SUBJECTIVE MECHANISMS FOR SURVIVAL IN THE UNFAMILIAR SCHOOLING SPACE: SPECIAL NEEDS TEACHERS' LIVED EXPERIENCES

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ABSTRACT

The research discussed in this article explores the experiences of special needs educators teaching the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) to diverse learners in a Cape Town special school. This study delves into how six teachers positioned themselves within the school's discourses and culture, employing an interpretive approach and drawing on theoretical frameworks such as Lefebvre's theory of spatial production, Bourdieu's concept of habitus, and Nespor's ideas related to bodies in space. The results highlighted the impact of the school's institutional culture, influenced by class, race, and age, on the teachers' personal and professional socialisation experiences.

The research for this article focused on the real-life encounters of special needs educators handling diverse students in a Cape Town school, while implementing the CAPS curriculum. The study investigated how six teachers positioned themselves in relation to the prevailing discourses and culture of the school by taking an interpretivist approach and drawing on Lefebvre's theory of the creation of space, Bourdieu's (1977) idea of habitus, and Nespor's (1997) theory regarding bodies in space. The results showed that the institutional culture of the school, which was moulded by concerns of class, colour, and age, had a substantial impact on the socialisation processes of the teachers on a personal and professional level. These teachers were able to reposition themselves in relation to the institutional culture and to establish their professional identities based on their individualised ways of acting and living in the school. The study's conclusions have consequences for teacher education and policy development, highlighting the necessity of viewing these instructors as a result of the uneven South African educational system rather than as a homogenous group.

Keywords: habitus, lived experience, school space, special needs education, survival mechanisms, teacher subjectivity

INTRODUCTION

A spatialised gaze considering the practices and mechanisms used to construct schools and classrooms aids in informing how we could prepare teachers for inclusive education in South

Africa (Lefebvre 1991; Nespor 1997; McGregor 2003). Many teacherss today entrusted with developing socially equitable and inclusive spaces for all learners (Mpu and Adu 2021) draw on their experiences under the segregation and exclusion ethos that had characterised South African (SA) education for more than a century (Hunt Davis 2004). The research presented in this article focuses on how teachers at a special needs school subjectively positioned themselves and their practices at the moment to give specialised and inclusive education, which could be valuable for informing higher education (HE) teacher training.

The concept of subjectivity is one method to understanding how teachers are subjectivised and how they emerge in their interactions with their school environment (Fataar 2010). Deleuze and Guattari developed their ideas around the concept of subjectivity and the construction of identity in relation to power and social structures. In a chapter titled "Becoming-Animal" (1987) these authors discuss the idea of becoming and how it relates to the process of identity formation and transformation. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) explain identity as a continuous "becoming", i.e., identity is always in process and continuously re-defined. Deleuze and Guattari's notion of subjectivity is based on the idea that individuals are not fixed, stable entities, but rather are constantly in a process of becoming. They contend that subjectivity is always in flux and is shaped by individuals' relationships and interactions with their environment and with others. Fataar (2009) defines subjectivity as the way in which an individual perceives themselves in relation to the social world in which they interact.

The school functions as a complex social system, shaped by the interpersonal relationships among various individuals within a culturally informed framework (Parsons 1951). Embedded within this intricate school culture, specific parameters are established, exerting a profound influence on teachers' attitudes and behaviors (Zhu, Devos, and Li 2011). Within the classroom setting, teachers assume the role of authority figures, responsible for creating inclusive and engaging spaces that cater to the diverse needs of learners, who spend a significant portion of their day in these environments.

Anecdotes about teachers' personal journeys, socialisation processes, and ensuing instructional practices are rarely heard. As a result, chances to create a responsive or suitable curriculum are missed. Findings from the current study can aid stakeholders to better comprehend the many realities faced by teachers who are required to teach a special needs school's Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) curriculum to a wide variety of students. My research focused primarily on how teachers' (conscious and unconscious) instructional methods serve as a place-making tool. This place can be formed in a variety of ways, but in classrooms, instructors construct space largely through their subjectivities, identities, and pedagogical endeavours.

This article is organised as follows: first, I investigate the teachers' professional socialisation. Second, I discuss what the teachers do to position themselves when they encounter the dominant school culture at a special needs high school. The teachers' subjective place-making, how they respond to the culture of the school, and how they exert their agency through embodied activities are presented in the third and final section.

