



UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

**Student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse
teaching practicum contexts**

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As the candidate's supervisor, I have approved this thesis for submission.

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Signed:



Date: 15 February 2024

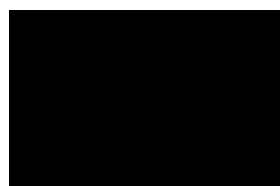
Declaration

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Post-Graduate Programme in Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

I, CLIVE JIMMY WILLIAM BROWN, declare that:

1. The research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research.
2. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
3. This thesis does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs or other information unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.
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CLIVE JIMMY WILLIAM BROWN



15 February 2024

Name and Signature of Supervisor

Name: Professor Sarasvathie Reddy

Date: 15 February 2024

Published journal articles

The following journal articles arising out of the study process have been published:

- Brown, C. J. W., & Samuel, M. A. (2022). Sustaining evolving teaching practicum models in higher education: A conversational ethnodrama between South African teacher educators. *Perspectives in Education*, 40(3), 163-180.
- Samuel, M. A., Reddy, S., & Brown, C. J. W. (2022). Critical reflections on researching lived and learning experiences: towards a critical phenomenology. *African Perspectives of Research in Teaching & Learning*. Volume 5 (Issue 01); 185-205

Abstract (English)

This doctoral thesis explores the lived experiences of pre-service teachers in the South African educational system 29 years post-apartheid, focusing on the challenges of navigating diversity. This study design focused on a case study of a single teacher education institution within the Western Cape. Despite policy encouragement for diverse teaching contexts, a predominant trend among final-year student-teachers is selecting placements aligned with their backgrounds, raising questions about their resistance to unfamiliar environments.

The research problem centers on understanding why student-teachers gravitate towards familiar settings in their teaching practice, avoiding the diversity encouraged by available school options. The study aims to uncover the motivations behind this selection pattern, employing a theoretical framework rooted in phenomenology, drawing on Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty to explore the concept of '***lived experience***.' Additionally, Ryan and Markova's ***comfort, stretch, and panic model*** and the ***pedagogy of discomfort theory*** are utilised to understand the sensations encountered during teaching practicum.

Through a chronological exploration of 12 years of schooling experiences, four years in the teacher education programme, and diverse teaching practicum contexts, it becomes evident that many students strategically choose placements for qualification rather than embracing a broader range of experiences. However, some opt for disruptive, scaffolded teaching practices, leading to autonomous professional growth.

The study's thesis is creatively presented as an imaginative consolidation in the form of a speech, culminating in the analysis of the findings. It suggests that ***levers of change*** can ***activate transformative professional development for student-teachers***, emphasising collaborative efforts among stakeholders. The need for a conscious, supportive, yet disruptive work-integrated learning intervention is underscored to broaden students' professional growth agenda.

In conclusion, the study highlights the importance of ***transformative professional development*** for student-teachers and proposes collaborative efforts among stakeholders to support learning in diverse spaces throughout the initial teacher education programme. It sheds light on the complex interplay between personal experiences, curriculum expectations, and student-teacher choices, providing insights to address the limited engagement with diversity in teaching practicum contexts. The research advocates for breaking the status quo of a purely racialised understanding of diversity for enduring positive change.

Abstract (IsiZulu)

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis

1. **Firstly**, to each marginalised Cape Flats child whose struggle with their sexual identity has unfortunately cut their schooling and lives short.
2. **Secondly**, to my late friends Marlo Johnson, who passed on in 2004 after a ferocious fight with AIDS and my firefighting friend Ashley Arendse, whose life was cut short by COVID-19 in 2021.
3. **Thirdly**, to a young academic whose academic career and life were cut short in an unfortunate accident in 2006, Nigel Delane, your memory will always remain with those you left behind.
4. **Fourthly**, this thesis is dedicated to my father and late mother, siblings, in-laws, nephews and nieces and life-partner: **Father**: Clive Brown Senior and **Mother**: (Late) Linda Brown, **Siblings**: Colleen, Lynn, Natalie, Clinton, Stacey, Chanelene and Conley; **In-Laws**: Warren Botha, Cheslyn Adonis, Chantal Brown; **Nephews**: Logan, Cody, Caiden, Carter and Connor; **Nieces**: Annabella, Chanlyn, Annalee, Chastity, Annastasia and Reign; **Life Partner** Darling Michael.



I was raised in one of the largest townships designed by the apartheid regime, Mitchells Plain, located within the City of Cape Town, Western Cape, South Africa and situated about 28 km from the Cape Town city centre, where I traversed an array of socio-economic circumstances. I hold steadfast to the belief that education has the potential to change one's life - **Clive Jimmy William Brown, eldest son of Clive Brown Senior and the late Linda Brown.**

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List of abbreviations

Acronyms	Meaning
ABER	Arts-based educational research or arts-based research
B.Ed.	Bachelor of Education
CAPS	Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement
CPUT	Cape Peninsula University of Technology
CCTV	Closed-circuit television
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
FGI(s)	Focus Group Interview(s)
FP	Foundation Phase
Gr.	Grade
HEIs	Higher education institutions
IP	Intermediate Phase
ISPFTED	Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development
ITE	Initial teacher education
MRTEQ	Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications
Q1 to Q5	Quintile 1 to Quintile 5 schooling
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SMT	School Management Team
TP	Teaching Practice or Teaching Practicum
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal
WC	Western Cape
WCED	Western Cape Education Department
WIL	Work-Integrated Learning

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PROLOGUE

MY PERSONAL JOURNEY IN DIVERSE TEACHING CONTEXTS: FROM TEACHER TO TEACHER-EDUCATOR TO RESEARCHER

The following milestones mark my personal research journey in understanding student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse Teaching Practicum contexts:

A naive conceptualisation of students' reluctance to venture into new contexts: Using my knowledge from earlier years as an undergraduate student at this institution

My research questions were rooted in my personal experience of Teaching Practice (TP) both as an undergraduate student-teacher from within this department at the university and now as the Coordinator of the Teaching Practice Programme at the research site. My biography is thus crucial in revisiting my experiences to explain the roots of my research questions. This is important because my life story provides insights into my inner consciousness and allows me to sense, feel, visualise and re-experience comparable student experiences that may border on shared experiences. My biography has a threefold purpose, namely, *(i)* I argue that within my experience is embedded a larger narrative of being presented with an alternative (*diverse*) Teaching Practicum context during my undergraduate teaching degree, which varied in the kinds of people and the type of school where I was placed *(ii)* I explicate the brief historical, political and social influences on my thinking and how they influenced and shaped my thinking and understanding of the world in which I live and which is in me; and *(iii)* I highlight how my biography invites student-teachers to see, feel and perhaps share the same kinds of experiences when being allowed to learn and teach in a different kind of schooling context. With reference to Gladwell (2007), my biography highlights that one does not simply undertake a research project without pondering what one knows and how one acquired that knowledge. Therefore, I review my biography using the methods of acquiring knowledge identified by Gladwell (2007), which can be broken down into five categories (1 - intuition, 2 - authority, 3 - rationalism, 4 - empiricism and 5 - the scientific method), each with its own strengths and weaknesses. Any biography is a construction of knowledge that signifies a combination of the social, political, psychological, and cultural influences on our own lives (Koopman, 2013).

The literature notes that grown-ups' insights into the world are strongly influenced by their childhood experiences (Belsky & Steinburg, 1978; Popkewitz, 1987). A justification of my childhood experiences as an individual with a great passion for the teaching profession is essential to this research since it describes and provides first-hand insight into the views I hold about teachers and their preparedness to teach. Moreover, my biography justifies how it historically shaped, impacted, and informed my life (Foucault, 1972). Underlying my biography is the intricate structure of my consciousness and how it directed me towards researching the lived experiences of final-year Intermediate Phase student-teachers within diverse Teaching Practicum contexts.

I was born on 22 May 1985 in Cape Town in the government Groote Schuur Hospital. Upon being discharged from the hospital, my parents took me to our home, a Wendy house in the suburb of Steenburg. In South Africa, Wendy houses are a form of accommodation for live-in domestic workers and are wooden structures on the employer's property. However, the definition of a Wendy house had a somewhat different meaning for my parents. The property I would briefly move into as an infant belonged to my grandmother (Dad's mother), and I would be introduced to my three older sisters. My mother was a homemaker caring for her children's needs and well-being, and my father was a blue-collar roofing worker. During the rainy season in Cape Town, my dad would go for months without work and a salary.

A couple of months later, in 1985, the family moved into our own house in Mitchell's Plain, also known as the Cape Flats (and as the Slums of India or the Favelas in South America). The apartheid government created Mitchell's Plain in the early 1970s as a Coloured township for middle-income families.

Figure A: An aerial view of Mitchell's Plain



Source: Mapcarta

Afrikaans was my first language as a child, and I attended crèche, primary school and high school in Mitchell's Plain. As a teenager, I enjoyed playing the educational game "*skooltjie-skooltjie*", meaning "*school-school*", where I would always be the headmaster or the lead teacher, and I walked from class to class interrogating learners with random academic questions whilst holding a thin wooden plank. The questions posed usually involved reciting multiplication tables (also known as the times table) and addition and subtraction. The narrow plank was used as a tool to intimidate friends and neighbours' kids into respecting and adhering to my school rules and self-created classroom regulations. As an imaginary teacher, I aimed to instil discipline in my learners. In the democratic era, South Africa's law courts considered corporal punishment an infringement of a person's human rights, and Section 10 of the South African Schools Act (1996) banned corporal punishment in schools. I grew up in an era when

corporal punishment was rife in schools, with parents refraining from questioning teachers' use of it. As I recall, teachers utilised mechanistic pedagogical and didactical teaching approaches. They were passionate about educating learners within this marginalised schooling environment. They constantly encouraged us to work hard and assured us that this would result in us seeing better places in the world than our immediate living and learning environments. I conversed with a professional person of a different race group for the first time during my last two years of high school, Grade 11 and matric. As learners, we were introduced to an isiXhosa speaker named Ms Dlamini (not her real surname). Before meeting Ms Dlamini, who was recruited to assist in teaching English Home Language at the school, I had never dialogued and built a social relationship with anyone outside of my direct cultural and racial grouping. The apartheid system defined me as a person of Colour. Therefore, my family are classified as 'Coloured People or People of Colour'.

I vividly remember accompanying my dad as a child in his work truck on Saturday mornings to work at White people's homes in Constantia and Newlands. Both these suburbs have recently been named the wealthiest real estate markets in Cape Town (Sotheby's International Realty, 2022, p. 1). At the homes of these people who looked nothing like us, I would see how they lived and what they owned, and I was even allowed to play with their kids, who were sometimes my age. I enjoyed receiving a sandwich and a glass of cool drink from their Black domestic workers.

I completed my high schooling in 2002, and in January 2003, I was accepted, registered, and started my undergraduate Intermediate Phase teacher degree programme at Cape Technikon, which later merged with Peninsula Technikon to become the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT). The next time I engaged in building social and professional working relationships with individuals from other racial and class groups was during my first year at the technikon. In line with the democratic government's attempts to redress the inequities of the apartheid past (Sehoole, 2005), the South African Higher Education System underwent a restructuring process of merging universities, technikons, faculties and colleges during the period 2001 to 2007 (Lethoko, 2016). However, Lethoko's (2016) study, *Taking stock thirteen years later: An investigation into the impact of mergers on institutions in the higher education landscape in South Africa* asserted that:

... there are more failures than success stories in relation to mergers in higher education in South Africa. The post-merger phase in South Africa has taken longer than anticipated. Some institutions merged successfully, with some unable to successfully go through the merger stage itself; some have de-merged, whilst others have been put under administration as a way to avoid a de-merger. This implies that there have been both positive and negative impacts of mergers in South Africa (Lethoko, 2016, p. 1).

Lethoko (2016) added that the "organisational culture, impact on the human resources, curriculum and quality assurance amongst others" could affect mergers (Lethoko, 2016, p. 19). A fundamental aspect of the undergraduate Bachelor in Education degree curriculum for several of my fellow student-teachers and me was the Teaching Practice (TP) course, which allowed us to experience real-life South African classroom situations. Theoretical learning of what constitutes a professional teacher and the practical component of TP would reveal the truth about my ability to teach or lack thereof. Teaching Practice is an indispensable component of teacher education, resulting in the student-teacher acquiring essential knowledge about the specific roles of teacher competence (Lombard &

Themane, 2015). Various terms are used in the literature to describe it, including teaching practicum (Myles, Cheng & Wang, 2006; Copland, 2010), practicum (White, 2007; Moody, 2009), teacher education practicum (Brown & Danaher, 2008) and supervised field experience (Goodnough, Osmond, Dibbon, Glassman, & Stevens, 2009). Teaching practice (DoE, 2000) is customarily used within the South African context. However, Lombard and Themane (2015) state that, more recently, the preferred terms appear to be *supervised and assessed teaching practice* or *school-based work-integrated learning* (DHET, 2011). In whatever way it is described, TP or teaching practicum (as it is referred to in this thesis) is globally acknowledged as a central component of any teacher education programme (Kilag, Malbas, Miñoza, Ledesma, Vestal, & Sasan, 2024; Koukounaras-Liagkis, Karavas, & Papaioannou, 2024; Marais & Meier, 2004; Myles et al., 2006; White, 2009; Copland, 2010; Hennisen, Crasborn, Brouwer, Korthagen & Bergen, 2011).

Student-teachers experience a mix of eagerness, nervousness, anticipation and fear as they begin their TP (Zyster, 2023; Manion, Keith, Morrison & Cohen, 2010; Perry, 2004. p. 4). Close to 40 years ago, Coates and Thoresen (1976) and Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1977) agreed that anxiety and stress are typically experienced by teachers within the classroom context. Furthermore, recent scholars (Ginsburg, Pella, DeVito, & Chan, 2024; Yeflach-Wishkerman, 2024; Chen, & Rosenzweig, 2024; Ullah, Asghar, Barbera, & Cimen, 2024; Mardhatillah, Widiati, & Sujatmoko, 2024) have observed that teacher anxiety has become increasingly complex and challenging due to a myriad of professional and academic issues confronting educators. Factors such as high-stakes testing, classroom management challenges, increased workload, and the integration of technology have compounded the stressors faced by teachers, highlighting the multifaceted nature of contemporary teacher anxiety.

In my **first year** of TP, I was placed at a primary school in the coloured suburb of Heideveld, where I taught Grade 4 learners in my home language, Afrikaans. The community and learners from the area were somewhat identical to my home community of Mitchell's Plain. The mother tongue or native language of these learners and staff was Afrikaans, a language I was most familiar with and comfortable utilising in my teaching.

During my **second year** of TP, I was placed at a primary school in the middle-class suburb of Athlone, where the learners' home language was English. I was exposed to a multicultural context in terms of the diverse languages used by learners in the school, coupled with the ready supply of teaching and learning educational resources, various faith beliefs, numerous extra-curricular activities and their stylish blazers, which learners were instructed to wear daily and which positively represented the school's image. It was the first time I had seen an upright piano at school.

In my **third year** of the teacher education programme, we were afforded what is termed a 'cross-over teaching practice experience or cross-cultural experience'. Student-teacher learning through a participatory cross-cultural experience is believed to broaden perspectives and increase intercultural sensitivity (Savva, 2017). From my standpoint, the cross-culture experience within the degree programme exposed student-teachers to an original learning space that would constitute a lived experience in which to examine their self-constructed pictures or opinions about unfamiliar contexts. Coates and Thoresen state:

Teacher anxiety appears to be associated with a variety of personal, social, and physical conditions (ranging from concern with one's adequacy as a teacher and discipline problems to the availability of materials and facilities) (Coates & Thoresen, 1976, p. 21).

Although I had personal worries about belonging (amidst professionals of a different race and class, this one being White), my panic was directed at whether I would fit into a space where, according to people from my culture, race, and class, I would automatically be mistreated because of my race and origins. In my view, the racial categories introduced by apartheid remain ingrained in South African society and the thinking (conscious cognitive process) of individuals like me. However, I embraced the cross-over lived experiences in diverse teaching practicum contexts.

In Figure B below, the images on the left portray my lived contextual heritage. The photos on the right represent the kind of environment I was unfamiliar with until I was exposed to it through my ITE TP programme.



Source: Google Images. (2022). Available online: www.googleimages.com [Accessed 6 Aug 2022].

Figure B: A context divide through the images illustrated

In my *final year (fourth year)* of the teacher education programme, we, as student-teachers, were equipped with a high schooling and lived experience for a minimum of four weeks at the start of the 2006 academic year. During the other four weeks of TP schooling placements, we were placed at a primary school of our choice to give us a better chance of obtaining employment for the following school year.

The high school I was placed at was an arts and culture-focussed school in the community of Athlone. I was placed at a music-specific school because of my diverse, multiple musical skills. In my New Apostolic Church congregation, I am the registered organist and the first tenor in the choir; and I can play the trumpet, recorder and violin in the orchestra. At the *high* school where I completed my TP session, the Islamic faith was the religion of the majority of staff members, and I became aware of the principles of their faith. On the other hand, the *primary* school was situated in the Mitchells Plain community and was my *alma mater*. It is noteworthy that, at the end of

my final fourth year of experiencing TP, the high school's principal contacted me and offered me my first teaching contract. I eagerly accepted his offer.

My professional career

I began my first teaching job at a high school in Athlone in 2007, thinking I had completed my teacher education degree (at Cape Technikon). Regrettably, I was informed that I had failed two courses, which resulted in my not graduating with my registered cohort of student-teachers I started with in the ITE programme. Since I was underqualified when I started teaching, I received a lower salary from the Western Cape Education Department (WCED), and the principal of the high school where I was employed decided to convert my contract with the WCED to one with the School Governing Body to enable me to receive a much higher salary. In the 2007 academic year, I was allowed to go to the university campus each Monday to complete the two incomplete courses (Inclusive Education and Computer Literacy) I had failed. I worked at the high school for two years, teaching Arts and Culture, focusing on drama and music to Grade 8, 9 and 11 learners. I was also tasked with teaching English Home Language to Grade 8 learners whose home language was Afrikaans. After two years, I decided to work abroad in the city of Khartoum, the capital of Sudan.

In 2009, I left for the city of Khartoum (translating to "place where rivers meet"), which is 5 701 km from Cape Town, to work at an independent multi-denominational co-educational private school, which uses the English language and provides a British-style education to children from 4 to 18 years of age. The learners were the children of professional expatriates working in Sudan to transform the economic structures within the country brought on by poverty, generally linked to the complex climate conditions and lack of natural resources. At the school, I worked with learners from an elite class who, in my view, did not have any knowledge of poverty. The stories they shared reflected their lavish lives, such as travelling abroad to enjoy warmer weather and shopping at high-end stores. They shared pictures of their homes, which were kept spotless by large numbers of cleaning and kitchen staff. A Cambridge Education Curriculum was offered to learners with French as a third language. The school managers were from England and were intolerant of any teacher in the school who was not from their 'first world context'. A type of racial segregation played itself out in the schooling environment. After working at the school for six months, I, therefore, made a conscious decision to return to Cape Town to take up a six-month teaching contract at a historically disadvantaged primary school in Mitchell's Plain where most of the learners were from broken or dysfunctional families, with little or no parental support.



Source: Google Images. (2022). Available online: www.googleimages.com [Accessed 6 Aug 2022].

Figure C: South Africa and Sudan on the world map

In 2010, I obtained a teaching post at a high school in the suburb of Salt River, and in the same year, I applied for entry to the Honours in Inclusive Education degree at CPUT. I was accepted into the Honours programme in 2011.

The following quotation is taken from my motivation letter to obtain entry:

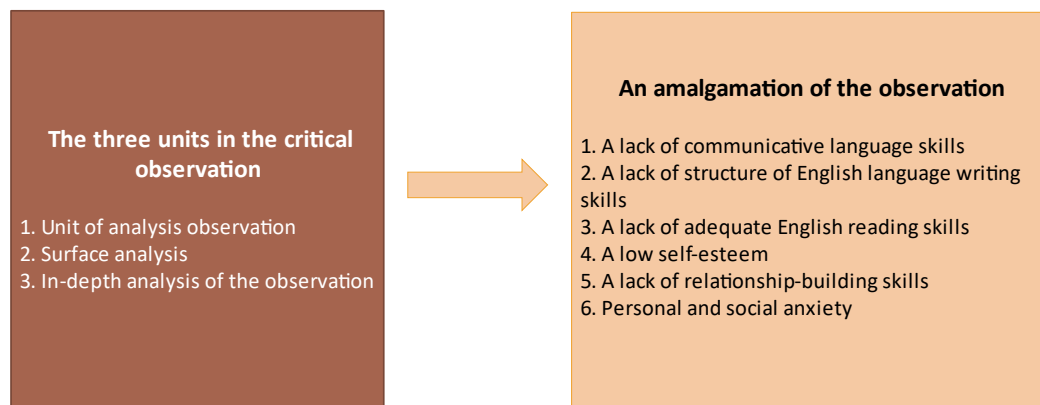
Whilst teaching at my current high school, an educational institution with learners from **various racial backgrounds** and, more importantly, disadvantaged backgrounds, I've found that more than forty percent of the first-year grade eight students are incapable of doing any form of basic reading and this spills over into various misdemeanours that will occur in multiple learning area classes. It is evident that if learners cannot read, they use the alternative to become disruptive and annoyed, and the result is to be removed from those working. I want to gain insight into the Honours programme so that I may be able to bridge that gap not entirely laid in the learner's years of primary schooling and implement it fully at my workplace (Clive Brown's Honours Application Letter, 2010, p. 1).

My practitioner passion for deep teaching and learning, coupled with the desire to further my professional knowledge to assist the students mentioned in the quote above, guided me into registering for the inclusive education honours programme at my *alma mater*. My goal at the time was twofold: **1)** to provide Grade 8 English Second and Third Language learners with the necessary language support and **2)** to formulate interventions to assist in my classroom when working with learners who are immigrants. At that time, the city of Cape Town and the general South African society were dealing with an upsurge in xenophobic attacks (Oyelana, 2016; Matunhu, 2011). Matunhu (2011, p. 2) asserts:

Xenophobia is a latent or obtrusive dislike of foreigners. It is anti-social and destructive of property and life. Xenophobic attacks in South Africa, which started around mid-May 2008 in Alexandria's informal settlements, claimed 62 lives. Thousands of foreigners were left homeless. What triggered the xenophobic attacks on foreigners? Better still, what can be done to stop xenophobia and xenophobic attacks in South Africa?

The xenophobic attacks, which were extensively broadcast on television and radio, led to high levels of fear among my foreign learners. At the high school where I was employed, a significant number of learners hailed from the Democratic Republic of Congo. They entered South Africa with numerous unhealed psychological and often physical traumas; however, the expectation of me as the registered classroom teacher was to ensure that they acclimatised to the school culture and norms. I identified three observation units in what I call the critical observation model, namely, 1) a unit of observation analysis, 2) surface analysis, and 3) an in-depth analysis of the observation. The interconnected structure below details my observation and understanding of the lived experiences of the refugee learners within my registered class. The incidences of xenophobia that my learners endured unconsciously acted as a pivot into my delivery of the daily curriculum and acted as a stepping point into the lived realities of those learners who experienced the xenophobic attacks. The xenophobic attacks in South Africa, therefore, had a profound impact on how I personally constructed the curriculum. The incidents of violence and discrimination against foreign nationals highlighted the urgent need for education to play a role in fostering tolerance, understanding, and empathy among all learners. In response to these xenophobic attacks, teachers within my school increasingly incorporated lessons that promoted cultural diversity, inclusivity, and global awareness into their curriculum. As a whole, we recognised the importance of creating a learning environment that celebrates differences and encourages open-mindedness amongst all learners and respective staff members. The curriculum adjustments aimed to counteract stereotypes, prejudices, and biases that may contribute to xenophobia. Furthermore, schools in the neighbouring area of Salt River started implementing programmes that foster intercultural dialogue, inviting guest speakers from different backgrounds and organising events that showcase the richness of cultural diversity. The goal was to empower learners and staff to become informed and responsible global citizens who reject xenophobia and discrimination.

A critical observation on the lived experiences of a selected group of refugee learners



Source: Author's own

Figure D: Diagram representing an interconnection structure of a critical observation model

During my time at the high school in Salt River, my contract teaching position was advertised in the WCED Job Bulletin. I had to apply for my contract to be converted to a permanent position, which would afford me various state benefits (medical aid, housing subsidy, pension fund, etc.). Due to my failure to submit all the required documents, the WCED informed me that I would not be shortlisted. My position was allocated to an outside teacher, and my contract was terminated.

My Honours degree in Inclusive Education from CPUT enabled me to secure a teaching position at an inclusive private primary school in Parklands, a Cape Town suburb. It is near Blouberg, bordered by Tableview, and part of the Western Seaboard residential district. My six months' of working in an all-White private school with only female staff was torture. I was one of three individuals of colour; the other two were the cleaner and the sports coach. My morale diminished over time, and my anxiety levels due to the professional abuse I received from the principal, secretary, and colleagues who were friends with the principal impacted my personal well-being. My working relationship with the parents of the learners in my registered class was something I would always cherish from my time teaching at a school where learners came in believing they were different. Different, not in a positive way, but sadly different in an unkind and untoward kind of way. The email below from a parent on my last day at the school whose child was considered a nuisance to staff and the epitome of having no direction in life gave me hope in my worth as a teacher. The school and the child's name have been altered:

"Good Morning

I would like to say a HUGE thank you. No words can express how I feel right now. It's sad to know you are leaving JP Inclusive¹ Primary School. We are also closing our career at JP

¹ JP Inclusive Primary School is a pseudonym to protect the school's identity.

Inclusive Primary School. You saw something in Peter² that no other teacher could see. You brought out confidence in Peter that was so detrimentally suppressed. Thank you!!!! You made my boy feel alive. Peter insisted on writing a card to you (he didn't want me to see it), and he wanted to wrap the small gift himself because he didn't want the wrapping to be boring. The only reason for him coming to school today was to say goodbye to you.

You have played a major role in his life since you joined JP Primary School. An amazing positive bubble surrounded Peter because of you. His marks in your subject are pure proof of how Peter wanted to apply himself because of the teacher you are. I asked Peter what makes you so different as a teacher. He replied that you are VERY patient and caring and explain the work to everyone until everyone understands. You correct mistakes and explain where the child went wrong. Now, that all takes patience and determination. He said you were the best teacher he had – EVER!!! And most importantly, he said you didn't put him in a corner to make him feel like a fool, and you never once labelled him. He could relax more in your class and be Peter and not what someone else wanted him to be. Thank you! He has had a tough time at JP Inclusive Primary School but is extremely grateful that he had the honour of having you as a teacher. You made the load very much lighter. Well done on all the achievements!!! I would like to still stay in touch. We will be looking at Peter doing extra Afrikaans next year. Perhaps you would be available to assist in the afternoons.?? My details are below, so email me back or SMS me back when you are ready. Good luck with the journey ahead. In life, they say when one door shuts, another one opens. You are a true asset to any school. Best of luck for the road ahead. We will miss you!!!!"

(Source: Email correspondence from the parent at the inclusive education school dated 3 December 2013).

In January 2014, I was contacted by the high school principal in Salt River, who indicated that my teaching position was again vacant. The teacher who secured the position had decided to resign due to the learners' rebellious behaviour and his inability to discipline them. The teacher was a White male professional in his late thirties who found it challenging to manage a diverse group of learners who struggled academically and came to school with myriad personal problems. The 2014 academic year would be my final year working in the schooling environment. From the following year, I would return as a university lecturer (Junior Lecturer) to primary schools to conduct TP evaluations. In Chapter Four (*section 4.7*), under the sub-heading titled: *Being Insider Researcher*, I expand on my professional knowledge and skills developed as a university teacher, better known as one who teaches student-teachers in the real-life world of work within the context of South Africa.

My life experiences of working in divergent spaces, from being an undergraduate student-teacher to a newly qualified professional teacher in both local and international contexts and involvement to a university lecturer, researcher, and Teaching Practicum Coordinator, have shaped my framing of this doctoral study. I have direct knowledge and experience with accompanied sharing of stories (obtained from years of overseeing the TP Programme) in the typology of challenges (and goodwill times) student-teachers encounter on their trajectory of becoming professional teachers.

As I embarked on the professional journey of becoming a primary school teacher, I have encountered an array of instances of unsettledness within the educational realm. Witnessing these incidents fuelled my commitment to fostering inclusivity and diversity in education, prompting me to explore ways to address such challenges, which I experienced along with fellow undergraduate student-teachers. In the process of evolving in my teaching career,

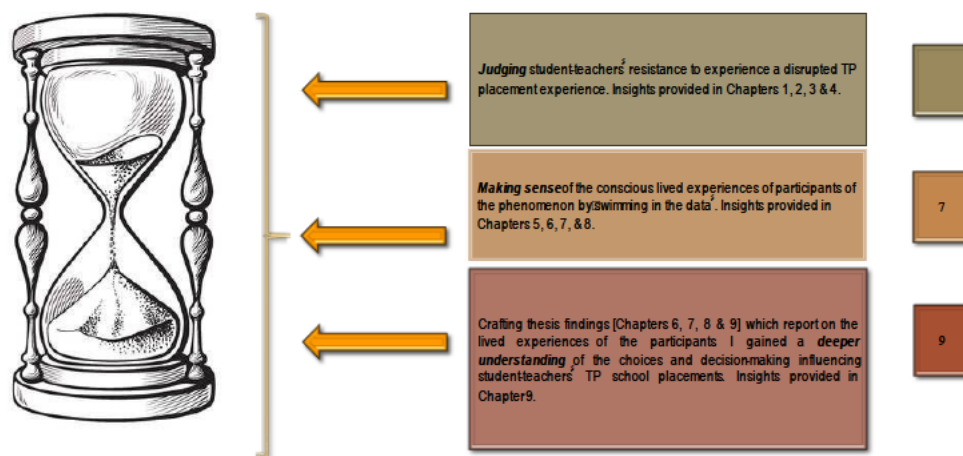
² The name of the learner Peter is a pseudonym to protect his identity.

as I transitioned to a high school teaching role in an international-level school, I further broadened my perspective on education. Interacting with students from diverse cultural backgrounds provided valuable insights into the complexities of creating an inclusive learning environment. This experience significantly influenced my pedagogical approach and instilled a passion for global education. As I ventured into academia, assuming the roles of a university lecturer and manager of work-integrated learning, my focus shifted towards preparing future educators for the dynamic challenges of diverse teaching environments. The nexus of theory and practice became central to my teaching philosophy. The decision to pursue a doctoral thesis on "*Student teachers' lived experiences in diverse teaching practicum contexts*" stemmed from my multifaceted journey. The varied contexts – from primary to high school teaching and now academia – underscored the importance of understanding the lived experiences of student-teachers. The title reflects my commitment to exploring the nuanced challenges and opportunities aspiring educators encounter in diverse practicum settings. Through these professional metamorphoses, I have come to appreciate the intricate interplay between individual experiences and broader educational contexts, shaping my scholarly pursuits and dedication to inclusive and culturally responsive teaching practices.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

In this doctoral study, I aimed to understand the lived experiences and reasons why a cohort of final year Intermediate Phase primary school student-teachers select specific placement schools to undertake a teaching practicum experience. I further explored the typology of influences and decision-making and the kinds of power dynamics informing their selection of teaching practicum placements schools. A culmination of their academic, personal, and professional experiences linked to learning in diverse teaching practicum contexts is illuminated through their exposure to their schooling, initial teaching education programme and practical placements in an assortment of schools to complete Teaching Practicum.

The below hourglass provided a personal lens for understanding the critical lived experiences of student-teachers when undertaking a diverse teaching practicum experience. Ultimately, critical phenomenology became synonymous with a two-sided hourglass. The image below, with its three segments labelled A, B and C, explains the triggering that took place and how my understanding of critical phenomenology and the phenomenon under scrutiny became enlarged through ‘swimming in the data’ as opposed to judging the participants’ experiences or attempting to gain surface level understanding thereof.



Source: Author's own

Figure 1.1: An hourglass through understanding critical lived experiences

This thesis structure has been designed to provide a progressively logical unfolding of each chapter. The study has THREE SECTIONS: SECTION A, SECTION B and SECTION C. The schematic outline of the chapters is as follows:

PART A: Setting up the study

Chapter one

This chapter consists of the contextual and policy background to the study. The rationale for this study and targeted beneficiaries are identified. The critical questions in relation to the phenomenon of this study conclude this chapter.

Chapter two

This chapter provides a comprehensive exploration of various aspects related to the transformation of higher education, encompassing macro and meso perspectives. The chapter is organised into the following sections:

2.1 Introduction: This section serves as an introductory overview, setting the stage for the subsequent discussions on transforming higher education.

2.2 Overview of chapter

Here, I provided the outline of the structure and content of the chapter, providing readers with a roadmap for the forthcoming discussions.

2.3 A transforming higher education system: A macro perspective: This part delves into the broader context of transforming higher education at a macro level, offering insights into overarching changes and challenges faced by the system.

2.4 Transforming institutional diversities in higher education: A macro perspective: The focus shifts to the transformation of institutional diversities within higher education, highlighting macro-level considerations and implications.

2.5 Transforming student experiences in a diversifying higher education system: A macro perspective: Examining the student perspective, this section explores how the transformation of higher education impacts and shapes the experiences of students in a diverse educational landscape.

2.6 Transforming national teacher education policy: A macro perspective: This part addresses the transformation of national teacher education policies, emphasizing their macro-level impact on the broader higher education system.

2.7 The transforming institutional context of CPUT: A meso perspective: The chapter then transitions to a meso-level perspective, focusing on the specific institutional context of Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT).

2.7.1 The context and background of the Faculty of Education at CPUT: This sub-section provides an in-depth exploration of the historical and contextual background of the Faculty of Education at CPUT.

2.7.2 The location of the study: Examining the geographical aspect, this sub-section discusses the significance of the study's location within the broader context of higher education.

2.7.3 The history of the Faculty of Education at CPUT: This part delves into the historical development of the Faculty of Education at CPUT, offering insights into its evolution over time.

2.7.4 CPUT Building a new identity and Developing a Strategic Plan 2021-2030: The chapter concludes by exploring CPUT's efforts in building a new identity and developing a strategic plan for the upcoming decade, providing a glimpse into the university's future direction and goals.

In summary, Chapter Two comprehensively examines the macro and meso perspectives of higher education transformation, specifically focusing on CPUT's institutional context and strategic planning.

Chapter three

This chapter extends the literature review on teacher education and builds the theoretical framework through which the phenomenon was viewed. I explore ITE in South Africa as a novice critical phenomenologist and then introduce and expound on the three theories (critical phenomenology, the comfort, stretch and panic model and pedagogy of discomfort theory) utilised. The use of these lenses was appropriate in providing direction to understand the phenomenon through the authentic lived experiences of the 19 developing professional teachers.

Chapter four

Chapter Four focuses on the methodological research design, with a detailed discussion of the research production process, methods and validation of the study, data analysis, measures to ensure quality, my role as an insider researcher, and the ethical application process and gatekeeping for this study.

SECTION B: Learning from the field

The following four chapters (Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8) provide in-depth empirical insights into the varied data produced and analysed.

Chapter five

Chapter Five sets out the demographic and biographical profiles of the 19 final-year IP participants. The data obtained from an online questionnaire survey provided the first level of analysis of the participants' understanding and interpretation of the diversity of people and contexts. Demographic and biographical profiles serve as foundational elements in research studies, providing a comprehensive understanding of the study's participants and facilitating the interpretation and application of research findings. This chapter provides insights into the first critical question, namely - ***What are student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse Teaching Practicum contexts?***

Chapter six

Chapter six presents the nine themes emanating from the thematic data analysis from the level two evaluative thematic analysis of the two one-on-one interviews on the participants' understanding and experience of diversity at home, within the ITE campus-based curriculum and at the self-selected TP schools. It provides insights into the

second critical question, namely - ***How do student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse Teaching Practicum contexts connect with their experiences of the initial teacher education curriculum?***

Chapter seven

This chapter provides philosophical insights into the problem of remaining in one's comfort zone, as was the dominant trend among most student-teachers. This group of student-teachers (*power-to-group*) are presented in line with the themes that emerged from the focus group interviews. This chapter utilises the dominant trends in participants' understandings and choices of diverse teaching practicum schooling through a dialogue with the initial theoretical frameworks. The key issues found within this chapter are explicated by virtue of interpreting the four zones, namely 1) The comfort zone, 2) The fear zone, 3) The learning zone and 4) The growth zone.

Chapter eight

Chapter eight offers deeper insights into the phenomenon under study by dissecting two carefully selected student-teacher narratives that venture away from the dominant trend of remaining in one's comfort zone. I tell the stories of two student-teachers I regard as outliers who utilised their autonomous and agentic qualities (*power-within-group*) to navigate TP over the four-year ITE programme. The chapter also infuses arts-based methodology images to elicit a deeper and richer understanding of the phenomenon. This chapter begins the exploration of the third critical question- ***What explains the student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse Teaching practicum contexts?***

SECTION C: Building the thesis

Chapter nine

The thesis is discussed in this chapter highlights the intricacies linked to the placement of future teachers in spaces of pedagogies of comfort and disruption. In this chapter, I engage with '**so what?**' and '**now what?**' questions as I provide concluding thoughts and philosophical insights into the problematic of professional growth and development (learning) in becoming a teacher. This is followed by a discussion on the varied roles played by educational stakeholders in the expected transitioning learning of teacher professionals in diverse schooling contexts. I elaborate further on the thesis, focus on the significance of this research, and discuss this study's intellectual, professional, political, policy and personal implications. Finally, I set out an agenda for future research.

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

In December 1919, a deputation representing the residents of Ndabeni, an African township in Cape Town, met the Minister of Native Affairs to discuss the future of the township. The residents faced the prospect of relocation to a new township (Maylam, 1990, p. 1). Expressing dismay at the impending move, a spokesperson for the delegation told the minister that it appeared that Africans were not wanted in Cape Town:

(T)hat only their hands were needed at work, and that if some mysterious arrangement could be devised whereby only their hands could be daily brought to town for purposes of labour and their persons and faces not seen at all, that would perhaps suit their White masters better (Kinkead-Weekes, 1985, pp. 8-9).

Transitioning into new spaces has been an endemic feature of most migratory patterns. A sense of belonging has always been a contentious endeavour. Academic Friedman (2021, p. X) presents a counterargument about the remnants of the once-divided social apartheid system which existed in South Africa, asserting that "a quarter-century of democracy has either changed everything - or nothing. Both views are right and both wrong".

Despite 29 years of policy and governance interventions to restore democracy, equality, and human dignity for all its citizens, the inequities of the apartheid past persist in South Africa. Notwithstanding the country's new constitution and laws that seek to democratise the education system at all levels, race, class, and gender disparities continue to prevail in learning spaces that should be open to all. Badat and Sayed (2014, p. 1) comment that the South African schooling sector currently operates in a two-tiered education system: "one for the privileged and another for the lower working-class community". They argue that "the doors of learning remain firmly shut to the majority of South Africans" (ibid.). Spaul (2013) describes South Africa as one of the most iniquitous systems that provides a dualistic education system wherein "schools which served predominantly White students under apartheid remain functional, while those who served Black students remain dysfunctional" (Spaul, 2013, p. 1). Sonn (2017) asserts that despite legislation to counter and eradicate past inequalities, South Africa remains a deeply divided and unequal society (Sonn, 2017, p. 2). These researchers question whether policy interventions alone are sufficient to drive social justice and redress inequality in schooling that persists in the democratic basic education sector.

Against this background, this research study sought to understand whether an alternative policy intervention exists to provide a socially just basic and higher education system in South Africa. Policy interventions provide the overarching framework and goals for the education system, while curriculum interventions translate these policies into actionable plans for what is taught, how it is taught, and how learning is assessed. The close interplay between policy and curriculum was essential for understanding the research study. It aimed to understand student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse teaching practicum contexts (better known as situational learning (Robinson &

Rusznayak, 2020)) through a work-integrated learning (WIL) programme that is part of the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) curriculum offered at the CPUT.

I understand the term 'lived experiences' as a lens to view research participants not as objects but as a means to uncover the truth about their lives or their lifeworld reported through their own voices. My objective in attempting to understand the final year IP student-teachers' lived experiences within diverse TP contexts was not to collect data, analyse it and report the findings, which is the case in most studies, but to engage with them with thoughtfulness and care as a way of summoning them to tell their own stories (Koopman & Koopman, 2020, p. viii).

In foregrounding student-teachers' lived experiences through the diverse teaching practicum schooling contexts, the study is situated within the phenomenological tradition, particularly the critical phenomenology research domain. It is thus informed by the theoretical underpinning of phenomenology, which draws inspiration from the work of Edmund Husserl, who is regarded as the fountainhead of phenomenology (Groenewald, 2004) in the twentieth century, and various other phenomenologists, such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Martin Heidegger, who developed Husserl's work.

Critical phenomenology, which was appropriate for this study, can be said to draw on the stance of Paulo Freire (1970), who argued that the research action should be directed towards redressing the power and hierarchy imbalances within a social system. This study was interested in such power and hierarchical imbalances presented in the diverse teaching practicum schooling contexts. It, therefore, located itself within a critical research paradigm "to encompass the belief that teachers should challenge themselves and learners to examine power structures and patterns of inequality within the status quo" (Freire, 1970, p. 36).

1.2 Overview of chapter

This chapter is organised into nine main parts.

Section 1.2 provides a detailed overview of the introduction of this research study commencing with a historical narrative which provides appropriate context and background for the positioning of the study phenomenon. I also take the liberty to expand my understanding of the term ***lived experiences*** used throughout the thesis. Furthermore, the suitability of the theories utilised for this study is mentioned.

Section 1.2 sets the stage to expand on the first chapter's conceptualisation and flow to illuminate the study's background and context.

Section 1.3 focuses on describing the research problem by foregrounding scholarly works and orienting the reader on the appropriateness of the research study. Furthermore, literature works and initial teacher education programmes within the South African context are listed and expanded. After that, I provide my observational stance on the phenomenon based on an area of topical matter within teacher education.

Section 1.4 provides the key research questions framed to understand the phenomenon of this research study. I provide a glimpse into the research study process, illuminating and highlighting critical research questions that best serve to understand the study phenomenon. The three critical questions outlined in this section are based on the framework of 1) descriptive, 2) procedural and 3) theoretical.

Section 1.5 highlights the framework for formulating objectives within research studies. My objectives for undertaking this doctoral research study are explained.

Section 1.6 delves into the scholarly works related to student-teachers and their journey to becoming qualified professional teachers. I also provide a figure which addresses the intersecting theories creating an initial lens for understanding the research phenomenon.

Section 1.7 divulges my rationale for this study by positioning '*what gives rise to the research study*'. I thereafter provide the significance linked to undertaking this PhD study.

Section 1.8 probes the deeper understanding of the National Policy on the Basic Competence of a beginner teacher in South Africa. This section explores the national teacher education policy and the benchmark it sets against the kinds of professional teachers emanating from ITE programmes.

Section 1.9 provides a synthetic overview of the chapter presented.

1.3 Description of the research problem

South Africa has one of the most acclaimed constitutions in the world, yet 29 years after the demise of apartheid, it struggles to meet the expectations of deep transformation (Khwela, 2022; Segalo, 2015; Moloi, 2007). The World Bank (2018) observes that South Africa has come a long way since the advent of democracy, but its transition remains incomplete. Although poverty has declined since 1994, levels of inequality remain exceptionally high (World Bank, 2018). Nzimande (2012, p. vii) asserts that, while the barriers to study at higher education institutions (HEIs) are not formalised or legalised on the basis of one's skin colour or racial designation³, apartheid legacies live on in the host of challenges related to the poor quality of schooling in numerous parts of the country and the socio-economic challenges confronting university students as they begin their journey in higher education (Nzimande, 2012). Chetty and Pather (2015) concur and note that "South African students entering universities do so from positions of extreme inequality in terms of schooling, race, class, and financial and other resources" (Chetty & Pather, 2015, p. 1). Therefore, many students enter HEIs without the 'cultural capital' deemed necessary for success (Chetty & Pather, 2015).

Students enter the university system with a heritage of their personal lived experiences of what schooling in different contexts has oriented them to based on the geographical context from which they emanate. These experiences are still primarily defined by demarcated racial groups, land and class that persist through the

³ In this thesis, I use the racial categories of White, Black, Coloured and Indian for discussion relating to South Africa, as these are the dominant racial categories that marked apartheid and the inequities that the system engendered. The usage of these terms does not in any way imply that I endorse racial categorisation and I argue that race is socially constructed and embedded in systems of privilege and inequity.

classification of the Basic Schooling Education System into quintiles. Schools in South Africa are divided into Quintiles 1 to 5 (Hall & Giese, 2009) based on three weighted poverty indicators: the community's income level, its level of literacy, and the unemployment rate (Zikhali & Bokana, 2012; Dass & Rinqest, 2017). The ranking determines which schools will be declared no-fee and receive a subsidy from the government; hence, the poorest schools should receive a bigger allocation than those in wealthier communities that can raise funds for themselves (Hall & Giese, 2009; Dass & Rinqest, 2017).

The ITE programmes at South African universities need to ensure that teacher graduates are prepared to teach across the range of classroom contexts that characterise the diverse post-apartheid context (MRTEQ, 2015). As part of the agenda to transform the education system, teacher education institutes are mandated to place students in diverse settings during their Teaching Practicum programme to develop their confidence beyond their restricted demarcated cultural lived experiences of schooling. This aims to disrupt their views and perspectives of different kinds of learning spaces, exposing them to a wider range of future prospects for learning and teaching experiences.

As the Teaching Practice Coordinator at the CPUT, I have first-hand testimony of students' resistance to being placed in schools that are different from those they are accustomed to. Going beyond their comfort zones of prior experience (when they were learners) is seen as potentially traumatic instead of as a possible development opportunity in their professional learning. Therefore, this study's main question was: Why do current student-teachers not want to embrace opportunities to disrupt their learning through their Teaching Practicum placements in schools? My conception of **disruption** connotes a positive broadening of the possibilities for learning opportunities (Samuel, Dhunpath & Amin, 2017).

Therefore, the study aimed to understand the quality of the student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse teaching practicum contexts during their ITE qualification, a four-year B.Ed. in Intermediate Phase Teaching. Drawing on a critical phenomenological framework, it further aimed to trace the lived experiences of student-teachers who themselves come from diverse schooling backgrounds and to examine how they negotiate between the diversity of the TP contexts in which they are placed and their own diverse schooling experiences as well as how these experiences relate to the B.Ed. curriculum.

1.4 Key research questions and the phenomenon of the study

Albert Einstein (1879-1955), the German-born theoretical physicist widely acknowledged as one of the greatest and most influential physicists of all time, said: "Everything that can be counted does not necessarily count; everything that counts cannot necessarily be counted". As the primary researcher, I had to carefully construct my thought process pertaining to what kind of study I aimed to undertake during this doctoral programme at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). Countless questions had to be considered and discussed during my first year of the PhD doctoral programme (in 2021), which I consider adequately prepared me for the proposal defence (on 28 April 2022) that would allow me to enter the research field after the successful ethical clearance application. Throughout the year of attending the PhD doctoral programme within the School of Education at UKZN, I had to learn to **a)** clearly identify the phenomenon of this study, **b)** clearly define the problem, and **c)** gain clear-cut insight

into the questions (also known as critical questions indicating precisely what one wants to find that provides one's work with a clear focus and purpose).

Reflecting on my year of being an observer within the doctoral programme, I realise how the UKZN Doctoral Cohort Programme⁴ shaped my thinking by attentively listening to the voices of fellow registered postgraduate students in their different phases within this programme. The phases were 1) **Phase One** - Developing a research proposal, 2) **Phase Two** - Fieldwork: Work in progress, and 3) **Phase Three** - Analysis and Thesis Report writing.

I learned that the research question guides the study and determines whether a quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods research methodology will be used. It signifies the direction and epistemological underpinnings of one's research path. Both methodologies have merit, but one must decide which is more appropriate for the research problem. Furthermore, as Scribbr (2022) suggests, by looking at one's research question(s), one should be able to establish whether one is looking at causal relationships (*quantitative study*) or exploring a phenomenon (*qualitative study*). The wording and structure of quantitative and qualitative research questions differ significantly. Therefore, I started asking myself which area of enquiry this study would adopt, qualitative, quantitative or mixed-methods and design the questions accordingly. I decided to locate the study in qualitative research as I wanted to delve into the phenomenon of "Student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse teaching practicum contexts". I then carefully constructed the following three critical questions to guide my reading and thinking:

- 1- **What** are student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse Teaching Practicum contexts? – descriptive
- 2- **How** do student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse Teaching Practicum contexts connect with their experiences of the initial teacher education curriculum? – procedural
- 3- **What explains** the student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse Teaching Practicum schools? – theoretical

1.5 The objective of this study

How one frames the critical research questions depends on one's research aims. The examples in the following table show the three formulated objectives for this study.

⁴ The UKZN School of Education uses a cohort model of PhD supervision. The academic support role lies in the fact that the cohort supervision seminars provided at UKZN promote the throughput of candidates within the programme.

Table 1.1: Examples of how one might formulate questions for different purposes

Research aims	Research question formulations
Describing and Exploring	What are the characteristics of X? How has X changed over time? What are the main factors in X? How does X experience Y? How has X dealt with Y?
Explaining and Testing	What is the relationship between X and Y? What is the role of X in Y? What is the impact of X on Y? How does X influence Y? What are the causes of X?
Evaluating and Acting	What are the advantages and disadvantages of X? How effective is X? How can X be achieved? What are the most effective strategies to improve X? How can X be used in Y?

(Source: Scribbr. (2022, May 21). "Developing Strong Research Questions | Criteria and Examples". IEPA. <https://www.scribbr.com/research-process/research-questions/>

This study aimed to:

- Explore the quality of student-teachers' lived experiences while undertaking TP in diverse school contexts.
- Gain a deeper understanding of how student-teachers interpret or make meaning of their lived experiences in diverse TP contexts and whether this links up with their learning experiences through the B.Ed. curriculum.
- Understand why the student-teachers' lived experiences while undertaking TP in diverse contexts connect with their experiences of learning through the B.Ed. curriculum in the way that they do.

1.6 Scholarship relating to the chosen phenomenon

The initial literature review engaged South African studies on experiences of TP and challenges in rural schooling contexts (Zyster, 2023; Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; Pennefather, 2016) and international research on the various tenets of becoming a professional teacher (Bunney, 2023; Chen, 2023; Stolte, 2022; Dan & Liu, 2021; Al-Shammari, 2019; Abou-Assali, 2013). As the study unfolded, it became clear that the scholarly work on student-teachers' lived experiences in learning to become a teacher presented a contextual, theoretical and methodological research gap. To guide this study, which focused on student-teachers' lived experiences in *diverse* TP contexts,

this area, given the fact that there is a paucity of research on professional learning from a critical phenomenological perspective in South Africa (Samuel, Brown & Reddy, 2022).

1.8 A deeper understanding of the National policy on the Basic Competence of a beginner teacher

The teacher education policy (the MRTEQ), which informs South African HEIs' design of professional, accredited degree programmes to train and produce teacher graduates for the world of work too informs the WIL programmes. The aim (in quoting below from the policy) is to highlight that diverse learning spaces and authentic contexts of learning are policy ideals that are not yet fully realised in practice, as pointed out by the policy-en**ACTORS** [*a term which I invented to provide deeper insights into the philosophical understanding of the politics linked to how the shapers of ITE policies initially reasoned TP would be realised in a democratic post-apartheid South African society*].

The history of South African education paints a picture of segregated schooling and tertiary institutions (Maistry & Le Grange, 2023). The democratic government that came to power in 1994 sought to adopt higher education and, specifically, teacher education policies to redress apartheid inequities and facilitate access for groups that were marginalised by a racialised system (Nomlomo & Sosibo, 2016). The primary objective of the carefully reconstructed policies is to ensure that social justice is placed at the centre of the agenda to transform HEIs. Connell (2019) asserts that most educationalists concur on the wider cultural purpose of a university, that is, to spread education and share knowledge and culture to prepare graduates entering the world of work to think autonomously. Graduates of ITE programmes are not bound by set agendas when entering formal employment. Instead, they rely on the knowledge, skills, values and competencies they gained in the professional degree programme. The national teacher policy (the MRTEQ) lays down the principles to design the core curricula for ITE programmes, which accredited institutions must adhere to. These minimum requirements aim to ensure that the higher education system supplies the kinds of teachers South Africa needs.

The two excerpts from the MRTEQ (DHET, 2015) below clarify what 'diverse-related knowledge' newly-qualified teachers should possess upon completing their formal professional qualification. Since this study aimed to gain a philosophical understanding of the WIL (also known as TP) and the experiences of a group of final-year IP student-teachers in diverse TP contexts, I include the citations that offer insight into the matter of 'diversity' within the national policy.

*Situational learning refers to knowledge of the varied learning situations, **contexts** and environments of education (classrooms, schools, communities, districts, regions, countries and globally), as well as to the prevailing policy, political and organisational contexts.*

*Naturally, all learning - including disciplinary, pedagogical, practical, and fundamental learning - should involve learning in context, but situational learning refers specifically to **learning about context**. This includes an understanding of the complex and differentiated nature of the South African society, learning to work in nuanced ways in confronting the **diverse challenges** faced by children in schools and the communities they serve, for example, HIV and AIDS, poverty and the lingering effects of apartheid,*

dealing with diversity, promoting inclusivity and environmental sustainability (DHET, 2015, p. 11).

*Newly qualified teachers must be able to manage classrooms effectively across **diverse contexts** in order to ensure a conducive learning environment* (DHET, 2015, p. 62).

Newly-qualified teachers taking up vacant teaching positions in new contexts are expected to establish a conducive learning environment since this environment is central to providing holistic teaching and learning. Sanford, Emmer, and Clements (1983) state that “A conducive learning environment is one that is task-oriented and predictable, where learners know what is expected of them and how to succeed” (Sanford, Emmer, & Clements, 1983). Relationship dynamics come into play between teachers and learners in terms of how they relate, communicate, and react to each other. Power dynamics between teachers and learners influence learning by virtue of mutually constructed and negotiated patterns, leading to empowerment. Foucault (1977) affirms that power relationships are not constant but always in motion. For Foucault, power lies within the knowledge base domain of the individual. He does not support the idea that power is believed to be repressive. Dose (2009) critiques Foucault’s theory of power as being oversimplified or just misunderstood. However, understanding the essential role of ‘power’, especially in the range of possibilities of schools which are social environments, leads to a clearer understanding of what kinds of barriers prevented student-teachers from entering unfamiliar contextual spaces and whose power influenced their decision-making about the choice of a school for the teaching practicum placement.

The teacher education policy can be said to act as a non-viable guidebook. Complex interpretations are provided of authentic and diverse learning to become a teacher. In my view, the MRTEQ was designed as a transformative imperative to provide society with the kinds of teachers needed in post-apartheid South African society. The policy shapers’ idealistically believed that exiting professional teachers would be the solution to transform many aspects of a fractured post-apartheid societal fabric, which requires teachers to enter learning spaces which do not resemble their own. Therefore, the MRTEQ seeks to act as a saviour to rescue a broken and fragmented education system.

Critical theorists hold that all human societies are structured around certain power relationships, which dominate the production of all forms of knowledge (Higgs & Smith, 2006). Freire (1972) asserts that societal power structures should be interrogated through the lens of the oppressor or the oppressed, enabling society to actively work for change locally and beyond. Currie (1972, p. 3) concurs with Freire:

Man [sic] cannot be free until he understands the present reality of his life situation and also the antecedent reality. Without such cognition, man cannot know or plan for the future since the future is inextricably interwoven with the past and the present reality.

1.9 Synthesis of chapter

This introductory chapter sketched the study’s background and context, seeded from the South African teacher education policy that expects exiting professional teacher graduates to be prepared to work in “**authentic and diverse TP contexts**” (DHET, 2015). The reality is that student-teachers tend to resist leaving their familiar contexts (comfort space) and entering unfamiliar schooling contexts (pedagogy of discomfort) that do not match

their lived realities. The purpose of the study was to understand student-teachers lived experiences of professional learning in the diverse teaching practicum contexts during their initial teacher education qualification, a four-year B. Ed. Intermediate Phase Teaching. Drawing on a critical phenomenological framework, the study further aimed to trace the lived experiences of professional learning of student-teachers who themselves came from diverse schooling backgrounds and how they negotiated between the diversity of the TP contexts in which they were placed, their own diverse schooling experiences and how these experiences related to the B. Ed. Curriculum. Three critical questions were designed to examine the varied layers and arrive at a philosophical dimension of this phenomenon.

CHAPTER TWO

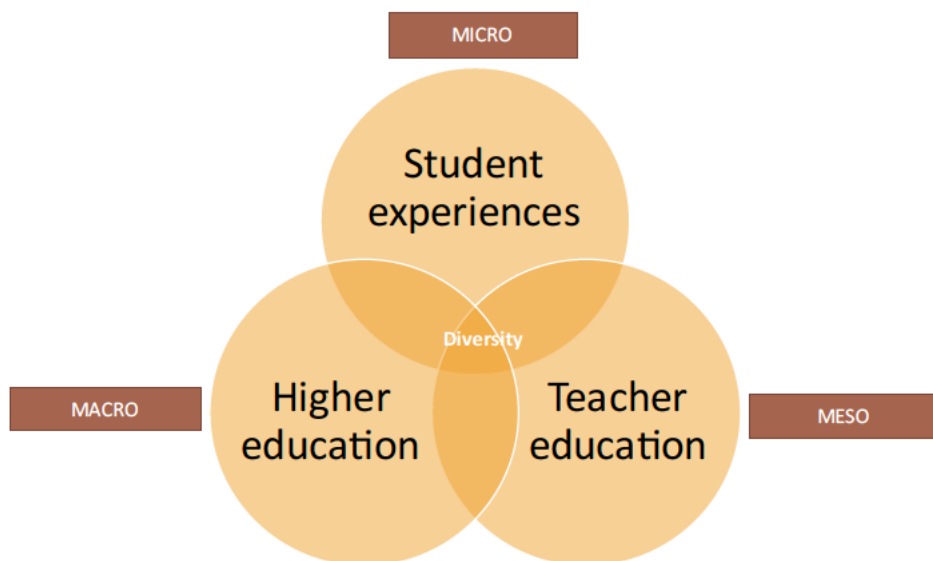
A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE: TRANSFORMING TEACHER EDUCATION FOR CHANGING CONTEXTS

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present a review of the literature on the transforming teacher education policies and programmes with a particular focus on teaching practicum spaces, which South African researchers have also termed as 'learning spaces' (Koopman & Koopman, 2020) and 'situational learning' (Robinson & Rusznyak, 2020) within the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) curriculum.

The Venn diagram in Figure 2.1 below uses overlapping circles to illustrate the logical relationships between the interconnected three sets of concepts constituting the literature review. It also integrates the three levels (macro, meso and micro) layers of educational environments that influence the phenomenon under study. The *first* set of concepts is the interconnecting relationships between a transforming higher education system directed by the Department of Higher Education and Training consisting of numerous policies, which influence the *second* set of concepts, a selected university's ITE programme. In turn, the third set of concepts is the lived experiences of student-teachers when engaging with Teaching Practicum within diverse South African schooling contexts. The term 'diversity' is the common strand that flows through all three concepts.

The Venn diagram enabled the concepts to be organised thematically and highlighted the ways in which the ideas are similar and different. By organising the literature review using a thematic rather than chronological, publication, trend, or methodological approach, I aimed to highlight the most common themes within the scholarly literature on the phenomenon of my study: student-teachers' lived experiences within diverse teaching practicum contexts.



Source: Author's own

Figure 2.1: Interconnecting thematic literature review concepts

Policy discourses on teacher education in South Africa today are largely informed by concerns relating to 'size and shape' (Mukeredzi, 2021; Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (MRTEQ) (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET], 2015; The Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development (ISPFTED), 2011). Issues such as teacher supply and demand, graduation and attrition rates, or the need for teachers in particular subjects are significant challenges within the education sphere (BusinessTech, 2022). However, few studies have offered deep analysis and understanding of the complexity of learning to teach and an account of how teacher educators engage with this intricacy in their own pedagogical practice. Robinson, Rusznyak, Luckay and Sathorar (2022) pose the following question:

How, for example, can teacher educators prepare student-teachers to be responsive to varying contextual demands, ethical imperatives, diverse learning needs of learners, new modes of delivery, specific professional expectations, and transformation priorities, amongst others?

This literature review examines what is already known on this subject and what is still unknown or poorly understood. It thus identifies the contextual and conceptual gaps this research aimed to address.

2.2 Overview of chapter

Section 2.3 begins by discussing transformation in higher education within the South African higher education landscape from a macro-perspective to build an understanding of the historical remnants of a fractured segregated society that was divided by race (Jansen, 2019). Various challenges experienced by HEIs 29 years' post-apartheid are covered in the literature, calling for an understanding of marginalised groups' lived experiences within the higher education terrain. I present detailed tables explaining the numerous teacher education policies between 1995 and 2015. The learning from section 2.3 serves as a basis to explore and outline the dominant discourses in the local and international literature on transforming institutional diversity within higher education from a macro perspective in section 2.4. Section 2.5 elaborates on the typology of transformative student experiences in a diversifying higher education system from a macro perspective, drawing on scholarly work which crystallises these experiences through their challenges and kinds of belonging at the university level. Student-teachers' experiences in varied contextual spaces in venturing to become professional teachers are also explored. The transformative nature of national teacher education policy in South Africa from a macro perspective is discussed in section 2.6. This is followed by a presentation of the context of the research site, the Faculty of Education at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT), the importance of the two campuses where this faculty is located and the history of the CPUT's transformation from a Teachers' Technikon to a university (post-merger) as well as its recently adopted Vision2030. The Faculty of Education's Vision2030 and graduate attributes and expectations set out by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) are captured in section 2.8, which addresses aspects of diversity in schools. Section 2.9 presents a synthesis of the chapter.

2.3 A transforming higher education system: A macro perspective

The southernmost country on the African continent, South Africa, is admired for its people's rich culture and heritage but is most revered for rebuilding itself from an apartheid regime to a democratic nation. Sizemore-Barber paints an image of the country as the "'Rainbow Nation', a term that had been widely adopted in the early post-apartheid years to describe the supposedly inclusive multiculturalism and communitarianism of the country - a country united in its diversity" (Sizemore-Barber, 2020, p. 4). However, South African society is marked by intergroup conflict at all levels and, despite its "attempts to live up to the promise of economic and racial equality, [it] has found it difficult to resolve many economic and political challenges inherited from apartheid" (Duister, 2021, p. 68). Gachago and Ngoasheng (2016, p. 1) challenged the notion of the supposed diversity outlined by Sizemore-Barber. Their research on the higher education system reveals that "South Africa's 'rainbow nation' is a myth that students need to unlearn". My research suggests that while admirable policies have been designed to ensure students are presented with diverse learning experiences (Habib, 2013), it speculates whether this has not been sufficient to transform the South African teacher education system. Engelbrecht, Nel, Smit, and Van Deventer (2015, p. 13) cite the case of the principle of inclusive education, which provides that all learners should be accommodated in mainstream schools regardless of their physical, intellectual, linguistic, social or emotional needs (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, 1994, p. 14). Over the past 30 years, the global movement on inclusive education, which resulted in new educational legislation and policies in post-apartheid South Africa, has been challenged to accomplish its objectives (Engelbrecht et al., 2016, p. 1). It can, therefore, be said that: "South Africa's education policies have been characterised by its idealism in trying to promote a just and equal society by addressing groups who were traditionally disadvantaged" (Engelbrecht et al., 2016: 2). My study is an example of attempting to convert theory into practice by offering student-teachers the opportunity of a diverse practicum experience.

In its efforts to bridge past divides where access to learning spaces was based on the colour of a learner's skin, access to higher education has been one of the democratic government's transformative agendas (Badat, 2010). Enrolment of previously excluded students (Badat, 2010) increased significantly by 67% between 2002 and 2014, with African⁵ enrolment reaching 70% of the total student population (Simkins, 2016). Massification and internationalisation of higher education (Marmolejo, 2010; MacDonald, 2020) have become the norm as government funding for higher education is declining in the face of the global economic crisis. This heavily influences university management.

⁵ Throughout this study, the categories of race and gender are used to analyse the demographic composition of the university staff, student bodies and the different stakeholders within the various schools where TP was conducted. I use the racial categories of Black (or African), White, Coloured, and Indian that my respondents identified themselves with as these are dominant racial categories that marked apartheid and the inequities that the system engendered. My usage of these terms does not in any way imply that I endorse racial categorisation and I argue that race is socially constructed and embedded in systems of privilege and inequity. The use of these racial categories is in no way meant to lend credence to a biological basis for the racial classification of persons, but recognises that these categories are politically constructed. Similarly, the use of the gender categories of female and male is not intended to ignore the spectrum of actual gender diversity that exists beyond the binary classification. It merely reflects the way progress towards gender equality and gender-based redress is measured in policy and in the university's annual reports. The application of binary gender and official race categories in this report merely serves to monitor and highlight progress (or the lack thereof) in redressing the apartheid legacy of gender and race-related inequity in public higher education and in establishing demographic equity, non-sexism and non-racism, as intended in the South African Constitution and the regulatory framework that governs higher education in the democratic South Africa.

Starting in 2015, South African higher education students waged a campaign against colonial and apartheid-era education structures, which resulted in the removal of the statue of Cecil Rhodes at the University of Cape Town as an attempt to suggest a shift towards realising a more inclusive, decolonised higher education space (see Daniel & Platzky Miller, 2022; Jansen & Walters, 2022). The national protest movement was conducted under two banners, namely, 1) decolonisation and 2) free higher education, which, in the end, were amalgamated into a campaign for “a free decolonised education” (Jansen & Walters, 2022: p.1). Levine (2019) notes that the nationwide student protests achieved what no other generation achieved, which is to advocate for free education which “is seen as the pathway to a better life” (Levine, 2019, p. 1).

During *As by fire: The end of the South African university*, Jonathan Jansen’s (2017) analysis of the responses of South African university vice-chancellors to the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall (and associated) movements details the need for HEIs to confront the lived realities of their diverse groups of students. At the time of writing, the fallist campaigns sparked public outrage throughout South Africa and abroad in response to the oppressive experiences of Black students. Nkomo (2019, p. 3) states:

As by fire: The end of the South African University is a rich narrative of the complexity of the university environment, showing that, although the students are at the centre of its business, a variety of often competing actors are encased in the environment. The #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall student movements became the twin campaigns around which a multiplicity of attendant issues arose as different student actors vied for prominence in quick succession (p.131).

Trowler’s (2018, pg. 131) review of the book observes that while many appeared alarmed at the outbreak and extent of the protests, university leaders had ample prior warning of the “perfect storm” brought about by “massification” on the one hand, and resource cuts on the other. Nkomo (2019) notes that, while the book is reasonably illustrative of the spectrum of university types: historically White and Black; well-endowed and inadequately resourced; urban and rural; large and small, students’ voices on their lived experiences within these diverse HEIs are missing. Instead, Jansen solicited the experiences of 11 of the 26 vice-chancellors (Nkomo, 2019).

Firfirey and Carolissen (2010) and Basson, Smit, Maart and Gordon (2022) concur with Gachago and Ngoasheng (2016) that, while all racial groups within the ‘diverse’ South Africa have access to higher education, this does not mean that policy adequately addresses the challenges that marginalised student racial groups experience on university campuses. A study on student experiences of poverty in South African higher education (Firfirey & Carolissen, 2010, p. 1) quotes a student as saying: “I keep myself clean . . . at least when you see me, you don’t know I am poor”. The authors state that macro-level interventions, such as policies, can be enhanced by micro- and meso-level interventions to recognise and support students who struggle to survive financially (Firfirey & Carolissen, 2010, p. 1). Universities also confront the challenge of improving their diversity, equity and inclusion culture. Mketane (2022) notes that Stellenbosch University (SU) established an independent commission of inquiry into allegations of racism after a White student, Theuns du Toit, was filmed urinating on fellow student Babalo Ndwayana’s study material. When asked about his action, he replied: “It’s a White boy thing” (Mketane, 2022, p. 1). This has not prevented SU from receiving an international accolade based on human-centricity.

The World University Rankings 2022 are “(b)uilt on 10 million data points from 2,500 institutions in 93 countries” and focus on “unrivalled news, insight and intelligence; and on a relationship of trust with universities spanning 50 years” (Times Higher Education, 2022, p. 1). Stellenbosch University was placed 251st out of 300 universities globally and celebrated for its Vision 2040 (Times Higher Education, 2022), which aims to provide a “transformative student experience, foster purposeful partnerships and inclusive networks, promote networked and collaborative teaching and learning, conduct research for impact, and position SU as an employer of choice” (Times Higher Education, 2022, p. 2). The racist incident illustrates how remnants of apartheid are playing out in higher learning spaces within a post-democratic society where everyone is supposed to be equal.

It is my contention that, to understand student-teachers' lived experiences in varying contexts, especially those entering the higher education space from a situation of poverty and marginalisation, one must listen to their voices to better understand their views and opinions about the lived ontological basis of their existence (Walker, 2020). My view is that how a student-teacher thinks (conceptualises) new content, integrates into a brand-new environment and sets out to work or does not work alongside fellow student-teachers is driven by his/her lived experience. The experiences student-teachers bring into university spaces come from social environments that impact their human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1998). Bronfenbrenner (1917-2005) developed the ecological systems theory, which views a person's development within various environments. The narrative interviews in Walker's (2020) study show how students are enabled or constrained in their educational decision-making in relation to selves and their social environments (schooling, family and social capital). Student-teachers' preceding experiences, beliefs and knowledge have firm roots in their experiences as school learners through an “apprenticeship of observation” (Lortie, 1975, pg. 3). When a student enters university, this apprenticeship is extended within the lecture theatre by students' levels of engagement with their ‘own kind’ as well as in the selection of the typology of TP placement schools (Swart, 2013, pg. 245).

Teacher education in South Africa has a long history spanning the colonial (1800s-1940s) and apartheid eras (1950s-1994) and now the democratic era (Ogunniyi & Mushayikwa, 2015, p. 2-3). Prior to 1994, the higher education sector relevant to teacher education comprised 21 public universities, 15 technikons, and 120 colleges of education (Badat, 2010, p. 12). In 1998, the state began merging technikons, with the eventual closure of colleges of education (Parker, 2002). In 2000, at least 82 public institutions provided teacher education to one hundred ten thousand one hundred students, of whom 15 000 were enrolled in colleges, 60 000 in universities and the remainder in technikons and other HEIs (Parker, 2002).

Table 3 below lists the numerous policies and acts adopted for education and teacher training in South Africa since 1994 (Chetty, 2007, p. 18).

Table 2.1: Education Acts and Policies post-1994

Year	Act	Consequences for Teacher Education
1995	• National Qualifications Framework • SA Qualifications Authority • Council for Higher Education • Higher Education Quality Committee	Standards for Teacher Ed Quality assurance of Teacher Ed programmes.
1996	• The National Education Policy Act	Democracy, equity, redress, and transparency. Guidelines for ed. and accreditation of educators.
1996	• SA Council for Educators	Teacher registration, discipline, conduct, and development.
1997	• Higher Education Act	Incorporation of Colleges of Ed into Universities and Technikons
1998	• Curriculum 2005 Framework	Outcomes-Based Ed. New learning areas. Implications for Teacher Ed & Provision.
1998	• Employment of Educators Act • Education and Labour Relations Council	Teachers' Conditions of Service.
2000	• Norms and Standards for Teacher Education	Competencies for educators. Identifies seven roles.
2007	• National Policy Framework for Teacher Ed and Development in SA (draft)	Clarity and coherence in relation to the complex matrix of Teacher Ed activities.

(Source: Chetty, 2007, p. 18)

This policy framework is complex due to the need to address issues around "regulation, accreditation, governance, curriculum, quality assurance, and stakeholder participation" (Chetty, 2007, p. 27) and the fact that the existing framework was in disarray (Chetty, 2007). At a macro-level (Higher Education White Paper 3, 1997), policy makers established a roadmap for the kinds of teachers they envisage exiting ITE programmes. However, interventions were lacking to bridge the diverse entry-level lived experiences (through homes, primary schools and high schools) that influence students. These lived experiences will form and impact the curriculum practice that unfolds in the ITE programme. Samuel (2017) states that the democratic government's interest in educational policy reform is understandable. Several new national policies were formulated to change the landscape in South Africa, with social transformation as the logical rationale for dismantling apartheid (Samuel, 2017, p. 1). The policies relating to teachers and teacher education post-2007 are as follows:

Table 2.2: Education Acts and Policies post-2007

Year	Policy
2008	• National Qualifications Framework Act • National Strategy on Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS)
2011	• Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) • Minimum Requirement for Teacher Education Qualifications (MRTEQ)
2011	• An integrated strategic planning framework for Teacher Education and Development in SA (ISPFTED)
2012	• National Development Plan
2013	• Higher Education Qualifications Sub-framework (HEQSF)
2015	• Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (MRTEQ)

Source: Sayed, Carrim, Badroodien, McDonald & Singh (2018, p. 269)

Habib (2013) provides an academic analysis of how South Africa arrived at where it is today with respect to policy designs and implementations and explains what needs to be done to set its trajectory to where it should be. However, Stanwix (2013, p. 1) deduces that “South Africa is probably more divided now than at any time since the transition to democracy”. Harkavy, Hodges and Weeks (2022), who have 35 years of experience in working with West Philadelphia schools and neighbourhoods, describe university-assisted community schools as the best practical means to democratically transform universities, schools, and communities to develop participatory democracy (Benson, Harkavy, & Puckett, 2007 in Harkavy et al. 2022). The role of universities should be to advance citizenship and social justice in the 21st century (Harkavy et al., (2022). As the literature explains, the connection between the debate on teacher education policies and community-sited schools in both the USA and SA has long been contested. These aforementioned sources discuss South Africa's current situation, with one emphasising the need for policy change, another highlighting increased societal division, and the third proposing practical solutions involving university-assisted community schools for democratic transformation and social justice.

Soudien (2009, p. 2) asks, “*What is the purpose of the institution which has come to be called the university?*” His insightful answer is:

I want to argue here that the university is the pre-eminent inheritor of the extraordinary contribution which the enlightenment makes to modern civilisation. At the heart of the enlightenment, which fed into cultural, religious and social discourse in Europe during the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, lay the idea of using knowledge to widen the boundaries of human inclusion, to expand the range of those for whom the label ‘human’ would come to apply. In the modern era, it is to the intellectuals and their universities that this burden is effectively entrusted.

Esau and Maarman (2019) concur with Soudien (2009) on the standing of education and universities being the cornerstone of development and change in any society. Furthermore, the role of the teacher emanating from the

higher education learning space as one of the architects in this process is both valuable and highly significant (Esau & Maarmann, 2019).

The significance of the macro perspective initiatives to design policies relating to teachers and teacher education in South Africa in relation to my study lies in their recognition of similar concerns and the need to respond to them. These include increasing critical university engagement with conceptions of transformation through student-teacher exposure to authentic learning spaces, which are diverse in nature, to prepare them for a broader range of possible future teaching settings.

From a macro perspective, the South African higher education system has continuously transformed through the design, implementation, and redesign of policies to shape the nature of teacher education and future teachers' professional identity. Kruss (2004) reminds us that policy implementation is not an automatic and immediate process and that it is somewhat unrealistic to expect a significant change in a short period of time at an institutional level. These policy reforms will certainly impact institutional diversity within higher education from a macro perspective. As further explained in the thesis findings, a scaffolding of intervention support for students entering higher education has the potential to ameliorate common challenges, which places primary focus on professional development. My study aims to extend the insights into the range of complexities of enacting the role of a teacher in a transforming society, especially since, as future teachers, they originate from the same iniquitous macro-society, which they could reshape.

2.4 Transforming institutional diversities in higher education: A macro perspective

The advent of constitutional democracy in South Africa in 1994 shook the educational realm of South Africa, bringing with it significant change in HEIs (Kistan, 2019). White Paper 3, a programme in Transformation in Higher Education (1997), outlined a framework of change that seemed destined to reform higher education in such a way that there would be one singular, controlled structure to manage the sector that would remove the inequality and disorganisation inherited from apartheid and shift it to an era of academic development and innovation (DoE, 1997). However, there is a paucity of research on the effect and demands that increased student enrolment would impose on academic staff and, inevitably, on teacher education (Kistan, 2019; South African Council of Higher Education (CHE), 2016).

A factor that contributed to teacher education policy re-development was the appraisal of professional programmes in education undertaken in 2006 by the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of the Council on Higher Education (CHE). Its report described fundamental challenges relating to ITE programmes. A key aspect was weak institutional programme design (CHE, 2010). Following this process, the MRTEQ (DHET, 2011, revised 2015) was published as a national policy to address the critical challenges confronting education in South Africa, especially concerns about teachers' weak content and conceptual knowledge.

Despite increased enrolment, structural differentiation between HEIs perpetuates their histories of privileged and under-resourced institutions (Carpentier, 2021). South African higher education is still characterised by differentiation not necessarily based on race but class, where the more economically privileged have greater access to better-resourced institutions (Sikhosana, Malatji, & Munyoro, 2023; Modiba, & Stewart, 2023; Hunter,

2019; Chisholm, 2004). The transformation agenda within the current 26 HEIs has to address specific challenges to change these histories of inequity and privilege. These agendas should thus reflect the broader societal diversity of race, class, gender, and geographic features.

Jansen reflects on his experience as the first Black dean of education at the University of Pretoria and his lived experiences of working in a historically Afrikaans-speaking institution. He recounts his first encounters with its liberal rector, Johan van Zyl, and the university's "profoundly complex institutional climate, characterised by deference to authority" (Jansen, 2009, p. 74). Mushaathoni (2021) asserts that institutional diversity within higher education calls for intercultural communication, which he defines as "a form of communication that takes place between people from culturally diverse backgrounds" (Mushaathoni, 2021, p. 40). Similarly, Allwood (1985, p. 3) describes it as "the sharing of information between people from different cultural backgrounds", and Hall, Covarrubias and Kirschbaum (2017, p. 38) maintain that intercultural communication is "a matter of negotiation, respect and understanding". Mushaathoni (2021, p. 6) states that:

... intercultural communication, including its enhancement, could assist a culturally diverse organisation to improve intercultural communication competence and offer a common basis for increasing team effectiveness, unifying employees towards a common purpose and achieving success.

This observation suggests that strategy alignment and continuous enhancement as guiding principles, coupled with an intercultural communication agenda of insight into cultural diversity, could improve intercultural communication competence between diverse individuals within the higher education terrain. Likewise, Mampane (2019) proposes a critical review of the efficacy of diversity management in HEIs with the aim of highlighting context-specific challenges. Mampane adopts Kreitner and Kinicki's (2001, p. 37) definition of diversity management as:

A process of planning, directing, organising, and applying all the comprehensive managerial attributes for developing an organisational environment that can actively and effectively contribute to the competitive advantage of an institution.

Dreyer (2012, p. 505) notes that the multifaceted nature of South African society calls for HEIs to provide education to all, resulting in increasingly multicultural student bodies. Mampane (2019) found that learning environments in HEIs sharpened critical thinking and analytical skills and prepared institutional role-players to succeed in an increasingly diverse and interconnected world (Mampane, 2019). This implies that situating university students in different contexts will contribute to their intellectual development. Hence, the topic of "diversity and social inclusion go hand in hand and ... discrimination of people in whatever form should be eliminated" (Mampane, 2019, p. 3).

However, challenges have been experienced in implementing diversity management in an HEI environment. Studies in the US have pointed to the minimal advancement and the "disproportionate representation of African Americans compared to their White counterparts in leadership positions at higher education institutions, resulting in a lack of diversity among individuals in a leadership capacity" (Allan, 2021, p. 2). Utilising Critical Race Theory, the hidden subtext of race and racism within the American legal system is exposed, and so begins the work of understanding various cultures and how critical it is to dismantle stereotypes, reduce bias, and allow for greater cultural integration (Allan, 2021). Cross (2004, p. 1) declares that "diversity", "diversity issues", and "diversification" have become part of the education debate and policy and pose new challenges to South African tertiary institutions.

The author speaks to social and epistemological possibilities for meaningful scholarship and curriculum practices in addressing the challenges posed by campus social diversity. Cross's (2004) study, *Institutionalising campus diversity in South African higher education: Review of diversity scholarship and diversity education*, interrogates four critical questions: 1) What counts as knowledge in diversity scholarship? 2) Who produces and disseminates it? 3) Who accesses it or utilises it? 4) What is its space in the curricula? Although dated, the findings in response to these questions are pertinent to the current study. Cross's (2004, p. 21) results revealed:

- *First*, there is a need to sustain current research and intellectual activities around diversity, which remain under pressure vis-à-vis market and global pressures.
- *Second*, given the legacies of scholarship and their impact on current epistemological and pedagogical practices, a paradigm shift is required to ensure that the reconfiguring of programme offerings takes place within a transformative rather than merely affirmative and add-on framework, in which issues of race, class, gender, ethnicity and other forms of identity, are brought to the core of the research and curriculum agenda.
- *Third*, given the legacies of apartheid, South African scholars also face the challenge of developing a critical theory of diversity that distinguishes claims for the recognition of difference that advance the cause of social equality from those that retard or undermine it, i.e. a critical theory that takes issues of equity, human rights and social justice seriously.

The CPUT's vision and mission statement aims to ensure that each graduate in the higher education system is one who can "shape a better world for humanity", and this can only happen through "embracing diversity" (Strategic Plan 2021–2030 One Smart CPUT, 2021). Its core values are to transform by embracing "(r)estoration as we deal with the legacy of our past and as we redress issues of equality, gender-based violence, and any form of discrimination" (CPUT, 2022, p. 7). My study aimed to gear this campaign towards recognising the diversity of individuals and teaching contexts.

2.5 Transforming student experiences in a diversifying higher education system: A macro perspective

The transformation agenda has increasingly shifted from systemic analysis to reviewing the quality of students' personal experiences within HEIs. A systemic analysis is a comprehensive method of analysis, evaluation and consultation that embraces the complexity and dynamics of current situations, crises and challenges and serves to support the decision-making of high-level personnel in global organisations, missions or risk scenarios (Industrieanlagen-Betriebsgesellschaft mbH, 2022, p. 1). The shift from a systemic analysis in this study means that I did not aim to obtain responses from high-level personnel; instead, I focussed on students' experiences and voices within the higher education system. Gachago and Ngoasheng (2016) adopted an innovative methodological process that enabled students to confront their discomfort in conversations around systemic injustices they experienced at university. Using McIntosh's (1988) celebrated '*White Privilege Checklist*,' the participants (university students) confronted their multiple forms of lived experiences and identified how their limited perspectives contributed to shaping their student identities. As future teachers, these participants recognised that

embracing diversity would be essential to "recognising and affirming difference rather than fearing it as a divisive force that must not be spoken of" (Gachago & Ngoasheng, 2016, p. 1). This study addressed the gap in previous research that focussed on past schooling experiences rather than the in-service Teaching Practicum experiences of a group of students learning to become professional teachers. My study elaborates on a group of final-year student-teachers' experiences and views on being prepared for the diverse South African schooling system whilst enrolled in an ITE programme at the CPUT. It might be argued that my study constitutes an analysis of the macro-systemic worldview but seen through the perspectives of student-teachers' lived experiences of diversity. Understanding more deeply how students make sense of the opportunity to traverse diverse teaching practicum contexts indirectly analyses how they may negotiate the macro-systemic space of transformatory opportunities at a wider societal level.

In a study conducted by three university teachers (Waghid, Waghid & Waghid, 2018) on the Massive Open Online Course (MOOC), which connected students at SU and a university in the United Kingdom, "(s)tudents were encouraged to share their views or claims about knowledge, education, schooling, teaching and learning in their own contexts" by using African philosophies, namely, the concepts of *ubuntu* (human interdependence) and *ukama* (relationality) to come up with home-grown solutions to societal and educational concerns (Waghid et al., 2018, p. 1). These included military dictatorships, famine and hunger, food insecurity, and societal violence. The findings revealed that "(i)nvariably, these views were in agreement or clashed with their classmates" (Waghid et al., (2018, p. 1). Students at both universities were able to respectfully agree and disagree on vantages of diversity based on their lived experiences and contextual placements. They listened attentively to different and contending viewpoints in a dignified and respectful dialogical engagement. Local scholars collaborated with international scholars to bring about societal and transformative change through collaborative teaching and learning. My study relates to an earlier initiative, which sought to connect students to case-study problems plaguing the African continent. While I delved into the lived experiences of a diverse group of final-year students, the focus was on their first-hand experiences of real-life diverse schooling contexts in South Africa, as opposed to an online case-study.

Divergent worldviews and perspectives amongst a heterogeneous class cohort were evident in the above studies (Waghid et al., 2018). However, few studies have foregrounded the importance of diversity within teaching and learning spaces in South Africa and its influence on student identities (Sekome & Mokoale, 2022). This study aimed to contribute to addressing this conceptual and contextual gap in the literature. The conceptual gap refers to the teacher education policies that advocate for diversity within the learning of becoming a professional teacher. My study extends to how these policies find roots and routes into the lived experiences of student-teachers. The told stories of final-year student-teachers at the CPUT and their lived experiences of diverse Teaching Practicum contexts constitute the data for theorising what explains their experiences in present-day South African schools.

Toshalis and Nakkula (2012), Zepke (2018), and Sun and Holt (2022) suggest that, in the context of higher education, the term 'student voice' is commonly entangled with student engagement. Therefore, student voice is a catchphrase related to student agency, autonomy, and the university-student partnership. Chiramba and Maringe (2022) argue that the changes made by the policymakers overseeing enrolment in higher education in post-apartheid South Africa have "not substantially altered epistemological access, which continues to trace the

contours of race and class differences" (Chiramba & Maringe, 2022, p. 1). While attention has been directed towards formal physical access, namely enrolment, the quality of newly-recruited students' participation and their success remain underexplored. Moreover, students do not necessarily experience an education that supports equity and represents multiple diversities (South Africa Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions Report, 2008). Chiramba and Maringe's (2022) study highlights the need to explore the nature of epistemological access, which questions the kinds of cultural capital that enable individuals to succeed by acclimatising to the dominant hegemonic worldviews of the receiving HEI. The current study encourages students and institutions to examine their affirmation of the diversities they may encounter during teaching practicum and the curriculum. The literature (Mukeredzi & Mandrona, 2013; Mukeredzi, 2017; Naidoo & Wagner, 2020) points to the benefits of exposing student-teachers to a diverse context and the professional development associated with being placed in an array of teaching spaces. Amin and Ramrathan (2009) argue that there are potential gains in student-teachers learning when one reframes, disrupts, destabilises and reconstructs their learning to teach in and for diverse contexts.

Pennefather (2019, p. 306) set out "to understand how to prepare student-teachers for the complexity and diversity of the South African schooling context" in a rural context. The research aimed to go beyond the "story" and to design a theoretical framework to understand student-teacher learning in this context. John (2019) posits that the experiences of pre-service teachers from rural backgrounds differ widely from those from urban schools and that these experiences play a crucial role in shaping their teaching careers during and after formal teacher training (John, 2019). Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) note that teachers in rural schools are confronted by the harsh reality of not having access to water, sanitation, or electricity and that classrooms are in a terrible state. These issues have profound implications for effective teaching and learning (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). Pennefather's (2019) qualitative study titled *Across the river and up the hill: A case study of student-teacher learning in the Wild Coast Rural Schools Project* yielded rich and insightful data for my study. The insightfulness of her research stems from the student-teachers' lived experiences within a first-time rural schooling context. The participants kept a reflective journal on their daily experiences (including both teaching and living) in a diverse schooling context. The study found that:

Situating student-teacher learning in a deeply rural context, supported by significant others, student-teachers often narrow conceptions of teaching and context are challenged, and their professional knowledge develops as they become increasingly cognisant of what it means to organize learning systematically by being responsive to context and by drawing upon the support of others (Pennefather, 2019, pg. 204).

John (2019) adds that while much research has been conducted on the various challenges experienced by rural schools in South Africa, "little has been done on pre-service teachers' perspectives" (John, 2019, p. 10). At the other end of the research continuum, Pennefather (2019) advocates for more in-depth research on the impact of partnerships on student-teachers, schools, and local communities. This is a significant area of research, given recent education policy requirements on context and the need to develop partnerships between schools and universities.

Amin, Samuel and Dhunpath's (2016) research on higher education demonstrated a need for the "Undoing of cognitive damage". Amin et al., (2016, p. 5) define and explain cognitive damage as follows:

To accept and inhabit impositions that are antithetical to a sense of self; the inability to recognise the ways and means in which the individual/self is marginalised, erased, rendered invisible, treated unjustly, oppressed, silenced, suppressed, censored, disregarded, ignored, mistreated, rendered powerless, or enslaved; giving in to practices and structures of hegemony; obedience and acquiescence to the imposition of these various forms of subjugation, the inability to overcome/resist these impositions when aware; and, the absence of agency, revolt or retributive action.

Amin et al.'s (2016) argument poses the question of whether or not students realise that they are cognitively damaged and whether they have accepted their position as marginalised citizens within a post-democratic South Africa. Their work opens up the possibility of constructing, deconstructing and reconstructing alternative perspectives in research and interrogating why, 29 years since the demise of apartheid, its hidden or overt subtleties are still rooted within the preferred selection of Teaching Practicum placement schools. Student-teacher selection and the decline in the number of geographically situated schools in which to develop their professional learning in becoming teachers show signs of segregation.

2.6 Transforming national teacher education policy: A macro perspective

South Africa has issued three school-based basic education curriculum statements since 1994: The National Curriculum Statement (NCS), implemented in 1997, followed by the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) in 2005, and the current CAPS, implemented in 2011. The positioning of diversity and inclusivity within each curriculum statement has varied, but the main aim of these reforms is to democratise education and eliminate inequalities in the post-apartheid education system (Jansen, 1998, p. 1). Pillay and Samuel (2017, pg. 1) discuss the ongoing debate surrounding the number of school-based curriculum reforms in South Africa. They identify five reforms: Outcomes Based Education (OBE), Curriculum 2005 (C2005), National Curriculum Statement (NCS), Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS), and Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS, 2011). However, it is important to clarify the distinction of the actual reshaped South African education policy framework which asserts that OBE was not a standalone curriculum document; rather, it was an educational principle that informed the development and implementation of both C2005 and the NCS. This clarification is crucial for accurately understanding the nature and influence of these reforms in the context of South African education. Each curriculum formulation was accompanied by trial periods and revisions for tweaking, making teachers endure an almost perpetual state of curriculum change, which was implemented concurrently on many occasions.

