bible is still considered as the only and ultimate Truth, but the field is open to the input of other religions systems, existentialisms, other people's experiences of realities and content of other academic disciplines (Wolfaardt 1992:10). In this way, people define their lives by what they read in the Bible; by what they encounter from other academic fields and by what they experience in their everyday lives.

These three interpretations are then merged into the hermeneutic narratives around which people structure their approach to pastoral care and practical theology. This means that the practical theologian and the individual interpret experiences and then use these interpretations to add religious meaning to their lives. The phenomenological analysis of human praxis within the context of the church's pastoral services is now employed to define this approach to practical theology that is focused on people and their individual situations (Louw 1999:128).

Karl Barth (1928:1) also proposes a theology in which the self-revelatory nature of God should be seen as prominent in constituting narratives. Stanley Hauerwas (2001:91) agrees when he states that

we are 'storied people' because the God that sustains us is a 'storied God' whom we come to know only by having our character formed appropriate to God's character. The formation of such character is not an isolated event but requires the existence of a corresponding society – 'a storied society.'

Although this ecumenical approach offers the opportunity for the enrichment of a person's spiritual life and enhances the possibilities for pastoral care, I am acutely aware that there are some

aspects that one should be cautious of. Firstly, it could be easy to assume that because this approach advocates an interrelationship and synthesis between God and human beings, that they can be seen as equals. This assumption could undoubtedly place people on the same level as Scripture and thereby transcend the power and role of God in people's lives.

Secondly, the Bible may be considered as an equivalent to secular texts and not be seen as the ultimate source of theology. In this way the Word of God is seen in relativistic terms and it is elucidating God's Word as a human term.

Thirdly, people might look for explanations for situations in their lives in secular terms instead of searching for God in the context that they find themselves in. It is therefore important to acknowledge the crucial role of context in theology and praxis, hence the development of the contextual approach to practical theology.

2.2.2.3. Contextual approach

The social construction discourse introduced the world of theology and praxis to plurality and multiple truths. This was not only relevant to a religious context, but also to the relational and social contexts in which practical theologians used social constructional thinking to define their realities. Wolfaardt (1992:11) expresses that contextual practical theology aims to interpret and change society through investigating this relationship between praxis and theory in a specific context.

Previously, the primary context wherein theology functioned was only considered to be the church, but with the growing influence of practical theology, the greater community was gradually included and incorporated into this context. As such, pastoral praxis can be defined as any deed or action that stands in service of God and His Word. Wolfaardt (1992:12) reminds us that although a practical theologian does indeed need some knowledge of theology, the ultimate goal is not to preach, but rather to influence people in a way that educates them on the love of God and thereby make them aware of their own ability to ultimately transform their own circumstances.

The moment that practical theology moves away from the concrete specific context it regresses into some sort of systematic theology. The constant effort to afford a viable place to context in practical theology can be tiresome, but at the same time it creates space for individuality, creativity and imagination that could lead to a dynamic theology (Miller-McLemore 2010:816). It is the unifying power of the imagination that allows and enables us to envision that nature, grace,

immanence and transcendence. The sacred and the secular have thus become distinct, yet interdependent and ultimately striving towards a dynamic whole. In this way, practical theology has matured to a theological discipline that endorses the conversation between the religious and the secular worlds through paying homage to the role that contexts play in human praxis.

Cahalan and Nieman (2008:85) concur with this statement when they claim that “these diverse dynamics and their constant interplay make practical theology persistently fascinating and occasionally frustrating.” This dynamic field has always, through the interaction between these dualities, been concerned with the human search for meaning and for hope. The Latin phrase “fides quaerens spem” means “faith in search of hope” and here the emphasis is on the understanding of meaning, as well as the means to foster and facilitate such understanding through liturgy and pastoral care (Cilliers 2009:624).

Bass and Dykstra (2008:13) reminds readers that practical theology is “undertaken in hope for the wellbeing of persons, communities of faith, and all creation.” The hope that they refer to is an exclusive sort of hope that it not only concerned with the God of the past, but intentionally focused on the role of God in the future.

Jürgen Moltmann's “Theology of Hope” encapsulates such a hope in that it is a theological perspective with an eschatological foundation and focuses on the hope that the resurrection brings (Moltmann 1967:21). Through faith we are bound to Christ, and as such have the hope of the resurrected Christ and are not forced to rely on the human elements of hope. For Moltmann, hope and faith are dependent on each other and only with both may one find “not only a consolation in suffering, but also the protest of the divine promise against suffering” (Moltmann 1967:32). Hope strengthens faith and aids a believer into living a life of love, and directing them toward a new creation of all things. It creates in a believer a “passion for the possible” (Moltmann 1967:35). This theological perspective of eschatology turns the hope of the future into the hope of today and into a hope of the average man.

In accordance with the ideas of Moltmann, *promissio* therapy^{xi} as postulated by Louw (2008:239) also advocates the use of hope to make a realistic assessment of a situation and help individuals to focus their attention upon quality of life. This builds a relationship of faith in which individuals learn “to trust God and anticipate life from the perspective of the resurrection” (Louw 2008:239).

For such a theology to be genuinely practical, it must have some description of the present situation, some critical theory and conceptualization about the ideal situation, and some understanding of the processes that will be needed for these loosely defined ideals to be realized. The development of a postfoundationalist approach to practical theology has raised questions within all practical theologians about the significance of the contribution that other disciplines could make to expanding to already significant role of a contextual approach to practical theology.

As the impact of these ideas on practical theology became more significant, the latent value of incorporating ideas from the feminist discourse and liberation theology into this research study became evident. The essential difference between the correlative and contextual approach is that the contextual approach aspires to not only influence individual people’s lives, but rather to promote social transformation (Wolfaardt 1992:6).

Isherwood and McEwan (1993:95) deduces that feminist theology is

involved in a twofold task: it is criticizing patriarchal theology and complementing traditional theology so as to safeguard the understanding of everybody as equal and equally suited to take his or her life experiences as the starting point from which to interpret theology.

In the context of this research the praxis of teachers as practical theologians will constantly be deconstructed. In the process of reflecting on our actions and using these reflections as indicators of how to act in similar or future situations, we expose discourses that can be marginalizing to teachers. In bringing to light traditionally expected ideas, we can work towards societal transformation that will empower teachers to feel safe in their role as practical theologians and thus be even more critical about practices and discourses. The next section will further explore the

^{xi} “*Promissio* therapy refers to the healing dimension of the fulfilled promises of God as revealed in the biblical text, guaranteed by the faithfulness of God, and affirmed by the covenantal events of Baptism and the Eucharist, and expressed in actions as related to ethical issues of justice and reconciliation as well as spiritual virtues (the fruit of the Spirit)” (Louw 2008:67-68).

impact that incorporating the theoretical ideas of a feminist practical theology can have on the practice and everyday lives of teachers.

2.3. Feminist theology of praxis

Feminist theologians like Elaine Graham (1996; 2009) and Sallie Mcfague (1982:21; 1991:12) have been instrumental in propagating the ideas of feminist and liberation theology amongst the public. These theoretical ideas have filtered into the realm of practical theology and provide theologians with the tools to critique and deconstruct the discourses and ways of thinking that have been taken for granted in our various cultures. Thus, questioning our experiences and the wider societal influence, particularly the way that some people have been silenced, has been an important contribution of the liberation and feminist theology.

The principles of liberation and feminist theology inspire the examination of the broader context in which people live and challenge those ideas that contribute towards the abuse of power. It questions the sets of power that tends to silence and marginalize people and in this way scrutinize and dissect the way that our societies are structured and maintained.

Elaine Graham and her colleagues refer to such an approach as “theology in action: praxis” (Graham, Walton & Ward 2005:170). Denise Ackermann explains that the word “praxis” involves the “inseparable relationship between reflecting and acting, between what I think and believe and what I do to achieve the goals of my beliefs... the continuous movement from action to reflection and back to action is one in which actions and thinking about these actions cannot be separated” (Ackermann 2003:36).

The famous “pastoral cycle” therefore involves moving from practice to theory and back to practice (Graham et al. 2005:188) and is played out in such a spiral-like process.

Such analysis begins with theological reflection upon a local religious practice, then studies that practice, using reflexivity and ethical regard for the research partners, then analyses and interprets his or her findings in the light of the faith tradition, then shares these findings back with the group. Such data, when offered back to the community in a respectful and appreciative manner, can become a basis for honest theological reflection and conversation. This encourages people to become more conscious of their lived faith practices and

patterns. The people are thus invited into a theological conversation (Moschella (2012: 229)

This notion that theory and practice should not be separated is also further advocated by contextual and participatory practical theology. I consider feminist theology to be contextual because it examines the reflection of social, political and cultural influences on people's lives (Ackermann & Bons-Storm 1998:22). The stories of teachers and the stress they deal with are ultimately a matter of religious, cultural and political concern. The voices of the teachers and the songs that they sing make it clear that their personal circumstances and pastoral needs are not individual problems, but cast light on social issues (Graham 1996b:173).

2.3.1. A quest for social transformation

Feminist theology acknowledges the influence of historical and cultural discourses and suggests ways in which to react to it. "Feminist theology is dynamic and inclusive; it is not a closed system. Thus the formulation of theological stories is an ongoing process and feminist perspective in practical theology will endeavour to contribute new insights to the process" (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:22). Ackermann (1996:45) agrees when she states that a "feminist theology of praxis is an exercise in accountability to a specific way of doing theology which stems from a passion for change" (Ackermann 1996:45). This implies that followers of this branch of theology can easily become involved in socio-political action through questioning and challenging the power relationships and imbalances in society (Bons-Storm 1996:25).

Using feminist ideas in research might uncover new stories that give women and marginalized people (in this case teachers) the opportunity to speak, to give them the confidence to once again sing loud enough so that their voices might be heard as part of the larger choir of teachers. It could also assist them in working through powerlessness to a place where they can step out of the traditional roles and dichotomies assigned to them by discourses (Bons-Storm 1998:17). Thus giving them the freedom to write and live their own stories testifying to their calling to teach, rather than having their stories dictated by the stress of their careers.

Reinharz (1992:197) agrees when she defines a feminist approach to research as an expression of the commitment to thoroughness, the desire to open-endedness and the willingness to take risks. McTaggart (1997:7) thickens this description when she states that postmodern participatory research is political because it is about people changing themselves and their circumstances. They

strive towards the ideal that people are “diverse-but-equal and inspire the marginalized to realize their potential, use their talents and come into the centre” (Bons-Storm 1996:29).

Feminist theology recognizes as one of its objectives the overcoming of old dichotomies and the endorsement of an understanding of pluralism, which gives a voice to the speechless and lets outsiders in to participate (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:91). Feminist theologians insist that pastoral care starts with the experience of people as “a source from which to do theology” (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:35). Ackermann (2003:35) explains that caring then becomes an ethical task because we are connected to each other. This makes our quest both political and feminist because we want to give people a voice within an academic discourse (Foucault 1980:81) and address dominant discourses, like patriarchy, that might prevent their empowerment and liberation.

2.3.2. Questioning the ‘Yes, sir!’- discourse

Isherwood and McEwan (1993:9) agrees in their definition of feminist theology as being “primarily about two disciplines reflecting on and complementing each other.” The first discipline is feminism, which is defined as

a socio-political movement whose objective is equity of rights, status and power for men and women... struggles for women’s emancipation.... which has led feminists to challenge both sexism and the capitalist system which is said to encourage patriarchy.... not necessarily anti-men, but against any social system which produces female insubordination (The Chambers Encyclopaedia 1990:438 quoted in McLachlan 2007:47).

McLachlan (2007:47) elaborates on this definition when she defines feminism as a “liberating praxis grounded in the lived experience of women.” Isherwood and McEwan (1993:103) wonders how Christianity and patriarchal theology determines gender roles. The Latin word for father is *pater*. The word patriarchy literally means: ruled by the father. In a patriarchal family there are structures and practices that insure male dominance and sharp gender differences. Patriarchy is therefore a political system that perpetuates a system of male domination at the expense of women.

Many patriarchal ideas are still alive in society today and it represents a complex set of ideologies and structures that sustains and perpetuates male control over females. According to this paradigm, women and children can be happy and free only as long as they obey their “master’s

voice.” Feminist theologian Denise Ackermann (2003:37) explains that this hints at women being submissive, not having authority in a relationship and subsequently feeling silenced and marginalized.

Feminist theologians claim that only when a theology takes the experiences of women seriously, can it become liberating and make a commitment to praxis (Ackermann & Bons-Storm 1998:22; Reinharz 1992:196). This resonates with my discursive positioning and intentions for this research journey as we will be reflecting on the actions of teachers and how these influence and sustain their spiritual journeys.

Men are at the pinnacle of the structures of most schools because most principals are male. This implies that the real source of power within the school is usually a man. The question needs to be asked why there are so few female principals when there are so many heads of departments or women acting as grade heads or even deputy principals. Yet these women very rarely get the opportunity to show their worth in a real leadership position that would put them in a position of power over their male colleagues.

On the other hand, many female teachers struggle frequently with issues of subordination of women structured and promoted through male superiority. They recognize the presence and power of patriarchy in several aspects of schooling. They also struggle with conflicts between the desire for social equality and fears of how such equality would influence their personal lives.

Walderdine (1992:16) describes female teachers as “being trapped inside the concept of nurturance which held them responsible for the freeing of each individual, and therefore, the management of an idealist dream, an impossible fiction.” As a woman’s work, the discourse expects the impossible: they must “save” every child by virtue of their ability to nurture, care for and love. Such plans often include off-duty time and at much personal expense. They are expected to be there for children, to offer help and advice, to act as a mother or an older sister, to build self-esteem and to empower children. This indicates that both the successes and failures of children could be determined by the care and service dedication of the teacher.

Although I am myself caught up in the conundrum of being an ambitious woman in a male-dominated world, I have to admit that initially I was quite apprehensive about reading more about the discourse of feminism. I was entrapped by the modernist discourse about the concept and definitely did not

want to be classified as a feminist in the way that I have socially constructed that label. Now I have a totally different conceptualization of the term. I now appreciate that feminist theology is not only the story of a few women promoting the rights of their gender and protesting against and demanding the demise of all men. It can be a movement of quiet liberation and gentle transformation. My newly acquired knowledge led me to wondering whether traditional theology paid enough attention to the complicated roles of being a woman, student, mother, wife, daughter, partner and female friend.

In the same sense I have come to realize that men can also benefit from the ideas of feminist theology. They too, are often tied down or caught up in discourses that prescribe what it means to be “a real man.” They also long for the freedom to be themselves and not be the product of generations of patriarchy and dominant discourses that stipulate their emotions and behaviour.

The participants in the two groups of this research study were both male and female. It was therefore important to promote an atmosphere of equality regarding both gender and power. By deconstructing discourses and using alternative language to discuss gender issues and patriarchy, the participants and I strived towards exercising a form of “care of the self” (Gore 1993) to acknowledge and address the differences and similarities between the two genders. This approach to feminist research is more than a way of *thinking* or *doing*: it is a way of *being*. In that the fact that all participants were committed teachers and were outspoken about their Christianity proved to be much more prominent than their different genders, thus providing an equal platform from where their situations could be explored. These issues will be conceptualized further in chapter 4 and 5.

2.3.3. Embracing an ethic of risk

In a modernist, scientific paradigm the ethical dimension of research can easily be neglected because the researcher can mistakenly think that he or she is dealing with “objective facts.” But Heshusius (1994:20) are reminiscent of the fact that ethics and epistemology are inseparable. This implies that research is therefore “not a neutral or innocent act, but an ethical-political process that cannot be anything but an ethicizing action.” In line with my postmodern, feminist epistemology I am in agreement with Kotzé that the search for new knowledge and alternative stories is “primarily an ethicizing act” (Kotzé 2002:21).

Kotzé (2002:18) then goes on to state that

participation of all is a primary commitment if in any way we aspire to be ethical... This means that those who have a voice and power have an ethical obligation to use the privilege of their knowledge/power to ensure participation with the marginalized and silenced, to listen *to* them, but not decide *for* them, and to engage in participatory solidarity *with* them. The question 'who benefits', becomes a central and guiding challenge [Kotzé's emphases].

This also resonates with the idea of the feminist discourse being an ethic of risk (Welch 1990:20). She explains that this undertaking begins with the recognition that we cannot guarantee decisive changes in the near future, or even in our lifetimes. Instead an ethic of risk is motivated by the recognition that to stop resisting oppression to marginalization would be the death of the ability to imagine strategies of resistance. Our journey is going to be a path of resistance, a quest to a collaborative search for reclaiming voices and empowerment. In accordance, feminist theology is committed to "participating in solidarity with all who struggle to find healing and freedom" (Ackermann 2003:xvi).

I believe that ethical care in the context of this research indicates a commitment towards the transformation of those teachers who are suffering in silence. It would stand against all oppressive and exploitative discourses and practices that teachers might be confronted with everyday. Ethical research requires transparency and accountability towards both the participants and the readers of the research report. As mentioned earlier, a postmodern view of reality postulates that there are no essential truths and that all realities are the product of social construction and interpretation. In the choir piece that this research is singing, the voices of the participants are "shaped in ongoing dialogues with others" (Ackermann 2003:11).

2.3.4. Being self-reflexive

As a researcher I am obliged to be reflexive regarding my part in this co-construction. That includes my commitment towards the credibility and accountability of the study. Hall (1996:30) explains that reflexivity attempts to monitor and reflect on one's doing of research and act responsively on these methods as the study proceeds, as well as to be accountable for the constitutiveness of the researcher. This process begins with being conscious about how I am

doing research as well as what I bring to it, for example my previous experience, knowledge, values and beliefs.

Thus, in order to be reflexive, I constantly attempt to be transparent about my own thought processes so that my contributions to the construction of local knowledge are clear. My self-disclosure opens up the opportunity for conversation that can enhance or question the current process. This echoes Hall's (1996:37) opinion that "knowledge is constructed by people in a dynamic context rather than implying that it is a static entity which is 'out there waiting'."

As I aim to be dynamic in my own social construction of practical theology and the role that it plays in my research, my classroom and in my life, I have to constantly assess my understanding and implementation thereof.

2.4. The song that I am singing in practical theology

If I were to define practical theology, it would be as the study of religious praxis, aimed at understanding, evaluating, and improving the relation between people and what is sacred to them. My own Christian background and convictions are intrinsically linked to the way that I view the world, and as a practical theologian, I take the human praxis of faith as a potential source for transforming the situations that people live in where they feel that their voices are not heard.

In "An introduction to pastoral and practical theology" Pattison (2000:22) outlines practical theology as "a place where religious belief, tradition and practice meets contemporary experience, questions and actions and conducts a dialogue which is mutually enriching, intellectually critical and practically transforming." Other features of practical theology include it being concerned with more than the rational and the logical. It is confessional and unsystematic, truthful and situationally related. Practical theologians commit to being socio-politically aware and reflexive. Through being analytical and interrogative, they strive towards creating an interdisciplinary and experiential space where local knowledge is honoured and celebrated.

In addition, I also believe that recognizing the local knowledge and values of people when I aim to find new meaning with them is one of the main principles of my approach to practical theology. Isherwood and McEwan (1993:71) concurs when they remind us that "how we experience our reality must dictate our theology." Bosch (1991:242) refers to the "doing of theology" as acts that are not confined to the church, but are done "from below." In this research, "below" will refer to our classrooms and school grounds "where people are experiencing and working for justice, freedom,

community, reconciliation, unity and truth in a spirit of love and selflessness, we may dare to see God at work” (Bosch 1991:430). In this way theology moves into the realm of praxis when we network, connect, care for and carry each other.

Ruard Ganzevoort (2008:10) defines the “locus theologicus” of practical theology as the praxis that is considered to be the starting point and the focus of the conversations that we need to have about God. He compares this to the canonical texts being the locus for the Biblical scholar, and thus, love for children being the locus for the teacher.

We start doing theology the moment we start caring for each other and for those who are suffering. In this way, what we are doing becomes more important than what we are saying. Combining such features with my own epistemology leads me to describing my own take on practical theology in the following way:

- Acknowledging that context is crucial to understanding and transforming a situation.
- The focus is more on praxis and lived experience than on theology and the church. Practical theology is contextual because it voices the reflections of the people of God from below as they live their lives of faith in the specific context of teaching in South Africa.
- Each person is entitled to their own interpretation of the Bible and the meaning they make from it.
- The primary motivation is not the training of theologians and clergy, but rather the empowerment of individuals to act as practical theologians in their everyday lives.
- There is more reference to ecumenical influence. The faith of the Christian community is more inclusive than just the Bible.
- Knowledge arises from people’s experience and their dialogue within those experiences. It cannot be produced apart from action.
- Open to a critical conversation with those who feel overwhelmed and suppressed by traditional theological and religious practices.
- Aiming for an interdisciplinary commitment towards growth and a constant urge towards evolving in its relationship with the natural and social sciences.

It is clear that although practical theology stays concerned with praxis and hermeneutics it is still growing in its resources and understandings. Practical theology reflects on and deals with the praxis of God as related to the praxis of faith within a vivid social, cultural and contextual encounter between God and human beings.

2.5. The marriage between social construction discourse and practical theology

Because both practical theology and the social construction discourse make out significant components of my epistemology it is important to further explore their possible relation to each other. The postmodern discourse and social constructionism merge well with the ideas of practical theology because both aim towards creating alternative ways of thinking. Practical theologians aspire to care for people who are caught up in their lived experience and to collaborate to transform practices that silence and marginalize.

Throughout this research endeavour, it is crucial that I do not think in fragmented bits or different segments about my epistemology and my project, but rather search for a merger of ideas and concepts where the overlap creates new opportunities and ways of thinking. I therefore started thinking about the interfaces between the social construction discourse and the customs of practical theology. The social construction discourse advocates the making of new meaning and authoring alternative stories. In a similar way, practical theology also promotes an alternative view on praxis, truths, hermeneutics and lived religion.

Gergen and Gergen (2003:13) captures this in a nutshell when they state that “such methods create different constructions of human activity and harbour different values.” Both practical theology and social construction discourse promote the use of alternative values to substantiate our personal and communal actions. Living according to alternative values also creates space for individual stories to be heard and validated and in such a way facilitates the transformation and care.

Another interface between the social construction discourse and practical theology is that both can be considered to be “a page from the postmodern text” (Gergen 2001:2). One of the striking parallels between these two approaches is that both promote the honouring of local knowledge and stories. Kotzé (2002:9) also postulates that “knowledge no longer represents the world as it is, but is now taken as referring to our interpretations, resulting in realities that are socially

constructed by people in specific contexts, with specific purposes and with real political and social effects.” In this way, there are no maps to knowledge that can be followed or reproduced, but only open spaces to design the future through conversation.

Ganzevoort (2003:1) also expresses his reasons for approaching practical theology from a social constructionist perspective. Firstly, a great deal of attention is given to the specific dialogues that people are involved in and the meaning that they make from these conversations. “We encounter other branches of theology and engage in conversations with the social sciences; we also connect with the church and the society.”

Secondly, he refers to the “attention to the performative dimension of language” (Ganzevoort 2003:1). The practical theologian working within the social constructionist framework will constantly wonder how the meaning they are making through language can influence experiences, for example in the perception of having a revelation from God. Ganzevoort (2003:2) will pay more attention to the process that lead up to a divine revelation, rather than just accepting it as a given that a person might have received a message from God. Hereby, he is not outright rejecting the possibility that God might reveal Himself to people. He explains that “I simply try to bring such a claim into conversation by asking how it has evolved, how it functions in the relationship with God and with fellow humans and how it can be evaluated...”(Ganzevoort 2003:2).

As a practical theologian I therefore have to balance Scripture with the meaning I make as I socially construct the realities that I live in. It is therefore crucial to yet again refer to the importance of being aware of the context in which these interactions between theory and praxis occur. Don Browning proposes such a view that goes from practice to theory and back to practice (Browning 1991:34). He argues that the once common understanding of practical theology as mere theory-to-practice, with a platonic understanding of practice, is faulty. Instead he interprets practical theology as a holistic discipline that binds together theory and practice as a practical hermeneutic (Browning 1991:7).

This cyclic interaction between praxis and theory, also known as the “practice wisdom model^{xii}”, is crucial to this research. The overall dynamic implicit in Browning’s model is the reconstruction of

^{xii} This concept corresponds to the Aristotelian concept of phronesis. Phronesis is practical reason that seeks to answer the question “what shall we do in light of this particular situation, and how do we live in light of the decision we make?” Phronesis therefore is knowledge connected to the concrete experience of daily living. German Philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer claims that phronesis is concerned with application and action from

experience as an interpretive and re-interpretive process, a hermeneutical spiral in which these new, reconstructed religious meanings and practices can be evaluated or implemented. It is worthy to note that Browning suggests that praxis, rather than theory, should be the starting point for this process (Browning 1991:10). This notion of praxis recognizes that we have pre-existing theories embedded within our actions. Praxis is theory-laden action, and practical theology advocates critical, theological analysis of our theory-laden practices in the context of daily living.

Our choir of teachers will not be able to sing if we do not use anecdotes, metaphors and stories to revisit the past, critically evaluate the present and adapt our actions for the future through finding parallels or differences between the ideals of theory and the realities of the praxis of being a teacher in South Africa. In this research text the literature of other researchers and teachers singing the same kind of song will come together and be fused with that of teachers participating in this study. I also have to include my own voice and academic background into this cycle of interpretation and creation of new knowledge.

The question should however be asked whether the social construction discourse allows me this sense of personal agency or whether it denies me any ability to reflect, to resist and to make choices. Does it abdicate the responsibility to determine the course of my own life, including how I view myself, others and the social construction discourse? Burr (1995:89) discards this idea because it opens up the opportunity to connect my own sense of agency to preferred and alternative realities and to construct and reconstruct the stories I live.

Michael White (White & Epston 1990:83) also rejects this concern when he highlights the parallels that emerge when the ideas of narrative therapy and practical theology are combined. He clarifies with his explanation that a narrative model can encompass theoretical, emotional, linguistic and therapeutic contexts. These acknowledge the lived experience (and per implication the lived religion) of an individual.

the beginning. Different from the enlightenment focus on understanding-prior-to-action, Gadamer claimed that understanding and application are mutually interpenetrating. Gadamer's notion of "the hermeneutical circle" (Gadamer 1985) implies the mutually interacting experience of action and interpretation in the hermeneutical process. According to Gadamer, we come to the process of interpretation with fore-knowing, and fore-concepts, and in the process of the hermeneutical circle, by acting and interpreting, understanding occur.

Ganzevoort (2007:1) reminds us that all Christians should consider themselves as practical theologians in their own right. I have to probe into how I embrace the freedom of the postmodern discourse that allows me to be a practical theologian while I am still creating knowledge in a way that is ethical and accountable. The possible answers to these concerns lie beyond the postmodern discourse and foundationalism. When we move into the realm of postfoundationalist ideas we might just find some new questions and if we are lucky, even a few socially constructed answers.

2.6. Towards a postfoundationalist approach to practical theology

2.6.1. Foundationalism

Foundationalism refers to an epistemology based on rigid belief systems and fixed truths. These are set in stone and, according to Van Huyssteen (1997b:3), are therefore treated as privileged knowledge for validating beliefs. Philosophically, foundationalists believe that we live our lives as part of pre-determined and proven meta-narratives, as promoted by modernism, rather than by creating individual stories in our own context.

Van der Westhuizen (2010:1) states that the initial task of foundationalism is the establishment of “an epistemological foundation for the construction of the human knowing project by determining, and perhaps even demonstrating, the foundational beliefs or principles on which knowledge rests.” Epistemologically, information is thus infallible and inflexible and it provides the groundwork on which we build our theories and hypotheses. When considering foundationalist knowledge in this way, reasoning moves in only one direction – from the bottom up – that is, from basic beliefs or first principles to resultant conclusions (Grenz & Franke 2001:30).

Foundationalism therefore supports the notion that all beliefs can be justified by appealing to some item of knowledge that is unquestionable and beyond doubt. Schrag (2006:21) agrees when he states that foundationalism finds its objective in a quest for certainty and that an unimpeachable knowledge-claim is what it is after. A theory built on such a presumption could be referred to as a “universal rationality” and is a validation of the idea of a universe of knowledge that functions as an overarching frame of reference. Accordingly there is only one theoretical truth that must be pursued at all cost. Foundationalism is thus not only a structure of beliefs, but also a structure of justification.

I see foundationalism as a fixed and rigid system of beliefs where all knowledge is built upon many absolute, Archimedean points around which one can base and explain everything else. This view cannot even imagine a world without a foundation because such would be seen as absolute chaos and relativism.

For the followers of this framework it is quite natural to use their own expert knowledge as the unquestionable starting point and then to engage the other rationalities from there. In this sense, interdisciplinary work is made extremely difficult, if not totally impossible. Incorporating the ideas from other disciplines is considered to be a threat to the ultimate truth. As a theologian coming to the table in defence of interdisciplinary discussion, I am very much aware of how universal rationality becomes an unyielding barrier in the discussion between theologians and natural scientists.

2.6.2. Nonfoundationalism

Nonfoundationalism stands as the antithesis to foundationalism because it advocates that there is no single, fundamental belief or truth from which people structure their lives. In the extreme form of nonfoundationalism there is a total relativism that does not allow any room for further conversation within this mode of thinking. Van Huyssteen (1997b) says that “at the heart of this epistemological brand of nonfoundationalism we often find fideism: an uncritical, almost blind commitment to a basic set of beliefs. In this sense fideism can in some cases ironically turn out to be a foundationalism-in-disguise” (Van Huyssteen 1997b:3).

This premise therefore rejects the traditional, modernistic definition of truth as an isolated given rule between the self and the world, as well as the concept that some experiences or ideas are privileged as the authoritative basis of human knowing (Thiel 1994:10). This implies that no meaning can be seen as fixed, but is always part of an experienced reality and a certain context.

Where foundationalists operate within the ideal of a universal position that provides the answer to all problems, this approach takes it for granted that fundamentals do not really exist and that we only have a diversity of opinions.

In our times the concept of a universal truth is no longer accepted. The challenge raised by postmodern theories, such as Foucault's understanding of knowledge/power, cuts at the foundationalist assumption of the 'university'. Perhaps a so-called 'multiversity' takes no assumption for granted and is

continually critical even of itself in a scheme of multiple rationalities and democratic organization, devoted to reducing the force of the power/knowledge matrix (Tatusko 2005:114).

As previously discussed, this epistemology disregards the existence of common belief systems, but rather argues that all sets of beliefs are interrelated within a community and that “they prefer the image of a web of mutually supporting beliefs, which are mediated through a particular community” (Van Huyssteen 2003:624). In 1997, he warned however, that an extreme form of nonfoundationalism “implies a total relativism of rationalities and, in a move that will prove to be fatal for the interdisciplinary status of theology, claims internal rules for different modes of reflection” (Van Huyssteen 1997b:3).

The nonfoundationalist position thus makes interdisciplinary discussion very difficult, because followers of this way of thinking are cynical about any effort to create mutual understanding. Understanding or knowledge according to this approach is always diverse and therefore it should be easy to expect more tolerance with interdisciplinary differences within this approach, but constructive discussions are difficult in a situation where everything is relative and subjective.

2.6.3. Postfoundationalism

Because neither the attributes of foundationalism or nonfoundationalism met the unique needs of the practical theological discourse, Van Huyssteen (1999:113) proposed a postfoundational approach that fully acknowledges and respects the role of context, the crucial input of interpreted experience and the significance of discourses and traditions in shaping religious values. He further argues against the isolation of theology in a pluralist world and advocates a postfoundationalist notion of rationality that embraces the postmodern, multi-disciplinary nature of theology (Van Huyssteen 2000:428-429) and thus places theology in conversation with other academic disciplines.

Such a postfoundationalist notion of reality enables us to communicate across boundaries and move transversally from one discipline to another, from one tradition to the next and also from context to context. This evolution started and developed from a real and local narrative. In other words, the rationality that unfolded was situational and contextual. The dialogue that was initiated was not based on abstract ideas and concepts, but on real-life situations where people searched for a safe public space to do theology. Van Huyssteen (2000:239) elaborates:

Each of our domains of understanding may indeed have its own logic of behaviour, as well as an understanding unique to the particular domain, but in each the rich resources of human rationality remain. When we discover the shared richness of the resources of rationality without attempting to subsume all discourses and all communities under one universal reason, we have discovered the richness of a postfoundationalist notion of rationality.

When considering this approach, we are forced to firstly listen to the stories and songs of people in real life situations. It does not simply aim to describe a general context, but rather wants to confront us with the reality of a specific and concrete situation. This approach, although also hermeneutical in nature, moves beyond mere hermeneutics. It is more reflexive and situationally embedded in epistemology and methodology. According to Van Huyssteen (2006:10) “embodied persons, and not abstract beliefs, should be seen as the locus of rationality. We, as rational agents, are thus always socially and contextually embedded.”

2.6.3.1. Transversal rationality

The notion of “transversal rationality” is a proposal by Schrag (2006:19), Van Huyssteen (2000:427) and others to better articulate what a postfoundationalist rationality would look like in practice. Transversal reasoning involves identifying places in time and space where concepts, ideas and disciplines intersect. For example, in “Alone in the World?” (2006) Van Huyssteen’s book based on his Gifford lectures, he examines the question of human uniqueness as a transversal concern that is addressed in various scientific disciplines, including theology and practical theology.

Richard Osmer (2006:339-342) also explores the potential contribution of Van Huyssteen’s transversal model of interdisciplinarity to practical theology. He characterizes contemporary practical theology as a discipline that “investigates [Christian] praxis empirically, interprets it to better understand and explain its patterns, constructs a theological framework with which it can be assessed critically, and provides practical models and guidelines for its future conduct and reform.”

This creates the way toward providing a responsible and workable interface between theology and other disciplines and the emergence of new voices. It sets the scene for the development of alternative forms of consciousness, the enhancement of metaphors that embody the transversality and the merge of different stories and disciplines. Rationality in a postfoundationalist sense is

attentiveness to the rational account of what people believe and how they think and act accordingly. This rationality describes the dynamic interaction of various dialogues with one another – as a form of transversal reasoning that justifies and urges an acknowledgment of multiple interpretations as one move across borders and boundaries. Through transversal reasoning, this rationality provides a common ground for communication between people who have different beliefs, cultures and academic viewpoints.

Postfoundational rationality is based on our own experiences, but is also capable of reaching beyond that. It starts with an individual but also extends to communities and aims towards acknowledging these shared and interpreted experiences on an interpersonal and social level (Müller 2011:electronic source). Just as all scientific observations are theory-laden, so all religious experiences are interpretation-laden and this elucidation provides valid religious meaning (Van Huyssteen 1997a:19-20). Agreeing with Van Huyssteen, Schrag (2006:25) asserts that “interpretation is called upon both in scientific discovery and humanistic inquiry. It cuts across the culture spheres of science, morality, art, and religion.” These interpretations are received because they are socially constructed, as opposed to an individual or subjective construction, and emphasizes the contribution of tradition, culture and societal discourses to the interpretation (Müller 2004:297).

As mentioned earlier, when working within the postmodern discourse there are no foundations or a pre-set piece of sheet music to follow. The only tools I have to compose this new song are the local, contextual and linguistic hermeneutical perspectives of the truth. The same cannot be said of singing this song if I consider it from a purely scientific point of view. There are set truths, parameters and proven hypotheses that are not open for reconsideration. This means that we could only memorize a song as composed by someone else and we would not be awarded any opportunity to alter the melody or the harmonies to better suite our voices and our needs.

A choir forced to sing a song that they had no part in creating will never take ownership of the song and it can therefore not make any difference to their lives. The same can be said for the meeting between different academic disciplines. It would be easy to think that there was no common denominator for conversation between the sciences and practical theology. But within postfoundationalism there is believed to be space for a certain degree of overlap between these disciplines and thus the opportunity for the creation of new knowledge and experiences.

2.6.3.2. Interdisciplinary conversations

Van Huyssteen (2006:25) claims that a “postfoundationalist approach helps us realize... that we are not the intellectual prisoners of our contexts or traditions, but that we are epistemically empowered to cross contextual, cultural, and disciplinary borders to explore critically the theories, meanings, and beliefs through which we and other construct our worlds.” This freedom offers the opportunity to facilitate conversations that accommodates two or more disciplines to ensure “... the borrowing of concepts, methods and techniques of one science by another and the integration of these elements into the other science” (Van Wyk 1997:78) can be achieved. De Lange (2007:50) points out that approaching the challenge of interdisciplinarity from such a postfoundationalist approach holds a number of advantages:

- First, human rationality cannot be claimed by one academic discipline only.
- Secondly, it is possible for different disciplines and reasoning strategies to be linked together on an equal footing.
- Thirdly, by taking into consideration our traditional and cultural scientific rationality in both theology and science, we can strive towards a multi-disciplinary epistemology.
- Fourthly, postfoundationalism provides a space in which epistemological overlaps in the theological and scientific dialogue can be promoted.
- Finally, a postfoundational approach to interdisciplinarity can be viewed as non-hierarchical in that no one discipline with its principles and practices can claim an absolute or foundational position over the other (Van Huyssteen 2006:41).

Van Huyssteen (2006:9) summarizes this line of thinking when he concludes that

interdisciplinary discourse, then, is an attempt to bring together disciplines or reasoning strategies that may have widely different points of reference, different epistemological foci, and different experiential resources. This ‘fitting together,’ however, is a complex, multileveled transversal process that takes place not within the confines of any given discipline... but within the transversal spaces between disciplines.

Interdisciplinary conversations are a means of solving problems and questions that cannot be addressed by singular methods and implies an understanding of epistemologies and methodologies of both disciplines involved. Secondly, it can be viewed as part of a traditional search for a wide-ranging knowledge. Paradoxically, at the same time it represents a “radical questioning of the nature of knowledge itself and our attempts to organize and communicate it” (Moran 2002:15).

Thirdly, interdisciplinarity brings together the products of focused enquiry to uncover new and broader patterns. It is democratic, dynamic and mutual in its attempts to forge connections across different disciplines. It also implies self-reflexivity and occupies what Moran (2002:15) calls “[the] undisciplined space in the interstices between disciplines... [and attempts] to transcend disciplinary boundaries.” It is always transformative, seeking to produce new forms of knowledge in its interaction with different disciplines.

According to Van Huyssteen (1999:35; 2000:428), these interactions result not only in the cross-disciplinary breakdown of traditional boundaries between scientific rationality and other forms of rational inquiry. It is also involved in the inevitable move from being objective spectators to being participants or agents in the very activities that were initially thought to be observed objectively.

Lastly, it is essential to keep in mind that ethics and epistemology should not be separated in the dialogue between theology and science. This underlines the assumption that knowledge cannot be separated from its contexts and traditions. Postfoundationalism in theology and science will therefore be held together by one overriding concern: while we always come to our interdisciplinary conversations with strong beliefs, commitments, and even prejudices, postfoundationalism enables us to at least acknowledge epistemologically these strong commitments and identify the shared resources of human rationality in different modes of reflection. Subsequently, a person will then aim to reach beyond the walls of their own epistemic communities in cross-contextual, cross-cultural, and cross-disciplinary conversations.

As many voices as possible should be included in an interdisciplinary research text like this one to ensure authenticity in covering all the aspects of the participants’ lived experience and their lived religion. This way of thinking is, however, filtered through with challenges that modernist discourse still present. It is therefore important to acknowledge such challenges in order to work towards dynamic growth and movement within practical theology.

2.7. Challenges to postfoundationalist and interdisciplinary thinking

One of the aspects most worthy of attention in Van Huyssteen's proposition (1998, 2000) is his claim that part of what it means to be *rational* is to be engaged in a public, critical dialogue with others, both within and across contextual boundaries. This means that theology can actually only claim to be rational when it is interdisciplinary. Although much effort has gone into the integration of interdisciplinary thinking into the conceptualization of practical theology, I am still not convinced whether the current paradigms for interdisciplinary theological method can fully account for a dynamic relationship.

With respect to interdisciplinary methods, I kept asking myself why almost all the literature that I have read referred only to the interaction with science. I wondered why the philosophy of social sciences has not yet been engaged as seriously as van Huyssteen has considered the contribution of the philosophy of the natural sciences.

I wonder how Van Huyssteen's postfoundational rationality can allow us to think about the ways that theology can engage in a dialogue with disciplines other than natural sciences, such as education, arts, cultural studies, political theory, economics, sociology, feminist theory and mathematics. In such a way we can incorporate rationality into a larger, more flexible framework that can account for a wider array of disciplines, voices, perspectives, contexts, and concerns. In addition to moving beyond "abstract" discussions and focusing on specific topics I would like to see more explorations of how thoughts on education and being a teacher could inform this dialogue.

The idea of vocation might be applicable as well: I expect there are a lot of scientists who have a firm sense of vocation with regard to their work. With this in mind, chapter four will explore the relationship between practical theology and education and the influence that the idea of vocation and calling have on teachers and whether that sense might have been dulled by the amount of stress and burnout that they have to deal with every day.

This research endeavour will facilitate a conversation between teachers being committed Christians with a calling to teach and the Department of Education that does not allow space for individual interpretations of the realities and job descriptions of teachers in South African schools.

As part of his work with HIV/Aids, Julian Müller (2003, 2004) identified a second challenge that a postfoundationalist approach faces. It is mostly focussed on contextuality and on the listening to people's in-context experiences. We have to ask ourselves whether a postfoundationalist approach will guarantee such an inclusion of the in-context experiences in the formulation of interpretations that is made. The postfoundationalist process does require committed listening to the in-context experiences of people, but is it also committed to the inclusion of an individual's own understanding of his / her own story?

If I aim to do research in an accountable way and with integrity, I have to include hermeneutics and social constructionism as part of the process. While hermeneutics and postfoundationalist thinking provide me with a good epistemological basis and even methodological direction, I need to refer to the social construction discourse to guarantee the inclusion of individual stories. Transversal rationality will not necessarily include the individual's own rationality if I do not succeed in giving a voice to a person's own reason.

The danger exists that even transversal rationality can then become just another universal truth. I could then easily revert back to a modernistic perspective of looking down on people and being the expert that merely reflects on their stories.

Looking back now, I realise that it is not the methodology or transversal rationality that creates limitations in the postfoundationalist discourse. The limitations are created by our own short-sightedness in the way we approach conversations and the assumptions and conclusions that we so easily come to.

If I can approach research within a postfoundationalist paradigm and in an ethical way I have the potential of doing practical theology as part of an interdisciplinary dialogue. This would mean a doing of theology that takes the social constructions of the local seriously, yet can move beyond the local into a global dialogue without recourse to universal foundations.

Through this research project the merger of the lived experiences of teaching and practical theology can contribute to moving the contextual boundaries that prevents interdisciplinary conversations and further opens up space for individuals stories of the praxis of teachers to be heard on an equal footing to that of the theories that gives substance to that what we believe.

2.8. In a nutshell

In order to place myself firmly within a postfoundationalist frame of mind while thinking in an interdisciplinary way it is important to understand the relationship between foundationalist- and nonfoundationalist ideas, a postfoundationalist approach and interdisciplinary conversations. The following table offers a summary on the premises of each of the approaches, the key aspects thereof and the practical implication of an interdisciplinary way of working.

Table 2: Summary of epistemological approaches

EPISTEMOLOGY	PREMISES	RATIONALITY	INTERDISCIPLINARY CONVERSATIONS
Foundationalist	Fixed truths. Meta-narratives. Modernistic approach.	Universal rationality – universal and fixed knowledge is the ultimate frame of reference. Dangers – approach is rigid and inflexible.	Ideas from other disciplines are considered a threat. Meta-narratives cannot be altered or adapted.
Nonfoundationalist	No privileged knowledge. Postmodern approach. Meaning is created within a specific relativistic context.	Multiversal rationality – meaning is a product of diversity and experienced realities. Dangers – approach is too relativistic and subjective.	Difficult because everything is relative and subjective. No tentative boundaries in which similarities can be found and differences be compared.
Postfoundationalist	Removed epistemology from the domain of abstract justification of knowledge and relocated it in the sphere of socially constructed knowledge in a specific and local context.	Transversal rationality – identifying places in time and space where different concepts, ideas, disciplines, etc. intersect. Dangers – easy to disregard the input of the participants to the story while moving from the local to the global.	Local or concrete account of the ways particular disciplines and persons intersect one another, overlapping in some ways and diverging in others. Including as many voices as possible to ensure authenticity in covering all the aspects of the participants' lived experience.

2.9. A public theology in public schools?

The term public theology describes a way of doing theology that has its focus on issues of public concern in the contemporary world. Public theology involves a critical engagement with Christian belief and practice in relation to public affairs through theological reflections, interdisciplinary discussions and inter-faith dialogues with those who have a shared concern about public issues in other disciplines and from other perspectives (Smit 1996:190).

At its heart, therefore, all Christian theology is public theology. It reflects on the love of God that is at work in all spheres of life. I thus consider public theology to also be an extension of practical theology because of the focus on the lived religion and the critical evaluation of praxis that it promotes. According to Koopman (2010:123), it may be helpful to recognize three basic questions in the field of public theology:

- What is the inherent public nature of God's love?
- Can we reach an understanding of the rationality behind God's love for the world?
- What is the meaning and implications of God's love for every facet of life?

In the previous section, I have stipulated postfoundationalist practical theology as an implicit part of my own epistemological positioning. This premise is a very clear example of a theologian placing the emphasis on the second of these three questions, namely the rationality of Christian faith. Van Huyssteen himself has described his work as being part of public theology when he stated that

these essays also reflect my deepest conviction that only a truly accessible and philosophically credible notion of interdisciplinarity will be able to pave the way for a plausible public theology that wishes to play an important intellectual role in our fragmented culture today (Van Huyssteen 1997b:1).

Not only do I feel that all theology should indeed be considered as public theology because it correlates with our Christian duty to love our neighbour as we love ourselves and with the calling that all Christians have to share the love and God with the rest of the world, but I can also narrow it down to my professional life as a teacher. In accordance, Koopman postulates his three questions about public theology (2010:123) that are extremely relevant to the world of education and the interaction between teachers and learners.

In his first question Koopman (2010:123) contemplates the inherent public nature of God's love. Being a teacher offers the opportunity to practice Christianity on a public forum and thus be an example of God's love to the world. Henriëtte, one of the participants in this study, explains how God is present in every minute of her day at school:

In one school day I have to be a teacher, mother, sister, friend, educator, nurse and counsellor. Only the Holy Spirit can guide me to fulfil all of these roles all the time. That is for every period of forty-five minutes eight times a day, five days a week. I try to be there not only the learners in my classes but also for those that I encounter on the sport field or even during a detention.

Secondly, Koopman (2010:123) wonders whether it is possible to reach an understanding of the rationality behind God's love for the world. Tertia considers it a big challenge to always remember that all children are created to the image of God and that she should treat them as such, regardless of their behaviour. She says:

A teacher is a living example of God's grace and love for the world, and thus, through their actions provide the rationality of the sacrifice that God has made.

