

**University of Missouri South African Education Program (UMSAEP)
Academic Exchange Programme Report**

Visit to the University of Missouri St Louis Campus (UMSL)

11 November to 6 December 2024

Project Title

Exploring the working conditions of teachers in three elementary and three middle schools in St Louis, in the United States, and four public primary schools in two townships, Bonteheuwel and Langa, on the Cape Flats in the Western Cape Province, South Africa to discover its impact learners' academic performance

Report Submitted by

**Dr Desiree Hamman-Fisher
Senior Lecturer in Industrial Psychology, Faculty of Economic and Management
Sciences (EMS)
University of the Western Cape (UWC), Cape Town, South Africa**

UMSL Host

**Dr Katya Sussman-Dawson
Assistant Professor of School Psychology
University of Missouri-St. Louis
St. Louis, State of Missouri, USA**

Current Project

The current project examines teachers' working conditions and their impact on the quality of students' learning in four public primary schools on the Cape Flats in the Western Cape Province of South Africa. The intention was to collaborate with Dr. Katya Sussman-Dawson to gain access to three elementary and three middle schools in St. Louis, United States, enabling a comparative analysis.

The research is linked to a multi-stakeholder project, titled: Turning the Tide: The case for learners' literacy development in the Foundation and Intermediate Phases in four public schools on the Cape Flats in the Western Cape Province of South Africa. As one of the project's co-researchers, the results of the St. Louis study will help the multi-stakeholder team compare and evaluate the working conditions of the teachers on the quality of their instruction and how that affects the academic performance of the learners' at four public primary schools on the Cape Flats.

Aim and objectives

The study aimed to: firstly determine the empirical differences between the working conditions of teachers employed in three elementary and three middle schools in St Louis, in the United States, and four public primary schools in two townships, Bonteheuwel and Langa, on the Cape Flats in the Western Cape Province of South Africa, and secondly, to examine the impact of the teachers' working conditions on the quality of their teaching, and how that impacts the learners' academic performance.

The objectives of the study were:

1. To review the Education Demographic, Geographic, and Economic Statistics Program that develops data resources about the social and spatial context of education in the U.S;
2. To review public documents of learners' scholastic performance in elementary and middle schools in the US.;
3. To observe the infrastructure and support offered to teachers at three elementary and three middle schools in St Louis,
4. To collect data through a self-reflected questionnaire that will be distributed to teachers on their working conditions in three elementary and three middle schools in St Louis; and
5. To conduct 6 semi-structured interviews with a selected group of elementary and middle school teachers in St Louis.

Contextual background

Poor working conditions at South African primary schools can lead to teacher exhaustion, which weakens high-quality teaching and superior learner performance (Hansen et al., 2015; Nkambule, 2022). The researcher argues that primary schools on the Cape Flats in the Western Cape Province of South Africa do not operate in a vacuum but are a product of the historical, social and cultural context that shapes them (Hamman-Fisher, 2021; Hamman-Fisher & Mc Ghie 2023). Consequently, their external environment on the Cape Flats influences teachers' working conditions (de Wet, 2016; Hamman-Fisher, 2021; Hamman-Fisher & McGhie, 2021; Van Dyk, 2004). The researcher previously investigated industrial and organisational (I-O) psychology constructs in primary schools on the Cape Flats (Van der Hoven et al., 2021). In particular, the relationships between leadership on teacher empowerment and organisational citizen [voluntary extra-roles that are not paid for but are essential for student success (Katz, 1964; Organ, 1988)] behaviours on a sample of 203 teachers on the Cape Flats. However, the study disregarded the aftermath of the previous apartheid dispensation's influence on schools, teachers' working conditions and praxis. Within this context, teaching and teachers' decisions refer exclusively to praxis, which implies doing (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Mayo, 2004).

In comparison to the United States (US), scholars have also reported that previous racial discrimination policies and economic inequality in the US have contributed to the African-American youth's apathy

towards academic advancement (Ogbu 1978, 1988, 1991; Zhu, 2022). Similar to primary schools on the Cape Flats in South Africa, the cohort of students in elementary and middle schools in the US is still segregated on racial grounds (Christian & Sayed, 2023). In a broadcast on Morning Edition, on the subject of The US student population is more diverse, but schools are still highly segregated, the racial division in elementary and middle school was emphasised. More alarming was Jackie Nowicki, the director of K-12 education at the GAO, report of the US education system, in a first world country that "... with large proportions of Hispanic, Black and American Indian/Alaska Native students – minority groups with higher rates of poverty than white and Asian American students – are also increasing. What that means is you have large portions of minority children not only attending essentially segregated schools, but schools that have less resources available to them." (Carrillo & Salhotra, 2022).

