The expectations of parent members of school governing bodies regarding teacher workload in South African schools

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ABSTRACT

The South African Schools Act, No 84 of 1996 (SASA), provides parents with opportunities to serve on the governing bodies of public schools. In this context, members of school governing bodies may hold unique sets of expectations, which may influence the type of education to which a school community aspires. This article reports on an investigation into middle-class, public primary school governing body expectations of teacher workloads from a South African labour law perspective (Minnaar, 2008). The expectations of parent members of school governing bodies were examined to determine whether they were aligned with or diverged from the law. The findings provided evidence that although governing body expectations of teachers were aligned with prevailing education labour law, the open-ended nature of such law, together with omissions and silences, allows legal space for individual and

contextual interpretation and implementation and may consequently intensify the workloads of teachers.

INTRODUCTION

In the South African context, the Review of Governance in South African Public Schools (2004:vi) states that school governance affords parents an opportunity to have a voice in school governance, a right they were denied during the Apartheid era. Government's main intention with the promulgation of the South African Schools Act, No 84 of 1996, was to place the control of schools in the hands of parents and to empower parents to determine, within the framework of the National Constitution, what is in the best interests of their children (Review of Governance in South African Public Schools, 2004:9). The South African Schools Act, No 84 of 1996 would simultaneously promote the principles of access, redress, equity and democratic governance in South African schools. In light of this, the parents of a school elect the members of the governing body to represent them in decision-making processes and governance functions. The manner in which the members interpret and implement SASA, as unique individuals and as a composite group, may have an effect not only on the ethos and organisation of the school but on the workloads of the teachers too.

Similarly, in the international literature, Dinham & Scott (2000:3) report that the 1980's was characterised by "a rush of simultaneous, educational reconstruction in many countries around the world in an effort to improve teaching outcomes and learner performance". In countries such as the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Japan, Canada and New Zealand, a succession of reports were published as "evidence" that schools were "failing" and that educational bureaucracies were

ineffective and in need of restructuring and reform (Dinham & Scott, 2000:4). Beare (1991) in Dinham & Scott (2000:3) claims that these reforms did not begin as curricular changes, but quickly honed in on the control and governance of schools. The reforms were seen to be political since they tended to target the management of schools. This resulted in an almost universal trend towards school-based management as well as a common vocabulary comprising concepts such as excellence, quality, school effectiveness, equity, efficiency and accountability (Dinham & Scott, 2000:4).

THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK UNDERPINNING THE STUDY

A prominent implication of decentralisation for schools worldwide is that governments shifted the responsibility of financial management and supplementing the school's income to school governing bodies. Consequently, decentralisation and reform strategies resulted in the emergence of what some scholars refer to as “new managerialism” and “marketisation”. New managerialism and marketisation appear to hold significant implications for school governance and management in both international and South African contexts.

The Implications of New Managerialism and Marketisation for School Governance and Management

International scholars who have investigated new managerialism and marketisation in education, warn of the implications that these trends may hold for school governance and management. Power (1997:348) emphasises that new budgetary responsibilities, which come with self-management status together with the imperatives of central government evaluations, appear to increase the workloads for head teachers and principals as they undertake the administrative duties that were

previously performed at other levels of the system. Chan & Mok (2001:30) in mainland China claim that the forces of managerialism and marketisation are closely related to a “heightened concern for the quality of services”. The heightened concern for the quality of services may be interpreted as being linked to increased parental expectations of schools. Simkins (2000:318) refers to a similar policy framework established in England and Wales under the Education Reform Act of 1988. Under these arrangements, “school governing bodies have been granted considerable powers to manage their own affairs, including the management of block budgets out of which the great majority of their resources must be funded. The funding mechanism is designed to provide schools with incentives to maintain and enhance their enrolment”. In addition, Coulson (1996:26) avers that, “Competition and the profit motive must be re-introduced into education so that teachers and school administrators will once again have a powerful incentive to meet the needs of the children and parents they serve”. Apple (2001:416) advocates that principals appear to spend more time and energy on maintaining and enhancing a public image of a ‘good school’ and less time and energy on pedagogic and curricular substance. At the same time, teachers do not seem to be experiencing increased autonomy and professionalism, but intensification. Whitty et al., (1989) similarly emphasise that owing to intensification, both principals and educators experience considerably heavier workloads and ever-escalating demands for accountability, a never ending schedule of meetings and in many cases a growing scarcity of emotional and physical resources.