LITERATURE OVERVIEW AND THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS ON TEACHER PLACE-MAKING

The link between the school environment and teacher identity was examined in the current study. This served as a conceptual foundation for research into the place-making strategies used by teachers in special needs schools. The investigation's main goal was to comprehend how teachers position themselves in relation to the school's prevailing discourses and cultures, as well as how they established themselves through their pedagogical practices both within and outside of the classroom. I present a brief review of existing literature and of the theoretical considerations guiding the study, addressing the following themes:

- teacher training for inclusive and specialised education delivery;
- place-making and classrooms as lived spaces; and
- teacher habitus and subjectivity.

Teacher training for inclusive and specialised education

The ideal of including all learners in inclusive education continues to be a challenge for most countries around the world (UNESCO 2017). Locally, a research report by Majoko and Phasha (2018, 16) titled "The state of inclusive education in South Africa and the implications for teacher training programmes" indicates that the country is "failing to achieve its education goals". The authors found that appropriate support to learners experiencing barriers to learning remains limited across a range of educational settings. To clarify, in the current study, inclusive education was understood in a broader sense in accordance with Du Plessis (2013, 78) who defines inclusive education in South Africa as "a learning environment that promotes the full personal, academic and professional development of all learners irrespective of race, class, gender, disability, religion, culture, sexual preference, learning styles and language".

At most tertiary institutions in South Africa, teacher certification focuses on awarding teachers a general teaching certification that should provide teacher training for inclusive education delivery (Department of Basic Education [DBE] 2001; Bernstein 2015). However,

Majoko and Phasha (2018) discovered that "inclusive education" is currently on the margins rather than at the heart of teacher education programmes. Consequently, special needs schools, particularly those that offer the national curriculum, appoint subject-specific teachers who often have limited special needs specific training or experience (Majoko and Phasha 2018).

Place-making and classrooms as lived spaces

Schools and classrooms are largely social spaces, and according to Lefebvre (1991), classrooms are something that people create and exist in across three interconnected fields of space. Lefebvre (1991, 11) explains:

> "The fields we are concerned with are, first the physical – nature, the Cosmos; secondly, the mental, including logical and formal abstractions; and, thirdly, the social. In other words, we are concerned with logico-epistemological space, the space of social practice, the space occupied by sensory phenomena, including products of the imagination such as projects and projections, symbols, and utopias."

Furthermore, spatial production is embedded in the activities of the communities that appropriate it (Lefebvre 1991, 53). This is known as a grounded or bottom-up construction of spatial theory. Lefebvre's spatial triad bridges the gap between theory and practice, imagination and experience, and philosophy, and serves as a powerful antidote to the sterile view of space as something abstract. Lived or social space is generated because of the interaction between "real" and "imagined" space and is established when individuals discover methods to use it (Lefebvre 1991). According to the concept of "lived space," space cannot be thought of as being lifeless and devoid of social interaction. Lived space is created through people's individual and group behaviours and interactions (McGregor 2003). It is socially created within various, intricate social relationships (Massey 1994). People are continually interacting with one another for a wide range of purposes, on several levels, and in a wide range of physical settings.

Place-making refers to the behaviours and practices of individuals that define a certain location. According to Nespor (1997), O'Donoghue (2007), and Tupper et al. (2008), place-making refers to the process through which instructors create place while engaging in individual and group activities inside the confines of the school. Space is generated as a result of the interaction of all of these variables in the production of lived experiences and meaning, which includes people, behaviour, buildings, objects, movement, language, and emotions (Lefebvre 1991; Massey 2005; Hirst and Vadeboncoeur 2006; Frelin and Grannäs 2014).

Focus is placed on "what people become when engaging their geographies, appropriating space, and inventing new practices" in a classroom as a lived space (Fataar 2009, 1). Specific

assemblages are created in classrooms that include various tools, languages, values, and methods of operation (McGregor 2004). Here, teachers and learners "are dialectically constituted by social relations and network ties, [and] pedagogy becomes an accomplishment of a network rather than an individual" (McGregor 2004, 348). Importantly, inter-subjective meaning construction occurs as the lived experience takes place (Frelin and Grannäs 2014). Therefore, the need exists to understand the lived experiences of teachers at special needs schools in South Africa. As a result, this article presents the findings of an ethnographic study that investigated how teachers' subjective complexities positioned them for inclusive place-making and pedagogical practices in a special needs high school in Cape Town, South Africa.

Habitus and teacher subjectivity

The inclusion agenda entails a change in how teachers view their vocations, obligations, and, consequently, their identities as educators. According to the research, the implementation of inclusive policies has presented instructors with a number of difficulties that have affected their essential identities as educators (Jansen 2001). The constructions of "teacher identity" or "the teacher becoming" constitute the behaviours and interactions of teachers inside and outside of the classroom (Fataar 2010). Identity formation is understood through a post-structuralist view, which "opens a space between self-consciousness and the interrogation of the discursive and affective conditions of a claim to identity .... Identity is formed in this shifting space where narratives of subjectivity meet the narratives of culture" (Zembylas 2003, 221).

