

**CONCEPTIONS OF TEACHER COMMITMENT: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF  
PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN TOWNSHIP SCHOOLS**

**BY**

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**DECLARATION - PLAGIARISM**

I, **PERCIVAL MANDLAKHE MAKHANYA**, declare that

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## **SUPERVISOR'S AUTHORISATION**

This thesis is submitted with/without my approval

.....

Dr. G Pillay

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis explores teachers' meanings of commitment in two township public primary schools. The purpose of exploring teacher commitment is to examine how teachers' meanings of commitment inform what they do and how they do it in the classroom. In documenting the teachers' conceptualisations of these meanings, I use re-constructed teacher stories to re-tell the teachers' experiences of a committed teacher. In reconstructing the stories of teachers' meanings of commitment, I use multiple methods of collecting data which includes artefact retrieval, collage inquiry, and unstructured interviews.

This qualitative study is located within the interpretivist paradigm and uses narrative inquiry as a methodology. The four experienced teacher participants teaching in two township primary schools were purposively selected for this study. All the four teacher participants in this study have been in the teaching profession for more than fifteen years. This study employs the teacher identity theory to understand the sources of meanings that teachers give to commitment. In this study, I use the three types of perceptual relevance: *interpretive, motivational and topical relevance* (Schutz, 1970) to explore how personal and professional experiences enable teachers to form the meanings they give to commitment as well as their behaviour in the classroom. The findings in this study reveal that teachers' meanings of commitment are varied and can also be the same.

The analysis in this study revealed that teachers are aware that their roles as teachers go beyond the book. It further includes teaching beyond the classroom, for instance, engaging the learners in extra-mural activities and providing personal and professional well-being. In dealing with complexities and challenges in the teaching profession, the teacher participants draw energy from different sources, for instance, their families, significant others and being life-long learners.

Through this study I became aware of the importance of personal lived experiences and the role played by being a life-long learner in understanding teacher commitment and in informing teacher behaviour. The use of identity theory in this study revealed that the personal informs the professional, and the personal and the professional are not fixed.

However, in this study teacher further emphasises the importance of being intellectuals. In order to produce committed and caring learners, teachers need to be seen as committed and caring teachers (modelling theory, Lake *et al.*, 2004).

In understanding teacher participants engagement with learners in the classroom, the struggles that teachers face, drive teachers to engage in personal and professional well-being of self. The personal well-being is inculcated by drawing on personal beliefs, personal relationships and personal desires. The professional well-being of self is achieved through engaging in further learning.

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

HOD - Head of Department

BEd – Bachelor of Education Honours

OBE - Outcomes-Based Education

RNCS - Revised National Curriculum Statement

NCS - National Curriculum Statement

CAPS - Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement

QLTP – Quality Learning and Teaching Programme

DoBEHET - Department of Basic Education Department of Higher Education & Training

UKZN - University of KwaZulu-Natal

DoHET - Department of Higher Education & Training

SPTD – Senior Primary Teacher’s Diploma

CPTD – Continuing Professional Teacher Development

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# CHAPTER 1

## EXPLORING TEACHER COMMITMENT

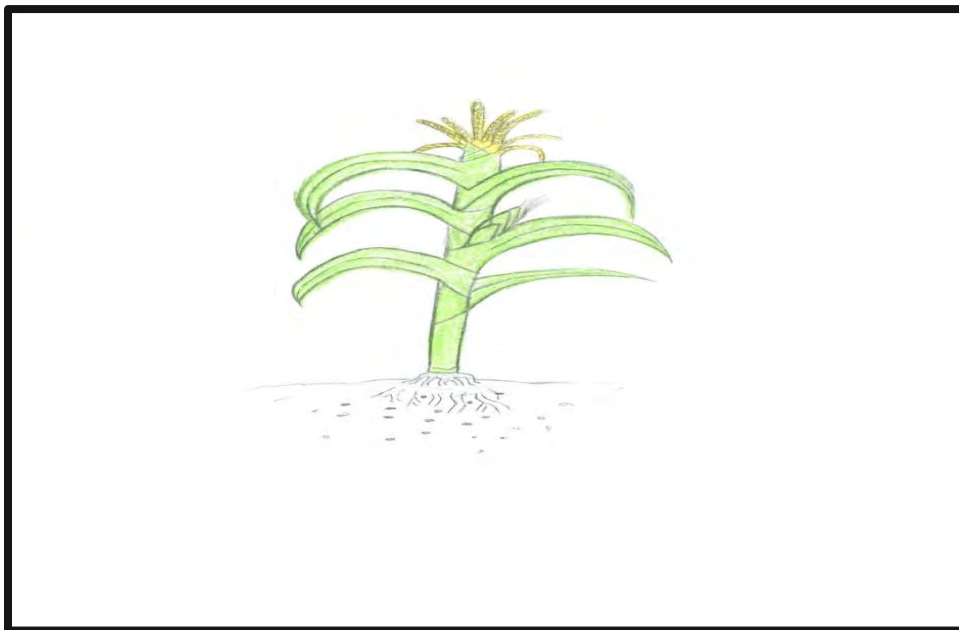
### Introduction

Every teacher in the South African school has a good or not so good story to tell from his/her personal lived experiences that eventually defines him or her as an individual. The stories that we compose as teachers reveal our past experiences, inform our present and shape our future. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) poignantly allude to the fact that people are storytelling beings who, alone and collectively, lead and live storied lives. The picture below (Figure 1.1) brings to life the memories of where and how my story began with my younger brothers and cousins. In this picture, my brothers and I were just coming from the field to plough the mealies on the farm and I was the leader of the group. The mealie plant bears fruit which can be used to make flour



**Figure 1.1: The regiment**

As a young Black African boy, I grew up in the rural area called Umbumbulu, South of Durban in KwaZulu-Natal. I started school in the early 1980s in the same area. My parents had nine kids, and together with my cousins, we lived in different rondavels on the same property. To be exact, there were five school-going boys who I grew up with at home. My dad was and he still is a staunch farmer in the area. He used to wake us up as early as 3:30am every morning to go to the field to plough the mealies. As young boys, this was not always a pleasant experience for us. We would have loved to sleep in late and wake up late. However, the relationship amongst the five of us was what kept us going. We believed in one another and wanted what was best for one another. We could accomplish any task assigned to us. Working as a team, we realised, was what made our lives as young boys easy; it also ensured the desired results for the mealie plant, ourselves and our family. This dedication and honesty that each one of us invested in the mealie farm made it possible for us to pay our school fees and provided for our supper. The mealie plant will thus always be an important part of my life.



**Figure 1.2: My special object - the mealie plant**

This drawing that I made of the mealie plant comes from my memory, reminding me of my upbringing in the rural area where I used to spend most of my days ploughing the mealie plantation. We had to ensure that the mealie plant was always protected from the very animals that assisted us to plough the field. We fed the mealie plant with enough soil and kept the weeds off for it to grow and bear good fruit. This is where I learned about the importance of working together, being dedicated and having perseverance in everything that I did. Mutual respect between myself and my brothers always characterised our relationship. Even as grown-ups, we still respect each other. In April 2006, one member of our group passed on. It was a very sad day for us all.



**Figure1.3: My high school days**



This photograph is a memory of my high school days in the rural area. After coming back from the field to plough mealies, I had to get ready for school. I travelled ten kilometres to and from school. This was my daily exercise. Growing up, I never anticipated that being a young mealie farmer would have an influence in the kind of teacher that I am today.

Upon finishing my high school in 1992, I registered for the Senior Primary Teacher's Diploma (SPTD) in a township training college, in Ladysmith, KwaZulu-Natal. I studied there from 1994 to 1996. In this college, the students and lecturers were all Africans. The relationships and communication were mutually good, characterised by respect for each other. Punctuality at tertiary level was the order of the day. This is where I learnt the talent and skill of being a teacher.

### **This study**

In April 1997, I started practising as a teacher in a rural primary school in Northern KwaZulu-Natal. In the beginning of 2005, I was transferred to a township primary school in Cato Manor, Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. Whilst practising as teacher in different schools, I never realised that my behaviour as a teacher was shaped by my lived experiences. It was after I engaged in post-graduate learning that I realised that my experiences of being a young mealie farmer contributed immensely to the respected, dedicated and hardworking individual I always strive to be.

This study is prompted by two major experiences in my life: firstly (personal), my upbringing as an African, black male growing up in a rural area, on the South of Durban in KwaZulu-Natal, and secondly, (professional), my experiences of registering for the Bachelor of Honours Degree (BEd), offered in the School of Education, at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

The passion and commitment that I have in everything that I do, is as a result of my upbringing. As a practising teacher, I find my experiences of being a young mealie farmer relevant to what I do in the classroom. This is because our learners need to be protected and cared for, just like the mealie plant. Firestone and Pennel, (1993) cited in Choi and Tang (2011, p. 67), define commitment as a “psychological bond or identification or an individual with an object that takes special meaning or importance”. As a young farmer, I identified the mealie plant as an object that had a special meaning in my life. There was always interdependence; we relied on the mealie plant for food and school fees, and the mealie plant also needed us for nurturing, protection and

growth. As a practising teacher now, I identify the learners as the individuals who take on a special meaning. The relationship that exists between myself as a teacher and learners is also a two-way one. The child, like the mealie plant, needs nurturing and protection for growth.

### **Personal motivation**

Post-1994, I worked as a primary school teacher in three different rural and township schools. Currently, I teach in a township called Durbanville, in the Pinetown District, Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. Durbanville is a township and children who grow up here, live a different life from my life as a young boy. In the township, schools are associated with debatable standards of education, lack of resources, lack of parental involvement and poverty. Our school is no exception. The high unemployment rate and the scourge of HIV and AIDS are major influences on effective teaching and learning. Pithouse, Mitchell and Masinga (2009) observe that teachers' work in the era of HIV & AIDS requires teachers who are audacious enough to deal with learners' problems and remain life-long learners in order to be relevant to their profession and to be able to meet learners' changing needs. The kind of experiences that teachers face daily can be observed from Masinga (2013) in a township school study, where a Grade Six learner laments his condition as an orphan.

*I do not know what a mother or a father is. My life has always been in a home for children. I believe in GOD, so I know that one day I will have a mother. Every day I pray that GOD keeps me alive so that I will see that day. That is all I pray for every morning, as I thank GOD for each day, I pray that my sickness does not take me while I still have so much to know. I do not feel sorry for myself, I am happy all the time because I know that there is that day and that GOD loves me. I do not have many experiences but what I dream I will experience one day (p. 5).*

This kind of experience is what teachers teaching in township schools wake up to almost every day. I am curious about other teachers who, like me, work in township primary schools where the majority of learners come from the township. I wonder what informs their meanings of care and dedication, which they bring to their lives as teachers. What personal lived experiences do they bring that assist them to create bonds with their learners, other teachers and communities where they work?

Teaching the learners who come from less privileged societies requires more than acquiring knowledge, it requires the acquisition of emotional intelligence (Day & Gu, 2007). Emotional intelligence is an understanding of how to deal with learners emotional and personal problems. Emotional intelligence can be traced back to the biographical force (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Samuel (2008) defines biographical force as the strength that obtains energy from the personal lived experiences informed by familial teachings and schooling. The biographical force can serve as a point of reference when teachers face difficult situations, and it usually stands out when other forces are “washed out” (Samuel, 2008, p. 12).

Engaging in postgraduate education was propelled by a discomfort that I experienced as a teacher and a member of the school management team (SMT). Enrolling for the BEd Honours Degree enabled me to realise how my upbringing as a young mealie farmer shaped the kind of teacher that I am. Doing the BEd Honours Degree opened my eyes to particular personal experiences of which I was not aware. This degree enabled me relate my story as a young mealie farmer to what it means to be a teacher, which is beyond being just a ‘job’. It further made me realise that a teacher’s work requires patience, hard work, passion, love and care, in order to produce learners (a ‘crop’) who can be valuable in our communities. However, for teachers to be able to achieve these values, they need to negotiate and renegotiate their lived experiences and deepen their understanding of how it informs what they do inside and outside the classroom. It made me realise that a teacher’s understanding of commitment is informed by his or her personal lived experiences.

### **Why teacher commitment?**

Riley, Smith and Forgoine (1997) define commitment as the extent of the affirmative, emotional bond among the teacher, the learner and the institution. This means that committed teachers are emotionally attached to their learners and their schools. Therefore the learners and schools have special meanings to the committed teachers. For learners to attach special meanings in the lives of teachers, teachers need to be consistent with their philosophy of education (Fox, 1964). Oxford dictionary (2011) defines “philosophy” as a theory or attitude that guides one’s behaviour. How a teacher develops his philosophy is influenced by his/her personal upbringing and professional engagement with colleagues. Fox (1964) states that a committed teacher takes

pride in his/her work and enjoys working with learners; he/she has a strong aspiration to assist each learner develop his/her full potential.

While Rampa (2012, p. 1281) relates teacher commitment to a sense of “professional and emotional” individuality, Day (2007) adds “intellectual (head) and emotional (heart)” capabilities which lead to what he calls the passion for teaching. However, acquiring of professional, intellectual and emotional uniqueness is a process that is informed by personal and professional socialisation. I therefore use Rampa (2012) and Day (2007) as a platform to trace the meanings and the sources of these meanings to understand how the professional, emotional and intellectual shape and continue to shape teachers’ everyday practices. The two major experiences in my life (my upbringing and enrolling for the BEd Honours), made me realise that the work of teachers globally is complex, challenging and informed by different beliefs which define different directions that each individual follows (Swart, 2013). From my engagement with scholars in the field, I have come to realise that more emphasis is placed on commitment and motivation in the teaching profession (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). However, the studies reveal that teachers’ unique experiences have not been considered as a critical aspect of commitment. Future research needs to place teachers’ experiences at the forefront of study.

In teacher education also, much research literature demonstrates that knowledge of the self is a crucial element in the way teachers construe and construct the nature of their work (Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1994). Furthermore, the events and experiences in the personal lives of teachers are intimately linked to the performance of their professional roles (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009), something which societies and policies fail to understand. The studies in South Africa in particular reveal that teachers feel that their status has been undermined and the respect of the profession is dwindling (Hammet, 2007). This can be traced as far back as 1964, to Shaw’s popular saying, “*He who can does. He who cannot teaches*”, cited in Shulman (1987). This is proof enough that our profession as teachers is undermined and that this is not something new: it started a long time ago. It is also reiterated by Nosipho, a participant in the study:

*Teaching is a mother of all professions; it can make or break the country. However, some people undermine our profession because some teachers do not do their best for the learners (Nosipho, 18 March 2013).*

The question is, what meanings do teachers bring to their understanding of commitment? Furthermore, what personal lived experiences assist teachers to form their meanings? In this study, I explore those meanings that teachers bequeath to teacher commitment within a South African context, and deepen these meanings of commitment by analysing how they inform their professional practice. In seeking to understand teacher participants' understandings of commitment, I am conscious of the fact that there is no single objective truth.

### **Political imperatives driving school transformation**

Since South Africa became a democratic state in 1994, there has been increased public interest in the teaching profession. This has led to unprecedented pressure on political leaders to effect change in schools. Democracy came with a number of changes, which teachers are expected to know and implement. However, these changes fail to recognise the "teachers' understanding of self to beliefs, attitudes and actions, and thus the kinds and effects of such actions" (Day, Kington, Stobart & Sammons, 2006, p. 603).

For many years, the South African education system has been used to ensure that there was discrimination and oppression (Kallaway, 2002). However, democratisation of the education system in South Africa since 1994 has led to significant changes in our education system, in both governance and curriculum. For instance, the policy on the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (2011), and the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS, 2004) were introduced as an attempt to improve the culture of teaching and learning in schools. In both these policies, the Continuing Professional Teacher Development (CPTD) programme is at the forefront.

Governments' performance all over the world is judged by how well the schools perform (Maestry, Hendricks & Bisschoff, 2009). Day (2009, p. 147) contends that "one of the biggest challenges faced by all governments in this century is to improve commitment of teachers and school leaders". This is due to the assumption that the success of any organisation is predominantly determined by the commitment of its members (Fox, 1964), and schools as professional organisations cannot be excluded from this assumption. However, the way members of any organisation conceive of commitment can either promote or hinder the success of the organisation. Who teachers are (personal), cannot be ignored; it will always be evident in what

the teachers do and how they do it in the classroom. In my view, what most governments fail to consider is the role played by the individual teacher's unique experiences of his/her upbringing, which shape his/her behaviour in the classroom (Samuel, 2008). For most teachers at some time in their teaching careers, passion for teaching fluctuates because of, among other things, contexts and challenges (where teachers work), according to Day (2007), and changes in policy (Kunene, 2009).

The stability and the effectiveness of the education system are predominantly dependent on the commitment of its staff as well as the input provided by the government. In the light of public demands, teacher bashing and government spending on education in South Africa, teacher commitment has become the focus of our government. In order to ensure that the commitment of teachers is maintained, it was imperative that the Minister of Education in South Africa in 2008, Naledi Pandor, launched the Quality Learning and Teaching Programme (QLTP), in October of that year. This programme specifically calls upon the departmental officials, teachers, learners, parents and communities to make a commitment (pledge) to ensure that quality education is rendered in schools. The teachers' pledge is in line with the South African Council of Educators Act, 31 of 2000, Code of Professional Ethics, which advocates loyalty and respect for the profession.

The current President of the Republic of South Africa, Mr Jacob Zuma, also reiterated the significance of Quality Learning and Teaching Programme (QLTP) in parliament in Cape Town, when he stated that "Teachers should be in schools class, teaching with no neglect of duty and no abuse of pupils" (State of the Nation Address, 2009). Likewise, Riley *et al.* (1997, p. 8) assert that "the degree of teacher commitment is one of the [ingredients] of the performance and quality of school staff" [and learners].

The pressures felt by governments globally lead to more emphasis on Continuing Professional Teacher Development (CPTD). Day (1999) defines professional development as a process by which teachers examine, re-examine and broaden their commitment as 'change agents' to the just purposes of teaching, and by which they attain and widen their knowledge, skills and attitudes in the classroom. However, policies and teacher development programmes do not cater for the teacher's biographical forces (personal lived experiences), according to Jansen (2001). Samuel (2008) argues that teachers bring to the school setting a "rich store" of personal lived experiences

which are not considered when professional development programmes are implemented. The grooming that needs to happen for teachers in the system to be effective and efficient, needs to consider that no two teachers can share the same experiences, teaching, and interpretations of their meaning-making of what it means to be a teacher in the practice of teaching and learning. Professional development programmes need to cater for teachers' personal lived experiences since they are regarded as the most powerful dimension that shapes a teacher's meaning-making of what it means to be a teacher (Samuel, 2008).

Already practising teachers need to engage in constructing and re-constructing their stories, hence through such an exercise, teachers can begin to understand the teaching programmes better (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009), as well as understand themselves better (Rodgers & Scott, 2008).

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is intended to examine what meanings teachers give to commitment and how those meanings inform their practice. In understanding those personal and professional meanings, the focus is on exploring the sources of those meanings. Hence, I examine those meanings from a teacher identity perspective. Day *et al.* (2006, p. 607) explain that identity is “an ongoing process that involves the interpretation and reinterpretation of our experiences as we live through them... [that are also] continually being informed, formed, and reformed as individuals over time and through interaction with others”. From the teacher identity perspective, there are personal meanings that a teacher brings in forming his/her professional identity (Day *et al.*, 2006). Teacher identity is informed by personal upbringing, professional context and social interaction (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Understanding teacher's meanings of commitment from a teacher identity perspective, will enable me to make explicit how the personal and professional aligns to make up what it means to be a teacher in a township school. The personal and the professional define who and what teachers are.

**The two key research questions underpinning the study are:**

#### **Critical Question 1**

*What are primary school teachers' meanings of commitment in township primary schools?*

The teacher participants relate stories of their daily lived experiences of what and how commitment is conceived of by them. This question focuses on the meanings since it was not intended to examine whether commitment existed in schools but rather to explore teachers' personally and professionally constructed meaning of commitment. The participants were expected to narrate the attributes which in their views demonstrate a committed teacher.

### **Critical Question 2**

*How do teachers' meanings of commitment inform their professional practice in township primary schools?*

This question wants to make explicit what and how teachers' understandings of commitment inform their practice. The teachers' responses to the above question assisted me to reflect on what meanings shape professional practice. The link between teacher commitment and relationship to learners, colleagues, parents, subject, and their personal and professional development, is explored.

### **The Context of the study**

The focus of this study is to explore teachers' meanings of commitment in two township primary schools in Durbanville, Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. This study was conducted with teachers who have taught for more than twenty years. They have lived and taught in township schools for more than ten years. Our school is situated in a township surrounded by low cost houses and shacks. As a result, most of our learners come from low cost houses and shacks. A shack is a roughly built hut mainly built for temporary purposes. The learners from the middle class families migrate to former model C schools; as a result, in our school most learners come from poor families. Model C schools were a system of limited school desegregation which gave White schools the power to decide their own admission policies which were converted to semi-private schools status (Carter, 2012). Township life and schooling under apartheid in South Africa under the stewardship of the National Party between 1948-1990 had manifested inequality and oppression towards other races (Pithouse, 2005).



## **Methodological approach**

The methodological approach elected for this study is narrative inquiry, which is defined by Clandinin (2006, p. 45) as the “study of experience as story [and] is the first and foremost...way of thinking about experience”. This study uses the interpretivist paradigm. Narratives encouraged the four teacher participants who work in a primary school to recall their memories concerning personal experiences and professional experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In this narrative inquiry study, I explore personal lived experiences that inform teachers’ meaning-making of commitment and how those meanings inform teachers’ professional practice. The methodological approach is discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

## **Overview of this thesis**

### **Chapter One**

The purpose of presenting an overview of this thesis is to describe its structure. In this chapter, I draw on my personal story to introduce the study, and further discuss the focus of this study. I introduce the theoretical framework (Teacher Identity Theory) in this study, the key research questions, and methodological approach informing my study.

