Being a Teacher
Professional Challenges and Choices

Section Two | Being a teacher in South Africa

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SECTION TWO

Being a teacher in South Africa

Introduction

Teachers in South Africa today face considerable challenges. They also find themselves in a climate of uncertainty, not only because they face less job security than in the past, but because they have to:

- maintain discipline and authority in a ***democratic*** school environment;
- adapt to new roles and major shifts in the curriculum;
- adapt to a new code of conduct and a new appraisal system; and
- meet the demands of more informed and assertive parents.

This module is an attempt to dispel much of this uncertainty, to help you understand and cope with a degree of uncertainty, and to help you to develop some of the special competences needed to meet the challenges of being a teacher.

As you study this module, it may be helpful to think of yourself as undertaking a 'journey', moving towards a clearer understanding of the world of teaching as you answer questions that increase your practical competence and professional confidence.

In this section, the key questions will therefore focus on the personal and public contexts in which teaching takes place in South Africa. The section begins by stepping back to question our 'common-sense' view about the need for teachers, before going on to explore what motivates teachers to take up teaching as a career.

Teachers do not teach in a 'vacuum' – their own understandings of what teaching is, their reasons for becoming teachers, the circumstances under which they teach – all these factors affect their teaching. These contexts naturally bring to light the various problems and challenges facing teachers, for which we provide a simple framework. Finally, we present you with an important challenge relating to your teaching practice at the end of the section.

Learning outcomes for this section

When you have worked through this section, you should have a clearer understanding of, and be able to discuss:

- teaching as a career choice;
- the contexts in which teaching takes place in South Africa; and
- the challenges that face teachers in South Africa today.

Let's begin by asking whether human beings really do require the attentions of teachers, and confinement in schools, in order to learn. In other words, are teachers really necessary?

2.2 Are teachers really necessary?

Many young people in South Africa today seem to be questioning the value of institutionalized teaching in schools. Though many of them may never have sat down to think hard about the question, their actions – loafing at school, dropping out, and so on – signify a rejection of what schools and teachers have to teach.

The controversial but accurate portrayal of what life is like in some township secondary schools in the well known television series *Yizo Yizo* conveyed this vividly. Dull, uncreative chalk-and-talk teaching, the alternative pull of 'easy money' from petty crime and sex, and the knowledge that few who complete their schooling will easily find jobs – these are some of the factors that have contributed to this state of affairs.

Another very small but growing group who are questioning the 'common sense' view of schooling in South Africa today are those (mainly white and middle class) parents who are choosing to educate their children at home.

Even more radically, some writers have suggested that young people may be their own best teachers. For example, research on the process of acquiring a language indicates that we learn, not by being taught by others, but from everyday experience – by listening to others, trying out patterns of words, and eventually discarding ones that don't seem to work. In fact it may be said that we learn our language *despite* adults trying to teach us.

Children *do* have an enormous capacity to learn about the world around them, and schools have sometimes been criticized for gradually *extinguishing* this capacity rather than using it or extending it. Margaret Mead, the famous anthropologist, was brought up by a grandmother who refused to send her to school, so that her education would not be spoilt. Perhaps this idea was best expressed by the playwright George Bernard Shaw, who claimed that his education was interrupted only by his time in school!

So how do we answer those who challenge the value of institutionalized teaching in schools? We could say that to equip the young learner for modern life, there is too much for him or her to learn at home or out on the streets. Learning to speak a language may be one thing; learning to read and write it – and to master the various *forms* of written language required in the modern world – is quite another. Parents might feel confident in teaching the basic skills, but it is likely that they would have reservations about teaching a second language, not to mention the 'languages' of mathematics, science and economics.

Clearly, although learning doesn't have to take place under the tutorship of officially-appointed teachers, or in schools, some form of institutionalized teaching in schools seems for the foreseeable future to be the most practical option for the majority of young people.

When adults try to correct a child who uses the word 'foots' for the plural of 'foot', they are interfering with a pattern that the child is applying with perfect logic. To add an 's' to a word when there are more than one of a thing is true for well over 90% of English words. Left to its own devices, the child would eventually drop the incorrect form and begin to use the irregular form 'feet'.