In the South African context, Section 36 (1) of the South African Schools Act, No 84 of 1996 states,” A governing body of a public school must take all reasonable

measures within its means to supplement the resources supplied by the State in order to improve the quality of education provided by the school to all learners at the school". Consequently, it appears that some but not all schools have evolved into organisations basing themselves on and pursuing business principles, which means that these schools are the products of new managerialism and marketisation.

The conclusion drawn from the literature reviewed in the conceptual framework in respect of teachers' workloads is that new managerialism and marketisation appear to contribute to the tension between teachers' accountability and sense of professionalism on the one hand, and their private lives and personal resources on the other. Furthermore, one could assert that an intensification in the workloads of teachers may hold negative effects for teachers and learners, as well as for education. The international and South African literature concerning teacher workloads provided sufficient evidence to support the assertion that teachers' workloads are indeed intensifying.

TEACHER WORKLOADS

In the international literature focusing on teacher workloads, scholars stress the negative consequences that the intensification of teacher workloads may hold for education. According to Naylor (2001), workload issues have been a concern for Canadian teachers and trade unions during the last decade. Naylor refers to the King & Peart (1992:182) study, which found that the limits of teachers' workloads are not clearly defined and that some teachers experience their workloads as overwhelming. Naylor (2001:4) also refers to a study by Gallen et al. (1995b:55) who found that the list of roles that teachers are called upon to perform on behalf of their students,

schools and communities, is lengthy and diverse. Teachers are, among others, expected to be counsellors, social workers, nurses, chauffeurs, fund-raisers, mediators, public relations officers and entertainers. Since all roles are important and teachers are constantly pressed for time, they must often make difficult choices about their priorities. Hargreave's Work Intensification Thesis, examines issues concerning the changes, pressures and increased expectations that many teachers have experienced in recent years. Hargreaves (1992:104) states that increased expectations, broader demands, increased accountability, more "social work" responsibilities, more meetings, multiple innovations and increased amounts of administrative work are all testimony to the problems of chronic work overload. Dinham & Scott (2000:7) similarly refer to the increased expectations placed by society on schools and teachers to solve the problems society seem unwilling or unable to deal with. The Job Demands-Resources Model of Hakanen, Bakker & Schaufeli studied concerns about teacher stress and burnout. They argue that teaching is traditionally viewed as a profession with high commitment and can be viewed as a calling. However, they suggest that efforts aiming at the reduction of job demands to prevent burnout should be of primary concern for schools and other organisations. Similarly, Robertson (2002:1) reports on the results of the Health Canada Study on "Work-Life Conflict" which confirms that health workers and teachers are "the most committed, overworked, stressed and politically maligned workers in the country". Finally, Riccio's Teacher Expectations addresses the debate on teachers' personal expectations regarding their professional performance. Riccio (2001:43) claims that teachers should be trained to have realistic expectations of themselves and their profession. He believes that if teachers are prepared to have expectations of

performance that are almost impossible to meet in today's classroom, the seeds for eventual and early burnout are sown.

In the South African literature on teacher workload, a prominent aspect that emerged from the Review of School Governance (2004:55) is that well-educated, professional parents who reside in relatively affluent contexts may become excessively involved in the administration, governance and management of the schools in their communities. According to the Review of School Governance, some school governing bodies dictate to the teachers how they should manage their professional responsibilities (2004:99). A recent study entitled Educator Workload in South Africa conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) for the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC) focused entirely on the hours that teachers actually spend on their various activities. Findings indicated that about three in four teachers felt that their workload had increased significantly since 2000. Chisholm & Hoadley (2005:18) advocate that there are essentially three tiers of accountability in regard to teacher workload. The first is the sense of responsibility of the individual teacher. The second encompasses the collective expectations of parents, teachers, learners and administrators while the third revolves around organisational rules, incentives and implementation mechanisms. Morrow (2005:12) is of the opinion that teachers may in future be faced with work overload if the formal and material elements of teaching are muddled.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Sampling Methods and Data Collection Instruments