South Africa's democratic government inherited a divided and unequal education system. Under apartheid, there were nineteen education departments divided by race, geography, and ideology. This system prepared children differently for their expected positions and how to participate in social, economic and political life during apartheid. In each department, the curriculum was influential in reinforcing inequality as "what, how, and whether the children were taught differed according to the roles they were expected to play in the wider society" (Department of Basic Education, 2001). At the start of the 1990s, as the legislative and political regime of apartheid was disintegrating and the groundwork was being laid for a new, democratic dispensation, most teacher education in the country was

presented in racially homogenous teachers' colleges, many of which were established in earlier Bantustan rural areas as part of efforts by the apartheid government to restrict migration from rural to urban areas and to separate Africans into distinct ethnic groups (Chisholm, 2019, p. 109).

Amidst perpetually increasing demand and declining financial support over the preceding decades, the quality of many of these colleges had deteriorated drastically (Chisholm, 2019, p. 149). Due to the fundamental role played by these colleges in upholding the segregated and unequal education system that was engrained and systematised during apartheid, it is unsurprising that the decision was made at the turn of the 21st century to close the vast majority. The small number of colleges not shut down was merged with universities, which have become the primary site of teacher education in terms of actual delivery and policy direction over the past 20 years (Chisholm, 2019, p. 155).

This chronicle of teacher education is noteworthy for my study since it provides a backdrop to more recent developments in South African education, which advocate for a rethinking of the kinds of 21st-century teachers South Africa requires, which Sayed et al. (2018) suggest will only happen through a democratic public-good approach. Such an approach will require a reconceptualisation of policy, practice and research. More importantly, in my understanding, the record of teacher education development highlights possible reasons student-teachers may oppose learning to become teachers through experiencing diverse typologies of schooling contexts that could contribute to their learning. These student-teachers enrolled for their teaching degree at a merged university (Cape Technikon and Peninsula Technikon), now amalgamated as the CPUT, which is itself beset by its own set of challenges relating to how university academics coming from these teacher colleges perceive that teacher development should take place. Notably, the student-teacher who enrolls for the teacher degree programme enters the university having encountered their learning in South African schools from South African teachers with different historical qualifications and educational backgrounds, most of which were developed under apartheid structures that consciously disadvantaged and underdeveloped large sections of the population (Teacher Education & Development (TED) Report Summit, 2021). Hence, student-teachers are not inclined to take up learning space within contexts with which they are unfamiliar. A different approach is necessary to examine student-teachers' attitudes in the diverse teaching practicum context.

With its emphasis on TP's intuitive and situated nature, teacher practical knowledge is considered a captivating approach to understanding what underlies such practice (Aspbury-Miyaniishi, 2022). Aspbury-Miyaniishi (2022) calls for a shift in focus from student-teachers' individual cognitions about the practice to what teachers directly identify as possible in their fundamentally social teaching environment. His approach is rooted in Heidegger's phenomenology, highlighting three key points contributing to a macro perspective of the national teacher education system.

1. First, much of a skilled teacher's practice is not a conscious and deliberative decision-making process but rather a skilful coping.

2. Second, skilful coping is guided by practical knowledge (Heidegger's "circumspection"), which can be understood as sensitivity and responsiveness to the towards-which⁶ and affordances that are disclosed within a teacher's practice environment or teacher world.
3. Lastly, many, if not most, of the affordances and towards-whiches a teacher engages with are conventional or socially constructed. Teachers come to perceive them directly through a process of socialisation/enculturation (Aspbury-Miyanishi, 2022, p. 12).

2.6 The transforming institutional context of CPUT: A meso perspective

2.6.1 The Context and Background of the Faculty of Education at CPUT

The Faculty of Education at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) was established in 2005 following a series of mergers of former training colleges. As part of a large multi-campus university, the faculty spans two campuses, namely, Mowbray in the southern suburbs of Cape Town and Wellington, a rural district of the Western Cape. All programmes were offered via the contact mode of delivery before the COVID-19⁷ pandemic.

The faculty is one of the biggest providers of teachers in the country, with the highest enrolments being in its pre-service teacher education programmes. It offers undergraduate and postgraduate programmes that cover the full range of schooling, from the Foundation Phase (FP) to Further Education and Training (FET). They include professional and more academically oriented programmes, like the Bachelor of Education Honours (B.Ed. Hons), Master of Education (M.Ed.), and PhD. The history of the faculty is one of extensive restructuring. In 2002, the Cape Town and Boland Colleges of Education, located in Mowbray and Wellington, were absorbed by the School of Teacher Education at the Cape Technikon to form the first Faculty of Education at Cape Technikon. The two Colleges of Education were products of extensive rationalisation of colleges and represented about 13 former colleges in the Western Cape. The Mowbray and Wellington sites are considered satellite campuses of the institution and are 70 km apart. Until 2005, the Department of Education at Bellville was located in the Faculty of Science at Peninsula Technikon. In 2005, the Cape Technikon and Peninsula Technikon merged to form the CPUT, and the Department of Education in Bellville joined the Faculty of Education in Mowbray. In addition to these extensive structural changes, the faculty has had to constantly re-curriculate all its academic programmes over the years, as neither the prior college nor technikon qualifications were aligned with the then Norms and Standards for Educators (NSE, Department of Education, 2000).

The NSE is a policy document that describes the roles, their associated set of applied competencies (norms) and qualifications (standards) for the development of educators. It also establishes key strategic objectives to develop learning programmes, qualifications and standards for educators. The NSE notes that a competent teacher (NSE, 2000) adheres to the following seven professional standards of conduct:

⁶ The term *towards-whiches* are the purposes or ends towards which our actions are directed. In a classroom, this might include the goals of a lesson, such as ensuring students understand a concept or complete an activity. A teacher's skilful coping involves an acute awareness of these goals and an ability to adjust their actions to achieve them effectively.

⁷ The COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa is part of the ongoing pandemic of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). The outbreak was first identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, China. The World Health Organisation declared it a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 30 January 2020 and a pandemic on 11 March 2020. On 15 March, the President of South Africa declared a national state of disaster and announced measures such as immediate travel restrictions and the closure of schools from 18 March 2020.

1. a specialist in a particular learning area, subject or phase;
2. a specialist in teaching and learning;
3. a specialist in assessment;
4. a curriculum developer;
5. a leader, administrator and manager;
6. a scholar and lifelong learner, and
7. a professional who plays a community, citizenship, and pastoral role.

This NSE (2000) policy is underpinned by the belief that teachers are the essential drivers of a good quality education system.

2.6.2 The location of the study

The study was located within the Faculty of Education, which comprises two campus sites in Mowbray (urban-based) and Wellington (rural-based). Pre-merger, the Mowbray campus primarily served White students with a small representation of Coloured⁸ and African⁹ students. Afrikaans historically characterised the Wellington campus as the medium of instruction that made provision for White Afrikaans speakers. Post-merger, both campuses serve all race groups, with the majority of the students being African. Mowbray has retained English as the medium of instruction, with Afrikaans as the medium of instruction in Wellington. This language policy is currently under review.

2.6.3. The history of the Faculty of Education at CPUT

The history of the Faculty of Education at the CPUT tells a story of complex institutional mergers (Chisholm, 2019). The merger in 1995 of four colleges of education (Barkly House, Mowbray Teachers College, Sallie Davis, and Hewat Teachers Training College) into the Cape Colleges of Education, Mowbray was followed in 2001 by the incorporation of the Cape Town Colleges of Education and the Boland College of Education into the Cape Technikon Faculty of Education, with the faculty located on two campuses, Mowbray and Wellington. The faculty's size expanded in 2005 with the merger of the Cape Technikon and the Peninsula Technikon into the CPUT when the students and staff of the Peninsula Technikon were added. This made the faculty the largest provider of teacher education in the province (Moll, Coreejes-Brink & Arendse, 2018).

Ten years after the merger, the faculty's contribution to teacher education remains substantial through its teaching and learning provision, research, and scholarship. This is evident in its almost 4,000 students in 2014, with over 3,000 BEd. students, 241 BEd. Honours, 232 ACE students, 150 diploma students, and 76 Master's and doctoral students (*Professor Mda, Dean of Faculty of Education at Inaugural Colloquium of the Centre for International Teacher Education on 12 February 2015*). The faculty has also positioned itself to begin producing research and innovation aligned to the needs of the Western Cape province and South Africa as a whole and to expand its postgraduate cohort. The establishment of the Centre for International Teacher Education and the SARCHI Chair

⁸ Coloured, formerly Cape Coloured, a person of mixed European ("White") and African ("black") or Asian ancestry, as officially defined by the South African government from 1950 to 1991.

⁹ African is an ethnic or racial reference in South Africa that may refer to indigenous South Africans. It is also used to refer to Black people from other African countries who are in South Africa. In this study, African refers to indigenous South African student-teachers.

in Teacher Education significantly strengthens research capacity in teacher education. It will undoubtedly build a knowledge base on teachers that begins to answer tough educational questions that continue to puzzle the education fraternity (CPUT, 2015).

The history of an institution helps us to understand how occasions in the past made things the way they are at present. With lessons from the past, we learn about ourselves and how we came to be and develop the ability to avoid errors and create better paths for our societies.

2.6.4 CPUT Building a new identity and Developing a Strategic Plan 2021-2030

This study was conducted within the CPUT, which claims to be the second largest University of Technology (UoT) in South Africa and the largest HEI in the Western Cape. Its Faculty of Education is also the most extensive teacher education provider in the Western Cape, with students from all over the country (CPUT, 2022). In 2020, the university set out to establish a new identity and developed a Strategic Plan for 2021-2030 underpinned by the slogan 'One Smart CPUT'. The CPUT's first strategic plan, Vision2030 (V2030), was created with four strategic aims identified:

1. Build a university that is highly efficient, sustainable, and environmentally conscious;
2. To create a vibrant, enabling, and well-resourced living and learning environment for students;
3. To enhance and develop the quality and effectiveness of research and knowledge production; and,
4. To be known for high-quality teaching and learning and a relevant curriculum.

Vision2030 takes cognisance of the university's challenges concerning first-time students not having received the basic education that provides the foundation for HEIs to build on their existing skills, attitudes, and knowledge (CPUT, Vision2030, p. 5). In the absence thereof, HEIs, through their Faculties of Education, will have to play a much more strategic, proactive and leading role in transforming education at all levels in South Africa, on the African continent, and globally.

The notion of "One Smart CPUT" has two key dimensions. The first is "*Oneness*", which is envisaged as follows:

The oneness dimension of V2030 is focused on our human-centricity through our smart people and the smart CPUT community that values and embraces unity (*ubunye*) in diversity (*ukungafani*). It directs CPUT to view itself in terms of trust, values, co-thinking, co-learning, co-creating and co-designing, dialogue and unified spirit. (CPUT, Vision2030, 2020, p. 7).

The second dimension, *Smartness*, "is focused on technological developments" (CPUT, Vision2030, 2020, p. 7). The Strategic Plan Vision2030 thus acknowledges that embracing diversity within this higher education space is vital.

2.7 The transforming initial teacher education programme at CPUT: A meso perspective

The ITE programme within the Faculty of Education at the CPUT does not use the critical term 'diversity' within the BEd. programme. However, the term 'democracy' emphasises recognition of all constitutional affirmations. The BEd. programme outlines the following:

- "The purpose of the B.Ed. programme is to provide initial preparation for teachers. It also requires that teachers reflect on their own Practice and be mindful of what it means to educate students within a **democracy**."
- Professional Practice includes a range of critical inquiry dispositions, ethical engagement, persistence and motivation, and capacity to act. It also requires that teachers reflect on their own Practice and be mindful of what it means to educate students within a **democracy**."
- The qualification aims to develop in teachers the ability to critically reflect on their teaching practices in an effort to enable systematic learning for others in the diverse South African contexts. There is also a major need for higher education to develop teachers who can contribute to the development of its people to become responsible, participatory, self-understanding, and reflective citizens that contribute to an emerging **democracy**". (CPUT, B. Ed Curriculum, Intermediate Phase Teaching, 2019, p. 7). (my emphasis added).

A review of the BEd. curriculum of the Intermediate Phase at the CPUT reveals a constructive conceptualisation of the ITE programme that directs its efforts to preparing prospective teachers for the diverse South African landscape. In order to prepare fully competent future teachers who are prepared for the world of work, a vital aspect of the official curriculum (MRTEQ, 2015) is to place student-teachers within schools that have been identified as excellent places of teaching and learning. By being placed within the real-life South African schooling context, student-teachers can complement their theoretical training experience and gain valuable experience in day-to-day operations within a school and an authentic teaching and learning situation (University of South Africa, 2019). In line with the National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa (2006), which advocates for "More Teachers; Better Teachers", the policy framework on teacher education has been a long time in preparation and is undoubtedly overdue, given the state of our education system (Jansen 2012; Metcalfe, Orkin and Jenny 2012; Spaull, 2013; Singh 2015; Maddock & Maroun, 2018; Köhler, 2022). The Ministry of Education believes the framework will provide the required coherence and impetus to guarantee a drive for more and better teachers (Department of Basic Education, 2011; Department of Higher Education and Training, 2011). It is not an end in itself and ultimately seeks to impact the core business of education: improving children's learning achievements at school.

The ITE curriculum at the CPUT is not only designed for prospective teacher graduates to learn teaching skills, but correspondingly, the important role of the teacher post-qualification lies in serving the community within this diverse landscape (Lumby & Heystek, 2012; Showunmi, Moorosi, Shakeshaft, & Oplatka, 2022). The diversity reflects the dominant typologies of authentic South African schooling, 80% of which are dysfunctional schools in townships

and rural communities (Mlachila & Moeletsi, 2019). I argue that this ITE curriculum includes preparing student-teachers to take up teaching spaces within these dysfunctional schools from which many themselves originate. However, teachers must also be well-trained for a broader range of real-life South African schooling. This is reinforced in the MRTEQ, which explicitly states that "(n)ewly qualified teachers must be able to manage classrooms effectively across diverse contexts to ensure a conducive learning environment" (DHET, 2015, p. 64).

The research site (*CPUT: Mowbray Campus*) selected for this study was deemed most appropriate due to its strategic alignment with the research questions and objectives. The site, chosen from a menu of initial teacher education programmes within HEIs in the Western Cape, offered diverse learning contexts for placing student-teachers to undertake TP, allowing for an in-depth exploration of pre-service teachers' lived experiences with diversity. The selection was deliberate, aiming to capture a representative sample that reflected the complex social dynamics within the South African educational system.

The chosen site provided a rich tapestry of cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, creating an environment conducive to studying the nuances of how student-teachers navigate diversity. Furthermore, the site allowed for a comparison between those who opted for familiar and comfortable spaces and those who ventured into unfamiliar, diverse contexts during their teaching practicum placements.

The diversity of the selected site aligns with the study's theoretical framework, which emphasises understanding the authentic lived experiences of student-teachers within a complex social system. By choosing this particular site, the research aimed to uncover patterns, challenges, and motivations behind the majority of student-teachers' decisions to select placements resonant with their backgrounds, contributing valuable insights into the broader social and educational context.

In summary, the (Faculty of Education at CPUT -Mowbray Campus) selected research site was most appropriate because it facilitated a comprehensive exploration of the research questions, aligning with the study's theoretical framework and offering a diverse context that allowed for a nuanced understanding of pre-service teachers' responses to diversity within the evolving South African educational system.

2.8 Transforming Schooling to address diversity: A micro perspective on past studies of diverse student experiences

2.8.1 The Department of Basic Education (DBE): Quality of education

Any quality education system rests on the quality of its teachers. Therefore, teachers' placement, deployment, and development are vital for the country (DBE, South Africa Yearbook 2015/16). The South African Constitution (RSA, 1996a) provides that education is a basic human right; thus, all citizens of school-going age must have access to basic primary education. The DBE not only focuses on the kinds of teachers entering schools; its overarching portfolio addresses the myriad complexities of all schools from Grades 1 to 12 and adult literacy programmes. The main objective of the DBE is to advance, maintain and establish a South African school education system prepared for the 21st century (DBE, South Africa Yearbook 2015/16). It is also responsible for translating the government's

education and training policies and the provisions of the South African Constitution into a national education policy and legislative framework. The Constitution (1996, p. 11-12) provides:

This Bill of Rights is a cornerstone of democracy in South Africa. It enshrines the rights of all people in our country and affirms the democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom. Everyone has the right — (a) to a basic education, including adult basic education, and (b) to further education, which the state, through reasonable measures, must make progressively available and accessible.

Twenty-nine years after the formal abolishment of a segregated education system that divided South African people based on the colour of their skin, the kinds of schools that now exist display apartheid symptoms. As described by Adze (2022, p. 20), the schooling system is divided into two parallel but unequal sub-sectors:

[The South African schooling system] comprises schools in suburbs that enjoy extraordinary opulence. Here, affluent parents invest substantial amounts of money in the school to ensure that they are well-maintained and always kept in pristine condition. Their sports fields are normally well maintained. The other reality is poorer and rural schools.

Spaull (2013b) painted the same picture in his research on *South Africa's Education Crisis: The quality of education in South Africa 1994-2011* and *Poverty and privilege: Primary school inequality in South Africa*, where he describes the two-tiered system that continues to exist many years after the abolition of a racialised education system. Compulsory quality education is of utmost importance to any nation that seeks to prioritise nation-building as it can produce progressive and worthy citizens (Adze, 2022). Berger (2003) notes that although the constitution explicitly recognises the right to education, many South African schools remain inadequate and fall far short of the constitutional requirements. He adds that the worst schools in predominantly Black areas lack the resources to provide students with “the education they need to participate effectively in a democratic, capitalist society” (Berger, 2003, p. 49). Poor quality schooling thus seems to be the variable most needing policy attention to sustain and improve South Africa’s economic development (Van der Berg, Taylor, Gustafsson, Spaull, & Armstrong, 2011). A well-designed school improvement plan is the first step that could turn a dysfunctional school into a great one (Adze, 2022, p. 3). Such an intervention would, in turn, produce visible changes in governance, fiscal management, parental involvement and the quality of education (Adze, 2022, p. 3). Adze (2022) found that progressive schools do not automatically opt for the best learners but provide added educational support to weaker learners to achieve academic excellence and moral rectitude (Adze, 2022) without regard for race, colour, or creed (Adze, 2022, p. 3).

The South African Constitution (1996, p. 8) also highlights the need to ‘redress ... the past’:

Everyone has the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions where that education is reasonably practicable. In order to ensure the effective access to and implementation of this right, the state must consider all reasonable educational alternatives, including single medium institutions, taking into account— (a) equity, (b) practicability, and (c) **the need to redress the results of past racially discriminatory laws and practices. (my emphasis added).**

This study, which aimed to solicit the lived experiences of a diverse group of final-year students and their conscious experiences of Teaching Practicum in diverse schools, offers first-hand insight into their impressions of encountering a different context. In my view, it can contribute to the personal development of prospective future

teachers and the nation's moral, social, political and economic development (National Education Policy Act, 1996, p. 4).

2.8.2 Past studies on diverse student schooling experiences

Based on the above review of the structural, systemic, and personal variables involved in addressing diversity, my study aimed to probe student-teachers' lived experiences during the process of becoming professional teachers; in particular, the focus was on exploring how their past schooling experiences influence their transition into diverse Teaching Practicum schools that are not similar to those they attended. The issue of diversity is central to understanding how to manage transformation and social justice. Therefore, diversity is an important concept that must be taken seriously and not be oversimplified or seen as an easy answer (Thompson, 2020, p. 6). An example of 'diversity' is how student-teachers negotiate the multiple variations of being and becoming a teacher professional. This study aimed to expose a group of final-year student-teachers to various schooling typologies other than the kind of institutions they attended. Hence, this conception of diversity spans mediating the past, the present, and future prospects. Students are deliberately placed in a variety of schooling typologies during their Teaching Practicum to explore reformulations of diverse lived experiences. These schools are also diverse in terms of quintile rankings, geographic location, and economic, physical, and human resources. They also vary regarding learners' and staff's gender, race, ethnicity, and cultural composition. Diversity in this definition adheres to the new constitutional framing of South Africa that suggests that no discrimination should be practiced against individuals based on their "race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth" (RSA Constitution, 1996, p. 2). It is vital that the constitutional value of diversity falls within the agenda of a unified democratic educational system and is reinforced through the provision for and acceptance of the different languages, cultures and religions in the South African educational system (Meier & Hartell, 2009, p. 1).

von Mende and Houlihan (2007) comment:

The persistence of discrimination, inequalities and power differences suggests that the rhetoric of diversity can be criticised as sanitizing differences and simply masking or attenuating underlying conflicts (von Mende & Houlihan, 2007, p. 217).

Therefore, the dimensions of diversity in matters of race, gender, ethnicity, class, sexual identity, age, language, disability, religion and so on are just some of the ways in which differences can be translated into discrimination and oppression as a result of power-related processes (Thompson, 2020, p. 6). Thompson (2020) argues that viewing each individual experience through two lenses, namely, 1) the sociological lens (which *generalises the causes and actions of individuals into patterns and categories*) and 2) the psychological lens (a set of beliefs used to examine the mental state of a person and how it affects his/her actions) is crucial in understanding the specific experiences of individuals within a social setting. This mirrors the structure and agency debate on the role of systems and individual actions in a discursive dialogical relationship (Gideons, 1993).

In preparing students for teaching in diverse contexts, Amin (2009, p. 73) highlights the need to “reframe memory” by disrupting experience, destabilising learning, and reconstructing uncertainty so that an understanding of context and contextual forces can start to inform their thinking about teaching, leading to self-reflection and understanding of the limits of their thinking (Pennefather, 2019, p. 101). Most ITE programmes are premised on a conception of teacher learning that embraces knowledge-for-practice (Bertram, Mthiyane, & Mukeredzi, 2012, p. 2). The supposition is that student-teachers will learn a variety of propositional knowledge through university-based lectures, then apply this knowledge during their school-based teaching in-service placement timeframe and thus develop theory-informed practice (Bertram et al., 2012, p. 2). The question of precisely what knowledge teachers need has been a growing field of research over the past 36 years. Shulman (1986) was the first academic to clearly describe a knowledge base for teachers or to respond to the question: What do teachers need to know? Subsequently, numerous academics have developed, expanded, reduced and critiqued Shulman's typology, and a range of models has been proposed to define teacher knowledge (see Grossman, 1990; Zeidler, 2002; Banks, Leach & Moon, 2005; Wilson & Demetriou, 2007). The concept of teacher knowledge is thus a contested term, and there is no universally accepted way of understanding it (Evans, 2002).

Slabbert and Naudé (2022) explored approaches to diversity among teachers in racially integrated South African school environments. Twelve urban, public, racially-integrated high school teachers participated in focus group discussions. The thematic data analysis indicated that the teachers articulated their understanding of diversity as the interplay between difference and sameness but were inclined to prioritise sameness (Slabbert & Naudé, 2022). Most respected the established ethos and identity of the school but noted the significance of embracing diversity in a cohesive schooling environment. High priority was placed on a multicultural school environment's role in preparing learners to become valuable members of a global and multicultural society. To fulfil the promise of racial integration and to truly utilise diversity as an asset, “teachers should be supported and equipped with the competence to manage the nuances, complexities, and contradictions” in advancing and appreciating the concept of diversity (Slabbert & Naudé, 2022, p. 2). Learners who enter university (*prospective future teachers*) with multicultural schooling and life experiences are likelier to have favourable beliefs and attitudes regarding cultural diversity than those with monocultural schooling and life experiences (Kyles & Olafson, 2008, p. 1). Kyle and Olafson (2008) note that a growing body of literature suggests a strong relationship among personal life experiences, beliefs, and how one teaches (Carter & Doyle, 1995; Levitt, 2001; Richardson, 1996; Stuart & Thurlow, 2000).

Kyles et al. (2008) explored the impact of structured learning opportunities that require pre-service teachers to reflect on their own beliefs about diversity and what constitutes effective teachers for diverse learners while enrolled in their second practicum experience. The findings indicated that becoming an effective educator is a “parallel journey between the personal and professional” that must be taken seriously, with the data affirming that every opportunity for contact with cultural diversity, both personally and professionally, provides teacher candidates with added experiences for reflection that connect with and build on previous experiences, reaffirm cultural diversity, or challenge existing notions and prejudices (Kyles et al., 2008, p. 16). The MRTEQ (2015) intends that all newly-qualified teachers should be able to take up employment in any schooling setting within South Africa in all its

diversity, wherein they would execute their teacher professional duties. Robinson and Zinn (2007) point to challenges in designing ITE programmes, especially TP, where student-teachers are afforded the opportunity to gain practical experience on-site in multiple diverse contexts. They are of the view that the myriad generic TP management challenges coupled with student-teachers' resistance to diverse alternative experiences prevent many student-teachers from adequately preparing for teaching in challenging environments. The net effect is that students' hesitance to work outside their comfort zones reinforces a racial and class dimension within their training (Robinson & Zinn, 2007). Their study explored whether students' lived professional learning experiences, mediated by appropriate scaffolding, could activate more productive engagement with diversity. It aimed to gain a deeper understanding of what enables or constrains students' resistance to placement in schools with which they are unfamiliar. The professional teacher needs to be trained to meet the needs presented within the 21st-century learning context (Phillips, 2013) and be future-orientated (Zhoa, 2010, p. 422); thus, teacher education should incorporate the forces that shape future societies. However, Darling-Hammond (2006) argues that teacher education preparation remains very traditional.

The supplementary literature on teacher education curriculum design reveals that the following key areas need to be addressed: pedagogical content knowledge, classroom management, learner discipline, educational leadership, teaching approaches, teacher identity, teacher roles and performances, curriculum design and interpretation, and evaluation and assessment (Amin & Ramathan, 2009). Students should be introduced to these essential aspects and gain competency in an ITE programme. The lack of research on how these key areas are addressed within a student-teacher placement in situations of negotiating diversity is of concern. Amin and Ramathan (2009, p. 5) argue that "(w)hilst knowledge about the subject matter, pedagogy, and education foundations have featured prominently in teacher education programmes, knowledge of context has been marginalized". My study sought to foreground student-teachers' lived experiences in such contexts of diversity and, therefore, to contribute to the literature in this regard.

The principal challenge in the democratic (post-1994) South Africa has been to enhance the provision and quality of education for all. While an increasing number of young people are "attending school, stark systemic challenges and inadequate remedying of the apartheid legacies of separation and inequality remain pervasive" (Christie, 2018, p. 2). According to Morrow (2007), learning to teach and ultimately teaching in the context of South Africa is beset by numerous challenges, with teachers confronted by high HIV prevalence rates, learners' low socio-economic status, adult illiteracy and widespread unemployment, the lack of functioning and maintained school infrastructure, and failure to deliver on teaching and learning equipment (stationery and books). Morrow (ibid.) also refers to the breakdown of school feeding schemes, the increasing linguistic and other diversity of pupils, and the levels of gang-related activities that impact learners' safety. These are indicators of the harsh and inescapable realities faced by many schoolteachers daily and reflect challenges noted more than a decade ago. The same challenges prevail within diverse teaching practicum contexts, posing obstacles to quality learning experiences for student-teachers (Modisaotsile, 2012; Mlachila & Moelets, 2019). My study, in somewhat the same vein as possessing a social justice agenda, aimed to explore and delve into the perplexing phenomenon of student-teachers reluctance

to immerse themselves in unfamiliar teaching practice contexts, opting instead for placements in familiar and comfortable spaces, from scrutinising student-teachers selection of teaching practice placement schools.

In order to address the issue of disparate schooling typologies linked to social-economic factors, the South African government has grouped the country's public schools into five quintiles for funding purposes (Dass & Rinquet, 2017; Graven, 2014). The lower quintile groups receive pro-rata funding based on a sliding scale of economic contexts. My Master's study (Brown, 2016) reported on the experiences of teachers and parents regarding the no-fee policy in a historically disadvantaged school in Cape Town. It found that access to state financial support enabled schools, especially in lower quintiles, to address the needs of their indigent communities. However, as noted earlier, Mlachila & Moeletsi (2019) and Spaull (2015) draw our attention to a two-tiered education system: one for the privileged and one for the disadvantaged. Spaull (ibid.) suggests that this diversity of privilege/disadvantage permeates the structure of public schooling in South Africa. It is my contention that the quintile system accentuates these inequities. Student-teachers should thus be consciously prepared to be situated within these diverse contexts while learning to become teaching professionals.

2.9 Synthesis of chapter

This chapter offered a critical synthesis of the existing literature on the transforming teacher education policies and programmes with a particular focus on teaching practicum spaces in changing education contexts. The literature review took a bird's eye view from a **macro perspective**, with in-depth details of the South African higher education system and the impact of institutional diversities within higher education. The discussion on the policy terrain of teacher education in South Africa post-1994 delineated the changes and developments that progressively recognised the complexity of teaching across various contexts and the need for student-teachers to be prepared for this complexity. The numerous policies on learning to teach in post-apartheid South Africa were examined. The transforming institutional context of the largest teacher educator provider in the Western Cape, South Africa, the CPUT's vision and mission (CPUT Vision2030), was examined through a **meso perspective**, which revealed recognition of diversity. Finally, the chapter focused on relevant earlier studies on diverse student schooling experiences (**micro perspective**). The insights gleaned from the literature revealed a research gap on the lived experiences of student-teachers within diverse Teaching Practicum contexts.

Considering the learnings from Chapters one and two, a critical paradigm informed the theoretical framing presented in the following chapter (Chapter Three). This chapter utilises critical phenomenology, the comfort-stretch and panic model, and the pedagogy of discomfort theory as the basis to inform the study's research methodology. Based on these theoretical conceptions in social research that focus on matters of power, inequalities and marginalisation, the accounts of a cohort of final-year developing student-teacher experiences are examined in the chapters that follow, which focus on learning from the field (Chapters five, six, seven and eight)).

CHAPTER THREE

A THEORETICAL FRAME FOR PRODUCING PERTINENT DATA ON THE PARTICIPANTS' PERSONAL, PEDAGOGICAL AND POLITICAL EXPERIENCES

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided an in-depth (macro, meso and micro) review of the transformative literature on higher education and ITE programmes in South Africa.

This present chapter aims to construct an amalgam of theoretical perspectives to serve as the backdrop for developing research instruments to understand the phenomenon of the study. This created theoretical framing was also used to analyse the fieldwork data produced. Varpio et al. (2020) define a theoretical framework as “an outline of how the researcher will use a theory or theories in a specific study”. My study is situated within the phenomenological tradition, highlighting the emphasis on researching lived experiences, and therefore, I chose aspects of three relevant theories to form the framework used to view the research problem. Varpio, Paradis, Uijtdehaage and Young (2020, p. 220) interpret theory as “An abstract description of the relationships between concepts that help us to understand the world”. My assembled theoretical lens helped me to construct my reading of the world of student-teachers' lived experiences.

The **first theory**, *critical phenomenology*¹⁰, was inspired by the work of Edmund Husserl, who is regarded as the founder of phenomenology (Groenewald, 2004) in the 20th century, and various other phenomenologists such as Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger, who further developed Husserl's work. This theory was employed to explain the underlying assumptions that student-teachers may have about their experiences at diverse schools with which they are unfamiliar.

The second theory, the *comfort, stretch, panic model* by theorists Ryan and Markova (2006), was used to explain the learning development that student-teachers may or may not have undergone during their exposure to an alternative learning context. It was utilised as a lens to understand the learning processes (*the comfort zone, the stretch zone and the panic (or stress) zone*) that student-teachers negotiate between their own diverse schooling experiences and those they may encounter during the Teaching Practicum placement.

The third theory, the *pedagogy of discomfort* by theorists Boler and Zembylas (2003), was drawn on to explore the role that discomfort plays in learning to become a teacher within a diverse Teaching Practicum schooling context. Zembylas asserts:

"(f)or me, pedagogy of discomfort still remains a powerful pedagogical tool able to produce action because teachers and students can utilize their discomfort to construct new emotional understandings into ways of living with others—the ultimate vision of this pedagogy, in my view" (Leibowitz, 2011, p. 1).

¹⁰ Critical phenomenology is not only descriptive but also normative. It seeks to link theory with practice (praxis), aiming for social transformation. By highlighting injustices and advocating for change, critical phenomenology aligns itself with social movements and activism, striving to make a tangible impact on the world.

This theory was useful in forming a link between student-teachers' experiences during TP and the learning that takes place through the BEd. curriculum.

These three theoretical frameworks shed light on the three critical research questions. Theory one, which focuses on critical phenomenology, examined experiences of the power dimension within the societal structure (the diverse TP school placement) when a student-teacher is positioned within a newly situated context. Theory two, the comfort, stretch, and panic model, was utilised to view student-teachers' development (or lack thereof) in the academic, personal, and professional spheres whilst placed within a diverse TP context. Theory three, the pedagogy of discomfort, was employed to measure the development of the student-teachers' views on diversity within an ITE curriculum.

The abovementioned theories and the extensive literature review thus provided a substantive framework to analyse the data and discuss the findings.

Table 3.1: The Study's Critical Questions, Theories, and Aims of the methods

Critical Questions	Theories lens	Methods of data production	Growing level of abstraction
1 - What are student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse TP contexts?	▪ Critical phenomenology ▪ The comfort, stretch and panic model	one stimulus activity to reflect on past schooling and intersecting themes of diversity using bio info sheet responses	Descriptive
2 - How do student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse TP contexts connect with their experiences of the ITE curriculum?	▪ Critical phenomenology ▪ Pedagogy of discomfort	one stimulus activity to reflect on university curriculum learning and experiences in diverse TP contexts	Procedural
3 - What explains the student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse TP schools?	▪ Critical phenomenology ▪ Pedagogy of discomfort ▪ The comfort, stretch and panic model	one stimulus activity to reflect on the image captured during their time in the school	Theoretical

Source: Author's own

In choosing the three theoretical lenses, I aimed to align them with three levels of deepening abstraction: firstly, a *descriptive* level, foregrounding the nature of the student's experience; secondly, a *procedural* level, aiming to understand the connections between everyday experience and the ITE curriculum; and thirdly, a *theoretical* level, aiming to provide explanatory value to why the student-teachers experiences unfold the way they do. Each of these levels corresponded with targeted methods of data production in the field (see further discussion in Chapter four).

3.2 Overview of chapter

This chapter is organised into four main parts.

Section 3.3 critically reviews pure phenomenology's essential features and describes the use of critical phenomenology as a dualistic framework (employing method and theory) to understand and develop professional student-teachers' lived experiences in traversing their learning.

Section 3.4 focuses on the kinds of shifts (if any) experienced by developing professionals when exiting their **space of comfort** to enter unfamiliar primary schooling spaces to undertake the practical component (TP) of their ITE programme.

Section 3.5 discusses the **pedagogy of discomfort theory**, a conduit to philosophically interpret students' progression in their professional learning.

Lastly, section 3.6 synthetically combines the three theories to understand the phenomenon of this study in a South African HEI. The theories provided a distinctive multifaceted lens to study the phenomenon in and at a specific time within the South African educational landscape.

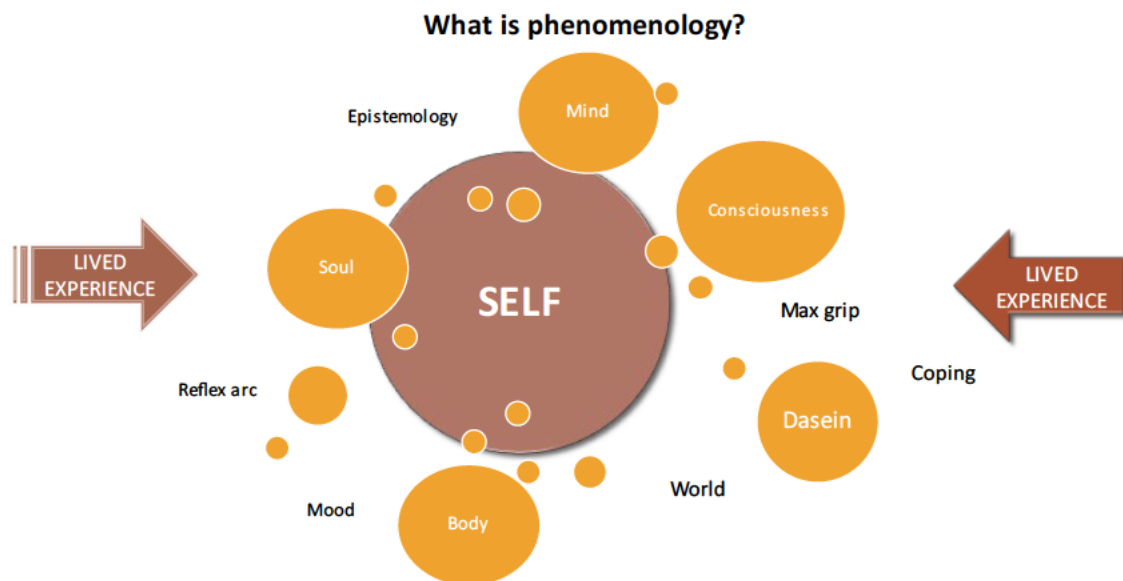
3.3 Phenomenology: Theory and Method

3.3.1 What is phenomenology?

Phenomenology is both a theory and a method (Qutoshi, 2018) (see further discussion of this construct in Chapter Four: Research Methodology). Phenomenology is both a theory and a method, serving as a philosophical framework for understanding human experiences; in this instance, the focus was on the nineteen final year student-teachers enrolled in the IP ITE programme at CPUT. As a theory, it explored the essence of phenomena by focusing on individuals' subjective perceptions and interpretations of what constitutes a diverse teaching practicum experience. It sought to uncover the intrinsic meanings and structures underlying these experiences, aiming to grasp the lived world from the perspective of those experiencing it. Simultaneously, phenomenology functions as a methodological approach, employing techniques like bracketing to temporarily suspend preconceived notions and biases, allowing me, as the researcher of this study, to delve deeply into the richness of individual experiences and uncover the fundamental aspects of phenomena. Conducting a phenomenological study involves adopting a thought-provoking approach to learning about people and their understanding, beliefs and interpretations of the world. This sub-section briefly describes phenomenology, which is a research approach that, according to Koopman (2017, p. 1), is "a means of accessing *subjective knowing* and *pure perception* but is sufficiently rigorous and systematic to represent the *lifeworld experiences* of research participants with a high degree of accuracy". Phenomenology has been used to examine society, ethics, law, aesthetics and architecture, among other topics (Moran, 2000). Phenomenological studies exhibit diverse philosophical interpretations and understandings; however, a commonality is "the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view" (Smith, 2013). Phenomenology is generally understood in one of two ways: 1) as a disciplinary field in philosophy (McCarthy-Jones, Krueger, Larøi, Broome, & Fernyhough, 2013) or 2) as a movement in the history of philosophy (Crossley, 2001).

William Dilthey (1985, p. 223) captures the nature of lived experience as follows:

A lived experience does not confront me as something perceived or represented; it is not given to me, but the reality of lived experience is there for me because I have a reflexive awareness of it. I possess it immediately as belonging to me in some sense. Only in thought does it become objective.



Source: Koopman, O & Koopman, K. (2022). 'Methodological shapes and forms of phenomenology: Venturing into the scholarship of researching lived experience'. [Slide 5]. Platform: PowerPoint)

Figure 3.1: Diagram representing phenomenology

Koopman and Koopman (2022) asserts that a phenomenological approach emphasises that lived experiences are not merely external events but are deeply intertwined with the individual's subjective perception, highlighting how personal meaning and interpretation shape our understanding of reality. By placing the self at the core, phenomenology acknowledges that our consciousness and existence (Dasein) are always situated within a specific context, influencing and being influenced by the physical body and the surrounding environment. This perspective underscores the integral role of the mind and consciousness in experiencing and interpreting life events, suggesting that our embodied interactions with the world are fundamental to constructing our sense of self and reality.

Phenomenological research aims to capture the lived experiences of the research participants (teachers, lecturers, learners, students, etc.) and to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence (Dilthey, 1985). Simply put, phenomenology is concerned with studying phenomena that arise from the experience of being in the world. Van Manen (1990) states that this reflection on lived experience has a "certain essence, a 'quality' that we recognise in retrospect for the reason that lived experience happens on a continuum of time – it is something that happened in the past – it can never be grasped in its immediate manifestation but only reflectively as a past presence" (ibid). For example, the instruments that play in an orchestra collectively comprise the whole symphony. As Dilthey puts it: "Lived experiences are related to each other like motifs in the andante of a symphony" (Dilthey, 1985, p. 227).

When evoking the term ‘subjective knowing’ (also known as perceived or self-assessed knowledge), the individual experiencing the phenomenon is consciously aware of the event (Koopman, 2015). Consciousness is what we experience through our sense organs that we can remember and thus allows us to remember, extending to reporting on the incident. We think about things that happen or happen around us, enabling us to represent them both epistemologically and ontologically. This, in turn, allows us to reflect on phenomena. All these are the mental residuum (or mental content) that drives our inner existence (LePore & Loewer, 1986). Every thought that flows through our minds is underpinned by some force referred to as ‘that which influences our thinking’, which equates to modes of being of all existence (Husserl, 1983, p. 484). Therefore, the phenomenological researcher is urged to view his/her research participants (in my case, final-year student-teachers) as actively living, feeling and thinking subjective beings to cultivate new understandings of how human beings perceive the world.

3.3.2 Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty on phenomenology and its implications for this study

Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) is acknowledged as the founding father of phenomenology. The phenomenological approach he forged was that of descriptive phenomenology, which is a straightforward form that only describes the world from the point of view of the person experiencing a given phenomenon (Ellis, 2016). Many scholars of phenomenology regard Husserl as the father or what Groenewald (2004, p. 3) calls the fountainhead of phenomenology in the 20th century (Koopman & Koopman, 2020; Koopman, 2017; Weimin, 2008; Groenewald, 2004; Devenish, 2002).

For Husserl (1967; 1984), the nature of truth can only be found in a person’s lived experiences, and he viewed human ‘consciousness’ as:

- I. the compositional plane of a person’s intentionality (which forms the object of one’s consciousness or the unity of consciousness);
- II. the primacy of his or her lifeworld;
- III. pre-suppositionless; and
- IV. that in which the meaning of existence is found (Schweitzer, 1983).

Heidegger (1927/1962) described phenomenology as a ‘tool’ or ‘lens’ to understand human nature as a substance with specified properties that can be unearthed (Koopman & Koopman, 2020). A Heideggerian phenomenological approach understands human beings from a subjective point of view in pursuit of their specific definitive properties that need to be described, unearthed or explained. Furthermore, the phenomenologist searches for deeper meaning and understanding of what it means to be human or what human nature means in a particular context by elucidating phenomena precisely as they are revealed to the experiencing person in all their concreteness, plurality and particularity (Koopman et al., 2020, p. 15).

The third canon of phenomenology is Maurice Merleau-Ponty. From this philosopher’s perspective, the focus is on perception, embodied consciousness, and the unity of these phenomena in time and space (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962; Dreyfus, 2006; Gallagher, 2014). Merleau-Ponty declared that rationalism and empiricism marginalise what phenomenology can contribute to research. The first concept elevates the importance of the mind and perception, while the second negates them (Crossley, 1995).

To put it briefly, all three phenomenologists focused on a phenomenon as it presents itself without any judgement through a specific ontological framework (the study of existence) and at the core of the approach is its access to meaning, which the phenomenologists consider as the 'essence' of a phenomenon. Therefore, the researcher will be able to report the voices, feelings, mindsets, culture and existence of the research participants.

3.3.3 What is critical phenomenology?

The keyword 'critical' denotes the capacity to inquire 'against the grain', to question the conceptual and theoretical bases of knowledge and method, to ask questions that go beyond prevailing assumptions and understandings, and to acknowledge the role of power and social position in phenomena (Publishing and the Mentoring Network Journal, 2016). Researchers who follow critical theory methods assume that social reality is historically established and that it is produced and reproduced by people. Even though people can consciously act to change their social and economic circumstances, critical researchers understand that their ability to do so is constrained by various forms of social, cultural and political domination (Publishing and the Mentoring Network Journal, 2016). Puncta (the Journal of Critical Phenomenology, 2023, pg. 1) highlights:

The critical turn in phenomenology suggests that phenomenology is not merely a descriptive method or practice but a *mode of critique* understood as an ongoing process of revealing and interrogating the concrete conditions, institutions, and assumptions that structure lived experience. Critical phenomenology aims to open up a more focused area of discourse than the works of those such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Simone de Beauvoir, Frantz Fanon, Hannah Arendt, and, more recently, Lisa Guenther, Sara Ahmed, Alia Al-Saji, and Mariana Ortega have opened up through their commitments to an engaged phenomenology.

Guenther (2019) asks pivotal questions pertaining to the prospects of 'critical phenomenology' by stating, "What, if anything, can phenomenology teach us about the lived experience of power and oppression and the role of quasi-transcendental social structures in shaping this experience?" (Guenther, 2019, p. 3). For Guenther, an emphasis on intersubjectivity is what renders phenomenology critical. Given the socio-historical and political context outlined in chapters one and two above and the linking of experiences with matters of the questions of equity and redistribution of power differential in an emerging democracy, my study thus adopted Guenther's (2019, pg. 2) position of 'critical phenomenology':

Critical phenomenology goes beyond classical phenomenology by reflecting on the quasi-transcendental social structures that make our world experience possible and meaningful and engaging in a material practice of "restructuring the world" to generate new and liberatory possibilities for meaningful experience and existence.

In this sense, critical phenomenology is both a way of doing philosophy and a way of approaching political activism (Guenther, 2019, pg. 2.).

3.3.4 Connecting experience and criticality in my study

In this section, I explore how the national policy context needs to be understood as a backdrop to researching students' experiences. The national professional teacher policy, MRTEQ (DHET, 2015), requires that student-teachers should be exposed to diverse, authentic learning spaces during the learning period when pursuing this formal teaching qualification. Hopefully, four years of learning to become a professional teacher afforded the

purposefully selected group of final-year students adequate time to gather professional knowledge regarding their lived experiences within diverse learning spaces. What becomes critical within phenomenology is questioning the kinds of pieces of knowledge assembled in the developmental process. Given (2008) asserts:

Knowledge is not simply a matter of representing and explaining reality but rather a social phenomenon, constitutive relations to personal identities, social practices, institutions, and power structures. This includes knowledge produced by social researchers; therefore, critical research must profoundly include a self-reflexive or reflective component.

This national policy attempts to steer the direction of the quality of student experiences so that they embrace a more critical transformational agenda. However, I examined in this thesis how the intersection between the world of the students and the world of the schooling contexts takes on a confluence of contested views about being and becoming a professional teacher. I explore how the power dynamics surface when a student-teacher is unfamiliar with a specific diverse schooling context, is entering the learning space for the first time and has to acclimatise to the new environment. This impacts the realisation (or not) of the policy ideals. An imbalance of power can exist between the student-teacher and stakeholders in the host school (the SMT, mentor-teachers, learners, etc.), which affirm or suppress students' professional growth and learning. Critical phenomenology, therefore, allows the theoretical examining of this space because of its attention to varied forms of power that are subjugated or asserted within the TP practicum space.

3.3.5 The educational context of critical phenomenology

The ITE programme (BEEd.) Intermediate Phase course prepares prospective student-teachers to take up teaching spaces within a varied typology of schools, focusing on Grades four to six and utilising a critical phenomenological lens, focusing on the diverse power dynamics within schools during TP placements. This research focused on the personal consciousness of final-year student-teachers. What goes on in their minds as they reflect on their placements in diverse TP contexts? This quest demands insight into their development knowledge a) personally, b) academically, and c) professionally through their lived experiences. The research was interested in the student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse teaching practicum contexts as per the national teacher policy, the MRTEQ, which describes qualifications pertaining to ITE. The student-teacher is a **being with personal interpretative powers to understand** the specific context (situation) in the diverse schooling spaces. It is noted that not all individuals or contexts are homogenous, and my study aims to expose the unique dynamics at play when specific individuals interact with unique schooling contexts. Merleau-Ponty's quest in his seminal provocations was to understand people as *beings* in a situation in which they exist (Merleau-Ponty, 1964). As the researcher, I aimed to understand how the student-teachers experienced the diverse TP placements, not just as passive recipients but as active agents. To capture their lived experiences, my student participants were allowed to tell their own stories of what they encountered in the various primary schools over the four-year initial teacher-teaching practicum programme. In a phenomenological study, the reliability of the phenomenon *as it is lived* means apprehending and understanding the experience in the lived context of the person living in the situation (Wilson, 2002; Case & Given, 2016).

Wilson's analysis of lived experience is set out by Gunter (1974). He asserts that phenomenology offers an entry point into the subjective experiences of student-teachers, investigating **why student-teachers do what they do** in the context of the person living it. In this study, existential phenomenology, as posited by Merleau-Ponty (1964), refers to the student-teachers' consciousness of their reality. The student-teacher is conscious of what drives his/her mental state, what to do, when, how to do it, and what works in a given context. Expressed differently, what are the intentions when diversity is taught in the Intermediate Phase classroom? Gunter (1974, p. 7) suggests that "real knowledge of a phenomenon can only be discovered within the relationship of intention". For example, is the student-teacher teaching an IP Grade four to six CAPS Life Skills themed lesson on the issue of personal and social well-being using one of the three topics (1 - *Development of the self*, 2 - *Health and environmental responsibility* and 3 - *Social responsibility*) or a representation of how they interpret the IP Life Skills CAPS in their own world? The researcher can probe deeper into the matter by considering whether the student-teacher is preparing his/her learners for an upcoming formal examination or focusing on understanding the topic based on real-life examples. This study aimed to understand student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse contexts while simultaneously reviewing their history of diversity as they were exposed to the concept at primary and high school and within the ITE programme. This study design, therefore, intersects *past* experiences (students' own schooling), *present* experiences (the ITE curriculum), and the prospective *future* conceptualisation of their roles as professional teachers.

3.3.6 Utilising critical phenomenology for this study

Critical phenomenology foregrounds experiences of marginalisation, oppression, and power to identify a transcendental experience (Weiss, Salamon & Murphy, 2019). Transcendent experiences can link to marginalisation when marginalised individuals seek solace or empowerment in spiritual or metaphysical realms, often as a response to societal exclusion or oppression. Yaden, Haidt, Hood, Vago and Newberg (2017) explain the term and offer examples of various forms of transcendent experiences. Yaden et al. (2017, p. 2) state that an exemplary example is when the "subjective sense of one's self as an isolated entity can temporarily fade into an experience of unity with other people or one's surroundings, involving the dissolution of boundaries between the sense of self and other". Examples of self-transcendent experiences (STEs) include (Yaden et al., 2017, p. 1):

*I felt myself one with the grass, the trees, birds, insects, and everything in nature. I exalted in the mere fact of existence, of being part of it all... I knew so well the satisfaction of losing self in a perception of supreme power and love ... (quoted in James, 1985/1902, p. 364-365).
 I lost the boundary to my physical body. I had my skin, of course, but I felt I was standing in the centre of the cosmos (quoted in Watts, 1957, p. 121).
 I could no longer clearly discern the physical boundaries of where I began and where I ended. I sensed the composition of my being as that of a fluid rather than that of a solid. I no longer perceived myself as a whole object separate from everything (Taylor, 2008, p. 42).*

When something is transcendental, it is beyond ordinary, everyday experience. In recounting the crisis of Black education in South Africa during apartheid, Murphy (1985, p. 64-65) states:

The crisis in black education was forcibly and distressingly brought home to the government by the Soweto riots on 16 June 1976. It is the opinion of many educationists in all racial

groups that the root cause remains the expression of the children's extreme frustration and hatred of a system of education based on ideological separation, which they consider discriminates against them (Murphy, 1985, p. 65).

Like its counterpart America, South Africa aimed to establish a multicultural educational system (Wagenaar, 2005), an aspiration that represents a transcendental shift from discriminatory practices to an inclusive vision of education that seeks to honour and integrate diverse cultural backgrounds. However, Gorski and Covert (2010) assert that it is rare for any two classroom teachers or education scholars to agree on an exact definition of multicultural education as they experience it subjectively. Gorski and Covert (2010, p. 21) offer the following working definition of multicultural education:

Multicultural education is a progressive approach to transforming education that holistically critiques and addresses current shortcomings, failings, and discriminatory practices in education. It is grounded in ideals of social justice, education equity, and a dedication to facilitating educational experiences in which all students reach their full potential as learners and as socially aware and active beings, locally, nationally, and globally. Multicultural education acknowledges that schools are essential to laying the foundation for the transformation of society and the elimination of oppression and injustice.

Gibson (1976, pp. 7-15) identified five approaches within multicultural education in the United States and expanded on concepts and assumptions that are sometimes explicitly distinguishable and, at other times, interrelated. The five concepts are:

1. Education of the culturally different or benevolent multi-culturalism
2. Education about cultural differences or cultural understanding
3. Education for cultural pluralism
4. Bicultural Education - Multi-cultural (or bicultural) education aims to produce competent learners who can operate successfully in two different cultures.
5. Multi-cultural education as the normal human experience

While Gibson's (1976) research may be dated, its key findings revealed that each of the first four approaches to what constitutes multicultural education experiences views culture as the culture of an ethnic group, which leads to "unintentional pigeonholing and stereotyping of learners" (Gibson, 1976, p. 10). There is thus a need to recognise race as a "complicated multiplicity of identifications producing, reproducing and transforming identities under changing social and historical circumstances" (Wagner, 2005, p. 41). Verwoerdian¹¹ demographic planning was designed to "ethicise, denationalise and fragment the black majority but to racialise and thereby unify the White minority of different ethnic backgrounds" (Adam and Moodley, 1993). The designers of ITE programmes within democratic South Africa aim to shape learning policies that would 'level the playing field' of each developing South African student-teacher regardless of skin colour. Robinson's (1999, p. 3) study on the intentions of the general and TP parts of the one-year pre-service teacher education programme at the University of the Western Cape and how these intentions played out in practice noted:

Three key recommendations were made to enhance the teacher education programme: building a culture of professionalism among students, removing language and racial barriers in the class and during teaching practice, and skills training.

¹¹ Relating to or characteristic of the former South African Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd or his policies. Hendrik Verwoerd (1901–1966), Prime Minister of South Africa from 1958 until his assassination in 1966.

The stark realities in post-apartheid South Africa show that racism still exists within the country's schooling spaces (Jansen & Kriger, 2020). Jansen and Kriger's (2020) study on the micro-politics of primary school admissions addresses the question: 'Who gets in, and why?' Similarly, against the backdrop of South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy, my experience as TP Coordinator who oversees student-teacher placements reveals a trend of elite schools only hosting students from private HEIs for TP.

Contextually relevant pedagogical strategies that speak to diversity and reconciliation and promote social cohesion are essential to empower ITE to prepare South African teachers (Sosibo, 2013). A case study of an ITE programme in South Africa used semi-structured interviews with purposely selected students and lecturers, focus groups, documentary analysis, and a survey of initial teacher educators to examine teachers as agents of social cohesion (Sayed Badroodien, Salmon & McDonald, 2016, p. 12). It revealed that the preparation of student-teachers is often less about what is instilled in ITE programmes and more about the many stark realities of schooling in South Africa; therefore, a "transformative social cohesion agenda in schools and at universities is unlikely in policy environments that deal with issues of diversity and difference in fragmented and individualistic ways" (Sayed et al., 2016, p. 13). Sayed et al.'s (2016) study revealed that:

It is, in fact, in the crossover practicum that student-teachers can be best helped to expand and develop a range of teaching strategies to apply in different contexts. This can even be extended to how the teaching practicum is organised, where student-teachers could be assessed on how much they sought to reduce social exclusion and address inequalities in the classroom or fundamentally address the learning needs of all students. Such initiatives would be especially helpful if the aim within ITE programmes is to open student-teachers eyes to diverse school contexts in South Africa.

The purpose of utilising a critical phenomenological interpretivist approach for my research study was to understand the **subjective transcendental critical experiences** of the selected group of student-teachers whilst placed within a diverse TP context during the final lap of their ITE programme. Robinson and Zinn (2007) asserted that the main challenge in relation to situational learning experiences for developing teacher professionals is student-teachers' resistance to being placed in schools where they feel uncomfortable.

3.4 The comfort, stretch, and panic model

In this section I elaborate on the second of the theoretical lenses drawn on to construct my theoretical amalgam for my study. In particular, this foregrounds that the student navigating through the ITE curriculum is not a linear but a discursive engagement with potentially alternative ways of being and becoming. The model from which this theoretical lens is drawn emphasises the metaphor of learning and growth dealing with one's personal sense of comfort, but also about stretching and shifting to new dimensions. Sometimes, these dimensions might involve a degree of panic.

Ryan and Markova (2006) developed a psychological-social theoretical model named the comfort-stretch and panic model, which offers insight into the degrees of learning zones an individual can experience. The model by Ryan and Markova displays similar tenets of the Yerkes-Dodson Law, which is a model of the relationship between stress and task performance (Yerkes & Dodson, 1908). Both models propose that one reaches one's peak limit of

performance dependability on one's level of stress, wherein too much or too little stress impacts one's performance (Ryan & Markova, 2006; Yerkes & Dodson, 1908).

The Ryan and Markova (2006) model was utilised within this study to explore the reasons for the hesitance and capitulation to familiar placement schooling choices of a group of final-year student-teachers when embarking on work-integrated learning within their ITE programme. The comfort-stretch and panic model considers that learning occurs within the constraints of three developmental zones: 1) the comfort zone, 2) the stretch zone, and 3) the panic (or stress) zone. In the context of student-teachers developing into professional educators, a brief analysis of the three zones of the model reveals the following:

- **The comfort zone** represents the familiar and routine aspects of their teaching practices. Sticking solely to what feels comfortable and familiar might provide a sense of ease, but it limits the potential for growth and learning. If student-teachers remain exclusively in this zone, their skills may stagnate, and their teaching methods become repetitive.
- **The stretch zone**, on the other hand, is where student-teachers engage in novel and challenging experiences. It's the realm of exploration and adventure in teaching – trying new methods, incorporating innovative technologies, or experimenting with diverse teaching strategies (for example, reconceptualising lesson designs to cater to specific learners with learning barriers). While not as comfortable as the familiar routine, the stretch zone is a stimulating space where student-teachers can push their mental, emotional, and physical boundaries, fostering foundational to deep professional development.
- **The panic zone** represents the areas that student-teachers may find intimidating or overwhelming. These could be teaching responsibilities or methods that seem too daunting or unacceptable at the moment. It's crucial to recognize the panic zone as a potential area for growth and not dismiss it entirely. By gradually incorporating elements from the panic zone into the stretch zone, student-teachers can expand their comfort zones, ultimately developing into well-rounded and adaptable professional educators.

3.4.1 Connecting the comfort, stretch and panic model to the phenomenon of this study

Russian teacher Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) is considered a pioneer in learning in social contexts. Shabani (2016, p. 1) writes:

Vygotsky's learning theories seem to be paramount to the existing models of learning and development due to its pursued multidimensional approach, which pays special heed to the cognitive, affective, social, and contextual aspects of change.

Vygotsky was best known as an educational psychologist with a sociocultural theory (McLeod, 2007). He suggested that social interaction leads to on-going step-by-step changes in students' thoughts and behaviour, varying greatly from culture to culture (Woolfolk, 1998). Essentially, Vygotsky's theory proposes that growth is contingent on interaction with people and the tools the culture provides to help form their own view of the world. Whilst this Vygotskian worldview might be critiqued for how many of the practitioners translated it into rather mechanistic steps to inform curriculum design, it has value in understanding the process of professional growth and learning relevant to my study. Professional growth and learning is a complex, fluid, dynamic interplay between

multiple factors and selected strategies. For example, there are three ways a cultural tool can be passed from one individual to another (McLeod, 2007). The first is *imitative* learning, where one person attempts to mimic or copy another. The second way is by *instructed* learning, which entails memorising the teacher's instructions and using them to self-regulate. The last way cultural tools are passed on to others is through *collaborative* learning, which includes a "group of peers who strive to understand each other and work together to learn a specific skill" (Tomasello, Kruger, & Ratner, 1993, p. 3).

The Learning zone model, which Vygotsky initially created, has been popularised by numerous other educational professionals (see the works of Tom Senninger, 2000; Carol Dweck, 2015; Ryan & Markova, 2006). As a whole, this theory demonstrates how to successfully engage with the learning process. Ryan and Markova (2006, pg. 2) identify the following three pivotal underpinning principles within this model that should not detract from any practical elaboration of the Vygotskian approach:

- 1) Every person's threshold for the different zones is individual and may differ in different situations.
- 2) Do not try to push a learning process. Do not try to push a person into a certain zone because you cannot know a person's individual "stretch".
- 3) It may happen that you need to organise several learning situations to make learning happen.

My synthetic learning from this above argument is that the use of theory is crucial in any research to give it direction and validate or disapprove of a phenomenon. Theoretical framings help to decipher the way things are and the foundation of specific actions. Based on performing or performance (the concept of doing), reflection is employed to review self-progression in competently and confidently performing a task. This theory offers strategies for use in cases where participants experience anxiety-related blockages to learning. However, the goal of a researcher is not to stereotype or commodify the theoretical impetus but to allow it to assist in understanding divergent contexts by testing its wider applicability. I adopt this stance as I explore the construction of my theoretical amalgam.

3.4.2 Utilising the comfort, stretch and panic model for this study

This theory was employed to understand the strategies developed and utilised in cases where participants experienced anxiety-related blockages to learning during the diverse schooling placement. It also touched on the anxieties associated with the kind of development student-teachers were exposed to during their time within contextual spaces they were unfamiliar with. I sought to understand if any feelings of stress or being overwhelmed were evident in the TP placement experience and what intervention measures were implemented to enable them to grow in their career. The ways in which student-teachers learn about teaching through their encounters with learners and staff were also explored. Placements in a diverse school context offer informal learning and professional socialisation opportunities. Importantly, the theory could reveal how student-teachers construct teaching work regarding people, practices, policies and programmes.

3.4.3 Applying the Comfort-Stretch-Panic Model: A Framework for Analysis

The primary aim of using this model was to understand the complex feelings associated with the student-teachers' diverse TP placement and how they were able to confront and hopefully develop within the professional learning

space. The theory was utilised to understand what constitutes a space of comfort and moving to a space of discomfort that offers insight into the unique lived experience. Openness to a diverse learning experience is a concept that significantly influences this theory's intricacies (Dengler, 2018). Dengler (2018, p. 69) asserts, "A person's comfort zone, stretch or development zone and panic zone are very individual and may vary over time". According to Brown (2008, p. 1), this model should be placed under cautionary watch to avoid the risk of promoting situations of "disequilibrium and dissonance". However, Gardiner and MacLellan (2022), Dengler (2018) and Brown (2008) concur that it can deliver individual professional development when a person's attitudes and behaviour reflect a degree of interest in his/her choice of career.

3.5 Pedagogy of discomfort theory

3.5.1 What is the pedagogy of discomfort theory?

From a legal policy perspective, formal access to higher educational learning in the democratic era grants freedom for all race groups to choose their preferred field of study. It is claimed by some that admission to higher education in Africa is not without barriers (Mdepa & Tshiwula, 2012). This argument is supported by those who are confident that the policy has steered South Africa towards transforming the higher education sector through a social justice approach. However, this celebratory stance often under-represents the challenges facing students as they have to navigate the landscape of post-apartheid institutions, many of whom still adhere to legacies of the past curriculum, management, and governance structures rather than embrace a new equitable agenda in practice. Morrow (2009) highlighted the need to understand formal access as only one component of directing the transformation of the higher education landscape. HE argued that one should consider the epistemological access that students have to acquire to succeed in the HE sectors. The cultural ethos of the institution and that of the lived experiences of students are often considered culturally divergent, and it is often understood that the student, rather than the institution, needs to transform and adapt to a new, equitable space. Other researchers suggest that one needs to question the nature of the knowledge domains towards which students need to acclimatise (Maringe & Chiramba, 2021; Maringe, Ojo & Chiramba, 2017; Maringe & De Wit, 2016).

Social justice education disturbs cherished beliefs about the world; thus, some discomfort is not only inescapable but could also be essential to individual growth (Berlak, 2004; Zembylas, 2015). It has been argued that a *pedagogy of discomfort* (Boler, 1999; Boler & Zembylas, 2003; Zembylas & Boler, 2002) is a teaching, learning and growth practice that can inspire students to move outside their 'comfort zones' and question their "cherished beliefs and assumptions". Boler (1999, p. 177) describes the concept of *pedagogy of discomfort* as:

A teaching practice [that] begins by inviting educators and students to engage in a critical inquiry regarding values and cherished beliefs and to examine constructed self-images in relation to how one has learned to perceive others.

In summary, the pedagogy of discomfort theory examines the stages of movement out of one's comfort zone to embrace discomfort (a pedagogy of disruption or discomfort).

3.5.2 Connecting the Pedagogy of discomfort theory to the phenomenon of my study

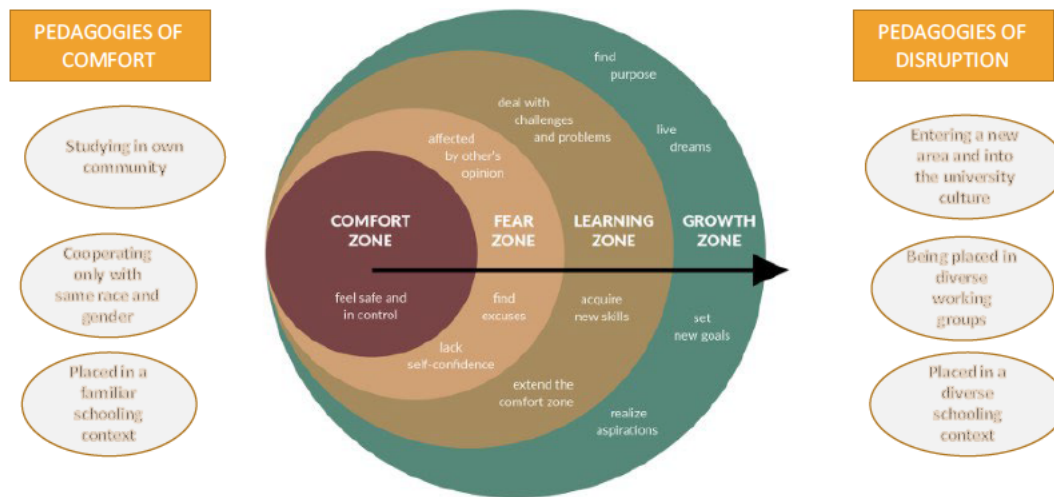
The MRTEQ notes that becoming a teacher within the democratic South African context requires exposure to a diverse range of schooling (DHET, 2015). Twenty-nine years after the demise of apartheid, a bifurcated schooling system still plagues South Africa, also described as the two-tiered education system (Spaull, 2019; Montfort & Moeletsi, 2019). This is made up of schooling for most of the marginalised groupings of people that were oppressed during apartheid (before 1994) and schooling for elite learners, many of whose parents benefitted from a racially segregated socio-economic system. Most first-time university students are only introduced to and confronted by diversity when entering the higher education learning space (Smith, 2020; Smith & Schonfeld, 2000). Dialogical engagement with fellow students regarding their lived heritage can broaden their understanding of past histories that continue to plague the country. The CPUT Intermediate Phase TP policy aims to present student-teachers within the ITE programme with a range of TP experiences over the four-year degree. The TP experience entails student-teachers being positioned within familiar and unfamiliar contexts such as various quintile schools (White & Van Dyk, 2019; Sayed & Motala, 2012), rural schooling (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; Dube, 2020), former Whites only schools also known as ex-Model C schools (Spaull, 2013; Seekings, 2008; Soudien, 2004), and special needs schools (Walton & Engelbrecht, 2022; Pather, 2011). Using the pedagogy of discomfort lens in this study enabled the identification and understanding of the kinds of learning experienced by the purposefully selected group of final-year student-teachers. My interests were to explore deeply whether the opportunities for disrupting student-teachers' alternative views about equity, transformation and democracy were capable of taking root given the background and legacies they drew from before they commenced initial teacher education.

3.5.3 Applying the pedagogy of discomfort theory

The figure below presents a diagrammatical representation of the 'Beyond the comfort zone' concept, which Samuel (2021) utilised at the South African Education Research Association conference (SAERA¹²) to understand the no student left behind movement taking place simultaneously in America (Bernstein, 2004) and South Africa.

¹² <https://www.saera.co.za/>

Beyond the comfort zone



Source: Adapted from Samuel (2021, SAERA conference presentation)

Figure 3.2: Moving through zones (comfort and discomfort)

Utilising this theory enabled Samuel (2021) to gain insight into the kinds of zones the doctoral and postgraduate diploma students in his care were in and to formulate interventions through scaffolding support to move them out of their placed zones. The model Samuel (2022) presented is not a linear process but a nested set of overlapping characteristics. The features of each of the zones, as described by Samuel (2022, pg. 122- 123), which explored the lessons learnt from the short-term emergency remote teaching and learning approach adopted to tackle the continuation of the HE academic programme during the COVID-19 pandemic, were as follows:

- The comfort zone features include working environments, relationships, or even demarcated choices about one's cultural, political and social preferences. For example, an individual may choose to remain in a specific work institution in a particular job even though one is aware that it is not one's desired job; however, the environment is predictable, and one can exert adequate control over the practices and relationships within that space without much effort.
- The fear zone features illuminated putting out one's neck to explore alternative pedagogical approaches that might result in getting one's head chopped off: exclusion from the tribe is a real possibility. Resistant individuals find excuses for not delving into alternative pedagogical strategies even though they are aware of their potential resourcefulness.
- The learning zone features dictated when individuals have migrated from simplistic cultural normative affirmations to become agents who contest the conventionalised values of their original comfort zone. Within this sphere, both teachers and learners see the potential for setting their own standards for what constitutes deep learning.

- The growth zone features offer potential for finding new purposes for pedagogy, enacting new dreams of the relationships of empowerment, and realising personalised goals that are not capitulating to the worldviews of others but continuously seeking broader redirections.

3.5.4 Applying the pedagogy of discomfort theory for this study

As noted previously, critical phenomenology enables an examination of the lived experiences of another person (in this case, the final year student-teacher). I aimed to gain insight into how ‘they’ lived authentically through various TP schooling placements and the impact (if any) that TP in diverse schooling had on their personal and professional growth. The pedagogy of discomfort model aimed to show the complexity of navigating the process of movement as a growing professional as students navigated the ITE curriculum space and the space of TP practicum schooling.

Other researchers have used the theory of discomfort to serve varied functions. For example, Maria Ojala (2021) used the theory to understand high school teachers’ beliefs and meta-emotions about climate change and their perceptions of how they deal with emotional reactions in the classroom. Using this theory, the researcher gained knowledge of the beliefs about emotions, which is an important part of the meta-emotion philosophical concept. Berlak (2004) used the theory to investigate “*Confrontation and Pedagogy: Cultural Secrets, Trauma, and Emotion in Antioppressive*”. The researcher aimed to understand various races’ (White and Black) tolerance towards each other regardless of the negative or pervasive and ubiquitous public videos and documents which present cases of institutional and personal racism. Berlak concluded:

I now believe that if a major purpose of teaching is the promotion of students' abilities to receive dissonant information, not just congruent with what they have learned before, then confrontation with its attendant trauma is necessary (Berlak, 2004, p. 20).

In applying the pedagogy of discomfort theory, my intention was to understand the dynamics of the experiences seen through the lens of power.

3.5.5 The motivation for utilising the Pedagogy of discomfort theory

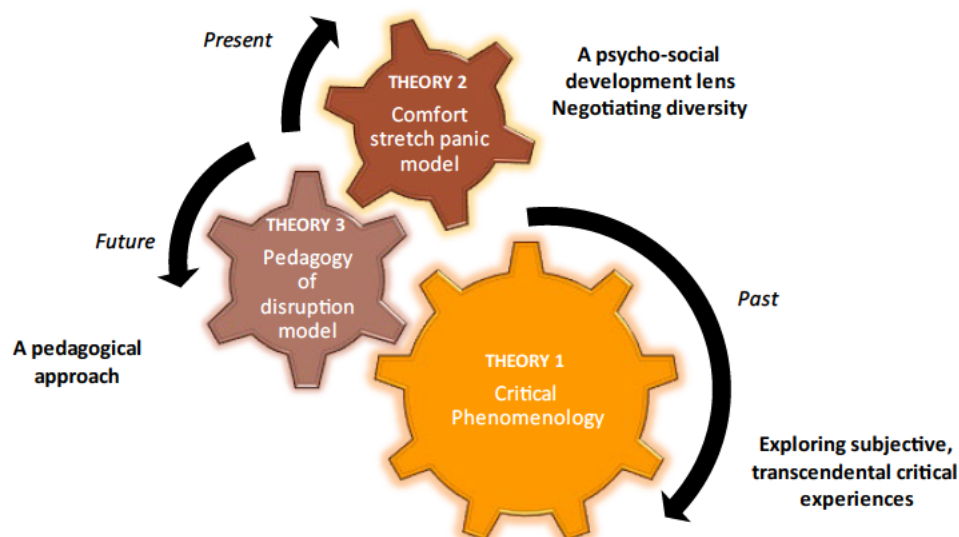
The primary aim of employing this theory was to comprehend the complexities of locating the student-teachers in diverse TP placements and how they were able to confront and hopefully develop within the professional learning space. The theory exposed whether progression or a channelling from a state of comfort to discomfort became evident when a student-teacher was exposed through supportive scaffolding to an alternative contextual schooling environment. Personal discoveries within a new setting can contribute to student-teachers’ pedagogical development or lack of development. The pedagogy of discomfort is not only a personal engagement of moving (*conduit*) from one context to another (operational consideration) but also offers a theoretical means to understand student-teacher quality as they negotiate this transition.

3.6 A theoretical amalgam of phenomenology, psycho-social and pedagogical models

This section places alongside each other the three theoretical models used to frame the theoretical lens of this study. I use the metaphor of an amalgam to note the processes, actions and unifying of the three perspectives, yet respecting the essence of each theoretical worldview. The amalgam draws from the theory and method of

phenomenology reviewing subjective, transcendental, and critical experiences; from a *psycho-social approach* to development and a *pedagogical approach* on growth and learning. These constitute overlapping categories of influence on my research study design. The discrete elements of the amalgam are nevertheless maintained in my representation.

I conclude this chapter by outlining how these lenses have assisted me in formulating the key critical research questions of the study.



Source: Author's own

Figure 3.3: An amalgam for theorising student-teachers' lived experiences

3.6.1 The critical research questions

My study has been based on the above exploration of the literature and theoretical framework, set out the critical research questions to clarify and understand precisely what this study aimed to achieve. The research questions were formulated as follows:

1. What are student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse Teaching Practicum contexts?
2. How do student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse Teaching Practicum contexts connect with their experiences of the ITE curriculum?
3. What explains the student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse TP schools?

The phenomenon is the student-teachers' lived experience within diverse Teaching Practicum contexts. The above questions describe the phenomenon pragmatically, offering insight into the operations or processes of the phenomenon and contributing to the conceptual, theoretical and philosophical stance on the phenomenon. In undertaking this research, I sought to understand the lived experiences of a sample group of purposefully selected final-year Intermediate Phase student-teachers and the diverse TP placements they encountered over four years

(See Chapter four: Research methodology). My objective was to determine what they learned about aspects of diversity in primary and high school and within the ITE programme before [consciously or not] experiencing the diverse TP placements over the four years within the IP teacher degree programme.

I selected TP as my focus as the course encapsulates the amalgamation of theory and practice. According to the MRTEQ (DHET, 2015, p. 62), “Newly qualified teachers must be able to manage classrooms effectively across diverse contexts in order to ensure a conducive learning environment”. It determines the timeframe for conducting TP over a set number of years and prescribes the kinds of learning settings a student-teacher should undertake. The following types of learning are dictated by the ITE national policy, which is associated with acquiring, integrating and applying knowledge for teaching purposes:

- disciplinary learning
- pedagogical learning
- practical learning
- fundamental learning
- situational learning (DHET, 2015, p. 10)

The MRTEQ focuses on developing undergraduate student-teachers learning to become professional teachers. The key concern of the study lies within the core of the policy, which focuses on NQTs’ readiness to teach in diverse teaching contexts.

The comfort, stretch and panic model explored two of this study’s three critical research questions. The first was: **“What are student-teachers’ lived experiences in diverse TP contexts?”**. The aim of the one-on-one interviewing method within this segment of data production was first to use an arts-based stimulus methodology activity [Appendix Two] to reflect on past schooling and intersecting themes of diversity [Appendix Three] using the responses to the biographical information sheet [Appendix One].

The theory of pedagogy of discomfort informed the understanding of two of the three critical questions: **How do student-teachers’ lived experiences in diverse TP contexts connect with their experiences of the ITE curriculum?** and **What explains the student-teachers’ lived experiences in diverse TP schools?**

The third critical question was: **“Why do student-teachers’ lived experiences in diverse contexts connect with their experiences of the ITE curriculum in the way that they do?”** The aim of the one-on-one interviewing method within this segment of data production was to primarily use an arts-based stimulus methodology activity [Appendix Four] to engage the participants to share with me an incident from their first year within the ITE programme, which can be regarded as a hallmark [stand-out experience] that affected their then views about diversity within the university. The one-on-one interview which followed [Appendix five] aimed to understand and capture the student-teacher’s stay in the diverse schooling placement during the final year of TP. Whilst the student participants were provided the first form of reporting on this critical question, my researcher’s critique is synthetically offered towards the end of the study (See Chapter eight).

3.7 Synthesis of chapter

This chapter presented a comprehensive discussion on the three theories utilised to understand student-teachers' lived experiences when located within diverse TP contexts. Chapter three focussed on the philosophies underpinning student-teacher experiences when engaging with individuals outside their comfort and familiar zone in an alternative schooling environment. To put the three theories into perspective [an expanded paradigmatic position of a **phenomenological approach** that embeds exploration of power dynamics (critical phenomenology), a **psychological-social theoretical** model exploring the negotiating of diversity (the comfort-stretch and panic model) and a **pedagogical model** examining the stages of movement out of one's comfort zone to embrace discomfort (a pedagogy of disruption)], I provided a historical overview of the theories. I drew attention to studies that utilised the theories for historical and political dimensions. The selected theories also guided the construction of the research instruments used to produce data for this study. The key constructs of the three theories are

- 1) authentic lived experiences of individuals in an alternative schooling environment,
- 2) power relations when placed within diverse schooling,
- 3) understanding the types of emotions involved in the professional learning of student-teachers and
- 4) scaffolding of learning as a tool to support students transitioning from a pedagogy of comfort to one of discomfort.

As noted in section 3.3.3, critical phenomenology has both a theoretical and methodological underpinning. While I have already touched on some methodological issues in relation to phenomenology, the following chapter focuses on these methodological aspects in more detail.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

4.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses only on the methodology of critical phenomenology, deemed a theory and method in understanding lived power-related experiences, whilst setting out the data production processes related to the research questions. Special attention is paid to facets such as the research framework, design, instrumentation, and ethical considerations, which provided credible and transferable results to answer the research questions effectively. I elucidate my interpretation of employing methodology to generate data by engaging with literature on its epistemology.

In any research project (in this case, a PhD study), the researcher's framework design influences the selection of a suitable method. Some scholars interchange the terms 'conceptual framework' and 'theoretical framework' (Fain, 2004; Parahoo, 2006). Others choose to demarcate the difference more sharply. Lacey (2010) indicates that a conceptual framework sets out a researcher's 'world views' on his/her research topic and delineates his/her beliefs and prejudices about the phenomenon under study. Fain (2004) proposed that where a framework is centred on concepts, it should be known as a conceptual framework, and when it is based on theories, it should be called a theoretical framework. I selected three theories for this research study based on their appropriateness, ease of application, and explanatory power. Fain (2004, p. 73) defined a theory as:

An organised and systematic set of interrelated statements (concepts) that specify the nature of relationships between two or more variables, with the purpose of understanding a problem or the nature of things and concepts as symbolic statements describing a phenomenon or a class of phenomena.

The "theoretical framework is the foundation from which all knowledge is constructed (metaphorically and literally) for a research study" (Grant & Osanloo, 2014, p. 1). The authors further remind postgraduate students (like myself) who are embarking on a dissertation that:

Without a theoretical framework, the structure and vision for a study are unclear, much like a house that cannot be constructed without a blueprint. By contrast, a research plan that contains a theoretical framework allows the dissertation study to be strong and structured with an organised flow from one chapter to the next (Grant & Osanloo, 2014, p. 2).

This chapter is underpinned by the argument that phenomenology (and critical phenomenology as its offshoot) could be regarded as both a theory and a method. In Chapter Three, I outlined the theory of both phenomenology and critical phenomenology as deeply interested in exploring individuals' subjective, transcendental experiences, foregrounding how these experiences link both personal and systemic elements, especially with respect to the distribution of power differentials in society. In this present Chapter Four I extend the methodological characteristics of phenomenology. As a method, phenomenology relies on the insights gained into the lived experiences by the choice of the methods/data production strategies of probing deeply in on the reported understandings of the participants' experiences. In this process, interviews are emphasised as a strategy to provide a dialogical relationship between the researcher and the researched. (Brown & Samuel, 2022). A conversational engagement

through interviews was extended further to draw on arts-based methodologies to activate a deeper form of critical reflection amongst the participants is explored in my study design.

Phenomenology is both a theory and a method, operating as a philosophical framework for interpreting human experiences. As a theory, it searches for the essence of phenomena by concentrating on individuals' subjective perceptions and interpretations. It seeks to uncover the intrinsic significances and structures underlying these experiences, aiming to grasp the lived world from the perspective of those experiencing it. At the same time, phenomenology functions as a methodological approach, employing techniques like bracketing to temporarily suspend preconceived notions and biases, allowing researchers to delve acutely into the richness of individual experiences and uncover the fundamental aspects of phenomena.

As a **theory**, phenomenology emphasises the importance of understanding phenomena as they are perceived by consciousness, prioritising subjective experience over objective reality. It proposes that reality is not separate from human experience but is instead constituted through it, suggesting that our understanding of the world is deeply intertwined with our perceptions. The **theoretical framework** of phenomenology asserts that by exploring first-person experiences, we can gain insights into the universal qualities of human consciousness. Phenomenology challenges the Cartesian dualism of mind and body, advocating for a more integrated understanding of human experience where the body and mind are inextricably linked. As a **methodological approach**, phenomenology involves detailed, qualitative analysis of lived experiences, often through in-depth interviews, diaries, or personal narratives. Researchers employing phenomenological methods seek to engage with participants' experiences empathetically and reflexively, striving to capture the essence of those experiences without imposing external interpretations. The method of epoché, or phenomenological reduction, is central to this approach, enabling researchers to set aside their own biases and assumptions to fully engage with the participants' perspectives. Phenomenology also uses the technique of imaginative variation, which involves exploring different possible meanings and perspectives of a phenomenon to identify its essential structures. This methodological rigor allows phenomenologists to explore complex and nuanced aspects of human experience, such as emotions, relationships, and cultural practices, in a systematic and profound manner. By combining theoretical insights with meticulous methodological practices, phenomenology provides a robust framework for examining how individuals make sense of their world, highlighting the dynamic interplay between perception, interpretation, and meaning.

To reiterate, the phenomenon of the current study is the lived experiences of a group of final-year Intermediate Phase student-teachers at the CPUT who completed their ITE Teaching Practicum course in different schools. The study aimed to understand the challenges, emotions, beliefs, perceptions, and convictions experienced by the participants when they were presented with a menu of schools to nominate for completing their practical learning component in becoming a professional teacher (course code TPR4741S). Critical phenomenology as a methodology was deemed most suitable to access and describe the lived world of student-teachers as revealed through interviews since (as described in the opening chapters) matters of power, marginality and the campaign for social justice are intricately connected. I elucidate my interpretation of employing critical phenomenology as a methodology to generate data by engaging with literature on its epistemology, particularly emphasising its suitability for accessing and describing the lived world of student-teachers. Their experiences regarding power dynamics

(during the ITE programme and within TP schools), marginality (amongst specific class and gendered students), and the pursuit of social justice are intricately intertwined, as evidenced by the data findings. Providing a conducive space to produce these insights was established by choosing non-threatening ways of engaging with the participants. Section 4.4.2 explains how I found my methodological way and why critical phenomenology was the most appropriate choice for my research methodology.

4.2 Overview of chapter

This chapter is organised into seven main parts.

Section 4.3 provides a detailed overview of the research methodology, focusing on the difference between *method* and *methodology* in tackling the study phenomenon. I also present a data production grid which describes the a) research questions, b) researcher's methods, c) participants' methods and the analysis approach.

Section 4.4 sets the stage to expand on the study's design by first describing the need to intersect a critical *phenomenological research approach* within a *qualitative case study* design. I discuss the complexities experienced in finding my methodological way within this doctoral research study, offer insight into the nineteen carefully selected final-year cohorts of Intermediate Phase student-teachers based in the Faculty of Education at the CPUT and provide details of the sample schools and their contextual histories through arts-based methodological imagery.

Section 4.5 focuses on the *data production process* by explaining its planning, the instruments designed to gather data, and the challenges involved.

Section 4.6 delves into the 'seriousness' of the research process and discusses the measures adopted to enhance the study's credence (*validity, reliability, credibility, and trustworthiness*).

Section 4.7 divulges my first-hand experience as *an insider researcher* in this doctoral study, researching the authentic lives of a group of final-year student-teachers whose practical TP programme I was responsible for overseeing for four years.

Section 4.8 probes the messiness and complexity of *the data analysis and interpretation* process in answering the critical questions.

The *synthetic overview* of the chapter presented in section 4.9 also sets out the lessons learnt.

4.3 Research Design and Methodology

4.3.1 Method and Methodology

This qualitative study was set within a critical phenomenology research paradigm (Lester, 1999; Salamon, 2022). Its guidelines informed the methodology and design of the empirical study. A qualitative approach was adopted to guide the development of the instruments used to produce data. The advantages of a qualitative research approach are generating an in-depth understanding of the participants' stories and understanding how people make sense of their experiences and perceptions within the real world. The phenomenological research approach involves

exploring the phenomena through people's lived experiences. Selecting a qualitative-led study design meant that the aim was not to discover a universalist truth but how the student-teachers interpret their understanding of their experiences. The selected qualitative framework with a critical phenomenological design showed tenets of an interpretivist paradigmatic orientation, which meant that the process of exploring the phenomenon of this study led me to gain insight into the analysis of human actions in the positioned contexts, which illuminated the individual perspectives and provided insight into their authentic lived realities centering around issues of cultural values, and beliefs.

In a critical study, the vantages are the relationship between the personal and the systemic/contextuals directed towards the realisation of social justice (Heidegger reinterpreted to address experiences of power and marginalisation - Zahavi, 2003, 2019, 2020, 2021). The study focussed on the world of academia, the design expectations of the formal curriculum, and the design of teaching practicum as stipulated in the MRTEQ (DHET, 2015), Norms and Standards for Educators (Department of Education, 2000) and the ISPFTED (ISPFTED, 2011). In the schooling context, the specific terms of reference of the national school curriculum policy – the CAPS that is embedded within the TP policy of the selected ITE programme framed student-teachers' lived experiences in relation to their understandings of the attributes that final-year student-teachers are expected to activate when engaging in teaching in diverse contexts. The collective interaction between the personal levels of reported experiences, within the landscape of the policy, management and curricular expectations informed the design of the instruments of this study methods.

4.3.2 Data production grid

To promote clarity about the choices of these particular methods, I designed the data-generating grid presented below. It shows alignment across all aspects of the research by setting out the following:

1. **Column one:** the research questions are outlined to promote congruence and consistency among all the components (paradigm, methodological approach, theoretical framework, etc.).
2. **Column two:** researcher methods are the strategies, processes or techniques utilised to produce data for analysis in order to unearth new information or enhance understanding of a topic.
3. **Column three:** participants' methods are the self-created research instruments utilised to produce data with the purposefully selected group of final-year Intermediate Phase student-teachers.
4. **Column four:** the analysis offers insight into the type of data produced and the approach adopted to analyse the data.
5. **Column five:** sets out the time frame for data production.

Table 4.1: Data production grid

Research Questions	Researcher Methods	Participants' Methods	Analysis	
A	Before TP – Researcher's reflective journal	✓ BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION SHEET	Thematic analysis of the transcriptions of the individual interviews with the student-teachers. This segment of the data production explores the biographical and demographical profiles of the student-teachers and the typology of TP schools experienced during the four-year ITE programme.	BEFORE TEACHING PRACTICE
1. What are student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse Teaching Practicum contexts? - descriptive	Before TP – Researcher's reflective journal (descriptive profile of the schools).			
B	During TP - The researcher's reflective journal	✓ ARTS-BASED METHODOLOGY STIMULUS RECALL ACTIVITY 1 ✓ INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: FIRST INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW ✓ ARTS-BASED METHODOLOGY STIMULUS RECALL ACTIVITY 2 ✓ INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: SECOND INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW	Qualitative analysis of critical incidents and routine recording of student-teachers' formal learning of diversity within the ITE programme and experienced with the respective TP placement schools.	DURING TEACHING PRACTICE
2. How do student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse Teaching Practicum contexts connect with their experiences of the ITE curriculum? – procedural				
C	After TP - The researcher's reflective journal	✓ FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: AFTER THE TP SESSION ✓ PRODUCTION CRITERIA FOR PHOTOGRAPHS	Integrated analysis of data from interviews as well as photographic data, including triangulation of data from these different sources.	AFTER TEACHING PRACTICE
3. What explains the nature of student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse TP schools? – theoretical				

4.4 Section One: Design of the Study

4.4.1 Intersecting a critical phenomenological research approach within a qualitative case study design

Van Manen (2017, p. 1) states that phenomenology is about the experience but should “not ... be confused with therapy or self-improvement psychology.” Phenomenology aims to study how people make meaning of their lived experiences (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). It is entrenched in European philosophy in the first half of the 20th century and entails a thick description and close analysis of lived experience to understand how meaning is generated through embodied perception (Sokolowski, 2000; Stewart & Mickunas, 1974). Phenomenology promotes a deeper understanding of lived experiences by exposing taken-for-granted assumptions about these ways of knowing (Stark and Trinidad, 2007). Sokolowski (2000, p. 57) notes:

Phenomenological statements, like philosophical statements, state the obvious and the necessary. They tell us what we already know. They are not new information, but even if not new, they can still be important and illuminating because we often are very confused about just such trivialities and necessities.

