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NARRATIVES OF NOVICE TEACHERS' PERSONAL
AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES (PLCS)

by

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SUPERVISOR'S AUTHORIZATION

As the candidate's supervisor I agree to the submission of this thesis.

Supervisor: Professor Daisy Pillay

Signed: 

Date: 24 March 2025

DECLARATION

I, **Pranav Harripersadh**, declare that

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ABSTRACT

This study, "*Narratives of Novice Teachers' Personal and Professional Development through Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)*", explores the ways in which early career teachers' personal and professional development is facilitated by their involvement in PLCs. Three questions guide the research: 1. What are novice teachers' stories of participation in PLCs? 2. How does novice teachers' participation in PLCs enhance their early personal and professional learning? 3. What personal and professional learning happens for novice teachers' development through PLCs?

The theoretical underpinning for this study is derived from Illeris's (2009) theory of learning. It focuses on three main learning dimensions: content (knowledge gained), incentive (intrinsic motivation to learn), and interaction (social components of learning). This framework aids in understanding how early career teachers develop professionally and personally in PLCs. The study uses memory drawings, object inquiries, and unstructured interviews to examine the experiences of three early career teachers: Mr Ross, Ms Priya, and Mr Carson. Through these data generation methods, participants could share past, present, and future memories and personal stories of their early professional experiences. The written narratives were then subjected to meaning-making and analysis to open up different ideas, concepts, and insights.

The study shows that PLCs serve as a critical social space assisting early career teachers by developing collaborative relationships, mentorship opportunities, identity construction and reflective practices. The participants' stories highlight the different approaches and ways that PLCs enable tackling the complexities of learning to teach the early professional years - like cultivating ideas and practices for connecting theory and practice and fostering a feeling of belonging in the teaching community as professionals. Participating in a PLC gave me a deeper insight into early career teachers' lived experiences and how they were developing new perspectives, different teaching methods, and the emotional confidence and attitudes to become researchers, mentors, and life-long learners. The study found that PLCs are potent sites for ECT's personal-professional transformation.

The study concludes with practical suggestions for improving teacher induction programs and developing supportive PLCs in a variety of educational settings. This study contributes to the growing body of research on early career teachers' early professional years by elevating their voices and highlighting PLCs as a forum for sharing their professional challenges and ideas, as well as the embodied knowledges they draw on and the competencies that these teachers bring with them.

Dedication

This is dedicated to my late father, whose love, wisdom, and unshakable belief in me helped shape me into the man I am today. Your fortitude, guidance, and sacrifices have been an ongoing source of inspiration in my life. I carry your legacy with me at every turn, and my work is a tribute to the values that you taught me. I dedicate this accomplishment to you, even though you are no longer with us. Your memory lives on in my heart.

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CHAPTER ONE

NAVIGATING NEW HORIZONS

1.1 Brief Background and Motivation

When the study was conceptualised, I wanted to address the following driving question: *What makes ECT's early professional years a fertile site of inquiry*. Novice teachers experience several difficulties as they transition from teacher education programs to full-time teaching (Zeichner et al., 2024). These difficulties are frequently accompanied by emotions of loneliness, uncertainty about their career, and the demanding nature of classroom duties (Steadman, 2021). It is clear that preservice teacher education and growth are chaotic, recursive, and emotional processes of becoming (Steadman, 2021).

Educational systems around the world face serious issues as a result of teacher attrition, which occurs especially among early career teachers (ECTs). According to a study by Schuck et al. (2018), ECTs frequently struggle to manage their classrooms, balance work and personal obligations, and maintain positive connections with other members of the school community. These challenges can lead to their decision to quit the field. Similarly, Kelly et al. (2019) aver that the quality of teacher training, early career assistance, and job satisfaction are all closely related to ECTs' intentions to stay or leave their jobs as teachers. These findings highlight the necessity of support structures to improve teacher retention during the early professional years.

Navigating the challenges of moving from classroom theory to real-world application is a key component of novice teacher development (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009). ECTs frequently deal with issues such as handling administrative duties, developing efficient teaching methods, and attending to a variety of student needs (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009). These experiences help to shape their professional identities as they learn to adjust, reflect, and evolve within the complexity of educational practice and becoming a teacher. The groundwork for ECTs' contribution and accountability to social transformation in and beyond the educational field is laid by these supportive networks, the incentive to learn, and appropriate professional learning opportunities and procedures that assist them to develop confidence, hone their teaching techniques, and build the capacity and agency necessary to succeed in their teacher positions.

In order for ECTs to negotiate the tensions and difficulties they face, school-based support structures are vital (Kelchtermans, 2019). These supportive structures can assist them in developing as teachers, attaining their professional identities, and becoming agentic and resilient. However, burnout and attrition are real threats in the absence of such support. Therefore, professional learning communities (PLCs) are critical social spaces that provide support for early career teachers as they make their way through this challenging terrain. Bascia (2014, p. 7) argues that “the norms and practices within a given professional community will dictate teachers’ opportunities to brainstorm teaching solutions with other teachers, to share teaching strategies, and thus to broaden their pedagogical repertoires”. ECTs who work together and share their knowledge with one another engage in learning and expand their ideas and perspectives in cooperative, introspective, and encouraging environments. PLCs have the potential to become a trusting, safe, and appealing platform for sharing and ‘resolving’ everyday issues and providing teachers with ongoing professional opportunities for opening up their thinking and ways of knowing (Khan et al., 2021). It was against this background that the current research focused on the narratives of novice teachers and their early professional experiences of professional learning communities (PLCs). The aim of this study was to generate ECTs’ personal stories of their careers and experiences and to analyse their reconstructed storied narratives to elicit a more in-depth understanding of the role professional learning communities played in their professional development. As an ECT and a researcher, I engaged in this study to deepen my understanding of teacher development by unpacking the nature of PLCs and determining how they contributed to the personal and professional learning experiences of ECTs. This investigation therefore explored the authentic experiences and perspectives of selected ECTs.

The main purpose of the study was to explore and evaluate inexperienced teachers’ narratives of their professional and personal growth in the context of their engagement with professional learning communities (PLCs). This investigation allowed me to learn more about how PLCs may either help or impede new teachers' professional development. In this process, I unpacked the participating teachers’ unique experiences, the obstacles they encountered, and the systems of support that impacted their professional and personal growth. By analysing these stories qualitatively, the study was able to shed light on the impact of PLCs as a tool for professional development. Based on the findings, the study offers ideas for improving the design and application of PLCs to better assist ECTs.

1.2 Personal–professional Rationale for Studying Early Career Teachers’ Experiences

I am an early career teacher who teaches Mathematics and Physical Sciences at in the GET and FET phases at a public high school. When I engaged in this study, I had only had 1 year of experience, so I could attest first-hand to the enormous list of experiences of every constraint and tension I encountered inside and outside the classroom as I learned to become a teacher in a public school. In my view, my university education did not adequately prepare me for the practical and social realities of school, which is a notion that Fantilli and McDougall (2009) support. I found that the responsibilities of the classroom frequently left little time for reflection and for personal-professional power-knowledge shifts. For me, the shift from theory to practice was daunting and I often felt emotionally overburdened throughout the first few weeks of teaching. In fact, I even contemplated changing career.