The study was situated within the *qualitative interpretive paradigm*. Sampling was purposive and the sample comprised fifteen public primary schools situated within the middle-class contexts of Paarl, Wellington, Durbanville, Bellville, Cape Town, Stellenbosch and Somerset-West in the Western Cape, South Africa. Besides the literature review, three data collection instruments were used. Firstly, nineteen parent members of school governing bodies completed *open-ended questionnaires*, in which they clearly stated what they expect of teachers in respect of the core duties listed in the Personnel Administration Measures of the Employment of Educators Act, No 76 of 1998. The core duties included teaching time, planning, preparation and evaluation, classroom management, extra-curricular, pastoral, administrative and professional development duties. Secondly, thirty-one teachers were required to record all their daily duties and responsibilities in a *time-use diary* for two weeks to determine the total time teachers spend on various teaching and other duties. Thirdly, *unstructured interviews* were conducted with fifteen school principals.

PRESENTATION OF THE DATA AND FINDINGS

The findings that emerged from the open-ended questionnaires indicated that parents in the sample, who are members of school governing bodies, hold specific expectations of teachers in terms of the roles, duties and responsibilities prescribed for teachers in legislation. In Figure 1 below, we present a graphic synopsis of the expectations that parent members of school governing bodies hold of teachers in respect of the core duties. The y-axis represents the number of parent participants

Figure 1.

Legend:

P+P=Planning and Preparation; TL=Teaching Lessons; M&F=Marking and Feedback; KR=Keeping Records; ALP=Assisting Learners with Problems; EBL=Enriching Bright Learners; PR=Progress Reports; CPE=Creating a Positive Teaching and Learning Environment; MD=Maintaining Discipline; SA=Involvement in Sporting Activities; CA=Involvement in Cultural Activities; FA=Involvement in Fundraising Activities; SF=Involvement in the School's Social Functions; SC=Involvement in School Committees; PD=Playground Duty; BGD=Bus and Gate Duty; SPD=Scholar Patrol Duty; SL=Sick Learners; CM=Collecting Money in Class; HN=Handing Out Newsletters; KAR=Keeping Attendance Registers; ASW=Attending Seminars and Workshops.

who responded to the questions regarding the various teacher core duties, which are represented on the x-axis. Figure 1 is followed by explanatory text.

All the participants responded to teaching responsibilities, namely planning and preparation, teaching of lessons, marking learners' work, providing feedback and keeping record of the learners' assessment and profiles. Enriching bright learners did not receive as much prominence as assisting learners with learning problems. The participants regarded planning and preparation of lessons as an important and essential requirement and expect teachers to complete their planning and preparation thoroughly and regularly in a structured and purposeful manner. They expected teachers to present their lessons with enthusiasm and passion and lessons must be made creative and interesting by means of modern teaching aids. Participants emphasised that teachers must take the special needs of learners into account. The participants expected remediation to be the main purpose for marking learners' work and providing the learners and parents with feedback. They also expected teachers to keep accurate records of learners' assessment and profiles in order to monitor progress and identify problem areas. The participants demonstrated mixed expectations in regard to assisting learners with learning problems. Some participants commented that teachers alone need to render the necessary assistance to learners while others preferred teachers to refer struggling learners to remedial teachers and specialists. Participants called on teachers to stimulate, motivate, challenge and enrich bright learners. All the participants expected to receive detailed, accurate and informative reports regarding the progress of their children.

All the participants expected teachers to fulfil their classroom management duties diligently. They emphasised that teachers need to create a positive teaching and learning environment, which would prove to be aesthetically appealing and stimulating for learners. Classrooms need to be comfortable, furnished, equipped, neat and cheerful. The teacher's frame of mind was also accorded importance and participants expected teachers to be consistent, friendly, fair, honest and sincere. All the participants singled out maintaining discipline in schools and classrooms as absolutely essential. They expected and appreciated positive and constructive discipline, applied consistently and according to procedures and policies.