Teachers are ordinary people

So far we have written about teaching in a very generalized way. The danger of any general or abstract discussion on teaching is that we may assume it is true and relevant for all teachers, in all circumstances. Nothing could be further from the truth. Teachers are ordinary but unique people who become teachers for different reasons, have different teaching objectives, and work in different circumstances, against a background of unequal educational provision. We therefore need to ask:

What does teaching mean for the individual teacher? Does this individual meaning and experience affect the way they teach? How does their individual context affect their experience and style of teaching?

Perhaps the best way to avoid too much generalization and abstraction is to introduce some teachers into our module. Let's start by looking in on the life of a teacher named Peter Adonis.

One teacher: Peter Adonis

> *It was 15:30 on Thursday afternoon. The children had all left some time ago, and Peter Adonis was getting ready to go home. Walking over to close the windows, his eye fell on a many-times folded piece of paper under a desk. He should have just thrown it away, but curiosity made him unfold it and read what was written on it.*
>
> *'Do you know what Doons is on about?'*
>
> *'I did – about half an hour ago.'*
>
> *'Ag well, it's just the usual sh—. I'm not gonna pass anyway. Are you going to Paul tonight?'*
>
> *Relieved that the contents (which referred to himself) were not more insulting, Peter crumpled the note and threw it neatly into the wastebasket. But the note had shifted his perspective, so that for a few minutes he found himself looking back on his lessons from the point of view of his students.*
>
> *The books he had been marking from the day's lesson included many errors and misunderstandings. Could it be that he was teaching badly? The work was of average difficulty and he thought he had explained the concepts carefully, using a diagram that he'd come to school early to draw on the board. His humour had seemed to make the lesson go well … so what could he do to improve the situation?*
>
> *Peter had started out as a teacher filled with enthusiasm for his subject, fuelled with the desire to impart the joy of learning that he had experienced as a student. He felt that if he could help some of the poorer children find their way to a better life as he had done, he would have achieved something of value.*
>
> *After his first frantic year of teaching, he had overcome many of his anxieties about discipline. He had found that he enjoyed interacting with his teenage students. The fact that some of them came to him to talk about their interests and even, occasionally, the very real problems some of them experienced at home, was very rewarding.*

Since we don't have space in this module to explore the challenges facing the first-year teacher, you may gain great benefit from reading some of the growing body of literature on this topic. (For instance, Bullough, R.V. *et al*. 1991. *Emerging as a Teacher*. London, New York: Routledge.)

Peter's story raises a number of issues, but let's start by focusing on the reasons why he became a teacher in the first place, because these initial choices are likely to colour subsequent choices in a teacher's career.

You need 10 to 15 minutes for this activity. Read the dialogue on page 15 carefully and then answer the questions again.

ACTIVITY 1: REASONS FOR BECOMING A TEACHER

1 What were some of Peter's reasons for taking up teaching as a career?
2 What added to his job satisfaction once he had adjusted to the work?
3 What motivated you to choose teaching?
4 How have your feelings changed, if at all, since you made this choice?

Why become a teacher?

Peter Adonis is in fact inspired by some of the most commonly-encountered motives we find among teachers: enthusiasm for his subject, and a desire to share the joy of learning with younger people, especially those whose circumstances might be improved by completing their schooling.

Michael Huberman and his team of researchers (Huberman, 1993: 113–117), basing their conclusions on interviews with 160 teachers in Europe, found the following motives for teaching to be the most common. Nearly all implied a desire to 'make a difference':

- the pleasure of contact with young people;
- the love of a specific subject, usually linked to the desire to impart it to others;
- the unexpected discovery of teaching as a pleasure in an unplanned teaching situation;
- the sense of a 'calling' to help others understand and to facilitate their learning;
- the influence of an esteemed former teacher, or family member who was a teacher;
- the desire to have an influence on young people, on the way in which teaching is conducted, or on society as a whole.

