

## Article

# Teacher Motivation to Teach in Challenging School Contexts on the Cape Flats, Western Cape, South Africa

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**Abstract:** This study emerged from a desire to understand the motivation of teachers to teach in challenging school contexts on the Cape Flats of South Africa where the legacy of apartheid continues to impact the quality of teaching and learning as the communities experience abject poverty, violence, and gang activity and have little regard for schooling, teachers, or education. This qualitative study employed an interpretative paradigm to understand the personal, lived experiences of teachers teaching in three purposively selected primary schools in Manenberg on the Cape Flats. The participants agreed to at least one semi-structured interview with follow-up questions for clarity if required. The findings suggest that the motivation of the teachers to teach at schools in a marginalised community is positively linked to the relationships they develop with their teacher community and the students and their families. If these relationships are positive, teachers are able to live out their beliefs and remain committed to the school community, which increases their perceived levels of self-efficacy and therefore their motivation to teach in the Manenberg area. Where they have support from the larger school community, their motivation is further enhanced. This motivation can be applied to countries with marginalised communities, particularly countries in the global south.

**Keywords:** self-efficacy; commitment; marginalised



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## 1. Introduction

The motivation of employees is essential for organisations to prosper. Within the context of a school, teacher motivation has a direct effect on student learning as the level of teacher motivation directly impacts the quality of teaching. However, teacher motivation levels are impacted by several things: the working conditions, the physical and interpersonal context of the school, and various other external and extrinsic as well as personal and intrinsic factors [1,2]. Factors that affect levels of motivation vary in different countries. Studies by Abubakar et al. [2] in Nigeria show that teachers are not motivated as they are dissatisfied with their working conditions and the leadership of the principals, while in Thailand, as a result of professional issues, teachers lack commitment and motivation [2]. Regardless of the context and country, where teachers are motivated and believe in what they are doing, they dispense quality teaching.

### 1.1. Historical Background

In South Africa, the patronising ‘salvational’ effects of English and Dutch white-settler colonialism, which treated black Africans as people in need of civilisation [3–5], were exacerbated by the Nationalist Party (NP) when it came to power in 1948. The NP put policies in place to ensure the segregation of racial groups, known as apartheid. The apartheid system affected all aspects of the country, including education, by impacting the quality of teachers and teaching and hence teacher motivation. The apartheid era entrenched the divisions between races, with white people advantaged above all others

and other races receiving poor teaching as mandated by the colonialists. The dissatisfaction with the education system saw students uprising against the apartheid education system in 1976, with many students dropping out of school due to distrust of the schooling system. Despite the advent of democracy in 1994, little has changed for the schooling of students of colour in South Africa, with ongoing poverty, lack of opportunity for improvement [6], and the continuation of epistemic violence that excludes groups of people through the withholding of knowledge as a form of domination [7].

Within South Africa's bifurcated schooling system [8], teachers in disadvantaged and impoverished schools have to deal with white-settler social-structural and apartheid legacies of racism and the effects of inequalities—hunger, lack of parental support, alcohol and substance abuse, and gang activity—which impact teaching and learning. However, motivated teachers offer their students hope for a better future. Within the context of South Africa, particularly in Manenberg in the Western Cape, the suburb in which this study is situated, the understanding of the motivation of teachers to teach within these schools is imperative to bring about a positive change in the community [9]. Exploring teacher motivation on the Cape Flats is important as factors such as impoverishment and gang activity are critical realities impacting teacher motivation in a context which is vastly different from more privileged schools in South Africa.

### 1.2. School Contexts on the Cape Flats

On the Cape Flats, particularly within Manenberg, a suburb designed for marginalised communities, the legacy of apartheid is still evident with high levels of poverty, gang violence, and substance abuse [10]. Numerous parents and grandparents participating in political struggles prior to democracy dropped out of school, likely affecting their appreciation for the value of school and education [11,12]. As a consequence, they do not see the need to support students, teachers, or schools in the ways necessary to uplift teaching and learning. Within this context, teachers are often dubious and unprepared to teach.

In many dysfunctional or disadvantaged schools within Manenberg, '*disorder, distrust, rebellion, and lack of cooperation have undermined efforts to create an appropriate culture of teaching and learning*' [13] (p. 2). Many of these schools are underperforming, have high failure rates, high dropout rates, and poor teacher attendance [13,14]. These schools tend to serve the socioeconomically disadvantaged, which accounts for these problems, but ill-discipline, poor administration, and low intellectual demand play a significant role. In addition, gangs are responsible for burglaries and vandalism of school buildings and for crimes: the stabbing of students and teachers at school, sexual offences against schoolgirls, and damage to teachers' cars [15].

Classrooms cannot be separated from the communities they serve. Schools within these areas fear the outbreak of violence between rival gangs, especially where students from different gangs attend the same school. When gang violence occurs in an area surrounding a school, absenteeism escalates as parents keep their children home and teachers, often dodging gunfire, are fearful for their lives [15,16]. In addition to this violence, schools experience administration and community factors that perpetuate violence: overcrowding of schools and classes, a lack of support for teachers, poor leadership, peer pressure, bullying, racism, and poverty [15].