In the third question Koopman inquires into the meaning and implication of God's love for every facet of life. Many children do not grow up with the concepts of unconditional love, acceptance and forgiveness in their lives. The only place where they can feel safe and protected is at school. Through the example of beloved teachers they learn that God can be found in all aspects of life if you are open to the experience of investigating the ways in which His children are living examples of His love and grace.

My understanding and interpretation of Koopman's three questions were confirmed and validated when I came across some of the work that is being done at the Beyers Naudè Centre for Public Theology (Smit 1996). Dirkie Smit (1996:190) explains that at this Centre they distinguish between four public spheres in democratic societies: the political and economic spheres, as well as the spheres of civil society and public opinion formation.

- The political sphere focuses on the state, the government, political power and the control and regulation of public life.

- The economic sphere entails aspects such as the so called autonomous market economy, globalization, ecology, science, and technology.
- The area of public opinion formation focuses on themes such as the nature of society, the common foundational values for society, common challenges for society, and common priorities for society. The ensuing public opinion paves the way for a collective strive towards the common good.
- Civil society focuses on themes relating to the relationship between theology and, amongst others, the institutions, organizations, associations, and movements of civil society that, independently from the state and economy, strive to enhance the quality of life. These institutions also aim to satisfy the needs and foster the interests of people, change the nature of society, and build the common good (that is, a life of quality for all). Schools, legal bodies, neighbourhoods and cultural- and sports clubs are all institutions of civil society. Sociologically speaking, churches are also part of civil society (Smit 1996:197).

At closer glance, it soon became evident that schools had a part to play in all four these sections through teachers' behaviour inside the classroom and after hours, in the contact they have with the outside world, as well as the way in which they prepare children to be responsible and well-balanced citizens. In that sense, every decision that a teacher makes and every conversation that they have with a colleague, a child or a parent, becomes the opportunity to practice public theology.

Public theology does not have to be a big event; but at the very least it has to, in some way be recognized by both parties involved as a substantial moment in time. It should also be acknowledged as a moment of theology in praxis, of living theology in the everyday lives of people who are as much Christians outside the church as they are in church on a Sunday morning. We can therefore say that public theology happens on the other side of the church threshold. Public theology is a Christian interpretation, guided by Scripture and tradition and that it offers a way of thinking about life and events that is informed by Christian faith.

When one considers teachers as doing public theology in their classrooms every day, we open up space for these people to also be practical theologians and to use their unique qualities to change people's situations and to make a difference in lives. If the song that we, as teachers, are singing has such an intrinsic theological message of hope and salvation, the way that we sing it will also

be affected. One cannot then look at theology as something universal (De Gruchy 2004:45) that pastors and clergy do, but it becomes localized and contextual. The teachers singing in the choir then becomes the composers of the song.

2.10. An ordinary theology of human praxis

... and for me practical theology is all about risk. Practical theology, in my mind, is daring to believe that life and not theory is where the theological enterprise begins... The only potential for the future of Christian faith lies in the doing, the going, the practice. A practical theology is not the taking of theology and applying it to a certain situation, but rather it is a beginning. (Taylor 2007b:204)

The doing of practical theology within a participatory approach “reaches beyond a mere practice of theology” (Roux, Myburgh & Kotzé 2003:66). Practical theology becomes more than “something out there that we discover, but something we construct within our local religious or spiritual community” (Roux, Myburgh & Kotzé 2003:62). The community becomes the author of theology in their local context and it proceeds and grows from life and from action, placing the practice of concrete people at the centre of its reflection.

In times of increasingly complex social problems and challenges that make cooperation indispensable, all disciplines, including (and especially) theology, are compelled to adapt their practices to be interdisciplinary, multi- perspective and cooperative. This is also true of the practice of practical theology within schools.

A Christian teacher will always contemplate how religion can primarily be carried out and promoted as an explicit and implicit reality in schools and their structures. Schools then become a high quality place of learning and living. My classroom is not only a place to practice my Christian principles, but also the laboratory of my own discipline. Teachers are blessed and burdened by the knowledge that everything they do in the classroom, from how they establish a learning environment to how they help the class negotiate conflict between learners with diverse experiences and perspectives, is a teaching about the praxis of theology.

Teachers are sometimes confronted with this challenging interaction between praxis and theology in more ways than just the obvious. It is not always easy to live out Christianity and to be consistent in the way that one handles children. *Onnie* explains that he experiences that being a Christian at school places additional pressure on him:

I have to be fair and unswerving in the way that I treat all children.

Mia agrees when she says:

I try very hard, but when I do get angry or lose my temper, I have to work twice as hard at it to reassure children that I do indeed practice what I preach.

Regardless of the challenges that it holds, all teachers who completed questionnaires as part of the first group of this study and attended the retreat as part of the second group, proudly bear witness to how they find solace in God and trust Him with their frustrations and concerns. Although they might not have spent so much time contemplating it, they were all adamant that their spirituality played an integral role in the way in which they approached their work every day. These conversations will be described in more detail in chapter 5.

I believe that the time has come to formally question the parallels between the discipline of practical theology and that of education. What are the points of contact between the church and schools as communities of faith? How do Christian teachers approach their subject matter? What is distinctive about schools with Christian teachers and what might they have to contribute to the understanding and conceptualization of practical theology? How do they act as practical theologians in their classrooms or on the sports field? What urges them to live out their faith and be a moral compass for the children they work with? Are they aware of the fact that they are practicing as practical theologians or do they simply feel that they are “doing their job”? How does their identity as a Christian teacher influence their work ethic and the way that they approach conflict and stress? How many of them consider their career in teaching to still be a calling from God?

As I contemplated these questions I wondered whether it was possible to learn something through comparing the literature study that I have done on practical theology to what people actually do in classrooms and why they do it. Astley (2002:47) argues that there is a lot in “ordinary belief” that is “worthy of theological attention.” He refers to the dogma and theologizing of Christians who have received little or no theological education of a “scholarly, academic or systemic kind” (Astley 2002:56), as ordinary theology.

I also resonate with the postulations of Hunt (1991), Cobb (1993) and Astley (2002:52), where they consider a theology that is grounded in the challenges of ordinary life, rather than only in the sphere of the academy. I concur that the ultimate object of theology, God, and its product, faith, are not necessarily better known by the “experts” than by those “who do their theology outside the academia” (Astley 2002:52). Furthermore, it is irrevocably part of the job description of the ordinary child of God.

If this argument is true, teachers are in a perfect position to be practical theologians when they encounter and attempt to manage the enormity of the “living human document^{xiii}” (Miller-McLemore 1996:366) that sit in front of them every day. This idea left me breathless as it seemed to create limitless opportunities for interaction. This raised another question: Are there are any limits on the practice of postmodern theology and care?

2.10.1. The living human web

My experience in teaching is often like this: I find myself uncertain about how to proceed in a specific situation, and then Grace intervenes. I have learned much about this vocation after twelve years of teaching, yet still I experience fairly consistent puzzlement and sometimes even distress about how to teach my discipline in ways that adequately and satisfactorily serve all the needs of my students.

I have always thought of teaching as being much more than just the conveying of academic knowledge. Thus I have always been concerned with educating the child as a whole, by giving attention to all the facets of the child's live, rather than just focusing on my chosen academic subject. When I

^{xiii} Phrase first coined by Anton Boisen (Boisen 1960; Miller-McLemore 1993:366). In the 1930s he insisted that education for practical and pastoral action should pay attention to the study not only of texts but also of the “living human document.” Boisen himself suffered acute mental health problems and it was from this experience that he advocated the need in pastoral theological education for interpretation of living human realities in engagement with the realities of the faith tradition. Such a hermeneutical approach to the work of practical theology has been continued and developed through the work of Gerkin (1984; 1990). Charles Gerkin reminds us that theologians should not lose touch with basic human experiences. Hermeneutical pastoral counselling should occur in the context of human life as a pilgrimage within a community of faith (Gerkin 1984:177; 1990). Such communities of faith turn people from “living human documents” into being a “living human web” (Miller-McLemore 1993:366).

came across the idea of children being living human documents, it just reinforced and strengthened this idea.

Bonnie Miller-McLemore (1996:366) promotes the concept of human beings being part of the living human web that places the focus in pastoral care on the interconnectedness between individuals and the broader patterns in their families and communities. She elaborates:

Pastoral care, thus, does more than offer healing, sustaining and guiding to individuals in need, the widely influential definition of Seward Hiltner. Rather it attends to the web of relationships and systems creating suffering through ministries of compassionate resistance, empowerment, nurturance and liberation (Miller-McLemore 1999:80)

Osmer (2008:17) evaluates the relevance of this concept for our understanding of practical theology and makes three deductions. Firstly, it promotes the inquiry into interconnections and relationships, rather than into individuals. Secondly, this image draws the attention to the interconnectedness of different forms of ministry, in this case including teaching as a form of ministry. Thirdly, congregations (and per implication schools) are part of a web of natural and social systems that goes beyond the walls of the classroom.

In the context of teaching, the concept of the living human web promotes viewing the child as more than just an academic mind. It incorporates other systems like the situation at home, the religious education that the child receives from his parents, the social context that he is growing up in and the amount of respect and support that parents show teachers and the school. *Mari* recalls:

Very often I only come to understand a child's behaviour in class after I have learnt more about the learner's situation at home. I often find myself wondering how I can expect a child to concentrate on a lesson if he fears going home where he will probably be abused, or how he is supposed to excel when he comes to school hungry and neglected. I often feel overwhelmed by the bigger picture I see when I take the time to look beyond the one-dimensionality of a school uniform. It is only in my connectedness to God and with other Christians, that I find the means to understand and attempt to help such a child.

Considering context and acknowledging the role that their Christianity plays in the way they view learners, encourages teachers to look beyond the physical child they see in front of them and to rather focus their attention on the inter-contextuality of all the different parts of the child's live. In this way they live out the theology they believe in.

I think that unconsciously I might have always considered myself to be a practical theologian, long before I knew the academic term therefore. I have always been concerned much more with the spiritual and emotional health of a child than with the academic progress that he is making. I thoroughly enjoy having personal and spiritual conversations with the children I teach and thereby getting to know more about their situations.

This journey has helped me to understand how these living human documents, the children that we all teach, are all connected through God and through a shared passion and calling. That turns teachers into a significant part of the larger living human web. But does that mean that there is there just one web?^{xiv}

Postfoundationalist and social constructionist thinking urge us to believe that there are many webs that are constructed by the specific context that we are in. If all these contexts and social constructions are to be honoured, it is clear that we must study the text of the living human document with a multi-disciplinary analysis of our role therein.

Emmanuel Lartey (2005:30) states that "basic to the scope of pastoral theology is a requirement to include in its study and practice all that has to do with the care of persons and communities within the global village." He goes on to explain the view of the scope of pastoral theology somewhat

^{xiv} Another line of thinking that could be explored is the metaphor of "connectivity." Through the Internet (commonly known as the "Web"), we are all connected on a world wide scale and such connections happen instantly and sometimes even anonymously. Social networks like *Facebook* and *Twitter* have created living human webs that are much larger than ever anticipated that it could be (Zappa & Mariani 2011:142). Boisen (1960) predicted this evolution to studying webs of interconnectedness when he prophesized "the study of living human documents rather than books." Social networks and the Internet give ample opportunity for the study and dissection of human webs. Questions can however be asked about the quality of these virtual relationships and how much substance it really does add to people's lives (Even-Dar & Shapira 2011:185). The effect that such a virtual web has on an individual's living human web can also be explored by questioning the quality of relationships with family and exploring the possible negative impact that spending a lot of time on the Internet can have on relationships the people who are in physical close proximity.

more specifically as a discipline that “operates around and studies the central themes of faith-inspired care and care-inspired faith.”

The impact that this realization has on schools is monumental. The focus will then shift from an individual teacher to the whole staff of teachers at school. The living human web then gets extended to include all Christians on the faculty. If we see the role of teachers in this way, we can rename schools from “a place of academic education” to a “community of faith.”

2.10.2. School and church and choir: All communities of faith

Collins (1988:50) defines a community of faith as a “local body of believers” which exists to “care for the needy, to welcome strangers, to do good to all people, to heal the broken hearted, to comfort the sorrowing, to hold up the weak.” Couture (1996:102) concurs with his definition of “a community of friends who delight in one another, who helps one another and who would hold one another accountable.”

After reading these definitions, I knew that this was exactly the way that I in which I have always envisioned a good school! I knew that I wanted the school that I taught at to be more than an institution of excellent academic learning, I wanted it to be a safe space for all who were somehow involved there, whether it be children enrolled at the school or teachers making up the faculty. I wanted to work at and be part of a community of faith. The more I thought about this idea, the more I realized that to my mind a school was simply a church without a denomination.

If we consider the ecclesiastical function of the church, the *koinonia*, the fellowship and community that Christians experience there, we have to consider the sobering reality that school might be the only place where some children will ever have the opportunity to experience these things. Bosch (1991:373) states that a church that functions as an effective community of faith

is able to welcome outsiders and make them feel at home; it is a church in which the pastor does not have the monopoly and the members are not merely objects of pastoral care; its members are equipped for their calling in society; it is structurally pliable and innovative; and it does not defend the privileges of a select group.

It became more and more clear to me that there was so much of this concept of a community of faith present in effective schools. Schools like that often become the place where locals and outsiders can feel at home; it is a place where the principal does not have the monopoly and the children are not merely entities of academic teaching. The teachers employed there feel equipped, emotionally sheltered and cared for to react to their calling by God. Furthermore, it is a creative and innovative environment that does not defend or promote the privileges of a certain racial or religious group, but creates a safe space where all teachers and children can get the opportunity to reach their potential and work towards becoming all they could be.

Ganzevoort (2007:1) refers to this as “a form of theological reflection in which pastoral experience serves as a context for the critical development of basic theological understanding.” He thereby corroborates the similarities and symbioses in the field of practical theology and teaching:

Teaching that matters, for me, is in the first place directed to the development of a kind of practical theology that takes the human praxis of faith as a legitimate source of theological reflection. Individuals, groups, and cultural producers all offer such praxis, sometimes in the form of God-talk, in which they deal with transcendence and relate to the holy (Ganzevoort 2007:3).

I have to ask myself how teachers can systematically and structurally introduce their experiences with faith to children and youth, in such a way making schools a place of learning about life as well as mastering academic curriculums. How can teachers support each other in coping with the stress and burnout that result from doing so much more than that is expected of them? How can teachers be honoured for the values, skills and knowledge that they bring to the table? In moving beyond the scope of schools, the question can be asked on how their heterogeneity can become a relevant resource for the academic discourse on theology in general?

In order to understand and define the potential beneficial interaction between schools and the greater academic world of practical theology, we have to further explore the role that teachers play as practical theologians, the concept of schools as communities of faith and how their religion becomes the praxis they live every day and in every interaction that they have with children.

Looking at these revelations through the lens of the metaphor that this research is built upon, namely that teachers are all part of a choir, reinforces the idea that there is an emotional connection and bond between the members of such a community of faith. In Chapter 1 two

movies, namely “Mr Holland’s Opus” and “Dead Poets Society” were used to illustrate the dominant discourses surrounding teaching and teachers in general. To demonstrate the concept of a community not only working together, but also having a profound impact on the spirituality of each other, I will briefly discuss the relevant symbolism of the movie “As it is in heaven.”^{xv}

2.10.3. A choir singing heavenly music

This Swedish film tells the poignant story of Daniel Dareus (played by Michael Nyqvist), a famous and respected international music conductor. Following a heart attack, he heads back to Norrland to the small village where he grew up. Daniel moves into the old deserted elementary school and finds himself gradually getting involved with the quirky members of the town choir and he is soon appointed as their new choir master. Initially, he seeks to remain detached, but he is irresistibly drawn into the community through the choir and their complex interpersonal relations.

Brussat and Brussat (2010:electronic source) explains that for Daniel, the biggest surprise of this involvement with the choir is that his growing love for these unusual and eccentric people enables him to at last fulfil the mission of his life, namely “to create music that will open a person’s heart.” Although Daniel’s dream has always remained the same, namely to write music that touches people’s hearts, this only truly happens once he allows people into his own heart.

Daniel also realizes that each member needed to find his or her own voice to make the choir work as a whole. By at last becoming able to speak openly with each other, the members of the choir developed a solidarity of sorts and an ability to see each other not only as the individuals they are, but also as part of a community of faith. It is clear from this movie that the issue is not only the dynamics of a choir, but also the functioning of a group or village.

That is exactly the same premise on which this research journey is structured. It is postulated that teachers also form part of such an inspiring choir where they become empowered to be agents of hope. In the process they inspire each other not only to sing, but also to experience spiritual connections within their living human webs. The grace of such unconditional love and acceptance transcends the rules of merely being colleagues; it motivates teachers to be transformed - not from the outside in, but from the inside out.

^{xv} As it is in heaven. 2004. Directed by Kay Pollak. Soret Films.

Made up of flawed people who accept one another for who they are, the choir of teachers commit themselves to lovingly serve others by sharing their passion for teaching and their love for God. As they work as practical theologians in their classrooms every day, they also transform the lives of others by allowing the grace that they have experienced to flow through their lives and wrap itself around those who they come in contact with. In this process the choir not only has an influence on the audience listening to them, but also on themselves. Only when an individual, whether he is singing with a clear voice, or even if he has lost his voice, can open up and share his joys and fears, does he become part of the heavenly music.

In summary, this chapter presented an interpretation of the current state of practical theology and offered a brief synopsis of the history of the field. The advantages of working from the viewpoint of a symbiotic relationship between the social construction discourse and a postfoundationalist approach to practical theology were offered as a suitable foundation for this research journey. A further investigation into the postfoundationalist approach revealed some challenges that such interdisciplinary conversations still face. The implications that these challenges present for research of this nature are also explored. Schools were compared to communities of faith that have the obligation and calling to offer a safe space for people where they can be exposed to the love of Christ. Teachers, as part of the living human web, have the responsibility to act as practical theologians and thus explore the ways in which their religion becomes the praxis they live every day.

The next chapter will paint a picture of the landscape of education in South Africa and the social and political platform that teachers in old model C schools have, some rather unwillingly, become part of. The question is asked what influence these circumstances have on the emotional turmoil that some teachers experience that eventually lead some of them to lose their voices and their passion for teaching.

This chapter will also journey through the available literature on stress and burnout and start to contemplate the effect that the experience of stress might have on the spirituality of a teacher and on the role that they play in the choir. Could stress and burnout cause some teachers to quit singing altogether?

In essence, this research study is therefore focused on two questions: how does the experience of stress and even burnout affect the spirituality of a teacher, and the opposite, yet just as important

question, how does being a Christian, who has a sense of calling, influence a teacher's perception of experiencing stress in his daily endeavours.

In this research I sometimes find myself, like Daniel Dareus, being a choir master. I am incessantly in the process of carefully conducting and singing a song that was written by someone else or, on good days, writing a whole new verse to a melody that has already been written. If I am very brave, I might work on composing a whole new symphony. Should I be prepared to question and explore the way I see the role of teachers in schools and entertain the thought that they might be doing practical theology every day, I will also have to turn the question on its head and ask myself how we then should approach the frustrations and challenges they face?

Chapter 3

The record is stuck: the song of education in South Africa.

If a doctor, lawyer or dentist had forty people in his office at one time, all of whom had different needs, some of whom didn't want to be there and were causing trouble, and the doctor, lawyer or dentist, without assistance, had to treat them all with professional excellence for nine months, then he might have some understanding of the teacher's job (Anonymous).

3.1. Three groups in the choir

Much has been said in the media, like newspapers, Internet blogs and television news, as well as across the social spectrum, from dinner tables to political meetings, about the state of education in South Africa. Opinions are abounding about when and how things have gone so awry and where the solution to all these problems lies. Even those not directly involved in teaching or education has a view or even a judgment to share. Very often educators are at the receiving end of these lashings of the tongues of the media and the masses and they have not stayed untouched and unaffected by all this.

Thousands of teachers will report that they find themselves simply mumbling along with this mass choir of protest and concern. As a result of all this negative feedback their collective song has turned from a joyous event into a sad lamentation (Travers & Cooper 1996:1; Engelbrecht & Eloff 2001:28; Colangelo 2004:2; Kasperdeen 2012:240). A second group of teachers have totally lost their voices and they feel silenced, stressed and often burnt out. They go through the motions of teaching, but they have lost the satisfaction of interacting with children and the rewards intrinsic to educating learners (Van Zyl & Pietersen 1999:77; Van der Linde et al. 1999:192; Brown & Roloff 2011:453; Collie et al. 2012:1190).

Yet, regardless of these two large groups, there are still a third group who does their best to be heard, who attempts to sing a tune that is in harmony with the larger choir, but that still includes solo parts that endorse their own beliefs and passions (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin & Schwartz 1997:21; Giles 2007:2492; Hackett & Lavery 2010:78). Teachers in this group echo the words of Professor Jonathan Jansen, an outspoken critic of the South African education system who believes that "just because we live in a third world country does not mean that we should settle for a third world education" (Jansen 2004:163).

Each of these groups in the choir of teachers will be explored in greater detail in the following chapters. In this particular chapter questions will be asked like where does the song that they sing come from? Who has played a part in the composition thereof throughout the past few decades in South African history? What are the false notes in this song? How do these false notes affect the daily lives and emotional state of teachers in our country?

Subsequently, the plight of educators who feel that they have lost their voices will be examined. Some might feel that their voices have been stolen by circumstances or by the system, while others feel that they are just not being heard anymore and therefore they lack the motivation or the energy to keep on singing. This result in teachers experiencing extreme levels of stress and for some, such elevated levels of stress might even lead them to experiencing professional and personal burnout.

In this chapter the causes of such stress and burnout in teachers' lives will be investigated and explored, while chapter four pays homage to those brave teachers who are still singing. They are responsible for the solo parts of the choir; they often compose the songs they sing themselves rather than just joining in the song of the masses. From their stories it will quickly become clear that they sing to a different kind of background music than many others – they sing to the beat of their love for God.

Before the emotional experiences of teachers can be deconstructed and delved into, it is imperative to conceptualize and thicken our understanding of the context that they work in every day. Thus a brief overview of the history of education in South Africa will follow, with specific reference to the rollercoaster journey that the teachers in old model C schools have been on.

3.2. The road that we have been travelling on

3.2.1. Where I find myself on the road

A brochure advertising a summer seminar on mentoring new teachers features a well-dressed woman standing at the chalkboard. The text reads:

She has been teaching for three years. Her students really like her. She's dedicated. She's energetic. She's creative... She's quitting (Michigan Education Association, 2000).

As I am writing this I am sitting alone in my classroom. There is not a single child in sight. Outside my window I can see the local security company and police vehicles at the main gate protecting my colleagues and myself against possible intimidation and violence. The country is caught up in the midst of an incapacitating strike by public service workers, including teachers and nurses. This industrial action was ventured into by various unions to protest against the Government's proposed salary increases for 2010.

As I am sitting here I am amazed that teachers can behave in such a destructive way. I find myself wondering what has driven them to such behaviour. I also contemplate why they feel that they have the right to strike but, according to their set of rules and values, I do not have the right to not take part. They feel justified in intimidating non-striking teachers, in throwing out windows, in threatening to burn down schools, in assaulting fellow teachers. Am I any different from those people? Do we really share the same passion for children, the zeal for teaching, or is the only thing that we share the title of "teacher" and an almost certain possibility of burnout?

While examining Grade 12 external exam papers in 2009, I was grading an essay when I saw the little note at the bottom of the page: *"For the sake of the learners that still have to be in this school next year, please do something. Our teacher is drunk every day."* I came across exam papers of schools where not a single child in that school had passed.^{xvi} It left me astounded and disillusioned. The real picture of education in our country was clearly not the same as the customary activities I see taking place at my school every day.

^{xvi} According to the official Department of Education results of the 2010 Senior Certificate exam, 506 South African schools had a pass rate of between 1% and 20%. Another 19 schools had a pass rate of 0%. (Department of Education 2010).

In 2012 the textbook crisis introduced new levels of panic about the reality of teaching in many provinces in South Africa. Demands for the resignation of the Minister of Education came from a multitude of sources (Louw-Carstens 2012:2; Ndlangisa 2012:1) and fears about matric results and conspiracy theories about corruption and illegal tenders became a familiar sight on the front pages of newspapers (Macfarlane 2012:1; Manyane 2012:1).

Through it all I kept thinking that a textbook was definitely not the most crucial element to teaching. A committed teacher can easily work around not having a textbook for every learner in her class and I found myself wondering how this crisis had become an excuse for many teachers not to work. I knew that at my school there would be no way that a lack of resources would keep us from completing the curriculum anyway.

Even when protest actions about the lack of books and teaching turned violent, I was astounded at how it disrupted all learning at schools and how absolutely no teaching took place. The outlook at rural schools in our country was becoming bleaker by the minute.

I came to the realization that I might have been living in a bubble of safety and ignorance. I found myself questioning that what we considered to be big issues at my school. Our frustration suddenly seemed insignificant and small when I looked at the bigger, lingering calamity that education in our country is staring in the face.

Regardless of the level of functionality at any specific school, all schools are subjected to the same levels of constant change. Cox (in Travers & Cooper 1996:143) also found that educational change is a major source of stress among teachers and adds that it is “not only change, but change on change beyond the control of most educators that is the cause of stress.” In order to understand this stress that teachers experience every day, we have to orientate ourselves in terms of the political playing field that schools in our country have become.

Throughout the last century in South African history, children and their schooling has become a juggling ball in the hands of politicians and their agendas to advance the restructuring of this country. The educational system has been used to initially advocate Nationalist ideas and after the elections in 1994 it became a pawn in the struggle for political and racial freedom of the masses.

Educational critic Jonathan Jansen expresses the sentiment that changes to elements like the syllabus in itself had little to do with changing the school curriculum and much more to do with “a precarious crisis of *legitimacy* facing the state and education in the months following the national elections” (Jansen 1999b:57). Opinions and advice about the proposed changes were heard from every walk of life, but it was teachers, and unknowingly so, the children, who found themselves caught up in the middle of this struggle.

3.3. The journey since 1994

Transformation is synonymous with change and reconstruction and this in itself produced much uncertainty about what was expected of teachers who were caught up in the midst of all these political changes. Poppleton and Williamson (2004:21) explains that such change may also involve coming to terms with a multicultural, multilingual educational system. The Government that came to power in 1994 aimed to change the basic orientation of education from racial segregation to non-discrimination, inclusion and racial equality.

It proposed that these goals could be reached through the implementation of a National Qualifications framework and a curriculum that advanced independent and critical thinking, the capacity to inquire, learner-centeredness and continuous assessment. The goal of this was to eradicate and level out inequalities that former apartheid policies had put firmly into place.

Teachers who started their careers in the old regime quickly felt frustrated because the Government did not acknowledge and concede that large parts of the system was good and very functional. They were overwhelmed and intimidated by all the changes, new terminology and total paradigm shifts that they were expected to make. It is undeniable that the problems in our schools and the dissatisfaction of teachers can to a great extent be traced back to the implementation of Curriculum 2005 and Outcomes-based education.

3.3.1. The product of change: Outcomes-based education

I can still remember watching the television news coverage of the launch of Curriculum 2005 on March 24th 1997 in Cape Town, where with great fanfare and culminating in the release of 2005 multi-coloured balloons, the Minister of Education explained the exciting times that education in South Africa faced. Many teachers were excited and passionate about what this new system promised to be on paper. But unfortunately many of those educators' enthusiasm had watered down considerably after they had become actively involved in implementing Outcomes-based education (OBE)^{xvii} in their schools.

Spady and Marshall (1991:70) goes on to describe the four key principles of OBE, starting with the importance of ensuring that reaching the outcomes stays the ultimate goal in curriculum design. Learners must know the outcomes and play an active role in achieving them and teachers have to ensure that learning experiences and classroom activities lead to the accomplishments of these outcomes.

Secondly, curriculum design must proceed *backwards* from the outcomes on which everything ultimately rests (Spady & Marshall 1991:70). Spady (1993:ii) describes it as “start[ing] where you want to end up.” Thirdly, they emphasize the high expectations that are set for all to succeed and therefore outcomes should be a considerable challenge for learners. Credit also needs to be given for performance whenever it occurs (Spady & Marshall 1991:70). Lastly, time should be used as a flexible resource rather than a predefined absolute in design and delivery, thus accommodating differences in learning rates and aptitudes.

I can clearly remember how my colleagues and I suffered to grasp the practical implications of this new way of teaching. I had no idea what was expected of me. I read and re-read all the material that I could lay my hands on, but all that I found myself doing was memorizing new terminology. I could not reach a clear understanding of this new pedagogy that I could internalize and explain in layman's terms to myself.

^{xvii} Mahomed (2001:16) points out that outcome are demonstrations or performances which reflect three things: (1) What the learner knows, (2) What the learner can actually do with what he knows, and (3) The learner's confidence and motivation in carrying out such a demonstration.

Then the epiphany came in the form of another curious colleague who also read so much more than the material that she received from the Department of Education. She captured the essence of OBE in the following words: "For many years we have been givers of information. Now we are to become managers of information."

Teachers were not expected to simply provide learners with information that they were to memorize. They were now expected to journey with the children towards finding the understanding of such information. Instead of spending an hour teaching, teachers were now expected to spend fifteen minutes teaching and manage the learning for the rest of the hour.

Teachers also had to deliberately allow learners more than one chance to receive the needed instruction and to demonstrate their learning successfully (Spady & Marshall 1991:70). Clearly, this methodology to education placed the needs of each individual learner at centre stage and therein laid the initial appeal of OBE. Teachers were soon disillusioned though, as the realities and troubles surrounding implementation became evident.

This new system has had a great impact on educators because from the beginning they felt that they were inadequately prepared to put into practice all these outcomes (Poppleton & Williamson 2004:196) and comply with all the requirements. *Jack* sums up many teachers' perception about the employees of the Department of Education that were delegated to train teachers in these new ways:

The Department might have good visions, but they have notoriously poor execution. I often feel that the individuals that were tasked with presenting the workshops and training sessions were not adequately trained or motivated to understand the basic principles that they were supposed to convey to me.

The time for the implementation of the OBE system came along before many schools were adequately provided with the text books, study guides, work schedules, curriculum outlines and assessment standards they needed. To some schools these resources only arrived months after the new system was put into practice. A further challenge to teachers was that they often had to rely on the Internet and colleagues for information because the departmental officials who had to

facilitate their training workshops often seemed as overwhelmed by this new system as some teachers did (Motseke 1998:85; Moriarty, Edmonds, Blatchford & Martin 2001:37).

Many participants involved in this study remember those initial training sessions with less than fond memories. *Dries* recollects:

I had no idea how I was ever going to remember all the new terms they had invented. It seemed as if they renamed everything. A subject was not a subject anymore, it was a learning area. I was not even to be called a teacher anymore; I was now an educator. It seemed to me as if even the facilitator of the course did not fully comprehend all the changes, he simply read the course material to us and was not able to answer many of our questions about the practical implications of this in our classrooms.

Rita also remembers her frustration:

I had to sacrifice a family holiday at the beach to receive this training and I left at the end of the week feeling even more apprehensive, sceptical and less empowered than before.

In the blink of an eye teachers were caught up in the challenge of having to teach in accordance to the requirements of OBE. They were confronted with large classes with lots of differently-abled children that were at different places on the learning continuum and at diverse levels of achieving the learning outcomes set for that specific phase. As if they did not have enough to deal with already, they were faced with the new challenge of including learners with special needs into mainstream classes of old model C schools.

3.3.1.1. Inclusive education

Since 1994 the legislation and expectation have been set for learners with barriers to learning to be accommodated within the main stream of teaching (Van Zyl & Pietersen 1999:74; Eloff, Engelbrecht, Oswald & Swart 2003:295; Lourens 2004:9; Strydom et al. 2012:257). According to the Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education 2001b:17), a wide range of learning needs result from physical, mental, sensory, neurological and developmental impairments, psycho-social disturbances, differences in intellectual ability, life experiences or socio-economic deprivation.

Teachers finding themselves in such integrated classrooms experience great levels of stress because in most cases they lack the necessary training to deal with all the aforementioned barriers to learning. Class sizes also come to the fore as an issue of concern, because it is almost impossible for teachers to give these special children the additional attention that they desperately need and deserve.

Noreen explains her experience of having a visually challenged boy in her class:

I can see him suffering day after day because he does not get the individual attention that he deserves. It doesn't matter how hard he tries, the circumstances at school are just not conducive to his learning or even his emotional state. It makes me so sad because there is nothing I can do to help. I know that he has so much more potential than what we are seeing, but my hands are tied, I have no training to help him.

Thousands of South African teachers share Noreen's frustration at not being able to provide the educational setting that many children with special needs deserve. Ferguson and Ralph (1996:51) perfectly captures the essence of these teachers' annoyance when they say that "it seems foolhardy and imprudent to believe that a single educator could possess all the skills needed to create rich and effective learning opportunities for all children regardless of their family, socio-economic, cultural, linguistic ability or learning differences."

3.3.1.2. Assessment

Before 1994 assessment was done exclusively in the form of tests and tasks. Progress was measured through formal examinations and children were forced to repeat a grade if they did not meet the specified requirements. The new educational system focused more on observation-based assessment and specified the following types of assessment to be used in schools: baseline assessment (the establishment of what learners already know and can do), diagnostic assessment (to identify the causes of a possible learning barrier), formative assessment (any form of assessment that requires formal feedback to the learner to monitor and support the learning process) and summative assessment (a judgment of the competence of the learner is recorded) (Department of Education 2004:28).

Lack of proper training left scores of South African teachers hesitant and uncertain about how to implement these assessment procedures. Teachers also lacked confidence in applying these

alternative assessment standards. Furthermore, the administration of the required assessment tasks placed greater demands on their time, which also induced a certain amount of stress (Motseke 1998:83; Conley & Woosely 2000:179; Rout & Rout 2002:27; Wilson & Hall 2002:179).

Although teachers were faced with numerous problems, some unique to their individual schools, others present in all schools, many of them did manage to comply with the most of the demands that OBE were placing on them. It was however a difficult road for educators. Chances were very good that in listening to conversations between any teachers during the formative years of OBE and Curriculum 2005, you would hear them complain and protest about a lack of clarity regarding the assessment process, of there being no consistency in what different schools were doing and of having too much administrative work to do over a short period of time.

Many teachers in old model C schools admitted to feeling tired and stressed and acknowledged that they could not manage the large amount of paper work they had to do to achieve the educational goals of the school. Yet they still managed to respond to last minute changes and instructions from the Department and even the haphazard and sometimes frustrating training sessions they continuously had to endure.

These are only three of the major changes that have re-shaped our educational system since 1994. In the years since then teachers have been bombarded with incessant transformations and adaptations to the original legislations. Not only were many teachers openly opposed to Curriculum 2005, but negative feedback from other academics, the media and parents were mounting.

3.3.2. The critics have their say

As critics had been warning from the onset, Curriculum 2005 and specifically OBE soon ran into a myriad of difficulties (Jansen 1999a:203). In commenting on the crisis in education, Jonathan Jansen stated that “the single most important reason for this crisis is the distance of politicians, policy-makers and bureaucrats from the schools: they simply do not know what is happening inside our schools and classrooms” (Jansen 1999a:203).

Teachers on ground level shared his concerns. *Marna* remembers how annoyed she was because the Curriculum Implementers and facilitators that he had to work with did not have any conceptual understanding of his life or of the setup at his school. She says:

I have two degrees and have been teaching for more than twenty years. Regardless of the vast amount of matric distinctions that I have produced throughout the years, this young, inexperienced guy showed up and tried to tell me how to be a teacher.

Teachers complained about poor training, abstract language, complex curriculum design, lack of support, and the general pace of implementation (Chrisholm 2000). Since the implementation of OBE many articles have been written and a variety of research projects have been conducted on the impact that all the changes had on teachers. Throughout the process Jansen has been very outspoken in his critique of the Curriculum 2005 system. In 1999 he listed ten reasons why OBE would fail. In a nutshell, he cited the following criticisms for OBE (Jansen 1999:147-154):

- The language of OBE is too complex, confusing and at times contradictory.
- There is no evidence of curriculum change leading to economic growth.
- The participation of educators in the development of this policy has been limited.
- It is based on flawed assumptions about what happens inside South African schools.
- It offers an instrumentalist view on knowledge.
- It will multiply the administrative burden placed on teachers.
- It side-steps the important issue of values.
- It trivializes content.
- It lacks the political will needed for a total re-engineering of the system, and
- It lacks appropriate assessment systems.

Despite all this relentless criticism and vigorous public and departmental deliberations on OBE, teachers were still expected to continue altering their teaching methods to fit the original demands and curricular reform embodied in the original Curriculum 2005. The confusion that resulted from this situation was a stark reminder of the continuous turbulence in curriculum reform and implementation in South Africa.

In a comprehensive study Giessen-Hood (1999) investigated the attitudes, perceptions and feelings of competence of 124 educators from six different types of schools, namely a private school, a historically “Black” school, a “Coloured” school, an “Indian” school, a “White” English speaking school and a “White” Afrikaans speaking school. This study showed that 64% of respondents expressed negative attitudes towards OBE. Feelings expressed were that of scepticism (17%), insecurity (16%), confusion (14%) and apprehension (7%).

From his research Stoffels (2000:15) reported that 65% of participants felt that the Department of Education did not sufficiently equip principals to support their teachers in implementing OBE. Singh (1999) and Mokgaphame (2001) both also found that teachers were dissatisfied with the training given, feeling that the training was inadequate, insufficient and rushed.

At the beginning of 2000 when it became clear that the implementation of Curriculum 2005 was not proceeding as planned, the Minister of Education at the time, Kadar Asmal, ordered a review of the new curriculum. In staff rooms all over the country the passive fire of rebellion in teachers burnt high. *Pienaar* remembers:

All conversations centred on how we just knew that it was doomed from the start. We all wondered how we could see all the warning signs from the start, but the powers that be making the executive decisions in Parliament, couldn't.

Jack agreed:

We were so concerned that there would be thousands of children who would get caught up in these whirlwind of changes. A whole generation of children was at risk of becoming the academic victims of a dysfunctional educational system.

After a three month long investigation into the state of education in the country, the Chrisholm committee published their findings (Chrisholm, Hoodley, Wa Kivulu, Brooks, Prinsloo, Kgobe, Mosia, Narsee & Rule 2005). It found that the implementation and success of Curriculum 2005 and OBE was compromised by the complex structure, tight time frames, weak models of teacher training, lack of resources, insufficient learning support materials and poor departmental support to teachers (Chrisholm et al. 2005:27).

The Review team recommended that the policy be streamlined, phased out and “strengthened” with a revised version in the form of a National Curriculum Statement (NCS). The critical findings of the Review Committee prompted the Department of Education to task a Ministerial Project Committee with designing a NCS that included these recommendations. The key changes that was proposed by this *Draft revised National Curriculum* (Department of Education 2001a:1-40) were the following:

- The complex organizational concepts of Curriculum 2005 were to be simplified.
- Each province and school were to formulate their own Learning Programs based on the NCS.
- Much simpler language were to be used to communicate the ideals of the NCS.

Clearly, as Cross, Mungadi and Rouhani (2002:186) notes, the development of the NCS was “not just a matter of semantics”, but it “reflected a major surgery on the existing curriculum and approach.” This important draft curriculum policy document was released at the end of July 2001, signalling the start of a second wave of curriculum reform in South Africa.

Given the sheer scale of the OBE project, most teachers were yet again grappling with the practical implementation of the changes in their classrooms (Chrisholm 2000). Many teachers who publicly claimed to have shifted to an outcomes-based approach was actually still focused on a content-heavy, teacher-centred pedagogy. This new, “thinner” version of Curriculum 2005 was not going to be as easy to implement as the Department of Education had hoped that it would be. Neither was the mindset of teachers in old model C schools going to be changed that quickly. *Bekommerd* recalls:

We just kept on doing things the way that we have been doing it for years. I was not prepared to sacrifice a whole generation of children for some experiment.

3.3.3. The conclusion of an ideology

According to Jansen (quoted in Jacobs 2002:1), teachers have had to deal with twenty-three different, and sometimes contradictory, policies since 1994. The political changes in the country have forced teachers to adapt to a new reality (Maritz, Swanepoel, Ferreira, Lerm 2012:41), radically different from what they were used to.

Throughout the term of three different Ministers of Education the story of Curriculum 2005 have evolved from the manifestation of an ideology to, in the words of Minister Angie Motshekga, “the signing of the death certificate of OBE” (Department of Education 2009). The enduring legacy of OBE will be one of an overwhelming sense of frustration and massive administrative workloads on teachers. It will also be remembered for teachers’ concerns about the lack of suitable learning material, textbooks and curriculum guidelines.

After much critique and consistently poor matric results year after year it was evident that the current system had outlived its validity. *Margaret* expresses her frustration when she says:

I am here to teach, not to compile portfolios, do window dressing and fill in masses of forms.

Hannelie agrees when she states:

It is a daily struggle to prioritize my academic work over all the administrative duties that I have to complete.

The system was cumbersome and difficult to understand and it was clear that it was yet again time for a change. Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga admitted that OBE had not passed the test and that there were still many teachers who were still not clear on what was expected of them.

Despite the public outcry of incompetence, the Minister of Education and the all involved in the development of the NCS desperately hoped that the announcement of the new NQF and FET structure would be the forerunners and initiators to an era of optimism about education in South Africa. These suggested changes proposed by the new CAPS system and Action plan 2014 had the possibility to lighten the load that teachers carried and even offer some the chance to get their voices back. Unfortunately, that might be easier said than done.

3.3.4. The next chapter of the story

In her address to Parliament on July 6th 2010, Me Angie Motshekga confirmed that the Curriculum Implementation Review Committee^{xviii} that she had appointed had found that teachers experienced curriculum and administrative overload (Ministry of Education press release July 7th 2010b, Department of Education 2010.). After years of pressure and grievances from teachers and unions, the Minister yet again announced substantial changes in an attempt to improve and enrich the national curriculum.

"Not again," I found myself thinking as the announcement about yet more changes were made. I have hardly found my feet in OBE and have just come to a place where I found a system that worked for me and kept the curriculum implementer from the Department of Education happy.

I have to admit however, that the proposed changes in the form of FET and CAPS fell softer on the ear than those of OBE did. It almost felt as if the Government was acknowledging that the old system did some things right and they were buying into the idea of using those to create the NCS.

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) would set out the new structure for both the prescribed curriculum and governance of schools. This framework recognizes three broad bands of education: General Education and Training (GET), Further Education and Training (FET) and Higher Education and Training (Department of Education 1997a, 1997b). The NQF centralizes all education in South Africa and recognizes that learning is a life-long process and can take place under many different circumstances. The GET band, which includes the reception year from grade one to grade nine, represents the free and compulsory education that the Government is constitutionally obliged to provide to all citizens of South Africa.

In 2006 the next phase of transform in the educational system became part of the dominant story of education as the new system of FET was put into operation as part of the NQF (Department of

^{xviii} The review was requested by Minister Motshekga after the 2009 matric results produced the worst pass rate that our country has seen in a decade. Overall, only 62,2% of all grade 12s passed the Senior Certificate exam, in contrast to old model C schools where 91% of candidates passed (Department of Education 2010a).

Education 2001c). Further education and training (FET) consists of all learning and training from NQF levels two to four, or the equivalent of Grades 10 to 12 in the school system.

Learners enter the FET band after completing the compulsory GET phase of education in Grade 9. At the end of Grade 12 (the senior secondary phase), pupils write a public examination on a minimum of seven subjects to obtain a Senior Certificate.

3.3.5. The 2010 Changes to the National Curriculum

Yet again teachers were expected to buy into to this new system without getting any proper warning that it might be coming or apt training to help them use it optimally. Although official training sessions were held, teachers did not experience it to be up to standard and they did not feel equipped to put this new system into practice. *Mari* calls to mind her initial thoughts about this announcement:

I was still not even comfortable with all the terminology attached to OBE, now I was struggling to understand what FET and CAPS entailed. When I heard what the proposed changes included, I could not help but laugh in the most melancholy of ways. I recognized the irony in the situation. They came full circle back to the terminology that I grew up with. I went from a teacher to being an educator and now back to a teacher again. My area of expertise went from a subject to a learning area and right back to a subject again.

The content for the new system was not only an update to the old curriculum, but also an attempt to eliminate gaps and mend imbalances created by OBE. This was the first time since former education minister Kader Asmal's tenure that South Africa had a new national plan for school-level education.

During the era of Curriculum 2005 assessment happened by way of rubrics and the general, sometimes vague, impression of the teacher or the peer group. In the new system the focus was now back on memorandums with very clear right and wrong answers. The irony was not lost on many teachers that a lot of these changes just went full circle back to the original pre-1994 ways of teaching. Some other leading changes included the following:

- The end of the era of learner portfolios and CTA's^{xix} that amounted to hours of paper work and window dressing every year.
- Academic teaching would also go back to the “chalk-and-talk”- method rather than outcomes-based teaching where learners were expected to reach insight and comprehension by themselves.
- Externally set examinations as assessments at the end of grade 3, 6 and 9.^{xx}
- The reduction of subjects in the Intermediate phase (grade 4 to 6) from eight to six in 2011.
- Far greater focus on the use of textbooks and workbooks.
- Examinations would yet again form the backbone of assessment (for example, in the promotion mark for grade 10 to 12 the end of year exam will carry a 75% weight and continuous assessment and year mark only 25%) , and
- Teachers are expected to assign only one large project in each subject every year, instead of continuous assessment that used to take up hours of their time to mark.

3.3.6. Where do we go from here?

These changes delighted teachers of the old model C schools who still believe in the value of writing exam so that learners can give a measurable account of the academic progress that they have made throughout the year. Implementing the new changes promised to take away a lot of extra administrative work from these teachers who have, for years, struggled to meet all the requirements set by the Department of Education (Benmansour 1998:29; Moriarty et al. 2001:37; Collie et al. 2012:1189).

^{xix} CTA refers to the Common Task Assessment that was nationally administered as a comprehensive assessment task and an examination at the end of grade 9. Teachers in old model C schools were adamant that the content of both the task and the examinations was not up to standard, as well as extremely apprehensive about the time consuming activity that CTA's had become and the large amounts of teaching time that was lost in order to complete these assessments.

^{xx} In 2012 the proposed external examinations (ANA's) for grade 9 was only written in pilot schools in the Home Languages and Mathematics. Papers in other subjects never reached the schools in time for the November examinations and teachers were yet again forced to rely on their own internal exam papers.

At face value they were following the guidelines of OBE and FET, but in many classrooms around the country “traditional” teaching still took place. Teachers were thus prepared to do twice as much work to ensure that they still prepared learners as best they could to write the final matric exam (Schroeder, Akotia & Apekey 2001:92).

Elize recalls the way in which she and her colleagues handled the situation:

We were just not prepared to lower our standards in any way, even if that meant that we had to do all the planning and paper work required by OBE, but in our classrooms we used old textbooks and did things in the old way. We kept the emphasis on the importance of written exams rather than continuous assessments. I firmly believe that this is the reason that schools like ours still produce the 100% pass rates, get the long lists of distinctions and produce learners that excel at university and at life.