Reality is understood in phenomenology as an embodied experience by carefully examining personal experiences in detail through appropriate and well-designed research instruments. In seeking to grasp the meaning and

similarities of essence, experience, or event, the truth can be abstracted as subjective and recognisable only through an embodied perception (Starks & Trinidad, 2007; Van Manen, 1990).

Gayle Salamon draws on her intersection of research interests, including phenomenology, feminist philosophy, queer and transgender theory, contemporary continental philosophy, and disability studies, to describe critical phenomenology as follows:

Phenomenology offers us unparalleled means to describe what we see with utmost precision, to illuminate what is true; critique insists that we also attend to the power that is always conditioning that truth (Salamon, 2022, p. 8).

This reflection on relations of power in social settings concurs with Mezirow's (1985, p. 22) transformative learning theory, which advocates that:

The process of becoming critically aware of how and why the psycho-cultural assumptions have [sic] come to constrain the way in which we perceive our world, of reconstituting that structure in a way that allows us to be more inclusive and discriminating in our integration of experience and to act on these new understandings (Mezirow, 1985, p. 22).

Three research approaches, namely, qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods, are commonly used in conjunction with diverse research designs that could inform the choice of a phenomenological study (Williams, 2007). **Firstly**, a quantitative research approach encompasses a range of methods concerned with "systematically investigating social phenomena using statistical or numerical data" (Watson, 2015, p. 2). Consequently, quantitative research involves measurement. It assumes that the phenomena under study can be calculated, thus investigating the data for trends and relationships and verifying the measurements (Watson, 2015).

Secondly, qualitative research involves collecting and analysing non-numerical data (e.g., text, video, or audio) to discern concepts, opinions, or experiences (Bhandari, 2020). It can be used to obtain in-depth insight into a problem or generate new ideas for research. Regarded as a comprehensive strategy, qualitative research incorporates discovery. Another definition of qualitative research is an unfolding model that takes place in a natural environment and allows the researcher to gain a high level of information via close involvement in the actual events (Creswell, 1994). A qualitative study uncovers the social phenomenon examined from the participants' perspective. Various study designs frame the research strategy using qualitative research techniques. Therefore, multiple methodologies affect the strategies employed.

Creswell (2009, p. 4) describes qualitative research as a means of "exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem". As noted by Smith, Denzin and Lincoln (2008, p. 2), it also has a strong focus on understandings and interpretations of experiences:

Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive naturalistic approach to its subject matter...qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use of and collection of a variety of empirical materials...that describe routine and problematic moments and meaning in individuals' lives.

This implies that qualitative research does not aim to find universalist solutions or to predict actions; it encompasses an understanding of the researcher's own 'natural setting', which, in the case of my study, comprised the lived

experiences of student-teachers within diverse teaching practicum contexts, in order to make sense of the phenomenon. Many researchers believe that studies must be either qualitative or quantitative (Rossman & Wilson, 1985).

Thirdly, a mixed methods approach is used to answer research questions that require numerical and textual data (Williams, 2007). George (2021, p. 2) asserts that blending (or mixing) the two types of data enables a researcher to benefit from both the “detailed, contextualised insights of qualitative data and the generalisable, externally valid insights of quantitative data”. The strengths of one type of approach often mitigate the weaknesses of the other (George, 2021).

The problematic moment in this research study was student-teachers’ lived experiences in diverse TP contexts. Various data production methods were used to produce rich data to capture the complexity of the lived experiences of a group of final-year student-teachers and how they personally, academically and professionally navigated their development within a range of TP placement schools over four years impacted by internal and external forces. These multiple methods were also used to diminish the influence of subjectivity and the researcher's positionality. The selected critical phenomenological research approach within a qualitative case study design involved acknowledging multiple truths and interpretations of these truths.

The *Online Oxford Thesaurus* (2022, p. 1) defines the word ‘*intersecting*’ as “to cut or split into two”, while Hankivsky (2014, p. 9) asserts that “Intersectional research should be designed to illuminate the multiplicative effects of different but interdependent categories and factors”. This study aimed to understand the lived experiences of student-teachers in the Faculty of Education at the CPUT based on the Mowbray campus when they were placed in diverse TP contexts (primary schools) over the four-year Intermediate Phase degree programme. It aimed to extract critical subjective embodied experiences with an emphasis on the power relations student-teachers faced within the unexposed alternative environment in which they were placed for TP.

Of the three different methodological research approaches [namely, qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods], I acutely decided to nominate the qualitative critical phenomenological research approach in order to gain deeper insights into the lived realities of the purposefully selected cohort of final year Intermediate Phase student-teachers about their understanding of a diverse TP experience and the reasons for their selected preferred schooling placements. Instead of judging the participants' choices of schooling selection through disseminating a quantitative survey, I set out to listen to the first-hand voices of this group of student-teachers and gain a deeper understanding and insights into their lived realities in the journey of becoming a professional teacher.

4.4.2 Complexities in finding my methodological way

This research journey was influenced by three critical questions outlined in Chapter One. The primary question was, “What is my understanding of student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse teaching practicum contexts?” I was prompted to study the phenomenon of student-teachers’ lived experiences in diverse Teaching Practicum contexts by my curiosity about the underlying reasons why student-teachers prefer to complete TP within their immediate surrounding communities. This not only led me to explore the consciousness of final-year student-teachers but also aided me in understanding my own coordination of TP within the Faculty of Education at the

CPUT. To place **consciousness** in perspective, I wanted to understand the lived realities of what student-teachers experienced in diverse schools, think about TP's meaning (or value) in diverse schools and determine their views on the future after doing TP in diverse schools. Put differently, what goes on in student-teachers' minds when they are presented with the opportunity for an alternative kind of TP experience? This enquiry is significant because it might give meaning to why student-teachers continue to complete TP in their own communities and present reasons that prevent them from exploring alternative schooling contexts within a diverse South African society. In such inquiries, one becomes present to another human being and recognises how undergraduate student-teachers function in their placed teaching world through their behaviour and actions.

A critical phenomenological approach accentuates participants' lived experiences, the forces influencing their choices and the multiple interpretations of their experiences. This approach aided me in exploring the participants as active subjective agents of stories narrated and unfolding (Sosulki, Buchanan & Donnell, 2010, p. 37) and how they choose to represent themselves. As a novice researcher, I recognised the resemblances between a critical phenomenology methodology (Koopman, 2013; Koopman & Koopman, 2020) and a life history research methodology (Samuel, 2009). Stories (emanating from the phenomenon) are told using phenomenology and life history research, which gives the researcher first-hand authentic insight into the field of study. Dhunpath (2000, p. 2) endorses life history as follows:

I want to suggest boldly, therefore, that the life history approach is probably the only authentic means of understanding how motives and practices reflect the intimate intersection of institutional and individual experience in the postmodern world.

Asghar (2013) is of the view that novice researchers undertaking research in the life and social sciences typically use positivist and constructive paradigms to understand the studied phenomena. However, due to their limited knowledge and insight into the umbrella term 'critical paradigm', which creates "valuable insight not only by analysing and exploring the situation but also by offering a change agenda for reformation" (Asghar, 2013, p. 1) these beginner researchers miss out on contributing to significant research. The author adds that listening to the voices of study participants can enable scholars to undergo a transformative learning process (Asghar, 2013). Critical phenomenology is located within a critical research paradigm with critical theory's roots lying in the original Frankfurt School. One of the founders of the Frankfurt School and critical theory, German Philosopher Max Horkheimer (1982, p. 244), stated, "Critical theory seeks human emancipation to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them."

Asghar (2013, p. 3) states that critical theory challenges the status quo and is concerned about the "issue of power relations within the society, and interaction of race, class, gender, education, economy, religion and other social institutions that contribute to a social system." Samuel, Reddy, and Brown (2022) concur with the views of Horkheimer (1982) and Asghar (2013) and suggest that embracing a critical phenomenological approach permits a blurring of paradigmatic boundaries. Furthermore, it allows experience to be explored through the lens of power, marginality, and authoritarianist injustices. I was of the view that critical phenomenology had the emancipatory potential for this study.

The following section presents a profile of the study participants.

4.4.3 Participants

Purposive sampling strategies were used to select nineteen final-year Intermediate Phase student-teachers from the Faculty of Education at the CPUT based on the Mowbray campus. Purposive sampling occurred after reviewing the questionnaire shared with the total population group of all final-year student-teachers that aimed to determine whether a student was suitable for this study. Initially, only student-teachers placed in a context other than that with which they were familiar were selected; however, I consciously opted also to incorporate student-teachers who chose *not* to embrace the cross-over TP experience. I include the insightful narratives that emanated from 11 varied primary schools told through the experiences of the student-teachers who entered the range of geographically situated contexts. Using purposive sampling (also known as judgment, selective or subjective sampling) means that candidates (student-teachers) are selected from the population based on who can provide the best information on the phenomenon (lived experiences in a diverse TP context), which I believed could be utilised and interpreted through the theoretical lens for this study. The researcher thus relies on his/her judgment in choosing members of the population to participate (Saunders, 2014). Ebeto (2017) notes that the researcher needs to concentrate on those who have the required information and are willing to share it. This was, therefore, an inclusion criterion for this study.

Subsequent to the review of the questionnaires, the following criteria were applied to establish whether the participants could be considered suitable representatives of the population:

- Whether the four years of completing TP varied in the typology of schools nominated for TP placement.
- The final-year IP student-teachers were selected on the basis that they completed their Teaching Practicum within an Intermediate Phase Grade four to Grade six classroom at a primary school (**types of schools:** *rural, urban, former Whites only school, African township, private school, faith-based schools, co-ed schools and gender-specific schools*).
- Students were included in the sample if they undertook TP within Quintiles 1, 2 and 3 (under-resourced state-funded schools) and Quintiles 4 and 5 (state, fee-paying, well-resourced schools).

In the end, the selection of nineteen participants ensured equal representation of gender, race, and the socio-economic background of the communities where schools were situated. The ethical procedures adhered to were explained in the consent form (Appendix one: *Biographical information sheet survey*) that all the participants completed. A detailed elaboration of the selected sample is presented in Chapter five (Section 5.4).

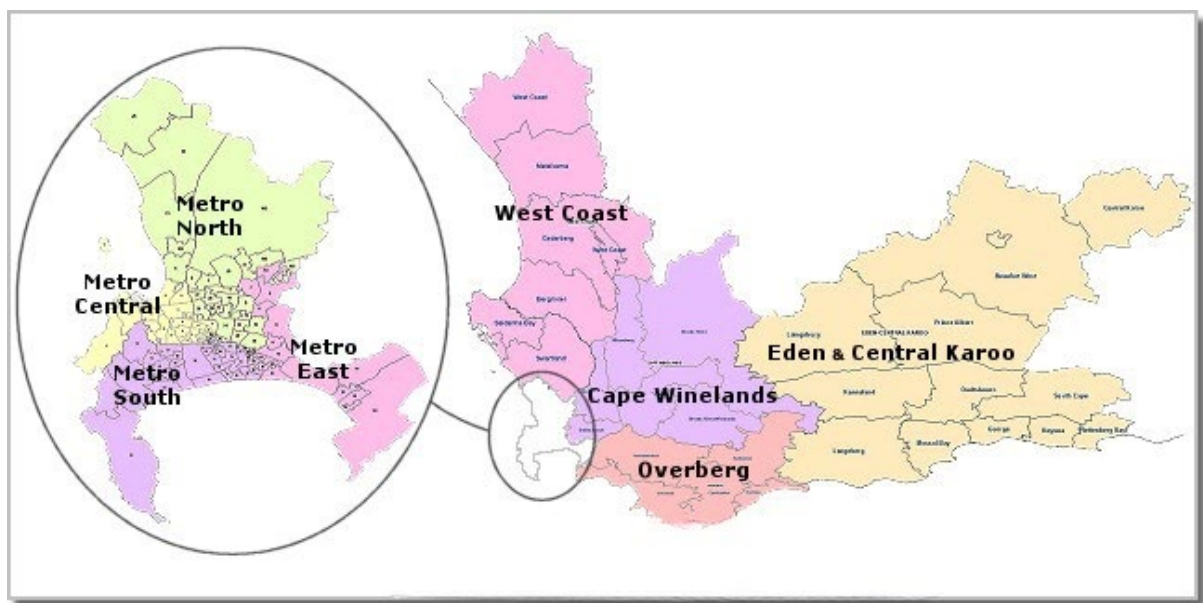
4.4.4 The sample schools and contextual histories

My study is located within the provincial structures of the Western Cape Education Department (WCED), within which my home institution (CPUT) is based. Following a redesign process in 2006/07, the WCED has eight education districts divided into 49 circuits. Kriger (2020, p. 75) states:

- The circuit is responsible for bringing professional support closer to schools via strong circuit teams.
- The district is mainly responsible for educational management.
- The head office, based in Cape Town, is mainly responsible for research, policy development, strategic planning, coordination, monitoring and evaluation.

Kruger (2020, p. 76) remarks that after in-depth research and consultation, the WCED established eight education districts based on local government boundaries “to facilitate an integrated approach to service delivery by all levels of government, in line with national policy”. The districts include four rural districts (West Coast, Cape Winelands, Eden and Karoo, and Overberg) and four urban ones (Metro North, Metro South, Metro East and Metro Central). Urban district boundaries are based on those of city wards. According to the WCED, these boundaries also allow for an equitable distribution of schools and resources across education districts and circuits.

The primary schools were selected for my study based on their contextual diversity (rural, urban, former White only schools, African township, private schools, faith-based schools, co-ed schools and gender-specific schools). The selected students undertook TP within Quintiles 1, 2 and 3 (under-resourced state-funded schools) and Quintiles 4 and 5 (state, fee-paying, well-resourced schools). The placement schools varied in terms of size, fees, resources, racial demographics, the language of teaching and learning, state schools and independent private schools.



Source: Western Cape Education Department (2012)

Figure 4.1: Map of the WCED Districts

The schools covered in this study were within the urban, rural, and township district boundaries. One (School 2) was a private school that did not fall under the WCED’s jurisdiction. However, it was necessary to include two final-year students conducting their last year of TP within a context both were unfamiliar with and unaccustomed to. Their experience could influence their future trajectory in education (post-graduation) when they would have to decide whether to remain within the constraints of the WCED or move into the private education sector. These two participants added insight to the study based on their lived experiences—the following tables and figures present data on the 11 placement schools.

Table 4.2: A descriptive profile of School One

Geographical location	South Africa - Western Cape, Observatory
Communication language	English Home Language
Education District	WCED – Central

A brief history of the school andThe school is in the middle of the city, close to the Groote Schuur Hospital (where community Professor Chris Barnard performed the world's first human heart transplant in 1967). It has access to various forms of public transport (taxis, buses, and trains), and the majority of the learners commute to and from school. A Former Whites-only Quintile 4 school, it is moderately supplied with educational resources and is known to celebrate and embrace ethnic and cultural diversity.



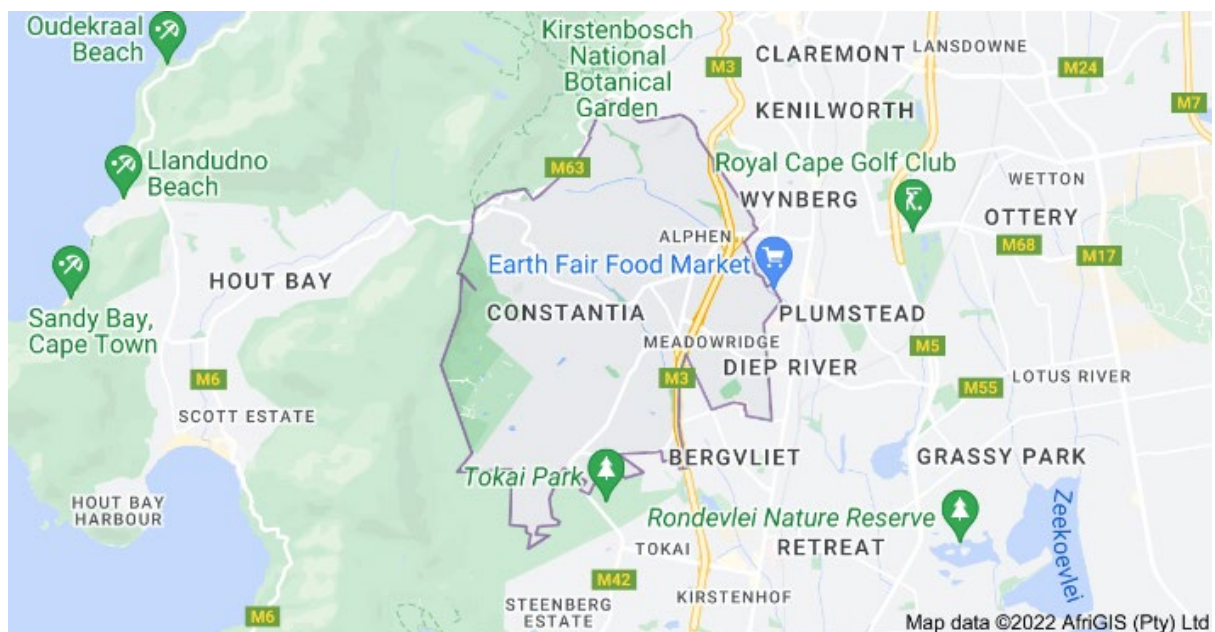
Source: Google Maps. (2022). Available online: www.googlemaps.com [Accessed 1 Aug 2022].

Figure 4.2: Geographical location of School One

Table 4.3: A descriptive profile of School Two

Geographical location	South Africa - Western Cape, Constantia
Communication language	English Home Language
Education District	WCED - South

A brief history of the school andThe first of 21 schools opened its doors in 1993 in South Africa. The motto of this community private school is “We shall give back”, which is described as “a fitting sentiment in the new South Africa and serves as a reminder to our students of the importance of contributing to the community”. It has small class sizes, abundant educational resources, and various creative arts classes (music, dance, drama and art).



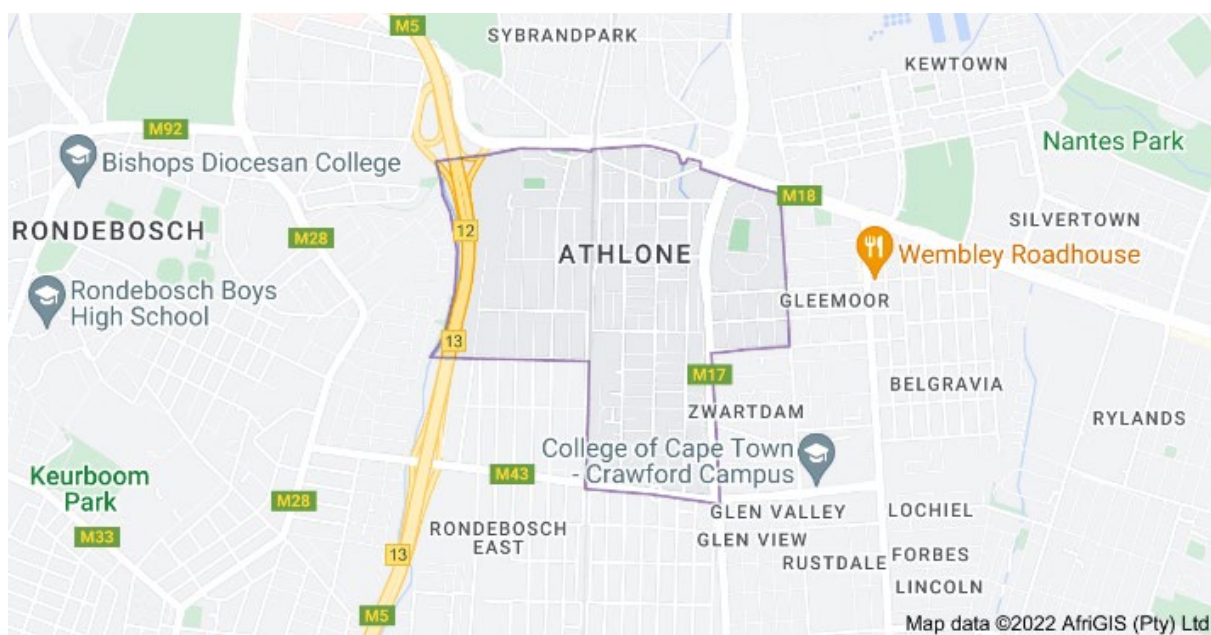
Source: Google Maps. (2022). Available online: www.googlemaps.com [Accessed 1 Aug 2022].

Figure 4.3: Geographical location of School Two

Table 4.4: A descriptive profile of School Three

Geographical location	South Africa - Western Cape, Athlone
Communication language	English Home Language
Education District	WCED - Central

A brief history of the school and community During apartheid, the area was designated a Coloured neighbourhood. Many people were resettled after being forcibly evicted by the government under the Group Areas Act from other parts of Cape Town. The school is situated in the suburb of Athlone, which is mainly residential and is served by a railway station and bus routes. It is described as possessing great academic, socio-economic, and cultural diversity. Many learners commute to and from school.



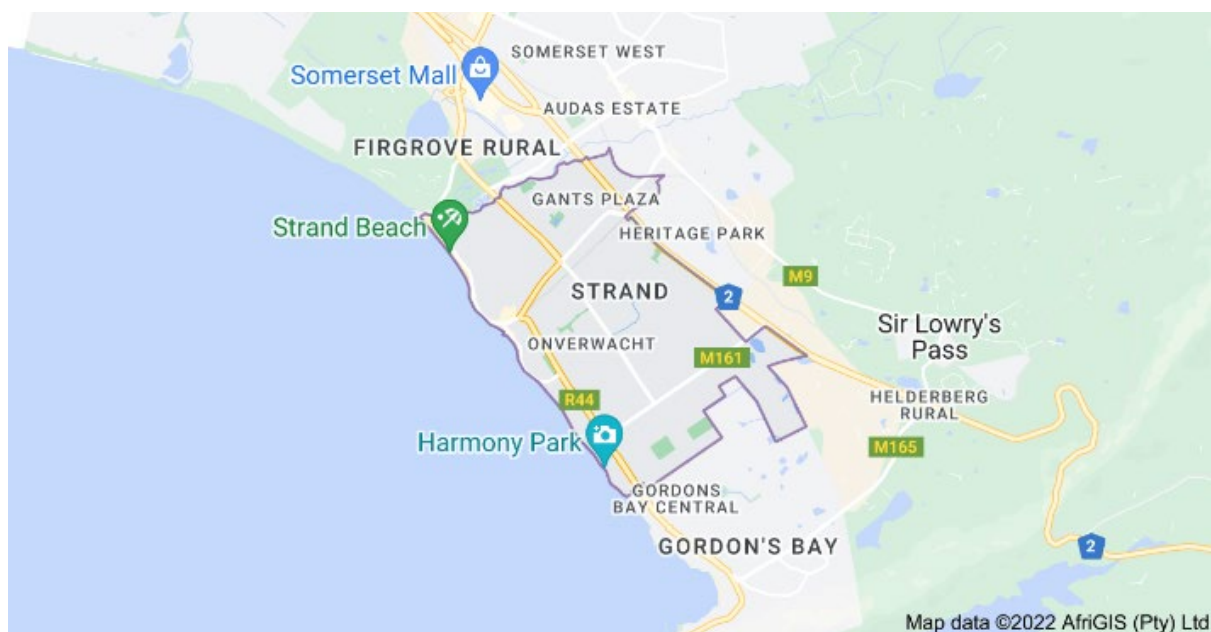
Source: Google Maps. (2022). Available online: www.googlemaps.com [Accessed 1 Aug 2022].

Figure 4.4: Geographical location of School Three

Table 4.5: A descriptive profile of School Four

Geographical location	South Africa - Western Cape, Strand
Communication language	IsiXhosa Home Language
Education District	WCED - East

A brief history of the school andThis school is based within a disadvantaged community of Strand plagued by community complex socio-economic ills such as high joblessness, poverty and gangsterism. It is located in the township of Lwandle near Somerset West. It started under very basic conditions, with the pre-primary school consisting of corrugated iron huts where lessons were held. In the 2013 academic year, there were a total of 120 learners. The children suffered from heat and dust in summer and cold during winter. There were no toilets or running water. The school is an integral part of the broader community, and parents assist in caring for learners. The school team is dedicated and committed to making a difference in the lives of the children in their school and beyond the classroom.

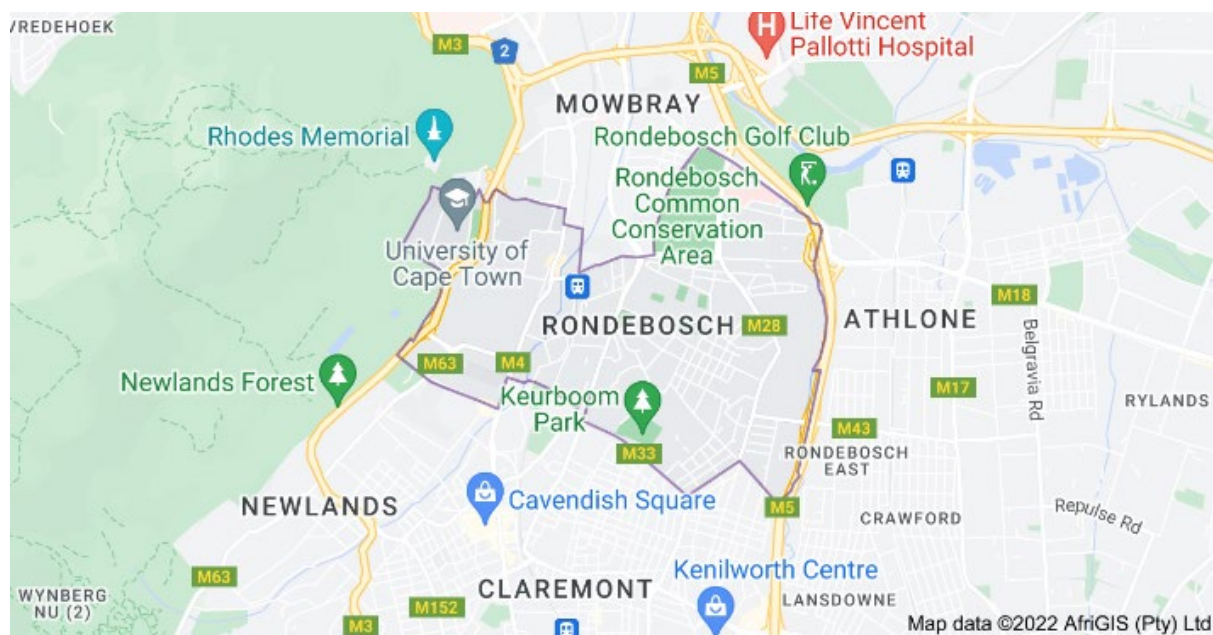


Source: Google Maps. (2022). Available online: www.googlemaps.com [Accessed 1 Aug 2022].

Figure 4.5: Geographical location of School Four

Table 4.6: A descriptive profile of School Five

Geographical location	South Africa - Western Cape, Rondebosch
Communication language	English Home Language
Education District	WCED - Central
A brief history of the school and community	The school was established in 1936 as an Afrikaans medium school for Whites only. Today, it is a diverse school with learners from all corners of the Western Cape. This small, English medium school strives to provide all learners with a safe, nurturing environment.



Source: Google Maps. (2022). Available online: www.googlemaps.com [Accessed 1 Aug 2022].

Figure 4.6: Geographical location of School Five

Table 4.7: A descriptive profile of School Six

Geographical location	South Africa - Western Cape, Manenberg
Communication language	English & Afrikaans Home Language
Education District	WCED - Central
A brief history of the school and community	Learners from Sherwood Park, Manenberg, Phillipi, Nyanga and surrounding areas attend this former Madrasa (<i>the Arabic word for any type of educational institution</i>). It was established in 1912 and converted into a secular school. This school is regarded as the oldest Muslim primary school in South Africa.



Source: Google Maps. (2022). Available online: www.googlemaps.com [Accessed 1 Aug 2022].

Figure 4.7: Geographical location of School Six

Table 4.8: A descriptive profile of School Seven

Geographical location South Africa - Western Cape, Blue Downs

Communication language English Home Language

Education District WCED - **East**

A brief history of the school andSince the school opened its doors, it has been a place all learners in the Western Cape and beyond can call home as it celebrates and embraces ethnic and cultural diversity. It is a public school whose learner population includes Coloured and African learners.



Source: Google Maps. (2022). Available online: www.googlemaps.com [Accessed 1 Aug 2022].

Figure 4.8: Geographical location of School Seven

Table 4.9: A descriptive profile of School Eight

Geographical location	South Africa, Western Cape, Wynberg
Communication language	English Home Language
Education District	WCED - South

A brief history of the school andThis school, founded in 1841 is an all-boy school offering primary and high school community to male learners from various races. The school aims to provide quality education to grow confident individuals ready to tackle future opportunities. Its values focus on a) Leading through Innovation, b) Growing through learning, c) Pursuing Excellence, and d) Relevant Citizenship. Its admission policy states: “No pupil will be refused admission to the school based on race, culture, religious belief or financial circumstance.”



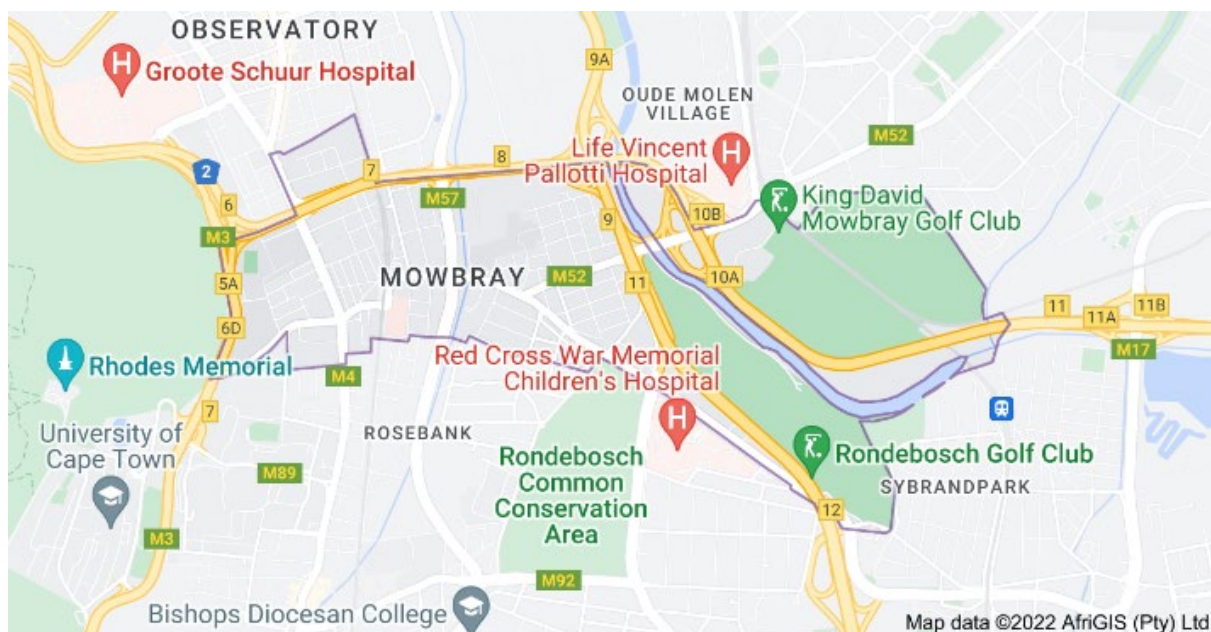
Source: Google Maps. (2022). Available online: www.googlemaps.com [Accessed 1 Aug 2022].

Figure 4.9: Geographical location of School Eight

Table 4.10: A descriptive profile of School Nine

Geographical location	South Africa, Western Cape, Mowbray
Communication language	English Home Language
Education District	WCED - Central

A brief history of the school andThe school dates back to 1893. It was re-registered as an independent school in community 2003 in terms of section 30(1) of the Western Cape Provincial Education Act, 1997 (Act No. 12 of 1997). The Seventh-day Adventist Accrediting Association also accredits the school. This faith-based school educates learners from Grades 1 to 7. Its vision and mission are to dedicate learners and staff to restore the image of the creator in humankind. The programme focuses on physical, mental and spiritual development. The school abides by the Department of Education objectives and collaborates with more than 8 500 Seventh-day Adventist educational institutions in more than 100 countries. It aims to prepare boys and girls to be worthy citizens of the world and the Kingdom of God. It provides a Christian education to as many learners as possible without prejudicing their opportunity for an optimal learning experience.



Source: Google Maps. (2022). Available online: www.googlemaps.com [Accessed 1 Aug 2022].

Figure 4.10: Geographical location of School Nine

Table 4.11: A descriptive profile of School Ten

Geographical location South Africa, Western Cape, Malmesbury

Communication language Afrikaans Home Language

Education District WCED - **Cape Winelands**

A brief history of the school andMalmesbury is a town about 65 km north of Cape Town. The school is regarded as a 'rural school' - an open swathe of land with few homes or other buildings and not many people. It is located in a small rural community 15 kilometres outside Malmesbury with a population of more than 2,000 farm workers. Limited public transport exists; the local church and school are the only institutions. There is only one small shop with a few spaza shops for immediate needs.

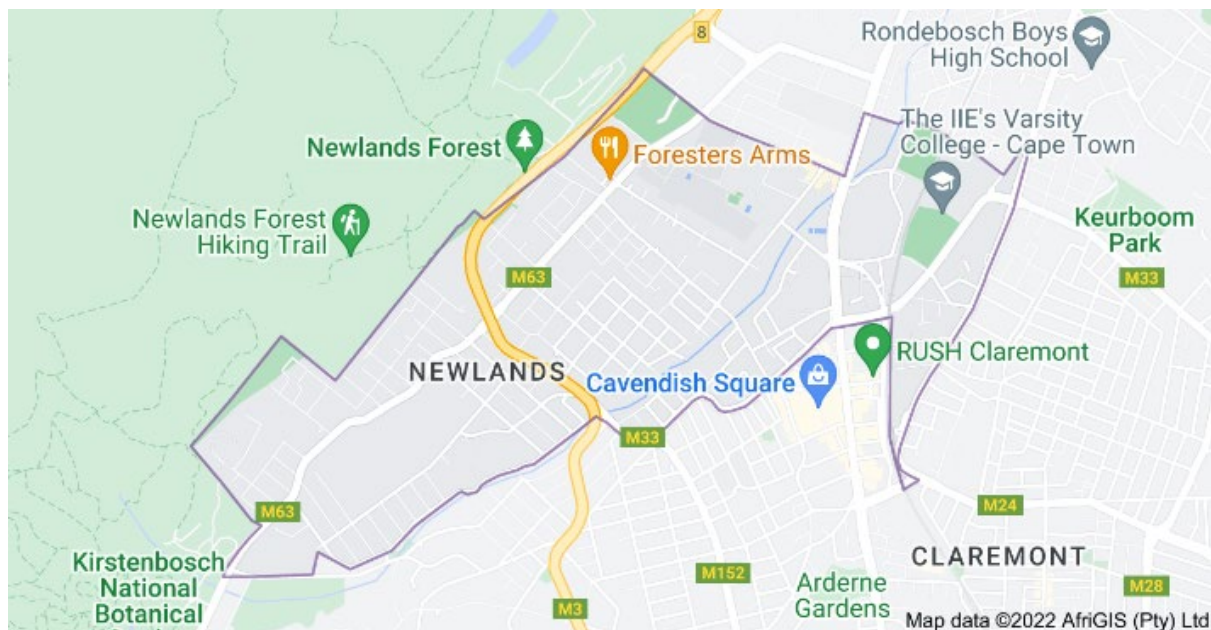


Source: Google Maps. (2022). Available online: www.googlemaps.com [Accessed 1 Aug 2022].

Figure 4.11: Geographical location of School Ten

Table 4.12: A descriptive profile of School Eleven

Geographical location	South Africa, Western Cape, Newlands
Communication language	English Home Language
Education District	WCED - Central
A brief history of the school and community	This school opened its doors to boys in 1829. It is committed to sustaining a strong learning culture within a values-based boys' schooling ethos. The school boasts a staff of highly competent, committed, and approachable teachers and excellent resources, including a modern multi-media library, specialised remedial and enrichment departments, and a full-time educational psychologist.



Source: Google Maps. (2022). Available online: www.googlemaps.com [Accessed 1 Aug 2022].

Figure 4.12: Geographical location of School Eleven

This study was limited to a relatively small geographical area, namely primary schools within the Western Cape's Metro Central, Metro South, Metro North and Metro East areas. The schools involved in this study did have diversifying characteristics. The various school samples that were selected for this study varied with regard to racial demographics, location within this area, socio-economic status, language of instruction, school traditions, learner school fees and background and history of the schools. Thus, the school samples were chosen because of their diverse nature. The sources used for constructing these schools emanated from the official Education Management Information System (EMIS) of the Western Cape Education Department (WCED, 2023). The EMIS public internet site of the WCED is an integrated information system accomplished through the acquisition, processing, dissemination, and reporting of quality education data (WCED, 2023).

4.5 Section Two: Data production process

4.5.1 Data production planning phase

The data production plan unfolded in a series of evolving strategies. A roadmap is outlined within this subsection to explain the shifts in refining the methodological tools in response to the field. During this study's proposal formulation and defence, time was set aside to focus on how the research methodology could invoke a strong argument. A pilot study was conducted to test the robustness of the research instruments, and they were adjusted in the field as time progressed. The study topic and objectives were presented to all final-year Intermediate Phase student-teachers during an online café conversation. This simple format helps “people feel at ease and gives everyone who wants it a chance to speak” (American Library Association, 2018, p. 1). The dialogue between the researcher and the cohort of students offered valuable insights into the phenomenon. Students were very interested and eager to participate.

A biographical questionnaire comprising 19 questions was administered to establish the students' suitability to participate in the study. It was shared via Google Forms. Lardinois (2017) notes that this application allows users to create and edit surveys online while collaborating with others in real-time. The aim was for students to complete the survey at their leisure. There are numerous advantages of using social technologies in higher education teaching and learning:

All in all, using social networking services can improve students' participation. Less active students can get more benefits from SNS. Through the use of social technologies, they may reduce anxiety levels (Habibi, Mukminin, Riyanto, Prasajo, Sulistiyo, Sofwan, & Saudagar, 2018, p. 3).

Amherst (2022, p. 1) adds that other benefits include:

1. **Substitution:** Students can complete the forms online (instead of using paper and pen).
2. **Augmentation:** Teachers can curate the students' responses on the spreadsheet automatically. Additionally, absent students can complete the Google form outside of school. Teachers can design self-grading quizzes that offer students instant feedback.
3. **Modification:** Teachers and students can collaboratively analyse, contrast, and compare results immediately after individuals complete the form.
4. **Redefinition:** Teachers can reach unlimited learners worldwide and share the results with them. Similarly, students can collect data from individuals worldwide for their research projects. Both teachers and students can reach thousands of people in their country and worldwide.

According to Melo (2018, p. 1), the major constraint in using Google Forms is the “necessity to have the internet to be able to use this tool”. A large number of students, totalling 76 of the 121 registered for their final year of TP, showed interest in this research study. Students also used their own data packages in the comfort of their homes to participate in its planning phases.

The biographical information survey (*refer to* Appendix One) was developed and administered to gain insights into students' suitability for this study. The objective was to determine whether they experienced a range of contextual primary schooling TP placements over the four years of the ITE degree programme. Besides gathering biographical information such as name, surname, race, age, and date of first registration in the ITE programme, three detailed questions were posed to assess the student's fitness for the study. Questions 13 and 14 asked whether the

developing teacher experienced a TP placement different from that of their own primary and high school. The two questions were as follows:

13. Have you experienced a TP schooling placement different from the kind you were exposed to when you were at primary school? Yes or No? Elaborate.

14. Have you experienced a TP schooling placement different from the kind you were exposed to when you were in high school? Yes or No? Elaborate.

Question 15 was the most vital in **1)** selecting the right participants for this study and **2)** noting which students realised the importance of the study. I consciously decided not to use convenience sampling, which, according to Etikan, Musa and Alkassim (2016), is perhaps the easiest method because the subjects of the population are easily accessible to the researcher. It is described as follows:

Convenience sampling (also known as Haphazard Sampling or Accidental Sampling) is a type of nonprobability or non-random sampling where members of the target population that meet certain practical criteria, such as easy accessibility, geographical proximity, availability at a given time, or the willingness to participate are included for the purpose of the study (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 2).

Etikan et al. (2016) point out that the kind of sampling will depend on the nature and type of research. Question 15 in the biographical survey questionnaire was: “What is your perception as a student-teacher of teaching practice at schools in diverse contexts/environments?” This was extremely helpful in gaining insight into the students willing to be involved in this study. The following table presents the purposive sample of participants included in the study.

Table 4.13: Participants, age, racial profile, gender identity and mother-tongue language

Final Year Teachers involved in the study (*Pseudonym ¹³)	Age	Racial Profile	Gender Identity	Mother Tongue Language
Dumo	22	Black African	Female	isiZulu ¹⁴
Nadia	22	Indian	Female	English ¹⁵
Magmoet	26	Black African	Male	Somali ¹⁶
Athandwa	22	Black African	Female	isiXhosa ¹⁷
Natasha	23	Coloured	Female	English

¹³ A fictitious or pseudonym name given to the individual throughout in the research.

¹⁴ IsiZulu, commonly shortened to Zulu, is one of the 12 official languages of this country. South Africa Explore. (2022). Zulu Language. Available online: <https://www.sa-venues.com/language-zulu.htm> [Accessed 1 December 2022].

¹⁵ English is a prominent language in South African public life, widely used in government, business and the media. As a first language it is mainly confined to the cities. In 1910 English and Dutch were declared the official languages of the new Union of South Africa. English has retained this official status ever since. South Africa Gateway. (2022). The 12 languages of South Africa. Available online: <https://southafrica-info.com/arts-culture/11-languages-south-africa/#:~:text=English%20is%20a%20prominent%20language,this%20official%20status%20ever%20since>. [Accessed 1 December 2022].

¹⁶ The Somali language belongs to the Cushitic branch of the Afro-Asiatic language family. Despite several regional dialects, it is understood throughout the country and is an official language. Britannica. (2022). Somali Language. Available online: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Somali-language> [Accessed 1 December 2022].

¹⁷ There are 12 official languages in South Africa, of which Xhosa is one of the most widely spoken. Approximately 16% of South Africa's population, or 8.3 million people, cite Xhosa as their home language. South Africa Explore. (2022). About the Xhosa Language. Available online: <https://www.sa-venues.com/language-xhosa.htm> [Accessed 1 December 2022]. This has extended to included sign language as now an official language (2023).

Ragmat	24	Coloured	Female	Afrikaans ¹⁸
Phelisa	21	Black African	Female	isiXhosa
Lynn	21	Coloured	Female	Afrikaans
Johanna	21	Coloured	Female	Afrikaans
Amina	21	Coloured	Female	English
Nkosana	27	Black African	Female	isiXhosa
Zafeer	22	Coloured	Male	Afrikaans
Bonga	22	Black African	Female	isiXhosa
Patience	23	Black African	Female	Sepedi ¹⁹
Lebo	40	Black African	Female	Tshivenda ²⁰
Khethiwe	35	Black African	Female	isiXhosa
Taylor	22	Coloured	Female	Afrikaans
Daaem	22	Coloured	Male	English
Adelaide	26	Coloured	Female	Afrikaans

Purposive sampling, also known as judgement sampling, was considered the most useful type of non-probability sampling for this study. This involves choosing a participant due to his/her qualities (Etikan et al., 2016, p. 3). Bernard (2002, p. 145) states that:

Data gathering is crucial in research, as the data is meant to contribute to a better understanding of a theoretical framework. Simply put, the researcher decides what needs to be known and sets out to find people who can and are willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge or experience.

My research study aimed to understand the quality of lived experiences of a cohort of final-year Intermediate Phase student-teachers during diverse Teaching Practicum placements by exploring what informed their choices when choosing a school and their practical experience of what it means to become a teacher in the South African context. As noted in Chapter Two, this study adopted a critical paradigm with a social justice dimension, which invokes a power dimension to explain the authentic lived experiences of the selected participants.

4.5.2 First stage: Arts-Based Methodology Activity titled *Tree of Life* (before Teaching Practicum)

The autobiographical arts-based stimulus activity - *Tree of Life* was the first in-person data production tool to determine the relationship between the student's experiences and (un)familiar contexts. The *Tree of Life* activity was adapted from Merryfield (1993) and Howlett, Ferreira, and Blomfield (2016). The participants drew a tree, focussing on its three parts - roots, trunk and branches. Before conducting my first interview with the participants,

¹⁸ Afrikaans is a Dutch word that means "African". Afrikaans emerged as a language in Cape Town, thanks mainly to the French and Dutch settlers of centuries ago. South Africa Explore. (2022). Afrikaans Language. Available online: <https://www.sa-venues.com/language-afrikaans.htm> [Accessed 1 December 2022].

¹⁹ Sepedi is also sometimes referred to as Sesotho sa Laboa or Northern Sotho. The language of Sepedi is spoken by approximately 4.7 million individuals and it is one of the 12 official languages in South Africa. South Africa Explore. (2022). Sepedi Language. Available online: <https://www.sa-venues.com/language-sepedi.htm> [Accessed 1 December 2022].

²⁰ Venda is also known as Luvenda or Tshivenda and originated from the Bantu language. Interestingly, it is also related to the languages spoken in Niger and Congo. It is one of the 12 official South African languages. South Africa Explore. (2022). Venda Language. Available online: <https://www.sa-venues.com/language-venda.htm> [Accessed 1 December 2022].

I referred them to a drawing of a tree with all its parts (branches, leaves, trunk and roots), which I pasted on my office cupboard door. Merryfield (1993, p. 3) observes:

I have learned that the activity can be quite powerful in promoting reflection while teaching an understanding of perspective consciousness, cultural universals, and cultural diversity, three of the major concepts in global education.

The initial stage of data production was to put the student-teachers at ease. The last time these students had been allowed onto the university campus was before the global COVID-19 pandemic. The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) instigated by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) (Arndt, Davies, Gabriel, Harris, Makrelov, Robinson & Anderson, 2020) was first identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, China. The World Health Organisation declared the outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 30 January 2020 and a pandemic on 11 March 2020. On 15 March, the President of South Africa declared a national state of disaster and announced measures such as immediate travel restrictions and the closure of schools from 18 March 2020 (Nordling, 2020). In the previous month, the purposefully selected group of final-year student-teachers were registered second-year students who had experienced one prior year of TP placement school experiences. During the 2020 academic year, I introduced a reconceptualised departmental Online Teaching Practice Programme that I co-ordinated in my capacity as the Intermediate Phase Teaching Practice Coordinator. The Intermediate Phase TP reconceptualised online programme had similar learning development elements as the national Teachers Choices in Action Module (TCIA, 2020). The Teacher Choices in Action module formed part of the Teaching and Learning Development Capacity Improvement Programme (TLDCIP), which was implemented through a partnership between the DHET and the European Union (TCIA, 2020). The module launched in August 2020 with 26,700 student-teachers from 20 HEIs. The Faculty of Education at the CPUT was unwilling to participate in the national online TP programme as 1) the programme was still in its infancy and 2) the department did not have readily available funding to register the large number of student-teachers in its care. These students were understandably a bit anxious at the start of the autobiographical arts-based stimulus activity *Tree of Life*, as the pandemic was nearing its end and the normative method of conducting interviews could resume.

A *Tree of Life* customarily represents personal development and focuses on individuality (choices, beliefs and emotions) (Appadoo-Ramsamy, 2022). In reflecting on what each part of the tree means in their life, participants were asked to reflect on an array of experiences. I used Priestley, Biesta and Robinson's (2015) ecological model of teacher agency to understand the forces relating to diversity emanating from the student-teachers' biographical experiences, their primary and high schooling, current views of the ITE programme and their future aspirations. The student-teachers reflected on the following:

- *Past experiences, also known as the iterational dimension:* personal and professional growth; who/what influenced their career choice; who/what influenced their pedagogical choices; collegial support and professional development or support from family members, previous teachers, community members, friends and fear, confusion, hesitation, confidence, satisfaction and other emotions expressed at the beginning of the developmental journey into becoming a professional teacher.

- *Present experiences, also known as the practical-evaluative dimension:* how they became who they are; who contributed to their current identity, personality and role; and who represents their support as they are evolving in becoming a professional teacher - family, community, mentor-teacher, learners, university-lecturers, classmates.
- *Future aspirations and motivations, also known as projective dimensions:* what are their expectations; in which direction are they moving – career path post-certification, further studies; their multiple responsibilities; satisfaction and dissatisfaction with regard to TP and learners' performance and holistic development; challenges, fears and how they plan their future; and their aims and objectives and desires.

Therefore, this activity jogged the participants' memories and helped them to think about how they interpreted their personal and professional experiences using diversity and reflection as the keywords in the interview schedule (see **Appendix Two** - Arts-based Methodology Stimulus Recall Activity 1).

The critical research question explored in introducing the autobiographical arts-based stimulus activity - **Tree of Life** - was the what-level question. The first critical question was: What are student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse Teaching Practicum contexts? The responses provided insight into the students' experiences in primary and high school with reference to unfamiliar contexts. This research question was purely descriptive and allowed the participants to offer a reflexive account of times in their lives when they confronted diversity.

4.5.3 Second stage: First self-constructed individual interview (before Teaching Practicum)

According to Atkinson and Silverman (1997), the act of interviewing has become a way of life in society. The objectives of utilising semi-structured interviews as a data production method in the broader context of life are many and varied. As noted by Longhurst (2009, p. 580- 584):

In-depth, semi-structured interviews are verbal interchanges where one person, the interviewer, attempts to elicit information from another person by asking questions. Even though interviewers tend to prepare a list of predetermined questions, in-depth, semi-structured interviews usually unfold conversationally, offering participants the chance to pursue issues they feel are important.

The first one-on-one interview for this study was considered a valuable source of information as it enabled me to understand the participants' initial acquaintance with matters of diversity ranging from their current family life to their upbringing and primary and high schooling. Semi-structured interviews were preferred as they could provide the much-needed scope to gain deep insight into the questions. Rather than in-depth interviews, this type of interview uncovers issues or concerns that the researcher has not anticipated (Trigueros, Juan, & Sandoval, 2017). Nieuwenhuis and Smit (2012, p. 133) state:

An interview is a two-way conversation and a purposive interaction. The interviewer asks the participant (the interviewee) questions to collect data about the participant's ideas, experiences, beliefs, views, opinions, and behaviours.

This research study aimed to understand the students' lived experiences while undertaking TP in diverse schooling contexts. Two types of interviews were conducted: a one-on-one interview and a focus-group interview. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2017, p. 358) identify various approaches to planning and organising interviews. The first

approach is the structured interview; the researcher should prepare upfront systematic questions for this interview. The second type is unstructured; in this interview, the researcher asks random questions, and it is ordinarily non-directive or unfocused. Collis and Hussey (1997) state that an in-depth interview is a formal engagement between researcher and respondent. The respondent is asked a series of questions using the researcher's interview guide or schedule.

I aimed to generate in-depth data guided by the theoretical framework and the study phenomenon, and *semi-structured interviews* were appropriate for this purpose (See Appendices 3, 5 and 6). Kawulich and Holland (2016, p. 238) point out that when phenomenologists use interviewing as a data production method, two fundamental questions are essential in identifying shared phenomena and describing shared experiences, namely, 1) **What** did the social actors or individuals experience? and 2) **How** did they experience it? As noted above, I was mindful of these questions in the interview process.

When framing questions within an interview schedule, researchers should be mindful of the underpinning methodological and theoretical paradigm that forms the study's foundation. I selected a critical phenomenological paradigm, a philosophical approach that combines phenomenological analysis with critical theory to examine how structural injustices affect individuals' experiences of the world (Alcoff, 2005; Marcuse, 2013; Guenther, 2021). Bruce (2017) proposes that when conducting interviews, the interviewee should be presented with questions directly bearing on the occurrence or event. The author adds that "**why**" questions can cause research participants to respond in ways they think the researcher wants. Instead, the researcher should ask:

Can you tell me an example of when you...? or, What was it like when...? This way, the researcher seeks and values context equally with the action of the experience (Bruce, 2017, p. 1)

Frechette, Bitzas, Aubry, Kilpatrick, and Lavoie-Tremblay (2020) observe that capturing lived experiences requires distinct methodological considerations, meaning that researchers must discern between, for instance, the critical phenomenological paradigm and an interpretive phenomenological inquiry. While both analytical research approaches use profiles to explore how participants make sense of their personal and social world, the former focuses on issues of power within the authentic experience. Therefore, it was important to carefully construct the interview questions to include matters of contention to gain deeper insight into the phenomenon and elucidate their lived experiences.

The first invasive question I asked during the first one-on-one interview was, "*Was the teacher [mentioned above] of the same race, gender and religion as you, and would they still have been your favourite otherwise?*" Thereafter, "*Can you remember ever being taught by a teacher [in primary or high school] who was not from your race group?*" Followed by, "*Did you grow up having friends or peers from other race groups and gender types?*" Lastly, "*Have you ever heard your peers say something racist, ableist, homophobic or inappropriate about any group of people? Explain.*" (see questions 3, 6, 8 and 9 in Appendix Three).

4.5.4 Third stage: Arts-based methodology stimulus recall activity 2: Teacher education programme experiences (*during Teaching Practicum*)

Before the second one-on-one interview with the 19 participants, I used another arts-based methodology, stimulus recall, which nudged students to recall incidents of value that occurred over the four years that could have contributed to their development (academic, professional and personal) or not. The objective was to apply imagery in the context of an interview to “open up participants’ interpretations of questions and allow a creative way of interviewing that is responsive to participants’ own meanings and associations” (Morris & Paris, 2022, p. 1). Rolling (2010, p. 2) suggests that arts-based research methodologies are not a substitute for social science or historical methods; they diverge because they are reviewed out of “appreciation that we negotiate bodies of knowledge in a complex world”.

Furthermore, human beings learn and acquire life practices passed along a spectrum flanked by scientific and artistic ways of understanding the human experience and doing productive cultural work. Arts-based methodologies can offer deeper insight into the phenomenon as experienced by the purposefully selected group of participants. Appadoo-Ramsamy (2022) maintains that an entanglement approach (Barad, 2010; 2014) should extend not only to the data sources in fieldwork but also to the strategies for reporting and representing the data. Rolling (2010, p. 2) promotes arts-based methodologies by asserting that:

There is no one set of criteria for judging the artistic quality of a work of arts-based research, just as there is no one paradigm for the beauty of a work of art; for some, the beauty of a work of art is in the aesthetics of its forms and the mastery of its techniques, for others, it is in the authenticity and expressiveness of voice, and for still others, in the incisiveness of its social critique.

The participants used a reflective practice engagement with the second arts-based stimulus activity, which promoted understanding of their interlocutor engagement with their knowledge and understanding of diversity at the teacher education institution. This stimulus activity connected with critical research question two: *“How do student-teachers’ lived experiences in diverse Teaching Practicum contexts connect with their experiences of the ITE curriculum?”*

4.5.5 Fourth stage: Second interview schedule: Initial school experiences (*during Teaching Practicum*)

The second one-on-one semi-structured interview schedule was constructed to zoom into the lived experiences of student-teacher lives and made use of the following sub-headings:

1. Sub-heading A: **The journey into university**
2. Sub-heading B: **Teaching practice**
3. Sub-heading C: **Learners and teachers**
4. Sub-heading D: **The university curriculum**
5. Sub-heading E: **Alternative teaching school contexts**
6. Sub-heading F: **The future teacher education**

In the reconceptualisation planning phase of the second one-on-one interview instrument, I realised the importance of explicitly stating the reason [purpose, goal, objective, aim, focus] for the follow-up interview. The initial

consultation may have been flawed, with the participants becoming tongue-tied and allowing their nerves to impact their responses. A brief reflection on the previous interview was thus necessary to stimulate the following discussion. The objective outlined within the second instrument was: *“By the end of this part of the research study, I would like to learn more about your initial development degree programme preparedness [or perhaps lack of preparedness] for teaching learners in different kinds of schooling.”*

Huysamen (1998), and Trochim and Donnelly (2001) collectively note that as much as interviews have their advantages, this research method has disadvantages. They state that interviews are very time-consuming and financially costly. Furthermore, “the presence of the interviewer may bias responses given by the interviewees” (Mentz, 2012, p. 103). I was always mindful of my position in the research study and conscious of the kinds of responses rendered during the first face-to-face and the second virtual one-on-one interviews. The dynamics changed from the first meeting to the second data production segment. Due to the students being safe within the comfort of their homes, they were much more relaxed in divulging their feelings and experiences when responding to questions that might be invasive. The students developed a propensity to adopt the following line of defence within their responses: “Mr Brown, to be honest with you” when answering delicate questions. A benefit of conducting the second one-on-one interview online [via MS Teams] was the cost savings of travelling to and from the location, contributing to students’ eagerness to be involved in this research study.

A total of thirty-eight in-depth dialogical semi-structured one-on-one **interviews** of approximately forty-five minutes were scheduled and conducted with the participants at their convenience (see **Appendices three, five and seven** for interview schedules). Semi-structured interviews were appropriate for this study as this type of interview “often generates unexpected complexities and highlights broader research dilemmas” (Brown & Danaher 2017, p. 1). Through these interviews, I reflected on the stories narrated by the final-year student-teachers and constructed and reconstructed their individual and shared life stories.

I am mindful that, at its visceral level, a critical paradigm is focused on power, inequality, and social change. It generally includes notions developed by early social theorists such as Max Horkheimer (Bourdieu, Calhoun, Gerteis, Moody, Pfaff, & Virk, 2007) and later works by feminist scholars such as Nancy Fraser (1989). The critical paradigm studies power imbalances and seeks to change them. Therefore, the shared narratives of the participants in this study provided insight into their authentic lived experiences in diverse TP contexts.

4.5.6 Fifth stage: Photograph production criteria (after Teaching Practicum)

The fifth stage of data production used *visual ethnography* as a trigger to solicit further meaning from the participants concerning their lived experiences within diverse teaching practicum contexts (Horner, 2021). Horner’s (2021) doctoral study utilised images of students in social and print media to interrogate the significance of campus spaces in the process of being and becoming a student in Higher Education. Her objective was to disrupt students’ dominant visual and oral discourse. Visual ethnography is defined by Pink (2013) as a kind of visual analysis, which is ethnographic research incorporating photography, video, or hypermedia formations. Hymes (1977) described seminal ethnography as an elusive and complicated question that anthropologists are usually faced with in their selected field of research. However, Hymes claimed that ethnography would be much discussed in

education. Brink and Edgecombe (2003, p. 3) elaborate on the signature of ethnography in educational research:

Ethnography, as its name implies, is a research design whose purpose is to chart, graph, or describe a “**people**.” It aims to be holistic — to describe the people “**in the round**” or as completely as possible. Ethnographers try to describe what people “**do**” as well as what they “**believe**.” Ethnography’s signature is the study of naturally occurring human behaviour through observation.

While Brink and Edgecombe focus on ethnography’s advantages in social research, Hammersley (2006) asserts that it also poses some challenges. Debate on the production of visual ethnographical data has focussed on whether ethnographical information obtained in research should be located within the studied context or the wider society (sometimes called micro-ethnography). Hammersley observes that “we cannot understand what goes on within particular situations unless we can locate these within a larger picture” (Hammersley, 2006, p. 3). This highlights the dilemma in producing visual ethnographical data of whether the two means of delivering data, **1)** face-to-face within the context [on-site] and **2)** virtual, hold true in constructing such data. Poster (1990) argued that scholars should carefully consider whether a traditional or unconventional approach should be adopted in ethnographical data production within the post-modern world. Poster (1990 cited in Hammersley 2006, p. 7) further argued that “postmodernity de-centres and disperses identities and blurs the boundaries between humans and machines”. Rabiee (2004) notes that focus group interviews have gained popularity among professionals. As described in sub-section 4.3.7 below, I used an *online focus group discussion* (OFGD) to elicit comparative and opposing views on the research phenomenon. Green, Draper and Dowler (2003) note that a focus group’s distinctiveness is its ability to generate data based on the synergy of group collaboration.

The purposefully selected group of participants were highly comfortable navigating virtual online tools. During the four-year degree course, they received approximately a full year of face-to-face learning on the university campus (pre-COVID-19) and three years of virtual education (during and after COVID-19). ICT tools can improve students’ public speaking skills, manage discussions, and use information technology as a communication tool (Yulianti & Sulistyawati, 2021). The primary purpose of incorporating visual ethnography in this research study was to gain deeper insight into the selected student-teachers’ diverse teaching practicum experiences and move beyond the spoken words rendered within interviews. Keeping in mind that the critical paradigm focuses on power, inequality, and social change, I consciously reminded myself that the topics could be problematic even though I conducted these interviews online. I should, thus, phrase my questions carefully and allow the participants sufficient time to render their ‘lived truths’ (Guerrière, 1990). The research instruments for the visual ethnography segment can be found in the following Appendices:

- **Appendix Two:** Arts-based methodology stimulus recall activity 1
- **Appendix Four:** Arts-based methodology stimulus recall activity 2: Teacher education programme experiences
- **Appendix Six:** Focus group interview part A: Images of teachers in diverse Teaching Practicum Schooling Contexts

Each arts-based methodology stimulus recall activity instrument was carefully constructed with individual objectives in order to not only enlarge my understanding of the research problem and the background to the study and offer insight into the critical questions but to allow each participant to consciously and attentively reflect on his/her lived experience using the phenomenon as the underlying impetus for deep reflection (Atkinson, 2007).

4.5.7 Sixth stage: Interview schedule: (after the Teaching Practicum)

The final segment of data production involved an array of focus group interviews with the purposefully selected cohort of student-teachers; however, before beginning these, I conducted a visual ethnographical activity (**Appendix Six**): Focus group interview part A: Images of teachers in diverse Teaching Practicum Schooling Contexts) was the first part of this data production segment. The purpose was to activate the focus group interview [Part A]. The focus group interview [Part B] explored the quality of student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse TP contexts. The images used within this segment of the research process depicted different student-teachers in diverse teaching practicum contexts and others, indicating stakeholders involved in the typical emerging teacher's developmental learning process. The secondary level of the sixth data production stage explored the quality of the student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse TP contexts. The focus group interview questions were framed around emerging themes derived from the previous two one-on-one interviews with the final-year student-teacher cohort. Hence, the focus group questions revolved around the following themes:

- A - Experiences over time
- B - Personal, academic and professional development experiences
- C - Affirmation and discriminatory experiences
- D - Future professional plans

Nieberding's (2011) dissertation titled: *"Photography, Phenomenology and Sight: Toward an Understanding of Photography through the Discourse of Vision"* argues that using photography or imagery in research is a complicated prospect and even photographs that "appear to be direct and transcriptive can be complicated" (Nieberding, 2011, p. 3). He adds that, in education, photography offers the possibility of greater insight into a phenomenological approach, as incorporating it promotes understanding of an ontological productive form of seeing. In order to achieve the unique understanding generated when looking at photography using an ethnographical methodological strand, 11 photographs carefully collected on the Google Imagery website (<https://images.google.com/>) were critically examined. Kleih, Lehberger and Sparke (2022, p. 1) support the usage of photographs in both qualitative and quantitative research and add that: "Photographs are a valid data source that is not outside of the quantitative-qualitative binary and, hence, can be analysed and used for integration, applying mixed methods principles."

Basch (1987, p. 1) described a focus group interview as:

... a qualitative approach to learning about population subgroups with respect to conscious, semi-conscious and unconscious psychological and sociocultural characteristics and processes.

The primary principle of focus group interviews is that members can comfortably converse with one another. Thus, a focus group arrangement is fundamental (Cheng, 2007). Cheng states that three aspects should be taken into

account in composing a focus group: 1) the classification of groups, 2) the size of a group, and 3) the number of interviews (Cheng, 2007). As noted previously, my study involved 1) final-year Intermediate Phase student-teachers registered within the Faculty of Education at the CPUT, 2) a cohort of 19 purposefully selected student-teachers, and 3) a total of three focus group interviews, taking into careful consideration the availability of each participant. McLafferty (2004) states that smaller groups are more easily controlled and that groups of strangers require more moderator intervention. However, as a data collection strategy, focus group interviews are a rich source of information (McLafferty, 2004).

4.6 Section Three: Measures to ensure quality

4.6.1 Credibility and Trustworthiness

When a researcher establishes the primary research approach on which the study will be based, he/she must carefully consider measures to ensure that quality is upheld from the beginning to the end of the research process, including research publications. Simply put, he/she should set out how the truth will be established and upheld. Cope (1969) makes a case for qualitative research by asserting that historically, this research approach was considered “soft” science and criticized for lacking scientific rigour (see Mays & Pope, 1995). Indeed, it has been described as “subjective, anecdotal, subject to researcher bias, and lacking generalizability by producing large quantities of detailed information about a single, unique phenomenon or setting” (see Koch & Harrington, 1998).

Patton (2001) identifies validity and reliability as two features qualitative researchers should be concerned about when designing an empirical study, analysing the outcomes and judging its quality. Newton (2013) asks a pivotal question: “Does it matter what ‘validity’ means?” and quotes Samuel Messick (1989):

Validity is an integrated evaluative judgment of the degree to which empirical evidence and theoretical rationales support the adequacy and appropriateness of inferences and actions based on test scores and other modes of assessment.

The terms validity and internal validity are often used interchangeably to mean the measure of truth attached to the phenomenon under scrutiny within nature (the real world) and whether the study's findings can be trusted (Gibbs, 2012). Lincoln and Guba suggest that the trustworthiness of a research study is vital in evaluating its worth. Trustworthiness involves establishing the following:

- Credibility - confidence in the 'truth' of the findings
- Transferability - showing that the findings are applicable in other contexts
- Dependability - showing that the findings are consistent and could be repeated
- Confirmability - a degree of neutrality or the extent to which the respondents shape the results of a study rather than researcher bias, motivation, or interest (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 7).

Credibility concerns how the researcher carried out the research, his/her background and expertise, how the research findings are presented, who is responsible for the publication of the research and the kind of monetary attachment involved (Gibbs, 2012, p. 1). The following measures were implemented to strengthen the trustworthiness (validity) of the data generated during this research:

- An in-depth discussion with the PhD cohort comprising a range of postgraduate students and experienced UKZN staff within the School of Education. The cohort members acted as moderators in ensuring that my personal biases were omitted in designing and implementing the instruments whilst ensuring that my position remained neutral throughout the course of data production.
- An academic specialist within the English Home Language Department at the CPUT reviewed the construction of the questionnaires to avoid incorrect feedback on questions.
- The English Home Language Department at the CPUT ensured that my questions for the one-on-one and focus group interviews were straightforward.
- At the commencement of each new data production segment, I used respondent validation, better known as member checks to verify whether the initial results still ring true. After that, the interview transcripts were refined and finalised.
- A case for deep saturation of the data became evident when the large sample of 19 participants began to respond consistently to questions posed separately.

The range of data production strategies, each layered one onto the other, could be seen as constructing a rich complex validated tapestry of the lived experiences of the student-teachers.

4.6.2 Validity and reliability across the research field

Creswell and Miller (2000) assert that trustworthiness in research depends on the reliability of the research instruments, meaning that the data production tools should be adequately designed and developed to avoid skewed findings. Data's trustworthiness is tested through four processes: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Cohen et al. (2017, p. 141) suggest triangulation to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of data for valid findings. This involves the use of *more than one instrument* to generate data. Moreover, Shenton (2004, p. 75) explains that the study design must enhance the believability and authenticity of the field data. Triangulation thus refers to multiple methods, sources, and interrogations of the data. These strategies enabled me to explore the phenomenon from various angles, enhancing the findings' richness, confirmability, dependability, and credibility. According to Owino (2020), a triangulated approach allows for a comprehensive, in-depth description of people's experiences of a given phenomenon. This study's phenomenon was student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse teaching practicum contexts.

Gravetter and Forzano (2006) define credibility as the degree to which a study measures what is supposed to be measured. This requires the researcher to evaluate what he/she set out to evaluate. Furthermore, all other factors that could impact the trustworthiness of the information need to be controlled, which calls for the researcher to avoid ambiguity in the questions and not to pose sensitive questions to the participants. Credibility and trustworthiness refer to the extent to which the reader can have confidence in the integrity of the data. A critical phenomenological research design lends itself to the use of multiple sources, multiple stakeholders (**19 final-year IP student-teachers**), and various methods of data production, generating data at varying stages in the different cycles [**before** TP, **during** TP, and **after** TP], which could be used cross comparatively over time.

A data analysis methodology allows for multiple involvements on the part of the participants to activate their interpretation of the emergent trends. This allows a range of voices from the field to engage in dialogue with the researcher, who is facilitative in bringing these multiple interpretations into the conversation. All these strategies enhance the credibility and the representation of the final data reported.

4.6.3 Ethical issues

Before accessing the field, I applied for and received ethical clearance from the university ethics committee and the gatekeepers' permission. Gatekeepers' letters (see Appendices 8, 9 and 10) were sent immediately after ethical authorisation (see Appendices 11, 12 and 13). Conforming to the rules of purposive sampling discussed earlier (refer to 4.2.3), the study included diverse public (government) schools and one private school.

I initially indicated to the entire final-year cohort of IP student-teachers that I aimed to engage in data production from 1 April to 30 September 2022. This timeframe is usually prearranged for TP within the academic schedule of the Faculty of Education at the CPUT. Regrettably, the ethical applications took longer than expected, as there was a misunderstanding between the CPUT Institutional Ethics Committee and the UKZN Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee regarding the institution responsible for issuing the clearance. Only after the CPUT granted full ethical clearance [ethical clearance number EFEC 2-08/2022] on 18 August 2022 to include the 19 student-teachers in my study was I able to commence with data production. However, I had to wait for UKZN to provide me with clearance to enter the field. On 15 September 2022, full permission was granted with the protocol reference number [HSSREC/00004459/2022]. Lastly, the WCED allowed me entry to the schools where the 19 student-teachers were completing TP. The clearance letter from the WCED was received on 6 September 2022 with the WCED Reference number 2022096-6304.

Due to the administrative red tape, which involved gaining ethical clearance from three institutions, I had restricted time to produce data. However, the carefully selected cohort of student-teachers was eager to work alongside me to understand their lived experiences, which took cognisance of their entire development during the four years within the degree programme and pre-university, namely, their primary and high schooling. In my view, their keenness contributed to the rich data produced.

Although the data production timeframe was minimal, I was eager to ensure that all segments of the data production process were completed before these student-teachers graduated at the end of the academic year and became newly qualified teachers.

At the commencement of this study, an added restriction that was fortunately able to be controlled was the COVID-19 restrictions in accessing schools to conduct one-on-one and focus group interviews. I did not need to enter schools to engage in data production with the selected cohort of students. The first segment of the data collection process occurred in my office at the university. The following two segments were conducted via Microsoft Teams. The students opted to use MS Teams, which they had become increasingly familiar with during their three years of online learning. At first, I was uncertain about the online resources available to students residing in disadvantaged areas such as townships, but they set out to make themselves available. Their availability was also restricted to specific timeframes as they were expected to complete various chores [such as housekeeping,

collecting their children and siblings from schools, performing part-time work, accompanying grandparents to withdraw money from their South African Social Security Agency²¹ (SASSA) account, attending gym etc.] besides completing their formal studies and participating in the research study. I was limited in my self-designed interview schedule and, therefore, had to structure my online meetings according to the timeframes that suited them.

An added limitation of the online meetings was the power cuts, known as load-shedding, in the homes of all the stakeholders involved in this study. Eskom is the South African public utility that represents the country in the Southern African Power Pool; however, “A history of deep financial losses and poor planning, plus allegations of mismanagement and corruption, have plagued the monopoly utility” (Cohen & Burkhardt, 2023, p. 1).

In conclusion, to address ethical issues within this study, I sought the participants’ consent to use a digital audio recorder and the MS Teams video recorder for data generation. At the start of each data generation phase²², members were reminded of their rights and that they were not obligated to answer any questions they might not feel comfortable with. Furthermore, to maintain anonymity, each participant was assigned a pseudonym and was not identified in the write-up of their respective narratives.

4.6.4 Research data storage and retention

Owan and Bassey (2019, p. 1) indicate that data is “very important in any research experiment because it occupies a central place in making decisions based on findings resulting from the analysis of such data”. This research study adhered to accepted methods for qualitative data production. The digitally recorded audio clips, verbatim transcripts (of audio clips), written field notes, written researcher reflective journaling scripts, and photographic images were stored on a password-protected external hard drive and safely stored in my office digital safe on the university campus. Entry required a unique password that only I possessed as the sole user of the safe. Furthermore, to gain entry to the university campus, a person would have to declare their reason and share their personal information, which would be reviewed and recorded by campus-controlled security officials. To protect the stored data, the university campus uses closed-circuit surveillance television (CCTV) cameras to detect and deter criminal activities.

4.6.5 Limitations and Challenges of the Study

This research study was limited to one province, the Western Cape, that consists of six distinct municipalities, namely: 1) the City of Cape Town, 2) the West Coast, 3) Cape Winelands, 4) Overberg, 5) Garden Route, and 6) Central Karoo. The study was limited to the province's Metro Central region, Cape Town. It was also limited to 19 student-teachers’ lived experiences of undertaking Teaching Practicum in diverse contexts; hence, a generalisable statement cannot be made about this phenomenon. The participants were diverse student-teachers in the Intermediate Phase Department within the Faculty of Education at the CPUT, with 17 identifying as female and two as male. However, no White students were included since the final year IP cohort on the Mowbray Campus

²¹ The South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) is a national government agency created in April 2005 to administer South Africa's social security system, including distributing social grants, on behalf of the Department of Social Development. This grant is given to elderly individuals (60+) who can no longer work and earn a salary. People aged 60 to 75 receive R2 090 per month, whilst those older than 75 receive R2 110 per month.

²² This research study employed a sequential approach comprising six distinct phases of data generation methods conducted over a specific timeframe. These methods were strategically designed to capture and illuminate the nuanced and multifaceted lived experiences of the participants pertaining to the phenomenon under investigation.

did not have any White-identified student-teachers, unlike those on the 'sister-campus', namely on Wellington Campus. It should be noted that case study research is bounded by time, place, and participants.

When I embarked on this study, I was aware that one of my first limitations was myself as the researcher. While I had easy access to the field as a Coordinator of Teaching Practice at the sampled HEI, this might restrict frank critique by participants who wished to present a positive image of their involvement in the practicum endeavour. I was also aware that the participants might exaggerate negative feedback or, worse, tell me what they thought I wanted to know - which may not be their lived experiences. To prevent this, I thoroughly explained the research study and operational processes. None of these limitations can be construed to have negatively impacted the findings.

Walden University (2023, pp. 1-4) notes that the following challenges can arise during doctoral studies:

- Choosing the Right Topic
- Choosing the Right Methodology
- Finding Study Participants
- Getting Institutions to Participate
- Dealing with Your Data

McGrath, Palmgren and Liljedahl (2019, pp. 1-5) provide insightful tips to overcome issues that confront focussed qualitative studies:

- **Tip 1:** Identify when qualitative research interviews are appropriate
- **Tip 2:** Prepare yourself as an interviewer
- **Tip 3:** Construct an interview guide and test your questions
- **Tip 4:** Consider the cultural and power dimensions of the interview situation
- **Tip 5:** Build rapport with your respondents
- **Tip 6:** Remember you are a co-creator of the data
- **Tip 7:** Talk less and listen more
- **Tip 8:** Allow yourself to adjust the interview guide
- **Tip 9:** Be prepared to handle unanticipated emotions
- **Tip 10:** Transcribe the interviews in good time
- **Tip 11:** Check the data
- **Tip 12:** Initiate analysis early

My challenge from the start of the study was understanding the multiple kinds of hats worn by researchers (Neill, 2023). I focus here on two hats: the practitioner hat and the researcher hat. Coupled with being a novice researcher in the field of academia, I had to come to grips with the knowledge that undertaking a PhD study did not mean that I was setting out to solve a problem (*practitioner hat*) that my specific department within the faculty at this one HEI within the Western Cape was experiencing. I had to understand that my task was broader than this parochial interest. To be a researcher means to add to the body of knowledge and provide an intellectual contribution with regard to the phenomenon, in this case, understanding student-teachers' lived experiences of undertaking teaching practicum in diverse contexts (*researcher hat*). In order to make even the slightest contribution to the field of higher education studies, I would have to interrogate my position as an insider researcher within the study.

4.7 Section Four: Being an Insider Researcher

Insider research studies are common in Work Integrated Learning (WIL) studies where the professional facilitator of a professional programme seeks to understand the practice of their curriculum, the students and the influence of the learning trajectory of their students (Fleming, 2018). Qualitative researchers explore and understand varied phenomena, what stories we are told, and how they are relayed. As a researcher, one's position and experiences inevitably influence the narratives one forms and shares with participants (Greene, 2014). My positionality as an "indwelling" (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 23) researcher, meaning that I worked in the same department as the purposefully selected participants, undoubtedly contributed to my capacity to gain deeper insights into their lived experiences within diverse teaching practicum contexts even though I had my own preconceived ideas about what hampers students from selecting specific schooling placements. My experiences as a teacher educator during this time also contributed to the process of "sense-making" (Jackson, 2013, p. 54).

Holmes (2020) describes positionality as a constructive and essential element of qualitative work because without contextualising the researcher and research location, the meaning of any research output is often lost. "Positionality is thus determined by where one stands in relation to the other" (Merriam, Johnson-Bailey, Lee, Kee, Ntseane, & Muhamad, 2001, p. 411). Consequently, the researcher's positionality, power, and representation can assist in exploring insider/outsider dynamics (Merriam et al., 2011). Through a critical process of reflexivity in qualitative research, the researcher declares his/her own beliefs and, as noted by Macbeth (2001, p. 35), attitudes play a part in the research:

Positional reflexivity leads the analyst to examine the place, biography, self, and others to understand how they shape the analytic exercise. Reflexivity is a deconstructive exercise for locating the intersections of the author, other, text, and world and penetrating the representational exercise itself.

As the principal researcher of this PhD study, I would be regarded as an insider researcher because I am the Intermediate Phase Teaching Practice Coordinator within the selected ITE university, researching the lived experiences of a group of final-year student-teachers directly placed within the programme that I lead (Unluer, 2012). Greene (2014) states insider research is a complex process with many benefits, posing significant challenges and opportunities. One of the strategies I utilised to minimise ethical implications, avoid potential bias and increase the trustworthiness of the data was to be 'indwell' within this study. This meant I was permanently present in the research by consciously being aware of my position and views about the phenomenon. Therefore, throughout the production and analysis of my data, I consistently kept field notes, a daily activity log and a personal reflection log and used a field journal to consciously make me aware of my involvement in this research study.

Jarzab (2021, p. 78) expressed her stance in her doctoral dissertation as follows:

I share this background to introduce my position to the topics of writing and writing development, which may be characterized as deep, personal, authentic, and in some ways nonconformist, yet still socially sanctioned and empowered.

I also acknowledge my status as a middle-class Coloured male professional, with English as my second language and Kaapse Afrikaans as my native one. I am one of eight siblings who attended primary and high schooling on

the Cape Flats. My parents performed blue-collar work. My mother worked in a Pick n Pay Group retail business selling consumer goods; my dad was a roofing labourer. My passion for teaching stems from childhood; I was privileged to have developed from primary to high school teaching. For the last eight years, I have worked in a HEI where I can be instrumental in the kinds of teachers emanating from our ITE programme. Teaching has always been a joy, and sharing vital life information with students to prepare them for the world after obtaining formal qualifications has always excited me. I acknowledge that this study, like any other, is not value-free and is potentially affected by inherent biases of which I am aware and those of which I am unaware. Consequently, I encourage the reader to critically assess the methodology, findings, and implications and to further contribute to inquiry into the subject matter of the lived experiences of student-teachers in diverse TP contexts (Greene, 2014; Jarzab, 2021).

As an insider researcher carrying out qualitative research in an institutional setting, there was a careful need to pay attention to researcher-participant relationships and their implications for research design. Towards participants, I had an indigenous insider status: I was seen as a member of their group who was eager to understand better teaching practicum and work-integrated practices and experiences. My insider-researcher position was not that of an outside academic expert being brought in to conduct a study or evaluate a situation. Still, I was the ideal candidate who could co or re-construct the future TP programme within this study site based on the data findings of the research project. One sort of limitation experienced in my position as an insider-researcher was during the first one-on-one face-to-face interview. The students' detectable *hesitation* to be frank and direct about their experiences of what led to them deciding to become a professional teacher, their lived experiences at varied schools and experienced aspects of diversification within the ITE programme were evident. Noticing the apprehensiveness, I had to assure them that I was not seeking obedient subjects. I was more keen on participants providing me with insights into their lived world experiences underpinned by the phenomenon. Observing the worry amongst specific participants at this early start of the data production process, a collective decision was made to move our outstanding future interviews online. As an insider researcher, I was personally apprehensive at the commencement of the study whether students would be honest about their lived experiences. So, from the onset of our engagement and before signing the consent form (Appendix eight: Information sheet and consent to participate in research) I displayed positive indebtedness to each participant for their time and knowledge shared with me. The follow-up interviews and data production engagements turned out to be more finer.

4.8 Section Five: Strategies for data analysis and interpretation

The steps in the data analysis²³ are depicted below:

- The design analysis plan [**prospective**]

²³ The method of data analysis employed in this study involves thematic analysis, which was chosen for its suitability in uncovering patterns and themes within qualitative data collected through in-depth interviews and participant diaries. Thematic analysis allows for a systematic and rigorous examination of participants' experiences, facilitating the identification of recurring themes and key insights relevant to the research questions. By employing this method, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex phenomena under investigation, while also allowing for flexibility to explore emergent themes and nuances within the data.

The delayed ethical clearance was a lengthy procedure over which I had no control. I could start producing data with the purposefully selected participants only when all parties were granted clearance. The parties involved were 1) The UKZN Ethics Committee, 2) the CPUT Ethics Committee, and 3) the WCED. I segmented data production into three categories that were initially planned before data production, before, during, and after. This was useful in exploring various facets of the participants' lives.

- 1) **Before Teaching Practice:** a reflexive interpretation of their schooling in relation to topics of diversity
- 2) **During Teaching Practice:** a reflexive interpretation of their ITE TP programme and exposure to an assortment of teaching practicum contexts
- 3) **After Teaching Practice:** a reflexive comprehension of their lived experiences in diverse TP contexts and the probability of remaining in their position of comfort

- The enacted analysis [**retrospective**]

At the time of final ethical clearance by the WCED on 6 September 2022, the student-teachers had already completed their second segment of TP within schools. The TP Second Session ended on 12 August 2022. This meant that students were studying from home and would be available to contribute to the study via online communication [WhatsApp, Emailing, MS Teams, Blackboard, Google Meet & Zoom] in their free time. All students selected MS Teams, as I had previously worked with them using this communication platform, and they were comfortable utilising the online tool for the purpose of this research study. Ninety-three days, equivalent to three months and two days from 6 September to 8 December 2022, were allocated to data production.

I presented my research study proposal to all IP final-year students earlier in the academic year. Immediately after that, specific students voiced their interest in participating in the study. By the time ethical clearance was granted, I had already selected the participants using the biographical questionnaire in the appendices section.

The first stage of data production took place on-site and in my office; however, I soon realised that students were struggling on two levels: 1) financially travelling to the office whilst teaching for lecturers and learning for students was still happening online, and 2) I had much authority since they entered my personal workspace where I operated before or after lecture sessions with students like themselves. Students were eager to participate in the study but used their own funds to travel to Mowbray, with the longest trip involving a 43.625 km (27 miles) journey from the area of Strand to the CPUT Mowbray campus. The first segment of data production revealed the power of arts-based methodologies as a qualitative research method and methodology, offering deep insight into the phenomenon being studied without participants' typical one-on-one verbal responses (Samuel, Reddy & Brown, 2022). As Weber (2008, p. 44) expressed: "Images can be used to capture the ineffable Some things just need to be shown, not merely stated".

A collective decision was made to conduct the second segment of data production online. The primary purpose was to avoid students spending money on public transport to meet with me on campus. The second segment commenced with another arts-based stimulus activity, which explored a pertinent event in the life of the student-

teacher, adding to their development in becoming qualified teachers. After that, one-on-one interviews were conducted using MS Teams to explore the ITE programme in which the student was enrolled.

The third and final segment of data production focused on a third arts-based instrument - A PowerPoint presentation. This included various images/pictures portraying student-teachers in different kinds of schooling contexts [such as impoverished, rural, private, safe, unsafe, etc.]. Several of the photographs depict the various stakeholders, such as mentor-teachers and school management, involved in this developmental learning process. The activity was designed to enable the students to reflexively recall the image they most identified with and the specific TP placement context in which they could see that kind of image playing out. Afterwards, a focus group meeting was held through the online communication platform MS Teams.

4.9 Synthesis of chapter

This chapter described the critical phenomenological research approach and methods employed for this qualitative case study. I began by declaring my stance concerning the complexities of finding my methodological way as a novice phenomenologist. This was followed by a discussion on who the purposefully selected participants were and how they featured in this research. Moving on, I demonstrated the intricacies of the 11 schools and their contextual histories. The schools differed in terms of learner backgrounds, location, socio-economic status, language of instruction, and demographic characteristics. This overview highlighted the diverse contexts in which TP placements occurred. The methods used for this research were explained. They included a biographical online questionnaire, in-depth semi-structured interviews [one-on-one and focus group], arts-based methodology activities, a research journal, and photographic evidence. I affirmed my insider researcher bearing and positionality within the study and offered insights into my limitations and challenges in the study process. The chapter concluded by discussing the measures adopted to validate the research. This chapter ends the first Section A of the study, which declares the processes of **setting up the study**.

In the second part of the study, Section B, I outline the **lessons learnt from the field**. This section deals with four chapters. **Chapter five** presents and discusses the participants' biographical details, profiles of the teaching practicum schools and student experiences within the schools where TP was conducted. It provides initial insights into students' lived experiences during their undergraduate BEd. programme in the Faculty of Education at the CPU. The chapter offers insights into this study's first critical question: *What are student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse TP contexts?* Further elaborations of learning from the fieldwork are presented in **Chapters six, seven and eight**.

PART B: LEARNING FROM THE FIELD

Part A of the thesis outlined the foundational research study platform.

As the primary researcher of this study and the research project architect, I immersed myself in the data, leading to unforeseen revelations and confrontations that underpinned the analysis. Part B reflects the participants' varied perspectives of the phenomenon. However, to develop an evocative and adequate account of the data analysis, in this section, I move from providing the individualistic narrations of diverse schooling contexts, participants' biographical profiles and student experiences (**Chapter five**) to students' views on their authentic first-hand experiences of learning about diversity at home, within the ITE campus-based curriculum, and teaching practicum placement schools (**Chapter six**). Each chapter offers insights into the phenomenon by answering the critical questions, namely:

- In Chapter five, the critical question, "**What** are student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse TP contexts?" is answered.
- In Chapter six, critical question two, "**How** do student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse Teaching Practicum contexts connect with their experiences of the ITE curriculum?" is answered.

The descriptive and evaluative analysis in these chapters enables me to characterise the multi-layered themes pertaining to diversity stemming from the participants' biographical data, diverse schooling contexts, experiences of diversity before and after the HEI terrain, and their formal introduction to the ITE curriculum as well as exposure to the real-life, complex South African classroom space during TP placements.

Chapters seven and eight explore the third critical question: "**What** explains the student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse Teaching Practicum schools?" I answer this question by providing an in-depth theoretical, some interpreted understandings of what explains the choices and experiences of a multidimensional group of developing teacher professionals. **Chapter seven** depicts the tendency among the majority of participants to capitulate to the status quo of remaining in their comfort zones, although they have the power to choose to experience an unfamiliar professional learning context. **Chapter eight** captures the features of the outliers Natasha and Dumo, who used their diverse experiences productively by reflecting deeply on their future roles in South Africa and utilising their power-within to develop autonomous professional learning. Chapter eight lays the foundation for the thesis presented in **Chapter nine** on understanding the politics of TP experiences and re-imagining developing professional teachers' learning in diverse contexts.

CHAPTER FIVE

DIVERSE SCHOOLING CONTEXTS, PARTICIPANT BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILES AND STUDENT EXPERIENCES

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter set out the research methodological design and discussed (1) the design of the study, (2) the data production process and (3) measures to ensure the quality of the findings. I also offered insights into my methodological journey, which explained the complexities of finding my methodological way as a novice phenomenologist. This present chapter presents the biographical and demographic profiles of the participants who were final-year Intermediate Phase student-teachers at the CPUT. I describe the contextual, historical, social, religious, economic, and political influences that shaped the participants' lived realities and how these influenced their decision-making in selecting placement schools, which led to their exposure to the self-selected range of varied learning experiences at the different TP placements. The descriptive classifications of the schools were based on Jansen's (2018) unpublished paper, *Twenty years after apartheid: Settled patterns of school desegregation and the prospects for social cohesion*.

5.2 Overview of the Chapter

This chapter is organised into three sections:

Section 5.3 presents a table format of information on the student-teachers (using pseudonyms) and the TP placement schools chosen to complete the TP course's practical component. After that, 5.4 sets out simultaneously providing an in-depth overview of the varied schooling contexts and in-depth narratives of each participant and this is followed by the profiles of the nineteen purposefully selected participants. Section 5.5 presents a word cloud image to provide insights into the participants' conceptions of diversity, and section 5.6 provides a synthetic overview of the chapter.

This chapter reports on the lived student-teacher experience within the selected teaching practicum context, how the learned curriculum of becoming a teacher impacted their development in diverse schooling spaces, and the kinds of issues experienced in the varied contexts.

Narrative biographies expose patterns of experiences through which one can (re)construct the participants' histories, or as Merleau Ponty (1964) puts it, we live in a body at a specific time and place.

