

Professional Development Through Teacher Roles: Conceptions of Professionally Unqualified Teachers in Rural South Africa and Zimbabwe

Tabitha Grace Mukeredzi
University of KwaZulu-Natal

Citation: Mukeredzi, T. G. (2013). Professional development through teacher roles: Conceptions of professionally unqualified teachers in rural South Africa and Zimbabwe. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 28(11),1-16. Retrieved from <http://jrre.psu.edu/articles/28-11.pdf>

Teachers' conceptions of what they learn and how they professionally develop through their teaching roles are key to classroom practice and learner achievement because they influence teachers' pedagogic approaches and choice of materials, content, and learner activities. This article reports on some of the findings from a doctoral research project that explored what 12 professionally unqualified practicing teachers (PUPTs) learned and how they professionally developed through their teaching roles in rural South Africa and Zimbabwe. Drawing on concepts around teacher knowledge and professional development, qualitative data from interviews suggest that these teachers conceived their learning and professional development as revolving around general pedagogic knowledge, pedagogic content knowledge, and knowledge of context emerging out of classroom practice and in-school and out-of-school structures. The article illustrates that policy initiatives to enhance education quality through professional development of PUPTs, particularly in rural schools, may not achieve the intended results if due regard is not given to their conceptions of learning and development through their roles.

Teaching is a major focus for educational research activity globally. That it is the point of implementation and delivery in the education system justifies the tremendous effort going into studying effective teaching methods. However, little is known about how those carrying out this huge responsibility understand their professional development. In particular, very little is known about how rural school teachers understand what they learn from their teaching roles and how this understanding contributes to their professional development.

The doctoral study from which this article draws explored professional development experiences of professionally unqualified practicing teachers (PUPTs) in

rural schools of Zimbabwe and South Africa. The teachers were studying in two institutions of higher education: the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) in Zimbabwe and the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) in South Africa. These teachers had undergraduate degrees and were enrolled in part-time initial teacher education (ITE) programs to become qualified teachers: a Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) at ZOU and a Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) at UKZN. Both programs were offered through mixed-mode delivery, which combined distance or school-based learning and face-to-face contact. This article focuses on the teachers' school-based learning—i.e., their learning outside their formal ITE programs.

As the PUPTs had been exposed to the language of teaching/learning through core educational and professional studies modules, this language was the lens through which their school-based learning was viewed. The study investigated the participating PUPTs' conceptions of their professional development within rural school contexts in South Africa and Zimbabwe through two questions: 1) What do you learn from performing your teaching roles? 2) How do these roles contribute to your professional development? The assumption was that as the PUPTs were studying and

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Tabitha Mukeredzi, College of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. E-mail: mukeredzt@ukzn.ac.za

The *Journal of Research in Rural Education* is published by the Center on Rural Education and Communities, College of Education, Penn State University, 300 Rackley Building, University Park, PA 16802. ISSN 1551-0670

practicing, they were experiencing learning and professional growth through their various day-to-day teaching activities in their rural schools. This interplay of teaching activities, professional learning, and professional studies is likely to have shaped their understandings of their roles and how these roles contributed to their professional development.

Rural education and rural schools have been associated with deficiencies and challenges (Arnold, Newman, Gaddy, & Dean, 2005; Pennefather, 2011; Wedekind, 2005), yet identifying interventions and strategies that enhance student success in these contexts is difficult because relatively few scholars study rural education (Arnold et al., 2005). Arnold et al. (2005) noted that there is quality inherent in rural schools and communities that should be preserved such as the desire for learning in teachers and learners. The rural context in this study is intended to show that teachers can learn and professionally develop through their roles in these settings. This understanding may draw the attention of teacher educators and policymakers to opportunities as well as to threats in these contexts so that strategies may be developed to promote teacher learning. Perspectives from this study may stimulate further research in rural settings and may also provide guidance for teacher educators and governments as they reconsider and review teacher development programs.

The UKZN PGCE Curriculum

The UKZN PGCE curriculum had three key parts: core education and professional studies, teaching specialization, and teaching practice (University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2006). The core education and professional studies modules introduced students to propositional knowledge around curriculum and assessment, theories of learning, classroom management, barriers to learning, language across the curriculum, and a range of teaching strategies. Specialization modules focused on the subjects or learning areas in which the PGCE students had achieved their undergraduate degrees and introduced pedagogical content knowledge, or how to teach those subjects. The teaching practice component consisted of one four-week module and one six-week module. PGCE students completed their teaching practice modules in the schools where they were teaching, four weeks in the first year and six weeks in the second year of the program.

The ZOU PGDE Curriculum

The ZOU PGDE curriculum had three components: education and professional foundations, teaching specialization, and teaching practice. The foundations modules exposed students to theories of learning, curriculum, educational management, philosophy of education, school experiences, communication in the

classroom, research methods with action research project, and media in the classroom (Zimbabwe Open University, 2001). Specialization modules targeted the subjects that the PGDE students taught or had studied in college and included lesson preparation, general pedagogy, and pedagogic content knowledge. The teaching practice module, which spanned two semesters, was carried out in the schools where the PUPTs were teaching.

Why Teacher Conceptions?

Conceptions are “more general mental structures, encompassing beliefs, meanings, concepts, propositions, rules, mental images, preferences and the like” (Brown, 2004, p. 303). They represent different categories of ideas that teachers hold behind descriptions of how they experience educational phenomena and provide frameworks for understanding, interpreting, and interacting with the teaching/learning environment. Teachers’ conceptions of teaching/learning and curricula influence classroom practices and student learning outcomes (Calderhead, 1996). In addition, changes in teachers’ understandings of teaching/learning and curricula precede changes in their practice (Brown, 2004). Hence, teachers’ conceptions determine their pedagogic approaches and choices of materials, content, and learner activities.

According to Brown (2004), the most resilient teacher conceptions of teaching come from memories of their own schooling and observations of their own teachers. Allender and Allender (2006), Pereira (2005), and Mitchell and Weber (1998) have also asserted that early learning and influences as young students determine who people become as teachers. These experiences as young students contribute to teacher formation, and much of what teachers do or not do is a response to those early influences (Allender & Allender, 2006). Subsequent teacher education does not seem to change early conceptions, perhaps because these experiences are rarely explored in teacher training programs. The premise of this study is that professional development that engages teachers in direct exploration of their conceptions may trigger self-awareness through reflection, which may in turn alter earlier conceptions and create openness to new learning.