Mampane and Bouwer (2011) explain that South African residential development took place as racially segregated, low-cost housing developments for black labourers to reside in closer vicinity of their workplaces within the cities and towns. These days, township life is challenged by problems related to poverty, crime, and violence (Harber, 2001; Leoschut, 2006; Prinsloo, 2007, 2005). Similar to the US, the relationship between gangsterism and the school environment has been a matter of deep concern (de Wet 2016; Fraser, 2013; Fredericks, 2016; Howell & Lynch, 2000; Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013; Petrus, 2021; Strandberg, 1995; Struyk, 2006; Wood & Alleyne, 2010). In South Africa, interschool rivalries and violent gang occurrences occur in high school and primary schools between learners and educators and learners (Burton & Leoschut, 2013; Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013). According to Fredericks (2016), the minister of Basic Education, Angie Motsekga, reported that gangsterism has severe negative repercussions on the education system.

Findings of a study conducted on a school in Manenberg, one of the areas where this study is also located, suggest that a challenging school context gives rise to teacher apathy if they are not connected to their teacher community, the learner or and families to support them and, thereby demotivating them to perform their roles well (Damm et al., 2022). One reason for teachers' demotivation relates to learners who belong to gangs. These learners do not associate authority with anyone other than the gang hierarchy (Christian & Sayed, 2023). Accordingly, enforcing discipline in schools is difficult, and teaching is often disrupted if a learner feels that students in class are not showing them the level of respect expected from their rank in a gang. Hence, teachers are challenged daily when dealing with learners whose behaviour is not conducive to teaching and learning (Devon, 2016; Mampane & Bouwer, 2011).

Regardless of the introduction and application of democratic regulations since 1994, little has changed in the schooling of coloured and black learners in South Africa (Christian & Sayed, 2023). In addition to

gang activity that teachers have to contend with, teachers on the Cape Flats have to cope with white-settler social-structural and apartheid legacies of racism and the consequences of inequalities related to hunger, absence of parental involvement, teenage pregnancies, alcohol and substance addiction, which impede teaching and learning (Christian & Sayed, 2023). Furthermore, Hansen et al. (2015) explain that inadequate resources, insufficient safety, inappropriate facilities, and poor infrastructure collaborate to create an environment that can induce teachers' burnout. Within this context, Pitsoe (2013) and the Centre for Development and Enterprise (2015) report that the South African primary education sector is experiencing poor learner performance, a shortage of qualified teachers, the relocation of teachers, many resignations, and increased teacher absenteeism.

The researcher emphasises that while offering extra classes is not formally recognised or remunerated as part of a teacher's primary responsibilities, it is vital to a teacher's job (van der Hoven, 2021). Particularly amidst the shortage of specialist teacher support, teachers on the Cape Flats take on various unpaid responsibilities to improve students learning (Collett, 2012). Findings in a study conducted on teachers' job satisfaction in Sweden reveal that a teacher's workload is significantly related to job satisfaction (Toropova, et al., 2021). These findings are consistent with the results from studies conducted by Allodi and Fischbein (2012), Hamman-Fisher (2009) and Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2016), who found that an excessive workload was directly significantly related to emotional exhaustion and motivation to quit teaching.

Therefore, Boateng and Ledimo (2023) recommend that South African education policyholders, practitioners and managers develop appropriate intervention programmes that emphasise the improvement of efficient job design and job resources, teamwork, leadership training and mentoring, performance management systems, reward and benefit systems, and teacher continuous development and training. According to the South African Employment Act of Educators (1998), primary school education (Grades R – 7) is compulsory for all South African citizens. They carry the enormous responsibility of producing quality primary education graduates who can advance to secondary and higher education, and ultimately form the future human capital base needed for the country to achieve its competitive advantage (van der Hoven, 2021).). For this reason, teachers require suitable working conditions that support their effectiveness and student achievement (Mahembe & Engelbrecht, 2014).