The chapter begins by examining who the participants are [*pseudonyms*], their gender, racial status and the typologies of TP schools selected in and around Cape Town in the Western Cape Province where TP was undertaken in the course of the four-year ITE degree programme. These findings suggest that the schools where the participants completed their Teaching Practicum provide valuable insights into their deliberate selection of educational settings and their nuanced understanding of diversity within the practicum context. These insights

serve as a foundation for further exploration of this phenomenon in the subsequent chapters. Pseudonyms are used to protect the schools' identity.

This data was produced via a biographical questionnaire at an early stage of data production using a Microsoft online questionnaire (Forms- *Appendix one - Biographical information sheet survey*). Online questionnaires are part of the technological revolution aimed at extracting specific data from a particular group of people instead of the conventional way of completing forms in person at a specific time. At the time, South Africa was exiting the COVID-19 pandemic; I thus took into consideration the practicality and feasibility of the data production method, as I was not constrained by “quarantine and health protocols in pursuing reliable, honest, and high-quality research outputs” (Moises, 2020, p. 1).

5.3 Biographies and Student Experiences

The online questionnaire provided insight into the nineteen participants' biographical history. The original online questionnaire template utilised is presented in the appendices (*Appendix one: Biographical information sheet survey*). The advantage of the online questionnaire lies in gaining insight into the participants' hesitance to be placed in unfamiliar schooling contexts. A birds-eye overview of each participant should have covered a total of four TP schooling placements; however, the one-year online TP programme (during COVID-19 in the 2020 academic year) resulted in students only being placed in three preferred primary schools. It is evident that specific students consciously chose to remain in the same typology of schooling as the ones they went to as school learners.

Furthermore, the data obtained from the online questionnaire point to students' preference to be placed in learning contexts/spaces/schools that reflect their gender, culture, race, religion, socio-economic status, and language. The data also illustrate varied students' perspectives of diversity within the South African schooling arena. Power differentials emanating from the apartheid past are apparent in the student's responses to the fifth question: “*What is your perception as a student-teacher of doing teaching practice at schools in diverse contexts/environments?*”

The table below presents a descriptive summary of the student-teachers and their respective Teaching Practicum schools.

Table 5.1: Participants, schools, and school contexts

Student-teacher (pseudonym)	School name (pseudonym)	School context
Participant 1: <i>Zafeer</i>	▪ Beam Ray Primary School	▪ Urban, fee-paying Quintile 5 state school, middle to upper-class suburb, Black African and Coloured learners
	▪ Greensward Primary School	▪ Urban, fee-paying Quintile 5 middle-class school, Black African and Coloured learners

Participant 2: <i>Daaem</i>	▪ Saint Michael's Public Primary School	▪ Catholic, urban public primary Quintile 5 fee-paying school
	▪ Greensward Primary School	▪ Urban, fee-paying Quintile 5 middle-class school, Black African and Coloured learners
Participant 3: <i>Lebo</i>	Sunflower Boys Primary School	Former Whites only Quintile 5 fee-paying boys-only institution
	▪ Wallace Practising School	▪ Co-educational private fee-paying school
	▪ Starlight Junior Primary School	▪ Ex-Model-C Quintile 5 fee-paying school, majority Coloured and Black African learners
Participant 4: <i>Magmoet</i>	▪ Cliftonville Adventist Primary School	▪ Christian faith-based co-educational primary school, which is regarded as an independent private fee-paying primary school
	▪ Mohamed Hanafi Primary School	▪ Islamic faith-based co-ed primary school in a semi-middle-class to upper-class suburb, fee-paying Quintile 5
	▪ Jacob Manon Primary School	▪ Urban fee-paying Quintile 5 school
	▪ Maliki Muslim College Primary School	▪ Urban private fee-paying school
	▪ Pinotage Boys Junior Primary School	▪ Upper-middle-class, high-achieving school in a previously (pre-1994) Whites-only area. An urban, former Whites-only fee-paying Quintile 5 school
Participant 5: <i>Amina</i>	▪ Penelopy Primary School	▪ Quintile 5 fee-paying primary school in the urban residential area of Surrey Estate
	▪ Taliep Muslim Primary School	▪ Situated in a Cape Town township for low-income Coloured families, non-paying (no-fee school)
Participant 6: <i>Taylor</i>	▪ Star Hill Primary School	▪ Fee-paying Quintile 5 school
	▪ Flourish Primary School	▪ No-fee-paying Quintile 1 school in the residential area of Steenberg
	▪ Elizabeth House Constantia Private School	▪ Private independent school
Participant 7: <i>Nadia</i>	▪ Penelopy Primary School	Quintile 5 fee-paying primary school in the urban residential area of Surrey Estate
	▪ Begonia Primary School	▪ Non-fee-paying Quintile 1 school.

	- Logville Primary School - Servamus Primary School	- Non-fee-paying Quintile 1 school - Fee-paying state-funded Quintile 5 school situated in the upmarket suburb of Rondebosch
Participant 8: <i>Dumo</i>	- Sunflower Boys Primary School - Bethel Street Primary School - Cliftonville Adventist Primary School	- Former Whites-only fee-paying Quintile 5 boys-only institution - Urban Quintile 5 fee-paying co-educational primary school - Christian faith-based independent primary school
Participant 9: <i>Athandwa</i>	- Nandipha Primary School - JCA Phala Primary School - Umfundo Primary School	- Non-fee-paying Quintile 1 township school in Strand - Non-fee-paying Quintile 1 township school in Strand - No-fee Quintile 1 school in the suburb of Strand
Participant 10: <i>Natasha</i>	- Zeal Academy - St. Jackson. R. C. Primary School	- Former Whites only fee-paying Quintile 5 primary school in an urban middle- to upper-class area - Previously (pre-1994) Whites-only but now no-fee paying Quintile 1 co-educational urban primary school
Participant 11: <i>Ragmat</i>	- Elizabeth House Constantia Private School - Pandora Primary School	- Privately funded school - Fee-paying Quintile 5 school in a low-income area
	- Begonia Primary School - Greensward Primary School	- Non-fee-paying Quintile 1 school - Urban, fee-paying Quintile 5 middle-class school, Black African and Coloured learners
Participant 12: <i>Phelisa</i>	- Mandoza Primary School - Uncedo Primary School - Starlight Junior Primary School	- Based in an impoverished Black African township, non-fee-paying, Quintile 2 - Non-fee paying Quintile 1 school in a Black African township in a rural setting - Former Whites only Quintile 5 fee-paying school, mainly Coloured and Black African learners
Participant 13: <i>Lynn</i>	Treeville Primary School	Former Whites only fee-paying Quintile 5 school in an upmarket urban residential area

Participant 14: <i>Johanna</i>	▪ Servamus Primary School	▪ Fee-paying state-funded Quintile 5 school in the upmarket suburb of Rondebosch
	▪ Starlight Junior Primary School	▪ Former Whites only Quintile 5 fee-paying school, mainly Coloured and Black African learners
	▪ Pandora Primary School	▪ Low-income fee-paying Quintile 5 school
	▪ Contemporary Primary School	▪ Fee-paying Quintile 5 state-funded co-educational primary school
	▪ Greensward Primary School	▪ Urban, fee-paying Quintile 5 middle-class school, Black African and Coloured learners
Participant 15: <i>Nkosana</i>	▪ Simphiwe Primary School	▪ Non-fee-paying Quintile 1 school in a Black African township
	▪ Mhlapo Primary School	▪ Non-fee-paying Quintile 1 school in the lower-class Black African township of Khayelitsha
	▪ Cliftonville Adventist Primary School	▪ Independent school with a faith-based culture.
	▪ Elite Nobility College Junior School	▪ Previously White school. Middle to upper middle class. Upmarket fee-paying public school
Participant 16: <i>Bonga</i>	▪ Khoza Public Primary School	▪ Non-fee-paying Quintile 1 school in a rural setting in the Black African township of Stellenbosch
	▪ Toscana Primary School	▪ Fee-paying Quintile 5 school catering for the middle to lower class
Participant 17: <i>Patience</i>	▪ Sambo Primary School	▪ Non-fee-paying Quintile 2 school in a Black African township
	▪ JCA Phala Primary School	▪ Non-fee-paying Quintile 1 township school in Strand
	▪ Umfundo Primary School	▪ No-fee Quintile 1 public primary school in a Black African township
Participant 18: <i>Khethiwe</i>	▪ Chrimbo Primary School	▪ No-fee Quintile 3 public primary school in a Black African township
	▪ Mahlangu Primary School	▪ Non-fee-paying Quintile 3 public school in Strand's Black African township.
	▪ Umfundo Primary School	▪ No-fee Quintile 3 public primary school in a Black African township

Participant 19: Adelaide	▪ Bonnie Primary School	▪ Fee-paying Quintile 5 co-educational primary school
	▪ Hilton Primary School and Peakville Primary School	▪ No-fee Coloured community-based co-educational Quintile 1 primary school
	▪ Donovan Primary School	▪ Quintile 5 fee-paying co-educational primary school.
	▪ Toscana Primary School	▪ Fee-paying Quintile 5 school catering for the middle to lower class
	▪ Annie's Special Needs School	▪ Special needs school

The biographical data sketches the typology of mainstream primary schools in which student-teachers undertook TP within the Western Cape (Cape Town, South Africa). One student-teacher (Participant 19 - Adelaide) briefly undertook TP at a Special Needs School. The data also provides insight into the participants' home provinces. Upon acceptance into the ITE programme, four relocated from the Eastern Cape to Cape Town, two from Gauteng and another from Limpopo. An observable characteristic of those students who moved to the Western Cape was their hesitance to undertake their TP in areas outside their primary residence. Twelve participants were from Cape Town in the Western Cape.

Throughout their four-year degree, 17 participants opted to complete their TP within $\pm$ ten kilometres of their residence (family home or university-allocated residence). The two who completed their TP in a school $\pm$ twenty-one kilometres from home did so out of personal choice. Bonga resided in a dangerous area and chose to travel to a different kind of school. Khethiwe conveniently chose the school her stepdaughter attended so they could travel to and from school together.

The first level of data revealed that the links between the conflict and tension experienced by the student-teachers and the support they received during the TP placement process are crucial in developing them to become professional teachers. I gained an understanding of what students perceived as diversity when they shared their views on this phenomenon. However, ITE should not be "about nurturing one's comfort zones" but about confronting fear, activating learning zones and disrupting rituals and conventions, particularly when they (routines/conventions) bolster inequities (Samuel, 2022). The first level online questionnaire provided aggregate information on the demographic characteristics of the purposefully selected student-teachers and the number of individuals who stepped out of their immediate comfort zone to explore an alternative, unfamiliar type of learning. I will now outline some of the issues the students reported on when confronted with the question of how they understood what diversity meant. In the section below, I also profile a more detailed biographical profile of the students, showing how their own personal background intersected with their conception of diversity, especially within the TP schools they chose.

5.4 Participant biographical profiles and student experiences

5.4.1 Participant 1: Zafeer: “A big language barrier between the learners and the teachers”

Zafeer is a 21-year-old male who self-identified as Coloured. He is also a Muslim and follows Islamic faith-based practices. He first registered for the BEd—degree in 2019. Zafeer was keen to join the Intermediate Phase Programme and wanted to work with older learners. He pointed out that had he not gained entry to a teaching career, he would have chosen to work with animals in the field of marine biology. His current residence is in Rondebosch East, a middle- to upper-class suburb in Cape Town, about seven kilometres southeast of the city centre. In his first year of the BEd., Zafeer selected Beam Ray Primary School for his TP placement. The school is situated in Athlone on the Cape Flats east of the city centre. During apartheid, it was designated a Coloured neighbourhood. This school is a Quintile 5 fee-paying school with a diverse cohort of learners, many of whom use public transport to commute to and from school. The diversity of learners stems from the different racial groups (Coloured and Black South African), language (English, Afrikaans and isiXhosa), socio-economic status (middle to lower-middle-class, including learners from poor townships) and religious groups (Islam and Christianity) who come from working-class backgrounds. In the second year of the TP programme, Zafeer’s cohort of students did not undertake TP at schools due to the coronavirus pandemic and the subsequent lockdown rules. In his third year of study, Zafeer opted to be placed at Greensward Primary School, an urban, fee-paying Quintile 5 middle-class school in Penlyn Avenue, Belthorn Estate, 1.9 kilometres from the school he selected the previous year (Beam Ray Primary School). In his final year of study, Zafeer chose to return to Greensward Primary School. Reflecting on his own primary school and high school experience, he said:

Yes, even though I attended Greensward Primary School as a pupil, it has changed a lot over the years, and it has become a new, more diverse environment and a revamped school with a new building, so it is safe to say that it is a totally different school. Beam Ray Primary School was also different in comparison to Greensward Primary School (when I was a learner there), a much more diverse setting. Yes, even though I attended an urban, fee-paying high school, the general atmosphere and demographics of the school was much more diverse than what I experienced in primary [school].

Asked about being placed in diverse TP contexts, Zafeer commented:

I think that it would be a good experience for students so that they can be familiar with different types of schooling environments. However, a massive problem which I have encountered when speaking with students who have gone to other diverse contexts schools is that there is a big language barrier between the learners and the teacher. In my opinion, if the lines of communication are blurred, and the teacher is not linguistically gifted to cross over to a language the learners will understand, you are doing an injustice to yourself and the learners.

5.4.2 Participant 2: Daaem: “[A diverse TP experience] It can be tricky when teachers don’t speak the mother-tongue of the learners”

Daaem is a 22-year-old male who self-identified as a Coloured South African. He embraced Muslim-faith-based practices and entered my office for our first interview moments after returning from the Islam Friday prayer (congregational prayer) (Arabic: صَلَاةُ الْجُمُعَةِ, Ṣalāt al-Jumu‘ah). He commenced his ITE programme in January

2019. The first school he selected to complete TP in year one was a parochial one, Saint Michael's Public Primary School, a Quintile 5 fee-paying school. These schools sometimes endorse a Catholic ethos or the Muslim tradition. Thus, the Catholic school would have mass (church service) usually once a week and say Catholic prayers at certain times of the day. The most common would be a special prayer at midday (*known as the Angelus*) and Catholic gestures such as the 'sign of the cross', usually at the start and end of the daily prayers. Religious instruction is evident and follows the Catholic ethos. While not all the learners are Catholic, they and the teachers are expected to abide by the prevailing ethos of the school.

Such a school generally has learners from middle- to lower-middle-class families who want a better education than that offered by schools closer to their places of residence. Learners who attend these schools on the Cape Flats utilise public transport to and from school. They vary in terms of the racial group (Coloured and Black South African), language (English, Afrikaans and isiXhosa), socio-economic status (middle to lower-middle-class, including learners from poor townships) and religious groups (Islam and Christianity) who come from working-class backgrounds. During the second year of the ITE programme, Daaem did not physically enter a school for TP due to the countrywide COVID-19 pandemic but attended an alternative online TP programme conducted via the CPUT Blackboard portal. In year three, he completed his WIL programme at Saint Michael's Primary School in Athlone's urban area. In his final year, he selected the fee-paying school Greensward Primary School, which is approximately 3.2 kilometres from Saint Michael's Public Primary School. Greensward Primary is an urban, fee-paying Quintile 5 middle-class school with learners from working-class homes. Many of the Black South African learners in the school commute from townships outside the area.

Reflecting on his own primary school and high school experience concerning matters of diversity within the classroom, Daaem said, "Yes, I was sufficiently inducted into a diverse schooling experience."

Asked about placing student-teachers in diverse contexts, he commented: "*It can be tricky when teachers don't speak the mother-tongue of the learners.*"

5.4.3 Participant 3: Lebo: “[A diverse TP experience] It is a good thing for this new generation to learn about diversity”

Lebo is a 40-year-old Black female from northern Limpopo, one of the rural provinces of South Africa. Her first language is Tshivenda. She commenced her ITE journey in 2018 and lived in a university residence within walking distance of the Mowbray campus. Like many other student-teachers whom I have been responsible for placing in schools to complete TP, Lebo was resistant to being placed in a school outside the immediate university community. The area of Mowbray is considered to be middle-class and was previously considered a White area. The schools she selected were within a radius of two kilometres from one another. In year one, she completed TP at Sunflower Boys Primary School, a former Whites-only Quintile 5 fee-paying institution. As its name indicates, the school is for boys aged six to 15 in Grades R (reception) to 7. The school population is diverse in terms of ethnicity and language (English, Afrikaans and isiXhosa). Most learners reside outside the schooling area, a farming estate until the early 19th century that became a suburb of Cape Town as the population and city boundaries grew. They use buses and taxis to travel to and from school. Lebo travelled by public transport in her first year of

TP, and the following year she walked to Wallace Practising School in Salt River. The school is a co-ed private fee-paying school, and the majority of the learners live outside of the immediate area and commute to school daily. The Black African and Coloured learners travel with their parents to the area where some are employed. They use public transport to commute home at the end of each school day.

In 2021, Lebo opted to be placed in Starlight Junior Primary School, a former Whites-only fee-paying Quintile 5 school. The school is co-ed²⁴, and the learners in Grades R to 6 speak multiple languages (English, Afrikaans, isiXhosa and French). It has many foreign learners from the Republic of Congo. The area of Observatory is middle-to-upper middle class, with a minority of White learners attending the school.

In the final year of the ITE programme, Lebo selected a co-ed Christian faith-based primary school, Cliftonville Adventist Primary School, which is an independent, private fee-paying primary school. The school was established in 1950. This previously White Afrikaans school transformed into a diverse school with White learners in the minority. It is relatively small, with 170 learners and 12 staff. The class size is generally small and manageable, with 14 learners per class. Most grades have teacher assistants whom the school employs. They assist with reading groups, administration, classroom preparation and marking. The language of instruction is English, although the learners' home language includes isiXhosa, Afrikaans and French. The majority of learners attending this school come from upper-to-middle-class families. English Home Language was problematic for Lebo, who had undergone her entire schooling in Tshivenda. She struggled in the grade five class she was placed in because she lacked the correct sentence construction to communicate in English.

Reflecting on her own primary and high school experience in Limpopo province, Lebo remarked:

My school was a school of one culture and race, and an African township school was fee-paying until the new government changed [the school] to non-fee-paying. [Also, at high school], the school was an African township school, which was a fee-paying school until it changed] to non-fee paying by the new government.

Her view on placing student-teachers in diverse contexts was that:

"It is a good thing to [for] this new generation to learn about diversity as they have to learn different culture [s] and different languages equally in an inclusive environment."

5.4.4 Participant 4: Magmoet: "You get to learn how different learners in different settings think, behave and live"

Magmoet is a 26-year-old self-identified Black African male with roots in the Federal Republic of Somalia, a country in the Horn of Africa. His parents migrated to South Africa in search of a better life for the family. He was admitted to the Intermediate Phase course at the CPUT in 2019. As a devout Muslim living in the suburb of middle- to upper-class Wynberg, an area in Cape Town with several Muslim faith-based primary and high schools, he chose to be placed in Mohamed Hanafi Primary School in his first year. This Islamic faith-based co-ed primary school is located

²⁴ Mixed-sex education, also known as mixed-gender education, co-education, or coeducation, is a system of education where males and females are educated together.

in a semi-middle-class to upper-class suburb and is a fee-paying Quintile 5 school. It first opened its doors in 1929 intending to follow a curriculum that would provide learners with a traditional 'religious' educational foundation. From a modest one-room school in 1929, it now has 720 learners, 28 teachers, 21 classes, two computer rooms, Islamic and Arabic reading teachers, a remedial and two physical education teachers and a creative arts teacher.

The school's financial and physical resources allow for numerous extra-curricular activities such as swimming, athletics, soccer, volleyball, cricket, cycling and hiking. The language of instruction from Grades 1 to 7 is English. Most learners come from the surrounding area within walking distance of the school.

In his second year, Magmoet requested to be placed at Jacob Manon Primary School in Plumstead, an urban fee-paying Quintile 5 school catering to learners from diverse socio-economic backgrounds (middle- to lower-middle-class, including learners from poor townships) in the surrounding communities of Lotus River, Southfield, Grassy Park and Ottery. The diversity of learners also stems from the different racial groups (Coloured and Black South African), language (English, Afrikaans and isiXhosa), and religious groups (Islam and Christianity). Although students could not complete TP in schools due to the COVID-19 restrictions, Magmoet requested that he complete in-service professional learning. The distance between Mohamed Hanafi Primary School and Jacob Manon Primary School is 1.65 kilometres. The difference between these two co-ed primary schools is that the former upholds a Muslim tradition, and the latter has a Christian ethos.

In the third year of the undergraduate degree programme, Magmoet requested to be placed at Maliki Muslim College Primary School, an urban private fee-paying school 5.4 kilometres from Jacob Manon Primary School. Maliki Muslim College Primary School was established in 1984 with two grades and 47 students but now has 1 609 students, 148 staff members and five institutions (pre-primary school, primary school, girls high school, boys high school and college). The annual school fees range from R26 500 for Grade R to R35 700 in Grades 1 to 3, R37 800 for Grades 4 to 7, R45 150 in Grades 7 to 9 and R47 250 in Grades 10 to 12. The school is a high-achieving one in a previously (pre-1994) Whites-only area of the Western Cape. There is strong demand for places due to its prestigious reputation in academics, sports and faith-based teaching and learning.

In his final year, Magmoet asked to be placed in his residential area at the Pinotage Boys Junior Primary School. This is an upper-middle-class, high-achieving school in a previously (pre-1994) Whites-only area of the Western Cape. A former Whites only fee-paying Quintile 5 school, it caters for male learners. It promotes the four Cs of learning alongside the CAPS policy: critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity. Learners' mother tongue is isiXhosa or Afrikaans; however, English is the language of teaching and learning. A music fee of R1 320 is payable per term, and an after-care full-time facility is available at an annual cost of R15 885. This type of school often has a rich tradition maintained by a very involved Parent Teacher Association (PTA). The distance between Maliki Muslim College Primary School and Pinotage Boys Junior Primary School is five kilometres. This, at no stage did Magmoet contemplate completing TP outside the Wynberg and Plumstead area.

Asked whether he was familiar with diverse primary and high school experiences, Magmoet commented:

Yes, the amount of technology now available in classrooms were [was] not available when I was attending school. The teachers now currently do not have the same love for students as in the past.

In terms of placing student-teachers in diverse contexts, he remarked: "You get to learn how different learners in different settings think, behave and live. You learn to appreciate diversity in children."

5.4.5 Participant 5: Amina: *"I think it is a good idea to get experience at schools of diversity as it enables you to see the world from different perspectives"*

Amina is a 21-year-old self-identified Coloured female whose mother tongue is English. She is from the poor Coloured township of Sherwood Park in Manenberg, a low-income township created for Coloured families during the apartheid era. Manenberg is known as a dangerous township with high levels of poverty and gangsterism.

Amina started her ITE programme in 2019 at the CPUT. She abides by the Muslim faith practice, which means dressing modestly and wearing a headscarf (also called a *hijab*). She selected the Quintile 5 fee-paying Penelopy Primary School in the urban residential area of Surrey Estate, three kilometres from her home. The learners are diverse in terms of racial groups (Coloured and Black South African), home language (English, Afrikaans and isiXhosa), socio-economic status (lower-class to middle-class) and religion (Islam and Christianity).

In her second year, Amina did not physically enter any school for TP due to the COVID-19 lockdown. She attended an alternative online TP programme conducted via the CPUT Blackboard portal. In her third year, she asked to be placed at Taliep Muslim Primary School in Manenberg, a non-paying (no-fee) school Quintile 1 school funded by the state. The school has more than 1,000 learners, 60% from Manenberg and the remaining 40% from the surrounding informal settlements. There is a total of 30 classes across all grades.

The distance between Penelopy Primary School and Taliep Muslim Primary School is 2.6 kilometres. Amina returned to Taliep Muslim Primary School, where she completed her first year of TP to complete her WIL segment of the degree.

Asked whether she had a diverse primary school experience, she responded:

Yes ... I went to Penelopy Primary School when I was younger and did my latest teaching Practice at Taliep Muslim Primary School. The schools are different as learners from these schools come from different backgrounds. I noticed that most learners at Taliep Muslim Primary had behavioural problems as opposed to Penelopy Primary School. Taliep Muslim Primary School learners didn't seem interested in school as if they were forced to be there.

In terms of a diverse high school experience, she said:

Yes Even though Taliep Muslim Primary School is a primary school, there are quite a number of learners who are smokers at very young ages. The way they were dealt with by the principal was very different to how my high school principal dealt with them. Parents were called in at Taliep Muslim Primary School, while at my high school, it was dismissed.

Her views on placing student-teachers in diverse contexts were:

I think it is a good idea to get experience at schools of diversity as it enables you to see the world from different perspectives. It also allows us as student-teachers to broaden our

knowledge as well as the way we deal with and handle different learners and different situations.

5.4.6 Participant 6: Taylor: “Since I was exposed to different schools, I have a different view and perception of how the different schools operate”

Taylor is a 22-year-old self-identified Coloured female whose first language is Afrikaans. She is from the suburb of Seawinds in Steenberg near the False Bay coast. It is bounded to the south by Lakeside and Muizenberg (previously predominantly White areas), in the west by Tokai, the east by Lavender Hill and the north by Retreat and Heathfield (mainly working-class Coloured households). Seawinds, as well as Lavender Hill, is home to mainly Coloured people. Both neighbourhoods are notorious for gangsterism and gang violence.

Taylor enrolled in the ITE programme in 2019 and underwent TP in her first year at Star Hill Primary School, a fee-paying Quintile 5 school. Established in 1967 and dedicated to serving the economically disadvantaged areas of Retreat, Steenberg and Lavender Hill, this school started with 500 learners and now averages 1,000. It currently has 1 050 learners and 43 staff members. The learners range in age from five to 14, and the school caters for Grades R to 7. The diversity of learners at Star Hill Primary School stems from the different racial groups (Coloured and Black South African), languages spoken (English, Afrikaans and isiXhosa), varied socio-economic status (lower-class to middle-class) and religious groups (Islam and Christianity) who come from working-class backgrounds. The area where Taylor lives is 2.6 kilometres from the school.

Taylor did not complete TP in school in the second year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, she completed an online TP programme via Blackboard. The following year, she experienced TP at Flourish Primary School, a no-fee-paying Quintile 1 school in the residential area of Steenberg. The school was built in 1965 when forced removals were well underway and designed for the Coloured Steenberg community. It offers several extra-mural activities, including soccer, athletics, netball and speech. The language of communication is Afrikaans Home Language, and English First Additional Language. The racial demographics of this school have transformed, and what was an Afrikaans medium school has now become a “multi-racial” school with Black African learners commuting by train to school. Most learners come from disadvantaged backgrounds, and a nutrition programme exists.

In her final year, Taylor was determined to have a completely diversified TP experience with respect to context. The principal of a private school in the leafy Constantia Valley reached out to the CPUT in search of two dynamic final-year student-teachers to experience a “cross-over TP experience”. I nominated Taylor and Natasha (Participant 10). Both were eager to take TP placement at the independent Elizabeth House Constantia Private School. The school is opposite the award-winning Steenberg (affluent area) vineyard and golf estate. Constantia is one of the oldest wine-growing regions in Cape Town and is famous for its world-renowned wines. The Constantia Valley has abundant forests, hills, and stately historical homes and vineyards owned by wealthy international business owners. During apartheid, Black residents were forcibly removed from farms under the Group Areas Act of 1950 and allocated blocks of concrete flats in Parkwood Estate (7.9 kilometres’ walking distance).

Elizabeth House Constantia Private School prides itself on offering “premium academic, cultural and sporting facilities”, which include art, music, drama, and dance provided by specialist teachers. The Preparatory School boasts four choirs and an award-winning orchestra. The extra-curricular cultural programme is also extensive, including four dance, chess, and art club genres. The school has extensive facilities, including art, drama, dance and music studios, computer and science labs, a multi-purpose hall, Astroturf, an indoor aquatics centre, a library and a magnificent cricket oval. Technology is used extensively in the classroom, and iPads are compulsory for Grade 6 and 7 learners. The language of teaching and learning is English Home Language, and the learners and staff are mainly White. Black African and Coloured learners are welcome if their parents can afford the annual fees ranging from R93 727 for Year 1 to R157 8830 for Year 12.

This school is relatively large, with an average of 25 learners per class. Teacher assistants are employed for each class or grade to help with reading groups, administration, classroom preparation and marking. The school follows the national curriculum (CAPS) but with added content, which it believes will help students develop valuable skills. As an independent private school, it is affiliated with the Independent Examination Board (IEB), an independent assessment agency with the authority to administer examinations to a wide range of client schools.

The distance between the state-funded no-fee school Flourish Primary School in the Retreat area and Constantia, where Elizabeth House Constantia Private School is located, is 7.4 kilometres.

Asked whether she had a diverse primary and high school experience, Taylor made the following comment:

Yes, I did. I was exposed to a "fee-paying" school when I was in primary school. So, my third and final year (non-fee paying and private) was a completely new experience for me.

In terms of placing student-teachers in diverse contexts, she stated:

Since I was exposed to different schools, I have a different view and perception of how the different schools operate.

5.4.7 Participant 7: Nadia: “Every student-teacher should do their teaching practice at different types of schools!”

Soft-spoken student-teacher Nadia is a 22-year-old self-identifying Indian female. Most of her extended family is based within the province of KwaZulu-Natal (Durban); however, her parents decided to settle in Cape Town. Nadia comes from the predominantly Coloured community of Hanover Park, which is plagued by gangsterism, drug abuse and numerous social ills. She commenced her ITE programme at the CPUT in 2019. In her first year, her TP was at a fee-paying school named Penelopy Primary School approximately four kilometres from home. As previously explained, Penelopy Primary School (fee-paying, Quintile 5) has a diversity of learners in terms of racial groups (Coloured and Black South African), languages (English, Afrikaans and isiXhosa), socio-economic status (lower-to middle-class) and religious groups (Islam and Christianity) from working-class backgrounds. The school is co-ed, and learners are encouraged to participate in co-curricular activities such as on-track sports, soccer, cricket and athletics.

In her second year of TP, the student-teacher was based at a non-fee-paying Quintile 1 school within her community, Begonia Primary School. This school lacked the human resources available at the school in year one. Begonia Primary School is located in Hanover Park, a very poor community close to a well-known highway, Jan Smuts Drive. This highway acts as the main road for learners from outside the Hanover Park area to gain entrance to the school via public transport. The school, which is less than three kilometres from her home, had a mix of race groups (Coloured and Black) but no White or Indian-identified learners. Learners were provided with food during the break. The medium of communication is English as a Home Language. However, learners use various languages, such as Kaapse Afrikaans and isiXhosa, especially during breaks. Nonetheless, teachers teach Afrikaans or English Home Language and not isiXhosa due to a shortage of teachers of isiXhosa (one of South Africa's indigenous languages).

In her third year, Nadia picked Logville Primary School, a non-fee-paying Quintile 1 school within the boundaries of Hanover Park, her residential community. The challenges experienced by members of this primary school linked to learner behaviour and academic performance were, to some extent, the same as those at Begonia Primary School. Similarly, the assortment of learners was the same, which meant different racial groups (Coloured and Black South African) from within the area, languages spoken (English, Afrikaans and isiXhosa), socio-economic status (lower- to middle-class) and religious groups (Islam and Christianity) who come from working-class backgrounds.

Nadia wanted to experience a fundamentally different TP experience before exiting the ITE programme. She, therefore, asked to be placed at Servamus Primary School, which she described as one of the most impressive places of learning she has ever experienced. She stated that this school was a "highly resourced school". It looks like a historic Dutch mansion with white columns and red-tiled roofs from the outside. It was founded by Dr F.C.L. Bosman, a lecturer in Dutch-Afrikaans at the University of Cape Town, who lived in Rondebosch. Having just returned from a visit to Holland, he wanted to find an Afrikaans-medium school for his oldest child, who was six years old. He asked one of the church's priests, who happened to be one of his senior students, Ds. A. M. Meiring, to find premises and children to fill the school. The school was officially opened on 13 July 1936 and was formally recognised and named Primêre Afrikaans Medium Skool. Servamus Primary School has undergone a major transformation in terms of leadership, staffing and the racial profiles of its learners. Today, it is a fee-paying state-funded Quintile 5 school in the upmarket suburb of Rondebosch, approximately 7.8 from Hanover Park. The school fees range from R28 878 per annum for Grades 1 to 4 to R22 853 for Grades 5 to 7. The learners at this once Whites-only school in upmarket, middle- to upper-class Rondebosch have access to various educational facilities and human and physical resources. There is great demand for places because of its good reputation in academics, athletics and cultural activities.

Asked whether she was familiar with diverse primary and high school experiences, Nadia responded:

Yes, in my first year, I did my teaching practice at my primary school (Penelopy). Then, in my second and third years, the school was a non-fee-paying school. They didn't have as much [many] resources as my primary school. More discipline was required, less extra-curricular activities were available (perhaps owing to COVID-19 as well). Then, in my final year, I did

my teaching practice at a highly-resourced school which had the most extra-curricular activities available compared to the other schools, with a huge diversity and they had a merit system, and the educational system was more strict and structured. Teachers were also more creative, and the school fees are quite high as well, especially since it is situated in an area where the cost of living is higher.

In terms of her familiarity with the concept of diversity, she remarked:

Yes, I attended Plaatjies High School, a fee-paying school with an equal amount of Black African and Coloured learners and 3% Indian. In the non-fee-paying schools where I did my teaching practice, [it] was roughly 80% Black African and 20% Coloured. In my final year, I noticed that school fees at my high school were a quarter of the amount at Servamus Primary, roughly 20% White, 60% Coloured, 10% Black African and 10% Asian & Indian [learners].

She expressed the following views on placing student-teachers in diverse contexts:

Every student-teacher should do their teaching practice at different types of schools because it not only helps you to gain knowledge and new perspectives about different learners and their backgrounds, but it also allows you to adapt to every teaching setting, which makes you a versatile candidate for future job opportunities, which in my opinion is very important within teacher development. You also gain a variety of different teaching strategies and constructive criticism, helping you grow and acquire better reflection, which is the key element of becoming an excellent teacher.

5.4.8 Participant 8: Dumo: “I learned more about their culture, race, and socio-economic status based on where the school is situated”

Dumo is a bubbly female with a sharp wit and insightful knowledge about 21st-century teaching. She is 22 and describes herself as a self-identified Black African female from the Nguni ethnic group known as the Zulu. On receiving news of her acceptance into the ITE programme, she relocated to Mowbray from her hometown Germiston, a small city in the East Rand region of Gauteng (1 410 kilometres from Cape Town). Dumo started her ITE programme in 2019. Due to living in the assigned university residence on the Mowbray campus, she selected a nearby fee-paying Quintile 5 state-funded public primary, Sunflower Boys Primary School. This was Dumo's first experience in an all-boys school built in 1958 to cater to Whites. Today, it admits a mixed racial cohort of Black and Coloured boys aged six to 15 from the surrounding area in a predominantly middle- to upper-class community. The school has three phases, namely 1) Foundation Phase – Grades R to 3, 2) Intermediate Phase – Grades 4 – 6 and 3) Senior Phase – Grade 7, and offers English Home Language regardless of whether learners' mother tongue is Afrikaans or isiXhosa. It is located close to the central business district of Cape Town, approximately 5.6 kilometres from her university residence.

In the second year of study, Dumo undertook her TP at a multicultural fee-paying, co-ed Quintile 5 school, Bethel Street Primary, in the urban area of Observatory. The learners come from different racial groups (Coloured and Black South African), speak different languages (English, Afrikaans, isiXhosa), are of varied socio-economic status (lower- to middle-class) and belong to different religious groups (Islam and Christianity).

In 2021 and 2022, Dumo took up a placement at Cliftonville Adventist Primary School, a Christian faith-based independent primary school close to her university residence. The history of Cliftonville Adventist Primary School was previously explained under Participant 3's (Lebo) account.

Asked whether she was familiar with diverse primary and high school experiences, Dumo observed:

Yes, the way of teaching has greatly improved. Learners are being given more resources during class time, different kinds of learners are being catered for when designing lesson plans, and education is now becoming learner centred.

She added:

Yes, I observe that learners are very comfortable with their teachers. They are not scared of them like we used to be. The way of disciplining learners is more appropriate than what we use to get through. I see that learners form a good relationship with their educators, even though it is still kept professional.

Her views on placing student-teachers in diverse contexts were as follows:

It gives me an opportunity to learn from my learners. I learned more about their culture, race, and socio-economic status based on where the school is situated. I had to learn how to create different resources depending on the school I went to, and at times, I would have to improvise just so that I could accommodate each and every learner during my lessons.

5.4.9 Participant 9: Athandwa: “It is more challenging to teach in schools based in township communities”

Female student-teacher Athandwa is a 22-year-old self-identified Black African whose first language is isiXhosa. After moving from a rural township in the Eastern Cape to Cape Town, she commenced her undergraduate studies in the Faculty of Education in January 2019. In the first year of the ITE teaching practicum programme, she was placed at her preferred school, Nandipha Primary School, a non-fee-paying township school in Strand. Strand is a wealthy beach community 35 kilometres from Cape Town; however, adjacent to the site is a buffer zone inhabited by approximately 60,000 people, most of whom live far below the average income of the surrounding communities. The buffer zone also serves as a temporary settlement for hundreds of displaced people. Therefore, the school caters to the children in the poor Black African township of Strand, and learners are taught in isiXhosa. The no-fee Quintile 1 school is part of the school feeding scheme, and each child is provided with a daily meal.

Athandwa did not complete a face-to-face on-site in-school placement during her second year, as the TP programme was conducted online, with remote tests.

In her third year of TP, Athandwa asked to be placed at the non-fee-paying Quintile 1 township school, JCA Phala Primary, situated in Strand, 1.2 kilometres from the other school she was placed at. In her last year of TP, she again requested a non-fee Quintile 1 school in Strand, Umfundo Primary School. Thus, all three schools where Athandwa was placed were no-fee Quintile 1 schools where learners are taught in isiXhosa, their home language. All lacked educational resources, and the classrooms were make-shift containers.

Athandwa said she was unfamiliar with diverse primary and high school experiences. Her opinion on placing student-teachers in diverse contexts was as follows:

Diverse schools have resources and discipline. It is not challenging to teach in this kind of context as it is in schools that are based in township communities.

5.4.10 Participant 10: Natasha: “Teaching at diverse schools can contribute to being able to teach under good or bad circumstances”

Natasha is a larger-than-life, bubbly individual who is a 23-year-old self-identified Coloured female. She lives in the suburb of Steenberg, and her home language is English. The Steenberg area is home to several smaller communities. Natasha resides in a free-standing brick house in the Coloured community in a lower- to middle-class household. Her parents were employed, and Natasha shared that her mother was a “cleaning lady” who was proud to earn her own income. Natasha commenced her studies within the Faculty of Education in 2018 and enrolled in the BEd. Intermediate Phase degree programme. She was an elected class representative from her first to final year due to her industrious professional nature.

In her first year, she asked to be placed in the Zeal Academy, a former Whites-only school fee-paying Quintile 5 primary school in the urban area of Retreat, Cape Town, seven kilometres from her home. Zeal Academy has a diversity of learners stemming from different racial groups (White, Coloured and Black South African), languages spoken (English, Afrikaans and isiXhosa), varied socio-economic status (lower- to middle-class) and religious groups (Islam and Christianity) who come from working-class backgrounds. The annual fees range from R19 135 (Grade R) to R17 230 (Grades 1- 7). Music is offered for those whose parents are able to pay R4 653 per annum. The school has massive grounds for learners to engage in co-curricular activities such as swimming and on-track sports such as soccer, netball, rugby, cricket and athletics, a choir and computers.

The second school Natasha selected TP was Berryville Primary School; however, due to schools not being keen to accept students during the global pandemic, she did not complete face-to-face on-site TP in her second year. An alternative online TP programme was constructed for all students.

In her third year of study, Natasha was placed at St Jackson. R. C. Primary School in a previously (pre-1994) Whites-only area 10.2 kilometres from her home. Today, it is a no-fee paying Quintile 1 state-funded, Catholic co-ed school for Coloured and Black South African children living in and around the area. It offers Grades R to 7, and transport is provided to learners from the impoverished and gang-infested communities of Ocean View and Masiphumelele. A daily meal is provided. The WCED states that this school is a full-service primary school²⁵, with learners supported by a psychologist, speech therapist and a learning support teacher once a week. It offers a range of co-curricular activities such as athletics, choir, soccer, netball, dance, chess, hockey and a computer club.

In the final year of study, the student-teacher selected a school in an entirely unfamiliar setting and context. The chosen school had written to me, appealing for student-teachers to experience an alternative TP at the institution.

²⁵ Full-service/inclusive schools are first and foremost mainstream education institutions that provide quality education to all learners by supplying the full range of learning needs in an equitable manner. They should strive to achieve access, equity, quality and social justice in education (Taken from Guidelines for Full-Service Schools, DBE, 2010).

Elizabeth House Constantia Private School is a privately-funded school located in the upmarket urban area of Constantia with an array of schooling resources ranging from massive sports grounds to an Olympic swimming pool and advanced electronic teaching devices and tools. It is ten kilometres from Natasha's home. She was placed in the school alongside Participant 6, Taylor.

Asked whether she was familiar with a diverse primary school experience, Natasha remarked:

No, the school[s] I did my TP placement at reminded me of the primary school I attended because it was a fee-paying school. Funds and Non-Profit-Organisations (NPOs) made many donations to the school. In the school I attended, we were learners from the working class and [came from] unemployed home [s].

Asked whether she had a diverse high school experience, she said:

No, I attended a fee-paying [high school], and it was located in an urban area. The school I attended was diverse; however, it lacked resources and had no sports facilities like the last school which I attended. We needed to use a local field in order to train for athletics.

Her opinion on placing student-teachers in diverse contexts was as follows:

It is extremely important to me to do my teaching practice in diverse environments. This is for the student-teacher to enhance their abilities to teach under any circumstance and practice the development of their own methodologies. Teaching at diverse schools can contribute to being able to teach under good or bad circumstances, e.g., writing on a chalkboard or presenting your work on a smartboard. I believe teachers should be equipped to be innovative and creative at any school they teach, even if it is a well-resourced, private or underprivileged school.

5.4.11 Participant 11: Ragmat: “A diverse TP experience is a great learning curve”

Ragmat is a 24-year-old self-identified Coloured female whose mother-tongue is Afrikaans, not standard Afrikaans but Kaapse [Capetonian] Afrikaans, a mixture of Netherlands and Afrikaans dialects used specifically by people of colour within the Cape Town region. She started her ITE degree programme within the Faculty of Education at the CPUT on the Mowbray campus in January 2019. Ragmat resides in Groenvlei in Landsdowne, which is marked by poverty, crime and gangsterism. Pandora Primary School, a low-income, fee-paying Quintile 5 school, was the first school where she completed WIL. Most of its learners are from townships outside of Landsdowne in lower-class communities. A multicultural and racial cohort of learners exists within Pandora Primary School, where most are Coloured and Black. The co-ed school caters for learners from Grades R to 7. The first school was approximately five kilometres from Ragmat's home, and she could walk to and from it.

No TP was conducted in the second year of study due to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

In year three, Ragmat asked to be placed at Begonia Primary School, a non-fee-paying Quintile 1 school in Hanover Park, an area internationally known for its street gangs and violence. This non-fee-paying school is also within walking distance of the student's home. The Coloured and Black South African learners are from impoverished homes; therefore, the school provides learners with a meal during break time. It is located along one of the transport hubs on the Cape Flats, allowing learners to commute to school easily.

In the final year of study, Ragmat opted for a placement at the public co-educational Greensward Primary School in the Belthorn Estate area. This relatively small school is a fee-paying Quintile 5 school located 2.9 kilometres from her home. The public school follows the national curriculum (CAPS), and learners are encouraged to be involved in various co-curricular activities such as track athletics, table tennis, soccer, cricket and Spellcheck. Belthorn is situated in a middle-class neighbourhood with learners from a working-class background.

Asked whether she was familiar with a diverse primary school experience, Ragmat commented:

Yes. At certain schools, some teachers were not as professional compared to the teachers I was exposed to at primary school.

She added that she did not have a diverse high school experience.

On placing student-teachers in diverse contexts, Ragmat said: *"A diverse Teaching Practice experience is a great learning curve. You are able to adapt your methods to accommodate the learners' needs."*

5.4.12 Participant 12: Phelisa: *"There's a lot of challenges linked to a diverse TP experience - one has to be strong and work hard to accommodate everyone"*

The next student-teacher, Phelisa, is a 21-year-old self-identified Black African female whose first language is isiXhosa. She originates from the rural township of Grabouw 62 kilometres from the Mowbray campus. Phelisa started at the CPUT within the Faculty of Education in 2019 when she registered for the BEd. Intermediate Phase degree programme. She selected Mandoza Primary School as her first TP. Mandoz Primary is a non-fee-paying Quintile 2 school based in an impoverished Black African township. Its communication medium is the isiXhosa home language since all learners are from the surrounding area of Philippi in the farming area of St Browns Farms. Philippi is a low-class area with makeshift shacks.

From the time Phelisa moved to the Cape Town area, she experienced issues with housing and eventually received a space in a university residence. During her first TP experience, she lived with her friend in the Philippi area 5.3 kilometres from the school. In her second year, Phelisa did not complete the TP programme due to the COVID-19 regulations, which restricted certain activities, such as face-to-face on-site learning in a school classroom. An alternative online teaching practicum was designed for her cohort of students.

In 2021, she was placed at Uncedo Primary School in the rural region of Grabouw to complete her third year of TP experience. This non-fee-paying Quintile 1 school is also situated in a Black African township and caters to African learners from the surrounding township. The medium of teaching and learning is isiXhosa, the learners' home language. The advantage of this school was that it took Phelisa seven minutes to walk to it.

In the final year of study, Phelisa experienced a more-or-less, diverse school when she asked to be placed at Starlight Junior Primary School within walking distance of the residential flats opposite the university. By this time, she had been granted space in the residence. Starlight Junior Primary is a fee-paying Quintile 5 school. She encountered a diverse range of learners whose home language was English instead of isiXhosa. Most are from middle-to-upper working-class areas, and their parents are working-class citizens. The school also offers a wide range of educational and human resources.

Asked whether she was familiar with a diverse primary school experience, she answered: "Yes, *my African township school was very strict and different from multi-racial schools.*" When I asked whether Phelisa was familiar with a diverse high school experience, she remarked: "Yes, *I went to an African township school, so being at a multi-racial school came with many challenges.*"

Her opinion on placing student-teachers in diverse contexts was as follows: "*There's a lot of challenges linked to a diverse TP experience; one has to be strong and work hard to accommodate everyone.*"

5.4.13 Participant 13: Lynn: *"My perception of diversity within the school environment is that I find it very interesting"*

Lynn is 21 years of age and self-identifies as a Coloured female whose first language is Afrikaans. She registered for the Bachelor in Intermediate Phase degree in 2019. She originates from East London, where she completed her primary and high schooling. East London is a city on the Indian Ocean in South Africa's Eastern Cape. Also called Buffalo City by locals, it is 1,000 kilometres from Cape Town. Lynn relocated to Cape Town to pursue her dream of becoming a primary school teacher. When she entered university, she did not know anyone. Lynn received university housing in proximity to the Mowbray campus and selected various schools with the same type of profile in her four-year WIL programme.

In her first year, she was based at Treeville Primary School, a former Whites-only fee-paying Quintile 5 school in an upmarket urban residential area. There is strong demand by Coloured and Black African learners for places because of its prestigious reputation in academics, sports and cultural activities. Learners at this co-educational primary school come from middle to upper-income areas, and the school has good human and educational resources to cater for learners' academic and physical needs. The annual school fees in 2023 were R10 300 (Grades 1-7). The school offers mini cricket, mini tennis, an art club, an orchestra, athletics, a book club, choir, coding and robotics, and speech and drama classes. This kind of school often comes with a rich history of tradition maintained by a very involved PTA. Lynn selected this school based on its geographical location, which is 5.7 kilometres from the residence.

In Lynn's second year, all students resorted to an online TP programme and did not enter public schools.

In the third year, Lynn asked to be placed at Servamus Primary School, a former Whites-only school. The school was approximately 2.8 kilometres from the residence. Although similar to the one she was based at in year one, many learners were from middle-class homes.

In her final year of the degree programme, Lynn selected Starlight Junior Primary School, which is based in an urban area and is a fee-paying school. The distance between the university residence and the school was one kilometre.

In response to the question of whether she was familiar with diverse primary and high school experiences, she commented "No". Lynn expressed the following views on placing student-teachers in diverse contexts:

My perception of diversity within the school environment is that I find it very interesting and good for the learners to be in a diverse environment. The learners will be able to learn about the different cultures.

5.4.14 Participant 14: Johanna: “The environment and the resources a school has access to affect a learner’s learning greatly”

Final year student-teacher Johanna is a 21-year-old self-identified Coloured female whose first language is Afrikaans. I would describe Johanna as a straight talker who is not shy to voice her views and opinions. She had an openness to her character and response to my questions. She registered in 2019 for the IP BEd. initial teacher degree programme. Johanna comes from Hanover Park, an area well known for gangsterism, underage children being involved in gangsterism, and high levels of underage pregnancy, illiteracy and unemployment. She completed her first year of TP at Pandora Primary School, a fee-paying Quintile 5 school in the suburb of Lansdowne, 2.8 kilometres from home. Public transport (buses or taxis) passes along the main road to the school.

Johanna did not complete a second year of TP in a primary school as the departmental teaching practicum programme was conducted online.

In the third year, Johanna was placed in Contemporary Primary School, a fee-paying Quintile 5 school 1.1 kilometres from her home and close to the first school (Pandora Primary School). Both schools have a racially mixed group of children from neighbouring townships and marginalised communities. Contemporary Primary offers sports and extra-curricular activities; most learners are from working-class homes.

In her final year, Johanna consciously decided to enter a different suburb (Penlyn Estate), which is home to middle- to upper-class people of colour (Coloured and Black South Africans). She was based at the fee-paying Greensward Primary School, 2.6 kilometres from home. The data thus indicates that a shift out of her comfort zone with respect to her professional learning took place within the final year of TP.

Asked whether she was familiar with diverse primary and high school experiences, she made the following comment:

Yes, I have. The school I attended did not have access to many resources apart from textbooks. This year (2022), I was fortunate enough to complete my teaching practice at a school with unlimited resources (a projector in every classroom, a sound system, textbooks for each learner, free Wi-Fi, etc.); it was an exciting experience and challenging my creative side.

In terms of placing student-teachers in diverse contexts, she remarked:

I’ve learnt that the environment and the resources a school has access to greatly affect a learner’s learning or cognitive growth. Being exposed to many resources helps the teacher to cater to different learning styles that the learners may have, resulting in learners grasping and understanding a concept easier, compared to a learner with limited resources and being forced to learn all the content in the same manner, specifically if it’s a learning style that does not cater to the learning style of the learner.

5.4.15 Participant 15: Nkosana: *“I think it is very important for teaching practice students to experience all types of schooling environments”*

Nkosana can be described as a proud, soon-to-be teacher graduate who loved talking about her diverse TP learning experience over the four-year degree period. She is a 27-year-old Black African female whose first language is isiXhosa. Nkosana speaks English fluently and has a relatively good command of Afrikaans. She enrolled in the IP BEd. Programme in 2019 and chose a school in the township of Khayelitsha in her first year. Nkosana did obtain a space in the university residence and stayed with family in the area close to the school. Khayelitsha is a township on the Cape Flats and is one of the fastest-growing townships in South Africa.

The first school where Nkosana completed TP, Simphiwe Primary School, is a non-fee-paying Quintile 1 Black African township school funded by the state. The mother tongue language of all learners is isiXhosa and English is the First Additional Language. The school is part of the National School Nutrition Programme, which provides a daily meal.

No in-school TP programme ensued in the second year due to COVID-19, and students relied on an online TP programme for their professional development.

In her third year, Nkosana was placed in Mhlapo Primary School, a non-fee-paying Quintile 1 school serving the Khayelitsha township. The approximate distance between the first-year and third-year school is 3.1 kilometres. Schools one and three are very similar.

In the final year of her studies, Nkosana received university accommodation, which caused her to select a school in the Mowbray area. However, she was the only student-teacher who asked to be placed at two different schools over the ten-week TP period for all final years.

According to the TP programme, a final-year student-teacher may first select any primary school to observe the preparations a week before learners commence the new academic year. In the second week, students observe learners' acclimatisation to the new grade, teacher and classroom space, and new classroom management strategies. Nkosana spent the eight-block TP periods from 4 April to 29 April and 18 July to 12 August at two different schools. The first session was at Cliftonville Adventist Primary School, an independent school with a faith-based culture 0.81 kilometres from the university residence. During the second session, she was based at Elite Nobility College Junior School, an upmarket fee-paying public school where school fees for 2023 were set at R53 300. This school is four kilometres from the university residence. It is an upper-middle-class, high-achieving school in a previously (pre-1994) Whites-only area of the Western Cape. While such schools declared themselves open to all races from 1994, restrictive criteria were put in place, such as living in the surrounding area. The high tuition fees also exclude many learners. Most staff and learners at Elite Nobility are White, with a few Black African and Coloured learners.

Asked whether she was familiar with a diverse primary experience, Nkosana responded:

Yes, I was placed at township schools in my first and third years. This was a first for me as I had never been exposed to township school life before. I went to a Model C Primary School.

Questioned on her familiarity with a diverse high school experience, she said:

Yes, I was placed at township schools in my first and third years. This was a first for me as I had never been exposed to township school life before. I went to a Private High School.

Her opinion on placing student-teachers in diverse contexts was:

I think it is very important for teaching practice students to experience all types of schooling environments. This was the main reason I chose township schools in my first and third years. I believe the resilience I gained at both schools gave me the tough skin I needed for the schools I was placed at this year. They prepared me very well.

5.5.16 Participant 16: Bonga: “A diverse TP experience is challenging but the best experience a student can gift themselves”

One of the most talkative participants was Bonga, a 22-year-old self-identified Black African female teacher whose first language is isiXhosa, who moved to Cape Town for her studies. Bonga originates from the Eastern Cape Province. Like her classmates, she started her undergraduate degree programme within the Faculty of Education at the CPUT in 2019.

In her first year, she selected a rural farm school in the farmland of Stellenbosch for TP. This public primary school in Plankenbrug falls within the Cape Winelands District Municipality. It is a non-fee-paying Quintile 1 school that mainly caters for learners from the surrounding farmlands whose parents are farmworkers and recipients of the child support grant from the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA). She stayed with her family during her TP session.

In the 2020 academic year, Bonga and her classmates completed an online TP programme due to the global COVID-19 restrictions, which prohibited HEIs from placing student-teachers in schools for on-site TP.

In year three of her studies, she asked to be placed in a multi-racial, multilingual school within the area of Blue Downs named Toscana Primary. The urban school uses English as the language of teaching and learning. The diversity represents different racial groups (Coloured and Black South African), different languages (English, Afrikaans and isiXhosa), varied socio-economic strata (lower-class to middle-class) and religious groups (Islam and Christianity) from working-class backgrounds. Toscana Primary is a fee-paying school. The estimated distance between the first and third schools is 24.3 kilometres.

In her final year of study, Bonga requested that she return to Toscana Primary School to complete TP due to the possibility of being offered employment once she qualified, as school management had expressed satisfaction with her previous performance and indicated that this was possible. Asked whether she was familiar with a diverse primary school experience, Bonga observed:

Yes. In 2019, I was placed at Khoza Public Primary School. This school was a different setting compared to the schools I have attended. Khoza was an isiXhosa school and was mostly

populated by Xhosa-speaking students. I have never been to a school with no diversity in terms of ethnicity. Also, most teachers were young, and during my primary school years, most of my teachers were mature of age. The school did not have adequate resources and facilities for sports and recreational activities. The students who wanted to participate in sports would take a 10-minute walk to the nearby stadium and train with the appointed teacher. The school was also in a very dangerous environment, and the learners were exposed to a lot of violence, which I had witnessed at times happen right in front of the school. Community members were not at all respectful to the school environment and, at times, posed a threat to the school and students. Certain situations would force the school to take an emergency dismissal because of a threatening situation within the community that would need the school to be cleared out. I have never experienced going to school and experiencing fear for my life. I had never had to question the legitimacy of security because the community is dangerous in general. This was a new experience but a great exposure in comprehending how some students from different schools and districts rise above their circumstances and become champions.

Asked whether she was familiar with a diverse high school experience, she commented: "Yes. Same as above regarding Khoza Public Primary School."

Bonga expressed the following in relation to placing student-teachers in diverse contexts:

As much as this is very challenging, this is the best experience a student could give themselves. When you go to a diverse set of schools, you are fully exposed to different settings with different types of students. It is such a great learning moment as it has made me fall in love with my career and handle every moment as a gem. Being at a school like Khoza and moving into a school like Toscana, I first-hand experienced the vast difference that there is in society. As a teacher, it has moulded me to be empathetic in the smallest of things as, when a student falls asleep in class, I do not immediately assume that they are rebellious. The first thing that comes to mind is their home setting. Children are energetic, so why would a child be falling asleep during class? Could it be that something happened at home last night, and the student could not sleep?

I ask myself these kinds of questions to assess how I would deal with that situation. Khoza Primary School made me realise that students are not problematic because they are horrible. It is because of the situations they have found themselves in and their exposures within their communities. I have never allowed myself to be emotionally attached to my students during TP because I know I am only there for a while. I didn't want them to form that kind of relationship with me, only for me to leave them a few weeks later. However, I made great observations and believe I have adequate tools to step into a classroom. If I had never experienced different kinds of school settings, I would have never received so much experience. Khoza Public Primary School, because they lacked resources, I learnt to be creative and create my material. At Toscana Primary School, a well-advanced school, I learnt that I need to prepare for my classroom THOROUGHLY. Now, I am a creative and thorough teacher!

Her opinion on placing student-teachers in diverse contexts was:

Toscana was a great pleasure, and it challenged me in ways that I needed to prove myself before I was trusted. Regarding educators, the school had only one Black teacher in the foundation phase, whereas in Khoza, there wasn't any diversity. At Toscana, I took a while to engage with teachers; however, they were very pleasant. The students were definitely the

best part. Most of these students have never had an Xhosa-speaking teacher, so it took them a while to understand how I could teach English Home Language and a little Afrikaans sometimes. This was very interesting as these students were smart! Monitoring every single word, listening to my pronunciation and questioning a few things I had to say, some with the justification of “Ah, Miss, you don’t speak English at home”. As a teacher, this is an opportunity for one to take offence as you feel undermined, BUT! I saw it as an opportunity to educate my students on diversity and capabilities despite what someone else sees outside their background. By the time I left, I had such a great relationship with those students, and I couldn’t decide more on my favourite student setting between Khoza and Toscana. They are all my precious gems.

5.4.17 Participant 17: Patience: “No, I have no experience of working in diverse TP contexts”

Patience decided to leave her hometown in the rural Eastern Cape for Cape Town to study to become a teacher. She is a 23-year-old self-identified Black African female, and her first language is isiPedi. She started her teachers' degree programme in 2019 at CPUT.

Her first TP placement school selection was Sambo Primary School, a non-fee-paying Quintile 2 school in a Black African township in the Strand area of Cape Town. She indicated that this school was the only one she knew and was only a few minutes from her residence. She could walk to school, which was convenient and saved money. This co-educational school is attended by predominately Black African learners in Grades R to 7. The community is an impoverished one, with many low-income homes. Many learners experience social ills (gangsterism, malnutrition, and unemployed parents).

Patience did not undergo a teaching practicum placement in a school in her second year of study but was part of an online TP programme due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

During her third year in the ITE teaching practicum programme, Patience requested to be placed within a similar township school in the Strand area, JCA Phala Primary, a no-fee Quintile 2 co-educational school. The distance between the first and third schools is 1.5 kilometres. Her experience at JCA Phala Primary School was fruitful. The dynamics of the first- and third-years' TP were the same.

In her final year, Patience chose Umfundo Primary School, also a no-fee paying Quintile 1 public primary school in the township of Strand, where the medium of teaching and learning is isiXhosa. Again, the schooling dynamics were the same as in years one and three.

The above data reveals that Patience hailed from the Eastern Cape, where she was familiar with isiXhosa. She selected three TP placement schools that fit the narrative of her own schooling. Asked whether she was familiar with a diverse primary school experience, she made the following comment: “No, I have no experience in working in diverse TP contexts.” She added that she was not familiar with a diverse high school experience. Her view on placing student-teachers in diverse contexts was that it would enable them “To gain experience and be exposed to different teaching style [s] and environment [s].”

Thus, although she was aware of the benefits of diverse environments, she remained within the area of Strand for all her years of TP.

5.4.18 Participant 18: Khethiwe: “Teaching in a diverse environment gave me a broader view about the different backgrounds of learners”

Khethiwe, a soft-spoken student-teacher with a humble nature, is a 35-year-old female self-identified Black African whose first language is isiXhosa. She enrolled in the ITE programme in 2019 after working at various corporations.

In her first TP programme, she requested to be placed at Chrimbo Primary School in the Strand area, a no-fee Quintile 3 public primary school. She selected the school based on a recommendation by a fellow student-teacher (fourth-year student-teacher) who informed her about the friendliness of the staff and their accommodation of student-teachers. A further factor was that her stepdaughter (Khethiwe is married to her second husband) was a learner there, and she could accompany her to and from school. She worked with girls and boys from the surrounding Black African township, many of whose parents were unemployed.

In the second year, there was an online TP programme due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the third year of TP, Khethiwe asked to be placed at Mahlangu Primary School, a non-fee-paying Quintile 3 public school in Strand's Black African township. isiXhosa was the medium of teaching and learning. The distance between the first and third schools is 21 kilometres.

In her final year of TP placement, Khethiwe was based at Umfundo Primary School in the township area of Strand.

Asked whether she was familiar with a diverse primary school experience, Khethiwe responded: “Yes, *I cannot recall seeing a student-teacher. Maybe it is because the school was in a rural area far from the university where student-teachers were placed for TP.*” Asked whether she was familiar with a diverse high school experience, she said: “Yes. *Student-teachers brought letters to the schools. The school principal would introduce the student-teachers at the assembly.*”

The above responses reflect the lack of visibility with respect to seeing first-hand student-teachers entering schools for TP may have been due to logistical factors rather than a reflection of the absence of student-teachers. Also, in her second response her clarification highlights the role of administrative processes in introducing student-teachers to the school community.

Khethiwe expressed the following views on placing student-teachers in diverse contexts:

Teaching in a diverse environment give[s] me a broader view about the different backgrounds of learners. It gives an experience of how you teach in a diverse classroom and how to accommodate all students. The environment of each school differ[s] in how the management does things like the culture of the school.

5.4.19 Participant 19: Adelaide: “A diverse TP experience moulds you into becoming a strong independent teacher and teaches you how to control a class in any environment or diverse context”

Adelaide is a 26-year-old self-identified Coloured female whose first language is Afrikaans. Unlike the rest of the purposefully selected participants in this study, she started her undergraduate ITE programme at the CPUT in the 2016 academic year when I was a Junior Lecturer within the faculty and was not responsible for overseeing TP.

Therefore, Adelaide was a unique participant who experienced various TP models over seven years of being enrolled in the programme.

The student-teacher indicated that she completed her first year of TP at Bonnie Primary School because the bus terminus was in front of the school. Bonnie Primary is a fee-paying Quintile 5 co-educational school in Austinville within the City of Cape Town. Adelaide indicated that she could safely travel from her home in Blackheath to the school and noted that she was not familiar with the area where it was located, even though she lived in that area. The school exhibited diversity in terms of the learners' race (Coloured and Black South African), languages spoken (English, Afrikaans and isiXhosa), socio-economic status (lower- to middle-class) and religious groups (Islam and Christianity), with the learners coming from working-class backgrounds. The school is co-ed, and learners are encouraged to participate in co-curricular activities.

In her second year (2017), Adelaide completed TP at Hilton Primary School and Peakville Primary School, only minutes from her first TP placement. She described both schools as 'ghetto', a term used to indicate an unsafe environment. These schools are based within predominantly Coloured communities, and the medium of communication is Cape Flats Afrikaans. Learners come from disadvantaged communities where gangsterism, unemployment and drug abuse are rife.

In her third year of the ITE programme, Adelaide was placed at Donovan Primary, again close to home. The Quintile 5 fee-paying school caters for Coloured and Black African learners from the surrounding communities. The language of communication is English, even though many learners' home language is Afrikaans or isiXhosa.

Adelaide completed her final-year TP at Toscana Primary School near Blue Downs, where she now resides. Toscana Primary is a publicly-funded school with a diverse cohort of learners (Coloured and Black South African) from the surrounding Coloured communities of Blue Downs, Dennemere, Kleinvlei and Gaylee, and the nearby Black African township, Mfuleni. The school the student-teacher was based at is in the same vicinity, less than five kilometres apart.

Adelaide said that in 2018, a compulsory segment of the Intermediate and Senior Phase degree programme was placement in a Special Needs School environment for three weeks. She selected Annie's Special Needs School near Kuilsriver Primary School.

Asked whether she was familiar with a diverse primary school experience, Adelaide said:

Yes, Hilton and Peakville Primary were situated in a low-class ghetto environment which involved gangsterism and drugs. Many of the learners showed gangster numbers with their fingers at Peakville Primary. They were undisciplined towards teachers to the point where a secretary and teacher told me it was okay to swear [curse] them out because they were already used to it. My primary school years were totally different compared to these schools. It was safer, more playful, fun, and a good learning environment.

In response to the question on whether she was familiar with a diverse high school experience, she commented:

Using an online word cloud-generating application (Free Word Cloud Generator), the frequencies of the words used in the responses to the questionnaire survey offered insight into the varied biographies of the participants, and their background and foregrounding of conceptions of diversity became evident. The ten primary keywords emanating from the data are listed in the table below.

Table 5.2: Questionnaire Survey Word Frequency

Frequency	Word
24	Different
12	School
11	Students
11	Learners
9	Diverse
9	Teacher
6	Experience
6	Diversity
3	Important
2	Adapt

The word cloud analysis provided insight into the themes and concepts most frequently mentioned by the student-teachers, aiding in the interpretation of their perceptions of diversity within different schooling contexts. The findings from both the word cloud and the accompanying table and figure collectively indicate a consistent preference among participants for familiarity and community connection despite exposure to various educational settings. However, the contention obtained from the descriptive data reveals that the student-teachers were aware of the broad range of conceptions making up diversity. These students were able to give examples such as *“faith, language, medium of teaching and learning, diversity of learners in school, multicultural conceptions, extra curriculum activities, physical resources, geographic location, socio-economic class, multiracialism”* which suggests even though students chose to select schools close to their convenience living quarters, they nevertheless came to see the multiplicities of issues of diversity they would confront. The following two chapters (six and seven) offer deeper insights into the conception of diversity within the ITE programme at the CPUT.

5.6 Synthesis of chapter

This chapter presented the demographic and biographical profiles of the nineteen final-year IP participants, drawing on their responses to the questionnaire survey. The qualitative narratives were crafted into 19 carefully constructed vignettes that encapsulate not only the student conceptions of views about diversity but also reflect on students' lived experiences as they negotiated the ITE curriculum processes over time. The data reflects that even though they were presented with the same ITE official curriculum, the students' lived experience of the curriculum mediated their interpretation of TP schools through the lens of their own diversity. The detailed insights respond to

the descriptive level one critical question: ***What*** are student-teachers' lived experiences ***in*** diverse Teaching Practicum contexts?

This data reported by the student-teachers offers a range of initial vantages on the nature of what constitutes diversity in school:

During the initial stage of data production, student-teachers provided a comprehensive set of descriptive data that offered diverse perspectives on the nature of what constitutes diversity within schools. The reported data encompassed various facets, shedding light on the multi-faceted dimensions of diversity in educational settings.

- **Faith and religion:** Student-teachers explored the diversity related to faith and religion within schools. This could include differences in religious practices and beliefs, integrating various faiths within the school community, and how the national learner CAPS workbooks for a subject such as Life Skills expect professional teachers to be versed in various religions.
- **Language and medium of teaching and learning:** The student-teachers examined the linguistic diversity present in schools, considering the languages spoken by students, faculty, and staff. Additionally, they explored the varied mediums of teaching and learning, acknowledging the impact of language on educational experiences, which is vital in quality teaching and learning.
- **Diversity of learners:** The data at this stage highlighted the diverse profiles of learners within schools, encompassing differences in learning styles, abilities, and needs. Student-teachers consider the unique challenges and opportunities that arise from a student body with a wide range of characteristics. They note their lesson planning to include the varied typology of learners in their planned lessons.
- **Multicultural conceptions:** Student-teachers delved into the multicultural aspects of education, exploring how different cultural backgrounds contribute to the overall learning environment. This could include discussions on cultural awareness, sensitivity, and the integration of diverse cultural perspectives into the curriculum. Those student-teachers who entered schools, especially private schools, were more inclined to comment on this segment in the findings (refer to Chapter 8).
- **Extra-curricular activities:** The reported data touched on diversity in extra-curricular activities, acknowledging the importance of offering various options that cater to students' diverse interests and talents. The student-teachers also highlighted the importance of learning a form of extra-curricular activity at the undergraduate level to stand a better chance of becoming employed (post-formal certification).
- **Physical Resources:** Student-teachers considered the diversity in physical resources available in schools, including facilities, technology, and learning materials, in drawing a distinct line of what resources are available in township schools instead of urban previously White-schools. Recognising and addressing disparities in these resources is crucial for promoting an inclusive learning environment, which student-teachers consider an obstacle to the teaching and learning process.
- **Geographic location:** The geographical diversity of schools was also explored, recognising that schools in different locations may face unique challenges and opportunities. Urban, suburban, and rural settings may present distinct contexts for education since each Metro is plagued by its own complex set of schooling challenges.

- **Socio-economic class:** The data included considerations of socio-economic diversity within schools, acknowledging the impact of financial resources on learners' access to educational opportunities and support services.
- **Multiracialism:** Student-teachers acknowledged and examined the racial diversity within schools, emphasising the importance of creating an inclusive and equitable environment that celebrates and respects learners from various racial backgrounds, which can be done via lesson construction and explication.

Overall, the student-teachers early-stage data production provided a rich and nuanced understanding of the multi-faceted nature of diversity in schools, encompassing a broad spectrum of dimensions that contribute to the complex tapestry of the educational experience. This comprehensive perspective is valuable for informing strategies and approaches to promote inclusivity and equity in educational settings, further outlined in the next few chapters.

The commentary made by the student-teachers highlights that while the students' initial comments provide valuable insights into their perceptions of diversity within their school environments, their observations may still be influenced by their familiarity with the survey methodology or their early engagement with the study, suggesting the potential for deeper insights as their participation progresses. Nevertheless, rich insights are gained into their interpretations of reading the school context. It may be argued that this form of understanding that student-teachers displayed was an abstract theoretical conceptualisation about diversity (a cerebral understanding), but it does not necessarily depict how student-teachers feel, act and respond to these conceptions at an experiential, deeper personal level. This latter level is what is probed further in the next chapter.

The students seem to suggest that even though many chose schools that seemingly were in close proximity geographically to their places of residence or similar to their own biographical legacies and cultural worldviews over the period of their ITE studies, they embraced the opportunity of seeing the unfolding of the conception of a diverse schooling context even in their familiar spaces. This chapter examined the individual selection of TP placement schools and a broad overview of student-teachers' experiences in these schools with reference to contextual, historical, social, religious, economic and political influences that shaped the participants' lived realities and how this influenced their exposure to diverse learning experiences at the different TP placement schools during the four-year degree programme. The chapter suggests that students have become sensitised to the conception of diversity through their TP placement choices. This might be considered the success of the ITE curriculum to initiate this reflective sensitisation. However, is sensitisation enough?

The following chapter deals more in-depth with the student's engagement with diversity issues, interlinking with the broader social structures within a critical phenomenological approach. It looks more qualitatively at the kinds of experiences that student-teachers had as they negotiated the multiple levels of university ITE and school curriculum, governance, management and classroom pedagogy. The presence of key shapers like the mentor teachers, the school management teams and the university supervisors assessing their TP practice are explored here in more depth. **Chapter six** presents the data from the level two evaluative thematic analysis of the two one-on-one interviews with the participants on their understanding and experience of diversity in the South African

context. It connects their lived experiences of their own prior experiences of primary and secondary schooling and their home environments with their formal ITE curriculum (within the university and the TP schools).

CHAPTER SIX

CONNECTING EXPERIENCES OF LEARNING ABOUT DIVERSITY IN THE DIFFERENT CONTEXTS WITH THE ITE CURRICULUM

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter described the contextual, historical, social, religious, economic and political influences that shaped the participants' lived realities and how this influenced their exposure to diverse learning experiences at the different TP placement schools during the four-year degree programme. This chapter provides a more in-depth interpretation of the nineteen student-teachers' lived experiences within the array of primary schools over the four-year degree programme and the interrelatedness to *the learnt ITE curriculum*. It is arranged around themes as indicators of selected types of learning that the participants regarded as influential in their diverse TP experience to respond to the second critical question, namely: *How do student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse Teaching Practicum contexts connect with their experiences of the ITE curriculum?* Two one-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant. The interviews revealed that diversity was interpreted as differences within a group of people, such as race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, and abilities. A handful of the participants extended their interpretation of diversity by acknowledging that promoting diversity in primary schooling is linked to a broader social justice agenda since it encompasses accepting and celebrating these differences, promoting equal opportunities for all regardless of their background. Through the dialogues shared with the student-teachers on the concept of diversity, it became evident that this is an important concept in promoting inclusivity and equality in society, especially through TP within a diverse range of schools.

The chapter reports on the two one-on-one interview sessions with a total of fifty-one questions aimed at gaining insight into the participants' primary and high schooling experience, their family's views on diversity, and their teaching practicum experiences in various contexts during their ITE programme. Most importantly, I gained insight into their formal curriculum exposure to diverse aspects *within* the HEI Faculty of Education, where their learning to become a teacher programme influenced their views.

In seeking to understand student-teachers' lived experiences, views, and opinions on TP in diverse schooling contexts, I learned that students come to university with multiple lived experiences and exposure to diversity. One of the challenges during data production was the participants' linguistic ability to coherently express their understanding of the concept of diversity and provide concrete examples. Nonetheless, each could comment on the phases of their lives, their lived and schooling contexts, people, and diversity. Furthermore, they offered insight into what makes people and contexts different and how they came to understand these differences through their ITE programme. This data production strategy also revealed that the students were becoming more at ease at expressing their views in the research data production process. The interview method also provided elaborations and clarifications that were useful for producing rich data.

South Africa's Higher Education Qualifications Framework describes an ITE programme as "a purposeful and structured set of learning experiences that leads to a qualification" (Department of Higher Education and Training,

2007, p. 6). By deeply scrutinising the data, I constructed themes that emerged from the participants' lived experiences about what constitutes diversity in the various TP schools and how these experiences connected or not with what was learned during their ITE programme (curriculum) at the CPUT. I thus compared two sets of experiences: 1) their experiences in TP Schools and 2) their experiences of the formal curriculum.

6.2 Overview of the Chapter

The data in this chapter is presented in line with the nine themes that emerged from the transcripts of the semi-structured one-on-one interviews. In understanding critical incidents and routine occurrences of what student-teachers link to their understanding of diversity in the various schooling contexts, I also highlight the subtle elements of critical phenomenological experiences, which provide insight into lived experiences of power dynamics which became evident in the authentic contexts wherein students-teachers were placed during their learning to become professional teachers.

The participants shared their experiences of the themes listed below. In my interpretation, I present divergent and convergent verbatim excerpts from the interviews in order to gain deeper insight into the research phenomenon. The themes emerged from the three stages in which the participants engaged with the study phenomenon.

Table 6.1: Stages of data production and thematic foci

Stage one: Experiences of diversity before university: At home, at school, and within the community				
Theme one: Diversity begins at home: A complexity of emotions	Theme two: Conceptions of becoming a professional teacher: Reflections on past teachers		Theme three: Choosing to become a professional teacher	
Stage two: Experiences of diversity within the university				
Theme four: Initial formal stage of learning about diversity				
4.1 Inclusive Education and Professional Studies	4.2 Rudimentary interpretations of diversity, equality and inclusion	4.3 Central comprehension of diversity in the South African context		
Stage three: Experiences of diversity within TP schools				
Theme five: Choosing the first Teaching Practicum school	Theme six: Day-to-day complexities of teaching in South African classrooms [school]	Theme seven: Student perspectives on expectations of the National Teaching Practice Policy Framework: Duration,	Theme eight: Roles and Responsibilities of Stakeholders in TP Placement School:	Theme nine: Typology of Primary School Learners experienced [school]

		opportunities and challenges [policy]	Confronting Dynamics [school and university]	

In carefully constructing qualitative themes underpinned by a critical phenomenological lens, I started by reading and analysing the verbatim transcripts while considering the key concepts of critical phenomenology, such as power, oppression, and diversity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2009). Critical research differs from pure phenomenology (Van Manen, 1990) because critical researchers focus more on the context than the individual experiencing the phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2009). Searching for patterns and similarities in the data led to key themes, and I carefully considered how the participants experienced and navigated these themes. An iterative process of coding and recoding to identify themes took place, and I ensured that I kept a careful record of my constructed codes and their definitions. Thinking back on the in-depth interviews, I relied on the researcher journal used during the many discussions.

I had to be reflexive and aware of my positionality and how it influenced my analysis. As the researcher, I fully recognised that I am integral to the meaning-making process. Since I was working with a specific marginalised racial population of which I am a member, I knew that it was imperative for me to reflect on my own personal narrative and how my paradigm shapes my role as a researcher. As noted, I am also the Teaching Practice Coordinator of this course within the Faculty of Education at the CPUT. Therefore, I had to consider how my biases and beliefs shaped the interpretation of the data. I had to be open to modifying my themes if they did not fully capture the complexities and nuances of the data and the lived experiences that were explored.

6.3 Stage one: Experiences of diversity before university: At home, at school and within the community

6.3.1 Theme one: Diversity begins at home: A complexity of emotions associated with becoming a teacher

The student-teachers noted that, on receiving their letters of acceptance to the ITE programme at the CPUT on the Mowbray campus, they experienced an array of emotions ranging from feelings of happiness to being overwhelmed and being excited to apprehension. A major concern was their parents' views on the safety of the higher education environment. As Lynn, who hails from the Eastern Cape, put it: *"My mom wasn't a fan of it [moving to Cape Town for studies], but my dad was. He was ready for me to leave. Yeah, they were very excited."* Parental fears impact students' uncertainty about studying outside their immediate borders. Twelve of the 19 participants already lived in the Western Cape. They comprised three self-identified Black South Africans, eight Coloureds and one Indian. Seven students resided in different provinces, namely the Eastern Cape, Gauteng and Limpopo and had to relocate to a region that many were completely unfamiliar and uncomfortable with. Furthermore, they would be living and studying in new settings.

The following excerpts highlight the participants' complex emotions with regard to being accepted into the ITE programme:

Athandwa: *I was nervous of starting to [be] adapting to a new context, a different context, that I'm not used to, [almost like] a high school context.*

Zafeer: *In the beginning, it was mostly that I was excited I was gonna become a teacher, and then secondly, I was anxious because I didn't know what to really expect.*

Bonga: *The journey of becoming a teacher, I was very anxious. I remember when we started varsity, I think. After a few weeks of just starting, we were already sent through for lesson collections just after a few weeks when we started. And that made me so anxious. I was super nervous but, at the same time, excited. I felt too blessed for the opportunity when I realised the impact of being a teacher and how, like the learners, I received [perceived myself] as a teacher. It made me so grateful and so, [also] overwhelmed with what was to come in the future.*

Amina: *So, I felt excited because I was starting a new journey in life. At the same time, I felt nervous because I didn't know what to expect, but I also felt happiness because I got accepted for the career choice that I chose.*

Lebo: *So, there was happiness for me that I'm in a university that I needed to be. Yeah, from my matric [year], I wanted to be somewhere far from home since I passed matric, but I didn't go by the right time. I passed matric because of some circumstances, so by the time I arrived here [from Limpopo] in 2018, you know it was a big happiness in my heart and joy.*

The participants experienced positive emotions, and their acceptance in a university programme was a cause for celebration. They were excited about experiencing new encounters and people. However, Johanna, who suffers from a mild anxiety disorder, said that the news impacted her health: *"I was very nervous when I got accepted into the university because I suffer from anxiety. So, there were challenges and [adapting to] different environments. Then came to the other campuses, and someone at the campus made me fit in a bit more. But in general, (inaudible) ... I wasn't sure what I was putting myself into."* Taylor said that her emotions on entry to the ITE programme bordered on melancholy: *"I actually felt very sad and disappointed, to be honest, because teaching was initially not the like the very first thing that I wanted to do, and I got accepted by the other university that I applied for. It was just that my parents were more keen on me doing education for some odd reason, so I felt very sad and disappointed because it was not my first choice, and it's not what I wanted to do initially."*

Acceptance into the teacher education programme thus stirred a range of affirming and challenging emotions, from being excited at moving away from home and embarking on new journeys to fear of possible challenges. Parents' anxiety about their children coping outside the comfort of their homes and families also caused anxiety among some students. Personal, psychological, and familial factors dominated students' reflections during the early days of higher education.

6.3.2 Theme two: Conceptions of becoming a professional teacher: Reflections on past teachers

Student-teachers arrive at university with a multitude of ideas of what it means to be a teacher. They are motivated by intrinsic and extrinsic factors in deciding to become professional teachers. Extrinsic motivation relates to material benefits (for example, a permanent job, salary, medical aid, etc.). Intrinsic factors relate to motivation to

bring about change within society and develop children. Most participants indicated that their understanding of what it means to become a professional teacher is linked to the intrinsic qualities of teachers they were taught by in school.

Simply put, the participants connected their learning of the primary and high school curriculum with specific teachers who taught them. In identifying the teachers who influenced their thoughts on what it means to be a professional teacher, the participants linked their experiences to how the teachers executed the curriculum. Hoadley and Jansen (2009, p. 27) identify the following three types of curriculum:

1. The intended curriculum: Curriculum-as-plan
2. The enacted curriculum: Curriculum-in-practice
3. The implicit curriculum

The participants' first encounters with teachers dated back to their primary and secondary school years, and their narratives included meeting their teachers who were responsible for the inculcation of the prescribed national curriculum. Although the participants' insights into types of curricula are somewhat minimal and they lacked the official terms used, they were able to provide tenets of the above-mentioned curriculum types in their provided responses to my interview questions. The questions in the one-on-one interviews sought insight into the student-teachers' knowledge of what it would mean to become professional teachers. Using the term 'professional teacher' was deliberate to gain insight into their understanding of the term and possibly prompt them to pinpoint the different attributes of a person who is and is not a professional teacher. I also expected that the students would acknowledge the importance of formal certified qualifications.

Phelisa asserted that a teacher is a professional who makes time to know her students and see them for who they are [recognise them]. For Phelisa, devoting time to understanding one's learners is pivotal:

Phelisa: *Okay, so when I applied to become a teacher, I was being inspired by my high school teacher. She was very old at the time, and I was in Grade 10. So, from primary to high school, I was this unrecognised kid. It doesn't matter how hard I worked; I don't understand why I wanted recognition, but I worked very hard. I got good marks, but still, some of the teachers didn't even know my name. So yeah, when I got to Grade 10, she knew my name, and she knew that I was capable of doing anything, and she knew that I, I've got good grades. So, how kind she was to me made me want to become that kind of teacher. Recognise everyone in class instead of having your favourites or people you know you understand. So I wanted to become the teacher that knows each and every one in the class. If I see you walking in that door, I can see you are not okay today. What's going on? Trying to find out. Do you understand?*

Lynn felt that a teacher should be aware that learning can be fun and that learners can learn through leisure reading rather than in a rigid disciplinary learning space. Her recollection of primary school revealed that her teachers inculcated a 'learning-through-leisure-reading culture', which she will emulate in her future classrooms:

Lynn: *My Grade 5 teacher and my Grade 4 teacher were very fun teachers, although the one was a bit older. She still made lessons interesting. She was a very sweet lady and always ensured we understood our work. And the Grade 5 teacher, she was a young teacher, and she was also very nice. And we always did things differently than the other classes, like we'd have time for reading, and the other classes didn't do that. Maybe on a Friday, we would*

have some time to read a book with the teacher, and she'd read to us and give us turns to read, but the other classes didn't have that, and that made us think we had something nice; you know?

Daaem reminisced about teachers whose intrinsic character traits impacted his future way of conducting himself in school. Having carefully observed how different teachers assigned to teach the different subjects [set by the DBE] went about imparting the curriculum to learners, he realised what kind of teacher he would like to be. For him, a professional teacher is defined by his/her attitude towards the teaching profession. He ascribed a twofold meaning to the term 'attitude', namely, a) competent professional curriculum knowledge and b) professional conduct knowledge. He singled out two primary school teachers: *"Like I said, the way they carried themselves and the way they presented themselves. There were actually two people: my History teacher and my English teacher, Mrs Inkling and Miss Kareem."* He added: *"You see, you can have the resources, but you can still be ...[pause] like an average teacher, so maybe, I think maybe it was the passion that they had...."* Thus, for Daaem, a professional teacher conducts him/herself professionally and has sound curriculum knowledge.

Unlike her peers, Khethiwe had real-life working experience before entering the ITE programme. Her desire to become a teacher seems to have been driven by intrinsic motivation to help others, especially children:

Khethiwe: *Oh, the story of becoming a teacher came after I wanted to resign as a store manager. The reason was I was helping many people, but I saw that they were not the people I wanted to help. They are old enough, they are responsible, and I'd love for children, so it was either teaching or social work. When applying for this, it was the only choice. And I realised when I was accepted that what if I wasn't accepted? I hoped to be a teacher because I want to make a change in children's lives, and mostly, what inspired me was where I come from. While I was at primary school, I didn't have help with homework with assignments, so if I didn't ask my teacher to explain to me, I knew there wouldn't be any assistance when I got home. Both my parents were uneducated, so they knew nothing about what was going on at school. So, I told myself that if I do this course, I'll make a change for my children and the children around me, mostly in schools.*

Secondly, Khethiwe was inspired by the human-centred approach of her favourite teacher, Ms Mkalela, inside and outside the school gates. It became evident that her teacher played an *in loco parentis* [in place of a parent] role when unfavourable conditions impacted her home life and, subsequently, her physical health.

The excerpt from the interviews with Khethiwe offers deep insight into her understanding of what it means to be a primary school teacher since content knowledge and teaching strategies are merely didactical concepts in making learning possible. Reflecting on the qualities of her favourite teacher, she realised that understanding the human experience was more vital when becoming a professional teacher:

Khethiwe: *My favourite teacher was Miss Mkalela. She was from Queenstown, away from the school, like kilometres. What inspired me was how she was when she was at school and outside of the school environment. She was a Life Skills teacher. So, if you had any problems without even going to her, she would notice something wrong with you. It's either you are hungry, and it's either you are sick, or there's a problem at home, so she will approach you privately, meaning that when we are done with class, can you please come to the staff room? And in the staffroom, if there are teachers, she would take you outside. When it's time for, for, was it guidance? She was that teacher that would tell you about anything in life. She wasn't secretive about that. If you have a boyfriend, you won't fall pregnant. She will tell you like it is. That if you do this, this will happen. And if you go to her house. Maybe to help with*

something if you did something wrong at school. She will still remind you. She will give you food before you go home, and before giving you food, she will not lecture you on what you did wrong until you have that plate in your hands, and she'll say it's either you eat it, or you don't. But I have to say this ... [pause], and I was privileged enough because she is the one teacher who took me in while I was very sick, and my home conditions were not favourable to my situation. So, she took me from my parents for three years, until high school, when I stayed with her sister. So, she was one of the teachers that really helped me. Not only me but even the learners after me in that school.

It is clear that Khethiwe and her classmates highly valued the implicit curriculum, demonstrating that her teacher used the insight and knowledge of her learners and their disparate characteristics to construct her Life Skills lessons. Through the implicit curriculum and the thoughtful actions of Miss Mkalela, she taught her learners meaningful life lessons to prepare them for what lay ahead as they grew up.

The narrative shared by Natasha is a supporting text which offers insight into what it means to be a professional teacher. She emphasised the importance of articulating one's reasons for entering the profession and stressed the necessity for teachers to be highly attuned to their assigned learners. Teachers should be cognisant of their learners' backgrounds and history and develop a conscious vision for them. Therefore, prospective teachers should conduct meticulous research on the school and the community where a position has become available. By doing so, they can prepare in advance the kind of additional support learners from specific geographical locations and marginalised groups may need. Natasha took the opportunity to argue the need for early childhood development, which linked to her experiences with her primary school teacher, Mrs Web:

Natasha: *I just love working with kids. I think it's my passion to change lives and see the potential within any child. I think that is my reason and just to make a difference, because where I come from, I'm from Steenberg, so they always like, they, they associate you with the area code, and I didn't want to be that person. They still associate me with my area code, but I felt like I could make a difference, not maybe within my community but in other children's lives. Referring to my primary school, my mum attended the school. My older sister attended the school, which was obviously like a family school. Mrs Web was the one teacher who saw the potential in me and was my Grade 7 teacher. She pushed us, my twin sister and me. She wanted us to be the best that we could possibly be, knowing our background and where we came from and also because of knowing our family.*

From Natasha's narrative, it is clear that when teachers have first-hand insight into learners' personal lives [such as their life history and family relations, etc.], they may unconsciously use an implicit curriculum to motivate them to perform better. The reason for using such a curriculum is that, although it is unacknowledged within the formal learning programme, learners experience its impact long after exiting the classroom of the teacher who used the curriculum to inadvertently make them rethink their current life challenges and reconceptualise a positive way forward.

Nkosana stated that only through real-life experiences can one discover whether a specific profession is calling one and understand one's purpose within that domain:

Nkosana: *So, my story about becoming a teacher is interesting. I matriculated in 2013. And in my first year, my sister became a social worker, so she chose social work for me, and I went to UWC and studied for a Bachelor's in social work. I discovered, I'd say the mid-first year, that it wasn't for me. I couldn't bear, you know, the responsibilities but also the pain that came with the job. So, um, the second year, the beginning of the second year, I told my*

parents, I don't want to do that anymore. I was supposed to continue with the course. But I eventually dropped it. To cut a long story short, I dropped out in my third year, which was 2016. In 2017 took a gap year and did absolutely nothing with my life. I was depressed at home, you know. And then, in 2018, I found a job at an NGO called Cool Clay. I was supposed to be a netball coach and life skills coach. I was equipping kids with tools for them to be able to handle stressful situations, them being from the township. So, it was a mentorship role, a netball coach and the ECL facilitator. And I think that's where I discovered my passion for working with young kids. And then, two years later, in 2019, I registered ... at CPUT and joined the teaching profession. So that's my story. It was quite unconventional because I didn't know from the jump that I wanted to be a teacher, but I fell in love with the interaction with young people and mentoring and moulding them, and that's what brought me here.