### **Chapter Two**

In this chapter, the international and local literature on the phenomenon of teacher commitment as well as the identity theory is discussed. This chapter comprises three sections. Section A explores the international and local literature on teacher commitment. It is further divided into four themes: the role of emotions in teaching; the role of caring in teaching and the role of passion as the driving force in teaching, which focuses on the debates raised in the personal domain. Section B discusses professionalism and teacher commitment which focuses on debates raised in the professional domain. Lastly, Section C deals with the teacher identity theoretical stance that this study adopts.

### **Chapter Three**

This chapter is divided into three sections: Section A defines the narrative inquiry approach that underpins this study; Section B discusses data production and generation methods, and Section C

explores how analysis is carried out in this study. In this chapter, I argue for narrative inquiry as the research design and the methodological approach that I use. The data generation processes are explored in detail in this chapter. The issue of the research context, the choice of participants, ethical issues and the role of the researcher are further explained. In this chapter, the teacher stories foreground the data generation method in this study through long interviews and arts based methods.

#### **Chapter Four**

In Chapter Four, I present the reconstructed stories of the four teacher participants in this study. These four reconstructed storied narratives form the first part of analysis in this study. The teacher stories in this chapter were constructed from the unstructured interviews, collage inquiry and artefact inquiry. This chapter further makes available lived experiences and the meanings teachers adopted from their personal experiences to enact their lives as teachers in the South African school context.

#### **Chapter Five**

In this chapter, I present the vignettes of the four teacher participants who responded to the first critical question, “*What are primary school teachers’ meanings of commitment in township primary schools?*”, with the term vignette having been explained in Chapter Three. The four vignettes give an understanding of each individual teacher’s personal lived experiences and meanings which inform their understanding of being a committed teacher. In this chapter, the participants’ personal meanings which inform their professional stance are explored.

#### **Chapter Six**

In Chapter Six, there are three themes entitled: *What teachers do within and outside the classroom?*, *Struggles and frustrations* and lastly, *Sustaining teacher commitment*. These emerged from the storied narratives which were presented to respond to the second critical question, “*How do teachers’ meanings of commitment inform their professional practice in township primary schools?*” What became clear in this chapter is that teachers’ meanings of commitment in Chapter Five do inform what teachers do. This is evident in what they do inside and outside school as well as the sources of sustained energy that keep them going. This chapter

further made a compelling statement that how teachers carry out their daily work is informed by their personal-professional experiences.

## **Chapter Seven**

This final chapter provides concluding arguments of the study, methodological reflections, synthesis of the findings in response to the two research questions, theoretical reflections, policy imperatives and what the study highlighted. My reflections on what I have learned are further outlined in this study.

## CHAPTER TWO

### PERSPECTIVES ON TEACHER COMMITMENT

#### **Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I presented how my personal lived experiences and registering for the BEd Honours triggered my desire to do a study on teacher commitment. In this chapter, the literature on teacher commitment is explored. The purpose of the literature search in this chapter is to engage in scholarly conversation with the debates on teachers' work and specifically, teacher commitment. This chapter focuses on the current debates on the phenomenon of teacher commitment, as Day (2007) regards teacher commitment as the cornerstone for the success of any school. The studies on teacher commitment have gained global interest.

This chapter is divided into three sections. Section A explores the international and local literature on teacher commitment. It is further divided into three themes: the role of emotions in teaching; the role of caring in teaching and the role of passion as the driving force in teaching, which focuses on the debates raised in the personal domain. Section B discusses the theme professionalism and teacher commitment which focuses on debates raised in the professional domain and lastly, Section C deals with the teacher identity theoretical stance that this study adopts. Identity Theory is used as the lenses to understand the sources of knowledge that teachers bring in understanding commitment.

#### **Section A: The Personal Domain**

##### **The role of emotions in teaching**

Recent studies show that there is an increasing emphasis that is placed on the role of emotions, passion, motivation, identity, resilience and commitment in the practice of teaching (Day & Gu 2007, Akkerman & Meijer, 2011, Troman, 2008, Choi & Tang, 2011). According to these scholars, these values weigh more than subject knowledge and teaching skills. Tait (2008) regards teaching as an emotional art and Swart (2013, p. 49) sees "teaching as craft" that involves a variety of skills that should be improved continually. However, Day (2007) argues that improving the skill of teaching is a daunting task. Teaching and emotions cannot be separated in the teaching profession. Emotions in the teaching profession can affect teaching and

learning in a positive and negative way. This is due to the complexity of the teaching profession. Hence Day and Gu (2007) call on emotional intelligence, which they associate with the ability to care for the learners. Teven, (2001, p. 159) states that a “vital requisite to effective teaching and [learning] is establishing a climate of warmth, understanding and caring within the classroom”. Teachers’ work should be self-driven and influenced by emotional commitment if teachers are to provide excellent service for their learners. Day and Gu (2007, p. 427) associate “emotional commitment to an ethic of care”. Learners learn better if they do not learn under constant fear.

In agreement with May and Fray (2010), Mottet, Frymier and Beebe (2006) advocate the Emotional Response Theory which involves three categories: the teacher’s communication, learner’s emotional response and learner’s approach. The relationship between the teacher and the learner in the classroom is always about communication, whether verbal or otherwise. This theory further highlights that an emotional response of pleasure (increased liking), arousal (increased concentration), and dominance (increased consent to approach) would predict how the teacher behaves. An emotional response of displeasure (decreased liking), non-arousal (decreased concentration), and submissiveness (decreased consent to approach) would predict avoidance behaviour (Mottet *et al.*, 2006). Teven (2007) further states that positive emotional responses by teachers can lead to learners appreciating learning. The way learners relate to their teachers determine how well they will do in class (Teven, 2001). Correspondingly, May and Fray (2010, p. 15) state that “learners who are anxious, angry, or depressed do not learn properly”. People who are caught in these states do not take information efficiently or deal with it well. Fleisch (2007) in a South African study points out that learners who are raised by single parents are more likely to struggle in schools compared to learners who are raised by both parents.

However, Allender and Allender (2006) mention that teachers normally teach the way they were taught by their teachers. It is in early learning where teacher’s personal identity is shaped, influenced and continued to be negotiated and re-negotiated.

In a qualitative study conducted by Choi and Tang (2011, p. 67), findings affirm that commitment of teachers is associated with “psychological attachment to the commitment objects”. In this case, the commitment object is learners and the subject that the teachers teach in schools. Day and Gu (2007) place the investment of emotional force in the classroom as the main ingredient for teaching and learning to be effective.

In a South African context, emotional investment is imperative due to challenges brought by unemployment, HIV and AIDS (Balfour, Buthelezi & Mitchell, 2004, Masinga 2013). In this study on township schools, it is imperative to deepen the understandings of the meanings that teachers give to commitment, given the contexts of their work.

### **The role of caring in teaching**

Insenbarger and Zembyllas (2006) define caring as the teacher's ability to non-selectively ensure that educational and emotional needs of learners are upheld. They further state that caring involves three major cornerstones, namely, commitment, intimacy and passion. Hence a committed teacher is regarded as a caring teacher. The most commonly exercised caring in the South African context is pedagogical caring and welfare caring (Insenbarger & Zembyllas, 2006). Dlamini (2013) defines pedagogical caring as teachers doing their best to provide a positive learning environment for learners in the classroom even if the necessary conditions and resources are not available. James (2012) defines welfare care as caring for learners' needs outside the classroom and the ability to understand and respond to their societal needs. However, Masinga (2013) in agreement with Allender and Allender (2006), found in a township primary school study that teachers' ability to care for their learners is predominantly influenced by teachers' schooling experiences.

The caring teachers use "modeling theory" as learners observe their teachers [behaviour] and in return, model their teacher's behaviour (Lake, Jones & Dagli, 2004). They further argue that a good caring relationship between the teacher and the learner is imperative for learners to develop emotionally and intellectually. Learners also need to see their teachers caring for each other for them to develop caring qualities. It is essential that teachers model caring relationships with learners if we are to produce a caring nation. The "modeling theory" implies that caring cannot be taught in the classroom. However, it can be practised. Teachers need to show that they care, manifest it and make caring a central part of their teaching lives. I view the "modeling theory" as inherited. The teachers who practise caring may have observed it from their parents or their former teachers. It is significant that as teachers we model caring to our learners for them to model it to future generations. However, for teachers to model their caring, their knowledge of self is imperative: it informs how teachers care for their learners and their daily work (Day *et al.*,

2006). How teachers care for their learners and their work may be shaped by among other things, the teacher's interaction with personal experiences and institutional settings.

The true caring relationship between the teacher and the learner should meet the learner's needs and must be confirmed by the learner as necessary (James, 2012). In most cases, teachers become selective when it comes to caring. The kind of care that they provide is not what is affirmed by learners. The teachers' responses to learners and the kind of care they show learners do not necessarily align to learners' needs. Confirming the caring as relevant involves working with children and acknowledging their efforts to be successful (Lake *et al.*, 2004). The way learners relate to their teachers determines how well they will do in class (Teven, 2001). Caring is associated with commitment and commitment is one of the cornerstones of caring.

For teachers to exercise caring every day to their learners and colleagues is a daunting task. This is due, among other things, to the unequal nature of the caring teacher-learner relationship. The learners are unable to contribute to this caring relationship equally and this can lead to teachers feeling the emotional burden (Goldstein & Lake, 2000).

There is a strong need to strike a balance between welfare care and pedagogic care. The kind of care that teachers provide to learners is contextual. However, focusing more on either welfare care or pedagogic care can be disastrous as both these kinds of care are important in the classroom. Teachers who teach learners who come from poor backgrounds are more likely to exercise welfare care, and teachers who teach in affluent areas are more likely to practise pedagogic care (Hattie, 2003). In the South African context, the teachers mainly exercises welfare care (Balfour *et al.*, 2004). The two types of care (welfare care and pedagogic care) are important in my study since the learners in township schools face societal-challenges. Over and above societal challenges, the learners also need to be taught (pedagogic care).

### ***The caring teacher as a credible resource***

Teven (2007) regards a caring teacher as a competent and credible resource. Credible is defined in the Oxford Dictionary (2002) as something "that can be believed and trusted, that can be accepted because it seems possible that it could be successful". A teacher as a credible resource fully understands what needs to be taught (knowledge of the subject) as well as how to teach it pedagogic care (Dlamini, 2013). In a country like South Africa, where we still find teachers who

get imprisoned for teaching without credible qualifications, it is essential that teachers become credible resources. Samuel (2008) states that a proficient and caring teacher makes the most precious resource to enhance the quality and depth in education. Hattie (2003) further maintains that teachers can have a positive effect in the classroom but he argues that teachers must have an exceptional effect in the classroom in order to be regarded as credible resources. Teven (2007) maintains that learners perceive their teachers as credible resources when they show respect and interact with learners as individuals and confess to learners that they care about them.

In this study, the understanding of teacher caring as a credible resource is imperative, hence it focuses on knowledge of self and how the knowledge of self is used in the classroom. Teacher's knowledge of self is central (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009); this assertion is discussed in Chapter Five and how this knowledge informs who they are, is further explored in Chapter Six in this study.

### **The role of passion as the driving force in teaching**

Day (2007) defines passion as the driving force which is associated with powerful feelings of emotions. These feelings of emotions are what teachers give to a particular object (learners) (Choi & Tang, 2011). Rampa (2012, p. 1281) relates commitment to teachers' sense of professional and emotional identity. This combination of the "emotional and intellectual" capabilities leads to passion for teaching (Day, 2007). Passion in teaching is as important as vision for any human being. Teachers without passion get frustrated in the teaching profession (Rampa, 2012), and the same can be said about teachers who are without vision in their classrooms: they do not succeed (Shulman & Shulman, 2004). Therefore, passion (heart) and vision (head) can be regarded as the driving force in the teaching profession and in life generally. Every visionary teacher needs to have a vision of a particular learner that he/she wants to produce at the end of the child's schooling. (Shulman & Shulman, 2004, p. 261) maintain that a vision needs to be well-spoken and formulated:

A highly developed and articulated vision serves as a goal towards which Teacher Development is directed as well as a standard against which one's own and others' thoughts and actions are evaluated.



If teachers show passion which can be explained as their behaviour and attitudes and commitment to their work, the learners are more likely to achieve good results (Day, 2007). Passion like vision need to be guided, nurtured, sustained and deepened; one way of doing this is by becoming life-long learners (Day, 2007; Rampa, 2012) and involving themselves in communities of practice (Wenger, 2008). Passion leads to resilience: if you are passionate, it is not easy to get derailed from your vision (Day, 2007). Furthermore, Day (2007 & 2009); Troman (2008), and Fox (1964) maintain that coping, satisfaction, good health and support also contribute to teachers' ability to sustain their passion in the teaching profession.

The teaching profession is challenging work. However, a teacher with passion is always able to bounce back or show resilience (Day, 2007). Gu and Day (2007) define resilience as the knack to carry on, to bounce back, and to gain strength in adverse circumstances. They further associate resilience to a sense of enthusiasm to teach which is imperative for ensuring that learners achieve good results. Passion and resilience are located within the personal domain and the psychological is located within the psyche of the individual self. The issue of resilience is measured by the interaction between the internal drive of a teacher and the external contexts in which a teacher works (Gu & Day, 2007). This is what Samuel (2008, p. 12) regards as “forces of biography” (energy that is drawn from the personal lived experiences) and the “contextual forces” (energy that is drawn from the environment in which teachers work). Rampa (2012, p.1) states that “one’s passion for teaching makes a contribution to understanding and improving the teaching profession and brings new insight into the work of and lives of teachers”.

In this study, I explore to what effect teachers use their hearts (passion) and head (vision), and how passion and vision sustain them (which is why teaching is regarded as challenging work). The inner qualities that inform the teacher’s attitudes and behaviour inside and outside the classroom are important in this study.

## **Section B: The Professional Domain**

### **Professionalism and teacher commitment**

Delong (2009) alludes to the fact that the main form of professionalism is a continuous, self-driven quest for development and brilliance. Likewise, others (Day *et al.* 2005) maintain that there is a perception that commitment is associated with professionalism. The benefits of this

professional engagement enhance learners' learning and personal growth. Erik, Peter, Frans, Thea and Femke (2011) further reiterate that committed teachers desire to be kept abreast of new developments and they also have a need to engage in professional learning activities, for example, developmental training. The main goal of professional development is to effect change in teachers' attitudes and beliefs which in turn informs classroom practice (Fraser, Kennedy, Reid & McKinney, 2007). Steyn and van Niekerk, (2002, p. 250) define "teacher developmental training as the participation of teachers or educational leaders in developing opportunities in order to be better equipped as teachers".

Evans (2002) maintains that teacher development is imperative since it can improve the standing of the teaching profession and enhance teacher knowledge and improve their practice. Life-long learning is regarded by most scholars as the relevant means of engaging in professional development.

Vilakazi (2013) alludes to the fact that teachers who engage in life-long learning contribute not only to their schools but also to their self-development. Life-long learning improves on the knowledge and skills that teachers acquire from initial teacher education and from their past experiences (Allender & Allender, 2006). A teacher who is engaged in life-long learning shows change in his/her "attitudes, beliefs, values, skills and knowledge" (Vilakazi, 2013, p. 3). However, Mothilal (2011) stresses that for these changes to be effective, teacher learning should be transformative; this will be evidently displayed in the teaching activities and methods that they employ in their classrooms.

### **Teacher learning and teacher commitment**

Learning in the teaching profession is life-long (infinite) but it follows a non-linear process that requires vigorous movement from learner to teacher (learning to be a teacher), to being a teacher of learners or a qualified teacher of learners (Swart, 2013, p. 22).

Day (1999, p. 4) describes the role of being a life-long learner:

...as a process by which, [the teacher] alone and with others review and extend their commitment as change agents to the moral purpose of teaching, and by which they acquire and develop critically the knowledge, skills planning and

practice. The teachers who care about themselves allow themselves to be more conscious of learners who come from diverse backgrounds.

This is a necessity in a South African context where learners face an array of societal problems such as the spread of HIV & AIDS, rising unemployment and continued child abuse (Dlamini, 2013). In a study conducted in township school, Dlamini (2013) further states that teachers need to equip themselves by being life-long learners in order to manage teaching in emotionally draining conditions. In this study, the need to engage in life-long learning was strengthened by all four teacher participants' ability to further their studies after completing their initial qualifications. The teachers were driven by the need to upgrade themselves when they decided to study further. This is in accordance with National Policy Framework for Teacher Educational Development in South Africa (2007), where it states that teacher development should be self-driven by the teachers' need to identify key areas in which they need to grow professionally.

Shulman and Shulman (2004, p. 259) state that “an accomplished teacher is a member of a professional community who is ready, willing, and able to teach and to learn from his or her teaching experiences” and colleagues. Shulman and Shulman (2004) further propose five ingredients to professional development: being ready (possessing a vision); being willing (having impetus to teach); being able (being able to know and being able ‘to do’); being reflective (being able to learn from experience) and being communal or being a member of a professional community. These five dimensions from Shulman and Shulman (2004) emphasise the facet of personal/professional development.

The scholarly conversation in this chapter points to the importance of the role of emotions, caring, passion and professionalism in the teaching of learners. In exercising these values (caring, passion and professionalism), knowing of one's self is the determining factor and it further assists the teacher to eliminate external influences which can have an influence in the way teachers teach their learners (Rabin, 2013). This is in agreement with the findings in a qualitative study conducted in South Africa by Moloi, Dzvimbo, Potgieter, Wolhuter and Van der Walt (2010), on “What may contribute to school success”. Here high school learners were participants and the findings reveal, among other things, that teacher motivation, discipline, care and trust are the main contributing factors to teacher commitment.

The literature in this study suggests that teacher commitment can be influenced by personal and professional lived experiences. These two experiences (personal and professional) are addressed under the four themes in this chapter: the role of emotions in teaching; the role of caring in teaching, the role of passion as the driving force in teaching (personal), and professionalism and teacher commitment (professional). The four themes address personal and professional in line with the teacher identity theory framework which is used to deepen the understanding of the sources of meanings that teachers give to commitment (personal) and how the meanings inform the practice (professional). However, the literature in this study point to the personal dimension as the primary contributor to teacher commitment.

In this chapter, I presented a review of literature on teacher commitment which assisted in deepening the understanding of how the personal and the professional lived experiences inform practice. The next section explores the teacher identity theory as the theoretical lens that I use to understand sources of meanings that teachers bring to their meanings and practices of commitment.

### **Section C: Theoretical framework (Teacher Identity Theory)**

The Teacher Identity Theory is used as a theoretical lens to understand how the personal and the professional meanings inform teachers' understandings of commitment. In this study, I use teacher Identity Theory by Beauchamp and Thomas (2009), which reveals that teachers' identity is "dynamic [and] shifts over time influenced by a range of factors both internal to the individual, such as emotions..., and external to the individual, such as life experiences" (p. 177). Samuel (2008) defines teacher identity as the crystal ball which is shaped by many factors, for instance, race, language, familial backgrounds, socially constructed meanings and professionally constructed meanings. The teacher participants' meanings of commitment in this study are explored in terms of their personal and professional meanings and experiences.

In understanding teacher identity theory I draw on Palmer's (1998) assertion that:

When I do not know myself, I cannot know who my students are. I will see them through a glass darkly, in the shadows of my unexamined life and when I cannot see them clearly, I cannot teach them well. When I do not know myself, I cannot know my subject not at the deepest of embodied, personal meaning. I will know it only abstractly, from a

distance, a congeries of concepts as far removed from the world as I am from personal truth (p. 2).

This assumption positions the knowledge of self as central in teacher commitment, to knowing our learners and our subject (Rabin, 2013). However, this knowledge of self originates in social settings and is shaped and reshaped through interaction with other people, for instance, those at home and our former teachers (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). The individual teacher then creates and recreates his/her meanings and experiences in constructing knowledge of self (Richie & Wilson, 2000). In trying to synthesise the meanings of teacher identity, Richie and Wilson (2000), and Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) come to the understanding that teacher identity is an ongoing process which involves the “interpretation and reinterpretation of experiences” (Sutherland, Howard & Markauskaite, 2010, p. 456).

Scholars like Beauchamp and Thomas (2009), and Sutherland *et al.* (2010) acknowledge that there is a lack of definition of the term *teacher identity*. However, these scholars agree that there are several conceptions of teacher identity. The teacher’s meaning-making of his/her identity cannot be divorced from the context where teachers work. The process of identity formation is informed by the goals that the individual teacher sets for himself or herself in relation to profession. Identity formation is not coincidental; the teacher plays a central role in forming his/her identity (Sutherland *et al.*, 2010). Jansen (2001) and Sutherland *et al.* (2010) allude to the fact that the way teachers’ feel about themselves as professionals defines who they are and shapes what they do.

### ***Personal identity dimension***

In this study, I draw from Sutherland *et al.* (2010), Beauchamp and Thomas (2009), Jansen (2001), Day and Gu (2010), and Richie and Wilson (2000) to explore how teachers’ personal experiences are inextricable interwoven in the forming of their professional identity. The combining of personal identity and professional identity can enable teachers to create new narratives of their identity that will assist them to understand their practice better (Richie & Wilson, 2000). Furthermore, they caution that an experience cannot always be regarded as the truth but as the “representation as a result of culture, history, and language” (p. 9).

The personal is regarded as the most powerful dimension in the life of a teacher. Samuel (2008) states that it is in this dimension where the thrust for change begins, and (Fraser *et al.*, 2007) state that this thrust leads to the professional dimension which is being constructed and reconstructed. Teachers' meaning-making of self is personally constructed, shaped in interaction with others in biographical settings (Samuel, 2008), and in professional contexts (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009).