## 2. Teacher Motivation to Teach in Challenging School Contexts: A Review of the Literature

This section develops the framework of this paper by exploring the definition and drivers of motivation, teacher commitment and self-efficacy, teachers and their teacher community, and students and their families as they pertain to teacher motivation in challenging school contexts. *Challenging school contexts* refer to schools in marginalised areas with high levels of poverty, inequality, and gang activity as a direct result of the legacy of apartheid [17]. Learners have insufficient resources, and families lack the means to supply resources. Learners in this context likely belong to gangs, which are entangled in the school context.

### 2.1. Motivation: Definition and Importance

The literature defines motivation as a process of feeling driven to act [18,19], as an inclination to carry out a particular act [1], or as directed toward particular goals [20]. Accordingly, motivation is a means of understanding why people behave in particular ways. Lai [21] states that the motivation to teach is based on a person's inclination and preference to carry out a particular activity, and that intrinsic motivation is increased by the level of enjoyment gained from participating in the activity, while extrinsic motivation is typically a result of the rewards for carrying out an activity. Motivation is the understanding of thoughts and actions, as shown by the way people behave and the choices they make [2]. For the purposes of this paper, motivation refers to a teacher's drive, commitment, and perseverance to teach in challenging contexts, as encountered on the Cape Flats [19].

Schools that experience positive levels of teacher motivation are able to achieve their goals as teachers seek new and improved ways of teaching. However, schools with low levels of teacher motivation experience higher absentee rates, minimal effort in planning and preparation, poor teaching practices, and limited, if any, commitment to extramural activities [12]. Within challenging school contexts such as in Manenberg, a lack of teacher motivation exacerbates the poverty, thereby reducing prospects within the community [22].

### 2.2. Drivers of Motivation

Drivers of teacher motivation can be divided into three categories. First is altruism, where teachers teach because they believe in the social value of education, in helping students, improving society, giving back to society, or feeling part of something larger than themselves. Second is intrinsic motivation, where teachers teach for the joy of teaching itself; internal or intrinsic motivational factors—a teacher's beliefs, commitment to teaching, and drive for self-efficacy—offer the greatest rewards for the promotion of long-term job satisfaction [23]. Third are extrinsic motivations, where job security, remuneration, and school holidays [18], for example, whether positive or negative, affect the quality of work the teacher offers students [24].

### 2.3. Teacher Commitment and Self-Efficacy

Teachers who are effective do not simply teach the curriculum; they develop relationships with students based on their beliefs defined as their '*deeply personal truths*' [25] (p. 309). Effective relationships serve as a motivating factor, while the absence of effective relationships leads to weak understanding, possible conflict, and ineffective lessons [26]. Committed teachers have a strong moral responsibility to offer good quality service to schools and are therefore motivated to offer quality education to their students. Because of this commitment, if their current teaching practice is below the desired quality, these teachers will engage in professional development activities to improve their teaching practice [26].

Both positive and negative emotions influence a person's sense of self-efficacy. Negative emotions may result in giving up in the face of adversity, such as a difficult school context, while positive emotions encourage people to tackle new challenges [27]. The degree to which people believe in their own self-efficacy influences their functionality. If they believe in themselves cognitively, they willingly try different activities, as needed by the students in marginalised schools. On the Cape Flats, teachers face daily challenges which cause frustration, conflict, and failure. However, with a sense of optimism, teachers can overcome these feelings and, through self-efficacy, find ways to succeed within a difficult context [28].

### 2.4. Teachers and Their Teacher Community

As a collective, teachers form a community within the school. The relationships developed and the support received from their teacher community bring a sense of belonging, which increases motivation to teach at a school. Some activities carried out by school staff must be collective and must fulfil the needs of teachers to encourage collaboration [24]. In

working together, teachers construct positive relationships. As relationships grow, they strengthen as a source of support within the school [24]. Where teachers experience high levels of cohesion amongst staff, they experience higher levels of self-esteem, improved job status, and satisfaction, all of which reinforce teacher motivation.

### *2.5. Students and Their Families*

Within South Africa, the Western Cape, and the Cape Flats, student performance fluctuates based on student background, parental support, teacher quality, and available school resources [29]. According to research by Bennell and Akyeampong [11], working with students is a key aspect of a teacher's job satisfaction and therefore an element of motivation. However, the high demands placed on teachers, their relatively low remuneration, and society's disregard for the profession are demotivating factors [11]. Studies in South Africa have linked teacher stress to students who are ill-disciplined and unmotivated [30], while teachers are restricted in dispensing disciplinary actions [11] for disruptive behaviour, poor work ethic, aggression, and violence in school [10]. Students who behave in an antisocial manner, take drugs, or are involved in gangs and associated activities tend to achieve poor academic results [29]. Constant exposure to violence brings about increased physical aggression, while decreasing emotional reactions to the violence. However, while students may show desensitised behaviour [10], this is not the case for teachers exposed to gang violence at school [31].