The Rural Context in South Africa and Zimbabwe

Devising a clear and objective definition of “rural” presents a conceptual problem. As Coladarci (2007) points out, “there is no singular or multifaceted definition that will suffice to satisfy the research, programmatic and policy communities that employ the concept” (p. 2). This challenge, some scholars suggest, is a consequence of the ambiguity of the term and arbitrary nature of the distinctions with the

urban (Abd-Kadir & Hardman, 2007; Anaxagorou, 2007). The situation is further problematized because scholars often overlook contextual differences between rural and urban settings because school curricula and practices look remarkably similar (Howley, 1997).

In the South African context, the Human Science Research Council (HSRC, 2005) has defined as rural Traditional Authority land composed of community-owned portions and commercial farms in former White areas of South Africa as well as the former “homeland” areas. Under apartheid, policies such as the Land Act, the Group Areas’ Act of 1953, and the Separate Development Act forced native Black South Africans to live in “homeland” areas, which continue to have poor infrastructure and inadequate services and facilities. These former homelands are generally characterized either by considerably dense or sparsely populated village-style settlements (Wedekind, 2005). Gardiner (2008) has observed that the poorest and least developed South African communities are those located in the former homelands of the Eastern Cape, Limpopo, and KwaZulu-Natal, where the conditions of poverty and underdevelopment continue to be reflected in the poor quality of education available there.

These deficiencies filter into the schools. Consequently, most South African rural schools lack material and infrastructural resources and basic services and facilities. In response to global movements such as Education for All, these schools also experience increased class sizes, multi-grade teaching, and pressures of performativity in terms of students’ achievement (Mukeredzi, 2009). Rural secondary schools are between 40 and 55 km apart, lack toilets on site or are limited to more than 50 learners per toilet, rely on borehole or rainwater harvesting, and have no source of electricity (Hugo, Jack, Wedekind, & Wilson, 2010). Due to poor physical infrastructure, public transport is limited and expensive, which forces children to walk long distances to the nearest school. The teachers who participated in this study worked in such schools, located in sparsely populated, village-style rural settlements.

In Zimbabwe, the legacy of colonial rule demarcated land into three categories. The former sparsely populated White farming areas enjoy developed infrastructure, are close to towns and cities, and spread across watersheds with rich agricultural farmlands (Mlahleki, 1995). Farther away from the towns are sparsely populated, Black-owned, small-scale market gardening farming areas on infertile soils and with limited infrastructure. At their “hems” are traditional village-style, remote, rural communal lands known as “tribal trust lands” or “reserves.” Both terms signify derelict land assigned by White colonial masters but not owned by the Black population that worked in it (Chikoko, 2006). “Remote” here signifies physical road distance of the rural

areas to the nearest urban center where the geographical distance imposes the highest restrictions (Kline, White, & Lock, 2013). It is from this perspective that rural is understood in Zimbabwe and in this study. Remote, rural lands extend for hundreds of kilometers away from towns and former White farms and are characterized by large tracts of infertile land for farming and grazing (Peresu, Ndundu, & Makoni, 1999).

Zimbabwean rural schools are located in sparsely populated villages. Classes are fairly small (see Table 1) but schools are severely under-resourced, which often forces teachers to “make-do” (Mlahleki, 1995). However, within this make-do frame of mind, an inherent theoretical possibility is that making do with limited resources prompts an ability to think creatively and address constraints, thereby creating space for professional learning. The implication is that an awareness of limitations often gives rise to the creation of effective ways to mediate their effects, which in turn brings about professional development. Economic levels around these schools are low, which tends to undermine the schools’ possibilities for pooling resources. Nevertheless, such limitations seemed to strengthen the spirit of interdependency, interpersonal, and personal agency. Further, rural secondary schools are far apart, without communication facilities (telephone, cellphone, broadband Internet), electricity, or piped water. Moreover, when transportation is available, poor roads make it limited and unreliable, placing it beyond the reach of many parents (Mukeredzi, 2009).

Working in rural contexts presents unique challenges. The farther a school is from the city, the harder it is to recruit teachers. Competent, qualified, and experienced teachers shun postings in rural contexts because of geographical isolation, socio-economic conditions, cultural differences, and the dominant discourse of deficiency that conceptualizes teaching in rural schools as inferior and undesirable (Arnold et al., 2005; HSRC, 2005; Hugo et al., 2010; Pennefather, 2011). While problems of “hard to staff, harder to stay” schools have been experienced the world over (e.g., Arnold et al., 2005; Kline et al., 2013; Lowe, 2006; Miller, 2012; Monk, 2007), they seem to be particularly severe in developing countries. McEwan (1999) revealed that a variety of incentives for rural teacher recruitment are a prominent feature of developing-country education systems. Citing Argentina, Bangladesh, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Egypt, Guyana, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Philippines, Venezuela, Zimbabwe, and others, McEwan pointed out that governments adopt a vast array of recruitment strategies, including wage premiums, subsidized rural housing, special in-service training, and even forcible teacher reassignment to rural schools. Thus, most teachers in rural schools are either unqualified or

underqualified. These teachers often do not want to be there, especially if they have been forcibly reassigned, which does not help their classroom practice.

In Zimbabwe in 1995, of 24,900 secondary-school teachers, 12,378 were unqualified. Typically, they had only an Ordinary-Level Certificate without a teacher professional course (Bertram, Mthiyane, & Mukeredzi, 2013).¹ By 1999, of the 8,386 university graduates in the secondary-school workforce, 4,035 did not have a professional teaching qualification (Nziramasanga, 1999). Currently, of 98,446 secondary-school teachers, 12,713 are professionally unqualified (Chiwanga, 2013). Specific numbers for rural secondary schools could not be established, but given the hard to staff, harder to stay issues and with more than half the population residing in rural settings, it is likely that the majority of unqualified teachers are in rural schools. In KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa alone, in 2010 approximately 14% (about 12,000) of the 86,017 teaching corps was completely unqualified (Hugo et al., 2010). They had Relative Education Qualification Value (REQV) of 9, 10, 11, or 12, which implies that they had no professional teacher training and suggests that the majority is in rural schools.² These numbers make education research in rural contexts an obligation to develop strategies for promoting teacher professional learning.