However, whether teachers are content with their working environment is often overlooked (Toropova et al., 2020). The literature on primary schools on the Cape Flats focuses mainly on learning, school challenges, infrastructure, and specific I-O psychology constructs such as job satisfaction, leadership, and perceived organisational commitment, derived through deductive reasoning. In this study, the

researcher seeks to provide a context for learner performance and teacher matters related to people management within the South African context. It is envisioned that this study's findings may propose recommendations to the Western Cape Education Department, policymakers, and educational practitioners to take appropriate actions to improve teachers' working conditions, which will positively impact learning.

Problem statement

Desiree Hamman-Fisher teaches Learning and Development to honours and master students in the Department of Industrial Psychology in the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences. She is also supervising a PhD that is examining learning and perceived employability. She has done intensive research on education (schools and higher education) and employability in South Africa to explore and lessen the challenges teachers, academics, learners and students face. Post-Apartheid education and training have produced systemic challenges that adversely impact teaching practice and student learning (Coetzee & Truman, 2019). Despite the South African government's inventiveness to educate, upskill and reskill its labour market with various initiatives such as labour legislation, the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Policy, the Industrial and Sectorial Charters, Human Resource Development Strategy, and the National Skills Development Strategy, the South African landscape remains a daunting place for find suitably qualified individuals with the competencies that meet their the South African economy (Hamman-Fisher, 2021; Mavunga & Cross, 2017). Accordingly, qualified teachers are a scarce skill both globally and in South Africa. Teachers' working conditions have been cited as problematic, thus triggering challenges for teacher development and increasing turnover. This contributes to a low-skilled teacher workforce and demotivated teachers who display a nonchalant attitude towards their jobs, eventually negatively impacting the quality of education students receive.

In a study conducted by Boeteng and Ledimo (2023) to compare public and private primary school teachers' employee engagement and organisational commitment on a sample of 300 teachers, they reported that only 2 had master's degrees, 42 had honours and postgraduate degrees, while the remainder of the cohort had an undergraduate degree or no higher education. Martin and Roodt (2010) advocate that higher qualification leads to the pursuit of greener pastures. To this end, Mlambo and Adetiba (2020) found that qualified teachers in South Africa emigrate to other countries because of poor salaries and working conditions, inadequate infrastructure, and limited career progression opportunities. Mahembe and Englebrecht (2014) state that lack of community assistance, parental involvement, adequate resources, and overcrowded classrooms continue to underscore teacher efficiency.

Classrooms in public primary schools continue to threaten the viability of the South African education system. International research evidence suggests that the diminishing prestige of the teaching

profession, coupled with a displeasing working environment and conditions, is the key reason for teacher turnover in the USA (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). According to Ingersoll (2017) and Sutchter et al. (2016), recruiting more teachers in the USA will most likely not resolve the challenges of underresourced schools as long as the new teachers resign due to discontent with their working conditions. Besides, recruiting, hiring, and training new teachers require significant financial costs that drain resources that might otherwise be spent on ameliorating schools' working environment (Borman & Dowling, 2008). Therefore, policy measures to tackle the teacher crisis are increasingly shifting towards teacher retention efforts (Ingersoll, 2017; Sutchter et al., 2016).

According to Van der Hoven et al. (2021), teaching conditions play an essential role in the quality of teaching, learners' performance, and teachers' willingness to remain at a particular school. A holistic approach and cooperation from as many role players as possible are required if the education objectives set out in the National Development Plan, and three of the most important sustainable development goals (SDG), namely, Goal 1: Poverty Reduction; Goal 4: Quality Education; and Goal 8: Inclusive and Sustainable Economic Growth are to be achieved by 2030. The elementary and middle schools in St Louis, which exhibit similar environmental challenges due to the historical, social and cultural context that impact them, can serve as a platform from which some lessons from a first-world country can be uncovered. It is well known that supportive working conditions improve teacher efficacy and student achievement (Ladd, 2011), while less supportive conditions lead to teacher attrition that undermines efforts to provide high-quality teaching to learners (Kraft, Marinell & Yee, 2016; Marinell & Coca, 2013).

Process Followed



Dr Sussman-Dawson made arrangements for my visit to St. Louis, Missouri. Both Dr. Sussman-Dawson and Dr. Mussman (who is involved in the bigger project) made arrangements for me to visit and interview teachers and community leaders who could provide information on the working conditions of teachers and their role in enhancing education.