As a theoretical term, habitus aids in the development of a vocabulary to describe the reciprocal connection between the individual and their social milieu. Bourdieu (1977) defines habitus as a system of resilient, transposable patterns of socio-cultural dispositions and practices instilled in people by their cultural history. Later, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) define "habitus" as a notion encompassing the intricate interaction of the past, present, individual, and society, and characterise it as a socialised subjectivity, an embodiment of the social. As a result, habitus functions as a "cultural agent," shaping and establishing the nature and breadth of an individual's social relationships. According to Bourdieu (1977), an individual accumulates cultural values and dispositions in his or her earliest life stages, partly unknowingly, which might serve as subconscious norms and influence action. As a result, exposure to values, attitudes, and behaviours that are then internalised as structures or standards affects how people act and behave. These institutions or regulations function in and through people as "human nature" or "civilised behaviour" (Webb, Schirato, and Danaher 2002, 39).

Bourdieu distinguishes between primary and the assimilations of secondary habitus. He believes that early life settings and conditions shape fundamental habits and are influenced by

family economic class and other structural power relations. Primary habitus is a set of dispositions acquired during childhood through a process in which "repetitive patterns of practice, interaction, and time-space organisation are internalised in the formation of core dispositions for perceiving and acting in social sites and relations" (Zipin and Brennan 2006, 334). According to Bourdieu, dispositions that have developed over time provide both possibilities and restrictions by functioning as a "strategy-generating principle enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations" (Bourdieu 1977, 72).

Simply said, habitus captures how people carry their histories and how those histories are carried out in the present (Grenfell 2008). Habitus is distinguished by the individual's embodiment of previous experiences involving structures and interactions, which manifests itself in their ideas, emotions, language use, actions, and behavior (Reay 2004; Shilling 2004; Nolan 2012). This article, based on ideas derived from Bourdieu's (1977) work, locates the six teacher participants' teacher habitus through their teacherly becoming in three lived spaces or spaces of becoming. These are the primary domestic socialisation spaces of the teachers, their schooling experiences (secondary socialisation spaces), and their professionalisation as instructors in contact with the school site.

METHODOLOGY: ETHNOGRAPHY

This article summarises key findings from a bigger study conducted in 2019 using an ethnographic methodological approach. The interpretivist paradigm shares the intellectual foundation of this method (Alvermann and Mallozzi 2010). The following data gathering methods and analytical tools were chosen to meet the study question: What are the subjective complications that comprise special needs teachers' place-making and pedagogical practices?

This study focused on one school and six teacher-participants, in accordance with Somekh and Lewin's (2005) guidelines for ethnographic work, to provide a detailed picture of people's attitudes and behaviours, as well as the nature of the place they inhabit (Reeves, Kuper, and Hodges 2008).

Through observations, interview facilitation, and data interpretation, ethnographic research recognises the researcher as a critical instrument in the qualitative research process. As a result, "the researcher as a 'human instrument' unavoidably brings to bear his or her interpretations and cultural orientations into the picture" (Somekh and Lewin 2005, 16). I recognise the inherent subjectivity of the "truth" as given here, but I am deeply concerned with the objectivity of the research methodologies.

I had accepted a post as a teacher at the research site where I had done the ethnographic study. I worked for Canaan School (pseudonym) for two years, during which time I adapted to

the school and completed my research. Throughout this time, I formed an engaged and connected observer position as I immersed myself in the actual, everyday atmosphere of the school. This strategy allowed me to investigate the complexities of socio-spatial relationships in classroom settings.

From a broader group of 38 high school teachers at Canaan School, six varied teacher-participants were chosen to engage in this research. These teacher-participants were chosen for their diversity in terms of age, gender, colour, and duration of service at the school. The six teachers volunteered and agreed to stay for the duration of the study.

The six participants' ages ranged from 26 to 54 years, and their time at the school spanned from 2 to 26 years. All participants were Afrikaans speakers who professed their faith in Christ (in keeping with the school's historical and religious emphasis). Three of the contestants were white, while the other three were colored. Canaan School was where the three younger individuals began their teaching careers. Pseudonyms were used for the participating teachers. The three younger participants, Mr Mitchell, Ms Müller, and Mr Vivier (ages 27 to 31 years) and the elder participants, Ms Jacobs, Mr Williams, and Mr Swanepoel (ages 45 to 53 years).