The ability of teachers to locate the sources of meanings of their identity can lead to understanding themselves better. This is due to the fact that teacher identity is fundamental to beliefs, ethics and practices that inform teachers' behaviour inside and outside their classrooms. Likewise, Day and Gu (2010, p. 33) maintain that "teaching is a matter of values". These values that teachers posit are imperative and define who they are, which eventually informs what they teach.

The personal dimension can be influenced positively or negatively by a number of factors. These factors lead to attitudes, ideals and ethics that can enhance teachers' conceptions of commitment and thus contribute to how teachers carry out their practice. The teacher in a school is a professional who belongs to a professional body. The professional identity is shaped by personally constructed knowledge to develop his/her professional beliefs which impact on his/her practice.

### ***Professional identity dimension***

The teacher identity theory is used in this study to understand and explain what and how teachers clarify, justify and define who they are and what they do in relation to learners and colleagues. The self in identity shaping is central, whether it is the self in relation to the professional or the self in relation to the context. Teachers' identity is negotiated and renegotiated relationally within the social context in which he/she finds her/himself. In the case of this study, the social refers to school and the community space it inhabits. The school culture, learner population, influences of colleagues - both positive and negative - shape and reshape teachers' identity in a school (Rodgers & Scott, 2008). Jansen (2001) alludes to the fact that teacher identity is formed and reformed within a particular context which is as a result of cultural, communal, political and historical dynamics. This also includes other teachers. The context defines the external forces of

identity construction. The contexts where teachers work certainly shape the conceptions of how teachers perceive themselves and how others in the context perceive the individual teacher (Rodgers & Scott, 2008). In a school context, there are certain norms and values, rules and regulations to which individual teachers are expected to adhere. However, pressures to adhere to these norms can deprive the individual teacher's personal meaning-making in negotiating the complexities inherent in the context.

### **Conclusion**

The next chapter explores the research design and the methodology used in the study. In this section, I presented how Identity Theory emphasises the importance of the knowledge of self in informing the professional. However, in this study, the personal dimension is regarded as the more powerful force which informs teachers' meaning-making of commitment. The teacher identity theory is relevant for this study since it articulates that teachers' meanings are shaped by their personal meanings, which in turn shape the professional. From the teacher identity perspective stance, teachers' meanings are informed by their personal experiences and professional contexts.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

#### **Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I presented the literature on teacher commitment, and argued for the theoretical framework used in this study. In this chapter, I present the rationale for choices that inform my research design. The narrative inquiry approach underpins this study. The teacher identity theory as a framework is used in this study since it focuses on the creation and recreation of meanings through stories (Richie & Wilson, 2000). The use of teacher identity theory in this study is drawn from Beauchamp and Thomas's (2009) belief that teachers' narratives express numerous identities. Their ability to narrate their stories reveals their identity, hence the stories and the identity are formed and reformed in social settings.

The focus of this study is to deepen the meanings that teachers give to commitment. The narrative inquiry approach in this study is used to allow teachers to narrate their stories which lead to the understanding of one's personal and professional experiences. The teacher identity theory is used to understand how the personal informs the professional. The data sources, for instance unstructured interviews, collage inquiry, artefact methods and pictures, enabled the participants to deepen their understanding of self. This chapter is divided into three sections. Section A deals with the research settings, Section B discusses the research plan and Section C explores how the analysis in this study is carried out.

#### **Qualitative research approach**

The qualitative research approach is used in this study, since the purpose of the study is not to test any hypothesis but to seek an in-depth understanding of teacher commitment. This is in agreement with Nieuwenhuis's (2010b, p. 51) assertion that "qualitative research attempts to collect rich descriptive data in respect of a particular phenomenon or context with the intention of developing an understanding of what is being observed or studied". Hence this study is positioned in the interpretivist research paradigm. The interpretivist paradigm enables the researcher to develop and make sense of contexts in which people live and work (Nieuwenhuis, 2010b). This study uses the interpretivist paradigm to explore the meanings that teacher



participants relate to commitment (personal or private) and how those meanings grow in terms of their practice (professional or public). The interpretivist paradigm is used to interpret teacher participants' meanings of the phenomenon commitment. In the interpretivist paradigm, the researcher co-constructs meanings in relation to lived personal and professional experiences of the teacher participants. In this study, I (the researcher) intend to make sense of and interpret the phenomenon of teacher commitment in terms of the understandings that the participants have. The meanings of commitment in this study are explored based on teachers' personal and professional selves. This is influenced by the assumption that the personal and the professional, in forming identity, are entangled.

The interpretivist paradigm is reconstructed in a dual sense (Krummheuer & Steinbring, 2000). This was utilised when I recorded and reconstructed teacher participants' personal and professional storied narratives. When reconstructing the teacher stories, the interpretivist paradigm enabled me to make meanings in relation to the personally and professionally lived experiences of the teacher participants.

### **Why narrative inquiry?**

This study uses a narrative inquiry methodology. The teacher narratives in this study are used on the premise that narrative inquiry is central in working with others (Richie & Wilson, 2000). Clandinin (2006, p. 45) defines narrative inquiry as the "study of experience as story [and] is the first and foremost...way of thinking about experience". Likewise, Lyons and LaBosky (2002, p. 14) state that "narrative reaches us in part through the imagination, helps us to imagine, to see more finely, and respond to possibilities and vicissitudes of other's lives, and engages us in deliberative, ethical considerations that make possible new [meanings]". The use of narratives in this study helped both the researcher and the participants to reflect on their experiences, and develop their knowledge and meanings of a committed teacher, which in turn informed their actions in the classroom (Bell & Gilbert, 1996). For an educational study to be of value for teachers, the researcher needs to experience the research process through the data generation and analysis of their own teaching practice (reflection), so that the research develops the researcher personally and educationally (DeLong, 2009).

Narrative inquiry encourages the participants to recall the memories concerning personal experiences, social and professional experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As a researcher, I found the experience of my story in Chapter One enabling as it helped me to better understand myself as a teacher. This experience was further witnessed when I reconstructed the teacher participants' stories: it assisted me to understand that what informs what and how the participants perform in the classroom and outside the classroom, is their personal lived experiences. My story of growing up in a rural area ploughing mealies brought back the memories that are embedded in my personal experiences which inform my teachings. This belief was further strengthened by Beauchamp and Thomas's (2009) assertion that teachers' narratives are informed by their identity and in turn, that their stories convey their identity. In narrative inquiry, the researcher and participants work collaboratively over a period of time in an environment, exploring communal *milieus* (Clandinin, 2006). This is what Jenkins *et al.*, (2009) call the we-relationship, with the participant and the researcher working together in the attainment of the objectives of the study. A narrative inquiry approach is relevant for my study since it is drawn from the "three dimensions of metaphoric space: *personal and social* (interaction); *past, present and future* (continuity) and lastly, *place* (situation)" (Clandinin, 2006, p 47). By working collaboratively with the participants, I managed to gain access and understanding of teacher participants' personal and professional experiences.

Hatch and Wisnieski (1995) affirm that we make meanings of our lives based not on fabricated stories but our lived experiences about ourselves and the meanings that we give to those stories. The meanings that we give to our stories help us reflect on and develop our philosophies, which can be evident in the way teachers carry out their work in the classroom (Bell & Gilbert, 1996). I realised by writing my own story in Chapter One, how powerful our stories are in shaping our lives as teachers. My story assisted me to reflect on myself as a teacher, which enabled me to understand myself better. This understanding of self further assisted me in forming relationships with learners and colleagues.

Each participant examined the meaning of the individually and communally made understanding of what it means to be a committed teacher. Bell and Gilbert (1996) allude to the fact that there is no "true self"; each individual teacher is shaped by "biographical forces" (Samuel, 2008), which emanate from familial teachings, personal lived experiences and their

teaching and learning experiences. By examining our stories, we see our personal values and beliefs in action, which helps us to realise how they were formed and how they impact on our teaching (Chui & Chan, 2009).

## **Section A: Research settings**

### ***Research Context***

The study is based in two South African public primary schools in Durbanville, KwaZulu-Natal. The schools are my former and my current school. About 70% of our learners in these two schools come from disadvantaged communities and low cost houses. These two schools are both no-fee paying schools. The unemployment rate in the communities where these two schools are situated, is very high. Most of the parents survive by means of social grants. In most families, the learners live with their grandparents. Those learners, who are fortunate to stay with parents, have single parents. In some cases, learners come from child-headed families, where you find a Grade Seven learner playing the role of father, mother, sister and brother to his/her siblings. This is evident in Masinga (2013) and Ndaleneni (2013), in their studies on township schools. This extract from Ndaleneni (2013) in a township school study, highlights the daily happenings in the context of this study:

*Life was so simple when she was still alive. Our mother could see through us if something was bothering us. She did everything in her power to make us feel better. My heart became broken when God took her away from us. There was no joy and happiness when my mother passed away. The house felt empty. Our father tried to fill the gap but his love was not like my mother's (Thandi, 07 September, 2012).*

### ***Selection of Participants***

The participants in this study narrated their stories (see Chapter Four). The participants, in narrating their stories, were assisted by the use of art-based methods (collage and artefact). Mitchell, Weber and Pithouse (2009) maintain that the use of art-based methods in a narrative inquiry can assist the researcher and the participants to see things in a different perspective. This was evident when I looked at the mealie plant and my pictures in Chapter One. They deepened my thinking about my personal lived experiences and how they impact on my practice. The

participants in this study come from my former and current township schools in KwaZulu-Natal, Durban. However, their choice was not based on how committed they are but rather on their experiences in the teaching profession and the fact that they are primary school teachers. Further to their experiences as primary school teachers, the issue of willingness to participate in the research process, as stated by Butler-Kisber (2005), and their accessibility and willingness to provide information were also considered. However, occasionally I found it difficult to work with teachers with whom I am familiar. At times, we used to spend more time talking about side issues which do not relate to the study.

The four experienced teacher participants included one male and three females. It was important to get the understandings of commitment of both school management team members and post level one teachers. Post level one educator means teachers who are at an entry level (both novice and experienced). The three participants were from the school management team, with one post level 1 educator. Their teaching experiences ranged from 17 years of experience to 24 years teaching experience. Two teacher participants in this study were trained in a racially segregated college which was meant for Indians only, and was opened in 1994 to all races. The other two participants were trained in colleges which were meant for Blacks only. Their ages range between forty and fifty years. In Table 2, the participants' details are shown but their real names are not used; pseudonyms have been used to ensure confidentiality.

Our meetings were conducted in English because one participant was a non-isiZulu speaking participant. Therefore we had to ensure that she was accommodated. However, the participants were allowed to use isiZulu, particularly when they wanted to emphasise certain points of their discussion. Nosipho, the participant in the study used isiZulu when she emphasised certain points in our discussions:

*I always wanted to see my learners “Ziyinto ethile emhlabeni” (becoming something big in life) because of me.*

The use of isiZulu was meant to ensure that participants were comfortable when expressing their views. Masinga (2013, p. 23) maintains that when “people have freedom of expression and choice of language to be used they tend to give more and be more expressive of their opinions through words that best make sense to them”.

In my former school, I chose two teachers, while the other two came from my current school. The first group meeting was arranged for December 2012 where we got to know one another. Luckily, the participants come from neighbouring schools; therefore, they know one another from cluster meetings and union meetings. In this group meeting, I further explained the issues of confidentiality and that their participation was voluntary. I explained to them that they needed to sign the consent letters (see Appendices 1 and 2).

**Table: 2 Particulars of participants**

<b>Pseudonyms</b>	<b>Teaching experience</b>	<b>Grades taught</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Highest qualification</b>
Khulani	20 years	4	African	Acting deputy principal	Doing Honours
Nosipho	17 years	2	African	Head of department	Honours
Reina	24 years	3	Indian	Post level one	B A degree
Zithulele	20 years	7	African	Head of department	Honours

### **Section B: Research plan (Fieldwork)**

The research plan details the strategies that are used in this study to make or compose the teacher participants' stories. When generating the data, I relied on Green's (1991) assertion that stories are found in many spheres of life, hence I used different strategies to get into all those spheres of teacher participants' lives. It is on this basis that I used unstructured interviews, artefacts inquiry and collage inquiry as my research strategies in this study. By using the different data collection strategies, I became aware that the way stories are received is predominantly determined by the methods used to tell the stories (Green, 1991). The unstructured interviews served as a research tool to get teachers to tell stories about their lived educational experiences. The interviews were recorded and transcribed immediately into text.

### ***Unstructured Interviews***

The unstructured interviews were used to access useful information about teachers' meanings of commitment in their professional practice. The unstructured interviews assisted me to capture the personal lived experiences of the participants and explored the central theme, which was teacher commitment. The participants were encouraged to talk about a topic without hinting that they give a particular answer (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Participants were therefore allowed to tell their stories of their lived experiences and this was digitally recorded in the audio format. The unstructured interviews were conducted in the venues chosen by the participants; one interview was conducted in the participant's house, another in the participant's office and the other two interviews were conducted in a public library. This was done to ensure that the participants engaged in self-disclosure and became leaders in the direction that the study undertook. People talk more when they are free (Masinga, 2013); this freedom enables the participants to see themselves as key in narrating their stories, which leads to rich data (Jenkins *et al.*, 2009). The following were some of the interview questions.

- 1) Can you explain the joys and frustrations of being in the teaching profession?
- 2) What has been your source of inspiration since you have been in the teaching profession for a long time?

### ***Collage inquiry***

In addition to the unstructured interviews, collage as an art-based method was used to help the teacher participants reminisce about their learning experiences. Butler-Kisber (2008, p. 265) defines collage as "the process of cutting and sticking found images and image fragments from popular print/magazines onto cardstock". The collage can be seen all around us, in magazines, newspapers, advertisements and in our family treasure boxes which can be used tell rich personal stories (Norris, Greg, Rorke, Goba & Mitchell, 2007). However, the focus was on pictures which in participants' views, depicted a committed teacher. I emphasised the importance of choosing pictures which related to their understanding of the question: "*What does it mean to be a primary school teacher in an urban primary school*"?

The participants were asked to compile a collage of their critical moments in their teaching careers. The process of developing guidelines, gathering and collecting pictures, identifying and choosing pictures, and lastly, making collages as expressions of their critical moments in their teaching career, were explained to teacher participants. While the participants and I were making collages, I realised that the process was similar and the results were different since we did the same exercise and yet we came to varied meanings of what it means to be a committed teacher.

The collage making gave the participants enough ammunition to “express the said and the unsaid and [handed] multiple avenues for interpretation” (Butler-Kisber, 2008, p. 268). This assisted the participants, since collage in a qualitative study can contribute to evoking and producing responses that assisted the participants to construct meanings in a concrete way (Butler-Kisber, 2008).

Reina expresses her feelings as a foundation phase teacher about using collage:

*I found collage easy to do, more enjoyable and thought-provoking. It enabled me to think more and talk more. I also use collage in my interaction with my learners.*

In my seventeen years of teaching, I had never been involved in the collage making exercise, not even in my interaction with my colleagues and learners. This is in agreement with Makhanya’s (2010) observation in a South African study that teachers’ educational backgrounds play a major role in understanding art-based methods. When the teacher participants were compiling the collage, I was also actively involved in compiling my own collage. The teacher participants then did a short presentation on the collage, where each participant presented to the group the reasons for choosing particular pictures. This method of visual inquiry was used to generate information on teachers’ experiences and meanings that led to their understandings of commitment. I enjoyed the collage making exercise; it made me connect with the participants and further enhanced the discussion. This is what Nosipho said about her experiences of teaching in a township primary school in her collage:

*It is interesting and challenging, you learn a lot from learners as well as colleagues. It is challenging because children are advanced...you need to give them more than you think. Children question more than in rural schools, you have to learn every day; each day you do research (Nosipho, collage making, December 2012).*

### *Artefact inquiry*

Artefacts help to provide tangible evidence of the realities of teaching and learning (Allender & Manke, 2004). In order for participants to reflect on their critical moments in their teaching careers, they used artefacts to relate to those moments. Each participant was required to bring along an artefact that captured critical moments in their teaching careers. Butler-Kisber, (2008) sees artefact as a means of revealing the past which leads to a reflective present, which in turn shapes the future. These three, the past, the present and the future, are interdependent in such a way that one cannot proceed without the other. In this study, the teacher participants mainly used the trophies and certificates they received from their respective schools. Artefacts can be any object, for example, certificates, letters from the principal, trophies they won or class photos that take special significance in their teaching careers. Artefacts have the ability to evoke emotional, sentimental memories of significance in teachers' lives (Varathiah, 2010). The participants were expected to explain their choices of artefacts in relation to the significance of the artefact, the people involved in the artefact and the emotions that they evoked. I found that artefact retrieval evoked good memories and a feeling of fulfilment since I used my BEd Honours degree certificate as an artefact. The four teacher participants brought artefacts which described critical moments in their teaching careers. The artefact complemented the collage and the unstructured interviews. The artefacts are used in the teacher stories.

This is what Khulani said about the artefact:

*I have many artefacts to choose from but I chose the trophy that I got in 2011. This artefact brings the feeling that I cannot even explain.*



**Table 1: Data production and collection plan align the lines**

Research Question	Method	Context	Participants	Data Sources
What are primary school teachers' meanings of commitment?	Unstructured interview, collage inquiry and artefact inquiry	Two Primary schools	Teachers	Interviews transcripts, Artefacts and transcriptions of discussion of artefacts and Collages and transcriptions of discussion of collages.
How do these meanings of commitment inform teachers' professional practice?	Unstructured interview, collage inquiry and artefact inquiry	Two Primary schools	Teachers	Interviews transcripts, Artefacts and transcriptions of discussion of artefacts and Collages and transcriptions of discussion of collages.

### **Section C: Analysing the data**

#### **Analytical framework**

In analysing the meanings and how the personal and the professional inform practice, I draw on Schutz's (1970) analytical framework, which states that meanings are informed by three types of perceptual relevance, *topical*, *interpretive* and *motivational*. The use of the three types of perceptual relevance as an analytical framework in this study is based on the meanings that an individual teacher attaches to a situation. This is integral to my representation of teachers' meanings and how the teacher perceives the situation (Schutz, 1970). However, I am conscious that meanings cannot be regarded as facts but as expression based on "culture, context, history and language" (Richie & Wilson, 2000, p. 9).

### ***Data analysis***

After completing data generation, I was anxious to start the analysis process but when I was ready to kick start it; I did not know where to start. I eventually started the data interpretation after all the data processes were completed. I first listened to audio tapes then transcribed each piece of data from the unstructured interviews, collage and artefact inquiry. The transcription process took longer than I had expected to complete. It led to the reconstruction of storied narratives which are presented in more detail in Chapter Four.

### ***Storied narratives***

Upon completion of transcribing, I engaged with the data, highlighted the emerging issues that I felt were relevant in answering the two critical questions in this study. The analysis in this study starts in Chapter Four with the teachers' storied narratives. In constructing teacher stories, I relied on *interpretive* relevance (Schutz, 1970). In the storied narratives, I selected particular pictures from the completed collage that was composed by the teachers to foreground experiences that were discussed in told stories. The composed collage has been used to introduce the participants. The collage data, the artefact data and the unstructured interview data complemented each other. I interpreted all the data sources (unstructured interviews, collage and artefact) to come up with each teacher's storied narrative. I used interpretive relevance on the basis that it is drawn from the diverse knowledge that the individual teacher gained that is regarded as relevant to the situation at hand (Jenkins *et al.*, 2009). How the individual teacher interprets the situation is central to the knowledge that he brings to that particular situation. The diverse knowledge that teachers bring from their lived experiences to the teaching profession was essential in making their storied narratives.

In engaging with the data, I used the analytic approach. Collins (2014) alludes to the fact that no understanding exists before the data are analysed. This approach relies on what Collins (2014) calls "emotional reflexivity", the ability not to allow my prejudices, biases and pre-conceptions to determine the findings of the study. I was touched to realise that the participants associated commitment with caring, something that I had never expected.

## *Vignettes*

Upon completion of reconstructing storied narratives, I read and re-read the teachers' storied narratives in order to highlight the emerging issues that related to their personal meaning-making regarding commitment. I used descriptive coding, where I summarised the participants' meanings of commitment based on their personal settings.

In analysing the stories, I used the theory that gave me both personal (Chapter Five) and professional (Chapter Six) meanings of commitment. I created vignettes in Chapter Five to deepen my understanding of how the personal lived experiences inform the meaning of commitment. I relied on motivational relevance to explore what motivates teachers' meanings of commitment. Is it the passion, caring or emotion? I used *motivational relevance* since it is two-fold: it comprises the purpose at hand which the individual teacher intends to follow, and the result the individual teacher intends to reflect on.

The teacher participants' vignettes form the second part of analysis in this study. Vignettes are defined by Jenkins *et al.* (2009) as a tool used in a qualitative study to capture a story-bound scenario in a participant's life. The use of vignettes in this study is relevant since it describes a story that is revealed in an individual's life. Hence the purpose of this study is to deepen my insight into teachers' meaning-making of commitment. Vignettes are also aimed at gaining insight into the social space of the participant's meaning-making of a particular situation.

The vignettes are known for richness in revealing a particular meaning or belief embedded in an individual. However, vignettes cannot conclusively indicate how an individual will behave in the real situation. I use vignettes in Chapter Five to deepen my understanding of teachers' personal meaning of commitment, and in Chapter Six I explore how those meanings inform their behaviour. I am cognisant of the fact that what is prescribed as knowledge does not always inform behaviour.

The condition central to the use of vignettes is the relationship between the researcher and the participant (Butler-Kisber, 2005). This kind of relationship respects the participant and the researcher's individuality and subjectiveness. I use the vignettes on the basis that they enable the participant to see himself/herself as the central figure in narrating his/her story (Jenkins *et al.*, 2009). The vignettes assist to explore beliefs as well as changes resulting from specific personal

experiences, for instance, the teacher's cultural settings. They further assist in unravelling the sources of certain meanings in an individual's life.

