

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](https://www.sciencedirect.com)

International Journal of Educational Research

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/ijedures

High and low performing schools in South Africa: Metaphors as a lens to understand teachers' views of school organisation[☆]

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1. Introduction

Until 1994, South Africa's education system was racially segregated and organized through divided education departments who each had different curricula, assessments of learners and resources for their white, black, Indian and coloured students, but controlled by white ruling. Education was an important means to oppress the non-white population through a system of inspectors and subject advisors and poorly qualified teachers. Examination criteria and procedures were instrumental in promoting the political perspectives of those in power and allowed teachers very little latitude to determine standards or to interpret the work of their students. As [Sayed et al. \(2013\)](#) describe, authoritarianism, rote learning, and corporal punishment were the rule in these schools, exacerbated by the impoverished environment of schools for children of colour.

After Apartheid formally ended in 1994, education was seen as one of the most important means to build a more democratic society. The South African Schools Act (1996) deracialised education and aimed to provide for a uniform system for the organisation, governance and funding of schools; the Act created one education department and national curriculum for all learners, abolishing corporal punishment in schools, and creating a more equal resourcing of schools.

The legacy of Apartheid however continues to have its effect on South African schools as desegregation has hardly touched the majority of formerly black African Coloured and Asian schools located in peri-urban and rural areas ([Turok et al., 2017](#)). Most of these schools are in communities experiencing high levels of impoverishment with very limited in-migration or out-migration and little change in the composition of the population. These areas also have not seen much improvement in access to, and opportunities for employment and further education. Analysing student performance from the SACMEQ III dataset, (2013) [Spaull \(2013\)](#) finds that the poorest 75% of schools which previously served black students are unable to teach children the grade-appropriate numeracy and literacy skills, while the previously white schools produce achievement levels comparable to developed countries. [Spaull \(2013\)](#) describes how there is an ongoing informal practice of disorder, distrust, rebellion and lack of cooperation in many –previously non-white– schools. These informal practices are reinforcing a bimodal schooling system with highly unequal learning outcomes.

One of the motifs that runs through the various analyses of the continuing high inequality is one of culture, mind-sets and entrenched practices that are hard to change through national reforms. [Carrim \(2013\)](#) for example explains how the emphasis has been on improving school resources and changing legislation, but many black teachers continue to use corporal punishment as it is seen as an acceptable practice if the situation warrants it. [Kanjee and Nkomo \(2013\)](#) further outline how the regularities of school culture

[☆] This study was funded by the ESRC/FCDO 'Raising learning outcomes' programme; grant reference ES/P005888/2

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2022.102094>

Received 10 May 2022; Received in revised form 24 October 2022; Accepted 30 October 2022

Available online 4 November 2022

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(assumed patterns, rules and procedures) undermine the basic purpose of education through high levels of violence, unconstructive social relationships in schools that are highly intractable and not easily reformed. The views of what good education constitutes and the role of teachers in it seems to vary widely amongst teachers themselves. High inequality has many dimensions which also link to wider societal and economic inequalities, but teachers and the quality of teaching in schools is one of the critical levers for change. Given the close link between mindset, behaviour and decision-making, understanding the metaphors teachers and school leaders use to describe their school and professional role matters.

This paper examines educators' views about four aspects of their school organisation (goals, participants, task, structure). Our study is informed by a substantial body of work on organisational metaphors and how different metaphorical images affect educational practices. Metaphors reflect how teachers view themselves but also how they make sense of their work environment. In turn, through their collective use of metaphors, staff in each school contribute to a pattern of metaphor use that is to some degree particular to a school, but may also have comparable elements across similar schools or professional and individual backgrounds of staff. Metaphors likely reflect educators' daily experiences, and will in turn also shape and reinforce behaviour themselves; they can offer the grounds for rationalising and explaining their actions.

Our study aims to enhance the work in this area and particularly how metaphors may vary by school context, and particularly the level of deprivation that is linked to historic inequalities. This paper will answer the following research questions:

- 1 Which metaphors do school staff in high and low performing schools in South Africa use when describing their school organisation?
- 2 Do teachers and school leaders use similar metaphors for various aspects of school organisation?
- 3 How are these metaphors related to/informed by the context in which educators work (e.g. level of deprivation; urban/rural area)?

The paper first provides an introduction to organisational metaphors and the metaphors commonly found in education. We then describe the methodology used to study metaphors in South Africa before we present our findings and resulting conclusions.

2. Conceptual framework: metaphors in education

The importance of metaphors was first recognized in the early 18th century. Berry (1973) describes how the dominant approaches at the time were concerned with the use of metaphor in language and communication; trying to understand why and how metaphors occur in early speech. Only in the 20th century work of philosophers, such as Cassirer and Wittgenstein, were metaphors recognized for their importance in reality construction and how we live through our metaphors. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and Lakoff (1993) for example outline how metaphors are not just a property of language but also powerful mental models through which people make sense of and come to understand their world, as a result of relating complex phenomena to previous and concrete experiences. This perspective of metaphors as a cognitive phenomenon has been further extended in conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) and critical metaphor analysis, bringing in a sociological view to understand how metaphors serve as a 'discursive manifests of internalized social structures' (Mills et al., 2017, p.857; see also Charteris-Black, 2004, 2005).

These sociological approaches broaden the view on metaphors as not just a means of accessing what people think, but also as 'windows to look into people's actions' (Mills et al., 2017, p.857). Mills et al. (2017) for example argue that how we choose to act is (also) a function of how we construct conceptions of what we are and what we are trying to do; and when certain metaphors gain prominence in the minds of a majority of people in an organisation or domain, they will over time transform into social values instead of only representing individual values or beliefs (Hart, 2016). Metaphors can act as self-fulfilling prophecies (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008, p.156) as they have reinforcing power in making experience coherent. Metaphors thus provide an important lens to understand teachers' views of their school, their experience of everyday school life and how these might guide future action. Here we follow Hart's (2010, p.126) definition of metaphor as a "cognitive operation performed in order to make sense of experience".

In education, metaphor analysis has been used to identify how teachers understand their profession and their work, the views they have on how students learn and the learning process (e.g., Martinez et al., 2001), or how school leaders describe their organization and the wider education system in which they operate (Botha, 2009). For this study we are particularly interested in school staff' metaphors about the nature of the school as an educational institution and organization, including the arrangement of teaching and learning and the structures for decision-making and communication in the school. Our understanding of school organisation follows Tyler's (2012, p.9) definition of a school as 'a localized administrative entity concerned with the face-to-face instruction of the young, usually on a single site'.

As teachers and school leaders have different roles and responsibilities in the school, we will look at ehri metaphorical statements in relation to four common features of school organisation, taken from Johnson (in Connolly et al., 2019, p.13) as *goals*: the desired ends toward which the work of the organisation is directed, which is done by *participants* who vary along a number of dimensions. Organisational work is defined by *core and supporting tasks* that vary in knowledge, skills and hardware needed to do them and the level of complexity and clarity. These tasks are divided and coordinated through an *organisational structure* which consists of physical (division of labour and concrete mechanisms to coordinate this work) and social dimensions (culture, informal structure and the conflict and political tensions inherent in these). Organisations exist in a larger *environment* which influences the organisation. The level of deprivation of a community may for example have a particular effect on staff's descriptions of the purpose of teaching.