Canaan School, the research site, is in Cape Town. A school site defined as a special needs high school offering the national curriculum (i.e., CAPS) to learners with learning difficulties was one of the selection criteria. School classification has altered architecturally as well as conceptually since 1994, especially when considering categorisation and access to special needs and inclusive education prior to 1994.

This article describes data collection methods that included a qualitative questionnaire to collect historical and biographical information, as well as three individual, semi-structured interviews with each of the six participating teachers. The fieldwork was done over the course of a school year. During 2019, the school allowed for about ten months of fieldwork. The time spent in the field allowed the researcher to build trusting connections with the selected participants, which aided in the formation of an interactive foundation for future individual interviews.

A questionnaire was emailed to participants to be completed electronically at a convenient time and returned to the researcher through email. Most of the questionnaire questions about historical biographical information were followed up on in the individual, semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interviews took place after school hours, with participants being interviewed individually at predetermined locations and at convenient times. Participants were interviewed in their workplaces or classes most of the time. These interviews used a structured conversational framework, which allowed for rational inquiry. Schedules aligned with the research goals guided interview questions about how teachers' subjective complexity

equips them for place-making and pedagogical practices. The following topics were covered in the interview questions: place-based practices, teacher identity, professional practice, and teacher participants' biographical information.

The reported conclusions are based on the subjective accounts of the teachers who participated. Thematic data analysis was utilised to identify patterns in the data, with emerging themes identified during analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). The data generated analytical themes related to the research topic of how teachers' subjective difficulties position them for place-making and pedagogical activities.

The informed permission of participants, their opportunity to decline, and the degree of secrecy with which the information they provided would be processed were all ethical factors. It's worth noting that the study didn't focus on the students; rather, it focused on the teachers' experiences and teaching approaches. The study adhered to the different universities' ethical clearance procedures, as well as consent from the Western Cape Education Department, the research location, and each teacher-participant.

TEACHERS' SPACES OF BECOMING AND SUBJECTIVE PLACE-MAKING

The teacher participants established their subjectivities and habits, which served as the foundation for their pedagogical practices in the classroom. As a result, I examined how they positioned themselves and their practices in the school as agents. In this article, I will first discuss the educational routes and professional socialisation processes of the teacher-participants. Second, I concentrate on the creation of teacher subjectivity in interaction with the school's institutional culture. Third, I characterise teachers' subjective place-making as survival techniques at school.

Teachers' educational pathways and professional socialisation

The socialisation pathways of the participating teachers were centred on their domestic socialisation (at home) and their experiences related to their schooling and university education, which were interpreted as secondary socialisation venues. Importantly, none of these teachers had prior teaching experience or training in teaching students with special educational needs (LSEN). As a result, they could only draw on their socialising experiences in their subjective place-making processes, which will be discussed further below.

Domestic socialisation

Race and class generated inequalities in the family socialisations of the various teacher-participants, a direct effect of the country's racially segregated past. The three, white teacher-

participants were raised in middle- to upper-middle-class households. These individuals grew up in mostly white suburbs in and around Cape Town. These three participants described their immediate family interactions and dynamics as "close", "close-knit", and "quite tight", as well as their formative years as "comfortable", "happy", and "carefree".

In contrast, the three individuals who were teachers of colour hailed from different types of homes than their middle-class white peers. The coloured neighbourhoods where these teachers grew up were notorious for drug and gang activity. While their parents worked long hours, grandparents took on parental and authoritative roles, which substantially shaped the pattern of these instructors' immediate familial lives. The parents of the two older coloured teachers were either working-class laborers or unemployed. The younger participant's father was able to attend university and work as a teacher once apartheid ended, but he and his wife tragically died, leaving the then nine-year-old kid and his younger siblings orphaned. Their grandparents reared them after that. Although their families were "very close" and they would "share everything," these coloured teacher-participants universally described their formative years as "challenging". Race, or their racial heritage, was tied to the working-class environments in which these instructors were raised.

The economic status of their families and various power dynamics, influenced by factors like race, were found to be crucial in shaping these teachers' fundamental dispositions within their household environments, as outlined by Bourdieu (1977).

Schooling and tertiary education

The six teacher participants approached teaching in a variety of ways. Schools, colleges, and universities were places for further socialisation. Importantly, for these teacher-participants, access to quality schooling and postsecondary education was shaped by their race and age.