Teachers must deal daily with the struggles of students who do not cope academically, who struggle with personal issues, and who are mired in family problems [32]. Despite a willingness to assist, teachers face this pressure while needing to meet the demands of the curriculum and of administration from the local and national education departments.

Where students lack parental support at home, parents are divorced, or a parent is ill or deceased, teachers face the added burden of feeding and caring for these students [30]. Within the impoverished Manenberg area, single-parent families, grandparent-led families, and familial gang activities strain the relationships between teachers and student families [33]. In the event that parents and teachers are able to connect with a common goal, the students, parents, and teachers trust and respect each other. Families motivate teachers to offer more to students in their care [22,34]. Moreover, when teachers feel comfortable with and supported by student families, they offer more personal services to the students in the face of challenges [28].

In exploring the consequences of the uprising against apartheid education, a survey by Bennell and Monyokolo [12] found that, while most students who were in Grade 12 in 1984 or 1988 managed to find employment, the actual percentage of students who attained a Grade 12 education was less than 10% of the students who originally enrolled in primary school. According to The Unit for Religion and Development Research, University of Stellenbosch, in partnership with Transformation Africa, Manenberg has a higher-than-average percentage (46.3%) of people over 20 years of age who did not complete high school [35], an average income well below the provincial average, and rising unemployment. If parents of current students did not complete their own schooling, they are unable to assist their children academically; this decreases teacher motivation as additional pressure is placed on teachers to support the students.

Students join gangs to garner the standing, respect, self-esteem, financial gain, and sense of belonging they require but do not receive at home from the dysfunctionality of the family structure, particularly in marginalised areas such as Manenberg [19,36]. The primary contributing factor for students to join gangs, according to Antrobus [37], is the absence of a father, leading to gang membership and criminal convictions [37]. Research, according to Alleyne and Wood [38], confirms that youngsters will forgo their moral standings and behave violently to be accepted into a gang. Gang involvement gives rise to a disregard for authority, further complicating the job of teachers.

As the behaviour and attitude of students and parents deteriorate and with teachers as targets of bullying, a sense of disempowerment sets in [15]. In addition, if the personal

possessions of teachers are vandalised and their core job of teaching is disrupted, the stress they suffer affects not only their physical health, but also their motivation to teach [37].

### 3. Materials and Methods

This study builds on the studies by the Centre for International Teacher Education (CITE), which concentrate on teacher preparation and classroom performance to bring about quality education and thereby improve equity in education. This study provides an understanding of the motivation of teachers, as teachers are regarded as the main drivers for bringing about educational transformation [36].

The methodology used in this qualitative study was open-ended to encourage participants to share openly and freely about their personal experiences. Their responses were subjective, and for this reason, semi-structured interviews were suitable.

Participants were selected based on their willingness to participate after indicating their consent through an interest questionnaire. The sample includes two principals, three senior management team members, and ten post-level-one teachers, non-management. The names of the participants have been changed, and the three purposively selected schools are referred to as Jupiter Primary School (JPS), Saturn Primary School (SPS), and Neptune Primary School (NPS) to ensure anonymity.

JPS is geographically situated at the point where four rival gang territories meet, resulting in many gang and drug-related activities, while the children of the various gangs attend JPS together, giving rise to tensions within the school. SPS is a relatively small school on a main road where the local youth gather daily to engage in substance abuse activities. This brings dangerous rival gang violence that has a detrimental effect on teaching and learning. NPS is situated in what is regarded as a more affluent area but is a commuter school; the students who attend are not from the area and often must dodge gang activity on their way to school. The three participating primary schools are not discussed separately as the effects of the teacher community, the students and their families, commitment, self-efficacy, and the job of teaching itself are applicable to teachers across all three schools.

Data were collected using open-ended semi-structured interviews in English, the language of teaching and learning, to allow participants to relay their experiences. The information gathered—in person and virtually via Skype and emails and follow-up questions—was transcribed, along with field notes, coded, analysed with identified themes, and reviewed using Braun and Clarke's [39] steps for analysing qualitative data: familiarisation, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up. Similarities, anomalies, or contradictions were carefully reviewed by the researcher, who is regarded as both an insider and outsider by virtue of the researcher's position as an education specialist.

The research was conducted by an education official who works in the district in which these schools are situated. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Cape Peninsula University of Technology as well as from the respondents themselves. Informed consent was ensured, and participants had the right to withdraw at any time without repercussion.

### 4. Results

The analysis of data collected in this qualitative study saw the emergence of the following dominant themes: teacher community, students and their families, teacher commitment and self-efficacy, and teaching, the job itself. Each theme is discussed individually below.

#### 4.1. Teacher Community

The teachers at all three schools indicated that they and the students benefit from working together.

*[They] share ideas and approaches as to how to teach a certain topic. We have internal reflections and external reflections regarding classroom management and keeping up to date with administration. (Samantha, Grade 7 teacher, JPS)*



Being able to discuss progress and plans with colleagues in a structured manner results in *'less stress when you come to school and we have discussed everything'* (Samantha, Grade 7 teacher, JPS). This is aligned with the findings of Schulze and Steyn [40] who contend that if teachers feel comfortable with their colleagues, their level of motivation is enhanced.