Howley (1997) noted that in the contemporary world rural places suffer more than other places due to a lack of research and misguided efforts to build applicable and reliable procedures for education improvement. Too few education scholars and policymakers pay attention to rural issues or offer substantive suggestions to fortify the will and intentions of those who desire the improvement of rural schools and communities. In both South Africa and Zimbabwe, rural education development lags behind all

¹ Secondary schooling in Zimbabwe was divided into 3 phases based on the Cambridge 3-tier model. The Junior-Level Certificate is obtained after two years of secondary education, the Cambridge Ordinary-Level Certificate is obtained after four years of secondary education, and the Cambridge Advanced-Level Certificate is obtained after six years of secondary education. To obtain an O-Level Certificate, a student must pass a minimum of five subjects at grade C (50%) higher. The five core subjects include English, history, mathematics, science, and a technical/vocational subject. An additional two passes are required at the end of six years to obtain an A-Level Certificate.

² The Relative Education Qualification Value (REQV) is the South African Department of Education's system for determining a teacher's qualifications for employment. The REQV determines a teacher's salary level and whether he or she may be employed in a particular post, be registered with the South African Council for Educators, qualify for a once-off cash-bonus on qualification improvement, or be considered as underqualified or unqualified for employment in education (Loots, 2008).

other parts of the country, despite the fact that the majority of school-age children live in rural areas. The World Bank (2012) estimated rural inhabitants at close to 40% of the entire South African population, and Gardner (2008) indicated that KwaZulu-Natal province alone has 2,956 rural schools with 1,097,499 learners. In Zimbabwe, 80% of Black Zimbabweans live in rural areas (Chikoko, 2006), so most schools are located in these settings. These data suggest that providing accessible, quality education to these communities is essential to the continuing development of a democratic society.

Teacher Qualifications in South Africa and Zimbabwe

The South African teacher qualifications terrain is complex due to the apartheid legacy. Under apartheid, the quality of teacher education depended on the race of the teacher (Bertram, Mthiyane, & Mukeredzi, forthcoming). Currently, a qualified teacher in South Africa should possess a three-year postsecondary school qualification with an appropriate teacher professional training. This education level is at REQV 13 (Hugo et al., 2010). So teachers with a three-year undergraduate degree who do not have a professional teaching qualification are defined as professionally unqualified. The South Africa Department of Education (DoE) is currently working toward a minimum requirement of REQV 14 for qualified teachers. New teachers are now required to acquire a four-year bachelor's of education degree or three-year undergraduate degree plus a one-year post-graduate professional diploma. The thinking is that teaching should be carried out by people with at least an undergraduate degree, and universities are tasked to train teachers through these two pathways.

In Zimbabwe, teacher training is offered in teacher's colleges and universities. The Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) Action Plan (2010) indicated that academic qualifications (knowledge levels) vary greatly among serving teachers. The required minimum qualification for primary and lower secondary school teachers (grades 8-11) is an Ordinary-Level Certificate plus a three- or four-year teacher's diploma obtained in a teacher's college.³ For

³ Teacher education in Zimbabwe occurs in teacher's colleges and universities. The majority of college students possess O-Level Certificates and undertake a three- or four-year teacher training program. Upon completion of the teacher training program, they teach in primary or lower secondary schools, depending on whether their college was primary- or secondary-school oriented. However, a significant number of students in the teacher's colleges will have gone through the A-Level but failed to attain the required points for entry to a university. Such students are usually offered a two-year teacher training program and will teach senior secondary school classes, supplemented by holders of undergraduate degree qualifications.

senior secondary school teachers (grades 12-13), possession of an Advanced-Level Certificate plus a two- or three-year diploma obtained in a teacher's college or achievement of an Advanced-Level Certificate plus a three- or four-year university degree and a teacher's diploma/certificate is required.

Teacher Recruitment in South Africa and Zimbabwe

Teacher recruitment in South Africa is decentralized to local school communities. The school principal advertises vacant posts and the school governing body takes a leading role in interviewing and appointing teachers (Potgieter, Visser, Van der Bank, Mothata, & Squelch, 1997). In Zimbabwe, teacher recruitment and deployment is provincially administered (MoHE, 2010). The central authority is generally free from local pressures and can operate transparently, but it is common for a secondary teacher's contract to require deployment to anywhere in the province.

In both Zimbabwe and South Africa, PUPTs are employed before they enroll in an ITE program. While entry into the ZOU PGDE program required practicing teachers to have at least two years of teaching experience, the UKZN PGCE part-time program accepted applicants who were not practicing teachers. The need for job security for the South African PUPTs compelled them to enroll in ITE programs immediately upon being employed and produce proof of registration or risk possible replacement (Mukeredzi, 2009).

Conceptual Frameworks of the Study

This study was situated within the broad field of teacher development and was informed by concepts related to teacher knowledge and teacher professional development. The study investigated what PUPTs learn through their teaching duties and how this knowledge contributes to their professional development.

Teacher Knowledge

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) identified three conceptions of teacher learning that inform initial teacher education programs. First, *knowledge-for-practice* includes knowledge of more formal and propositional content, educational knowledge, and pedagogic knowledge. It is assumed that there is a knowledge base for teaching that must be learned by new teachers and subsequently used in their practice. Second, *knowledge-in-practice* involves teacher knowledge that is constructed by teachers in their everyday practice. Third, *knowledge-of-practice* constructs

teachers as agents where teacher knowledge is connected to larger political and social agendas (Bertram, 2011). In addition, Shulman (1987) addressed what teachers need to know through four main domains of teacher knowledge: content knowledge (the knowledge of content that needs to be taught); general pedagogical knowledge (knowledge of different teaching strategies, classroom management strategies, assessment strategies, etc.); context knowledge (knowing about the background of the learners, organizational culture of the school, etc.); and pedagogical content knowledge (PCK, which is content-specific pedagogy that addresses how teachers make their specific subject content accessible to learners).