The participants' responses to the questions regarding extra-curricular activities provided evidence that all the participants expected high commitment from teachers. Teachers' involvement in sport and cultural activities received more prominence than their involvement in fund-raising activities, social functions and school committees. The reasons for the participants expecting high commitment from teachers in respect of sporting and cultural activities was based on the desire for teachers to get to know their learners in a context other than the academic context in the classroom. Some of the participants were of the opinion that since fundraising is indispensable to schools, which are managed according to business principles, all teachers should be involved. Some of the participants were also of the opinion that the involvement of teachers in the school's social functions fosters teamwork and promotes communication between parents and teachers. Participants deemed it important for teachers to be represented on school committees since teachers have first-hand knowledge and experience of problem areas and needs in a school.

Figure 2. **Graphic Representation of the Average Time Spent by Teachers on Core Duties**

Legend:

TL=Teaching Lessons; MD=Maintaining Discipline; CPE=Creating a Positive Environment; OEM=Other Extra-Mural Activities; M&F=Marking and Feedback; SA=Sport Activities; P&P=Planning and Preparation; OCM=Other Classroom Management; OAD=Other Administrative Duties; ASW=Attending Seminars and Workshops; KR=Keeping Records; OTR=Other Teaching Responsibilities; ALP=Assisting Learners with Problems; CA=Cultural Activities; PR=Progress Reports; SC=School Committees; BGD=Bus and Gate Duty; SF=Social Functions; OPaD=Other Pastoral Duties; OPrD=Other Professional Duties; EBL=Enriching Bright Learners; PD=Playground Duty; CM=Collecting Money; FA=Fundraising Activities; SPD=Scholar Patrol Duty; HN=Handing Out Newsletters; SL=Sick Learners; AR=Attendance Register

Eighteen of the nineteen participants communicated high expectations of teachers in respect of pastoral duties, particularly playground duty. The participants' main concern was that of learner safety and preferred teachers to supervise learners at playtimes. Slightly fewer participants indicated that they expect teachers to fulfil their duties in regard to bus, gate and scholar patrol duties diligently. Most participants expected teachers to act according to policy and follow the correct procedures when dealing with sick learners.

Participants reacted to the questions regarding administrative duties in the following manner. Few participants expected teachers to collect money in class and stressed that this practice should be kept to a minimum. They indicated that collecting money was predominantly the responsibility of the administrative personnel. Seventeen of the nineteen participants, however, deemed it essential that teachers hand out newsletters regularly in the interests of school to home communication. All the participants expected teachers to keep attendance registers for purposes of keeping record of learner absenteeism and to follow up on those learners who are continually absent from school.

All of the participants communicated high expectations of teachers in terms of their professional development. Participants emphasised that they expected teachers to keep abreast of the newest developments in education by regularly attending seminars and workshops for purposes of development and empowerment.

The findings that emerged from the teacher time-use diaries indicated that teachers are meeting, and in some instances surpassing parental expectations. In Figure 2

below, we present a graphic synopsis of the average time over two weeks that teachers spent on the core duties, in order from the duty having the highest average to the duties having the lowest averages. The data were sifted into an outlier and six categories. The y-axis represents the number of minutes spent by teachers on the core duties, which are represented on the x-axis. Figure 2 is followed by explanatory text.

Teaching Lessons was identified as an outlier. Howell (2008:42) defines an outlier as an extreme point that stands out from the rest of the data distribution. Teaching Lessons scored the highest average and stood out from the rest of the data set because teaching lessons is a teacher's primary function.

The first category comprised core duties on which teachers spent a very high average of time. The total time spent varied between twelve to twenty-three hours. In this category, most teacher participants commented that maintaining discipline is a continual process as it occurs "all day". Creating a positive teaching and learning environment included pinning learners' work on display boards, cleaning, sweeping and tidying the classroom and packing away books and apparatus. Teachers were involved in a multitude of other extra-mural activities, which included among others, attending a rugby camp for four days during the April holidays, planning the school's centenary celebrations, arranging a cultural evening and co-ordinating the school's Charity Committee. In response to the time spent on marking learners' work and providing feedback, one Gr. 1 teacher indicated that he/she marked 99 books each day, which amounted to 2 hours 30 minutes additional work per day. The data revealed that teachers' involvement in sport is not only limited to coaching. Teachers spent additional time attending social sports functions, attending meetings, camps and

courses, completing sports administrative duties such as contacting other schools to schedule and arrange matches and competitions, holding motivational talks with players and handing newsletters concerning dates, venues and times of sports matches and practices to learners.