Due to the country's discriminatory history, the older, coloured teacher-participants faced numerous forms of segregation and prejudice throughout the apartheid era. From the late 1960s to the 1980s, one female and one male coloured teacher attended their respective primary and high schools in racially divided neighbourhoods. They remember their high school years as "unpleasant" (Ms Jacobs) because of statewide boycotts, racial segregation, and general social and political upheaval in South Africa. During the 1970s, on the other hand, their white male colleague could attend his local whites-only, well-resourced, middle-class school. In contrast to his coloured contemporaries, he enjoyed his school years, describing them as "loads of fun with friends galore and sport practice or games every single day" (Mr Swanepoel).

A younger teacher of colour in post-apartheid South Africa could attend "a former Model C school," one of the more prestigious institutions in his working-class district. His peers, the

two younger white participants, finished school at the same time (late 1990s); However, they grew up in mostly white middle-class neighbourhoods and were able to attend respected primary and high schools, exposing them to middle-class educational circumstances and activities. These schools were described as "organised, disciplined, and strict". This was not the case with their coloured equivalents. Although the young, coloured teacher had previously attended a Model C school, the neighbourhood surrounding the school at the time was dominated by coloured working-class families. He highlighted how gang-related activities hampered school operations, as well as his participation in several physical confrontations and altercations during his high school years.

The tertiary education possibilities and pathways available to these teacher-participants were marked by their race. Each of the three racialised individuals confronted financial barriers to obtaining university education and training. The elder coloured female teacher stated that throughout the 1980s, the apartheid regime made it difficult for non-white students to gain entry to higher education, and funds were scarce. She and her two siblings were fortunate to receive state bursaries and were able to attend university. Receiving governmental assistance that their parents were unable to repay put additional pressure on their achievements and quick completion of their degrees. Ms Jacobs added that because they were not permitted to attend "white institutions" during the apartheid era, "we had no choice but to attend the so-called 'coloured' university". These academic years had been "tough" at the height of the boycott. Classes were held from January to June of 1985, after which the university closed, and students were forced to "teach themselves ... and write exams in January of 1986" (Ms Jacobs). The three years that followed were devoid of substantial political upheaval.

Access to SA universities in the late 2000s gave the younger coloured teacher additional options, but financial affordability remained a worry for his working-class family. Years later, a bursary from a family friend provided the opportunity for him to complete his bachelor's degree in education. He explains he "had amazing lecturers and friends who supported [him] throughout the four years" (Mr Mitchell). In contrast to the previous three participants, white teacher-participants had easier access to formerly white higher education institutions, as well as the opportunities and financial means to earn more than one degree or diploma.

School, college, and university settings served as secondary socialisation spaces for these teachers, introducing them to diverse social contexts where they acquired additional traits. Through their educational journeys, these teachers encountered various forms of schooling, teaching methods, and learning environments, all of which became integral resources they internalised and applied when they became educators in schools and classrooms.

Before starting at Canaan School, teacher-participants were socialised and positioned

differently. Their standing was determined by past socialisation in their domestic and educational situations. Importantly, concerns of class, race, and age have all had an impact on the formative personal and professional processes of the participating teachers. These challenges positioned each of them differently upon their arrival at the school with its institutional culture.

Constructing teacher subjectivity in interaction with the school's institutional culture

After joining the Canaan School faculty, the teacher-participants developed their teaching habits in response to the school's unique institutional culture. They are initially overwhelmed by the spatial intricacies and frequently feel isolated; nonetheless, they figure out how to exist in the school space and so talk back to it in unique ways.

Overwhelmed and isolated inside of classrooms

When the teachers engaged with the institutional culture at Canaan School, they had to grapple with their previous socialisation experiences and determine their position within the distinct school environment. The results highlight the complexity of the institutional culture, which proved challenging for each teacher initially, making them feel like outsiders in unfamiliar territory.

Canaan School was founded and historically operated as a whites-only, Afrikaans, special needs school owned and maintained in part by the Dutch Reformed Church. Importantly, the school provides the national mainstream curriculum to students who have been identified with a variety of learning disabilities. At any given time, teachers must teach a diverse group of students who have autism spectrum disorder (ASD), severe attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), hearing loss, dyslexia, dyspraxia (developmental cohesion disorder), dyscalculia (mathematics learning disorder), visual impairments, physical disabilities, and other conditions. In this "unfamiliar" and difficult situation, the expectation is "inclusion," and that the teacher would be able to adequately teach the curriculum in the same amount of time as provided for mainstream learners.