My experiences as a novice teacher highlighted how important it is to have support networks that can assist ECTs with everyday situations of learning and to teach in complex schooling spaces. As an ECT who sought ways to enhance my everyday teaching practice to help my students learn and change, I realised that I needed to explore current tensions and find ways to unearth the potential within the complexities of a novice teacher’s everyday experiences. For instance, I realised that my participation in the Science/Maths PLC at my school had enabled me personally to develop agency and capacity to teach a subject in which I was not a specialist, and I was intrigued by the potential influence such communities could have on the professional experiences of ECTs. The PLC I attended opened up an accepting, friendly, and collaborative space where I could enhance my teaching skills, ask for advice, and share experiences that had been both challenging and enriching. My personal encounters with other teachers in the PLCs I attended sparked my curiosity and I was motivated to research new teachers' experiences of PLCs.

By adopting a scholarly stance during my narrative inquiry into the role of PLCs in teachers’ early professional lives, I was able to learn more about how PLCs either helped or impeded their professional development. The study's professional rationale stemmed from various sources that referred to the many challenges that new teachers encounter when they enter the field. Regardless of their passion, most early career teachers frequently feel isolated, uncertain, and inadequate when adjusting to their roles (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). However, the literature avers that both professional and personal development can be promoted by

PLCs as they provide a cooperative setting where reflection and support guide the development of novice teachers (DuFour et al., 2006).

I explored ECTs' narratives regarding the role of PLCs in their early professional development. I envisaged that understanding novice teachers' early experiences would provide valuable insights into the support and guidance they sought for their successful transition from university to the classroom where they needed to learn how to become proficient teachers in these formal schooling spaces. Furthermore, in consideration of teacher attrition and retention rates, I deemed it vital to understand the factors and forces that contribute to novice teachers' early professional experiences of development and job dis/satisfaction, as this may have a direct impact on their decision to stay in or leave the teaching profession.

1.3 Contextual Imperatives and their Implications for ECTs

According to the Department of Basic Education, ECTs in South Africa are expected to perform a variety of duties such as classroom leaders, learning facilitators, and learning program planners (Soudien & Sayed, 2019). Thorough guidelines on planning to enhance teacher education and development are offered by the *Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa 2011–2025* (DBE, 2011). However, this gazette noticeably lacks measures that are suited to ECTs as it fails to address their specific requirements. While it highlights the value of lifelong learning and high-quality teacher development, the framework mainly concentrates on continuing professional development (CPD) and general teacher professionalization, while it fails to specifically address the difficulties they face and the support networks that ECTs require as they enter the field. In fact, this document fails to recognise ECTs' vulnerability and their crucial need for professional identity construction that happens in the early years of teaching. However, on a positive note, this document outlines the objectives, characteristics, and activities of PLCs and argues strongly in favour of using them as a platform for teacher development (Brodie, 2019). It is argued that PLCs are able to offer "the setting and necessary support for groups of classroom teachers, school managers, and subject advisors to participate collectively in determining their own developmental trajectories, and to set up activities that will drive their development" (DOE, 2011, p. 14).

I decided to research PLCs in particular because Chauraya and Brodie's (2017, p. 232) research has demonstrated that "PLCs can be an important vehicle for teacher learning in South Africa". Moreover, given the fact that PLCs are intended to serve as educational tools for teachers, the limitations that are associated with the South African education system render their development and research both challenging and important (Chauraya & Brodie, 2017).

1.4 Purpose of the Study and Objectives

The purpose of the study was to explore and evaluate the narratives of ECTs' concerning their early professional experiences of PLCs. By means of qualitative analyses of selected teachers' stories, I hoped to shed light on the impact of PLCs as a tool for professional development and to provide ideas for improving the design and execution of CPD.

The research objectives were to:

- Explore novice teachers' stories of their participation in PLCs.
- Find out how novice teachers' participation in PLCs enhanced their early personal and professional learning.
- Determine what personal and professional learning and development occur when novice teachers are exposed to PLCs.

1.5 Research Questions

Question 1: What are novice teachers' stories of participation in PLCs?

By posing this research question, I was able to zoom in on the narratives and personal experiences of novice teachers who were members of PLCs. The aim of this research question was to unpack the in-depth stories and lived experiences of novice teachers to better understand the supportive environment that PLCs provide.

Question 2: How does novice teachers' participation in PLCs enhance their early personal and professional learning?

This research question aimed to examine the precise ways in which selected novice teachers' participation in PLCs supported their professional development in the early phases of their employment. Additionally, it aimed to identify how PLCs assisted and improved new teachers' learning on both a personal and professional level.

Question 3: What personal and professional learnings occur in novice teachers that support their development when they engage in PLCs?

This research question zoomed in on the specific types of learning that enriched the new teachers when they participated in PLCs.

When I had learned how their learning occurred, I also wanted to find out how these processes affected their ability to function better in their classrooms. This question sought to clarify the personal and professional aspects of their growth and how these aspects were supported by their participation in PLCs.

1.6 Key Concepts

Novice teachers' early career experiences: Various professional experiences of teachers occur in the early phases of their teaching careers. This occurs soon after they have transitioned from theoretical preparation to actual classroom engagement (George et al., 2022). Challenges, including classroom management, student engagement, and adjusting to the school environment, are common during this time and might affect their sense of confidence and job satisfaction. During this phase, support systems, including collaborative relationships and mentoring, are essential for improving teaching and encouraging teacher retention (George et al., 2022). The early career experiences of ECTs were explored in my research as I unpacked the role of PLCs as essential support networks in their development.

Early professional learning: According to Swart (2013), early professional learning is the first stage of a teacher's professional development that focuses on the shift from teacher education to active classroom practice. It is during this time that new teachers must apply their academic knowledge to practical teaching situations in order to develop their professional identities. In this process, they have to adopt successful pedagogical skills. According to Swart (2013), early professional learning has a big impact on how teachers conduct themselves in the classroom and how well they can handle the challenges of the learning environment. My research explored how ECTs can bridge the gap between theoretical preparation and real-world teaching through early professional learning within PLCs. This phase is essential for forming their professional identities and preparing them to successfully handle difficulties in the classroom.

Social learning: The social learning theory emphasises the function of cognitive processes in learning and claims that people adopt new behaviours and skills by watching and mimicking

others (Firmansyah & Saepuloh, 2022). This concept emphasises that behavioural, cognitive, and environmental factors constantly interact to shape human behaviour. Firmansyah and Saepuloh (2022) argue that social learning has a major influence on a number of fields, such as public health and education, by making it easier to adopt new behaviours and attain new abilities through interaction with others. In my research, social learning underscored the value of PLCs as spaces for ECTs to learn through observation, collaboration, and engagement with colleagues and mentors.