Nkosana was of the view that poor and marginalised learners from the township do not require an intended, enacted, or implicit curriculum. Instead, she asserted that topics such as life-skills mentoring and moulding and guidance on managing stressful situations are better tools to empower these kinds of learners. Her conception of what constitutes a professional teacher is thus someone who has compassion for learners because of their origins. Similar to Mrs Web [Natasha's primary school teacher], being knowledgeable about one's learners' backgrounds, history and life circumstances makes one better able to cater to their developmental needs.

It is noted that all the student-teachers' experiences attested to an almost complete intrinsic motivation, leading them to understand what it would mean to be a professional teacher based on their interactions with past teachers who impacted their understanding of the profession. A pivotal role of shapers of the ITE programme will be to guard these intrinsic qualities of student-teachers throughout their undergraduate teacher development period and intentionally create intervention/support structures should they encounter challenges whilst undertaking TP placement in schools, possibly contributing to them losing these sterling qualities. Teachers at all stages of their career [undergraduate, novice or veteran] should be mindful of the significant role they played in unconsciously influencing prospective 'teachers' - those young minds in their classes who one day will have to choose a future career, which could lead them to undertake a professional teacher's degree. Undergraduate student-teachers thus draw on their interaction with their primary school teachers to shape their way of being professional teachers.

6.3.3 Theme three: Choosing to become a professional teacher

Teaching was not the first choice of profession for all the student-teachers. The CPUT Online Application system allows prospective students to choose three courses at the university, and most select teaching as their third course of choice. The participants shared the following:

Taylor: *[Asked why she chose to become a teacher]. There's definitely a story. So, education was definitely not my first option. So, the initial plan was law. And then because I had some health issues, and then that led to my parents wanting me closer to the hospital, just because at that [time] it was very bad. And so I applied for education, knowing that in the back of my mind, this would not work for me. So, the first year came. I made my decision. I finally chose education even though the law choice was still an option. Then... um... And then, like, my father forced me to take it, and I did. And I was like, ok, I'm just going to see the year through, and after that, I'll decide. And once my first teaching practice hit, it was like I knew this was for me and then. I was like, okay, so maybe this is God's plan of working, and then I was like, okay, so that's...ya... so that's how I ended up in education.*

Athandwa: *I applied, but my first choice was nursing, so my second choice was teaching, so they (clicks tongue) nursing replied late, teaching replied first, so I just chose teaching.*

Zafeer: *To be honest. I did not actually know what field I wanted to go into, and teaching seemed like a viable option, something that I was open to. And I went for it. The first time I applied, I didn't get accepted into university, and I applied again the following year and was accepted.*

Bonga: *Okay, so, um, growing up, I've always loved people in general. However, growing up, I had a stuttering issue. I couldn't speak very properly. So that kind of stopped me from being able to engage with people because I was an easy target to be mocked and so forth and so forth. So eventually, I remember there were times I would go home and literally go on my mom's phone and teach myself how to talk, and I'd pretend I was a radio presenter. I would read these interviews in magazines and stuff like that. So, from that, I believe I got cured of stuttering, and that was, for me, the first step to engaging and embracing that passion I've always had for people. I've always known I wanted to work with people, whether in psychology or sociology, but then I decided to go into teaching.*

Daaem: *It only became apparent to me, like my later years in high school, to become a teacher. My grandma was a teacher, and my mom is like an Islamic studies (inaudible) teacher ... like. I don't know what you call it. I never saw myself as a teacher, but I would say they were mainly why I went into teaching, like my previous teachers.*

While some participants did not initially lean towards becoming a teacher, it seems that learning more about being one ignited their interest, especially TP.

Other participants knew from the start that they wanted to become teachers and that this would be their lifelong career:

Dumo: *So, when I was in Grade 10, I started helping or tutoring at school, right, my peers and my classmates. So especially in that when they don't understand and you know you get over after school, and I'll make sure that I teach them how I understand, and surprisingly, a lot of people would actually understand. Sometimes, others would call me for house visits and maybe pay me, but I wouldn't really want to take the money because I'm also learning in the process. So that's when I knew that maybe I should just do teaching because I was very, I was very, what's this word, very patient with people and very helpful. I just love what I do.*

Amina: *The first career that even popped into my head since I was younger is becoming a teacher, and I think it's mainly because my father is a teacher, so he influenced me. He's very passionate about what he does. And, like ... [he] spends more time at school than home. And my mother found a problem with the fact that we were okay as long as he was there for us when we needed him like; even today, he works two jobs. So, he does night school, and he does like teaching at the high school. So yeah, that's really.*

Lynn: *I've always wanted to be a teacher since I was like in Grade 4, and I think the teachers that taught me influenced that a little bit because they were nice teachers. So, after a while, when I was in high school, I wanted to change it, but then I leaned towards education.*

Although a career in primary school teaching was not the first choice for some participants, the student-teachers that participated in this study drew on their schooling experiences [using impactful words and dramatisation or professional teachers who were role models] with different people such as teachers, learners, parents, and a work internship programme to decide whether or not teaching was for them. Nonetheless, the ultimate decision to choose teaching as a future career was in the hands of the student-teacher. They had the agency to choose whether to exit the ITE programme or remain. Electing to become a professional teacher meant empowering oneself to develop into a professional, which meant applying oneself to understand the knowledge, skills, and values of being a newly qualified teacher. I believe that the exiting graduate should have a firm grasp of the

subjects they teach, be true to the intellectual demands of their discipline and be able to undertake teaching in an array of authentic learning spaces. Therefore, students must be made aware from the early stages of their teacher development that they are being taught to teach in an array of schooling [TP] contexts and not being professionalised for specific contexts with which they are familiar and comfortable.

6.4 Stage two: Experiences of diversity within the university

6.4.1 Theme four: Initial formal stage of learning about diversity

6.4.1.1 Inclusive Education and Professional Studies

All the student-teachers who participated in this study do not reside in the immediate middle-class suburb of Mowbray where the university is situated. Leaving their places of comfort [residences and home towns] and stepping into a new learning environment could potentially have been unsettling. When I posed the second question [number 5] in the one-on-one interviews, *“During the degree programme, in which subject were you first taught about diversity regarding race, social class, gender, culture, special needs, and new technologies supporting actual classroom teaching?”*, they were aware of the research topic [Student-teachers lived experiences in diverse TP contexts] and noted that in the first year of the ITE programme they were formally introduced to two new subjects, namely, Inclusive Education and Professional Studies. Excerpts from their responses are presented below:

Zafeer: *During the degree programme, the first module we were exposed to was in Education and regarding technology in the schools, which was more associated with the Prof Studies Module. The new things I learned were mostly inclusivity in a classroom, which you do not see and must be aware of. Like um.... Open-mindedness, consciously coming into the class with an open mind. Be aware that there are children there with underlying situations, and you need to be able to accommodate them and set up a platform for them. Be mindful that there might be those who you do know about but still need to create an inclusive atmosphere for everyone in that classroom.*

Amina: *I think it was in the first year in Inclusive Education. We were taught that the South African classroom is very diverse and that we should tolerate and be considerate of other cultures, religions, and customs by being inclusive.*

Nkosana: *It was in Inclusive Education as well as Professional Studies. We were learning about learning barriers, understanding uhm learners with learning barriers, and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory.*

Taylor: *So, the very first subject was inclusive education, which taught me about diversity, social class, gender, culture, etc. Professional studies were where I learned about new technology supporting actual classroom teaching. I learned honestly; I think I was very naive when I came to university because I only thought that there were three different groups; firstly, I believe when I got to university, that's where I learned that there are more cultures. There are more races, and it's not just Christian and Muslim. There is beyond that. So, I think that's with like it was like that was new to me because I never thought beyond Christianity and, um, Islam. It was bad. Furthermore, I didn't know about learners with learning problems. Um, I knew maybe about hyperactive learners or that I knew at that time was hyperactive. I really didn't know what the problem was. Until my brother his IQ... I think his IQ, or the... the percentage of his brain, was 10% higher than a child with Down's Syndrome. So, that's when*

I learnt... like...you don't necessarily have to be Down Syndrome to be... that...dyslexic or something like that in that in that sort ... so I learnt... so basically at university, I did learn because um that's where I found this ADHD. There are a whole lot of other learning disorders that could actually stop the child or learning that cause the child to have a learning barrier.

The ITE programme for this cohort of final-year Intermediate Phase student-teachers acknowledges the vantages of the diverse student population and constructs two sets of year-long courses which orient students on matters of professionalism and awareness of 'othering'. The claims are supported by the key phrases supplied by the participants (e.g. *"The new things I learned were mostly inclusivity in Prof Studies. We learnt that we should tolerate and be considerate of other cultures. The very first subject was inclusive education in Professional Studies"*). It is evident from the students' narratives that students are given introductory professional insight into topics that make them aware of mainstream primary school learning and are simultaneously acquainted with special needs schooling. Zafeer best describes the objective of these courses by saying, "Open-mindedness is taught". The ITE programme also addresses the kind of newly-enrolled student, most of whom exited high school only two months previously. Focusing on Professional Studies and Inclusive Education makes first-year students consciously aware of how primary school learners develop and the kind of support they may need from them in their student-teacher roles.

6.4.1.2 Rudimentary interpretations of diversity, equality, and inclusion

I have strategically titled this sub-heading '*rudimentary*' since the participants' understandings at this stage of their learning do not yet embrace the deeper levels of contestation and power challenges embedded in forging relationships or conceptions about diversity.

The student-teachers entered their ITE programme with restricted, socially constructed and influenced understandings of diversity. In addition to their limited knowledge of this topic, their understanding was limited by their prior experiences and possibly formal engagement with the theme. The participants associated diversity with '*being different*'. For Athandwa, it is linked to contexts and people. She said: *"Diversity is a constant context where everyone is included, and it is a place with various teachers. Also, equality is based on children. Maybe equality means when you teach and treat everyone equally. Inclusion means maybe when teaching, you include maybe a person with a disability, include that person in the lesson."* In the follow-up interview, when asked: *"You've only been in schools where the medium of communication is isiXhosa and township schools. Why did you not take the opportunity to teach in a different kind of school?"* she responded, *"I was scared of new context or environment."* Zafeer said that his understanding of diversity included the concept of race:

Zafeer: *What I learnt about diversity is basically that different people come from different backgrounds and different races and religions, and basically taught us that we need to be open-minded, and we need to accept the people around and be tolerant, even if their beliefs systems and or their colour of their skin was different from our own.*

However, he sought to demonstrate a deeper understanding of the concepts of diversity, equality, and inclusion by asserting that:

Zafeer: *Well, diversity, equality, and inclusion for me; it basically means for me as a teacher now going into this career path that we must have an open mind; we can't go into the classroom with a conservative mindset. We have to be open; we have to have that expectation that there will be people from different races who will have different views, different belief systems, different gender identities and stuff. We must accept, tolerate, and encourage others to accept them because everyone is the same.*

Bonga related diversity to specific community social norms. Referring to her primary and high schooling, she shared the following:

Bonga: *I was very much exposed to diversity in primary and high school. Um, I think what I learnt mostly was even though we preach on diversity and so forth, it's not a realistic thing that we do. It's not practical for us. We speak of it, and it's out in the open. It's there. But then, I went to a diverse primary school and a diverse, high school, but we were always in those cliques. Black kids are with black kids, and coloured kids are with coloured kids. So, it's something we talk about, but I don't think it's something we practice.*

Again, she used diversity as a synonymous term to describe difference by asserting that:

Bonga: *Diversity is being open to engaging with someone outside your racial group. Understanding that you can relate to that individual, you can find things in common. To be able, I feel like to be able to see colour but not allow it to matter. Let's embrace our differences. I'm Black, and you're White. But we're embracing the differences, which is part of what brings us together because we come from those distinctive backgrounds.*

Asked "What is your family's take on diversity?" Bonga showed that her understanding of these concepts was linked to her life experiences: *I think my family, we are okay with that. My sister is married to a White person, so we don't necessarily have any problems. We are very much okay with issues of a diverse nature, yes."*

Furthermore, she asserted that for her, equality and inclusivity involve the following values:

Bonga: *Okay, so I would think equality would be basically to understand that we all deserve equal opportunities and where maybe somewhere, someone had a situation they were underprivileged, things need to be put into place where they can be in the same position as the different individual. So, equality is in the sense of having the same opportunity. But not exactly. How can I put in a sense of? There is a vast difference between an individual who grew up in a lower-class environment and one who grew up in a higher-class, middle-class environment. The person who grew up in a lower-class environment needs certain blocks to build them up to get to where the middle-class person is. They cannot exactly be treated the same, but for that person to have the same opportunities, they need to be given the blocks to be in the same position as the person in the middle class, so with us being okay. Inclusion is to be able to [be] involved in a sense. It does not include acknowledging, as I said, diversity, recognising the difference, but being okay with involving the individual and not making someone stand out to be highlighted because they're different but involving them in whatever.*

Probed about mistakes teachers make in schools concerning the teaching and learning of aspects of diversity in the classroom, she said:

Bonga: *I think schools. [Pause]. Okay, in primary school, we were not allowed to speak Xhosa. We would get in trouble. We would get in trouble speaking Xhosa in primary school because we were at an English school. Looking back at that, it was a bit problematic. Because it's saying, we are not allowed to embrace ourselves. We're not allowed to express ourselves the way we are most comfortable in. As much as I can speak English fluently, it's because Xhosa is my home language. It's easier for me to express myself, and I'm unable to do that*

with my peers because most English-speaking people surround me. I feel like that was a bit unfair.

At the beginning of the interview, Amina linked diversity to race, human characteristics and religion. She said that her views on diversity stem from her mother: *"My mother was standing in a line at home, where she'd speak to the Black African lady, and she would always like want to know more about where they come from, and it would always end up in a big conversation, yeah."* She firmly believes that all races should "be treated equally":

Amina: *In primary and high school, I was at Penelopy Primary and the Management College in Manenberg. So even though it was like in a Coloured Township or area, they were still like this. There was still diversity. There were still African children. There were no White children, but there were, like, Coloureds and a lot of Indians from different backgrounds. Also, diversity refers to the different races and religions, not just physical features. It's also about the qualities that you have. So, someone could be confident, and someone could be shy. So that's all, yeah.*

Frankly expressing her limited understanding of the concept of diversity, Dumo said: *"People being different or believing in different things or acting in different ways is one aspect of diversity."* Unlike Amina, who focussed on religion and aspects of one's character, she linked the concept of 'being different' to a person's socio-economic status:

Dumo: *Okay, well, back then, I thought diversity was just based on race, and I didn't really think much of it's been based on religion because I was not exposed to other religions. I didn't know that there were other religions. I thought we were all Christians in the world, you know. So yeah, that's how I looked at it back then. Now, I look at diversity as having different religions and economic, social, and economic backgrounds, and it can also look at different cultures, so that's how I see it.*

Lebo linked her knowledge of diversity to the two kinds of schools she attended. She noted that, in Limpopo Province, *"In most schools in the villages, in the schools, there's still one race. But there are public schools and private schools outside of town. There [referring to outside the village], kids are mixed up with White kids, and there are also Muslims, so they combine them. That means those kids are growing up with diverse learners from other races and cultures."*

Race repeatedly reared its head as the focus of diversity. Johanna remarked:

Johanna: *I wouldn't say I learnt much in primary or high school because the high schools and the primary schools I went to were predominantly coloureds. There wasn't much diversity in the school, so besides what we learned in the textbook, I did not witness it in school as much, which means that people from different races, cultures, backgrounds, and religions join together for a common cause.*

Asked about her family's perspective on diversity, Natasha said: *"I think we're very accepting because we have very different people who come into our household, and we all have very diverse friends. So, my dad has a lot of Xhosa friends because of his work, and my mom has a lot of Muslim friends, so there's quite a diversity within our house."*

The student-teachers' perspectives on diversity, equality, and inclusion demonstrate a finite understanding embedded in race, culture, people's characters, abled and disabled-bodied people, socio-economic status, and

typologies of schools. They noted the importance of 'including' people of various backgrounds, races, religions, and cultures but did not offer recommendations on how to do so.

6.4.1.3 Central comprehension of diversity in the South African context

The dominant theme which emanated from the student-teachers' understanding of the concept of diversity seems to be the matter of race that was used with reference to their experiences at home, in school, in the community and when embarking on the teacher degree programme. Moreover, they linked the concept of race to their TP experiences with different types of learners and staff and connected race to the school sites. It became apparent that this cohort of student-teachers elevated the colour of a person's skin as a superior category within the topic of diversity within the South African context.

During the first interview, Athandwa said equality was *"When you treat everyone equally"*. She then gave an example of such a person: *"Maybe a person with a disability; include that person in the lesson"*. She linked the example of the person with a disability to the racial profile of an individual by asserting, *"Yes, we do accept them because, at church, we also go to the same church as other races"*. By focusing on a person's race as a measure of engaging with alternative social groups, Athandwa is overlooking alternative aspects of diversity such as an individual's nationality, gender, sexual orientation, economic status, age, and learning barriers, to name but a few. Probed further on the concept of diversity in South Africa, Athandwa revealed that during group work at university, she preferred *"Choosing someone in my race. It is better to work with them. I feel like when I work with the other race. They... I don't... I don't know the word..."* [Researcher: *"And are they judging you in a good or bad way?"*] *"Bad way"*.

In contrast, Zafeer shared his story about learning about diversity in the South African context by using an alternative language learned while at primary school: *"Yes, during the Foundation Phase, at that time, we learnt isiXhosa, and the isiXhosa teacher was an African woman different race."* His mother tongue is English, but exposure to a different language broadened his horizons: *"Yes, I grew up having friends from other race groups and genders. But that was mostly at school."* When Zafeer commenced his undergraduate teacher degree programme, he was already familiar with working with people from different backgrounds:

Zafeer: *Yes, we [different races] work together. We have various conversations. I think it's nice to speak to people from different backgrounds to hear their stories and their experiences, and I always say you have to have an open mind because the more you are open to listening to people and their stories, the more it educates and enlightens you about things you never knew in the past.*

Zafeer takes responsibility for his own development in the formal content being taught within the constraints of the university curriculum and in undertaking group work with classmates from diverse backgrounds. He chooses to work with various individuals instead of people from his own race.

Bonga shared that she attended primary and high school in a Coloured area but is a self-declared Black African female. At school, she met and was taught by the only other Black person, a Black African male teacher. She witnessed the challenges that he confronted in the classes of Coloured learners who did not show him the same respect they showed Coloured teachers:

Bonga said: *Um, Mr Mnxhola, then, was the only Black teacher at the high school. He struggled a lot with students not respecting him. He was challenged a lot. Respect-wise, and yeah, they [Coloured learners] did take advantage of him in that regard. I also think he wanted to make things easier for students. I also think he felt a bit of a gap and wanted to relate to students in a sense. So, I think it was just, um... probably the difference in culture and race.*

Bonga's experience is a real-life schooling situation in a post-apartheid diverse South African context that, to a certain degree, prepared her when she confronted a similar situation during her TP placement when learners from the same culture as her criticised the way she speaks English:

Bonga said: *I've been to a Black school. I've been to a multiracial school, but I've always felt separated. When I go to the Black school, when I was doing my teaching practical at a Black School, and even though we were of the same culture, the same race, we spoke the same language, I found that people shied away from me because they felt like they maybe don't relate to me. After all, to them, I am from a different background. According to them, my accent is a little bit different. I've had students complain that I speak English funny. They don't hear what I'm trying to say. And then the multiracial school also, I had individuals that had a hard time interacting with me because I was the only Black teacher that students have interacted with, and that was probably part of the, let's say, the things that I was working in. So, in the beginning, I also had a hard time connecting with teachers and learners. Also, I had a hard time having the learners trust me that, as a Black teacher, I am capable of teaching a language like English Home Language. It didn't make sense to them, so I always thought there were people around me, but in the sense of like. Isolation, like I never actually belonged in a sense.*

Apartheid's racial segregation persists in many of the communities where student-teachers undertake their WIL. Bonga described her 'sense of not belonging' close to thirty years after the demise of apartheid. The same held true for other participants who experienced 'estrangement' from specific people and situations:

Amina: *I think I was in matric. Yes, I was taught by a Black African teacher, and he was not from here. He was from the Eastern Cape. So, for him to fit in, it was like a challenge. And I feel like the students and the learners in the class made it look very difficult for him. I think because he was from a different race, they were being racist in a way, so they would, like, when he would speak very softly, so it was hard for us to understand him and interpret what he was saying. So, the learners just made fun of the way to pronounce words.*

Dumo: *Okay, so I think the mistake that schools make when thinking about diversity is that they only look at a certain aspect of diversity and not all of them. So, they normally look at race diversity only. They only focus on that, but not focusing, but not thinking about it the way they are Black, and she is White, but then we are both Christians, you know. So, we have the same religion, but no, they focus on race.*

Johanna: *Yes, a lot of stereotyping against people of colour or African people takes place, especially when it came to protests or times like that when our country was struggling, and the protests would happen on campus. Here at CPUT, we would always hear them give comments like oh, it's just that race... that would start things like that.*

Student-teachers' responses on their understanding of diversity in the South African context point to race. These narrative records suggest that race has had a long, enduring effect on the worldview of teachers. There perhaps is a residual legacy of direct or vicarious prejudicial or negative experiences of race that still are ever present in students' readings of their world. Disrupting this narrative towards re-understanding the need for re-imagined equitable interpretations of race and broadening the conception of diversity towards other social categorisations

will require each student-teacher to become an agent for social change in a much wider set of foci. This echoes the view that transformation discourses cannot be confined to only the demographic representativity of racial groupings in our 'post-apartheid' midst but also to deeper conceptions of how to tolerate within a reimagined system of equity and social justice. This task is a large responsibility to bear for their learning in becoming a professional teacher. Student-teachers should collaborate and support one another to produce this expanded work. Johanna reflected:

Johanna: *Most of the time we speak, it is over WhatsApp, so I'm unaware of the racial background, colour, or religion. So, I often treat them like I would treat anybody else and listen to their opinions. Because when you are working in a group you need to work together to deliver a good or satisfying task and if you're going to be constantly not listening just because of their race or whatever, it could hurt you and your marks as well, so it's better just to be open and listen and take guidance, even if it's from someone who is in your year grade.*

6.4.1.4 (Re)interpreting "South Africa the rainbow nation" as a future professional teacher

The term 'South Africa, the Rainbow Nation', was coined by national icon Archbishop Desmond Tutu, a South African Anglican bishop and theologian known for his work as an anti-apartheid and human rights activist, to describe the 'New South Africa'. The country held its first democratic elections in April 1994. At the time of writing up the thesis [29 years later], it had adopted numerous policies to promote transformation [*A statement of intent, a deliberate system of principles to guide decisions and achieve rational outcomes*] and legislation [*to give legal force and effect to policy*] by enabling all children to access quality education. I asked the 19 participants to share their interpretation of this term through their lived experiences in a post-apartheid South African context in their development to become professional teachers. Nkosana noted that during her high school years, South Africa the Rainbow Nation received considerable attention when South Africa qualified for the 2010 Football World Cup:

Nkosana: *So in primary and high school, I mean, we never had these conversations [topics relating to diversity] to begin with, especially in primary school. I think they probably crept in in high school, maybe Grade 11, because times were changing a bit after the World Cup, the World Cup in 2010. But how it was told to us was just Rainbow Nation. We are all different. And we should all love each other.*

She added:

Nkosana: *It's a beautiful expression, and I wish I held it close to my heart as everybody did. But I mean, I see through the facade that it is, and I just wish we, as a nation, really and truly lived up to it and embraced it fully in everything we do, say and how we act towards one another. It's a beautiful expression. It's just a shame that we don't truly live by it. I think it was meant to mean a celebration of difference, a celebration of diversity. Yeah, but I think the issue came with us not wanting to address the differences and the diversity. I don't know if that makes sense.*

For Nkosana, South Africa, the Rainbow Nation is a wonderful aspiration, but an illusion. Taylor linked optimism to race: "I feel like I actually have a good view of it. I think it's a very inclusive statement, so everyone in South Africa, the Rainbow Nation, would be accepted by different people. It doesn't matter what skin colour or religion you come from." Khethiwe was clear that, in her experience, as a nation with different colours and races, including different abilities, inabilities and disabilities, we do not practice being a rainbow. She added that treating one another fairly and ensuring justice for all would embody a rainbow nation: "We are in one country, but I still wonder if what we

say and do is true to being a rainbow nation. Do we practice it? Do we treat people like we say we are one rainbow nation? Are we fair towards other people? So, for me, a rainbow nation means we are multicultural, and also, we are multiracial.”

In order to give life to South Africa, the Rainbow Nation, future teachers need to be change-makers in the lives of the many children whom they will be responsible for educating and developing. Language has the potential to connect people in a country with 12 official languages (South African Sign Language was recently added as the 12th official language) that encapsulate citizens’ diversity. Khethiwe offered suggestions to address the current challenges:

Khethiwe: *Yes, I listen to everyone and can mostly work with fellow students. You can be Coloured, you can be White, and you can be from outside the country. For me, they say English is key. It means that if she can hear me and I can’t, I start teaching the basic language once I become too close to her. I want to know how you say **molo** in your language and how I approach them. It’s actually timely, yeah. I respect who they are because I cannot change and am always open to their views and opinions.*

As outlined in the MRTEQ, the future of South Africa lies in the hands of competent, newly-qualified teachers. The seventh of the 11 basic competencies listed is: “*Newly qualified teachers must understand diversity in the South African context in order to teach in a manner that includes all learners*” (DHET, 2015). These beginner teachers will be responsible for transforming the thinking and actions of South African children placed in their care within a rapidly changing world. Conscious acknowledgement of South Africa’s past and drawing on close to three decades of transformation practices in primary, secondary, and higher education requires a reinterpretation of the primary school curriculum. Reconceptualising the past is fundamental for teachers and learners to build a country that looks beyond the superficial layer of skin colour. Rethinking the metaphor of the rainbow nation and what makes for a non-bifurcated and non-judgmental learning experience in a post-apartheid South Africa will require future professional teachers to be keenly interested in deep societal transformation.

6.5 Stage three: Experiences of diversity within TP schools

6.5.1 Theme five: Choosing the first teaching practice school

Most student-teachers relish the opportunity to assume the role of teachers during their initial experience with the compulsory annual TP course. While it causes trepidation and anxiety, it provides the practical play-acting dimension of the ITE programme. Teaching Practice is also known as Teaching Practicum (TP), WIL, Teacher Education Practicum and sometimes Supervised Field Experience. Within the Faculty of Education at the CPUT, the course is named Teaching Practice, and student-teachers must pass it each year with a minimum of 50% to be able to complete TP in the following years. Students acknowledge the seriousness of the practical eight weeks of TP, usually four weeks between April and May and four between July and August. The type of TP that the student-teacher can expect can be divided into three broad categories, namely, 1) **observation** [student-teacher to observe experienced teachers in action], 2) **co-teaching** [student-teachers start co-teaching or work collaboratively with an experienced teacher] and 3) **supervised teaching** [student-teachers plan and teach

lessons, then receive formal evaluations from the supervising mentor-teacher] (Sachs, Fisher, & Cannon, 2011). A Reflective Practice TP framework is utilised within the ITE programme, which relies on constant self-improvement of the student-teacher over the four-year degree by reflecting on their thoughts and actions for personal learning and development. Choosing a school for the first TP placement is thus of great significance as it could offer a positive and productive time or result in academic failure of progression.

The participants shared their reasons for choosing their first TP school:

Athandwa: *I selected Nandipha Primary School to complete my first teaching practice. It was, I didn't have to long kilometres to get there. It's in my area, but I was not familiar with people in that school, but some learners live in my area.*

Zafeer: *In my first year, I chose Beam Ray Primary School. I knew someone at Beam Ray Primary School, and they made a plan for me to attend and do my teaching practice there. I had knowledge of the school. It's not a school I hadn't heard about. I kind of knew what I was getting into in that school.*

Bonga: *I chose Khoza Public Primary School because I had an assumption that because it was a Black school, I would have a much easier time with the learners. For me, it was kind of like an easier scheme for my first year of Teaching Practice. I thought that I wouldn't be challenged in terms of diversity; not like I didn't want to be in an environment that would challenge me. That was my assumption when I decided to select Khoza Public Primary. I'm not gonna lie. It was probably because it was a Black school, and I assumed it would be a comfortable environment for me.*

Amina: *I chose the school because it was my primary school and was close to my home. My mother drives children at Penelopy Primary School, so it was very convenient as she could drop me off and fetch me. Also, not much had changed since the last time I'd been there, so I was familiar with the school.*

Dumo: *I selected Sunflower Boys Primary School. I chose this specific school because it was convenient for me to go to the school in terms of its location. Also, I chose the school because it's well, it had space first of all, and also, I could actually get there using the school shuttle, so it didn't cost me anything.*

Lebo: *I chose this school because it was not that far from my place where I'm staying and then I just found out that there would be no travelling, and it won't be difficult for me to go there if I'm using a taxi or a shuttle bus to school. Also, I can be there on time. Then, if I'm using a taxi in the morning, it means in the afternoon I would be able to go to my campus, because it is closer to my campus, where I can walk there and then take a shuttle to come back, which I won't be having much problem of, that of money for transport. As I checked my financial status by that time, uhm... I was not financially stable.*

Johanna: *I asked to be placed at Pandora Primary School in the area of Lansdowne. I chose the school because I attended primary school in Pandora, and I was familiar with the teachers at the school. Because I knew the teachers and they knew me, it was easier for me to integrate with them and gain an understanding of the job.*

Natasha: *I chose a school within the area because in the southern suburbs that school is known as a really good school and also, I think the easiest way for me to travel was by using one taxi. I must say my first school, Zeal Academy, was my most comfortable there because the educators were so welcoming. The principal was so welcoming, and they were just, and they gave me good criticism in the sense of where I could improve and what I could do. They wouldn't be harsh. When they want to make a point, they made a point and came from the point of love and teaching and encouraging, so that is one thing that I'm grateful for that, that way I learn, and I learned to be open-minded and yeah, so my first year.*

Lynn: *I live in the university residence, so I chose Treeville Primary School. I thought it was close to my residence, but it wasn't. I had to Uber to the school. I didn't mind the small Uber fee because I did some research on the school, and it seemed like a pretty decent school.*

Phelisa: *In my first year, I opted for Nandipha Primary School in the area of Nyanga. I chose the school because it is near where I live. It was the school which had a lot of Black kids. So, I was comfortable with that. [Researcher: "Tell me, were you familiar with the school of your first year, where you went to?"] No, Sir.*

Daaem: *In my first year, I used transportation because I wasn't living in the current area at that time. I would drive past, and I knew some people from the area whose kids went there, but I wasn't familiar with Saint Michael's Primary School.*

Khethiwe: *It was Chrimbo Primary School in the Strand area. I chose the school because Nontombi, a fourth-year student, recommended the school to me and spoke about how accommodating it is, the staff, the warmth in the school and a lot I had to learn from there. The school was a distance away, and I travelled to the school by car. I was familiar with the school, Mr Brown, because my stepdaughter attends school there.*

Taylor: *I chose my own primary school because I was or I'm an ex-pupil of Star Hill Primary School. Obviously, just the teachers, some teachers who taught me, were still there. Sir, everything was basically the same. The new principal was one of, like, my educators. I was not familiar with any learners.*

Nkosana: *I chose Simphiwe Primary School, my community. The school is less than a five-minute walk away from my home. It's a school everybody in our community knew growing up. It was the first school in our community when our community was first established, so it just made it. It was more of a comfort. So, I think we knew some of the teachers who had been there for quite some time, so it was a safe space for me to find my footing.*

Adelaide: *I first applied to Hillton Primary School but then went to Bonnie Primary School. I took a taxi, seeing that the area where the school was located wasn't very safe, actually dangerous. I didn't know anyone or anything about the school, and it was just in my immediate area.*

Nadia: *I went to Penelopy Primary School and chose that school because I was in my first year and wanted to be at the school I knew. Many of the staff were quite new because I'd been to the primary school a while back. So, the principal and many teachers were different.*

Magmoet: *I went to Mohamed Hanafi Primary School in my area. I chose the school, to be honest, I thought about transport issues. So, I just picked it in my first year. The school was a three-minute walk from my home. In terms of the school setting, I was familiar with it, yes. But there were new teachers, so it was different for me. I only remembered my Grade 1 teacher. Other than that, they were all new teachers.*

Patience: *My first school was Sambo Primary School, which is based in the Strand area. It is a nearby school. I went there because it was the only school I knew then. It's just about a few minutes from home. That's the reason I chose that school.*

Ragmat: *I chose Pandora Primary School. To be honest, Johanna and I chose the school because it was our first teaching practice. We decided to choose a school together, so it was more convenient for us to travel together to the school. We walked to the school since it was convenient and there weren't resources to spend on travelling. I didn't know anyone at the school, but I knew it because it was next to my primary school. I think I didn't choose my primary school because I heard that my primary school weren't taking students from CPUT. [The researcher mentioned that the school might have made an exception for her.] I'm not sure, but I felt anxious to go there because I would have been around my old teachers, and I feel like they would have had high expectations.*

Students' agency comes to the fore when selecting a school which should foster their professional development. The participants' responses on the selection of schools for the first TP session [before COVID-19] offer an in-depth understanding of how internal forces mainly linked to students' agency, rooted in decision-making to foster change, are practiced when nominating a TP school. Such agency is exercised throughout their ITE programme in terms of the typology of schools where they complete TP. The data reveals that few students selected a TP site based on educational resources or the possibility of sound mentorship; rather, they relied on convenience and comfort to jump-start their growth. The table below shows that, over the four-year degree, 17 participants opted to complete their TP within ± 10 kilometres of their residence (family home or university residence). The two who completed their TP in a school ± 21 kilometres from their home did so out of personal choice. Bonga resided in a dangerous area and travelled to a different kind of school typology. Khethiwe conveniently chose the school her stepdaughter attended so they could travel together.

Table 6.2: Distance between home and TP placement school

THE FURTHEST DISTANCE TRAVELLED FOR TEACHING PRACTICE		
±5 - 10 kilometres distance travelled to Teaching Placement School		
▪ Lebo [3.2 km], ▪ Magmoet [5.4 km], ▪ Dumo [5.6 km], ▪ Athandwa [1.6 km], ▪ Phelisa [5.3 km], ▪ Nkosana [4 km], ▪ Patience [1.5 km],	▪ Zafeer [7 km], ▪ Daaem [3.2 km], ▪ Amina [3 km], ▪ Ragmat [5 km], ▪ Lynn [5.7 km], ▪ Johanna [2.8 km], ▪ Taylor 7.4 km], ▪ Natasha [10 km] ▪ Adelaide [5 km]	▪ Nadia [7.8 km]
±11 – 15 kilometres distance travelled to Teaching Placement School		
<i>*No participants*</i>		
± 16 – 20 kilometres distance travelled to Teaching Placement School		
<i>*No participants*</i>		
± 21 kilometres distance travelled to Teaching Placement School		
▪ Bonga [24.3 km] ▪ Khethiwe [21 km]		

A holistic analysis of the theoretical, conceptual, and operational considerations around TP schools shows that *priority* is not placed on choosing a space that offers maximum professional growth. Other expedient factors, such as geographical access to the school [*there are more than 984 primary schools in the Western Cape*], convenience in terms of being on transport routes, and securing spaces where students experience a shift from what they consider familiar and comfortable, are apparent. Professional learning is sidelined in relation to operational and

personal considerations. It can be argued that, in figuring out how best to navigate the requirement to undergo and pass TP, the student-teachers base their decisions on expediency rather than growth. This begs the question of whether similar attitudes are adopted towards the rest of the ITE curriculum. The narrative responses to the interview question about selecting and practicing in TP schools seem to reflect propriety in strategising how to participate in the ITE curriculum expectations. Shared views about how to ensure success in the curriculum assessment regimes seem to be circulated amongst the student body, and these strategies become transferred from one student cohort to the next.

How and where are we, as teacher educators, activating adequately the deeper learning to develop teacher professionals? Many students seemingly override the curriculum goals of the ITE curriculum and find strategies to feign compliance to achieve the qualifications. Notably some of the curriculum goals are 1) Develop Pedagogical Competence, 2) Enhance Subject Matter Expertise, 3) Foster Reflective Practice, 4) Promote Inclusive Education, 5) Cultivate Professional Ethics and Leadership. As teacher educators, we believe that higher education ought to be not only about obtaining a formal qualification but also about the quality of learning, which impacts the kinds of teachers produced. However, the quality of the curriculum experience is mediated not only by the curriculum developers (us as teacher educators) but also by how students negotiate comfortable experiences through the curriculum space.

6.6 Theme six: Day-to-day complexities of teaching in South African classrooms [school]

Teaching practice, the practical component that interweaves professional learning with the real-life classroom experience, is filled with intricacies. While it can be a positive and enriching experience, it was a reality check for many participants. Delving into the teaching profession from a divergent angle as a student-teacher developing into a prospective professional teacher required them to embrace a developing-teacher identity. It required that they rethink their beliefs, values, and commitments towards being a teacher. The schooling circumstances in which they undertook TP and other factors often hidden from the naked eye came into play.

During their four-year degree, the 19 final-year student-teachers who participated in the study entered 57 varied primary schools in the Western Cape. Their narratives point to various elements that can render a school successful, dysfunctional, or ineffective. These resilient and eager-to-become teacher professionals shared turbulent contextual, personal, and professional experiences directly linked to day-to-day issues in the classroom.

6.6.1 Stories linked to contextual sites

Phelisa stated there is a disconnect between the theoretical environment students are taught about during the ITE programme and the lived experience when they enter township schools: *"I was a bit scared of the environment I was going to. I feel like we learn about different environments, right? We focus on one environment. We don't face the reality that happens in schools, such as in township communities."* She offered a solution: *"If it was possible, could we get more articles and pictures that have been done from those schools [township schools]? So, we can actually read about it, and then we can actually be able to face the reality."* There thus seems to be a need for

more concrete information to ease the process. A fascinating narrative shared by Phelisa was the amount of administrative work linked to specific schools where TP was conducted:

Phelisa: *There's a lot of admin. I don't know where it comes from, but compared to township schools, I don't know where the admin comes from. But each and every diverse school has a lot of admin. I don't know where it comes from. Like really. I don't know what it is, especially if a learner does something in class. Now, you have to go and grab this observation file and write down everything they are doing in class. Of which it was new to me. Even though you do communicate with parents, it was new, that okay you have to write something down that they did, this and this and this and this detail you have in detail and township schools they shouted at you or call your mother. It's like two options. And then it's fixed. Now we have to go through this observation file before they call the parents, and I'm like...but in township schools, you simply just call your parent and say, see, this time we are tired. Just come fetch your kids because it's honestly just like that [giggling]. They call your parents just like that and say they are tired. We've been talking too much. Now, come fetch your kid. It's like that. And then you have to write letters. You have to do detention. What for? Simply call the parents and say come fetch your child.*

This excerpt reveals a multilayered set of issues at play as the student reflects on three contexts: past lived experiences within their own schooling (A), recent, current experiences within the teaching practicum school outside of the township (B), and indirectly on the university space (C) and its curriculum in relation to (A) and (B). Phelisa notes that administrative responsibilities are conducted differently in a township school and the teaching practicum school. She suggests that the way township schools deal with learners who engage in misconduct is the best one: (A) *"Just come fetch your kids because it's honestly just like that [giggling]. They call your parents just like that and say they are tired. We've been talking too much. Now, come fetch your kid. It's like that. And then you have to write letters. You have to do detention. What for? Simply call the parents and say come fetch your child"*. She regards this as more efficient because it relies on quick oral discourse with parents. While she maintains a critical distance by referring to generic township teachers using the pronoun *"they"*, she nevertheless supports their action because it asserts that teachers have agency. Her analysis views these teachers as having authority and a professional, respected status in relation to parents: teachers can inform parents that their children are not complying with school rules. She also suggests that parents accept the perspective of teachers.

However, in School B, she notes that the administrative work is accompanied by a written discourse that takes priority when dealing with learner misconduct: forms must be completed, and official records must be acted upon first before the teacher can contact the parents: *"Even though you do communicate with parents, it was new, that okay you have to write something down that they did, this and this and this and this detail you have in detail and township schools they shouted at you or call your mother"*. Phelisa positions herself as a technician in administering school regulations: *"Now you have to go and grab this observation file and write down everything they are doing in class. Of which it was new to me"*. This could also be a commentary on the lower status afforded to herself as a student-teacher who is expected to comply with school rules or a reflection on teachers in non-township schools in general: they seem to be obsessed with administrative record-keeping to legitimise (or defend) their actions in the face of the powerful parent or school authorities. The (student) teacher represents herself (and her mentor-teachers at School B) as adhering to procedural practices, such as learners being given warnings and detention. The records are then presented at official meetings with parents. The legal rights of learners and their parents thus

seem to dominate. She comments, "*I don't know where it comes from*", suggesting that this set of practices' origins lie outside the everyday professional role of teachers and might be emanating from elsewhere - perhaps in school-based policies within the teacher practicum school and infers that it is undermining teachers' professional agency.

Phelisa's analysis further hints that the university space (C) is aligned with the agenda of record-keeping and administration, which supports the operational accountability regimes of the teaching practicum school but not the township school. She believes this is because the authentic experiences of township schools (as described earlier) are not tackled in the university curriculum. This disconnect between her lived experience of being a learner in a township school and what she experienced as a student-teacher at the teaching practicum school is burdensome. She considers the township experience of dealing directly and assertively with parents to be closer to her view of acting as a professional teacher. Thus, the university curriculum is indirectly seen to be complicit with more affluent non-township school worldviews. Paradoxically, the more assertive agentic role of professional teachers is not regarded as valued by the university curriculum.

Nkosana asserted that TP in different schools revealed what kind of teacher she would like to develop into. Having undergone her first and third TP in township schools, she observed bifurcated interpersonal relationships between teachers and learners in the two different types of schools.

Nkosana: *The schools showed me what I'm supposed to do as a teacher. But also, to a large extent, what I'm not supposed to do as a teacher. I think with the two schools I attended this year [final year], I learned to a large extent what is expected of me regarding my commitment. To the job. How far I'm willing to stretch myself and give of myself to my job. And that goes beyond the classroom involvement, in extracurricular activity involvement, you know, by being interested in the learners inside and outside the classroom. So, my first-year experience and the third year were, I would say, the polar opposite of that. Through those two schools, I could see what I didn't want to be as a teacher.*

Lynn deems TP important but adds her reservations about the environments student-teachers are placed in to complete it because the workload is challenging:

Lynn said: *"I think it's very important [being placed in a diverse TP school]. Because what we learn at university is mostly theory, and we don't really, we don't teach at university but during teaching practice. We actually teach in a school environment; we get to see and feel what it is like actually to be a teacher. We get to experience the admin that they make us do as well. I've noticed during my teaching practice that there's a lot of workload, which seems a lot for a teacher and the learners' behaviour. And admin seems very, very much. I helped my mentor teacher with admin, and it seems. Like, it's quite a lot.*

Magmoet introduced a completely different angle on the challenges which impact day-to-day teaching. He focussed on the kinds of resources that should be used in teaching contexts:

Magmoet: *I think now we have to continue with technology in a sense. We have to equip ourselves technologically to be able to impart skills and knowledge to the kids. If you stick to the mainstream, just books, pen, and board, then you won't get their attention. In terms of learner behaviour, some of them are extremely rude. And I don't blame them, but at the same time, as a teacher, I think we should be more equipped to deal with those kinds and situations in the best manner. I would really appreciate it if we could be taught more about technology, how to create PowerPoints, and how to create documents in these kinds of lines. We didn't get some exposure in that aspect.*

This excerpt reveals a crucial pedagogical and didactical element in teacher preparation for new schooling contexts. For Magmoet, student-teachers should be introduced to the technological tools that learners may be familiar with. He asserts that technological resources are important in day-to-day learning in school. His statement, *"I would really appreciate it if we could be taught more about technology"*, gives the impression that he considers that technology will enhance his ability to teach: *"We have to equip ourselves technologically to be able to impart skills and knowledge to the kids"* and simultaneously maintain learners' attention. *"If you stick to the mainstream, just books, pen and board, then you won't get their attention"*. However, teacher professionals should be aware that while technology can be used to clarify content, it should not override the lesson's purpose, as this would mean that teachers lose their role and meaning in the learning process.

6.6.2 Stories linked to personal development

Nadia voiced her concern about being watchful about what one says in one's professional capacity as a future teacher. She offers insight into teachers exposing their unconscious biases and prejudices to learners and notes that the results can be dire: *"The reality of being a 21st-century teacher in South Africa would be that, firstly, you have to really think about what you're saying when you deliver a lesson or even when you speak to your students."* This can be interpreted to suggest that the curriculum based on student-teachers' professional ethics and the law exposed her to educators' employment rights and that neglecting her professional role can result in dismissal. She acknowledges the importance of her teacher identity in what she shares with her learners. Nadia added: *"As I said earlier, diversity now versus diversity then and how certain legislations against different races, or even now with the LGBTQ, have progressed like we have to think before we speak. You really must think as a teacher."* This refers to the body of statutes [the South African Constitution, Labour Relations Act, Employment of Educators Act, etc.], policies, norms, standards, and measures that administer and regulate the education system, which the ITE curriculum should have exposed developing teachers to in their undergraduate degree programme.

The vantage that student-teachers use when confronted with daily challenges in schools can benefit their relationship with their learners. For instance, Natasha said, *"I saw the positive within the students and would say, 'Oh my gosh, I love this class'. She [Mentor-Teacher] would ask, 'Why do you like this class? They are such a rowdy bunch'. I was like, okay ... [thinking] are we seeing two different classes?"* Choosing to accept that noise levels might increase when undertaking collaborative work will prevent teachers from associating noise with behavioural issues. Natasha pointed out that she and her mentor-teacher differed on such issues:

Natasha: *This, to me, was a shock. But I really think it's how you are with the learners. They had a much better relationship with me than they had with her. Sorry, so that to me was quite strange. I think it was our personalities, and I think what I saw in them mattered to me. The learner that I know that they can be, and I think she was just there to do a job and teach.*

Numerous elements are at play within the narrative shared by Natasha about her TP experience in this well-resourced school. Although she knows that the learners come from wealthy backgrounds, she adopts a different attitude to the mentor-teacher because she is new to the context. Her passion for teaching is also new. She acknowledges that, *"You know these students have got all the money, and they've got all that resources, and that to a large degree influences the way they treat people"*, but this did not influence her caring nature, and she adopted

an uplifting, caring and most importantly, professional attitude whilst navigating the complexities within her TP placement.

6.6.3 Stories linked to professional development

Phelisa was frank about the kind of content taught to developing student-teachers:

Phelisa: *For instance, we are not being taught what we are expected to teach in school—rather more broad content. So, for instance, I would make an example that in Natural Science, being taught something that is being taught in high school. Yes, I'm going to teach in the primary. How about we focus more on what I will teach in the primary? How we're going to implement this in class?*

The student-teacher points out that there is a missing link in the ITE formal curriculum content for the “primary schools”. The expectation is that the lecturer should be able to modify the content from the high school to the primary school level to better prepare student-teachers to teach in the latter. It seems to be taken for granted that the lecturer assigned to teach the Natural Sciences curriculum has the competencies required to make such a shift.

Taylor reported on her preparedness for the daily complexities of classroom teaching and learning by comparing her ITE teaching practicum programme with that of a friend who studied education at a different institution:

Taylor: *Teaching practice is important because it actually gives you a taste of what it's like, yet to come, because a small example, like I know a friend, where she wasn't like exposed to teaching practice that she went to teach, and she found it very difficult because she found out that she wasn't prepared. On the other hand, I know I have a certain foundation because of three years and being in three completely different environments. So, I know more and could adapt to a different environment, like change is uncomfortable. Still, I would sort of try to make what is uncomfortable comfortable because of the teaching practice experience, which was really of value.*

This excerpt reveals a profound set of issues at play as the student reflects on her readiness to navigate the future schooling context, taking into account the learning experience at one HEI and critiquing the type of learning a close friend underwent at an alternative teacher education institution. Being prepared as a teacher also means being equipped to deal with different challenges [people and places]. The diverse teaching practicum experience enables student-teachers to make informed decisions about the typology of schools that provide learners with knowledge and a safe environment for their social and psychological development. Teachers have the right to work in an environment where they feel valued and respected and should be free from fear, threats, and harm. An unsafe learning space caused by learners' behaviour, an uncomfortable collegial environment between staff members and, most importantly, an ill-prepared professional teacher negatively impact the quality of the learning experience for both them and their learners.

6.7 Theme seven: Student perspective on national teacher education policy

Teaching practice is an essential component of becoming a teacher. It gives student-teachers experience in the actual teaching and learning environment. The Intermediate Phase TP programme within the Faculty of Education expects student-teachers to spend eight weeks [*four in April and July, respectively*] in a primary school with a

mentor-teacher, to design and execute lesson plans and, hopefully, in the process, gain the necessary knowledge to become a competent teacher who contributes to quality teaching and learning. Many students, especially in their first year of the programme, have a somewhat unrealistic vision of an ideal perfect class. In undertaking TP, their visions of teaching are quickly shattered. The amount of work that goes into becoming a professional teacher is a daunting revelation. Work-integrated learning, which encompasses academic study and learning through and at work via the Intermediate Phase initial teacher degree curriculum that integrates theory with practice, should therefore be carefully designed to develop a skilled and competent professional teacher that meets the workplace requirements.

Consequently, TP is fundamental in enhancing graduate employability. However, universities and workplaces operate for different purposes, and do not always easily articulate with one another. More serious is uncertainty among ITE implementers on their role in developing professional teachers: is the graduate to become a technician of the South African state (and its legislated curriculum expectations) or a professional agent who is able to make conscious individual decisions on matters of education?

The student-teacher cohort involved in this research study was exposed to two TP timeframes during their ITE programme. During their first year [before COVID-19], they underwent two four-week TP sessions at schools. In the second year, COVID-19 resulted in the student-teachers relying on an online TP programme. They completed their second TP placement in their third year but were expected to remain in the school for a block period of eight consecutive weeks. Finally, in their final year, they undertook two four-week TP placements. The reflections reported here cover the entire period of TP.

6.7.1 The policy framework

All the participants conceded that, as per the MRTEQ (DHET, 2015), there is merit in diverse teaching practicum schooling placement. Even those who did not take up the opportunity to venture into uncomfortable or mildly different typologies of schools agreed that an alternative TP experience offers professional learning benefits. However, the students did not hesitate to voice their reservations about issues which may hinder a different kind of TP placement experience as per the National Teacher Education Policy framework, which speaks of “authentic learning spaces”. Ragmat said:

Ragmat: *So, I would tell them [university TP Office] to consider the student, their background, and their needs, like travelling plays a role. However, I would encourage students to go to these different types of schools and experience them and see what they enjoy more. They will learn if they can teach different children from diverse groups. I feel like the university needs to consider the student and their financial situation, so sometimes you don't live close to a school that has resources or a diverse group. So, I feel the university would need a stipend for travelling. Or some way to help these students?*

This excerpt points to a fundamental pitfall with respect to deep transformation. Since the CPUT is a public university and most of its students come from historically disadvantaged backgrounds, it has a responsibility to reconceptualise the current TP policies with the Faculty of Education so as not to overlook marginalised students. The TP policy designers should put the necessary operational and financial structures in place to support the

disruption to the developing teachers' familiarity with specific contexts without these students facing the additional challenge of financial resources in making a cross-over TP placement possible.

Patience considered her employability prospects when undertaking TP: *"I will tell other year groups that being in the same context will not help because you do not know where you will get the teaching post later. Then also, where you will be hired, you have to be exposed to different kinds of schools."*

Magmoet offered a different perspective on the TP framework and its value to future student-teachers by noting the increased number of student-teachers, which adds to administrative and TP-related challenges. This results in them not receiving adequate one-on-one professional development during the ITE curriculum and in the TP placement school: *"Getting to know each student will be tough So, give them a brief that will prepare them for the schools they will be going to."* He also reflected on internationalisation during TP and alluded to the advantages thereof:

Magmoet: *Maybe in terms of the world. With students differ from country to country. It would be nice if we get the perspective of what's happening in different parts of the world. In terms of education, teachers, and students. And we could also see this is a good country; maybe I can apply my skills there. That would be nice.*

In closing, Magmoet shared his thoughts on his preparedness for the world of work:

Magmoet: *In these four years, if I could say maybe I am more equipped than other parts of Africa. I would like to go to other parts of the world and encourage and assist teachers who are struggling with how to teach and what to do in terms of especially the poorer countries.*

In understanding student-teachers' varied lived experiences by linking their shared narratives to the university TP curriculum, the impact of an alternative teaching practicum experience on their development becomes evident. The designers of the TP curriculum should be mindful of the social constructs that are reinforced when students are not challenged to move out of their comfort zones. People's exclusion from specific contexts, spaces, and buildings may no longer be enshrined in policy and legislation, but remnants of the past linger when student-teachers choose schools for TP placement.

6.7.2 Duration of teaching practice

Learning to teach has no set timeframe. The participants felt that too short a time is allocated to TP as student-teachers have to complete numerous activities during their time at the school. Daaem observed: *"I think it's long or so, but coming to an end, you realise it wasn't actually that long"*. Nkosana also felt that the timeframe was inadequate to gain sufficient professional learning:

Nkosana: *I think it's short. And I say that purely based on the learning process, you know, four weeks is quite short for us to gather all the experience that we need to prepare us for learning because so much happens within schools, and four weeks is not enough for you to be able to grasp everything. But I do think that because students not all students have, you know, financial means.*

Furthermore, university-assigned evaluators formally assess students, and the short timeframe means that much of the professional learning and interaction with school staff and learners cannot be evaluated. Student-teachers do not focus solely on teaching content. They must become familiar with the schooling culture, the typology of

learners, their needs, constraints to learning and the overall school policy. As noted earlier, time, effort, and endurance are required to successfully complete TP and be considered for employment at the school. From another perspective, the fact that TP is split into two four-week periods is a possible refresher for students to reinforce their learning and also benefits those who lack the resources to be at school for eight consecutive weeks.

Nkosana: *I think it would primarily be the money because, uh, travel money is quite an issue with all of us when it comes to teaching practice, but also coming up with resources, the printing, and all of that to have that already within one teaching practice session. Yes, it gives us time to, you know, be removed from the school so we can reflect and strategise, but I think it also prevents, you know, all the negative behaviours that can occur in teaching practice, like the conflict with staff and dating other staff members in teaching practice. So yeah.*

In contrast, Nadia shared: *“I was actually best happy with the one stretch. The break in between made you forget certain things, and you had to come back and then remember all these learners’ names. Also, you know there are no assignments that you have to do during teaching practice”.*

Johanna said that the four-week timeframe promoted her psychological well-being and health: *“I think it helps me refocus because I get easily overwhelmed in new situations, so it helped me calm down and like get things in order and not feel so like the work is just piling up, it gave me a chance to get everything sorted.”*

The student-teachers thus presented mixed reactions to the TP timeframe, which depended on various elements within the placement schooling context and their personal resources during their placement in a different context.

6.7.3 Opportunities linked to teaching practice

Student-teachers become a part of a community of practice, which means socially integrating into the school. Through social interactions with various school members, the placed student-teacher is able to develop rapport, which may lead to school management offering employment. It is not unheard of for school managers to identify professional qualities and potential in developing student-teachers and link those qualities to the description of the ‘right’ candidate for a job in the school.

Diverse TP placements offer student-teachers a varied professional learning experience. Lynn identified the benefits of being introduced to varied typologies of schools:

Lynn: *I think it's a good idea for people to go to different schools because one day, when they are looking for a job, maybe they are only accepted at a school where it's different from what they used to, and then they would have that behind them [experience of working in different schools]. The experience behind them was what they had done in teaching practice.*

The formal ITE programme [curriculum] trains students on concepts of diversity and equality. However, Lynn seems to suggest that personal interest is more important than experiential learning about diversity. She focuses on future employability and equates varied schooling contexts with employment opportunities. This suggests that students do not fully understand the deeper meaning of diversity and its potential in professional learning. If Lynn is to influence the minds of the hundreds of primary school children whom she will teach between her current age of 21 and retirement age [usually 60] over the next 39 years, she would need to explore more deeply what diversity means for her outside of the curriculum.

Dumo offered an alternative view on the value of undertaking TP in different school environments:

Dumo: *Teaching Practice is important, and what makes it important is that we get a feel of what it's like to be a teacher, and sometimes we actually also get challenges that we are not taught at university because, you know, we have different schools and different learners, so teaching practice it actually opens someone's eyes and makes them see the kind of space that they'll be working in.*

This excerpt implies deep reflection by the student-teacher on the purpose and aims of TP endeavour as well as the curriculum programme offered at this Faculty of Education. The formal curriculum is designed to provide student-teachers with the necessary basic competencies as beginner teachers in the world of work in a country with a highly fragmented past.

6.7.4 Challenges linked to teaching practice

Each school where student-teachers are placed for completion of TP over the four-year degree has its own set of dynamics, beliefs and practices. Student-teachers are situated within authentic schooling contexts with a view to gaining direct experience of a teaching career in its entirety. By experiencing WIL and under the guidance of their assigned mentor-teachers, they become familiar with the kinds of duties their future role will entail. Dumo described what she deemed challenging during TP:

Dumo: *Much of the problems have to do with the behaviour of learners. Some learners do not regard us as student-teachers because the university tells us to go to school dressed up and be ready, and you know, we should always smile and be nice to people, and we do that. But sometimes the learners, how they behave, know that this is not my teacher, so I will not answer this person, you know? And so, we face such challenges that we don't know what to do. And also, we have different learners. So, at university, we have been taught the theory of how to overcome such challenges. But when you are in the classroom, you do it practically and see what works and what doesn't.*

This suggests an acute disconnect between the ITE programme experienced by the students and their on-site experiences within the TP placement schools. Thus, a lack of insight and support from the university might result in students failing to navigate unfamiliar schooling contexts during TP. The drive to obtain the qualification is powerful in navigating the four-year degree programme; however, a lack of proper structures to support a move into uncomfortable spaces can discourage student-teachers from being willing to learn in diverse TP contexts.

A lack of support from parents prevents teachers from successfully supporting learners. Phelisa said: *"Parents being in denial about their children's behaviour in school and blaming the teacher for everything. Not getting maybe support regard to emotional and mental health."* Collaboration between parents and teachers is required to provide learners with physical, social, emotional, and intellectual support. Delivering the official CAPS curriculum within the set timeframe is more difficult when teachers are confronted by learners' misconduct. Adelaide noted: *"You're always going to be busy, and that is to say, the more kids you have in your class, the more admin you will end up having. And be aware of your time management; also, you need to manage your time."* This participant observed that large classes increase teachers' administrative workload.

In Ragmat's view, being a teacher in the 21st century has its drawbacks due to children's access to technology from a young age:

Ragmat: *I feel the learners are more advanced now. They know their rights. Some of them have bad attitudes. They will talk back. They're not as obedient as we were. I think social media plays a role as well as technology. Children at that age are usually on social media. For example, I saw a video where teachers were dancing to a song on TikTok and people in the comments told them, "You teachers, how can you behave like this?" To me, it seems people expect you not to have a personal life just because you are a teacher. So, I feel like that is one of the drawbacks.*

Technology has changed teaching as a career. Learners are also technologically savvy. Learners and teachers' access to technology calls for debate on its application in a learning environment and how it can be used to advance learning.

Teaching practice as a segment of the ITE programme enables students to experience the reality of a South African primary school. Students are exposed to the complexities of teaching diverse groups of learners and, as such, learn first-hand the many possibilities linked to becoming a professional teacher. They are called on to apply their agency, while their HEI is responsible for providing scaffolding support to enable them to navigate a seamless shift. This calls for scrutiny of the curriculum and how diversity is mediated by the course designers of the ITE programme. Are the subject specialists facilitating in-depth knowledge of the concepts relating to diversity?

6.8 Theme eight: Roles and responsibilities of stakeholders in the TP placement school: confronting dynamics [school and university]

Many successful graduates of CPUT have acknowledged having had a wonderful mentor at some stage in their journey. Mentoring enables a person to develop by drawing on the wisdom and experience of someone who has gone before and is a good way to accelerate teachers' professional development. Student-teacher mentoring is a collaborative effort encompassing clear-cut terms of reference between the content lecturer [also known as a student-teacher educator] within the ITE programme, the choice of a mentor-teacher by the school principal when the student-teacher embarks on a TP school placement, and the mentee [student-teacher] who also plays a cardinal role in his/her own professional development. If all goes according to plan, the university lecturer, mentor-teacher, and student-teacher mentee will collectively benefit from the experience. However, many student-teachers experience an array of complexities when undertaking teaching practicum within diverse South African schooling contexts, and mentoring is among the challenges.

6.8.1 Exploring the role of the school manager: principal

The school principal is the person entrusted with providing leadership and management within the school. They decide whether or not to host student-teachers in the school. From the outset of the placement, a professional relationship should be established between the incoming student-teacher and the principal. Patience relayed her experience:

Patience: *I had a good relationship with the teachers, principal, and general workers. They welcomed me with warm hands, unlike others. I couldn't ask for some things if I needed some materials. I had to buy the posters I will be using, but they told me that if I need anything, you are free to come to the office or go to teacher X for help.*

A collegial, warm environment that welcomes student-teachers could remove some nervousness experienced when entering a new school. Ragmat was of the view that: *"The principal needs just to brief you on the school, what they do at the school, their teaching methods, their resources. I feel like the principal needs to just inform me of that."* Magmoet suggested the principal could *"Maybe call ... us once a week or once every third or fourth day, speaking to asking what's happening, or what we're struggling with, or what support you need."* Amina remarked: *"I think principals should have daily meetings with the staff and student-teachers ... to make [them] aware of things occurring in the schools."*

Dumo offered in-depth insights into what she considered added value to the placement of university students and building early career relationships:

Dumo: *I thought the principal should open their doors to student-teachers. For example, we were not allowed to talk to the principal directly at the school I went to. I don't know why, but sometimes you want to, so I did not really feel comfortable, but they know that, okay, this is what the principal wants, so that's what I'm going to do. So you know when the principal is open enough to say you can come to me. If you have any questions, you can come to me. Just opening their doors to student-teachers because we feel that okay. We can only talk to our mentor teachers, who will then convey their message to the principal. So it just doesn't make sense because, as student-teachers, we should have some kind of relationship with the principals. After all, we are going to become qualified teachers one day, and we are required to have a relationship. So, if we do not get that experience as student-teachers, it will be something completely new when we are working, and we wouldn't know how to relate to the principal.*

This detailed description hints at some principals' authoritarian positions asserting their school leadership roles. There is a need for change as, in due course, student-teachers will be newly-qualified teachers who will require the learning necessary to communicate with an array of educational stakeholders, one of whom is the school manager.

6.8.2 Exploring the varieties of mentor-teachers

Teaching experience is crucial when supporting incoming student-teachers. Zafeer said: *"You have that more experienced individual there to guide you and give you more tips and advice"* Student-teachers rely on the professional expertise of the assigned mentor-teacher to guide them in their developmental journey of becoming certified professionals. They require insight into the schooling and classroom space and the learner challenges which may be encountered. Zafeer described his mentor-teacher's influence and their professional relationship:

Zafeer: *Mrs Jones was a very good mentor-teacher. She taught me about teaching and gave me tips and advice on what to do and what not to do. Not only regarding teaching but how you carry yourself at the school, interact with others, and admin work. How to go about things to make your life easier. I really appreciated that. She gave me a lot of insight and taught me a lot.*

The mentor-teacher thus exposes the student-teacher to the different roles teachers play. Their weakness and shortcomings will become evident to the placed student-teacher. Athandwa said: *"I don't remember my first mentor-teacher. The third-year mentor-teacher used textbooks to teach but also projectors and all that. Her weakness was just administration. As such, I would advise the mentor-teacher to be helpful and not overwork the student."* An unpleasant experience or unprofessional teacher-mentor can also shed light on the kind of teacher a student-teacher should aim not to become. Bonga shared her final year of a diverse teaching practicum experience:

Bonga: *My most recent mentor-teacher at the primary school was Miss Williams. She's Coloured, and she positively influenced me. We are very similar. She positively influenced me. Although we are from different backgrounds, we are similar in terms of style and what we like to do. So, she helped me to embrace that individualism that I have.*

Bonga, a Black African female participant, noted that people from different race groups can positively impact one's professional development. Crossing racial boundaries and embracing likeness or similarities promoted inner growth for her. Reflecting on two schooling sites during her TP placements over four years, Bonga declared her distaste for teachers behaving unprofessionally:

Bonga: *I never really had a relationship with any of my mentor-teachers. I was swopped around, but often, what I didn't particularly appreciate as a weakness was my first mentor-teacher, who said very confidential things to me about her learners. Which also goes to, like, not taking the learners seriously. They don't take learners as human beings. That's the problem that I found and another weakness; also, my second mentor abandoned me in his class a lot of times. And he was like because I was there, it was a free pass, no mentoring, and there was no mentoring whatsoever.*

The positive characteristics of mentor-teachers cited by some participants are the traits of a professional teacher. Being placed in the classroom with a mentor-teacher who lacks experience and professionalism negatively impacts a student-teacher's development. A collaborative partnership can produce positive results; as such, there should be clear-cut communication between the parties with the aim of both growing during the mentorship and possibly thereafter.

Bonga presented an evocative account of the first time she entered the schooling environment as a developing teacher:

Bonga: *In my first year, I had two mentor-teachers. It was really bad. It was a Black school in the township. The mentor teacher, the way that she did things. On my first day, actually, on lesson collection day, she said to me: "Oh, I didn't know that you were coming. If I had known, I wouldn't have come because I am also currently studying. I need to do my psychology practicals" So, I laughed it off, and then I was sitting there. The two mentor-teachers were having a conversation and then telling me about the kids, and she was pointing out children with HIV. Saying this one was sexually abused by this one, and she's pointing out these different kids was problematic for me. After the first break, I get into the class, and the kids start coming in, and I'm waiting, I'm waiting, and I'm waiting. And apparently, she [mentor-teacher] went home. And that was lesson collection day in the academic year 2019 in the month of February. I'm fresh from high school. I don't know Jack. I don't know a thing about teaching kids. And that was very traumatic for me. So, she left me with a very negative experience. It's not even about her leaving me with her class. It's about her not respecting children.*

The vignette shared in this interview is not unique. However, the contexts and typologies of schools and mentor-teachers vary. In this instance, the mentor-teachers were enmeshed in the mediocrity of unprofessionalism, given that they shared personal details about children without their parents' formal consent. The mentor-teacher also disrespected the student-teacher by not informing her that she was leaving school early.

Lebo expected her assigned mentor-teacher to literally take her by the hand and turn her into a professional teacher:

Lebo: *The way she was, she was not mentoring me. I think she was such a harsh teacher to me. Even though I was in class, I was not self-confident that I could be active in the classroom because she was not showing me how to draw and learn as a student-teacher. I know I was practicing being a teacher, but as a mentor, she was supposed to show me that. I must do this as a new teacher who is as a student who is becoming a teacher, and then as she would have been a good mentor to me.*

The roles, responsibilities and expectations of all stakeholders should thus be addressed at the commencement of the teaching practicum timeframe to prevent misunderstandings.

6.8.3 Exploring the kinds of lecturers during the initial teacher education programme

In the second one-on-one interview, the participants were asked: “Do you think your lecturers were sufficiently competent in the knowledge of the school subjects you were expected to teach?” Natasha responded:

Nkosana: *Yes, for the most part, they did. I mean, what's unfortunate about our four-year degree was COVID because with COVID came the convenience of just slapping loads of work on Blackboard and expecting students to, you know, complete tasks. And you know, we had to reimagine completely how we do things? How do we study and learn in this degree? But in the first year, I think for the most part, some of the majority did, yes. Their experience this year, though, is quite different. There have been a number of new additions. But I am quite concerned about the new students coming in. I don't know how to put it. I'm concerned for them because some lecturers aren't at the calibre we experienced in the first year. It would be a shame if those lecturers were allowed to continue lecturing without at least some kind of supervision.*

This suggests that mentoring is required to support new staff taking up positions in the Faculty of Education. While professional development is cardinal in the growth of student-teachers, newly-employed academics also require support to be of benefit to their assigned cohorts of student-teachers within the ITE programme at the CPUT. Natasha asserted that lecturers should “do what you preach”:

Natasha: *Yes. So we have a lot to say, but we'll keep it short and sweet. You are preaching to us about one thing, but you're not doing what you're preaching in the sense of how you show you are teaching. You are talking about the different methodologies, yet we are sitting there in a lecture, and it's not student-centred. As you are saying, even the teacher should be the same. Learn the same thing. But you are not giving us the same, so also I feel like it's important. As I said previously, lecturers teaching future educators must be aware of what is happening in South African schools now. It is important. So that's the advice I can give.*

Natasha described a disconnection between how lecturers teach the teacher education programme and their execution of the curriculum. In her opinion, it is vital that developing student-teachers appreciate the connection between the theoretical interpretation of the formal curriculum and the way academics bring the theory's practical component into the university space, where it impacts the professional growth of the students in their care. In brief, the designers of the formal teacher education programme are responsible for imitating the programme they advocate for in the lecture theatre. Zafeer proposed that the ITE programme should be redesigned: “To the university, I would say, incorporate more real-life scenarios and situations into the curriculum so that students can mentally prepare themselves for what they might experience in a different schooling context.”

Dumo asserted that the current Teaching Practicum curriculum, linked with the MRTEQ, prevents student-teachers from gaining authentic learning in diverse teaching practicum contexts:

Dumo: *I don't know if this only counts, um, for CPUT or also other institutions, but the limitations that the school gives when it comes to teaching practice, we cannot go outside of the province. So sometimes people feel more that people want to know how it feels like, like me, how it feels like to teach in a rural setting. Because I, for one, didn't grow, grow up in a rural setting, and I've never been there. But then we, had we had the chance to go to such settings, would take that opportunity and go and explore to see what is needed there. Also, I feel that many teachers want to work in urban areas because of, you know, all the advantages that we have in urban areas. Still, others want to explore what it's like to teach in rural areas and apply all of the theories that we learnt in university in rural areas to improve rural education. Because it's it, it won't grow. It won't grow. So yeah, I feel that if the university allowed us to do our teaching practice anywhere, we would have insight and be able to apply the knowledge we learnt. So now it is only limited to the Western Cape, and therefore, you find that there are overcrowded student-teachers in one school, and you know the school gets tired of student-teachers and are like, when are they leaving? So, as we don't even feel comfortable, we're like, you know what? I just want those two months to end so they can be done with teaching practice. So it takes, it takes a lot away from us. So right now, student-teachers, the fourth years, are only now enthusiastic to try other places because we want to be placed in certain areas. After all, we've always wanted to teach in those areas or to see how those areas teach their learners and also to, you know. So it's only now that that's going to happen.*

6.9 Theme nine: Typology of primary school learners experienced [school]

Close to three decades after the demise of apartheid, its residual elements persist. There are growing concerns that, especially in the Western Cape, specific primary schools' acceptance of student-teachers for TP perpetuates societal inequalities and divisions, creating further polarisation amongst HEIs. In the process of becoming a teacher in the South African context, especially in the Western Cape, one will come across a diverse set of primary school learners. The first two excerpts below highlight the kinds of learners, while the third focuses on experiences of special needs schooling and the last two recount instances where prejudice prevented students from entering certain learning contexts.

Natasha and Dumo shared their experience of attending various schools during the four-year degree programme and working with different types of learners. However, both explicitly stated their choice not to work within their community upon being formally certified. Natasha, who lived in the suburb of Steenberg, felt she would be doing an injustice to herself if she worked in such a community:

Natasha: *So where I reside at the moment, it's Steenberg. So, the kids here are different types, and they are different types of breeds. They are different types of children, and they are from different households. You need to talk a certain way for them to understand your point, and I'm not willing to be that person when I've been a certain way. For example, I would speak so nicely to them, and they wouldn't listen to me, but when I changed my tone, they automatically just listened. I didn't want to be that. I didn't want that to be my teaching experience. So, that's why I opted for teaching outside my community.*

Dumo: *I am ready, Sir [to teach in various contexts]. Yes, I am ready because even during my first year at Sunflower Boys Primary School, it is a Christian and Muslim school. So, it was the first time I was being exposed to the Muslim community, and after my teaching practice, I knew how to relate to people from other religious groups. Honestly, Sir, I feel comfortable teaching outside of my community because I am outside of my comfort zone, and I can grow more as a person and as a teacher because I always need to learn. It helps me develop a growth and just mindset, not just a fixed mindset.*

Nkosana asserted that the only way to ensure that student-teachers are exposed to teaching various learners within different contexts is to make this compulsory: *"I would say maybe don't make it an option. Don't give students a choice because students will always choose comfort over growth. And that's just from my own personal experience as well."* Adelaide ventured into a special needs school:

Adelaide: *The schooling just seemed different, and the approach that the teachers had and working with about 13 learners in the class, and you could hear the quietness in the silence. No learners were making a noise, which was very appealing. Very nice. So, I was considering maybe teaching at a special needs school. But there was the one bit of uncomfortable [situation]. I don't know what word, but the one teacher had to like to feed him through a pipe and just like how he was moving and the food was possibly coming out again, so just too much for me, like a little bit too much like.*

While the participants worked with various types of learners, none undertook a Teaching Practicum in a special needs school, 73 in the Western Cape, since the current ITE WIL excludes such schools. Adelaide's experience opens up a broader choice of future placement and employability options.

Inclusion and exclusion are sought by learners and student-teachers alike. Being placed in an uncomfortable and dehumanising position by a mentor-teacher who consciously or unconsciously asserts their power within the classroom may negatively affect student-teachers academically and emotionally:

Bonga: *From my experience, as a Black student-teacher in class, we get highlighted quite often, right? You have braidings on your head. They ask you, Uh. How do you wash that? It's kind of disturbing. Doesn't it get dirty that you have that for months on, like, those kinds of silly things that teachers would ask Black student-teachers in the classroom? So we were quite a bit outstanding. If there was something, maybe we'll be reading poetry about, let's say, culture what, they would say, come do that dance for us. Let's see and stuff like that. I feel like that was a bit silly.*

Covert racism within the mentoring process impacts the selection of schools for teaching practicum. Being singled out by a mentor-teacher who should be developing student-teachers can impact one's teacher identity. Bonga noted that this also occurred in single race schools:

Bonga: *During teaching practice, I've been to a Black school. I've been to a multiracial school, but I've always felt separated. When I went to the Black school while I was doing my teaching practicals, even though we were of the same culture and race, we spoke the same language, and I found that people shied away from me because they felt like they maybe didn't relate to me. After all, I'm from a different background. According to them, my accent is a little bit different. I've had students complain that I speak English funny; they don't hear what I'm trying to say. And then the multiracial school also, I had individuals that had a hard time interacting with me because I was the only Black teacher that students have interacted with, and that was probably part of the, let's say, the things that I was working in. So, I also had a hard time. In the beginning, I was connecting with teachers and with the learners. Also, I had a hard time having the learners trust me that, as a Black teacher, I am capable of teaching languages like Home Language and English. It didn't make sense to them, so I always thought there were people around me, but in that sense, I felt isolated, like I never actually belonged in a sense.*

I posed a follow-up question: *"So teachers' idea about diversity is not broad enough. And so, what they tend to do is, they highlight the already marginalised Black learners and perhaps Coloured learners and insinuate that you would know what it means?"*

Bonga: *Yeah, yeah, exactly. Yes. Already from them, they assume that we are different. Right. So basically, let's say we're talking about certain foods, and then, it's a poem about foods, and then you would like, and then if you would comment, they're like, oh, you guys eat that, okay and like, how do you guys do it? Do you know certain? Yeah. Slightly mock. I understand. When someone else asks from an interesting point of view, sometimes it's just pure ignorance.*

Legislated racial inequality was abolished in South Africa before the 1994 democratic election. However, covert racism rears its ugly head in teaching placement schools. It is constructed to make certain already marginalised individuals feel unwelcome and that they do not belong. Natasha shared her experience working with learners from wealthy homes at an independent private school in her final year of TP. She compared them with the marginalised learners of different races from the Ocean View area where she was placed the previous year:

Natasha: *This year, I worked with a lot of White students and one or two Xhosa students. So, I feel that it was quite, it was quite diverse. I must say this year for me was a challenge — last year, not so much and my first year, not much. But the first year was a challenge. I found it difficult to be on those students' level or felt like I was not equipped enough to teach learners, not because of their race, but more because they were acting like they knew it all and I didn't need you because I have other people who can teach me this. I think that's because of their attitude, and last year, the students were all learners. They were willing to learn. All they wanted was more knowledge. ... they were eager. The same happened with my first-year experience. They were willing to learn. They wanted to learn, and yes, there was an eagerness. They tried to intimidate me, but it did not work because, as a teacher, you need to stand your ground and just be like, I know more than you know. Okay, because when it's like this, to be honest, they can intimidate you, and they would want to challenge you.*

As a developing student-teacher from a marginalised context in the Western Cape, exposure to a context that looks and feels nothing like one's comfort zone can be overwhelming and daunting. All the student-teachers experienced a diverse teaching practicum to some extent. However, the complexity associated with an authentic and diverse TP placement requires further, deeper interpretation.

6.10 A commentary on the above stages: Reflections on diversity and social justice

Diversity was understood by the 19 final-year Intermediate Phase student-teachers in limited ways, confined to race and conceptions of different personalities. It was understood as difference (**oppositional**) rather than social justice (**collaborative democracy**) and as a construct emanating from their experiences. These lived experiences were more powerful than any formal curriculum effort to change this worldview. Diversity was thus understood to be about managing differences rather than constructing a social justice agenda. The student-teachers had cognitive knowledge of diversity-related legislation but did not deeply internalise this construct to influence how they related to a wider view of recognition and respect for otherness. They prioritised current lived experiences of circles of beliefs and values. Diversity is not enacted to influence change and promote socially just relationships. Past prejudices and lived experiences of racism and classism (*in the home, schooling and the broader community/society*) endure, and there is a loss of faith in the rhetoric of democratic policy. The university curriculum does not provide adequate scaffolding for student-teachers to move out of their experiences or predefined worldviews. Lecturers labour under the misconception that because they lecture about diversity, this is sufficient to disrupt students' beliefs, values and past experiences. The students knew about legislative notions of diversity

and respect, but did not reveal a deep commitment to a new direction in their personal lives. They tolerate diversity conceptually but not personally. The rhetoric about diversity is not translated into personal choices in relation to being a professional teacher. They expressed a preference to return to schools similar to those they attended. Some of the student-teachers interpreted the formal university curriculum as a ritualistic profession of preferred views but indicated that their ideological principles were not adjusted. For them, certification rather than education was the priority. Obtaining a job was more important than changing their knowledge, beliefs and values. These views are likely to consolidate rather than disrupt students' comfort zones.

The primary source of transformation within the TP cross-over experience lies in the student-teacher's capacity to effect change, rather than in superficial university curricula or broader societal issues like inequity and community division. The changes which these student-teachers could potentially alter are as follows:

- **Improving learner learning outcomes:** Student-teachers may aim to enhance the academic performance and overall learning experiences of their learners by implementing effective teaching strategies and providing individualised support.
- **Fostering positive classroom environments:** They may strive to create inclusive and supportive classroom environments where all learners feel valued, respected, and engaged in their learning.
- **Promoting equity and inclusion:** Student-teachers may work to address inequities and promote diversity by ensuring that all learners, regardless of background or ability, have equal access to educational opportunities and resources.
- **Building stronger school-community relationships:** They may seek to strengthen connections between the school and the broader community, fostering collaboration and partnerships that support learner success and well-being.
- **Professional growth and development:** Student-teachers may focus on their own growth as educators, reflecting on their teaching practices, seeking feedback, and continually striving to improve their instructional skills and effectiveness.

Overall, the change expected from student-teachers within their TP schools encompasses a range of educational, social, and professional outcomes aimed at positively impacting both students and the broader school community.

6.11 Synthesis of chapter

Chapter Six presented the data from evaluative thematic analysis of the two one-on-one interviews with the participants on their understanding and experience of diversity in the South African context and the link between their lived experiences and their formal ITE curriculum. An extensive list of sub-themes emerged from the three stages presented, which focused on aspects of diversity at home, in the ITE programme and in TP schools, providing a deeper understanding of the students' reasons for selecting specific school placements. The participants shared their authentic first-hand stories of experiences after entering varied schools and working alongside varied learners, mentor-teachers and school managers. The insights that emerged in this chapter also contribute to the possible review of the current TP programme within this HEI to build a stronger link with the type of learning students should experience when entering a new, unfamiliar school during teaching placement.

Chapter seven answers this study's third critical question by linking the participants' experiences of diverse teaching practicum placements with the initial theoretical frameworks. It focuses on theorising the lived experiences of the dominant group of student-teachers who remained in their comfort zone.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THEORISING PARTICIPANTS' LIVED EXPERIENCES OF TP: REMAINING IN THE COMFORT ZONE: THE DOMINANT TREND

7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the student-teachers' professional growth and development in light of the ITE programme they experienced within higher education. It highlighted their emotions, thoughts and interactions that stemmed from their subjective experiences. This chapter, which is the third of four chapters of data presentation and analysis, discusses the participants' experiences of traversing their *TP placement* journeys within the context of school spaces.

This present chapter offers deeper insights into the phenomenon of this study. It examines the factors that explain the student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse Teaching Practicum schools by examining their home life and family views on aspects of diversity, the reasons why they chose to embark on teaching as a career, functioning in groups whilst undertaking group projects during the ITE programme and insights into the choice of schools for practical experience. This case study was located in the Western Cape, and at the time of the data production, the participants were registered in the BEd. programme at a teacher education university. I commence this chapter by presenting an analysis of the narratives of the dominant group, students whom I delineate as capitulating to the norm by remaining in their comfort zones when choosing schools for placement. I refer to the concept of comfort zone in the context of students not wanting to cross over to other schools refers to a psychological state where students prefer to remain within educational environments that mirror the dynamics of their previous schools. This reluctance to venture into new educational settings stems from a familiarity and sense of security associated with environments similar to those where they previously learned. These students entered the same school or various schools with similar kinds of dynamics to the ones that they themselves went to as learners because they were afraid of the unknown dynamics linked to diverse schooling spaces. How and why they chose these schools is the focus of this chapter's analysis, showing its influences on their emergent professional learning, which is complex. Although not an initial intention when joining specifically selected TP placement schools, in hindsight, participants recognised their learning experience served as a site for professional growth and development.

The cohort of participants listed in this chapter differs to the two participants in chapter 8. In chapter 8 the stories shared by Natasha and Dumo provide deep insights into the journey of becoming a professional teacher in a society still plagued by the legacies of a once-segregated society. By deeply analysing these two outliers' participants' life histories and experiences, I aimed to understand how their biographical profiles and teaching experiences in a range of South African primary schools influenced their understanding of diversity in TP placement contexts. Their stories reflected the potential of positive agency.

Emergent professional learning for these participants at university engaging in teaching practice refers to the ongoing and dynamic process through which they develop and refine their professional skills, knowledge, and

identities in the journey of becoming professional teachers. It involves the continuous emergence of new understandings, insights, and competencies as they actively engage with the complexities of teaching and learning in real-world (South African) educational settings. This form of learning, as it stands, emphasises reflection, collaboration, experimentation, and adaptation to address the diverse needs of students and navigate the evolving demands of the teaching profession. It is deeply characterised by its responsiveness to the context and challenges encountered during teaching practice at the selected TP placement schools, fostering a deepening understanding of effective teaching strategies, pedagogical approaches, and professional responsibilities expected from developing teacher professionals.

As explained in Chapter three, three theories (critical phenomenology, the comfort, stretch and panic model and the pedagogy of discomfort theory) informed the study's theoretical framework. The analysed data of students' experiences within a familiar zone were viewed through the theoretical amalgam set up in Chapter three. How individuals make sense of the world around them is vital in understanding their conscious first-hand experiences.

What makes this group of participants distinct from the cohort listed in Chapter eight is based on their conscious decision-making to undertake teaching practicum placements within schools which permeate familiarity with their schooling and lived experiences. The group listed here may be declared to have philosophically²⁶ capitulated to the existing systemic powers. In this chapter, it becomes evident that many of the participants were reluctant to venture into unfamiliar educational settings, preferring to remain within the confines of their comfort zones. This hesitancy suggests a philosophical capitulation to existing systemic powers, as they opt for familiarity over the challenges and opportunities presented by diverse teaching environments.

The data presented in this chapter emerged from the two focus group discussions using an arts-based methodology stimulus activity²⁷ (*Appendix six: Focus group interview part a: Images of teachers in diverse tp schooling contexts*) before moving on to the interview questions (*Appendix seven: Focus group interview schedule part b: After the teaching practice session*). It should be noted that not all the participants could attend the focus group interviews for various reasons. This chapter presents insights from two focus group interviews involving two sets of participants:

- Focus group session one consisted of the following participants: Natasha, Khethiwe, Bonga, Amina and Zafeer [*Natasha's commentary is utilised in Chapter eight since she was one of the individuals who embraced an out-of-comfort zone TP experience*]
- Focus group session two consisted of the following participants: Dumo, Ragmat and Lebo [*Dumo's commentary is utilised in Chapter eight*]

²⁶ In this context, "philosophically" refers to a mindset or belief system that guides the participants' attitudes and actions. It suggests that their reluctance to explore unfamiliar educational settings is not merely a practical decision but stems from a deeper philosophical stance. The term implies that the participants' choices are influenced by their underlying beliefs about education, society, and their role as teachers. Specifically, their preference for familiarity over challenges indicates a philosophical capitulation—a surrender or acceptance—to the existing systemic powers within the educational landscape.

²⁷ In Chapter 7, I employed arts-based methods to facilitate deeper expression and reflection among participants, allowing them to convey their experiences and emotions creatively. These methods included activities such as the tree of life visual journaling and narrative storytelling, which provided rich, multifaceted data. In Chapter 8, I analysed the participant responses to these arts-based activities, drawing connections between the creative outputs and their personal and professional insights. This approach illuminated the nuanced ways in which participants understand and navigate their development as professional teachers, linking artistic expression to their reflective processes.

At the start of the focus group interview, I indicated that the purpose was to activate the focus group interview (Part A). After that, the focus group interview (Part B) would explore the quality of student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse TP contexts (**Refer to Appendices six and seven**). I looked forward to hearing their first-hand authentic stories about the schools chosen to learn to become a professional teacher.

In the opening activation activity, I indicated that I would be sharing in a PowerPoint format a series of photographic images of scenarios or incidents directly related to teaching in diverse TP contexts (*Appendix six: Focus group interview part a: Images of teachers in diverse TP schooling contexts*). Some images depicted the various stakeholders in this developmental learning process. Each student was tasked with choosing one or two images that best depict his/her own experiences of TP. They would then describe the persons involved. Lastly, I aimed to zoom into the kind of experiences of the learning processes the image/picture represented for the students. Overall, these questions activated the focus group interview with the varied participants who, for the first time, could meet in a safe online space and engage about their development (personally, academically, and professionally). Although the participants were familiar with one another as they were completing the IP programme on the same campus, it was the first time they met those purposefully selected for this research study in a virtual meeting. The data production session (Part B) would follow the regular route of a focus group interview in which a dialogical conversation between the researcher and the researched is engaged about the topic.

7.2 Overview of chapter

Section 7.3 discusses divergences linked to comfort pedagogies and disruption pedagogies (Boler & Zembylas, 2003). The figure of the two theories demonstrates the levels of movement (learning shifts) anticipated to occur in the varied zones when an individual enters a new and unfamiliar learning context.

Sections 7.3.1, 7.3.2, 7.3.3 and 7.3.4 present a more in-depth discussion on the different conditions linked within each zone that enable a professional to remain within a space of security and safety as opposed to stretching themselves to shift out of their zone of certainty (Boler & Zembylas, 2003).

Section 7.4 presents an account of the student-teachers' lived experiences in the schools using critical phenomenological theoretical reasoning for accounting for their understanding of these experiences. Section 7.4.1. explains level one descriptive level of understanding the experiences, namely the education system participants experienced before entering the ITE programme.

Section 7.4.2. describes the level two descriptive level of understanding the interconnected experiences of the participants through an ITE curriculum, preparing them for the world of work.

In Section 7.4.3, I expound on the level three descriptive level of understanding of the participants' experiences by examining their views on their contextual transitioning and development.

Section 7.5 provides a glimpse into a possible course of action to research professional teachers' lived experiences using fragmentary tenets from the previous findings.

Section 7.6 offers a critique on whose obligation it is to ensure that professional learning receives the consideration it requires.

In Section 7.7, I bind together the conceptual agendas of social equity and social justice to provide a framework for a collaborative work order to foster professional learning for future professionals.

Lastly, Section 7.8 synthesises the lessons learnt from those participants who chose to remain within the confines of their comfort zone in the development segment of their ITE programme.

7.3 From Pedagogies of comfort *to* Pedagogies of disruption

This section draws on the theoretical challenges Boler and Zembylas (2003) suggested to work towards confronting dominant worldviews that are acceptable and normal (naturalistic) but which, with greater criticality, reflect hegemonic culturally constructed values. The theorisation by Boler and Zembylas (2003) focuses on self-practices, which reinforce current cultural affirmations instead of contesting whose interests' current hegemonic practices serve (critical enquiry). Using the data analysis from the two focus group interviews, I examine the nature of a cohort of Intermediate Phase student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse Teaching Practicum contexts to either capitulate to systemic power or embrace agentic power (Samuel, 2022). This section uses the phased approach to attempt to move individuals from a pedagogy of comfort to a disruption pedagogy (Samuel, 2022; Boler & Zembylas, 2003).