Where teachers believe they are supported and where teachers with whom they work have the same objectives, teachers are united in purpose and motivation [11,12]. Zola believes,

*the relationships between the teachers, even if there's a disagreement, you can figure it out, and we can move from it. We can solve it and move from it. We share a common denominator.* (Zola, Deputy Principal, SPS)

When connecting and collaborating with colleagues, teachers do not rely solely on their own initiatives to bring about effective teaching, but together, they increase motivation [41,42]. According to Samantha, despite personal feelings, teachers must work together for the benefit of the students.

*We have our disagreements, but everybody knows they need to do something and they need to apply themselves. Whether it is in your favour, or not in your favour, at the end of the day, we apply ourselves because it's about teaching.* (Samantha, Grade 7 teacher, JPS)

Discussion amongst teachers in Manenberg has made a difference in the way they teach. They understand each other better; they share ideas. The opportunity to share stories allows colleagues to share in each other's excitement, which is motivating for all. They share in each other's successes and support one another when needed. This has a positive effect in the classroom, encouraging students. According to Nyakundi [43], all staff must work together for the benefit of the students. Where there is a particularly difficult student or a student struggling academically, the student may be sent to another teacher's class to give the student a different way of learning. When students improve, all teachers share in the success.

*It's such a nice feeling knowing that together we have made a difference in the child's life.* (Anusha, Grade 2 teacher, NPS)

By collaborating to offer students the best possible education, teachers uplift the students but also each other, which increases their levels of motivation [26].

*We share the environment with teachers who are actually there for the kids. It kind of just makes you want to go and be better. You can't even express how amazing it is working with a team who actually wants to just make a difference!* (Anusha, Grade 2 teacher, NPS)

When teachers work together, these relationships support and encourage the teachers and increase their levels of motivation.

#### 4.2. Students and Their Families

As a residual result of apartheid, many families in Manenberg struggle with poverty and lack of education, giving rise to feelings of powerlessness and resignation to overcome their circumstances [17]. As poverty has risen, so has gang activity, with concomitant substance abuse and violence. This exacerbates the challenges for teachers, impacting their motivation to teach [44].

Many Manenberg families live in abject poverty, feel disempowered, and suffer from disillusionment. With few prospects, parents are blind to the value of schooling [45]. If they do not value their children's education, they show little, if any, interest in the progress their children are making at school, and therefore, they *'don't even collect their children's report at the end of the year'* (Ulrich, Grade 7 teacher, SPS). This is extremely demotivating for teachers as they feel unsupported by the parents.

The belief that students are incapable of improving stems from the absence of parental education, which hinders parents from supporting the students academically.

*The role of the parent has become so much more important in a child's education, but we have what we call the "lost generation of parents". Many of our parents at our school did not complete their education. They are not really able to assist our students. Many of my parents are illiterate, and they are not able to assist. (Donovan, Deputy Principal, NPS)*

As a result of their own lack of schooling, parents are unable to assist children with schoolwork, so students rely solely on teachers to achieve academically [12]. A parent's lack of education inhibits their attempts to assist their children academically [45].

*Most of the students in our areas don't really do homework. We have a backlog here in our curriculum, and especially with our students, because the parents themselves can't help them. (Donovan, Deputy Principal, NPS)*

The lack of parental support for students can have a demotivating effect on teachers when students are unable to complete the work required; teachers sometimes withdraw themselves emotionally from the students [36]. Another problem is that many parents are young and inexperienced.

*Many of our parents are still young children, young people, so they also are not able to assist. (Donovan, Deputy Principal, NPS)*

If parents are young, perhaps from a teenage pregnancy, they typically endured inadequate parenting themselves and then struggle to parent their own children. Matthew (Principal, SPS) admitted that students have poor behaviour and 'negative attitudes as a result of parental neglect'. Where parents 'neglect' their children, the teachers perceive this as a lack of interest in the students, which opens students to seek affirmation from other sources, often gangs [46].

In addition to the poor academic performance of the students, teaching is hampered by violent gang activity that occurs outside of the school.

*When shooting happens during intervals, the students run to the fence to see what is happening. (Enver, Grade 7 teacher, NPS)*

Natasha (Deputy Principal, JPS) knows that if students are in gangs or abuse alcohol and drugs, it is difficult to deal with 'student behaviour, discipline and work ethic'. When students arrive at school already under the influence of alcohol or other narcotics, they cannot be engaged in teaching and learning. Students who are members of a gang generally do not associate authority with anyone other than the gang hierarchy, so school discipline is difficult, and teaching is disrupted.

If a student feels that the other students in class are not showing the level of respect called for by their status in a gang, bullying may ensue to enforce their perceived standing [37]. Bullying brings additional disciplinary issues into the classroom, challenging the authority of the teachers and thereby decreasing teacher motivation [47].