### ***Thematic patterns***

Upon completion of the vignettes, I read and re-read the storied narratives to look for similar issues that emerged from the teachers' storied narratives. The issues were then grouped into themes. The themes foreground what teachers do inside and outside the classroom, which falls under professional dimension and informs their practice.

The themes developed for discussion in the chapter focusing on *topical relevance* intended to determine how a social situation becomes challenging or non-challenging for the individual teacher. How the individual teacher responds to the situation at hand is informed by the individual's own personal lived experiences, which are unpacked in Chapter Five (vignettes). The personal lived experiences are inherited as a result of interaction with self and the outside world. The beliefs that teachers inherit inform the motives for their actions in the classroom and they make teachers unique individuals who view situations differently.

The process of analysing data made me realise that data analysis is not a straightforward process. Upon engaging with analysis, starting with the stories in Chapter Four, vignettes in Chapter Five and themes in Chapter Six, I realised that some information that I did not include when writing the narratives was equally important. I ended up using the transcriptions to add more data in the narratives. This process helped me realise the similarities and the dissimilarities in the participants' narratives. In analysing the data, I realised that my best listening and writing skills were essential.

### ***Ethical Issues***

Firstly, the need for the study and the benefits of the study to myself and the participants themselves, were outlined to the participants in our first meeting. The participants were given consent letters and they were asked to read them and sign them (see Appendix Two). The data generation strategies were further explained to the participants. The researcher assured the participants that their real names were not going to be used in the study, only pseudonyms. To the researcher's surprise, the participants mentioned that they were less concerned about the

names I used since their stories reflected their experiences and their experiences alone. However, as a researcher I had to ensure that the issue of confidentiality was strictly addressed. The participants' rights were explained. The data will remain in the School of Education, in the University of KwaZulu-Natal housed in a storeroom on the ground floor in Wing 3.

Negotiating power relations is critical when working with qualitative research, more especially narrative inquiry, where I had to ensure rigour in data generation, depth of analysis and reflexivity, all important criteria (Collins, 2014). Hatch and Wisniewski (1995) maintain that in a narrative inquiry research, the participants, when telling their stories, can be easily vulnerable. However, a researcher is ethically and morally obligated to protect the participants. The use of pseudonyms throughout this study is one way of protecting participants' vulnerability in this study.

### ***Role of the researcher***

My first role was to ensure that there was enough data provided by the teacher participants that could be used to inform the findings. As a member of the school management team, I acknowledged the asymmetrical power relations that are present between myself as a researcher and the research participants when data were generated before and during the analysis phase. The fact that I categorised and analysed the data provided by the participants makes the participant-researcher relationship hierarchical. However, in trying to bridge the gap, I relied on the purpose of the study as well "emotional intelligence" (Collins, 2014). Emotional intelligence is defined by Collins (2014) as the ability to connect with the participants and expertly listen during and after interaction, which eventually assists the researcher to understand the daily lived experiences of the participants. In further minimising the gap of asymmetrical power, I participated actively in collage making exercises as well as artefact retrieval. The use of multiple methods of collecting data ensured that participants' voices are maintained throughout the study. The participants' voices are further strengthened by the use of excerpts from the data. My role as the researcher kept changing, based on the methods used. At times I acted as a facilitator, for example, in group meetings and at times as a listener during unstructured interviews.

## **Conclusion**

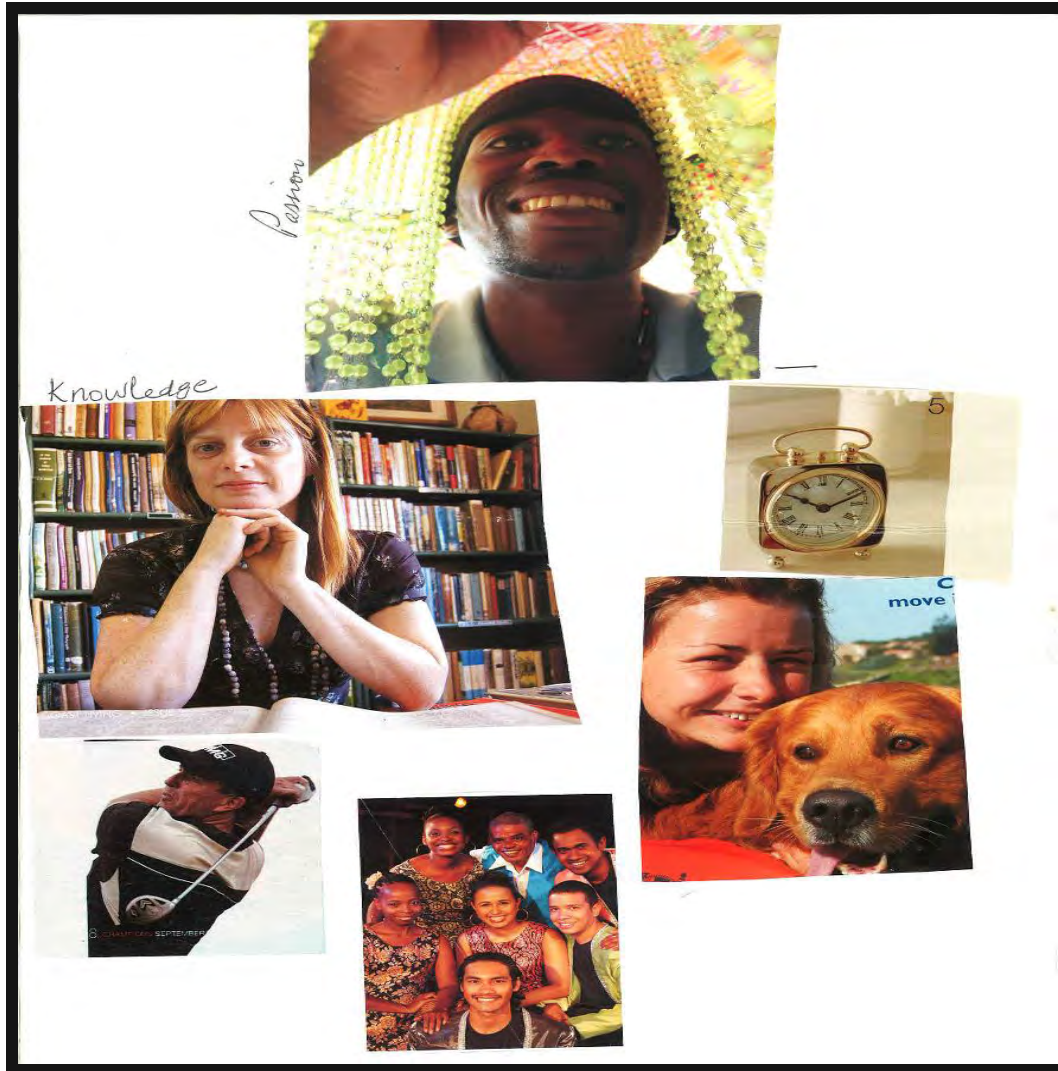
In this chapter, I argued for the utilisation of the interpretive paradigm and the qualitative approach in this study. The narrative inquiry as the methodology that is used in this study is further explored in this chapter. I then explained how the teacher participants were sampled for the study. I also argued how the unstructured interviews, collage and artefact inquiry enabled the participants to narrate their meanings of commitment and how the meanings inform their practice. The next chapter presents the storied narratives reconstructed from using the different data sources. The use of narrative inquiry enabled me to understand the importance of telling our stories using different methods.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **TEACHERS' STORIES**

#### **Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I presented the research design and the methodology that I used to generate data in this study. This chapter presents the four reconstructed stories of the four teacher participants. The stories unravel the teacher participants' personal and professional lived experiences, which define their meanings of commitment. The main purpose of this chapter is to represent the storied narratives of the participants. The storied narratives were interpreted from all the data sources used in this study: unstructured interviews, collage and artefact inquiry. In order to adhere to ethical considerations, I used the pseudonyms Khulani, Zithulele, Nosipho and Reina. The four teacher participants' narratives start by exploring their background, then move on to their schooling and tertiary education and lastly, their careers.



#### 4.1 Khulani’s collage – Developing learners holistically

##### Khulani’s story - “Engaging learners”

The collage introduces Khulani a 46 year old, male, primary school teacher in a township school. It is a visual representation of how Khulani experiences his life.

##### *Born out of wedlock*

I was born in the late 1960s in a township called Ntuzuma, KwaZulu-Natal. I was born out of wedlock. I lived with my grandmother, who was very strict. There were so many children in our



four-roomed house. There were eight children in the house and we would all sleep under the table. Children did not have the luxury to sleep on beds. My grandmother had her own children (my uncles and aunts), who occupied other rooms. The experience of growing under these conditions taught me not to despair. My Grade Twelve teacher also used to tell us that “...*do not despair, do not despair*”. That was set in my mind every time I do something. I know I must not despair. I must push forward and get what I want. I always wanted to reach greater heights because of my grandmother and my Grade Twelve teacher’s positive influence in my life.

We took different turns to help our grandmother doing different chores in the house. In the midst of our busy schedule, we still got time to play soccer with other boys in the street. Soccer was and is still my sport. Playing soccer with other boys in the township was what kept us going.

### ***Be the best***

My grandmother would tell us in the face that if you did not want to go to school, you are not her children. You must go and live somewhere else, not in her house. She was a very strict woman. She would sit us down and tell us so many things about life. At that time I did not understand much of what she used to tell us, but now I understand that she was preparing us for the future. I remember she used to tell us that “*You must be the best in everything that you do, in everything that you do you have to shine*”. She would also tell us that in everything that you do “*You must know that God is watching you*”; that is how I was brought up. Fortunately, all the children in the house liked school and we all passed matric. At times my grandmother would say very nasty things. Therefore, we wanted to prove her wrong. We all matriculated. I don’t know where she got the money from because she was a domestic worker. She managed to send all of us to tertiary institutions.

### ***Corporal punishment the order of the day***

I started my early schooling in a township school where I grew up. I enjoyed my junior primary schooling. It was sad leaving my Junior Primary school teachers for senior primary schooling. In senior primary, teachers were violent, and we were always scared since corporal punishment was the order of the day. We were disciplined because we were scared of teachers.

### ***Pass one, pass all mentality***

I was unfortunate to do my high school during the times of riots. Most learners left school. I couldn't leave school because of the strict family that I came from. I always wanted to reach greater heights because of my grandmother. We didn't learn much, I cannot remember myself doing the other grades but I would pass. In Grade Ten there was a slogan "*Pass, one pass all*", which meant if one learner passes, we must all be moved to the next grade. In Grade Twelve, we had to sit at home for three months; nobody taught us. There was political violence between the African National Congress (ANC) and Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP). I did not do well. I only passed four subjects. I had to repeat Grade Twelve. The following year I went to another high school; that's where I passed my matric.

### ***I never wanted to be a teacher***

Upon finishing my matric in 1987, I stayed at home for eighteen months. Initially, I wanted to be a male nurse. After eighteen months staying at home, I received a letter confirming that I was accepted at Edendale hospital in Pietermaritzburg to train as a male nurse. I thought about going to the teacher training college first to seek if I cannot be accepted to train as a teacher. When I got there it was around 4:00 pm. I met the rector (principal) and I explained to him that I needed to train as a teacher but I have been sitting at home for the past eighteen months. The rector just gave me the application form and asked me to come in college uniform the next day. That's when I decided I am not going to be a male nurse anymore. Upon completing my diploma, I did the Advanced Certificate in Education majoring in science. Later I registered for my BEd Honours in 2003. I had to take a long break due to financial constraints and family commitments. I have since re-registered to complete my degree in 2014.

### ***From Inanda to kwaMaphumulo***

I started teaching in a primary school in a township called Inanda. I taught English and Science in Grade Five. Ever since, I have been teaching English and Natural Sciences my whole teaching career. From 1999-2003, I was redeployed to the rural school in kwaMaphumulo. I stayed there for four years. It was in a rural area but I enjoyed teaching there. Life was difficult at this school. I grew up in a township where there was electricity and running water. I had to get used to the

idea of having to stay in an environment where there was no running water and electricity. Another challenge was the amount of money that I used to spend just going to the school.

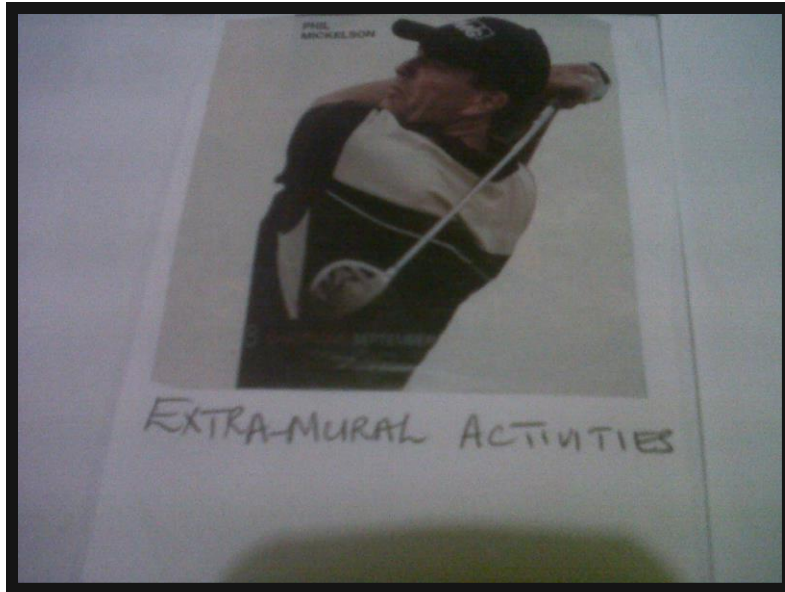
In this school, I met people who were eager to learn. We worked together, we worked as a team and we were happy. We used to get ideas from each other. It was in this school where I realised that there is no teacher who can work successfully as an individual. It was my first experience of teaching in a rural school. I learned from them and they also learned from me. I managed under these difficult circumstances because I am humble, that is how I was brought up by my grandmother. In 2003, I started in my current school where I am the Head of Department (HOD).

### ***I came back to Durban a better teacher***

By the time I came back from kwaMaphumulo, I was more experienced; in fact, I was a better teacher. I was more active in the classroom and outside the classroom. I am now involved in a number of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities. It has been ten years since I joined the school. I have won a lot of trophies. I have won sixteen trophies since 2003 when I came to this school.

### ***Engaging with learners***

I develop learners holistically, academically and in sport. I realised that some learners are not good with school work. An example is Chad Le Clos; he is a swimmer. He was not good at school but now he has a career in swimming because he first did it in school. He started in primary school until high school. He is an Olympian with gold medals; everybody envies him. The primary school teachers have to do extramural activities, since it can open up opportunities for learners, (see Figure 4.2). I do a lot of things in my school. We enter quiz competitions and we win. I engage learners in quiz competitions. I am a quiz master and under thirteen soccer coach. I also involve learners in library competitions where we compete with different schools, for instance, private schools and former model C schools. I feel fulfilled that I am doing something that brings joy to learners.



**Figure 4.2: Engaging in extra-mural activities**

***My significant award***

In 2011, I was recognised by the Department of Education in our district (Umlazi) for winning the quiz competition for three years in a row. There were special awards for 100 teachers in our district. The special awards were organised by the Department of Education. The award is very significant to me because it puts our school in the map. Our school is known in the district, even by people from outside Umlazi district. The people who come from the national department education to do monitoring - they see all the trophies that we have won on the wall. They realise that the school is working by looking at that.

This trophy (see Figure 4.3) is a living proof that if you are serious in whatever you do, you will succeed. That's what I always tell my learners, that if you have passion for what you are doing, definitely you will succeed. The joy that I see on learners' faces when they have won something or after they achieved something is what keeps me going as a teacher and always encourages me to do my best as a teacher.



**Figure 4.3: My special award**

### **Passion drives me**

I always come to school on time, time management is a prerequisite for teachers. I believe that teachers should manage their time properly. At school there are things that a teacher has to do before he/she comes to class and after school. All of the above cannot be achieved if a teacher lacks passion. As a teacher in any school primary or high school, public or private, you must have passion. A teacher without passion will give up easily, sometimes get frustrated and not be able to do the work properly. If you are passionate, you will strive for knowledge, (see Figure 4.4). If you do not have passion and you have knowledge, you would not even know that you have knowledge. Passion drives you to go beyond the call of duty



**Figure 4.4: Getting what you want through hard work**

I have since realised that teachers in any school primary or high school, in fact wherever, have to know his/her subject very well, and know more than the learners, even in general knowledge. This will assist the teacher be able to answer all questions that learners ask. Nowadays, children come with a lot of questions, some school-based, general and thought-provoking questions. I believe that as teachers we must be able to answer all those questions. I also believe that teaching is a God-given talent, having this skill of teaching is a talent. One day I will die and I would have to answer to God. I don't want a situation where if I die and look at my children, I feel that I let them down. I always strive to give my utmost best in whatever I do.



#### 4.5 Zithulele’s collage –The teacher, the care-giver

##### Zithulele’s story - “Understandings of care”

##### *My loving family*

The following narrative describes Zithulele, a 44 year old female, primary school teacher.

I was born in the early 1970s in a township called Ndabazabantu, in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal. I was born the second in the family of three girls. I grew up in a very good, loving family. Our parents showed us love. We used to live with both mother and father. They both passed on in 1997, when I was in my third year working. My father was sick and my mother passed on six months later in a car accident. Though we were all working, it was difficult losing both parents in a short period of time. It was tough but my big sister took care of us. She played the mother



figure role; even today both myself and my younger sister go to her for motherly advice. Before my parents passed on, they were both working. Financially we were ok. We had a roof above our heads. We used to stay in a staff house. Later on they bought a house; we still have that house today.

### ***Sister-sister relationship***

Our parents taught us to love each other. After my parents had passed on, my big sister, myself and my younger sister became even closer to each other. With my younger sister we went to school together, we went to college together and we started working together in the same school. Even today we are close buddies.

### ***My rollercoaster early learning***

I started my first year (Grade One) in a township school with good resources. I did my first year to third year there. Everything was good; we were taught in English and the teachers cared for us. Whilst in Grade Three, I moved to Hammarsdale because my father got the job there. The place was poorer than where I was born, even the school that I attended was far backward compared to my first township school. It was difficult to adjust there. I learned there up to Grade Seven.

Upon finishing my primary school, I went to a High School where education was not good at all. The teachers used to bunk classes. Whilst in Grade Eight there were riots in Hammarsdale. The IFP was fighting with the ANC. We were young girls and the situation was bad because of the riots. Our parents kept us indoors. I guess that's how we bonded as sisters.

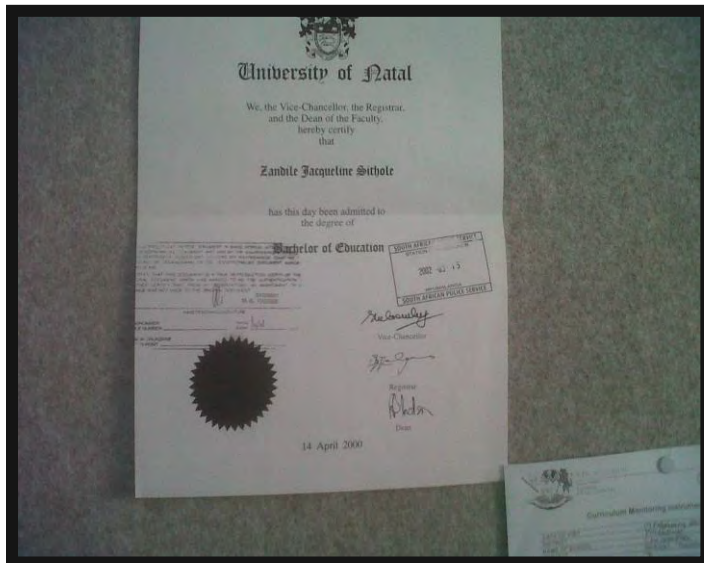
I had to go back to Pietermaritzburg where I did Grade Twelve. It was difficult changing schools. I had to do new subjects. As a result I ended up failing matric. The following year, my parents sent me to finishing school to do the subjects that I failed. I got my matric certificate in 1989 in a finishing school.



### ***Becoming a teacher***

Initially I wanted to be a Microbiologist. I was fascinated by the term as I was not sure what Microbiologists actually do. I knew they work in hospitals. When I look back now I loved to be a teacher and I still love it. I enjoy making learners learn, help them see and making them better.

Upon getting my matric certificate I was accepted at Indumiso College to do the Senior Primary Teacher's Diploma. Doing this diploma with my younger sister by my side made things easy for me. We relied on each other for inspiration. This is where I realised that the teacher must try by all means to be kept abreast with current teaching strategies that will make learners competent. One way of doing this is to study further. Upon finishing my diploma, I did the Advanced Certificate in Education; later I registered for Bachelor of Honours degree (see Figure 4.6).