Week 1

Dr Mussman spent two days with me, showing me around campus and the St. Louis area. In the first week, I also had to prepare and present with Dr. Sussman-Dawson and Ms. Hannah Rose, one of her senior students, at the Missouri Association of School Psychologists (MASP). The members of MASP are professionals and academics who are trained in school psychology. Their goals are to raise the bar, spark interest in school psychology, and exchange research, ideas, and methods to enhance psychological services in classrooms. We presented a comparative study of the educational systems in the United States (US) and South Africa (SA).

Although the schools in the US appeared to be better resourced, we discovered that, in many cases, teachers in both the US and SA face similar challenges. These challenges include violence in schools, under-resourcing in some public schools, and their locations in poverty-stricken areas, which ultimately leads to stress and burnout for teachers. We proposed ways for teachers to help both students and themselves manage stress. After the presentation, several teachers approached me to share their thoughts on it. They expressed a desire for people in the US to raise their "voice and confidence" against the poor standard of education, hoping to inspire significant social and educational reforms, similar to those achieved by South Africans.



I also met a Robert Carpenter, a pastor and former community school coordinator. He explained his assignment at the Mullanphy School to a mixed-race community from diverse socio-economic classes. He relayed that the area had a youth gang culture with high drug dealing activities. However, he helped cultivate a school philosophy that believed that the community school belonged to the people rather than to the Board of Education.

Post-school hours for the students were occupied with adult education classes and youth recreational facilities. From morning to evening, youth activities such as basketball, dance/drill classes, and karate, among other activities, were offered. Adult literacy, sewing, stained glass and other classes were offered to adults. With the assistance of law enforcement, the area and the community surrounding the Mullanphy School were transformed. This reduced the stressful environment and dangerous activity directed towards the children and teachers who were trying to bring about order and instill a learning culture in the community.

I also met John Pimmel, a devoted community leader invested in restoring the lives of schoolchildren in the City of St. Louis. He is the Director of Partnerships and Strategic Planning at The Little Bit Foundation, a nonprofit organisation. They supply the basic necessities to underprivileged children in an endeavour to eradicate obstacles that challenge the education of school learners. Again, I was drawn to the involvement of the community and organisations in their efforts to alleviate the challenges that could impede the education of students in poorer communities. Their involvement in schools can possibly contribute to happier students, better working conditions and higher levels of job satisfaction for teachers.

Hence, the Little Bit Foundation plays a significant role in serving 14,000 students in 48 schools in the St. Louis area. They provide clothing, food, and hygiene products, along with programs that support academic achievement and overall well-being. They are steadfast in their plight to enable learning by eliminating barriers for students living in poverty to ensure personal dignity and have the power to change lives. I reflected on my engagement with Mr Pimmel and understood that the learning, learning environment and role of teachers can only be improved if we all contribute, if only in some small way, to an enabling learning system.

Insights gained in my first week

I learnt that St. Louis City, similar to Cape Town, has a socio-economic standing between the “haves and the have-nots.” However, I believed it was important to explore this further since the U.S. is a first-world country, and I did not expect to see the divide so clearly.

Furthermore, I learnt at the MASP Symposium that the audience was very interested in my presentation and wanted to understand the South African education, training, and development landscape. The presentation stirred emotions as we unpacked the historical perspectives from the education system, particularly during the apartheid dispensation era. What we came to understand was that both the US and SA are embroiled in similar challenges. However, it appeared that South Africans dared to voice their objections to inequalities, which was something the audience felt they could learn from. What I learnt from this face-to-face interview with Mr. Pimmel and Mr. Carpenter is that the community plays a significant role in the education system in any country. Eradicating poverty and violence are more than just a government’s responsibility. This leads me to believe that it takes a “community to raise a child. ”

Week 2

On November 19, 2025, I had the opportunity to meet with Dr. April Regester, Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Inclusive Education and Educator Preparation & Leadership at the USML campus. During our interview, we discussed various topics related to special education, disabilities, and risk studies. Professor Regester teaches courses on behavior management, individual and school-wide positive behavior supports, transitions and planning, and cross-categorical special education. Her research focuses on autism, which aligns with my interest in understanding how students with disabilities learn in the classroom. Moreover, how teachers were supported with the learning of students with autism in the classroom.

I wanted to know if school psychologists, occupational therapists, social workers and other support assistants were available to school teachers to help with the learning of autistic students. More specifically, were teachers in mainstream education trained to deal with the challenges of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD)? In SA, despite the government's commitment to inclusive education, children with ASD in public schools face challenges, including limited access to specialised education and support. While some schools have ASD units, there are few autism-specific public schools, and many children wait for school placement in such schools.