A managerialism discourse had come to characterise the school's adaptive institutional tone, which was made up of activities linked with neoliberal institutional functioning (see Rinquest 2021). Teachers stated that decisions affecting teaching and learning, as well as their day-to-day functioning at school, did not appropriately respect their students' unique special needs context. The difference in teaching in the fields of special education and mainstream schooling was a significant factor influencing teachers' perceptions of school culture. When

referring to the unknown or different aspects, they were addressing various challenges related to the learners' diagnoses, strategies for managing learner behaviour, a notable rise in daily after-school meetings, the requirement for teachers to attend specialised training sessions focused on special needs or specific subjects, prolonged and detailed discussions about individual learners during meetings, participation in smaller multidisciplinary team gatherings, and the need for teachers to maintain consistent and professional communication with parents.

The factors mentioned above create a complex network of cultural norms and expressions that teachers must navigate, analyse, and manage as they progress in their roles within the school. During the study period, the school's culture portrayed teachers as being isolated within their classrooms, leading them to handle challenges independently. Ultimately, the institutional culture at Canaan School played a significant role in shaping the perspectives and teaching methods of these six teachers.

Surviving in an unfamiliar school space

Prior to starting at Canaan School, none of the participating instructors had received official training as special needs teachers. Prior to working at this special needs high school, the six instructors were socialised in a variety of mainstream institutions. Individuals raised in white, middle-class families were strongly aligned with Canaan School's emphasis on its "whiteness". On the contrary, the three participants who developed their social attitudes in underprivileged, working-class backgrounds found themselves in a school environment where white-oriented status was valued. Consequently, they had to exert more effort than their white peers to establish their position within the school's institutional culture.

Habitus is characterised by socio-culturally acquired tendencies that are ingrained and function at different levels as a holistic bodily encounter (Bourdieu 1977). Crucially, as teachers navigated various educational contexts, they incorporated the values and demands of those contexts into their habitus. Consequently, each teacher's physical presence and bodily tendencies, observable to others, were shaped by this assimilation (Webb et al. 2002). As a result, the bodies of the participating teachers became visible representations of their experiences, social contacts, and acquired dispositions. Data reveal that the teachers underwent a process wherein they had to address their ingrained habits and previously acquired teaching skills. They had to navigate how to adapt these inclinations to fit into the new social context within Canaan School.

The white teacher-participants had no difficulty understanding the socio-cultural intricacies at Canaan School because these aspects resonated with their own socio-cultural backgrounds and personal experiences. They learned how to interact and communicate with a

top-management structure made up entirely of white people, as well as their fellow (predominantly white) teaching colleagues. These instructors' habitual modifications, on the other hand, were anchored in their efforts to find out what teaching at a special needs school entailed, as well as the educational competencies required for teaching learners with varied learning difficulties, including physical, emotional, and behavioural challenges.

The coloured teachers, on the other hand, had little prior experience with socio-cultural aspects such as those present and operating at Canaan School. The school of its white tone (Hunter 2019) positioned them away from the articulation. In comparison to Canaan School, these teachers were socialised in educational contexts located in disadvantaged regions where resources were short, fundraising activities were not prioritised, school safety was a problem, and students came from low socioeconomic backgrounds. These three coloured teachers had to put in extra effort to comprehend the cultural "whiteness" of Canaan School while also working out how to adapt their teaching style to teaching at a special needs school.

The six participating teachers lacked training and experience in special needs education, putting them at a disadvantage in this highly competitive educational field. They all agreed that they felt a sense of urgency to swiftly integrate into the school culture, and that they needed to work efficiently to ensure their survival in this new institution. Within their classrooms, teachers were entrusted with the responsibility of independently determining how to effectively accommodate and instruct a highly diverse group of learners with special educational needs.

While the school culture initially felt daunting for the teachers, once they immersed themselves in the environment, they started behaving in distinct manners, adapting their identities within the school. The teacher-participants recognised that their ability to thrive hinged on utilising their own inherent qualities and abilities that aligned with the school's culture and standards. Consequently, it seemed that educators in this setting had to adjust and find a way to coexist, which I interpreted as their efforts to create an inclusive environment through subjective practices.

Subjective place-making as mechanism for survival

The participating teachers at Canaan School shaped their identities by merging their personal histories with their interactions in the school environment. This observation aligns with Nespor's (1997) concept of identity politics, which involves intricate interactions between identities within a particular space and time, highlighting the temporal and spatial connections between individuals and their surroundings.

To survive at school, each participant built his or her teacher subjectivity in different ways, framed by crucial components of their childhood schooling and biographical experiences and

represented via their instructional practices. This process is referred to as "subjective place-making," since these instructors constructed their teacher subjectivity as the foundation for their pedagogical mission in this complicated environment. The narrative discussion focuses on three of the six teachers' experiences with apartheid schooling and childhood poverty; childhood trauma and care pedagogies; and freely expressing homosexuality at school.