Professional Learning Community (PLC): In different educational contexts, professional learning communities, or PLCs, are conceptualized differently. According to Stoll et al. (2006), a PLC is a collection of individuals who share and critically examine their practice in a continuous, introspective, cooperative, inclusive, learning-oriented, and growth-promoting manner. According to Moosa et al. (2024), PLC definitions frequently include the three main elements of process, outcome, and critical conditions. These disparate definitions demonstrate how different people around the world have different perspectives on PLCs. A school-based PLC, according to Chuang and Ting (2021), is a group of teachers that meet on a regular basis to discuss their teaching methods, exchange knowledge, and work together to enhance their abilities as teachers and the learning outcomes of their students. This definition conceptualizes a PLC in this study since it aligns with what I am researching.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

I utilized Illeris's theory of learning as the theoretical framework for my study (Illeris, 2009). The three interrelated components of Illeris' theory of learning- content, incentive, and interaction- made it a perfect framework for my study on the professional and personal growth of new teachers who engage with others in PLCs. The theory's focus on integrating the cognitive (content), emotional and motivational (incentive), and social (interaction) aspects of learning was ideally suited for my exploration of the complex nature of teacher development in PLCs (Illeris, 2009). Illeris's framework enabled a thorough investigation of how PLCs influenced the experiences and progress of novice teachers as they inevitably entail collaborative learning, sharing of expertise, and personal development that are all motivated by internal and external factors (Illeris, 2009). Moreover, the theory assisted me in exploring the intricacies of learning and to understand it (learning) as a dynamic interaction between individual and collective factors. This is further explained in Chapter 2.

1.8 Research Methodology

This research employed narrative inquiry as the methodology of choice. The study's emphasis on the role of PLCs in ECTs' experiences and development was in line with the narrative inquiry approach, which was in turn appropriate for exploring ECTs' subjective experiences and personal narratives in order to understand how they managed their professional development. By documenting the social and personal settings in which these experiences occurred, this methodology enabled a thorough investigation of the ECTs' complex, nuanced, and changing learnings. The appropriateness of narrative inquiry for this study was further supported by this approach as it recognizes the dynamic and relational features of professional learning and emphasises how interactions within communities' impact teachers' experiences.

1.9 Overview of the Chapters

Chapter 1: Navigating New Horizons. This chapter provides an overview of the study by describing the difficulties ECTs encounter when they enter the teaching profession, while the discourse also emphasises the role of PLCs in fostering the growth of novice teachers. The use of narrative inquiry for exploring ECTs' professional and personal development through PLCs is highlighted while the chapter also outlines the research aim, objectives, and key research questions. As an introduction to this study report, the chapter clearly elucidates the context of the study's focus as I reflect on my own experiences as a novice teacher and the researcher.

Chapter 2: Pathways to Growth. In this chapter, I explore the existing body of research on novice teachers' professional growth and the role that PLCs may play in this process. The literature review examines the difficulties ECTs encounter, their developmental needs, and the ways PLCs function as platforms for collaboration, development, and reflection. The role of PLCs in the South African education landscape and the possible barriers to their efficacy are also explored. I also explain that the three dimensions of learning as posited by Illeris's (2009) theoretical framework were utilised to comprehend the role of PLCS in supporting the development of ECTs.

Chapter 3: Creating Meaning Through Narrative Inquiry. This chapter explicates the qualitative study approach that was used. More specifically, I explain that narrative inquiry was adopted within the interpretivist paradigm as the study aimed to explore the personal and

professional development of novice teachers in the context of PLCs. I describe how my three participants were selected and the data generation techniques that I used, namely memory drawings, artefact inquiry, and unstructured interviews. Moreover, key research processes such as data analysis strategies, achieving trustworthiness, adhering to ethical considerations, and acknowledging the study's limitations are also covered in this chapter.

Chapter 4: Narratives of the ECTs' lived experiences. This chapter presents the analysis of the data in response to the first research question: *What are ECTs' narratives of professional experiences?* The chapter applies Illeris's (2009) paradigm of the three dimensions of learning to examine the critical events along the teachers' respective journeys using narrative inquiry. The chapter is divided into three sections: Section A presents the narratives of Mr Ross; Section B presents the narratives of Ms Priya; and Section C presents the narratives of Mr Carson.

Chapter 5: Learning Landscapes. This chapter analyses the data that were collected in response to the second research question: *How has novice teachers' participation in PLCs enhanced their early personal and professional learning?* The analysis applies Illeris's (2009) paradigm of the three dimensions of learning to precisely examine the ways in which novice teachers' participation in PLCs supported their personal and professional development in the early phase of their employment. Chapter 5 is also divided into three sections, similar to those of Chapter 4.

Chapter 6: Belonging through Becoming. This chapter provides an analysis of the data that were collected in response to the third research question: *What personal and professional learnings occur in novice teachers that support their development when they engage in PLCs?* The chapter applies Illeris's (2009) three dimensions of learning paradigm to examine the specific types of learning that ECTs obtain by taking part in PLCs. Chapter 5 is also divided into three sections in which the narratives of the three participants are presented consecutively.

Chapter 7: A Journey of Passion and Learning. An overview of the dissertation is provided in this chapter and I subsequently reflect on my methodological, professional, and personal learnings. This chapter is concluded by outlining my plans for improvement in light of the research findings. I also dwell on the questions and research topics that I and other researchers may explore in the future.

1.10 Chapter Summary

Chapter one elucidated the inner and outer tensions that ECTs encounter when they transition from university to full-time teaching. I also discussed how the personal and practical experiences of ECTs can be impacted by PLCs that can serve as a nurturing setting that promotes ECTs' development when they are exposed to opportunities for collaboration, information exchange, and reflection. With emphasis on comprehending how these communities support teacher learning, I discussed the purpose of the research, which was to investigate the role of PLCs in ECTs' professional and personal development. The importance of unpacking ECTs' narratives was emphasised as this served to understand their experiences and the difficulties they faced as new teachers. The aim of the study and the research objectives and questions were clearly and concisely presented, and the research methodology (narrative inquiry) was also briefly discussed.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pathways to Growth and Leveraging PLCs to Address ECTs' Challenges

2.1 Introduction

The development of ECTs beyond the mere acquisition of teaching skills is an important issue for negotiating the dynamic and complex educational context. The transformed ideological, political, and administrative ways of governing basic education have consequences for the many diverse schooling systems, cultures, and teachers' lives that are endemic in South Africa (Furlong et al., 2008). As a consequence, novice teachers are confronted with tasks, accountability, and commitments that are constantly changing and contextually situated. Expectations of teachers are complex and relational to schooling realities. It is in this context that PLCs have emerged as a critical social space for supporting and promoting novice teacher transition and learning as they provide sites for collaborative and reflective engagement among educators (Feldman, 2020). In this chapter, I review a range of scholarly sources to generate a narrative of the key debates, issues, and trends in this contested and complex field that is part of the early professional learning experiences of beginner teachers. The review of the literature assisted me in developing a scholarly stance to research ECTs' early professional and personal experiences as participants in PLCs. This review developed my insights and perspectives on how supportive networks, particularly PLCs, can contribute to the development of new ideas and perspectives for negotiating the complexities of teacher work.