What my observations on the UMSL campus and Oak Hall residence, where I was residing, showed me was that many UMSL students had successfully proceeded through the school levels with ASD to become students at UMSL. I discovered from Prof Regester that not only had the students successfully transitioned from school to university, but they were also performing well at university with the support they are receiving. This was contrary to the situation in SA. Hence, I further explored the South African context to heighten my understanding and unearth what it may mean for the working conditions of teachers.

Insights gained in my second week

South African teachers in government schools face significant challenges when supporting students with ASD. This is because of a lack of specialised training, difficulties managing challenging behaviors, inadequate resources, and systemic barriers to inclusive education. The literature revealed that this often leads to South African teachers' stress, burnout, potentially reduced quality of education, affecting both

the teacher's well-being and the autistic learner's development (Nthibeli, et al., 2022; Snyman et al., 2023).

Moreover, teacher turnover in South Africa is associated with the stresses experienced of working with students with ASD, including lack of training, role ambiguity, and the challenges of supporting diverse learners. This could potentially lead to emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion and, ultimately, teacher turnover intentions (Van der Hoven et al., 2021). Therefore, the development of education policy and programs is recommended to promote teacher knowledge and skills in teaching learners with special needs.

Week 3

Following my engagements with the teachers and school psychologist at the Missouri Association of School Psychologists (MASP) and my interview with Prof Regester, I examined the Education Demographic, Geographic, and Economic (EDGE) Statistics Program. It provided insight into the social, economic, and housing conditions for school-age children and school districts. I was particularly interested in the Missouri area to discover how specific location impacts educational opportunities and outcomes. I learnt that economic indicators incorporate social and spatial conditions to develop indices of educational costs and neighborhood income levels.

The EDGE collection provides information and insight into issues such as:

- socioeconomic conditions of school-age children, enrolled students, and parents;
- School district social, economic, demographic, and housing characteristics;
- Neighborhood poverty;
- Geographic contexts of school district social and economic conditions;
- Spatial analysis of schools and community conditions; and
- Urban and rural schools.

I was also taken on a tour by Dr. Mussman of the St. Louis area to observe the location of some elementary and middle schools. I was particularly interested in understanding the socio-economic areas in which public and private schools operated. I was invited to a lunch by the Faculty of Education, where I was also introduced to staff members involved in teacher training. I could further explore the socio-economic landscape as it related to the school, the students, and the teachers. Following my learnings of the Edge Statistics Program and, observation of the socio-economic area of St. Louis, I wanted to meet

with a teacher who taught in a school similar to the schools on the Cape Flats in Cape Town, where students were subjected to violence. As a result, Dr. Mussman arranged for me to meet La'Ondrill Brown, a former student of hers.

My meeting with La'Ondrill Brown was interesting and insightful. He was a Democratic candidate for Governor of Missouri in 2020. He is also a linguist and UMSL graduate who currently teaches middle school French at Ladue Community School. Ladue Community School is a highly regarded public school, consistently recognised for academic excellence. It offers foreign language instruction, including French, to students in grades PK and K-6. Mr. Brown had previously worked at Ferguson Middle School, another public school in Missouri. Thus, a comparison could be made between the two schools. He could provide insights into the resources available and the student profiles of two different public schools. Ferguson Middle School has been in the media due to violence, which seems similar to some incidents occurring at schools on the Cape Flats. I learnt that parents and grandparents were asked by the principal to help make Ferguson Middle School a safer environment for students to learn and for teachers to teach, as well as to assist with implementing measures for providing mental and emotional support for students.



Mr. Brown heightened my interest in the St. Louis area. With a bus stop and train station at UMSL, I often took a train or bus to observe different areas in St. Louis. I wanted to observe the differences in socio-economic conditions of areas to understand how it might influence the school and teacher's working conditions. I was most surprised to find heaters on stations, which was welcomed in November. More important was the safety of using low-cost, reliable, public transport. This implied that teachers could commute to their workplace easily. This significantly improves the job satisfaction of teachers because reduced commuting stress and high travelling costs can ultimately lead to happier, more productive teachers.