**Figure 4.6: Hard work pays**

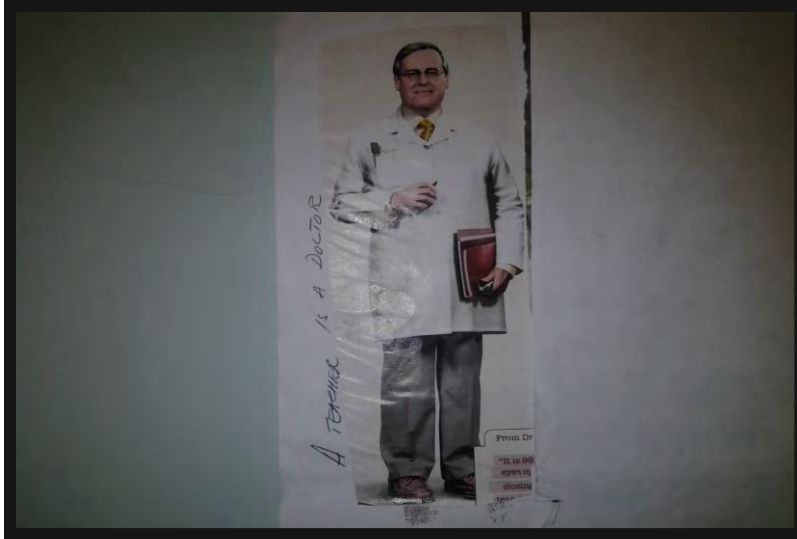
### ***Learning to swim or sink***

I started my teaching career in 1994 at a High school. I was asked to teach Maths in Grade Twelve. Though I was not qualified to teach in high school, I did my best because I learned Maths in Grade Twelve. The school was in a rural area called kwaSwayimane. The area was far

back. It was very difficult to teach there. The learners did not take education seriously and they lacked respect. I was young and learners were uncontrollable. They used to drink alcohol during break time. It was extremely difficult to teach under these conditions. Later on I was transferred to a junior primary school in Hammarsdale. That is where I enjoyed my teaching. I used to work very well with the kids because I enjoy teaching young learners since I was trained as a primary school teacher. I taught there for four years. In our neighbouring school they were adding Grade Eight so I was once again transferred to teach Grade Eight there. I taught there for five years. The principal retired and things got worse; teachers did not behave. Because of the post provisioning norms (PPN), five teachers were declared in excess, including myself. Post provisioning norms is a system that is used to determine the number of teachers the school get based on a number of learners. It is also referred to as teacher-pupil ratio. I was taken back to the rural area again. I was frustrated there were no television sets, and goats used to get into our classrooms at any given time.

### ***It was difficult***

I had no other options as a trained teacher. I knew what to do but it was difficult. I remember I was teaching Economics and Management Sciences which required that learners know things that were happening in the media, TV and newspapers. Media was foreign to them. As a teacher I had to go an extra mile. I had to go beyond the call of duty in teaching the learners in this ever-changing world that is technologically advanced. This is where I learned that a teacher should be more resourceful, be more informative. The learners needed to learn more. Therefore I had to be creative and equip myself with knowledge. I had to be more knowledgeable and upgrade myself. I worked hard to get the children to reach up there using all the resources. As a practising teacher, sometimes I get frustrated by the learners' lack of motivation. They do not see themselves somewhere other than where they are right now. Some see everything as okay, that's what frustrates me.



**Figure 4.7: A teacher is like a doctor**

***The teachers playing a doctor's role***

After teaching for many years in an urban primary school, I realised that as teachers we are also doctors (see Figure 4.7), we must diagnose the learners. The teachers must know the learners' problems, know the learners' likes and dislikes, know learners' strengths and weaknesses, so that the teacher can work with that. The learners come to school with a number of problems, the teachers should know the learners problems and help in those problems. The teacher should go an extra mile, go beyond his calling. The teacher must try by all means to be kept abreast with current teaching strategies that will make learners competent. The teacher should go beyond his call of duty regarding the teaching of the learner in this ever-changing world that we live in. The world that we live in now is advanced technologically and so many things are happening in this world. So the teacher should be there to walk an extra mile in his/her teaching career.



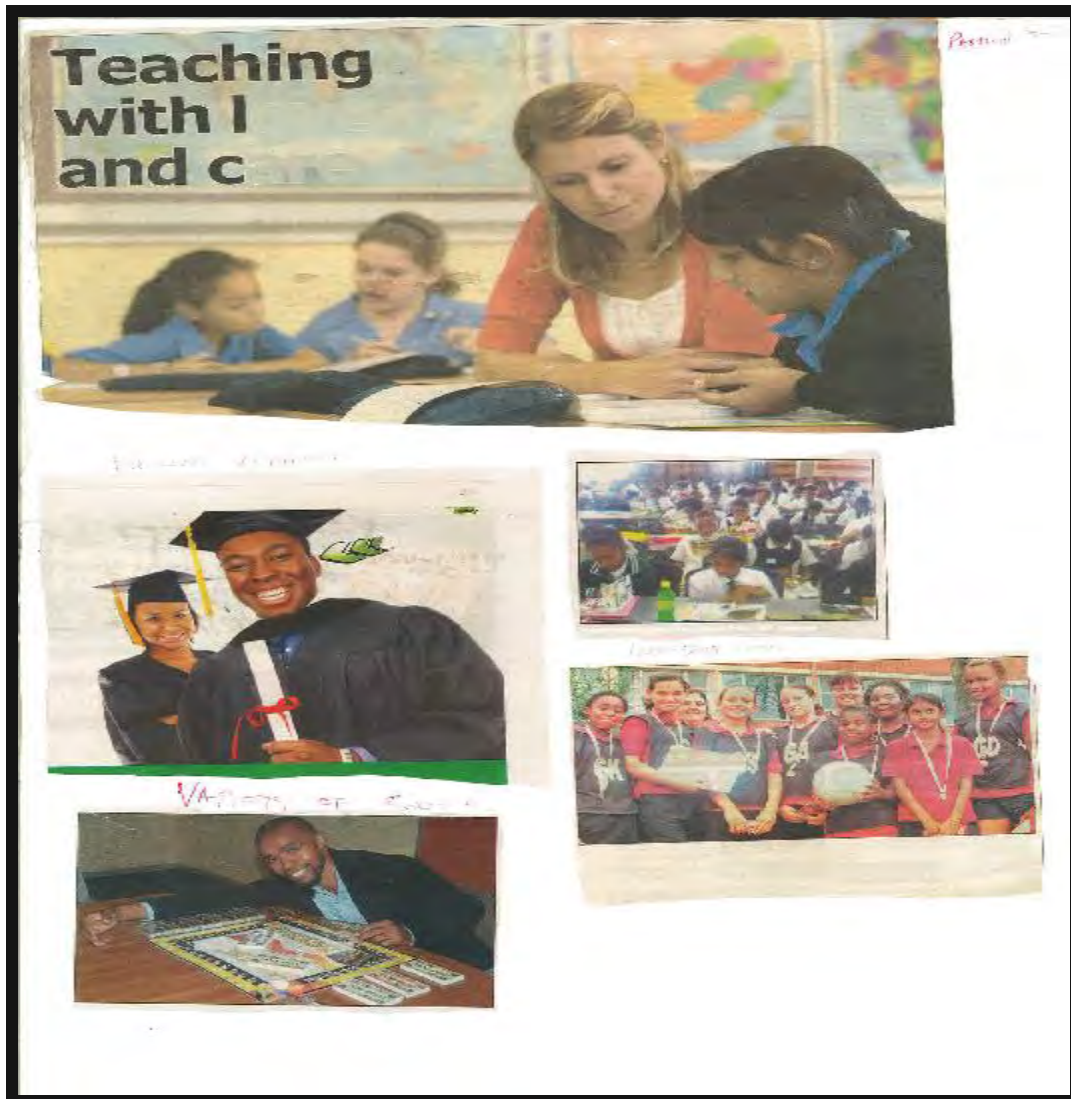
**Figure 4.8: The teacher cares**

In a primary school, the teacher should care for the learners, provide pastoral care; many learners in our environment are abused (see Figure 4.8). The teacher should be there to cater for their needs, make them comfortable, and feel at home so that learning could be interesting. A doctor is always resourceful. Just like the doctor, the teacher should be also resourceful and informative in order to exercise pastoral care. The teachers should equip themselves with knowledge and upgrade themselves. The teacher-learner relationship should always be mutual; the teacher should not be bossy because the children might be scared. I always see learners having opportunities to make their lives better. I see opportunities in them that lie ahead that's what keeps me going. Seeing my learners realising how beautiful they are and actualising their dreams, makes me love my job.

### ***Caring for learners' learning***

My desire to see learners succeed comes when I look at them being humble, yearning for knowledge. That humbleness for knowledge makes me want to meet their educational needs that would make their destiny. The spelling bee competition that I organise showcases learners' talent

and improves their English vocabulary. It is always learner-driven, competitive among learners themselves and it gives learners a sense of pride in their endeavours.



#### 4.9 Nosipho's collage – Teaching is a calling

##### Nosipho's story -"My love for teaching"

###### *My grand-mother*

Nosipho is a female, junior phase teacher and a mother of two kids. This is her story.

I was born in the early 1970s in a township in Durban which was built for Africans only. My parents were working in Durban at that time. My mother was a domestic worker and my late father was a police officer. I did not have the privilege of staying with my parents since they were both working. After I was born, my parents send me to stay with my grandmother in a rural

area called Nongoma. I was raised by my grandmother up until I went to the tertiary institution. I am a single parent with two kids. I am a bread winner and I have a family that I support, my mom and my sister depend on me.

My father always wanted what's best for me. He discouraged me from being a police officer because he knew the challenges since he was a police officer himself. He did not want me to face those challenges but he approved of me being a teacher. I had two choices. I wanted to be a police officer or a teacher.

### ***Learning under the trees***

I started my primary school in the early 1980s. That's where my memories of early schooling began in a rural school called Ndlozana Primary. There was no infrastructure and we used to learn under the trees. My illiterate grandmother is the one who raised me up there. After passing Grade 1, I went to stay with my aunt whom I realised later was very abusive. I completed my Grade 2 and 3 while staying with my aunt. There is no way that I could stay any longer with my aunt. Her daughter was the same age but I had to do washing in the late hours, clean the house and go to the shops. I was moved back to my grandmother's place when I was ten years old. I started at a senior primary school and that was much better than my junior primary. However, the school was far away from my grandmother's house. I used to travel 10 kilometres to and from school. I completed Grade 8-10 in the same place. I was again moved to KwaSomkhele, a high school in Mtubatuba, where I completed Grade 11-12. Whilst in High School, I realised that I wanted to be a police officer or teacher. It was in this high school where my love for the teaching profession began.

### ***Teaching as a calling***

My calling for teaching started in High school. My IsiZulu teacher was my role model. Firstly, her appearance - she was a teacher. She was a teacher and a mother at the same time. The way she guided and taught us, she was a teacher. She used to tell us "*You do not have to be rich; to be rich, you can come from the poorest background but you can be something in future*". I was doing Grade 11 and my mind was a little bit busy but she managed to get me focused. She always emphasised the importance of going to school. It is only now that I realise that she was not teaching for the love of money. Teaching was a calling to her. That's where my love and



passion for teaching started. She inspired me to be a teacher. I now realised that some teachers became teachers so that “*Impilo ibe lula*” (so that their lives are better), but if you regard teaching as a *calling* it makes a difference to other people and learners. I always wanted to make a difference to other people, especially children. I am proud of myself if I can make a difference to children’s life. I always wanted to see learners “*Ziyinto ethile*” (being successful) because of me; I want to see learners gaining knowledge from me (see Figure 4.10). This is how I picture all this. Young children come to school not knowing, but when they grew up and they know because of me, that’s what makes me like my work as a teacher.



**Figure 4.10: Striving for knowledge**

### ***The love of teaching***

Whilst doing matric I fell pregnant. The following year my mother told me that I have to sit at home the whole year looking after my baby. The frustrations of being pregnant at school meant that I did not pass my matric like I had wanted. The following year I had to write supplementary examinations while pregnant. It was the most difficult period in my life. I was brave enough to register for all the subjects, even the ones that I had passed. Doing supplementary examinations while pregnant called for determination and dedication on my side. It was the most frustrating



period in my life. What made matters worse was my mother who kept shouting at me. However, the love of teaching sustained me. I knew what I wanted to do in life.



**Figure 4.11: Engaging with learners with love**

### *Having mutual respect*

Upon passing my supplementary exams, I was accepted at Springdale College to do the Junior Primary Teachers Diploma. Springdale College was one of those colleges which were built specifically for Indians. Under the apartheid government in South Africa, schools were grouped according to the races. There were schools which were built for whites only, Indians only, Africans only and for coloureds only. In this college, I had to endure the frustration of studying in a foreign environment where the foreign language (English) was spoken. Even the teachers in my primary and in high school, were only IsiZulu speaking teachers. Therefore having to learn everything in English and being taught by non-IsiZulu speakers was a major challenge for me. We were the only second group of African student intake. The lecturers were only Indians. I was exposed to many sporting codes, something that I had never experienced in my primary and in high school. I even developed more love for teaching. This is because of the way the lecturers

taught us. I learned so many things at Springdale. The mutual respect characterised our relationship with lecturers. I don't regret being accepted there. I learned a lot.

### ***Teaching at Melville Primary***

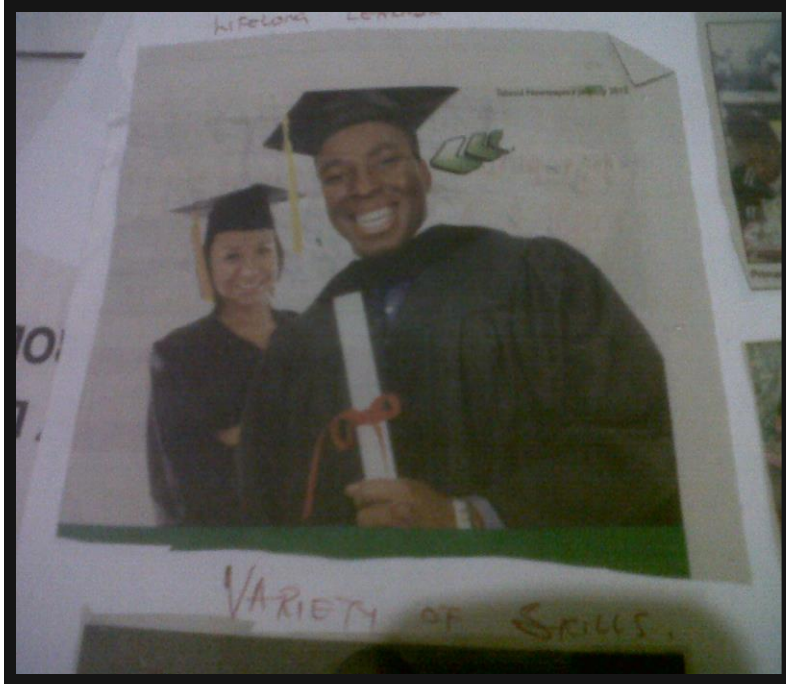
After finishing my diploma in 1996, I got a teaching post in a new school in Cato Manor, Durban. Teaching in this school was interesting and challenging at the same time (see Figure 4.11). I had to learn every day, each day I had to do research. There were more sporting activities that I had to get involved in and encourage learners to participate in. In December 1997, I became a surplus educator since I was not even permanent. I had to stay at home the whole year, 1998. It was a frustrating period again in my life. I had a son, my mother and sister who all depended on me. Towards the end of 1998, I got a substitute post because of the teacher who was on accouchement leave. I served there for a couple of months. I later got a permanent post in the neighbouring school. I taught there from 1999-2004. It was in this school where I received my first trophy. It was special moment for me, it is even written *special award* (see Figure 4.12). I was chosen the best teacher in Grade 3 in the year 2004. When I received the trophy I felt special, honoured, excited and overwhelmed. My former principal used to say, "*You must make learners like going to school for the things that we do at school*". I find teaching in a primary school interesting and also challenging because children nowadays question a lot. As a teacher you learn from learners as well colleagues. It is challenging in the sense that teachers have to think more because children are advanced. You need to give them more than what you think. A committed teacher needs to learn every day. Each day I need to do research, come to class well prepared.



**Figure 4.12 My reward for hard work**

***Being the Head of Department***

In the beginning of 2005, I was appointed head of department (HOD) in my current school, Dunbar Primary school. I enjoy teaching my Grade 3 class. As HOD I organise meetings with teachers where they engage each other. I get along with all the teachers though at times I have to take tough decisions as HOD. Even in our meetings, nothing extraordinary happens, teachers participate in discussions they engage each other. However, there are those teachers who do not want to be told what to do.



**Figure 4.13: Life-long learning is rewarded**

***Engaging in life-long learning***

For the first three years of my teaching career, we were doing Outcome Based Education (OBE); we changed to National Curriculum Statement (NCS) and later it was Revised National Curriculum Statements (RNCS) and now it is Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS). I told myself that in order to be kept abreast with all these changes I must further my studies (see Figure 4.9). Currently I am doing the Honours degree, specialising in leadership and management. This will help me become a better manager. I told myself that I have to study further and focus on my studies. Though it is difficult at times studying while working and with family commitments, the passion for knowledge is what keeps me going.



**Figure 4.14 Reina’s collage – The teacher, the loyal servant**

**Reina’s story - “Serving the learners”**

***My humble beginnings***

This narrative introduces Reina, foundation phase teacher.

Firstly, I hail from very humble beginnings. I lost my dad when I was ten years old. It was a struggle for my mom to bring us up, with the state grant. However, she managed to get us all educated. She also taught us good values and we were disciplined. We appreciated whatever she could provide us with. We had to learn to do without luxuries in life. I realised that with hard work and commitment you can achieve great things in your life. My goal in life has always been to become a better person in terms of my social status and economy.

### ***School and strict teachers***

My memories of schooling date back to the primary level. I started my primary schooling in an Indian township, called Phoenix. It was a very small building with about eight classes. Looking back, I believe we had very strict teachers, with a principal that was extremely strict. At that time, corporal punishment was used without any problems and parents allowed it. As learners we were very scared of the teachers and we saw them as people who had authority over our movement and learning. It was how they made sure that their work was done by us. Issues of poor discipline were not there, as we did what was expected of us. Teachers worked very hard when it came to reading and maths. We spent a lot of time reading. There were a lot of curricular and extra-curricular activities such as speech contests, annual school sports and debates. The learners were expected to participate in all of these. Later on, I came to understand that the type of school that I attended was a State-aided school.

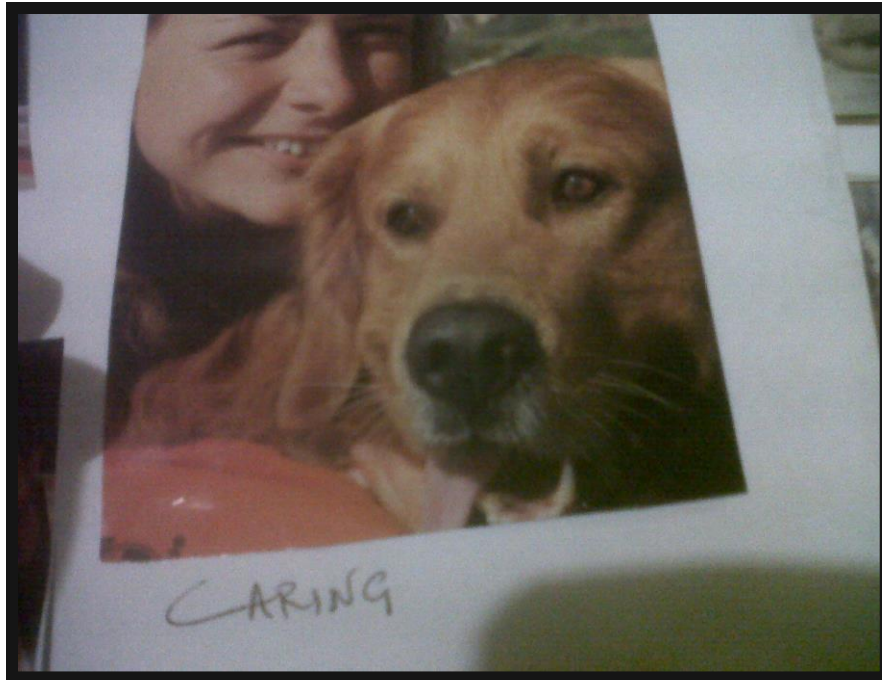
### ***A good high School***

Moving to High school, I had to choose a school that was placed on the map for us because there was a learner who achieved a top ten spot in Matric results in the whole of South Africa. For that reason, it was regarded as a good school by all parents in the area. I had a bit of a problem choosing my course, but eventually I settled for Physics, Maths, Biology and Afrikaans.

### ***I care***

I am a family-oriented person. I care a lot for my family (see Figure 4.14). I come from a loving environment where if you have problems, you are able to sit and talk. If you come from family where there is always trouble and fighting, you come to school in a bad mood. This turned to anger and it goes to your learners. My family always keeps me going, particularly my husband. He is the one person who shaped me in terms of my career. I met him when I was in Grade 10 at High school. He always supported me and he encouraged me. I was a very introverted person and he got me out of the shell. He has always been my mentor in terms of my career and studies. At one point I wanted to give up, but he told me you have to pursue and finish your studies. When I graduated in the year 2000, it was like *A Crowning Glory*. My husband also comes from a very poor background. His father did not have money to send him to University and his brother assisted him with finances.





**Figure 4.15: Caring**

*Teaching was never my priority*

Upon finishing my Matric (Grade Twelve), I applied to a college. I had also enrolled at M.L Sultan Technikon in the Durban area, KwaZulu-Natal to do Chemical Engineering. I attended for about a month until I received a letter from the college asking me to come for the interview. I was accepted and I started training to be teacher from 1985-1988. Honestly, teaching was never my priority. However, due to financial troubles at home, I ended up being a teacher. Initially, I wanted to get to the field of computers. When it came to choosing a course to do, I had no choice as they had space for the Junior Phase which I accepted, as it had a bursary. I have no regret about being a Foundation Phase teacher because I love children and I enjoy teaching them.