The second category comprised core duties on which teachers spent a high average of time. The total time spent varied between five to ten hours. The data revealed that most teachers complete their planning and preparation at home during the evenings and during weekends. Other classroom management duties included, among others, discussing the week's academic work with colleagues, assisting student teachers with their classroom organisation, making posters and completing discipline reports. In respect of other administrative duties, some teachers were required to; translate and proofread school documents and newsletters, sort photographs to update the school's photo album, travel more than 1 000km to gather information for an outreach programme during a long-weekend, advise prefects and control the staffroom inventory. Teachers regularly attended seminars and workshops, which included among others, lesson discussion meetings, grade meetings, phase meetings, staff meetings, parent meetings, area meetings, union seminars, methodology training, first-aid courses, marketing meetings and meetings with occupational and speech therapists. Teachers kept accurate records of learners' assessments and updated them regularly. One teacher asserted that the recording of incidents takes an additional 15 minutes per learner profile.

The third category comprised core duties on which teachers spent a medium to high average of time. The total time spent varied between three to four hours. Other

teaching responsibilities included a variety of teaching related duties such as compiling lesson content, setting tests and memoranda, photocopying work, communicating with parents and supervising student teachers. Assisting learners with learning problems demanded a great deal of teachers' time. The data revealed that, according to most teachers, the majority of learners encounter difficulties with Mathematics. Effective intervention requires teachers to complete additional planning, preparation, marking and feedback to assist learners who have special needs. Teachers were also involved in a variety of cultural activities, which included organising a talent competition, leading assembly, organising a music and choir evening and attending a concert. In most of the participating schools, teachers discuss learners' progress reports with the parents at meetings held at the end of each term.

The fourth category comprised core duties on which teachers spent a medium average of time. The total time spent varied between two and three hours. The data indicated that teachers spend many hours serving on school committees such as the school management team, sports, language, charity, school newspaper, editorial and class committees. In most schools, bus and gate duties were combined with playground duty. A number of teachers accompanied learners who needed to travel by bus to sports competitions held in distant towns, which consumed many hours of their time on Saturdays. Some teachers indicated that social functions were a regular occurrence at their schools. One teacher was in charge of the crockery and cutlery storeroom and was responsible for counting out and dispatching all crockery and cutlery required for the functions held at school. She was also required to pack all the items back into the storeroom, which she did in the afternoons. She commented that several functions take place within a single week. Another teacher's pastoral duties included collecting

and organising tinned food, doing grocery shopping and packing grocery hampers, collecting second-hand clothing and handing out these items to needy families in the school community. She is required to do this once a month in the afternoons after school.

The fifth category comprised core duties on which teachers spent a low to medium average of time. The total time spent varied between one to two hours. Teachers reported that additional professional duties such as the handling of social skills, emotional intelligence exercises, study skills and conflict resolution skills take place every day. They also responded that they enrich bright learners during lesson time and continually during the school day by providing extra tasks and differentiating the lesson content. Teachers performed their playground duties diligently in response to their duty of care, which is to ensure the safety of the learners. Teachers furthermore indicated that the time spent on collecting and counting money in class increases substantially during fundraising projects. Some teachers were involved in collecting funds for charity organisations such as the Guide Dog Association.

The sixth category comprised core duties on which teachers spent a low average of time. The total time spent was less than one hour. The time recorded by teachers for the section dealing with fundraising activities was minimal owing to the fact that the teacher time-use diaries were recorded at the beginning of a new school term, which did not coincide with any fundraising activities. Teachers indicated that such activities take place throughout the year. Few teachers performed scholar patrol duty. Apart from some Foundation Phase teachers who spent some time stapling pages containing learners' homework tasks into their diaries each day, few teachers were required to hand out newsletters. The reason for this is that many middle-class

schools that used to rely on newsletters to communicate with parents now use cellphone text messages and electronic message boards, which are located at the school entrance. Teachers spent little time caring for sick learners but some telephoned parents to enquire about sick learners and to arrange for missed homework. All teachers kept attendance registers but some delegated this duty to responsible learners.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The parent expectations of teachers that emerged from the open-ended questionnaires were analysed, compared with and interpreted in terms of prevailing education labour law and other relevant law to determine the degree of alignment with or divergence from such law. The legislation that was analysed included:

- The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996
- The South African Schools Act, No 84 of 1996
- The National Education Policy Act, No 27 of 1996
- The Employment of Educators Act, No 76 of 1998
- The Basic Conditions of Employment Act, No 75 of 1997
- The Labour Relations Act, No 66 of 1995.