2.2 Who are novice teachers?

The term 'novice teacher' has been defined and interpreted in a variety of ways. Makoa and Segalo (2021) describe novice teachers as newly qualified teachers who have fewer than five years of teaching experience. For most scholars, novice teachers (NTs) are distinguished by their lack of classroom experience. They encounter specific problems such as classroom management, pedagogical preparation, and transitioning to a particular school culture (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). This view is supported by Makoa and Segalo (2021, p. 931), who argue that early career teachers may experience problems relating to "workplace adjustment, poor mentoring, and the absence of professional collegiality", and they argue that this may unconsciously impede their attainment of the necessary professional growth.

According to Steadman (2021), novice teacher education and growth entail a chaotic, recursive, and emotional process of becoming. Conflict, transition, and agency are three interconnected themes that frame the experiences of novice teachers and, when combined, they reflect the emotions that shape the journey of learning to teach (Steadman, 2021).

Listening to teachers' authentic narratives is important if one wishes to understand teacher development at a deep level (Maharaj, 2021). It was therefore envisaged that the narratives of novice teachers would provide significant insights into their inner tensions and struggles as they negotiated who they were as newly appointed professionals, while it was expected that their stories would also elucidate the immense value of their experiences in the dynamic and complex educational contexts in which they found themselves (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Scholars agree that narratives provide a useful lens for studying novice teachers' past-present experiences of learning to become professionals in the process of making sense of their complex schooling realities and the school culture (Maharaj, 2021).

In this study, the words "novice teacher" (NT) and "early career teacher" (ECT) have the same meaning and are used synonymously.

2.3 Novice Teachers' Lives

Novice teachers are new arrivals to the teaching profession and face many obstacles during their early years. They face a range of negative emotions as they grapple with obstacles to adjust to their work environment. Not only do they experience anxiety and fear as they attempt to manage their personal and professional lives, but most also experience uncertainty as a result of inadequate support (Kozikoğlu & Senemoğlu, 2019). The latter authors argue that novice teachers frequently encounter stress when they first begin their careers; hence, support is essential for their professional development.

According to Fantilli and McDougall (2009), NTs often face daunting duties because they are assigned the same workload as experienced educators. Being an NT in the classroom might put individuals in difficult situations, and many find it difficult to adjust due to a lack of experience and support. The incapacity of NTs to handle challenging behaviours, coupled with the unrealistic demands of learners and parents, is a major obstacle in their becoming (Kozikoğlu & Senemoğlu, 2019). This is arguably due the fact that teacher preparation programs only cover conventional classroom management practices while failing to go

beyond the setting of well-behaved students who react well to such approaches (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009).

Conflict and tension are unavoidable when one is learning to teach because preservice teachers form their professional identities in a wide range of contexts. Conflict is described by Steadman (2021, p. 2) as “ideas of struggle that occur within an individual. It is a mental state that can result in anxiety, indecision, and a crisis of identity”. The transition from student/preservice teacher to classroom teacher is complicated and fraught with internal conflicts. As a result, a teacher's personal-professional transition is challenging and often confusing. When novice teachers are exposed to new situations/environments, they may have inner misgivings and face various dilemmas (Pillen et al., 2013). These experiences can make them fragile in the process of trying to meet the requirements set by their superiors and educational officials. Steadman (2021) highlights that educators who learn to teach encounter tensions as they migrate between learning spaces and clashing perspectives and procedures, which is a process that impacts the development of their teacher identity and autonomy.

Ingersoll and Strong (2011) argue that novice teacher induction is an important process to assist NTs to transition from teacher ‘observers’ to dealing with the realities of the classroom. However, there is often not the same focus and levels of support, guidance, and orientation across different schooling cultures, and empirical studies have highlighted that NTs are frequently left to sink or swim on their own as classroom practitioners (Glazzard & Coverdale, 2018). In fact, some ECTs may find this isolation particularly challenging and may choose to leave the schooling system (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

2.4 Novice Teachers’ developmental needs

To ensure support for the early induction of NTs into the classroom, they need to meet various developmental requirements. Mentoring, emotional support, opportunities for reflection, and the acquisition of subject specialist knowledge and pedagogical skills are among these foundational requirements. It is imperative for NTs to understand how to run a new class and which teaching strategies are effective for learners at an appropriate age and skills level. To accomplish this, novice educators must first seek guidance from other educators who work with the same grades and teach the same subjects (Lecat et al., 2019). Fantilli and McDougall (2009) add that new teachers often experience stress and feelings of

loneliness, which are realities that emphasise the value of support networks like professional learning communities and mentoring.

Ingersoll and Strong (2011) insist that supportive networks and the mentorship offered by experienced educators are extremely beneficial as they can provide direction, feedback, and emotional support to new educators. According to Taylor (2017), some teachers highlighted the use of mentorship as a means of providing individualised support to inexperienced teachers to ensure that specific educational and managerial requirements are met. Novice teachers need to talk about curriculum implementation, seek suggestions for addressing individual students' needs, and learn from their colleagues who have more experience in their subjects or learning areas (Feiman-Nemser, 2003). According to Lecat et al. (2019), social informal learning has the potential to enhance job performance, particularly in knowledge-intensive institutions. Moreover, social interactions with co-workers, the management team, and parents can be immensely beneficial for beginner teachers.

2.5 Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

2.5.1 What are PLCs?

According to Chauraya and Brodie (2017, p. 223), PLCs can be defined as “groups of teachers who come together to engage in regular, systematic, and sustained cycles of inquiry-based learning”. Teachers generally collaborate in a PLC to share their professional knowledge, develop new skills, and learn from one another. PLCs provide an official space for teachers to engage in continuous discussion, share successful strategies, and address teaching difficulties collectively (DuFour et al., 2006). These communities have grown in popularity as a result of their ability to improve the effectiveness of teachers as well as students' academic results (Hord & Sommers, 2008). PLCs promote reflective practice and are instrumental in offering teachers opportunities to analyse and evaluate their own pedagogical approaches (Burns, 2012). Teachers should therefore engage in such communities to enhance their professional development and consistently improve and refine their methods through reflection on their teaching and their learners' results. Chuang and Ting (2021) define a school-based PLC as a group of educators who get together regularly to talk about their teaching strategies, share knowledge, and collaborate to improve both their own teaching skills and the learning results of their students. Since this definition is in line with my research, it conceptualizes a PLC in this study.

2.5.2 Why PLCs are important for ECTs' professional learning

The experiences that NTs gain by participating in PLCs help them to understand the challenges they face and the advantages they can gain when they begin their teaching careers. Recent research on novice teachers' experiences associated with PLCs has highlighted several key facets of these communities. The first is collaborative learning, as PLCs allow NTs to understand the importance of broadening their educational knowledge and building a deeper understanding of effective teaching practices through shared experiences and insights (Mydin et al., 2024).