Apartheid education and childhood poverty

Mr. Williams, an experienced teacher of colour, described his role at Canaan School by reflecting on his early education experiences. He shared his upbringing in a financially disadvantaged area with limited resources, emphasising how he resolved during his formative years not to be confined to the constraints of the small town where he grew up. During our interviews, he revealed a strong feeling of agency as the sole factor driving his life trajectory. He remembered making a conscious decision as a child that his current circumstances would not shape his destiny.

Having been an educator at Canaan School for just over a decade during the study, he expressed immense fulfilment, deeming his job there as a long-awaited achievement. The prestige associated with Canaan School resonated deeply with him, aligning with his aspirations to be part of such an esteemed institution. His identity as a teacher was rooted in his journey, evolving from a young boy in a struggling working-class family living in difficult conditions to the adult life he envisioned and eventually built for himself.

These experiences shaped his ambition to make a difference in his learners' future visions and to give them with assistance and advice in their careers. His involvement in a wide range of activities at Canaan School, particularly as grade head and hostel supervisor, demonstrated his dedication to his students. He was an intriguing character that conveyed his subjectivity through his physical adaptations. His acute sense of dress was always up to date with the current trends, which helped him portray himself as the erstwhile poor lad who overcame adversity. His students appreciated the fact that he "dressed in a 'cooler' way than normal teachers" (Mr Williams). During school breaks, he explored different cultures abroad, embracing his passion for global travel. His objective was to share his worldly wisdom and enthusiasm for life with his students. Being single, he dedicated most of his free time to going above and beyond for his students. As a hostel supervisor, he viewed this role as an opportunity to positively impact the lives of those under his care. He exhibited a strong sense of agency, expressing his opinions during staff meetings, even if they were unpopular at the moment, challenging the school's norms.

Childhood trauma and pedagogies of care

Mr Mitchell, the younger coloured male teacher, based his teacher subjectivity at Canaan School on his encounters with two major adult figures in his life: his harsh disciplinarian father and a caring high school instructor. His father influenced his teaching subjectivity by recalling his father as an emotionally restrained, severe, disciplinarian teacher at a reformatory school for boys. As the eldest sibling, his father put a lot of pressure on him. As a child, he remembered receiving punishment for his own and his brothers' wrongdoings. When his father and mother died in a horrific occurrence, his attitude changed dramatically. The ensuing rage and bewilderment resulted in a rebellious adolescent who had to fend for himself, engaging in physical altercations at school, frequently getting into trouble, and being expelled from school.

One of his high school instructors was the second most influential person in his teacher subjectivity. He mentioned that the approach and communication style of this teacher acted as a type of rehabilitation for him. Even though he was misbehaving at school, she found a way to communicate with him and always encouraged him. Another significant influence on his decisions stemmed from his practicum experience at an underprivileged school, where he absorbed the essence of professionalism in teaching. The principal of this school was notably strict, mandating formal attire and emphasising rigorous classroom discipline. As a young teacher, he internalised this experience, deciding that this approach would define his teaching style. He firmly believed that professionalism, formal appearance, and strict discipline were key factors for effective teaching. His aim was to project unwavering strength and avoid displaying any signs of vulnerability in his role as an educator. He clarified that "when the learners see a weakness, they will exploit it and the teacher will lose control of the class".

At Canaan School, he utilised these past encounters to shape and convey his teacher identity. The school's culture allowed him the space to express this identity, positioning him as the teacher to consult whenever disciplinary concerns emerged. His no-nonsense approach was well-known among students, and remarkably, his classroom remained free from disciplinary problems, even with students displaying the most challenging forms of rebellion. This teacher identity not only found acceptance but perhaps was valued in a school where many students had diagnoses involving behavioural challenges.

Openly expressing homosexuality at school

Mr Vivier, one participant, characterised his teacher subjectivity by expressing his sexuality as a white, homosexual male in his twenties. He indicated that his childhood schooling experiences had the most influence on his approach to teaching. He hoped to present a subjectivity that was open to otherness and real expression by expressing his non-normative sexuality. He felt secure

in the manner he chose to live his sexuality at a special needs school where diversity is essential.