As another writer has pointed out (Bolin, 1987: 8), all such motives come from sources that are **personal** to the individual teacher, and linked specifically to teaching itself, rather than from the external rewards that teaching may offer, such as long holidays, and, in the past, job security or prestige within certain communities. This is borne out in a study by Fullan and Hargreaves (1992: 33):

> *The greatest satisfactions of […] teaching are found not in pay, prestige or promotion but in what Lortie (1975) called the psychic rewards of teaching. By this, he meant the joys and satisfactions of caring for and working with young people. The teachers in the […] study talked a lot about the pleasures of being 'with the kids'. They spoke of the immense pleasure of hearing a child read his or her first word or sentence […] Several were eager to say that while they had been critical of certain aspects of their work they did not want the interviewer to think they disliked teaching […] Even when bureaucratic pressures and constraints seemed overbearing, it was the kids and being with the kids as they learnt that kept these teachers going.*

Peter Adonis probably doesn't consider himself a bad teacher, but knows that this does not necessarily make him a *good* teacher. A number of researchers (Lortie, 1975; Sikes, 1985; Huberman, 1993) have noticed a tendency of teachers in their early to mid-careers to be dissatisfied with the *adequacy* of their practice. It suggests that for many teachers, the career of teaching is more than just a job.

The 'performance gap' that these teachers experience between their ideals and the reality of the classroom, suggests that teaching is a 'calling', or a '*vocation*'. And although we've seen that a vocation can cause some performance anxiety, it also holds a number of important rewards for such teachers. Let's examine what a highly respected schoolteacher, Herb Kohl (1984), says about teaching as a 'calling':

> *I believe the impulse to teach is fundamentally altruistic and represents a desire to share what you value and to empower others […] I began teaching when I was twenty-five and my students were twelve years old. Now I'm forty-five and those youngsters are in their thirties. There's not as much difference between forty-five and thirty, as between twenty-five and twelve. Your students 'catch up' with you and quite often end up knowing more than you do. It's wonderful to witness that continuous growth at the same time as you're taking on another group of learners […] You can see and feel your students grow, and that finally is the reason to teach and the reward of teaching.*

The word '**vocation**' comes from a Latin word meaning 'to call'. It refers to the feeling that one is 'called' to a particular occupation by something in or beyond oneself in order to serve others.

Altruistic impulses refer to intentions that place the happiness and good of others before personal interests.

You will need 10 to 15 minutes for Question 1.

ACTIVITY 2: A JOB, OR A VOCATION?

1 Kohl provides some stories by students to give substance to his assertions about teaching, and we have included some of these in the Reader. Turn to Reading 1 on page 3 of your Reader, and read Excerpt A, entitled 'Patience and belief as key teaching tools'.

a From Huberman's overseas study, it seems that personal motives and values, and rewards that are linked specifically to the act of teaching might be the most important influences that prompt people to become teachers. How might this tendency benefit teachers? (The last sentence in the passage quoted from Fullan and Hargreaves' study above will give you a clue.) What disadvantages might it have for teachers?

b What point about learning and teaching does Herb Kohl seem to be making in James' story?

2 (Optional) You may find it interesting to make an informal survey among your colleagues or fellow-students of what motivated them to take up teaching as a career:

a Approach at least five colleagues or fellow-students individually to tell them about your informal survey, and to ask them why they decided to become teachers.

b Avoid asking the question in a group, as some people tend to be influenced by other people's opinions in group situations.

c Avoid asking questions in a way that makes your colleagues feel bound to give you the answers they think you want, rather than their honest reasons.

d Jot down the answers, and compare them.

e What did you learn? How many of your colleagues expressed ideas that involved making the world, or some part of it, a better place, or that involved making a difference in society?

In the story of James, Herb Kohl illustrates that even the most frustrating learners have a capacity to learn and grow, and it is such unexpected growth that teachers find especially rewarding.

For those disillusioned by a *materialistic* culture in which television and advertising media promise satisfaction from being able to buy and possess material goods, a career like teaching holds a particular attraction. Perhaps they seek what Fullan and Hargreaves describe (1992: 33):

> *These psychic rewards of teaching [...] are central to sustaining teachers' sense of value and worth in their work. In many ways, what the primacy of these rewards points to is the centrality among [...] teachers of [...] an ethics of care, where actions are motivated by concerns for care and nurturing of others, and connectedness to others.*

A **materialistic** culture enjoys worldly pleasures that involve money and possessions.

Psychic rewards would be ones that satisfy the mind and soul.

Unfortunately, the same psychic or *intrinsic* rewards of teaching have led to salary exploitation. People assume that teachers will be happy to accept lower salaries. In the past, South African teachers, the majority of whom have been women, received lower salaries than other, similarly qualified employees of the state. The implied gender discrimination has played an important role in the way society regards, and treats, teachers (see Heather Jacklin, Reading 3, page 14).