The next aspect is awareness of and the ability to build the capacity to expand their professional identities. According to Caza and Creary (2016), professional identity refers to how individuals perceive themselves in their professional roles and includes all of the traits, beliefs, principles, drives, and life experiences that people combine to define who they are at work (Caza & Creary, 2016). Scholars have found that NTs' narratives frequently trace their evolving professional identities, and it is in this context that PLCs serve as spaces where they can negotiate their roles, voice their beliefs and values, and ultimately develop a strong sense of belonging within the educational community (Noonan, 2018).

The impact of PLCs on student learning is another facet that is highlighted. The fundamental idea of a PLC is to enhance teachers' learning to improve teaching practice (Vescio et al., 2008). According to Vescio et al. (2008), participants in their study improved their usage of teaching techniques to such an extent that they met a variety of students' needs for subject understanding. Moreover, reflection is also encouraged by PLCs to encourage novice teachers to think about and evaluate their practices and teaching methods. Also, reflective dialogue leads to critical and continuing conversations among teachers concerning the curriculum, their instruction practices, and student progress (Mydin et al., 2024).

In a PLC, educators interact, collaborate, and have ongoing discussions about improving educational practices. They reflect on their work and their students' performance and, as a result, professional development occurs (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). Interaction and collaboration must be built on mutual trust and shared expertise, which means that "effective PLCs require positive and collegial relationships among teachers" (Bascia, 2014, p. 8). Therefore, to identify and combat pedagogical challenges, group members must make

their practices known to their colleagues and take an investigative stance (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). Participating teachers thus learn to describe, discuss, and adapt their practices in accordance with a collectively understood standard of teaching and quality of learning.

2.5.3 ECTs' learning experiences when exposed to PLCs

The emphasis on a collaborative culture in PLCs creates a forum for teachers to exchange resources, ideas, perspectives, and strategies for managing complex classroom demands and negotiating mundane experiences. PLCs also help create a culture of sharing, listening, giving feedback, and embracing opportunities for continuous improvement as they create a safe space for teachers to share ideas and reflect on their practice (Bascia, 2014). PLCs help teachers to move beyond isolated methods and instrumentalist ways of teaching and they cultivate a sense of collaborative responsibility for student achievement objectives. Ikpuri and Peter (2024, p. 77) highlight that, in PLCs, “students' success is a collective responsibility [as] this culture fosters a sense of agency in teachers as they work collaboratively to develop strategies that address diverse student needs”. This perspective emphasises that PLCs promote collaborative environments that support alternate ideas and ways to teach; hence, they enhance teachers' professional agency.

PLCs also promote professional growth by promoting the practice of reflection. According to Hudson (2024), when teachers engage in collaborative reflection it greatly increases the possibility that their teaching methods will change for the better, thus ultimately improving students' results. When they share their insights reflectively, educators are enabled to modify and enhance their methods, and this is important for professional learning (Hudson, 2024). According to Palmer (1997), teaching is more than just methods, as it is about the teacher. In this context, Kennedy's (2005) model of professional development has transformed professional learning into the community of practice model. This model purports that a group of teachers should work together to achieve a common objective. They should also learn together through mutual interaction to reinvent self in relation to the schooling realities they encounter. Thus, by moving beyond the one-size-fits-all teaching method, teachers are incentivised to seek out new ideas and engage in meaningful interactions (Kennedy, 2005).

Moreover, the professional learning that occurs in a PLC is a form of democratic professionalism. According to Day and Sachs (2004), the essence of democratic

professionalism is the focus on collaborative efforts among teachers and their educational partners. The discourses they engage in thus become profession-driven, collegial, and encourage teacher activism (Day & Sachs, 2004). As PLCs are driven by teachers for teachers, they become fertile sites for early career teachers' professional learning.

2.5.4 ECTs' involvement in PLCs in the South African context

Chauraya and Brodie (2017) investigated the impact of PLC involvement on the practices of Mathematics teachers in South Africa. Based on their findings, the authors emphasise that PLCs offer a structured space for professional growth and collaborative learning, arguing that such spaces are crucial in an environment with a range of educational requirements and limited resources. Chauraya and Brodie (2017) aver that PLCs enable major changes in instructors' teaching approaches by encouraging collaborative inquiry and reflective discourse. They state that frequent PLC meetings serve as a platform for improving teaching methods as these spaces are employed for curriculum interpretation, student assessment, and the adoption of effective pedagogical strategies (Chauraya & Brodie, 2017). According to the latter study, the collaborative structure of PLCs enables teachers to exchange knowledge and experiences, which in turn promotes a sense of group accountability for negotiating the different forces in everyday classroom encounters (discipline, administrative overload, assessment, bullying) in order to enhance student engagement and learning. They aver that PLCs empower teachers to improve their professional practice, arguing that this makes PLCs potent with possibilities to support meaningful educational transformation in South Africa (Chauraya & Brodie, 2017).

Similarly, Makoa and Segalo (2021) observe that PLC participation guides educators to recognise the value of professional dialogue and to foster professional growth as they serve as forums for sharing best practices. However, Makoa and Segalo (2021, p. 935) caution that a major barrier that was raised by teachers is *time*, arguing that this issue can impede teachers' professional development. For instance, teachers reported that they struggled to schedule appropriate times to convene formally with their colleagues to discuss matters pertaining to their professional needs. Moreover, the notorious issue of administrative overload continues to claim teachers' time and can lead to teacher 'deprofessionalisation'.

2.5.5 Constraints associated with PLCs

Makoa and Segalo (2021) emphasise that educators may battle to schedule formal PLC meetings due to various reasons, as alluded to above. Among the many factors that could

prevent a structured professional development program for NTs are the South African school environment, administrative overload, overcrowded classrooms (Makoa & Segalo, 2021), and the rising demand for academic excellence and high pass rates (Milner & Khoza, 2008). According to Hudson (2024), issues that reduce PLC effectiveness include the fact that most teachers work in isolation, ineffective school leadership, and the fact that PLCs tend not to focus on appropriate objectives. Additionally, Hudson (2024) argues that PLCs lack the time for teachers to engage in meaningful and complex work. Moreover, although analytics-driven decision-making procedures direct PLC activities, excessive reliance on data may be detrimental to teachers' professional development and may thus not help to improve students' academic results (Hudson, 2024). PLCs should encourage transparent and reflective dialogue among educators and allow them to ponder, investigate, and solve problems pertaining to their complex work beyond developing content knowledge expertise (Meijlof, 2018). This perspective emphasises that teacher learning and teamwork are essential components of a successful PLC, and argues for the avoidance of excessive dependence on data (Hudson, 2024).