I was also invited to attend a Thanksgiving dinner with the Turkish society. It was interesting to uncover the diversity in St Louis and how many people were adapting and aligning themselves to fit into the American way of life, hoping for a better future for themselves and their families. The members of the Turkish Society were warm and welcoming and allowed me to experience Thanksgiving for the very first

time. I also enjoyed the diversity of the student profile on the UMSL campus. Here, I met students from all over the world. Studying at the university and also being involved in diversity awareness campaigns. Hereby, enriching the learning experience for all they came into contact with.



Insights gained in my third week

I found that government school funding in the US is a combination of local, state, and federal sources. Therefore, there are significant disparities across states and regions that affect a school's resources and outcomes. Moreover, local funding in Missouri, like all other states, is often dependent on property taxes. Consequently, this produces disparities between urban and rural areas. As a result, teacher working conditions vary across US states. Therefore, wide-ranging factors such as salary, benefits, workload, resources and higher compensation, which ultimately influence the working conditions of teachers, are excellent in some geographic areas and not in others.

Furthermore, poor working conditions and violence in schools are concerns of teachers at some public schools in St. Louis. Teachers experience verbal and physical aggression from students and parents. Additionally, poor working conditions impact safety, student disruptiveness, and trust. The violence directed at teachers causes health-related problems and illnesses, especially those related to mental health. According to Ribeiro et al. (2023), occupational violence can lead to teacher burnout syndrome. Therefore, plans and actions to promote sound working conditions are essential and should involve teachers, students, parents, principals and management.

I was impressed with the public transport system, since safe, cheap and reliable transportation is essential for teachers. It has been found in other studies to influence the stress levels and overall well-

being of teachers, which can adversely affect their performance and the quality of education they deliver.

It was interesting to see the diverse student and staff profile at UMSL and in the state of St. Louis. They were either students studying at UMSL or undertaking education in languages or other fields to be able to work or integrate themselves into the St. Louis and American culture and society.

Week 4

On 2 December, Dr Sussman-Dawson arranged for me to visit Premier Charter School. I was met by Ms. Julie Rhodes, the Social-Emotional Development Leader at the school. I was given a tour of the elementary and middle schools and provided with the opportunity to observe the learning in a Grade 4 class. I also met the elementary and middle school coaches, from whom I could probe about the socio-economic environment within which the school is located, the resources available to teachers, and the learning and psychological support for students. I understood that Charter schools are funded differently from public schools and that the staff put in tremendous effort to ensure favourable financial and academic outcomes.



Furthermore, the teachers are highly motivated and actively involved in the development of their students. The students have access to modern facilities and equipment and highly skilled academic support to enhance their learning. When necessary, the staff meet with the families of their students to ensure that their students are happy, because it affects their students' well-being and learning. Students with special needs are also supported both inside and outside of the classroom. I was also presented with the opportunity to present a historical overview of the South African schooling system, as well as the current South African schooling context.

I also met Ms. Hayley Bordelon a teacher at Bea Underwood Elementary School, in Colorado, via zoom. It is a public school located in a farming community, where parents work a full day and the poverty is very high. As is common with rural schools, the school is only open four days a week. The class sizes are small, and Ms. Bordelon employs individual and group learning exercises to help students. She also provides additional tuition to help children who have experienced trauma. Often, this involves extended teaching time with students until they are comfortable to proceed to the next level.

What I found intriguing was her involvement with her students and their families. Ms. Bordelon makes a special effort to meet with each learner’s parents at their home to get to know them and their circumstances. Doing so allows parents to meet their children’s teacher, which helps foster a trusting relationship between the teacher and the parents, and a willingness to be involved in their children’s education and the school.

Dr. Sussman-Dawson also arranged for me to visit Northside Community Elementary School and Northside Community Charter Middle School on December 5, 2024. Dr. Douglas Thaman, the Executive Director, very kindly picked me up from Oak Hall Residence to introduce me to the beautifully kept campuses. Upon my arrival, I was warmly received by the staff and students. Two students welcomed me and handed me a gift from the school. As I walked through the corridors and observed the facilities, students approached me to greet and welcome me as they transitioned from one class to another at the end of their periods.

I also had the opportunity to observe how mathematics was taught at the elementary school level. I was particularly interested in the application of both individual and group methods. Furthermore, one-on-one guidance was provided to help solve mathematical problems. I observed the students’ confidence in asking questions and contributing to solutions.

The school demonstrated its interest in the students by considering their learning styles, lives, and futures. Reflecting on my visit, I had the impression that all the staff were highly skilled and committed to the academic success and well-being of their students, having created a familial structure where students feel safe to learn and grow.