The PGCE and PGDE ITE programs were premised on a conception of teacher learning that embraces *knowledge-for-practice*. Student teachers, it was assumed, would learn a range of propositional knowledge from university modules, apply that knowledge in classroom practice, and subsequently develop theory-informed practice. As these part-time PGCE/PGDE students were expected to possess content knowledge from their undergraduate studies and were already practicing teachers, this study wanted to understand what kinds of *knowledge-in-practice* these teachers develop through their teaching roles and how that knowledge contributes to their professional development.

Teacher Professional Development

Teacher professional development has become a dominant theme in the quest for improving education quality. The concept has been assumed to refer to qualified teachers, but in this study it refers to PUPTs. Professional development has been broadly viewed as the growth of individual teachers in their profession. This understanding suggests "a long-term process that includes regular opportunities and experiences planned systematically to promote growth and development in the profession" (Villegas-Remers, 2003, p. 12).

Villegas-Remers (2003) suggested that this perspective regards professional development as underpinned by four characteristics. First, professional development draws on constructivism. That is, teachers are viewed as active learners (Villegas-Remers, 2003) for whom there is an active meaning-making process of transforming understandings (Du Plessis, Marais, Van Schalkwyk, & Weeks, 2010). In this process, teachers as learners are motivated to learn, assuming an active role for professional development to occur. Professional development is social and ongoing, occurring through experience and practice, allowing people to learn from and with others in particular ways (Lieberman & Mace, 2008; Villegas-Remers, 2003). The centrality of the learner (a PUPT, in this study) in learning and the continuous nature of that learning imply a link between

teachers as learners, teachers in practice, and teachers in student learning. Hence, being a teacher implies ongoing professional development.

Second, professional development is conceived as collaborative (Villegas-Remers, 2003). Notwithstanding some opportunities for isolated work and reflection, the most effective teacher professional development occurs through interaction and debate not only among teachers but with other stakeholders (administrators, parents, etc.) as well (Villegas-Remers, 2003). Interaction provides opportunities to discuss, criticize, evaluate, and disagree not by being dictated to but by being treated and treating each other as professionals. Socio-constructivism suggests that individual knowledge construction occurs in social contexts because learning activities are socially and contextually bound (Du Plessis et al., 2010). Emphasis is on meaning-making in interactions with colleagues and the context. Also critical is interaction with knowledgeable “others” to acquire social meanings of important systems and to learn how to utilize them. Knowledgeable others in this context are mentors, colleagues, and other stakeholders who facilitate and support PUPTs in knowledge construction.

Third, professional development takes place within a particular context and is related to the daily activities of teachers and learners (Villegas-Remers, 2003). In this regard, context becomes central to learning itself. Context should support and challenge PUPTs’ thinking and assist them in becoming effective professionals capable of handling and experiencing real-world complexities (Du Plessis et al., 2010).

Fourth, a teacher is conceived as a reflective practitioner who enters the profession with some knowledge (Villegas-Remers, 2003). These PUPTs have an undergraduate degree and will acquire new knowledge and experiences which will be influenced by their prior knowledge and experiences. Professional development will aid PUPTs in building pedagogical theories and practices, thus helping them to develop expertise. PUPTs will acquire or improve their theoretical and teaching ideas, trying them out and evaluating them (Guskey, 2002) with critical reflection and through receipt of support and feedback.

Methodology

A qualitative methodology was adopted for investigating what PUPTs learn and how they professionally develop from their teaching roles in rural secondary schools. Twelve information-rich participants, six in each country, were purposefully selected. Participants were in the final year of their programs. Zimbabwean participants were identified from biographical data sheets that included the geographical location of their schools and their schools’ distance from town. South African participants volunteered

during registration and orientation for the second year of their PGCE program. These participants self-selected after receiving an explanation of the study and its requirements for participants. Volunteers provided biographic details on sheets, and this information enabled identification of participants in rural schools.

Biographical details of study participants show diversity in teaching experience, teaching specialization, age and gender. The mean age for the South African sample was 31.5 years, and the age range was between 26 and 41 years. The Zimbabwean sample’s mean age was 36 years, and participants’ ages ranged from 30 to 43 years. Detailed biographical information is reflected in Table 1.

Data were collected through individual face-to-face interviews supplemented by photo elicitation. Informed by Seidman (1998) that interview data should involve more than one interview, a series of three in-depth semi-structured interviews (following an interview guide) was conducted with each participant. All participants responded to the same questions in a similar sequence. Interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes, and all were audio-recorded. Throughout each interview I used facilitative communication techniques—probing, paraphrasing, minimal verbal response, and summarizing—to promote continuous talking. Teachers responded in English and were able to speak with ease, choosing and using appropriate words effortlessly when responding to questions and probes. The field notes were expanded immediately after each interview. I transcribed the interviews verbatim to ensure an accurate reflection of participants’ views and cross-verified data from different interviews and across different participants. Interview data were further verified by checking field notes and taking transcriptions back to participants for “member checking” (Cresswell, 2008).

The first interview began with an explanation of the purpose of the study, a promise of confidentiality, assurance that participants could withdraw at any time, and encouragement that there was no right or wrong answer to any question. Interview 1 addressed the first research question: What do you learn from performing your teaching roles? It focused on participants’ education history and details of their teaching activities so as to contextualize their teaching roles and connect them to events which answered the question what they learn from their teaching roles. The second interviews used photo elicitation based on photographs that participants took to illustrate their teaching roles. Photo elicitation involves inserting into a research interview photographs or other forms of visual representation and asking the participant to comment on the images (Warren, 2005). This process stimulates more direct participant involvement and promotes data collection. In this study, participants took photographs that depicted their teaching activities and used the images as prompts

Table 1
Biographical Details of Participants

Teacher	Age in Years	Gender	Subjects Taught	Teaching Experience Before ITE Program (in Years)	Class Size Taught
South African Participants					
1	41	Male	Mathematics Physics	16	70-92
2	30	Male	Mathematics	8	60-80
3	36	Female	Mathematics	7	65-89
4	26	Female	Life Orientation English	6	60-75
5	27	Female	Consumer Sciences	9	65-80
6	29	Female	Mathematics	5	55-75
Zimbabwean Participants					
1	35	Male	History Geography	9	40-45
2	43	Female	English Religious Studies	7	38-40
3	37	Female	Accounting	9	40-52
4	38	Male	English Shona	7	40-45
5	30	Female	Business Studies	17	35-40
6	34	Male	Geography	6	40-45

in the interview when talking about their learning through teaching roles. Interview 3 addressed the second research question: How does your teaching role contribute to your professional development? To this end, the key question posed in the third interview was “What do you learn from your teaching duties, and how does this contribute to your professional growth?” Participants examined their roles in detail within the rural school context. The findings presented in this article draw mainly from the third interviews.