Metaphors for school organisation have been identified in both the organizational literature as in education where family, factory, hospital and war zone are recurring themes (see for example Ahmady et al., 2016; Reitzug et al., 2008; Schlechry & Jolsin, 1984). We expect these four metaphors to also have prominence in the South African context as explained below.

2.1. School as a factory

The school as a factory metaphor has its origins in an understanding of organisations as machine bureaucracies and earlier contributions to organisational management theory by Max Weber (see [Morgan, 1991](#)). Weber described administrative bureaucracies in terms of routinized processes of administration and a fixed division of tasks, hierarchical supervision and detailed rules and regulations. Classical management theory has further developed the idea of organisations as bureaucracies with a pattern of precisely defined jobs organized in a hierarchical manner through lines of command or communication, clear job responsibilities and patterns of authority. Organisations as machines or bureaucracies are particularly understood as rational systems that should operate as efficiently as possible; there is little attention to human motivation or spirit.

Applying this perspective to a school, the learning environment is viewed as ‘similar to a mass production line of a factory in which learners are like raw material’ and should meet specific criteria to enter the production line (e.g. meet certain test targets or entry qualifications) ([Ahmady et al., 2016](#), p.54; [Cook-Sather, 2003](#)). After entering the school, they are ‘converted into useful products with unified, transparent, predetermined standards during the production phase (teaching) and adapted to market needs (i.e. specific purposes and measurable outcomes) ([Ahmady et al., 2016](#), p.54; [Botha, 2009](#); [Cook-Sather, 2003](#)). In case the desired and expected results are achieved, the conclusion could be drawn that the output of the managers and workers of the factory –i.e. teachers and principals- has been optimal. As is the case of factories, the management of schools is hierarchical, bureaucratic, and top-down ([Ahmady et al., 2016](#), p.55). Power and accountability in such organisations are – according to [Morgan \(1997\)](#) – intimately connected with one’s knowledge and use of the rules and with the law-like form of administration that this implies. The factory image also suggests that ‘human relationships should be characterized by dominance/submission, superordination/subordination, and passivity’ ([Schlechty & Joslin, 1986](#), p.157).

Examples of where educators conceptualize their school as a factory come from [Reitzug et al. \(2008\)](#). Their study of principals’ conceptions of instructional leadership in a high-stakes testing environment showed how some principals hold a predominant ‘linear’ conception of instructional leadership, ‘grounded in structural functionalist assumptions of rationality, linearity, and straight-line cause and effect’ ([Reitzug et al., 2008](#), p.699). Principals describe the teaching and learning process as a causal chain where test data is used as a way to monitor student outcomes against a set of standards and to adapt teaching to meet targets.

In South Africa we would expect to find similar metaphors given the distinctly hierarchical nature of the system where national government sets the service conditions for educators and education policy, provincial departments employ teachers and districts and circuits set and control standards for schools. [Cameron and Naidoo \(2018\)](#) and [Ehren et al. \(2020\)](#) describe how teachers are required to teach the national curriculum (CAPS), which defines the instructional activities and assessments to be implemented. The Education Laws Amendment Act, 2007 (Act 31 of 2007) and the South African Standard for Principalship Policy (2015) authorizes school principals to control the work of teachers by keeping a teacher attendance register, reviewing workbooks of teachers and monitoring their implementation of the curriculum as part of the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS). Head teachers also have performance contracts in which targets are set around similar process indicators (e.g. grade progression, curriculum coverage, attendance¹) and these are then monitored by the circuit, district and province. However, as [Taylor \(2017\)](#) and [Ehren et al. \(2020\)](#) point out, the overall lack of capacity and resource constraints in the system means that principals and heads of department often do not have time to monitor their teachers and also go without actual monitoring of their own performance. Schools also vary in their capacity to standardize their teaching and organisational processes, such as where some schools have large multigrade classrooms for which the curriculum and assessments were not designed, while others have smaller monograde classes. These differences will likely affect the actual implementation of policy and whether and how school staff perceive their school as a factory.

2.2. School as a family

A number of studies find the metaphor of the school and/or class as a family to be particularly pervasive amongst educators (e.g. [Arslan, 2019](#); [Duru, 2015](#); [Kadi & Beytekin, 2017](#)). Although the reference is not commonly used in the public debate, conversations in school staff rooms and school corridors - in particular in primary schools- would often include similar phrases as used by parents, according to [Schlechty and Joslin \(1986, p.159\)](#); phrases like ‘my children’, ‘individual differences’, and ‘unique potential’. Teachers would describe their relationships with learners as teaching the whole child and not ‘pushing them to perform before they are ready’, treating children as ‘unique individuals’ with their own capacities and limitations ([Schlechty & Joslin, 1986, p.159](#)).

Relations with other staff would also be characterized as a family or extended family. School staff in a study by [Arslan \(2019, p.241\)](#) for example described the school community as ‘teachers are like my family. Security staff is the same. The principal and the deputy principal care about us just like their own children’; or

‘Our family protects and cares about us, they discourage us from bad behaviour. They help us find the right thing to do. We don’t have our family at school, but our teachers are like our family’.

School leadership would have an emphasis on building constructive relationships and helping students and staff feel better about themselves. In [Reitzug et al. \(2008\)](#), p.698) study principals for example saw student success as a by-product and result of positive relationships where (in contrast to the factory metaphor) education is not about ‘cramming knowledge into kids’ brains’.

It is however important to acknowledge that the family metaphor will have different meanings for teachers according to their own

¹ https://static.pmg.org.za/2021-22_APP_Final_for_Tabling.pdf

family experiences. [Lakoff \(2010\)](#) showed how US Conservatives and Democrats have highly divergent conceptions of the family from the 'strict-father model' to the 'nurturing parent'. [Morgan \(1991\)](#) describes similar differences of organizations which function as a patriarchal family where one person defers to the authority of another exactly as the child defers to parental rule, creating the kind of dependency where people would look to others to initiate action in response to problems. In such organisations, fortitude, courage, heroism, favoured by narcissistic self-admiration are often valued qualities compared to more matriarchal families which would value love, optimism, trust, compassion, nurturing and tolerance for diversity; the types of values described in our previous examples of schools as families.

In South Africa, family structures vary and are affected by parental migration, whether parents live in urban or rural areas and/or experience high levels of deprivation. [Hall & Posel \(2019\)](#) describe that many families are dispersed geographically as mothers and/or fathers (particularly in rural areas and from African/coloured backgrounds) are non-resident for reasons of seeking or having urban employment. [Wilcox et al., \(2019\)](#) show that, in 2017, 33% of children were not living with any parent. Substantial proportions of children at the compulsory school age move frequently, often without their mother. Deprived households also tend to see higher levels of alcohol and drug abuse, and health-related issues, including HIV and AIDS ([Peltzer et al., 2010](#)). These circumstances will not only influence teachers' conceptualizations of 'family', particularly when they themselves have been raised by grandparents, older siblings or single parents, but also when they have to teach children who come from unstable and sometimes –violent, and unsafe households. They may feel a greater need to provide care to learners in their classroom.

2.3. School as a hospital

The image of a hospital highlights the 'autonomy of the individual practitioner and the supportive functions of the organization', where staff are 'strongly committed to teaching' and have a 'fair amount of internal communication' ([Firestone, 1980](#), p.469). The school as a hospital builds on notions of 'profession' and 'professionalism' where the school is perceived as a location where teachers practice their art and are 'assumed to know best how his or her tasks should be performed' ([Firestone, 1980](#), p.469). They would have control over their own body of work, and organize their own professional accountability (e.g. through peer review and accreditation) to uphold a high standard of work, and reflect on and deliberate over what is the right course of action ([Banks, 2013](#)).