This idea was also reinforced in an article in the Rapport Newspaper of November 11th 2012 where Llewellyn Prince reports on a study by the Afrikaans Union, Solidariteit, on the state of old model C schools in South Africa (Rapport 2012:5). He writes that these schools are extremely healthy and functional and this is verified by the fact that old Afrikaans schools in South Africa can be rated in the top 10% of schools in the world. He attributes the success of these schools to committed teachers that motivates learners to work towards a tertiary education and the way in which teachers have adapted to curriculum changes and have incorporated these changes into their traditional way of teaching.

Currently the new CAPS system of teaching is being implemented in grade ten classes in schools all over the country. In 2013 this system will be expanded to also include grade eleven learners. Teachers find themselves yet again adjusting to new forms of assessment and new guidelines to working out marks. But they appear to be much more comfortable with these systems than they were with OBE and even FET.

It is however vital that effective communication takes places around these proposed changes. Communication between the Department of Education and schools and the Department and the country’s media need to be streamlined. So far there have been mixed reactions in the media about all these projected changes to the National Curriculum. On the one hand, people feel that although it looks good on paper, it still does not address issues of teacher training or working

towards having proficient subject advisors and curriculum implementers. The flip side of the coin is that this system proposes to reduce the administrative load on teachers, giving us more time to plan classroom activities and to support individual learning needs. It seems that teachers might also be quietly optimistic about the far greater focus on the use of textbooks and core content knowledge.

I do however find myself wondering how much of a political grandstand this has become, rather than being an endeavour to turn around an education system that is flawed and at risk of imploding.

It is February 2012 and I am yet again attempting to attend training for the new CAPS system that the Department of Education has implemented in an attempt to improve the state of education in our country. As mentioned earlier, training sessions was also scheduled during school holidays in 2011. During that event no facilitator showed up to present the training. No communication was received afterwards about the reasons for the absence of representatives of the Department.

The training I am sitting in now should have started almost an hour ago. Twenty people are sharing my classroom, some who have travelled far to attend. This round of training was scheduled by the different unions as an intervention workshop for teachers who were still not comfortable with the content and structure of CAPS for grade 10. Yet again no facilitator has shown up to present training for my subject. In classrooms all around us training is underway, but my colleagues and I are getting restless.

Although I am the only representative from an old model C school, all the people sitting around me are still teaching in the only manner that they know how or some not even teaching at all, because although we were meant to start implementing the CAPS system to grade 10's at the beginning of this academic year, some have yet to receive any documentation or guidance from the Department. Those of us privileged enough to have access to the Internet have downloaded the necessary documents or used other resources

like our union to obtain the learning material, but others are left totally in the dark.

It remains to be seen if the changes that is planned through CAPS and Action Plan 2014 will actually translate into a lighter workload for teachers. During June 2012 a group of pilot schools completed the first ANA (Annual National Assessment) in home language and mathematics for grade 9 as a predecessor for all grade 9's. These draft papers were full of mistakes, memorandums were not translated into Afrikaans and many questions and concerns were aired about the practicality of implementing this system throughout the country.

Where would the manpower, financial resources and most of all physical space in the form of schools hostels come from to accommodate all the markers that will be needed to assess Grade 9 and Grade 12 external papers in all schools? Teachers in old model C schools are already suspecting that this project might, just like the CTA's, not be viable and will not have a very long shelf life. Therefore, they are setting their own exam papers and are preparing themselves to assess as they have been doing for many years. These draft exam papers have just yet again proven to these already sceptical employees of the Department of Education that the implementation of such proposed changes are slow and cumbersome.

The reality is that proposals from Government are mostly politically driven and in no way practically feasible. At the ANC's National Conference in Mangaung during December 2012, Joe Phahla, chairperson of the social transformation sub-committee, announced that all learners in South Africa be taught a third, indigenous language (News24 2012:electronic resource). They wanted this major change implemented in 2013, only a month after the decision has been made. No thought was given to where qualified teachers would come from, how schools would fit a whole new subject into their time tables that has already been developed for the following year. They did not spend some time critically thinking about where work schedules or learning material would immediately come from. In their response in the public media, educational experts just shook their heads at the almost naive way in which the powers that be regarded educational changes in this country.

It is seemingly clear that until these issues are addressed in a logical and practical manner, until experts are consulted and workable plans are put on the table that will take some years to implement properly, the reality of teacher stress and burnout caused by these situations is one that we dare not overlook.

3.4. The human face of reform: teachers' experiences of singing in the choir

Somewhere, in the midst of all these never-ending transformations and adaptations that South African teachers have been forced to deal with, the individual teacher's voice got lost. They had no say in the changes they were forced to implement. They felt like they were constantly being bullied into something they were often certain was doomed from the start. It is here where, what Evans calls the "human face of reform" (Evans 1993:20), became visible. This face may take the form of enthusiasm and commitment to change, but could also be embodied by insecurity, frustration, anger and resistance.

Akhurst (1997:8) explains what she considers to be challenges relating to such structural issues:

At the heart of structural issues lies the legacy of the demise of the previous authoritarian and hierarchical system of education with no structures in place to facilitate the democratizing of education. Teachers feel that they have been given too little information, often hearing the developments through the press, and have not been consulted sufficiently by departments of education. There was little in the way of giving guidance during the process of change and schools themselves had to take the lead, a role to which they were unaccustomed in the previously regimented system. Furthermore, many teachers have had to develop the new skills of curriculum design and organization with no departmental support.

Throughout the past twenty years South African teachers have been bombarded with changes that left them stranded or feeling caught up in the middle of a cyclone of changes that they did not necessarily anticipate or foresee. Many teachers also still have concerns about the place that their own ideas on pedagogy and teaching will have in this new system.

Every time that the reality of yet another change sets in, many voices in the choir of teachers become still and silenced. The ideal situation would rather have been to have them raise their voices in shared excitement about the proposed alternations, but Harley, Barasa, Bertram, Mattson and Pillay (2000:300) captures the essence and reality of the personal conflict that many teachers understand all too well:

... for real change then, what teachers need is not impersonal policy directives implemented from above with overtones of authority and control, but localized, contextualized, even personalized developmental support and assistance in the everyday business of teaching.

3.4.1. Caught up in a climate of change

Teachers are as unique and diverse as the students they teach, yet the system of education show little recognition for the individuality of educators. Nazir Carrim (2001:45) is in accord with this idea when he states that "the notion of 'the educator' continues to homogenise teachers and teaching and is unable to analytically address the specific realities experienced by teachers or the complexities of their identities" (Carrim 2001:47).

Many teachers standing in multicultural, multilingual classrooms today were part of the previous educational system where almost all the children sitting in front of them spoke the same language and came from similar cultural backgrounds. These teachers were forced to adapt to the new system, regardless of their personal views thereof. *Noreen* recalls the difficulties of finding her feet in a multicultural setting:

It felt as if two different worlds had physically collided in my class, and I, who prided myself on understanding children, suddenly knew nothing about half of the kids sitting in front of me.

As mentioned previously, teachers have been forced to implement an array of changes that have had substantial impacts on their professional lives. Not only did teachers in old model C schools have to learn to meet the needs learners from a variety of different cultures in their classrooms, but they also had to adapt to severe changes in their way of teaching as they were being inundated with new strategies and curriculums from the Department of Education. Three changes that possibly had the greatest influence on their personal lives were the abolition of a Christian character in schools, the changes in the way that they were required to do assessments and their volatile relationship with the Department of Education.

3.4.1.1. No place for Christianity?

In the old National system of Education under the previous apartheid Government, Christianity and Bible teaching had a very prominent place in schools. The content and structure of Curriculum 2005, FET and CAPS promote religious freedom and an equal platform for a variety of

religions. Bible education fell at the wayside and teachers were expected to introduce learners to the basic principles of all the major religions as part of the learning area, Life Orientation.

As a result of curricular and institutional changes since 1994, schools also had to find a new identity as being multilingual and multicultural institutions. This had an implication on how the school was managed, how school assemblies and hall meetings were structured, etc. Old model C schools now had to, for example, accommodate Muslim learners who had to be served *Halaal* food at the Matric Farewell and who practiced Ramadan in the middle of the record exam. Rather than working on finding safe and respectful ground to address all these issues, some schools did away with practicing Christian traditions altogether.

But many schools and individual teachers felt that being a Christian was such a definitive part of their identity that they were not prepared to sacrifice living out their faith. So they carried on in the way that they have always had. They still start every morning with a reading of Scripture and prayer. They still invite clergy and ministers to preside over school assemblies at the beginning and end of each term. Many talk openly and honestly about their relationship with God to the children they teach. *Rita* validates this point when she explains:

We still keep up all the Christian traditions at my school and in my classroom we still start and end every day with prayer.

In a significant manner, thousands of other teachers are like *Rita* and have all but ignored the political undertone of equality and religious freedom that was embedded deeply into the ideology of Curriculum 2005 and OBE. The aim of OBE was to create level-headed citizens who wishes to embrace the democratic nature of our country and be responsible citizens who respect the choices that other people make and in doing so, not promote any religion above another. A Christian, on the other hand, has the Biblical calling to share the message of the love of God with the rest of the world. The ethical dilemma that this caused in a teacher's mind was enormous.

One the one hand, the Bible tells us to honour the authorities of our land; on the other hand, we are summoned to honour God in every aspect of our lives, including our professional capacities. This conundrum that Christian teachers face will be discussed in more detail in chapter four and five.

3.4.1.2. Assessment

It is estimated that a typical high school teacher teaching one learning area to four classes, with thirty-five learners in each class, would have assessed a minimum of 2 520 tasks in one year (Bubb & Early 2004:2). It is therefore no surprise that almost all educators find the process of assessing, handing back work, filing work in portfolios and marking sheets and storing it safely, extremely tedious and tiresome.

Even now, as the end of the era of OBE had dawned on education in South Africa, many teachers still face the problem that all the assessment are often at the expense of learning. Although CAPS requires much less assessment than OBE, teachers still spend many arduous hours grading papers and marking projects. *Helmine* and *Pienaar* both share their internal struggles and frustrations with all the marking that they have to do. *Helmine* admits:

I am resolute and almost obstinate in my resolve to not let the standard of work that I present to my learners be negatively influenced by the demands of a National system.

Pienaar declares that since the implementation of OBE he has been prepared to do so much more work himself just to ensure that his learners received the level of academic exposure that they have been used to:

I ended up doing all the assessments that was expected by my Curriculum Implementers, but on the side I also did extra papers that were graded in the traditional way.

These trepidations that teachers share are corroborated and enhanced by peer moderation that often still do not represent an adequate and reliable form of feedback about the quality of their work. Teachers feel that gaps in educator experience, the different standards of work done by different schools and the rushed time frames are contributing factors that result in these moderations being seen as a charade. The teachers in old model C schools are mostly in a league of their own at these cluster meetings^{xxi} or moderation sessions. They cannot compare the

^{xxi} Cluster groups are made up of educators teaching the same subject in a particular region. One of the teachers is then appointed as a cluster leader. The goal of such meetings is for these educators to support one another, share ideas, experiences and frustrations. Often cluster groups set exam papers together or create communal assessment tasks for their learners.

level of work that they do with that of many of their more rural colleagues and they often feel that they are only there to provide the other teachers with examples of workable assessment tasks and projects.

In the end, they end up creating their own projects and tasks, rather than joining the groups in setting communal tasks that they all can choose to use (Giessen-Hood 1999:15). Many old model C teachers feel that these are not up to par or on a standard that they are used to and resolute to uphold. *Daleen* explains:

We very often choose to rather go to the trouble of setting our own exam papers because we know that the communal papers that the Department provides are not always up to the standard that we set for our learners.

A multitude of teachers still feel that the events of the past fifteen years have exacerbated educational and societal inequities rather than redressing them (Stoffels 2000). The general feeling still is that there is no consistency across schools in terms of the quantity and quality of work done. This becomes so clear at moderation sessions where some schools produce portfolios with two pieces of work and other schools present portfolios for the same learning area that included twenty-two assignments. The ways in which projects are assessed are also very different from school to school. The old model C schools often present much more difficult projects and also expect a much higher standard of work in order for their learners to get good marks.

3.4.2.3. Department of Education

Another significant concern educators have is about some of the members in the Department of Education and how little practical knowledge they actually have of the classroom and school context. Many studies have criticized the way that information about new systems are delivered to schools (Singh 1999; Mkhabela 1999:4; Pithouse 2000:154; Stoffels 2000:15; Smit 2001:73; Mokgaphame 2001:60). All these studies highlight the poor training provided and the lack of feedback and support from the Department. *Hannelie* rightly stated:

Sometimes it feels as if we can run our school better without the input and help from the Department.

The aspect of teacher training can also be questioned because of the rushed time frames, the ever-changing information that is disseminated and the unreliable way in which information is communicated to schools. Many teachers involved in this study including *Jack, Daleen, Dries* and *Rita* referred to their frustration in dealing with district and regional offices not delivering documentation and notices of meetings or memorandums in a timely fashion. According to *Dries*:

We will very often receive such notices on the same day that the meeting is scheduled to take place or the notices sometimes arrive days after the meeting had been held. It is then always a big undertaking to try and obtain the necessary documentation or to find out what had been decided at that meeting.

Throughout all these changes that they had to endure teachers still had to appear confident and in control to their learners. For the committed teacher, teaching does not only consist of giving lessons to learners who sit in neat rows at desks, dutifully listening to what they are being told, but ideally, it offers every child a rich, rewarding, and unique learning experience. Learners are not only consumers of facts. They are active creators of knowledge. Schools therefore are not just brick-and-mortar structures – they are centres of lifelong learning. The ideal for every hard-working teacher who pours their soul into their work is that teaching be recognized as one of the most challenging and respected career choices, seen as absolutely vital to the social, cultural, and economic health of our nation.

3.5. A complicated job description

The combination of their academic responsibilities and the extra-curricular tasks that they undertake force modern day South African teachers to become omnipotent generalists who play a multiplicity of roles – that of teacher, negotiator, curriculum designer, journalist, sports coach, social worker, counsellor and administrator.^{xxii}

Public opinion about teachers and the transformation in our country obliges teachers to sometimes unwillingly rethink every part of their jobs. They have to give attention to their relationship with students, colleagues and the community; the tools and techniques they employ, their few rights and vast array of responsibilities. The form and content of curriculum, what

^{xxii} As set out in the Norms and Standards Document (Department of Education 2000b).

standards to set and how to assess whether these are being met also require their attention. They are even responsible for their own ongoing professional development. Many of these roles that teachers fulfil have been bestowed upon them by the Department of Education and thus define their policy image (Department 2000b), while other roles have become their responsibilities through choices that they make and interests and passions they choose to pursue. The combination of these values and responsibilities constitutes their personal identity.

3.5.1. Personal identity vs. policy image

Sachs (2001:150) further deconstructs this often problematic relationship between "policy images" and the "personal identities" of teachers. By "policy images" he refers to the official projections through various policy texts of what the ideal teacher looks like; by "personal identities" he suggests the understanding and social construction that teachers hold of themselves in relation to these official policy images.

Drake, Spillane and Hufferd-Ackles also define "teachers' identities" as a teacher's sense of self, as well as their knowledge and beliefs, dispositions, interests, and orientation towards work and change (Drake et al. 2001:12). In the South African educational system it has become clear that the "policy images" of teachers are making demands that stand in direct conflict with their "personal identities" (Sachs 2001).

These "personal identities" of teachers are often more complex than the roles set out by the Norms and Standards document (Department of Education 2000b) and other policy documents that have been provided by the Department of Education as guidelines for teachers. Before this study can attempt to investigate all the roles that teachers play, some that they might not realize they are playing, it is important to dissect the conventional discourse of what a good teacher is.

3.5.2. The identity of a good teacher

The following quote by Nelson Mandela, from his book "Long Walk to Freedom" (1994), captures the essence of the vast and infinite task of teachers:

Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mineworker can become the head of the mine, that a child of farm workers

can become the president of a great nation. It is what we make out of what we have, not what we are given, that separates one person from another.

To be a great teacher "is a mission in life and not just another job ... the responsibility of guiding the development of the emotion and the intellect to our usual human ability is awesome" (Wilmot 2000:12). Research in the development of teacher identity (Elliott & Kington 2005; Beauchamp & Thomas 2009; Day, Chong & Low 2009; Trent 2010) is abound but not much of the research is focused on the Christian teacher. It is therefore within the scope of this research study to expand on the discourse about the identity of the Christian teacher.

According to Wilson and Deaney (2010:171) it is preferable to distinguish between two types of identity that is prevalent in teachers. Personal identity is based on the idea that we construct our own sense of self from identifying with ideas, positions and beliefs linked to various social relationships (Giddens 1991). In contrast, social identities are contextualized and it includes the traits, characteristics and goals linked to the social role that a group of people, like teachers, plays. The dominant discourses surrounding teachers in South Africa influence both their personal and social identities. Furthermore, these identities are validated and affirmed by the beliefs and experiences that teachers share amongst each other.

Joseph and Heading (2010:77) build their concept of teacher identity and sense of agency on Wenger's (1998:192) construction of identity as an "experience in terms of engagement, imagination and alignment." In the main it is our teacher "engagement [that] allows us to invest in what we do and in our relation with other people gain a vivid sense of who we are" (Wenger 1998:192). In this way, the theoretical concept of identity becomes translated into lived experience.

Most educators will site different reasons for becoming a teacher, but regardless of the initial motivation, eventually all Christian teachers will share a communal identity that places emphasis on having an impact not only on academic progress, but also on the emotional and spiritual lives of the children they teach. Therefore it is important to identify and explore the specific skills, knowledge and values that will enable teachers to handle this responsibility of their shared identity with integrity (De Wet 2004:155).

3.5.2.1. Values

According to Goodson (2000:181) teaching is “above all, a moral and ethical vocation.” Within the teacher’s emotional life are forces that, sometimes unbeknownst to them, most powerfully affect the entire teaching process. The human and emotional qualities of a teacher are at the very heart of teaching. No matter how much emphasis is placed on other qualities like educational technique, technology, equipment or buildings, the humanity of the teacher is the vital component if children are to learn. *Helmine* explains:

I am often humbled by the responsibility of being considered by some as the primary educator of the children sitting in front of me. I am no longer just there to teach them the principles of Business Economics, I often have to teach them the principles of life.

Kok and Grobler (2001:135) and Fried (1995:103) emphasize that all teachers ought to be Christians because they are firstly in service of God and subsequently in the service of education. Every day thus becomes an opportunity to live out their faith in a practical way. In line with their Christian beliefs, a teacher chooses to honour certain ethical and moral values like honesty, trust and accountability.

Good teachers are further characterized by their willingness to listen attentively, provide encouragement, hold their students to high expectations and simply enjoy the company and development of their students.

3.5.2.2. Teacher-learner relationship

Teachers come into contact with all types of learners, from the gifted and talented to the naughty, the distraught and the academically challenged (Kok & Grobler 2001:134). Grundy (1996:113) proposes a style of teaching where imagination, rather than rationality, is privileged to invite all types of children into the conversation. An imaginative approach to teaching therefore puts the needs of the child ahead of the administrative duties that so easily threaten to engulf teachers’ time. *Rita* clarifies:

I am definitely not a good teacher only because I like children, you need more than that. It is my passion, my enthusiasm, my ability to keep lessons interesting although it is the fifth time I am teaching the same lesson in one

day. It is the privilege to see the soul of the child. It is my ability to still laugh.

3.5.2.3. Academic and professional skills

It is crucial that teachers not only master the academic content of their subject, but also be comfortable in presenting this information to learners (Kok & Grobler 2001:134; De Wet 2004:157). Teachers who demonstrate enthusiasm and a passion for their specialized subject will walk the extra mile in preparing their learners for external examinations. They will devise interesting strategies of promoting an understanding of academic material and will not hesitate to explain the content repeatedly until learners feel like they have mastered the content.

Teachers of today are encouraged to adapt and to adopt new practices that acknowledge both the art and science of learning. They understand that the essence of education is a close relationship between a knowledgeable, caring adult and a secure, motivated child. They grasp that their most important role is to get to know each student as an individual in order to comprehend his or her unique needs, learning style, social and cultural background, interests, and abilities.

3.5.3. The unwritten code of conduct

The reality is unfortunately that not all teachers live according to the same system of values or have the same work ethic. As the state of teaching in South Africa became clearer the true behaviour of and lack of qualifications of some teachers also became part of the public discourse. Although teachers in old model C schools had an unwritten code of conduct that most of them adhered to, for the rest of the country's teachers it was very clear that there was a desperate need to specify what teachers should be able to do and what ethics they should honour and uphold. Since 1997 a number of key policy documents were produced to address these needs and provide lucid guidelines that set the boundaries within which teachers had to operate.

The Norms and Standards policy document provide a "generic" picture of the professional and academic skills that a teacher should possess (Department of Education 2000b). This document, along with other policy documents like the SACE Code of Conduct and the NDOE Duties and Responsibilities of teachers (Department of Education 2000a), define employer requirements, provide frameworks for professional development and appraisal, label professional conduct, and specify duties and responsibilities. The Norms and Standards for Teacher Education (Department

of Education 2000b) is an outline of the professional duties of a teacher and a synopsis of the seven roles that they are expected to fulfil. These roles include being a mediator of learning, interpreter of learning programs and lifelong learner. Furthermore, a teacher is tasked to be a leader, a researcher, an assessor and a learning specialist. Lastly, they are expected to fulfil a pastoral role in the school and the community.

In line with our musical metaphor, these roles of the teacher may be compared to the performance of an orchestra performing a piece of music. The composer is the planner who has the inspiration and delineates the music to be played. The conductor interprets the composer's score and facilitates and guides the players to perform the piece and the audience to appreciate the music. Resources in the form of sheet music for the players and programs for the audience have to be developed to enable the musicians to master the music and for the audience to fully appreciate the experience and understand the deeper meaning and symbolism behind the performance.

Finally the musicians transmit the music to the audience – they are the “information providers.” This “performer role” may include all or just one of the orchestral ensemble. Individual members of the orchestra giving solo performances that may be perceived as “role models.” Finally, the conductor evaluates the musicians' performance in private and the music critics and the audience assess the performance in public.

It is often this public recital that creates even more stress and anxiety in teachers. As a result of the history of education in South Africa, as well as the perception and view of teachers that parents are presented with through the media and around dinner tables, local teachers are bombarded with much more critique and conflict than positive feedback and praise. They also have to find their way through the maze of previous musical performances by well-known and not so well-known teachers who have, according to their legacy, given a phenomenal and inspirational performance.

Many teachers have reached a point where they can no longer spontaneously tell you what they enjoy about their work or how they experienced their learners during a specific day. But they can, however, exactly tell you what have frustrated and annoyed them during that same day. They might struggle to tell you what energizes them, but they will have no trouble telling you how tired and stressed out they feel. In the following section the conceptualization of stress and burnout

and the factors that are considered to be responsible therefore in teachers' lives will be deconstructed and explored.

3.6. Burning the candle at both ends

As already stated, many members of the choir of teachers have seized to sing a song of joy and pleasure about their work because their voices have been silenced by frustration and resentment about what they are forced to deal with in their professional capacities.

Naylor (2001:12-13) distinguishes between the administrative departments of a Government as the "right hand" and the people that stand in the caring professions, such as teaching, as the "left hand." He explains that, as a result of the transformation in Western countries throughout the past few decades, the left hand might not always be aware of what the right hand is doing. Thus the left hand is forced to do much more with a lot less resources at their disposal.

This similar state of affairs in South African education have lead to teachers becoming overworked and forced into making a paradigm shift from feeling safe and secure in their jobs towards a disproportionate state of stressfulness that might even be unhealthy for the individuals concerned.

Teachers are consequently confronted with a plethora of potentially stressful situations. Some days this might feel overwhelming and threaten to engulf all their energy, motivation and general sense of feeling in control. It is however important to bear in mind that the combination of sources of stress will be unique and dependent on the context that is created by individual personalities, values, skills and circumstances at work and at home.

As such, whilst I can highlight the most generic definitions and common sources of stress for teachers in general, I must, in line with my preferred postfoundationalist approach to practical theology, take care not to overlook the specific context of the individuals' lives. Before I can delve into particular and individual perceptions of stress, it is necessary to create a baseline understanding of what stress is and how it commonly affects most teachers.

3.6.1. Stress? What stress?

On the notice board in my class I have a cartoon of a panicky, frantic face with a speech bubble that reads "I'm a little stressed right now. Just go away quietly and nobody will get hurt."

Most teachers, including myself, feel like that at least once every single day. At some stages I am so busy and so stressed out that I do not even have the time to acknowledge to myself that my stress levels are exceptionally high. I just keep my head down and do what needs to be done.

To stop and think might just lead to an implosion.

The term stress has been used multiple times in this dissertation already. It is therefore crucial to get a clear understanding of the different social constructions that researchers and lay people attribute to this term that has become a buzz word in most occupational fields and specifically in the world of teaching that this research is concerned with.

Academic literature acknowledges this difficulty to, in true postmodern line of thinking; pinpoint a single definition of the term "stress." One of the pioneers in research about teacher stress, Chris Kyriacou, defines stress as the experience of unpleasant, negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety, tension, frustration or depression that is resulting from some aspect of their work as an educator (Kyriacou 1987:146).

Another frequently cited definition of stress is that of Selye (1974) when he defines it as "the nonspecific response of the body to any demand made upon it" (Selye 1974:27). I have to admit that, in contrast to that of Kyriacou, I do not get much substance from Selye's definition and can rather relate with the description provided by Gold and Roth (1993:17) of stress as

a condition of disequilibrium within the intellectual, emotional and physical state of the individual; it is generated by one's perceptions of a situation, which result in physical and emotional reactions. It can be either positive or negative, depending upon one's interpretations.

Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman suggest that stress can be considered as a result of an "imbalance between demands and resources" or as occurring when "pressure exceeds one's

perceived ability to cope” (Lazarus & Folkman 1984:1). Stress management was thus developed and premised on the idea that stress is not a direct response to a stressor but rather one's resources and ability to cope mediate the stress response and are amenable to change, thus allowing stress to be controllable.

From the definitions mentioned above it can then be deduced that stress is a particular relationship between people and their environments that they experience as exceeding their resources and endangering their wellbeing. It is a reaction to circumstances and events, whether real or imagined, internal or external, which exceeds a person's resources for coping.

Events in our lives place demands on our coping resources. If the demands exceed our coping resources, we experience stress. It should be kept in mind that stress is neither in the environment nor in the person, but in the complex relationship between the two. Many factors in the environment and in the person thus combine to generate stress and its outcomes. For some teachers the most intense and recurring stress responses might be in reaction to student behaviour. *Meneer* exemplifies this when he states:

I spend more time on non-academical issues like behavioural problems, disciplinary action, socio-economic difficulties and emotional problems that learners experience.

For others, planning lessons, grading papers, preparing to teach several different learning areas, managing a classroom with large class sizes or coping with learners with barriers to learning might be significant stressors.

Menlo and Poppleton (1999:53) conducted extensive research across nine countries on the prevalence of stress in teacher's lives. Their results show that teachers in six of those nine countries (namely the United States, England, Germany, Japan, Canada and Israel) found a change in their working environment to lead to a greater workload that in turn caused them to experience more stress. Ngidi and Sibiyi (2002:15) concur with their finding that 67% of teachers in Kwazulu Natal experience unnaturally high levels of stress.

Most teachers unequivocally declare that lesson planning has become more time consuming than ever before. Afrikaans-speaking teachers in old model C schools report that they spent

considerably more time on setting papers and preparing for lessons because they now have to do this in both Afrikaans and English and translate all notes, assignments and examinations.

They also testify that, since their schools have become multilingual and multicultural, they have to spend more time with learners from different backgrounds that are not up to standard with the knowledge and skills that they expect them to already have mastered when they entered this new school system. Having to teach larger classes also present its fair share of challenges in terms of assessment and grading papers (Chrisholm et al. 2005:61).

Bubb and Early (2004:8-13) identifies the following as the main causes of stress among teachers: excessive administrative work, assessment, taking part in school- and teaching initiatives, poor planning and communication within schools, excessive workload, low morale and lack of motivation, inadequate control and guidance from the Department of Education and concern about salaries. Of all the factors mentioned above, excessive workload is identified as the largest contributing factor to educator stress.

According to Dunham (1992:46) other factors should also be stipulated as adding to the levels of stress that teachers' experience, including the lowering of academic standards, changes in the National Curriculum, poor leadership and lack of acknowledgement for their contributions. Dunham further explains that teachers would rather prefer to spend their energy and time on what they consider to be important educational issues, but in reality their time is squandered on unimportant administration, excessive assessments and dealing with unacceptable behaviour by learners.

Ngidi and Sibaya (2002:14) also lists the possible causes of teacher stress and postulates that political changes are underlying to most causes of stress. They identify time pressures, poor working circumstances, changes in educational policies, administrative difficulties and behavioural problems among learners as the leading causes of teacher stress. According to their study, 63–84% of White South African teachers experience excessive levels of stress, compared to 16–33% of teachers in countries like England and Australia. Olivier and Venter (2003:186) and Saptoe (2000:6) report similar results and list a lack of discipline, unmotivated learners, larger teacher-learner ratios and the new curriculum as significant sources of stress. Van Zyl and Pietersen (1999:76) and Kaspereen (2012:238) add changes in structures of teaching and medium of instruction to the growing list.

Brown and Brember (2002) identifies the following as the most important causes of work related stress in teachers: internal versus external demands on teachers, excessive workloads, pupil attitudes and behaviour, the working environment and conditions, lack of resources, poor communication models, the rate and speed of change, poor management and organization in schools.

As part of a task group compiled by the SAOU (Suid Afrikaanse Onderwysersunie), Maritz et al. (2012:15) investigated the realities of the professional lives of South African teachers. Through interpreting the results from 127 empirical questionnaires, they identified ten factors that caused stress in the lives of teachers in Mpumalanga. These include classrooms not being equipped with necessary resources, lack of support from Curriculum Implementers, excessive workloads, balance between professional and private lives.

Various models of teacher stress have been published throughout the years. The first by Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1979:89), then followed by Travers and Cooper (1996:16-18). On my quest to identify a suitable model of stress to closely mirror the situation of South African teachers I came across various different models that each seemed to touch onto some aspect of teacher's lives. Subsequently I studied the models of Cooper, Palmer and Thomas (1999), Marocco and McFadden (in van Wyk 1998:50) and the job strain model by Karasek and Theorell (1990).

The Cooper model (1999:16) divides the causes of work-related stress into seven different categories while the Marocco and McFadden model (in van Wyk 1998:50) is a modern adaptation of an earlier model by Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1987:159). Here the authors have combined the Kyriacou model with the cognitive aspects of the Burchfield model of stress (van Wyk 1998:51) and this model identifies three major contributors to stress in a teacher's life, specifically personal, professional and social stressors.

The job strain model (Karasek & Theorell 1990:10) is also known as the "demand control model" (Payne & Fletcher 1983:136) due to the constraints that is placed on a person in the context of high demands that lead to stress. In this model, stress is seen as a function and result of the job rather than of the individual.

For the sake of this dissertation I have merged the characteristics of these various models into an integrated model that includes the professional and personal stressors that play into the dominant stories of South African teachers. A brief description of these factors will now follow.

3.6.2. Professional stressors

Authors like Gold and Roth (1993:17) and Brackenreed (2011:12) classify factors like disruptive students, excessive administrative work, complex scheduling, curricular issues and disproportional workload as professional stressors. Two distinct patterns of behaviour by students are identified as being salient stress factors on the teacher, namely (a) disrespect that refers to students indicating disrespect for teachers or showing disrespect to one another and (b) inattentiveness that is seen in unwillingness to study or failing examinations.

Teachers are expected to fragment activities in order to give attention everywhere that it is needed, for example in maintaining discipline, giving individual attention to more gifted learners that need supplementary work and weaker learners that need extra assistance. Furthermore they have to create a class atmosphere that is conducive to learning and have to, often after hours, be available to parents to consult about their children's progress or problems. Teachers are also expected to make time to attend administrative-, staff- and cluster meetings and on top of it all, do playground duty.

3.6.2.1. Constant change in the National Curriculum

As previously discussed, post-1994 legislation have left teachers perplexed and confused about the impact that Outcomes-based education and the new system of CAPS would have on their daily lives. Some teachers felt that the demands of teaching was becoming too much to handle and that they did not feel equipped and sufficiently trained to cope with these changes.

For the past decade, most teachers in old model C schools attempted a dual system of keeping up the old "chalk and talk"-method of teaching as well as trying to execute the requirements of the outcomes-based system. This lead to them feeling a bit more in control, they felt they were still doing things in a way that made sense to them. The result however, was a double workload which was extremely time-consuming.

3.6.2.2. Organizational structures and leadership styles

The culture of an organization includes norms, values, behaviour, rules and regulations that form the ethos of the institution. Theunissen (1993:28) mentions that there are invisible powers within an organization that makes it unique and different to other institutions of the same nature. The stronger this sense of ethos has been developed, the better the chances that the employees at such an institution will grow towards the same way of work ethic.

In the isolated world of education it is therefore crucial that teachers at the same school share the same ethos and live by the same set of values. It is often only in each other that teachers find a sounding board for their frustrations and stress. Should teachers experience this in the same way, they can support each other in dealing with the factors that cause stress and burnout. They will also support each other in the positive and rewarding aspects of their work.

Goddard (2001:184) defines such a collective efficacy as the “perception of educators in a school that the faculty as a whole can organize and execute the courses of action required to have a positive effect on learners.” In some schools teachers will therefore have a positive influence not only on learners but also on each other as teachers. Unfortunately, the opposite may also be true in that in some schools teachers might not feel that they get the necessary support from colleagues. This could leave them feeling disheartened and with low morale and this will in turn lead to teachers experiencing higher levels of stress and even burnout.

Loanette shares her story of going to her school’s management team and asking for help when she felt overwhelmed and anxious.

It took a lot of guts, but I asked for help. I was simply told that I just had to learn to cope. At that stage I was head of grade, coached three hockey teams, was athletics organizer, responsible for data capturing for all demerits and was organizer of the annual musical. I just couldn’t do it anymore. Today I am at a different school, and I am happy. I was sad for it to have ended that way, but my sanity was on the line.

The leadership style in a school can undeniably also have a considerable impact on the stress level of teachers. Carlyle and Woods (2002:147) are in accord when they say that teachers consider a managerial style of scrutinizing, monitoring and appraisal as being too concerned with finding fault, rather than with rewarding success and promoting feelings of self-worth. The leadership style will also have an influence on whether teachers feel that they have a part to play in decision-making at that particular school. Not only can the interaction between teachers and the senior management teams and colleagues at their school lead to stress and conflict, but intrinsic factors in the form of personal stressors, are also a very large contributing factor.

3.6.2.3. Interaction with parents

The relationship between parents and teachers can easily alleviate the levels of stress that teachers function under. Some parents become over-involved and overstep the boundaries of acceptable involvement. Other parents attempt to manipulate or intimidate teachers to advance their own goals and agendas. A last group of parents have a total disregard for the authority of teachers and the school and thus do not support the school in any disciplinary action that they might take against their children.

Most teachers will report that more and more parents do not want to actively engage in a partnership with teachers and expect that, because they pay school fees, teachers are responsible for the general education of their children. *Cornelia* is very vocal in her frustration about parents when she claims:

Sometimes I wish that I could punish the parents rather than having to punish their children.

A general perception among teachers is that parents often hold them in low esteem and have unrealistic expectations of what their children can achieve. *Jack* explains:

Some parents think that I work for them. They think that because they pay school fees they have the right to make unrealistic demands.

Pressure from parents on how to treat children and handle disciplinary issues might lead to teachers feeling that their authority is undermined. Many teachers experience parents as being their children's friend rather than being a parent who sets boundaries. This leads to a myriad of difficulties should the children find themselves in trouble at school. All too often do teachers have to hear parents complaining that they have been too lenient in enforcing rules at home and now they do not see a way to get their child's behaviour at home back in line. In the same breath however, they object to teachers taking a firm stand against such behaviourally challenged children.

3.6.2.4. Work-related and domestic demands

Lack of discipline in learners appears to be causing great levels of stress and anxiety in most teachers; this is proliferated further by poor pupil motivation and negative and arrogant attitudes.

Margaret claims:

I can handle a naughty child, I might silently even find them amusing at times, but if there is one thing that I absolutely struggle to handle, it is a child with an arrogant and cocky attitude.

Kyriacou (2001:30) also identifies learners' poor attitudes towards work and too heavy a work load as major sources of teacher stress. Daily interaction with pupils, including dealing with pupil behaviour problems which may occur while the teacher is completing routine educational and administrative tasks, as well as coping with the individual demands of students' more personal problems, are also reported as being highly stressful. Teachers' roles have expanded substantially from being only the facilitator of academic knowledge to fulfilling a wide variety of roles.

3.6.2.5. Role conflict

Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2002:184) lists the roles of a teacher as a mediator of learning, scholar, researcher, lifelong learner, administrator, manager, supporter, designer, interpreter of learning programs, assessor of learning and specialist. If these roles are clearly defined, teachers will feel comfortable in fulfilling most of those roles and in meeting the demands of each role. However, if some of the roles are not clearly defined, teachers will most likely feel stressed, overwhelmed and anxious.

When teachers are confronted with conflicting or uncertain job expectations they might feel like they are experiencing role conflicts or feel as though they have more responsibility than they can handle. *Bekommerd* explains:

It feels like I have too many hats to wear at once and therefore I do not always have a clear understanding of what is expected of me.

Working without a clear and concrete understanding of a school's expectations, particularly in relation to student behaviour and disciplinary issues, can contribute significantly to levels of teacher stress (Papastylianou, Kaila & Polychronopoulos 2009:295). Feeling that they do not have significant backing from the senior management team, principal and school governing body leaves teachers feeling disempowered.

3.6.3. Personal stressors

Teachers also have personal lives outside of the school that directly or indirectly have an impact on their stress levels. Just as teachers take some of the stress of their school day home with them in the afternoon, occurrences at home can influence their productivity and functioning at school.

3.6.3.1. Social stressors

The daily task of almost every teacher includes an eclectic range of duties that go beyond the basic parameters of the teacher/learner relationship. Olivier and Venter (2003:190) explains that teachers spend long hours at school or on the sport ground, they attend meetings after hours and do their preparation and marking at home at night but they are also expected to be administrative clerks, counsellors, sport coaches, fund raisers, journalists, et cetera. This is ironic if you consider that one of the most infamous discourses surrounding teaching states that teachers have half day jobs. *Klara* explains:

I immediately lose my cool if people say that we only work half days and further have four vacations a year. It is usually those people who close their office doors in the evening or over weekends and never has to do a single bit of work at home. If they do any work, they are quick to claim overtime. They have no idea how many hours I spend planning and marking and I do not get any overtime pay like they do.

Teachers further find it difficult to balance their professional and social lives. Good teachers spend a lot of energy on interaction with children, often having conversations about emotional issues that drain not only the child who is sharing these difficult stories, but also that of the teacher listening and empathetically feeling the need to assist such a learner (De Waal, Pinchuck, Xiniwe, Enfield, Southgate & Henderson 2000:electronic source; Holeyannavar & Itagi 2011:1005). Teachers therefore often just wish to go home and rest after a long, stressful day at work. *Noreen* states:

Many of my friends do not have careers where they are confronted with so much conflict every day, so they very often do not understand that I do not

have the energy to spend on social events during the week. I just want to go home and rest, or even worse, go home and work.

3.6.3.2. Physical stressors

Experiencing high levels of stress has a direct influence on the immunity system and health of an individual. They might have troubling sleeping, experience weight gain or weight loss and have a greater susceptibility to colds, flues and other diseases. Such individuals are also prone to using and abusing substances like alcohol, cigarettes, drugs and even prescription medication.

Jex and Beehr (1991:350) explains that there are three types of physiological indicators of stress: cardiovascular symptoms, biochemical symptoms, and gastrointestinal symptoms. Other physical effects of stress include frequent headaches, sleep disturbances, hypertension, fatigue and tightening of muscles.

3.6.3.3. Mental stressors

Stress does not only have a physical effect on a person's body, but also has an effect on the mental health of the individual. Stressed teachers will complain of general tiredness, irritability, an inability to concentrate and having their attention easily drawn away from the task at hand. Alternatively, their mind is constantly active and they do not feel like they are getting enough rest. As a result they feel spaced out and experience that they are not as active as they were before.

3.6.3.4. Emotional stressors

A general sense of being unhappy and frustrated could be indicative of experiencing too much stress. Feeling out of control, having meltdowns, losing their temper and a general inability to control emotions might even pose a danger to the people and children that teachers come in contact with. Many teachers share stories of feeling excessively worried or even report multiple symptoms that could indicate depression.

Perceptions of negative community attitudes towards teachers individually, and to the teaching professional in general, are a further major stressor in the lives of committed teachers (Moriarty et al. 2001:33). During the National Strike of 2010 discussions and arguments in the media about teachers' salary scales were abound. This led to teachers having even a lower morale as the picture that was painted of most South African teachers was that of people worthy of the small salaries that they received.

Teachers in old model C schools felt humiliated because they attempted to live a certain lifestyle, despite their salaries not keeping up with those of their professional friends. They now found themselves sitting around dinner tables and having to explain how they survived and being on the receiving end of comments that suggested that it was impossible to live with such small incomes. They felt pitied, shamed and disrespected by people who often had much less academic qualifications than they did.

3.6.3.5. Spiritual stressors

Being cynical and displaying apathy towards issues that they used to care about could indicate unhealthy levels of stress. Teachers often feel unappreciated and used. A general sense of emptiness might cause some teachers to struggle to find sense in their work. Teachers even report conflict in their relationship with God and trouble in searching for His will in their lives. This point will be discussed in great detail in chapter 4 and 5.

3.6.4. Stress versus burnout

All teachers experience varying levels of stress at any given time. It is therefore crucial that they learn to distinguish normal levels of stress from excessive and unhealthy levels, and per implication the difference between stress and burnout. Stress, by definition, involves a feeling of “too much.” Too many pressures that demand too much of a person on a physical and psychological level. People who under great deals of stress can still imagine, though, that if they could just get everything under control, they would feel better.

Burnout, on the other hand, is about “not enough”. Being burnt out means feeling empty, devoid of motivation and beyond caring. People experiencing burnout often don't see any hope of positive change in their situations. If excessive stress can be compared to drowning in responsibilities, burnout can be associated with a feeling of being all dried up. Another significant difference between stress and burnout is that while a person might always be aware of being under a lot of stress, they might not always be aware of the warning signs for burnout when it present in their lives.

Although it is clear that stress and burnout are theoretically distinct phenomena, in the absence of empirical data or extensive observational reports, it might be difficult to distinguish on a practical level (Farber 1991). Joseph (2000) suggests that the following guidelines be used to differentiate between these two occurrences:

Table 3. The difference between stress and burnout (In Joseph 2000)

Stress	Burnout
Characterized by over engagement	Characterized by disengagement
Emotions are over reactive	Emotions are blunted
Produces urgency and hyperactivity	Produces helplessness and hopelessness
Loss of energy	Loss of motivation, ideals, and hope
Leads to anxiety disorders	Leads to detachment and depression
Primary damage is physical	Primary damage is emotional
May kill you prematurely	May make life seem not worth living

3.7 Burnout

Booyse and Swanepoel (in Poppleton & Williamson 2004:197) interviewed numerous teachers and from that concluded that educators' duties had increased dramatically, resulting in less time to interact with colleagues, which in the past may have served as a form of stress relief. As Greenberg (1984:27) states, the schedule of an effective educator may infringe on their time for family and for social and recreational activities during evenings and on weekends. *Onnie* concurs:

Some of my friends, who do not teach, used to say 'but you have four holidays a year?' They have no idea what I do with those holidays! I spend the first week finishing off school work, marking and completing administrative duties from the term that has just finished. Then I may have a week's rest, but soon after that I have to start my preparation and administration for the next term because there is never time during the term to do it.

Greenberg (1984:6) explains that so much of a teacher's energy is expended in treating and coping with the mental, physical and emotional ills of others that little is left for personal care and development beyond the basic necessities. The teacher's own wellbeing receives very little attention.

Brown and Roloff (2011:452) stresses that there is a desperate need to create an atmosphere in schools where stress and burnout are no longer presented as personal failure. The first step in tackling stress is to acknowledge its existence, but such an acknowledgement might be difficult for those who associate stress with personal weakness and professional incompetence.

3.7.1. *"Only twelve years left!"*

A few months ago, as we sat around the lunch table at an athletics meeting on a Saturday, I asked a colleague how his year was going. He paused, looked up from his sandwich, and then simply said, *"Only twelve more years until I can retire."* His response left me speechless. Earlier in his career he had been a passionate, enthusiastic and infectiously curious teacher who was as effective an advocate for children as I have seen during all my years in education.

Seated before me that day was an intelligent but embittered man who, less than one month into the school year, appeared to be professionally burned out. The contrast was striking. As I walked away from the table, I contemplated the fate of this man who has most definitely lost his voice and no longer felt that he made a contribution to the choir of teachers. If he no longer had a voice to be part of the choir, I seriously doubted that he had a voice to interact effectively with the children in his class.

I couldn't help but wonder how many other teachers shared his predicament, for how many has coming to work every day become a punishment rather than an adventure? How many others were there who could, on the first day of term, tell you exactly how many days they had to endure before the next school holiday began? How many of them were not as vocal about their situation as the man I shared my lunch with? How many suffered in silence and longed for the opportunity to speak out, to regain their voices and their passion for their chosen career?

Alet Rademeyer reports in *Beeld* (2012b:3) that great amounts of teachers are unmotivated and experience severe symptoms of burnout. During March 2012, 81 principals and 16 274 teachers in Gauteng had already depleted their annual sick leave. In Mpumalanga 2 877 teachers were on extended leave for stress related conditions. Many of these teachers list stress related issues as the cause of their lengthy absence from school.

Sonja explains the way that burnout has silently crept into her life:

For years I have loved being a teacher, but now it feels as if I can't wait to retire. The highlight of my day is going home and getting into bed. Even my weekends belong to the school. I wish I could get a job where I did not have to ever talk to people. I want to close my door and be left alone.

I am tired of wearing a mask that I am happy and that all is fine in my life. Sometimes I wish I could just scream... but I don't think that I would even have the energy to do so.

Often one of the first signs of burnout is a feeling of being emotionally exhausted. When asked to describe how they felt, emotionally exhausted teachers might say that they feel drained or used-up, that they are at the end of their tether and physically fatigued. Waking up in the morning may be accompanied by a feeling of dread at the thought of having to put in another day on the job.

Beswaard admits:

Some mornings I lie in my bed and wish that I did not have to get up. I have no desire to spend the whole day pretending to be interested in the children that are sitting in front of me.