A brief description of the varied zones according to the theory (Samuel, 2022; Boler & Zembylas, 2003) is as follows:

- **Comfort Zone: *Description:*** A comfortable space, often called the comfort zone, is where individuals feel safe, happy, and in control of their environment. It is characterised by low levels of anxiety and stress, providing a refuge that requires minimal additional energy from those within it. - ***Importance:*** Safety and control are crucial in this learning zone, fostering a positive environment that attracts individuals to its comforting features.
- **Fear Zone: *Description:*** The fear zone is marked by heightened anxiety, lack of self-confidence, and reluctance to embrace change. Individuals in this zone may be unmotivated and concerned about external judgments. To progress, individuals need to let go of inhibitions, open up to emotions, and address factors hindering their professional development. - ***Importance:*** Confronting fears and breaking through self-imposed barriers is essential for personal and professional growth.
- **Learning Zone: *Description:*** The learning zone provides an opportunity for student-teachers to reflect on their accumulated professional knowledge and skills within an Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programme. It allows for the review of competencies related to practical teaching in diverse contexts, encouraging the creation of opportunities, acceptance of challenges, and the acquisition of new skills. - ***Importance:*** This zone facilitates growth by encouraging reflection and the development of independence and adaptability within the teaching practice (TP) context.

- **Growth Zone: *Description:*** The growth zone represents the final stage of development in the transition phase. In this zone, student-teachers critically reflect on their experiences, incorporating knowledge gained from both positive and challenging situations. The physical, psychological, and spiritual aspects of self-come into play as individuals assess their progress. - ***Importance:*** This zone is crucial for consolidating learning, recognising personal and professional development, and preparing individuals for the next steps in their teaching journey.



Source: Adapted from Integra Property Services (<https://www.integra-ps.com/news/from-comfort-zone-to-growth-zone.html>)

Figure 7.1: From 'Pedagogies of comfort' to 'Pedagogies of disruption'

7.3.1 Comfort Zone

"A comfort zone is a beautiful place – but nothing ever grows there (Gina Millicia)."²⁸

A comfortable space (safe area, safe place, happy place, stress-free situation, refuge), better known as a comfort zone, is a familiar psychological state where individuals are at ease and (perceive that they are) largely in control of their environment, experiencing low levels of anxiety and stress (Behavioral Care News, 2023). It requires limited additional energy from its occupants since they are drawn to the zone's positive features. Being safe and in control is vital within this kind of learning zone. People who are placed in their professional capacity in a space where they are comfortably familiar with the stakeholders whom they are to accommodate and build working relationships with find the experience less strained. Being acquainted with the workplace's resources and possibly its work-cultural

²⁸ Gina Millicia was one of the most widely known and respected photographers in Australia who posited the aforementioned quote.

climate enables individuals to thrive in such a space. Comfort zones encompass working environments, relationships, or even demarcated choices about one's cultural, political, and social preferences (Behavioral Care News, 2023).

In the narratives shared in the focus group interview, several participants referred to elements relating directly to the comfort zone and what holds them steadfast in such a space, which could lead to stagnation in their professional learning to become professional teachers. Amina said:

Amina: *I think, Sir, I will look for a job similar to the teaching practice school I was at this year. [A school situated in a Cape Town township established by the apartheid government for low-income Coloured families. The school is non-paying (no-fee school status) ... I say this because I was dealing with learners with similar backgrounds and learners I can relate to.*

For Amina, a comfort zone means working with individuals [primary school learners], such as learners at an under-resourced primary school who may lack the educational and financial resources to pursue their objectives. Amina is familiar with the challenges linked to government-funded schools where she was schooled and completed her pre-service TP placements. She explicitly stated that she feels connected to the learners because they have the same backgrounds and face the same life challenges. Amina considered that the contextual challenges she experienced influenced her decision to become a professional teacher. In delving deeper into the thought process that motivated Amina to remain within a schooling environment with limited resources, it seems that she observed that teachers based in this type of environment can help their learners to achieve academic success since she herself is an example of coming from a township schooling context, progressing to higher education learning and being about to obtain formal certification. She assumes she will be able to give learners in similar circumstances the opportunity to excel since her teachers afforded her the opportunity of a better life. In Amina's case, the comfort zone and the familiarity linked to it offer security and affirmation, yet they do not provide possibilities for otherness. According to her understanding, individuals like her choose to operate in their comfort zone because they benefit from the pattern shared by their immediate communities.

A comfort zone differs from one individual to another based on an array of social, political and economic factors coupled with a variety of lived experiences. Ragmat had a different view of what constitutes a comfort zone. Based on her different placement experiences, she linked the habituation of a school's code of professional ethics to a comfort zone. Every school has its own culture in the form of shared values, belief systems and normative behaviour in how staff members (teachers, administrators, school cleaners, etc.) think, express, feel and behave in and outside the school setting. However, this participant believed that professional teachers should habitually display the ethics associated with being a professional teacher. Each school has a code of professional ethics for organising and planning content and activities within the schooling environment. Knowing how to divide their time between different activities is vital in setting a good example of time management and professionalism to learners. For example, arriving early for school and maintaining a professional dress code are key features of a competent and dedicated teacher. Her narrative pointed to the different ways in which schools approached professionalism:

Ragmat: *I noticed the differences between the different schools, and I noticed that the school I was at this year, they [referring to teachers] were very professional. I had to be there half*

an hour before the time, and there was a certain dress code, no casual clothing, nothing like that. Then, in previous schools I've been at, the teachers come when they want to. Eight o'clock on the dot, they will arrive. I'm currently also teaching at a school. I'm experiencing the same as I experienced in my previous schools compared to the school I'm at now, where teachers dress casually and come late. I was finding it hard to adapt to this again when I was in my teaching practice school, and I had to be there early. So now I'm the first person there at my school. I'm the only one dressing professionally. I preferred the school where I was doing my teaching practice this year.

In the initial stage of becoming a teacher, Ragmat could clearly articulate the minimum qualities of a professional teacher, encompassing the cognitive ability to retain content and teach learners. For Ragmat, structure within the schooling environment is vital since it affects teaching quality and learner progress. For her, the qualities of a professional teacher comprise being able to carefully manage one's time (before coming to school and being on time) and dressing in a dignified manner, which presents a professional demeanour to the public. These professional qualities may seem somewhat insignificant and irrelevant in terms of what constitutes and contributes to a comfort zone for developing professional teachers. However, the professional and ethical codes of professional conduct gave Ragmat a sense of comfort and order within the working school environment.

Amina and Ragmat's reflections point to familiarity with the schooling context, the kinds of social issues that learners in the class consciously or unconsciously bring to the classroom, and their need for a role model as key in preventing student-teachers from shifting into the unfamiliar. Amin (2008) critiques the notion of knowing one's learners since this may impact the time dedicated to understanding the problem the learner is encountering and that spent on providing empathetic support. In her view, knowing about the learners' personal home challenges is dangerous, which could potentially impact the time available to complete the curriculum. She considers it more useful not knowing their home lives. For Ragmat, the teacher's professionalism and structure within the schooling environment are fundamental in not disrupting her state of comfort. In gaining knowledge within the professional development programme outside the confines of the ITE programme, students will realise that teacher education is complex; hence, the ITE programme should explicitly state what developing teachers should learn in varied contexts (Bertram, 2011). Although ITE programmes cannot anticipate the kinds of challenges developing student-teachers may encounter when entering real-world contexts, they can offer stories of similar kinds of past experiences to assist students in making a move from their space of comfort (Bertram, 2023).

7.3.2 Fear Zone

Student-teachers entering the ITE programme arrive with preconceived notions of possible challenges linked to geographical contextual schooling sites and recollections of issues their teachers faced at school (Lortie, 1975). Learning to be open to embracing new concepts and ideas in becoming a professional teacher means opening oneself up to the possibility of learning and developing assertively and deliberately in one's learning instead of being shy and withdrawn, causing one to shift from the comfort zone and move into the fear zone. Much anxiety is usually associated with this zone since students lack self-confidence, are unmotivated and ripe with excuses and are typically worried about what others think. Moving into the second level zone, the fear zone, individuals should let go of their inhibitions and open themselves up to embrace their feelings and emotions that are causing them to

stagnate in their being and existence, leading to slow or no professional development. Bonga's narrative illustrates her transition through and in the kinds of experiences in the fear zone:

Bonga: *There was a time when I felt a bit excluded at the school. The principal, in general, was welcoming, but she forgot about me on some days. So usually, at the beginning of the year, right at the first session of teaching practice, that is when they introduce any new staff members and any new student-teachers that were there. So, she introduced everyone, all the other student-teachers, and she forgot to introduce me, but I didn't take that as a biggie. I was fine. I remember this one time I had gone to the computer room to fix something, and usually, I prefer using my own things. Still, it was very urgent on that day, so I got there. There was this other teacher from Grade 7. He was a male; he came in and saw me at the computer. He then starts scolding me by saying, "What are you doing here? You are not supposed to be here, are you stupid? Do you not know that this is for teachers?" and stuff like that. And like in that moment, I froze and did not understand why he was speaking to me in that tone. He might have assumed I was a teacher's assistant, but that was not how you speak to an individual. So, there was, like, I had a very hard time blending in with the school environment. Majority of the staff, I think there was only one, the Xhosa teacher, and she was also new; she was in the Foundation Phase, but the majority of the staff was English-speaking, so I had a very hard time blending in. Usually, people would shy away from conversing with me, or some wouldn't want to speak English. And maybe we would be having a conversation. Like they would stand to the side and then switch to Afrikaans under the assumption that I can't speak Afrikaans, so then I would literally we would be standing together as a group. Then everyone shifts to one end, and I'm standing alone. So yeah, it took a while for me to blend in, and it was only later in my teaching practice when I was blending in with everybody, so yes.*

Bonga's story indicates that she was vaguely worried when the school manager did not formally introduce her to the entire staff where she was to undertake TP. Although she considered the lack of a formal introduction as "no biggie". The consequence of this action directly impacted her stay at the school. Her status as a developing teacher was not recognised, possibly leading to her entering restricted spaces for teachers only. She further felt alienated by the teachers' choosing to converse in her presence in a language other than that in which she was perceived to be proficient. Paradoxically, she was able to conceptualise her marginalisation because she was proficient in both isiXhosa and Afrikaans. The desire to step out of her comfort space and connect professionally with staff from other cultural and language backgrounds was cut short. Staff members' alienating practices contributed to her anxiety about feeling excluded, and it took longer for her to feel incorporated. Bonga's experience of exclusion as a student-teacher was shared by Ragmat, who said: *"For feeling excluded, I would say, I didn't like when teachers are a group of friends, and they would sit together, and I would have to sit one side. I think that was when I felt excluded"*.

While in the fear zone, student-teachers in the classroom thinking of exploring an alternative pedagogical approach might be severely judged by the seasoned mentor-teacher and, in this case, the expert with whom the developing student-teacher is placed for mentorship, which could contribute to the stress of TP. The student-teacher might not use the creative and innovative lessons and games learned during the ITE programme for fear that this might not fit with the lesson design and structure. At this stage of the TP placement, the individual may or may not realise that a possible disconnect exists between the information learnt about the diverse typologies of schools and the kinds of knowledge required for specific contexts obtained during the ITE programme. Here, the worldview of the

ITE programme and the worldview of practice may directly contrast, impacting student-teachers' fear of being in an alternative schooling placement.

Ragmat said she feared learners whom she regarded as having more authority than the principal:

Researcher: *Okay Ragmat. What is your view about who holds the most power within any school and why?*

Ragmat: *I would say the learners and maybe their parents as well. I've noticed that the learners have a lot to say at certain schools. There are certain things teachers cannot do because the learners are going to involve their parents.*

Researcher: *Okay, so the teachers become afraid of these learners?*

Ragmat: *I think they are more afraid of the consequences.*

Ragmat's remarks suggest that teachers are cautious in their treatment of learners because they fear being reported to parents, who will take action against them. She also alluded to feeling discriminated against whilst undertaking TP:

Ragmat: *I spoke about this before my mentor-teacher in the first year. I felt like she was discriminating, and I felt like she also took advantage of the fact that I was a student. And then, I felt like the two mentor-teachers I had for the following years were very affirming. I agree with Dumo; the type of school you teach at depends on how you feel about it. When I was in my teaching practice this year, I enjoyed it so much, but now that I'm teaching at a school that isn't up to the standard that I did my teaching practice at, it feels a bit harder because their learners are struggling. And I actually had a teacher come into the class and ask me: "Are you sure you want to become a teacher?" And I was like, why would you do that? She could see on my face I wasn't entertaining her, and then she said: "Oh, well, there are some good things about it." And I was just like, wow.*

Mentor-teachers can unconsciously contribute to student-teachers' anxiety. Whilst the mentor-teacher is assigned the often-hidden mandate of being the liaison between the university's TP office and the school, they are expected to provide incoming student-teachers with guidance and direction on the school culture, philosophy of teaching and learning, and staff matters to mention but a few. However, it seems that some are complicit in causing anxiety and fear in students during their TP placement and placing them in a fear-filled zone instead of a learning-directive one. Similarly, mentor-teachers who contribute to the now fear-filled nature of the TP experience exacerbate the situation by misusing student-teachers presence to promote their own agendas by being absent from school and spending more time out of the class. Their failure to provide professional mentoring and collegiality to student-teachers can result in mental and anxiety disorders, which may require psychological assistance.

The data revealed that emotions are rife in developing teacher professionals entering this second zone outside the familiar. Nairne (2000, p. 444) defines emotions as follows:

An event that involves a mixture of reactions: a physiological response (usually arousal), an expressive reaction (distinctive facial expression, body posture, or vocalization), and some kind of subjective experience (internal thoughts and feelings).

As demonstrated by the literature on students' preparedness for early childhood teaching, moving into an unknown or unfamiliar physical space does bring on levels of anxiety (Botha & Baxen, 2018). The data collected for the current study revealed that anxiety is first evident when students consider studying at an institution that is not in

their hometown (province). Their cognitive shift from comfort to discomfort begins at the point of choosing the teacher educational institutional setting that is located in another province. Their decision to venture into an unfamiliar space causes mixed emotions (happy, sad, excited and afraid) that also impact family and friends, especially parents who have to let go (figuratively) of their young ones to pursue grown-up and professional career decision-making. The varied emotions influence the student-teacher's navigation to becoming a professional teacher. Student-teachers' decisions do not stem from the desire to expand their professional knowledge base on their future careers. Instead, the decision to venture into schools of comfort is based on fulfilling course requirements and making the grade. In the process of making the TP placement choice, the main underlying reason for choosing a school is students' familiarity with the structures within the school. Structures, in this instance, refer to how the school and all stakeholders operate in its daily activities. Developing teachers like the participants in this study are not blind to ineffective management and a lack of leadership in schools. Moreover, the toxic nature of competitive staff becomes visible to them. These authentic experiences provide a lens into what future teacher professionals (themselves included) may encounter.

Student-teachers' experiences when entering a new school are based on real-life circumstances within the organisation. They first encounter levels of comfort where they are not challenged and remain comfortable in their familiar experiences, a replica of what they experienced in their own schooling (Lortie, 1975). Moving out of the comfort zone through experiences such as an assigned mentor-teacher being absent and the student-teacher being expected to teach the same grade for six consecutive periods, with each focussing on a different subject, facilitating the lesson, pairing learners to complete cooperative learning tasks, operating in an overcrowded classroom, handling learner behaviour, managing e-learning resources throughout the lesson, managing assessment tasks and classroom interruptions (delivery of office notices sent to the class and learners who are part of the nutrition programme leaving the classroom to have a meal) or unnecessary toilet breaks by troublemaking learners all require student-teachers to scale-up their knowledge and skills and move out of the comfort zone (My own views emphasised). Regardless of the year of study, the student-teacher is automatically 'pushed into a complex and unfamiliar' terrain within the teaching fraternity. They become the lead teacher for the day.

Added to the role of the lead teacher is the watchful eye of the various members of the audience (those in the school who will observe the student-teacher undertaking this serious job responsibility). They will assess the individual's readiness through whether he/she can deliver a sound performance (not outwardly showing he/she is struggling). Various people will undertake rigid scrutiny of the actions of the somewhat fearful student-teacher. Fellow staff (**qualified teachers**) in the classrooms beside them might hear the noise emanating from the classroom. **Mischievous learners** removed from their own classroom may decide to wander into the student-teacher's class, which they attempt to disturb since the student-teacher lacks seniority within the school. If the student-teacher does not assert his/her authority by demonstrating a lack of fear for the ill-behaved child, the rest of the class might see this incident as a reason to lose respect for him/her. The **Secretary** of the school may walk into the class at any moment to convey a message to a learner concerning their after-school transport or perhaps a change in the pick-up time by one of the parents (due to an incident relating to the family).

Adding to the student-teacher's anxiety is the school's principal, who assesses the student-teacher's readiness for a possible job prospect post-certification or employment at the end of the academic year when invigilators are required for exams. In essence, student-teachers are placed in a vicarious situation to prove their readiness to manage and teach a class. The determining factor is how the individual cognitively interprets (subjective thoughts and feelings) the physiological incident, which depends on the situation (Zyster, 2023).

Student-teachers entering a new schooling space are often regarded as outsiders (Cuenca, Schmeichel, Butler, Dinkelman, & Nichols, 2011). This is despite the perfunctory welcome that is offered officially to the student-teachers when they enter the TP school. Some staff members see incoming student-teachers who are young and sometimes ambitious as a threat and, therefore, set the scenario for students experiencing being alienated (Thomson & Wendt, 1995). German philosopher Karl Marx (1844) described four forms of alienation: (*Entfremdung* -"alienation" or "estrangement") that employees may encounter during their internship in a social organisation, namely, "*The alienation of individuals (workers) from the product, from economic activity, from their species-being, and the alienation of individuals from one another*" (Christ, 2015, p. 1). The alienation which student-teachers experience is linked to a subjective experience since the alienation imposed by teaching staff makes the person feel like an outsider or "feeling a sense of isolation, strangeness, or feeling of having no external connection", as observed by Mukhopadhyay (2021, p. 1).

The inclusion of the four forms of alienation in this section of the students' experience provides a theoretical framework to understand and analyse the challenges student-teachers face as they navigate through different zones of professional development. In the context of the presented narrative, the four forms of alienation, as articulated by Karl Marx, help illuminate student-teachers' subjective experiences in their journey from the comfort zone to the fear zone.

- **Alienation from human resources (*teachers and learners alike*):** In the context of participants, this form of alienation is evident when Bonga expresses a sense of exclusion at the school where she undertakes teaching practice. The lack of formal introduction and the insensitive remarks from a fellow teacher contribute to her feeling alienated, as if her status as a developing teacher is not recognised. The consequence is a perceived exclusion from certain spaces within the school, symbolizing alienation from the 'product' of being a teacher in that particular educational setting.
- **Alienation from economic activity:** The economic aspect of alienation is reflected in the experiences of participants who may fear judgment from seasoned mentor-teachers when placed in the fear zone. This fear can inhibit them from implementing creative and innovative teaching methods learned during their initial teacher education programme. The potential economic consequences, in this case, are the stress and challenges associated with teaching practice and the potential impact on their future careers as educators.
- **Alienation from species-being:** The alienation from one's species-being is evident when participants, like Ragmat, express fears related to power dynamics within schools. The perceived authority of learners and the fear of consequences if teachers don't meet their expectations contribute to a sense of alienation.

This form of alienation affects the developing student-teachers' ability to assert themselves confidently in the learning environment.

- **Alienation from one another:** As described by Marx, the alienation between individuals is echoed in the experiences of participants who feel excluded and discriminated against by staff members. The narrative of Bonga and Ragmat illustrates instances where language barriers and the reluctance of colleagues to engage with them contribute to a sense of isolation and estrangement within the school community.

By incorporating Marx's alienation framework (elaborated by Mukhopadhyay, 2021), this sub-section highlighted the multifaceted nature of student-teachers' challenges, emphasising the emotional and psychological aspects of their professional development. The theoretical lens helps to interpret the subjective experiences of these student-teachers as they grapple with the complexities of the fear zone during their teacher education journey.

The participants also raised the issue of 'fearing learners'. Nkongchu Njicha (2023, p. v) notes that in Swedish schools, schoolteachers and principals are currently dealing with numerous occurrences of student violence comprising "physical assault and weapon use, bullying, aggressive resistance, gangsterism, and verbal abuse caused by different factors". In South Africa, there are daily media reports on violence in schools. Indeed, Khumalo (2019) states that it has reached "unparalleled and unprecedented proportions". This adds to the fear of developing professional teachers since the disruptions impact learning and tuition time (Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013). Furthermore, functioning in a disadvantageous, harmful learning environment where anti-social behaviour is prevalent is extremely difficult (Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013). Such incidents contribute to student-teachers' decisions on whether or not to venture into the unknown schooling spaces for TP.

The focus group dialogue also revealed the pivotal roles and responsibilities played by assigned **mentor-teachers**. Student-teachers depend on mentor-teachers to take them by the hand (metaphorically) and lead them on the emotional and complex journey of becoming a teacher. They also depend on them to learn professional pedagogical skills and classroom management and count on them for support during their time in the class and the school. Dewey (1986) stated that experience is not necessarily educative:

Experience can be miseducative, and practising teachers are not necessarily good role models. Exposing student-teachers to poor or mediocre teaching examples is likely to entrench inadequate or unsuitable pedagogies and poor professional habits (University of Johannesburg, 2023, pg. 1).

In the same vein, Dhunpath (2018) voices concern with regard to HEIs' supervision models with respect to mentors: "It is also critical that we recognise that not all (senior) (experienced) staff are automatically skilled mentors" (Dhunpath, 2018, p. 22). There are inconsistencies between assigned mentor-teachers' conceptualisation of their role and its alignment with practice; hence, more consideration should be given to the kinds of mentoring models which could produce the desired results (Van Der Haar, Petersen & Ramsaroop, 2022). When mentor-teachers lack mentoring skills, this contributes to the powerlessness experienced by student-teachers in the fear zone. Dhunpath (2018) states that HEIs should consider redesigning their mentoring programmes, moving from an individualistic performance management approach (typically associated with the dominant master-apprenticeship model) towards an Inclusive Model of Mentorship in Higher Education which focuses on a "non-hierarchical, co-

constructed menu of possibilities based on negotiated reflection, arising out of the specific, situated contexts of mentor and mentee” (Dhunpath, 2018, p. 1). The nominated mentor-teachers with whom aspiring professional student-teachers are placed must be adequately informed about the role they should play in the future professional's life.

7.3.3 Learning Zone

The learning zone affords the possibility for student-teachers to pause and reflexively review their accumulated professional knowledge within the ITE programme and their knowledge, skills and competencies relating to undertaking TP in a new and varied context. It allows the individual to create opportunities, accept challenges, increase comfort, realise independence and gain new skills within the TP context. The following narratives shared by student-teachers during the focus group interviews offer insight into matters relating to the learning zone within their trajectory of progress in becoming professional teachers.

Khethiwe: *The principal thought we were the assistant teachers because we were there for two weeks at the start of the year, and she didn't know there were student-teachers until she came to the class with visitors. I don't know what she said about the other student-teacher, so the student-teacher told the principal, "No, I'm not the assistant teacher. I'm actually the student-teacher". That was when she realised there were student-teachers at the school. Because the first time we were there, she was not there, and I don't know why the secretary or the person we were reporting to didn't tell her there were student-teachers at school.*

The narrative details the participants' growth in addressing management. Khethiwe recounts that her fellow student-teacher had the confidence to inform the principal that they were not assistant teachers. Furthermore, Khethiwe reflects on why the situation arose. Learning to speak up for oneself and others in the workplace is a vital trait that professional teachers should hone, as it demonstrates their ability to establish boundaries and command respect.

A student-teacher must orientate him/herself in the professional world through learning (De Kock & Slabbert, 2008). From the outset, the student-teacher is exploring his/her professional world, getting to know and understand it. Learning about people and places in diverse contexts enables him/her to move from a state of 'being unable' to 'being able'. While learning in the capacity of being a student-teacher enables mastery of the competencies of becoming a professional teacher, all these experiences move the student-teacher towards the position of beginner professional teacher. A sign of development in an unfamiliar space is student-teachers who are comfortable "finding their voice in the developmental stages of their career" (Gravett & Kroon, 2023). The authors add that the ITE programme should place “a sharp focus” on the kinds of teachers needed in the South African schooling space.

As student-teachers transition through the years filled with uncertainty, confidence begins to reign over doubt. Ragmat's placement in diverse primary school grades in different schools enabled her to realise which grade she best fit:

Ragmat: *For me, it has. I have developed. I did notice that I prefer to teach Grades 5 and 6 compared to Grade 4. My teaching methods have improved as well, and I noticed that there are certain subjects I'm more willing to teach than other subjects.*

Ragmat's tone was confident, and she clearly stated her preferred grades and subjects. She had grown, and the boundaries of her world had shifted. She found herself in 'new situations' where she orientated herself. Orientation commences with differentiation since she can clearly stipulate her choices.

Student-teachers' confidence level in their exiting year of study is largely unexplored in the literature. Umugiraneza, Bansilal, and North (2022) explored 75 primary and high school beginner teachers' confidence in teaching. The study found that there were gender differences in confidence levels. It also noted that the relationship between teacher experience and confidence is not linear (Umugiraneza et al., 2022).

The age-old question about whether developing student-teachers' teaching practicum experience is affected by their assigned title was evident in the debate between student-teachers during the focus group interview. I selected the most evocative narrative:

Researcher: *Before I move on to the last question. I want to ask you, does it make a huge difference or not when the principal or the mentor-teacher introduces you to the class as this is Miss Dumo Mhlekezzi (pseudonym), she is a student-teacher or rather saying this is Miss Mhlekezzi, she is a teacher from Cape Peninsula University of Technology. Which one works and has better repercussions? Which one is better?*

Ragmat: *I disagree with Dumo [Dumo stated that she preferred being called Miss Dumo Mhlekezzi and being described as a student-teacher]. I feel that learners take advantage when they hear the word student. They feel you are not a teacher, so we can do whatever we want; also, regarding the principal or mentor teacher introducing, I feel that it's better if you introduce yourself as well because I feel like students can pick up when you aren't really in control. I think they use that to their advantage. I think they respect you more when you don't use the word student.*

The student's view is complex, yet sound reasoning and supportive evidence are provided to demonstrate the impact a name has on the individual during the learning zone process. There is a lack of academic research on student-teachers' assignation when they enter the TP placement space. In my view, student-teachers are highly contested (meaning debated) amongst seasoned teachers because they raise various behavioural flags amongst learners. Teacher identity is a term applied to those seeking to become a teacher and is a "role-shift from being a non-teacher to being a teacher" (Malderez, Hobson, Tracey, & Kerr, 2007, p. 6). Further research should focus on the benefits and constraints linked to naming student-teachers when entering unfamiliar learning contexts.

7.3.4 Growth Zone

The growth zone is the final placement zone in developing within the transitioning phase which the individual enters. It orientates the student-teacher against the background of his/her knowledge and pleasant and unpleasant experiences to critically reflect on the moves made to progress. The physical, psychological, and spiritual self comes into play in this zone. The student-teacher finds purpose in teaching as a career, lives out his/her dream of becoming a professional teacher, becomes more confident in his/her didactical and pedagogical practice, sets new goals for further study and conquers resistance to entering a diverse TP context (Oghly, 2023). Essentially, in reaching this growth zone, the student-teacher has the mental capacity to decide on his/her career trajectory. The final question posed to the student-teachers before concluding the focus group interview was: Number 11: **What**

kind of school would you like to teach in the future? How does this future school compare or contrast with your TP school?

In his closing remarks, Zafeer said:

Zafeer: *So, if I think about the future school that I would like to teach at, a school that is similar to the school that I was at during the teaching practice period [an urban, fee-paying school]. Simply because it's a nice environment, I would like to teach maybe at a private school or a school in another country or something like that just to get a different experience of how it is because I haven't been to a private school yet.*

Through engagement with Natasha in the focus group, Zafeer realised that his choice not to select a private school TP placement during the four-year ITE programme limited his experience and the kinds of learners, staff and possible learning resources he might have been able to engage with. However, within the growth zone, he states that he would prefer to work at an urban fee-paying school due to his familiarity with such schools during his own schooling and his placements. This places him in a position of comfort which does not require him to shift the hegemonic circumscription. Amina was the second participant to respond to my question:

Amina: *I think, Sir, one similar to the teaching practice school I was at this year, which is a non-fee-paying school. I say this because we're dealing with learners with similar backgrounds and learners that I can regulate. But as Zafeer said, I think I'd also want to experience teaching at a private school or a Model C school just to gain experience, and just to say that I've had that experience, then only can I say which I prefer.*

In seeking broader redirection in the kinds of contexts where teaching occurred for her, Ragmat confidently asserted:

Ragmat: *I personally would prefer to teach at a school that has resources. It has a projector and those printers. To me, I feel that it would make my job easier, and it would make it so much better. Where I can expand what I want to do with the class. I had that kind of experience with the school I was at this year. In my previous schools, I struggled more to try and be creative with my lessons. I would rather want to teach at a school with disciplined learners which has those resources.*

Resources and learner discipline stand out in Ragmat's choice of a future career. A varied TP contextual placement allowed her to disrupt her learning and realise that she would contest whose interests she serves and place her well-being first in pursuit of teaching at a specific school. In her development, Ragmat chooses or, as she states, "*I personally would prefer ...*" to be employed at a school with sufficient educational resources where discipline is high on the list of priorities since she had first-hand experience of schools with discipline challenges; as her biography stated: "*The final-year student-teacher resides within a gangster-ridden and high poverty and crime area called Groenvlei in Landsdowne*". This student-teacher's learning was disrupted since her final TP experience provided her insight into a teaching and schooling experience free from the challenges of a lack of educational resources and ill-disciplined learners. Her growth zone indicates that Ragmat sets a new goal to secure employment in an environment where she is stress-free.

Furthermore, Ragmat commented on a remark by a fellow participant who believed that resources and learner behavioural problems are synonymous:

Ragmat: *I agree with everything as well. But I also think it's about the learners and their intentions. Because even though some schools will have all those resources, some learners will come to school and do not want to learn. They come to school because they have to. So, I think that plays a role as well.*

Independent, alongside high-level critical thinking is evident in Ragmat's response on the role played by learning resources within the schooling space. She offered peer guidance to her fellow participants by alerting her to certain learners' attitudes. Needless to say, educational resources make teaching and learning possible, but they can only do so much. The teacher's role in the learning space is vital for holistic, integrated learning (Ataboyev & Tursunovich, 2023).

In wrapping up the second one-on-one interview, with Ragmat and Dumo robustly engaging in dialogue, I posed an unscripted question about parents and the community's involvement, namely:

Researcher: *Okay, so would both of you say the involvement of the parents and the community is vital in the learning of that child in that classroom?*

Ragmat: Yes

Dumo: Yes, Sir

Parents play an often overlooked but pivotal role in the child's learning progression. The four years' workplace experience afforded the student-teachers first-hand insight into the kind of role a parent fulfils in their children's learning and growth. Different schools have different class sizes, with public schools often overcrowded with 45 learners per class compared to private schools with less than 25. It is more difficult for teachers to attend to the needs of all learners in a large class. Overcrowding negatively impacts teachers' ability to keep track of learners' academic progress, and poor performance leads to grade repetition. Parents could alleviate some schooling challenges by actively contributing to the child's learning (Ceka & Murati, 2016).

Reflection

A spectrum of teaching practicum schools awaited the student-teachers before the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic and after it, yet most deliberately settled for convenient TP schooling placements. The dominant cohort of participants remained within their zone of knowing, shielding them from distress. Most entered schools that were the same as their former typologies of schooling and only heard first-hand stories of experiences of unfamiliar contexts when they came together with the other participants. In Natasha's frank estimation, these students missed out on "the experience of a lifetime". What becomes apparent in the analysis of the dominant cohorts' choice of schools for TP is that they did not focus on experiencing anything new within the schooling context; rather, they aimed to tick all the right boxes and making the grade.

Given South Africa's history of domination, injustice and inequality, a quality education system requires upcoming teacher professionals to adopt a teacher education model that supports agency and teacher agency (Long, Graven, Sayed, & Lampen, 2017). Teachers are key agents in delivering good quality education (Long et al., 2017). However, using their teacher agency in the early stages of their careers, the dominant cohort of participants focused on their well-being rather than their professional growth.

It should be borne in mind “that agency is conditioned by past experiences and lived realities of the teachers” (Long et al., 2017, p. 7). It can, therefore, be said that South Africa’s history is unconsciously engrained within student-teachers’ decision-making when embarking on their journeys of teaching practicum, even though they have the mental capacity and the power to make a change. Bantra (2009) asserts that teachers possess the agency that can contribute to change to achieve larger social goals. Although developing student-teachers possess the **power to** (in this contextual framing, I mean capability) choose which specific schooling typology to venture into, their use of their agency is limited.

7.4 A critical phenomenological Interpretation of experiences through varied levels

The section describes how I applied structural and systematic deductive reasoning using the initial theories to understand the findings (Okoli, 2023). Deductive reasoning commences with a general assumption. It applies logic and explores it in detail to reach a conclusion (Okoli, 2023). In this kind of reasoning, the conclusion must be true if the premises are true. Johnson-Laird (1999, p. 1) states that scholars generally make use of deductions relying on 1) factual knowledge, 2) formal rules, or 3) mental models. In seeking to understand the possible reasons for the participants’ lived experiences in the varied schooling contexts over the four-year ITE programme, I first set out to understand the term ‘lived experiences’ as a lens to view the research participants not as objects, but as existing in a world where the truth about their lives or their lifeworld is seen and reported through their own voices. I would not achieve unbiased understanding of their experiences within diverse TP contexts by simply collecting and analysing data and reporting the findings, but by engaging with them in a thoughtful manner and with care to enable them to tell their own stories (Koopman & Koopman, 2020, p. viii). This study was premised on a teacher educator in dialogue on Teaching Practicum placements with the first coloured principal of an all-White private primary school in the leafy upmarket area of Tokai, Western Cape. The principal made the following comment:

Our school is willing to host Black (*Coloured, Indian and African*) student-teachers for Teaching Practice. However, to date, no Black student has been placed in our school. What explains why Black students do not choose to undertake TP in former White schools?

Therefore, as described by Johnson-Laird (1999), what constitutes reasoning was interwoven with the objective of this research study, which was to gain an understanding of the participants’ perceptions, thoughts, or assertions about their selection of primary schools to practice becoming a teacher. The study also aimed to understand their lived experiences in various primary schooling spaces during the ITE programmes’ WIL component (TP) and the scaffolding that supported them in making these contextual transitions. The participants’ stories revealed that power and hierarchical imbalances were present in the diverse teaching practicum schooling contexts in which they undertook their practical learning. I illustrate these criticalities of incidences using three levels of analysis of the existence of critical phenomenology in the participants’ experiences.

1. **Level one:** The self-experienced education system
2. **Level two:** The interconnected experiences of the participants through an ITE curriculum
3. **Level three:** Looking into the participants’ contextual transitioning and development

7.4.1 Level one: The self-experienced education system

The participants in this study all came from lower- to middle-class backgrounds, attended public primary schools and were typically the first in the family to study at a HEI. Most relied on funding from the DHET. In their shared biographies (refer to Chapter Five), the participants indicated the typology of schooling they experienced first-hand. None encountered a private or independent kind of schooling since their parents lacked the financial resources associated with these kinds of schools.

It is important to consider the historical context of the South African education system as it provides the backdrop of the contentious issues within the country's schooling sector. Mouton, Louw, and Strydom (2013) assert that the new curriculum post-1996 that aimed to promote a transition from a traditional approach to outcomes-based education (OBE) and Curriculum 2005 was flawed. They add that this paradigm shift aimed to enable South Africa to become internationally competitive (Mouton et al., 2013, p. 1). However, the education system was plagued by "poorly performing teachers, poor work ethics, lack of community and parental support, poor control by education authorities, poor support for teachers and very low levels of accountability". This led to the creation of a dualistic education system that Spaul (2013) describes as one for those who experience poverty and the other for those who enjoy the privilege. Beginner teachers' challenges in entering the schooling system are intensified by this bifurcated system (Bertram, 2023). Spaul provides further insight into the nature of this system:

The strong legacy of apartheid and the consequent correlation between education and wealth has meant that poorer South African students perform worse academically. Although racial segregation has been abolished for 18 years now, schools which served predominantly White students under apartheid remain functional, while those which served Black students remain dysfunctional and unable to impart the necessary numeracy and literacy skills students should acquire at this level (Spaul, 2013, p. 1).

The Centre For Development and Enterprise's report titled *South Africa's Education Crisis: The quality of education in South Africa 1994-2011* (Spaul (2013, p. 3) asserts that there "is an on-going crisis in South African education and that the current system is failing the majority of South Africa's youth". The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) study found that the majority (81%) of Grade 4 learners in South Africa could not read for meaning in any language, including their home language (Equal Education, 2023). Several recent policies indicate that the DBE is starting to address the root causes of underperformance. The recent workbook initiative, the CAPS, and the Action Plan for 2030 are all steps in the right direction.

However, the reality is that the participants in this study are all too familiar and comfortable with schooling that caters for poor communities, as these kinds of schools reflect their lived experience of schooling. Their acquaintance with marginalised, poverty-stricken communities causes them to seek TP placements within similar spaces whether or not the aim is to improve the conditions in the school or, as Natasha asserted in one of the focus group interviews, "serve a purpose".

Although the participants completed their formal schooling in a democratic South Africa based on the principle that all are equal and entitled to reap the benefits of the post-apartheid era, 29 years after the political transition, race continues to act as the primary distinguishing factor which influences the geographical spaces student-teachers consider entering for completion of their practice ITE programme. Due to their lived realities, they seem to lack

conceptions of enacted social justice and equality. Two examples of a lack of conceptions of social justice and equality could happen by virtue of a) limited exposure and experience and b) influence of personal backgrounds. Student teachers may have had limited exposure to diverse and equitable educational settings, leading to a lack of understanding and practical experience in enacting social justice and equality in their teaching practices. Also, their personal backgrounds and experiences may not have included robust discussions or examples of social justice and equality, resulting in a gap in their conceptions and ability to implement these principles effectively in their professional roles. Students can acquire conceptions of enacted social justice and equality through the following ways 1) Exposure to diverse educational environments: By participating in teaching placements or internships in diverse schools, student teachers can gain firsthand experience in addressing the needs of learners from various backgrounds and learn how to create inclusive and equitable classroom environments. 2) Incorporating social justice education in teacher training: Teacher education programmes should include courses and workshops focused on social justice and equality, providing theoretical knowledge and practical strategies for promoting these principles in the classroom. This can include case studies, role-playing exercises, and discussions on the impacts of systemic inequalities in education.

They relatively easily profess the rhetoric of transformation discourse but fail to choose to realise its enactment when it deals closely with their personal career choice matters. The consequence is that apartheid's systemic racial segregation lives on in South African schools. It is detailed in the work of Jansen and Kriger (2020), who report on the patterns of racial segregation in the elite primary schools of one of the 'whitest' and wealthiest areas of South Africa, the southern suburbs of Cape Town. Of note is the fact that the CPUT Faculty of Education is located in the same southern suburbs and that many of its registered student-teachers originate from marginalised communities (Sayed et al., 2018). These students who relocated from their hometowns to reside on the university campus chose to enter primary schools where learners and teachers are of the same racial classification as themselves.

As Athandwa unequivocally stated when asked about her choice of TP schooling contexts, *"I was scared of new context or environment."* This response is not unique since primary schools in the area have begun using unwritten criteria to exclude specific types of student-teachers from TP placement (Botha, 2023). These include that they must be in their final year (fourth year) of study, implying that they are sufficiently ready for the world of work and must possess English as a Home Language. Based on the data, the latter criterion drives student-teachers from outside the Western Cape into a state of panic and stress, resulting in them seeking schools that will accommodate their first language, normally isiXhosa or isiZulu (pedagogy of comfort²⁹). In making crucial decisions during their professional development, a form of alienation develops within the students.

Khan (2021, p. 1) distinguishes between alienation and self-alienation:

Alienation and self-alienation appear to be products of modernity as a modern human being, an alien, personally or impersonally, at home or on foreign lands, in loneliness or gatherings, seems in a state of great perplexity, confusion, chaos, uncertainty, helplessness and

²⁹ The reason for using the term pedagogy of comfort relates to the student-teachers' working and learning within the schooling space. In essence, they are using methods and practices of teaching which stems from the root work pedagogy [Pedagogy refers to the method and practices of a teacher].

hopelessness. The discussion shows that alienation is objective, whereas self-alienation is a subjective phenomenon.

Self-alienation occurs when student-teachers withdraw or become isolated from their environment or other people as they are overcome by the shocking reality of having to enter an unknown zone over which they have no control. It explains developing student-teachers' choice to complete the Teaching Practicum in a school that reproduces past inequities (their own school experiences). In familiar contexts, they are not required to reframe their thinking; there is no need to disrupt the racial status quo or destabilise and reconstruct learning to teach (Amin & Ramrathan, 2009).

It, therefore, becomes evident that, despite policy interventions, the more things change, the more they remain the same. As an alternative, I advocate for a paradigm shift that recognises students as central stakeholders and agents in shaping the education and schooling landscape.

7.4.2 Level two: The interconnected experiences of the participants through an ITE curriculum

The second layer of criticality comes in the curriculum itself. The second research question examined the interconnected experiences of the participants through the formal teacher professional curriculum (See Chapter Six). The objective was to understand whether the ITE programme, alongside the kind of Teaching Practicum model utilised within the Faculty of Education, adequately provides future teachers with the knowledge and skills required to navigate various contextual spaces in completing practical teaching experience in different schools. This is relevant since there is always a need to reflect on whether the curriculum prepares graduates, better known as newly-qualified teachers, for the existing diversity within the world of work. According to Feinberg (2023), the American schooling workplace is pressured and plagued by systemic and institutionalised racism, which requires a shift to diversity, equity, and inclusion. The same is true in South African schools (Francis, 2023).

Teacher education in South Africa is governed by the MRTEQ developed by the DHET (DHET, 2011 and 2015). It dictates the kind of development beginner teachers should undergo during the course of the four-year degree programme and frames the kind of teacher that needs to be produced for the range of South African contextual schooling spaces. However, this policy, which acts as the 'Bible' of teacher education, is sometimes vague, ambiguous, and downright problematic in its entirety (*my view emphasised*). The policy does not explicitly state nor provide the operational and programmatic support to make a cross-over TP experience possible. While MRTEQ (2011) outlines the broad goals and competencies required for initial teacher education, it falls short in detailing specific mechanisms or frameworks for supporting student-teachers in cross-over teaching experiences—those that involve transitioning between diverse and contrasting educational contexts. Without clear guidelines or resources, institutions struggle to implement these experiences effectively, leaving student-teachers underprepared for diverse classroom environments. Additionally, the policy lacks a robust evaluation framework to assess the impact and effectiveness of cross-over TP experiences, which could provide valuable feedback for continuous improvement.

Furthermore, MRTEQ (2011) tends to emphasise compliance with standardised criteria over fostering innovation and responsiveness to local educational needs. This rigid approach can stifle creativity and adaptability in teacher

training programmes, which are crucial for preparing teachers to address the unique challenges of different educational settings. The policy also does not adequately address the need for ongoing professional development and mentorship for student-teachers during their cross-over experiences, which are critical for their growth and effectiveness. Finally, MRTEQ (2011) misses an opportunity to integrate contemporary issues such as technology in education and multicultural competence, which are essential for modern teaching practices. The nature of the practice of teacher education is much more than policy. The expectation that policy should be implemented and the required timeframe for such is much more complex.

Teacher educators and policy designers should note that it is a set of guidelines that should inform the framework for the ITE programme in creating a competent, skilled, professionally-qualified teacher. If policy were to be understood as that which happens (action) and not that which is declared, progressive deep transformation could occur in teacher education. Ultimately, student-teachers develop into newly-qualified teachers act and behave in their own way regardless of what policy dictates. In understanding the role of policy in teacher education, Samuel (2017, p. 1) asserts that ITE programmes and practitioners responsible for developing professionals should pose the following questions when reviewing the range of (educational) policy types:

... what is "policy"; how is policy constructed; what are policy goals; who does policy benefit; what does policy aim to accomplish in the wider social context; how is policy to be implemented; and how is ownership of policy activated or thwarted? [This] extends the notion of policy analysis beyond simply a content analysis ("policy as text") to engage the social, cultural, economic, and political ramifications of "policy as process".

The expectation of the South African educational policy designers is that professional teachers should place their full faith in policy is problematic. Designers of the teacher education curriculum need to start thinking in a much more complex way about what it means to be a teacher beyond the technical requirements since teacher education has the potential to revert to producing teachers who serve to promote state agendas (Samuel, 2008). Samuel (2008) adds that, as time progresses, additional roles and responsibilities are imposed on teachers.

It can be argued that the unrealistic policy that developing professional teachers should undertake teaching practicum in a range of diverse, authentic learning environments is unsound and lacks detail. It is open to an assortment of interpretations of what "authentic and diverse learning" means, which, on a practical level, leaves the student-teacher at high risk of being exposed to the harsh realities associated with myriad unsafe contexts in South Africa when expected to undergo TP in a cross-over or diverse space. The main concern with the student-teacher undertaking TP in a different context is their safety, which no HEI in the country can guarantee. Entering varied contexts and being exposed to blatant racism, bias, gender-stereotypes, gender-based violence, marginalisation, and cultural, linguistic, and inhumane judgment is out of the hands of any ITE curriculum (Harber, 2001; Van der Westhuizen & Maree, 2010; Adewale, Adebayo, & Afolabi, 2023).

While the MTRTEQ (DHET, 2015) advocates for a diverse experience, this was not the study participants' chosen path. Although they were allowed to venture into a different schooling space and type, they drew on their schooling experience to enter a similar familiar space. The participants thus subverted the curriculum to their prior

experiences. While they acknowledged a new-found understanding of diversity and its importance, this should be read in relation to their own history of being exposed to inequity.

Therefore, the implications of the study's findings are far-reaching, calling for a radical shift in how universities approach a diverse teaching practicum experience. They highlight the importance of co-creating knowledge and embracing student agency in shaping educational practices since newly-qualified graduates rely on their agency when taking up professional teaching positions (Bertram, 2023). By integrating students as active stakeholders in decision-making processes such as the Faculty of Education Advisory Board (CPUT, 2021), institutions can bridge the gap between students and academics, ensuring a more harmonious and impactful learning experience which leads to better-prepared professionals. While recognising the unique contributions that a diverse TP experience can offer, the study points to the need for institutions to examine their own scaffolding of such an experience in relation to its practicality and theoretical implications.

In order to mediate the conflict and dissonance that student-teachers will experience, HEIs can provide comprehensive support services: HEIs can offer comprehensive support services such as counselling, mentorship programmes, and peer support networks to help students navigate and cope with the challenges they encounter. These services can provide emotional support, guidance, and practical advice to assist students in managing conflicting expectations and experiences. Also, HEIs can facilitate critical reflection and dialogue: HEIs can create spaces for critical reflection and dialogue where students can openly discuss their experiences, perspectives, and concerns. By encouraging dialogue and facilitating respectful exchanges of ideas, HEIs can help students develop a deeper understanding of the complexities of education and society, empowering them to navigate conflicts and dissonance constructively.

7.4.3 Level three: Looking into the participants' contextual transitioning and development

In reviewing the level 3 experiences of the participants in the varied contexts, which have direct implications for their future trajectory of schooling placement for job-seeking purposes, I explore the levels of criticality which could have caused stumbling in the student's development and growth through the critical phenomenological lens. Wolhuter, Van der Walt, Potgieter, Meyer, and Mamiala (2012) explored what inspires student-teachers in South Africa and the driving forces behind their entering the teaching profession. This section explores "now what?" and "what's next" answers from participants after a turbulent four-year ITE degree filled with complex challenges such as:

- Acculturation to one year of face-to-face academic learning within the Faculty of Education
- Transitioning to an online teaching and learning modality for two years due to COVID-19
- Reverting to a dual teaching and learning modality
- Experiencing student protests amidst their ITE programme

All the participants experienced a complexity of learning linked to their development in becoming professional teachers. They set out to gain practical experience within primary schooling contextual spaces to become better

equipped as beginner teachers within the world of work. In the one-on-one interviews, the participants expressed their reluctance to undertake TP in an unfamiliar context, primarily due to the continuous narrative of race. Race was the main source of difference when discussing diversity with this group of final-year student-teachers from the leading teacher-educator university based in the Western Cape. As quoted by the participant Johanna after being asked during the second one-on-one interview about her comfortability in teaching learners from her own community or whether she would prefer teaching outside of her community, she stated: "I think none of the schools were really in my community, but it was all in Coloured schools, so I think I was more comfortable because I could relate to them more than I could if I were at school or the different race school." The difficulty of incorporating the variants of what diversity entails is evident in their stories. Most failed to see beyond the colour spectrum, not because of their limited understanding of others and places; their shared stories provided insight that they were exposed to different conceptions of diversity prior to university, what they learned in their initial teacher education programme limited and circumscribed their understanding, despite having experienced diversity in their life stories before coming to university. It was observed that student-teachers self-alienate when confronted by personal learning shifts in their professional development. This means that they oppress themselves since the power to be change agents lies within themselves, and they have multiple potentials to contribute to both societal peace and development (Novelli & Sayed, 2016).

During the development of student teachers into professional educators, various forms of marginalisation, both subtle and overt, may manifest in the following types of behaviour:

- A primary school principal may regard excluding a student-teacher from a major staff meeting as irrelevant, but this might be detrimental to the professional development of the student-teacher who feels that he/she is intentionally excluded and judged based on his/her inferior status of being a *student-teacher*.
- A mentor-teacher may use his/her power to dictate the lesson structure in class, contrary to the university-based TP office lesson guide, which results in the student-teacher complying since he/she is afraid to fail the TP course.
- A student-teacher may be shouted at and belittled by another professional staff member who uses this as a way to exert the power of his/her age, seniority, and permanent position at the school.

All these examples occurred in the lives of the student-teachers who participated in this study, which opens a debate around the topic of professional inclusion and exclusion within becoming a professional teacher. Should different views between student-teachers and school management regarding the importance of specific schooling matters be regarded as a social exclusion that embodies marginalisation? Or should the school leader be permitted to use his/her professional judgment to decide that it is not important for a student-teacher to attend a gathering?

Reviewing the participants' contextual transitioning and development informed my understanding of the kinds of scaffolding structures that could be established to counter the complex and obstinate traditions, cultural practices and normative behaviours that exist in diverse Teaching Practicum placement schools.

7.5 New directions for researching lived experiences

Scholar Paulo Freire highlighted teachers' impact on the holistic development of their learners (Freire, 1970). His critical pedagogy theory can be utilised to examine the post-apartheid South African teacher's role in developing learners as future citizens. On re-examination, the nineteen student-teachers who shared their lived narratives of their encounters with various individuals and TP spaces in their pursuit to become professional teachers were the ideal candidates to divulge their knowledge of the South African higher and primary school education systems. Their narratives enabled an analysis of whether deep transformative systems have been designed to include all voices within their learning. Each participant experienced a power-dynamic encounter through his/her development in becoming a professional teacher. While several participants confronted race relations and racial disparities, they were able to use these challenging experiences to build resilience, embrace change and choose their future trajectory in education. A critical phenomenological interpretation of developing student-teachers' lived experiences provides insight into the structural injustices affecting individuals' experiences of the world. The extent of influence that student-teachers possess in addressing "structural injustice" and whether they have the agency to avoid marginalisation and challenge social injustice became evident in this research study. It acknowledges the notion as an ideal but prompts consideration of the practical impact that student-teachers can have in the face of systemic injustices. Hence, the following requires exploring:

- **Influence on structural injustice:** The question of the scope of influence that student-teachers can wield in addressing "structural injustice," referring to broader, systemic issues in education or society, should be reviewed. It raises the point that while it is ideal to combat such injustices, there may be limitations on the actual impact student-teachers can have within existing structures within the ITE programme.
- **Agency and avoiding marginalisation:** Another aspect is whether student-teachers have the agency or the ability and power, *not to allow* themselves to be marginalised. This implies a consideration of the personal choices and actions that student-teachers can take to resist being pushed to the margins of influence or recognition within educational or societal systems.
- **Challenging social injustice:** The findings suggest that, beyond avoiding marginalisation, student-teachers may also possess the agency to actively challenge social injustice. This involves questioning and actively working against unfair practices or discriminatory structures within the educational system or society at large.

In essence, the findings encourage reflection on the realistic influence that student-teachers can exert in the face of structural injustices and whether they can proactively shape their roles to challenge and resist social injustice within the context of their educational journey. The in-depth interviews with the final-year group of primary school student-teachers unveiled what shapes individuals' perceptions and experiences of reality. They showed that an unstable and ill-prepared ITE programmatic WIL programme creates a false consciousness that limits individual freedom and critical thinking. In constructing the type of epistemic insights future professional teachers should possess (underpinned by a social justice agenda), it becomes apparent that the experienced ITE programme, focusing on the TP programme, requires deeper teacher professional orientation. It is imperative to delve into the specific aspects of the WIL programme that contribute to instability and lack of preparation. Conducting a thorough

analysis of the identified issues can guide the development of targeted interventions. Possible areas to explore include the curriculum design, mentoring and supervision mechanisms, exposure to diverse teaching contexts, and the integration of critical pedagogy within the WIL programme (leading to the levers of change in Chapter nine). One intervention measure could involve a comprehensive review and redesign of the ITE programmatic WIL curriculum. This might include incorporating modules that explicitly foster critical thinking skills, encouraging reflection on diverse teaching practices, and providing strategies for navigating unfamiliar or challenging environments. Additionally, ensuring that mentorship and supervision during WIL are robust and supportive can contribute significantly to the stability and preparedness of the programme.

Furthermore, the intervention could involve implementing professional development opportunities for ITE instructors and supervisors. This aims to equip them with the skills and knowledge necessary to create a conducive learning environment that stimulates critical thinking and prepares student-teachers for the complex realities they may face in diverse educational settings.

Additionally, establishing partnerships with various schools, including those in culturally and socioeconomically diverse communities, can enhance student-teacher exposure to different teaching contexts. This exposure contributes to a more well-rounded and adaptable teaching perspective, counteracting the false consciousness generated by a narrow and limited WIL experience.

In conclusion, the argument can be extended by advocating for a targeted intervention that addresses the identified issues within the ITE programmatic WIL program. By focusing on curriculum redesign, mentorship enhancement, professional development, and increased exposure to diverse teaching contexts, the intervention aims to mitigate the impact of false consciousness, fostering individual freedom and critical thinking among pre-service teachers. This comprehensive approach ensures a more robust and effective preparation for the challenges and realities of the teaching profession.

Deep analysis of the student-teachers' experiences revealed they hang onto their safe space [pedagogy of comfort] because this feels familiar and manageable.

In contrast, the ITE curriculum alongside the MRTEQ (2015) propels students to 'cross over' into a varied, unsure, and uncomfortable [pedagogy of discomfort] space. ITE curriculum ought to provide a safety net and resources to activate this cross-over. However, the cultural capital to venture into the unknown is amongst the list of resources that not all students possess equally, as it is often influenced by factors such as socioeconomic status, educational background, and access to opportunities. Therefore, addressing disparities in cultural capital becomes essential for ensuring equitable access to educational experiences and opportunities for all students, regardless of their background or circumstances. By recognising and valuing diverse forms of cultural capital, institutions can create inclusive environments that support students in exploring and embracing the unfamiliar, ultimately fostering greater diversity, equity, and inclusion within higher education and society as a whole. As Samuel et al. (2022, pg. 1) posit, "Lived experiences and the historicised and politicised systemic contexts are intertwined". Two crucial questions to be posited at this juncture of this study are whether student-teachers can escape their systemised contexts and what constraints their agentic powers. The analysis of this study reveals that students exercise agency but for

different reasons: 1) on the one hand, the majority of them strategise for the expedient formal qualification (dominant trend), and 2) on the other hand, a small cohort chooses to enact opportunities for professional growth and learning (the outliers). This study provided insights into the lived experiences of a developing group of marginalised Coloured, Black African, and Indian student-teachers from the CPUT was essential in ending the silence where systemic silencing might dominate. Both the dominant and outlier groups collectively exercised a form of voicing of their choices for professional education.

A brief review of the findings in line with the elements of critical phenomenology reveals that:

- Student-teachers experience subtle power-related experiences in the ITE curriculum and TP programme.
- Lecturers present themselves as the bearers of all knowledge and, unfortunately, do not re-enact their exposed curriculum³⁰.
- Mentor-teachers carefully use their power to impose their authority on students, knowing they hold the power to determine whether or not they pass TP.
- Lecturers are outdated in their real-life classroom experiences but seek to critique a lesson based on their dated knowledge. Students are afraid to speak up because they do not want to fail.
- WCED officials or designers of the policy are ill-informed about the challenges students confront when embarking on a cross-over TP experience.
- Students experienced marginalisation when working within different contexts. For example, wealthier learners made students feel undervalued and less important in the classroom. Children speak a different language from the student-teachers, making student-teachers feel incompetent to contribute to their learning.
- Old and young mentor-teachers create a rift in the learning experience by consciously or unconsciously asserting their power over it due to the belief that age dictates the relationship.

In my view, critical phenomenology could be the antidote to alleviate the marginalisation of individuals due to their race, gender, sexual orientation, class and other factors by oppressive hegemonic forces (Guenther, 2019). I use the term '*antidote*' to symbolically illustrate the liberating effect of facing, exploring, and progressing from educational inequalities. Samuel et al. (2022, p. 1) concur that we believe this critical phenomenological approach has the potential to tackle the continuing endurance of social injustices, inequities and marginalities in profound and significant ways.

7.6 Professional learning is everyone's joint responsibility

In capturing the essence of what it means for collaborative dialogical engagement towards a shared understanding of developing professional teachers for the diverse South African context, the vignette shared by Dumo provides

³⁰ Despite lecturers presenting themselves as the primary holders of knowledge, their teaching practices often do not reflect the content and principles outlined in the curriculum they present to students, resulting in a disconnect between what is taught and what is actually experienced in the classroom. In essence, while lecturers may cover the prescribed curriculum content in their lectures, they fail to actively engage students in meaningful discussions, practical applications, or critical reflections that would bring the curriculum to life and enable students to fully understand and internalise the material.

insight into a change in the construction of TP within HEIs. She offered the following in order to provide food for thought:

Dumo: *I don't know if this only counts for CPUT or other institutions, but there is a limitation that the school placement selection gives when it comes to teaching practice. We cannot go outside of the province. Sometimes, people feel more; they want to know what it feels like. I would like to know how it feels like to teach in a rural setting because I didn't grow up in a rural setting. I've never been there, but if we could go to such settings. That then would actually take that opportunity and go and explore to see what is needed there. Also, I feel that many teachers want to work in urban areas because of, you know, all the advantages that we have in urban areas. Still, others want to explore what it's like to teach in rural areas and apply all of the theories that we learned in university in rural areas to improve rural education. Because it's it, it won't grow. It won't grow. So yeah, I feel that if the university allowed us to do our teaching practice anywhere, we would have insight and be able to apply the knowledge we learned. So now it is only limited to the Western Cape, and therefore, you find that there are overcrowded student-teachers in one school, and you know the school gets tired of student-teachers and are like, when are they leaving? So, as we don't even feel comfortable, we're like, you know what, I just want those two months to end so they can be done with teaching practice. So, it takes, it takes a lot away from us. So right now, student-teachers, the fourth years, are only now enthusiastic to try other places because we want to be placed in certain areas. After all, we've always wanted to teach in those areas or to see how those areas teach their learners and also to, you know. So, it's only now that that's going to happen.*

The ideals of extant policy regarding ITE curriculum design for WIL require prospective South African teachers to experience opportunities to practice their professional learning in a diverse range of authentic schooling contexts (DHET, 2015). This policy expectation is driven by an interest in promoting intercultural competency amongst novice student-teachers who, as found in this study, had restricted mono-cultural and mono-racial experiences of secondary and primary schooling. The pattern of racialised and classed geographies continues to bifurcate the schooling system despite almost three decades of democracy (Spaull, 2013; Jansen & Kriger, 2020). This socio-constructivist transformative policy aims to shift teacher professional growth toward more significant social justice agendas. It seeks to enable future teachers to become comfortable working democratically within any schooling context. However, (*from experience*) the lived reality of managers of WIL teacher education programmes highlights the impediments to implementing this ideal. Based on the participants' experiences, it can be argued that managers' report significant challenges in acclimatising students to accept this "cross-over experience", marking a shift from the apartheid legacies towards choosing new epistemic experiences of 'otherness' in divergent cultural settings. The under-preparedness of schooling contexts also predisposes prospective mentors to prefer student-teachers who share their internal schooling cultural ethos marked by linguistic and culturally pre-established rituals and routines.

The COVID-19 pandemic activated shifts in normative delivery within a range of higher education curriculum spaces, including the Teaching Practicum operations of ITE. The ideas shared by Dumo are not unique amongst constructors of TP models in South Africa, who, in my view, are aware that the current national and departmental policy guidelines related to TP constructed in a pre-COVID era suggest that they have passed their shelf life.

The new contextual global and national spaces of the wider economic and health milieus, the specific personal circumstantial characteristics of current students, the unique institutional resourcing within specific ITE institutional

environments and the operational challenges confronting mentor-teachers in altered (technologised) classrooms and schooling have significantly impacted the possibility of deep professional support to activate student-teachers' growth (Ab Kadir, 2017; Davis, & Sumara, 2014). Moreover, school learners' readiness for normative curriculum engagement has been compromised or elevated as new pedagogical learning strategies had to be enacted due to COVID-19. This diversity of student readiness presents itself in varying levels of competencies, not only across school typologies but even within singular classroom cohorts. Teaching Practicums should activate alternative practical, pedagogical and curriculum re-imagination, holding in-depth professional quality at the heart of teacher education.

As noted previously, the CPUT's vision is to "Create a smart CPUT community that will contribute to a unified CPUT collective and unified identity – known for mutual respect, and a deep appreciation for diversity and issues of transformation" (Vision 2030: 2021:19). As the leading provider of student teachers within the Western Cape, it is necessary to embrace deep transformation of its ITE curriculum to ensure that professional teachers are prepared for the assortment of people and places that exist in the world outside the confines of its lecture rooms.

7.7 Social Equity and Social Justice: The coming together of the social and the self

The compartmentalised segments of the theories utilised in this study illuminated the cardinal roles played by different stakeholders in the various stages of the scaffolding of learning within the developmental space of the ITE and real-life schooling contexts. Furthermore, the constructed teacher professional programme should consider the interpretation of what constitutes an authentic and diverse experience that future professional teachers are expected to undergo from their first to final year of study per South African teacher education policy.

The term social equity is not new (Heleta & Chasi, 2023). Nalbandian (1989, p. 3) asserted:

Social equity is not an explicit constitutional value but rather a term that implies a calculation of fairness, right, and justice.

Scholars exploring social equity in teacher education should direct their reasoning to the type of professional teacher required in a post-apartheid democratic society. A professional teacher whose values are underpinned by the country's democratic principles, which are similar to the elements cited by Nalbandian, can hopefully withstand the myriad forces attempting to penetrate their teacher development. As per the Constitution of South Africa, "Everyone has the right to education ...taking into account the need to redress the results of past racially discriminatory laws and practices" (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, pg. 79).

Samuel (2008, p. 4) speaks of forces that impact teachers' development, namely, biographical, contextual, institutional, and programmatic forces that impinge on teacher identity. These elements became evident in the data analysis for this research study, which also sought to understand the professional developmental qualities obtainable in varied contexts while completing WIL to become a professional teacher.

In my view, the critical phenomenological approach, especially in the South African context of delayed departure from the remnants of segregation, acts as a conduit through which the experience can be viewed to provide a

bidirectional understanding when the individual avoids, confronts, or comes to terms with the adversarial and sometimes disrespectful experiences of power dynamics and marginalisation at university and in schools when learning to become a professional teacher. These oftentimes lamentably denigrating acts contribute to a teacher's development. While the developmental experiences may not occur in a compartmentalised manner or a vacuum; they will rear their head in the 'becoming process'.

Developing to become a professional teacher should mean using unsettling experiences as a praxis wherein critical reflection and action are constructed. To develop, one must critically think about one's experiences and attempt to understand one's place, which should be a springboard to collectively develop a social action plan. This has the potential to create a just and equal society, which questions how dichotomies create a divided world (Edward, 1941). We need to start questioning the operative injustices and the hidden injustices and inequalities within the world we know, beginning in our immediate spaces.

As a collective, we in teacher development (HEI policy designers, DHET policy frameworks, DBE professional teacher standards) have a paramount role to play in the transformative role teachers should activate within and outside the classroom space. Renowned Brazilian scholar Paulo Freire describes critical consciousness as the ability to intervene in reality to change it. Consciousness involves individuals and communities developing a critical understanding of their social reality through reflection and action (Freire, 1970). Through Freire's characterisation of critical consciousness, he explores the constructs of a critical theory of reasoning that explores questions of meaning, emancipation vis-a-vis ideological inscription, and a particular focus on the socio-political construction of the self. Through deep learning about matters involving a need for social change, students will start to see their role as vital in making social cohesion a reality. Social cohesion starts through the dialogical engagements of individuals intending to make a difference. It requires proactiveness in an attempt to foster societal change. Student-teachers developing into professional teachers should be capacitated in ways that cause them to reflect on their pedagogic approaches and carefully consider how to enact social cohesion in their classrooms (Sayed, Badroodien, Salmon, & McDonald, 2016).

One of this study's key findings lies in the value of the assorted student biographies coupled with the insightful stories stemming from the mixture of lived experiences they underwent in becoming a professional before and during the ITE programme, specifically throughout the diverse TP programme. By sharing their experiences, challenges, and expectations, they provide policy designers and a range of other educational stakeholders with invaluable insights that could enable them to refine their teaching programmes. The student-teacher voices and shared stories invoke empathy and facilitate a deeper understanding of students' diverse backgrounds and needs. As universities strive for educational excellence, this research study highlights the pivotal role of the levels of scaffolding of support required to enable developing teachers to make these transitions, which can contribute to deep societal transformation. Therefore, this study is a catalyst for change between HEI and primary education concerning the status quo of student-teachers undertaking TP in familiar schools (primary schools). It adds to the body of knowledge on professional teacher development. It is worth bearing in mind that my inferred argument is that student-teachers are not complete professionals at the end of the journey of TP since becoming a professional is a lifelong continuing process.

7.8 Synthesis of chapter

Firstly, chapter seven analysed the data from the focus group interview to theorise the participants' diverse experiences of their undergraduate teacher professional degree programme with reference to the teaching practicum programme.

Secondly, it highlighted the utilisation of arts-based methodologies to act as a springboard to activate students' memories. Examples are included in the appendices.

Thirdly, through thematic sharing of the dominant cohort of participants' decision to remain in their comfort zone, the initial theoretical lens provides adequate insight into the zones per the theory of discomfort (Boler & Zembylas, 2003).

Fourthly, I explored segments relating to a pedagogy of comfort and a pedagogy of disruption by explaining and supporting each section with narratives from the participants.

Fifthly, I offered insight into the role of utilising a critical phenomenological approach in understanding student-teacher learning growth in becoming a teacher professional. I *ended the chapter* by providing a new direction for researching lived experiences, exploring varied stakeholders' joint roles and responsibilities in future teachers' professional learning, and approaching social equity and social justice concepts through a transformative lens.

Chapter eight provides insights into the other cohort of students' experiences in making full use of the menu of schools provided for completing TP placement. The two carefully selected narratives of Dumo and Natasha provide deeper insight into the future teachers who selected schools based on broadening their experiences in diverse contexts. They are considered the outliers in this study.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THEORISING LIVED EXPERIENCES: DEVELOPING AUTONOMOUS LEARNING – OUTLIERS’ PERSPECTIVE

8.1 Introduction: Students’ choices of Teaching Practicum Schools

The previous chapter highlighted the dominant group of participants’ experiences of choosing comfortable and familiar teaching practicum schools to undertake their capstone event in learning to become a teacher. Although the schools opted to represent convenience in practical professional learning, this does not mean that salient occurrences did not move student-teachers into zones of complexities in acclimatising to the new schooling environment, which brings its unique set of intricacies. In the previous chapter, student-teacher voices illuminated the conventional culture of student-teachers in HEIs focused on ticking all the right boxes. This present chapter brings to the fore the worldviews of a few developing teacher professionals whose scrupulous choice of teaching practicum school depended heavily on their agentic deep transformative professional knowledge and growth gained within the profession. I provisionally designated them the ‘outlier group’ in this chapter due to their distinctive, exclusive student-teacher nature in terms of their mindset and outlook on the current reality of education in South Africa and their future professional plans for teaching.

8.2 Overview of chapter

This chapter is organised into seven major sections.

Section 8.3 examines the convergent and divergent participant profiles of prospective future professional teachers in the field of education. The insights into the dualistic typology of the participants allow for a deeper understanding of the reasoning behind their decision to shift zones or remain in them.

Section 8.4 critically reviews the new lens for understanding the participants’ authentic TP experiences during practical professional learning timeframes in familiar and unfamiliar schooling.

Section 8.5 expands on the two main pronouncements, namely, the dynamics of power and agency found within experiences of navigating practical professional learning spaces.

Section 8.6 discusses the reasoning behind creating two outliers and the basis for understanding their connected experiences through the identified elements of power.

Section 8.7 presents the two distinctive outlier stories. Section 8.7.1 is devoted to Natasha’s story of traversing teaching practicum placements, and 8.7.2 recounts Dumo’s migratory journey from a comfort zone to a fear zone.

Section 8.8 sets out the theoretical implications of the experiences in the varied zones.

Section 8.9 synthesises the lived experiences in developing the two student-teachers' autonomous learning perspectives. These are stepping stones for a deeper understanding of how people use diverse TP experiences productively.

8.3 Choosing teaching as a career: Convergent and divergent student profiles

The profiles of the participants who participated in this study have many convergences regarding their mindset and approach to TP placement. Collectively, they came from similar working-class home environments and attended similar under-served schooling typologies. Despite this common biographical class and schooling heritage, their social experiences varied in terms of their exposure to and experience of diverse cultures, races, and ethnicities within their families or in the wider community. These lived past experiences before entry into teacher education (see *Chapter Six*) profoundly influenced their framed understandings of what it would entail to cross over into diverse schooling contexts. Despite their diverse past lived experiences, these participants were notably similar in their decisions to thoughtfully choose to become a teacher. *Deciding to join teaching as a professional career* was not a purposeful choice for many participants. Section 5.2 of Chapter Five narrates the divergent life pathways that led to these participants entering the ITE programme. These narratives record the largely externally imposed circumstantial factors that directed their enrolment to become teachers.

Whilst entry into the teacher education higher education space was not necessarily self-selected, the *choice of the schools* within which they would undertake their Teaching Practicum (the focus of this chapter) was more conscious and intentional. This could have been motivated by the desire to ensure a smooth and successful comfortable practicum to gain a qualification or to address their personal and professional learning trajectories. To a large degree, the choice of specific practicum learning spaces was an individual one. Each participant's personal motivation, goals, values and beliefs came into play when deciding where their practicum could be conducted. The managing structures of the teacher education institution presented a menu of typologies of available school placements in primary schools that were willing to host students. However, all students (*including the participants in this study*) had the freedom to choose where they wanted to be placed for TP.

This chapter illuminates the individualistic school selection made by participants and provides insights into the third critical question of what accounts for the nature of students' experiences during diverse TP school settings. Firstly, this analysis reinforces the pre-TP phase that informed the selection of schools. This analysis reflects on the underlying *motivations* informing *the choices* the students made. Secondly, the analysis offers insights into *how* these *pre-framed expectations were constructed*, depicting students' own anticipation of the dynamics they would encounter within diverse schools. However, these past experiences, motivations and expectations were accumulatively negotiated and mediated by conscious personal self-selection of the kind of professional learning trajectory or productive outcome students sought. Combining these levels of analysis provides the syntax into what explains the *nature of the experiences* that students have about (before TP) and within diverse school settings (during TP). Students could be said to read the anticipated and lived TP schooling experiences that are primarily

framed by their personal prefigured beliefs about the kind of relationships they anticipate and encounter. Their reading of their future professional lives is encountered in this chapter.

8.4 Infusing power and agency: An additional lens to frame the analysis

In order to make sense of the students' *motivation, expectations and experiences* of diverse schooling, I invoke an analytical framework drawn from VeneKlasen and Miller's (2002) theoretical depiction of *power dynamics* at play in inter-relationships during pedagogical encounters. This analytical lens could be said to elaborate on the version of critical phenomenology invoked in the theoretical framework (Chapter Three). It exposes in more depth that individuals are not disembodied beings disconnected from the social system within which they reside (Idahosa & Bradbury, 2020). Critical phenomenology foregrounds the need to locate the dialogical relationship between individual and structural systemic elements (Samuel., et al., 2022). Such relationships are never unrelated to the dynamics of power.

VeneKlasen and Miller (2002) argue that a *broad spectrum* from abusive to productive power could characterise the nature of the relationship between interacting participants. They suggest that the following types of power dynamics are at play at the opposite ends of the continuum:

People often see power as *sinister and unchanging*. Such a one-dimensional perspective can paralyse effective analysis and action. In reality, power is both *dynamic and multidimensional*, changing according to context, circumstance, and interest. Its expressions and forms can range from domination and resistance to collaboration and transformation (VeneKlasen & Miller, 2002, p. 1) (emphasis added).

The spectrum suggests that some groups (usually the dominant majority) tend to interpret power as a form of restrictive imposition and subjugation of subordinate groups. These relationships are premised on hierarchical and paternalistic arrangements. Another group (usually the exceptional or the 'outliers') tends to reflect on how power can be appropriated to achieve productive outcomes for the interacting partners. The latter relations are based on cooperation, collaboration, shared interests, and goals.

VeneKlasen and Miller go further to describe *four kinds of power*, of which only one is seen in a negative light (See *Table 20 below*). Abusive power is considered negative for the following reasons:

The most commonly recognised form of power, *power over*, has many negative associations for people, such as repression, wealth, force, coercion, discrimination, corruption, and abuse. Power is seen as a win-lose kind of relationship (VeneKlasen & Miller, 2002, p. 1).

The scholars note that practitioners and academics have explored more collaborative ways of exercising and using power, which has led to three alternatives, namely "power with, power to, and power within", that suggest positive ways of expressing power (VeneKlasen & Miller, 2002, p. 1).

Table 8.1: Conception of power dynamics: An analytical lens (*Adapted from VeneKlasen & Miller, 2002*)

	ABUSIVE POWER		PRODUCTIVE POWER	
Worldview	One-dimensional, hierarchical, paternalistic, restrictive, imposition, subjugating		Multiple, dynamic, and changing	
Prevalence	Dominant central trend		Outliers	
VeneKlasen & Miller's (2002) categorisations	<i>Power over</i>	<i>Power with</i>	<i>Power to</i>	<i>Power within</i>
Characteristics	Repression	Affirmation	Belief in transformation and change	Self-worth Growth
	Force Coercion	Strength Shared collaborative practices	Resources to act Directed to future action	Empowerment Self-affirmation
	Corruption Win-lose logic	Negotiation Win-win	Participation Liberation	Self-in-service Development
This study's chosen Chapters, seven and eight labels, expand insight into the two diverse power groups.			<i>Chapter seven:</i> Theorising lived experiences: Remaining in the comfort zone	<i>Chapter eight:</i> Theorising lived experiences: Developing autonomous learning
			<i>The dominant trend</i>	<i>The outliers' perspective</i>

This analytical lens offers additional leverage to understand how the power dynamics between various stakeholders played out in the TP relationships.

8.5 Conceptions of power dynamics: An analytical lens

In this analytical chapter, I report on students who do not constitute *the dominant trends* that tend to depict conceptions of abusive power within TP schools. Instead of focusing on the negative interpolations of the expected

relationships in the practicum experience, I look at two students who depict varying *degrees of appropriating productive powers*. This group I consider an “**outlier**” to the dominant data from the field. While they, too, tend to acknowledge the potentially abusive nature of power dynamics, they choose to advance themselves to recast their experiences in productive ways.

The two outliers' narratives mainly draw on data not yet drawn from the analysis chapters. It mainly emanates from the focus group interviews and refers to past lived experiences recounted during the individual one-on-one interviews. The previous analysis, Chapters Five and Six, dealt with the spoken word of individual interviewees, whilst Chapter Eight incorporates the arts-based methodologies used to produce data (see Chapter Four) with the collaborative dialogues produced by the participants in the focus group. The analytical stance adopted in this chapter thus draws on the original *theoretical lens* (critical phenomenology, pedagogy of discomfort and the comfort, stretch and panic model) set up to design the instruments for the study and *the selected analytical lens* (positive ways of expressing power alongside a critical phenomenological approach in qualitative research) presented in this chapter. The cumulative impact engenders a comprehensive understanding of the explanatory facets and theoretical scrutiny inherent in the fieldwork, thereby affording profound insights into the phenomenon under investigation.

This analytical lens could be said to elaborate on the version of critical phenomenology invoked in the theoretical framework (Chapter Three). It exposes in more depth the dynamics that show that individuals are not disembodied beings disconnected from the social system within which they reside. Critical phenomenology foregrounds the need to locate the dialogical relationship between individual and structural systemic elements. Such relationships are never unrelated to power dynamics (Prupis, 2023).

8.6 The story of two distinct outlier participants in traversing Teaching Practice placements

The study participants came from very similar upbringings and schooling but varied in terms of culture, race, and ethnicity. Nothing of great significance made these participants decide to undertake a degree to become a professional teacher, although, as narrated in Chapter Five, their decision varied (Participant Biographical Profiles starting on page 105). However, entry into a higher education space to undertake learning to become a professional teacher within various schooling spaces was an individual choice which, to a large degree, required an individualistic decision. Each participant's agency came into play when deciding where TP would be conducted since a menu of primary schools was presented to them, and they had the freedom to choose available schooling placements for the academic year. I, therefore, divide the participants into two distinct cohorts, namely, 1) the power-within group and 2) the power-to group³¹. The two distinct cohorts of student participants are divided according to their relationships with power dynamics. The power-within group consists of participants who exhibit a sense of internal empowerment or agency. They perceive themselves as having some degree of control or

³¹ During the research project, the data unexpectedly unveiled an alternative typology of theory, offering a richer framework to elucidate the intricate tapestry of the participants' lived experiences within their self-selected TP placements. This revelation not only enriched my understanding but also underscored the significance of exploring diverse theoretical lenses to capture the nuanced complexities inherent in their narratives.

influence over their own actions and circumstances. Their locus of power is primarily internal, meaning they draw on personal strengths, beliefs, and resources to navigate their experiences. The power-to group in contrast, the power-to group comprises participants who seek to attain or exercise power in relation to external factors or structures. They may advocate for change, challenge existing power dynamics, or strive to gain influence within their social, institutional, or political contexts. Their focus is on leveraging power as a means to effect change or achieve certain goals, rather than relying solely on internal sources of empowerment. This chapter focuses on the power-to group of students who participated in the focus group interview and responds to critical question three [*What explains the student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse Teaching Practicum schools?*]. It addresses the power-to-group's experiences through two participants' narratives.

To understand the role of power and empowerment in the lives of the developing participants, I take heed of the scholarly work of VeneKlasen and Miller (2002). In seeking to offer insight into forms of power, the scholars state:

Power is an integral dynamic of politics, yet it turns out to be one of the more uncomfortable and difficult topics to address. People often see power as sinister and unchanging. Such a one-dimensional perspective can paralyse effective analysis and action. In reality, power is both dynamic and multidimensional, changing according to context, circumstance, and interest. Its expressions and forms can range from domination and resistance to collaboration and transformation (VeneKlasen & Miller, 2002, p. 1).

They describe four kinds of power, of which only one (power over) is seen in a negative light:

The most commonly recognised form of power, power over, has many negative associations for people, such as repression, wealth, force, coercion, discrimination, corruption, and abuse. Power is seen as a win-lose kind of relationship (VeneKlasen & Miller, 2002, p. 1).

The scholars affirm that practitioners and academics have explored more collaborative ways of exercising and using power, which has led to three alternatives, namely “power with, power to, and power within”, suggesting positive ways of expressing power (VeneKlasen & Miller, 2002, p. 1). Therefore, I categorised the two outlier participants in this study as those embodying positive expressions of power. The expressions of power they embodied became evident in the typology of schools they selected to undertake teaching practicum.

8.7 Journeying from a zone of comfort to a zone of professional growth

8.7.1 Natasha's journey from a zone of comfort to a zone of fear

In the focus group interview, I used an arts-based methodology activity to stimulate a reflexive interpretation of the kinds of schools the participants selected for TP. Ten images were shared via MS Teams for the participants to choose from. Natasha, who was in her final year at the time of data production, dominated the discussion whilst most participants faded into the background. Of the ten images presented, Natasha selected images 1 and 10 to describe her TP experiences best. They are depicted below:

involved in the learning because this is where I get to develop my professionalism in the sense of what methodologies or teaching strategies I am equipping myself to be and, um... and then yeah. And I think the learners are learning here, and as a teacher, I am learning here. You are learning what you, as a teacher, want and understand the learners' needs. You can also reflect on yourself as an individual. I feel the raising of the hands means there's a sense of they understand, there's interaction, they are willing to learn, there's an eagerness to learn, and when you teach a topic after your lesson, and now you are asking questions, everybody is raising their hands, it means that now they understand, and they eager to answer. I think it's a sense of security and comfort.

Natasha comes from the Coloured community of Steenberg, which is well known for an array of societal challenges; hence, she chose Image one, which depicts a Black African township school with problems in and outside the schooling space that resonate not only with her primary and secondary school experiences but with her school-based TP experiences in first to third year (Refer to Chapter Five, page 99). Her ethic of care is evident in her remarks about the kinds of interaction she aims to build with her learners in the future classroom space. Although she advocates for a 'learner-centred' classroom approach, it becomes apparent that the comment on "raising hands" relating to regulated behaviour and structure is key in managing the learning space for Natasha, which does not necessarily make for learner-centred learning. It can be deduced that she was exposed to various educational terms through her university's ITE programme and uses "learner-centredness" to describe her insights into learning strategies. These terms are evident in her commentary; in her view, these learned pragmatic processes would ensure learning takes place. Although, in becoming a professional teacher, Natasha understands hand raising as an interactive learning strategy, some educational experts may disagree with this approach since they consider that it contributes to ongoing educational injustices, which creates a divide between specific social groupings as it can lead to academically weaker learners' exclusion from the learning conversation (Orner & Netz, 2023). While there are indeed diverse perspectives on what constitutes learner-centered classrooms, it is important to acknowledge that regulation of behaviour may not necessarily be antithetical to learner-centered education (LCE). However, in the case highlighted by participant Natasha, where learners engage in rote behaviour by raising their hands to answer questions, it contradicts her understanding of learner-centered classrooms. This suggests a potential misalignment between theoretical ideals of learner-centeredness and the practical implementation observed in the classroom context.

In relation to the second image, Natasha said:

Natasha: *The second picture, I feel that it looks very much like my last teaching practice. It looked like the school I was at. And here, firstly, why I chose this picture; as I said, it brings back memories of my final teaching practice, and it was a good thing. I was at a very diverse school. It was a private school, and I learnt so much, and it contributed so much to my knowledge in the sense that, um... the kind of teacher I needed to be in the private school and the things you need to go through and the things you need to develop on. You really think you are doing it by yourself, but in actual fact, you're not and then, um, the people involved in this image were definitely the staff for me at the school and the learners. For me, at the school, the learners were so different. I was in a very diverse school, a very diverse classroom, and they made me feel a certain way. They made me question meetings. Um, so... I think I had to learn how to deal with this kind of learner. That was the challenge for me.*

How to work with them. How to think like them, and what I need to do to make them comfortable in my classroom. This made me doubt myself as a teacher.

The above excerpts provide a deep understanding of the lived realities the participant underwent in her ITE degree programme when she entered an unfamiliar context. She quickly became aware that the ITE programme did not fully prepare her for what she would encounter. Bertram (2023) indicates that the ITE curriculum cannot address many challenges developing professional teachers face because they are grounded in other sub-systems.

In the second school (private school), the teaching practicum placement brought about feelings of fear as a result of her lack of confidence in the new schooling context. In contrast, Natasha felt safe and in control in the first school since that context resonated with her own schooling experience. Her interpretation of the first image provides insight into her desire for order, security and management of the learning environment and learners within her classroom. However, at the other end of the spectrum, she views her learning in the private context as more focused on "how to think like them". The high regard within the private school learning space is not necessarily afforded to the learners in the first image based on a Black African township school (or classroom). Natasha took the opportunity to venture into a virtually all-White private school guided by the principle of multiculturalism and equality. She regards support in this context as much more encouraging since the learners "made her feel a certain way". In the process, she re-evaluated her approach to the teaching and learning space by changing how she initially constructed her method of engaging learners and building sufficient trust for them to accept her into their space since she was the student-teacher.

Engel (2007) and Pather (2018) use the term *first-generation student* to describe students whose grandparents, parents or siblings did not earn a tertiary degree. Natasha's lived experiences as a first-generation student (Refer to Chapter Five, page number 99) in an unfamiliar context are similar to Sayed, Carrim and Badroodien's (2018, p. 249) finding that first-generation post-apartheid student cohorts transitioning ITE programmes "carry with them into their teaching the hopes and frailties of a society still in transition and may be scarred by new and old conflicts and tensions." Entering an unfamiliar field as a first-generation student can create a level of discomfort (Pather, 2015).

The notion of power playing itself out through age in the workplace is a growing research field (Wang, Olson, & Shultz, 2013; Wegge & Meyer, 2020). Due to the increased coexistence of multiple generations in workplaces, it is necessary to understand how organisations can expand the benefits derived from different staff whilst simultaneously utilising their experience and expertise to capacitate novice incoming colleagues in the world of work (Wang & Fang, 2020). A power dynamic emanating from Natasha's lived experience in diverse TP schools became apparent when she revealed that age could be a compounding factor in developing to become a professional teacher. Due to divergent views amongst various cultural groups and the expected treatment of people of a certain age, complex understanding arises with regard to who should be listening to whom during the TP learning process. In the second one-on-one interview, Natasha said:

Natasha: *I look at teachers that just came fresh out of university. I look at the older teachers at the school; sometimes, they have great bonds, and sometimes, they don't have any at all. I think older teachers just think we are younger teachers or are here to change the dynamics,*

making a person's life difficult. Trying to incorporate what you know, and I think it's not that. I think some people, sometimes the older teachers, need a fresh look and perception of what's happening. And if you change your ways just a little bit or have a good relationship with your students.

This suggests that age profoundly impacts relationship building amongst individuals during the development stages of becoming a teacher, which is an added complication in the unfamiliar contextual environment. In her opinion (Natasha was 23 years old at the time of the study), older teachers should make an effort to allow younger teachers to contribute to change in and at the school for the betterment of their learners. Natasha may not be aware that specific teachers who have worked extensively in the same schooling space for several years may be averse to change since they have witnessed it before and have numerous times seen that it lacks purpose. However, Natasha's views on age suggest a far more complicated experience when entering schooling environments wherein seasoned staff have been employed since "bonds" take time to develop. In light of this, Manap (2023) cautions professional teachers about the two variables impacting teachers' work-placement choice: the site where the workplace environment is situated and the kinds of reward system in place that can contribute to teacher job satisfaction. Therefore, in my study, age provided a critical lens to determine the factors in professional relationship-building.

Based on her varied schooling TP placements over the four years, Natasha was keen to provide insight into her experiences in teaching different kinds of learners. She noted that the children in township schools adopted a different attitude to learning. Marginalised learners presented a subservient attitude in schools where, "*Xhosa learners, foreign learners from informal settlements and Coloured learners*", were taught. However, referring to her time at the private school, Natasha said, "*I must say this year for me was a challenge*". Another story which leaned towards a critical experience was as follows:

Natasha: *I found it difficult to be on those learners' level or felt inadequate to teach them, not because of their race, but more because they were acting like they know it all, and I don't need you because I have other people who can teach me this. I think that's because of their attitude, and last year, there were learners who were willing to learn. All they wanted was more knowledge. Not each of them was eager. The same is true with my first-year experience. They were willing to learn. They wanted to learn, and yes, there was an eagerness.*

The private schooling environment which Natasha entered had other staff of colour. However, they were mainly Black people engaged in gardening, security and in the tea room doing menial work, with a White person in charge (*Refer to extracts from the second one-on-one interview*). Natasha unconsciously experienced classism during her TP period at the elite private school. She encountered multiple 'attitudes' as she described it because the learners did not see her role as influential as that of their assigned classroom teacher. Natasha's role was similar to a teacher assistant who is expected to perform mundane administrative duties on behalf of the classroom or homeroom teacher. In fact, she was a few months away from obtaining her degree. Her treatment could possibly have been inherent to the schools' assignment of low-order teaching duties to people of a specific type and colour. In this case, Natasha, a young Coloured female from the disadvantaged community of Steenberg, was confronted by a lack of professional respect from her learners since she did not look the part of a professional teacher in the current schooling context.

According to McGillen (2023), the United States' history of racism, colonialism, and racially discriminatory immigration laws and practices has resulted in persistent cultural stereotypes and ideas identifying Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and people of mixed heritage with "lower"-class status. Similarly, in South Africa, undergraduate students from marginalised communities or historically disadvantaged backgrounds negotiate their performance within a university environment because of the past injustices of apartheid legacies, as Natasha found during her WIL experience (Cross & Atinde, 2015). The experience of classism, as narrated by the participant, made her feel that she did not belong in this schooling space. Further perceptions of alienation confronted her since she met with aversion among certain learners within the unfamiliar context. The formal ITE programme could not have prepared Natasha for the kind of psychosocial experience she would undergo in the private schooling context. The various professional and personal development zones during TP placement highlight the need for the ITE programme to continuously review the degree of development in the new TP context and the mechanisms that can be adopted to make the learning experience more meaningful and manageable for both parties.

Natasha: *They tried to intimidate me, but it did not work because when you are a teacher, I think you need to stand your ground and be like, I know more than you know. I don't think that the learners could relate to me and that they felt like I was not worthy enough to be teaching them new knowledge, while some learners just loved when I taught them because I came with something different.*

This excerpt underlines that a developing professional teacher will encounter a different type of learner in an out-of-comfort context experience. A personal decision, or as VeneKlasen and Miller put it, the *power-to* within the individual, has to be made (a decisive mindset) to gain a diverse learning experience which could be impactful in his/her personal, professional and academic development (Zembylas & Papamichael, 2017). The reality is that the experience will be emotionally rocky and somewhat unstable, depending on the culture of the learning environment one enters, which embeds an array of social, historical and community influences and beliefs about the role and practices of teachers (Abdessallam, Ghouati & Nakkam, 2020).