2.4.6 Concluding remarks on PLCs

The above review presented a range of perspectives and raised various issues associated with early career teachers' professional learning. The discourse highlighted the need for a teacher-driven, school-based supportive learning community for ECTs in the dynamic and complex schooling landscape. The critical review highlighted the potential of PLCs to offer a collaborative and reflective environment that will be beneficial to novice teachers who frequently encounter challenges that impede their ability to deliver subject content and that compel them to become the sole producers of knowledge. The potential of PLCs to provide a structured environment for meaningful teacher learning where new teachers may choose to create alternate social relations, [re]construct their professional identities, and develop confidence in using meaningful methods and embodied ways of thinking and teaching was highlighted. The review suggested that, through ongoing discussions and reflective practice, PLCs may foster significant advancements that will promote a sense of collective responsibility among educators in the South African setting. These ideals may be achieved despite various obstacles such as time constraints, administrative overload, and crowded classrooms. According to the literature, PLCs should be used as spaces for productive and generative collegial and mentoring relationships. When functioning effectively, they foster open, reflective inquiry that is aligned with teachers' ambitions, aspirations, and expectations

for self-initiated early professional learning. Hence, in the South African educational context that is characterised by inequality and numerous challenges, PLCs offer teachers the opportunity to enhance their teaching practice to ensure that meaningful student learning and educational outcomes are achieved.

A key gap in the literature on PLCs is the lack of emphasis on early career teachers and their integration into the profession. Few studies have looked at how new teachers interact with and gain from PLCs, despite the fact that previous research frequently highlights the advantages of these collaborative frameworks for seasoned educators (Mabunda & McKay, 2024). This gap is significant since ECTs encounter specific challenges including adjusting to school settings, gaining confidence as teachers, and controlling classroom dynamics (Glazzard & Coverdale, 2018). By focusing on ECTs' involvement in PLCs, my research seeks to clarify how these collaborative settings either facilitate or hinder teachers' early professional development. This viewpoint is essential for guiding initiatives and regulations meant to improve the onboarding and retention of new educators in the field (Mabunda & McKay, 2024).

2.6 Theoretical Framework

To frame this study, I utilised Knud Illeris's (2009) theory of learning. Illeris (2009) presented a trio of dimensions of learning that can be applied to understand how people acquire knowledge and attain various abilities. These three dimensions are the content, incentive, and interaction dimensions. According to Illeris (2009, p. 7), learning is “any process that in living organisms leads to permanent capacity change and which is not solely due to biological maturation or aging”. Illeris contends that learning happens when all three dimensions coexist and interact.

According to Illeris (2009), there are three learning dimensions that offer a useful framework for comprehending the complexities of the learning process: content, incentive, and interaction. These are deemed interconnected and of equal importance, and they elicit understanding of the settings in which subjects find themselves. Furthermore, the framework illuminates that learning occurs as a combination of two processes, namely external (environmental) and internal (psychological) interactions (Illeris, 2009). The external process

entails the learning environment, society, and object situations, whereas the internal process includes dispositions, life, age, and the subject's situation.

The first dimension of learning is the content dimension. The information or knowledge that is being learned is referred to as content (Illeris, 2009). This content contains the concepts, theories, ideas, facts, and skills required to understand a specific subject or issue. The content dimension of learning is critical because it serves as the foundation for understanding and applying knowledge. This dimension was useful to me as I investigated the information and skills that new teachers had picked up through PLCs, and it was applied to understand their professional development concerning subject matter competence, pedagogical techniques, and other cognitive components of teaching.

The second dimension of learning is what Illeris describes as 'incentive'. This refers to an individual's urge to learn (Illeris, 2009). Incentives can come from both external and internal sources. External incentives may include awards, recognition, or praise, whereas internal motivation may include volition, positive feelings, personal satisfaction, a sense of accomplishment, or a drive for self-improvement. The incentive component of learning is highly significant because it motivates individuals to participate in the learning process and to persevere in the face of obstacles. The innate motivation to improve teaching and learning is an example of the incentive dimension (Calvert, 2016). This intrinsic motivation is a professional learning component that promotes teacher agency.

The third dimension of learning is interaction. This dimension provides the stimuli that activate the learning process (Illeris, 2009). Interaction refers to how individuals engage with the content and with one another during the learning process. Interaction can take numerous forms, including activities, debates, collaboration, feedback, and reflection. The interaction dimension of learning is crucial because it helps individuals to enhance their comprehension of the topic through active involvement and to learn from one another through social interaction (Illeris, 2009). The role that others play in the learning process is significant in the interaction dimension. For instance, according to Lecat et al. (2019), social informal learning could enhance job performance, particularly in knowledge-intensive institutions. Social interactions with co-workers, management, or others can thus be immensely beneficial to teachers.

The three-dimensional learning theory that was discussed above provided the conceptual tools to explain the intricacies of PLC as a social space. This theory assisted me in analysing the ways that PLC spaces enabled collaborative interactions, mentorship, and teamwork to support and enhance the development of novice teachers.

2.7 Chapter Summary

The literature review enabled a deep scholarly gaze into the phenomenon under study as it allowed me to explore the perspectives of the participating ECTs and their developmental requirements. By listening to their debates and discussions, I was provided with a scholarly basis for my study on the role of PLCs in novice teacher learning. The theoretical framework that I had selected for this research also helped me to understand the nature of the learning that ECTs acquired through their early professional experiences with PLCs. In the next chapter, I delve into the chosen methodology for the study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In Chapter two, I presented the key findings that emerged from the literature review and that laid the theoretical groundwork for comprehending the role of PLCs in the personal and professional development of ECTs. I emphasised the challenges that ECTs generally encounter and the role that PLCs play in resolving them. In Chapter three, I discuss the research design and methodology that I employed and I describe how the study was conducted to explore the role of PLCs in the lived experiences of ECTs. I thus pay specific attention to the methodology that I utilised to better understand the role that PLCs played in the personal and professional development of the teachers who participated in the study.

3.2 The Research Approach

I used a qualitative approach based on “a clear methodological tradition of research, whereby researchers build up a complex, holistic framework [to analyse] narratives and observations [and to conduct] the research work in the [chosen] habitat” (Devetak et al., 2010, p. 78). This approach involved acquiring and analysing non-numerical data to understand concepts, viewpoints, and experiences. Unlike the quantitative research approach where researchers rely on statistics and data, the qualitative approach uses an inductive approach to derive explanations that emerge from the data (Thomas, 2006). According to Devetak et al. (2010), this approach consists of basic empirical material that is vocally reported or narrated. Furthermore, the obtained material is perused and evaluated verbally rather than numerically. It is an inductive, constructivist, and interpretative exploratory approach that aims to view the world through the perceptions of participants (Doyle et al., 2020). This approach also allows the researcher to describe and take into consideration the context in which the study is conducted and to emphasise the process rather than merely the final results. This approach is adaptable and facilitates the development of concepts and theories that emerge as conclusions from the research process (Devetak et al., 2010).

This qualitative research was conducted in accordance with the guidelines of the interpretative paradigm as it allowed the examination of individuals’ subjective experiences, thus recognising the value that these individuals attached to particular incidents (Doyle et al.,

2020). The qualitative research approach was therefore appropriate for this study because it aligned with the complex, narrative-driven character of the topic and provided a trustworthy approach to studying the career lives of ECTs. More specifically, the investigation could unpack the role of PLCs in these teachers' personal and professional experiences. The stance that this approach facilitated enabled me to make space for the voices and stories of novice teachers, and it was therefore an excellent platform from which the objectives and aim of the research could be achieved.