Freudenberger (1974), a psychiatrist, is credited with coining the phrase, burnout, in his book "Burnout: The High Cost of High Achievement." He characterizes burnout as a loss of enthusiasm or inspiration, especially when one's hard work fails to yield the desired results. For Pines and Aronson (1981) burnout is characterized by "physical depletion, feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, emotional drain and negative self-concept and attitude." Schaufeli and Enzmann (1998:36) concur with their definition of burnout as

a persistent, negative work-related state of mind in 'normal' individuals that is characterized by exhaustion, which is accompanied by distress, a sense of reduced effectiveness, decreased motivation, and the development of dysfunctional attitudes and behaviours at work.

Regardless of the amount of definitions that have already been assigned to the term burnout, the loudest voice in the choir on burnout research still belongs to Maslach and Jackson. These experts in the field have refined the meaning and measurement of the burnout construct throughout the 1980's (Maslach & Jackson 1981:99). Their well known definition includes three sub-domains:

- Emotional exhaustion: Burnout is typified by fatigue and weariness that develops as emotional energy is drained. This leaves teachers feeling hopeless (Corey, Corey & Corey 1997:254) and lethargic. They often seem to find that they cannot give of themselves to their students as they usually did (Whitehead & Ryba 2000:52).
- Depersonalisation: This leads to teachers experiencing and displaying negative emotions and behaviour towards their pupils. Eventually they will distance and detach themselves on an emotional and physical level from their learners (Whitehead & Ryba 2000:52).
- Reduced personal accomplishment: In this characteristic of burnout the teacher feels that he/she is no longer capable of helping students to learn and to grow (Whitehead & Ryba 2000:52).

3.7.2. Causes of burnout

Some studies take the view that it is the environment that produces stressors responsible for the onset of burnout. Examples of such environmental stressors are the social relationships of teachers with students, colleagues and principals (Brouwers & Tomic 2000:238) and the organizational circumstances (Van Dierendock, Schaufeli & Buunk 2001:48; Lavian 2012:233) that they have to function in.

Earlier studies by Miller, Ellis, Zook and Lyles (1990); Maslach and Leiter (1997); Van der Linde, et al. (1999); Adams (2001) and Colangelo (2004) concur with the findings of Platsidou's study (2010:60-76) by categorizing the possible causes of burnout into organisational, biographical and personality factors.

3.7.2.1. Organisational factors

The organisational factors that contribute to burnout include work overload (Adams 2001; Pas, Bradshaw & Hersfeldt 2012:130), role conflict and role ambiguity (Miller et al. 1990;

Papastylianou et al. 2009:296), poor collegial support and professional concerns such as lack of career progress.

The classroom climate can also have an influence on the possibility of experiencing burnout. When the working environment is less than ideal, stress occurs. Teachers, who have learners with disciplinary problems, face student apathy and have to deal with low student achievement or teachers who fear that they will have to face verbal and physical abuse from learners, frequently become overwhelmed.

Another major stressor for teachers is their lack of involvement in decisions that have a direct influence on their quality of work. Due to their minimal involvement in decision making at their schools, teachers feel a declining sense of morale, lack of job satisfaction and loss of control and self-esteem. These factors form a cumulative relationship with stress and burnout.

3.7.2.2. Biographical factors

Biographical factors that could relate to burnout include age, work experience and gender. Van der Linde et al. (1999:195) testifies that Afrikaans-speaking female teachers with 16-20 years teaching experience in schools using Afrikaans as a medium of instruction, and those in urban and semi-urban schools, experience a higher degree of burnout than their colleagues in other biographic and demographic categories.

In their research report for the SAOU on the state of the professional lives of teachers in Mpumalanga, Maritz et al. (2012:12) report that 76% of their 127 respondents were female and 70% of them had more than ten years teaching experience. These women all commented on their workload becoming substantially larger than a few years ago.

Papastylianou et al. (2009:296) argue that the responsibilities of married teachers towards their children and family might constitute a more demanding burden to bear. Afrikaans speaking teachers in Afrikaans- or parallel medium schools often experience even higher levels of burnout because of the dual language teaching which has been introduced in many schools. Enlarged teacher-learner ratios, larger class groups and general uncertainty (Theunissen 1993:40; Swanepoel & Booysse 2003:96) also contribute to a sense of uncertainty. *Santie* admits:

I cannot speak English. I have taught in Afrikaans for 35 years and I have made it clear to my principal that the day he gave me an English group of children to teach, I would hand in my resignation on the spot.

3.7.2.3. Personality traits

Pas et al. (2012:130) maintains that certain personality traits in teachers correlate with a higher possibility of burnout. The tendency to perceive events and circumstances as stressful, the ways of coping with these stressful events and possible failures, depend in part on the dispositional characteristics of a person. These characteristics involve one's beliefs about the world and the different possibilities an individual perceives to deal with these beliefs.

Teachers who are experiencing burnout tend to feel as though all events in their classroom are beyond their control due to fate, luck or other people. They start to sense that the whole experience of teaching is beyond their control (Platsidou 2010:62). The locus of control of these educators thus shifts from being internal and dependent on themselves, to being external and dependant on situations and on other people.

Burnout is a gradual process that occurs over an extended period of time (Van Zyl & Pietersen 1999:74; Steyn & Van Wyk 1999:40; Maslach 2003:190). It does not happen overnight, but it can creep up on a person if they are not paying attention to or show awareness to the warning signals. All teachers experience varying levels of stress at any given time, but it is crucial that they be acutely aware of their levels of anxiety becoming more than just "normal" stress and be cautious of the warning signs and symptoms that could indicate possible burnout.

3.7.3. Warning signs to burnout

According to Shirom (2003:245), professionals like teachers should be vigilant to the presence of the following warning signs in their lives:

- Physical signs of burnout like feeling tired and drained most of the time, having a lowered immunity and regular incidents of feeling ill. Frequent headaches, back pain, muscle aches and an awareness of changes in appetite or sleeping habits are also symptomatic of burnout. Some other physical manifestations include gastrointestinal problems, chronic fatigue, muscle aches, high blood pressure and frequent colds.

- Emotional signs of burnout may manifest as a sense of failure and self-doubt, feeling helpless, trapped and defeated. Burnt out teachers feel detachment and alone in the world. They become increasingly cynical and have a negative outlook on life. They also experience decreased satisfaction and have no sense of accomplishment. Teachers suffering from burnout struggle to get excited about life and they are inclined to partake in high risk behaviours.
- Behavioural signs indicative of burnout include withdrawal from responsibilities, isolation from colleagues and friends and procrastination. Such individuals often use food, drugs or alcohol to cope or take out their frustration on others. They also tend to skip work, come in late or leave very early.

3.8. Could God be the antidote against burnout?

As previously stated, all teachers experience stress, but not all teachers suffer from burnout. The same factors that cause burnout in some teachers may also be the factors that prevent others from experiencing this debilitating syndrome. A new trend recently emerged in burnout research which boils down to a broadening of the traditional concept and scope (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter 2001:400; Dunford, Shipp, Boss, Angermeier & Boss 2012:637).

The focus in the study of burnout now seems to shift towards its opposite: work engagement. Researchers recently extended their interest to the positive pole of employees' wellbeing, instead of looking exclusively at the negative pole. Seen from this perspective, burnout is rephrased as an erosion of engagement with the job. This development indicates an emerging trend towards a "positive psychology^{xxiii}" that focuses on human strengths and optimal functioning rather than on weaknesses and malfunctioning (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi 2000:5).

Throughout his book "Authentic Happiness", noted psychologist Martin Seligman argues that true gratification and happiness is a longer-lasting joy that requires skill and effort and can only be

^{xxiii} Positive psychology places the emphasis on "an interest in the more desirable aspects of behaviour - what used to be called 'virtues' - as opposed to the recently more prevalent focus on pathology" (Csikszentmihalyi 2006:3). As a discipline, positive psychology rests upon three distinctive intellectual pillars:

- The first pillar is formed through positive subjective experiences of the past, present and future.
- The second pillar investigates individual and positive characteristics, like strengths and virtues.
- The third pillar confirms the search for positive institutions and communities.

achieved by taking part in activities that are consonant with having a noble purpose. In other words, says Csikszentmihalyi (2006:2), to achieve happiness and optimal functioning, a person ought to be doing their best, enjoy what they are doing as well as be contributing to something beyond themselves.

Seligman further postulates that authentic happiness is obtained through striving towards three major sets of experiences in life. For the purpose of this research study, I had to ask myself how these translate to the lives of Christian teachers in South Africa. The following table is thus a critical interpretation of Seligman's three criteria to suit the specific and localized context of teachers and indicate how teachers can strive towards including all three of these criteria in their everyday lives.

Table 4: An interpretation of Seligman's characteristics of authentic happiness

EXPERIENCE	DEFINITION	INTERPRETATION FOR TEACHER'S LIVES
The pleasant life	The frequent experience of pleasantness and happiness	Laughing with colleagues or the children they teach exposes teachers to the experience of the pleasant life. Spending time at work and even after school with these people adds value to the lives of teachers.
The engaged life	Engaging and being part of satisfying activities	Seeing children connecting to and internalizing the academic material they teach them and seeing satisfactory results after tests or examinations offer involvement in the engaged life. Involvement in extracurricular activities can also enhance this experience.
The meaningful life	Experiencing a sense of connectedness to something greater than themselves	Connecting to God and constantly searching for the presence of God in a classroom, thereby doing practical theology every day, leads to engagement in a meaningful life.

Striving towards work engagement for the Christian teacher thus implies a constant endeavour to actively stand against burnout by searching for meaning and work engagement in every situation they find themselves in.

3.8.1. Work engagement

Maslach and Leiter (1997) states that engagement is characterized by energy, involvement and efficacy, which are considered as the direct opposites of the three dimensions of burnout namely exhaustion, cynicism and lack of professional efficacy. Teachers who are engaged in their jobs experience an energetic and effective connection with their job activities and consider themselves able to deal with the demands of their vocation.

Menlo en Poppleton (1999:53-55) found that teachers who are content and at peace with their career choice experience more work engagement and are therefore more effective in transferring knowledge to their students. Theunissen (1993:164) identifies the following factors as contributing to a feeling of work engagement: a pleasant work environment, sharing in decision making, contributing to discussions about the general activities and workings of the school. Menlo and Poppleton (1999:142) confirms, through research that they have done in nine different countries, that support from colleagues, parents and the community also further contribute to a teacher's sense of wellbeing.

In their report, Maritz et al. (2012:13) identifies the following as some of the factors leading to teachers experiencing their work as a positive event:

- Enjoying the subjects they teach.
- Having rewarding relationships with colleagues.
- Receiving positive evaluation from their superiors.
- The mission and vision of their schools are clearly defined.
- Teachers are clear about what is expected of them.
- Gratifying relationship with the learners.
- Consider teaching as a lifelong commitment and calling.
- Seeing teaching as a professional challenge.
- Being able to count on support from colleagues and friends.
- Realizing that school plays an important role in contributing to the larger community.

All of the abovementioned research projects focused solely on the secular aspects of teaching and work engagement. Because this research journey is built upon the premises of an interdisciplinary approach, I have to wonder whether the definition of work engagement can be extended to include the spiritual and religious aspects of a teacher's life.

Ample research have been done to support this interdisciplinary approach to considering a link between having a sense of calling and work engagement, indicated by higher levels of work satisfaction, life satisfaction and lower levels of depression and burnout (Wrzesniewski et al. 1997:296; Treadgold 1999:104; Wrzesniewski 2003:25). Similar links also have been established between calling and positive work attitudes, embodied by a greater commitment to one's profession, more enthusiasm and an acceptance of duties not necessarily included in a basic job description (Serow, Eaker, & Ciechalski, 1992:137; Serow, 1994:65).

Religiousness and spirituality have been found to also influence work-related values, help individuals cope with challenges and stress inducing events in their daily lives (Constantine, Miville, Warren, Gainor & Lewis-Coles 2006:240; Duffy & Blustein 2005:430; Robert, Young & Kelly 2006:165; Duffy & Lent 2008:360). Grant and Campbell (2007:665) also concludes that perceptions of being of service to others protect individuals like teachers against burnout and decreased job satisfaction (Grant & Campbell 2007:666).

Schoeman and Van den Berg (2011:6) draws the conclusion that the meaningful contribution of such interdisciplinary work can be found in the overlapping of the fields of pastoral care and positive psychology. An interdisciplinary theological conversation will thus concern itself with the hermeneutical approach to lived religion and the conceptualization of how people "in their concrete situations, communicates affirmation, preserves the cohesion of selves and identities, and builds on strengths" (Browning 1991:284).

3.8.2. Having a sense of coherence

Whilst reading up on work engagement and positive psychology, I came across the work of medical sociologist Aaron Antonovsky (1996). He promotes the idea of a person having a sense of coherence in their career that might be a direct antidote against the symptoms of burnout.

The basis for his work was his amazement at the fact that some people who survived the Nazi concentration camps to some degree succeeded in not being affected by psychological problems. The originality of Antonovsky's work is due to his focus on factors that promotes health, so-called

salutogenic factors, instead of looking at factors causing disease. According to Antonovsky, such a sense of coherence has three hierarchically organised dimensions: comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness (Antonovsky 1996:11).

He further explains that most individuals have the need to intensely experience and feel the things that are happening to them. A high sense of coherence would thus enable a person to do exactly that because they have the necessary resources to handle the daily stresses of life. Because such people also attribute sense and meaning to their lives, they are able to more easily deal with everyday occurrences that other people might find extremely stressful.

Antonovsky secondly claims that the basis for maintaining mental health is an individual's understanding of their surroundings. If such comprehensibility is not achieved, the individual's chance to cope with what happens may change a lot. Manageability can thus be influenced by factors such as the power structures of a workplace or a group, or by certain types of behaviour that is applauded or even ridiculed.

Meaningfulness is also required to obtain a stable basis, according to Antonovsky. Meaningfulness therefore requires a person's comprehension of events that happen around them and to them. It also requires an active and meaningful interface between an individual and their specific context and situation. Teachers are therefore in the perfect situation to strive towards a high sense of coherence in their workplace. This dissertation asks the question whether teachers who consider their Christianity to be an integral part of their identity as a teacher could have a higher sense of coherence and therefore a lower rate of burnout than teachers who consider their work to be only a secular undertaking.

In summary, this chapter sketched the background to the situation of education in South Africa. Not only was attention given to the political playing field that schools have become, but the emotional and social challenges and frustrations that teachers have to deal with, were highlighted. In his address at a SAOU principals' symposium in Port Elizabeth, Derek Jackson stipulated the following four reasons as being responsible for making teaching such a demanding career since 1994:

- Lack of support from parents (Jackson 2009). As discussed in detail in this chapter, the attitude of many parents towards teachers and the effort of schools to discipline their children are characterized by resistance, passiveness or sometimes even aggression.

- Lack of support from the Department of Education (Jackson 2009). Teachers are constantly forced to deal with employees of the Department of Education that are not equipped to present the training workshops they attend, documentation very often do not reach them on time and they experience a general sense of disarray within the ranks of the Department of Education. Constant confusion seems to be at the order of the day at most district offices in our country.
- Learners are no longer a homogenous group (Jackson 2009). Twenty years ago all the children attending old model C schools came from the same type of background, shared the same cultural heritage and were most often from the same racial and language groups. Teachers knew that all the children had mostly the same frame of reference than they had. These days there are many different cultures and backgrounds in one class and teachers need to master the skill to capture the interest of each child and make the work accessible to their diverse frame of reference.
- Schools have become multi-cultural societies (Jackson 2009). After 1994 many South African citizens could attempt to carry on with life in their set ways and ignore the changes that were happening in their country, but teachers were quickly forced to adapt to dealing with suddenly having students from all different cultural backgrounds in their classes. They had to learn the differences between the habits and rituals of different cultures and convert their classrooms to a safe space for all learners that passed through there.

A plethora of changes for which they were not adequately prepared engulfed teachers in old model C schools in a rollercoaster ride full of stress and concern. Some teachers chose to merely carry on in the only ways they knew how. Others embraced the challenge and attempted to become as liberated as the Government expected them to be. Very often most teachers still feel as if the system might overwhelm and absorb them, as if they have been trying in vain. Yet, regardless of how well they have been adapting throughout the past fifteen years, more changes are abound and the question still remains whether teachers in old model C schools will ever again feel totally at ease with what is expected of them.

This chapter also set the scene to ask the question whether, through the combined efforts of practical theology, positive psychology and a sense of coherence, these teachers can obtain a sense of work engagement and whether that could be considered an antidote of sorts to stress and burnout. I have to now step this investigation up a notch and wonder about the relationship

between Christianity and work engagement. Does an individual teacher, who is acutely aware of his or her own personal interaction between their faith and their daily activities, face a lesser threat of becoming burnt out? Does feeling like a part of a choir of teachers guarantee a lesser chance of burnout?

Participation in such a choir could easily be viewed as a decrease in individuality. Becoming part of a successful choir entails among other things that no individual should be more audible than another. To achieve harmony through the unity, each individual must have his own voice, but also respect the requirements of the unit. The balance between individuality on the one hand and the needs of the choir or school on the other hand, is a juggling act.

A lack of balance between the individual and the greater coherence could be a major cause of discord in a school or even in life. Should a person be experiencing too much stress or even burnout, they might feel obliged to still keep on singing for the sake of the choir. They might feel silenced and marginalized from the choir that is meant to be their safe space. The ideal is therefore for the choir to offer enough space for teachers to develop individually, both musically (spiritually) and emotionally, but also as a group that exists in coherence. In this way an individual would have enough space to live out his personal context and relationship with God and to also experience participation and a shared sense of belonging, fellowship and community that could strengthen him in times of duress.

The next chapter will thus pose the question whether the presence of God in an individual's life could lead a teacher to experience more work engagement than one who does not invite God into their workplace? Is a Christian inclined to having a stronger sense of coherence because he searches for meaning and sense in everything that happens to him? Would he or she have a different experience and understanding of stress? Is a strong sense of having a vocation or calling for teaching a possible prediction that this teacher might not so easily get caught up in the labyrinth of burnout? Is having a sense of work engagement a sure guarantee that a teacher will still contribute to the choir?

Chapter 4

When God is the inspiration for the song

The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet" Buechner (1992:189).

4.1. A place for faith at the blackboard?

The previous chapter explored the feasibility of many teachers feeling stuck in the rut of their stressful routines while desperately yearning for more substance in their professional lives, searching for that calling and inspiration that lead them to becoming teachers in the first place. They might be acutely aware of the privilege they have to bear witness to those fleeting moments that shimmer with passion and insight that sometimes miraculously invade their classrooms. But too often that awareness is overshadowed by the realization that all their preparation and confidence unravel because of unforeseen classroom dynamics or very often from changes to a system that they just have become comfortable with.

The question was asked how many times teachers feel emotionally and physically drained by the relentless demands of their jobs, not to mention the pressures of an imploding educational crisis in South Africa and coming to grips with the constant changes they are bombarded with. Yet no matter how forsaken and desolate the classroom might sometimes feel, there are those undeniable moments when teachers feel sustained, even overwhelmed, by the wonder of teaching.

Osmer touches on to the responsibility that practical theology has to address this vulnerability of being isolated in a classroom and often feeling alone in the quest for sharing these stories of conquest and fear. "Across the great variety of perspectives in a particular field, what do its current members share? Where are the points of convergence in their work, even as they diverge sharply in other ways?" (Osmer 2008:241). Many teachers oscillate daily between being vulnerable and defensive and for most of them, their career stories bear witness to these fluctuations.

Schubert and Lopez-Schubert (1997:205) agree that "to teach seriously is to continuously ask oneself fundamental questions about what one is doing and why one is doing it." The local knowledge of teachers is the force that both shapes this research and gives life to new narratives

and practical theological discourses. The ideas and stories that participants share comment on the “what” they are teaching, as well as the “why” they continue to be teachers. It explains why they are still in this profession even though they might have come to the realization that burnout was becoming part of their identity. This happens even if they have never thought of their career choice as a calling, regardless of public pressure that teachers are meant to be “called” in order to be a good teacher.

Bertrand captures the enormity of living out a calling when he states that “good teaching is guided by knowledge and inspired by love” (Bertrand 1925:28). Tertia proudly shares how she has just always known that she had a calling to be a teacher:

I used to line up all my dolls or even my friends and I would teach them everything I knew. I even gave them homework!

Daleen have also never regretted her choice to study teaching.

I could have made a success of many other careers, but since I was little I just knew that I was meant to be a Maths teacher.

Before the question can be asked whether all teachers should feel comfortable labelling their career choice as definitely being a calling or vocation, the definition thereof and the discourses surrounding these terms have to be deconstructed and conceptualized.

4.1.1. A plethora of definitions

The traditional view of a calling is not only a job or a career, but a vocation.^{xxiv} It is not what you do to earn a living; the expectation is set for it to encapsulate your whole life. Both calling and vocation have been defined and researched in all possible academic and religious paradigms.

^{xxiv} In their book “Habits of the heart” (1985), Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler & Tipton clarify that most people see their work either as a job, a career or a calling. Schwartz (1994) also makes these three distinctions and explains that people who believe that they have a job are only interested in the material benefits from work. In contrast, people who consider themselves to have a career have a deeper personal investment in their work and mark their achievements not only through monetary gain, but through the possibility of advancement within the occupational structure (Bellah et al. 1985:66). Finally, people with a calling find that their work is inseparable from their life. They work for the fulfillment that doing the work brings to the individual (Davidson & Caddell 1994:134).

Definitions of calling and vocation in psychological and theological literature are diverse, often vague, and sometimes confounded.

Dik and Steger (2008:226) conceptualizes calling as consisting of three overlapping dimensions:

- “A transcendent summons, experienced as originating beyond the self...”
- “... to approach a particular life role in a manner oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness...”
- “... that holds other-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation.”

Vocation is defined as a combination of the second and third dimensions of calling. Thus, with reference to occupation, Dik and Steger (2008:227) makes a distinction between people who not only connect their work to an overall sense of meaning, but who do so for purely internal reasons (vocation) and those who attribute their motivation for working to an external source such as God, a family legacy, or a pressing societal need (calling).^{xxv} Both constructs refer to one’s ongoing approach to work rather than something a person will find or discover at a single point in time.

Sumner (2003) thus defines calling as depicting “a sense of passion, giftedness and a direction one longs for and a sense that God has placed this on one’s heart.” Guinness (1998:1) sees calling as simply being in a relationship with God. “Our primary calling as followers of Christ is by Him, to Him, and for Him. First and foremost we are called to Someone (God), not to something (such as motherhood, politics, or teaching) or to somewhere (such as an informal settlement or Outer Mongolia)” (Guinness 1998:2). This understanding of calling and vocation is by no means novel; aspects of it have been part of the discourse on the role of work in human life since at least the 16th century (Hardy 1990).

4.2. The Reformers and their “Vocation Externa”

A significant legacy of the Protestant reformers of the 16th century was their controversial declaration that lay people could be called upon by God to pursue certain occupations (Forrester 1951:148; Hardy 1990). Until that time the Roman Catholic Church, in accordance with the heritage of Greek philosophers, believed that one should rather spend time contemplating and

^{xxv} The conversations that I had with teachers and that was used as research material for this dissertation was conducted in Afrikaans. I faced an interesting conundrum when I realized that the Afrikaans language did not have separate words for vocation and calling. Both were understood under the same term, namely “roeping.” Thus, vocation and calling are used as equal and interchangeable terms in this dissertation.

envisaging your spiritual and religious life (“vita contemplativa”), rather than occupying your time being concerned with your professional and occupational live (“vita activa”) (Grenholm 1993:41).

In medieval Europe certain practices, such as entering the priesthood or joining a religious order, were deemed “vocations” or holy callings from God. This concept of calling originally implied that people were called by God to engage only in particular religiously affiliated occupations. Only priests and monks could receive a spiritual calling and they had to respond to such a calling by committing themselves to a life of religious seclusion.

Later, during the Reformation and as a result of the work of reformist theologians like Luther and Calvin, the concept of calling was broadened to include any “honest” line of work, as long as its pursuit was motivated by a summons from God and with the intention of serving a greater purpose as well as the common good (Hardy 1990). Luther held that all Christians share a common “vocation” to love and serve others, but that they carry it out through a variety of specific “vocations” that could range from being a missionary to being a teacher.

The consistent distinguishing feature of this religious perspective on calling throughout the centuries was the sense that the “call” came from a transcendent source, specifically the voice of God. The spiritual calling (“vocation spiritualis”) to devote yourself to a life as a child of God was believed to ultimately lead to the reward of also receiving a secondary, outward calling (“vocation externa”). Such outward callings were then visible in the professional lives that most of the children of God pursued (Stevens 1999:77-80).

Ruhland (2001:2) warns however, that this secondary calling should not be thought of as secondary in the sense of being unimportant. He suggests that “complementary” might be a better description, since it can be thought of as an expression and extension of the primary calling and as a place to demonstrate our love for God (Ruhland 2001:2). This call towards a relationship with God is expressed as a secondary calling that often find its manifestation in a person’s choice of an occupation. Over the course of a lifetime, one person may experience several secondary callings and thus pursue several occupations.

4.2.1. Implications of a secondary calling

Schuurman (2001:52-56) states that a “vocation externa” and secondary callings have three definite implications for the Christian in the work force. Firstly, it implies that all believers can legitimately attach religious and spiritual meaning to their occupational activities. In this way they

can make a contribution towards the Kingdom of God, not only through being involved with the Church, but also in their everyday lives.

Secondly, the roles and responsibilities awarded to them by their occupational choices can be aligned with the will of God for their lives. Christians do not need to surrender all their possessions and go into seclusion to feel that they are being obedient to God. In doing their daily work well they are already adhering to His will.

Thirdly, it implies that religious legitimacy can be awarded to more than just clergy and trained theologians. Now all role players in a society, whether they are teachers, lawyers, employers or even parents, can find themselves called to serve God in the situation where they function every day. In this way they are all representatives of God (Schuurman 2001:52-56). In reference to this study, teachers can then justifiably be seen as practical theologians in their classrooms and their schools. It validates the contribution that they make to the theology of praxis.

Not all theologians agree, however, that Christians are called both to a general way of life (“*vocatio spiritualis*”) and to particular paid occupations (“*vocatio externa*”). Lee Hardy (1990:79), for example, focuses upon the various forms of work that Christians are called to do. He wonders how people then know what they are supposed to do if there are so many options available to them.

By contrast, for Gary Badcock (2000:124), the will of God does not concern itself primarily with the details of our specific career choice. Badcock relates, in great detail, the story of three very different careers, namely a fisherman, investment banker, and theologian, all of which he could have pursued and that would all have been equally pleasing to God. He comes to the conclusion that there is only one call for all Christians and that is the call to share in Christ's mission of love and service.

Whether or not I choose to adhere to the divergent opinions of either Hardy or Badcock, it is clear that the social constructions of calling and vocation are much broader and more diverse than I had originally anticipated. In addition, an interdisciplinary way of working also guides me to question the contribution that a postfoundationalist practical theology can make towards my understanding of calling and vocation. Thus, before the current context and influence of such social constructions on teacher's professional and personal lives can be mapped out and related to their experience of stress and burnout, I have to ask myself if these concepts of calling and

vocation that Reformers like Luther came up with are still valid in the postmodern world we live in today.

4.3. Are Luther's ideas still relevant in a postfoundational contextuality?

Practical theology happens whenever and wherever there is a reflection on practice, from the perspective of an individual's experience of the presence of God (Müller 2011:electronic source). If we then investigate the presence of God in teacher's lives and the motivation that have inspired them to become teachers, we are indeed formulating a context out of a very specific and concrete moment of praxis. The postfoundationalist approach to practical theology motivates us to firstly listen to the stories of people in real life situations and not only aim to describe a general context, but rather to acknowledge the specific and concrete situation of each teacher.

The context of teaching is much different than it was in the times of Reformers like Luther and I have to, with other authors like Volf (1991:46) wonder if Luther's ideas about vocation and calling are still relevant in teacher's lives today.

Firstly, it is important to pay some attention to the way in which the understanding of what an occupation is, have changed through the years. Not only have the motivation that people have for working changed, but the relationship between the economics, politics and even religion have had an influence on how people perceive their daily tasks. Economy has become much more independent from religion and that has had a distinct influence on people's perception of the relationship between their religion and their occupations (Volf 1991:46-65).

Croatian born theologian Miroslav Volf is one of the leading voices advocating the idea that the perception of occupation as a calling should be relinquished. He believes that Luther only refers to the initial experience of being called toward a certain profession and does not make any mention of a person becoming estranged from or at odds with their work (Volf 1991:106).

Secondly, Volf points the attention to a dangerous ambiguity present in Luther's work. Luther does indeed distinguish between a primary (spiritual) and secondary (occupational) calling, but he stands indifferent to the possible tension between these two types of calling. Luther's proposal that people have a religious calling to a certain occupation has been altered by the Westernized world's focus on rather being called to diligence than to a specific career. Through being thorough

and ethical in your way of work, you not only experience religious self actualization, but you develop a sense of identity, pride and even prosperity.

Lastly, Volf also warns against the ideological abuse of the concept of calling. He worries that even the cruellest form of work could then be justified by referring to it as a calling from God. Workers could also be forced to work harder because they are supposed to be doing it for God. He is also concerned that work was also not primarily done for financial gain or for the social standing and status that certain career options award these days (Stott 1990:180).

I have to wonder if these ideas that Volf represent are not just only the other side of a very modernistic coin? Looking at calling through a postfoundationalist lens forces me to reconsider the limits that people so easily place on defining the term. In my mind the primary requirements for a meaningful reflection on the ideas of calling and vocation are the need for it to be locally contextual, socially constructed, pointing beyond the local, directed by tradition and open to being explored through interdisciplinary conversations.

Müller (2005:72) understands this dilemma between honouring the opinions of academic and theological giants versus creating one's own interdisciplinary understanding of concepts that have stood the test of time. He explains that

in the dialogue between theology and other disciplines, transversal reasoning promotes different but equally legitimate ways of viewing specific topics, problems, traditions, or disciplines, and creates the kind of space where different voices need not always be in contradiction, or in danger of assimilating one another, but are in fact dynamically interactive with one another. This notion of transversality thus provides a philosophical window to our wider world of communication through thought and action and teaches us to respect the disciplinary integrity of reasoning strategies as different as theology and the sciences.

Considering the ideas of Luther and Volf in this way affords me the freedom to acknowledge the fact that although much has changed since the Reformation, the postmodern discourse allows us the freedom to still believe that some of those ideas are valid, even though some others might not be relevant to the times that we live and work in.

This realization channelled me towards the decision to still expand on the possibility of teaching being a calling from God. But, in the same sense, I will also give a voice to the possibility of teaching being a secular profession that people might have decided upon without having a religious reason thereto. In this way, both groups of teachers can feel validated in their decision.

4.4. Widening the concept of calling and vocation

The word "vocation" is derived from the Latin term "vocare", that means "to call." Calling is thus also an issue of voice. In our choir metaphor, teachers need to feel an urge or desire to sing along with the choir. They need the motivation to join in and have to be in agreement with the lyrics that is sung by the choir. In terms of a calling then, a teacher must in some way sense the transcendent voice of the Caller, then find their own voice and consequently realize that there are a symbioses and similarity of sorts between the two.

Our vocal expression and contribution to the choir is therefore melodious when we sing in response to the "vocare", to the call of the vocation. When a teacher is reminded of this uniqueness of their own voice, they will be more open to sense the presence of God in their personal, as well as their professional lives.

In order to comprehend the complexities of singing in the choir and when considering the initial decision to become a teacher, attention needs to be given to at least three subjects:

- A further exploration of the present state of the conversation about the general concept of Christian vocation.
- Secondly, deconstructing the difference, if any, between regarding teaching as a Christian vocation rather than simply a form of professional life.
- Finally, considering the activity of teaching both as a general human endeavour and as a profession for Christians.

4.4.1. The theological concept of calling and vocation

Popular authors like Hardy (1990); Wrzesniewski et al. (1997); Palmer (2000); Brennfleck and Brennfleck (2005) and Hall and Chandler (2005:155) advocate reclaiming the constructs of calling or vocation in occupational planning. Hartnett and Kline (2005:9) refers to a definition by Guinness (1998:1) that

calling is the truth that God calls us to himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have [is] invested with a special devotion and dynamism lived out as a response to his summons and service.

Guinness clearly sees calling as an umbrella term where occupation is only a small part of the call and the primary function of calling is rather to remind people that they should be in a relationship with God. Palmer (2000:10) agrees that “vocation does not come from a voice ‘out there’ calling me to be something I’m not. It comes from a voice ‘in here’ calling me to be the person I was born to be, to fulfil the original selfhood given me at birth by God.” Although it sometimes happens that an individual’s calling is recognized and confirmed by other people, ultimately it is something very personal and concerned with that individual’s intimate relationship with God. *Onnie* says:

God is there, in every lesson I prepare, every conversation I have. I teach for Him.

On the other hand however, the Oxford Student’s Dictionary (2002:1178) defines profession or vocation as a type of work that you feel you are suited to doing and to which you should give all your time and energy. A profession is generally defined as an occupation characterized by skilled intellectual techniques with a voluntary association to a code of conduct. Teaching can thus be considered under both the definitions of an intensely personal vocation and a public profession and therefore the question needs to be asked whether it can exclusively be considered as a religious or a secular occupation.

4.4.2. Teaching as a religious versus secular profession

4.4.2.1. Filling-a-pail or lighting-a-fire?

Is teaching really a vocation or is it simply a secular profession? This question and the multiplicity of possible answers indicate many different ways of thinking about teaching. Hare (1993:101) affirms that “the way we think of teaching has an influence on the way in which we teach.” How we think about teaching, what it is and what it ought to be, amounts to a conceptual framework, a set of fundamental beliefs within which we understand and come to give meaning to what we do (Brookfield 1990).

Some approach teaching with a filling-a-pail philosophy and others see themselves as adhering to a lighting-a-fire philosophy. Filling a pail is an easy goal to reach. If a teacher can manage to

convey all the academic knowledge that a curriculum dictates, they can consider their job well done. If knowledge is water and the mind a bucket that cannot resist being filled, then worksheets, copied notes and reading aloud will suffice.

Yeats' famous analogy of education as "not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire" replaces the knowledge-as-water, mind-as-bucket construction with one equating both knowledge and the mind to flammables, and placing the teacher in the position of the fire-starter. A fire, once lit, must find its own fuel and will then often become out of control. In the case of a student, not only do the teacher need to find enough passion to ignite the interest that would lead to the fire starting, but it is also necessary to ensure that there is enough passion left to keep the fire burning after the teaching is done.

Whereas a profession is concerned with competency, qualifications and working conditions that leads to filling the pail, a vocation represents intrinsic motivations or dispositions toward people or actions that motivates a teacher enough to focus on the education of the child as a holistic being. A vocation in teaching is a deeply-felt personal calling that is sustained by a sense that teaching is an activity where meaning is larger than the sum of its parts. Thus lighting a fire in a child will also have an influence on other parts of their lives.

Whether teachers think of teaching as a profession or think of it as a vocation does indeed make a difference in how they deal with students, what they do in the classroom and beyond, how they interact with colleagues, what commitments they are willing to make, what expectations can be imposed on them and by what standards they measure success.

It has to be said, however, that while the label has wide currency in Christian and some secular contexts, the use of "vocation" also denotes an ambiguous concept. In a generic sense, vocation refers to any career choice, but in a more specific religious context, the concept of a vocation has an admittedly theological connotation.

Teachers can thus consider themselves to be effective, irrelevant of whether they feel their calling to be a religious or secular experience. *Bekommerd* explains that although he is a Christian, he doesn't see it as inherently part of his academic work at school. He says:

I am a geography teacher; I am here to teach them weather patterns, not to educate them on religious issues.

4.4.2.2. The conceptual framework of a profession

The secularized concept of a profession is traditionally viewed as an important factor in people's work experiences, regardless of their religious heritage. In line with views of profession as a source of general meaning, many people appear to believe that work should provide meaning (Šverko & Vizek-Vidovic 1995:3) and that finding meaning in one's work is as important as salary or job security (O'Brien 1992:44). People describe a wide variety of specific meanings that their work holds for them (Colby, Sippola & Phelps 2001; Wrzesniewski 2003), and, regardless of the specific occupational title, many people appear to approach their careers as a source of valued meaning (Wrzesniewski et al. 1997; Isaksen 2000:84) even though they might not attach any religious meaning to their work.

Buijs (2005:334) cites four factors that need to be acknowledged and kept in mind when one views teaching as a secular profession. Firstly, the various activities that comprise the teaching process are done for financial remuneration. Secondly, there is an expectation of a certain level of expertise and this anticipation usually translates into appropriate knowledge of a subject matter.

Effective teaching requires a certain level of pedagogical expertise, what Ramsden (1992:9) calls "a body of didactic knowledge." It also translates into relevant pedagogical skills and consistent performance over a whole spectrum of educational activities, for instance, the preparation for specific classes, assessment, setting of exam papers and grading tests. Being professional in such activities implies doing them well and according to specified standards and in diverse circumstances.

Thirdly, teachers are meant to be accountable for both their academic expertise as well as pedagogical skills. Children should be able to rely on the teacher's knowledge of the subject matter to be correct and up-to-date; they should be able to expect competent instruction and fair treatment. Fourthly, there is a component of choice. Individuals voluntarily enter the teaching profession from a range of various different options, although they may do so for a variety of personal reasons. Their selection mostly arises from an interest in the profession, coupled with the requisite expertise and skills.

This conceptual framework of profession views a role or activity in terms of expertise, governance, autonomy, and accountability. Because of its focus on expertise and independence,

the framework of a profession implies a determinate set of objectives and standards which one chooses to adopt.

Consequently, to think of teaching in these terms is to dwell on the role of teaching itself. It is to view it in impersonal terms, to see it as comprised of a range of activities that an individual does well. The concept of a profession also tends to view these activities in self-serving or self-interested terms, even though the activities might be directed toward the benefit of others (Macdonald 1995).

4.4.2.3. The conceptual framework of a vocation

The framework of a vocation, on the other hand, implies a personal commitment because of the specific focus on a calling and the aspect of service for the Kingdom of God. Viewing the role of a teacher through the conceptual lens of a vocation focuses on response to a call, service to others and an assumed responsibility for both.

Consequently, to think of teaching in these terms is to look beyond the role of teaching itself to those engaged in the role. It is to view teaching in subjective and interpersonal terms. *Klara* shares:

If I see one child succeed, I am reminded of why I became a teacher.

In the end, it is children who give shape to the vocation of teaching; they are the purpose behind the call and the recipients of a teacher's commitment to it. In its theological sense, a vocation is an inner calling that arises from one's own faith experience. It is experienced as an invitation from God, an exhortation from the person of Christ that expects a response. A vocation is inherently altruistic and personal and a task that in the case of teachers takes on a specific dimension not only to educate in skills or learning but also in faith.

Tertia shares that she has spent some time contemplating her place in teaching. She has been wondering if that is where she is really meant to be, if the school that she is at was the right place for her:

But after a lot of prayer I know that this is where I am supposed to be. God has given me a calling to this school. My job here is not done yet.

The sense of vocation finds its expression at this crossroads of public obligation and personal fulfilment. It takes shape through involvement in work that has social meaning and value (Hall & Chandler 2005:156). Secondly, the idea of vocation presumes a hopeful, outward-looking sentiment, a feeling of wanting to engage the world in some substantive way. It presupposes an inner urge to venture into and devote oneself to working in a first-hand kind of way.

The symbolism behind this metaphor is worth mentioning. To “venture” forth raises the image of an adventure, a plunge into an activity where the outcome is often uncertain and unpredictable. To “devote” oneself to the doing of it recalls one of the original meanings of the term vocation, namely to commit oneself to a particular religious or social practice.

Devotion further indicates an active and creative relationship with the work. The work that an individual does must involve initiative, rather than merely passively performing a set of predetermined tasks. Teachers who consider their career path as a vocation will not merely be carrying out specified functions according to recognized norms, but will be sensitive to new possibilities in their daily interactions with children.

This also means supplementing and possibly extending the functional requirements of the secular part of the job. It may even mean questioning and deconstructing some of the meta-narratives and set truths that make up some of those requirements. For example, a teacher may find him- or herself paying increased attention to what students say, think, and feel about what they are learning.

They will therefore think further than just on how to fill the pail of academic knowledge, but will attempt to strengthen and enhance the education they give in order to light the fire of lifelong learning and spiritual growth in the children they teach.

4.4.2.4. The conflict or compatibility between these contrasting conceptual frameworks

Are the above-mentioned conceptual frameworks of a calling incompatible with that of a profession? Does one necessarily have to preclude or exclude the other? At first glance it might appear that they pose exclusive alternatives: teaching is either a profession or a vocation, you are either lighting a fire or filling a pail. However, they need not be exclusive of each other. It seems perfectly plausible to consider a teaching career one’s vocation in life and yet pursue it

professionally or to insist that one feels called to the teaching profession and yet consider it one's duty to serve.

Indeed, it is often recommended that Christian teachers view their role as more than a profession, that they view it as a vocation as well. *Henriëtte* reveals that she is the third generation teacher in her family and that her mother and grandmother have taught at the same school that she does now, even in the same classroom that she now occupies. She says:

I didn't choose a profession; I chose to uphold a tradition, to live up to my family vocation.

According to Buijs (2005:333) the one feeds off the other: a Christian identity supports a vocational and spiritual orientation, whereas a vocational orientation in the sense of a divine call acknowledges a Christian identity. As Lent (1994:145) concludes, "only in such a community, constantly challenged by the twin demands of academic excellence and faithfulness to the gospel, can generations of young Christian minds be formed to engage and leaven the world."

I find myself wondering if this merger of two worlds cannot be incorporated into a term used to refer to the conceptual framework that teachers function under. Due to the freedom provided by the postmodern and social construction discourse, teachers can construct the context and view they prefer. The tension between seeing their occupation as a vocation or a profession can, due to a postfoundationalist and interdisciplinary approach, be merged and thus considered as profession-as-vocation.

4.4.3. Profession-as-vocation

Christa Walck writes, "I have been thinking about teaching, not as a task or a job or even a vocation, but as a life, a way of being and doing that constructs who I am" (Walck 2000:157). The generally accepted notion about the occupation of teaching has for some years now have been moving away from discussion of method, technique, and cognitive theory toward discourses about the character of the teacher and the virtues that make for excellent teaching. In "The courage to teach" Parker Palmer (1998:2) reminds readers that there is more to good teaching than technique: "As I teach, I project the condition of my soul onto my students, my subject, and our way of being together."

To observe the profession of teaching through a Christian lens therefore implies thinking about the distinctive traits of good teaching both inside and outside the classroom. Weiler states that “this commitment to human values give these teachers a sense of their own worth and the value of their work, even in a society where it is often devaluated” (Weiler 1988:113).

4.4.3.1. It's the meaning that matters

If I regard teaching as a religious vocation where people feel called by God to make a difference in the lives of the children they work with, it must also become the socially constructed exegesis of my live. Taking this into consideration, I believe with Bauer (2008:20) that to be a good teacher I have to be concerned as much with the human side of teaching than with the professional side thereof. Thinking of teaching as a calling will therefore not mean that the quality of my work will necessarily differ from the quality of the teaching rendered by a non-Christian. The distinguishing factor will be that the meaning that I, as a Christian teacher, attribute to my work will be different.

Another distinctive point of difference between teachers who see themselves as being called and those teachers who see themselves as just doing a job is the collective goal of spreading the gospel. A choir is a communal group activity, and although individuals come to join the choir of teachers from a personal sense of vocation or calling, they share the same ambition and objectives that will eventually lead to them performing in harmony and as a single unit, rather than as the individual voices that they once were. A good choir has perfected the skill of combining many voices to produce a performance where not one of the voices stand out, where not one individual voice can be recognized above the synchronized performance.

A theological interpretation of our choir metaphor when applied to vocation will therefore involve a sense of the transcendent, of purpose and of community. What an individual does in response to that call provides him/her with purpose. This call and the response thereto occur within and are guided by a larger community, in this case, a whole faculty of teachers.

In the fullest sense of the word, a vocation includes a teacher's chosen occupation but it also involves the civic responsibilities they share to, as members of the family of God, live out their calling as they teach the children that sit in front of them year after year.

The source of a Christian teacher's calling and the inspiration for the song that their choir is singing is God. In that the difference between understanding teaching as a Christian vocation or viewing teaching simply as a secular profession becomes clear. For Christian teachers their work has been and will forever be bounded by transcendent horizons and will make a contribution towards eternity and the Kingdom of God. *Helmine* agrees:

My classroom is my mission field. I know that I am a co-worker with all the missionaries and evangelists all around the world and we have the common goal of introducing as many people as possible to God.

4.5. The elephant in the room

The well-known metaphor "the elephant in the room" refers to a difficult topic or issue that everybody is acutely aware of, but not prepared to discuss. It is based on the idea that an elephant in a room would be almost impossible to overlook, thus people who pretend that the elephant is not there simply choose to avoid dealing with the issue at hand. This figure of speech can also be applied to the conundrum of teachers and their calling to teach.

Although the distinction between teaching as a calling and as a secular profession was made very clear in the previous section, the question still remains whether the social construction of profession-as-vocation is encapsulating of all types of teachers. What about teachers who are outspoken Christians and believe that they are in service of the gospel but might still not consider their career choice to be a distinct calling?

I have to, in a way, group myself with such teachers, given the fact that I did not study teaching or have never felt the desire to become an educator before I actually found myself standing in front of a class of challenging teenagers. Only then did I realize that it was what I was, at that time, meant to do with my life. Do I then have less of a calling than the teacher who was giving reading lessons to her dolls and teddy bears from since she can remember?

Am I less of a teacher than the woman who is the third generation teacher in her family and had her career path mapped out for her since her childhood? Do I have less of a connection with my spirituality because all the references to calling sounds like the ideal to me, but a secondary calling is not something that I have ever experienced? Do I, in my daily interaction with children, make less of a contribution to the Kingdom of God because I may not feel called?

Does the calling of a teacher then arise from within or is it dependent on source from outside their own spirituality? Some have always been aware of their calling as they were growing up with the prospect of teaching while others found it through the process of living with and serving others. The issue at hand might thus be an exploration of whether a calling should still be seen as fixed or a finished state of being?

To my own mind, there are four groups in the choir of teachers that are educating the youth of our country. Many teachers have always considered themselves to be called to this profession and can relate with the song that other teachers that share this passion is singing; a second group sing to a different tune because they have only discovered their sense of calling and vocation while they were already teaching. They now also consider themselves to be called and also share in the joyous song of those who have grown up with a clear sense of calling.

There are however, two more groups in our diverse choir of teachers. The third group of great and inspiring teachers has never made a link between the idea of calling and what they do in class every day. They simply do their array of tasks to the best of their abilities and do not spend time contemplating the reason or motivation behind their actions. Many of these teachers create an emotional barrier of sorts between their professional and personal lives. They do not merge the two worlds and some even report being a totally different person at home than what they are in their classrooms. They see their work as merely an occupation and they prefer it to be that way.

But the choir also consists of a last group of desperate individuals who have become so caught up in the maze of professional burnout that they only see themselves as going to work every day. They have long since lost the idea that the work that they are doing might have a greater purpose. Whether they might have once considered themselves to have a calling has now

become irrelevant. The result is a multitude of teachers who have moved away from a positive alignment between their religion and the realities of their occupation.