An **intrinsic** reward would be one that was an essential part of the work.

Non-vocational reasons for teaching

What about people who become teachers primarily for *extrinsic* reasons? In many countries, teaching offers relatively easy access to tertiary education for those who could otherwise not afford it and a chance to escape from rural or urban poverty into the middle class. This was especially true in South Africa. For instance, black women in South Africa have until quite recently had few career choices beyond nursing, teaching or becoming a homemaker.

Other 'non-vocational' reasons for teaching include long holidays, and in the past, unstructured afternoons and job security. But we should be cautious about looking down on such motivations because they are often mixed with what we might call more 'vocational' reasons, and in many cases, people have had very limited career options.

Nevertheless, if extrinsic reasons are uppermost in a teacher's mind, they are unlikely to sustain motivation for long, especially in trying circumstances. Extrinsically motivated teachers will tend to relate to teaching primarily as a *job*; they are less likely to see difficulties as challenges, and are therefore more likely to find their motivation weakening in the face of problems.

Realistically, career choice usually involves a *mixture* of motives. We know many teachers without an initial vocation who find themselves enjoying the work and becoming very committed. We also know teachers who had an initial vocation who find their enthusiasm and motivation waning over the years. So teachers in *both* these categories may in time have to deal with de-motivation.

Teachers are the largest occupational group in the state's employ. Their combined salary bill usually accounts for over 80% of state expenditure on education, even up to 100% when budgets are tight. Because this leaves little over for school facilities, curriculum reform and teaching materials, the cause of improving teachers' salaries is seldom popular.

2.6 The contexts of teaching

The personal motivations of teachers don't exist in a vacuum. So let's shift our focus from the 'private' level of personal motivation to the more 'public' level of teaching contexts – social, political, economic and administrative factors that influence teachers to varying degrees.

Let's rejoin Peter Adonis, who is trying to figure out why he is feeling uneasy.

Everyday anxieties

> Peter was feeling less, rather than more, sure of himself after three years of teaching. And the reason didn't seem to be his inexperience, but things that were happening at work. Earlier in the day, for example, he had planned to revise cyclonic rainfall, and move on to the next chapter so that his class would be ready for the test that was being set for the whole grade. But he realized that the special lesson he had prepared the previous week had taken longer than planned, so he was under pressure to cover the prescribed work.
>
> Just then the Deputy Principal announced practice for an inter-school choir competition, leaving Peter only 15 minutes with his class. And then a few minutes later, a student came to collect the Big Walk money from his register class. The collection was R3 short, so Peter put in his own money to save time.
>
> However, Peter was forced to tell the class that they'd have to finish reading the section on cyclonic rainfall from the textbook at home, and ask him about anything they didn't understand in the next lesson. He knew, however, that few would do so. And there was a certain irony in knowing that it was cyclonic rainfall that caused the patched roofs of their pre-fab homes to leak every winter, making their homes uncomfortable for living, let alone studying.

Spend about 10 minutes on this activity.

ACTIVITY 3: PUTTING PROBLEMS INTO WORDS

Earlier we referred to the fact that newly qualified teachers often experience problems in their first year. Here Peter, after some years of teaching, experiences problems that certainly do not seem to be of his own making. Try to summarize in your own words some of these problems.

You probably did not interpret Peter's experiences in quite the same way as we have done, but the problems we noticed were: the pressure to keep to, and keep up with, the syllabus; conflicting priorities in the school day; and administrative interruptions.

These are the kind of difficulties that make up the day-to-day contexts in which teaching takes place. We will try to put them into perspective, along with other contextual factors, in Section 2.8.