I conducted interviews between March 2008 and March 2009 and employed content analysis to analyze the data. This process entailed transcribing the interviews and reading the transcripts, making brief notes in the margins when interesting/relevant information emerged. I then reviewed the notes made in the margins and listed the different types of information found. Based on this list, I categorized each item in a way that described what it was about. I then determined whether or not the categories could be linked and listed them as major categories/themes or minor categories/themes. I then compared and contrasted the various major and minor themes. I repeated these stages for each transcript. After going through all the transcripts, I collected all themes and examined each one in detail,

considering its relevance to the data. Following this process, I categorized all transcript data into minor and major themes and reexamined the data to ensure that the information was appropriately categorized. I then reviewed all the categories to ascertain whether some categories could be merged, or if some needed to be subcategorized. Finally, I returned to the original transcripts to ensure that all the information that needed to be categorized had been categorized.

Findings

The findings presented here report on the ways in which the PUPTs talked about their conceptions of what they learn from their teaching duties and how that learning contributes to their professional development. In discussing findings, the participants are identified by codes (e.g., Zimbabwean Teacher 1, South African Teacher 6, etc.).

General Pedagogical Knowledge

We understand general pedagogical knowledge as aspects of pedagogy that apply to teachers regardless of their specialized content knowledge. Such knowledge enables

teachers to draw on principles of child development and the respective approaches to teaching, classroom management, and student control (Shulman, 1987). Descriptions offered by participants suggested that they gained such knowledge and professional development through teaching in the classroom and other teacher activities. Zimbabwean teachers understood what they learn as widely dispersed through responsibilities within and outside the classroom, encompassing all aspects of school relationships (i.e., both curricular and extracurricular roles). To illustrate, Zimbabwean Teacher 1 explained:

For me professional development is from doing everything a teacher does in the school, teaching in your classroom. In classroom experience, you learn methods, student discipline and you grow. You are involved in all school activities: meetings, sporting, trips etc. You work alone, with others; colleagues, head, deputy, parents, ministry, politicians in teaching children.... Talking to people you learn and grow in your job, this means my professional development in a rural school.

Teacher 1 described gaining generic pedagogical knowledge from hands-on experience in the classroom and from diverse teacher activities in interaction and collaboration with multiple stakeholders. Effective professional development occurs through interaction (Villegas-Remers, 2003) as it engages teachers physically, cognitively, and emotionally.

Similarly, South African participants talked of generic pedagogical knowledge emerging out of classroom practice. Their descriptions portrayed responsibility and accountability to learners and an approach to teaching that focused on learner acquisition of knowledge and skills for progression to the next grade:

To make sure learners acquire knowledge and skills. You learn how to teach content for passing exams from experiencing it in class. So I make sure that I teach them so that they acquire knowledge appropriate to the level. In doing this you learn teaching techniques. (South African Teacher 6)

There seems to be a largely intuitive conception of the teacher's role as classroom-based and responsible for learners' academic and educational success. The primary goal through which these teachers learned seems to have been effective and successful teaching and transmission of knowledge for children's vertical progression. These participant comments confirm findings in the literature (McLaughlin, 1997), which views experiential professional development through classroom practice as "teaching/learning for understanding," which relies on teachers'

abilities to view subject matter against learner learning levels and school/classroom context.

Zimbabwean teachers further illustrated learning of general pedagogy related to classroom environment and holistic child development. For example:

From teaching, you learn to create an atmosphere where children learn from doing ... to make them develop enquiring minds, taking care of their mental, physical, and moral development, different needs ...you begin to reflect and evaluate your work and improve. If you do not evaluate, you won't see your mistakes, you won't learn or improve ... you must see what worked and did not work and why, which students were active or poor and why. Questioning yourself and finding answers is professional development. (Zimbabwean Teacher 5)

Apart from creating a conducive learning environment, a key aspect emerging from the evidence is reflection. Participant comments suggested that professional development transcends general pedagogical knowledge and skill acquisition to comprise occasions for critical self-reflection and self-evaluation. Through this meaning-making process, which moves them from one experience to the next with deeper understanding of relationships with and connections to other experiences and ideas (Rodgers, 2002), they develop knowledge about pedagogy and handling students' diverse learning needs. Scholars (e.g., Guskey, 2002; Villegas-Remer, 2003) have emphasized that it is through critical reflection on and about practice that effective professional development occurs.

Participants also described gaining generic knowledge about use of specific teaching strategies to maintain learner discipline and attention and to increase learner involvement and classroom productivity. The general trend among the South African participants reflected expository teacher-centered pedagogies due to contextual constraints. For example:

I learnt to lecture effectively and to keep them attentive because these children are undisciplined, so you learn to make your lessons productive. You have to talk facing them; looking at them otherwise you lose some. It's madness to think of group work or any collaborative approaches in a small room packed with 89 learners. There is no space so I lecture otherwise it becomes chaos. (South African Teacher 2)

While South African participants understood and were aware of policy expectations regarding learner-centered pedagogy,

the description provided by Teacher 2 demonstrates teacher agency amid large classes and learner indiscipline. The South African PUPs had studied the core professional studies courses, which exposed them to learning theories and various teaching strategies. Learning and teaching in these core modules was through learner-centered pedagogies. However, aspects of teaching practice in these modules were experienced through discussion and debate and became more pronounced through the experiential domain where the PUPs connected theory and practice. It seems as if South African participants were failing to make this theory-practice connection in handling large groups and complex behaviors. Again, teacher-centered approaches may have had roots in the apartheid history within which some PUPs may have experienced such approaches as teachers or learners. Use of teacher-centered approaches, however, created mismatches between policy and practice as South African education policies advocate for learner-centered strategies (DoE, 2006).