4.5.1. “Loving my job” versus “Doing my job”

For me teaching is about having the desire to be “profoundly connected to children” (Evans 1993:19), to love them and to take pleasure in their accomplishments in such a way that my own self becomes deeply connected to their wellbeing. Teaching is not only about giving marks or writing with chalk on the blackboard that is an almost mechanical action for all teachers. Teaching is often about what happens after I have written on the blackboard or after I have explained the required theoretical knowledge.

Jack is of the same mind when he says:

There are many things that I have learned at university that I have never used in practice. But in the same sense there are so much more about teaching that I did not learn at university, I had to learn it the hard way. Teaching is not about setting up a lesson plan or having good administrative skills, it is about allowing the individual into the lesson plan, about seeing the child behind the lesson.

The modernistic meaning of teaching wants it to be measured by the thickness of books and files. But I have encountered teachers with all these prescribed thick planning files and all the necessary window dressing that I would like to ask: What have you done for the children? What has your contribution outside of academic knowledge been?

Throughout my years of teaching I have seldom heard a child comment on a teacher’s neat paperwork, but I have heard many children speak about a time that teachers gave them a needed pat on the back on the sport field or consoled them during trying times. The commitment, devotion, compassion, competence, care, love and desire for their profession manifest themselves

in such teacher's lives. These actions create connections between people that far outweigh and outlast the impact that sharing pure intellectual and logical knowledge have on people's lives. Such teachers truly love their jobs.

Public discourse often focuses on this type of teacher that these altruistic stories of change and inspiration are told about. But it is also important to acknowledge the members of the choir who have become so caught up in the debilitating grip of severe stress and burnout that they have quite possibly lost their ability to connect with children on a deeper level. Many of them have for a long time not felt like a part of the choir of fulfilled teachers anymore. They have long since forgotten what it feels like to look back on your day and find it emotionally satisfying. At this stage they experience teaching as soul-destroying and debilitating and they can hardly recall a time that they did love their jobs. They are now simply "doing their jobs" (Stott 1990:164). *Bekommerd* admits that he is caught up in this incapacitating grip of burnout:

I only studied teaching because thirty years ago it was the easiest degree to get a full scholarship for. Nowadays I cannot even remember a time when I got any emotional satisfaction from teaching itself. Sometimes, if I am lucky, I still enjoy the sport.

4.5.2. Might this construction need to be demolished?

Does thinking about teaching as a vocation marginalize people, like *Bekommerd*, even more? Do they feel even more excluded from the body of teachers who take part in staff room conversations about their accomplishments or the emotional rewards they get from teaching? Should there be a concern that all this talk about having a calling could create an expectation that even the average teacher, who at times gets frustrated with his/her classroom situation, cannot meet?

When thinking about the world we live and work in as a postmodern society, we have to wonder whether we have set the requirements for being a good teacher in stone? Have we built a modernistic construction of the concept of calling and vocation and have we now somehow become trapped in our own creation? Do some teachers silently express a need for such a construction to be deconstructed and demolished?

Placing myself firmly within the sphere of postfoundationalist practical theology awards me the opportunity to migrate between praxis and theory. Browning (1991:41) explains "the idea that

practical thinking moves from practice to theory to practice, not from theory to practice.” In this situation we therefore have a tension between the lived experience or local knowledge of teachers and the theoretical expectations created by the generally accepted ideas on calling and vocation. The only resolution to this tension will be a constant alternation between theory and praxis and in doing so, questioning and deconstructing the dominant social construction and taken-for-granted discourses that teachers adhere to.

There is a desperate need among teachers for a redefining of what they are. There is an urgent necessity to feel free to create and carve out spaces for the unique experiences that make up the texture of their daily lives. A new understanding of their own identity is necessary to give teachers the confidence they need to see themselves in ways that they feel comfortable with. Such a development can offer possibilities for thinking and acting differently, for celebrating practices, ideas and values that might not always have been recognized.

As a scholar in practical theology I have to wonder how the view of teaching can be reconstituted so that more opportunities emerge for the voices of teachers to be heard. As Provenzo et al. (1989:551) put it, “working in the fundamentally ambiguous context of schools, teachers... need... a language that enables them to clarify meaning in the midst of complexity.” To accomplish this it might be crucial to rethink the traditional ideas about calling and vocation.

Volf (1991:111) shares this sentiment when he suggests that the word “calling” be replaced with another Biblical term that gives a better overview on the dynamic culture of current day working conditions. As an antithesis to the ideas of Luther, Volf suggests the use of the words “charisma” or “gift.”

The notion of vocation indicates a general calling to work for the Kingdom of God and the spreading of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Such a calling then becomes concrete in the application thereof through the different gifts that God has bestowed upon an individual. Volf further states that it is easier to concretely understand such gifts as they are set out in the Scripture, than to understand an abstract term like calling (Volf 1991:115). 1 Peter 4:10-11 affirms that

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God

may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power forever and ever, Amen.

Jack acknowledges:

The gifts that I have been blessed with are perfectly suited for teaching, but might not have been so well suited for a different career.

Focusing on the variety of spiritual gifts that every teacher has been blessed with makes it easier for an individual to live out and practice using these gifts in their daily occupational setting. In that way it becomes possible to teachers to reconnect their professional lives with their personal spirituality. *Daleen* is witness to this when she says:

My Christianity determines every decision that I make, thus it is also intrinsically part of my way of teaching and my interactions with people.

Such a renewed connection will open up space for teachers like *Daleen* and *Jack* to grow in their relationship with God, with themselves, with colleagues and with the children they teach every day. In doing so, the focus will shift from seeing teaching as simply a job to be done to seeing it as a calling. It can now be seen as an individually constructed concept that is aligned with each teacher's personal values, beliefs and goals and is free from discourses confining its meaning.

4.5.3. My own (de)constructed space

For me, such a newly (de)constructed space, free from modernistic fixed truths about teaching and the consequent marginalization due to not seeing teaching as a childhood calling, did not yet have a name or a socially constructed definition that I could adhere to. I had to go searching through my mind and heart to identify markers in what I do every day and in my approach to teaching that might indicate the way forward to mapping my own placement on the continuum of teacher's identity.^{xxvi}

As part of this search I investigated and explored a few Biblical themes and concepts, because I consider Jesus Christ to be the biggest teacher of all times. Watkins (2008:53) agrees when he

^{xxvi} This continuum will be explored in 5.3.

explains that both His disciples and even some of those who opposed Him referred to Jesus as “Teacher” (Matthew 26:25; Mark 9:4; John 1:38). Watkins (2008:55) further shows Jesus portrayed as a teacher in Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount, Luke’s Sermon on the Plain, and in the Johannine discourses. In the gospel of John, Jesus explicitly accepted the title “Teacher” from his disciples (John 13:13).

Jesus was not the kind of teacher who simply imprinted His messages to the memory of His pupils, He educated them, He reprimanded them when they needed it and He had a sincere connection with his followers.

I wondered if I could, through exploring His ways and methods of teaching, identify some of what I attempt to do in my class. In this inquiry I have come across many ideals that I am still working towards, but I find solace in the fact that this journey that I am on is not a solitary one. Many Christian teachers have spent years working on their approach to teaching and on their efforts to become more like Jesus.

Not only was this journey giving me the opportunity to investigate the impact of stress on other teacher's lives or deconstruct the ideas that teachers have about themselves and their reasons for teaching, but I was also in the process of constructing my own epistemological placement.

In my constant migration between the theory of Biblical principles and the praxis in classrooms, I am growing in my own understanding of why I am teaching. I firmly believe that the conclusions that I come to can serve as a tool or inspiration for other teachers who find themselves on this same journey.

After much reading and contemplation, I identified two Biblical principles that could possibly resonate with the reasons why I was a teacher and with the rationale and incentive that kept me doing it year after year.

These concepts from the Bible offer the opportunity to daily commit myself to teaching in a way that, unlike calling, does not require an emotional connection or commitment that have been nurtured and upheld through many years.

The first is the principle of stewardship. The commitment to be a steward of God is not a feeling or an urgency that a person grows up with; it is a practical decision that one makes every single day. It is not a task or a commission that one has to work towards, but instead it is a personal commitment and choice that is validated and renewed on a daily basis.

Because I could identify with this principle and place it firmly within my positioning in both the worlds of education and practical theology, I considered the option that other teachers might also find this a safe and comfortable space to practically live out their Christianity in relation to their occupation. Therefore, I will now discuss the theoretical framework of the concept of stewardship and then also explore the second Biblical principle, namely servant leadership. Through conversations with the participants the possibility of either idea being used as a possible platform from which they also can consider their own placement within the social construction of teaching in South Africa, will be evaluated.

4.6. A stewardship of ethical praxis

4.6.1. Journey through the Bible

The Christian principle of stewardship is based on the belief that human beings are created by the same God who created the entire universe and everything in it. To look after this Earth, and thus God's dominion, is the responsibility of the Christian steward. A Biblical view of stewardship is conventionally defined as "utilizing and managing all resources God provides for the glory of God and the betterment of His creation" (Bugg 1991:1303).

The central premise is thus the management of everything God brings into the believers' life in a manner that honours Him and impacts eternity. Traditionally the church frequently connects the idea of stewardship with money and the financial contribution that Christians make to the church and to the spreading of the Gospel of Christ.

There are twenty-six direct references to a “steward” or “stewardship” in the Old and New Testament. Hall (1991:10) clarifies that the Old Testament mostly refers to the Hebrew word “ashurbeth”, while the New Testament uses the term “oikonomia.” The direct translation of both these words is related to the management of the household of a ruler of a king.

The steward of the Old Testament is depicted as a servant, but not merely as a slave. Such a person was a foreman of sorts, responsible for making appropriate decisions, giving orders and generally managing and being in control of the household (Rowe 2009:15). Holding such a position implied a certain relationship of trust and shared responsibility between the steward and the owner of the household.

It is clear that although there is a close relationship between a steward and his master, the steward is ultimately responsible for his own actions and has to report back on all issues to his master. Should the steward not treat the household in a responsible way that is in accord with the wishes and orders of the owner, he could be punished or even replaced.

“This, then, is how you ought to regard us: as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed.” Here, in 1 Corinthians 4:1, Paul further applies this principal of stewardship to himself and to the church. Tooley (1966:75-76) explains that “we have here the most pregnant use of the metaphor in the New Testament and one which throws light on Paul’s understanding of leadership in the church.” He further urges Christians to remember that they should take care of each other and that they are thus partially responsible for each other in more areas than just finances. Herein we find the modern message of stewardship.

4.6.2. Faces of stewardship

Throughout the last few decades stewardship has found its way from the traditional view of it being concerned only with management of money and finances, to the heart of people’s religion. As a teacher I have the privilege of being a steward not only in my personal life or during Sunday’s church service when I give my offer, but also in all the relationships that I form with colleagues, parents and children. I have to, through the merging of my professional life and my spirituality, be a living example of God’s love to the world. In this way my role as a teacher offers me the opportunity to approach stewardship in more ways than just the obvious. It is therefore important that I, and all the other members of the choir of teachers, am accountable for our own conceptualizations of the different faces of stewardship.

4.6.2.1. Steward of material possessions

A large part of the traditional definition of stewardship focuses on the believer giving back a substantial part of his income as a way of showing gratitude towards God (Rowe 2009:15). Followers of Christ choose to still support their churches and missionary work in times when the whole world is under financial pressure. Teachers are not exempt from also being influenced by financial issues and concerns. Many of their conversations centre on teacher salaries and the lack of financial peace of mind that they often experience. Therefore, money and material possessions often have an impact on decisions teachers have to make about their lives. *Dries* shares his concern:

I have to retire in two years. Last year I realized that I do not even own a house. I have been living in the school hostel for all my working life. Where would I go? How would I manage to afford to buy a house on my pension?

Most teachers have to work hard to find a consensus between the realities and expenses of living and their desire to be stewards of God in every sense of the word. *Rita* shares:

I have left teaching several times for business opportunities that offer a better salary. But I keep on coming back, so I have to admit that God wants me here. I could not get myself to work for money rather than for the emotional reward that teaching brings.

4.6.2.2. Steward of the environment

Schools share in the responsibility of teaching children how to improve the quality of our environment, to decrease pollution and help the earth to be more capable of sustaining natural ecosystems. Children need to learn how to meet the energy demands of our modern lifestyles and minimize the harmful effects of climate changes. Promoting recycling and fostering a love for the environment from a young age enables a teacher to act as a steward of the environment. *Henriëtte* explains:

I use my role as a biology teacher to create opportunities to remind children about the miracle of God's creation and their responsibility to look after those creations.

God has entrusted to us the responsibility of being stewards of the resources and creatures of this planet. When we, as teachers, shape, refine and creatively utilize the minerals, plants and animals that God has placed at our disposal and we are then accountable for the results (Sorley 2011:137).

4.6.2.3. Steward of time

Ephesians 5:15-17 calls on Christians not to spend their time like heathens, but rather to live according to the will of God (Cunningham 1987:59). Brian Edgar (2003:130) reminds us that, in their role as stewards, Christians have the responsibility to spend their time as wisely as they can and to ensure that they set time apart to work towards having an intimate and personal relationship with God.

Klara wonders if she is always keeping God in her focus when she plans her day:

How much time do I spend on trivial matters while I could have been working on reaching more souls? Do I make the best use of the time I have at school to be a living example of a steward and child of God?

On the other hand being a steward of time can be a big challenge for the teacher dedicated to his work and his own family. Such teachers want to give their utmost in both their areas of life but sometimes find themselves juggling too many balls at once. *Borries* can identify with this predicament:

I feel guilty towards my family because of all the hours of potentially good family time that I have to spend on school work. I often feel like the school is stealing my children's time.

The challenge is therefore to find the balance between all different areas of life and to strive towards being accountable to yourself, your colleagues, family and foremost to God for the way in which you spend your time.

4.6.2.4. Steward of gifts

According to Dr Coenie Burger (2005:160) people receive different gifts and talents from God that add to the richness of their lives. Christians have the responsibility to embrace the diversity of these gifts and to use them to become effective stewards for the kingdom of Christ. Being a

steward of gifts also implies that Christians have to be stewards of the fruit of the Spirit, namely "love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23). Schools provide a context where children can learn to grow and share this fruit with others, something that many children do not see being done in their own homes.

As previously mentioned, a teacher is very often the only example of living out such values that a child is exposed to. Mia reiterates:

Teachers are very often the only Christians that certain children come in contact with and we therefore have to be accountable for the example we set and the image we project by using the gifts that we have been blessed with.

Being a good teacher is also a spiritual gift in itself. God has bestowed many different gifts on people and having the ability to teach, to interact with people, to have empathy and to care can all be seen as spiritual gifts. As a child of God a teacher is therefore under the distinct command to use these gifts to the service of His Kingdom and stand in duty of God to prepare children to become part of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:7; Romans 12:6 and 1 Peter 4:10).

In the same way my body can also be used in stewardship and to the honour of God. Caring for myself and my body is not a selfish act, but is included in God's will for the lives of His children (Giles 2007:2492). Dinelia explains:

I sometimes feel that my own body is betraying me. My body just cannot always keep up with my brain anymore. I have to make peace with the reality of aging and therefore I have to take extra care and responsibility to look after my physical wellness.

Stewardship thus includes all aspect of a human being's physical capabilities, including physical, mental and emotional components.

In the same way my mind and my intellectual abilities are therefore also gifts from God for which I have to take responsibility. The way in which I utilize the talents that God has blessed me with is directly related to me being a steward and a practical theologian in my class. Even the undertaking of this research study thus becomes an act of stewardship.

4.6.2.5. Steward of life

God gives each human being unique opportunities which occur in specific situations and contexts. An essential part of stewardship of life is making wise decisions about how to most effectively use such opportunities (Armstrong & Ohlson 2003:34). All teachers can testify to countless opportunities where they used the chance to influence children's situation or decisions, or where they only later recognized that such an opportunity had presented itself. Being a steward of life motivates teachers to be sensitive to such situations and to use every opportunity to its fullest potential.

4.6.2.6. Steward of knowledge

Proficient teachers will constantly be evaluating their own levels of expertise and search for ways to use their unique physical, mental and emotional abilities to improve their knowledge. Being aware of my own set of skills can identify areas in which I, as a teacher and as a Christian, need to improve. Through prayer and contemplation I can ask God to enlighten and guide me in these areas that need improvement.

All teachers possess a certain amount of knowledge about their chosen subject that they need to convey to their learners in the most effective way possible. Not only are teachers responsible for building a base of external knowledge in children, but they should also inspire learners towards a process of lifelong learning and foster and inspire children to create a love for learning (Nicoll & Fejes 2011:403).

Daleen says:

As teachers, we are entrusted with helping to develop the knowledge, wisdom, and understanding that students will carry with them in the years ahead. I am accountable to my students to do my best to prepare them in part for what lies ahead.

4.6.2.7. Steward of the Gospel

In 2 Corinthians 5:19-20 Paul explains that the message of reconciliation that God has meant for the whole world to share has been entrusted to the church (Hall 1991:101). The church has the obligation to share the love, mercy and gospel of Jesus Christ with the rest of the world. In a way schools, and per implication teachers, have that same responsibility. "The steward in the biblical

tradition is not first of all an individual but a community” (Hall 1991:132). The way in which teachers, individually and as a faculty, deal with that responsibility becomes an issue of stewardship. *Onnie* testifies:

In my school most teachers believe that we are sowing the seed and God is going to let those seeds grow.

Spreading the gospel in such a way has always been a cornerstone of the Christian faith and a primary task that God has imparted on His children. Not only are Christians tasked to proclaim the love of God through the words they speak, but also through their actions. The responsibilities that schools have in advancing the Gospel of Jesus Christ have increased exponentially since the perception that schools can be seen as the primary educators of children have become generally accepted. *Jack* understands this pressure on teachers:

It is becoming more common to see how parents are losing control over their children. A shocking amount of children will only ever hear about the Lord from their schools. That makes our responsibility so much bigger.

Louw concurs:

This is exactly why I am forced to embrace my stewardship and make God a reality for every single child.

4.6.2.8. Steward of relationships

Both stewardship and education are corporate acts. When a group of people bring together their gifts, it soon becomes evident that what might be impossible to one person becomes possible to a group who stand together under the grace and guidance of God.

To have an attitude of stewardship requires a genuine involvement with and concern for that which is entrusted to your care. Christian stewards speak the truth in love and hold one another to the very highest standards. As previously mentioned, as stewards teachers can also be there to emotionally support one another in the sharing of issues that cause stress and burnout in their lives. *Helmine* explains:

I cannot imagine not having colleagues that I could go to at any time. We try to have coffee together at least once a month, we have a ladies' weekend

every year where we go away together, laugh together and support each other through the good and the bad.

Sharing the responsibility of being stewards in our classrooms, on school grounds, in the staff room and in our interaction with parents, creates a mutual platform for teachers where they can reflect and dream together. In the same sense it creates the potential for the release of energy, work force and resources that can enhance the effort of the individual teacher to endorse the love and grace of God in the classroom.

It is important to note that teachers also have an impact outside the borders of the classroom or even the gates of their school. This eventually flows through into the cumulative and larger society in which they live and teach (Hall 2009:37).

4.6.3. Stewards in the light of the cross

In the New Testament Jesus Christ displays a new societal model of stewardship through his devotion and righteousness. Jesus never considered Himself to be the focal point of His work. He was obedient to His master and responsible for His master's interests on earth. Traditional theology paints Jesus Christ as king, priest and prophet, but practical theology awards us the freedom to also consider the example that Jesus set as a steward.

Cooper-White (2009:202) explains that as Jesus was suffering an excruciating crucifixion on Golgotha, at a time when He had every reason to be concerned with himself, He was still more focused on giving to and caring for other people. "When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, 'Woman, here is your son' and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother'" (John 19:26-27).

It would be a modernistic outlook to simply consider Jesus Christ only as an example of what a steward should be (Fransen 2005:29). A postfoundationalist approach to practical theology would look beyond the example and realize that "it is the prior stewardship of Jesus into which, through the Spirit and through faith we are initiated" (Hall 1991:44).

In this way, we are charged to remember that everything is a generous gift from God and that all we have, not only material things but our bodies, minds, souls and even our human relationships are gifts from the hand of God. Jesus reiterates the importance of handling these gifts in a responsible way through the parables he shares in the New Testament.

4.6.4. The parable of the talents

The broader concept of stewardship is illustrated in the parable that Jesus tells about the talents in Matthew 25:14-30. Chenoweth (2005:61) explains that in Biblical times a talent was the equivalent to fifteen years' worth of salary or thirty-six kilograms of silver. It is therefore understandable that the servants in this parable might have felt slightly overwhelmed by the thought of being entrusted with so much money. But throughout the telling of the allegory Jesus makes it clear that the size of the gift is not the important variable. What matters is what each servant does with what he has been given.

The reader might initially think that this parable refers only to the dispensing of specific amounts of money, but by implication it refers more to our abilities and gifts. While the first servant is given more than double what the second servant is given, they are both commended with the exact same words, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness" (Matthew 25:21, 23). From this it can be derived that, on the day of reckoning, the master will not ask what an individual have done with what they did not have. He will only be concerned with what a person did with the gifts that He has chosen to confer upon them.

This parable clarifies that people are accountable and responsible to God for the way they use the resources they are blessed with. Individuals are expected to "steward" or "manage" their talents for God who has bestowed these upon them for exactly this purpose. Cunningham (1987:18) and Hall (1991:39) agree with this message that humans are meant to treat the abilities they are blessed with, with responsibility and with the same values as that of the owner.

When the servant who had buried the money began offering explanations and excuses, the master simply refused to accept them. Instead, he rebuked the lazy servant and punished him severely. The master in this story is sketched as a generous man, but also as a man who holds his servants accountable. This third servant is not judged for doing dreadful or unscrupulous things; he is judged for doing nothing. He did not lie to his master, steal his possessions, defraud him or made him guilty of corruption and unethical practices. He merely did not do anything with the talents that he was blessed with.

As I was writing this, I found myself contemplating this parable and wondering about teachers who have lost the joy for teaching. I was concerned about those individuals who was just "doing

their job”, just going through the motions of teaching. I found myself worried about those who no longer have the heart to sing in the choir, or does not want the responsibility of being in charge of the gifts that they have been entrusted with.

They do not seem to have a sense of passion for their work anymore and no energy to be stewards of the talents that they have received. They could probably read all available material on stewardship and even still know in their hearts that they want to live out their calling as stewards; they truly want to be obedient to God. But through circumstances they have become the third servant of the parable.

Have stress and burnout caused them to bury their talent? What is going to happen to these teachers who cannot muster the courage to dig up their talent and use it in their classrooms every day when they are held accountable by God? Are they, like the servant in the parable, on their way to being punished for not utilizing their talents anymore? Or does the grace of God have a role to play in the predicament that these people face? Can this save them from possibly feeling cut off from the body of Christ in their schools and communities, from not feeling like a servant worthy of being blessed with talents?

I found myself speculating about the role that gaining knowledge about practical theology and pastoral care could play in these teacher’s lives. Could enough support help these teachers to find their voices again? Could the desire to teach be rekindled in such a way that they would want to dig up their talent and start over?

Because stewardship and accountability are not individual assignments, I share in the burden of these teachers who have buried their single talent. Part of my personal stewardship with my given talents might include supporting those who have lost their voices, who feel marginalized and overwhelmed by the responsibilities of being Christian stewards at school.

This puts stewardship in a category that expects more from a person than just accepting responsibility for certain areas, instead it creates a purpose. God bestows these talents upon us not as an act of generosity, but as an act of trust. In this way Christians become responsible for the “whole family of humanity” (Hall 1991:37). In their book “Staying on the road less travelled: fulfilling a vocation”, Keith Miller and Ruth Miller (1997:212) see stewardship as

a worldview that encompasses all of life... including what we feel (e.g., arts, aesthetics, relationships, worship), what we think (e.g. philosophy, theology,

history, science), and what we do (e.g. technology, work, finances, social action, spiritual disciplines).

4.6.5. A vehicle of God's grace in the classroom

If I regard myself and my colleagues as stewards, it means that we ought to relinquish the right to believe that all authority at the school revolves around us. If we see ourselves as stewards for the Kingdom of Christ, then God is in control of everything that happens at our school; from the academic aspect to every emotional and social interaction we as teachers have with children. Sergiovanni (1992:270) writes, “the leadership that counts in the end, is the kind that touches people differently. It taps their emotions, appeals to their values and responds to their connection with other people. It is morally-based leadership – a form of stewardship”.

The interaction between praxis and theory in the practical theological domain then urges people to question the dominant discourses even further. Putting the Biblical principles and understanding of stewardship in practice in a classroom means that, in their work as a teacher, an individual is to use the talents and gifts that God has given to them in a responsible way.

My own focus is set on living out my faith in a practical and unselfish way (Van der Merwe & Vos 2002:370). My attention cannot only be set on meeting academic standards; I am in service of a higher power. In the same sense the glory of the achievements I experience at school must solely be awarded to God. When the Lord becomes my ultimate focus it also becomes the reason why I keep singing in the choir of teachers. It gives me a reason to go back every day, regardless of the issues that cause stress and burnout in my life.

Margaret agrees:

If I wasn't a Christian I would have left teaching many years ago. God keeps me focused on my purpose and on the gifts that I have a responsibility to use.

This same principle applies to many of her fellow choir members who see themselves as living out the many faces of stewardship on the battlegrounds that schools can sometimes become. Teachers who see themselves as stewards will have a different kind of relationship with the

children in their class than a teacher who simply sees him- or herself as a conveyer of academic knowledge. *Louw* explains:

In my class I consider myself to be a father. I want my pupils to feel safe and secure. Children who feel secure will feel loved. I feel safe and secure in the knowledge that my Father will always protect me. I have the responsibility, in following the example that Jesus have set, to create that safe space for the children in my class.

All children and most adults will be able to share detailed accounts and anecdotes about teachers who have influenced their lives. During those times their school became more than just a place of learning; it turned into a community where people touched the hearts of other people.

4.6.6. Stewardship is about transformation, not about organisational survival

If you ask many teachers what they do, the answers will not be “I teach”, they will rather say “I am a teacher.” The difference in response is semantic, yet subtle and powerfully important. The social construction of these words carries exceptional meaning. To teach means that it is simply a job that you do, a professional qualification that you have and a skill that you possess. Using the phrase “I teach” suggests an action that is initiated and then completed. It calls for a direct object, namely the conveyance of academic knowledge. To teach can therefore easily become impersonal, the children easily forgotten and the focus solely on the curriculum.

On the other hand however, the statement “I am a teacher” implies something inherent and continuing, something which is not only a job description, but engrossing and encompassing. To be a teacher is to embrace a certain identity, to let your whole being voluntarily be labelled with the connotation and discourses attached to being an educator.

Rather than just setting test papers or preparing great lessons, the caring teacher tries to look through their student’s eyes, to struggle with them as subjects in search of their own destinies, their own way of making sense of the world. *Greene* (1973) refers to this mind-set as “connected teaching” in which care is practiced not from an expert, hierarchal position, but from a position of being alongside a child.

Schools in South Africa are caught up in the grip of politics and forced changes. Children and their needs are often left behind in order to meet all administrative demands. Teachers who see themselves as stewards work hard at still doing what they believe schools are there to do. For them it is about investing in children's future, about guiding learners to discover the gifts and talents that God has bestowed upon them.

They struggle to do so in classes filled with individuals from other religions or even children who did not practise any religion at all. Such teachers find their inspiration in the situations they have to deal with every day. Through their endeavours they discover that investing their time, money, energy and gifts are closely related to their ultimate goal on earth, namely to honour God through everything that they do. They stand not only in service of the South African Department of Education; they stand in service of their God. Peck (1978) defines such a love as "an extending of oneself for the growth of the other."

4.7. Letting my life speak

As a teacher, I have definitely experienced some disillusionment, but throughout the years I have refused to become permanently disillusioned. I have recognized that external forces can contribute to my sense of occupational wellbeing and even cause severe unhappiness. So throughout this journey and through contemplating my contribution towards the song that the teachers in my school are singing, I am attempting to maintain a sense of equilibrium.

Most teachers I know attempt to find the extraordinary in the ordinary, the fascinating in the mundane. Teachers who can capture a student's imagination, who can lead a student to an understanding of a concept or who can show a student how to solve an equation and then watch in awe as that student applies his newly acquired knowledge to an even more complex problem. Such teachers who can awaken a student to the beauty of poetry or music or art are the ones that we should recognize as excellent teachers.

Most never receive a public award for their teaching, but almost all receive treasured private rewards in the cards, letters and notes sent by students (often years after the child had finished school). *Noreen* explains how social networks like *Facebook* has expanded the contact she has with her former students:

I am often amazed at who contacts me through Facebook! I am so proud to see the successful people that these children have become... some even has families and careers of their own by now.

As discussed in a previous chapter, the living human web can be expanded through the use of social networks. The positive feedback that teachers get in this way motivates them to keep on connecting with children. As a result of such correspondence, their belief in education and themselves are validated, even if it is by adults who sat in their classrooms many years ago and may now be geographically separated from them by thousands of kilometres.

The future is inherent in a teacher's vocabulary. They plan for the next quarter, the next term, the next year. When teachers teach "for the kids", they also believe that teaching is a public service and that social transformation will result from their teaching. Christian teachers uphold the vision that spiritual changes will come about as a result of the time, love and energy they invest in the children they work with. This effort often surpasses the frustrations that they have to come to terms with.

As a teacher I have learned that there are few definitive answers but there are many questions. I am constantly told that my questions and concerns are important, but I never get answers. Every year I am faced with more challenges, and the answers become even less satisfying.

After saying the abovementioned words, *Piet* also said that he tries hard to make peace with the situation at hand; that he curbs his protests and instead, channels his energy towards being a steward in his classroom.

His love for God and for children motivates him to overlook the frustrations and to focus on the opportunities that his occupation affords him to spread the gospel of the Lord. Not only does teachers like *Piet* act as leaders in their communities, but they are also, due to their commitment to stewardship, often acting as servants. Through this realization I found the connection to the second Biblical concept that might motivate some teachers to keep singing in the choir, namely servant leadership.

4.8. Servant leadership

4.8.1. The story of servant leadership

The concept of servant leadership was first identified by Robert Greenleaf in his seminal work “The servant as leader” in 1970. He makes it clear that at the heart of servant leadership is the desire that other people’s highest priority needs are met (Crippen 2005:3). It refers to a natural desire to serve, rather than just to lead.

Greenleaf (Spears 1998a:3) tells the story of how he discovered the concept of servant-leadership through reading a little book called “Journey to the East” by Herman Hesse (1956). The book tells the story of a small group of men who set out on a long journey. A man named Leo accompanied them on their trip; his job was to care for the band of men by doing all of the menial chores and thereby ensuring their comfort. Halfway through their journey Leo disappeared from the touring party. At this point the group fell into disarray without him and later they simply abandoned their journey.

Many years later the narrator of the story again encountered Leo. He was astounded to realize that Leo was the ostensible head of the order that sponsored that initial journey. He was the leader, but his nature was that of a servant. His leadership was bestowed upon him and could be taken away by the same group of men. Leo had a sincere desire to serve the men that he travelled with. But he chose to be a servant first by taking care of their basic needs while they were on the journey.

Greenleaf believes that the message of the story was that one first has to serve society and through one’s service one might then be recognized as a leader. He concludes that leadership therefore always must be about service (Spears 1998a:81).

4.8.2. Leading with a servant heart in a school

Crowther, Ferguson & Hann (2009) recognizes the need for teachers to lead with a servant heart. Although several articles and dissertations have probed the concept of servant-leadership,^{xxvii} the body of research related to servant-leadership with specific focus on educational institutions is small. Much of the data have come from the world of business, i.e. Bennis and Goldsmith (1997:24); Pinchot (1998); Autry (2001) and De Pree (1992).

^{xxvii} See <http://www.greenleaf.org/leadership/read-about-it/Servant-Leadership-Articles-Book-Reviews.html> for a list of relevant research.

Spears (1998b:5-9) also studied appropriate literature and subsequently identified ten characteristics of servant-leadership, namely (1) listening, (2) empathy, (3) healing, (4) awareness, (5) persuasion, (6) conceptualization, (7) foresight, (8) commitment to the growth of others, (9) building community and (10) stewardship. In the following section the definition and practical implementation of each of these characteristics will be investigated.

An interdisciplinary mode of working enables a practical theologian to investigate the possibility of taking these principles of servant leadership in the world of business and economics and expanding on how they can be applied in schools. I found the affirmation for the link between my ways of thinking about teaching as a form of stewardship and also possibly as servant leadership when I explored the context in which these principles, in connection to practical theology, came alive in the stories of teachers. Evaluating the different facets of servant leadership sheds light on how it can be applied within classrooms.

4.8.2.1. Listening

This first tenet of servant leadership embodies a deep commitment towards listening to others and to be focused on understanding the communication of others (Greenleaf 1991; Secretan 1996; Frick & Spears 1996; Bennis & Goldsmith 1997; Autry 2001).

Efficient teachers are great talkers; it is their job to spend most of their time talking. But, it is equally crucial for them to be good listeners. Not only should teachers have the ability to listen to others, to have discourses with people (Spears 1998b:5), but teachers should also spend as much time as possible listening to their own inner voices. They must constantly assess the role that they are playing in the choir and evaluate the contribution that their listening is making to the communal song sung by teachers all over.

4.8.2.2. Empathy

Secretan (1996:240) describes empathy as “identifying with the thoughts, feelings, and perspectives of others” and suggests that “civility is built upon empathy” (Secretan 1996:78). Starratt (2004:86) explains his conceptualization of empathy as “being present” or in the moment with someone else. “This being present is also an unspoken message, responding to the other from your own spontaneous authenticity” (Starratt 2004:87).

Teachers therefore need to be empathetic not only to the needs of their students, but also to those of their colleagues. When we are stewards of relationships we share the responsibility for

each other's emotional health. *Pienaar* suspects that there is some sort of special camaraderie between teachers:

It is as if we know what the other person is going through, there is an unnamed bond or alliance of sorts between teachers.

If a teacher then, as part of the choir, realize that one of their fellow members are not singing the way that they used to, they have the obligation, as a child of God, to act upon their concerns and offer support to such a person.

4.8.2.3. Healing

The servant leader has the impending potential to heal his own pain and that of others (Spears 1998b:7). Goodlad (1994:72) writes at length about the emotional health of schools, he claims that "schools are like living organisms, with characteristics that can be described in varying degrees as healthy or unhealthy. Schools, as independent cultures, must assume responsibility for their health and be held accountable."

The same goes for staff rooms where teachers spend a lot of their time. After a long morning of teaching and interacting only with children, they often yearn for adult conversation. But more times than not, staff room conversations also just revolve around children and their antics, good and bad. Instead of teachers being a healing source to each other, they end up just contributing to the factors that cause stress and burnout. *Elize* admits:

I sometimes walk out of the staff room after break and all that we talked about were naughty children, so I feel more tired and frustrated than I did before break had even started!

Teachers should rather be motivated and reminded to work together to create a healthy environment for authentic learning and teaching, to create a safe space where they can motivate and inspire each other and be a reminder of the reasons they choose to stay in teaching.

Being a practical theologian means that I am as much responsible for the emotional and spiritual wellbeing of my colleagues as I am for that of the children that I encounter at school.

Helmine shares her experiences of break time conversations:

I sometimes cannot wait for break just to have a proper conversation. The sound of laughing coming from that staff room is often like someone throwing a life saving raft at me just before I drown!

4.8.2.4. Awareness

Before a teacher can contribute to the healing of others or act in sincere empathy, they have to possess an acute awareness of people around them, as well as a self-awareness that leaves them in tune with their own emotions and experiences.

Spears (1998b:6) explains that one develops such an awareness through self-reflection, by listening to what others tell us about ourselves, through being continually open to learning and by making the connection from what we know to what we say and do. *Marna* believes that her strongest tool as a teacher is her gut-feeling. She confirms:

I always listen to my intuition. As a Christian I know that it is the Holy Spirit that is guiding me towards the children that need my attention.

Santi agrees and shares the story of a grade eleven boy who always look tired and never did his homework.

He never made eye contact with anybody and always looked tired and sad. After asking around about his situation at home, I started suspecting that he might be coming to school hungry every day.

She started building a rapport with this boy and after some time he trusted her enough to confide in her about all his troubles at home. Since that day she packs an extra lunch box every day. As a result, his marks have improved substantially and he will even, on a good day, bless her with a slight smile. If *Santi* was not willing to be a servant leader, she would most likely not have been receptive to this child's silent cries for help.

4.8.2.5. Persuasion

The servant leader should seek to convince others, rather than to coerce compliance and obedience. Transparent, fair, and consistent action by teachers will create a learning space where children can feel free and safe. Teachers, who inspire children to learn rather than force them to do so, create lifelong learners.

Purkey and Siegel (2002:177) describes “the little nameless acts that reveal a true leader’s character, inspire trust and respect among colleagues.” That can be seen in the mundane and unimportant deeds that servant leaders do every day, it is tangible in the way that they interact with colleagues and learners alike. The result is that learners will obey the rules and work hard academically because they want to please their teacher.

Teachers may not always see the effects that their servant leadership has on other people’s lives. Children do not always give feedback about a positive influence that a teacher had on his or her life. *Meneer* has realized that a teacher must not stop trying, even though they do not always firsthand experience the fruit of their labour:

I have seen countless times how I thought that a specific grade nine child just had no future prospects. I was convinced that he would never be able to take responsibility for his actions or for himself. I sometimes even thought there was no way that he would one day pass grade twelve. But a few years later, when that child did reach grade twelve or even a few years after that, I was astounded at how he has developed and grown. All the input that my colleagues and I have put into that child was worth it in the end. Because we did not give up, he was ready to face the world. That is the way in which God works in schools.

4.8.2.6. Conceptualization

The servant leader needs to aspire towards nurturing their own abilities to still dream great dreams. A teacher who has dreams for his/her students, has hope for the future of the children they teach and will also have a vision of what they would like to see their learners become. They will learn to skill to conceptualize new ideas to improve their own lives as well as those of the learners they come into contact with.

For teachers to develop their identity as servant leaders they need to find opportunities to reflect not only on “what they do” but also “why they do it” and “where to next”? These reflections are essential for clarifying their actions, validating the decisions they make and using this as a foundation to conceptualize new ideas from. Groome (2001:161-162) refers to such reflections on actions as “praxis.” Praxis is a form of reflective practice that allows a person to examine his or

her life through contemplation and to find expression for that reflection and to imagine possibilities for the future (Groome 2001:164).

Christian teachers might even be blessed to become part of the spiritual growth of a learner or even a colleague. They must therefore always be acutely aware of the obligation that they have to spread the Gospel through their words and actions.

4.8.2.7. Foresight

According to Glenn, Gordon and Florescu (2008:foreword), foresight “means to systematically explore, create, and test both possible and desirable futures to improve decisions.” In other words, this refers to the ability to foresee or predict the likely outcomes of situations. According to Greenleaf (1991:18)

foresight means regarding the events of the instant moment and constantly comparing them with a series of projections made in the past and at the same time projecting future events - with diminishing certainty as projected time runs out into the indefinite future.

One of the greatest challenges in teaching is finding creative ways to keep presenting lessons in an innovative and enthusiastic way when the learning material often stays the same year after year. *Hannelie* explains:

It is the new faces sitting in front of me that energize me to present work as if for the first time.

Teachers need enough foresight to anticipate new and innovate ways of teaching and in creating opportunities for children they deal with, to grow. This concept will be conceptualized and explored in greater detail in chapter 5.

4.8.2.8. Commitment to the growth of people

De Pree (1992:12) reminds readers that “the signs of outstanding leadership appear primarily among the followers. Are the followers reaching their potential? Are they learning? Serving?” Starratt (2004:109) believes that teachers should challenge their students to take more responsibility for authentic learning and for accepting civic responsibility.

As previously mentioned, more and more teachers are confronted with being primary educators rather than just being academic instructors. They also seem to have a lot in common with the Leo character in our story; most teachers are not always applauded and recognized for the leadership skills they display. They are more often confronted with negative feedback and criticism from parents than they are with praise. In this way the education that they provide in so many more areas than what they get paid for, goes unnoticed.

Most devoted teachers can attest to their desire to spend more time on the children who do what is expected of them, who do not find themselves in trouble, who almost becomes invisible in class because they never give the teacher reason to personally engage with them. Teachers are always very thankful for these types of children, because they have to spend all their available time on the academically and behaviourally challenging pupils. But, when they have a minute to regroup and look back on a year that have gone by, they will almost always express regret at not making time to engage in a conversation with the positive child, at not complimenting them more and at not motivating them to develop their potential even further. *Bets* concurs:

I become frustrated because I do not get around to spending time with the bright stars. I spend all my time doing remedial work on academic problems or attempting to rehabilitate behavioural issues in children.

Santi has made a commitment to herself that in the next year she was planning to actively spend more time on these types of children:

I am going to use one afternoon a week to phone the parents of positive and hardworking children. I want to thank them for the education that they are giving them. I want to tell them stories about their children that would make them proud.

4.8.2.9. Building community

As previously discussed, the servant leader should seek to identify some means of building a community of care within their school. Approaches to building such a community include giving back through service to the community; investing financially into the community and caring about one's community. Novak (2002) encourages schools to move towards being an independent community through their service and real life problem solving. He also urges parents and members of the larger society to become part of such a community.

It is also important to acknowledge that the servant leadership quality of a teacher should not only be contained to their individual schools. The question can therefore be asked in what way the church (as a whole and as individual denominations) can support teachers in their calling to be practical theologians and in their fight against stress and burnout. Are churches involved enough to really identify the needs that the teachers in their communities of faith have?

4.8.2.10. Stewardship

Fullan (2003:21) suggests that teachers should mull over the role they play in making a difference in their school as a whole. De Pree (1992:13) emphasizes the need for teachers to also make a contribution to the larger society when he states that “the art of leadership requires us to think about the leader-as-steward in terms of relationships: of assets and legacy, of momentum and effectiveness, of civility and values.” Sergiovanni (1992:139) explains that stewardship “involves the leader’s personal responsibility to manage her or his life and affairs with proper regard for the rights of other people and for the common welfare.” The concept of stewardship, as deconstructed in detail in the previous section, merges well with my personal framework of teaching and living. In addition with servant leadership it creates a harmonious song with the voice of practical theology in the music piece that is my life.

4.8.3. The symbioses of servant leadership and practical theology

Both stewardship and servant leadership have many different dimensions that touch on and encompass all aspects of human behaviour. Practical theology is also intimately concerned with the human being’s journey with life and with God. The social constructions and discourses that people use to order their professional and personal lives are therefore also connected to their spirituality. Being a steward or a servant leader can therefore not only be confined to certain or even convenient areas of someone’s life, but should be visible in all areas.

The servant leadership and discipleship identity of teachers will also at times be tested because not all people they come in contact with are going to be Christians. Ganzevoort (2004:53) anticipated this when he said that “practical theologians will need to develop both explicit or Christian and implicit or secular language” (Ganzevoort 2004:3).

In the world of practical theology the ultimate example of servant leadership set by Jesus Christ provides the guidelines and paradigm around which individuals, in this case teachers, can shape their models of practice. Moving around in both the realms of praxis and theology will bring about

transformation and a lived-through spirituality in teachers that will filter through to colleagues and to the children in their schools.

Greenleaf refers to how servant leader teachers are viewed by others when he states that “effective servant leaders can be so subtle about it that all anybody is likely to see is the result. They don’t see the cause” (Greenleaf 2002:151). Just as the constant interchange between praxis and theory form the foundation that practical theology is built upon, the teacher should also be aware of the interchange between their personal and occupational worlds. Being a servant leader means that a person cannot separate those worlds. If I am a Christian in my life outside of school, I cannot but be a Christian at school too. Every person will therefore always be placed somewhere “on the spiral between theology on the one hand, and theory and praxis on the other” (Louw 1999:119).

This chapter portrayed a multitude of voices being situated at different places on this continuum and singing about having a sense of calling towards their specific occupation. The concept of calling has worn many different jackets since the times of Luther and those who criticized his views on calling, to the current postmodern approach to the word where people have the freedom to create a social construction of the word that fits into their own preferred realities. Concepts such as stewardship and servant leadership were offered as alternatives for using the word calling. It turned out that these Biblical notions fit well into the epistemology of the teachers taking part in this research journey. When teachers are obedient to the voice of God, they become a part of the final song. They then realize that living means being called, that true stewardship means to be responsible for your choices and that servant leadership can sometimes be the antidote against burnout. It is in responding to these commissions from God that teachers open themselves up to not only be children of God, but to be contributors to the Kingdom of Christ.

The following chapter will therefore, in further detail, explore the practical implication of inviting God into the classrooms and staff rooms of teachers taking part in this journey. A group of participants share their experiences of considering their spirituality as being intrinsically part of their professional lives and personal identities. They explore the effect that being a Christian and practical theologian have on their experiences of stress and burnout. They further give witness to the ways in which assuming an identity as a steward of God have a direct influence on their relationships with the children they teach, their colleagues and even with themselves, and thereby inspire them to act as agents of hope.

Chapter 5

Voices from the staff room

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!" (Isaiah 6:8).

I know where I come from... I know I am not alone... I know I must be here (Prof Jonathan Jansen, inaugural lecture as the 13th Rector of the University of the Free State, October 18th, 2009).

5.1. The theological habitus of this research journey

Habitus refers to "a disposition of the mind and heart from which action flows naturally" (Forrester 2000:5). Such action therefore does not originate from rational thinking or logical interest, but rather from the depths of the personality and the soul.

I am in die midst of a personal journey into the reality of stress and burnout in the lives of teachers, into the possibility of them being practical theologians in their classrooms everyday and an investigation into the rewards they find in being stewards for the Kingdom of Christ. My experiences on this journey resonate with the words of Haines (1954:32) where he claims that "I do not bring back from a journey quite the same self that I took."

I also had to be transparent about the fact that through the questions I asked, or not asked, I had an influence on the outcome of the research. I did not enter this research as a blank slate, even though I was committed to ethical ways of knowing, as described in chapter 1.

I am also evolving and growing as a person, as a teacher and especially in my relationship with God. As I have explained in chapter 1, I am committed to research that constructs knowledge according to the stories that my fellow travellers on the research journey have to tell. Therefore the direction of this journey is dictated to a large extent by the stories that the

participants bring to the table, literature that presented itself during my search through available articles and books, as well as reading material suggested by my promoter, colleagues and other researchers.

In the words of Nouwen as reflected in Yancey (2001:285):

Most students think that writing means writing down ideas, insights, visions. They feel that they must first have something to say before they can put it down on paper. For them writing is a little more than a pre-existent thought... but with this approach true writing is impossible. Writing is a process in which we discover what lives in us. The writing itself reveals what is alive... the deepest satisfaction of writing is precisely that it opens up space within us of which we were not aware before we started to write. To write is to embark on a journey whose final destination we do not know!