Following [Freidson \(2001, p.127\)](#) and [Evetts' \(2009\)](#) description of 'profession', we would understand teachers' work as having a high freedom of judgement and discretion to accommodate individual circumstances, underpinned by a commitment to doing good work and serving the public good. In South Africa,² the latter can be interpreted from the purposes of the national curriculum and educational Acts which aim to equip learners with knowledge and skills for their self-fulfilment, and meaningful participation in society as citizens of a free country, and provide access to higher education and the labour market.

[Schlechty & Joslin \(1986\)](#), [Cook-Sather \(2003\)](#), and [Botha \(2009\)](#) provide various examples of education reforms which are premised on the idea of schools as hospitals. These reforms for example aim to enhance the autonomy of teachers in making professional decisions, limiting the decision-making authority of managers to scheduling, purchasing and coordinating. Curriculum and assessment proposals which include individual education plans for children with special needs, individualized instruction and remediation on the basis of assessment outcomes and frequent testing explicitly embrace more clinical aspects of schooling. Educating children would be considered as something so specialized that it cannot be standardized, rationalized or commodified and quality would be decided and upheld through peer to peer review and conversations. Learners (and their parents) are positioned as recipients of care who would be 'diagnosed' to receive the appropriate instruction by skilled professionals who know what they need and who are expected to follow the instructions of teachers.

In South Africa, the metaphor of a hospital can particularly be found in recent efforts to introduce professional accountability through the South African Council of Educators (SACE). SACE is responsible for promoting professionalism amongst all educators in South Africa, by developing professional standards for teaching, a code of professional ethics, and by overseeing the teaching profession ([Van Onselen, 2012](#)). Within the school, professional accountability is part of the integrated quality management system (IQMS) which includes processes for developmental appraisal and performance management of teachers; both of these build on teacher self-evaluation and peer review, the development of personal growth plans and a development support group in the school. The practice of using assessment outcomes to plan teaching is also taken up in some schools, such as through a partnership with the Data Driven Districts Programme,³ but the practice remains patchy and part of an overall logic of external regulations on curriculum delivery (<authors>).

2.4. School as a warzone

Schools can be perceived as warzones when conflict arises and interests collide. [Morgan \(1991\)](#) explains how conflicts in organisations can be personal, interpersonal or between rival groups and coalitions and are often built into organisational structures, roles, attitudes and stereotypes or arise over a scarcity of resources. Conflicts may be explicit and open for all to see, or covert when relations in meetings are governed by various hidden agendas of which only some participants are aware. Where such conflicts become institutionalized in the attitudes, stereotypes, values, beliefs, rituals and other aspects of organisational culture, they would create a sense of a battlefield or warzone.

² <https://www.education.gov.za/Curriculum/NationalCurriculumStatementsGradesR-12.aspx>

³ <https://dbedashboard.co.za/Home/>

In schools, metaphorical expressions of a warzone would convey a sense that conflict, hostility, and aggressive action are a normal and expected part of school and classroom life (Schlechty & Joslin, 1986; Inbar, 1996). Cooperation and accommodation are seen as tactics, 'forming alliances', 'collaborating with the enemy' where different groups in the school (e.g. faculty versus parents) need to form 'a united front' (Schlechty & Joslin, 1986, p.160). Staff would talk about expelling disruptive students from the classroom or school, establishing or re-establishing their authority, and the need to protect themselves from burglary and violence. Within the warzone metaphor, corporal punishment would be considered a legitimate form of discipline (Schlechty & Joslin, 1986, p.160), while the managerial style of the principal would be dominated by confrontation and intimidation, command and control and motivation through fear. The school is considered to be an unsafe place where antagonism and strife are the order of the day and communication is marked by exchange of slogans and abuse.

Sayed et al. (2013) and Carrim's (2013) description of black township schools in South Africa fits this warzone metaphor. They talk about frequent strike action, high levels of absenteeism, frequent beating of children as an accepted disciplinary practice and school grounds which resemble a prison. Karlsson (2002) describes a school which perimeter fence was extended with razor wire, guarded by security guards with wooden clubs. These infrastructures were put in place to protect the school from wider community violence and allow staff to retain control over the school during and after school hours. In some areas, schools were targets for criminal gangs in the community breaking and entering to carry off electrical equipment, computers, and other items such as furniture, doors taken off their hinges for sale in the informal market. In urban areas, gangs dealing in drugs and alcohol are also known to evade security measures to trade their wares on school premises. These occurrences are likely to contribute to the impression amongst learners and teachers that their school is unsafe or under threat and this may also affect relations within school. Karlsson (2002) provides an example of a school where staff was advised not to speak to parents alone in the classroom for safety reasons with high levels of distrust between different factions in the school. As Morgan (1998) describes, conflicts and disputes may have a long history and, in South Africa, these are likely also rooted in the Apartheid history and patterns of racial oppression and discrimination. Where school staff do not trust each other, their students or the community, the school will likely feel unsafe and provide a bedding ground for conflict that underpins the warzone metaphor.

Each of the four metaphors carries different goals orientations, different conceptions of how the organisation operates and relations between its participants, and different ideas about the core tasks of schooling as summarized in the table below. They provide an important lens through which to improve our understanding of differences in how teaching professionals in South African schools appropriate metaphors to make sense of and give meaning to their experiences.

3. Methodology

We implemented eight case studies of primary schools to study the extent to which the four metaphors feature in staff's descriptions of their school and how the use of metaphors varies by high/low performance of the school and professional role of staff. Case studies included interviews with staff in a purposeful sample of four high and four low performing schools in two provinces (Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal). The schools were selected to represent wide disparities in school quality and learner performance that are found amongst schools in the South African provinces of Gauteng and Kwa-Zulu Natal, demographically the two largest provinces with the former being dominantly urban and the latter characterised by a balance between urbanity and rurality.

3.1. Sampling

Four high and four low performing schools in Gauteng and Kwa Zulu Natal were selected from a dataset which included:

- the 2014 South African Annual National Assessments (ANAs⁴),
- the 2014 Schools by Settlement Type (Wilson, 2014),
- the 2017 South African Annual Snap Survey for Ordinary Schools⁵
- the 2017 South African Schools Masterlist⁶

Table 2 summarizes our sample and the number of respondents from the low and high performing schools, including their roles in the school. School staff with leadership roles (often also the principal) are also teaching but only listed by their leadership role.

3.2. Data collection and analysis

Staff in these schools were interviewed and asked to describe their school community, the parents and learners in the school, strengths and weaknesses of the school and what they considered the biggest challenges to children's learning. They were also asked to talk about the school's mission, what they considered the purpose of teaching, what high quality teaching means to them, and what they consider the most important part of their job.

The majority of interviews were conducted in English and –where needed- in participants' first language (isiZulu) and then

⁴ <http://www.education.gov.za/Curriculum/AnnualNationalAssessments/ANA/tabid/569/Default.aspx>

⁵ <http://www.education.gov.za/Programmes/EMIS.aspx>

⁶ <http://www.education.gov.za/Programmes/EMIS/EMISDownloads.aspx>

translated into English. All interviews were transcribed and –using AtlasTi- a deductive approach was used to analyse for quotes which fitted our four metaphors. Each relevant quote was coded on two dimensions: organisational feature (goal, participant, task and structure) and type of metaphor (factory, family, hospital and warzone metaphor) as outlined in Table 1. Coding was cross checked by a second researcher.