Finally, the day before I left St Louis, I visited the Education Museum. On this Saturday, the Museum hosted an initiative focused on enhancing students' literacy skills. It was a fun day for parents to attend with their children. Schools put up stands emphasising literacy. At the stands, educators were available to assist parents with their questions. Books, food, stationery and sweets were also provided to the parents and children. The initiative is part of a broader effort in St Louis, such as the "Literacy for the Lou" initiative or the Emerson Early Literacy Challenge to improve literacy in the area.

Insights gained in my last week in St Louis

I gained valuable insights from the classroom observations and discussions with the people I met. The teachers' motivation and commitment were apparent in developing the learners' knowledge and skills. Small class sizes enabled the teachers to know their students and provide additional tuition when necessary. Moreover, the satisfactory and efficient infrastructure and resources (both human resources, equipment, internet connectivity, laptops for every single learner with the required learning material, food and transportation) and the support of the principal and school districts enabled the teachers to focus on learning and teaching. Strong school-family partnerships have the potential to positively impact students' achievement and well-being. Ensuring that both the teacher and the family are working together to ensure the students' success.

Next Steps

My suggestion is to proceed with a qualitative, broad-minded and explorative approach to understanding the environment within which teachers function, the school's resources (including law enforcement, the church, community leaders, parents, etc.) and the teachers' working conditions on the Cape Flats. The challenges in South Africa's public schooling sector are complex and require the involvement of the entire community. Furthermore, open-ended interviews and observations should be conducted to gather rich, descriptive and explorative data to understand the problem.

In addition, the South African Education Policy on Inclusion, which is contained in the South African Schools Act (SASA) of 1996 and White Paper 6, is examined. This is to understand how all learners, including those with disabilities, can access quality education and participate in traditional educational situations.

The findings and the recommendations should be shared with the Department of Education. Finally, a model of how teachers can manage stress and adopt certain stress-coping mechanisms to alleviate stress should be developed.

The new objectives are:

1. Observe the geographical area in which the four public primary schools in Bonteheuwel and Langa operate;
2. Examine the South African Education Policy of the South African Schools Act and White Paper 6 on Inclusion;
3. Collect data on the working conditions of the teachers;
4. Collect data on learners' academic performance;
5. Assess how teachers' working conditions influence learners' academic performance; and
6. Write joint research reports, teachers' guides on stress and well-being, journal articles and a handbook on how teachers can take care of their psychological well-being and safety in South Africa.

Modus Operandi

1. An ethical clearance certificate was issued in January 2025 to conduct the research;
2. Liaise with youth development organisations and civil society organisations (CSOs) already working in schools and communities on the Cape Flats to co-opt them as partners of the project;
3. Obtain permission from the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) to conduct the research at the schools;
4. Assess the teachers' psychological needs and find funding to promote wellness programs;
5. Recruit retired teachers and academics to assist teachers in coping with children with special needs and other psychological problems;
6. Appoint a research assistant to document and track the data and analyse the data as the project unfolds;
7. Write research reports to present to the WCED and other stakeholders to extend the project to other schools and provinces in South Africa; and
8. Write articles for publication in accredited journals.

Appreciation

I would like to express my appreciation for being presented with a UMSAEP award to travel and stay at the University of Missouri-St. Louis in St. Louis, USA, during the months of November and December 2024 to conduct research on teachers' working conditions and their impact on students' academic performance. This endeavour was undertaken with the intention to make a comparative analysis of teachers' working conditions in the Cape Flats and how it affects learners' academic performance.

I am most appreciative of Prof Uphoff and his team for selecting me and the great work they do in choosing research projects that will promote social development in South Africa. I am also grateful to Dr Sussman-Dawson for hosting me and Dr Mussman for assisting and transporting me where I needed to be. I am satisfied that I could perform the activities I envisioned in the US, to be able to do further research in SA and hopefully make recommendations to the Department of Education that will contribute to the plight of teachers working conditions on the Cape Flats in South Africa.

I am also extremely thankful to the teachers, principals, academics and administrative staff who assisted me with the arrangements for the visit, gave me a warm welcome, were willing to accommodate, meet and share their best practices and experiences with me.

The result of my visit to UMSL is the building on to an existing research project, but a new research initiative for me. Thank you once again for all your help and assistance.

Desiree Hamman-Fisher

Desiree Hamman-Fisher
Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences
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