As a result of their circumstances, many students are not ready to learn, regardless of their willingness. Students who have been exposed to violence, abuse, and exploitation, whether by gangs or home circumstances, need teachers to offer the safety, protection, and care they do not receive elsewhere [17,48] before effective teaching can occur. Faith has grown more anxious about being in the school area over the last couple of years.

*I've seen bodies on my way to school. I've had to divert the students from crime scenes. Crime is definitely creeping close to the school. In the past week between 9 am and 10 am, six to eight gunshots every day without fail. I'm not sure if it is a warning, or what the purpose is. (Faith, Grade 5 teacher, JPS)*

Gang actions may be a form of intimidation and, while the gang members do not enter school grounds unless they are students, are scary and traumatic; student fears need to be mediated by teachers who, themselves, are fearful. Again, this directly affects the quality of teaching and negatively impacts the motivation to teach in Manenberg [31,48,49].

Ironically, students are often drawn to the shootings, rather than moving to safety. Their intrigue may stem from their own gang affiliations or a family gang affiliation. Despite the incessant trauma, many students have grown desensitised to the surrounding violence.

*A man was killed right there on the field, and I think that what struck me was the Grade 7s who just walked on. They looked, they glanced, and they discussed who was killed. It didn't faze them.* (Faith, Grade 5 teacher, JPS)

Moreover, the apparent desensitisation is applicable even when a family member is the victim.

*What I've noticed about the students when they tell me about their cousin being killed and they saw it, there's this nothingness on their face and I can't imagine being that cold when a family member is ... I think it's a coping method.* (Faith, Grade 5 teacher, JPS)

This desensitisation is an emotional response to trauma, potentially affecting normal brain development and therefore student responsiveness to teachers in class [50]. This is indicative of the level of desensitisation amongst the community, as discussed by Mrug et al. [10].

While the ongoing violence and its repercussions may appear to have little effect on students, in discussing the victim, as noted by Faith, students experience 'secondary or vicarious trauma' [50] (p. 3), which harms teaching and learning.

Teachers are challenged daily when dealing with students whose behaviour is not conducive to teaching and learning. Student behaviour is affected by relationships within their families, coupled with alcohol and substance abuse and gang connections. Teachers often have to administer psychosocial support to students who have been exposed to alcohol and substance abuse and gang activity in an effort to overcome the detrimental impact [10,31,32,43]. Where students have no respect for the authority of teachers, this compounds the burden of teachers; student behaviour and attitudes directly impact the motivation of teachers to continue to teach.

So, in addition to the psychological support teachers must extend to students, teachers must constantly find ways to work with poorly behaved students. In their meetings, they frequently discuss this.

*So how you getting this naughty one to actually sit and work? What are you doing with that one?* (Anusha, Grade 2 teacher, NPS)

While poor behaviour can be demotivating, the teachers at NPS seek ways to improve student behaviour. Teachers such as Anusha are compelled to help.

*There's just something about the under-privileged, which I'm so drawn to. You kind of mould them, and you expose them to life. You can show them even though we are in Manenberg, we can carry ourselves differently. In Manenberg, they only know one way. Everyone conducts themselves in one way. I don't think I'll ever leave the area which I teach in.* (Anusha, Grade 2 teacher, NPS)

All the participants interviewed admitted a fondness for their students. To some teachers, as indicated by Bennell and Akyeampong [12], students are more than just students: 'I believe that they are not my students, they are my kids' (Kubeshni, Grade 6 teacher, SPS). Parents often notice this commitment and approach the teachers to say:

*Ms Kubeshni, can you please help me, John is not listening, or I'm battling to do this or that.* (Kubeshni, Grade 6 teacher, SPS)

The teachers identified that effective teaching and learning relies on their connections with students on a personal level.

*It's impossible to teach this type of student if you don't know how to say, 'well done' and you know it is more about the affirmation.* (Samantha, Grade 7 teacher, JPS)

Taking care of students is a vital part of what teachers do, according to Nguyen [50]. Where students are distrustful, have been traumatised, or have not been shown adequate



love and support at home, they have little self-confidence or belief in their own abilities; therefore, teachers must connect emotionally with students to ensure effective teaching and learning [29]. Teachers stressed their commitment to their students as they feel that ‘students need me’ (Samantha, Grade 7 teacher, JPS), again speaking to their commitment to teach despite the difficult circumstances.

Teachers such as Anusha see an opportunity to encourage students to rise above their surroundings and to overcome the apparent poor parenting they receive. As motivation to teach these students increases, teachers offer students more than just teaching and learning; this is a strong motivating factor when considering alternative teaching opportunities.

*We provide education, we provide counselling, we actually provide everything besides education.* (Donovan, Deputy Principal, NPS)

As noted by Donovan, the teachers are prepared to offer support services to students to overcome their personal challenges. In supporting the students, teachers can mollify some of the poor behaviours to better teach the students, which is motivating as the students then have a means to rise above their circumstances. Despite the demotivating effects of students’ circumstances, teachers cling to the belief that they can have a positive effect on students. Despite behavioural challenges, the teachers at all three schools still claim that they are motivated to improve the lives of the students in their care. In finding the good in the students, teachers live out their beliefs.