In a second round of analysis, we used an inductive approach to analyse all transcripts for other metaphors beyond these four. Quotes which did not fit within one of our four metaphors were grouped separately and given more appropriate names: (sports) team (13 interviewees in 8 schools), body (6 interviewees in 4 schools), building (2 interviewees in 2 schools) and ship (1 interviewee in 1 school). These metaphors are not included here as we were particularly interested in testing the relevance of the factory, family, hospital and warzone metaphors.

For each school a case study report was written with a summary table of type of respondent who described specific features of the school according to one of the four metaphors. A comparison of the reports allowed us to analyse whether views vary by low and high performing schools, by professional role (principal and heads of department versus teachers) and the consistency of metaphors across organisational features and professional role.

4. Findings

We present our findings by metaphor where we explain how school leaders and teachers talk about the goals, participants, tasks and structure of the school, comparing high and low performing schools where relevant. Particularly school leaders in high performing schools use metaphorical language to describe their school, whereas staff in low performing schools tend to mostly provide brief and general descriptions of their school in terms of goals, roles, tasks or structures. Appendix 1 provides a more detailed summary table.

4.1. Factory metaphor

In high performing schools, the factory metaphor features in the description of goals (3 out of 4 schools), participants (2 out of 4 schools), tasks (4 out of 4 schools) and structure (4 out of 4 schools). In low performing schools, we find references to goals and tasks in 1 out of 4 schools and structure in all 4 schools, but no relevant descriptions for participants.

Goals in *high performing schools* are for example described as ‘imparting knowledge into learners’ (principal school 5), ensuring high

Table 1
Conceptual framework of metaphors according to four aspects of school organisation.

	Goals	Participants	Tasks	Structure
Factory	Measurable outcomes: learning objectives and achievement as measured in tests	Learners are raw material’ and required to meet specific criteria Superordinate-subordinate relation between principal and teachers	Routinized processes of administration Fixed division of tasks and defined jobs Teaching as a standardized production line, converting learners into measured outputs	Bureaucracy: hierarchical and top down supervision, lines of command and control, detailed rules and regulations
Family	Ensuring each learner meets their potential, high well-being	Learners are unique children with individual potential Colleagues are brothers/sisters	Whole child development, nurturing and caring	Hierarchical/vertical or participatory/horizontal decision-making, depending on type of family: Patriarchal family: parental rule, dependency, fortitude, courage, heroism, favoured by narcissistic self-admiration OR Matriarchal family: love, optimism, trust, compassion, nurturing and tolerance for diversity
Hospital	Public good (learners’ self-fulfilment, meaningful participation in society, access to higher education and the labour market)	Learners are recipients of care who are ‘diagnosed’ to receive the appropriate instruction by skilled professionals and need to follow the instructions of teachers	Teachers practice their art, know best how teaching tasks should be performed, use of assessment data for personalized instruction	Autonomy of the individual practitioner and the supportive functions of the organization, teachers control their own work, work collaboratively to plan and review their work
Warzone	Winning political arguments over opposing values, securing resources	School staff view each other and parents as enemies. Teachers are School leaders and teachers are generals of an army of (respectively) staff and learners who need to be disciplined.	Drill and practice in teaching and subjugation of learners, staff and parents. High level of conflict, fighting in classrooms, strike action, corporal punishment for discipline and enforcement, putting protection in place, expelling disruptive students, dealing with complaints.	Rival groups and coalitions, built into organisational structures, roles, attitudes and stereotypes Confrontation and intimidation, command and control and motivation through fear.

Table 2
Case study sample.

High performing N = 41 Staff profile	Interview sample	Low performing N = 39 Staff profile	Interview sample
School 1 (Gauteng) 13 Male 40 Female All white staff with an average of 8 years in the school	1 Principal 1 Deputy Head 3 Head of department 2 SGB members* 2 Teachers	School 3 (Gauteng) 3 Male 10 Female All black African staff with an average of 13 years in the school	1 Principal 2 Head of department 2 SGB members 2 Teacher union representative 3 Teachers
School 2 (Gauteng) 8 Male 15 Female All white staff with an average of 8 years in the school	1 Principal 1 Deputy Head 1 Head of department 2 SGB members 1 Teacher union representative 4 Teachers	School 4 (Gauteng) 9 Male 31 Female All black African staff with an average of 8 years in the school	1 Principal 3 Head of department 2 SGB members 1 Teacher union representative 4 Teachers
School 5 (KZN) 1 Male 23 Female Mixed -mostly white- staff: 1 black African 1 Coloured, 9 Indian/Asian, 13 White with an average of 6 years in the school	1 Principal 3 Head of department 2 SGB members 1 Teacher union representative 2 Teachers	School 7 (KZN) 3 Male 13 Female All black African staff with an average of 6 years in the school	1 Deputy Head 1 Head of department 1 SGB members 2 Teacher union representative 4 Teachers
School 6 (KZN) Gender background not recorded Mixed -mostly white- staff: 3 black African, 2 Indian/Asian, 24 white with an average of 6 years in the school	1 Principal 3 Head of department 2 SGB members 6 Teachers	School 8 (KZN) 5 Male 9 Female All black African staff with an average of 11 years in the school	1 Principal 2 Head of department 1 SGB members 1 Teacher union representative 4 Teachers

* SGB: school governing body is a statutory body of parents, educators, non-teaching staff and learners (from Grade 8 or higher) with specific duties and responsibilities (e.g. to set language and school fee policy).

results in the annual national assessments (principal school 1) and meeting departments standards (SGB member school 6). These goals are reflected in the description of tasks as ensuring curriculum coverage (HOD school 2, principal school 6), and following a prescribed schedule of worksheets where teachers sometimes have to do 'catch up work' because they have to be 'on a certain time on a certain place' (principal school 1).

The structure that would support and reinforce the high level of standardization is informed by external requirements of the department of education which expects regular checks by the principal and heads of department of teachers' implementation of the standardized curriculum which are subsequently monitored by external subject advisors from the district.

In high performing schools, references for school goals and tasks that fit the factory metaphor are particularly made by school leaders, while the factory metaphor only features in a description of a teacher in school 2 of learners which have to meet a standard (set by the department), and in teachers in school 1 and 6 who talk about formal lines of (hierarchical) decision-making in promotion, selection and school accountability which includes the checking of teachers' work and 'copious assessments and paperwork' (teacher school 6).

In *low performing schools*, school leaders talk about the goals of the school as 'impacting knowledge and getting the desired results' (HOD school 4), and 'producing doctors and producing a number of people' (principal school 8). Their descriptions of the school structure that fit the factory metaphor are particularly about checking the implementation of lesson plans and checking learners' work books (HOD school 3), requiring teachers to 'be able to answer questions about subject matter and why they haven't implemented the annual teaching plans (HOD school 4) and the need to control teachers because they tend to be absent or are 'just sitting in the classroom with their cell phones' (SGB member school 7). The principal in school 8 explains the need for these controls by referring to district circuit managers who comes in to 'check the time book' and whether all teachers are in the school and accounted for. School leaders in low performing schools do not use the factory metaphor to describe the participants and tasks of the school organization. The latter (tasks) do feature in how teachers in school 4 and 8 talk about teaching as 'an industry to be in', and teaching as 'a business where you need to do the right things'.