In contrast, all the Zimbabwean teachers' responses reflect a sense of interactive learner-centered approaches. To illustrate, Zimbabwean Teacher 4 commented,

You learn how to involve learners, make them discuss in groups, pairs or threes, how to make them participate fully otherwise some will be passengers. I learnt to have much pupil involvement in lessons only guiding them. For me this is great learning, this is professional development.

This finding supports Shulman's (2004) argument that the goal of education is to enable students to construct their own meaning, and the teacher's task is to maximize that meaning-making through appropriate student-centered pedagogies. Enabling such learning processes promotes professional development around classroom organization of the teaching/learning process (Caires & Almeida, 2005).

The issue of classroom management appears to be key among South African participants given the widespread indiscipline in these schools (see, e.g., Christie, 2006; Kiggundu & Naymuli, 2009; Marais & Meier, 2004, 2010). As classroom management and learner discipline are primarily concerned with building an environment that optimizes teaching/learning and teacher professional learning, participants seemed to view it as integral to teaching practice—particularly in rural contexts where other challenges are often at play. Specifically, PUPs had to nurture appropriate behavior through teaching strategies. The comments below represent participant sentiments regarding classroom management.

Class management I didn't know small things like ground rules, managing a class, what learners want; how you see when they don't understand, dealing with barriers.... If they don't want to learn what must I do; disciplining them; everything, because discipline is a problem here. (South African Teacher 1)

I learnt how to manage my class, to treat learners, to speak with them correctly, to say I don't know when I don't. I now know how to group them and create an atmosphere for effective learning, how to hold their interest and keep groups going. (Zimbabwean Teacher 2)

General knowledge related to class management and learner discipline also emerged from meetings with parents. All Zimbabwean PUPs indicated strong reciprocal parent-teacher interactions through organized regular gatherings and consultations. To illustrate, Teacher 1 commented:

They look at children's books, we discuss children's learning weaknesses and strengths, they also advise you on the child's other weaknesses and strengths and advise you to capitalize on strengths. It makes me understand parents' attitude towards their children's education, this helps me on how to deal with pupils in class.

The meetings facilitated development or strengthening of relations as the two parties met face-to-face, and the association gave rise to subsequent interactions. These meetings provided scope for handling particular learners, which in turn fostered classroom management skills. Reciprocal teacher-parent relations and support are effective in enhancing teacher professional learning in class management and student discipline (Anaxagorou, 2007) and consolidating skills, knowledge, and resources (Kline et al., 2013).

In contrast, all South African participants reported an absence of teacher-parent partnerships. Comments made by Teacher 5 below represent the general trend:

Parents only come in December to get reports, never to attend meetings. Even if you write a letter that you want to see them maybe a learner told you a sad story and you want to help, they don't pitch up.... I got an idea of what parents are like around here ... you end up helping otherwise the child's work goes down.

While comments suggested fences between communities and schools, of importance is the PUPs' ability to assume a pastoral role to help learners. Barriers between South African communities and schools have been documented (see, e.g., Bhengu, 2007; Harley, Bertram, & Mattson, 1999; World Bank, 2005). This indifference contradicts the general belief that South African schools can be improved by joint efforts of parents, educators, learners, and community members (DoE, 2006).

Participants also mentioned acquiring generic pedagogic knowledge from formal meetings. Five Zimbabwean participants spoke about learning in whole-school staff meetings as these offered a platform for some degree of cohesion in teachers' views. Teacher 4 reflected:

It is about learning class management, assessment, social issues from colleagues through their ideas because they impart different ideas. They have trained at different teachers' colleges, so we have a cross-pollination of ideas in staff meetings ... all discussion revolves around teaching, so you learn these things and grow.

Learning here occurred through sharing ideas. Different teachers emerging out of diverse biographies, backgrounds, disciplines, knowledge, and understandings pooled all these experiences into structured gatherings that created an enriched environment for collaborative learning. Villegas-Remers (2003) and Du Plessis et al. (2010) concurred that effective professional development occurs in interaction. Such learning and sharing is not marked by disciplinary boundaries but is within a "feel equal factor" covering a wide array of professional and social topics (Day, 1995).

Again, the situation was different for South African participants. Indeed, two complained of a total absence of any formal meetings. For example, Teacher 2 lamented, "Since I came here in 2004, there are no gatherings, no meetings of any kind; we are never assembled for anything. We just come, teach and go ... just do the best you can." The other four South African participants described whole school meetings as unbeneficial. For example Teacher 6 explained:

Yes, yes, we have meetings during break between 11:30 and 12:00. Recently he was telling us about how to score ... he always tells us what to do. He does not want us to say anything ... gets angry and will call you to the office. Ja! He says teachers it is like this, do this, do that without asking us is it ok or not.

Denying professional gatherings for teachers negates the social aspect of professional development as the school

community, inclusive of its structures and practices, is the context where PUPs (learners) learn to teach through engagement in socially and contextually determined activities (Du Plessis et al., 2010; Villegas-Remers, 2003). Little and McLaughlin (1994) noted that joint staff meetings cut through disciplinary boundaries, promote teacher discussion around pedagogy to make them think deeply about their practice, and inspire examination of their work from a global perspective. South African participants were not offered this experience.

Pedagogic Content Knowledge (PCK)

We understand PCK as the disciplinary-specific pedagogic knowledge required for teaching particular subjects and make concepts accessible to learners. Thus, as Shulman (1987) said, it is an amalgam of content and general pedagogy which transcends subject matter per se to the dimension of subject matter knowledge for practice, which is uniquely the province of teachers. This concept seems to be well developed and researched in quantitative subjects (mathematics, science, etc.) but lacking in the arts and humanities. Hence, PCK here takes a different form. Bertram, Mthiyane, and Mukeredzi (2013) pointed out that mathematics and science have a strong tradition of understanding propositional PCK in the form of common learner errors, or using particular analogies to explain certain concepts, whereas the arts and humanities may focus more on the use of particular pedagogies (i.e., practical PCK). Ten respondents did describe learning this kind of knowledge from departmental, cluster, and association meetings as is illustrated below.