The second group of participants, who undertook this challenge to create a temporary destination for this research journey, went on a spiritual retreat during October 2011. This event provided a time, place and context for individuals to spend time alone or to reflect as part of a group on their daily situations and the influence that their Christianity have on their daily endeavours at school. It engaged people in a deeper understanding of who they were in relationship to God and one another and it challenged them to reflect on God's will for their lives. It also allowed teachers the opportunity to contemplate their methods of teaching and expand on their capacity to build "experiential knowledge" and complement their competence as teachers (Hackett 2007).

I found inspiration and guidance for the structure of such a retreat in the work of Parker Palmer who, in 2006, created the Centre for Courage and Renewal that provides retreats for teachers suffering from stress and burnout (Centre for Courage and Renewal 2006). Palmer's work is however purely secular and I had to spend a lot of time investigating and considering the possibilities that inviting practical theology to sing a leading voice in the content of the retreat, could open up.

Because this research was conceptualized as a participatory action research project, I could not simply define and formulate the subject matter of the whole weekend. I had to let go of my fear of failure and of not-knowing and depend on the participants to steer the conversations in the directions where

they had the greatest needs to go. As I am inherently a planner and find comfort in being prepared for all possible circumstances, it was hard to relinquish the ability to plan the retreat to the last minute to rest assured in the knowledge that all would go well.

I had to find peace and solace in the realization that although there were many excellent tools for conducting a successfully planned retreat, it was not the tool that was important - it was the process and the rich discussions and dialogues that would inevitably follow and thereby pave the way.

5.2. I teach... therefore I am

At the beginning of the retreat *Santi* shared the following well-known folk tale that became a strong metaphor for her life as a teacher:

Three men were busy with the tedious task of breaking up large boulders and rocks. A bystander asked the first man what he was busy with. "I am breaking up rocks," he said. He asked the second man the same question: "I am making bricks," he replied. Upon asking the third man the same question, he got the following answer. "I am building a temple."

What an extraordinary reply the third man had given. All three men had performed exactly the same physical task. The difference was in the way in which they had approached their assignment.

If I approach my work as a teacher as simply breaking up rocks, I will most likely not display great work ethic or experience any pride in my work. But if I see myself as building a temple, I take ownership of what I am doing. I see myself as being part of a bigger picture than simply bashing rocks. I am a steward, responsible for those rocks that will be turned into bricks and eventually become part of that special temple.

Astley (2002:126) states that "language is a complex, many-sided thing that can easily lead us astray." The development of the social construction discourse frees us to wonder whether, if there was such a difference in the implications of the answers the three men gave, there also

were such significant semantic differences between the following two sentences: “I teach” and “I am a teacher.”

Jack captures the essence of this difference:

When I say ‘I teach’ it refers to a job that I do, to a career path that I choose to follow. But when I say that ‘I am a teacher’ it is an identity that I assume. It refers to my calling to teach, to a way of life that I am proud to be identified with.

Santi compares this difference to the folk tale about the three men and their approach to their rocks:

When I say ‘I teach’, I am simply breaking up rocks. But when I claim to be a teacher, I am building a temple. I Peter 2:5 says, ‘You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.’ That is what I do when I say that ‘I am a teacher.’

Dorothy Emmett (1958:255) also uses a metaphor to explain that teaching is considered by a person with vocational interests as constituting more than carrying brick, mortar, and shovel. To her, it implies “being the architect of one’s classroom world” (Emmett 1958:255).

5.2.1. Who do I really work for?

I consider my career a part of my identity and because my identity is grounded in Christ, teaching also becomes a religious and spiritual act. If I consider myself to be a steward for the Kingdom of God, it changes my approach to my career. My life and my work as a teacher becomes a living testimonial to the love of God.

If I critically evaluate the system in which I operate and look at education in South Africa and the plight of our children through the eyes of God, I am busy with an act of practical theology. If that is what I do every day in my responsibilities as a teacher, then I am indeed a practical theologian.

Cobb (1993:1) affirms this statement when he argues that real Christian theology is not only a matter for professionals. According to him, every Christian is a theologian. In that way, every teacher has the right to call him- or herself a practical theologian.

Many teachers stand in service of God. They are ultimately accountable to God for all the actions and decisions that they make. Therefore they are not accountable towards a Government, the Department of Education or the Governing Body of the school where they teach. Whatever such teachers do, they do it firstly for God and then only to satisfy requirements set by these abovementioned authoritative structures.

Long and animated discussions on this topic lead the participants at the retreat to the realization that they could consider their daily duties in a new and different light. When they work for God they cannot but give their all and more. They cannot but take ownership of their tasks and see themselves as stewards. Then they do not merely work for a salary anymore, but for God. *Jo-Mari* shares her newly found understanding of this:

Now I will not mind putting in extra hours or walking the extra mile for a child, because I know that the input that I have in that child's life may have eternal value.

When a teacher approaches each new day in this manner, they do not find themselves concerned with only the academic lessons that they have to present to their pupils. *Fanie* reports:

With every conversation that I have with a child about any mundane subject or even about God, I am investing in his future. I am busy building temples every day.

A Christian teacher needs to be reminded that, regardless of the level of stress or burnout that they are confronted with, God has bestowed certain gifts upon them that they must use to His honour. Secondly, they have been placed at a specific school at this specific time by God because He has a task for them to complete. *Dries* concurs:

I was placed at this school for a reason. That's why my words and especially my deeds need to tell a story of my love for God. My pupils should see God in me every day. I can sense in the fabric of my daily life the extent to which

this job extends far beyond the theoretical education that I received at university.

5.2.2. From theory to practice

Reducing teaching to a set of methods and techniques composing only of pure academic knowledge and meta-narratives turns it into a modernistic practice that is set in stone. In this way teaching is limited to only being the dispensation of cognitive content, abridged to the provision of knowledge or the development of skills (Rowe 2004:4; Hackett & Lavery 2010:76). Should this have been true, teachers would have been well equipped for their tasks with merely the tools and skills that they have learned at college or university. But for the Christian teacher however, teaching is far more encompassing than simply the relaying of academic knowledge.

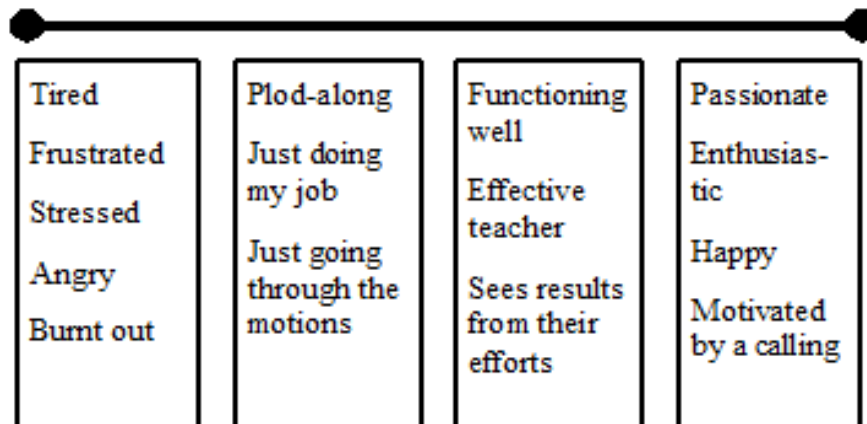
Bauer (2008:15) agrees and emphasizes the specific demands that God has placed in the hands of teachers. He then goes on to stipulate four characteristics that he would attribute to a teacher living up to their calling to be more than just the deliverers of theoretical knowledge (Bauer 2008:15-20):

- Effective teaching is born from a passion for teaching that becomes more powerful than the painful toil of teaching (2008:15). Teachers who feel called to live out their passion for children and their love for God will not mind going the extra mile for the wellbeing of the children that are placed in their care.
- Effective teaching will place emphasis on the learner, not on the teacher (Bauer 2008:15). The joy that a teacher experiences is not always directly linked to the excitement of the experience of teaching as such, but rather toward the event of being witness to another's learning.
- Effective teaching involves a commitment to the search for truth (Bauer 2008:15). Teaching from a calling involves equipping students, on a spiritual, emotional and intellectual level, to tease out and deconstruct presuppositions and to expose them to the possibility of being transformed through critical thinking.
- Effective teaching aims towards being event, not merely the communication of a body of knowledge (Bauer 2008:15). Learning is an experience that involves the whole person. A proficient teacher is a person who can not only teach well but also understands students and engages positively with them (Hartnett & Kline 2005:10; Lovat & Toomey 2007).

After a critical evaluation of these characteristics of an effective teacher and a subsequent comparison thereof to their own experiences of teaching, the participants at the retreat constructed a continuum on which they suspected that teachers placed with regards to the experiences of their career. A teacher's placement on this continuum would be an indication of their job satisfaction at a specific moment in time. They made it very clear that no person would be on the same place on that continuum for very long, placement can even change within minutes, depending on external and internal factors playing into the life of that specific individual.

The reasoning behind creating such a continuum was to not only assess themselves at the beginning of the retreat, but also to give them a goal to work towards. When one is clear on what the dominant story of your professional life is, it becomes easier to envision an alternative story that you would like to live by.

5.3. Placement on a dynamic continuum



Teachers finding themselves on the left side of the continuum will experience severe levels of stress and even burnout. They will struggle to notice the presence of God in their daily activities and will find it difficult to list positive aspects of their chosen career path. The second placement stipulates teachers who are doing what are expected of them, but who do not necessarily find much joy in their daily endeavours. They get the academic results and they have good organisational and administrative skills, but they would not necessarily walk the extra mile that goes beyond the basics that they get paid to do.

The third group of teachers is functioning well. For the greater part, they enjoy what they do. They are effective in the completion of their daily tasks and will sometimes find fulfilment from their

experiences at school. They experience some work engagement and have positive experiences at work.

Teachers finding themselves on the far right side of the continuum consider themselves happy in their chosen vocation. They are passionate, enthusiastic and fulfilled. They are stewards for their God. They consider themselves to work for Jesus Christ, rather than for human employers. Such teachers do not need to be reminded why they are still in teaching; they live that passion every single day. They consider it a privilege and they often find the energy to walk the extra mile for colleagues and children they work with.

As mentioned before, an individual's placement on this continuum is never static and permanent. It would unfortunately not be possible for an individual to always find him- or herself on the far right side. If that was possible, all teachers would be happy and content in their careers. But because the relationships between people are dynamic and physical circumstances change, it is imperative that people continually assess their placement and question the situations that prompts movement on this scale.

In chapter three of this dissertation the factors that induce stress and burnout in teacher's lives were investigated. These factors steal people's joy and prevent optimal functioning in their daily endeavours. Both internal and external factors influence an individual's placement on the continuum. Internal factors like being tired, overwrought, stressed and frustrated could cause a person to move more towards the left side, while a rewarding encounter with a child, positive feedback and emotional support could cause a person to shift more towards the right side of the continuum.

An awareness of having a purpose and calling will automatically position a teacher more firmly on the right side of the spectrum. Having a clear vision will empower a teacher to feel fulfilled and motivated. Prayer and spending time with the Lord also assist teachers in working towards staying on the right side rather than allowing external factors and causes of stress to compel them towards the left side of this job satisfaction continuum. *Rita* concludes:

Factors forcing me towards the left side are often external, while internal motivation moves me towards the right side of the continuum. That implies that I do have some form of control about where I find myself on the spectrum. I cannot always change external factors, but I do have a measure

of control about my internal factors, so I can indeed cause myself to improve my placement.

Jack agrees with Rita:

I am where God wants me to be. So I have a responsibility to do all in my power to remain on the right hand half of this continuum so that I can do my best for my Lord. I would like to believe that asking for His will in all my decisions, that asking Him to bless my daily work will help me to stay passionate. I often send up a quick prayer when I find myself in a difficult situation. Sometimes I don't even have the time to use words and construct sentences... I just sigh. I know that He understands my needs.

Another avenue of inquiry that could be explored is the relationship between this continuum and the concept of positive psychology, as explored in 3.8. Seligman (2002) offers practical and specific recommendations to progress along the continuum of happiness from the pleasant life to the good life and finally to the meaningful live. A teacher finding him- or herself mostly on the right side of the continuum of teacher effectiveness can thus challenge themselves to improving the level of happiness at which they function and therein find true fulfilment in their work. The reality is unfortunately that not all teachers find themselves on this right hand side for most of the time. They struggle and strive amidst the realities of their daily lives even though they yearn to experience true happiness and contentment.

5.3.1. "I am just a plod-along"

Borries honestly admits that he often finds himself on the negative, left side of this continuum:

I am just a plod-along. I try to do what I have to everyday, but I find myself in a rut. I am in a hole and I have no idea how to get out of it. I don't even move around on the continuum anymore, I am stuck on the far left. I hear everybody talking about having a calling, about being passionate and enthusiastic, but I can't relate with what they have to say. I want to relate. I want to know how it feels to remember why I became a teacher, but I have no idea how to get back to that happy place. That is what this retreat needs to help me do...

Kathy Weingarten (2004:70) understands this desperate call for empowerment and change when she tells the story about a farmer telling his neighbour about an experiment with feeding his chickens that he has been conducting to try and save money. He tells of how successful he has been, until, “just when I got ‘em on pure sawdust, they up and died!” This anecdote begs the question whether we, as teachers, have a responsibility to ensure that our colleagues get more to eat than sawdust? Do we have to be accountable to people like *Borries* who have become stuck on the left hand side of the continuum? Is it part of our calling to stewardship to compassionately address the inevitable toll that working with others exacts on some teachers?

Teachers like *Borries* have stopped being an active member of the choir a long time ago. He might still stand in the choir and be surrounded by singing neighbours, but he has lost his voice. It is up to him, with the support of colleagues, to find his voice again, to work towards confidently singing as loudly as he can. The next section will focus on the song that all the participants at the retreat sang at the beginning of their careers in teaching. Re-living such stories might remind some people of why they started on a career path of teaching in the first place and might bring about a realization of why they are still on that journey at the present moment in time. Reliving a few positive memories could even have an influence on an individual’s placement on the continuum.

5.4. Where our songs started

After school I completed a degree in History and then joined the Army. I could easily have been in the Army all my life – I loved the structure and routine – but then I married a Minister. My husband was called to a congregation in a very small town and as we all know, all towns have at least one school. So I started teaching...

Bets tells her story with a slight smile. She admits that she never would have considered teaching as a career option had it not been for her husband’s career guiding her in that direction. Many women can relate with her story. Many others can relate with *Piet’s* story.

I wanted to become an engineer. My marks were good enough and I got accepted into the program. But my parents did not have the financial means to send me to University. At that time I realized that I would have to find an alternative calling. My technical drawing teacher suggested that I apply for a

bursary to study teaching. At that time such bursaries were easier to come by. My initial plan was to study teaching, work for a few years until I have saved enough money to go back to University to become an engineer. I have never gone back. I have never had the desire to go back.

Madie tells a similar story:

I wanted to become a physiotherapist, but I was not as lucky as Piet. I did not get accepted to the course. I was devastated! At that stage applications for all other courses had already closed and all that was left was a BA degree followed by a post-graduate diploma in teaching. Today I am glad that things have worked out the way that they had. I love teaching. I will never know if I might have been an excellent physiotherapist, but I do know that I am a good teacher.

Eighty percent of the teachers who attended our retreat admitted that they had never even considered teaching as a career choice or now admit that they had found their way to teaching through some “coincidence.” Jo-Mari laughed when someone said these words:

Luckily we all know that there is no such a thing as coincidence. The Afrikaans word for coincidence is ‘toevallig’. If you dissect the word, it breaks down to ‘toe val lig’. I firmly believe that God is letting light fall on a situation and in that way He guides our way. He placed each of us here for a reason. I believe that the road I was on before I entered teaching definitely prepared me to be a better teacher.

The other twenty percent of individual’s attending the retreat have always felt called to teaching. They could relate with the concept of calling as discussed in chapter four. Rita explains:

I prepared lessons and taught them to my two younger brothers in our spare room. I had tables, chairs and a little black board. That was my favourite place in the whole world. After a few years in teaching I resigned and went to lecture at a Technicon. That was the biggest mistake that I had ever made. I had forgotten the exhilaration that I had felt in that spare room

surrounded by two unwilling brothers and some teddy bears. I am now back in teaching and this is where I will stay.

5.4.1. Let go, let God

As I have testified in an earlier chapter, I am part of that group of the choir that did not initially envision teaching as a part of my future. God though, had other plans. Today, when I look back on the times when I had so many different plans, I realize that it was not a case of not wanting to be a teacher, but rather a case of just never considering the option.

Most of the teachers attending the retreat had to admit that they also had to, at some point in their lives, stop fighting God and accept the path that He has laid out for them. As this discussion progressed, more and more people shared stories of how God had repeatedly steered them in a specific direction, but they were adamant to be in control of their own lives and thus pursued their own ideas and career paths. But regardless of where they wanted to go, they all ended up in teaching, where God wanted them to be. Once they had made peace with the fact that they were meant to be in a classroom, they started finding satisfaction and fulfilment in their careers. *Piet* captured it perfectly:

Most of us started our stories this morning with an ‘I never thought that I would be a teacher’, but almost all of us ended our story with ‘I am where I am meant to be and there is nothing else that I would now rather do.’

5.4.2. “Regardless of...” versus “As a result of...”

Müller (2002) wrote an article about factors motivating pastors to keep hope alive rather than giving up when faced with difficulties. Some of the factors he mentions, include

- A commitment towards their task because they feel called to their profession.
- Regular vacations that refreshes a pastor who does not get much positive feedback.
- The willingness to change and adapt to new situations.
- Striving towards balance between the demands of their congregation and the needs of their families.

- Keeping their own spiritual lives stimulating and growing makes it easier to keep their hope alive.

This article has so many overlapping interfaces with the lives of teachers that it might just as well have been written about them. All the factors mentioned above are just as relevant in teachers' lives. Just like the church has the responsibility to take care of its pastors, in some way someone needs to accept responsibility for the emotional health of teachers. Unfortunately, that onus often falls upon the teachers themselves. Therefore, just as the question was asked which road leads people to teaching, the question needed to be asked: what keeps them in teaching? What energizes them? What role can practical theology and stewardship play in keeping them motivated? What keeps their hopes alive?

The secular reasons that lead me to teaching in the first place are so different from the spiritual factors that keep me in teaching today. I had none of those religious motivations when I started teaching. I wanted to coach rugby. I came to an abrupt realization that there were so much more to teaching than rugby. I hated my first year of being a teacher. It was definitely not a calling to me then. But throughout the years my experiences changed, my contact with children developed and intensified my calling and I developed a silent contentment with being here.

Jack's brutal honesty opened up a line of conversation where the participants shared their experiences of what kept them in teaching throughout the years. Santi captured the general feeling:

I am still in teaching regardless of everything that I have to deal with... definitely not as a result everything that happens around me.

Other participants shared some of their reasons for still being in teaching.

Jo-Mari: I love the academic side of teaching. It is so rewarding to see children learn something new and then internalizing it in such a way that they can link it to knowledge that they already have.

Rita: It's the extra mile that makes me stay. I love walking it with someone and it is so special when I see a colleague that is prepared to also do it for me.

Madie: The extra-curricular activities that I am involved in create the opportunity to have a different kind of relationship with children. I get to know children on a different level. I am not only there to convey academic knowledge. I am there to educate. It is so rewarding to know that God is next to me every step of the way... whether it is in the classroom or on the netball court.

Santi: The positive feedback that I get from children, parents and very often from colleagues keeps me going.

As the teachers sitting around the table told of the positive experiences they had in teaching, the mood in the room lightened. I could hear more laughter, I could see light in eyes that just a day before were tired and burnt out. In that instant, the meaning of practical theology became real to me. What we were doing in that room was practical theology at work.

Being a facilitator in reminding teachers why they were here opened up space for our choir to reach a crescendo. Some of the participants discovered and heard their own voices for the first time in years and they also spent time listening to the verses that others had to sing. The false notes that stress, burnout, the Department of Education, difficult parents and other factors played in their lives were fading. Only the beautiful melody of having a purpose and a calling could be heard.

5.4.3. Inspired by a (new) identity

I was in awe of the symphony that was playing out in front of me. I was also convinced that the realizations that the teachers around that table was coming to, was going to sustain them for many months to come. The safety and security that they found in each other in that moment turned them into stewards and agents of hope.

At the start of the retreat only I had an understanding of practical theology, I had the theoretical knowledge and a dream in my heart of journeying with these teachers to a place where they would understand it as well. Now, as a result of the retreat all the participants had more than a simple understanding what practical theology was. They were doing practical theology now. They could give a name to what they did in their classrooms every day. They were the stewards. They were God's hands and feet in this situation.

Another outcome of the retreat was that the teachers who attended spent time conceptualizing a very definite and specific identity of a Christian teacher. The recognition that they were proud to assume this identity came as a surprise to some, while others simply saw it as merely a confirmation of their daily commitment to others. For both groups though, the retreat offered the opportunity to sharpen and detail their understanding of this chosen identity.

5.5. The Christian identity of a teacher

5.5.1. A new social construction of calling

In chapter 4 I expressed concern about the exclusive use of the term “calling” due to the dominant discourses attached to the term and I thus opted to include alternatives like servant leadership and stewardship. I was therefore very surprised to find that most of the participants at the retreat had no qualms about using the term “calling”.

I shared my own emotional and spiritual journey and concerns with using only the term “calling” and my subsequent preference for the word stewardship. The group deconstructed the understanding that they had of both the concepts and came to the realization that they, as teachers, had very specific and individual conceptualizations of both words that lead them to be comfortable with the use of either of the terms. The social constructions that the participants had of calling included:

Madie: I have never considered having a calling to be a wow-moment. For me it was a gradual comprehension of the task that God had set out for me.

Piet: the first thing that comes to my mind is that I have to make a difference in the world. It is my way of giving something back to God as a sign of appreciation for everything that He has done for me.

Santi: I am an instrument in the hands of God. I am available for Him to use me to fulfil the task that He has planned specifically for me.

Louw: Because I am a steward for the Kingdom, I have a calling to take that responsibility very seriously. In my eyes these two terms are simply different sides to the same coin.

It was distinctly clear that the participants did not attach a narrow and one-dimensional meaning to the word “calling.” Coenie Burger (2005:200) also upholds the view that there is more than one way to interpret the word. He understands the term in two ways: Firstly, as a narrow and constricted understanding that refers to a supernatural occurrence where a person hears the voice of God and receives a very direct task. This takes the form of a vision or a dream where God Himself might appear to convey His assignment.

Secondly, it can be understood in a broader context where calling is not localized to a specific area of a person’s life, but it rather encompasses all aspects thereof. This will lead to the insight that a person’s whole life is in service of God and that everything that they do, including the execution of the responsibilities of their chosen career, should be a response to the calling to be a child of God.

The former definition creates the wrongful perception that having a calling is something that only happens to a select few and that such a person will just be in the service of God in certain domains of his life and thus be free to direct the choices in the rest of his life as he might please. The second definition of calling that aligns it with the conceptualizations of the participants of the retreat is that calling encapsulates all domains of a Christian’s life, including all relationships that they stand in, in a personal and professional capacity.

5.5.2. “We work for God”

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving (Colossians 3:23-24).

Considering calling in this way changes the approach with which a Christian will fulfil their daily tasks. As mentioned earlier, it stipulates that a Christian teacher works primarily for God, rather than for the Department of Education. Whatever they do, they do it primarily for the Lord and secondarily for the good of their school and their pupils.

Approaching the idea of calling in this manner empowers the individual to create their own understanding and scope of the word. For the remainder of this text the word “calling” will thus have an array of potentially different meanings for the reader. For some it will imply a personal encounter with God, for others a commitment of their whole lives to His service and for others a gradual insight into the plan that God has for their lives. Some might contribute a larger portion of their calling towards being a steward, while others feel that God expects of them to be servant leaders in their communities.

For the scope of this dissertation, the direct implication is that although all teachers at the retreat might feel that they have a calling towards being a teacher, they each have their own perception of what the conditions of that calling is. Seeing themselves as a community of faith that supports each other, that have the best will of all the children they teach at heart and engages in the doing of practical theology every day, will cause them to have communal goals and values. This does however not mean that they have to share an exact definition thereof.

5.5.3. With Him every step of the way

Living with an awareness of God’s calling usually brings about a transformation because a person’s whole life is now dedicated to and lived in service of God. Having a calling is, as mentioned, not a singular occurrence, but rather a daily commitment. Therefore, the notions of stewardship and servant leadership merge well with the idea of calling in a teacher’s life. Stewardship entails the obligation and duty to be responsible in the way in which people go around with the world.

My devotion towards stewardship is therefore guided by my calling and will also determine exactly how I am going to live out that calling. Through stewardship I give physical embodiment to my calling.

Attentiveness to living out a calling can enrich a person’s life in six specific ways (Burger 2005:27):

- “Calling gives sense and meaning to life” (Burger 2005:27). For a teacher this often gives all the motivation they need to endure all the frustrations they have to endure. It gives meaning to the hardships that they live out every day. Most teachers will be able to share anecdotes that testify to the difference that their commitment makes to the lives of the children that they teach.
- “Calling gives hope and energy” (Burger 2005:27). Joy does not always lie in the trivial day to day tasks that we do, but rather in the knowledge of who we are doing it for. A teacher will be able to tolerate many tribulations and very little positive reinforcement because they know that they are in the service of God.
- “Calling gives focus and direction” (Burger 2005:27) Teaching is all about having an end goal. For the Christian teacher the goal will not only be for their pupils to successfully complete grade 12, but rather the successful and purpose-driven living of a life. The ultimate goal is the winning of souls for the Kingdom of Christ.
- “Calling provides a reason to endure through difficult times” (Burger 2005:27). Many teachers tolerate adversity and even destitution because they know that they are there for a different reason than the obvious. They are there because God wants them to be at that exact place at that exact time. In such circumstances, the greater needs of others become more important and more relevant than their own personal frustrations.
- “Calling gives conviction and passion” (Burger 2005:27). Living out passion leads to fulfilment. All teachers have different talents that could have enabled them to pursue different career options than teaching, but they choose to find embodiment for their passion in front of a black board or on a sport field.
- “Calling helps us to understand that God yearns to have a personal relationship with each of us” (Burger 2005:27). The Lord knows the name of every single teacher who spends their days working for His Kingdom. Taking ownership of and being a steward for all that He has entrusted a teacher with, is the ultimate living out of a calling.

Living with such an awareness of a calling continually strengthens the identity of a Christian teacher. During the second session of the retreat the participants investigated ways in which having such a strong sense of identity, that is layered upon calling and stewardship, can impact on their relationships with different entities that they encounter in the world of education. These

include the administrative systems that they have to function in, their relationship with colleagues, their interaction with the children they teach, as well as their expectations of themselves. The next section will give a more detailed account of these conversations.

5.6. Having an identity that is true to God's calling

A variety of relationships with different entities influences the placement of a teacher on the continuum and therefore indirectly determines their identity. From external systems like the Department of Education to sources closer to home, such as colleagues and themselves, these entities can have an uplifting or detrimental effect on the emotional and spiritual state of an individual teacher.

5.6.1. My relationship with the system

5.6.1.1. A circle person in a square world

The literature study and voices of the participants on this research journey have already made it clear that the Department of Education is a substantial cause of stress and frustration in the lives of teachers in old model C schools (refer to Chapter 1 and 3). It is however crucial that should teachers wish to remain on the right hand side of the continuum (as discussed in 5.3), they need to find a way of coping with the Department of Education and with the endless stream of changes that it brings about.

It is not possible for teachers to remove themselves from these systems that cause them to move towards the unmotivated, frustrated side of the continuum. They need to structure their relationships with these systems, like the Department of Education or often with the senior management team and administrative aspects of their own schools, in a way that strengthens their identity as Christian teachers rather than diminish that chosen identity.

When I walk into our circuit office, talk to my Curriculum Implementer, attend a moderation session or cluster meeting, I feel like a square person in a circle world. It's just not working!

Jo-Mari expressed these words that echoed around the room. Everyone understood exactly what she meant because they shared the same experiences. Education in South Africa has deteriorated into a system that changes too often and that is by now even ridiculed by the rest of the world. The Department of Education has little control over their officials and does not seem to

be able to manage their employees. This state of affairs leads effective teachers to feel overpowered by the incompetence they are confronted with.

When I consider myself a practical theologian and steward in my classroom, I am duty-bound to also conduct my actions from this framework when I deal with the authorities and members of the Department of Education. As a Christian I choose to live according to a different set of values, often even an alternative code of conduct, because I live my life aligned with the laws and values of Jesus Christ.

This state of affairs very often brings about a disharmony and some false notes in the song of a Christian teacher's life because, as Christians, the Bible demands respect for authorities, yet very often the instructions from people in authoritarian positions are directly opposed to a teacher's values and beliefs. Teachers committed to God struggle to consign to and identify with requirements and requests from the Government or Department of Education that are not aligned with their standards and ethics. During the retreat the question was raised whether, as stewards of God, teachers could be validated in their decisions to go against orders from the Department?

5.6.1.2. An intelligent disobedience of orders

Christians believe that God is the ultimate source of authority and power. Should a teacher thus find themselves in a position where they have to choose between a worldly, secular authority and that of their God, the choice is seemingly clear. Yet, in practice, it remains difficult to uphold the values that Christians live by in a system that is based upon religious freedom and secular education.

A good example of Christian teachers placing the best interest of their learners ahead of direct orders from the Department of Education was in the execution of Outcomes Based Education. Because teachers had very strong suspicions that this system was not going to produce the results that the Department had promised that it would, many teachers simply carried on with their old method of teaching. They did the window dressing that the Department required and if you studied their files you would think that they were the best OBE teachers in the world, but in reality, should you sit in on their lessons, you might find yourself listening to exactly the same lesson that you would have received twenty years before.

Should the choices that these teachers make to ensure the best outcomes for their learners be considered as being disrespectful towards the Department of Education or as being respectful to

their faith and their own values? The issue at hand could be surmised in one question: if teachers consider themselves to be in service of the Lord, can they then individually decide whether an order from their earthly employer is in line with or opposed to their Christian beliefs?

After a long discussion, the participants came to the following conclusion: an individual cannot arbitrarily decide on these issues. Would all the teachers in a specific subject department of a school, or a teacher with the full support of the senior management team of the school take a decision such as not keeping to the administrative orders of Outcomes Based Education, and their decision is fully aligned with the best interest of the child, then it is morally acceptable to intelligently disobey orders. Reaching such a conclusion might allow teachers some form of rationalization for their decisions, but it does not abdicate their responsibility towards the Department of Education or towards other schools that are still caught up in all the turmoil characteristic to this system.

5.6.1.3. As a steward I am forced to help

As a steward of Christ I have the responsibility to help build community and do my part to enrich the education system in our country. Therefore I cannot simply work hard in order for the school where I am employed to perform well, for my own school to have excellent matric^{xxviii} results. As a Christian I have a responsibility and duty to improve the situation in other, less effective schools. I have to accept some of the burden faced by the 90% of schools that are not as highly productive and successful as old model C schools.

Alet Rademeyer (2012a:2) reports in *Beeld* of January, 25th 2012 that the Matric pass rate in old model C schools are much higher than that of the national pass rate. In the 2011 Senior Certificate Exam old model C schools achieved a 96,3% pass rate while the national pass rate was only 67,8%.^{xxix}

^{xxviii} Matric, also known as grade 12, refers to the last official year of schooling in South Africa

^{xxix} Another interesting avenue of research that could be pursued would involve an analysis of the reasons for such significant differences in matric pass rates. Factors such as teaching methods, learner populations, lack of resources and lack of experience could possibly be relevant contributing factors to worrisome matric pass rates in many South African schools.

Paul Colditz, chairperson of FEDSAS,^{xxx} attributes the success of these old model C schools to dedicated and committed teachers that share a personal commitment towards reaching the goal of successfully preparing their learners for the grade 12 final examinations (Prince 2012:5). *Thurza* expresses the concern of many participants:

I work so hard to set papers, to grade exams, to give my learners the best that I have to offer. I know that it is my duty to help, but very often I feel that it is unfair that I do all the work and other teachers, who sit under a tree for most of the day, just take all my hard work. They never offer me anything that is worth using... but I know that it is my duty. I have an obligation to help.

Teachers who have a Christian identity and a calling to teach often feel compelled to assist schools that are not functioning like their own. Being a steward coerces Christian teachers toward assisting others in order for the whole system to eventually become more streamlined and efficient. It would be easy for Christians to simply focus their efforts and attention on their own schools and ignore the bigger picture of the state of education in South Africa.

But the reality is very clear that all schools in the country form part of the same educational system. We cannot simply divide the system into “our schools” and “their schools.” We are as much part of the same system as the schools with the 0% matric pass rate. Therefore we need to step out of our comfort zones and become actively involved in the plight of such schools. *Jo-Mari* shares how she has made peace with this issue:

I have to set a paper anyway. I might just as well share it with other teachers who do not have the same privileges, resources and skills that I have.

It is also important to acknowledge that even though most teachers in old model C schools are highly skilled and effective, they often also need support. It is therefore imperative that such teachers also find an alternative system of support and assistance outside of their own schools. Expanding resources by networking with other old model C schools that are not in the same circuit or even region, enables teachers to share papers, assignments and other ideas instead of simply supplying such resources to other previously disadvantaged schools. This leads to a more balanced situation where work is exchanged and not only handed over.

^{xxx} Federasie van Beheerliggame van Suid-Afrikaanse Skole

5.6.1.4. Closer to home

It would be naive to think that all teachers are satisfied and totally content within their own schools and do not experience some level of frustration due to leadership styles, work ethic, allocation of responsibilities, et cetera. The relationship that they have with different systems therefore include more than their affiliation with the Department of Education, but it also includes the quality of the relationship with the systems in their own school.

Any institution functions best when a culture of trust exists among its members. Van der Linde (2000:375) describes the ideal school as a secure environment where innovation and creativity is encouraged and all functions are integrated to achieve continuous improvement of the quality of education. He adds that good management techniques are the best prevention for stress in learners and teachers. Conversely, if a school is a low-trust working environment, characterized by conflict, divisive working arrangements and lack of security, it is ultimately counterproductive in terms of the overall quality of education offered by the school.

The participants pointed out the following ways in which a senior management team, principal and governing body can empower and support teachers in order to promote an identity of calling and stewardship.

- Treat teachers as an investment: An important first step in strengthening the identity of teachers and in motivating them to move towards the right hand side of the continuum is to treat them as investments rather than as expendable assets. Many schools neglect this by assuming that their teachers are self-sufficient and that they have no further need for training or emotional support. *Bets* reports:

The fact that I get many distinctions from my matrics every year and that I have been teaching for almost thirty years does not mean that I do not need some stimulation and have the desire to learn new things. I like hearing that the top structure of the school appreciates my loyalty and hard work.

- Provide clear expectations, feedback and rewards: A clear statement of expectations and rewards in all areas of responsibility, curricular and extra-curricular, is very helpful to teachers (Conley & Woosesly 2000:179; Olivier & Venter 2003:186). The importance of recognition and rewards from the school itself is becoming even more important since the

implementation of the IQMS system from the Department of Education does not carry much weight or respect from teachers on ground level. *Dries* explains:

I am convinced that every single teacher in our province received a 1% IQMS increase, so the system is definitely not effective in rewarding only teachers who are effectively doing their job.

- Give constructive criticism: While classroom visits from senior staff members tend to inspire a sense of dread in many teachers who equate them with judgment rather than support, it can be a source of constructive feedback if used well. This is however only possible if there is a definite relationship of trust that exists between the observer and teacher. If teachers know that the person coming to observe them share their passion, also takes their calling seriously and consider themselves to also be an instrument of God, the whole atmosphere of the class visit will be different.
- Establish support systems for teachers: *Louw* made the suggestion that the teachers who attended the retreat set up a prayer schedule where they would know that at all times someone is praying for them by name. Another simple and important concept in supporting teachers is keeping two-way lines of communication open between teachers and those in positions of authority at school. Teachers need to know that they can safely consult a respected senior colleague when they have questions or concerns, or simply know that there are fellow Christians close by to share stress and frustrations with.
- Create a safe space at school for such conversations: *Rita* admits:

Conversations of that nature typically take place in the context of busy staff rooms in a very short space of time, usually during break time, and rarely with any possibility of a follow-up conversation to review the effects of the advice that was given.

Having a room that is allocated specifically for such conversations, or assigning a specific part of the staff room for more private conversations, creates the opportunity for teachers to know that they can at any time share their emotions or just be encouraged and motivated for the rest of the day. It is also important to lay down ground rules for such a space, for example that no negative

talk about school, learners or colleagues will be tolerated there. In that safe space only the emotional and spiritual welfare of teachers are to be promoted.

The identity of teachers is not only reinforced by the actions of the senior management team and the governing body, but also by the relationships that colleagues have with each other.

5.6.2. My relationship with colleagues

The Lord said to Moses: “Bring me seventy of Israel’s elders who are known to you as leaders and officials among the people. Have them come to the tent of meeting, that they may stand here with you. I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take some of the power of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them. They will share the burden of the people with you so that you will not have to carry it alone” (Numbers 11:16-17).

Blackaby and Blackaby (2011:147) explains that the task laid upon Moses to lead the Israelites placed great strain on him. God then provided Moses with seventy colleagues to assist him in this huge task and to lighten his load as leader and role model to a rebellious nation. Just as Moses and the seventy elders lived out their calling as a team, a faculty of teachers also acts as such a team that stands together in service of God. Teachers should serve as examples for one another. They are meant to share the joy in good times and support each other during trying times. They are also obliged to, through sharing their experiences, be stewards to each other.

In the choir metaphor that this research is built upon, it means that the teachers at a school all sing in the same choir. They might not all sing with the same tone or even on the same note. Some might sing more or less than others. Some might not even like all the other members of the choir. Some might even be off the beat or off key sometimes, but it is in those times that they need the support of their choir mates the most. The members of the choir need to be in tune with the emotional state and wellbeing of the others to ensure that the end result is the best song that they are able to produce.

5.6.2.1. Sharing the task

An academic institution like a school can simply be a group of people that share certain goals or it can be seen as a community of people that share not only goals, but also share a collective identity (Fowler, Van Brummelen & Van Dyk 1990:107). Thus, in a school that considers themselves to be a community of God, teachers will not only share a love of God, but they will

support each other in handling stressful situations and rejoice together when they experience God working in their own and their pupils' lives in a practical and tangible way.

In a world where teachers are often bombarded with and overwhelmed by negative feedback and criticism, colleagues need to remind each other of their calling and of their commitment to being stewards of God in their schools. It is often only a colleague who can understand what someone is going through. A support system at home in the form of a spouse, family or friends often do not fully comprehend the realities of being in the trenches of schools in South Africa.

The tasks and responsibilities that the Christian teacher face is too large to carry alone and just as an individual cannot consider him- or herself to be a choir, the task needs to be carried out by a group of people living according to the same values and rules. The diversity of a group of teachers, coupled with the different gifts and talents that they were given by God, brings to the table an array of positive facets that can make the choir of teachers a harmonious one.

5.6.2.2. Creating a community of care

Supportive relationships with co-workers are a teacher's best protection against a sense of isolation that is often a major cause of teacher stress (Gmelch 1993). A pleasant atmosphere among the staff, characterized by interdependence and togetherness, helps to create an optimal working environment. Every teacher can benefit from an informal support network of trusted colleagues who can discuss concerns and share failure stories without fear (Kyriacou 2001:27). In this way teachers become a community of care for each other and thereby foster a sense of camaraderie among themselves.

Santi feels that the first step in creating a community of care is admitting that people have different personalities, talents and working styles:

We might all be teachers, but we are so different at heart. We need to give each other space to excel in that which we are good at and support each other in the areas that we are not so skilled in.

Rita reminds the participants that people often get caught up in their own problems and then forget to sometimes turn their focus to other people who might be struggling as well:

I will so often ask someone how they are and then not really wait for them to answer. Or I will walk past a colleague and see that she is not doing well but

be in too much of a hurry to stop and have a talk with her. I am really going to make a point of looking past my small little world and pay more attention to my friends at work.

5.6.2.3. “Be an apron...”

Throughout this conversation I could see that *Piet* was in deep thought. Later, I asked him about it and he used the following metaphor that summed up our whole discourse:

We must be apron-colleagues to each other rather than being bib-colleagues.

My facial expression must have expressed my confusion, because he quickly explained:

Someone who wears a bib needs to be fed; he needs someone to provide a service to him. But someone who wears an apron is of service to others. They do not expect to be served, they serve. That is the type of colleagues that we need to be to each other.

I immediately shared this powerful metaphor with the other teachers around the table and explained that this perfectly summarized the principle of servant leadership. If I approached my work as an apron-colleague I will always be on the lookout for opportunities to be of service rather than just sit back and expect to be served. If I pull my weight and take responsibility for my tasks at school, I am an apron-colleague. But should I not do what is expected of me and thereby make the workload of another colleague heavier in the process, I become a bib-colleague. Being a practical theologian in our staff room will also imply that I will motivate and inspire colleagues to be apron-colleagues to each other.

5.6.3. My relationship with the children

Kahlil Gibran (1981:56) notes that a teacher in tune with the spirit of learning “gives not of his wisdom but rather of his faith and his lovingness. If he is indeed wise he does not bid you enter the house of his wisdom, but rather leads you to the threshold of your own mind.” This spirit of faith is also brought to the classroom as students realize that the teacher expects them to learn and wants to see them to stretch themselves and excel. *Helmine* concurs when she explains:

I often write notes on my students’ tests or exam papers that let them know that I know that they can do better or that I am impressed with a particular

effort. A student struggling to grade 12 once told me how one of these notes helped him believe he could succeed and that gave him the motivation to keep on trying. I was rewarded by seeing a consistent and marked improvement in his work.

Teachers should thus be accountable for their academic input into children's lives. But as Christians they should also be accountable for the input they have in children's souls. Then schools become communities of learning about more than what will help them to pass an exam. It becomes a community of learning about life and about God. Edlin (1999:131) is convinced that such schools will produce children that respect themselves and others, have the ability to have meaningful and caring relationships and are on their way to themselves becomes stewards of God.

Teachers are often required to act as "cleaning crews" for the challenging children they encounter. Those children need to know that whatever they do, they will still be loved. They need the safety of knowing that someone will emotionally clean up after them and not hold it against them. Many children do not grow up in homes where they experience unconditional love. If a teacher can assure a child that, irrelevant of their behaviour, they will still be loved, it gives them much needed security.

Dries explains:

I start every day on a new page. If I have to keep score of every time that I was upset with children, I would never sleep and never be anything but angry. We don't keep their behaviour against children. God compels us to be forgetful and start anew.

The other challenge to teachers is to create an atmosphere that is at the same time both safe and yet challenging. Children need to be challenged on academic and emotional level to ensure growth. The need for teachers to become involved in more than just a child's academic progress is becoming more and more pressing. *Cornelia* concurs:

I am responsible for the whole child, not only the child's brain. I had to make a mind shift from merely being a science teacher to being an educator. I could not see a child who was suffering sitting in front of me and only be

concerned with him understanding Newton's laws. I had to get out of my comfort zone and start using the opportunities that God provided for me to have conversations with children.

Another outcome of seeing a school as a community of stewards, rather than an institution filled with educators, is that the welfare of the community becomes part of your own wellbeing. Such teachers will ensure that the transformation that happens at the school will be in accordance with their Christian convictions and beliefs. *Tertia* elaborates:

It is my duty to teach children responsibility. I need to know that he will be able to cope in the world outside the safety net of the school. I need to be an example through my deeds. I cannot be irresponsible but then expect them to act responsibly.

Teachers therefore have an obligation to not lead a child astray through their own actions and the example that they set. Negative feedback, a bad example and not acting in a way that is coherent with a Christian lifestyle gives children confusing messages. *Jack* mentions:

A minister sees his congregation for an hour every Sunday. I see children for at least half an hour every day and often for longer. The impact of the influence that we have is often larger than we anticipate or realize.

Adults in a community should serve as role models to its children about values, skills and attitudes. The love that a teacher should have for the children they teach should include mutual respect, disciplinary action when needed, empathy with individual circumstances and consistent and consequent reactions. They should not only be a role model through what they say, but even more so through their own behaviour (Edlin 1999:131). That is the physical manifestation of stewardship.

5.6.4. My relationship with myself

Schools not only offer teachers the opportunity to be stewards in their relationships with colleagues, parents and the children they teach, but also in their relationships with themselves. Before a teacher can share their calling with others, they have to define and conceptualize it for themselves. In the same sense teachers have a responsibility towards themselves to do self-care.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to care for others if they do not take care of their own emotional and spiritual needs. *Jack* understands this:

The quality of education that I give is directly proportional to my relationship with God.

When a teacher feels fulfilled and excited about their relationship with God it will filter through to other aspects of their lives like their careers. They will then also be more effective and productive in the classroom and in their relationship with children. *Dries* agrees with this when he explains:

When I work on behalf of God I am going to display so much more self-control. I am going to be more focused on praying and asking for His guidance in difficult situations. I think first before I act. I consciously place myself under God's control. Is that not the ultimate message of the Gospel? To live in grace and forgiveness...

5.6.4.1. "Taking care of me first"

Teachers can take care of their own emotional and spiritual wellbeing through implementing skills like good organization and time management, concentrating on one task at a time, having a sense of humour and perspective as well as having realistic self-expectations. Such actions enable them to move towards the right side of the continuum where they will be able to be productive and content. Other effective strategies for reducing stress include physical exercise, entertainment and keeping up with personal interests and friends. *Bets* shares her ways of coping:

I manage myself. I go for a jog every afternoon to clear my head. I know that my body is a temple of God and that I am responsible for taking care of it. That is part of my stewardship. I am the steward of my own body and my mind.

Jo-Mari captures the importance of acknowledging the different pressures that teachers are faced with:

I have two toddlers at home. Some days I get home for the first time after they already had their dinner. It feels as if I am missing out on them growing up. But when I do get home early enough to spend time with them I often

feel too tired to do so. I have to remind myself that they, and not the school, are my first priority.

Jack feels that teachers very often set expectations to themselves that they cannot meet:

It is so easy to complain that parents are overcritical about schools and teachers, but we are very often even harder on ourselves. We do not allow ourselves to make mistakes and be human. I needed to learn to not be such a perfectionist. I had to learn the hard way that I could not teach a child to live a healthy, balanced life if I did not live one myself. I had to accept all my idiosyncrasies and personal flaws. If Jesus Christ died for me just the way I am, I guess I should live for Him just the way I am.

While drawing a clear line of demarcation between work and personal time is difficult for most teachers, setting aside some personal time is crucial (Troman 2000:332). It is impossible for teachers to be there to meet the vast needs of children or to be an emotional support system for their colleagues if they do not take adequate care of themselves. Santi agrees:

When I am physically or emotionally tired I just do not feel up to going that extra mile. For me, spiritual maturity and emotional intelligence means that I will know when to ask for help. I have to know that I cannot perform to be best abilities to take care of others if I do not take care of me first.