External requirements around curriculum implementation and the need for school leaders to check this regularly is an important condition for the use of the factory metaphor in both high and low performing schools. However, in high performing schools the standards and standardization of teaching is more often discussed as a minimum goal, or something that needs to be balanced with more personalized instruction and set of activities. School leaders in our high performing schools (HOD school 1; SGB member school 2 and 6) for example talk about developing, nurturing and caring for the whole child as additional goals and tasks which are implemented in addition to, or integrated into the standards set by the department. The HOD in school 1 says:

'Sometimes they (learners in grade 1) are shutting down and saying 'too much information now' because the syllabus is so compact. (...) it's pressure, pressure... (...) those fun things sometimes are left behind so I tell the teachers, 'just relax' and do something fun. (...) so that they (learners) can just experience that school isn't just only this achievement-driven thing'.

A member of the SGB in school 2 also explains that academic achievement comes first and learners need to go through the system to

become 'ready', before there is time or funding for sports and culture. The latter however is explicitly offered to learners as extra-curricular activities and for which the school is renowned for.

Furthermore, an SGB member in school 6 explains that

But I think that within the structure of our syllabus and CAPS and everything that the school has to do in terms of the department requirements, we look at that as our minimum standard. And then we have extension opportunities for learners. We go above and beyond.

In low performing schools, the hierarchical control, standardization and frequent checks are particularly discussed from a position of distrust between school leaders and teachers and something that needs to be done to ensure that people do their work, rather than as a way to efficiently organize the school. In low performing schools, the factory metaphor is more often used in reference to the difficulty in implementing the standardized curriculum in large multigrade classrooms where teachers are struggling to keep and are preoccupied with covering all the required activities and assessments.

4.2. Family metaphor

The family metaphor is used by high performing schools to describe goals (4 out of 4 schools), participants (3 out of 4 schools), tasks (3 out of 4 schools) and structure (1 out of 4 schools), while staff in low performing schools use the metaphor when describing goals (2 out of 4 schools), participants and tasks (3 out of 4 schools), with no relevant references for school structure.

School leaders in *high performing schools* talk about the goals of the school as 'to give every child the opportunity to explore himself to a better level' (deputy principal school 1), providing an opportunity to grow (principal school 2, HOD school 5), and 'doing what's right for the children' (principal school 6). Teachers in high performing schools similarly use the family metaphor to talk about the goals of teaching (e.g. taking care of the whole being of a child; teacher school 6), but they also use the family metaphor to describe participants and structure. A teacher in school 5 for example refers to herself as the learners' 'mom away from home', while a teacher in school 6 refers to the school as a 'loving home environment for the learners and ourselves'.

In low performing schools, the family metaphor features in both school leaders' and teachers' description of the school goals and participants. They - similarly to high performing schools- talk about the need to 'raise the child' (principal school), 'growing the child to be responsible human beings in the future' (teacher school 7), and 'to give love to the child and act as a role model' (teacher school 8). Both principals and school leaders make explicit reference to parental expectations and the high level of poverty in the community when explaining these goals. The principal in school 4 for example says that parents entrust the school with the welfare of their children, while a teacher in school 8 says that she needs to be both a parent and a mother to learners as they often come to school undressed and unfed. Parental expectations also feature in how the principal in school 4 describes his role: parents see him as the family head and go to point for complaints.

In school 7, a teacher expresses more dysfunctional relations when referring to her employer as an oppressive father from whom teachers need to be protected (by the union), while also referencing the ability for parents to hit their child when aiming to discipline it when arguing for the use of corporal punishment of learners.

The family metaphor seems to be most relevant to describing the school goals, participants and relations in the school where the level of deprivation and level of neglect in staff's own experiences of family life particularly feature in descriptions of staff in low performing schools.

4.3. Hospital

In high performing schools, the hospital metaphor features in descriptions of the school goals (1 out of 4 schools), participants (4 out of 4 schools), tasks (2 out of 4 schools), and structure (4 out of 4 schools). We find little references in low performing schools: there are no hospital references in descriptions of the school goals and tasks and only some references in descriptions of participants (1 out of 4 schools) and structure (2 out of 4 schools).

In high performing schools, school leaders talk about participants, tasks and structure in metaphors that fit a hospital. A HOD in school 5 for example refers to school staff as doctors whose opinion needs to be trusted (by parents). Similar expressions of the professional role of staff are made by the deputy principal in school 6 when saying that parents need to respect boundaries and sometimes 'need to be spoken to' when explaining decisions of the management team. Teachers are viewed as having a high level of expertise and experience and who can be trusted and relied upon (principal and HOD school 6). These views also feature in descriptions of the tasks and structure of the school, such as where the HOD of school 1 explains that teaching needs to be stimulating for learners but teachers decide on how to stimulate learning. The decision-making structure in the school allows them to work collaboratively in groups to discuss learner outcomes (HODs in school 1 and 2), where they are trusted to have the capacity to do the work (principal school 5) and ensure that they collectively bring every staff member up to the high standard of the school (SGB member school 6). This collaborative structure seems to function within the hierarchical standardized model that we described under the factory metaphor. The SGB member of school 6 for example explains:

So I would say that our basic level of expectation from everybody that's involved at the school is at a high standard. And the educators are evaluated based on those standards. And the whole team ethos is to bring colleagues up to the standard who are perhaps are struggling and need some help. And that happens within the grades so the grades have their head and they have their meetings and they make sure they work together as a team to bring everybody up to those standards.'

Teachers in high performing schools also use the hospital metaphor to talk about participants and the structure of the school, but they also reference learners (in addition to parents) when talking about their role as professionals who need to be obeyed and whose guidance needs to be followed. A teacher in school 6 also expresses frustration with the hierarchical control instigated by external

requirements and ‘the need to get on with the job and not being constantly checked upon’.

In *low performing schools*, the hospital metaphor particularly features in a HOD (school 3) and SGB member (school 4) expression of the need for collaboration and teamwork between teachers, but these views do not represent the actual situation of high conflict in the school. One teacher in school 8 describes her role as ‘a nurse’ who needs to care for children given the high level of deprivation of the community where teachers have to be ‘everything’ to learners.

The variation in the use of the hospital metaphor in high and low performing schools seems to be related to the differences in parental involvement and expectations and the professional agency and capacity of teachers. The quotes from staff in high performing schools indicate that teachers are well equipped to teach their learners but have to negotiate their autonomy with demanding parents.

4.4. Warzone

In high performing schools, the warzone particularly features where participants talk about conflict in the school but –apart from school 2- these do not seem to be ingrained into school life as much as in low performing schools. The metaphor only features in references to participants (2 out of 4 schools), tasks (1 out of 4 schools) and structure (1 out of 4 schools), but not in the school goals. In low performing schools, the warzone metaphor features in descriptions of participants (2 out of 4 schools), tasks (1 out of 4 schools), and structure (2 out of 4 schools) and reflect ingrained conflicts over promotion and selection and long-term dysfunctional relations in the school which seem to have a higher level of physical violence. Although conflicts will have an effect on the realization of school goals, the metaphor is not used to describe school goals as all participants seem to understand that the ultimate goal of schooling is not about fighting over positions or resources.