At the beginning of term to map our way; we discuss content, suitable approaches, tests etc. I get new subject information and suitable methods for different topic sections, complex topics, jah so it's developmental and we use this information in our different classes. (Zimbabwean Teacher 4)

In the Physical Science Association I learn new content and methods that work etc. I was not good but I learnt that from colleagues. We discuss what we teach and assist each other with suitable methods and assessments that are relevant; this is what we rely on with our classes. (South African Teacher 4)

Participants' accounts illustrated that PCK includes opportunities for reexamining subject matter content from the perspective of student learning. There is, as Shulman (1986) explained, "a blending of content and general pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics or

concepts are organized, represented, and adapted to meet diverse learner interests and abilities” (p. 7). These reports showed that learning enabled teachers to grasp not only content knowledge but also how to present it in an accessible way to learners. While the assumption was that participants had knowledge of content—i.e., knowledge-*for-practice*—from their undergraduate degrees, evidence here shows that they also gained some content knowledge through specialization meetings. These specialist communities meet to establish norms of practice, plan work, solve problems, share failures and successes, and reflect on and about their practice (Day, 1995).

All Zimbabwean participants further confirmed gaining PCK through mentoring. The trend was illustrated by Teacher 6:

The mentor demonstrates lessons for me.... I learn how to present content in Literature seeing what methods work better.... I learn from joint planning, the content she emphasizes, methods, assessment. All this is my professional development. Sometimes colleagues teach sections that I am not sure of and I observe their approaches to some topics and learn.

Bertram (2011) pointed out that PCK could be gained from talking to other teachers who have taught the topic before, from a textbook or other resource materials, by observing a colleague teaching the topic, and from existing knowledge about the learners and what they might find difficult about the topic. However, the situation was different in the South African context. Comments by Teacher 3 below represent a pattern described by five of the respondents.

Yes, I have a mentor on paper but it’s not like it actually does happen, no-o-o, no one assists me; there really isn’t anything like mentoring or supervision here. Nobody wants to be bothered, even the principal although it is written down ... he says people are busy here.

Mentoring has been touted as a pinnacle for effective school-based professional learning and practice where mentees benefit from supervisory guidance, critique, and feedback, as well as from their own reflection (Kerry & Mayes, 1996). The absence of mentoring in the South African case does not only deprive the PUPs of PCK acquisition but also of many dimensions of learning and a whole repertoire of in-school support and professional development. In these ITE programs, universities expect the PUPs to work under school-based mentors during the stipulated teaching

practice period (10 weeks for the UKZN PGCE, and two semesters for the ZOU PGDE), but according to participant reports, mentoring was not occurring in the South African context. Again, with the uneven quality of schooling as currently experienced in South African schools (Bertram et al., 2013) it is unsurprising that some appointed mentors did not feel that they had the capacity and expertise to support the PUPs, in particular when the PUP had a degree which the mentor did not have.

Knowledge of Context

Knowledge of context includes understanding of the working, organizational culture, setting, and practices of the school; the contextual factors; the students and their backgrounds, including their particular strengths, weaknesses, and interests; and expectations, opportunities, and constraints posed by the district, community, etc., that affect teaching and learning. All participants described knowledge of context from being members of their schools, participating in and observing day-to-day school activities. Some participants also described knowledge of context related to learner behaviors.

My classes have 80-89 learners. I tried group work but naughty boys always corrupt everyone so I just lecture. I have realized that you must be prepared and firm, if you do not do that, big boys always talk and disturb everyone ... serious misbehavior here, you have to put your foot down or you will not work. (South African Teacher 4)

My largest class has 52, here we have no discipline problems, even if you go out to get something from the staffroom or from another teacher next-door you just find them whispering to each other. You just make sure they are occupied with an activity or something. (Zimbabwean Teacher 3)

It is from the knowledge of their students and their characteristics that teachers were able to devise and adapt their strategies and activities to meet their needs. The knowledge of cultures and characters of learners which shapes teaching and learning is part of what Shulman (1987) called knowledge of context.

Discussion

This study investigated conceptions of professional development of the PUPs through their teaching roles, what Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) defined as knowledge-

in-practice. Findings indicate that through their teaching PUPs gained knowledge and professional development around general pedagogy, PCK, and context.

In relation to general pedagogic knowledge, participants described having learned and professionally developed around teaching strategies, classroom management and learner discipline, and assessment. A major source of this kind of knowledge was classroom teaching experience. Generally, experiential learning is a process of meaning-making through direct experience by the individual. It requires no teacher, instead being mainly a knowledge construction process of the individual's experience.

Teachers in this study indicated experiences of professional development through the hands-on process of classroom practice. The intersection of their practice, professional learning, and professional studies seems to have enhanced their learning from classroom practices. Russell (1988) concluded that classroom teaching experience is the only way to learn how to teach as experiences in classroom practices shape the meaning. Through classroom teaching experience, as Shuman (1987) noted, participants gained general pedagogical knowledge, including knowledge of classroom organization and management, different teaching strategies or methods, assessment strategies, and understanding classroom communication and discourses. Bertram (2011) suggested a vital interplay between general pedagogical knowledge from research and personal pedagogical knowledge which is "fuelled by personal beliefs and personal practical experience" (p. 6).

An important aspect of professional development that emerged from classroom practice concerned reflection. Some participants described having learned to engage systematically in critical self-reflection and self-evaluation about their work and learning from that experience. Critical reflection on and about practice enhances professional development (Villegas-Remer, 2003). Teachers must be able to examine their practice critically, seek the advice of others, and draw on educational research to deepen their knowledge, sharpen their judgment, and adapt their teaching to new findings and ideas (Rodgers, 2002).

Whereas Zimbabwean participants also indicated acquisition of generic knowledge through parent-teacher relations and whole-school staff meetings, South African participants did not enjoy such school structures and practices. School-community partnerships provide a strong basis for improving student learning outcomes and contribute to community strengthening (Kline et al., 2013). Creating appropriate environments and structures for teachers' collaborative learning is the responsibility of the principal (Day, 1995). Failure to provide for such collaborations deprives teachers of a whole repertoire of professional development as holistic learner improvement is generally

achieved from aggregating professional development of individual teachers.