According to the pedagogy of discomfort, self-examination of one's learning and the emotions linked to the experience is achieved through problematising professional experience as a learning resource, enabling the participant the opportunity to reflect, enact, and connect (Zembylas & McGlynn, 2012). Being placed within a TP primary school environment is daunting for any student-teacher and could be traumatic since they are required to single-handedly navigate the new space (Bertram, 2023). Natasha encountered times when she experienced discomfort:

Natasha: *There were many times when I felt like this was not for me. They [private school learners] have everything already. I am looking for learners who are eager to learn. I want students in my class who want to learn where I feel I can give and give them that. I don't want to be in a classroom where I'm coming in, and they already have the mindset that I know it all, so I am worried about why I am still here.*

In Natasha's case, the theory of the pedagogy of discomfort is a powerful pedagogical tool which is able to produce action in the experienced situation. She was afforded the chance to utilise her discomfort to construct new emotional understandings of ways to better relate and connect with learners who do not necessarily look like her or come from the same social class.

Using the different lenses to gain a deeper understanding of the insights and perceptions Natasha gained during her four-year ITE programme, it becomes clear that an interplay exists between various fundamentals. Her primary and secondary schooling exposed her to different kinds of teaching pedagogies and engagement with diverse racial, cultural, and religious peers. Her entry into the world of work to study dentistry, then embarking on her dream career choice, teaching, contributed to her ultimate decision that teaching was for her. Natasha was accountable for her growth throughout the ITE programme since she overtly used the *power-to* concept to carve out her professional trajectory. She carefully orchestrated being exposed to varied contexts while holding onto the spirit of learning. Natasha grabbed the opportunity to venture into an unknown area and private school environment. She gained formal practical experience, and as she exited her final TP placement school, she was asked where she would plan to take up teaching employment in the new year. She asserted:

Natasha: *Definitely not a private school. I would like to teach at a non-fee-paying school. It's a Quintile 1 kind of school. The reason for my answer is that I've experienced Model C, and I've experienced a private school. I enjoyed myself at a low-quintile school where they paid school fees but had a feeding scheme. They solely depended on funds from churches. And I loved teaching where you change a life and you can serve a purpose. The experience of a lifetime is when you know where you want to go and see the change in learners. They don't have anything, and you can give them everything. So, I love that kind of environment.*

The voice of this future professional teacher articulates that a diverse Teaching Practicum experience opens up choices for potential employment and simultaneously allows one to reflect critically on one's purpose and the aim of taking up teaching as a career. Having entered numerous schooling contexts and experiencing a wide range of emotions, Natasha has the capacity to work in varied contexts and can use this knowledge to construct a new direction for herself. Zyster (2023) provides guidelines for future ITE programmes to alleviate stressful emotions and emotional events that may accompany TP. For Natasha, her new career direction can be underpinned by the context, circumstances, and interests which serve her. Her choice of future work placement is a Quintile 1 (under-resourced, fee-paying) school since she considers her professional influence on the lives of those situated learners to be more impactful as "you change a life".

Learning to become a professional teacher is filled with complexities. Seeking schooling placement within spaces of unfamiliarity, will no doubt leave an indelible mark on the life of a developing student-teacher. Moreover, entering a new social and cultural domain requires the developing professional to go beyond surface-level knowledge and gain insight into transformative multicultural school spaces, and only they can be responsible for learning in their personal transformation (Jansen, 2009).

8.7.2 Dumo's migratory journey from a zone of comfort to a zone of fear

During the second focus group interview, which included three participants, Dumo played an active role in the discussion, probably due to her more forthright manner. In contrast, Ragmat was softer-spoken and timid, and Lebo, who struggled with English and was online, experienced numerous connectivity issues, which resulted in her prematurely terminating the interview.

Dumo was also presented with an arts-based methodology activity to stimulate a reflexive interpretation of the kinds of schools the participants selected for TP. She indicated that the two pictures that best described her TP experiences were images 1 and 4, depicted below.



Image One (Source available online: <https://images.app.goo.gl/upY8E6Vz69rMWq9s7>)



Image Four (Source available online: <https://images.app.goo.gl/u8pHBRv7hXw1AoAcA>)

On close review of the selected images, it became evident that the first portrays a classroom in a rural school (Quintile 1, since there is a chalkboard, and the class is made up of all Black students and a Black female teacher is present). The other image reflects the classroom structure during the COVID-19 pandemic as the learners are wearing face masks and physically distancing in the classroom.

Dumo's interpretation of these images was thought-provoking:

Dumo: *I selected two images: the first and the fourth one. Okay, so in this image, Sir, I see an inclusive teacher because both the teacher and the learners are involved in the lesson. The learners have their hands up, and the teacher is interacting with all the learners, so I know that this teacher is inclusive because if the teacher were only a textbook teacher and only focused on one teaching method, then not all learners would have their hands up. And also, I see her as setting an example. She's standing in front of the class, happy to be where she is. She enjoys what she's doing because the learners are comfortable with her and not scared of answering questions. So yeah, that is an inclusive teacher. Also, what I take from that is what I need to do exactly when I plan my lessons. I need to think of Johnny, this particular student who learns this way and how he will be accommodated in my lesson.*

In Dumo's view, the controlled learning environment established by the professional teacher constructs an inclusive setting for both parties [the teacher and the learners]. As much as the student-teacher is placed in a new and unfamiliar context, he/she should be aware of the disruption of normative classroom practice and should thus retain current practice rather than disrupt the manner in which learners interact with the class-based teacher (mentor-teacher). A new person entering the classroom space has the potential to adversely disrupt the classroom climate that Sieberer-Nagler (2016, p. 144) describes as: "... the social climate, the emotional and the physical aspect of the classroom". Student-teachers entering schools to experience the practical aspect of learning to become a teacher directly influence the learners' academic growth and psychosocial behaviour. In order for the placed student-teacher to contribute to a positive classroom climate, they need to make learners feel safe and build respectful, welcoming and supportive teacher-learner relationships (Sieberer-Nagler, 2016).

An appropriate and well-established classroom environment must be in place for both groups to learn from sharing content knowledge and interactive teaching. A controlled classroom may improve productivity for the teacher and learners; a code of conduct focusing on issues such as learner behaviour should thus be established. Fegter and Kost (2023) support the notion of co-construction of learning spaces, which brings the voices of learners and teachers into dialogue and contributes to both parties' overall well-being. Dumo asserts that a professional teacher should be knowledgeable about an array of teaching methods in order to produce an all-inclusive learning environment wherein no child feels excluded. Her statement that "not all learners would have their hands up" if it were not an inclusive classroom environment demonstrates that, during her development within the ITE programme, she observed varied mentor-teachers who possibly incorporated an inclusive learning stance and this kind of classroom management technique in pursuit of active teaching and learning. Dumo believes that a safe, inclusive learning environment will mean that learners will "not (be) scared of answering questions". Denis and Bunar's (2023) research in primary schools in Sweden examined learning strategies within the mainstream classroom, which aims to create an inclusive schooling environment. Their findings revealed that in order to better prepare for displaced refugee learners entering Swedish schooling, supportive learning structures that include varied stakeholders (administrators, ground staff, teachers, school managers, parents, learners, etc.) should be built to promote inclusion and retain such learners.

Dumo added that image four resonated with her journey to becoming a teacher during a specific timeframe:

Dumo: *In image number four, I see a few students, which is how my teaching practice was in my 3rd and 4th years. Because it was a private school, it ... had less than 20 students per class. So, I relate more to it, and it's kind of more of a little community. The school is just a little community, and everybody just knows everyone. So, it's easier for teachers just to pay attention to learners because they know what each learner needs.*

Dumo links the experience of learning to become a professional teacher during the COVID-19 pandemic to the private school scenario, with a limited number of learners per grade and class. During the pandemic, the WCED instructed public schools to ensure learners attended school based on strict timeframes regulated and enforced by the DBE to avoid spreading the virus. Large classes were divided into three or four groups, with teachers teaching each once or twice a week. The above excerpt highlights the type of 'community' private schools instinctively build. Dumo's experience of the private schooling system provides deeper insights into how much easier it is for private school teachers to manage their learners' progress due to smaller classes.

Schools in both South Africa and India often grapple with overcrowding issues due to high learner enrolment rates, leading to challenges in providing individualised attention to learners (Vandeyar & Vandeyar, 2012). Additionally, both countries face disparities in educational resources and infrastructure, with rural areas typically experiencing greater deficiencies than urban counterparts. Furthermore, societal factors such as poverty and cultural diversity influence the educational landscape in both nations, impacting student access to quality education and exacerbating disparities in academic outcomes (Mahofa, 2020). The growing number of independent schools in India has seen a rapid decline in students attending public schools (Kingdon, 2017). Kingdon (2017, p. 10) notes that *"The average size of government elementary schools in India fell from 122 students per school in 2010-11 to 109 students per school by 2014-15, a decline of 12 students per government school, or a decline of about 10% over a short four-year period"* due to the structural support offered to teachers within private schools. Duma appears to be reflecting that public schooling for her as a future teacher is not the only option and that perhaps, with the potential rise of private schooling in South Africa she may opt for this type of employment space.

Reflecting on her time at different schools during the TP timeframes, Dumo pointed out that at the private school:

Dumo: *I would say the principal holds the most power because learners need to be interviewed and tested by her before they get admitted into the school. So, she doesn't tell the teachers to do the interviews but rather does it herself, and then she will decide whether they will accept the learner.*

This reveals the private school principal's autonomy to accept or reject learners for admission if they do not meet her criteria. During the apartheid era, schools had limited say in the choice of new learners. Nowadays, the process of selecting learners for particular schools begins with school-based processes coordinated with selected stakeholders (including school governing bodies, SMTs, and teacher unions) under the auspices of the principal. It is believed that this ensures that the community's needs are considered. Therefore, the role of the principal in deciding on learner enrolment in private schools can be problematic since he/she can impose unconscious segregation. The above statement reveals Dumo's perception of her and her fellow teachers' lack of power in deciding which learners will be admitted.

In the United Kingdom, the head of the school, known as the School Master, School Principal or Head Teacher, played a fundamental role in implementing the Labour Government's education reforms (Bolden, Hawkins, & Gosling, 2023; Hatcher, 2005;). In South African public primary schools, the principal's main task is to manage human resources, with the School Governing Body participating in staff selection (DBE, 2016). However, no legally binding policy holds private school principals responsible for their decisions pertaining to admission. This means that they have the power to allow or disallow specific marginalised groups entry. In other words, they can choose to embrace a diverse community of learners and staff members and build a multicultural school or perpetuate race and gender discrimination as was the practice under apartheid (Sayed & Novelli, 2016).

Dumo also identified a disturbing aspect of her experiences in becoming a professional teacher. She felt that in the name of democracy, student-teachers and qualified teachers suffer injustices and learners' opinions and views are prioritised:

Dumo: *Okay, the children, so they know that they have rights. They know they can tell their parents, and their parents will come and fight the teachers. So, the teacher always has to protect themselves every time. You can't just say anything to the learners. You cannot discipline the learners, and when I say you know what I'm talking about, discipline, I don't mean doing it physically. Instead, sometimes asking the learner to apologise to someone they wronged you know will be an issue. So now, the teachers don't have the same rights Every time, it's the learners, the learners this, the learners that and even when the child fails, the parents question the teachers. It's never about learners taking responsibility, in my opinion.*

It is disheartening that a developing professional teacher views her future career as voiceless in contrast to learners. Dumo considers teachers as marginalised in an educational system that undervalues their voice. Harsh public criticism of teachers on social media and in newspapers in recent times has resulted in parents siding with their children instead of respecting professional teachers' opinions and expertise when the child is at fault (Brown, McNamara, O'Brien, Skerritt, O'Hara, Faddar, & Kurum, 2020). Qualified teachers' ability to exercise their professional judgement and decide on learners' holistic development is impeded by 'surveillance' of who is right or wrong. Dumo feels that learners should be held responsible for their actions. Kim, Owusu and Ashbury's (2020) study on 'The ups and downs in perceived societal appreciation of the teaching profession during COVID-19: A longitudinal trajectory analysis' reports that many teachers felt voiceless and disrespected in the unfamiliar schooling context during this period.

Dumo also reported feeling discriminated against:

Dumo: *Sir, I felt discriminated against during my first year, but not by my mentor-teacher. It was just another teacher because she asked why you were doing education. You are so young and can be whatever. Why do you want to be a teacher? Some people don't want to listen, and you know, she's an old teacher; she's seen it all, and I wasn't expecting that from her. And I was just very discriminated against by her. And I kind of had second thoughts, and I was like, yeah, maybe she's right. But then, after that, I noticed that not everyone does teach because they love it. Others do it for the money. So, it depends on the person. So, after that, I've had mentor-teachers who are affirming right, who were just there for me.*

I remember I taught this one lesson during my first year, and it was this old boys' school. Hence, I taught this lesson about rape and everything. I was focusing more on females, that this happens when a female is raped. Then, you know, my mentor-teacher called me after

the lesson, actually called me to the side. He was, like, I noticed that you were talking a lot about females, and you know you took for granted that also males can be raped. So, he had a nice way of telling me next time, this is what you should do. They've just always been supportive.

This excerpt introduces the age factor and the power dynamic that can be created in the relationship between the mentor-teacher and the student-teacher. The participant felt marginalised or insignificant to the teacher whom she respected. Dumo only experienced the kind of mentoring that enables progress during TP later in her journey at the boys-only school. She used her agency not to allow one teacher's views to diminish her passion for teaching as a career. Keiler, Diotti and Kara Hudon (2023) concur that mentor-teachers can dramatically alter their mentees' trajectories, contributing to their effectiveness and persistence in the profession. They add that two-way learning can occur if they both open up to the possibility of growth (Keiler et al., 2023).

It is apparent that Dumo encountered various moments that *disrupted*³² her learning in the journey of becoming a professional teacher/ In her first one-on-one interview, she noted that she was not from Cape Town:

Dumo: *First, because I'm from Johannesburg, I wanted just a change of scenery, so I wanted to study elsewhere. So, I then looked online and checked out CPUT. I then saw that it has more education or Bachelor of Education students, so I decided to apply here. Everything went well because I applied online and was accepted there.*

The participant relied on her inner capacity (agency) to navigate an unknown terrain (social structures). Drawing on one of the theories adopted for this study, namely the Comfort, Stretch and Panic Model by Ryan and Markova (2006), it can be said that she catapulted into the panic model, meaning that she moved into the unknown zone within her development. Everything was new, from the province to the university residence, the students in her residence, university life and the overall context, making her an ideal participant to offer insight into her transition from a comfortable to a more uncomfortable and unfamiliar space. Appadoo-Ramsamy (2022) categorises the forces that impact agency, namely, internal and external forces that influence one's identity, roles and agency. She adds that, based on the contexts where learning takes place, the identity of the developing professional teacher will be altered and, therefore, evolve "changing beliefs, inhabiting different cultures, or adhering to firm beliefs and principles" (Appadoo-Ramsamy, 2022, p. 5). The student-teacher agency is thus a complex phenomenon in understanding the growth and evolution a developing professional teacher has to undergo within the varied contextual spaces in which they are placed for TP.

In terms of personal, academic, or professional development during this transition, Dumo reflected:

Dumo: *I think personal development means you get to know yourself better as you are in the profession. For instance, I now know I prefer working with Grade 4 instead of Grade 7 because of my patience. So, I get to know more about this is what I prefer or rather, this is the way I prefer teaching, or these are the rules I would prefer personally. So academically, it's the context or the content we teach learners. Before you teach learners, you need to make sure you do your research ... to answer all the questions, give them all the clarity, and be in the correct context. So, learners learn in different ways. I need to know how I teach that*

³² Disrupted here means in the positive sense of the word, namely, a positive disruption to bring about positive transformative change in either an individual or organisation.

lesson and then professionally. It is the way in which I relate to my colleagues and how I relate to my learners. So, there have to be boundaries I put aside or set in place.

An instrumental tenet of the Comfort, Stretch and Panic Model (Ryan & Markova, 2006) is stepping into unfamiliar contexts and handling new experiences by being comfortable in what others consider uncomfortable experiences. Dumo held herself responsible for varied levels of her growth:

- within the *personal* dimensions of self – stepping out socially from home, family and community spaces into another context
- within an *ITE curriculum* terrain – enrolling in a HEI teacher professional development degree programme as a first-generation student
- within different *contextual learning spaces* (schools) – navigating the ethos and cultural spaces of varied schools (classrooms and staff rooms)

As noted in Chapter Six, Dumo, whose home language is isiZulu, said that speaking English with an accent was problematic in her attempt to teach a language lesson. She described the incident as futile and funny. Her experience as a growing teacher responsible for teaching a language filled with challenges adds to the literature on Black South African student-teachers' experiences in teaching a language to primary school learners whose mother tongue is English. This reveals the possibilities that open up when a student-teacher is placed within various contextual learning spaces. Nguyen, Trent, and Nguyen (2023) observe that language teachers are positioned by themselves and others through a mix of personal, professional, cultural and social factors; hence, Dumo experienced race, equity and social justice issues (refer to Maddamsetti, 2021; Ruohotie-Lyhty, Aragão, & Pitkänen-Huhta, 2021). These findings are similar to a qualitative study that used visual-textual methods to compare Finnish and Brazilian student-teachers' desired and feared professional futures (Ruohotie-Lyhty et al., 2021).

A collection of schooling spaces makes for various personal, academic and professional learning experiences. In developing to become professional teachers, students should use their agency to reflect on incidents, which makes for personal growth critically. Not every activity within the situated diverse schooling context will make for profound life-altering moments. The agency lies within the student-teacher to choose which lesson is meaningful and serves a growth purpose in their life trajectory. As outlined in Dumo's narrative below, in the in-school (private school) practice to which she was exposed during her teaching practicum timeframe, she realised the need to improve her academic preparedness:

Dumo: *It has developed me, Sir, but especially academically. Because my school does not repeat, doesn't take in repeats. So, if a learner had to repeat a class, they must go to another school. So, then, I had to ensure I knew my story. During my first and second year, you know, sometimes I would take other subjects for granted, and I wouldn't prepare for the lesson, or I would be told in the morning that you would teach Math or whatever. But at my school, I knew I had to do my job because the parents of the learners paid a lot of money, and I did not want any learner to be left behind. It made me grow as a person because I would have different strategies for teaching the same subject or topic, but I would have to teach it in different ways.*

From the learnings undertaken in the situated private school contexts where Dumo gained most of her practical professional learning, it can be said that she had a 'wake-up call'. She quickly learned that the private school

setting was vastly different from government-funded institutions and that teachers should always be thoroughly prepared for lessons regardless of the subject they were expected to teach on the day. In retrospect, Dumo used the experiences gained at the school to reconstruct the way she prepared for future classroom lessons and assignments for university courses.

A different Teaching Practicum experience holds valuable potential for any developing professional teacher since meaningful incidents can prepare him/her for the real world of work, and false impressions of the kind of future working spaces are debunked. For Dumo, leaving her comfort zone in Johannesburg and travelling to Cape Town to undertake formal studies to become a professional teacher meant migrating to the unknown. Her story confirmed that her two years of private school TP placement made her aware that when schools are unwelcoming, the status quo of the past is perpetuated in a post-apartheid transformative era (Jansen, 2009; Robinson and Zinn (2007).

The stories shared by Natasha and Dumo [the outliers in this thesis] provide deep insights into the journey of becoming a professional teacher in a society still plagued by the legacies of a once-segregated society. By deeply analysing these two outliers³³ participants' life histories and experiences, I aimed to understand how their biographical profiles and teaching experiences in a range of South African primary schools influenced their understanding of diversity in TP placement contexts. Their stories reflected the potential of positive agency.

8.8 Theoretical implications

Drawing on the narratives of the two selected outlier participants' developing as professional teachers, I grappled to fully understand what makes them distinctive from their peers. Through deep engagement with the analysed data, I arrived at the conclusion that this group used their *power within* to journey into diverse social spaces to interact within a critical dialogue with teachers and learners about socially just pedagogies, which were uncomfortable but contributed to their professional development in becoming a teacher (Veneklasen and Miller (2002).

These participants did not follow the familiar trend of schooling placements taken by the majority of their peers; instead, they interrupted the way things are and, at the same time, generated an alternative conception and practice around a diverse teaching practicum experience based on the principles and values of teacher agency, participatory democracy, and social justice. In the course of their development, future professional teachers' self-scrutiny of their bigger role and purpose within teacher education needs to occur before the bigger pressing questions in teacher education can be answered. Mosito (2023, p. 1) emphasises that ITE programmes should evaluate their effectiveness in "preparing student-teachers for teaching in diverse situations". I argue that only then is it possible to create and sustain the conditions conducive to developing future professional teachers. The experiences and perceptions of these participants, as seen through their eyes, give voice and provide agency to prospective teachers, contributing to the knowledge base on what constitutes good quality ITE (Sayed et al., 2018).

³³ The term outlier is used to describe students who went against the normative teaching practice placement decision to be placed in schools of comfort.

The four sets of transcriptions below were carefully selected to highlight the four zones of development expected to be undertaken by students in learning to become professionals. I assert that the power within the group (Natasha and Dumo) allowed them to navigate these terrains developmentally. These participants skipped the first zone (comfort) and delved straight into the second, namely the fear zone.

▪ **Fear Zone**

Student-teachers gravitate towards people with similar cultural, political, and social preferences in deciding on a school. A comfort zone can unconsciously be discovered amidst a fear zone through developing interrelationships when placed in TP schools.

Natasha: *The staff was the most memorable part of my teaching practice at the school. I know we are there for the kids, and I'm supposed to be loving them, but I think, when I mean staff, I mean ground staff, the cleaners because they played a massive role while I was there because I did feel out of place when I was at school [private school]. So I was at a private school which obviously had super rich and upper-class people. I couldn't do anything, and I was just there to teach. I couldn't really serve a purpose. I was really out of place. We have kids here who probably pay more for school fees than I ever had to. I felt that the cleaners, because they were Coloured and came from the same area I was out of, understood me so much better, and I understood them. I clicked instantly with all of them. And that was a nice experience. I think I went to school because of them. I wanted to go to school because of them. I was eager to go to school every single day and finish my teaching practice because there was so much laughter happening while they were in my presence, and I think that's just the most memorable part of my most current teaching practice.*

This excerpt reveals that although Natasha chose to enter an unknown and unfamiliar schooling type, she put her fears aside and felt at ease in the new teaching context since she was amongst Coloured, unqualified ground staff working at the private school. These individuals reflected her own circumstances. Furthermore, her parents embraced different typologies of people, which reflected in Natasha's outlook on life:

Natasha: *I think we're very accepting because very different people come into our household, and we all have very diverse friends: my mom and my dad. My dad has a lot of Xhosa friends because of his work, and my mom has a lot of Muslim friends, so there's quite a diversity within our house.*

To tackle what could culminate in fear of operating in a mainly unwelcoming environment, Natasha aligned herself with individuals who share her cultural and social background and preferences. The cleaning staff (ground staff) rather than the assigned White mentor-teachers provided affinity and connection in this hostile space.

Within the alternative TP context and working in her first-ever private school, Natasha embraced the learning opportunity to develop relationships with people at the school who, due to the colour of their skin, in her opinion, were more familiar with the challenges she faced since they too were from the historically disadvantaged Coloured community of Steenberg where Natasha was from. While not verbally declared, the connection between Natasha and the ground staff was built on race as a social organisation (Anthias, 2001).

Being afraid to venture into a new context is daunting, but choosing to expound on the reasons for doing so will sustain the crossing-over experience. Without assistance from the assigned ITE programme coordinator or anyone

within the placed school, Natasha created a coping mechanism: to befriend the ground floor same-race staff who, to a large degree, had intercultural rather than professional knowledge about the challenges she faced.

▪ **Learning Zone**

The learning environment sets a developing student-teacher up for critical moments of deep conceptual and reflective development because of situations and experiences during the situated schooling TP placement. The reality of ill-mannered learner attitudes in a private school became clear to Natasha:

Natasha: *I really think they (mentor-teachers) were trying their best to allow us to fit in. The one time it really happened was when it came from one of the kids. One of them commented because the teachers were there, and he said, "Oh, my dad pays for your salary, or my Dad owns you" or something. So that was like an eye-opener for me, and I asked myself whether I wanted to go into private schools. Is this something I want to hear for the rest of my life? My Daddy pays your salary. So that's just the one thing, and obviously, being so professional, we reported it to the educator, and the educator reported it to the principal. The principal contacted the parents. It was such a serious matter that the parents were called in; they had to come into the school, and the matter was addressed. So that is the only part, the discriminating part for me.*

Natasha's racial and class identity was laid bare through the insensitive and unpolished comments made by the learner. Being treated differently by a learner was a cardinal learning moment for Natasha, which caused her to reflect on the kind of context in which she wanted to teach. In this instance, Natasha did not rely on the ground staff with whom she had built a strong relationship to mediate. She elected to find strength and encouragement in her mentor-teacher, who is from a different race and class, allowing the mentor-teacher and school principal to mediate. The principal did not hesitate to support Natasha and transformed a potentially career-destructive moment into an unfolding life moment, demonstrated by the professional support provided by the school staff.

Developing to become a professional teacher means being exposed to varied life lessons, sometimes not through natural, inevitable processes but unfavourable conditions (Day & Gu, 2007). Dumo revealed two developmental lessons during years one and four of her ITE programme. Both contributed to her transitioning from beginner to final-year exiting student-teacher. She shared the following narrative, which switches from an unfavourable to a favourable scenario.

During Dumo's first year, a fellow staff member at the school where TP was undertaken negatively influenced her attitude towards teaching as a career:

Dumo: *It was my first year, so she was not my mentor-teacher because I never had a bad experience with my MT. But then she was teaching in the school, so I asked her whether I could teach her a lesson in her class. She then said yes and welcomed me into her class. So, I went and taught the lesson, which was very nice. And then, after the lesson, she asked: "Why do you want to be a teacher?" She said, "I want to leave this profession, and you are coming in. You are young. You're only 19 years old. Why?" Just why, you know? And I thought to myself, why she is so negative? And she started telling me all the negative things that parents do that learners do, and she said, "You are not fit for this. You know you need to leave here." Yeah. So, yeah, I actually started questioning myself: what am I doing here? Really, you know? But then I realised that I love what I do, and she probably doesn't like what she does, so I can't compare myself with her.*

Not every staff member in a school is totally committed to their career since every professional teacher is at a different level within their career trajectory (Huberman, 1989). The disgruntled staff member's experiences and low morale could have stemmed from many challenges, some of which were made known to Dumo. She was selective in the kinds of information she allowed to affect her. She chose not to let the disparaging views of one teacher within the placed fee-paying Quintile 5 state-funded public primary school affect her outlook on teaching as a career.

In her final year, Dumo experienced a life-altering lesson:

Dumo: *A memorable event of TP that I will cherish, possibly, is, I would say that when the school was having a show and tell, so basically what happened, learners would bring something to show the class about their culture or themselves. We got to learn about the backgrounds our learners are from. We got to learn about different cultures and different practices. Others got food, others got clothes and brought a lot of things. It was quite memorable because the learners were quite involved. They weren't just sitting but rather presenting to us what they had. And as I had mentioned earlier, my school was a very small, intimate school. So, every learner had something to say.*

Learning by showing or demonstrating is not a new method of learning. It delves into the learner's knowledge base to reveal what is important to him/her; thus, the teacher can use this insight to build strong learning. In the diverse South African landscape, this is an innovative way of exposing learners to varied cultures, religions, languages, traditions, and practices. For Dumo, the activity was meaningful since she learned more about her learners and the mentor-teacher at the independent, faith-based school where she completed her teaching practicum. She was confronted with her own stereotypical views, which she could resolve through the shared class activity:

Dumo: I would say it's for me. I was looking down on myself. Hence, I mentioned that when I went to Cliftonville Adventist Primary School, I was intimidated by my mentor before she even opened her mouth to talk to me. And I just, I was like, did I really make the right choice by coming to this school because I wanted a Black person that I would understand, but only to find out that Mrs MacDonald was a very nice lady. So, I think I look down on myself until I get to know that person better or feel comfortable with the person or the people who are different or diverse from me.

This shows that the outlier participants blame nobody but themselves when things go wrong at the self-selected school where they are placed. They thus look to themselves for growth and development. Dumo's self-reflection points to her fear of working with someone of a different colour and the realisation that she judged the mentor-teacher before allowing her to contribute to her professional learning in the diverse selected faith-based school. Self-doubt has deep roots, and such doubt within developing teachers emanates from past daunting experiences. Coping with self-doubt is possible and leads to enhanced professional performance (Braslow, Guerrettaz, Arkin, & Oleson, 2012).

The title a student-teacher is assigned when entering a school for TP can have a detrimental impact since how they are addressed will influence their stay. Dumo's response to a question I posed sheds light on this issue:

Researcher: *Before I move on to the last question. I want to ask you, does it make a huge difference or not when the principal or the mentor-teacher introduces you to the class as this is Miss Dumo Mhleka (pseudonym), she is a student-teacher or rather saying this is Miss*

Mhlekez, she is a teacher from Cape Peninsula University of Technology. Which one works and has better repercussions? Which one is better?

Dumo: *Sir, to be honest, I think the first one. When I'm regarded as a student-teacher, learners will know I identify with or relate to them. So, they will know that we have this huge assignment, and then they'll come to me and ask Ma'am how we can tackle it. So, I now know what to say because I am a student, and I understand what they are going through before they write their exams. I also give them words of motivation that are currently working for me that I think will work for them. And also, I'm not yet qualified, and I'm still learning. Learners should know that sometimes, I might make mistakes and not be perfect, but it's a learning curve for me. I want learners to know I'm not there to replace their teacher. I'm not disregarding their teacher or how their teacher teaches them right. I feel that most of the time, students feel happy that there are student-teachers in their class because they know we are friendlier and nicer than their **actual** (emphasis on the word) teachers. So I'm not there to take their place, but I'm here to do my learning and always reassure them. Thank you for allowing me to be in your class; although they have nothing to do with that decision, they still feel like you are more in control.*

Dumo's thinking is unconventional and points to her ability to reflect on her positionality, purpose of entering a school, learners' common misconceptions and strategies to address challenges that arise when embarking on cross-over teaching practicum placement. Her narrative reveals the challenges in venturing into an unknown schooling community that may not have arisen had she selected a Black African township school in her hometown in another province. The challenges faced by developing student-teachers like Dumo are not unique to South Africa. Milliken, Bates and Smith (2020) note that education policies relating to teacher deployment in Northern Ireland focus on ethnic separation: "As many as half of the teachers employed have had little or no professional engagement across the community divide; they have remained community-consistent throughout their entire education and career". Therefore, South African ITE programmes should focus strongly on the cross-over contextual dynamics.

▪ **Growth Zone**

The growth zone represents the cognitive phase in an individual's learning, where they can acclimate to familiar patterns or acts that previously destabilised and disrupted their normative understanding of situations. Natasha's lived experiences in the private school provided insight into and understanding how private schooling operates and thrives. By entering private schooling, she was able to confront her fears about White people and how White schools operate. Nevertheless, Natasha pointed out that she was keen to work in a school environment with which she is familiar and comfortable since she now knows how to assist learners from disadvantaged environments to confront fears of the unknown. Natasha's assertiveness in her growth zone stems from her ability to differentiate between the typology of schools where she would feel capable of handling learners (possibly based on behaviour) and those where she would not be able to:

Natasha: Definitely not a private school. I would really teach at a non-fee-paying school . . . Yes, it is more of serving a purpose. Just serving a purpose and making a change, making a difference.

The participant grew to the extent that she could make a professional and personal judgement on the kind of school where she would consider taking up future employment. She bases her decision on her view that her future job should serve a purpose. Natasha believes that her life as a teacher should have meaning; therefore, she feels she

can give more to marginalised learners. Her passion for educating children in impoverished communities outweighs her need for a monthly salary.

The fundamental question is how a formal ITE programme in South Africa prepares pre-service teachers to adopt the mindset that Natasha displays. Furthermore, can an ITE curriculum be crafted to present student-teachers with opportunities to confront their fear of the unknown, or does it have little potential to destabilise a developing student mindset? South African students enter formal learning spaces with the belief that they do not belong in certain spaces for numerous reasons (see Chapter Seven). However, Natasha showed that she would not allow herself to capitulate to their power since the ITE programme affirms the hierarchy if one decides to walk away (in her case, being belittled by a learner). As a developing professional, it is imperative that one confronts the power imbalances in a democratic society. After the student-teacher professional has been exposed to a varied context, the professional teacher can conceptually and theoretically understand how power plays out and understand that agency has the potential to fracture power dynamics.

Dumo also shared her intentions concerning future jobs:

Dumo: *I also want to teach at a school with enough resources because it is a versatile learning method. So yeah, it accommodates a lot of learners simultaneously, and that's the kind of school I did my teaching practice at in both my first and second years. Yeah. I mean—both my first- and fourth-year school. So, um, I realised most of my friends would complain about teaching practice about not having enough resources from their school, and it would make it a bit difficult for them to be inclusive. And they would opt for teaching learners with textbooks and all that. Now that I've experienced both worlds in terms of resource-wise, I am kinda [kind of] like better informed.*

Dumo's exposure to diverse contextual professional learning environments has honed her ability to navigate challenges with resilience and adaptability, empowering her to confront situations that may have once posed significant cognitive dissonance. Having traversed placements ranging from resource-abundant to resource-scarce schooling settings, Dumo has developed a nuanced perspective on the impact of resources on educational outcomes. With a firm belief in the transformative power of adequate resources, she aspires to contribute her expertise to a school environment equipped with ample resources, recognising the profound enrichment such provisions afford learners in their educational journey (Carnoy, Ngware & Oketch, 2015).

Reflection

The core features of being and becoming a student-teacher are well documented in a longitudinal study conducted in England that involved 85 face-to-face interviews and the administration of 4 790 self-completed questionnaires amongst initial teacher preparation (ITP) programmes (Malderez, Hobson, Tracey, & Kerr, 2007) which are the equivalent of ITE in South Africa. Malderez et al. (2007) found that teacher identity, the role of relationships, the notion of relevance and the presence of emotions were evident amongst these cohorts of students. However, power was not included. The tenacity linked to the power within two selected outlier participants within this study symbolises the kind of professional teacher needed within the South African schooling space. The DBE requires teachers who will lead the younger generations with whom they will be working in contesting power at all levels of

their lives. Such teacher professionals choose not to be victims of their circumstances. They are acutely aware of the possibilities linked to different kinds of treatment within specific schools. The future student-teacher should know that by not opting to enter a schooling space due to fear of the unfamiliar, they are affirming abuse of power instead of the productive power which lies within them.

8.9 Synthesis of chapter

This chapter focussed on the experiences of the two outlier participants who productively utilised their 'power within' to venture into unknown schooling spaces regardless of their fear of doing so. It provided a theoretical framework that explains why specific students (the outliers) depended on their agentic and autonomous judgement to venture into unfamiliar schools. I provided deeper insight into the power which emanated from this cohort of students and briefly compared them to the other group (Chapter seven). This chapter comprises the building blocks that flow into the construction of the thesis of this study. The thesis chapter (Chapter nine) uses the theoretical insights gained from the outlier group of participants discussed in this chapter to make an argument (thesis) concerning the politics associated with TP placements and how the changing *space, time and curriculum* according to context, circumstance, and interest could influence forthcoming generations of newly-qualified professional teachers.

Chapter nine presents the findings in relation to the study's objective, which was to understand the lived experiences of student-teachers in diverse teaching practicum contexts.

PART C: BUILDING THE THESIS

This section marker is a signpost to organise my framing of the scope of work covered thus far. I sketch a brief overview of each of the chapters (one to eight) that guided my understanding of the phenomenon of student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse teaching practicum contexts.

The introductory chapter provided the platform to contextualise the study by presenting the background, the research problem, and the research objective and questions. It also presented a brief literature review. The chapter noted that South African teacher education policy expects exiting professional teacher graduates to be prepared for working in “**authentic and diverse TP contexts**” (DHET, 2015). However, the reality is that student-teachers are afraid to venture outside their familiar contexts (comfort space) and enter unfamiliar schooling contexts (pedagogy of discomfort). This study thus aimed to determine what informed the choices of a group of final-year developing professional teachers when selecting schools for their practical undergraduate teaching practicum learning.

The second chapter offered a critical synthesis of the phenomenon (student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse teaching practicum contexts) with a focus on the primary school curriculum offered within the Faculty of Education at the CPUT. The literature review began with a **macro perspective**, which provided an in-depth examination of the South African higher education landscape and the realities linked to institutional diversities within this sector. The policy terrain of teacher education in South Africa post-1994 was examined, describing the changes and developments that recognise the complexity of teaching across various contexts and the vital need for professional teachers to be prepared for this complexity. The many policies that govern learning to teach in post-apartheid South Africa were explored. The **meso perspective** focussed on the CPUT's institutional context and its vision and mission (CPUT Vision2030) that recognise diversity. Lastly, the chapter reviewed relevant studies on diverse student schooling experiences (**micro perspective**). The literature review revealed a research gap in understanding the lived experiences of student-teachers when entering varied schooling contexts to complete a Teaching Practicum.

The third chapter presented a detailed account of the three theories used as lenses to explain the underlying causes or influences impacting developing professional teachers' choices and actions regarding the selection of schools for Teaching Practicum. The three theories were then placed in perspective [an expanded paradigmatic position of a phenomenological approach that embeds exploration of power dynamics (critical phenomenology), a psychological-social theoretical model exploring the negotiating of diversity (the comfort-stretch and panic model) and a pedagogical model examining the stages of movement out of one's comfort zone to embrace discomfort (a pedagogy of disruption)], by providing a historical overview of the theories and studies that utilised them. The theories shaped the construction of the research instruments utilised to produce data for this study. The key concepts of the three theories are 1) authentic lived experiences of individuals in an alternative schooling environment, 2) power relations when placed within diverse schooling, 3) understanding the types of emotions involved in the professional learning of student-teachers and 4) scaffold learning as a tool to support students

transitioning from a pedagogy of comfort to a pedagogy of discomfort. Finally, Chapter Three discussed the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of critical phenomenology.

In Chapter four, I examined the principal theoretical foundation on which the study was constructed, namely a critical paradigm and the research methods for this qualitative case study from a critical dimension. This was followed by a discussion on finding my methodological way as a beginner phenomenologist in the world of research. The chapter discussed the selection of the 19 purposefully selected participants and their profiles, as well as the 11 schools in the Western Cape which opened their doors for pre-service teachers from the CPUT Faculty of Education to complete their practical segment of the TP course. These schooling spaces differed in terms of learners' background, settings, socio-economic stratum, language, and demographic characteristics. The detailed analysis of the environment of each of the school settings enhanced insights into what it means to venture into an 'unfamiliar' TP placement experience. The data production tools were discussed, including a biographical online questionnaire, in-depth semi-structured interviews [one-on-one and focus group format], arts-based methodology activities, a research journal, and photographic data. I reflected on my insider researcher status closely linked to my positionality and offered insight into the limitations and challenges I confronted during the course of the study. The chapter concluded with a description of the methods adopted to authenticate the research.

Chapter five commenced the write-up of the findings using the data obtained from the online questionnaire survey, which provided the demographic and biographical profiles of the 19 participants. The qualitative narratives from the research data were presented in 19 carefully constructed vignettes that capture the diversity of the student population in this research study. This chapter presented detailed insights into the descriptive level one critical question: *What are student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse Teaching Practicum contexts?* The primary focus was what informed the participants' selection of TP placement schools. This chapter thus provided an understanding of the conceptual reasoning of developing student professionals when provided with a menu of schools to undertake TP in and what informed their decision-making.

Chapter six presented the data from the level two evaluative thematic analysis of the two one-on-one interviews with participants on their understanding and experience of diversity in the South African context and linking their lived experiences and their formal ITE curriculum. Three stages emerged from the analysis, which focused on aspects of diversity at home, in the ITE programme and in TP schools. An extensive list of sub-themes emerged, providing a deeper understanding of the students' reasons for selecting specific schooling placements. They shared their authentic first-hand stories of experiences after entering varied schools and working alongside diverse learners, mentor-teachers, and school managers. The perspectives offered in this chapter offer insight into how the teaching practicum placement programme within this HEI could be restructured to focus on designing supportive scaffolding structures to enable students to enhance their professional and academic (and possibly personal) lives by confronting and addressing their fear of the unknown. At this stage, the participants were somewhat unaware of their agentic power to promote a positive cross-over (out of context) experience.

In Chapter seven, the analysis of the empirical data revealed two typologies of students with respect to their embracing or not the opportunities for entering specific TP schools. Chapters Seven and Eight facilitated a

philosophical understanding of the participants' reasoning and understanding of the study phenomenon. One cohort leaned towards the dominant trend of remaining within their comfort zone by conveniently and purposefully undertaking teaching practicum in schools that largely resembled their schooling, situated in the familiar community spaces from which they emanate. Within these selected schools' student-teachers used their agentic power to control their typology of preferred placed mentor-teachers. The mentor-teachers' pedagogical practices point to flawed instructional learning practices. This cohort made minimum personal input in their learning. The other cohort (discussed in Chapter Eight) of participants leaned towards using their agentic power to carefully select schools on the schooling placement list to build their autonomous professional, academic and personal learning.

Chapter eight focussed on the two outlier student-teachers who utilised their power to undertake teaching practicum in schools which were unfamiliar and unknown to them, and although fear-bound, this distress catapulted them into disruption which led to growth. The chapter provided a theoretical interpretation that explains why specific students (the outliers) depended on their agentic and autonomous judgment to venture into unfamiliar schools. I offered deeper insights into the power which emanated from these students (power within the cohort) who embraced their agentic power and contrasted them with the power to group (Chapter Seven) those who capitulate systemic power. This chapter comprised the building blocks that flow into the construction of the thesis. The thesis chapter (Chapter Nine) utilises the theoretical insights gained from the experiences of the outlier group and makes an assertive case concerning politics accompanying TP placements and how changing (*space, time and curriculum*) according to context, circumstance, and interest could potentially influence forthcoming generations of newly-qualified professional teachers for the world of work.

The Thesis Chapter (**Chapter nine**) represents the recurring perspectives, patterns, and arguments of various teacher education associates affected by how a diverse teaching practicum placement experience could potentially transpire and impact the prospects of beginner professional-teachers. A creative approach is used to present the study's research findings in the form of a speech intertwining the imagination and the reality. I chose to use an artistic approach to present the findings through the medium of delivering a speech at a summit to be hosted in Cape Town. I titled the event the Global summit on teacher education 2024 [*The summit on teacher education 2024 is a make-believe event; however, the research findings are genuine*].



Source: Available online: De Graff, J. (2023). See The future first. Available online: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/za/blog/innovation-you/201708/see-the-future-first> [Accessed 29 Oct 2023]

CHAPTER NINE

LEVERS OF CHANGE: NAVIGATING THE POLITICS AND POWER OF TEACHING PRACTICE PLACEMENTS

9.1 Introduction

Chapter eight provided a synopsis of insights into the phenomenon under study by presenting the lived experiences of two outlier participants who vacillated about whether the experience of crossing-over into unfamiliar teaching practicum contexts was valuable or not for their personal and professional development. The three initial theoretical lenses chosen for this study (see chapter four) were utilised to gain insight into their biographical journeys' radical and turbulent nature. From their narratives that foregrounded their critiques and concerns regarding relating their experiences of the curriculum to their actual experiences of diversity at the self-selected schools, I came to understand the power and politics involved in TP placements. The new insights extend beyond the specific site, context, and South African situation, aiming to contribute to a global conversation on the challenges and opportunities inherent in teacher preparation programmes worldwide. My research has uncovered a tapestry of perplexing critiques voiced by the participants as they navigated the intricate landscape of diversity education within a university setting. Their narratives, rich in descriptive and interpretive elements, transcend geographical boundaries and resonate with educators around the world, highlighting the universal relevance of their experiences (Cochran-Smith, 2021; Smith, Tuck & Yung, 2018). As evidenced by studies on cross-cultural teaching practices (González-Serrano, González-García, Carvalho, & Calabuig, 2021), the insights gleaned from Natasha and Dumo's journey serve as invaluable contributions to the global discourse on education, fostering mutual learning and understanding among educators across diverse contexts. The phenomenon explored transcends borders, offering valuable insights applicable to international teaching placement contexts, whether in the Philippines, Malaysia, Brazil, or beyond (Adams & Lok, 2022; Gepila, 2020; Marcondes, Leite, & Ramos, 2017).

The distinctive feature of looking at the study phenomenon from a critical paradigmatic perspective, namely foregrounding critical phenomenological experiences as being mediated by perceived power and the inequality experienced by the participants, directed me to the existence of two kinds of power in the HEI/ TE space. As participants negotiated both the world of the expectations of the teacher education programme (academia) and the world of the schooling TP contexts (work), I came to see the enactment of dialogical contestations between *systemic power* and *personal power* (Nazari, De Costa, & Karimpour, 2023). Based on the data from the participants, it can be argued that sometimes, individuals challenge the “power of the system” and become complicit when they resort to a form of self-marginalisation. It can thus be deduced that the TP practicum space is a fluid, dynamic space of negotiation between the self and the system, traversing from their past to their futures and about responding to the power and politics of a teacher education system in South Africa.

These insights allowed me to present what constitutes the key *levers for change* when looking at the purpose of the Teacher Practicum within a framework of addressing the expectations of student-teachers who come from under-resourced contexts and who aim to navigate into the role of a prospective professional teacher in a still unjust and skewed social system as illuminated by the participants lived experiences. By using the term ‘a lever’,

I am not using it metaphorically but, in fact, concretely to speak to the notion of change actors responsible for transforming the dynamics associated with learning to become a professional teacher in the face of systemic challenges amidst a transformative, ever-changing world.

Unlike how I previously judged these student-teachers as largely resistant to change, I came to understand more deeply why they struggle with opportunities for disruption of their comfort zones. Based on the participants' narratives, it can be stated that their journeys through the higher educational landscape of obtaining credentialing for prospective employment understandably dominate their preoccupation. These insights have relevance beyond the boundaries of the sites where the data was produced and perhaps have applicability across other contexts, especially where the purpose and function of the TP as part of a social justice and redress agenda in an initial teacher curriculum is being negotiated at policy and curricular levels.

The dominant group of participants chose to “remain in the comfort zone”; they did not choose to be “disrupted”. From their narratives it became clear that they were prudently aware of the organised power that exists in social systems. These participants chose not to enter into different types of schools for TP. Since social engagement via various online social platforms is easily accessible, a dialogue with fellow peers and professional staff in different schools can easily be maintained, influencing decision-making when selecting schools for TP. It seems that many of the student-teachers' understanding of diverse schools is being mediated vicariously through social media, often fueled by perspectives shared about the school by the institution itself or other student peers' shared views about the school. Historical interpretations of the nature of varied schooling contexts underlie these perspectives. My study reveals that the dominant trend for the selection of schools was for the student-teachers to opt for schools that promote their agenda of passing through the qualification system without much or any learning disruption. Those participants who chose to follow the trend consciously decided to remain within their comfort zone since they saw no purpose at this stage in their professional development for learning experiences in diverse, unfamiliar schools, which possibly could result in them failing and having to repeat a Teaching Practicum session or an academic year. For the participants, extending the time taken to obtain their formal qualification is not an option since it has financial implications.

On the other hand, the outlier participant cohort, which is in the minority, examined their role in the education system. Using their strengths, they set out to confront their own internal conflicts and productively use these fears to fuel their learning (professionally, academically, and personally). The perspectives voiced by outlier participants in this study suggest that Teaching Practice placements involve navigating risks to venture into the unknown, confronting fears and overcoming obstacles or acquiescing to societal structures designed to perpetuate individual compartmentalisation.

9.2 Overview of chapter

This chapter is organised into six main parts.

Section 9.3 provides a response to the study's three critical questions. Section 9.3.1 delineates a catalogue of more abstracted statements encapsulating recurring thematic emergences derived from the various data scrutinised throughout Chapters five to eight. The list is presented in 9.3.1 but expanded on in section 9.4.

Section 9.4 discusses the implications of these findings. I bring the participants' lived experiences to the attention of collaborative partners who are instrumental in making the authentic TP experience a reality. The research findings are creatively presented as a speech intertwining the real data (as gleaned from the fieldwork) and the imagined possibilities of redirection (as generated from the fieldwork analysis). I chose to use a creative artistic perspective to stimulate an insight into my thesis exploration presented through the medium of a speech delivered to a summit in Cape Town, South Africa, reviewing the role of Work Integrated Learning and its function in the university higher education curriculum, especially in professional programmes.

The change levers outlined in this factionalised speech are as follows:

- Section 9.4.1 - Number one: Lever of change: The Department of Basic Education
- Section 9.4.2 - Number two: Levers of change: The school principal and senior management team
- Section 9.4.3 - Number three: Levers of change: Mentor-teachers
- Section 9.4.4 - Number four: Levers of change: Parents of learners
- Section 9.4.5 - Number five: Levers of change: Teacher-educators within HEIs
- Section 9.4.6 - Number six: Levers of change: Student-teachers

Section 9.5 explores how the study pushes back the boundaries to represent understandings of student-teachers' resistance to embracing diversity by focusing on its contextual elaborations (Section 9.5.1), theoretical elaborations (Section 9.5.2) and methodological elaborations (Section 9.5.3).

Section 9.6 presents concluding thoughts, including the study's thesis (9.6.1), the study's contribution to the body of academic knowledge (9.6.2), the implications of the study's contribution (9.6.3), then its limitations (9.6.4) and suggestions for future research (9.6.5).

Section 9.7 presents my personal and professional reflections at the closure of this research journey.

Lastly, I provide an epi-prologue to this study.

9.3 Reflecting on the new insights into the critical questions

This study was based on three critical questions that guided the research process (*refer to section 1.4: Key research questions*). Each has multiple, nuanced answers that arise in response to the depiction of the lived experiences of a group of developing final-year pre-service student-teachers navigating the terrain of the ITE programme (curriculum) and self-selected teaching practicum schools in order to learn to become professional teachers. The critical questions were drawn up to guide the study direction but, in the end, it produced deep insights and wisdom about the phenomenon's complexity. The critical questions were a means to guide deeper theoretical and philosophical engagement with the phenomenon of the study that being the lived experiences of student-teachers in diverse Teaching Practicum contexts.

The study revealed that the ITE curriculum is not sufficiently robust to develop a deep commitment to professional responsibilities, creating two kinds of student-teachers who exist and thrive when entering the higher education

terrain and learning to become professional teachers. The two types of developing student-teachers are 1) those who are strategic and expedient in **choosing not to choose** TP schools outside of their comfort zone in order to transfer blame for the lack of a social justice agenda to the ITE programme and absolve them of any professional responsibilities; and 2) student-teachers **who choose to choose** (participant outliers) TP schools in unfamiliar and diverse contexts, develop agentic autonomous professional learning and mature to a deep level of understanding about why people act the way they do in diverse schooling contexts.

With an extensive menu of diverse primary schooling contexts to enter for their practical learning, the two kinds of participant student groups relied on varied powers to navigate their TP placement journeys. Two forms of power became evident in the TP school placement decision-making journeys of these groups of participants. The dominant group self-marginalised and avoided leaning into their **power to** venture out of their comfort zones, whilst the outlier participants productively utilised their **power within** to step out of their zones of comfort and disrupt their professional learning by traversing pedagogies of discomfort in becoming a professional teacher. The first group could be argued to be capitulating to the existing systemic powers of the dominant school ethos. The second group chose to draw on their personal agentic power to redirect the learning they derived from the TP experience. It might appear at first glance that the first group of participants are subservient to the systemic discourses. However, they, too, are making a conscious choice of what they wish to derive from the TP process: this could be simply to use the curriculum expectations and achieve their qualifications. This suggests that when viewing and interpreting student-teachers' choices for TP placements, one should become aware of what the driving forces behind the choices are; these choices are not necessarily the nature of the stimulation of whether the ITE curriculum itself offers, but that student-teachers exercise their own personal agency to make of TP what they intend. It is noted that the ITE curriculum might actually intend to prepare student-teachers to embrace the politically acceptable discourse of respect and valuing of diversity, but when the curriculum and its agents (teacher educators primarily) do not understand deeply the motivations of their student choices and how they negotiate the curriculum space, they (the institution, its curriculum and staffing) miss the opportunity to produce deep professional development. Students are likely to present semblances of their enactment of the "diversity agenda" but privately are motivated by other interests.

Section 9.3.1 presents a list of statements from the varied data analysed and interpreted in no specific order. Section 9.4 categorises this list into the broad and diverse levers of change in the participants' journey when embarking on a cross-over teaching practicum experience. It represents a macro analysis of the data in the form of a bird's eye view by virtue of an abstraction towards a thesis. It will be infused into the list of the various roles and responsibilities of the levers of change within the education sector.

9.3.1 Some synthetic extracts of insights about the phenomenon

1. Student-teachers exploit and strategise the annual Teaching Practice placement trajectory without imbibing deep conceptions of professional learning.
2. Student-teachers should engage with higher education to generate deep professional learning, not for expedient strategising to obtain a degree.

3. For most student-teachers, becoming a teacher is seen as expedient, technical compliance with state policy.
4. The university ITE curriculum overemphasises and is complicit with promoting technical knowledge and expertise.
5. Mentor-teachers are not deeply committed to student-teachers growth and development.
6. Teaching practice interferes with the daily routines of schooling; however, a few growth-invested teachers oversee large numbers of student-teachers, and their actions activate expanding conceptions of professional learning.
7. The curriculum design and practice of ITE lectures are primarily based on subject matter knowledge rather than professional learning.
8. Subject matter knowledge is usually confined to the content of the school curriculum in the CAPS.
9. Despite some student-teachers choosing to experience diverse, unfamiliar teaching practicum schooling, unlike their own schooling experiences, student-teachers profess the desire to continue teaching in schools in geographic and cultural spaces similar to the ones they attended.
10. The MRTEQ underestimates the complexity of traversing (authentic schooling connects) on a pragmatic and theoretical level.
11. The policy is prescribed at the national level and needs reinterpretation for specific localised or provincialised spaces.
12. Students from indigent contexts regard affluent schools as spaces where they have no potential agentic action.
13. Prospective student-teachers who choose teaching as a profession are not necessarily motivated by a deep commitment to social justice, reconstruction, and development.
14. The university curriculum under-develops conceptions of being a critical agent of transformation as a teacher.
15. Mentor-teachers lack experience mentoring student-teachers outside their racial in-group and fail to see student-teachers' struggles.
16. Black student-teachers enter the classroom assuming that White mentor-teachers will not provide them with the necessary professional mentoring assistance.
17. The school context is a powerful curriculum.
18. School principals regard incoming student-teachers as cheap labour.
19. Student-teachers' potential threatens mentor-teachers; thus, they fail to provide any new knowledge.
20. Student-teachers learn how to manipulate the TP system by entering schools where personal relations exist.
21. Family and friends play a cardinal role in supporting developing student-teachers in their professional journey.

While these 21 statements may appear broad and generalisable, they encapsulate significant portions of the empirical data findings gleaned from the narratives of the 19 participants in this study, which delves into the lived

experiences of student teachers across diverse Teaching Practicum contexts. I set out to carefully infuse the 21 statements into the levers of change system for teacher education in the South African context model (in the next sub-section).

I have chosen to construct my contribution to the body of knowledge by presenting a fictional speech. Global leaders often offer their views on the kind of change that should happen worldwide. I imagined that I had been invited to present a speech at a global summit on my research study and the empirical findings. The speech provides an in-depth account of the findings, the implications for future research and words of wisdom shared from a space of humbly contributing to the vast body of research. I have used the latitude of drawing a combination of the “evidence” from the fieldwork and a fictional (but possible) imaginative audience to engage with the research study’s insights. This is a form of “*factionalised writing*” encouraged by Bruce and Fitzpatrick (2017), who see research as needed to be delivered with a breath of creativity, imagination and artistic flair not just as a decorative representational device but as a form of research report writing to cohere complexly the past, present and future directions of research.

In the speech, I reference the different educational stakeholders responsible for the change required within teacher education. These levers of change are the primary agents in developing professional teachers. Furthermore, at the end of the speech, a diagrammatic representation of the levers of change (change actors responsible for transforming the dynamics associated with learning to become a professional teacher) is provided and further expanded from abstract to concrete-level reasoning.



9.4 The Speech: Levers of change: Navigating the politics and power of Teaching Practice placements.

- Presentation: The Global Summit on Teacher Education
- Location: Cape Town - South Africa³⁴

Your Excellency, Presidents of countries, Secretary General of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres, Your Majesties, Your Excellencies, Heads of State and government representatives and officials. President Cyril Ramaphosa, esteemed President of South Africa, and Doctor Blade Nzimande, Honourable Minister of Higher Education and Technology and Honourable Minister of Basic Education Angie Motshekga, thank you for your nomination. I am Clive Brown, a teacher, teacher educator and novice researcher (PhD candidate). Thank you for setting up this pivotal summit that will hopefully raise global awareness of what is taking place in the Global South regarding Teacher Education. The research findings of my PhD study could be used to craft meaningful future teacher education initiatives. We gather here united by our deep concern about the status of teacher education in South Africa. The kind of professional teacher being developed within initial teacher education programmes directly impacts the children they are entrusted to holistically develop in school. The child or learner, as they are known, is being educated for the good of the greater community in which they reside, the province in which they live, their country, and ultimately, with much work, the world as a whole. Professional teachers have the potential to deeply transform society, one learner at a time. As South Africa is a developing nation, we hold the firm view that every child is entitled without reservation to quality teaching and learning. In seeking to develop the ideal teacher for every child, we cannot overlook South Africa’s history and the lived and experienced atrocities perpetrated against people of colour by the apartheid regime. Having said that, we believe that the past should remain where it belongs.

However, the residue of an iniquitous system does not disappear, and the democratic government has formulated and continues to formulate numerous policies to redress past inequities. Despite its potential, South Africa is a

³⁴ Note that references to title, conference and location are imaginative and fictional as motivated earlier.

deeply divided nation which continues to favour the haves over the have-nots. The dualistic education system is well-documented in the literature (Jansen, 2019; Spaull, 2019; van der Berg, 2007). My empirical PhD study aimed to understand a group of 19 pre-service teachers' lived experiences in contrasting teaching practicum contexts in a democratic South Africa that belongs to all its inhabitants. I quote the closing remarks of the three-hour speech made by the first democratic president of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, on 20 April 1964 from the defendant's dock at the Rivonia Trial:

During my lifetime, I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against White domination, and I have fought against Black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die (Broun, 2012).

Fifty-nine years after the delivery of this speech, the legacies of the brutal apartheid system have led 21st-century developing teacher professionals to question their sense of belonging in specific learning spaces. This is not the free society of which the late president spoke. The remnants of a vicious legal racialised system which kept South African people apart have caused young developing professionals to self-marginalise when they are free to use their democratic self-practicing autonomy within their learning to become professional teachers.

For the international audience, allow me to briefly provide a context to the Minimum Requirements for the Teacher Education Qualification (2015), a teacher education framework designed to assist in stitching together a broken nation following the advent of democracy. In becoming a professional teacher over the four-year degree programme, each developing student, teacher or pre-service teacher as they are known, should experience a practical dimension of learning to teach. The policy infers that *authentic and diverse learning should happen while developing to become a professional teacher*. As it stands, these terms require further delineation since each higher education institution in South Africa producing teacher professionals interprets them in different ways. The Cape Peninsula University of Technology (in the Foundation Phase sector of initial teacher education) interprets them as placing a student-teacher in four mainstream different primary schools over four years. When selecting from a menu of schooling TP placements, no student-teacher is allowed to attend a TP school previously attended during the course of the four-year degree programme. In my capacity as the Intermediate Phase Teaching Practice Coordinator, I was gravely concerned when I realised that students identifying as Black, Coloured and Indian choose TP placement schools in areas within walking distance of their residence. Only one percent of student-teachers enrolled at the CPUT are White, and no White-identifying student-teacher was part of this research study. At the beginning of the 2022 academic year, the first Coloured principal of an affluent private school in the leafy upmarket suburb of Tokai in Cape Town wrote an e-mail which further stirred my curiosity. The email read, "*Dear Mr Brown - Our school is willing to host Black (Coloured, Indian and Black African) student-teachers for teaching practice. However, to date, no black student has been placed within our school. What explains why black students do not choose to undertake TP in former White schools?*"

The findings of my PhD study, which I am about to share, are a culmination of extensive one-on-one and focus group dialogue between a group of 19 Intermediate Phase student-teachers from different provinces, of different genders and cultures, who speak different languages and have different lived experiences relating to aspects of diversity in learning to become a professional teacher. The major findings reveal the existence of a two-fold typology of student-teachers when it comes to choosing a TP placement school. The dominant group of participants is the group that '*chose not to choose*' schools outside their comfort zone where people and spaces did not match their lived realities and, therefore, remained in their comfort zone. These participants selectively modify certain aspects of the schools they choose to enter from a position of perceived inferiority, as they feel their degree programme primarily equips them to teach only in their own marginalised and impoverished township communities. The minority of the participants (*the outlier participants*) chose autonomous and agentic self-learning when navigating TP placement schools in pursuit of becoming a teacher. The findings further revealed that in selecting schools for teaching practicum, two kinds of agentic powers influence the participants' decision-making at the junior level of their journey. The first group of participants (who followed the dominant trend in selecting TP schools) could have entered any school – for example, rural, township, urban, faith-based, all-girls or all-boys schools, Quintile 1 to 5 schools, or well- and under-resourced schools within the Cape region. Their power was strategically used in not choosing a school that could lead to them not making the grade to pass the Teaching Practice module in the higher education qualification. The power to choose was exercised from a position of comfort masked by unresolved historical impediments. Specific participants in my study strategically used the apartheid past of the country to act as a mask, not to enter specific contexts wherein people did not share their same racial profile.

On the other end of the spectrum were the minority participants who used the TP placement to venture into spaces of learning to which they would normally not have access. They entered diverse, unfamiliar schooling sites not only to comply with TP but to change the notion held by their peers that they were being prepared to be teaching in their communities. This small group of participants suspended their judgment of people who do not look, speak or behave like them to gain professional learning within their context. I draw lessons from particularly two participants who represent the kinds of teachers needed for the South African and international schooling terrains. A teacher who possesses the power to confront past histories without fear of being discriminated against or engendered should be the hallmark of becoming a professional teacher. It could be judgmental of me to say that the cohort of student-teachers who did not choose to venture into specific diverse schooling contexts was guilty of absolving their agency. In fact, it can be argued that the dominant group also exercised some agentic power, the power not to choose. Delivering this kind of teacher who ventures into a new kind of contextual professional learning space is possible, and we should carefully consider the variety of agents who should contribute to being *levers of change* in developing professional teachers. I identify at least six levers of change. My interpretation of a lever is that which acts as a force to enact a movement or redirection of an obstacle (Kruis, Speklé, & Widener, 2016).

9.4.1 - Number one: Lever of change: The Department of Basic Education

One of the cardinal understandings of student-teachers in learning to become a teacher is as follows: *"To become a teacher is seen as technical compliance with state policy"* (Lawy & Tedder, 2012; Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1988). Regrettably, teachers entering the schooling terrain believe their true goal is following the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS, 2011), formally assessing learners, adhering to standardised examinations and complying with whatever ill-informed information flows from school senior management teams. (This is sometimes also the view unconsciously underlying some teacher educators who see themselves as agents of the State school curriculum implementation) (more of this later). Newly-qualified teachers like the 19 final-year student-teachers enter the public schooling sphere and lose their autonomy. The dominant typology of teacher identified in this study may easily surrender their voice and not question leadership since they lived within comfort when undertaking professional learning. By this, I mean that they were ready to simply adhere to what would not 'rock the boat' in any way. They choose (consciously or not) to be a follower of the requirements set before them and do not question the authorities who impose these expectations on them.

However, of greater interest should be the agentic teacher who could be sucked into the habits and rituals of schooling in order to survive. Such a teacher understands the dynamics of power at play but chooses to assert her independent judgment about what she will select for her experiences with those around her, whether they are teacher educators, school management or mentor teachers in the TP schools.

The study concluded that *"The policy MRTEQ (2015) underestimates the complexity of traversing across (authentic schooling connects) on a pragmatic and theoretical level"*. As a framework for developing teacher professionals for the real-life South African classroom, deeper analysis and clarity should be provided to ITE programmes throughout the country with respect to work-integrated learning. Designing a national teaching practicum programme involving a range of HEIs could potentially assist the Teaching Practice and Work-Integrated-Learning Divisions to address the annual challenges relating to TP placements in schools in the Western Cape and potentially in other provinces. As it stands, *"The policy is nationally prescribed and needs reinterpretation for specific localised or provincialised spaces."* (DHET, 2006). There is a need to revisit the meanings of the terms "authentic and diverse teaching practicum placements" as declared in the South African official teacher education policy. It should be noted that the Department of Basic Education has a strong hand in managing the systemic challenges that developing student-teachers face, especially with reference to schools. A lever of change in making the cross-over teaching practicum placement a reality for developing students means working collaboratively with HEIs to address the pitfalls of their learning. This process has commenced at the CPUT and should be cascaded to all Faculties of Education across the country (Butana, 2021).

9.4.2 - Number two: Levers of change: The school principal and senior management team

The *"school context is a powerful curriculum"*; nothing beats engaging face-to-face with learners and the mentor-teacher within the context of the schooling environment (Robinson et al., 2020, pg. 3). In my opinion and regrettably so, student-teachers are aware that *"School principals regard incoming student-teachers as cheap labour for their school."* The reality is that school leaders have a significant role to play in ensuring that incoming student-teachers accepted for TP placements receive sound mentoring from competent, qualified teacher professionals. In my assessment, supported by both empirical evidence and my professional expertise, I believe that the role of the principal is to timeously source the capable mentor-teacher within the school who is willing to grow with the students placed within the school. The principal should also be cognisant of the fact that *"Student-teachers learn how to*

manipulate the TP system by entering schools where personal relations exist". For example, it has been found that student-teachers seek schools where immediate family members (brother, sister, mother, father, aunt, uncle), lover, spouse or friend are employed on the understanding that they will automatically pass because of nepotism or patronage. Principals should establish whether there is any 'relationship' between the student-teacher and the mentor-teacher in order to create a system that requires deep-quality learning. Notably, *"Students from indigent contexts see affluent schools as spaces wherein they have no potential agentic action"* (Participant Athandwa). Such students carry with them the legacies of race apartheid or class apartheid, where they do not escape the confines of their past home, schooling and community experience. They regard any member as an outsider if they do not share the same legacy worldviews. It could be argued that they also *other* themselves. The principals of affluent schools could make a concerted effort to engage with prospective student-teachers entering a school that contrasts with their own prior schooling. Advising the prospective student-teacher on the "behind the scene" schooling challenges, perhaps relating to learners, will provide them with the necessary commitment to nurture their professional learning. Such on-boarding and induction are rarely done, leaving many student-teachers attempting to cross-over into unfamiliar contexts feeling unwelcome or disorientated to the cultural ethos of the new TP school. Unconsciously, schools are transferring the responsibility to the student-teachers to acculturate to the school's ethos, albeit that the ethos is toxic and hostile. Participant Bonga conveyed her traumatic experience of two teachers openly and without reservation discussing the HIV status of specific learners in the classroom. A toxic TP placement school working environment for student teachers can stifle professional growth and erode confidence, hindering their ability to navigate classroom challenges effectively. Additionally, such an atmosphere may foster feelings of isolation and disillusionment, undermining the potential for meaningful collaboration and mentorship crucial for their development in a new learning space. This is a difficult expectation for novice student-teachers to undergo during their early acculturation stages to the teaching profession. Some studies (Swart, 2013) show that this transition is difficult for even newly qualified teachers. She argued that this might activate NQTs to paradoxically engage in 'self-mentoring' their journey into the schooling space (Swart, 2013).

9.4.3 - Number three: Levers of change: Mentor-teachers

The assigned mentor-teacher is the lead role player in making the transition into an unknown context less daunting. It was recorded that *"Mentor-teachers are not deeply committed to student-teachers growth and development"* (Participant Natasha). Teachers in South Africa are overloaded, with large learner-to-teacher ratios and daily criticism from learners, parents and the public. Mentor-teachers have the added responsibility of overseeing a student-teacher amidst their own life challenges and workload. The assigned mentor-teacher should be timeously informed about his/her valued role in sharing his/her knowledge of the school, learners and the teaching profession. Different mentor-teachers could be selected each year to build mentoring skills among school staff. It was also found that *"Teaching practice is an interference in the daily routines of schooling – a few growth-invested teachers oversee a number of student-teachers"* (Participant Nkosana in the second one-on-one interview). To address this challenge, the university could propose that mentor teachers be permitted to undertake postgraduate studies at the institution for lower fees as a token of gratitude for their role in assisting student-teachers. Furthermore, *"Mentor-teachers lack experience mentoring student-teachers outside their racial in-group and fail to appreciate student-teachers' struggles"* (Participant Dumo). It is imperative that the school and university collaborate to iron out problems that impact the growth of both the mentor-teacher and the placed student-teacher. Lastly, it was noted that *"The potential of student-teachers threatens mentor-teachers, and so they (the mentor teachers) do not offer any new professional learning knowledge"* (Participant Ziyaad). This is particularly noticeable in contexts where mentor teachers have not fully embraced their own further professional growth and continuing learning trajectory after they initially graduate as teachers. Robust engagement concerning the role of the mentor-teacher in the development of the professional teacher could address this challenge. Mentoring should stem from a reciprocal and collaborative mindset between the student and the mentors, the mentors and their school management, as well as between the mentors and the teacher education institutions. This constitutes joined-up thinking in a collaborative partnership model for the Teaching Practicum.

9.4.4 - Number four: Levers of change: Parents of learners

When student-teachers enter schools to undertake Teaching Practicum, they are introduced to a variety of learners whom they engage with. In the process of learning more about the learners in the allocated timeframe, it would be beneficial to establish a professional relationship with the parents of learners to understand the child better. Learners often behave differently in school than they do at home. Parental support whilst undertaking teaching practicum in a context the student-teacher is unfamiliar with will assist him/her to understand challenges the child may face. This is definitely an area of further research: how does the cultural world of the home environment and the school environment dialogue with each other? Why do some parents choose not to engage in activities of

education and schooling? Is schooling representing a world dislocated from the home environments? However, I do not want to stray too far from my interests in the possibilities within teacher education institutions. However, as participant Phelisa put it in the second one-on-one interview, *"In township schools, you simply just call your parent and say, see, this time we are tired. They call your parents"*. Introducing student teachers to parents or caregivers of learners during Teaching Practice (TP) is essential for fostering effective communication and building supportive relationships between educators and families. By establishing this connection, student teachers gain valuable insights into their learners' home environment and cultural context, enabling them to tailor their teaching approaches to better meet individual learners' needs. Moreover, involving parents or caregivers in the educational process generates a sense of accountability and partnership, enhancing student motivation and engagement. When parents are actively engaged in their child's education, they are more likely to provide additional support at home and collaborate with teachers to address any challenges their child may face academically or behaviourally. This collaboration can lead to improved student outcomes and a more positive school climate. Additionally, introducing student teachers to parents or caregivers helps to bridge the gap between the school and the community, fostering a sense of belonging and mutual respect. By demonstrating a genuine interest in engaging with families, student teachers convey their commitment to student success and demonstrate their willingness to collaborate with all stakeholders in the educational process. This lays the foundation for strong partnerships that benefit both learners and developing student-teachers alike, promoting a positive and inclusive school environment and, furthermore, deep professional development for the student-teacher.

9.4.5 - Number five: Levers of change: Teacher-educators within HEIs

American scholar Harden's (2013) provocative paper, *"The end of the university as we know it"*, predicted that "4500 colleges and universities will cease to exist, the residential college campus will become largely obsolete and amongst others the Bachelor degree will become increasingly irrelevant" (Harden, 2013, pp. 1-2). His predictions were based on the fast-paced information technology revolution in education and the view that, 'the college class is about to go virtual'. In 2023, Jonathan Jansen published his book titled *Corrupted: A Study of Chronic Dysfunction in South African Universities*, which addresses the root causes of dysfunction within public universities, such as *"Student protests, violence, police presence, rubber or real bullets, class disruptions, burning tyres, damaged buildings, injury and sometimes death"* (New York University Press, 2023, p. 1). The exiting 19 student-teachers who participated in this research study experienced the annual student protests which erupted around HEIs during their first year on campus. They were among the many who were violently and traumatically and forcefully removed by students when declining to participate in the protests. Recalling the incident, participant Johanna describes briefly and frankly in the first one-on-one interview the kinds of discriminatory and racist comments which came along with the student protests. She said: *"A lot of stereotyping against people of colour or African people, especially when it came to like protest or times like that when our country was like struggling, and the protests would happen on campus, on CPUT, then you would always hear them (students not identifying as Black African) give comments like, oh, it's just that race (referring to Black African identified students) ... that would start things like that"*. Deep transformation at CPUT is imperative as student protests often expose underlying racial biases and stereotypes, particularly against people of Colour or Black African students. These biases contribute to a divisive campus environment and hinder progress towards a more inclusive and equitable university culture. Furthermore, the participants in my study, at the same time, when the university shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic, students had to transition from face-to-face to online learning. Students had to be resilient and cope or run the risk of not making the grade. This suggests that higher education institutions, including teacher education institutions, are under threat. Many students are increasingly choosing to interpret the higher education space as simply the medium through which to obtain certification. The aim is to generate a certificate to enter the job market, not a space for learning, knowledge development, imaginative thinking or creativity.

It is, therefore, imperative that in the process of learning to become a professional teacher, student-teachers should engage with higher education for generating deep professional learning, not for expedient strategising to obtain a degree. Future teachers must learn to actively utilise their critical thinking and analytical skills to navigate projects instead of relying on surface-level memory skills to complete tasks (Alsaleh, 2020). Higher education aims to develop professionals within a specific field. Furthermore, *"The University ITE curriculum overemphasises technical knowledge and expertise"* (Natasha's second one-on-one interview). Many HEIs are suffering the consequences of incomplete mergers of technikons. The CPUT became a university in January 2005. Perhaps many teacher educators still believe that they are duty-bound to a limited training of only pragmatic skill sets, as was the agenda of former Technikons. The remnants of former training college mentalities seem to still prevail in some contexts despite the agenda of state policy, which attempts to shift the discourse towards professional growth, learning and development. The world views of teacher educators impact the status of a professional

teacher. The growth and development of the institution from a university of technology to a research-based institution will take time (Winberg, 2005).

This challenge also impacts the design of the ITE curriculum. It was noted that *"The curriculum design and practice of the ITE lectures are based on subject matter knowledge rather than professional learning."* There is a need to reconceptualise the CPUT teacher degree programmes. Furthermore, *"Subject matter knowledge is usually confined to the school curriculum content in the policy CAPS."* Reconstruction of the ITE curriculum will hopefully shift the focus to teacher graduates being knowledge producers rather than state technicians (Sandholtz & Reilly, 2004).

It was found that *"Prospective student-teachers that choose teaching as a profession are not necessarily motivated by a commitment to social justice, reconstruction, and development"*. In my view, there is a need to revisit the admission criteria for teacher education programmes, starting with the entrance requirements and the First Year Experience programme. This will hopefully lead to better-qualified teacher professionals exiting from this HEI. Moreover, *"The University curriculum under-develops conceptions of being a critical agent of transformation as a teacher."* A more robust ITE curriculum would place emphasis on how one becomes a change agent within education. As it stands, no official programme emphasises professional teachers' agency when embarking on a teaching degree (Stetsenko, 2020).

A critical commentary to add is that the ITE programme should consider implementing a multicultural education curriculum since South African schools are diverse, and each existing graduate should be thoroughly prepared to operate in schools which differ according to race, culture, language, religion, socio-economic background, gender and sexual orientation (Mpisi & Alexander, 2022).

9.4.6 - Number Six: Levers of change: Student-teachers

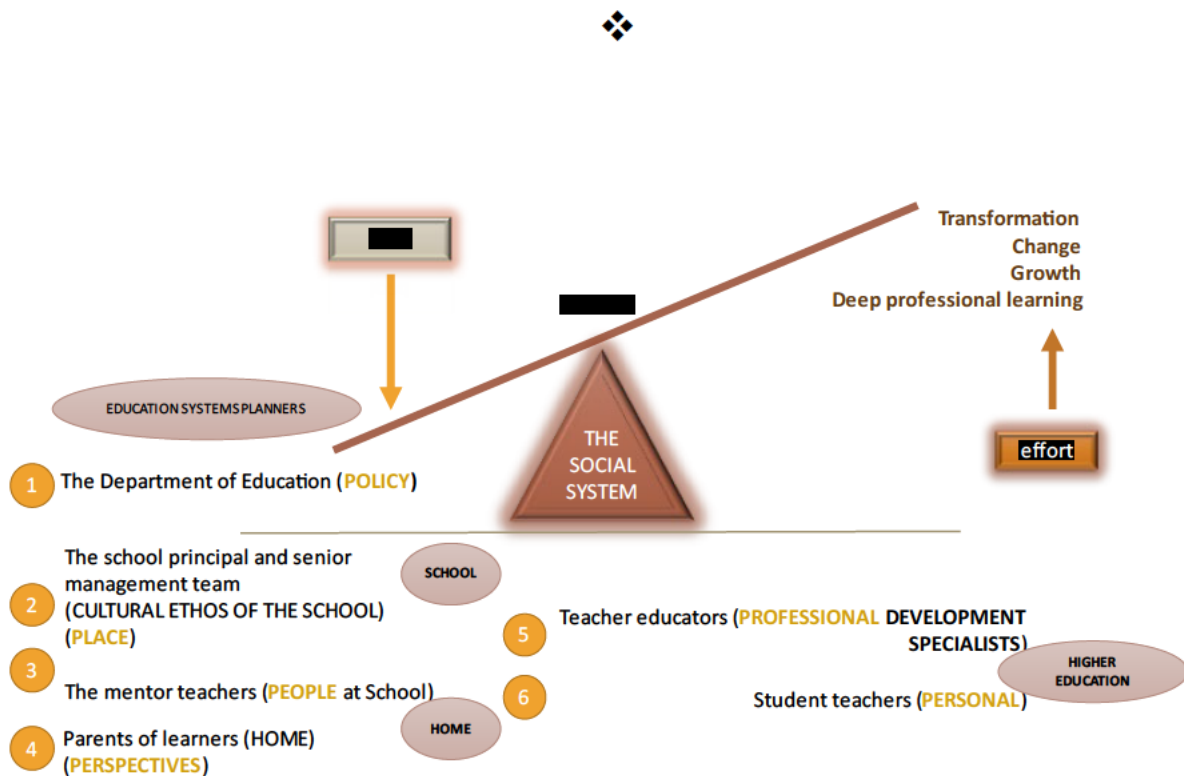
The main change agents in their learning are the student-teachers themselves. It is my belief the aim of enrolling in higher education is to have one's knowledge base disrupted and stretched to a point where one can critically and selectively make decisions. Unfortunately, *"Student-teachers exploit and strategise the trajectory without imbibing deep conceptions of professional learning."* In my assessment, supported by both empirical evidence and my professional expertise, I believe that although teaching is seen as an easy career, it soon becomes clear to undergraduate student-teachers that becoming a professional teacher requires resilience and fortitude since it involves much more than standing in front of a class and speaking. Professional teachers must have the didactical and pedagogical knowledge required for the real-life classroom. Entering the classroom often means consciously and critically collaborating with learners who confront challenges at home and in their community (Christian & Sayed, 2023). Class sizes are large, and schools lack resources. Professional learning does not happen overnight but throughout the course of the teacher's career (Huberman, 1989).

Most participants in this study chose to remain in their comfort zone, resulting in them teaching in the manner in which they were taught (Lortie, 1975). It was evident that *"Student-teachers profess the desire to continue teaching in geographic and cultural spaces similar to those they experienced"* (Participants like Phelisa, Athandwa, Johanna and Bonga). Constructing a more robust ITE formal curriculum and providing student-teachers with the necessary scaffolding to learn collaboratively will enable more of them to step out of their comfort zones and undertake TP in unfamiliar contexts. This would address the tendency for *"Black student-teachers walking into the classroom to assume that White mentor teachers would not provide them with the necessary professional mentoring assistance"* (Dumo referred to this idea in the second one-on-one interview). Developing student-teachers should also be aware of how cultural influences, practices, and beliefs influence their worldviews about others (especially race-focused). A much more robust ITE programme highlighting research paradigms would teach students to become aware of their relationships since *"Family and friends play a cardinal role in supporting developing student-teachers in their professional journey"* (Lynn alluded to this idea in the first one-on-one interview).

The main concern of teacher education practitioners should be whether we (including myself) are perpetuating segregation, albeit unconsciously, by allowing student-teachers to select their own schools for Teaching Practicum. Are students controlling the system and agenda by conveniently placing themselves in schools where minuscule professional growth is required to obtain a formal teacher qualification? It is my contention that their focus is on obtaining a formal degree, neglecting the greater purpose of the role and influence that teachers have in the lives of children who are future leaders. The study I conducted takes cognisance of the authentic first-hand experiences of a limited number of future teachers who shared their lived experiences. The objective was to promote a deep transformation of the teacher education system, which is perhaps unconsciously adding to the dualistic schooling system because future teachers do not regard themselves as belonging in certain spaces.

As universities, we have a societal responsibility to prepare agentic, free-thinking teacher professionals for the world of work and not mere state technicians. Through a collaborative partnership with the various levels of change-makers, societal transformation, as opposed to superficial and surface-level transformation in universities and schools, takes place. Ultimately, when asked why he/she chose not to be placed in a different school after four years of teacher education, no developing student-teacher anywhere in the world should say, 'I was afraid.'

Our responsibility in education is to work through all the aspects of what makes students afraid as it forces them into their zones of perpetual comfort in the marginalised communities from whence they come. Let us collaboratively help developing student-teachers who are afraid to choose growth and let them be the change agents in this and many other countries where voicelessness exists. I will now provide a diagrammatical representation which translates my speech into a self-designed illustration. Thank you for the opportunity.



Source: Author's own

Figure 9.1: The levers of change system for teacher education in the South African context

The levers³⁵ of change diagrammatical representation illustrate the key stakeholders responsible for making the out-of-familiar to disrupted professional work integrated learning possible. As outlined above, the figure consists of various concrete elements that can transform the situation or experience lived out by an individual student-teacher in a diverse context such as South Africa.

The three main components which constitute the diagram termed 'the levers of change' are as follows:

- 1) **The load** consists of key change actors and makers within the Education System from the DBE, placement schools, parents of learners within placement schools, ITE programme designers and enactors and the student-teachers themselves.

³⁵ A lever makes it easier to lift/raise/uproot an object. Levers require a bar or plank and fulcrum in order to move up or down. The fulcrum is the part of the lever that does not move. The fulcrum is the endurable support on which a lever turns.

- 2) **The fulcrum** which represents the Social System
- 3) **The effort** details the potential impactfulness of the ITE programme and collaboration systems, which, in combination, may lead to deep professional learning and transformation.

Each part within the lever of change diagram has the potential to make the cross-over or disrupted professional learning possible during the process of becoming a professional teacher within the ITE programme in the South African education context. A vital role is played by bringing all three parts together. Each part's compartmentalised role evidently comes together via the collaborative interplay of each part.

Firstly, **the load** detailed in blue within the figure represents the assortment of systems which influence the student-teacher (besides themselves) in navigating the terrain of becoming a professional teacher. Each system consists of professional member influences which potentially steers the growth and development of the teacher. Number one on the load is the policy directive from the DBE. The DBE, through the national teacher bursary scheme Funza Lushaka Bursary Scheme (DBE, 2021, pg. 1), formally encourages high school learners to take up teaching as a profession by advocating for the following:

Teaching is a noble profession that requires passion, commitment, tolerance, perseverance, character and the dedication to make a difference in the lives of a diverse group of young and older children, depending on your choice of phase specialisation. This profession will afford you the opportunity to nurture and mould young and growing minds and to develop a variety of vital lifelong skills in children. Contributing to the academic and social development of children is a fulfilling experience that you should embrace. Go ahead. Make a difference in the lives of children. Choose teaching as a career!

The terms of reference declaring the potential of moving from one's comfort zone and teaching in unfamiliar contexts within the South African context are not explicitly made known within the provided teacher bursary. It is therefore advised that DBE mandates a diverse teaching practicum experience which sees student-teachers learning in unfamiliar contexts. To ensure that future professional teachers have the theoretical and practical experience required to enter the world of work upon graduating, the Department should require that student-teachers undertake TP in varied school typologies situated in varied geographical spaces, which influences the kinds of experiences to which specific marginalised groups are not exposed. As it stands, each teacher education institution has its own Teaching Practice Framework, which is only known to the specific DBE and the HEI to which the ITE programme ascribes. There is a need for a national Teaching Practicum Placement model in order to guide HEIs' in carefully designing the cross-over or disrupted teaching practicum experience.

The schooling system wherein developing student-teachers experience the physical act of learning to become a teacher is also mandated by the DBE, which means that the school principal and senior management team play a vital role in welcoming and easing student-teacher's journey into the realities of teaching in the South African context. As the school leader, the principal sets the tone for the kinds of affordances that will be extended to the student-teacher, from acclimatising to the ethos and culture of the school to the use of schooling equipment to building professional relationships with staff and learners alike. The school manager could use this opportunity to build mentoring capacity amongst staff. However, the school's leadership should take a strict stance to fully expose developing student-teachers to the uncut version of being a teacher within the specific school. Therefore, selecting

mentor teachers is the most difficult task, especially if they themselves receive no mentoring. Mentors must apply empathetic approaches to assist student-teachers in traversing the learning stages of their early teaching careers to become qualified professional graduates willing and eager to perpetuate the mentoring cycle. A badly assigned mentor teacher has the adverse potential to negatively impact the type of professional teacher the ITE programme aims to deliver. When student-teachers do not embrace opportunities for extended professional learning in diverse contexts, they will likely revert to choosing schools that resemble their past experiences for their prospective employment. The outcome of such a failed in-practicum schooling experience leads to professional teachers perpetuating the notion of the same race, class, gender, religion and class system placed geographically within society. The net effect is to reproduce the current bifurcation of an iniquitous schooling system. Fundamentally to the professional development of the professional teacher is the impact of the learners and their parents whom they are assigned during the unfamiliar teaching practicum placement period. Learners' parents are vital in supporting growth in the context and community in which the school is located. The aspects of supporting growth may stem from a dialogical engagement with the parents of learners, being included in community-based-schooling projects alongside staff and parents of learners. A meet and greet with parents could forge life-long relationships, broadening teachers' knowledge base and positively impacting their professional learning.

Two added loads onto the lever are the teacher-educators within HEIs who have a societal duty to rethink a university's purpose and disrupt the current unconscious segregation. There is a need for a reconceptualised multicultural ITE programme which takes careful cognisance of the typology of student-teacher entering the university space and provides the necessary professional, academic and personal support to venture into unfamiliar contexts. This support would elaborate both knowing about diversity, marginalisation and power negotiations in the schooling and social system in a cerebral abstract way and about actively living and experiencing diversity in personal practices.

Lastly, the student-teacher is the most cardinal load in making the transition of an out-of-context experience possible. Student-teachers must be empowered from the commencement of coursework about the kinds of power that exist. Reverting to self-marginalisation and not embracing an autonomous agentic voice in learning to become a professional teacher is catastrophic for the developing professional teacher and their future learners who expect to rise out of their impoverished circumstances. Student-teacher agency, as postulated by Appadoo-Ramsamy (2022, pg. ii), states that "(t)eacher (or student) agency is not simply a singular identity and political construction, but also a strategic negotiated shifting set of performances of responsiveness to situational contexts that in themselves are not stable, or coherent". In other words, being a teacher is not just about having a fixed identity or following a set of rules; it involves a dynamic and strategic process. Teachers constantly navigate and adjust their approaches depending on the context they find themselves in. The situations teachers deal with are not always stable or coherent, meaning they are often unpredictable or changing, requiring teachers to be flexible and responsive. Hence, a diverse TP experience can potentially activate such agentic responsiveness.

Secondly, **the fulcrum**, in the field of mechanical engineering, "hinged support, also known as a pin joint, is a type of support used in construction and engineering to allow for the rotational movement of a structure or object around a fixed axis" (Byjus Exam Prep, 2023, pg. 1). In the case of the provided diagram the hinge support is the **Social**

System in which the developing student-teacher is born into which affects their relational understanding of cultural practices through the building of relationships (family, community, social class, language, religion etcetera). South Africa has a complex social system marked by a history of apartheid, which officially ended in 1994 with the advent of democracy. Since then, the country has been transforming and addressing various economic, political, and social challenges. In the context of student-teachers developing into professional teachers in South Africa, they are likely to face several challenges related to the broader socio-economic and political landscape:

- **Historical context:** South Africa's history of apartheid has left lasting social and economic disparities. The Indian literary critic and scholar Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak termed the inequalities in India as a bifurcated system that provides children with dual types of learning -one for the rich and the other for the poor. It can be argued that the same phenomenon exists in South Africa. In South Africa, the scholar Nic Spaull (2013) refers to the education system as two-tier – one which describes functional schools and the other dysfunctional schools. The reality is that developing student-teachers will likely encounter diverse classrooms with students from various socio-economic backgrounds. Providing broader professional learning contextual spaces in an array of geographical settings broadens the learning exposure of the student, allowing for a broader selection of kinds of learning spaces to embark on future employment.
- **Educational inequality:** There are still significant disparities in the quality of education, resources, and infrastructure between various schools (previously Whites-only schools, private schools, township schools, faith-based schools, quintile one to quintile five schools, gender-specific schools, under-resources schools, inclusive schools, special needs schools, etc.) in South Africa and within various geographical positions of these learning sites (urban, rural and township areas). Student-teachers may need to adapt their teaching methods to address these inequalities and ensure inclusive learning environments. Providing each child with quality learning will require each student-teacher to become familiar with the challenges within specific contexts and strategically adapt their professional knowledge and skills to make quality teaching and learning possible regardless of the allocated contextual learning space.
- **Economic challenges:** Economic challenges, such as high unemployment rates, may impact students' access to resources and support systems when embarking on entering an unfamiliar 'out-of-context' teaching practicum experience. In considering the implementation of the diverse TP context experience, TP designers, along with student-teachers, may need to deliberate the economic context of their students' lives when asked to secure specific resources for the TP experience, which sometimes is daunting because of the lack of financial capital that makes planning and resourcing lessons and providing additional support to learners in schools problematic. Furthermore, public transportation and safety is a major concern within the varied communities within South Africa and negotiating TP in varied contexts needs to acknowledge these realities.
- **Multilingualism:** South Africa is a multilingual country with 12 official languages (namely Sepedi -also known as Sesotho sa Leboa, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu and Sign Language). Student-teachers are likely to encounter linguistic

diversity in classrooms, which may require them to develop effective strategies for teaching in a multilingual environment. Therefore, ITE programmes must ensure student-teachers receive foundational learning insights into South African languages, including sign language, to provide inclusive learning for learners with hard-to-hear-to-complete deafness.