Conflicting theories and 'policy downpour'

> *Back at college, Peter's pedagogics lectures had made everything seem so predictable: if you applied the right methods, and adapted them to the age group of your learners, your students would have no problems!*
>
> *But now it seemed as though his training had only deepened his problem. The pedagogics textbooks seemed to discourage any teaching that didn't fit into the Christian National Education framework. Later, when he learnt of other teaching approaches that seemed useful, he couldn't decide which ones were more valid. They all seemed to be backed by strong, even factual, arguments, yet they often seemed to contradict one another. Should the curriculum focus on the needs of the child or those of society? Should they go 'back to basics' or move towards outcomes?*
>
> *Since the arrival of Curriculum 2005, there seemed to be a new policy for teachers to implement every few months, each of which created more uncertainty among Peter and his colleagues. How much attention were they supposed to give to content in an outcomes-based curriculum? Did continuous assessment mean setting more tests? What did the role of learner-centred facilitation entail? How could learners develop skills if they had to spend so much time working in groups? How were teachers to maintain order without caning?*
>
> *In the light of all these alternative theories and reforms in educational policy, was it realistic to hope that one could make a significant difference in the lives of children?*

> A **valid** approach is one that is sound, one that you can defend with a strong argument or solid evidence.

ACTIVITY 4: CERTAINTY AND UNCERTAINTY IN EDUCATION

1 Why do you think Peter's reality was so much less predictable than his lectures had led him to believe?
2 After reading about Peter's experience, would you agree or disagree with the writers Lieberman and Miller (1984: 2–3) that 'no uncertainty is greater than the one that surrounds the connection between teaching and learning [...] the knowledge base in teaching is weak; there is simply no consensus [...] about what is basic to the practice of the profession'?
3 Why do you agree or disagree?

> These questions require some concentrated thinking, without much support from the Learning Guide or the Reader. Give yourself about 20 to 25 minutes to do this activity.

Peter is beginning to see doubts about his own competence in a broader context. He feels doubtful about any educational theory that claims to be the only acceptable doctrine, but also about theories that contradict one another. Perhaps teachers need to weigh educational theories and policies against real, complex everyday practice. And educational policies, which after all are based on particular theories about teaching, learning and other social behaviour, seem open to the same doubts. This is a theme we will return to in more detail in Section Five on the teacher and knowledge.

> No **consensus** means that there is no general agreement.

Schools without purpose

Many teachers may recognize policy overload and identify with Peter's uncertainties about educational theory. But perhaps for some, these problems seem something of a luxury. The discrimination and neglect that we associate with apartheid, and the resultant boycotts and rejection of authority, have resulted in a great number of schools that have lost a sense of purpose. In such schools, internal and community problems are so serious that a culture of learning and teaching has all but ceased to exist.

ACTIVITY 5: THE CULTURE OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN YOUR SCHOOL

1 Botshabelo Maja is a researcher who spent the whole of 1994 interacting, observing and recording what went on, and what did not go on, in the daily life of a Soweto high school. Read about this research in 'The future trapped in the past', Reading 2, on page 7 of your Reader.

2 Imagine that you are also a researcher conducting a study on a school with which you are familiar (as a teacher or a student). Borrow any six subheadings from the Maja reading and write them down (they provide useful 'concept clusters'). Now jot down a point under each subheading about how they compare.

We are not going to provide a follow-up comment on Activity 5, partly because we imagine answers would differ widely. However, in Section 2.7 below we will attempt to categorize these 'school culture' factors, along with the other contextual factors we have described.

Race, gender, social class and location

In South Africa, *race*, *language and ethnicity, gender, social class* and *location* have all had a strong influence on how teachers have been identified and how they have identified themselves. For instance, the experiences of black teachers in underfunded schools in the former black 'homelands' were very different from the experiences of their counterparts in suburban 'white' schools. And in many of our schools, women teachers have been identified as 'ordinary teachers' rather than as suitable candidates for leadership positions.

Despite corrective policies and legislation since 1994, it is wrong to assume that the old social arrangements have disappeared. Heather Jacklin's article 'Teachers, identities and space' (Reading 3 on page 14 in your Reader) shows how race, gender, class and location continue to shape the lives and teaching of teachers in South African schools.

ACTIVITY 6: THE TEACHER IN SOCIETY

Read Heather Jacklin's article 'Teachers, identities and space' (Reading 3 on page 14 of your Reader), and then answer the questions below.
a Write down three important changes that you think have occurred in the identities of South African teachers. Refer either to changes described in the article, or to changes you have experienced yourself.
b Say whether these changes were brought about by the efforts of teachers or some other part of society (the Government, parents, press, learners).
c What were the effects of the changes on teachers, and how might they in turn have affected learners?