In *high performing schools*, the metaphor features in a description of a teacher in school 6 who talks about being ‘stabbed in the back’ by parents who ‘go over my head with a problem’, and teachers in school 2 who talk about parents who threaten them and ‘scream and shout’ to them. In school 2, a teacher and SGB member also point to different factions in the school who do not work together and where a high level of conflict and jealousy underpinned the recent promotion of a teacher to a HOD position.

In *low performing schools*, we find references to the warzone metaphor in school leaders’ descriptions of participants, tasks and structure. The principal in school 4 for example talks about the community being ‘infiltrated by foreign nationals’, where ‘everyone is fending for themselves and the community has not learned to work together or take responsibility for their children; parents are frequently obstructing school life by protesting on the streets and preventing teachers from coming into school and by active violence. Conflict in school 7 over vacancies for HOD positions has led to the removal of one teacher from the school with a position that cannot be filled as she is not formally fired (deputy principal). Teacher unions seem to play an important role in conflicts in the school; the deputy principal in school 7 talks about how the union is not acting in the interest of education more widely, but only represents individuals who are ‘in office or in a position’. The HOD in school 8 talks about the need for union membership to protect him/her from the department of education who is ‘not on their side’, particularly when staff want to be promoted.

Teachers in school 3 and 7 similarly talk about the need for union protection when talking about participants and school structure, while a teacher in school 7 also refers to violent parents who come into the school ‘furious and blazing’ when their child has been suspended for disruptive behaviour. In school 7, the union representative refers to structural practices of bribery over positions, strive, fighting and backstabbing in the school. The warzone metaphor features in a teacher’s description of school task and the need to physically discipline learners:

‘And children, they insult each other and they insult their parents. Our government doesn’t allow us to do whatever we want to do about it. Something like that. Understand? That one (to discipline learners) is the best. They don’t (allow us)...we are not going to kill them, just to be threatened by the stick, so to turn them right.’ (school 3, grade 3 teacher)

5. Conclusion and discussion

This paper reported findings from case studies in four high and four low performing schools which looked at the metaphors primary school staff in South Africa use to describe their school organisation and the extent to which these fit the images of a family, factory, hospital and warzone. We also analysed how use of metaphor varies between teachers and participants with leadership roles in the school. While an enormous body of research has analysed the metaphorical views of educators, fewer studies have focused on examining how different metaphorical images come about and are informed by people’s everyday experiences. Each metaphor carries different value orientations, different conceptions of how the organisation operates, and different ideas about the purpose of schooling. Given their influence on school staff behaviours, their decision-making and communication, metaphors provide an important lens through which to understand the wide disparity in school quality and performance in South Africa.

An important caveat to our findings is the difficulty in interpreting school staff’s descriptions of their school and assigning these to the various metaphors. As Black (1993, p.29) notes, studying metaphors means that we need to read ‘behind the words’, and ‘cannot set firm bounds to the admissible interpretations’; ambiguity is a necessary by-product of the suggestive nature of metaphor. Moreover, as emphasized by Mills et al. (2017, pp.868–869), ‘metaphorical interpretations of utterances are always context dependant, and the informational content of a metaphor is subject to multiple interpretations, suggesting that a metaphor may have a continuum of meanings’. Our family metaphor is a case in point as actual experiences of family life of both staff and children in our case studies varies from caring and nurturing to violent and oppressive. Context also plays a role where staff described their colleagues as ‘brothers and sisters’ and how these references have different connotations depending on the specific context in which these references are made. The familial metaphor for example referred to nurture and care where respondents talked about the school as a home environment in a positive manner; however references to fathers when talking about oppressive employers clearly indicated a different understanding of

the concept of family.

Context-specific variation of metaphors is also indicated in the work of Mahlios et al. (2010), Ozgenel and Gokce (2019) and Saban et al. (2007). They find that expressions differ amongst gender, educational actors (e.g. principal vs. teacher), and as a result of personal experience, previous schooling experiences, formal knowledge of staff and the school context. For example, Mahlios et al. (2010) showed that secondary teachers put more emphasis on intellectual qualities for both adult and student roles, whereas elementary teachers felt nurturing was a most desirable quality. Our work adds the level of deprivation of, and relations with the school community (as in the warzone and family metaphor) as relevant context variables, and highlights that staff use different –sometimes seemingly contradictory- metaphors to describe different aspects of school life; ‘a school’ is clearly not a single institute but rather a multifaceted institute that is experienced differently by those working in it.

The situated nature of metaphors also highlights the need to ensure the validity of metaphors through a strategy that Maasen & Weingart (2000) describe as ‘contextual stabilization’ – that is, a careful analysis of context of discourses in which metaphoric expressions arise (see also Mills et al., 2017, p.869). This implies making sense of metaphoric utterances ‘in relation to “subject positions” of the speakers from which they experience social realities’ (Mills et al., 2017, p.869). In our study we asked school staff to describe the school community and strengths and weaknesses of the school to get a better sense of how to interpret their references to family, factory, hospital and warzone and how such descriptions vary by their professional role, the socio-economic, ethnic and religious background of the school population, and the performance of the school. We have articulated relevant aspects of context in our description of the four metaphors, but in future studies these links need to be more explicitly analysed. We for example expect that the hospital metaphor will be more prevalent in the descriptions of staff in high performing schools which serve a community of parents who have expectations of their children’s education. Participants in our study expressed a need for clear boundaries to parents, similar to a doctor-patient relation. Where schools are located in deprived areas with transient communities, conflict tends to dominate in the language of school staff and they also have difficulty in expressing their views of school organisation which goes beyond the daily experience of getting by and getting through the externally prescribed standardized curriculum.

5.1. Prevalence of metaphors in high and low performing schools

In our case studies, school staff described their school mostly in terms of a family and factory, with some reference to the hospital and warzone metaphor. In both high and low performing schools, the family metaphor includes references to nurturing relations where staff aim to develop and grow the whole child and refer to the school as a ‘home away from home’, as well as more dysfunctional relations of abuse and oppression. Nurturing and care and teachers describing their role as ‘a mother away from home’ needs to be understood against the backdrop of a high level of deprivation of the student population in particularly the low performing schools. Staff who are teaching in the most deprived school communities often have to provide children with basic needs (e.g. food), where -for some of their learners-, the school is the only safe environment. The family metaphor is also used to describe relations between staff with some reference to brothers and sisters or -when referencing the school principal and ministry- as abusive fathers. Such familial metaphors suggest that staff’s own experiences are mostly of a dysfunctional family.

The factory metaphor is used by staff in both the high and low performing case study schools to describe hierarchical and clear structures for decision-making, communication and (in few cases) promotion and professional development, as well as the standardisation of the teaching and learning process. The latter is particularly informed by the highly regulated nature of schooling in South Africa where staff have to implement a national curriculum and set of assessments and where heads of department sign off on the implementation of these. In high performing schools, factory references however particularly reflect an orientation to the efficient organisation of decision-making and meeting minimum standards of curriculum coverage; staff in low performing schools however talk about the need for control from a position of distrust in staff’s willingness to perform their job, and a lack of capacity to cover the external requirements around curriculum and assessment.