- **Cultural sensitivity:** South Africa is culturally diverse, and student-teachers will need to be culturally sensitive to the backgrounds and traditions of their placement list of learners. Understanding and respecting cultural differences is crucial for effective teaching.
- **Policy changes:** The education system in South Africa has undergone various policy changes aimed at addressing historical inequalities. It is imperative for student-teachers that they must stay informed about these policies and be adaptable to changes in the educational landscape.
- **Professional development opportunities:** Access to quality professional development opportunities may vary. Student-teachers may need to proactively seek additional training and resources to enhance their skills and stay current with best practices after obtaining their formal teaching degree.
- **Community engagement:** Given the importance of community engagement in South Africa, student-teachers may be encouraged to involve local communities in their teaching practices. Understanding community dynamics and building partnerships can enhance the effectiveness of their teaching.

The social system in South Africa unquestionably poses unique challenges for student-teachers as they navigate a diverse and evolving educational landscape. Adapting to socio-economic, political, and cultural nuances is crucial for their development as professional teachers.

Thirdly, **the effort** towards professional development not at a superficial level but instead at a deeper level seems an idealistic achievement. However, according to my way of thinking, it is pivotal that all actors within their compartmentalised systems collaboratively embark on making change possible if a collective partnership is established through dialogical engagement to foster sustainable development of professional teachers for the world of work. My argument is that the result of deep societal transformation with a focus on teacher education emanates from this diagrammatical representation, and by student-teachers continuing to remain in their familiar contextual learning spaces when undertaking WIL, their learners unconsciously become influenced by the notion of race-based in-service learning through interactions with student-teachers of their own kind. It is not expected that all stakeholders will necessarily share a common understanding of what this deep transformation would entail, but my confidence comes from the need for creative, imaginative, robust and critical dialogue amongst all stakeholders in the lever system.

9.5 Pushing back the boundaries

9.5.1 Contextual elaborations

Teacher education evolves yearly, and political and historical systemic structures can be questioned. This study provided a comprehensive exploration of student-teachers' experiences in diverse teaching practicum contexts in South Africa twenty-nine years since the advent of democracy. The findings reveal that becoming a professional

teacher in a country like South Africa is complex. Therefore, this thesis, as suggested in the section above, has relevance for South Africa and underdeveloped countries where developing professional teacher education programmes exist. This study has significance for any educational stakeholder involved in teacher professional development, such as government officials, Departments of Basic Education, public and private schools, teacher unions, the South African Council for Educators and private and public HEIs. It highlights the need for a collaborative sharing of responsibilities for joint accountability for producing teachers of a high professionalism. The tendency to sling arrows across the different stakeholders is not useful to any sector.

This study aimed to understand the lived experiences of a group of final-year Intermediate Phase student-teachers in diverse Teaching Practicum contexts. The study findings revealed the two major factors inhibiting a cross-over experience into an unfamiliar context, namely, 1) systemic challenges and 2) student-teachers' self-marginalisation that causes them to remain within their zones of comfort. Its findings could thus assist in achieving Goal 10 of the United Nations' 2030 SDGs, *reducing inequalities*.

Activating the levers of change that could ensure that student-teachers undertake learning within multiple learning spaces over the four-year degree programme will require extensive collaboration between the DBE, the DHET and the Faculties of Education. As noted previously, a national TP framework and possible online TP model requiring student-teachers to self-select schools that do not replicate their schooling would be ideal. Thus, I recommend reviewing the current TP framework within the South African National Teacher Education Qualification Curriculum Programme to afford future professional teachers a more robust practical professional learning experience when undertaking a teaching practicum. As idealistic as it may seem, by not redesigning the real-life working practical experience of developing undergraduate student-teachers to disrupt their professional learning, it unconsciously perpetuates a race-based social system wherein different raced individuals return to the comfort spaces of their own kind.

9.5.2 Theoretical elaborations

This research study adds to the limited research scholarly works in South Africa using critical phenomenology as a theoretical lens to understand the complexities of learning with, through and amongst power in a post-apartheid South African schooling and higher education system, twenty-nine years since the advent of democracy. The study also contributes to the limited literature on factors that constrain as well as enable the placement of developing teachers in ITE. Although other scholarly works have focused on the emotions, well-being, and personal influences in becoming a professional teacher, my study penetrated the authentic lived experiences of a cohort of student-teachers who consciously selected types of teaching practicum schools to undertake practical professional learning in pursuit of becoming a professional teacher. The study offers deep philosophical insight into why students oppose an alternative schooling TP placement and opened up (metaphorically) on the typology of powers which exists within various educational systems but, most importantly, the agentic self-power which can alleviate the professional learning experience or allows student-teachers from marginalised and impoverished communities to allow self-diffidence to inform their decision-making when provided with a menu of schooling placement possibilities. Through the deep engagement of the produced and analysed data, a synthetic comprehensive overview of the typology of students selecting teaching as a profession has been revealed. In order to provide

deep societal transformation and deep professional learning and development of future teachers, it is highly important to expose student-teachers to unfamiliar experiences. Through exposure to disrupted learning experiences, the developing professional teacher learns to value and appreciate their agency at this early stage of their teaching career. Their agency as student-teachers will reflect in their growth when becoming teachers; therefore, the choices they make as individuals can be guided by various informed levers of change.

9.5.3 Methodological elaborations

As highlighted regarding the theoretical implications, student-teachers' experiences are complex and even if they collectively reinterpret the past, individuality and the uniqueness of experiences should be acknowledged. The chosen methodology enabled me to immerse myself in the authentic lives of a selected cohort of student-teachers as they traverse multiple diverse learning schooling spaces during their initial undergraduate teacher education programme to become newly qualified teachers in post-apartheid South Africa. The selected methodology further permitted me to understand how and why the participants negotiate their selection of placement schools in the foundational level of their teaching career and how strategically professional identities and different types of power and agencies are utilised to complete their formal teacher degree programme.

The plurality of student-teachers' insight into a diverse learning environment and experiences associated with what it means to activate "South Africa, the rainbow nation" was captured through the multiple truths of the participants whose messy narratives, as past, present and future overlap, offering me a glimpse into the complexity of the target. The utilisation of the '*Tree of life*' (Merryfield, 1993), an **arts-based methodology** tool for self-reflection, was instrumental in allowing me into the world of the research participants who were similar students whom I had been working alongside during the four years in the ITE programme in my capacity as their lecturer and TP Coordinator yet never was able to explore specific intricacies of their lives. Using this self-reflective tool to explore the complexities linked to diversity in the personal, professional and academic experiences of students allowed me deep insights into their career decision-making, kinds of support systems whilst studying, their aspirations in life, choices of schooling placements, lessons learnt during practicum experiences and future post-degree choices plus decisions of where to work.

Additionally, the usage of arts-based methodology allowed for the representation and co-construction of the narratives, leading to the design of an epi-prologue in the form of an ethnodrama, which highlighted the transition student-teachers make with respect to learning about aspects of diversity among various spaces, the temporal embeddedness of their experiences and also my disruption as a researcher. Indeed, each stakeholder's contributing role in making a developing student-teachers' diverse learning experience a reality is embedded in the politics and power of teaching practice placements in South Africa. The levers of change, as my contributing thesis argument dictates, that compartmentalised power amongst the various educational constituencies is not as potentially impactful as when a collaborative partnership happens, which means all levers come together and contribute to the deep professional development of future professional teachers. The arts-based methodology used during the commencement of each interview (one-on-one and focus group) uncovered multilayered insights into the complexities of a disrupted teaching practicum experience and the challenges encountered by student-teachers. The sharing of images of teachers in diverse teaching practicum schooling contexts (*Appendix six: Focus*

group interview [Part A:] Images of teachers in diverse TP schooling contexts) allowed the participants to link and expand their authentic experiences to the characters portrayed within the images. The ethnographic analytical representation allowed me to clarify the complexities of sustaining a coherent and meaningful diverse TP experience (Brown & Samuel, 2022).

The utilisation of **both face-to-face and online interviews had their distinctive merits and pitfalls in establishing a researcher and participant relationship, yet similarly to other validation techniques of data production, yielded** rich data based on the study phenomenon. Firstly, the face-to-face interaction took place in my office on-site at the university during the exiting phase of the global COVID-19 pandemic. This meant both participants were sceptical about unintentionally infecting each other with the respiratory COVID-19 disease through our face-to-face dialogical engagement. However, at this stage of the global pandemic, we were allowed to communicate without using facial masks when inside buildings but had to adhere to special seating distances. Added to the health and safety issue during our interview was managing the power-dynamics between myself and the participants. It was also tricky since I wanted the participants to be frank and outspoken about their knowledge, experience and understanding of the phenomenon being studied. In my view, the first one-on-one interview (Appendix three: First individual interview schedule: Schooling experience) was mechanically completed because of the various accompanying stressors aforementioned.

However, the merit linked to face-to-face interviews was having human interaction with a person we could not engage with for a long time because of the COVID-19 restrictions and the university management, which moved all learning classes online. The face-to-face engagement also gave me authentic displays of awkwardness and uncomfortableness to specific questions. It also easily allowed me to rephrase questions which might have been unclear to the participant. Secondly, the online interviews (second face-to-face and focus group) conducted via Microsoft Teams opened up a glaringly different set of responses to the research study.

I discovered that the participants were much more relaxed in the comfort of their homes and vehemently more direct with their responses to my interview questions. The new responses from participants would start with statements such as “To be honest with you, Mr Brown”, which, in my opinion, there was a disconnection in power between the participant and myself owing to us not being in my office at work, and we could not see each other (participants had the choice of showing their faces via MS Teams or for their own convenience and pleasure leave their camera off). The challenge with having online interviews was four-fold: 1) internet connectivity issues, 2) participants navigating MS Teams application as novice tech users, 3) the time schedules of student-teachers and 4) the national energy crisis in South Africa.

- **Internet connectivity issues:**

The move from face-to-face interviews to online was a collective decision between all participants since this act would cut out public or private transportation costs from their homes to university campuses. Many of the participants reside in far-off geographically placed areas requiring at times two busses to commute to the interview site. However, as much as moving online would be a convenient way of communicating, not all participants had sufficient data, Wifi or other forms of internet connectivity at all times. This meant I was at the mercy of their internet

access to make the interview possible. Also, whilst being knee-deep into conversation with the participants there would be cut-off sessions since they would have used all their internet bundle for the interview. This challenge with internet connectivity issues was problematic since it sometimes prevented participants from expanding on vital commentary made during our sessions.

- ***Participants navigating MS Teams application as novice technology users***

The participants involved in this research study were mostly those regarded as Generation Z's³⁶. Although these participants could effortlessly navigate online social media platforms, many of them struggled to use MS Teams as a communication platform to conduct the interviews. Their university online classes were being conducted via Blackboard, which they were comfortable navigating. Still, MS Teams was a struggle, from switching on the microphone and camera to locating the MS Teams hyperlink in the shared email. Nevertheless, when the focus-group interview was conducted, the participants were more familiar with the communication platform.

- ***The time schedules of student-teachers***

As much as the participants were keen to offer their insights into the research study, they had to strategically balance their final year of studies, personal lives (coupled with relationship matters) and having agreed to be involved in this doctoral research project, which to future students (after they have graduated) will potentially benefit from this research. Researchers must be acutely aware that although participants initially unequivocally agree (by signing the consent form), they might become overwhelmed by the kinds of questions being asked during the interview. It is paramount to pause the interview and reiterate the importance of the participant to the study. This somewhat seamless act can bring the student back to reality about their value in the research project. I was at the mercy of the participants with respect to their schedule to slot me in, and I made a concerted effort to thank them at the beginning and end of each interview session. Participants have their own lives to live and must be valued for offering their authentic lived insights into the studied phenomenon.

- ***The national energy crisis in South Africa***

South Africa is facing a national electricity crisis, which has been well documented in newspapers and broadcast stations nationally and internationally. In 2023, South Africa hosted the fifteenth annual Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South (BRICS) summit, an international relations conference attended by the heads of state or heads of government of the five-member states and South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa commented on the untapped potential in the country and asked for international aid to the ongoing national electricity crisis. The act of load-shedding³⁷ affected the scheduled time frames with participants since each lived in various geographically placed areas that could experience a cut in electricity at any given time. I had to constantly encourage participants to share the load-shedding schedule of their respective areas with me since I, too, in my community, would experience load-shedding at various stages through any given day.

³⁶ Generation Z (aka Gen Z, iGen, or centennials), refers to the generation that was born between 1997-2012, following millennials. This generation has been raised on the internet and social media, with some of the oldest finishing college by 2020 and entering the workforce.

³⁷ The action to reduce the load on the power stations in the country, by providing certain sections of the country with electricity during specific timeframes.

An added prominent factor which became apparent during the final focus-group interview (Appendix seven: Focus group interview schedule [Part B]: After the teaching practice session) was the engagement between the two established groups of participants- those who ventured out of their comfort zone and those who remained in their comfort zone. To a degree, the participants who remained in their comfort zone regretted not having taken up TP placement in private schools to experience a diverse, resource-full and contextual experience. The cohort of participants who embraced their agentic power instead of capitulating the systemic power was thoroughly questioned about their TP experiences and thoughts about future employment in such schooling spaces. The cohort of participants who embraced their agentic power took the lead in conversation during the focus-group interview session. Deciding to utilise specific methodological approaches in research is key to producing rich and insightful knowledge about the studied phenomenon.

All of the above reflections suggest that the research process is enhanced by the openness and creativity of the researcher to embrace new and imaginative ways of producing data. The quest for an in-depth understanding of lived experiences and the opportunity to explore the intersection of personal experiences and the wider social systems involve a complex task. Methodologically, this study has opened some possibilities for how this can be enacted to bolster critical phenomenological research.

9.6 Concluding thoughts

9.6.1 Contribution of the study

This study highlights the dilemmas associated with the teacher education policy (MRTEQ, DHET, 2015), which assumes that student-teachers would benefit positively from undertaking TP in what is termed 'diverse' and 'authentic' schooling spaces. Every school presents an unwritten curriculum in the ethos of how it manages diversity; it unconsciously shapes the constructions of acceptance or not of varied cultural worldviews. Most student-teachers bypass this potential professional learning opportunity for a range of reasons unrelated to matters of professional growth or their lack of courage to challenge the ethos of present schooling. To do so would constitute a potentially confrontational outcome with the localised schooling contexts, which might put their chances of passing the Teaching practicum component in jeopardy. Therefore, students choose strategically and expediently (and sometimes unconsciously) an alternative and less challenging practicum experience. Their choices underscore the complex social negotiations that are at play when selecting TP schooling placements. They show how context often overrides policy intentions.

This is not simply a failure to "implement the official curriculum" by teacher educators. The study highlights the range of complexities that students are negotiating when they choose or not to engage with crossing over to unfamiliar contexts. However, the net effect is that the majority of participants' choices to remain in their comfort zones separates education into the already iniquitous worlds that have characterised apartheid schooling. This study highlighted the need to reconceptualise the MRTEQ to clearly articulate the expected outcomes of placement within varied schooling sites, suggesting ways in which to tackle the complexities of negotiations that need to happen in order to develop a joined-up policy thinking between homes, schools, systems planners, teacher

education curriculum designers and teacher educators and students within the teacher education institutions. Not to do so will have the long-term effect of continued separatist apartheid schooling.

This study provided insights into the crucial complex planning which accompanies a Teaching Practice Placement Model. The design of TP and support for future student-teachers should take cognisance of the critical experiences embedded within schooling sites when students are placed for their practical training and their lack of sufficient university-based curriculum knowledge.

This study gave voice to the marginalised groupings of developing professional teachers who, 29 years into a democratic South Africa, are apprehensive about venturing into spaces where people do not look the same as them. Its three objectives were achieved by providing an understanding of the quality of student-teachers' lived experiences while undertaking TP in diverse school contexts. These experiences are complex and fuelled by power dynamics, which impact the selection of specific schools for practical learning. These power dynamics are both located in the macro-systemic space, as well as located within the agentic reach of student-teacher as an individual who can choose or not to disrupt their past heritage worldviews. The study also enabled an understanding of how student-teachers interpret or make meaning of their lived experiences when confronted with diverse TP contexts. The development of these agentic powers of teachers to challenge, question, and interpret the TP spaces is not yet fully developed if the ITE curriculum does not confront students to embrace deep professional learning and growth.

This can be used as the basis to review the current ITE programme and design a curriculum that focuses on deep rather than surface transformation in learning. The construct of diversity is not just some theoretical exploration confined to matters of addressing inclusivity policy expectations and implementation. Managing diversity also embraces how individual student-teachers (and teacher educators) see themselves as part of the landscape of varied, historicised, and politicised social ways of being. How we read the world is through these diverse lenses. Our lens may themselves need re-examination and critique in a curriculum that deeply tackles the matter of diversity. Diversity is not a matter "out there in the macrosystemic environment": It is already deeply embedded in who we are already, whom we choose to associate with, and who we want to be in the future. Furthermore, this research study explored how the curriculum of the ITE fails to address sufficiently this matter of the whys of student-teachers' experiences while undertaking TP in diverse contexts, and it too is hereby complicit in reproducing the bifurcation of confining students within their comfort zones and separate communities. This undermines the possibility of deep professional growth and learning and will have long-term consequences for any democratic schooling system.

9.6.2 Limitations

At the end of the undertaken research study, it is important that a constructive rethinking of the entire process takes place. Theofanidis and Fountouki (2018, pg. 1) best described the process as mentioned earlier by stating the following:

It is evident that any research attempt inevitably carries limitations and delimitations regarding its underlying theories, study design, replication potential, shortcomings in data collection

and questionnaire design, insufficient subgroups or data for robust statistical analysis, narrow time span for data collection, lack of consideration for seasonal differences and missing data, causal relationships, measurement errors, study setting, population or sample, ethical parameters, data collection/analysis, result interpretations and corresponding conclusions.

My research study in itself also, in its own right, possessed limitations, which will require future studies to have a look at the future patterns of student-teachers' decision-making in the kinds of schooling choices selected post-formal degree certification having experienced a diverse TP placement. A list of future research studies is outlined under the sub-heading 9.6.3 Future Research. The limitations of this research study did not see the long-term effect of diversity since participants claimed to be diversely exposed to a range of schooling placements however, a follow-up study is best to explore what this translation means.

The uniqueness of this research study lies in the narrow population and the unique situation it explored. This study is a case study since the focus was on understanding a purposefully selected cohort of one group of final year students within one specific degree programme (Intermediate Phase) at one higher education institution (Cape Peninsula University of Technology) in one province (Western Cape) and the country (South Africa). The case study approach is therefore limited but without reservation, allowing an in-depth, multi-faceted exploration of complex issues in their real-life settings (ITE programme on-site and online whilst also exploring the TP placement schools) in which these students navigated their journey in becoming professional teachers. This study was conducted within one HEI in the Western Cape, Cape, South Africa, and its findings cannot be generalised to other spaces; however, other similar learning spaces which have developing teacher professionals experiencing the same kinds of challenges are likely to benefit from the data findings of this study.

An added limitation to this study was using English as the medium of communication which could have unconsciously contributed to student-teachers being unable to voice their experiences fully. The medium of communication within the Faculty of Education at CPUT on the Mowbray campus is English, meaning all participants were familiar with the language. However, there were instances wherein I discovered that certain participants whose native language is not English lacked the confidence and vocabulary to appropriately expand on certain sentiments raised in the interview. Despite the language being a minor pitfall in communication, the participants grew the confidence to stop me at any given time during the interview process to re-explain the question for them to understand the issue better since they realised that I was keen to explore *their* understanding of the phenomenon.

An added impact of constraint to this research study was the lack of a White identified South African or international participant within the purposefully selected list. I was not able to secure a White identified South African final-year student-teacher or any international students since none were enrolled and in their final year during the time of this data production timeframe. Limited insight into the kinds of experiences those kinds of identified participants may encounter when choosing and undertaking teaching practicum in schools can be further explored in future research studies.

9.6.3 Future research

This study illustrated the racial segregation of the past and its aftermath in the form of structural inequities, which circumscribed the choices made by a group of developing teacher professionals who unconsciously reproduced the fractured South African society. A major finding is its insights into the experiences of two student-teachers who opted to traverse an unfamiliar schooling placement.

Based on the findings and discussions in this study, here are a few suggestions for future research:

1. **Comparative studies:** Conduct comparative studies on teaching practice placements in different countries to understand the global trends and challenges in teacher education in keeping with activating a democratic, socially just future schooling system. This could provide valuable insights for improving teacher education in South Africa and beyond.
2. **Longitudinal studies:** Conduct longitudinal studies to track student-teachers' progress from their initial teacher education programme into their first few years of teaching. This could provide a deeper understanding of the long-term impact of teaching practice placements on their professional development.
3. **Mentor-teachers' perspectives:** Explore the perspectives of mentor teachers on their role in supporting student-teachers. This could provide valuable insights into their challenges and the support they need to mentor student-teachers effectively.
4. **Impact of policy changes:** Investigate the impact of any changes in teacher education policy on student-teacher experiences in their teaching practice placements. This could help assess the effectiveness of policy interventions. It may also question the often-lauded expectation that policy alone is adequate to develop systemic change.
5. **Role of parents and communities:** Examine the role of parents and communities in supporting student-teachers during their teaching practice placements. This could provide a more holistic understanding of the teaching practicum experience and the (dis)connections between the home, the schooling and the higher education systems.
6. **Online Teaching Practice models:** With the advent of digital learning, research could be directed towards understanding the effectiveness of online teaching practice models and their impact on student-teachers' professional learning experiences.
7. **Addressing systemic inequalities:** Further research could focus on understanding and addressing the systemic inequalities affecting student-teacher experiences in diverse teaching practicum contexts. This could involve exploring strategies for promoting diversity and inclusion in teacher education.

In addition, further research should be conducted to understand diversity in higher education WIL programmes. The following recommendations are based on the following objectives: (i) identification and elimination of knowledge gaps, (ii) identifying which uncertainties are more robust, and (iii) extending the research beyond its current limits (Du Bois, 2013). Whilst these are constructed to foreground student-teachers and teacher education, the same kinds of questions could be extended to all professional development programmes in higher education, for example, in the health sciences, social sciences, engineering and law fraternities:

- Exploring the effect of cultural differences among student-teachers and learners on the student-teaching experience in diverse schools in South Africa
- Examining enabling and constraining factors confronting student-teachers in developing suitable pedagogical strategies to support learning among diverse groups of learners
- Investigating the role of school leadership in promoting inclusive teaching and learning practices during the student teaching experience
- Exploring the role of school-based mentors in supporting student-teachers to meet the needs of diverse learners
- Understanding the impact of student-teachers' individual beliefs, values, and attitudes on their ability to work effectively in diverse teaching practicum schools
- Identifying the strategies that student-teachers use to build positive relationships with learners and families from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds
- Investigating the impact of student-teachers' socio-economic background on their experiences in diverse teaching practicum schools
- Identifying the opportunities that the student-teaching experience offers for student-teachers to develop critical reflection skills that support their future TP, especially in diverse contexts
- Understanding the support needs of student-teachers who experience culture shock when placed in diverse teaching practicum schools
- Examining the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on student-teachers' teaching and learning experiences in practicum schools, especially in the context of teaching diverse learners

9.7 Closing thoughts: Personal and professional reflections

Reflecting on my doctoral research journey to 'stand on the shoulders' of past postgraduate scholars and researchers (see Leadem, 2023; Soto, 2023; Ngwenya, Sithole, & Okoli, 2020; Plagerson, & Mthembu, 2019; Koopman, 2018; Yao, 2014; Koopman, 2013; Fox, & Chesla, 2008), I recognise the value of utilising a pure, critical phenomenological research design in South Africa and other parts of the world, especially in the former wherein marginalisation of certain groups persists. The study revealed that members of these groups marginalise themselves in order to remain within their learning zones. Critical phenomenology as a theory and method penetrates a 'surface level' understanding of the person's lived experiences. Critical phenomenology allows the researcher to understand the participants in their fullness as a personal, political and social being, not fixed but dynamic in their engagement with the world of the past and the planning for the future. However, researchers using a critical phenomenological research design should be aware that a holistic interpretation of the person's life experience is cardinal. The interconnectedness of the participants' primary and high schooling and ITE programmes illuminated the phenomenon under scrutiny. Each participant whom I had the privilege to interact with divulged their interactions and memories of lived diversity experiences. As a doctoral student and lecturer, I am not blind to the lived realities of my student-teachers in their progression to become professional teachers during the course of the ITE programme over the years. This space is not a passive absorption of the transmitting higher

educational values. The advocacy for the levers of change framework within ITE programmes has the potential to lead to deep professional learning and social transformation. Higher education institutions, especially in South Africa, have experienced annual student protests demanding that social justice concerns with regard to students' participation and access to HE be addressed. These protests arise out of a deep phenomenological disquiet, expressed in ways that reveal students' desire to quest for a new democratic future based on principles that deeply reflect their being and becoming agendas. Higher education curriculum spaces are about economic, political, social, cultural and epistemological negotiations of identities of the past and preparations for the future.

This research study aimed to provide a platform and opportunity for a cohort of nineteen final-year student-teachers to critically reflect on their choice of teaching practicum schools within one ITE programme based in the Faculty of Education at the CPUT over a four-year degree. The participants shared their lived experiences, and as the researcher, I provided each with a safe space to share their stories, which constitute their lived histories. The focus group interview provided a reflective space to learn from one another, which speaks to the concept of transformation within ITE preparedness, which holds that crucial dialogues need to take place to change narratives and ignite change within society. There is a need for the levers of change framework in navigating the politics and challenges of teaching practice placements in South Africa.

At the onset of the study, I was motivated by the question of whether it is possible to create the scaffolding to support students to move through stages from the comfort zone (*provoked*) to the fear zone (*needing exposure to alternative possibilities*), learning zone (*deeper experimentation with otherness*), and disruption (*embracing otherness and more social justice promotion*) (Scholarship of teaching and learning in the global South, 2023). Upon deep reflection and being informed by the data, I further questioned whether 'comfort zone learning' should be supported. Is the ideal of non-racialism achievable when deeper systemic injustice prevails? Should we abandon the dream? Is the policy goal of exposure to authentic schools unrealistic or unachievable? Why? Why not?

Through the construction and operation of this study, I identified my methodological contribution to the field of higher education research studies. This study shows that visual and arts-based methods can enable complexly/deep knowing and have disruptive potential (Brown & Samuel, 2022).

By utilising the selected theories, this study demonstrated the limits of individualistic canonical phenomenology, which embraces the uniqueness of participants' compartmentalised lived activity. Therefore, I make a strong case for using critical phenomenology to understand how to reclaim the quest for a non-racial, socially just democratic societal project (Samuel, Reddy & Brown, 2023). In my contribution to this published journal article, I describe this as the act of moving away from the "[p]arochial, nostalgic and circumscribed world of neo-liberalist romanticisation and reductionist accounting of individualistic experiences." Critical phenomenology offers the potential to understanding experience deeply not only as the celebration of self but also as a questioning of how the self acts to produce and contribute to a more socially just society.

I believe my study has opened possibilities for moving beyond narcissism toward understanding how to activate agentic, critical responsibilities, not just as student-teachers but also as teacher-educators, policymakers, and, importantly, as imaginative researchers of education systems. We could and should lever change collectively.

EPI-PROLOGUE

LEARNING TO BECOME A PROFESSIONAL TEACHER IN DIVERSE TEACHING PRACTICE PLACEMENT SCHOOLS

I believe that as I end the study, I see new beginnings for other journeys. I cannot title this section an epilogue since this would depict that I have reached a final definitive closure of my thinking around the phenomenon of student-teachers in the initial teacher education programme. I believe I am beginning a new journey. And so the cycle continues ...my 'epilogue' becomes my 'prologue' to the next steps: an epi-prologue.

This epi-pro-logue presents a short fictional conversation between a mentor-teacher (MT) named Mrs Dunnberg from a school named The Golden Elevation Primary School situated within the upmarket Tokai suburb in the Western Cape, a Teacher Educator /Researcher (TE) at the CPUT named Ms Daphne and two final-year Intermediate Phase student-teachers (Andrietta and Thando) both from different provinces.

Andrietta comes from Pretoria, and her mother tongue is Afrikaans, and Thando, whose home language is isiZulu, moved from KwaZulu-Natal to Cape Town. Both students live in university residences within close walking distance of the university.

This discussion indicates the interplay between the types of professional learning spaces (cultures) in schools and the kinds of student-teacher experiences through the lens of the pedagogy of discomfort.

I decided to include this imaginative conversation to highlight crossing into unfamiliar contexts with the student-teachers as the foremost sources of their learning and the impact of a lack of support structures to make the cross-over experience a developmental reality. While I have fabricated an imaginary dialogue, I am conscious that as a researcher, I am the storyteller of how the thesis process produced such imagination.

Characters:

MT – mentor-teacher (Mrs Dunnberg)

TE – teacher educator (Ms Daphne)

ST1 – student-teacher one (Andrietta)

ST1 – student-teacher two (Thando)

Background

Ms Daphne, the assigned Teaching Practice Evaluator, is visiting a TP partnership school where Mrs Dunnberg is the Liaison Teacher Mentor. Mrs Dunnberg manages all mentoring at the school.

Ms Daphne has arrived at the private school where the two student-teachers are placed to check up on these final-year students before conducting a formal TP evaluation.

A conversation begins on the way from the parking lot to the school staffroom.

Mrs Dunnberg: Welcome! Good morning, Colleague! Welcome to The Golden Elevation Primary School. How are you this morning?

Ms Daphne: Good morning. You must be Mrs Dunnberg?

Mrs Dunnberg: Yes, I was the one whom you were contacting via email. It is so lovely to meet you finally.

Ms Daphne: Thank you for having me, and again, thank you very much for opening your doors to developing student-teachers from our large Faculty of Education.

Mrs Dunnberg: Not a problem at all. We at our school pride ourselves on being providers of lifelong learning since we are now veterans or, better still, seasoned teachers who also had to walk this journey to becoming a teacher. But times were different then.

Ms Daphne: I agree times were different. Learners were different, and the COVID-19 pandemic brought along with it more challenges for teachers in the classroom. Anyway, it is way too early to start complaining.

Mrs Dunnberg: Ah... Not at all. We must voice what troubles us. Come, let's walk to the staffroom. I want to talk to you about a few concerns I picked up since your final-year students arrived four weeks ago.

Ms Daphne: No problem. Please show me the way to your staffroom. It is my first time at this beautiful school. Oh, my word, the water fountain and statues are beautiful.



The pair enter the school staff room.

Mrs Dunnberg: Please be seated. I must be frank about what I am about to say about the final-year student-teachers doing teaching practice placement at our elite private school. The fact is that they are both ... how do I say this ... fairly incompetent and highly unprepared for the kind of schooling environment we provide to our learners. What have they been learning during their initial teacher education programme whilst becoming a teacher?

Ms Daphne: Please excuse me, but I think you are being a bit harsh in your analysis of our student-teachers. These students have had a hard time learning to become a teacher since they were confronted with numerous student protests, only one year of full-time on-site learning to become a teacher, two full years of learning remotely online due to the COVID-19 pandemic and now in their final year they doing their best to gain sufficient practical experience. Since schools are reluctant to open their doors to teaching practice due to the number of HEIs competing to gain entry into schools for TP, we are grateful to you for considering our students. Still, I think your assessment is incorrect.

Mrs Dunnberg: I am afraid that as much as these future teachers encounter challenges in their professional learning programme at the university, they will be doing a disservice to the education community. Is it the expectation of the university that we (the school) should be teaching all the missing concepts they could not do whilst learning for a degree? I know my summation of these students sounds crude, but I will expand on my statement shortly.

Ms Daphne: Both these students come from marginalised communities and require a space to learn to grow into professional teachers. It seems to me that you are not keen on hosting our students since they obviously do not replicate your staff complement as per the staff photo in the foyer of the office area, which we just passed by. Am I right in my statement, or am I now being too crude?

Mrs Dunnberg: *[Smiling]* Not at all, Ms Daphne. We are both professionals with a passion for what we do. Had it not been the case, we could both have been absent today. Furthermore, we are at liberty to debate what constitutes student-teacher preparedness since their preparedness will directly influence the kind of future leaders our country will have.

Ms Daphne: *[Forcing a smile]*. I am all for preparing professional teachers for the world of work, Mrs Dunnberg. Please continue.

Mrs Dunnberg: From my observation of these two soon-to-be professional teachers, I have noted the following *[Opens table drawer and takes out a notepad with writing]* about these individuals. Let me start with Andrietta, who

has for the last three weeks arrived late at least four times since she makes use of the university shuttle to get to a nearby taxi rank and then uses the taxi to commute to the school. When I say late, I am talking about arriving at school 50 minutes after classes have commenced. Interestingly, she is not eager to participate in extra-curricular activities since she fears missing public transport to commute back home. Andrietta also has insufficient content knowledge for many of the subjects she is expected to teach. The other day, she indicated on the world map that Greenland is at the bottom. Added to this, her mathematical knowledge is dismal. She does not know the difference between the numerator and the denominator. Moving onto Thando, he is continuously tired during classes and incapable of using any of the technologies made available to him for teaching and learning purposes. He asked one of the learners to assist him in switching on the smartboard, and when he could not manage the laptop alongside the projector, he gave up and tried dictating the work to the learners. Luckily, the assigned mentor-teacher arrived back to the classroom in time to take over the lesson before this became a catastrophe and avoided a case where parents sent threatening letters to the school about the kinds of learning their children are receiving. Mind you, Thando cannot even speak proper English. Oh yes, Andrietta also did not know her parts of speech and asked her assigned Grade 4 learners to repeat after her, "How is you doing?". To wrap this up, may I ask who, at the end of the day, should be held accountable for the poor quality of teachers being sent out into South Africa? If not your institution, then who, mind you?

Ms Daphne: I am truly shocked. I am at a loss for words, Mrs Dunnberg. I had no idea the impact that online learning must have had on the professional development of these students. Will you allow me to speak to the student-teachers briefly and then have a few moments with you before I convey the shared challenges to the Teaching Practice Coordinator back on campus?

Mrs Dunnberg: No problem. I will send both students to the staffroom and sit in the break room beside the pool area. You may ask the gardener outside the window, Fritsie, to come and call me. Please do not be too hard on the two student-teachers. [Smiles and exits the staffroom].



Mrs Dunnberg leaves the staffroom. A few moments later, both student-teachers enter the staff room and take a seat opposite Ms Daphne. She also lectures the course Professional Studies to these students. They have only spoken online, and it's her first time meeting them face-to-face. The students are a bit nervous, and Thando gets up and closes the staffroom door.

Ms Daphne: Good morning, students! I have asked you to join me in discussing your learning at this school over the past three weeks. I am very keen to hear your stories. I have to be honest, and I am aware that there have been some kind of happenings, and I give my word to you that what is shared here will remain between you and me. You may speak in your mother tongue since I am versed in various languages. isiZulu and Afrikaans are two which I undertook during my schooling back in the 1990s.

Thando: *Ake ngiqale. Bayacwasa laba bantu! Angizizwa sengathi ngiyinxenye yalesi sikole futhi ngizonda ukuthi ngibhalisele ukungena kulolu hlobo lwesikole. Ngikholwa ukuthi ngizohluleka. Izingane zicabanga ukuthi ngiyisiphukuphuku futhi ziye zangihleka. Akekho ofana nami. Akekho ozwakala njengami, futhi uma ingane ifana nami, ayizwakali njengami. Ngikhathele nsuku zonke njengoba kufanele ngivuke ekuseni kakhulu futhi ngisebenzise izinto zokuhamba zomphakathi ukuze ngifike ngesikhathi. Akekho ozibuzayo ukuthi kukhona engikudlile noma cha. Inyuvesi ayinandaba. Ihovisi le-TP alinandaba. Isikole asinandaba, futhi i-NSFAS ayinandaba. Umama wami ongumzali oyedwa ekhaya uyaqinisekisa ukuthi nginemali yokufika lapha, kodwa ngibukeka ngiyisiphukuphuku kulaba bantu ngoba angikwazi ukukhuluma isiNgisi.*

[English: Let me begin. These people are racists! I don't feel as if I belong in this school and hate the fact that I signed up to come to this kind of school. I believe I am going to fail. The kids think that I am stupid and have even laughed at me. No one looks like me. No one sounds like me, and if a child looks like me, they definitely don't sound like me. I am tired every day since I must get up very early and use public transport to arrive on time. No one wonders whether or not I have eaten. The university doesn't care. The TP Office doesn't care. The school doesn't care, and certainly, NSFAS³⁸ doesn't care. My single-parent mom back home ensures I have money to get here, but I look stupid to these people because I can't speak English.]

³⁸ The National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) is a South African government student financial aid scheme which provides financial aid to undergraduate students to help pay for the cost of their tertiary education after finishing high school. It is funded by the Department of Higher Education and Training.

Andrietta: *Laat ek hier inspring, Thando. Jou ervarings is presies soos myne, of die meeste van hulle is dieselfde. Ek wag ook nog op NSFAS, en my ouma gebruik haar SASSA om vir my publieke vervoere koste te betaal en moet die huur betaal, kos koop en elektrisiteit [Word tranerig]. Ek het 'n vrees om te reis wanneer dit donker word, want om die waarheid te sê, ek is een aand seksueel aangerand, en die trauma het my bygebly vandat die gebeure in my eerste jaar toe ek van Pretoria hierheen getrek het. Mejuffrou Daphne, ek dink nie dit is regverdig om ons in 'n skool te plaas waar mense nie soos ons lyk en ons taal praat nie. Afrikaans is my taal nie Engels nie. Ek wil net hê hierdie TP moet eindig sodat ek hierdie godverlate plek kan verlaat.*

[English: Let me jump in here, Thando. Your experiences are exactly like mine, or most of them are. I am also still waiting on NSFAS, and my grandmother uses her SASSA grant to pay for my travel and has to pay the rent and buy food and electricity. [Tearing up]. I have a fear of travelling when it becomes dark because truth be told, I was sexually assaulted one night, and the trauma has remained with me ever since that happened in my first year when I moved here from Pretoria. Ms Daphne, I do not think putting us in a school where people do not look like us and speak our language is fair. Afrikaans is my language, not English. I just want this TP to end so I can leave this godforsaken place.]

Ms Daphne: I have listened to both of your stories and now have more clarity on the reported incidents. With all the schools made available to you by the Teaching Practice Office, why did you select a private school context in your final year of TP?

Thando: The school is not too far from my university residence. Seeing that we keep hearing about the rainbow nation, I wanted to experience this so-called rainbow nation to which I believe I also belong, even though I am from outside this province.

Andrietta: I came to this school because I thought fewer learners in the classroom would make teaching easier, and because these learners come from households where they do not lack resources, I thought they would be well-behaved and respectful. How wrong I was! In fact, I have experienced the opposite.

Thando: Sorry Ms Daphne. Added to this is my mentor-teacher, Mr Green, a White English first language male teacher who doesn't seem to relate to me and my challenges. He kind of ignored my plea for help. So, I am merely sitting out my days here at the school.

Andrietta: Yip, the same here. My mentor-teacher does not seem to trust me with the learners since she fears I might mix up my parts of speech again. *[Forcing a light smile]*.

Ms Daphne: Thank you for being truthful about your experiences so far. Much needs to be done to make a diverse and unfamiliar TP experience a reality for all involved. I suspect an intervention should be designed to support you and your mentor-teachers to repair failed relationships and provide you with the professional developmental learning you both sought to receive at this school. Please note that if you allow me to mediate this learning, all will be well. You have my full support in navigating this unpleasant TP placement terrain. *[Smiles]*.

Thando: I really want to be the best teacher there ever was. I believe I can do better with support. Yes, Ms Daphne, please help us learn more.

Andrietta: Ms Daphne, as long as my voice is heard about the kind of help I need to grow and we do not fail because we spoke up, please help us by all means.



Ms Daphne gives both students a warm handshake and asks them to return to their assigned classes. She turns to the window and signals to the gardener, Fritsie, to kindly call Mrs Dunnberg.

Moments later, Mrs Dunnberg enters the staffroom and they discuss how better to prepare the two student-teachers for the follow-up four weeks of TP later in the year.

The university TP office and school set up a formal meeting to discuss the necessary support structures for both students to traverse the terrain of entering an unfamiliar context.

However, one wonders whether mentor-teachers are willing to use their knowledge and expertise to effectively support student-teachers in navigating the uncomfortable contextual territory. Or are they too busy...?

And what becomes of the student-teachers? Will they embrace the challenge of tackling unfamiliar schooling contexts? Will they return to this school ethos?

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³⁹ The reference list is formatted according to the UKZN APA 7th edition STYLE for print and online sources. https://libguides.ukzn.ac.za/ld.php?content_id=58817639

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Appendix one: Biographical information sheet survey



UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

PhD Study: Proposed Title' **Student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse teaching practicum contexts'**

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS

This schedule is directed to **Intermediate Phase final-year student-teacher** participants.

Dear **Research Participant**

This biographical information sheet aims to gather in-depth information regarding yourself as a participant in the study and the types of Teaching Practice Placements you experienced during the four-year initial teacher education programme. The purpose of gaining in-depth knowledge of your personal and placed school situations will provide the necessary baseline information against which other data will be analysed. It will take approximately 30 minutes to complete the information.

The information you give here is strictly confidential and will be used for the abovementioned purpose. All names of schools, mentor-teachers, and other persons will be substituted with pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of all participants. However, if you want your name to be used, the particular clause on the consent letter to participate in this study must be completed. All recorded data will be housed in the strong room of the Faculty for five years.

Thank you

Clive Brown (PhD Student)

All participants must complete biographical information at the commencement of the data production phase (*in written form or audio format*).

Surname and Name:	(Optional)
Age:	
Gender:	
Nationality:	
First year of registration?	
Name of Qualification?	
Current year of study?	
List the school's name where TP was completed and the type of school [<i>Rural, Model C, African Township, Urban, Private, Fee-paying, Non-Fee Paying, etc.</i>]	
Name of School:	School Type:
Year 1:	
Year 2:	
Year 3:	
Year 4:	

1. **Provide** the contextual background to your past Teaching Practice placements (History, demographics, role of Mentor-Teacher, space, social interactions among staff).

Year One:

Year Two:

Year Three:

2. **Provide** the contextual background to the school that has been selected for Teaching Practice in 2022. (History, demographics, role of Mentor-Teacher, space, interactions among staff)

3. **Have** you experienced a TP schooling placement different from the kind you were exposed to when you were at primary school? Yes or No? Elaborate.

4. **Have** you experienced a TP schooling placement different from the kind you were exposed to when you were in high school? Yes or No? Elaborate.

5. What is your perception as a student-teacher of doing teaching practice at schools in diverse contexts/environments?

Appendix two: Arts-based methodology stimulus recall activity 1



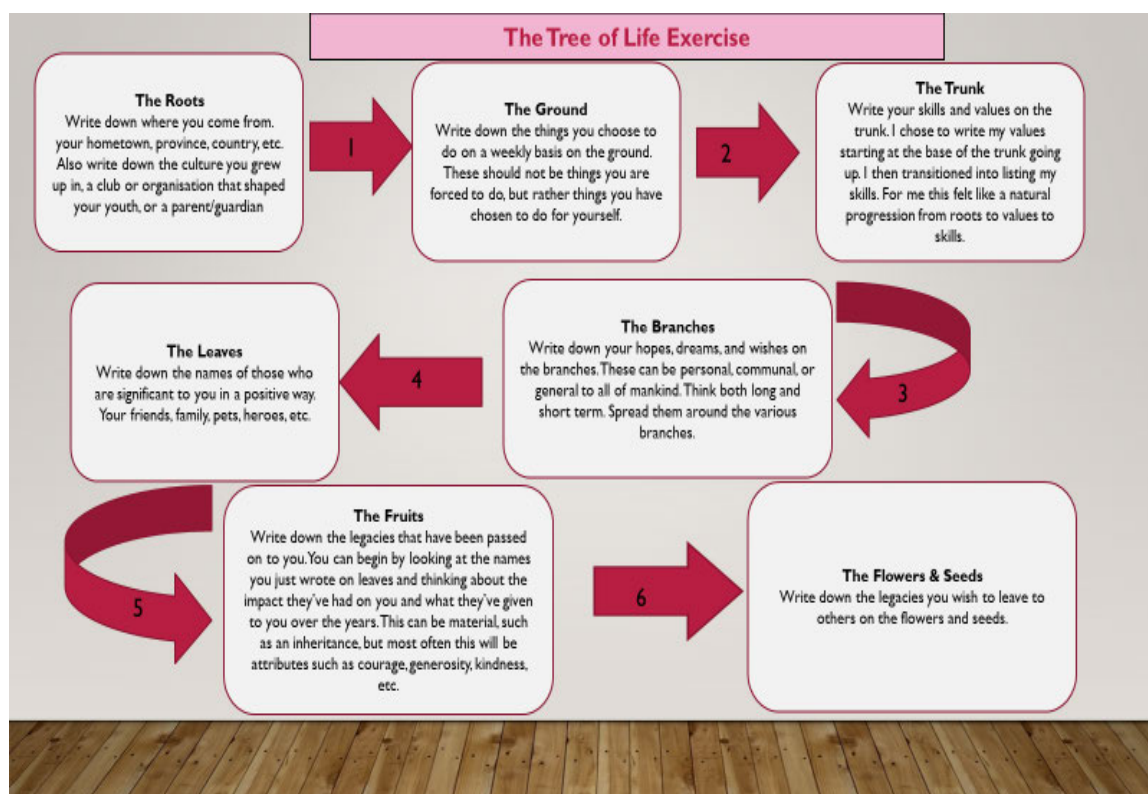
UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Tree of Life: A Tool for Self-reflection (Merryfield, 1993)

Overview of activity:

The Tree of Life is a visual metaphor in which a tree represents your life and the various elements that make it up—past, present, and future. By labelling these parts, you not only begin to discover (or perhaps rediscover) aspects of yourself shaped by the past, but you can then begin to actively cultivate your tree to reflect the kind of person you want to be moving forward.

Instructions: (Online resource: <https://nathanbweller.com/tree-life-simple-exercise-reclaiming-identity-direction-life-story/>)



Appendix three: Interview schedule: First individual interview: schooling experience



UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

PROPOSED QUESTIONS

1. Tell me your story of applying to become a teacher. Draw on the reasons that led to you considering teaching as a future choice in your career.
2. **"Tell me the** name of your favourite" teacher when you were in primary school and **what made** them your favourite teacher?
3. Was the teacher [mentioned above] of the same race, gender and religion as you, and would they still have been your favourite otherwise?
4. Which teacher did you most admire at high school, and **why did** you admire that specific teacher?
5. In primary and high school, what did you learn about diversity, and how would you explain the term to someone?
6. Can you remember ever being taught by a teacher [in primary or high school] who was not from your race group?
7. Were there any challenges you can recall the abovementioned teacher encountered while teaching you? Explain.
8. Did you grow up having friends or peers from other race groups and gender types?
9. Have you ever heard your peers say something racist, ableist, homophobic or inappropriate about any group of people? Explain.
10. What do diversity, equality and inclusion mean to you as a final-year student-teacher?
11. What is your family's take on people from diverse racial groups?

12. What is your view about the expression 'South Africa the Rainbow Nation', and what does it mean to you?
13. How do you approach understanding fellow student-teachers from different backgrounds?
14. Looking back at your days in school, what aspects of diversity in schooling have **changed**? Explain.
15. What is a mistake schools make when thinking about diversity?
16. What is a mistake teachers make when teaching diversity to learners?
17. **Reflect** on your Teaching Practice placements and mention one Mentor-Teacher and one Teaching Practice Evaluator who **positively influenced** your teaching. Give supporting reasons.
18. **Reflect** on your Teaching Practice placements and mention one Mentor-Teacher and one Teaching Practice Evaluator who **negatively influenced** your views on teaching. Give supporting reasons.
19. How do you approach understanding the point of view of colleagues from diverse backgrounds?
20. **Have** you worked with diverse learners in this degree programme over the last four years? Explain.
21. What would you do if a learner is culturally insensitive, racist, or homophobic?
22. What is the most challenging aspect of working in a diverse environment?
23. Any other comments relating to your experiences of diversity in your schooling [at primary and high school]?

Appendix four: Arts-based methodology stimulus recall activity 2: *Teacher education programme experiences*



UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Instruction:

Tell me about an incident from your first year **which stands out** that affected your view about diversity within the teacher education programme. Write down the incident in the space and provide reasons in the lines below.

Form of submission and due date:

- You may write your reflections in as much detail as possible to reveal your views about diversity at the teacher education institution. Adjust the length of your reflections to give adequate background information about the contexts and participants in the event you describe.
- Take a photograph of your reflections and upload it to my WhatsApp [my cellphone number 0747828969] or email [browncl@cput.ac.za]
- In the reflection, indicate which issues you would like to discuss with me in a face-to-face discussion.
- Please include a picture/photograph related to the issue you would like to discuss in your upload.

YOUR REFLECTIONS ON EARLY YEARS IN THE TEACHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

(written text)

A PICTURE/PHOTOGRAPH

related to the above incident

(visual text)

Thank you for your reflections on the early stages of becoming a teacher.

Appendix five: Interview schedule: second individual interview: *Initial school experiences*



UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Instructions:

1. For this part of the research study, you will need to use your smartphone or laptop to log onto MS Teams – the link: [Click here to join the meeting](#)
2. Ensure that you are in a noise-free room and you can honestly voice your answers to the questions
3. Speak as clearly as possible and try to elaborate in detail when explaining your answers [*where necessary*]
4. The interview will not be longer than 30 minutes

Expectations:

1. By the end of this part of the research study, I would like to learn more about your initial development degree programme preparedness [*or perhaps lack of preparedness*] for teaching learners in different kinds of schooling.

.....

QUESTIONS

1. **State your full name and surname. [Administration task]**

A

THE JOURNEY INTO UNIVERSITY

2. How did you **feel about starting the journey of becoming a teacher**? Explain. [*List of emotions:* sadness, disappointment, happiness, joy, contentment, satisfaction, fear, anger, surprise, disgust, etc.]
3. Did you know anyone on campus when you first arrived? Explain.
4. Are you the first person in your family to come to study at a university? No, or yes. Explain the reasons why— [Could talk about funding issues, what your siblings are doing, etc.].
5. During the degree programme, in which subject were you **first taught** about diversity regarding race, social class, gender, culture, special needs, and new technologies supporting actual classroom teaching?
6. What new did you learn about a multicultural South African classroom in the subject or subjects taught within the degree programme?
7. Let us talk more about the picture/photograph you submitted related to an incident in your early years in the teacher education institution. Describe the picture.

B

TEACHING PRACTICE

8. Which school did you **select in your first year to do TP**?
9. **Why** did you choose that specific school?
10. Were you **familiar** with this school during your first-year TP placement? **Explain.**
11. **Briefly describe** the other two schools you chose in years three and four.
12. In which of the above schools were you **most comfortable and why**?
13. What is your view of the **length of time** spent in TP schools?
14. Should this timeframe be **changed**? Why or why not?
15. What makes TP important or not to you as a future teacher?
16. Who influenced you most during Teaching Practice?
17. How did the school develop your role in understanding how to teach?
18. Could you describe your relationship with your assigned mentor-teachers?

A) What were their strengths in assisting you to deal with their specific school context?

B) What were their limitations in assisting you to deal with their specific school context?

C

LEARNERS AND TEACHERS

19. Are you more **comfortable** teaching learners from your own community, or prefer teaching outside of your community? Explain.
20. Describe the reality of being a 21st-century teacher in South Africa. [List challenges teachers face in the class with workload stress, learner behaviour, CAPS content, administration, management, parents, etc.]

D

THE UNIVERSITY CURRICULUM

21. How well-prepared do you consider yourself to be with respect to the **subject matter** that you will be teaching?
22. **How applicable is what you learnt** [during your courses] about a diverse [multicultural] South African classroom, and what you experienced when entering a TP placement school?
23. Do you think your lecturers were **sufficiently competent in the knowledge** of the school subjects you were expected to teach?
 - A) What were your **lecturers' strengths**?
 - B) What were your **lecturers' limitations**?
24. What is your view about the **assessment strategies** at a) university and b) during Teaching Practice?

E

ALTERNATIVE TEACHING SCHOOL CONTEXTS

25. **What was your response** as a student-teacher when asked to perform teaching practice in an alternative schooling context?

26. What **support can the TP Office give** students when asked to complete TP in an unfamiliar context [for example, in a different quintile school, rural, private, Model C, etc.]

F

THE FUTURE TEACHER EDUCATION

27. What **advice can you**, as a soon-to-be qualified teacher, give about diverse TP placements of students to:
- A) policymakers
 - B) teacher education providers
 - C) Mentor-teachers
 - D) School Managers [Principals]
28. What other issues would you like to talk about that we have not addressed about your learning to become a teacher?

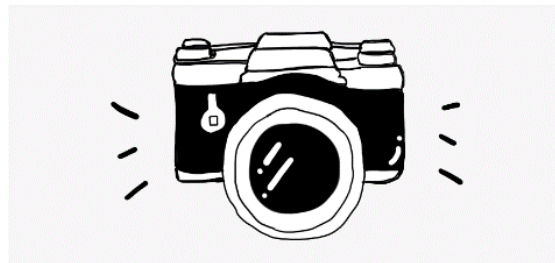
Thank you for your participation in this second interview.

Appendix six: Focus group interview part a: Images of teachers in diverse tp schooling contexts



UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

PROPOSED CRITERIA



The purpose of this instrument is to activate the focus group interview [Part A]. The focus group interview [Part B] will explore the quality of student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse Teaching Practice contexts

Below are a series of images/pictures of student-teachers in diverse TP contexts. Some of the images depict the various stakeholders involved in this developmental learning process.

Instructions:

1. Choose one or two of these images that most depict your own experiences of TP.
2. Describe who are the persons involved.

Question:

3. What experiences of the learning processes does this image/picture represent for you?

Slide 1

A series of images/pictures of student-teachers in diverse TP contexts.

- Instructions:
- Choose one or two of these images that most depicts your own experiences of TP.
- Describe who are the persons involved.

Slide 2

1



Comfort space (all African Learners and 1 African Teacher) within a township school.

Slide 3

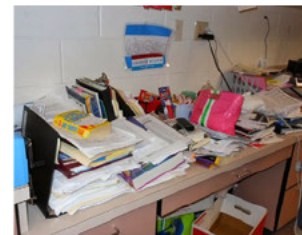
2



Rural School Picture.

Slide 4

3



A disorganised mentor-teacher and class.

Slide 5



2022 (COVID-19 schooling experience).

Slide 6



Two Black African learners and several White learners within an all-boys school.

Slide 7



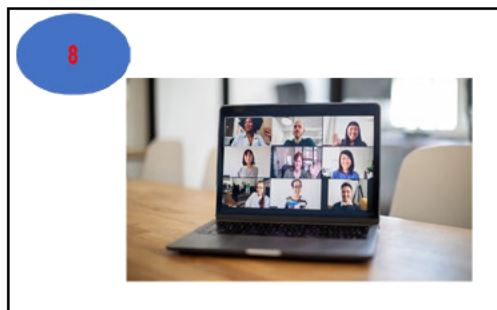
A Muslim-faith-based school with boys and girls wearing their faith attire.

Slide 8



A general feeding scheme picture. National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP) is a government programme that provides one nutritious meal to all learners in poorer primary and secondary schools.

Slide 9



The students experienced one year [2019] of learning face-to-face on campus and three years remotely.

Slide 10



A diverse group of learners: gender, race, religion and age.

Slide 11



A private school situated within the upper market suburb of Constantia.

Slide 12

What experiences of the learning processes does this image/picture represent for you?

- Why that picture?
- What learning do you take out of the picture?
- Who is involved in the learning process? List the individuals.

Instructions for the arts-based methodology activity.

Appendix seven: Focus group interview schedule part b: After the teaching practice session



The purpose of this instrument [Part B] is to explore the quality of the student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse Teaching Practice contexts.

PROPOSED FOCUS-GROUP QUESTIONS

A

Experiences over time

1. What were the most memorable learning experiences during your Teaching Practice placement session?
[Immediate Past]
2. What do you consider the highlights and limitations of the learning experience in diverse schooling contexts?
 - a) Who or what holds the most power within the school and why? [Describe this power].
 - b) Why do they hold this power? [Immediate Past]
3. Would you choose to return to teach in a school like your Teaching Practice School? [Future]

B

Personal, Academic and Professional Development Experiences

4. What was your understanding of personal, academic, or professional development? [The past]
5. How has this understanding of personal, academic and professional development changed? Why or why not? [The present]

6. How has your TP Placement developed or not developed you?
- Personally
 - Academically
 - Professionally [*Space*]
7. What is your experience of personal, academic and professional development?
- a) During university teacher preparation
 - b) During Teaching Practice

C

Affirmation and Discriminatory Experiences

8. Who was affirming or discriminating against you or others during TP? Let us talk about this experience.
9. What explains these experiences of affirmation or discrimination ***of you or others*** during TP? Let us talk about these experiences.
10. Were you at any time made feel to be included or excluded whilst being at the school? Let us talk about who or what made you feel this way.

D

Future Professional Plans

11. What kind of school would you like to teach at in the future? How does this future school compare or contrast with your TP school?

Appendix eight: Information sheet and consent to participate in research



UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Title

Student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse teaching practicum contexts

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by [Clive Brown, B. Ed., Bed Hons., MEd] from the [School of Education] at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. [The results will contribute to finalising my PhD studies. You were selected as a possible participant in this study.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

To investigate the lived experiences of final-year Intermediate Phase student-teachers hailing from a university of technology teachers. This study will report on the Intermediate Phase classroom activities, including pedagogical activities, assessment, policy implementation (CAPS), and teacher-learner relationships. This research addresses the issue of diversity in the classroom as schools with different social backgrounds were selected.

2. PROCEDURES

Data Production

The investigator would like to conduct a maximum of three interviews with the final-year student-teacher, approximately forty-five minutes per interview session.

3. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

The student-teacher's normal teaching time and school timetable will not be disrupted for the purpose of data production. The interviews will take place after regular classroom school hours.

4. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

This study will report on the activities in the Intermediate Phase classroom, ranging from pedagogical activities, assessment, and policy implementation (CAPS) to student-teacher and teacher, plus mentor-teacher relationships. Through this research, the challenges student-teachers face concerning their understanding of the diversity in teaching practice placements and the aim of the Teaching Practice experience can be addressed if it is inconsistent. Furthermore, the research will help and encourage prospective student-teachers to manage the teaching practice placements when being removed from their comfort zones and placed in schools' other' than they are accustomed to.

5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

N/A

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any findings that emerge from this study will be disclosed only with your permission or as the law requires. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of the data being kept by the researcher. It will not be shared with anyone except the student-teacher and the supervisor in charge of the study.

6. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to participate in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise that warrant doing so.

7. IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Prof Sarasvathie Reddy at 082-826-8808 or via Reddys15@ukzn.ac.za.

You may also contact the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, and contact details are as follows:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001

Durban

4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

8. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights, or remedies because you participate in this research study. Contact Mr Sabelo Mathembu [mthembus4@ukzn.ac.za; 031 260 3919] at the Division for Research Higher Degrees if you have questions about your rights as a research subject.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

The information above was described to by in English, and I am in command of this language, or it was satisfactorily translated to me. I was allowed to ask questions, which were answered to my satisfaction. *I hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study.* I have been given a copy of this form. _____

Name of Subject/Participant _____

Name of Legal Representative (if applicable)

Signature of Subject/Participant or Legal Representative

Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to _____ and/or his/her representative _____ name of the representative. He/she was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions. This conversation was conducted in English, and no translator was used _____].

Signature of Investigator

Date

Additional consent, where applicable

I hereby provide consent to the following:

Audio-record my interview/focus group discussion **YES / NO**

Video-record my interview/focus group discussion **YES / NO**

Use of my photographs for research purposes **YES / NO**

Signature of Participant Date

Signature of Witness Date
(Where applicable)

Signature of Translator Date
(Where applicable)

Appendix nine: Letter to WCED requesting permission to conduct research



UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Highbury Road
Mowbray
7700
June 2022

Western Cape Education Department
Private Bag X 9114
Cape Town
8000

Dear Sir/Madam

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT CASE STUDY RESEARCH

I am currently a PhD student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The working title of my research is ***Student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse teaching practicum contexts.***

My research explores the lived experiences of final year Intermediate Phase student-teachers from the Cape Peninsula University of Technology in diverse teaching practicum contexts. I request permission to interview only student-teachers completing their teaching practice at schools under the jurisdiction of the Western Cape Education Department. The purposefully selected participants will be 15 student-teachers currently enrolled in the Intermediate Phase Initial Teacher Education Programme at CPUT and currently in their final year of studies. The intended case study will occur during the third term (July to September) and will be conducted during the non-contact time. The research approach will be based on one primary data production method: one-on-one in-depth interviews.

You are kindly requested to grant permission for this research.

I thank you in anticipation.

Mr Clive Jimmy William Brown (***UKZN Student Number 222116658***)

Appendix ten: Letter to principal requesting one-on-one interviews



UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Highbury Road
Mowbray
7700
June 2022

Dear Principal

REQUEST FOR ENTRY TO SCHOOL TO CONDUCT ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS WITH FINAL-YEAR INTERMEDIATE PHASE STUDENT-TEACHERS

I am currently a PhD student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The working title of my research is ***Student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse teaching practicum contexts.***

My research explores the lived experiences of final year Intermediate Phase student-teachers from the Cape Peninsula University of Technology in diverse teaching practicum contexts. I request permission to interview only student-teachers completing their teaching practice at schools under the jurisdiction of the Western Cape Education Department. One of the purposefully selected student-teachers is completing their Teaching Practice at your school. I aim to have three in-depth interviews with the student-teachers over their four weeks of in-service from 18 July to 12 August 2022. These interviews will not be conducted during regular class times and will not impact their student-teachers to learner invigilation sessions.

You are kindly requested to grant permission for this research.

I thank you in anticipation.

Mr Clive Jimmy William Brown (***UKZN Student Number 222116658***)

Signed at _____ on the day of _____ 2022

Appendix eleven: CPUT Faculty of Education research ethics approval letter



Faculty of Education
Highbury Road
Mowbray
7700
Tel: +27 21 959 6583

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

On the **16 August 2022** the Chairperson of the Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee (FREC) of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology granted ethics approval (**EFEC 2-08/2022**) to **C. Brown** for a **PhD degree**.

Title:	Student teachers' lived experiences in diverse teaching practicum contexts

Comments:

The FREC unconditionally grants ethical clearance for this study. This clearance is valid until **31st December 2024**. Permission is granted to conduct research within the **Faculty of Education only**. Research activities are restricted to those details in the research project as outlined by the Ethics application. Any changes wrought to the described study must be reported to the Ethics committee immediately.



Date: 18 August 2022

Prof. Zayd Waghid
Chair of the Faculty Research Ethics Committee
Faculty of Education
efec@cput.ac.za

Appendix twelve: CPUT institutional ethics committee approval letter



Office of the Director: Directorate Research Development (DRD)
District Six Campus
Cnr Keizersgracht & Tennant Street
Zonnebloem
Cape Town
8000
Tel: +27 (0) 21 953 8456

18 August 2022

Mr Clive Brown
Intermediate Phase Studies Teaching Practice Coordinator
Deputy Chairperson: Faculty Transformation Committee
Secretary: GET Dept. Advisory Board
Faculty of Education

Dear Mr Brown

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT CPUT

The Institutional Ethics Committee received your application entitled: "*Student teachers' lived experiences in diverse teaching practicum contexts*" together with the dossier of supporting documents.

Faculty Ethics Committee Approval Date: 16 August 2022

Faculty Ethics Committee Approval Reference No: EFEC 2-08/2022

Permission is herewith granted for you to do research at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

Wishing you the best in your study.

Sincerely



Prof Diña Burger
Director: Directorate Research Development
Cape Peninsula University of Technology

Appendix thirteen: UKZN full approval of ethics application



15 September 2022

Clive Jimmy William Brown (222116658)
School of Education
Edgewood Campus

Dear CJW Brown,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00004459/2022

Project title: Student teachers' lived experiences in diverse teaching practicum contexts

Degree: PhD

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 27 June 2022 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

This approval is valid until 15 September 2023.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/ms

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 Email: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics>

Founding Campuses: ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

Appendix fourteen: WCED ethical clearance granted



Directorate: Research

meshack.kanzi@westerncape.gov.za

Tel: +27 021 467 2350

Fax: 086 590 2282

Private Bag x9114, Cape Town, 8000

wced.wcape.gov.za

REFERENCE: 2022096-6304

ENQUIRIES: Mr M Kanzi

Mr Clive Brown
6 Suffolk Avenue
Weltevreden Valley
Rondevlei
7785

Dear Clive Brown,

RESEARCH PROPOSAL: STUDENT TEACHERS' LIVED EXPERIENCES IN DIVERSE TEACHING PRACTICUM CONTEXTS.

Your application to conduct the above-mentioned research in schools in the Western Cape has been approved subject to the following conditions:

1. Principals, educators and learners are under no obligation to assist you in your investigation.
2. Principals, educators, learners and schools should not be identifiable in any way from the results of the investigation.
3. You make all the arrangements concerning your investigation.
4. Educators' programmes are not to be interrupted.
5. The Study is to be conducted from 6 September 2022 till 30 June 2023.
6. No research can be conducted during the fourth term as schools are preparing and finalizing syllabi for examinations (October to December).
7. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey, please contact Mr M Kanzi at the contact numbers above quoting the reference number.
8. A photocopy of this letter is submitted to the principal where the intended research is to be conducted.
9. Your research will be limited to the list of schools as forwarded to the Western Cape Education Department.
10. A brief summary of the content, findings and recommendations is provided to the Director: Research Services.
11. The Department receives a copy of the completed report/dissertation/thesis addressed to:

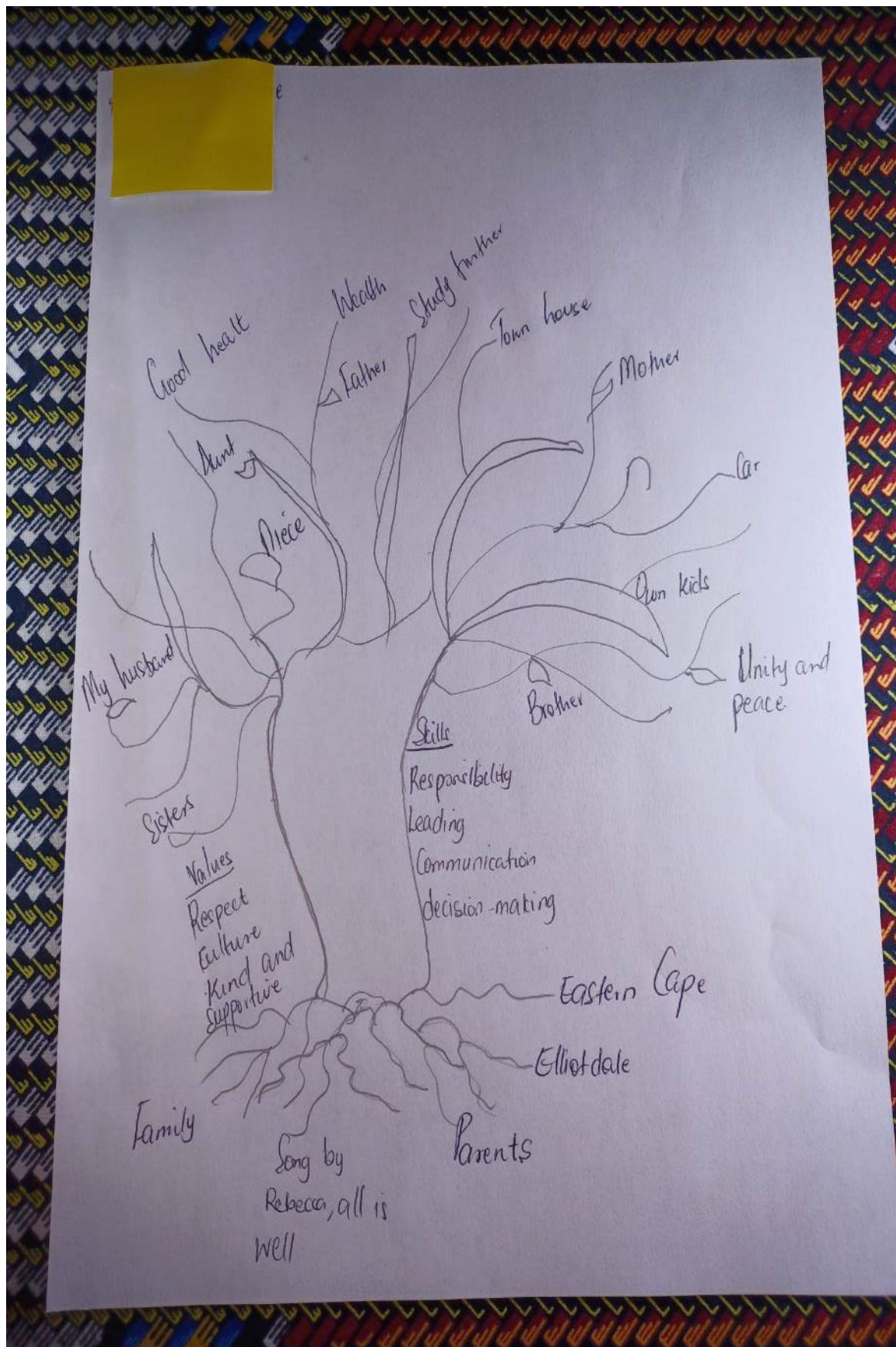
The Director: Research Services
Western Cape Education Department
Private Bag X9114
CAPE TOWN
8000

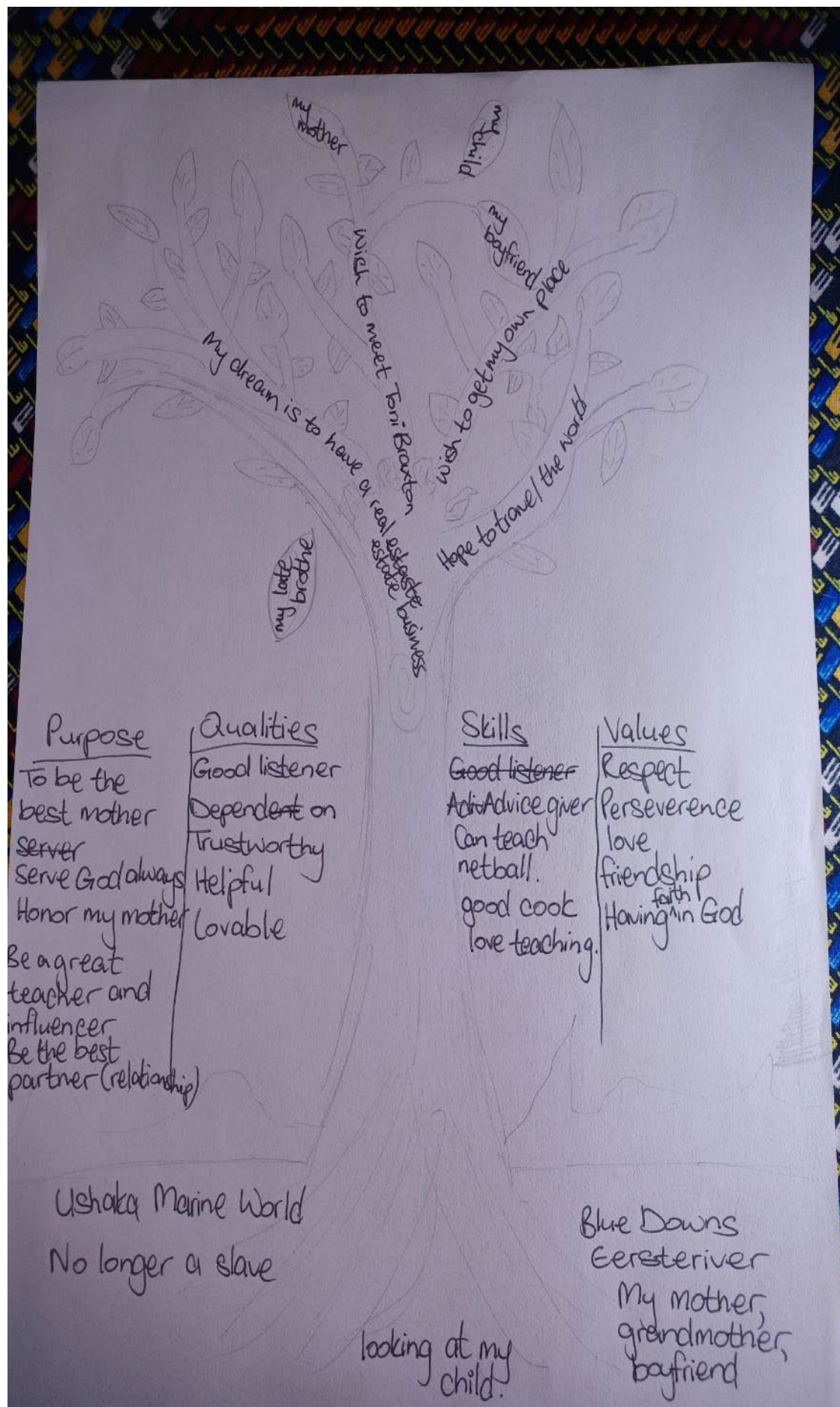
We wish you success in your research.

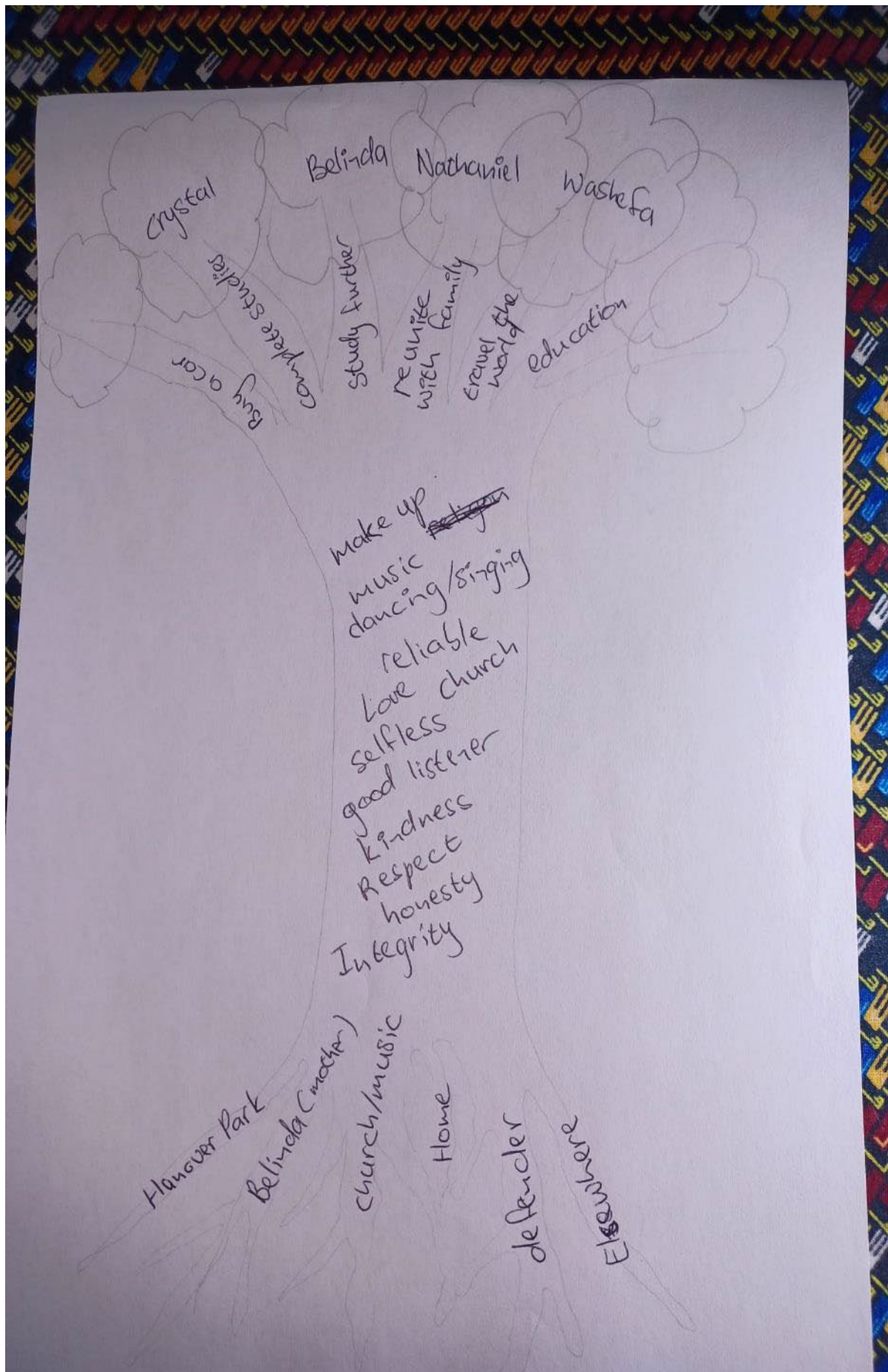
Kind regards,
Meshack Kanzi
Directorate: Research
DATE: 6 September 2022



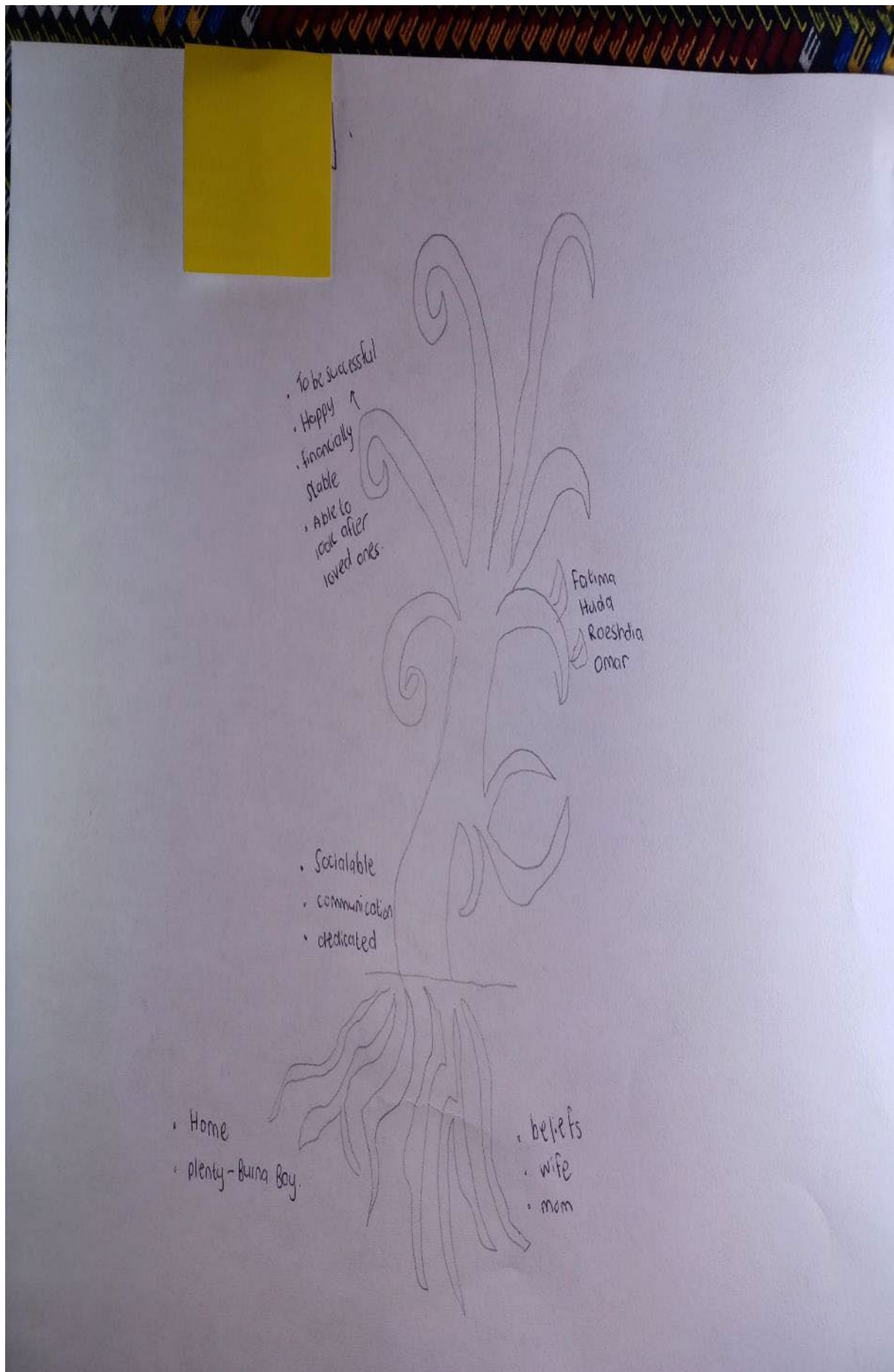
Appendix fifteen: Participant drawings

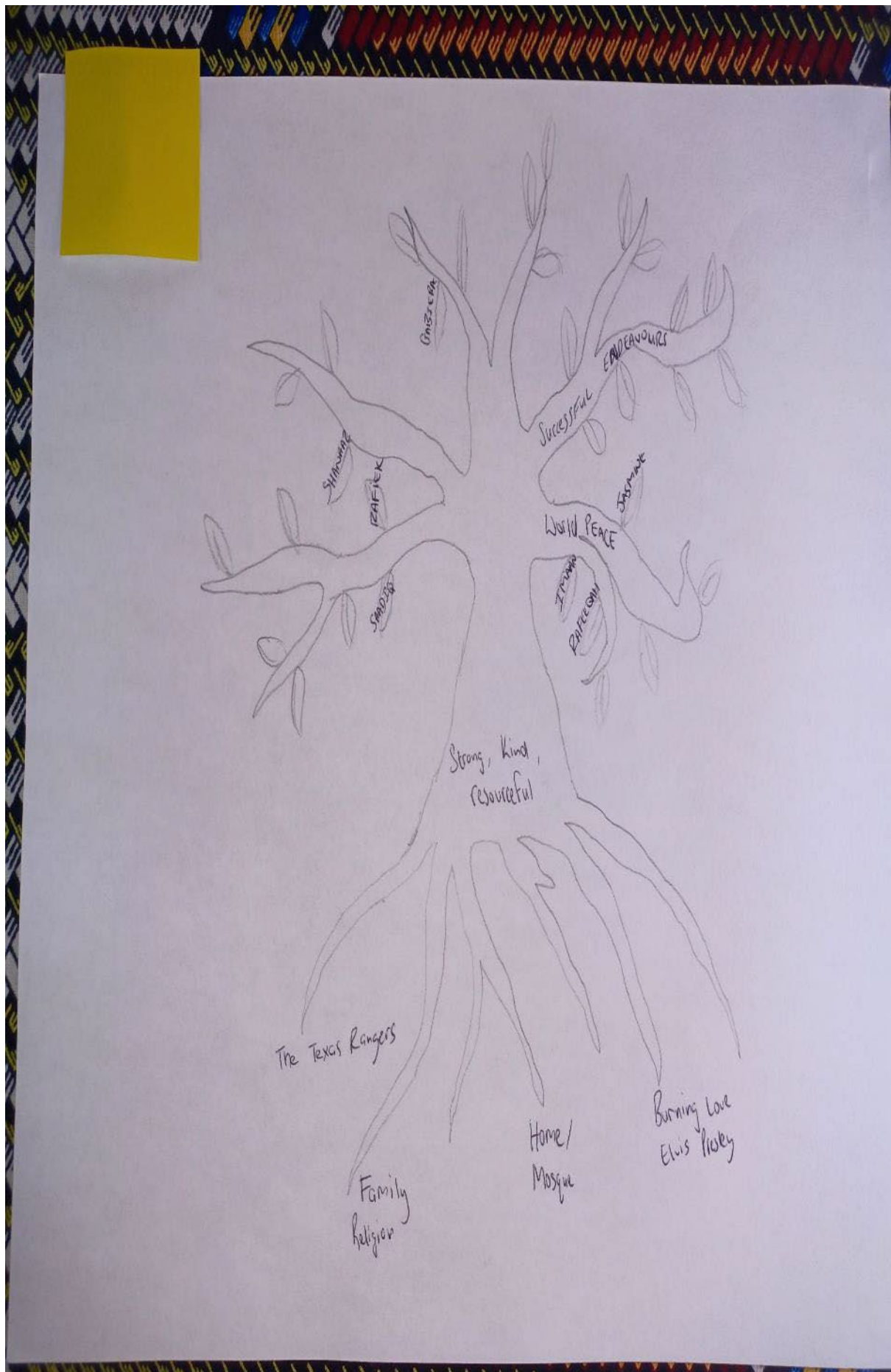


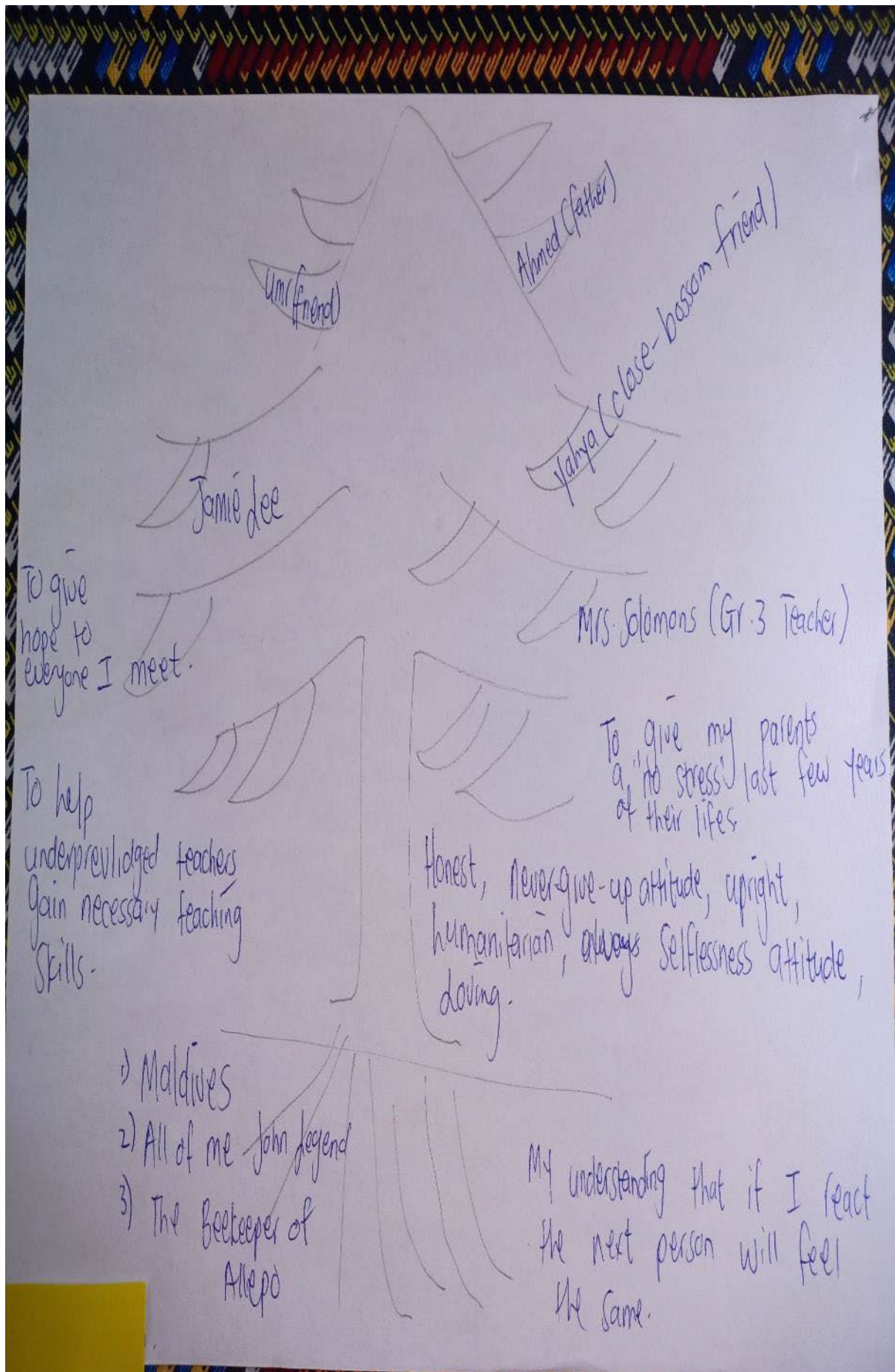












Appendix sixteen: Declaration of professional editing

62 Ferguson Road
Glenwood
DURBAN 4001
Tel: 072 442 7896
Email: deanne.collins30@gmail.com

2 December 2023

This serves to confirm that I have edited the thesis, "Student-teachers' lived experiences in diverse teaching practicum contexts", by Clive Jimmy William Brown, student number 222116658, excluding the appendices.

DISCLAIMER: The editor cannot be held responsible for any errors introduced due to changes being made to the document after the editing is complete.

Yours sincerely,



(Ms) Deanne Collins (MA)

Appendix seventeen: Turnitin report



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UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
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