Here are some of the changes in teacher identity that we found in the reading and elsewhere. Do not worry if your ideas are different.

• During the nineteenth century, teachers were primarily viewed as representatives of Christian religious denominations. A number of factors changed this, particularly the policies of the British Colonial Government after the South African War, which aimed to break the power of the Dutch Reformed churches in the schools of the former Boer republics. This seems to have resulted in greater autonomy for teachers, and a self-identity that is closer to the professional.

• During the years of apartheid, the racial categorization of teachers was regarded as more significant than the fact that they were teachers. Unfortunately, many teachers came to identify themselves in this way. While such forms of self-defini-

tion take time to fade, most teachers can now define themselves as teachers first and foremost.

• Until the 1990s, women teachers were paid less than male teachers, could not receive housing subsidies, received lower pensions and were viewed as better suited to lower positions and primary education. Today women are – officially at least, and in terms of basic conditions of service – on a par with men. This was achieved partly by the continuous campaigning of some teachers' organizations over many years, and partly by the new South African Constitution, in terms of which such discriminatory identification and practice was outlawed.

• With retrenchments, rationalization and redeployment in the latter half of the nineties, job security is a thing of the past. Such changes have been brought about by government policies aimed at achieving greater equity in schools across the country. All teachers have been affected by these changes, but teachers in working class areas experience greater insecurity because their schools are less able to pay for extra teaching posts.

These examples bear out Jacklin's argument that teachers' identities did not just 'happen', but have been 'constructed' over time by various groups in society. But at the same time it is important to remember Jacklin's observation that our 'constructed' identities have often been *contested*, sometimes by teachers themselves, and sometimes by teachers in concert with others in society. Teachers have been able to *redefine* identities that were constructed for them.

The importance of this fact will become more apparent as we consider whether teachers themselves are able to exert any influence on their situation, or whether the contextual challenges they face are overwhelming. This will be a major focus of the final section of this module.

2.7 Contextual challenges that teachers face

There are so many contextual factors over which we may seem to have little control, that from time to time we need to 'step back' from everyday routines. This is the beginning of a 'reflective practice', an approach that is increasingly being expected of teachers (see Section Seven). The first step is to try to clearly identify contextual factors, giving them generalized names and grouping them in categories. This is how we have categorized the factors we have been considering in Section 2.6:

- *Unpredictable events*: In the everyday reality of schooling with its practical challenges and problems, things are never completely under control. This is considered normal in almost any school in any country. Unexpected problems can be annoying, yet many teachers thrive on the element of surprise – up to a point.

- *Community factors*: The socio-economic and cultural structures that shape the lives of various communities can deeply influence teaching. In one community it could be the influence of gangs, parental poverty, ill health and taxi wars. In another community, it could be values of individual competition for higher grades, sports prestige and status possessions. These factors create different senses of entitlement in young people, which may work against their making an active contribution to their own education.

- *Political and social transition*: The consequences of apartheid education, its legacy of inequality and resistance, have led to a continuing breakdown in the culture of learning and teaching. The fact that some schools are completely isolated from such problems simply points to continuing inequality in the schooling system.

- *Educational reform policies*: The new policies, initiatives, and regulations that come thick and fast from education authorities, every one of them requiring responses (and sometimes major shifts) from teachers, are another contextual challenge. Curriculum 2005, teacher appraisal, and the abolition of corporal punishment are mixed blessings for many teachers. The fact that reforms sometimes seem to contradict one another may create a sense of confusion and uncertainty.

- *Race, class, language, gender and location*: The fact that teacher identities were essentially constructed by groups of people, meant that teachers were able to contest and redefine their identities. This raises the possibility that teachers might be able to make a difference in the other contexts we outline above – all of which have been constructed by human beings (we take up this argument in Section Seven).

- *Global change*: Another contextual factor that we have not yet touched on is the fact that teachers in all countries, including South Africa, are experiencing pressure from government, employers and parents to prepare children for competitive employment in a global economy. Indeed, curriculum reforms like Curriculum 2005 are in part an attempt to redirect South African teaching towards this competitive global economy.

The contextual factors outlined here confront teachers in South Africa with considerable challenges and are bound to affect the way they experience teaching and the way they teach. So it's a good idea to keep in mind the environment in which teachers work as you study the rest of this module.