3.3 Paradigm

The study was located within the interpretivism paradigm because I wanted to understand teachers' stories of their experiences of PLCs from a subjective viewpoint. According to Alharahsheh and Pius (2020), interpretivism primarily concerns context-specific variables and aspects. It regards humans as being separate from physical phenomena because it allows them to provide great depth and meaning to the notion that human beings cannot be investigated in the same manner that physical phenomena can. This paradigm facilitated explanations and in-depth understandings of how the people I involved in the study made sense of their world and of their specific behaviours. Moreover, it facilitated learning based on authentic experiences rather than on those taught or imposed from beyond (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). I was cognisant of the fact that interpretivism recognises the impact of social and cultural variables on individuals' experiences (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020); hence, I adopted a critical stance as I aimed to capture a range of meanings from the different narratives and experiences of novice teachers who had experienced the influence of PLCs on their professional development. The interpretivist paradigm was ideal for my study as it underscored the multifaceted, subjective, and context-specific nature of my research topic. It allowed me to delve deeper into the narratives and experiences of novice teachers in PLCs while also understanding the significance of social, cultural, and contextual elements in shaping and being shaped by those experiences.

3.4 Methodology

Narrative inquiry refers to "the study of the way human beings experience the world, and its main focus is on subjective experiences of life" (Naidoo et al., 2021, p. 1128). It is a qualitative research methodology that centres on the examination and comprehension of human stories and experiences; thus, humans' stories of their experiences are the foundation of narrative inquiry. This methodology recognises the value of storytelling as a way of

sharing experiences, making sense of the world, and creating individual and societal identities (Naidoo et al., 2021). Webster and Mertova (2007) state that narrative inquiry provides researchers with a rich framework for investigating the ways humans experience the world through stories.

Because stories are moulded by ongoing personal and social narratives, they are always changing in response to new information. Therefore, by listening to and interpreting stories, researchers can understand the lived experiences of others holistically and in all of their complexity and richness (Webster & Mertova, 2007). This means that the temporal idea of experience is illustrated through narratives, and this process acknowledges that people's perceptions of other people and events evolve over time (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Stories can be shared by means of written narratives, memoirs, oral histories, interviews, and diary entries, among others.

By exploring narrative frameworks such as plotlines, turning points, and epiphanies, narrative inquiry explores the intricacies of stories to capture and understand the complicated experiences of humans (Wieslander & Löfgren, 2023). Furthermore, narrative inquiry exposes power dynamics and captures a variety of viewpoints by allowing the researcher to listen to and understand the experiences of many voices. More specifically, by highlighting the individual and group experiences of novice teachers in the current study, this inclusive approach promoted a thorough knowledge of the participants' journeys and experiences of PLCs. Their narratives thus provided in-depth understanding of their everyday experiences that informed their becoming. Moreover, by focusing on the personal career experiences of the participants, this narrative inquiry was most appropriate for studying the complexities the ECTs experienced in the early years of learning how to teach. The process allowed me to unpack their individual experiences, the tensions they negotiated, and their expanding ideas and ways of thinking that were relational to the social context of the school as the study setting.

In essence, understanding how the beginner teachers viewed and negotiated their early professional experiences of learning communities was enabled by narrative inquiry, which recognises and fosters an individual approach (Huber et al., 2013). Additionally, this methodological approach facilitated the elicitation of thick data that emerged from the intricate tapestries woven by the respective narratives. Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) argue

that the process of becoming a teacher is multifaceted and frequently impacted by a number of internal and external forces and variables that create opportunities for ECTs to tell their stories. I could therefore access their stories to understand the complexities of their lives that were entangled with both the human and non-human. Essentially, narrative inquiry assisted me in identifying the constraints, accomplishments, and pivotal times that assisted the participants to develop as more accomplished teachers.

3.5 Data Generation Methods

I had one-on-one meetings with each participant on three different days during the data generation process. We did a memory drawing exercise during the first meeting, and each participant created one drawing. During the second meeting, we conducted an object inquiry, with each participant bringing one object. Lastly, we conducted the unstructured interview during our last session. In the sections below, I discuss each research approach and explain how I used it to evoke stories from early career teachers about/of their experiences as participants in professional learning communities

3.5.1 Memory drawings

Memory drawing is an arts-based research method that may be used in narrative inquiry and serves as a metaphorical mirror to help us comprehend and navigate the future by allowing us to look back at our past experiences (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2019). Such drawings allow people to communicate ideas and emotions that might be hard to put into words. Memory drawings often help to recall forgotten experiences and they bring the past into the present as they facilitate the reliving of memories, feelings, and emotions (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2019).

The memory drawing technique was first introduced to me while I was pursuing my Honours degree. I was asked to sketch a picture of a memorable moment—good or bad—that I had experienced with any of my teachers along my schooling journey. I sketched a picture of a time when I was embarrassed in front of my classmates by my Accountancy teacher's rants. This memory drawing made me realize how this unpleasant experience had shaped the teacher I had become, but ironically in a positive way. I discovered that, because of this bad experience, I was always trying to become a better teacher and that I would never allow any of my learners to go through something as horrible as that. Recalling this event made me realize the significance of a teacher's influence on students' lives, and reflecting on

that drawing inspired me to strive to become a better teacher who would always try to help students retain happy memories of the times in my classroom.

Using the memory drawing method was suitable for my study because these drawings helped me to access implicit knowledge as they provided rich visual data and allowed the participants to express themselves non-verbally (Fan et al., 2023). The participants were asked to recall explicit experiences of learning to teach and of participating in school-based PLCs. They were then tasked to draw a picture that elicited memories of a critical moment, incident, event, or challenge during their participation in a PLC. I could then unpack these memory drawings to generate data as it was a potent instrument for revealing deep and complex insights into the lives of the participants. I could access 'hidden' feelings and information that might not have been revealed in conventional written or spoken stories. However, I was also aware of possible restrictions, such as the participants' concern about their artistic skills which could have prevented them from expressing their ideas cogently. To overcome this, I made sure that they knew that the emphasis was on the significance of their drawings rather than their creative ability. This assurance established a secure, encouraging environment.

3.5.2 Artefact inquiry

During my Honours studies, I completed the 'Teacher Identity and Teacher Change' module, among others. In this course, students were given the opportunity to cultivate self-study and embrace their teacher identities, and this gave me a better grasp of what it means to be self-reflective. I was able to reflect on my life journey by scrutinising objects in a method referred to as 'self-box' (Leitch, 2008). Each time I interacted with an object, I recalled either joyful or sad moments in my life and was filled with nostalgia that connected me to each particular experience. I was so fascinated by the potential of the 'art-box' tool that I decided to employ artefact inquiry in my research.