We were the pioneers of the four year diploma (Higher Education Diploma). It was also the first time they selected students based on their points. I enjoyed being a student at the college. During the times of teaching practice, our lecturers supported us. Teaching practice gave us the opportunity to experience classroom in a real life situation. We had freedom, but used our

freedom wisely. After completing my four year diploma in 1988, I took a break from studying. It was after I got married that I did the Bachelor of Arts degree through University of South Africa (UNISA). When I was single, financially it was a bit challenging. It was challenging even in terms of time because my first son was born in 1994. I was busy studying at that time when he was born, it was very challenging.

### ***Adjusting to the real school situation***

Upon finishing my four years of training, I began my teaching experience in a public primary school in Phoenix, around Durban, in 1989. I worked in that school for ten years. I did not have a problem to adjust to the real school situation because I took advantage of the practice. I was lucky to have a good HOD who supervised me about other finer things like record keeping.

### ***I am not afraid***

After working for ten good years in my first school, I became a surplus educator. I was transferred to Dunbar, a primary school with only African learners in 1999. This school is located in the middle of the low cost houses. When I first came here it was a nightmare. There was a lack of parental involvement, the homework was never completed. The language and the environment were major problems. It was a situation that I had to adjust to, get used to the staff and the learners. When I came to the school I did not know a word of isiZulu. It was very challenging but also rewarding.

Being an Indian teacher in an African school was a bit scary. I was thrown in the ocean, I had to swim or drown. Fortunately, I am a person that does not give up easily and I am not afraid to take on challenges. I had to find ways and means of getting out of this difficulty. However, I do not regret being in this school, it is no doubt very challenging but I simply get a lot of joy teaching children. We always interact with each other, sharing knowledge, sharing ideas and learning from each other. Our interest is with the learners, sharing ideas make us better teachers. I always feel that as a teacher, when I get my salary I must be happy to spend that money because I know I earned it sincerely. I give my children a 100% commitment and they can attest to that.



### ***I share good relationships***

My mother taught me to interact well with other people. I like sharing what I have with learners as well as colleagues. I regard school as a family away from home. I spent most of my time at school therefore I must get along with everybody. The mood that a teacher brings to school impacts on the learners. I always ensure that I interact with everyone, share knowledge, share ideas and learn from each other. At the end of the day, my interest is with the learners.

### ***Being creative***

The difficulties that I had when I first came to this school taught me that as educators, we need to be creative; we need to make teaching and learning interesting (see Figure 4.15). Teaching should be a pleasurable experience for both the teacher and the learner. Though at times it is not easy, we should always strive to make teaching an enjoyable experience. Learners learn better in a happy environment. Learners find it very difficult to internalise things when they are constantly learning under fear, so classrooms must be a happy environment.



**Figure 4.16: Learning creatively**

***Having interests of the learners at heart***

It was in this school where I realised that as teachers when we teach children, we must have the interests of the learners at heart. In most cases, teachers do things for themselves, for *Self-Glorification*...they forget about the learners. The learners must be the central focus to everything that we do. Teachers who have the children's interests at heart are able to enjoy their work irrespective of the conditions they work in. It is easy to get help from other teachers and parents if they see that you have the children's best interests. Children are best messengers, what you say and do in class learners will always convey to their parents. However, if you do things for name and fame, you tend to seek glory and forget about the learners' interests.

### *I enjoy teaching*

I am enjoying teaching the children because I can identify with these learners. I come from a poor background and they also come from the same background. I know the difficulties that they go through. The economic background that the learners come from is not good. They live in low cost housing and come from the surrounding shack settlements. However, I always encourage them to get better because I understand fully what they are going through. I always give them a pep talk in my lessons about getting out of poverty and making themselves better individuals. I always tell them that poverty does not mean you should accept it and stay down. You need to set yourself a goal and you have to work hard, you must persevere and find ways and means of getting what you want in life.

I am a hardworking and committed person, my learners are aware of that. I always want to feel happy at the end of the month when I get my salary because I know I earned my pay sincerely.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter presented the stories of four teacher participants which form the first part of analysis in this study. The participants' stories provide the lenses to reflect on their understandings of commitment and how their understandings inform their professional practice. The participants' stories varied and are also similar due to familial backgrounds, social standings and their professional contexts. The participants' stories enabled me to understand the complexities of their lives and how these experiences inform their meanings of themselves. By questioning and refusing to repeat some oppressive and traditional ways of living, these teachers are able to commit themselves to their lives, both personal and professional, in better ways.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### VIGNETTES - THE TEACHERS' MEANINGS

#### Introduction

The previous chapter presented the reconstructed teacher stories which unravelled their lived experiences. This chapter analyses the teachers' narratives to respond to the first critical question: "*What are primary school teachers' meanings of commitment in township primary schools?* From a Teacher Identity Theory perspective which looks at the self in relation to the profession, I have reviewed a range of research that discusses how meanings past, and present influences practice. Day and Gu (2010) maintain that teacher identity multifaceted Teacher identity follows a 'chameleon principle'. In different contexts, a teacher forms multiple relationships which enable the teacher to portray different aspects of himself or herself. In this chapter, the vignettes are a portrayal of how particular personal lived experiences and relationships provide the source of the personal meanings and identities they adopt that inform who they are and what they do as committed teachers.

The vignettes in this chapter highlight how the personal lived experiences assist the teachers to form their meanings of commitment. In presenting teacher participants' vignettes, I am of the view that what is regarded as knowledge is always informed by a particular meaning and that the meaning is shaped by a specific belief (Sutherland *et al.*, 2010). The purpose of utilising vignettes as a tool is to deepen my insight into teacher participants' personal-professional meaning-making of commitment. The vignettes in this study are used because of their rich potential in exploring the dynamics in individual's lives that may be as a result of specific lived experiences, for example, exposure to certain behaviours (Jenkins *et al.*, 2010). The teachers' meanings are formed and reformed in interaction with families and colleagues. The meanings are vital in the teachers adopting certain beliefs that inform what teachers do inside and outside the classroom (Sutherland *et al.*, 2010).

## **Vignette One: Khulani - Resilient spaces for deepening beliefs, purpose and learning**

### ***Spiritual purpose of life***

Khulani, a 46 years old male teacher, was raised in a township by his grandmother. Khulani grew up with eight other children in the same four roomed house. This experience of growing up in such conditions was necessitated by racial segregation which ensured that houses of black people were congested and segregated in townships (Hunter, 2010). Khulani speaks highly of his grandmother's influence in his life and her role in shaping his purpose in life and the kind of teacher that he became. As a God-fearing person, he strives to make a difference in everything that he does to realise his purpose for living.

*My grand-mother used to tell us that in everything that you do you must know that God is watching you, that is how I was brought up. I also believe that teaching is a God-given talent, having this skill of teaching is a talent. I also believe that one day I would die and I would have to answer to God.*

Khulani's upbringing under strict conditions in a God-fearing environment enabled him to regard teaching as God-given talent. According to the Oxford dictionary (2002), talent is defined as the natural aptitude or skill for doing something. Khulani believes that he is answerable to God.

For Khulani to regard teaching as a God-given talent, means that he is relating teaching to spirituality. Spirituality is defined by Miller (2006, p. 7) as the "attitude, and the practice, of suspending our imagined reality in order to stand in wonder and awe at that which unfolds and emerges beyond our conceptual grasp". This spirituality can be witnessed through the promotion of an open, considerate environment which leads to joy and admiration of life. I regard spirituality as the inner qualities or the purpose to serve beyond the call of duty, with the mind, heart and body.

### ***Mental resilience***

The resilience that is revealed in Khulani's life is as the result of growing up in a big family with limited resources. However, he mentions that these experiences taught him not to *despair*. When he was in high school, his Grade Twelve teacher further instilled in Khulani the learner, the idea of not giving up. His belief propelled him to push forward and complete his high school education.

*Don't despair, don't despair. That set in my mind every time I do something I know I must not despair I must push forward and get what I want...I was unfortunate to do my high school during the times of riots, most of my classmates left school. I couldn't leave school because of the strict family I came from. I always wanted to reach greater heights because of my grandmother.*

Gu and Day (2007) maintain that teachers as role models need to exhibit resilient qualities for their learners to be resilient. Khulani acquired the belief of hopefulness through interaction with his grandmother and high school teacher.

### ***Physical well-being***

Khulani brought to school his experiences of playing soccer with other township boys. When there were riots and the schools were closed, Khulani states that:

*Playing soccer with other boys in the township was what kept us going.*

Soccer for township boys became the main sporting activity, "a socially formation of class groupings" (Soudien, 2007, p. 193). The different class groupings were manifested by the legacy of apartheid which defined the kind of social activities necessitated by race and class (Jacklin, 2001). Hence the children in townships did not have the luxury of playing fancy games like cricket and golf which required uniforms and expensive playing kits. However, growing up in these adverse conditions inspired Khulani to be a spirited person, a fighter and a go-getter.

### ***The heart for learning***

Upon completing his matric, Khulani enrolled for the senior primary teacher's diploma in the very same township where he grew up. After finishing his diploma, Khulani registered for the

Advanced Certificate in Education majoring in Science. His passion for teaching led him to enrol for the BEd Honours and enabled him to survive difficulties in the teaching profession (Day and Gu, 2010). His passion for learning was necessitated by his belief that:

*The teacher should know more than the learners, even general knowledge.*

For the teachers to know more than the learners, it is imperative that they further their learning. Swart (2013) alludes to the fact that teacher learning is a continuous intricate route that needs dynamic progress from learner to teacher (learning to be a teacher), to being a teacher of learners (qualified teacher of learners). However, as much as Khulani acknowledges the importance of knowledge, he further states:

*...no amount of knowledge will be enough if the teacher does not have passion.*

Likewise, Day (2007, p. 1) points out that “what marks teachers out as good or better than good is more than their mastery of content knowledge and pedagogical skills, it is their passion for their teaching, for their students and for their learning”.

### ***A passion for teaching***

Khulani’s passion is evident in the way he involves his learners in curricular and extra-curricular activities. He further maintains that:

*A teacher in an urban primary school, you must have passion. A teacher without passion will give up easily, sometimes will get frustrated and not be able to do his work properly. If you are passionate you will strive for knowledge. If you do not have passion and you have knowledge you would not even know that you have knowledge.*

The core of teaching is passion, a [driving force], a motivational force emanating from strength of emotion that creates energy, determination, conviction, commitment and even obsession to [learners] (Day, 2007, p. 2). However, just having passion is not enough. Teacher passion needs to be nurtured and maintained by being a life-long learner (Rampa, 2012). Day (2007) associates sustaining of passion to commitment and he further relates commitment to professional emotional identity as the engine of teachers’ work, to ensure effective teaching and learning.

Teachers who are passionate about their work, their students and their learning, do everything in their power to make their learners gain the necessary knowledge and skills. They motivate their learners daily to adopt a positive attitude in doing things (Dlamini, 2013). They show passion in everything they do in the classroom and outside the classroom.

Khulani's vignette reveals how his personal experiences of growing up in a township inform his meaning of being a committed teacher. His embodied meanings (spiritual, mental and physical) provide him with the basis to pursue a purposeful life as a passionate teacher learner.

## **Vignette Two: Zithulele - Close-knit spaces for deepening understanding of care and learning**

### ***Caring relationships for emotional well-being***

Zithulele, a forty four year old African, female teacher, was born in a family of three girls in a township in Pietermaritzburg, in the early 1970s. In South Africa, this was a time when the country experienced increasing political tensions that led to the 1976 Soweto Uprisings (Samuel, 2008). Due to the volatile situation in the country, most families lived in fear.

*We were young girls and the situation was bad because of the riots. Our parents kept us indoors. I guess that's how we bonded as sisters*

Zithulele grew up under unstable conditions; she thus formed the close relationships with her family members. Her earlier experiences as individual are shaped by the interaction with people in a social context (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). What we become is linked to our past experiences, particularly those which involve our families (Varathaiah, 2010).

When Zithulele was in primary school, she enjoyed similar caring relationships with her teachers. She mentions that in her primary school:

*...everything was good we were taught in English and the teachers took good care of us.*

In a study by Masinga, (2013), she mentions that the way teachers care for their learners can influence how the learners learn. Likewise, James (2012) further stresses that people who were



brought up in a caring environment are more likely to care for other people. This caring that Zithulele enjoyed in her family and in primary school is seen as the seeds of hope for Zithulele and her caring relationships as a teacher later in her life.

### ***Resilient learner***

Zithulele relocated to Hammarsdale while doing her Grade Three. While in high school in Hammarsdale, she experienced political in-fighting like the conditions she experienced when she grew up Pietermaritzburg. As a resilient learner, propelled by the desire to complete her schooling, she went back to Pietermaritzburg. The ongoing movement of schools eventually caught up with her when she failed matric. Again pushed by the desire to better in her life, she went further to complete her matric in a finishing school. She mentions that in high school, education was terrible:

*I attended the high school where education was bad and teachers used to bunk classes.*

From her primary schooling years up to tertiary, Zithulele and her younger sister schooled together, and that's how their relationship was further developed into a close and caring one.

*With my sister we went to school together, we went to college together and we started working in the same school.*

Day (2007) mentions that the inner qualities are what determine one's ability to maintain resilience and pursue goals even when the circumstances are not permitting. She developed resilience and the ability to care for her learners.

### ***The knowledge seeker***

The desire to make her life better is taken up when Zithulele enrolls to do the three year Senior Primary Teacher's Diploma (SPTD) in 1993. However, prior to her becoming a teacher, she wanted to become a Microbiologist. She mentions that:

*If I had passed my matric very well I would have chosen another career. I was interested in becoming a Micro-biologist. I think I was fascinated by term Micro-biologist, but deep down I loved being a teacher.*

Being the knowledge seeker that she is, Zithulele enrolled for a fourth year at Natal College to do her Higher Diploma in Education. From there she went on to complete a BEd Honours degree at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, specialising in Maths and English. She explains:

*Committed teachers must equip themselves with knowledge, be more knowledgeable, and more resourceful.*

By engaging in further learning Zithulele was exposing herself to what Evans (2002, p.131) defines as both “attitudinal development” (*a process whereby teachers` attitudes to their work are modified*) and “functional development” (*a process whereby teachers ` professional performance may be improved*). It is imperative that teachers upgrade themselves personally and professionally. The conditions where teachers work might not necessarily enhance their learning; however, their commitment to learning can surpass such conditions.

When she was 27 years old, both her parents passed on. She describes her close relationship with her sisters as the one that kept them strong. Zithulele mentions how it felt when they lost their parents:

*It was difficult loosing parents in such a short space of time. They both passed on in 1997. My father was sick and my mother died six months later in a car accident. My big sister kept us going. She played the ‘mother’s role. Even today both my younger sister and I go to her for motherly advice.*

Zithulele’s vignette highlights the close-knit relationships in which caring and resilience prepare her to be a teacher and knowledge seeker.

### **Vignette 3: Nosipho - Relational spaces for mutual respect and learning**

#### ***A different attitude for making a difference***

Nosipho, an African female teacher in a junior phase and now HOD, was born in a township but raised by her grandmother in a rural area in northern KwaZulu-Natal, in the early 1970s. Her early learning up to high school was in rural schools. She states:

*I had to travel ten kilometres to and from school. There was no infrastructure and we used to learn under the trees.*

Nosipho's grandmother looked after her until Grade One. She later went to stay with her aunt in Mtubatuba, about one hundred kilometres away from the grandmother's place. She could not stay with her aunt longer, as she treated her like a domestic worker:

*There is no way that I could stay longer with my aunt. Her daughter was the same age but I had to do washing in the late hours, clean the house and go to the shops.*

Upon finishing Grade Eight, she went back to stay with the aunt where she did her Grade Eleven to Grade Twelve. It was in this school, Somkhele High that Nosipho remembers that her love for teaching was inculcated by her Grade Eleven isiZulu teacher.

### ***Teaching as a calling***

Nosipho describes her teacher, who was not teaching for the love of money:

*...teaching was a calling to her...I now realised that some teachers became teachers so that "Impilo ibe lula" (so that their lives are better). I am proud of myself if I can make a difference to children's life. I always wanted to see learners "Ziyinto ethile" (being successful) because of me, I want to see learners gaining knowledge from me.*

Nosipho's purpose in life is motivated by her conviction to find better ways of being and living and to better the lives of the learners. She inherited this belief from her teacher. This is what Mitchell and Weber (1998) call the "Usable Past" when teachers use their past learning experiences when engaging in their daily work. To regard teaching as a calling does not only contribute to the effective teaching of their learners; teachers further contribute to their learner's enthusiasm (Rampa, 2012). Varathaiah (2010, p. 52) maintains that as teachers we were more "drawn to express admiration for the teachers whom we consider had a positive influence on our lives and those who believed in us rather than those who were negative".

Nosipho's Grade Eleven teacher portrayed what Lake *et al.* (2004) call "modelling theory" and in turn opened up possibilities for Nosipho as a teacher to model herself on her. This implies that

teacher identity cannot be bought; however, it is shaped in social contexts through interaction with other people (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). The modelling theory that Nosipho's Grade Eleven teacher displayed is 'hereditary', hence teachers teach like their former teachers (Allender & Allender, 2006). The kind of interaction that Nosipho experienced with her plays out later in her life as a teacher who is obsessed with making learners lives better.

### ***Developing self-worth***

Nosipho is a survivor and she remembers some of the challenges she faced and how she overcame them.

*The frustrations of being pregnant at school meant that I did not pass my matric like I had wanted. The following year I had to write supplementary examination while pregnant. It was the most difficult period in my life.*

Nosipho, being driven by the desire to make her life better, soldiered on and eventually passed her matric. Gu and Day (2007) regard the ability to fall down and get up as the a sign of being a good and effective individual. They further state that this ability requires optimism.

When she was accepted to do teaching in a Teacher Training College that was previously allocated to Indians only, Nosipho found it difficult, because "every subject was taught in English". From her early age she got used to a foreign environment. However, she survived these trying times and learnt about self-resilience as a critical space for becoming knowledgeable. Irrespective of the challenges in her life, the love for teaching that developed her as a high school girl sustained her.

Nosipho believes strongly that each person should realise their own potential and capacity to be something and someone. Being emotionally and socially resilient is necessary for one to grow in self-worth and she got frustrated when others (including her close family members) become totally dependent on her, even when she was out of job and when she became a surplus educator in her school.

*The whole year in 1998 I had to stay at home. It was a frustrating period again in my life. I had a son, my mother and sister who all depended on me.*

These strong personal feelings hold alternate possibilities for what it means to be a teacher. As Rampa (2012) explains, people who are passionate about their work are able to bounce back (resilience) in difficult conditions and difficult contexts. This is what happened to Nosipho: the challenges that she encountered became opportunities for her to strengthen her resolve for becoming a resilient and knowledgeable person. Day and Gu (2007, p. 1302) call this resilience, the ability to “bounce back” competently in difficult situations. This sense of urgency of motivation is necessary for inculcating a different and better attitude as a teacher.

Nosipho draws the energy and strategies of teaching from her challenging life. This drives her belief of always striving hard to make her life better and for bettering the lives of learners.

### ***Developing a love for being a teacher-thinker***

Nosipho did her four year Junior Primary Teachers Diploma in a training college with good facilities. She mentions that in this college:

*...I was exposed to many sporting codes I even developed more love for teaching.*

In South Africa back then, schools were grouped according to races. Nosipho attended a college with better facilities.

Nosipho observes that her love for teaching developed in high school and was further inculcated in a teacher training college. As a result, she finds that teaching in a primary school is interesting and challenging because children nowadays are more advanced.

*Teachers have to think more because children are advanced. I learn from the learners and they also learn from me and I also learn from colleagues and they also learn from me. A committed teacher needs to learn every day. Each day I need to do research, come to class well prepared.*

Korthagen, Loughran & Russell (2006) regard as key to learning, the need to move away from traditional trained teachers who teach in a traditional manner. The kind of teachers that we become and the teaching strategies that we employ can be influenced by our biographies and the way we were taught by our teachers (Allender & Allender, 2006).

### ***A life-long learner***

In order to keep abreast with current changes in the education system and be relevant in her managerial position, Nosipho enrolled for the BEd Honours degree.

*I am doing an honours degree specialising in management, this will help me become a better manager.*

The teacher who upgrades in life-long learning, engages in learning communities “where teachers work together collectively in order to achieve their objectives” (Norms and Standards, 2000, p. 7). Continually upgrading ourselves as teachers’ falls under the professional domain of Bell and Gilbert’s (1996) social-personal-professional model. Teachers work in an institution called schools with other teachers; therefore, learning from others is expected. The school culture that exists in a school can either enhance or prohibit teachers’ learning from one another.

“Changing times require teachers who are prepared to change their ways of teaching in order to overcome challenges and to be effective in their teaching” (Dlamini, 2013, p. 51). This can be achieved by continuously upgrading our initial qualifications as teachers. The committed teachers should teach in the classroom and outside classroom.

Nosipho’s love for her learners and personal belief helped her construct herself as a teacher who wants to be a teacher-thinker, who makes a difference to people’s lives.

### ***Vignette Four: Reina - Humility as the space for deepening understanding of diversity care and enjoyment.***

#### ***A family-oriented person***

Reina, a Grade Three teacher, hails from humble beginnings. She was born in the late 1960s in a township that was previously allocated to Indians only. She started her primary school in an Indian school in a township, Phoenix. The teachers in her school, she remembers, were very strict and hard working. They placed more emphasis on reading and doing maths. She lost her father at an early age and was raised by her mother. However, despite the hardship, she experiences the home as a loving environment:

*“I come from a loving environment. I am a family oriented person. I care a lot for my family”*

Reina’s ability to grow up and care for her family was shaped by her mother, who raised them without a father. She further did well at school under the circumstances. This is different to the findings in a study conducted by Fleisch, (2007), which states that learners who were raised by single parents are more likely find it difficult to cope at school. The inner qualities in her surpassed the challenges she faced when she grew up.