5.6.4.2. “I am almost part of the furniture by now”

Dries has been teaching at Rob Ferreira High School for almost thirty-six years. He has never taught at any other school and do not plan to do so before his retirement in two years. He has always had a calling to teach and have always had an intimate relationship with God. All his decisions are made from the foundation of his faith and he believes that the difference that he has made in the lives of children has been a blessing from God. For now, he finds it extremely important to finish his career in the same way that he had started it, in a passionate and inspired way:

I have been here so long that I feel like part of the furniture already. I want to finish well. I do not want to deflate and just be until I retire.

No good teacher wants to “deflate and just be”. They want to approach every day as an opportunity to spread the Gospel and win children for the Kingdom of God. They want to be stewards and servant leaders in all the situations they find themselves in. They want to, despite severe personal exhaustion, be agents of hope for their colleagues. They want the schools in which they teach to strengthen and enhance their identity as teachers of God.

The detail of teachers’ lives may be different, but the structure of their lives is very similar. They share the same joys, the same frustrations and the same conundrum of being on the spiral of fluctuation between praxis and theory. Therefore, teachers are best suited to be an emotional system of support for each other. When one is on the theory-side of the spiral, another on the praxis side might remind him why they became teachers in the first place, or of another situation where they were reminded of the positive rewards that teaching brings. That might inspire a person to persevere. In being practical theologians to each other, they are living up to their responsibilities as children of God. In the staff room and office block of a school driven by a calling, teachers will be aware of this cycle and be open to the possibilities for healing, growth and transformation that it might bring.

The remainder of the retreat was spent contemplating the idea of transforming an old model C school to such a school that is driven by a calling. A school that is based on and managed from the epistemology of the Christian character and values that these teachers uphold and live by. They all dreamt about the possibilities that this might hold for the children in the school and the teachers working there.

The participants came to the realization that such a school driven by a calling would be a dynamic entity, rather than just a passive set of buildings. It would aim towards growth and development, rather than just reproducing clones who all obtain the same academic qualifications. Just like the teachers themselves, such a school would evolve and grow through constant movement within the cycle of theory and practice. Using the theoretical knowledge that teachers have gained on this retreat, their years of teaching experience and the praxis they uphold in their classrooms, qualifies them as practical theologians who can take ownership of this dynamic school that they are creating.

5.7. A school driven by a calling

5.7.1. Envisioning a school that is true to its calling to stewardship

I agree with Hunt (1991:152) when she warns that a sense of community cannot be forced. It does not emerge just because people are in the same room or in the same profession. It emerges slowly as a network of trust grows between people who live by the same values and who nurtures one another – it is indeed slow and cumbersome work. The same principles apply to the development of a school that is driven by a calling to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is a lengthy and extensive process in which teachers with the same passion and dream work towards slowly transforming their school into a community of care.

Ackermann (2003:27) speaks of the ideal communication between Christians as being characterized by four pre-requisites:

- Firstly, it is “non-authoritarian” and therefore takes place “between free subjects on an equal basis” (Ackermann 2003:27).
- Secondly, the “unconditional freedom of the participants is presupposed” (Ackermann 2003:27).
- Thirdly, the “unconditional acceptance of others as individuals entitled to authentic existence is posited” (Ackermann 2003:27).
- Finally, “Christian communication is conducted in the context of love” (Ackermann 2003:27).

If we are able to put into practice this kind of open, loving communication the “Christian hope for the actualization of the ‘reign of God’, when love, justice, freedom, peace and wholeness will flourish” (Ackermann 1998:89) might become a reality in our lives. These premises are not only a description of the characteristics and principles of Christian communication, but are also very similar to the goals of a school that is driven by calling. Evaluating the ethos of a school against these criteria can give the teachers of that school an indication of how far they have come on their quest to becoming a school driven by a calling.

The participants attending the retreat came to the joyful realization that they have already set out on this quest, even though they might not have consciously sat around a table and decided to do

so. Through the way that they, as individuals and as a team, were acting at school, the decisions that they were making and most importantly, the significant place that they were offering their faith in their actions, they were already working towards being a school driving by a calling.

Being more aware of and more focused on this pursuit, they now set out to create a strategy for further transforming their school into an institution that is true to the calling to be a steward for the Kingdom of Christ. The followings aspects were identified as some of the core characteristics of such an establishment:

- Diligence – Teachers working hard on curricular and extra-curricular fields do it to honour their God. This also includes staying up to date with the newest developments in their chosen academic field. Teachers have the responsibility to give children the best academic education that they possibly can. Marna emphasizes the importance of teachers keeping up with new developments in their subjects:

I love my subject. I cannot sit back and teach the same lessons year after year. I want to keep up with the times. I am old school. I had to learn to use a computer last year. It frightened me, but I realized that I had to be willing to learn new skills if I assumed the right to encourage children to become lifelong learners.

- Being grateful – Christian teachers believe that they have been saved by the grace of God and they are humble and thankful for the success that they achieve. Jack testifies:

We have a roster that gives every teacher the opportunity to open with Scripture and prayer in the staff room every morning. Then we go out to the quad to do the same with all the children. Many teachers end off the school day with prayer. We have an Afrikaans and English Bible in every class and the children in our school know where we find our strength and who we honour for the successes and prosperity of our school.

- Loyalty – Teachers at a school that is dedicated to God are loyal to their colleagues and will also display a sense of loyalty to the school when they find themselves in situations where the school is being discussed. Rita bears witness to this:

We need to love each other like God loves us – unconditionally. I want to rely on my colleagues to protect me and I want them to be assured that I will protect them. The same goes for the children in our school.

- Act in truth – Because teachers in a school true to its calling will consider themselves as stewards to the Kingdom of Christ, their perception of the truth will be different from the secular perception thereof that is promoted by the world. Values like honesty, sincerity and integrity are crucial components of a school built upon their Christian convictions. These teachers will live by example, rather than just by the words that come from their mouths. *Santi* explains:

Values like prosperity, status, appearance and popularity can never be the motivating factors in my life. I have to live my life according to the values dictated by the Bible.

- Unselfish service – Due to the calling to stewardship, such a school will be focused on the needs of others. As discussed in 5.6.1.3. they will search for opportunities to uplift the community and support schools that might not be as effective and productive as they are. *Mia* clarifies:

We make a point of sharing our learning material with other schools. I teach Afrikaans and I know that most of them do not have the knowledge or resources to set papers that are up to standard. It might be frustrating at times, but it is my duty to help.

- Focused on reconciliation – Diversity is a reality in South African schools, even more so in old model C schools that had to adapt to a multi-cultural milieu. The unfortunate reality is that not all children grow up in homes where diversity is acknowledged and reconciliation is promoted. The onus for educating children in this area of life thus falls upon the school. *Tertia* tells about the mindset in her school:

An attitude of tolerance, forgiveness and equal opportunities creates a living space where the soul of the child is more important than the history of a country or the colour of a person's skin. I love all the children that I teach

just the same. At my school we get excited about the opportunities that embracing difference can bring.

- Accepts responsibility – As a steward teachers need to accept responsibility for learners, colleagues and facilities. The African concept of *Ubuntu* promotes the sharing of the responsibility for the children entrusted to the care of a school. But the principle of stewardship also urges teachers to reach further than just the pupils sitting behind desks in their classrooms. It also includes the desks itself as well as the rest of the facilities at that particular school. *Piet* understands this responsibility:

I have come to the realization that the facilities does not belong to us, or even to the Government, it belongs to God. Therefore we need to take care of it like we take care of our body that we consider to be temples of God.

- Be a community of hope – *Jo-Mari* captures the essence of teachers caring for each other:

We know each other. Enjoy each other. Laugh with each other. Get frustrated with each other. Forgive each other. We are more than colleagues. We are a family.

Teachers are not only responsible for caring for each other, but are very often considered to be the primary educators and only safe space for several children in their school. Many children are often given the message at home that there is no hope or future for them or for this country that they are growing up in. The Gospel of Jesus Christ offers us hope for eternal salvation. Through the blood of Jesus and the input of the Holy Spirit Christians are awarded a new life. This offers the assurance that God will let everything work out for the best for those who keep to His will. In a world that is build upon pessimism, war, conflict and destruction, a school that is focused on its calling will be a beacon of hope. As a direct result the teachers will become guardians and agents of hope for themselves, their colleagues, their pupils and the greater community of which this school forms part.

5.7.2. Thriving... not just surviving

Frederick Marais (2008:electronic source) urges congregations to not only work to ensure their survival, but rather focus their energy on being dynamic, constantly evolving and growing. He proposes that a congregation should develop on four cornerstones towards become an effective

institution driven by a calling from God. For the scope of this research, I have critically evaluated and adapted these cornerstones to be relevant to a school.

Firstly, the question needs to be asked whether the senior management team and teachers are emotionally and spiritually fit enough to guide the school through the transition from a school run by the Department of Education to a school run by God? It is crucial that this group of people come together in prayer and dependency on God to create a vision and strategic plan for transformation. To change a school that have for so long simply survived, rather than thrived, requires inner strength and a strong, personal connection with God. Leaders should place their faith and challenges at God's feet and trust Him with the risks that they are willing to take. They also need to be honest enough to acknowledge mistakes that they might have made in the past and be willing to apologize and accept responsibility for their decisions and actions.

Secondly, such a school needs to develop the courage and integrity to sort out relevant conflicts. So many schools are attempting to build a future upon discrepancies and atrocities from the past. It is impossible to be dynamic and to move forward if there are still weights from the past holding a school and the individuals connected to that school, back. Living out a calling thus becomes impossible if the people involved cannot start afresh.

Thirdly, in a school driven by a calling to stewardship the Bible should become the authoritative text. The teachers and other people involved in the day-to-day functioning of the school should spend time together searching for the voice and will of God for their school. No substantial decisions can be made without prayer and discussion with fellow Christians on the matter. Trust is a crucial component when a school decides to make all their decisions from a place where they ask for the will of God and where they plead the blessing of God down on their school.

Finally, schools driven by a calling ought to be acutely aware of the needs of the learners in their school and in their greater community. Having empathy and becoming more involved dissolves the borders that exist between people and between communities. When teachers act in love they develop the ability to step across all borders, whether it is emotional, racial, intellectual or financial.

Should a school succeed in building these cornerstones firmly into their identities, they will evolve from being one of thousands of schools in South Africa that have simply been keeping their head above water in a time of very stormy seas to a beacon of hope that stands out above the rest and can even become a safe harbour where other drowning schools can anchor. Then such a school

becomes a place where all the people involved, from teachers, pupils, governing body, to parents and the greater community becomes involved in building temples rather than just breaking up rocks. They might even find themselves singing whilst they are building. Forming a choir that is made up of more than just teachers, it will become a community choir that sings a song of resilience, transformation, forgiveness and hope.

5.7.3. The role of the church

In such a choir, the voices of the teachers will be strengthened by other leading voices in the Christian community. At the retreat the question was asked what role, if any, the church in general has to play in supporting growth in such schools driven by a calling, and per implication in the choir of a school driven by a calling. Does the church have any obligation toward the emotional and spiritual health of the teachers responsible for creating and maintaining such a school?

Santi shares something that she learned at a seminar on parenting that she attended a few years ago:

***The guest speaker drew three large overlapping circles on the white board.
Then he wrote the word 'child' in the section where the circles overlapped.
These circles represented the school, the church and the home of the child.
He could not stress enough how important it was that these three circles overlapped in equal parts to ensure the optimal development of the child.***

Many children grow up in homes where Christianity and attending a church regularly is not a reality and therefore these children only have two of the circles actively overlapping. Other parents refuse assistance from the school and thereby detach the final two circles from each other. A school driven by calling has the responsibility to work towards getting the balance between the circles restored.

The church and schools should have a symbiotic relationship with regard to the children and the teachers. Churches should actively question whether they have a strong enough presence at schools. Do they only send a minister to take care of the first or last assembly of each term or show up only when they are invited? Or do they seriously consider it their duty to contribute to the emotional and spiritual health of teachers. Traditionally, churches focuses more on the learners than on teachers, but the time may have come for that status quo to be challenged.

Should teachers start to consider themselves as practical theologians employed at a school driven by a calling, they can definitely benefit from support of the church in this endeavour. More events like the retreat that the staff from Rob Ferreira High School attended can offer opportunities for teachers to find their voices, to become part of the choir of Christians and to be part of the future duet that the church and school can sing together.

5.8. A constant reminder

Throughout the course of the retreat and even afterwards, participants asked if they could have access to a summary of the ideas that was shared. As a result of these requests and also as a constant reminder of the realizations that we have come to during the retreat, I designed a desktop calendar to which teachers could refer should the realities of stress and burnout threaten to steal their awareness of their calling to be steward of their own and other people's hope.

Januarie 2012

SO	MA	DI	WO	DO	VR	SA
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

met hart & siel



‘Dis nooit te laat vir ‘n nuwe doelwit of ‘n nuwe droom nie’
LIS BROWN

Jy is nie toevallig hier nie!

God het jou met n **rede** op hierdie **spesifieke tyd** op hierdie **spesifieke plek** geplaas.

Die meeste van die mense by die retreat het nie noodwendig **beplan** om in onderwyser te word nie...

Maar hulle almal se stories oor hul paadjie tot hier het geëindig met **“ek weet ek moet hier wees.”**

Leef elke dag jou **roeping!**

Februarie 2012

SO	MA	DI	WO	DO	VR	SA
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29			

Drie faktore bepaal hoe gelukkig jy is:

1. BETEKENIS
Die **verskil** wat jy in kinders en ander se lewe maak, gee betekenis aan jou lewe.

2. VERHOUDINGE
Die **hoeveelheid** en **kwantiteit** verhoudinge in jou lewe, vriendskappe, mense wat **omgee**

3. PLESIER
Vermoë om dinge te **geniet**, te kan lag, **natuur**, lekker kos, **musiek**

met siel...



*Hoop is om die melodie van die toekoms te hoor. **geloof** is om op die maat daarvan te dans.*
REBECCA

Maart 2012

SO	MA	DI	WO	DO	VRY	SA
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

met siel...

Hoe meer die siel in stilte ontvang, hoe meer gee dit in daad.



Moeg
gespanne
Kwaad
Uitgebrand

Doen
maar net
elke dag
wat ek
moet doen

Effektief
*Kry dinge
gedoen*
Maak n
verskil

Vol hoop
Passievol
Gelukkig
Gemotiveerd

Waar is jy Vandag op hierdie skaal?

As ek n **roeping** het kan ek nie anders as om **REGS** te wil wees nie.

April 2012

SON	MA	DI	WO	DO	VRY	SAT
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

met hart & siel

Dankbaarheid gee sin aan gister, bring vrede vir vandag, en skep 'n droom vir môre. ANONHEM



Vir Wie werk jy regtig?

Jy werk nie vir 'n hoof of vir die Departement nie, jy werk vir **God!** Jy is 'n **rentmeester** en leef dus volgens God se reëls.

Jou frustrasies met die Dept word dan klein in die lig van jou **roeping**. Jy staan in **diens** van God en daarom moet jy die **ekstra** mgl stap

Wat hou jou hier?
Daardie een dankie
 Vertroue van kinders en kollegas
Die buitemuurs
Dis lekker om vir kinders nuwe dinge te leer
Emtiositiese tjiens
Leer heeltyd nuwe vaardighede
Kry geleenthede om al my talente uit te leef
Dis my roeping

met hart...

Waar blomme bot, groei hoop
LAURIE BRUGGEMANN



SO	MA	DI	WO	DO	VRY	SAT
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

Mei 2012

'n Roepings- bedrewe skool:
 Staen in volle lig van God
Reintseesters van ons fossiilteite
Akademie is 'n prioriteit
Bid vir ons skool en vir mekaar
Is lojaal
VERTROUW tussen kinders en kollega's
GROEI— duiens, groei-lik, wysdom, verhoudings
Is n skool met 'n plan

met siel...

Daar's 'n plek waar jy niks besit nie, maar waar niks jou ook ontbreek nie... omdat God daar is
WALTER BRUGGEMANN



Junie 2012

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

Julie 2012

SO	MA	DI	WO	DO	VRY	SAT
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

met hart & siel

Om groot dinge te bereik, moet ons *nie net doen nie*, maar ook *droom*, nie net beplan nie, maar ook *glo*.

ANATOLE FRANCE



'n Roeping gee...

- Betekenis en sin aan my werk
- HOOP en energie
- FOKUS en rigting
- 'n Rede om vas te bly
- Passie en oortuiging
- Bevestiging van my persoonlike verhouding met God.

'My uitroep tot die Hoogste...'

Augustus 2012

SON	MO	DI	WO	DO	VRY	SAT
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

Wees 'n voorskoot, -kollega eerder as 'n borslap-kollega.

Iemand wat 'n voorskoot dra dien ander, iemand wat 'n borslap dra, word net bedien.

Wees vandag God se hande en voete in jou skool.



met siel...

Gee die wêreld jou beste. En die wêreld se beste sal na jou toe terugkom.

ALAN LAURENCE BARRON

SO	MA	DI	WO	DO	VRY	SAT
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30						

met hart...



Dis die klein dingetjies wat ons *weer en weer* doen, wat uiteindelik 'n groot verskil maak

BYRON PALMER

Lééf

September 2012

Roepingsgedrewe kollegas sal:

Bid vir mekaar

Elkeen sy deel van die vraag dra

Gee ruimte vir mekaar se verskille

Ondersteun en motiveer mekaar

Stel belang in mekaar se lewens buite die skool

Lag saam

met hart & siel



Wat lyk soos die einde, is dalk net 'n *nuwe* begin

ANONIEM

My verhouding met die kinders...

Skep veilige, maar uitdagende atmosfeer

Oktober 2012

SO	MA	DI	WO	DO	VRY	SAT
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

BEGIN ELKE DAG NUUT

Werk met die hele kind, nie net sy brein

Leef God se liefde

Wees 'n inspirasie en voorbeeld deur my dade

Bou op, nie breek af

Wen siele vir die Koninkryk



met hart...
Geluk lê in jou hart, nie in jou omstandighede nie

My verhouding met myself...

Meer genadig en geduldig met myself wees

Nie so hard op myself wees nie.

Moenie te trots wees nie—

vra vir hulp

Myself *doelbewus* onder beheer van die Here stel

Versorg my liggaam, siel en gees

Meer binnepret hê en meer lag

Ek verdien tyd vir myself!

SO	MO	DI	WO	DO	VRY	SAT
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	

November 2012

SO	MO	DI	WO	DO	VRY	SAT
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

Desember 2012



Bring altyd jou eie sonskyn - maak nie saak waarheen jy gaan of hoe die weer lyk nie
Anthony J. D'Amelio



met siel...

in Man stap verby drie mans wat besig is om 'n hoop klippe op te kap.

"Wat doen jy?" vra hy vir die eerste man.

"Ek kap klippe." Hy vra vir die tweede man dieselfde vraag. "Wat doen jy?"

"Ek maak stene". "Eh wat maak jy?" vra hy vir die derde man. Die man antwoord: "Ek bou 'n temper".

Jy is elke dag besig om *meer* te doen as klippe te kap. Jou werk het 'n groter **BETEKENIS** as net elke dag klippe kap.

Jy bou tempels!

5.9. My utmost for His highest

I was astounded by the impact that this retreat and the little calendar had on the lives of the teachers that attended. The realizations that they had come to inspired them and strengthened their identity in God. They could not wait to go back to their school to, now deeply aware of their responsibility, act as stewards and practical theologians. For them, their classrooms have changed from a simple brick building to a “workplace for God” because they are people who have been called to His service (Blackaby & Blackaby 2011:67).

The participants at the retreat learned to see themselves as teachers with a higher calling who have been placed at a specific school for a specific reason. This insight makes a difference to the way they prepare for lessons, how they act on the sports field, the way they handle conflict and even the manner in which they handle stress and burnout. It also has a direct impact on their placement on the continuum of how they experience themselves at school. Living and teaching from a calling will force a teacher to do their utmost for His highest and thus firmly place themselves on the right hand side of the continuum from where they can act as practical theologians, as stewards and as servant leaders in the service of God.

This chapter explored the spiritual identity of teachers as conceptualized and lived out in their daily lives at school. In these relationships that they have with each other they often find solace and comfort. Creating the platform of a retreat offered participants the opportunity to be pampered on a physical and emotional level. The shared experience of disclosing the stories of their joys and frustrations energized them to yet again work towards turning their schools into schools driven by a calling.

As the next chapter of this dissertation reflects on the path that this research followed, it will refer to the different roads that I, as researcher and as teacher, found myself on. So many different opportunities presented itself and looking back on the journey sheds light on the many facets that have been explored and even those unanswered questions and issues that could not be explored due to the limited scope of the research. Reflection is necessary not only to confirm the realities that we have created, the discourses that have been deconstructed and the principles of living out a praxis of human faith that have been accentuated, but also to lift the curtain on the songs that are yet to be sung by the choir of teachers. This journey might not only have helped some teachers to regain their sense of having a calling and of having a voice in the choir, but also served as a catalyst for my own voice to be heard.

Chapter 6

Reflecting on a journey of discoveries

What we call the beginning is often the end, and to make an end is to make a beginning. The end is where we start from... yet we shall not cease from exploration. And the end of all our exploration will be to arrive where we started – and know the place for the first time

TS Eliot (Four quartets 1943).

Freud, in his typical unabashed candour, regards teaching and clinical therapeutic work as “impossible professions” (Freud 1937). “Impossible” because of the inherent expectation that professionals must be constant and unwavering in being empathetic, benevolent, reliable, dedicated, steadfast, and flexible to obtain results in their work. These expectations for such constancy in behaviour become almost unreasonable for the average person. Freud claims that these “impossible” professions can either wane into stagnation or wax into a vital commitment.

The teachers in this study reconnected with this vital commitment when they started evaluating their daily activities through the eyes of their faith (see 5.6.1 - 5.6.4). The awareness of having an identity of calling enables them to face adversity with more resilience and optimism.

Liu and Meyer (2005:985) reports that 50% of new teachers quit teaching within the first five years. Their motivation for giving up on their dream includes too much administrative duties and poor student behaviour. Bivona (2002:10), on the other hand, maintains that 81% of teachers with more than ten years’ experience planned to stay in teaching until they chose to retire.

The Bivona study was a secular, quantitative study that did not include an investigation into the religious convictions of the participants. It would be interesting to know how many of the teachers who took part in that study were devoted Christians and have gradually come to this realization that they had a calling to be a teacher and that they were content to be in this profession regardless of the negative factors they are confronted with year after year.

6.1. “We do not take a trip, a trip takes us”

6.1.1. Merging the public and the private

At the beginning of this research journey I envisioned myself standing between two parallel roads. The one road represented the body of conversations I had with the two groups of participants. Their lives and experiences that resonated so closely with my own provided almost a mirror in which I could reflect on my own experiences as a teacher. I had to constantly stay alert to ensure that my own understanding did not overpower that of the participants.

What I have come to learn through this journey is multifaceted. It was through engaging with people that shared their personal and professional experiences that I had come to realize that I was not alone in my predicament as a teacher. Others were singing the same song that I was - there was indeed a multitude of voices in this choir.

The other road represented the conversations that I entered into with academic literature. Initially, I felt lost in the sea of available information and much of the literature I came across turned out to be more of a monologue than a dialogue to which I could make a sensible contribution. Instead of drowning, I had to learn to find my feet and more importantly, find my own voice within the plethora of opinions that I was confronted with.

Initially, the most adventurous aspect of this journey was, for me, the attempt to build a bridge between these two roads, the personal lives of the participants and the parallel road paved out by the academic discourse. Not only was there a great amount of personal growth involved in finding my way between the two roads, but as time passed and I succeeded in connecting a bridge, I was able to learn from both lines of thought and thus create an alternative story that honoured both the local knowledge of the teachers and

showed respect towards the established academic voices that are referred to in this text.

But, true to the nature of the postmodern discourse and social construction approach to research, I also began to suspect that there might always have been more roads than the initial two that I found myself travelling on because having interdisciplinary conversations built on a postfoundational approach to research did not advocate only two roads connected by a single bridge.

In an article in the *Getaway* magazine, Steinbeck (2001:52) compares a holiday journey to the uniqueness of people. He further says that most of the plans that one makes for a journey are fruitless because “we do not take a trip [journey], a trip takes us.” The same is true for an academic research journey based on an epistemology of participatory action research.

This was never just a simple qualitative inquiry that aimed to prove or disprove a true and pre-set hypothesis. Such research does not leave a lot of room for surprises and innovation or for the individual’s voice to have a leading role. The only voice that receives any academic stature is that of statistical analysis and factual interpretation. Such a journey is predetermined from start to finish. Getting lost or innovative is not an option.

But in the journey that we undertook, getting lost was well permitted, even advisable. The voices of the participants sang out loud and clear and they dictated the course of the research. No route was specified, no possible turnoffs were ignored. No one single person was in the driver’s seat for the duration of the journey (as discussed in 1.3 and 1.8.3)

As previously mentioned, I found it hard not to plan the retreat to the last minute, not to schedule sessions where I was comfortable with the content and could even predict the outcomes and responses from the participants. But the participatory epistemology forced me to let go of the control, to not expect to sing a solo part in the choir. I had to allow the trip to take me.

6.1.2. More voices joining on the journey

As the research progressed it became seemingly clear that my visualization of two roads merging might indeed have been too simplistic and one-dimensional. This study was not only based on the voices of the participants and that of existing academic literature. More voices have joined this choir to eventually lead to the song that we are singing now.

The writing of this study actually focused on five interactions: Firstly, the voices of the teachers taking part, secondly, the contribution of academic literature, thirdly, my own voice as teacher and researcher, fourthly, the praxis of theology and lastly, the influence that this research might have on other teachers and future readers.

Gergen (2002:electronic source) argues that “writing is fundamentally an action within a relationship.” I was not only stuck between two parallel roads and aiming towards building a bridge between the two; I was standing in the middle of a traffic circle with four or more different roads joining the roundabout. There was no clear bridge or crossing between two roads, this journey was to become a merger of all the roads. The participants in this research study have even constructed roads that have not previously been travelled upon. The concepts of practical theology and the previous research by fellow academics provided a firm enough foundation for the praxis of the teachers to build such a new road.

Although we have reached the end of the road for the scope of this research, the teachers who started building this road will keep journeying on it. They will keep going around the roundabout and fluctuate between being on different roads as long as they remain in teaching.

I might end my writing here, but the choir will continue to sing and the building of new roads will continue. The large volume of ideas shared throughout this research journey could not all be reflected on here, partly as a result of the limited scope of the research. But I hope that telling and re-telling will take place, which will lead to the composing of new songs and even more roads. It is however, needed to first reflect on and contemplate some aspects of this exciting journey and to deconstruct a few of the verses that we have sung together.

Dingemans (1996:78) describes practical theology as a discipline that is conceptualized through three actions, namely the analyses of praxis, the evaluation and deconstruction of praxis and then followed by strategic planning. Louw (1999:132) concurs with this definition when he applies this

interchange between theory and practice to the research process. He identifies four different phases in the process to explain the transformation that eventually takes place.

Firstly, a relevant situation is described in the descriptive phase. Secondly, in the reflective phase a critical analysis of that situation will indicate possible interfaces with theology. Thirdly, the results of the analysis are evaluated and interpreted in the face of transformation. This phase is called the systemic hermeneutical phase and it questions the narratives and discourses that play into the choices that people make. In the last phase new theoretical models are created that have a direct impact the praxis of people through initiating changes in this praxis.

In the context of this research, parallels are clear and evident between this methodology explained by Dingemans and Louw and the four questions set by Osmer (2008:4) that form the theoretical foundation for this research (refer to 1.10). The following table illustrates the interfaces and parallels between these three models of practice.

Table 5.: Parallels between three models of practice

OSMER	DINGEMANS	LOUW
Descriptive-empirical task	Analysis of praxis	Descriptive phase
Interpretive task		Reflection phase
Normative task	Evaluation of praxis	Systematic hermeneutical
Pragmatic task	Strategic planning	Strategic phase

At the onset of this research journey the situation in teaching was examined and discourses and dominant stories identified and explored (as explored in chapter 3). Subsequently, through journeying with teachers through their minds and hearts the role that practical theology plays in their everyday lives became evident and was recorded in chapter 4 and 5.

Because of the postmodern approach to research, there is no set hypothesis to be proved and the course that the research was going to take was not confined to set parameters. Therefore, after I initially suspected that all teachers involved in the study would feel comfortable with using

the term “calling”, I soon came to the realization that the discourses attached to this term could be adding to the stress that teachers have to deal with every day.

Chapter four portrayed the systematic hermeneutical task (also known as the normative task) of this research as an investigation into the discipleship identity of teachers. Conversations and a spiritual retreat were utilized to share teachers’ experiences and to expand on their personal understanding of calling, stewardship and servant leadership.

The last step in the process, the strategic planning phase, or in Osmer’s paradigm, the pragmatic phase explored how teachers could effectively and faithfully respond to their duty to be practical theologians in their class and in turn address the stressors in their lives. The retreat that a large group of teachers from Rob Ferreira High School attended turned out to be a mutual search for strategies and actions that could be undertaken to empower teachers to deal with their daily events and situations.

A choir is composed of many different voices, all of them necessary for making music. Every voice is distinct and special without being “better” than any other. To make a significant contribution to the choir and participate in the final powerful song that the choir of teachers sings, individuals have to be responsive to the unique call of their own voices.

If everyone played the same instrument or sang exactly the same song, the music would just be loud, monotone and boring; it would lack texture and harmony. The wonder of the choir of teachers is caught up in the magic of so many voices each singing their own tune, but the final product being a harmonious melody. I believe that it is the presence of God in the song that merges and harmonizes all the different voices.

6.2. Bringing the metaphor to life

Winter (1996:27) points out that “writing up a report is an act of learning and, in this sense, we write for ourselves so that, when we read what we have written, we find out what, in the end, we have learned.”

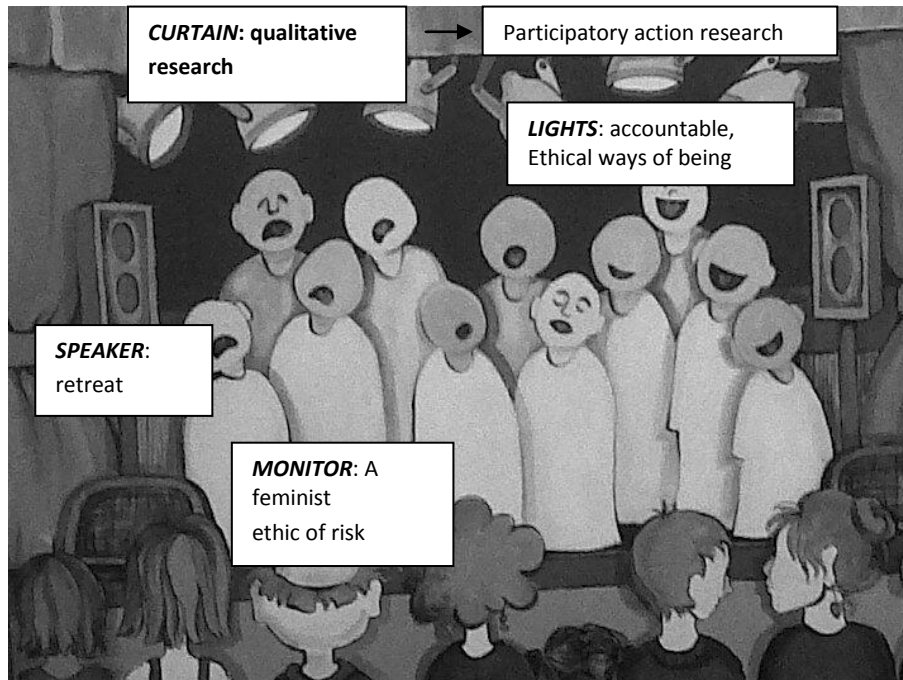
This journey did not start with a written text; it started with a mental picture that was, through the talents of a good friend, turned into a painting that formed the core from where all my thinking happened. Once I had shared my dream and my vision of thinking of teachers as a choir where

some sing with a louder and more confident voice than others, with her, she set out to capture my dream on a canvas.

This painting now proudly hangs in my office where I can look at it every day.^{xxxix} I consider it a constant reminder of the task that I have undertaken to join teachers on the road to reclaiming their voices from a system that often do not want to hear their joys or their concerns. I plan to let the painting not only be a precious keepsake, but also a prompt to constantly question my commitment and ongoing devotion to this cause.

In the following section I will use my cherished painting that was specifically commissioned for this purpose, to reflect on the different facets of this research endeavour and also to evaluate the impact that our research journey might have on the praxis of theology in teacher's personal lives and in the schools where they teach. Each individual item in the painting represents a part of my epistemology or of the research paradigm and will be indicated in text boxes on the painting itself before a short reflection will follow.

6.2.1. The surroundings



^{xxxix} See addendum for a representation of this painting

6.2.1.1. The curtains – A co-search to create new meaning

According to Schubert and Schubert-Lopez (1997:205) there is a need for research to be done from the perspective of the individual teacher, thereby ensuring that they are a primary source in action research: “It was evident to us that our lives as teachers were interwoven with our lives as human beings, and that reflective teaching went hand in hand with reflectiveness about our personal living” (Schubert & Schubert-Lopez 1997:206). Through their stories, teachers are invited to speak of themselves, their natural world and their school community in personal and professional terms.

In participatory action research a group of people enter into a living process examining their reality by asking penetrating questions, mulling over assumptions related to their everyday problems and circumstances, deliberating alternatives for change and taking meaningful actions (Conde-Frazier 2012:241). Reason and Bradbury (2001:1) understands such participation as the bringing together of action and reflection, theory and practice. Participatory research should always aim to create a social space where the researcher and participants can share such experiences and information. The primary purpose of action research is to produce *practical* knowledge that is *useful* to people in the everyday conduct of their lives (Reason & Bradbury 2001:2). Such knowledge should be grounded in the perspectives and interests of those immediately concerned (Reason & Bradbury (2001:4).

In 1.8.3. I concurred with the incentives that Berge and Ve (2000:129) supplied for opting to use a participatory action approach as a research methodology for a study of this nature. I will now, in retrospect, critically evaluate the decision to use action research as the backdrop to my own research journey.

Firstly, Berge and Ve (2001:130) claims that “action research is about learning from actions.” During this journey I not only learned from the actions of the participants, but I also learned from my own actions. Through our initial conversations and the subsequent retreat the constructed nature and identity of teachers’ perceptions around living out their calling became clear. These gradual realizations led to the research developing around new avenues that I might not have anticipated in the initial planning stages. Respecting these lessons that we have learned from our actions opened up the possibilities to enhance the impact that the research could have on the lives of the participants.

The second motivation for using action research is that “in action research the participants aim to achieve equality in relationships” (Berge & Ve 2000:131). As I reflect on the conversations that we have had throughout this journey, I recognize that all teachers are constantly aiming towards equality in their professional and personal lives. Therefore it was imperative that there was an equal relationship between the participants and myself. Should I critically analyze this point, the question should be asked whether total equality is ever possible in a situation where one person conceptualized the initial research idea and research questions.

The third reason that Berge and Ve (2000:132) offers for doing action research is that “one important method in action research is self-reflection.” Self-reflection has helped me to realize that I might have had pre-conceived ideas about factors causing stress in teachers’ lives and about their own conceptualization of the idea of calling. I had to allow my own ideas to be challenged by the voices of the participants and I had to keep quiet long enough to let them muster the courage to have their voices and opinions heard. I had to be willing to let myself and my thoughts be guided by the participants on the journey.

The retreat offered the ideal opportunity for participatory action research because of the way in which the weekend was structured (refer to 5.2.2). The lack of organized activities and pre-set agendas freed the teachers to just be themselves, to share as much or as little as they felt comfortable with. In the days before the retreat *Cornelia* uttered the following words:

I look forward to going, just as long as nobody expects me to share. I’m not a talker, especially not in front of a group of people.

Yet, when transcribing the text, I noted how many contributions she eventually did make. Nobody forced her to share her personal experiences and emotions. Nobody gave her a questionnaire with pre-determined right and wrong answers and pressured her to complete it. The atmosphere at the retreat made her feel safe enough to have her voice heard, and maybe even she was in the end surprised at the song that she had sung. This attests to the fact that the nature of this research was truly participatory action research.

If there is to be a theory of action research, it resides within the personal constructs of each teacher... reflecting on sources of meaning and direction in their lives... Moreover, this is not merely individual work; it requires that the teacher be reflective as a human being, that is, one who engages with other

teachers and students to create and continuously recreate an authentic public space. (Schubert and Lopez-Schubert 1997:203).

6.2.1.2. The stage lights - Accountability

Doehring (1999:95) states that “in our communities we need to strive towards accountability that is the first step towards healing.” As explored in 1.6.2.1 accountability can initiate and lead to healing and growth.

Although I can plead that “I did not know” or claim that I did not directly take part in some practices that might have marginalized teachers, I stay accountable. I am therefore not excused from not knowing. As a result of accepting my accountability, I chose to reach out and build trust with a group of people, because I believe that the core task of practical theology is to build trust in order to collaborate in the ongoing process of action and reflection.

I must however admit that the beginning of this research journey did not fully reflect authentic participation in research. McTaggart (1997:29) states that one aspect of authentic participation is the participant’s role in setting the agenda of the journey. This research journey was initially structured through my own curiosity and not because a group of people approached me with a specific set of needs that motivate them to change their lives. Full participation was, however, emphasized as soon as the research journey began as I challenged my power/knowledge position through self-awareness, transparency and accountability. The end product was therefore substantially different from my initial interest.

McTaggart (1997:27) further points out that due to the complexity of social situations, in practice it is never possible to anticipate everything that might occur during a research journey of such a participatory nature, but because of the flexibility of the research, it could accommodate all the changes that occurred once the conversations with the participants started.

My openness to these changes and unforeseen alterations in the song that we were singing were due to my ethical commitment to, through being accountable and transparent, keeping the participants the primary beneficiary of the research.

6.2.1.3. The speakers – The retreat

Teachers spend a much greater part of their lives talking than they do listening. They might find that they are good at talking about many subjects, but not very often do they feel comfortable talking about themselves. Many teachers have lost the part of their voice they need for asking for help and for caring for themselves. For a group of people who have, through the power of various discourses operating in their lives, been marginalized and silenced, it was refreshing to attend a retreat where they were considered as more than mere objects for evaluation, or subjects for the gathering of statistical data. To be acknowledged as co-creators of conversations and research fostered a feeling of personal worth and value (as explored in 5.4.3).

Furthermore, being pampered by not having to even make yourself a cup of tea, but being served hand and foot, was a welcome relief to teachers who were bombarded with chores and responsibilities at work and at home. Many of them felt that, even in their own homes, they were mute and without a voice. I found it imperative that the retreat not only nurtured their emotional, but also their physical selves. There would be no cooking, no washing dishes, no cleaning up after themselves or others. There would only be a feeling of contentment and being made a fuss of. And in that pampered state, experience the feeling of being safe enough to venture to places in their soul and their mind where their voices were silently screaming for some attention.

The retreat was a maiden journey that the participants and I undertook together. I was not at all sure whether this context would lead to any sharing or even make a real difference in the lives of the teachers that attended. I approached the first conversation with a little apprehension and fear, not knowing whether people were at all going to be willing to open their hearts and share the anecdotes and emotions that make up their dominant stories in teaching.

I deliberately did not make use of any prescribed quantitative method or therapeutic tool that would guarantee success - instead we approached the process that lay ahead more like a dance. Janesick explains that "there was continuous movement in the research [retreat] that was based on praxis, participations, elasticity and transformation. Therefore, it was not always structured and organized; it was sometimes out of order and confusing" (Janesick 1994:204).

Yet, in hindsight it became clear that every participant seemed to get what they needed from the experience and I could only stand amazed at the symphony of song and dance that was created around me. We will never be able to present an exact replica of or even repeat this retreat. This can never be seen as only a dress rehearsal for a final concert. This retreat was the one and only performance.

The liberties that a postmodern and qualitative approach to research allow, opens up doors for the next retreat to focus on totally different discourses, and that time around, I will personally be a lot more secure within the confusion and creativity. I will be more excited and open to not planning anything in advance and simply joining in the joyride.

The primary goal of qualitative research is defined as describing and understanding, rather than explaining, human behaviour. This leads to perceiving participants "in terms of their own definition of the world" (Bless & Higson-Smith 2000:156). The work reported here respects the original voices of the teachers involved in the research and lets them speak for themselves, using the rich density of meaning of direct quotation. This also brings into communal hearing voices that are often ignored or have become silent in the micro-political realities of life as a teacher.

The retreat was based upon principles of power-sharing that created a safe space for such individuals to find their own voices again. Ideas were introduced from the first conversation, giving the teachers "agency" of their own stories and experiences. Agency also meant that the participants had a say in the use of their stories as well as in sharing with me the way they wanted

me to re-tell their stories. The participants also continuously had a voice in the research questions that we journeyed towards finding answers to.

This implies that everybody's opinion was valued and was taken into account in trying to understand their personal situations. In this way, no opinion was seen as a final and exact understanding of what all the other views really meant. The variety and difference in people's experience made it a rich resource. "To treat all viewpoints as a collaborative resource is thus to suspend the conventional status hierarchy which gives some members' viewpoints greater credibility than others" (Zuber-Skerrit 1996:22). This accentuates that every person who made a contribution as a member of the first group of teachers or attended the retreat with the second group was considered an "expert" of their own experiences and therefore valuable to the project.

6.2.1.4. The monitors – A feminist ethic of risk

Reinharz (1992:211) compares the feminist discourse (as discussed in 2.3) to people setting off on an important journey. The journey becomes one of gradual discovery in which it is crucial to reflect on the process, rather than only on the end result. This is because the different routes taken on this journey constitutes an important aspect of understanding feminist research. And the result of this is "part of the product" of the research project (Reinharz 1992:212).

The telling of teachers' stories can be a way of talking themselves "into existence", but the re-telling of their stories also implies that they are not the same people they were when they started on the research journey. After the retreat, while I was contemplating the events of the weekend, I came to a very interesting conclusion. I found myself wondering if the men might not have received more from the discourses that we had over the weekend than the women did. Should the scope of this research have allowed, I would have like to enquire further on the following issues:

- In transcribing the conversations of the weekend I deducted that the men who attended had contributed more to the conversation than the women did, although there was more women in attendance than men.
- Could it be that women, through their friendships and the nature of their conversations, speak more freely in the staff room and at social events about their frustrations in the classroom and at school in general?

- Is it possible that many women acknowledge and share their emotions more spontaneously and might therefore be more aware of the reasons they are still in teaching?
- Might men have a different understanding of stress and of the role that they play in children's lives?
- Do the dominant discourses on masculinity prevent men from admitting that they might not be coping and might be in need of some help?

These questions are not intended to support a form of research that, according to Gergen, would contribute to "alienated relationships, the creation of inadequacy and an atomistic and hierarchical conception of society" (2002:electronic source). It would rather be an ethical act where others are to also benefit from this process. It would be modernistic and one-dimensional to simplify the answers to these questions and then to merely generalize the answers to all male teachers.

I spent some time listening in a critical and analytical manner to the conversations in my school's staff room. Traditionally the women sit inside and the men sit outside on a large deck. On the women's side of the room I heard about happenings and confrontations in their classrooms, rewarding incidents with children, religious experiences, frustrations in their homes and the state of affairs with their husbands and own children. At any given time, there was a plethora of emotions being shared and a mass of empathy and advice being dispersed.

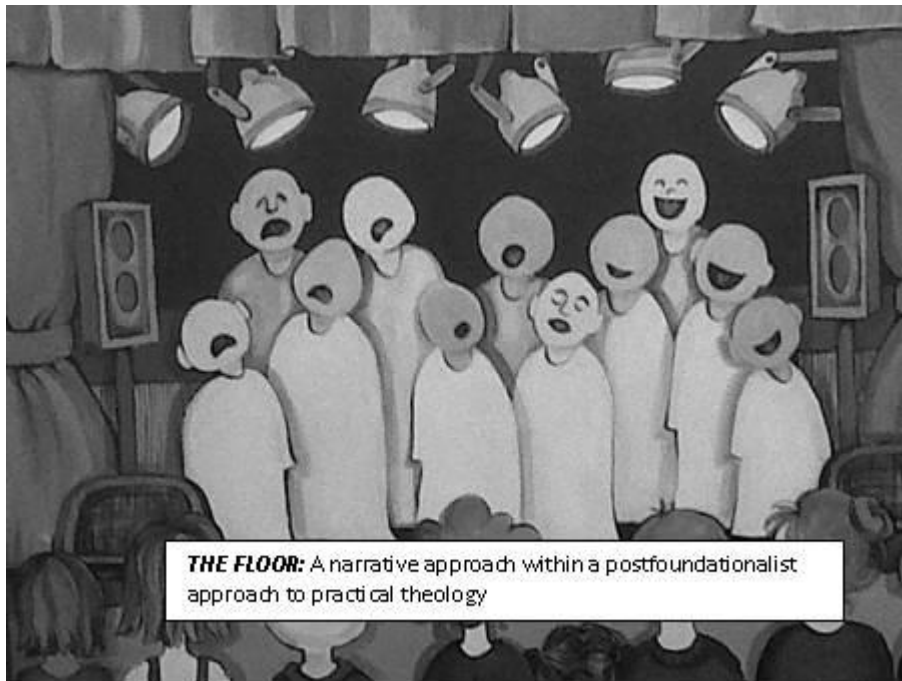
For the week that I sat outside on the men's side of the staff room I heard more talk about rugby and cars than I have ever heard before. Conversations about pupils were mostly located to happenings on the sports field and often involved more talk about tactics or strategy than emotions. I had to, again, at the risk of finding myself trapped in a modernistic frame of mind, wonder if religion and emotion were more private experiences to men? Was the retreat therefore a welcome, quite possibly unexpected, opportunity where they felt safe enough to share their experiences? And once the dam wall broke and the first man had the conviction to share, they embraced the opportunity. I thus feel that the retreat offered men the opportunity to also "talk themselves into existence".

When postmodern thinking is applied to such issues of inquiry and discourses, no-one has privileged knowledge that may claim to be universal truths. I can therefore not make any deductions on this issue simply on my own observations. I agree with Kotzé (2002:18) that the

approach should be participatory rather than prescriptive. If we aspire to be ethical, focus should be on being in praxis with such silenced and marginalized people like the men who attended the retreat. We should aim to listen *to* them, instead of deciding *for* them.

There are so many possible research avenues caught up in the two aforementioned paragraphs and it is my sincere wish that someone, it might even be myself, will go on a quest to find the answers and join male teachers on a journey towards empowerment on this issue that is so filtered through with gender discourses.

6.2.2. The floor – My approach to practical theology



THE FLOOR: A narrative approach within a postfoundationalist approach to practical theology

I entered into this research with a specific discursive positioning^{xxxii} from which I explored and developed a relationship based on a postfoundationalist practical theology. The participants also entered the research with their own unique epistemology, but acutely aware of the communal situation that all teachers share. I chose this research paradigm because through the process, participants were validated as stakeholders of their own knowledge and experience. Throughout the process I paid attention to allowing myself to be led by new ideas, developments and conversations with my co-searchers. Kotzé (2002:9) surmises that

^{xxxii} Refer to chapter 1 for a detailed discussion on my epistemological positioning.

knowledge no longer represents the world as it is, but is now taken as referring to our interpretations, resulting in realities that are socially constructed by people in specific contexts, with specific purposes and with very real political and ethical effects.