Entitlement refers to the belief that one has a right to something.

We do not claim that the way we have categorized the contexts of teaching is comprehensive. You may think of other contextual factors or categories yourself. For instance, you may believe that young learners have become more assertive or defiant than they were in the past, and that it is now more difficult to manage a class of children or adolescents, for reasons that vary from political upheaval to television.

Challenging contexts can create a sense of **powerlessness** in many teachers. For teachers who are **intrinsically** motivated, a vocation may carry them far in the face of difficulties and threats. But for teachers who are **extrinsically** motivated, these difficulties are unlikely to be perceived as challenges that require strategies. A lack of intrinsic motivation tends to leave them open to demoralization when the difficulties mount up.

For this reason some teachers become **fatalistic** and simply give up, becoming part of the problem. Some adopt a bureaucratic 'mask' or image and begin to lead a 'double life'. Maxine Green, an American philosopher of education, has written of a **'divided consciousness'**, in which teachers aim merely at efficiency, content for their students to achieve surface learning rather than 'deep' learning that endures, is adaptable, and helps the student to develop intellectually (1987: 180).

This divided consciousness also leads to **detachment** – teachers relating to students only in terms of their roles as 'learners', rather than in a full awareness of, and in response to, their differences of background and their individuality as people. These teachers lose sight of the goal or purpose of their actions (perhaps the strongest reason for introducing OBE with its focus on real, demonstrable learning outcomes).

Inaction in the face of disorder is another typical reaction of teachers to difficult teaching contexts, as Andrew Patterson and Aslam Fataar observe in their article 'Teachers, moral agency, and the reconstruction of schooling in South Africa' (Reading 4 on page 29 in your Reader).

> If you have a **fatalistic** attitude, you believe that events are decided by fate, and are therefore beyond human control.

ACTIVITY 7: RESPONDING TO A CONTEXT OF DISORDER

Read 'Teachers, moral agency, and the reconstruction of schooling in South Africa', by Fataar and Patterson, which appears as Reading 4 on page 29 of your Reader.

a Why, according to Patterson and Fataar, do dysfunctional schools find it nearly impossible to break out of the 'vicious circle' of disorder and inaction? Give reasons that apply to individual teachers as well as reasons that apply to schools as institutions (and principals as the heads of institutions). Write about ten lines.

b The writers 'theorize' that there are three types or groups of teachers in dysfunctional schools. In which group, or groups, would you expect to find teachers who have a sense of a calling or vocation?

> Take about 45 minutes to read this article and answer the activity questions.

Patterson and Fataar's study focuses on how teachers in difficult schools experience teaching, how they see themselves, and how this influences their practice. These writers explore the **institutional** environment by contrasting functional and dysfunctional schools.

The functional school environment is associated with order, consensus and clear lines of responsibility. A well-organized and supportive work environment ensures that difficulties are shared. The dysfunctional school is associated with disorder and community problems that distract teachers and staff from using the school as a learning institution.

A common teacher response in dysfunctional schools is to assume a victim position and feel powerless to improve the situation. The state is seen as the only institution powerful enough to have an impact. As a result, many teachers do not take any moral responsibility for what happens around them. This is what the writers label 'moral minimizing'.

The institutional response in dysfunctional schools manifests typically in a loss of moral authority on the part of the principals. They feel that they can do little more than keep the peace between conflicting factions in the school community and feel unable to act as leaders, inspiring a collective vision for the school. Their energies are scattered and diffused. This is what the writers label 'moral diffusion'.

The three types of teachers identified by Patterson and Fataar are:

• those who appropriate vital functions such as fundraising to make themselves indispensable, and who acquire considerable power in the process;

• those who disengage from any sense of responsibility for their environment and who experience a relatively low self-esteem in proportion to their low output; and

• those who take on more and more responsibilities and eventually either burn out or leave the teaching profession.

Teachers with intrinsic motivation are more likely to be found in the third group, yet they can also be found in the first two groups. This is because Patterson and Fataar perceive these responses to contextual challenges as *adaptations* to a bad environment rather than the mark of bad teachers as such.

So while intrinsic motivation is an important driving force for teachers, especially in difficult environments, it is unlikely to be enough on its own. Something else is needed, not only to *sustain* teachers through difficult times, but to ensure that they teach well and maintain a positive self-identity. Could the missing element be professionalism? Before we turn to this topic in the next section, let's look in on Peter Adonis to see how he faces challenges.