Reina was exposed to good teaching from her primary schooling to tertiary level. In her secondary schooling, she mentions that:

*Teachers worked very hard when it came to reading and maths. We spent a lot of time reading. There were a lot of curricular and extra-curricular activities such as speech contests, annual school sports and debates.*

Reina’s teachers can be regarded as credible resources (Teven, 2007), as they worked tirelessly in assisting the learners achieve greater heights not just academically but also to develop strong and healthy bodies through sport.

### ***I enjoyed being a student***

From her primary school she enrolled in a good high school that was put on the map because of its matric results. She specialised in Maths, Physics, Biology and Afrikaans. Upon finishing matric, she studied to become a teacher in a teacher training college meant for Indians only. She had initially enrolled to do Chemical Engineering at ML Sultan Technikon, where she studied for about a month.

She mentions:

*Due to financial troubles at home I ended up being a teacher. I have no regret about being a foundation phase teacher because I enjoy teaching children.*

The personal experiences, for instance, growing up in difficult conditions, can be regarded as the thrust for change (Fraser *et al.*, 2007). The teachers’ familial conditions can enhance or prohibit the meanings they give to commitment. The challenges that Reina encountered in life financially and otherwise, did not stop her from achieving her goal of caring for her family. Being self-

driven and motivated by her inner drive to provide better life for herself and her family, Reina ensured that her dream of being self-reliant was fulfilled.

Reina found the teacher training college to be a good place for her, and where she received much guidance from the lecturers:

*I enjoyed being a student at the college. During the times of practice teaching, our lecturers supported us. Teaching practice gave us the opportunity to experience classroom in real life.*

The good support that she got from the training college prepared her to become a qualified teacher for the learners. However, a teacher's ability to inculcate love for school can lead the appreciation of learning which will eventually define how as teachers, they teach their learners (Allender & Allender, 2006).

Upon finishing her teacher's diploma, Reina stopped studying due to financial challenges. It was after she got married that she pursued her studies while assisted by her husband. Reina is a family-oriented person, coming from a loving family, which is further observed in her husband's support to help her further her studies.

*Studying further was challenging in terms of time and the fact that my son was born whilst studying.*

The challenges that Reina faced when furthering her studies prepared her for complexities in the teaching profession. Further learning requires teachers who are self-driven, willing, ready and able to face challenges head on (Shulman & Shulman, 2004). Being able to display these qualities is a sign of being committed to the purpose at hand which was to better her life.

Reina's upbringing in a loving family and her schooling experiences contributed to the kind of teacher that she later became. Her humble beginnings instilled the values of honesty, hard work and motivation. This assisted her to adjust when she was transferred into an historically Black school with only isiZulu speaking learners.

*I can identify with these learners. I come from a poor background and they also come from the same background. I know the difficulties that they go through...In*



*most cases teachers do things for themselves, for Self-Glorification...they forget about the learners.*

The ability to relate to learners was necessitated by her humble beginnings. Reina brought to her school family teachings (Day *et al.*, 2005 and Samuel, 2008). Her knowledge of self and understanding of her background assisted her immensely in understanding the learners' difficulties.

### ***A teacher, a motivator***

The relationship that existed between Reina and her mother assisted her to understand that

*...learners must be central focus to everything that teachers do. We must have their interests at heart...*

Committed teachers always strive to “bring reserves of emotional energy to their work [everyday]”; they put their learners first no matter what the conditions are (Day & Gu, 2007, p. 428). The conditions under which teachers work require teachers to be emotionally mature in order to successfully deal with learners' ever-changing needs (Pithouse, Mitchell and Masinga, 2009). A committed teacher with the best interests of learners can positively influence other teacher and learners in a school. However, if a teacher does some things for name and fame, they tend to seek glory and forget about the learners' interests.

### ***A creative teacher***

Teachers who were taught by creative teachers are likely to produce creative learners: this rings true in Reina's life. Reina studied to become a teacher in a good training college. In this college, they were pioneers of a four year diploma. She believes that:

*“As teachers we need to be creative, we need to make teaching and learning interesting”.*

Being a creative teacher means being able to use a variety of teaching resources other than the chalkboard. Soreide (2006) mentions that a creative teacher is constantly willing to learn and extend his/her own competencies. However, the issue of teacher identity cannot be ignored when talking about creativity in teaching (Kunene, 2009). This is because teacher identity can enhance

or inhibit teacher creativity depending on teachers' socialisation. The teachers who were taught by creative teachers are more likely to produce creative learners.

Reina's humility developed her to become a flexible teacher who is able to work in different schooling contexts with learners of diverse backgrounds. This is in agreement with Esquivel's (1995, p. 190) stance that [committed] teachers are regarded as flexible when they deal with their learners.

## **Conclusion**

The vignettes of the four teacher participants foreground a range of emotions that create psychological attachments to their lives as teachers. The teacher participants grew up in different environments (rural and township), hence their meanings are different. For Khulani, being passionate and resilient enables him to go beyond becoming an intellectual. Zithulele's meanings are informed by her relationships that are based on care and also foreground her love of being an intellectual who always seeks new knowledge. Nosipho's belief and love for teaching as a calling, develops her as a teacher who is always thinking about ways to make a difference. Reina's humility allows her to be a flexible teacher and professional. All four teacher participants' meanings are informed by deep emotional, intellectual and professional dimensions. Key relationships, practices and critical moments in and through which teachers make meaning of their lives, motivate them to become the teachers they are and the kind of teachers that they hope to be. A teacher's capacity to connect emotionally, professionally and intellectually is critical to what he/she does in daily life in this profession. In Chapter Six, I explore how, as emotional, intellectual and professional beings, teachers' meanings inform what they do daily inside and outside the classroom.

## CHAPTER SIX

### PUTTING MEANINGS INTO PRACTICE

#### Introduction

In the previous chapter, Chapter Five, I presented the teacher participants' vignettes. Chapter six explores what meanings motivate teachers' commitment. I thus respond to the second critical question, "*How do teachers' meanings of commitment inform their professional practice in township primary schools*"? In responding to this critical question, I seek to explore how the teacher participants' personal experiences and meanings inform what teachers do inside and outside the classroom as committed teachers. Exploring how the meanings inform the teacher participants' practice, I share Nieto's (2004) conviction that:

Pedagogy does not simply mean the techniques or strategies that teachers use to make learning more fun or interesting. Pedagogy also refers to how teachers perceive the nature of learning and what they do to create conditions that motivate students to learn and to become critical thinkers. (p. 107).

This chapter is divided into three sections which explore how the meanings of commitment inform teachers' practice: Section A is entitled "What teachers do within and outside the classroom" Section B focuses on "The struggles and frustrations teachers face daily", and Section C is on "Sustaining teacher commitment". In exploring what the teachers do and how they do it, I concur with Beauchamp and Thomas (2009), that the knowledge of self is imperative in assisting teachers understand their actions.

#### Section A: What teachers do within and outside the classroom

In this section, I present my analysis under two sub-themes:

- Ensuring personal well-being of learners
- Ensuring professional well-being of learners

### ***Ensuring personal well-being of learners***

Ensuring learners' emotional well-being is important. According to Allender and Allender (2006), this is a humanistic approach, "where the teacher's ability to deviate from traditional methods that were used by most of our teachers to put learners' needs first and model the goals [teachers] have for their students", (p. 15), is significant. Humanistic also means caring about learners. Likewise, James (2012, p. 166) affirms that a "true caring relationship depends on a teacher's ability to identify and meet students' needs and is affirmed by students' confirmation of that caring".

All teacher participants in this study teach in township schools, but their expressions of how they demonstrate learners' emotional well-being happens in different ways. This is informed by the uniqueness of teachers.

Reina: *Giving a pep talk*

*I give my learners one hundred percent commitment, and they can attest to the fact that I do not regret being a foundation phase teacher because I enjoy teaching learners. I give them a pep talk in my lessons about getting out of poverty and making themselves better individuals.*

The above statement reflects how Reina does not only teach what is prescribed in the curriculum, but also motivates and gives encouraging words that will develop self-belief in what learners are and do (Dlamini, 2013). Infusing moral lessons into her teaching ensures that learners' psychological (Choi & Tang, 2011) and emotional well-being is taken care of. This is what Korthagen *et al.* (2006, p. 1021) emphasise when they state that "in order to change educational practices it is necessary to break the circle of traditionally trained teachers who teach in a traditional manner". Children perform better if they are motivated and are given encouraging words that will inculcate in them self-belief in what they do (James, 2012).

Khulani, another teacher participant in the senior phase, states:

*...teachers should care for their children, listen to all the problems they come up with so that there will be smooth transition of whatever they do in class.*

Khulani acknowledges that learners come to class with different problems, and listening to their problems can assist to ensure that teaching and learning is effective. His ability to listen to learners' problems signals that he cares for learners' emotional well-being. Day and Gu (2007) emphasise that learners learn better when they are cared about rather than being cared for. If considered, this can enhance children's learning. Khulani further emphasises the importance of knowing our children by names: "...*know their desires, know their problems, love them and care for them*".

Zithulele, a female teacher participant who teaches Grade Seven, grew up in a different environment compared to Khulani, and she also believes that teachers must care for learners:

*The learners come to school with a number of problems. The teachers must know the learners' problems and help in solving those problems.*

Zithulele believes that teachers have a role to play in solving the learners' problems. The learners felt most cared-for if they saw that their teacher tries his/her best to care for them in the classroom and outside the classroom (James, 2012). In James (2012), findings reveal that the more personal relationship between the teacher and the learner, the more caring a teacher is perceived to be.

Nosipho, also a female teacher participant who teaches in the junior phase, maintains that the way we teach must make our learners like going to school. This was confirmed in Dlamini's (2013) findings that a caring teacher infuses motivation and moral lessons when they teach their children. Nosipho's ability to care for the learners within the classroom and encouraging them is part of taking care of learners' personal well-being, caring mostly for who is taught (Day, 2007).

### ***Ensuring professional well-being of learners***

The ability to alternate between the historically naturalised constructions of (stereotypical/traditional) teacher (Pillay, 2003) shown by Khulani and Zithulele, open up ways to being teacher differently, making it something that is pleasurable and fulfilling (Oplatka, 2001). As much as teachers are expected to ensure the personal well-being of learners, professional well-being is equally important. According to Evans (2002, p. 130), "professionalism-elements of [teachers' work] constitute the knowledge, skills and procedures

that teachers use in their work”. Professional caring means paying attention to learners’ educational needs inside and outside the classroom (James, 2012). This is what Day (2007, p. 7) calls “the nature of good teaching [caring] for the integrity of what is taught (*professional caring*)”.

Teachers’ work is challenging and they need to expose the learners to different activities and meet the needs of different learners inside and outside classroom. Khulani’s life in a township developed in him the capacity to balance the different aspects of his and his learners’ lives. His professional life is not constrained to describe the range of curricular and extra-curricular activities to which he exposes his learners.

*I do a lot of things in my school we enter quiz competitions and we win. I am quiz master and under 13 soccer coach. I have won a lot of trophies. I have won sixteen trophies since 2003 when I came to this school. The joy that I see on learners’ faces when they have won something or after they have achieved something is what keeps me going as a teacher and always encourages me to do my best as a teacher.*

Khulani engages learners in pedagogy that develops their bodies, minds, hearts and spirits (Hooks, 1994). Engaging learners in quiz competitions develops thinking (minds); involving them in soccer develops learners physically (body) and the joy that he sees on learners’ faces develops them spiritually. Khulani’s ability to engage learners intellectually, physically and emotionally, offers an alternate version to the stereotypes meted out to male teachers in township schools (Human Rights Watch, 2001). According to James (2012), the learners who are taught by an inspiring teacher are more likely to develop good self-esteem and achieve good results. The reciprocal feeling of witnessing your learners’ success is a condition for commitment. The joy that we get as teachers is when we see our learners grow, and growth can be measured when our learners become successful (Day *et al.*, 2006).

Zithulele’s close relationship with her learners is a reciprocal one underpinned by a yearning for knowledge (Shulman & Shulman, 2004). Her bond with learners is cemented by her deepened understanding of care and being cared for. Her own yearning for knowledge and the hope that

this brings she hopes to see in the learners, as this yearning offers them a way to become better citizens.

*My desire to see learners succeed comes when I look at them being **humble**, yearning for knowledge. That **humbleness for knowledge** makes me **want to meet their educational needs** that would make their destiny.*

Zithulele's desire to improve learners' vocabulary was encouraged through competitions she organises:

*The spelling bee competition that I organise showcases learners' talent and improves their English vocabulary. It is always learner-driven, competitive among learners themselves and it gives learners a sense of pride in their endeavours.*

Like Khulani, Zithulele focuses on developing learners' thinking through competition and thus gives them a sense of pride (belief in themselves). This assertion is further supported by Day & Gu, (2007, p. 1304), that teaching is emotional work, and committed teachers are "emotional, passionate beings who connect with their [learners] and fill their work and their classes with pleasure, creativity, challenge and joy".

The four teacher participants are aware that their job requires them to go beyond the book in ensuring that the personal and the professional well-being of learners is taken good care of. Teachers' capacity to ensure the personal and the professional well-being of learners' development enable them to inspire, motivate, care and listen to their learners. Day (2007, p. 7) regards the ability to ensure personal and professional well-being of learners as the nature of good teaching, "caring for the one who is taught and the subject that is taught (*emotional and professional caring*). All the four teacher participants ensure personal and professional well-being. However, Khulani and Zithulele went beyond the professional and focus on the intellectual development that encourages learners to develop the capacity to think.

## **Section B: The Struggles and frustrations teachers face daily**

In this section, I explore the struggles and frustrations teachers face under two sub-themes:

- Professional challenges: Teaching and Learning
- Professional challenges: Employment conditions

### ***Professional challenges (Teaching and learning)***

The challenges that teachers raise in this study are two-fold: dealing with teaching and learning conditions and changes in employment conditions as a result of policies.

Zithulele states that teaching in a township school is challenging and frustrating at times.

*As a practising teacher sometimes I get frustrated by the learner's lack of motivation. They do not foresee themselves somewhere other than where they are right now. Some see everything as okay, that's what frustrates me.*

For Zithulele, teaching under these circumstances requires that teachers go beyond the book and understand the learners' challenges. Teven (2007) maintains that teachers who understand learners' problems are more likely to make a huge difference in learners' lives. Day (2007, p. 2) stresses that teachers' work is "stressful not only to the body but also to the heart and soul, for the processes of teaching and learning are rarely smooth and the results are not always predictable".

Furthermore, Zithulele, in emphasising how she taught the learners in a school that lacked resources, states:

*As a teacher I had to go an extra mile, I had to go beyond the call of duty in teaching the learners. I had to be creative and equip myself with knowledge.*

Learners learn better if they know that their teacher believes in them, and goes beyond his/her call of duty in helping them to reach greater heights. Going an extra mile is a way of teaching that goes beyond teachers' stipulated working hours (Day & Gu, 2007). This is evident in Zithulele's assertion that her previous school lacked resources. A fundamental requirement in



ensuring effective teaching and learning is the establishment of an atmosphere of warmth, understanding and caring for learners within and outside the classroom (Teven, 2001). Though this is not an easy accomplishment, it is doable if Zithulele can teach irrespective of the conditions; so can other teachers.

Reina was redeployed to a school with only African learners. She states:

*When I first came here it was a nightmare. There was a lack of parent involvement, the homework was never completed. The language and the environment were major problems. It was a situation that I had to adjust to, get used to the staff and the learners. When I came to the school I did not know a word of isiZulu.*

The schools have a major role in getting parents involved in the learning of their children. This is because learners see schools as places that give them inspiration and hope (Grant, Jasson & Lawrence, 2010).

Nosipho finds working and studying at the same time challenging and frustrating.

*Though sometimes I find it difficult studying while working and with family commitments. This is because days are not the same. Sometimes you have frustrating days at work.*

The above excerpt shows how imperative it is that parents are involved in the education of their learners. The parents need to be at the forefront in the decision-making. The South African Schools Act of 1996 emphasises the need for parent involvement and the roles parents should play in schools.

Every individual teacher at times feels the frustration in his/her teaching career. The ability to be resilient in such conditions is critical (Gu & Day, 2007). The sources of energy that Nosipho draws on her motivation to strive for learning no matter what the conditions are enable her to pursue learning. Nosipho, being self-driven, is always wanting to make a difference to the lives of learners, an attitude which assisted her when she faced such frustrations.

### ***Professional challenges (Uncertain employment conditions)***

Policy imperatives impact on teachers' work and are the result of democratisation since 1994. The policy imperatives have led to the restructuring of the education system which later led to the redeployment of teachers (Chisholm, Soudien, Salim & Gilmour, 1999). The redeployment of teachers was meant to achieve equity regarding the teacher-pupil ratio. However, it led to the lack of teacher's motivation (Chisholm *et al.*, 1999).

In this study, all the four teacher participants at one stage in their teaching careers were affected by redeployment. Khulani was redeployed into a rural school in kwaMaphumulo. This is where he had to adjust to the foreign environment.

*Life was difficult at this school. I grew up in a township where there was electricity and running water. I had to get used to the idea of having to stay in an environment where there was no running water and electricity.*

For schools to attract good teachers in rural areas, the issue of infrastructure needs to be addressed (Devranian & Matthias, 2011). As a result of lack of infrastructure, a number of learners and teachers still feel the pinch of poor conditions.

Reina first started teaching in a township school that was allocated to Indians only. In the tenth year of her teaching career, she was redeployed to a school that was previously allocated to Black learners. She states that in this school:

*...Being an Indian teacher in an African school only was a bit scary. I was thrown in the ocean; I had to swim or drown...*

The period after the 1994 elections in South Africa led to changes in the education system. Some of the changes were intended to ensure social change (Chisholm *et al.*, 1999). As a result, redeployment came into existence in 1994 in order to shift human resources and equalise teacher-pupil ratios (Chisholm *et al.*, 1999).

Zithulele mentions that in her school, the principal retired and things got worse. The teachers did not behave; as a result, the enrolment dropped drastically. She states:

*Five teachers were declared in excess including me. I was taken back to a rural school. I was frustrated there were no televisions. Goats used to get into our classrooms at any given time.*

The policy on redeployment was meant to ensure that the resources were distributed equally to schools (Chisholm *et al.*, 1999). However, contrary to what it was meant to achieve, it impacted on some schools negatively.

Although Nosipho was never redeployed in her teaching career, redeployment did affect her. She mentions:

*In 1997, I became a surplus educator since I was not even permanent. I had to stay at home the whole year in 1998. It was a frustrating period again in my life.*

Nosipho was still not afforded appointment status when she was affected by redeployment. The government, in trying to curb spending, moved teachers who were permanent in their respective schools but who were in excess.

This section points to the frustrations teachers face daily work as teachers. These changes brought about by contextual challenges and policies affect teachers' work (Kunene, 2009). Likewise, Day and Gu (2007, p. 425) state that "the reforms-particularly which are poorly managed, disturb the relative stability of teachers' work and the conditions for their learning and development, in some cases, their beliefs, practices and self-efficacy". When teachers are trained, they are not prepared for such realities that they face when they get to schools (Masinga, 2013). They then rely on their inner qualities and resilience to be strong in dealing with such difficulties.

Despite the external challenges that teachers face daily, like the lack of parental involvement and lack of learner motivation and negative working conditions, teachers find personally meaningful ways to sustain their lives as professionals and intellectuals.

### **Section C: Sustaining teacher commitment**

The teaching profession requires that teachers are resilient (Day & Gu, 2007). In order to understand what sustains the teacher participants who work in township schools in KwaZulu-

Natal, it is important that to understand the sources that teachers draw on to be resilient. The knowledge of self and the understanding of what drives teachers' actions is the first step towards understanding what contributes to teachers' resilience.

This section is divided into two sub-themes:

### **Personal well-being of self**

- Sources of Inspiration (Personal/Emotional)
- Engaging with new knowledge and ideas (Intellectual)

### **Professional well-being of self**

- Engaging with others collaboratively (Professional)

The teacher participants draw their sources of inspiration from diverse contexts, for instance families, significant others, a desire to make a difference, engaging with new knowledge, further learning and others.

### ***Personal Beliefs***

Khulani reflects on certain beliefs that he learnt while growing up with his grandmother:

*My grandmother always reminded me, you must be the best in everything that you do. In everything that you do you have to shine. You must know that God is watching you. That is how I was brought up.*

Khulani's personal belief is that he must give of his best in everything and that everything that he does is meant to be. "God is watching me" motivated him. In the midst of the challenges, he remembers that "giving up" is not an option. Significant others, like his grandmother and his Grade Twelve teacher used to tell him not to *despair*. This alludes to the fact that teachers form their meanings in interaction with others in social settings (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009).

### ***Personal Relationships***

For teachers to cope in difficult conditions like the one that Reina faced, requires that they draw energy from a sense of “emotional identity” (Rampa, 2012). Reina draws on the strength to deal with challenges from her supporting family.

She mentions:

*If you come from a family where there is always trouble and fighting, you come to school in a bad mood. This turns into anger and it goes to your learners. My family always keeps me going, particularly my husband.*

Our families, like our teachers, can influence the kind of teachers that we become. Varathaiah (2010) explains in her study how her un-educated mother inspired her to commit herself to her studies. The teacher who comes from a caring, affirming and encouraging environment, is more likely to enjoy his/her work (James, 2012).

### ***Personal Desires***

Nosipho believes that assisting the learners to know makes her look forward to another day at school.

*Young children come to school not knowing, but when they grow up and they know that it is because of me, is what makes me like my work as a teacher.*

Nosipho attended a good teacher training college where she enjoyed good relationships with her lecturers. Also, in high school she had a good relationship with her Grade Eleven teacher. In her schooling life, Nosipho maintained good relations with teachers she came across.