The dynamic interaction between qualitative research, feminist discourse and the growing influence that postfoundationalist ideas have on practical theology creates even more space for research studies like this one where a critical evaluation is done on the relationship between praxis and theory in specifically the educational sector. This helped me and the participants to feel comfortable with the process, no matter the voice with which they were singing in the choir.

It is possible that approaching this research using a quantitative approach might have yielded much of the same results. The alternative results offered by such an approach might have brought other conclusions and suggestions to the table and therefore the value of quantitative work should not be dismissed.

It is however plausible that the depth and quality of feeling of a sincere and heart-felt qualitative discourse might not be produced and replicated in quantitative work. The dynamic, unpredictable flow and surprises of interdisciplinary conversations made for a journey worth travelling.

Chapter 2 of this dissertation explored the *habitus* in which practical theology operates in South Africa. Alastair Campbell (2000:84) encapsulates this epistemology by making a few conclusive points on the nature of practical theology that I find satisfactory. In summary, he mentions five important aspects:

- “Practical theology is concerned with the study of specific social structures and individual initiatives within which God’s continuing work of renewal and restitution becomes manifest. These may be found either inside or outside the life of the church” (Campbell 2000:84). In the context of this research, teachers acting as practical theologians inside their schools and homes are examples of individuals being responsible for renewal and restitution in the lives of the people surrounding them.
- “Practical theology can no longer take the functions of the ordained ministry as normative for its divisions of subject matter and delineation of scope” (Campbell 2000:84). Awarding teachers the freedom to assume the identity of being practical theologians in their ventures

at school discards any former scope and limitations that might have been attached to the praxis of theology.

- “The relationship between practical theology and other theological disciplines is neither inductive, nor deductive. The relationship is to be seen as a ‘lateral’ rather than a ‘linear’ one” (Campbell 2000:84). The interdisciplinary nature of this research project also reminds us of the multi-layered and lateral relationship between the different disciplines involved in this discourse.
- “Because of the ‘situation-based’ method it employs, practical theology can be expected to be fragmentary and poorly systemized” (Campbell 2000:84). Because teachers are primarily educators and not theologians, they can and will not be expected to spend all their time on theological matters. Being a practical theologian must not only be an emergency tool that teachers grab onto when they feel overpowered by stress. It must become an integral part of their identity, a natural occurrence that they should not even recognize when they are doing it.
- “The findings of practical theology can be expected to be mostly in the form of concrete proposals” (Campbell 2000:84). Educators spend their days teaching children new knowledge or internalizing knowledge that they might already have. In their other undertakings with children, they sometimes have to give advice or be empathetic to situations they might not be familiar with. Very often, these situations do not ask for words; a simple smile, touch on the shoulder, or hug will suffice. It is those concrete actions that make teachers the hands and hearts of God on earth.

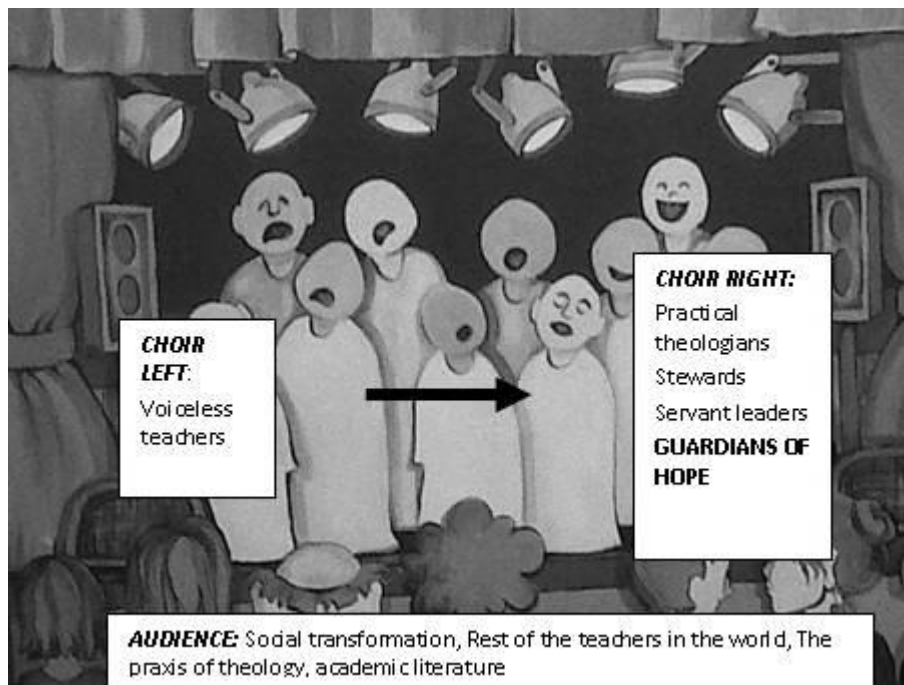
In 2.2.2.3 it is established that the contextual approach to practical theology concerns itself with social transformation. The aim of contextual practical theology is the social and political improvement of people in communities, especially those who experience some sort of oppression. The amounts of children that come to school with serious socio-economic or emotional problems are becoming an increasing reality in most schools in South Africa.

Teachers share in the powerlessness and pain of these children they teach. The expectation and need to minister to the whole child is becoming eminent. Contextual theology is thus relevant to this study because it empowers the participants in this study to handle these situations that they are confronted with on a regular basis.

This dissertation has emphasized the vibrant relationship between narrative and practical theology through referring to the contributions of academic minds like Charles Gerkin (1984), Anton Boisen (1960) and Julian Müller (2004). Ruard Ganzevoort (2012:219) investigates this dynamic affiliation and explains the interactions between human stories and the story of God as taking one of three positions that are sometimes used strategically and sometimes considered as theological normative.

Firstly, the stories of God in the Bible express the stories of people and supply the words to describe how we know or feel, thereby validating our experience. Secondly, the stories of God offer critique on our stories and our lives. The prophetic styles challenge us, offer guidance, warnings and support (Ganzevoort 2012:219), and thirdly, the stories of God opens up space where we can reflect on our own stories, without feeling that we have to fit into a specified mould. Everyone thus has the opportunity to take from the story that which fit within their own local knowledge and frame of reference (Ganzevoort 2012:219).

6.2.3. The people in the painting



6.2.3.1. The choir – The participants

This research endeavour was a journey into multiple discoveries. It has taught me many things about the constructed nature of the world that teachers function in. The previous chapter elaborated on the discoveries that the participants and I have made on this journey. These are realizations that both parties will be able to use on their journeys into the future. Skills that they will be able to incorporate into the song that they will be singing (refer to 5.7.1).

Many teachers often see themselves as being helpless, tired, de-motivated and even scared like the faces on the left hand side of the painting. Should this research have focused on their powerlessness it would have maintained their awareness of how difficult the work is and how much stress and even burnout they encounter on a daily basis.

Making the choice to focus on success stories and the participants' reasons for still being in teaching initiated the discourse that focused on how they collaboratively made a difference. In that process the faces of the teachers changed like the faces in the painting. They lit up, they smiled, they reconnected with their calling, and they found their voices (see testimonies in 5.9). Cozad Neuger (2001:68) believes that having a voice is not just a matter of being able to tell one's story, but it is also about the empowerment of "hearing oneself speak and learning to believe the truth of that long-denied voice, language and narrative".

Such conversations that strengthened the identities of teachers as having a calling or as working for God and not for the Department of Education placed the emphasis on the achievements and work engagement that they did experience. The anecdotes that they shared brought home to me the active nature of participatory ethics in a profoundly concrete way.

The caring solidarity that was so visible among the teachers that attended this retreat doesn't just happen. The ability to create such a community of care lies within the shared values and principles that are upheld by individuals who choose to live their lives according to a participatory ethic. It is kept alive by the willingness to be compassionate witnesses to the pain they are confronted with every day. Transforming the school they teach at to a school that is driven by a calling might turn out not to be such a mammoth task after all. These teachers were implementing so many of the strategies they attributed to becoming such a school already. Their focus was already on God and honouring Him through their daily actions. The rest of the road might turn out to be purely semantic.

Unfortunately, the realities of life can easily overshadow the progress that they have already made. The findings of Professor Jonathan Jansen's committee on National Education Evaluation and Development Unit (NEEDU) confirm that there is still a general lack of public confidence in our education system (Jansen 2011:electronic source). All the work that these teachers might be doing towards transforming their school into a school guided by a calling, might at times seem trivial in the light of the dire situations that cause stress and burnout in their lives. It is therefore imperative to remind them of their resolution to live according to their calling and to devote their professional lives to God. So, after the retreat, I created a calendar for the following year with short summaries of the conversations that we had (see 5.8). In that way, the participants could keep reminding themselves of their daily commitment towards living out their calling and refer to these notes should reality threaten to overwhelm them.

Sometimes they also just need to be reminded of the hope that they inspire in themselves and in each other. "It is the responsibility of those who love you to do hope with you. Hope is something we do with others" (Weingarten 2000:402). Riet Bons-Storm (1998:15) also captures the essence of hope when she says that hope has to do with

a different order, a new earth. In the Second Testament I read that of faith, hope and love, love is the most important. But nowadays I think that hope is the most needed virtue. Hope nurtures the courage to love, that is, to be open to others and to see the best in them and to cherish them without being afraid. Without hope in the midst of dread there cannot be faith.

6.2.3.2. The audience – The larger world

This journey was not only about a group of people telling their stories and finding their voices in a choir, but it was also about starting a current of transformation that would bring about change in the lives of all teachers in South Africa. Our aim was to transform hope into actions for a better way of life for teachers that devote so much of their own lives to others.

Should the scope of this research have allowed, I would also have liked to further explore the concept of hope itself. A more intensive study of the "Theology of Hope" by Jurgen Moltmann (1967) and the contributions of authors like Daniël Louw (2001; 2008) would have enabled me to make a substantial contribution to the conceptualization of the influence that an awareness of the power of hope can have on a teacher's live. Exploring the practical implications that fostering

hope for themselves, for the children they teach and for their schools have, might empower these teachers to turn hope into a practical *habitus* and an important part of their personal epistemology.

I firmly believe that this research journey has made a significant contribution to the field of practical theology and pastoral care. The arguments presented in this research and supported through the process of participatory action research, can

- Contribute to a sense of community in teachers.
- Identify ways in which their identities as Christians that have been called can be strengthened.
- Identify, recognize and celebrate the vast range of gifts that teachers have.
- Create a sense of solidarity that can act as a counterbalance to the individualistic nature of teaching.
- Share experiences of the theology of praxis and hermeneutics of lived religion they experience in their classes every day.
- Create possibilities for people to become the guardians and agents of their own and other people's hope.

As argued from a social constructionist perspective as motivated in chapter one, there is no conclusion or final word to this study. There is however a final "wish" that the choir will go on singing a song of hope and healing, enhanced by harmonies of care, awareness, empowerment and ethical practices. It is my wish that this study will expand to include more teachers, that more schools will risks ventures like the retreat to empower their teachers to find their voices. Therefore, it is my hope that the structure of our retreat can serve as a starting point for other groups of teachers to also embark on an adventurous journey.

6.3. Suggested framework for a "Courage to teach"-retreat

As already mentioned, a retreat can never be planned to the last minute, because of the participatory approach and the social construction discourse that promotes the development and evolution of such an event as it happens. But not all teachers have training in these types of actions; therefore I am presenting suggested guidelines for facilitating such a retreat. Even if

these guidelines are followed, the conversations will still take on a life of their own and the retreat will develop along the lines of the specific needs of the unique group of teachers that attend.

A retreat is structured to be a physical and spiritual treat for those who attend and therefore attention also needs to be given to the refreshments that are going to be served and the little treats that participants are going to be spoiled with. In Addendum 2 examples of such treats are included. It is also not a given that a retreat needs to be presented at a luxury venue. I believe that it can even be presented in a hall close to home. I would however suggest that it not be done at the school itself, because a lot of the success of the venture lies in getting away from the circumstances in which the teachers experience the stressors they have to deal with.

Friday^{xxxiii}

15:00 Arrival

Teachers are welcomed with beautifully presented non-alcoholic beverages and snacks. It is important to take at least two people along who will be responsible to act as a food-team for the weekend (positive parents are always a good idea). It is imperative that the participants feel that they are being spoiled and being served plays a large part in succeeding in this goal.

Rooms are allocated beforehand and creative heart-shaped nametags are placed on the door. A welcome note is placed on each bed before the participants arrive. In addition, there is also wooden heart on each bed with instructions for the teacher to collect and keep all the wooden items that they are to receive throughout the weekend for an activity at the end of the weekend.

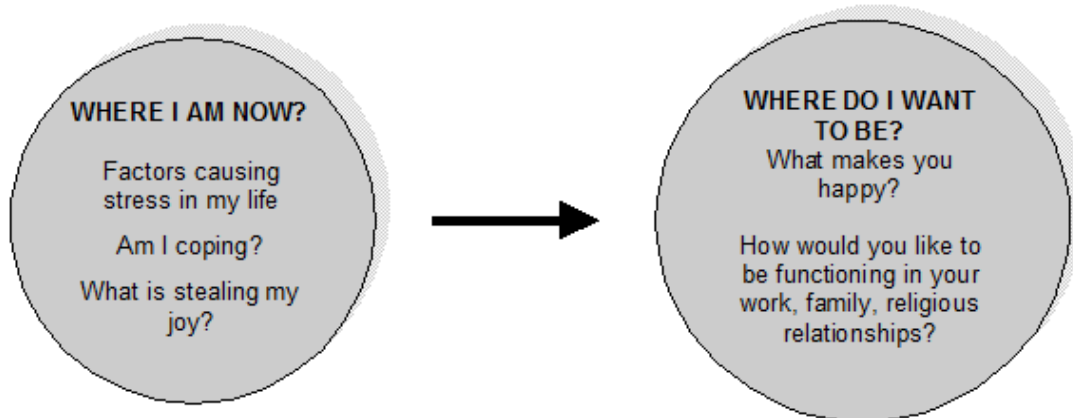
16:00 – 18:00 Session 1

Each participant receives a notebook and pen should they want to make any notes for their own future reference. On their chairs participants find a wooden cross that has also been painted with blackboard paint and a card with an inspirational message. While this session is underway, someone from the food-team places another painted heart and inspirational card on each bed so that the participants can find it when they return to their rooms. All the cards have messages or

^{xxxiii} The ideal would be that the attendants spend the night somewhere, but all schools function around budgets, and therefore it would also be possible to adapt the format of the conversations and present the whole retreat in a single day.

ideas relating to having a calling that participants could save in their Bibles or put up in their classes (See Addendum 2 for examples of these cards).

- A. Should the venue allow, the retreat can be started off with a spiritual session where the teachers spend 15-20 minutes alone in nature with their Bibles. Specific scriptures related to having a calling can be given to guide their thoughts and prayers.
- B. It is crucial to start the group session with an ice breaker, even if all the participants know each other very well. An easy option would be to have everybody just say where they were born and tell one thing that the other people might not know about them or to share where their favourite holiday destination is. This usually leads to some laughter and everybody are then more relaxed for the session to follow.
- C. During the first conversation the big picture of the goals of the weekend are presented.^{xxxiv} The dominant story of a teacher's life is socially constructed and the alternative story of where they would like to be is conceptualized. Using a flip chart or projector enables the facilitator to create a visual presentation of a large circle where the current situation of teachers is set out and in a second circle, the place where they ideally would like to be.



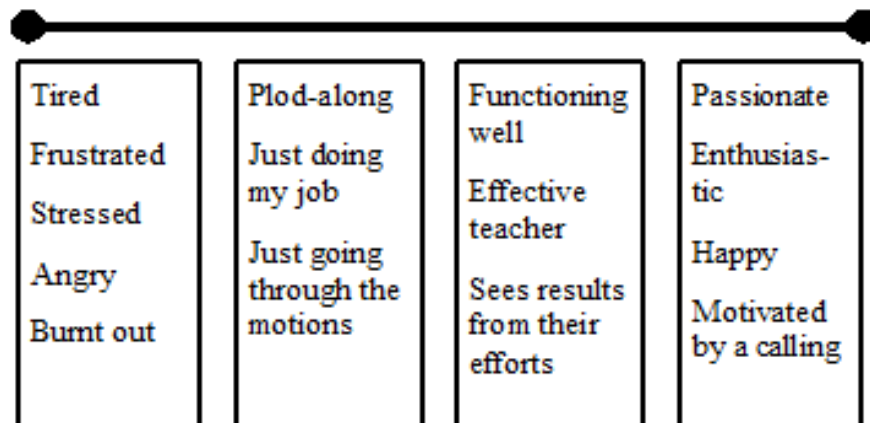
- D. Conceptualize circle 1: WHERE YOU ARE NOW
 1. Define factors causing stress in the professional lives of teachers. What do the teachers find frustrating? What steals their joy and fulfilment? It is crucial that clear distinctions are made here between intrinsic and extrinsic factors.

^{xxxiv} I am vigilant about the dangers of using a video camera to record sessions. Participants might experience "stage fright" and not be willing to share their stories. So I opted to use a small Dictaphone to record the conversations to be transcribed for this text and the calendar.

2. Investigate the discourses that define the dominant stories that these teachers currently live by.

E. Introduce the continuum

1. From the abovementioned information the continuum with the four groups of teachers can now be introduced and explained. Give enough time for teachers to place themselves on this continuum. Where do they currently find themselves? How long have they been on that side of the continuum? Is it a place where they are content and happy to be? Do they have a need for tools to move to a different place on this scale?
2. Explain that placement is not static, but rather a dynamic process and that a person's placement will change a few times throughout the day and can be influenced by changes in external and internal circumstances. It is therefore important to also look at the bigger picture to get a general idea of where they are placed most of the time.



E. Circle 2: WHERE WE CAN BE

1. Discuss the factors that cause people to be happy and fulfilled, for example feeling like your life has meaning, believing that you make a difference, having meaningful relationships in your life, finding joy in life through friends, music, nature, et cetera.
2. Offer the participants the opportunity to create a picture of how they would like to function in their professional capacity, in their family life, other personal relationships and in their relationship with God. Let them assess themselves on their progress towards this preferred state of being. Have they reached it yet? Have they ever reached that place? Might they just like some acknowledgement that they are on the right track to getting there?

18:00 Dinner

It is important that throughout dinner and the socializing afterwards, no negative talk about school be allowed. It often happens that teachers will share anecdotes and stories about their experiences, but these have to be humorous or sentimental, rather than negative and detrimental to the overall atmosphere of the retreat.

During dinner the participants receive another inspirational card with a message about calling on their plates (see Addendum 2).

Saturday

7:30 Coffee and rusks

8:00 – 11:00 Session 2

Participants find their second painted cross on their seats, again with an inspirational bookmark. During the session someone from the food-team will place another wooden heart on each bed. A coffee station is set up in one corner where participants can help themselves to refreshments. This session could loosely follow the following format:

- A. 15-20 minute individual session in nature where participants can do Bible study and ponder over the session of the previous night.
- B. The conversation is then started with a discussion about how the participants came to be teachers. Some will share stories of always wanting to study teaching while many others will have vastly different tales of plans to do many other things and then eventually finding their way to teaching.
- C. The participants can then be questioned about the reasons that keep them in teaching. Some may share stories of leaving education and then finding their way back while others might admit to having opportunities to leave, but deciding not to take it. But most participants will probably have a lot to say about their motivation for still being there. It is important to mention that not everyone will contribute to conversations. As the day progresses, it is often noticeable that more people will actively take part in the conversation.

- D. The concept of calling is now explored and teachers are asked to give their definitions thereof. What difference does making a calling have to the way that you do your job? Is calling a once-off occurrence or could it be a continuous commitment you make every day?
- E. The conversation can now focus on the spiritual aspect of teaching. Where do you see God in your classroom? How does your Christianity affect the way that you work with children? How does it affect the decisions you make and the actions you take?
- The facilitator can now, through examples and brain storming, conceptualize terms like stewardship, servant leadership and practical theology. What do these words mean to you? What positive and negative connotations do you have to these words? Which of these words can you relate to in your personal and professional life? Have you ever thought of yourself as being one or more of the abovementioned?
- F. The session is ended with a summary and reflection on the social constructions that the participants have created around these terms.
- G. It is also necessary to link these concepts to the session that they had the previous evening. What influence does seeing yourself in this light have on your placement on the continuum? How does considering yourself as wearing these labels influence the journey to where you want to be?

11:00 – 12:00 Brunch

12:00 – 15:00 Session 3

The participants receive a key ring with a reminder of their calling (See Addendum 2). It is suggested that they put their classroom keys on this key ring so that it can serve as a constant reminder of this weekend and of the commitments that they have made to themselves. This session is meant to be a more practical engagement. During the previous session the participants have formed academic conceptualizations of where they are on the emotional continuum and where they would like to be, but they now need to be equipped with the tools to indeed become practical theologians in their classes and in the relationships that they have in their professional capacities.

- A. During this conversation the identity of being a Christian teacher is defined and strengthened. The discourses should centre on how having such an identity would influence your relationship with the following entities:
- Your relationship with the Department of Education.
 - Your relationship with colleagues.
 - Your relationship with the children you teach.
 - Your relationship with yourself.
 - Your relationship with the greater community.
- B. Have a discussion about practical situations where being a Christian, having a calling and seeing yourself as a steward for the Kingdom of God are tested. Refer to situations with the Department, colleagues, children you teach, parents, et cetera.
- C. What role can the church play in supporting teachers in their fight against stress and burnout and in strengthening their identity as Christians with a calling?
- D. Christian teachers have the obligation to transform their schools into a school that is driven by a calling. Have the participants list some characteristics of such an institution. Which of those are they doing already? What at their school has to change for them to consider themselves as schools with a calling? What role do they as individual teachers have to play in this process of transformation?
- E. End the conversation by again referring to the two circles that was created the previous evening. Point out how the tools that they have received through this day could be used to guide them from where they are to where they want to be.

15:00 Last refreshments and snacks before departure.

During this time the participants are asked to bring all the hearts and crosses that they have collected throughout the course of the retreat. During the last session a bag with pieces of string and some white chalk are also put on their beds. They now get the opportunity to string the hearts and crosses together. This decorative piece can now be hung up somewhere and should they want to, they can use the chalk to write words like calling, stewardship, et cetera on some of their

hearts and crosses. The idea is that it is done with chalk so that it can even be changed on occasion.

Being the facilitator of such a retreat may seem like a daunting prospect that some might not easily feel qualified for. It is therefore always advisable to use the skills of respected local ministers or pastors. In such occasions, they should however be briefed thoroughly ahead of time on the context of the specific group that they are meant to jointly facilitate.

6.4. Future songs in this line of research

6.4.1. Limitations on the research

When undertaking a research journey founded on an epistemology of the postmodern discourse, it is important to also recognize and acknowledge limitations to ensure that in future research such issues can be addressed. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, this study was localized to two groups of white, Afrikaans teachers from old model C schools. The direct implication of this fact is that the voices of teachers in non-model C schools and from other races or language groups are thus not heard in this text.

A second restriction came about because of my personal involvement with the second group of teachers that attended the retreat. Because I teach at the same school that they do, I could anticipate fairly well which issues might present itself at the retreat and I could also predict with a fair amount of certainty which issues the participants might choose to explore as research questions for this study. I had an intimate knowledge of their needs and the circumstances in which they worked every day. Should I have invited other schools to also experience a retreat I might have encountered alternate discourses, local knowledge and even different outcomes.

As a result of these limitations the needs and expectations of one group of South African teachers were fully explored and deconstructed. Although many of the findings of this study can undeniably add value to the lives of all South African teachers and to the hermeneutical legacy of practical theology, it also highlights the need for other teachers singing a silent lamentation of stress and burnout to be offered a platform to have their voices heard.

6.4.2. Further avenues of study

The objective of research in the field of practical theology is to gather rich data in order to understand the interaction between and within particular human situations, theology and practice.

In this way the *habitus* of the participants is explored and the unspoken, but firmly entrenched rules or patterns that governs the way a group of people is explored. “It involves immersing one’s self in the communal and ritual life of a group, in order to gain an understanding of the situation from the inside out” (Moschella 2012:226). In the midst of such a journey, other avenues of research might present itself and the temptation to meander along these paths is often very real.

As discussed in 6.2.1.4 the different experiences that men might have had on the retreat and the alternative content of their discourses at school and in the staff room might be a very feasible area of study. Secondly, a further exploration of the concept of hope (as discussed in 2.2.3) and the role that it plays in keeping teachers motivated and called might also prove to be a valid research undertaking.

Thirdly, looking towards offering the concept of a retreat to more schools and even considering integrating different schools into sharing a retreat together, will offer alternative research data that will contribute to the domain of practical theology. Fourthly, it would be interesting to learn more about the traditional African conceptualization of calling, stewardship and servant leadership (see chapter 4). Does the concept of *Ubuntu* play into their conceptualization of this in any way? Would teachers in previously disadvantaged schools also feel themselves called to work for God, rather than for the Department of Education? What are the main causes of stress in their lives and how is that influenced by their understanding of calling? What would a deconstruction of their dominant stories reveal about the hope and motivation that keeps them coming back year after year amidst very challenging circumstances?

Fifthly, comparing these testimonies of teachers from different types of schools could facilitate conversations that might also give those teachers an opportunity to have their voices heard. The potential for growth that is created by teachers from different cultural and racial backgrounds discoursing around factors causing stress and inducing hope in their lives, fill me with endless optimism and excitement.

Lastly, but possibly the most important avenue of research to be pursued is the contribution that interdisciplinary research in practical theology can have on solving the educational crisis in our country. By inviting teachers from other types of schools, language groups and races to join in our quest to become a harmonious choir, we might join the wave of transformation in South Africa.

Such research could invite teachers from old model C schools to make a paradigm shift from simply offering their colleagues in previously disadvantaged schools assistance on academic issues to sharing with them spiritual and religious experiences. Thereby they might accept partial responsibility for their wellbeing and become accountable for their efforts to empower them. New research about such a symbiotic relationship could re-author the story of South African teachers and compose a new, communal song that they could all join in.

6.5. One voice in a choir of many – An epistemology of insidersness

While writing this chapter I also reflected on places where I wish we could have paused or lingered more, but had to pass through quickly while on our journey. I reviewed the detours that we had chosen to take and the decisions we had made when we encountered forks in the road.

Continuous reflection and evaluation also formed an integral part of my role in this research journey. After I have read a book or an article, had a conversation with a teacher or sat in my own staff room during break times, it was my reflection on this occurrence which helped me to make new meaning and to integrate it into the song that the choir of participants on this research journey were singing.

I had to acknowledge to myself that I could not study everything that was available, I had to admit that there are so many more stories that I will not be able to tell, that there are many teachers that I will never be able to reach. But I have to be satisfied and content with those who have grown and have become enriched and empowered through this journey. And I have to rejoice in the fact that, quite possibly, I am the one that has grown the most.

This journey has started as an investigation into the factors that silenced the voices of teachers, the negative factors that lead them to experiencing stress and burnout as unfortunate but tangible realities in their lives. It has evolved to an awareness and positive reinforcement of the role that God was already playing in the lives of the participants. A new commitment to a seemingly old calling reminded many of the participants why they are still teaching. This journey gave each

participant the opportunity to clarify their sense of identity in God and acknowledge how the realization of being a steward of Christ changes their perspective. The manifestations of these realizations will be with them, and especially with me, for a long time to come.

We all came to the realization that if you look at the situation of schools in South Africa through the eyes of God, you see a different picture. You see a scenario that is more encompassing than frustrations about learner behaviour, impatience with employees of the Department of Education and stress about internal functioning of schools. You see potential for transformation, chances for winning souls for the Kingdom of God and opportunities to live out the example of what a child of God should be.

Knowing that you have a calling to be a part of the transformation, not only in your place of work but also towards the people you encounter, reminds us that Christian teachers are in their schools for a very specific reason. They do not just haphazardly find themselves in that place at that specific time. This realization does not cause the negative factors and frustrations to simply disappear. It does not guarantee that a person might not experience stress or even be at risk of feeling burnt out. It might still at times interfere with the song that teachers are singing, but they now have the tools to counter the attack that stress and burnout launches on their joy and their hope. It is now God that writes the melody line that this choir of His followers, His stewards, will be singing. Teachers viewing themselves as practical theologians will enable them to not only hear their own voices in the choir, but also to become part of the process of helping others to find their voice, inviting them to also be an active part of the choir.

Welch (1990:162) says that such resilient connections with other people “bring joy, pain and wisdom, and are the presence of grace”. Sharing in carrying the burden of making schools in South Africa beacons of hope and reputed for being driven by a calling to serve God, makes individual burdens lighter. These actions should not occur in an isolated space. The joys and burdens are meant to be shared with others.

My life is inextricably linked to the lives of the other stewards that serve with me. They have indeed become the agents of my hope. I will not stop singing. I will be a part of this choir for as long as the Lord wants to use me there. On this journey I have learned that a choir might be made up of many individuals, each with their own quirks and idiosyncrasies, but if they

share a love for God and a calling for teaching, they make delightful music together.

The motto for Princeton University in the United States of America is the Latin phrase, "Dei Sub Numine Viget", which can loosely be translated as "Under The Spirit Of God She Flourishes." That is my wish for every teacher who gives their time and themselves in full service of their Lord.

May the teachers in this country always keep on singing.

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Addendum 1
The painting



Addendum 2

Resources for the Retreat

Notes that is left on chairs and beds after each session



*Drome is soos sterre... jy raak dalk nooit aan hulle
nie, maar as jy hulle volg, sal hulle
jou na jou bestemming lei.*

~ Anoniem ~



*Die doel van
die lewe is
om 'n lewe
met 'n doel
te leef.*



*Bestemming is nie 'n ge-
val van toeval nie, maar
'n geval van keuse. Dit is
nie iets om voor te
wag nie, dit is iets om
te bereik.*

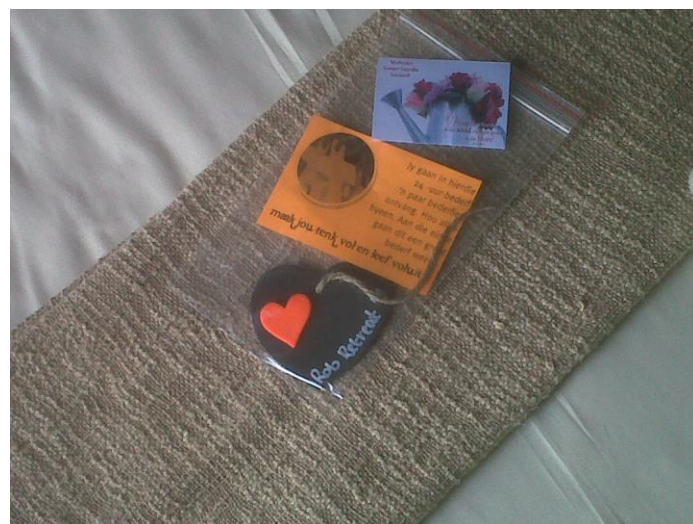
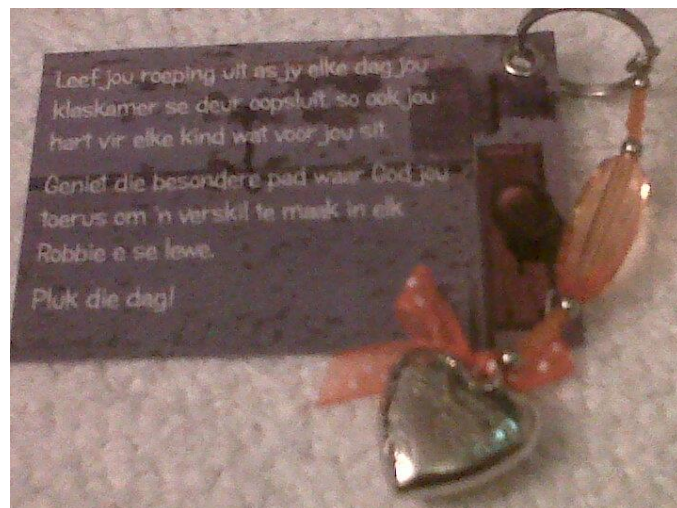
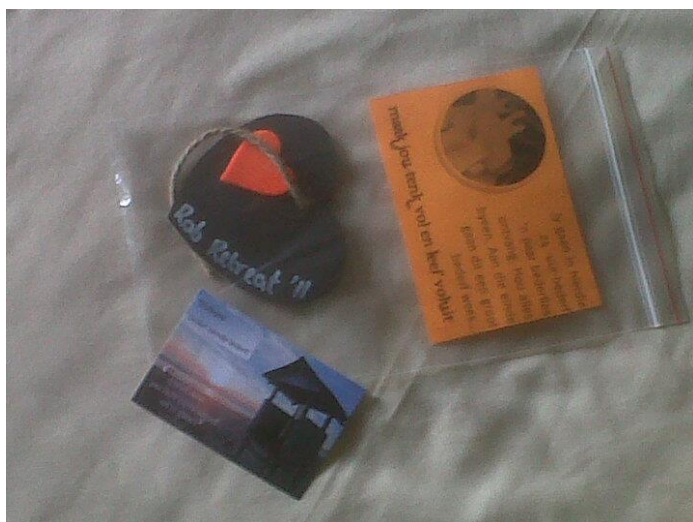
~William

Jennings Bryan~



*God verstaan
jou gebede selfs
wanneer jy nie
die woorde
daarvoor kan
vind nie.*

- Anoniem -



Addendum 3

Ethical considerations



THEOLOGY
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Departement Praktiese Teologie
Department of Practical Theology
Lefapha la Thutatshebetso

Informed consent: A guideline document

(14 June 2011)

An informed consent letter/form is a legal document to safeguard the Department of Practical Theology and its researchers from possible legal action upon dissemination of research results.

Researchers are required to subscribe to a code of ethics that respects the co-researchers' rights, facilitates communication in the research field and leaves opportunities for further research.

In embarking on research projects involving humans and society, the researcher should carefully scrutinize all ethical issues. The principles of ethical propriety, upon which most of these guidelines are based, encapsulate simple considerations of e.g. fairness, honesty and openness of intent. Certainly, no person should be asked to cooperate in any research that may result in a sense of self-denigration, embarrassment, or a violation of ethical or moral standards or principles. Every researcher should fulfil the commitments made to those who assist in the research endeavour. No research should ever be conducted under circumstances in which disclosure of the aims and purposes of the research cannot be set forth - preferably in writing. Nor should any subject be lured into cooperating in any research endeavour without knowing fully what participation in the project will involve and what demands may be made on that subject.

Suggested content: Informed consent letter/form

An informed consent document needs to contain the following information:

1. A **heading**, which must include the name and address of the department and institution, the researcher(s) name(s) and contact details. (It must be on a letterhead)
2. **Title** of the study.
3. **Purpose** of the study.

4. **Procedures:** explanation of the procedures to be followed and their purposes; nature of activities such as clinical tests and filling in of questionnaires; time required; schedule of participation; duration of study, etc.
5. **Risks** and discomforts, e.g. medical risks; fatigue.
6. **Benefits:** any personal or societal gains. This also includes financial gain or lack thereof.
7. **Participants' rights:** participation is voluntary; they may withdraw from participation in the study at any time and without negative consequences.
8. **Confidentiality:** the assurance that all information is treated as confidential; that anonymity is assured; that the data would be destroyed should the subject withdraw. All persons having access to the research data must also be identified.
9. The subject's (or in the case of a minor, the parent's/guardian's) **right of access to the researcher** must be established, and the means clearly delineated, in order for clarity on any issue be sought, should doubts arise.

General guidelines

The informed consent letter/form:

- must be on letterhead
- needs to be written in a style or register which is clear, simple and unambiguous to lay persons;
- should include no exculpatory language through which the subject is made to waive, or appear to waive, any of his/her legal rights, or to release the institution or researcher from liability for negligence;
- requires the signature of the subject (or the parent/guardian in the case of a minor) and that of the researcher, as well as the place and date of signing and it must be filed by the researcher;
- should be given to each subject.

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Informed consent letter for participants

High School Teachers as Agents of Hope: A Practical Theological Engagement

Thank you for showing an interest in this project. This research project will be used to fulfil the course requirements for a thesis as part of a Doctoral study in Practical Theology. This letter is designed to provide you with information on the nature and purpose of the study.

The elastic nature of qualitative research makes it possible to adapt, change and redesign the next step in the research process to suit the social constructions and meaning that is made as a research journey progress. As a result of choosing to use a participatory research methodology that advocates power sharing, the goals of this study will thus be negotiated throughout the process. I undertake this journey with two groups of Afrikaans speaking teachers in old Model C schools hoping to address the following tentative research questions:

- What do teachers consider to be the sources of stress and burnout in their lives?
- Can a narrative pastoral approach facilitate a situation where teachers can identify, question and interview dominant discourses and share stories that cause stress and frustration?
- How can we assist these teachers in empowering themselves to make their voices heard by speaking about their preferred realities?
- Do many teachers still consider themselves to have a calling to teach?
- Could exploring the possibilities of being practical theologians and stewards for the Kingdom of God influences the way teachers perceive their jobs and the related stress they are subjected to?
- Could this research strengthen teachers' identity whilst they are working towards creating a school driven by a calling towards stewardship?

What will the participants be asked to do?

In this study I will aim to collaboratively create a context where teachers can find an audience to witness the stories of their lives and to create a forum in which participants' stories can be linked around shared beliefs and collective commitments.

Two groups of teachers will take part in this study. The first group will consist of Afrikaans speaking teachers from different old Model C schools while the second group will be made up of teachers from Rob Ferreira High School in White River, Mpumalanga. The first group will be asked to complete a questionnaire about the positive and negative experiences they have in their chosen career. They will share the factors that cause stress in their lives as well as the emotionally rewarding experiences they encounter and the situations that remind them of what called them towards teaching in the first place.

The second group of participants will attend a weekend retreat where they will explore the expectations and pressures that society places on teachers that make it difficult for them to live

the story that they would like their lives to tell. We will be investigating ways in which they can reclaim their voices in society and re-write their stories about being a teacher as well as looking into ways in which they can cope with the stress and possible burnout that they experience.

The conversations at this retreat will be audio taped, transcribed and translated. These texts as well as the final draft of this thesis will be available to the participants to comment on, make recommendations and provide feedback to ensure that I have captured their voices in the correct and suitable way during the translations. Where they are directly quoted in the text, it will be indicated in a different font, to strengthen my belief that they should be awarded an equal voice in this project.

Can participants change their mind and withdraw from the project?

The participants in both groups will be informed that they are free to withdraw at any time. During, or after our journey together, more group conversations, or any individual conversations can be arranged.

Confidentiality

The information obtained from the questionnaire and as a result of conversations and sessions during the retreat will be discussed with my promoter, Prof J-A van den Berg and subsequently used to describe the process and development of the research. Results of this project may be published as academic articles, but data included will in no way be linked to any specific participant. Because it is important to me to keep conversations confidential and to protect the identity of the participants, they will be given the option to choose pseudonyms to be used in the research report.

Thank you for considering participation in this journey.

Should you have any further inquiries regarding the research project, feel free to contact Carolina Botha (carolina@robbies.co.za) or Prof Jan-Albert van den Berg (vdbergja@ufs.ac.za).

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THEOLOGY
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Consent form for participants

High School Teachers as Agents of Hope: A Practical Theological Engagement

I have read the information sheet concerning the project and understand the purpose thereof. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage.

I know that:

My participation in the project is entirely voluntary.

I am free to withdraw from the project at any time.

I am aware of what will happen to my personal information (including tape recordings) at the conclusion of the project and that the raw data might be kept for later use.

I will receive no payment or compensation for my participation in this project.

A copy of the final research project will be detained by the University of the Free State.

All personal information supplied by me will remain confidential and anonymous throughout the duration of the project.

I am willing to participate in this project.

Signature

Date

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Summary

This participatory action research journey with teachers from old model C high schools in South Africa investigates the possibility that teaching might be a practical theological engagement that sanctions teachers towards becoming agents of hope for themselves and their colleagues. This qualitative study is built upon an epistemology of a postmodern, postfoundationalist approach to practical theology embodied within a narrative, feminist and social constructionist feminist framework.

Such a multi-authored approach to research also creates space for the individual voices of silenced, marginalized and often burnt out teachers to be heard. Through a constant migration between theory and praxis within the *habitus* of practical theology, the academic discourses about teachers, factors causing stress in their lives and their personal relationship with God are explored. This specific context creates a moment of praxis where teachers can feel empowered and in a position to facilitate social transformation. This research journey thus concerns itself with a critical reflection on the secular and religious aspects as it is understood in the specific context of a teacher. The postfoundationalist approach to practical theology forces a researcher to firstly listen to the stories of people in real life situations and does not merely aim to describe a general context, but confronts the participants with a specific and concrete situation, in this case the state of education in South Africa.

Two groups of participants took part in this study. Through conversations the first group conceptualized the factors causing stress in their lives and explored the traditional understanding of having a calling. The question is asked whether the traditional concept of calling is still relevant in the lives of modern day teachers. Concepts like stewardship and servant leadership are offered as alternatives. It is then postulated that the awareness of the presence of God in a teacher's professional life can change the way that this person perceives a calling, will cope with stress and anxiety, as well as reduce the possibility of them experiencing severe burnout.

The second group attended a weekend retreat where these teachers could share hope and encourage each other to take part in healing conversations. They were offered the opportunity to re-author their stories and deconstruct the discourses that shapes their lives and identities as teachers. Subsequently, their preferred identities as teachers with a calling to be stewards for the

Kingdom of God were strengthened through conceptualizing the influence that living according to such an identity can have on their relationship with the Department of Education, their colleagues, themselves and their relationship with God. The teachers attending the retreat also defined and conceptualized a school driven by a calling. They further committed to transform their school to becoming such a school driven by a calling.

Seeing themselves as practical theologians does not eliminate the factors that cause stress in teachers' lives, but it becomes the driving force that keeps them coping in times of duress. The participants in this research journey learned that having a calling to teach requires a daily commitment to being in the service of God, to viewing the children and the situation in education in South Africa through the eyes of God. Being a practical theologian creates a different kind of responsibility in the Christian teacher, because they are now accountable to an alternative source than only the Department of Education, they answer to God. Thus they become the hands and feet of God in their classrooms and in turn, serve as guardians and agents of hope for each other.

Key words:

Practical theology, high school teachers, old model C schools, agents of hope, calling, stewardship, servant leadership, stress, burnout, retreat.

Opsomming

In hierdie deelnemende aksie navorsingsreis met onderwysers van oud model C hoërskole in Suid Afrika word die moontlikheid ondersoek dat onderwys dalk 'n prakties teologiese onderneming kan wees wat onderwysers uitdaag om beskermers van hoop vir hulleself en hulle kollegas te word. Hierdie kwalitatiewe studie is gestruktureer vanuit 'n epistemologie van 'n postmoderne, "postfoundationalist" benadering tot praktiese teologie wat gefundeer is in narratiewe, feministiese en sosiale konstruksie diskoers.

Só 'n veel-stemmige benadering tot navorsing skep ruimte vir die individuele stemme van onderwysers wat stil geword het, ingeperk is, gemarginaliseer en dikwels uitgebrand voel. Deur 'n konstante migrasie tussen praktyk en teorie binne die *habitus* van praktiese teologie word die dominante diskoerse oor onderwysers, faktore wat stres in hul lewens veroorsaak en hul persoonlike verhouding met God ondersoek. Hierdie spesifieke konteks skep sodoende 'n moment van "praxis" waar onderwysers bemagtig word om sosiale transformasie te fasiliteer. Hierdie navorsingsreis is bemoeid met 'n kritiese en geïntegreerde refleksie op die sekulêre en geestelike aspekte van onderwys soos dit verstaan word in die spesifieke konteks van die onderwyser. Die "postfoundationalist" benadering tot praktiese teologie noop 'n navorser om eerstens aandagtig te luister na die alledaagse omstandighede van mense in regte lewe situasies en poog nie net om 'n algemene konteks te beskryf nie, maar konfronteer die deelnemers met 'n spesifieke en konkrete situasie, in hierdie geval die stand van onderwys in Suid-Afrika.

Twee groepe deelnemers het aan hierdie navorsingsprojek deelgeneem. Die eerste groep het, deur middel van verskeie gesprekke, faktore geïdentifiseer wat stres in hul lewens veroorsaak en ook die tradisionele siening van die konsep roeping ontgin. Die vraag is gevra of die tradisionele konsep van roeping nog relevant is in die lewens van hedendaagse onderwysers. Konsepte soos rentmeesterskap en diensleierskap is as alternatiewe gebied. Dit word gestel dat 'n roepingsbesef en 'n bewustheid van die teenwoordigheid van God in 'n onderwyser se professionele lewe 'n verandering kan bring aan 'n individu se verstaan van roeping, aan hoe stres en angs ervaar word en gevolglik dus 'n vermindering in die moontlikheid van uitbranding te weeg te bring.

Die tweede groep deelnemers het 'n naweek retraits bygewoon waar hierdie onderwysers deur genesende gesprekke hoop kon deel en mekaar kon bemoedig. Hulle is die geleentheid gebied

om alternatiewe stories te skryf en die diskoerse wat hul lewens en identiteit definieer, te dekonstrueer. Hul verkose identiteit as roepingsgedrewe onderwysers en rentmeesters vir die Koninkryk van God is versterk deur gesprekke oor die invloed wat 'n lewe volgens so 'n identiteit sal hê op hul verhouding met die Departement van Onderwys, hulle kollegas, hulleself en hulle verhouding met God. Hierdie retraite was ook 'n geleentheid om die konsep van 'n roepingsgedrewe skool te definieër, ondersoek en na te streef.

Deur 'n roepingsidentiteit te versterk en hulleself dan moontlik te beskou as praktiese teoloë sal nie die faktore wat stres veroorsaak heeltemal elimineer nie, maar dit word die dryfkrag wat veerkragtigheid in moeilike tye aanmoedig. Die deelnemers aan hierdie navorsingsreis het geleer dat 'n roeping 'n daaglikse toewyding is om in die diens van God te staan, om kinders en die stand van onderwys in Suid Afrika deur God se bril te sien. Om 'n praktiese teoloog te wees skep 'n alternatiewe soort verantwoordelikheid by die Christen-onderwyser omdat hulle nou rekenskap moet gee teenoor meer as die Departement van Onderwys, hulle doen verantwoording aan God. So word elke onderwyser God se hande en voete in hulle klaskamers en gevolglik ook die beskermers van hoop vir mekaar.

Sleutelwoorde:

Praktiese teologie, hoërskool onderwysers, oud model C skole, agente van hoop, roeping, rentmeesterskap, diensleierskap, stres, uitbranding, retreat