None of the parent expectations of teachers in respect of the core duties seemed to diverge from prevailing education labour law. The only silence found in prevailing education labour law comprised teachers' involvement in fundraising activities. Possible explanations for the apparent alignment of the core duties with prevailing education labour law and other relevant law may be that prevailing education labour law is open-ended and does not explicitly state the degree of involvement it expects

from teachers in respect of the core duties. Government's expectations of teachers are neither sufficiently clear nor binding in respect of the time, scope and extent of teachers' involvement in the core duties. The open-ended nature of prevailing education labour law results in silences and gaps, which make allowance for individual and personal interpretation. Prevailing education labour law provides the members of public school governing bodies, on behalf of the parent community, with legitimate opportunities to assign a variety of additional, unspecified duties and responsibilities to teachers, which may prove to be a compelling factor in the intensification of teachers' workloads.

The findings of the teacher time-use diaries provided a detailed description of what teaching and educating entails in respect of the actual duties and responsibilities performed by middle-class context teachers every school day, weekend and holiday. The actual time spent on the various core duties as well as additional comments recorded by teachers in their time-use diaries provided evidence that teachers who teach at public schools situated in middle-class contexts meet all Government's expectations in respect of the core duties. They also meet, and in some cases exceed the expectations of parents. One of the most important and striking correlations in the findings emanating from this research was the recurrence of four of the six sections entitled "Other Responsibilities" in the top three categories. Other Extra-Mural Activities attained a very high average, Other Classroom Management Duties and Other Administrative Duties both attained high averages and Other Teaching Responsibilities attained a medium to high average. This finding holds various important implications for this study. Firstly, it means that the greater part of a middle-class teacher's workload consists of duties and responsibilities of which

parents and in particular the members of school governing bodies, are unaware. Secondly, parents appear unable to comprehend the full extent and the true nature of a middle-class teacher's duties and responsibilities. They seem unable to project their expectations beyond their perceptions into the classroom and into the private lives of teachers. The reasons for this disparity could be twofold. Perhaps this indicates a lack of communication between the school governing body and the school management team or it suggests a social trait of the middle-class environment.

Reasons for Intensification of Teachers' Workloads

The literature review confirmed that parents in different contexts have responded to decentralisation in education in different ways. Societal pressures, such as marketisation and managerialism that emerge in middle-class contexts appear to link with and support the high value that middle-class parents attach to education, teaching and learning.

Evidence obtained from the time-use diaries confirmed that teachers performed duties that parents did not expect. Therefore, parents cannot lay claim to an in-depth knowledge of the teaching profession. Despite the fact that many middle-class parents and members of school governing bodies may be intelligent, highly qualified, professional people who may be experts in their disciplines, they are not qualified teachers and need to be discouraged from interfering intentionally or unintentionally in the professional management of the school. Furthermore, the most significant finding emerging from interviews with school principals is that the management and leadership style of the principal in respect of the members of the school governing body plays a pivotal role in the type of expectations parents hold of teachers. A

principal who clearly demonstrates a convincing and influential leadership style will not permit interference from parents in the professional management of the school but at the same time, not alienate them in any way. Yet, the findings emerging from the interviews with principals indicate that some principals appear to have unwittingly become “parent pleasers” and permit parents, to a greater or lesser degree, to interfere in the professional management matters of the school without due consideration for the implications it may hold for the teachers and learners.

CONCLUSION

The findings therefore provided evidence that teachers who teach at public primary schools located in middle-class contexts, manage and maintain heavy workloads in response to the expectations placed on them by Government, parents and in some instances, themselves. The findings encourage reflection on the way in which workloads affect the private lives of teachers and ultimately the quality of education provided by public schools situated in middle-class contexts. This begs the question, “To what extent will teachers in future be able to respond to even greater parental expectations in regard to teacher workloads? Will this trend continue or will policy writers intervene”?

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