The teachers feel a connection with the students because of their personal backgrounds or because they feel they are contributing to something greater than themselves. This is particularly true for Natasha, who finds it intensely satisfying to work in Manenberg.

*As it gives me an opportunity to plough back in the community as a person who was reared in a similar community myself. I feel blessed that coming from a similar under-privileged community, yet I am successful and can be a positive role model and an example of success to our students.* (Natasha, Deputy Principal, JPS)

Donovan grew up in and currently still lives in the local area. Although he rose above the legacy of living in Manenberg by completing his schooling and becoming a teacher, he believes that students will struggle to improve themselves. He is realistic and aware that teachers who think that they can expect more from the students

*are going to struggle. I have been working here for 30 years, and I have known this as a marginalised community. They are illiterate.* (Donovan, Deputy Principal, NPS)

However, if teachers do not believe that the students and, likewise, the community will improve despite their efforts, teachers will grow despondent and demotivated over time [51].

Francis believes that showing respect and encouraging students will show families that teachers value them and are willing to work together. However, this does not necessarily help parental involvement in their children’s schooling. Ulrich believes that teachers would be more committed to their schools if

*we had more parent involvement, and more commitment from parents.* (Ulrich, Grade 7 teacher, SPS)

If parental involvement is lacking, teachers must redouble their efforts to engage with the families for a better future for the students. Engaging the families generates more interest from the parents in the academic progress of their children, which then motivates teachers to offer even more [11].

#### 4.3. Commitment and Self-Efficacy

Teachers make judgements about their competencies and then adjust to improve if they feel that they are lacking. Ideally, competencies are recognised by school leadership, which leads to promotions and additional responsibilities. A high level of competence may lead to praise from the teacher community, motivating the further development of competencies, which cycles into further achievements [52] and an increased sense of self-efficacy.

Teachers with high levels of self-efficacy are more willing to approach others for assistance in achieving their goals and instil in students a hope for the future. When teachers are approached to assist or to carry additional responsibilities as a result of their displayed competencies, they have higher self-efficacy and accept more challenges.

*I think by earmarking you as a partner that can help mentor someone, you also realise your strengths and your capabilities by mentoring someone. When I was initially earmarked to mentor someone, I thought . . . Why me? I'm still figuring out all the acronyms. But [the principal] entrusting me with, like even with regards to finding the interns, I was flabbergasted that I was asked to run that, and I definitely put my all into it, and I think it's still going very well with our interns. (Faith, Grade 5 teacher, JPS)*

This acknowledgement of her achievements motivated Faith to offer a valuable service to the school as a mentor, which further heightened her competence [24,53]. However, not all teachers need external validation for a sense of achievement, as indicated by Natasha, who finds her sense of achievement internally connected to the students and teacher community.

*Balancing personal, social and well-being of the student always reflects what I achieve; why did I do that? To do the best I can to support the growth and success of the students and teachers. (Natasha, Deputy Principal, JPS)*

Offering support to the teacher community and students helps teachers to feel that they are making a difference in people's lives. This by no means is just academic support, as indicated by Anusha when talking to her female students.

*Girls, we are ladies, we are not vultures, so please act like ladies, and they just looked at me like: what are you speaking about? So, I actually had to go back and teach them different ways of bringing themselves across and how to manage their expressions and their emotions. (Anusha, Grade 2 teacher, NPS)*

Anusha not only offers academic support to students, but also advises them on personal conduct, which heightens her sense of achievement. Donovan notes a sense of achievement when he offers the students hope for the future. He believes they need to be prepared for what lies ahead, so teaching the curriculum is not enough.

*It's not just a matter of just being a teacher and teaching the curriculum. You need to teach the curriculum in a manner that will prepare the child for the next couple or five years, uplifting the community. If you just come in here to teach a curriculum then you're defeating the purpose. (Donovan, Deputy Principal, NPS)*

Donovan's sense of achievement also stems from the assistance he offers students and their families. In doing so, he is afforded respect, which he perceives as achievement.

*Our children don't have; our community don't have what I have; what I've experienced. The broader community, because I interact with them on a daily basis and people know me, and they trust me. I have been here so many years, and I've earned that trust through giving them advice and helping them, and sometimes giving them money, and sometimes helping them with forms. Whatever, it is not only to do with education. I am able to live out my dreams here because I know I make a change. (Donovan, Deputy Principal, NPS)*

Students and their families impact teacher self-efficacy and the sense of achievement when teachers are able to offer the students advice that opens opportunities to improve their future prospects. In addition, if teachers widen their teaching practice to include preparing students for a changed future, they increase their perceived self-efficacy.

Being able to 'make a change' increases teachers' sense of achievement, which increases their self-efficacy. Anusha feels motivated when she finds different ways for her students to succeed.

*Because there's always new ways and different tricks to teaching certain things and finding new ways of bringing something across. You have to ask; you have to go out and find different ways just to make things more exciting and knowing that together we have made a difference in this child's life. (Anusha, Grade 2 teacher, NPS)*

Anusha has a sense of satisfaction which comes from making a difference in a student's life, as this increases her perceived self-efficacy. As the teachers' sense of achievement and satisfaction increase, they are often recognised for their efforts by students and families.