References to factory in the description of standardised teaching are part of what Smith (2003 refers to as the neoliberal discourse which –in other countries- have resulted in somewhat similar perceptions of education as a business transaction. As Smith (2003, 37–38) observed, the application of business principles to most sectors of the public domain affected the field of education whereby curriculum and instruction work should be directed at producing workers for the new globalizing market system. The metaphor ‘education as production’, and ‘school as a factory’ mirrored the changes in the curriculum theory and the education policies that put emphasis on ‘product-based outcomes’.

In South Africa, the high level of standardization however is also informed by a lack of capacity of teachers and principals to provide for high quality teaching and a lack of trust in their willingness to do well. One of the circuit managers in the case studies for example talked about ‘having to give principals marching orders because they are artful dodgers and only come up with excuses’. It seems that, on the local level, the factory model is sometimes enforced in response to lack of leadership or teacher engagement and agency, or as a means to prevent conflict and ensure stability in the school environment, particularly in low performing schools. Similar findings have been reported by Henke (2008) who has argued that in places in the United States where poverty, lack of leadership, or other social issues sap a district’s energy, schools often hyperbolize the factory metaphor and frame the work of school in ways that narrow the possibilities for children and adults to thrive.

There were few references to the hospital metaphor in low performing schools, and only in four high performing schools do we find a few examples of staff talking about their school as a hospital. Staff refer to children and parents in terms of patients who come to the school to be ‘cured’ by experts. The ‘cure’ would also entail taking children out of the system for special treatment. Other examples of the hospital metaphor are of staff describing their roles and relations with other staff and parents in medical terms, such as in terms of a doctor-patient relation. In the high performing schools, the use of the hospital metaphor is related to high parental expectations and

professional staff who want to express their autonomy in the classroom, while in low performing school the hospital metaphor is particularly invoked when teachers express the need to 'be everything' to their learners, including 'a nurse'.

The warzone metaphor featured in our case study interviews with both staff from both high and low performing schools. Staff in high performing schools mostly talk about competition and cliques which create a sense of battlefield and a need to 'collect ammunition' to protect one's position. Warzone references in the low performing schools more often included severe examples of conflict and violence which seem to be a more ingrained part of school life and informed by staff's own experiences of dysfunctional families. They describe relations in the school (e.g. between principal and teachers) as highly patriarchal and authoritarian, similar to their experiences with father figures in their own life. High levels of conflict and violence also arise from poor relations with the local community (including parents) who see the school as a place for looting and to progress their own interests. These situations are played out in such a way that forms of violence and abuse are normalised invoking the type of conflict that fit our warzone metaphor.

5.2. Metaphors are not unique constructs

Our case study findings indicate that the four metaphors are not unique constructs to describe a school organisation, but rather need to be considered collectively to appreciate how staff view their school and particular characteristics of the school. Staff have different images of, for example the decision-making and communication style versus the teaching and learning culture in the school, as well as employ different metaphors when talking about relations with parents, learners and colleagues. Staff sometimes also use different metaphors when describing similar aspects of school organisation, such as when referencing a high level of standardization and following a prescribed lesson plan to meet basic external standards (factory metaphor), but ignoring these strictures at other times to play with, and care for their learners and offering extended learning opportunities for them to grow and mature (family metaphor). Where metaphors present views on aspects of the school organisation, staff explained how they try and bring these in line, such as by organizing extra-curriculum activities on top of a standardized curriculum or to allow for professional collaboration and decision-making around the planning of teaching within a hierarchical structure of decision-making about the curriculum.

These examples suggest that school staff do not have one root metaphor for all aspects of their school organisation, but rather view different aspects of the school through different lenses. This raises the question of whether the divergent views –both within one participant as across participants in one school- is problematic for the functioning of the school or should be seen as a positive condition for change. Ambrose (1998, 2000) and Godor (2019) have reflected on this question in their work on root metaphors. Root metaphors or 'worldviews' are described by Ambrose (2000, p.161) as a 'broad conceptual lens, or metaphorical filter through which an individual perceives reality'. Two root metaphors that are often cited (see also Lakoff, 1993) are 'machine' which encourages us to perceive reality as stable and fixed, search for cause-effect explanations and using a reductive analysis of the world; most closely related to our factory metaphor. An opposite world view described by Ambrose (1996, p.258) is the organistic root metaphor which portrays phenomena as dynamically evolving and holistic, encouraging an analysis of long-term developmental processes in a system and for interactions amongst the elements of subsystems. Our family and hospital metaphors both have elements that relate to an organistic view in the goals of whole-child development and how teaching processes and the school organisation would support this. Ambrose (1998) and Godor (2019) argue that where decision-makers have one root metaphor and viewpoint on the concepts with which they are working, this can lead members of an organisation to be trapped blindly into a particular philosophical framework. Having different philosophical orientations may thus enable colleagues to understand and appreciate different views to school organisation, consciously discuss multiple strategic options and make decisions about the future of the school. There may however also be advantages to adhering to a single perspective. Godor (2019) points to the greater ease in attaining professional practice within that worldview, while wider work on school improvement also points to the relevance of shared values for school improvement (Knecht, 2019). Some middle ground, where there is some convergence in worldview, but without these becoming dogmatic and constraining professional action seems to be the most advisable.

Our study shows how an analysis of metaphors can be used to understand both the experience and values of school staff and the types of models they consider legitimate to describe the goals, participants, tasks and structure of their school organization. We find that the level of deprivation of the school community, parental involvement and expectations and external requirements for school accountability and decision-making are particularly influential in how staff come to understand and talk about their school. Metaphors of school organization therefore not only tells us how staff think about their school, but also the context in which they are working and the extent to which these enable certain avenues for change. Given the relevance of context, further analysis could therefore explore teachers' experience in different schools and other work settings and how these potentially expand the richness of their metaphorical framework and their possibilities to imagine more effective ways to organize their school.

Participant consent

The data from this study is not publicly available as participant consent included full protection of their identity.

Authors confirm no conflict of interest

Ethical approval for this study was given by the university's ethical committee; the study has been performed in a way that is consistent with the ethical standards articulated in the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and its subsequent amendments and Section 12 ("Informed Consent") of the ASA's Code of Ethics. All participants gave their informed consent prior to their participation in the research and steps were taken to protect their confidentiality.

Appendix 1

Summary of case study findings.