Allender and Allender (2006) mention that as teachers, our behaviour in the classroom is influenced by our former teachers:

“...unless we are consciously aware of what is driving our choices of behavior in the classroom, we are all too likely to revert to the ways of the teachers who taught us-maybe for the good, but usually for the not so good” ( p. 15) .

The knowledge of knowing that your teacher loves you and wants what is best for you, makes the learner feel special, appreciated and wants to do more in his/her learning (James, 2012). Students felt most cared for when their teachers develop a relationship with them that goes beyond the classroom (James, 2012).

Zithulele, as a teacher who believes in opening opportunities for learners, mentions what sustains her in teaching profession:

*I always see learners having opportunities to make their lives better. I see opportunities in them that lie ahead that what keeps me going. Seeing my learners realising how beautiful they are and actualising their dreams makes me love my job.*

The learners get motivated if they see that their teacher tries his/her best to assist them reach greater heights in life (James, 2012). In James's (2012) study on caring, the findings reveal that the more personal relationship between the teacher and the learner, the more caring a teacher is perceived to be. Empowering learners is an important discourse articulated in the Norms and Standards (2000). One of its seven roles is that "An educator will demonstrate an ability to develop a supportive and empowering environment for the learner and to respond to the educational and other needs of learners".

### **Engaging with new knowledge and ideas (intellectual)**

Rampa (2012) regards teaching as complex and challenging. However, she cautions that one way of negotiating these challenges is through teachers becoming life-long learners (Vilakazi, 2013). Teacher learning works better if it is "self-motivated and self-regulated" and if it involves both "intellectual and emotional processes"; such processes enrich teachers' knowledge base, improves their teaching practices and enhances their commitment (Day, 2007, p. 425).

### ***Engaging in further learning***

Zithulele maintains that:

*The teacher must try by all means to be kept abreast with current teaching strategies that will make learners competent. One way of doing this is to study further. Upon finishing*

*my diploma I did the Advanced Certificate in Education; later I registered for Bachelor of Honours degree.*

The Norms and Standards for Educators (2000) document describes the seven roles of a competent educator, the one of being that the teacher is a scholar and a life-long learner. In order to be kept abreast of current trends in the teaching profession, teachers need to upgrade themselves by furthering their studies and attending subject related workshops. This will enhance their knowledge as well as confidence. Life-long learning is a necessity for all teachers since it assists teachers to grow professionally and also personally (Vilakazi, 2013).

Nosipho is driven by the passion for knowledge:

*Currently, I am doing an Honours degree, though it is difficult at times studying while working, the passion for knowledge is what keeps me going.*

From this statement, it is evident that Nosipho is aware that her role as a teacher requires that she becomes a life-long learner. Teacher learning ensures that teachers become credible resources in the classroom. The credible resource can be regarded as a teacher who knows what and how a subject should be taught (knowledge of subject and pedagogic care, Dlamini, 2013). As expressed by Fletcher-Campbell cited in Day and Gu (2007, p. 428), caring for learners' learning needs is "an expression of teachers' professional beliefs and emotional commitment that goes beyond contractual obligation of caring for".

Reina, assisted by her caring husband, studied further upon completing her initial qualifications.

*After completing my four year diploma in 1998, I took a break from studying. It was after I got married that I did the Bachelor of Arts degree through Unisa.*

Khulani is also driven by a purpose to make his life and that of learners better. He mentions that irrespective of family and financial challenges, he studied further:

*Upon completing my diploma I did Advanced Certificate in Education majoring in science. Later I registered for my Bachelor of Honours in 2003. I had to take a long break due to financial constraints and family commitments. I have since re-registered to complete my degree in 2014.*

Teachers' passion for learning supersedes the challenges they face which posed a threat to inhibit their learning. Fraser *et al.*, (2007, p. 157), state that teachers engaging in further learning represents "the processes that, whether intuitive or deliberate, individual or social, result in specific changes in the professional knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs or actions of teachers".

### **Professional well-being of self**

Teacher learning from each requires that a teacher be "willing and motivated" to engage in learning (Shulman & Shulman, 2004). However, they caution that willingness and motivation is not enough but the vision is also imperative. The teachers engage in learning with others to improve practice (Lieberman & Pointe-Mace, 2010).

### ***Learning from learners and other teachers***

Teacher learning is individual-driven but it occurs through interaction with other teachers in learning communities. The teachers who engage in learning from each other in learning communities care about themselves and their learning (Wenger, 2007). Nosipho, in emphasising the important role that is played by teacher learning from each other, states:

*As a teacher, you learn from learners as well as colleagues. As HOD I organise meetings with teachers where they engage each other.*

Korthagen *et al.* (2006) regard teachers' learning from each other as the determining factor in assisting individual teachers to enhance their classroom practice. Lieberman and Pointer Mace (2010, p. 78) confirm that "...the teachers who plan together and work together overtime build commitment not only to each other [but] to further learning". They further state that even the "act of struggling together" can teach teachers new ways of solving problems.

### ***Learning from colleagues***

The idea of learning from each other was emphasised by Khulani when he talks about his experiences in a rural school.

*In this school I met people who were eager to learn. We worked together, we worked as a team and we were happy...we used to get ideas from each other. It was in this school where I realised that there is no teacher who can work successfully as an individual.*



The role that is played by Khulani's personal lived experiences enabled his understanding of commitment as a team member. Khulani's ability to work with other teachers in ensuring effective teaching is supported by Wenger (2008), where he mentions the importance of teachers' learning from each other in professional learning communities. However, for this learning to be effective, personal identity plays major role in developing a professional who is able and willing to work with other teachers successfully. The personal beings (teacher identity) in this case are shaped and reshaped by interaction with colleagues.

Shulman and Shulman (2004) propose that a proficient teacher is a member of a professional community who is willing, ready and has an ability to teach and learn from his/her colleagues. Khulani proved to be willing and ready to teach and learn from his colleagues when he was redeployed to kwaMaphumulo. He was enabled to work successfully in a team (team-building). He grew up playing soccer with other township boys and soccer is regarded as a team sport.

Reina states that in her school though there are challenges in terms of the language that is spoken, working together with other teachers make things easier.

*We always interact with each other, sharing knowledge, sharing ideas and learning from each other. Our interest is with the learners, sharing ideas makes us better teachers.*

Appreciating good relationships with other colleagues is an indication of valuing others. The teachers who value other teachers reflect their personal experiences. A teacher who was valued by his/her parents is more likely to value his/her colleagues, learners and work. The Department of Higher Education and Training (DoHET, 2010, p. 7) makes provision for teachers to learn from each other in learning communities and refers to learning from each other as "extended professionalism", where teachers work collectively together to achieve their objectives.

The sources that sustain teachers are similar and varied. The impetus that propels them to remain committed emanates from different sources of inspiration-personal, social and professional.

## **Conclusion**

In exploring how teachers' personal meanings inform their professional practice, the teacher participants alluded to the particular ways committed teachers engage and connect emotionally with their learners in their professional work. The teachers, being both professionals and

intellectuals, are enabled to negotiate and renegotiate the struggles and frustrations they face daily in the teaching profession. The complexities and challenges of their lives as teachers propel them to sustain themselves in different kinds of learning, both formal and informal. Teachers' work requires that they are self-driven, emotionally mature and prepared to teach no matter what the conditions are. The inner qualities that teachers bring to school assist them to survive complexities in the teaching profession.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **WHERE DO I GO FROM HERE?**

#### **Introduction**

In this study, I worked with four teacher participants who teach in two township schools in KwaZulu-Natal, to gain insight into their narratives of commitment. The two research questions that framed this research process are:

“What are primary school teachers’ meanings of commitment in township schools?”

“How do teachers’ meanings of commitment inform their professional practice in township primary schools?”

The stance that this study takes, is that there are committed teachers in township schools who express their commitment in common and different ways. Their experiences and expressions of commitment happen within the constraints and challenges of teaching and the realities of township schooling, where resources in most cases are inadequate (absent, inappropriate or broken, see Ndaleni, 2013). Providing an understanding of commitment from teachers working in the complex realities of township schools, draws on the personal and professional lives of teachers.

#### **Context of the study**

This study was conducted in two urban primary schools in a township called Durbanville, KwaZulu-Natal. In township schools, teachers deal with learners who come from diverse family and community experiences. In South Africa, national educational policies point to “what teachers should do”; however, in most cases, the policies fail to consider the context and the conditions where teachers work (Jansen, 2001). Engaging with four teacher participants in this study made me understand that teachers do realise that their work is complex. The complexities in township schools caused by, among other things, lack of learner motivation and inadequate parent involvement, were highlighted. However, the committed teacher’s passion, thirst for knowledge and love of teaching surpass the challenges that teachers have in the education system. Through narrative inquiry, the teachers’ storied narratives revealed unique and creative ways that teachers use to negotiate and renegotiate these challenges to make sense of their lives as township school teachers.

## **Methodological Reflections**

The teachers' narratives composed from teachers' stories made available who they are, and what they do inside and outside the classroom in committing themselves to their lives as teachers in township schools. Through constructing and re-constructing teacher participants' stories, I became aware of their lived experiences that inform their meanings of commitment. In Chapter One I explained the use of teacher identity theory in this study. In this chapter, teacher Identity Theory enabled me to understand the sources of meanings that teachers give to commitment. The teachers' personal and professional meanings of commitment are represented as three types of perceptual relevance: interpretive (Chapter Four stories), motivational (Chapter Five vignettes) and topical (Chapter Six themes).

The use of narrative inquiry, the data generation methods and data sources in this study assisted me to generate data that were relevant and assisted me to get a deeper and more insightful understanding of teachers' personal lived experiences. The use of art-based methods (collage and artefact) is useful in delving into teachers' personal and private lives. However, as a researcher I struggled to have enough time to really understand how the methods work. On reflection, my use of such methods in future will require me to focus on creating a relationship where my authorial power as a researcher will be negotiated in a more productive way. This study revealed that teachers' lived personal experiences have a powerful impact in teachers' lives and inform their actions in the classrooms. The use of narrative inquiry enabled the teachers to open up in telling their stories. The ability to narrate their stories enabled me to understand them and their actions better. I acknowledge through this study that as a researcher, my role was not linear as it kept on changing at different times. I was the initiator (probing participants with questions); listener (listening to participants stories); selector (reconstructing participants' narratives) and writer (transcriber, narrator, author and researcher).

### **Responding to critical question one: Meanings of teacher commitment**

In responding to Critical Question One, I concur with Henkin and Holliman's (2009) point of view that commitment is an exercise that is mandatory and which also informs an individual's behavioural actions. The teachers' meanings of commitment in this study show commonalities as

well as variations. Through significant relationships and practices, particular meanings are adopted which motivate teachers to do what they do inside and outside the classroom.

The meanings that teacher participants give to commitment are informed by deep emotions of care, love and passion that lead to the kind of teacher they become. The emotions enable the teachers to be teacher-thinkers, knowledge seekers, passionate teachers and flexible teachers. The teacher participants regard committed teachers as passionate, resilient, knowledge seekers who motivate their learners and regard their work as a calling.

### **Emotional and Intellectual meanings informing the teacher self**

The kind of particular life that each individual teacher leads, connects him/her to the particular kind of teacher that he/she becomes. This study reveals a range of emotions in teachers that create psychological attachments to their lives as teachers. For Khulani, spiritual, mental and physical practices develop him to be a particular kind of teacher - one who is passionate, and always desiring to live a purposeful life as a teacher learner. Zithulele draws on her meanings from her close-knit relationships with her family. As a caring, resilient woman, she negotiates her life of a teacher as a knowledge seeker. Nosipho, who is driven by her inner calling and love, always strives to be a teacher who is a thinker capable of making a difference in the lives of others. Reina, through close family relationships, values humility and care which enable her to commit to her life as a flexible teacher.

### **Responding to critical question two: Professional Practice**

#### **Personal and Professional well-being of learners**

In responding to how personal experiences shape teachers' meaning-making of commitment, the findings in this study reveal that teachers allude to a number of emotions that defines their lives as teachers. The emotions further enable the teachers to engage learner's different curricular and extra-curricular activities inside the classroom and outside the classroom. In ensuring the personal and professional well-being of learners, the teachers in this study go beyond the book. They inspire their learners, motivate, care and listen to their learners.

## **Personal and professional well-being of self**

When teachers engage their learners' learning (professional) and social (emotional) selves, and further expose learners to different activities, both curricular and extra-curricular, they develop learners holistically. This kind of engagement has a broader impact on the learners and the community.

In ensuring that professional practice is maintained, the teachers are aware that their roles as teachers go beyond the book. The roles further allow teachers to develop their learners personally and professionally. They achieve the three roles by inspiring, motivating (giving pep talks) and listening to the learners.

The committed teachers find personally meaningful ways to deal with the challenges they face. The teachers in their training institutions are not prepared for the challenges they face when they become teachers, hence they rely on the personally meaningful ways. The impetus for sustaining their commitment to their work and lives as teachers, starts at the level of emotional and intellectual identities and it is what sustains teachers' professional and intellectual identities.

These teachers remain resilient and teach the learners no matter what conditions exist. The sources of teachers' resilience are varied and similar, but all are informed by their personal lived experiences. Their significant others, the personal desire to make a difference and engaging in further learning alone, with others and from others, sustain the teachers in times of difficulties.

## **Professional well-being**

The teachers' ability to face challenges is assisted by being life-long learners. All the four teacher participants in this study, after completing their initial qualifications, studied further. They have all studied up to BEd Honours level. They thus engage in formal learning alone and with other teachers.

The teachers' ability to work together in a school, maximises learners' growth. Since teachers are specialists, they bring to school different specialities: some teachers are good in sports, some in maintaining discipline and others excel at curriculum delivery. If the teachers' specialities are used effectively, learners can be developed *holistically*.

## **Theoretical reflections**

The teacher Identity Theory framing this study, from Beauchamp and Thomas (2009), offers two lenses (personal and professional) to understand teachers' meanings of commitment in township schools. In committing themselves to their lives as teachers in township schools, they ensure both the personal and professional well-being of learners. Furthermore, in order to sustain that commitment to the personal and professional well-being of learners, teachers ensure their own personal and professional well-being by engaging in learning with others and from others. Importantly, as individuals, these teachers were able to cultivate positive inner attitudes and beliefs that provide the impetus to continue to commit themselves, irrespective of the challenges of teaching in township schools. Zithulele expresses the challenges:

Sometimes I get frustrated by the learners' lack of motivation. They do not foresee themselves somewhere other than where they are right now. Some see everything as okay, that's what frustrates me.

The teacher Identity Theory is used as the lenses to understand the sources of meanings that teachers give to commitment. How the individual teacher carries out his/her duties is informed by his/her personal and professional meaning-making. The teacher identity theory assisted me to understand the personal and the professional as well as the personal in the professional. I used the teacher identity theory on the basis that the personal lived experiences that the individual brings to the school context, inform professional practice.

The Identity Theory points to the personal and the professional in understanding teacher commitment. However, in this study, the participants further include intellectual capabilities in understanding teacher commitment. The intellectual dimension is further developed through engaging themselves and learners as thinkers.

Each participant's background was different in the study, hence teachers' meanings also varied, though they were similar at times. The differences in teachers' meanings are informed by their "unique racial, cultural, religious and socially situated experiences" (Samuel, 2008, p. 12). Samuel (2008, p. 12) points out that familial upbringing can be regarded as a "residual force". The Oxford Dictionary (2010) defines *residual* as the remains after the greater part or quantity has gone or been subtracted. This 'residual force' informs a philosophy of a committed teacher

irrespective of the school where he/she teaches. Day *et al.* (2005), and Samuel (2008), in qualitative studies affirm that teachers come to school with a variety of contexts that have a great influence on their commitment and identity. It is these contexts that define an individual teacher as a unique being.

Over and above on what every teacher believes, commitment has a personal version. The four teacher participants, unique as they are, consciously or unconsciously allow the personal lived experiences to entangle with the professional. The personal that is embedded in the professional is what gives teachers impetus to go beyond what is prescribed in teaching their learners. This study emphasises that the participants' beliefs are re-defined and fine-tuned through narrating their stories.

### **Policy implications**

The democratisation of the Republic of South Africa post-1994 brought various policies which offered projections on what a perfect teacher should look like (Jansen, 2001). According to the policy on the minimum requirements for teacher education qualifications (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2011, p. 49), teachers have various roles. These include “community, citizenship and pastoral care and teachers as scholar, researcher and lifelong learner”. As a practising teacher and HOD, I have realised that teachers find it difficult to negotiate these roles (Ramadeen, 2014). Through writing my own story in Chapter One, I observed and concluded from experience that the policy-makers need to consider the role of personal lived experiences in every policy draft. Policy can dictate but part of the teachers' lived experiences will always raise its head. Hence, every teacher has a good or not-so-good story to tell which eventually informs the interpretation of education policies. The teachers' ability to understand themselves better which can be necessitated by the composing of their stories, can enable them to understand the policies better.

The South African Council of Educators maintains that all the teachers must uphold the professional values embedded in this act. However, teachers display the personal that is embedded in the professional that goes beyond what is prescribed in the policies. The teachers in this study show an understanding of what the policy spells out; however, dynamics, beliefs and attitudes inform what they do and how they do it. The policies can affect teachers' personal and



professional lives. The redeployment of teachers in this study affected the teachers' lives and their careers.

### **Practice implications**

In the South African context, there are many changes brought about by the different roles teachers are expected to play. However, these roles and policies show disparity between what the policies entail and the realities teachers face in schools (Jansen, 2001). In order for teachers to negotiate and renegotiate these changes, they cultivate deeper inner beliefs which enable them to teach, irrespective of the challenges. The impetus that teachers bring starts at an emotional and attitudinal level, and assists them to sustain their personal and professional identities. At school level, the programmes need to allow teachers' personal lived experiences to influence their practice.

### **Contributions for further research**

This study adds to educational research in the field of narrative inquiry. It assists in deepening our understanding of how teacher stories and lived experiences offer a particular understanding of teacher commitment. This study further enlightens how teacher identity informs teachers' actions inside and outside the classroom. The findings of this study can be used by the Department of Education officials and the teachers who have a keen interest in understanding what motivates their behaviour as teachers.

### **How further research could build on this study**

The questions that can be generated in further research emanating from this study are:

What is the role of male teachers in enacting the personal well-being of learners?

What are the effects of policies, for example, *redeployment* on teachers' commitment?

### **Final reflections**

The ability to understand care and commitment in my personal life through the metaphor of the mealie plant in Chapter One is later witnessed in my learning and development as a teacher-researcher. In listening to the teachers and including their voices in the stories I retell of who and what committed teachers think, feel and do, I have opened up my understanding of what it means

to be a committed teacher and researcher. By nurturing each of the four teacher participant stories, I am able to question and resist particular traditional and oppressive perceptions that block and constrain what it means for me to live intentionally and pursue my academic interests and practices differently. I have developed a deeper awareness of how my personal and professional meanings are interwoven and the ongoing struggle to negotiate the personal-professional desires and interests in being a teacher-researcher.

This study highlights the importance of the personal and the professional well-being of learners and teachers. If we wish to build a caring nation and a learning nation, teachers need to model behaviour for their learners (modeling theory). I am of the view that as teachers, we cannot teach our learners to be emotional, loving and passionate; we need to model our own behaviour inside and outside the classroom. All four teacher participants unanimously agreed that caring, passion and being emotionally mature are essential in the South African township context. This further strengthens the assumption that emotions and teachers' work cannot be separated. However, how teachers engage in emotional growth is informed by their personal experiences. Finally, this study pointed out that when teachers love what they do, irrespective of the conditions in their working environments and the policies which dictate, they can be regarded as committed. The fundamental of teaching is to love teaching and love learners with all our hearts (passion), minds (vision) and body (physical).

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## Appendix 1

### REQUEST FOR CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

#### PARTICIPANT'S ADDRESS

I am currently studying towards a Master of Education degree at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) and I am required to complete a dissertation for my study. The topic that I am researching on is Conceptions of teacher commitment: A narrative Inquiry.

The purpose of this study is to explore teachers' meanings of commitment and how these meanings of commitment inform their professional practice. This study is supervised by Dr. G. Pillay who is a senior lecturer in the School of Education (UKZN). She can be contacted telephonically at 031-264 7598.

Participation in this study is voluntary. I would conduct unstructured interviews with you, using artefact and collage inquiry that will be digitally recorded in the audio format. We shall have meetings that will be held at a venue convenient to you.

I hereby request permission from you to use the interviews, artefact and collage inquiry as a means to collect data for my study.

If I receive your consent, I will use this data in a way that respects your privacy and dignity. I will use pseudonyms to protect your identity. All data gathered will be treated with confidentiality. There are no direct benefits for participating in this study. The findings from this study could contribute to scholarly conversation within the phenomenon of teacher commitment.

I wish to inform you that you have no binding commitment to the study and you are free to withdraw from the research at any stage without any negative or undesirable consequences. If you withdraw your consent, you will not be prejudiced in any way. Should you have any questions relating to the rights of research participants, you can contact Miss Phume Ximba at

the University of KwaZulu-Natal Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics office on 031-2603587.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Yours in Education

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Percival M. Makhanya

Appendix 2

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT FOR PARTICIPANTS

TITLE OF STUDY: Conceptions of teacher commitment: A Narrative Inquiry of primary school teachers in township schools.

AUTHORIZATION:

I ..... (Full names of participant) hereby confirm that I have read the above and understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project. I understand that I may refuse to participate or I may withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice. I also understand that if I have any concerns about my treatment during the study, I can contact the lecturer on the number provided.

I consent to the following data collection activities (please tick):

	Yes	No
Interviews		
Audio recording of interviews		
Creating a collage		
Audio recording of discussion on collage		
Presenting artefact		
Audio recording of artefact discussion		

.....

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

.....

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER

DATE