> The writers do not tell us whether the third group of teachers (who take on too much responsibility) actually manage to teach well. But their ability to do so must be severely limited by the prevailing atmosphere in such schools, and by their own overloading.

Back at home

That evening as he opened the newspaper, Peter's eyes fell on a report about renewed calls from leading politicians for professionalism among teachers. This didn't exactly make him feel cheerful, even though he knew he was not guilty of the things attacked in the report – absenteeism, drunkenness, losing exam papers and having sexual relationships with learners. At the supper table, his wife Rachel noticed his thoughtful mood.

'Is something bothering you, Peter?'

'No, it's nothing …' A long pause followed, Rachel waited. 'Oh all right, I was just beginning to wonder whether I was really a good teacher. But

> *these days I'm not too sure that anyone knows just what a good teacher is. And with everything the Department wants us to put into practice at supersonic speed, when we haven't even got overhead projectors in most of our classrooms…'*
>
> *'Peter Adonis, are you going to sit there and play the victim, or are you going to do something about it? We're not judged according to the problems facing us, but according to how we tackle them,' said his wife.*
>
> *Over the next few days, Peter wondered how he could answer this challenge. There were so many questions he had never tried to answer about teaching. Should he get to know his subject better in order to teach it better, or become more learner-centred and try to relate the work more to their world? Should he 'take a stronger line' with his learners or take the risk of allowing them more freedom?*
>
> *How could he help them to become something in the world if he just moaned about the Department? The children he was teaching were certainly going to experience plenty of difficulties and challenges in their lives. How could he equip them to deal with some of these problems?*

Taking up Peter's questions, and slightly modifying our key question about what it means to be a teacher in South Africa today, we now need to ask what is required of teachers in South Africa today? What do they need to do to become 'part of the solution'? How can they prepare learners to face challenges?

In fact, you have already begun to answer these questions if you have chosen to study a module like this as part of your formal or informal professional education as a teacher. What you learn here will equip you to begin the journey towards 'becoming part of the solution'. Once equipped, you will also learn from your own observation, from other books or courses, from some of your colleagues, and most of all from the learners in your own classes.

2.9 Conclusion

In this section you have learnt how the intrinsic or extrinsic rewards that motivate teachers are likely to affect their approach to teaching, and to the challenges they face in South African schools. You have also learnt how to categorize the often confusing contextual challenges that teachers face. And you have been encouraged to 'make a difference' rather than adopt a 'victim' position in these contextual challenges.

In the next section we examine the rather controversial concept of professionalism in teaching to discover whether it can help teachers to become 'part of the solution'.

Key learning points

1. The reasons for becoming a teacher are likely to influence the educational choices and decisions that teachers make throughout their careers.
2. Intrinsic motivation among teachers would include an overriding interest in learning, a belief in the ability of all learners to learn and to grow, a desire to participate in and promote that growth and a desire to make a difference in other people's lives. Extrinsic motivation would include the attraction of external factors or perks, such as inexpensive access to tertiary education and longer holidays.
3. The contextual challenges facing teachers may be broadly categorized as:
   • unpredictable events, a degree of which are normal to schooling everywhere;
   • community factors such as the influence of gangs, parental poverty, and taxi wars;
   • a legacy of resistance to apartheid, which has led to a loss of faith in education;
   • identities constructed around race, class and gender, which can be challenged;
   • global trends, which include preparation for a global economy; and
   • educational reform, which is partly a response to some of the factors above.
4. Teachers who are motivated primarily by intrinsic values are more likely to experience teaching as a vocation, and see contextual factors as challenges. Teachers motivated chiefly by extrinsic reasons tend to relate to teaching primarily as a job. Such motivation will not provide the drive and incentive to subordinate contextual problems to the challenge of assisting young people to learn and grow.
5. Faced with very difficult teaching environments, many teachers develop various coping strategies that may not attack problems, but instead contribute to inaction and passivity, and lead to a loss in self-esteem.
6. Tackling contextual challenges requires more than strong motivation from individual teachers. It requires a shared vision or goal in each school to enable teachers to function well in spite of the difficulties.