High performing schools		Goals	Participants	Tasks	Structure
Factory Goals: 3 out of 4 schools Participants: 2 out of 4 schools Tasks: 4 out of 4 schools Structure: 4 out of 4 schools	School leader	The principal in school 1 talks about the results in the ANA exams and striving to be number 1 in the province to attract parents. In school 5, the principal explains that the goal is 'imparting knowledge into learners.' An SGB member in school 6 says that the department standards are considered to be the minimum, but the school also tries to go beyond this in offering a more extended experience (hospital).		The principal in school 1 explains how teachers are using worksheets according to a prescribed schedule where teachers sometimes have to 'do some catch up work because we have to be on a certain, time on a certain place' (principal) The HOD in school 2 explains the need to ensure 'curriculum coverage' The principal in school 6 says that teachers need to ensure to get through the curriculum but need to find a balance between going through the activities and having 'a bit of fun' (family/hospital).	The HOD in school 2 outlines how teachers' files and learners books are checked regularly. The SGB member in school 6 says staff are evaluated by the standards of the department for education. A HOD in school 6 describes how 'teachers got to be on track' and how (s)he checks their day book and all those kind of things. An SGB member in school 6 refers to the school hierarchy for teachers to discuss problems.
	Teacher		According to teachers in school 2, learners have to meet a standard		Teachers in school 1 refer to formal lines of decision-making in promotion and selection and school accountability. Teachers in school 6 describe the school structure of checking on teachers' work, referencing external requirements of getting through the school curriculum and 'copious assessments and paperwork'
Family Goals: 4 out of 4 schools Participants: 3 out of 4 schools Tasks: 3 out of 4 schools Structure: 1 out of 4 schools	School leader	The deputy principal in school 1 explains the purpose of the school as to 'give every child the opportunity to explore himself to a better level'. The principal in school 2 talks about how this is a school 'where your child has an opportunity to grow'. A HOD in school 5 describes the school goals as 'to grow the children'. The principal in school 6 says that the aim of the school is 'doing what's right for the children'.			
	Teacher	A teacher in school 6 says that the purpose of the school is 'taking care of the whole being of a child'.	Teachers in school 2 describe learners as human beings who are lifelong learners. A class teacher in school 5 refers to herself as her learners 'mom away from home'		A teacher in school 6 refers to the school as 'a loving home environment for the learners and ourselves'.
Hospital Goals: 1 out of 4 schools Participants: 4 out of 4 schools Tasks: 2 out of 4 schools	School leader		A HOD in school 5 says that the school has qualified teachers and that parents should not be questioning teachers and there should be boundaries to what they are allowed to say. S(he) refers to the school staff as doctors	A HOD in school 1 explains that the teaching needs to be stimulating and teachers need to decide on how to stimulate learning.	School leaders in school 1 and 2 talk about collaboration of teachers in teams to discuss learner outcomes and make decisions collaboratively. The principal in school 5 talks about groups in the school who need to be trusted to have

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Appendix 1 (continued)

High performing schools		Goals	Participants	Tasks	Structure
Structure: 4 out of 4 schools			<p>whose opinion needs to be trusted.</p> <p>The principal in school 6 explains how she can rely on school staff to do their work. The deputy principal in school 6 says that parents sometimes need to be spoken to when explaining decisions of the management team.</p> <p>A HOD in school 6 talks about the relevance of experience and capacity for the professionalism and professional development of school staff</p> <p>A SEN teacher in school 1 talks about parents and learners who need to obey the rules and follow her guidance; children with special needs are taken out of the system and put in special classes.</p> <p>A teacher in school 6 talks about the need to get on with the job and not being constantly checked upon.</p> <p>A teacher in school 6 a teacher compares herself to a doctor when saying that confidentiality about learners is important to her work.</p>		<p>the capacity to do their work, but where there are also clear lines of authority and decision-making in the school for people to do their work (factory).</p> <p>The SGB member in school 6 outlines how teachers work within grades under the coordination of a HOD to bring everyone up to the high school standard.</p> <p>Teachers in school 1 and 2 talk about collaboration of teachers in teams to discuss learner outcomes and make decisions collaboratively.</p>
	Teacher				
Warzone	School leader				
Goals: 0 schools out of 4 schools					
Participants: 2 out of 4 schools	Teacher				
Tasks: 1 out of 4 schools				A teacher in school 6 says she was 'stabbed in the back' when the parent went 'over my head with a problem'.	Conflict in school 2 is caused by jealousy and union involvement in the most recent HOD promotion, according to an SGB member. Poverty and neglect underpin school 2 teachers' references to parents who threaten them and who scream and shout to them.
Structure: 1 out of 4 schools					A teacher in school 2 talks about conflict which underpins staff relations with different factions who do not work together.
Low performing schools					
Factory	School leader	Goals	Participants	Tasks	Structure
Goals: 1 out of 4 schools		The HOD in school 4 HOD talks about 'the most important part, is to impact knowledge and to get that desired results'.			The HOD in school 3 monitors teachers' implementation of lesson plans and the learners' work books and checks on teachers through class visits.
Participants: 0 out of 4 schools		The principal of school 8 talks about how the school has 'produced doctors here, we have produced a number of people'.			The HOD in school 4 says teachers need 'to be able to answer questions about subject matter' and why they haven't implemented the annual teaching plans
Tasks: 1 out of 4 schools					An SGB member in school 7 explains the need to control teachers and check that they are actually teaching as they tend to be absent or just sitting in the classroom with their cell phones.
Structure: 4 out of 4 schools					The principal of school 8 the

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Appendix 1 (continued)

High performing schools	Goals	Participants	Tasks	Structure
				school says the district circuit manager controls the school and 'checks the time book' and whether all teachers are in and accounted for.
	Teacher		A teacher in school 4 refers to teaching as an industry to be in. A teacher in school 8 teacher talks about the teaching as a business where you 'need to do the right things'	
Family	School leader	The principal in school 4 says that parents expect the school to raise their child and are entrusted with the welfare of their children	The principal in school 4 indicates that it needs a village (including the school) to raise a child, and that parents view him as the family head and go to point for complaints.	
Goals: 2 out of 4 schools Participants: 3 out of 4 schools Tasks: 3 out of 4 schools Structure: 0 out of 4 schools	Teacher	A teacher in school 7 talks about the goal of the school as wanting 'to see is, our children are growing now, is to teach and build them to be responsible human beings in future'. Teacher in school 8 talk about the high level of poverty in the community with children coming to school undressed and unfed, and how this means they 'need to become a teacher and a parent and a mother' and give love to the child, and 'act as a role model'.	A teachers in school 7 refers to his/her employer as an oppressive father from whom teachers need to be protected by the union. A teacher in school 7 talks about being sold out by government for not being allowed corporal punishment anymore. (S)he makes a comparison to parents who can also hit their child to discipline.	A teacher in school 4 says that learners need to be moulded
Hospital	School leader			The HOD in school 3 and the SGB in school 4 describe the (need for the) collaboration and teamwork between teachers.
Goals: 0 out of 4 schools Participants: 1 out of 4 schools Tasks: 0 out of 4 schools Structure: 2 out of 4 schools	Teacher	A teacher in school 8 says that she is a nurse to the children as they need to be cared for, concluding that 'we are everything, yes'.		
Warzone	School leader	The deputy principal in school 7 talks about how the union represents individuals who are 'in office or in a position' but do not act in the interest of education more widely.	The principal in school 4 says the community is infiltrated by foreign nationals where everyone is fending for themselves, where parents in the community haven't learned to work together or take responsibility for their children.	The deputy principal in school 7 explains how conflict over vacancies for leadership positions has led to one teacher in an acting HOD position being removed from the school. A HOD in school 8 explains the need for union memberships to be protected from the department who is not on their side. This is particularly relevant when staff wants to be promoted.
Goals: 0 out of 4 schools Participants: 2 out of 4 schools Tasks: 1 out of 4 schools Structure: 2 out of 4 schools	Teacher		The union is needed to protect teachers from management and government, according to a teacher in school 3 and 7.	A teacher in school 3 says (s)he would not kill learners, but would want to use a stick to threaten

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Appendix 1 (continued)

High performing schools	Goals	Participants	Tasks	Structure
		A teacher in school 7 talks about parents who come in to the classroom 'furious and blazing' when their child has been suspended for disruptive behaviour.	learners and discipline them and protect her/himself.	each other; they are like 'two houses and you don't eat bread in someone else's house'. The union representative in school 7 describes practices of bribery over positions and resulting strive, fighting and backstabbing

No materials from other sources are included.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Appendix 1

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