Zimbabwean PUPs further suggested that they gained PCK from subject specialization meetings within and outside their schools (departmental, cluster, and association meetings) and mentoring. From meetings and observations, as Bertram (2011) suggests, teachers were able to transform subject knowledge into "sequenced, graded and developmental tasks for learners, learning and assessment" (p. 5) in their own classrooms. In-school specialization meetings provide effective teacher professional development spaces as they are usually marked by an active exchange of information and teachers are bound by a clear and shared sense of vision. As learning is generated from within the specialization, the PUPs took advantage of planned and structured opportunities to learn from colleagues with particular subject expertise. Concurrently, subject clusters and associations also provide platforms for effective teacher learning and professional development. Such gatherings have been hailed for promoting teacher collaborative learning and reflection and decreasing teacher isolation and imprisonment in their own classrooms (McLaughlin, 1997).

Zimbabwean participants further indicated gaining PCK from being mentored; South African participants missed out on that aspect of in-school support. An absence or poor mentoring in South African schools has been noted elsewhere (DoE, 2006; Kiggundu & Naymuli, 2009; Marais & Meier, 2004). Regrettably, higher education institutions do not have any jurisdiction over the quality of schools, their structures, and their cultures, including mentor choice and mentoring quality, as the PUPs are already practicing in these schools. Further, for participants in this study, UKZN did not offer face-to-face mentor training, and there was no monitoring or strong school-university partnership. Letters to principals and mentors were hand-delivered by the PUPs. The assumption was that principals and mentors would engage with the material and this would inform practice. Findings suggest that this process did not happen.

Another kind of knowledge that participants described as having gained was knowledge of context. Knowledge of context includes knowing about the background of learners, knowing the organizational culture of the school, etc. (Bertram, 2011). It also encompasses how learners come to know specific subjects and how the context in which teachers teach shapes the teaching and learning of their subject. Zimmermann, Lorenz, and Reinhard (2007) added that knowledge of context implies information or circumstances that characterize situations, activities, and dynamics in schools and classrooms. Hence, being teachers in particular schools, interacting (or not interacting) with colleagues and parents, observing and participating in activities, and

engaging in day-to-day classroom interactions with learners offered the PUPs knowledge of context. Participants also gained knowledge of the behaviors and characteristics of their learners, including what they knew, could do, and were likely to understand (Shulman, 1987), which guided them in their preparation and delivery of classroom activities.

Conclusion and Implications

The study explored what PUPs learn and how they professionally develop through their teaching roles. Findings suggest that PUPs gained knowledge and professionally developed around general pedagogic knowledge, PCK, and knowledge of context from classroom practice and from in-school and out-of-school meetings. However, South African PUPs did not experience meaningful professional development through whole-school meetings, parent-teacher gatherings, and mentoring. Due to contextual constraints related to increased class sizes and indiscipline, South African PUPs adopted teacher-centered pedagogies. Interactive learner-centered strategies adopted by Zimbabwean participants may be attributed to smaller classes and generally disciplined learners. Professional learning around context emanated from their being active members of their schools and their daily interactions with colleagues, learners, and parents.

These findings have a number of implications. First, they suggest that appropriate supportive cultures shape teacher learning and professional development and are influenced directly by school management. If teacher learning and professional development are to be supported in rural schools, particularly in South Africa, then in-school support should be built into structures that continuously and purposefully bring teachers together to enhance their professional development. Professional development is not an individualized process residing purely at a psychological level. Rather, it is highly mediated. Motivation to learn may come from the individual PUP, but much of their learning is through, with, and from other people. Hence, the most significant factor in their professional development is interaction, which implies that school leaders must pay attention to teacher learning individually and collectively. Literature shows that individual teacher professional development is central to classroom practice, learner achievement, and organizational professional development (Guskey, 2002; Roth & Tobin, 2004). Thus, occasions for interaction and collaborative learning, even times for team teaching and observing each other as professionals, are critical. School communities with interdependence and collective learning practices eliminate disciplinary margins, foster teacher professional development, and improve student learning as they reinforce and foster—rather than diminish—teacher learning (Day, 1995). By extension,

bringing teachers together to learn with and from one another, they take responsibility for students' learning as debates are rooted in the shared subject: teaching/learning.

Second, the findings suggest a need for more focused and comprehensive mentor training for in-service teachers. Mentor training needs to be viewed as an ongoing and long-term collaborative process, and institutions should put in place appropriate monitoring strategies to ensure mentoring effectiveness during teaching practice. Consequently, teacher educators must take a leading role in developing strong university-school-department of education partnerships. Such collaborations may not only help establish and/or strengthen supportive partnerships with schools and expose them to university expectations, but they would also create university awareness of the realities in rural schools. The success of school-based ITE programs resides in the programs' being a coproduction, and achieving desirable outcomes for all stakeholders may necessitate reconsideration of institutional policies to give institutions, site-based teacher educators, and education departments opportunities to engage in these kinds of conversations. Until this tripartite group engages in serious and committed discussions around support for unqualified teachers, the possibility of significant improvement in this regard is unlikely as schools and mentor teachers will continue to pay lip-service to mentoring of PUPs.

Third, the findings suggest that positive teacher-parent relations are vital for PUPs' professional development. Such relations were absent in the South African context. Understanding mechanisms through which involvement promotes academic achievement would point to logical interventions. Rural communities where these PUPs were practicing were generally poor. Poor communities are less likely to be involved in school life than are wealthier ones, and schools in poor communities are less likely to promote parental-school involvement (Hill & Taylor, 2004). Consequently, the children who would benefit most from parental school involvement are those who are least likely to receive it unless special effort is made. Thus, overarching policies designed to promote parental involvement in advantaged districts may be ineffective in promoting parental school involvement in disadvantaged communities. Understanding each community's unique barriers and resources is important for establishing and maintaining effective collaborations between families and schools otherwise barriers instead of bridges between schools and communities in rural settings will continue to be built.

Contextual realities in South African schools—large classes and lack of discipline among learners—are complex issues that require collaborative effort. Management of disruptive behaviors should involve all stakeholders in education: national, provincial and local level policy makers, principals, teachers, support systems, and parents. Barriers

between stakeholders should be broken and collaborative goal setting undertaken to develop skills and abilities for use in ITE programs. In addition, new knowledge from research, reflection, and evaluation of disruptive behaviors should be introduced to students during professional courses so that they are able to manage indiscipline in schools and classrooms. Although the present study is a small piece of research that explored a few South African and Zimbabwean PUPs, but given the centrality of teacher learning and professional development to improved classroom practice and learner achievement, these insights need more comprehensive exploration.

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