*These ... people are so grateful for what you do. There are people here that think the world of me in Manenberg because of what I've done for their children, and what I've done for them. And that makes you feel great, that people will remember!* (Donovan, Deputy Principal, NPS)

Being appreciated and recognised by students and families encourages teachers to continue teaching in difficult teaching environments such as Manenberg [24,49,54]. In addition to being appreciated by students and their families, teachers are motivated when recognised by their teacher community [55].

Recognition has been identified by the World Bank [56] as one of the nine motivating factors for teachers to teach. Being recognised for their efforts in teaching encourages teachers to apply themselves even more and to accept more responsibility [57]. Recognition of teachers builds their self-esteem and 'gives allowance to use one's initiative and creativity' (Kubeshni, Grade 6 teacher, SPS), which motivates even more and perpetuates this positive cycle.

#### 4.4. Teaching, the Job Itself

The enjoyment of teaching itself is vital to the motivation of teachers to teach in Manenberg.

*To give my best. See students being successful. Helping them to become self-motivated, disciplined and confident human beings. This can be achieved by me expanding my knowledge as a teacher, through reading information on various topics, attending workshops or any other forms of enrichment.* (Sally, Grade 3 teacher, JPS)

The job of teaching is regarded as a strong intrinsic motivating factor [11]. Teachers who enjoy teaching will inspire their students to achieve [58], which then motivates teachers to offer even more [34]. Teachers who teach because of the job itself do so for altruistic reasons, believing they will make a difference in the lives of the students [18].

Teaching for many teachers is a calling, meaning they have a strong urge to teach, rather than seeing their job as a position that puts food on the table [26]. Teachers who feel 'called' are more emotionally involved with their students.

*I always tell my parents; this is not just your child for the year. We are in it together, and most of the time, it extends to well after the year.* (Anusha, Grade 2 teacher, NPS)

The connection with school families and the subsequent commitment means that 'called' teachers offer students more than teachers who view teaching as simply a means to an end [26]. For 'called' teachers,

*being a teacher, the job, comes home with you. It's with you on holiday. It's with you when you're out with your family. You're thinking: I needed to do this for that child; I wonder if this one is okay at home? Being a teacher is not just 9 to 5. Not at all.* (Anusha, Grade 2 teacher, NPS)

In addition to it not just being a '9 to 5' activity, teachers who are motivated by teaching consider their teaching in all that they do.

*I get my best inspiration when I'm driving to work, when I'm in the shower, when I'm having a conversation, when I see something ... Okay, okay ... I must take this to school because it's going to help me here, and also just using my students, their everyday experiences, what they know and taking my content to meet what they know.* (Faith, Grade 5 teacher, JPS)

For many teachers, teaching cannot be separated from the students; there is a strong connection and commitment of teachers to students and their families. Being part of something bigger than oneself and the status and recognition that teaching offers make teaching fulfilling despite the daily challenges [24,28].

Certainly, teachers may feel overwhelmed by teaching from time to time. When this happens, they may opt to leave the profession, but when ‘teaching’ is a motivating factor, they find their way back into the classroom [23].

*Twelve years ago, I entered the teaching profession again, and have not looked back. An amazing journey.* (Diane, Grade 1 teacher, NPS)

According to Diane, although she left the teaching profession for a while, returning to education rekindled her passion. Faith, despite the urging of her family to leave Manenberg, believes ‘I don’t think I’m done with what I can give to the school’ (Faith, Grade 5 teacher, JPS). Although Manenberg has challenges, Faith believes that she has more to offer the school and students.

Education cannot take place without teachers, who are pivotal in bringing about change in the world of the students, particularly within Manenberg [29].

*I always believe that I can make a difference in the lives of the kids. Working in underprivileged areas makes me more excited to work at the school.* (Florence, Grade R teacher, NPS)

Commitment to the students is demonstrated by the connections made, but also by the manner in which teachers view their role professionally and prepare for their daily tasks [59].

*I am fully committed. Every day at school. Always early and well prepared. Making lessons exciting with different methods and strategies. Having my classroom neat and tidy, inviting and conducive to learning. My attire professional, which contributes to my discipline. My use of language and behaviour also very professional. My commitment to my students is also revealed through my engagement with them.* (Sally, Grade 3 teacher, JPS)

As indicated by Sally, teachers who are motivated by teaching offer themselves fully to the profession and are committed to their students and their teacher communities. In offering themselves fully to teaching, teachers are often prepared to offer their students additional support.

*I spend most weekends at school working. If I did not care about or believe in the students, I would not offer my weekends to teach them.* (Zola, Deputy Principal, SPS)

If teachers feel strongly about teaching, and teaching students in Manenberg in particular, they are prepared to go beyond the call of duty. While the students in Manenberg have challenges, they are, underneath, like all other students, having the same needs as any other student, as per Maslow’s hierarchy of needs [57,60]. However, faced with crippling challenges, their physiological and safety needs are not always met within the family structure and must be met at school [29]. Teachers who see teaching as a ‘calling’ not only teach academics, but consider the individual needs of each student they teach.