Heteronormative ways of being reigned at Canaan School, and Mr Vivier frequently overheard homophobic jokes and comments made by instructors while addressing students. Here, primarily white professors frequently made comments regarding students' sexual orientation. Other staff members' discriminatory actions fuelled his ambition to present himself as a successful homosexual guy and advocate for LGBT rights. He was promoting open and critical discussion on challenging themes with students in his social sciences seminars at the time, and he created what he saw as "a safe space for others to express their individuality". His subjectivity was a result of his earlier socialisation experiences of exclusion and marginalisation as a homosexual man, along with what he discovered at Canaan School.

In summary, once the participating teachers had determined their placement, they responded to the school space in a variety of ways, including assertions of agency through their bodies and the resulting subjective place-making activities.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, teachers' identity construction and negotiating processes are inextricably linked to their behaviours in the classroom. The spatial qualities and daily activities that take place within school environments are critical in comprehending the various identities that teachers acquire. These geographical qualities are distinct, allowing teachers to draw on specialised resources such as institutional resources, regular classroom roles, and the curriculum.

The culture at Canaan School is characterised by complex interactions among administrators, teachers, and students. These interactions are continuously changing, shaping, and being absorbed by both educators and students (Webb et al. 2002). As per the study findings, when teachers gain a deeper understanding of the institutional culture, they recognise that their professional achievement and longevity rely on leveraging their inherent qualities and abilities that align with the school's cultural norms. While teachers may be first overwhelmed by a particular school culture, immersion in the space leads to a process of adopting specific behaviours and projecting their acquired subjectivities inside the school environment. As a result, instructors must adjust and negotiate their methods of being and living within the school, a process known as subjective place-making.

Teachers' subjectivities are shaped by their socialisation in numerous elements of their life paths. Prior to joining Canaan School, each teacher's socialisation positioned them in relation to the school's culture. Teachers respond to encounters with institutional culture by situating themselves and expressing or projecting distinct teacher subjectivities. The teachers'

individual backgrounds and teaching experiences position them uniquely in relation to shaping the environment within the school context.

Class, race, sexual orientation, and age all have a significant impact on the personal and professional socialisation processes of participating instructors, positioning everyone in a unique way inside Canaan School and its institutional culture. Teachers engage in identity-shaping processes as they confront the institutional culture of Canaan School, altering their responses to their new social context. Once instructors have established their position, they can exercise agency by "speaking back" to the educational environment.

Teachers' real-life encounters and engagements at school mirror their efforts in shaping their environment, enabling the development, adjustment, or transformation of their teaching approaches. These efforts are evident in the paths they navigate through time and space, encompassing their involvement or detachment from various physical, social, and mental areas within the school. Additionally, the diverse student body significantly influences their reactions, actions, and adjustments as they determine the most suitable ways to establish and express their roles as educators within their particular school setting.

The ramifications of this study for higher education practitioners and policymakers are obvious. Teachers' identity negotiations are firmly based in their unique schooling and teaching experiences in South Africa. To appropriately equip teachers for inclusive education in South Africa, it is critical to question teacher homogeneity as articulated in education policy (Carrim 2001; Jansen 2001). Furthermore, individuals in charge of planning teacher education courses must recognise their role in educating teachers to function effectively in a variety of schooling situations. By supporting inclusive and flexible approaches that prioritise diversity, collaboration, and research-based practices, we can attempt to resist the homogenisation articulated in education policy. Teachers' professional development programmes should include inclusive teaching techniques and strategies. By providing teachers with the essential knowledge, skills, and resources to successfully cater to the varied needs of students.

Future research efforts should prioritise the assessment of school policies and procedures. Studies could look on the roles and activities of school management teams (SMTs) and school governing bodies (SGBs) in the establishment and implementation of internal policies and procedures that promote inclusion. There is a need to examine how these regulations and procedures help or impede teachers' abilities to effectively adopt inclusive education approaches. Furthermore, additional research should investigate the leadership techniques of school principals and their impact on fostering inclusive school climates. The study of how principals' leadership styles, attitudes, and methods influence the whole institutional culture, including teacher support and empowerment in supporting inclusive practices. Ultimately, the

process of inclusion places substantial emotional stress on teachers, affecting their physical and mental health significantly. Research on inclusion in the South African context could illuminate crucial structural factors to be mindful of when it comes to upholding and maintaining teachers' well-being in both special needs and mainstream schools. This is vital to ensure their ability to effectively advance inclusive education.

Finally, this study gives light on the subjective survival mechanisms used by special needs teachers in an unfamiliar schooling environment. We received useful insights into how instructors negotiate the complexity of a foreign educational environment by investigating their identity construction, negotiation processes, and subjective place-making strategies. Understanding these mechanisms is critical for assisting and empowering special needs instructors in their quest of inclusive education, as well as ensuring the well-being of both teachers and students.

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