*I understand the need that every child is different, and as a school we need to embrace it.* (Diane, Grade 1 teacher, NPS)

Teachers who are motivated by teaching see teaching as an opportunity to grow and develop marginalised communities, despite the challenges to students in that context. As many of the students come from dysfunctional families and live in difficult neighbourhoods, they do not expect to improve their circumstances [33,57], but the teachers feel that they are ‘just giving those kids a bit of hope’ (Anusha, Grade 2 teacher, NPS), which is undeniably motivating [34,49].

*Teaching is a profession which is truly born to have a strong sense of self-efficacy. Teaching, in general, and teaching at my school is the ultimate fulfilment for me and it gives me a gratification that I draw from when there are more difficult days.* (Natasha, Deputy Principal, JPS)

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

This paper identifies the relationships teachers develop, both with their teacher community and with students and their families, and the context of challenging schools as

factors that influence the motivation of teachers to teach on the Cape Flats, specifically in Manenberg.

Good relationships between teachers and students and their families are a motivating factor for teachers to feel more connected to their students and their families, motivating them to teach. If teachers have the support of students and their families, they feel a greater level of commitment to the students, increasing motivation. This paper argues that if teachers develop relationships with students to offer them hope for a better future, teachers are motivated to change student mindsets and thus are able to live their beliefs. If teachers believe they can make a difference in the lives of the students, they maintain their motivation to teach at their schools and uplift the communities within Manenberg, increasing their sense of self-efficacy [21,27].

This paper suggests that when teachers have a sense of belonging at their school, their level of motivation increases. In addition, teachers' social needs are met when they are able to connect with their teacher community and with students and families and when teachers are acknowledged by colleagues, by students, and by parents. As these relationships develop and teachers feel supported and accepted rather than judged, their sense of self-efficacy increases, which then bolsters their sense of achievement.

This paper indicates that the positive relationships teachers engender in their teacher community allow for a feeling of belonging, which in turn allows teachers to feel that they are part of something larger than themselves. This finding reaffirms the research by Cherry [59], Alghamdi [28], Over [61], and Davies et al. [23].

Relationships are shaped by the school context in which teachers work. The Manenberg area in which this study was conducted is known for high levels of alcohol and substance abuse and violence from the prevalence of gang activity [62,63]. Consequently, many parents are unable to assist their children with schoolwork, are unable to parent their children properly, or do not value the education schools offer their children [8,12]. The low level of schooling, the poor socioeconomic environment, and the inequalities of the apartheid policies have not improved, giving rise to a high level of gangsterism [62]. The gang discourse of 'power for the powerless' is alluring in these communities [17]. However, if teachers cultivate a relationship with students and their families, as this paper indicates, these negative aspects can be overcome, at least to an extent [22,28,34].

Research [57] indicates that teachers who grew up in Manenberg or similar areas return to teach in Manenberg to offer the students and the community hope for a better future. For these teachers, returning to Manenberg is not regarded as a step down but as an opportunity to altruistically offer students and their families quality teaching.

Data suggest that despite the school contexts and the prevalent gang activity, teachers continue to teach in Manenberg regardless of threats to their personal safety, typically for altruistic and therefore intrinsic reasons. However, for some teachers, a challenging school context gives rise to apathy if they are not connected to their teacher community or to the students and families, thereby diminishing motivation. A lack of effort by teachers perpetuates the epistemic violence brought about by apartheid policies [64].

This paper contributes to the body of knowledge regarding the analysis of the micro and macro factors that shape teacher motivation and their effects on the Cape Flats in South Africa and globally. It adds to the understanding of how the relationships the teachers develop with their teacher community and the students and their families are integral to the motivation of teachers to teach in challenging school contexts. Despite the challenging contexts, if teachers believe they can offer students and families hope for a better future, their perceived self-efficacy increases, as does their motivation to teach in difficult contexts. Recommendations for further research include considering a broader site and sample and a comparative study across provinces within South Africa or across Africa. This paper reveals a certain incompleteness as no attempt was made to consider the motivation of secondary school educators in the Manenberg area, which may offer new insights not identified in this paper. A further study using a comparative lens to consider the motivation of educators across the Western Cape Province and across South Africa or other African countries or



poor and marginalised communities within first-world countries may reveal commonalities that may confirm the results of this paper.

We acknowledge the limitation of this paper, as it represents a snapshot in time. Further limitations stem from the reluctance of the participating teachers to meet face-to-face and for follow-up sessions due to personal and professional demands as well as the potential bias that may emerge due to the researcher's position as an education official. However, the findings we presented are substantiated by various sources of data, enabling reliable conclusions.

This paper has shone the spotlight on relationships as a core factor in the motivation of teachers to teach in challenging school contexts and on how these difficult contexts affect the relationships teachers form with their teacher community and students and families. It is hoped that the insights offered will inform future policies and practices.

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