Figure 3.1: Image of the ‘self-box’ used for my Honours degree

According to Turkle (2007), objects serve as our passionate life companions and help us understand ourselves better. Meaningful artefacts help us map out our social relationships in an ongoing process of identity formation, which adds to an understanding of self (McAdam, 2019). This means that the study of objects can help us get to know ourselves better and forge meaningful connections with others. This notion is supported by Turkle (2007, p. 51), who argues that objects “help us think about number, space, time, causality and life”. Objects that define and represent us are acquired, stored, and lost throughout the course of our lives, and interacting with such artefacts typically prompts us to recollect and tell stories associated with them, and these stories evoke memories on which we then reflect (McAdam, 2019). Reflection and storytelling related to objects then help reveal our feelings, principles, and the significance of these objects in our lives. When I reflected on such significant objects, it added depth to my study and it was a valuable research instrument. Similarly, I asked novice educators to choose and talk about significant artefacts that reflected their experiences of PLCs. I prompted them to choose any one or two objects from either their classrooms or school environments that they used every day, to discuss the reasons for their choices, and to reflect on the happy or sad memories that these objects evoked. They could connect any sentimental significance to the items they selected.

Through artefact inquiry, the participants were able to relate their professional experiences to their physical surroundings as they grounded their reflections in commonplace items. This approach helped me to better comprehend their experiences as they revealed their authentic feelings, professional identities, and object-related stories. It was my ethical responsibility to manage any sensitivity surrounding artefact reflection, especially when a participant recalled sensitive interactions with people. To ensure a respectful inquiry process, I asked the participants to discuss just what they could share comfortably, and I stressed the confidentiality of the narratives they shared and use pseudonyms in this report.

3.5.3 Unstructured interviews

Conducting interviews is a common approach to learn from the stories of individuals as they reveal something about their backgrounds, attitudes, and sentiments of the world as they experienced or experience it (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). The interview method is often used in interpretivist research. I used unstructured interviews because, according to Bertram and Christiansen (2014), in such interviews the interviewer may introduce the subject or main research question at the outset and then give participants free reign to answer as they see fit. The researcher may follow up with some guiding questions as the participant speaks, but generally participants are encouraged to discuss the topic candidly and without interruption (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). Due to its flexibility, this type of interview was ideal for my study. The emergence of unexpected themes and topics was made possible by the unstructured nature of the interviews in which I engaged with the participants.

Each participant was asked one main question during the unstructured interview to learn more about his or her experiences of PLCs. In addition, I posed probing questions that directed and encouraged them to share stories of their perspectives and experiences of professional development during PLC engagements. The main prompt was: “Could you discuss your experiences as a novice teacher of a PLC and how your involvement has impacted your professional growth?”. I also posed additional prompts and questions to ensure that I obtained rich data.

Unstructured interviews are not inherently random or nondirective just because they do not employ pre-formulated questions. One cannot engage in unstructured interviews without thorough preparation if one wants to gain a profound understanding of the lives of individuals (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Heeding this advice, I ensured that I went into the interviews fully prepared and that I was mindful of the objectives of the study. Another factor that I had

to bear in mind was the importance of building rapport with the interviewees. This resulted in honest and forthcoming communication, which is essential when discussing sensitive topics pertaining to identity and professional development (Leslie et al., 2024).

By enabling the participants to freely narrate their experiences, the unstructured interviews elicited crucial viewpoints that enhanced the arts-based data that emerged from the memory drawings and artefact inquiry. I was therefore able to investigate nuanced dimensions of their PLC experiences that would not have been adequately conveyed using fewer or other approaches. Additionally, using these data collection methods elicited unanticipated themes and insights which enhanced the body of data that was collected.

3.6 Selection of Participants

Making decisions regarding which individuals, contexts, events, or behaviours to include in a study is referred to as sampling, and a qualitative researcher must determine the number of individuals, groups, or objects (such as teachers and schools) to be examined (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). Purposive sampling is often employed in qualitative research to identify and select the most valuable data-rich instances in an effort to effectively make the best use of the resources available (Etikan et al., 2016). This requires identifying and selecting people who are competent and informed about a particular topic. Purposive sampling, as opposed to random sampling, may encompass a sample representing a wide spectrum of ages, experiences, and cultures, and usually focuses on individuals who have certain features that are deemed appropriate for the study at hand (Etikan et al., 2016). Therefore, to adequately address the research topic, I used purposive sampling which entailed the deliberate selection of the people I wished to include in the sample (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). This means that I selected a subset of the population that was adequate to elicit the required data. This was a non-probability sampling technique that did not need any underlying principles or a specific number of respondents (Etikan et al., 2016).

The participants I purposively selected were three ECTs who had fewer than five years of teaching experience and who were members of PLCs. Although this sample was small, I was able to make a thorough and comprehensive analysis of their narratives as I had sufficient time to spend with each participant which allowed me to comprehend their viewpoints and experiences. Such a small sample was thus effective in terms of time, money, and labour. To identify and recruit these individuals, I used my personal and professional networks.

I acknowledge that all was not plain sailing as the study was affected by a number of constraints, especially when I recruited the individuals. Initially, it was difficult to find ECTs who were actively involved in PLCs because not all schools had established PLC structures. Secondly, because the participants had restricted availability and demanding teaching schedules, it was challenging to schedule times for the interviews and activities.

3.7 Data Analysis and Interpretation

In a narrative study, data analysis entails piecing together prior events by dissecting parts of field text and examining individual stories to construct a single, cohesive narrative (Polkinghorne, 1994). The narratives of the ECTs that I interviewed served as a key data source and I used narrative analysis to analyse the data. Eatherly and Cronin (2008) state that narrative analysis is a method used to analyse interview data in order to comprehend how and why individuals describe their lives as narratives or a sequence of stories. Narrative analysis allowed me to access the interviewees' experiences, meanings, and views as I examined these narratives' content, structure, and context. Furthermore, narrative analysis enabled me to identify the underlying themes, patterns, and meanings that emerged from these narratives. The data are presented in Chapters four, five, and six. Essentially, I evaluated and interpreted the participants' responses to answer the research questions and I present the data as verbatim excerpts in this dissertation. During the data analysis process, I selected, evaluated, reorganised, and categorised the emerging findings and generated descriptions and explanations to comprehend how the data-derived stories related to objects, drawings, emotions, and ideas related to the participants' contexts and their experiences of PLCs.

Polkinghorne (1995) contends that narrative inquirers can gather event descriptions and use a plot to organise them into a story through the use of the narrative analysis method. I chose narrative plots as the data analysis method as I concentrated on early career teachers and the significant events that had shaped their work experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

To improve the clarity and validity of my data analysis approach, I recognize the need for a more specific description of how narratives were selected and analyzed. Illeris's (2009) three dimensions of learning and narrative plots (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) were employed as analytical instruments for my narrative inquiry-based analysis. The excerpts were chosen based on their significance to the research questions and their portrayal of major themes that

surfaced in the various data sources (memory drawings, object inquiry, and unstructured interviews), not at random. Each narrative excerpt was examined in light of its structure, substance, and the larger background of the participant's experiences. I made sure to maintain a thorough and open approach by seeking critical feedback from significant others in my master's support group to enhance the validity of my analysis and interpretation using the selected theoretical framework.

3.7 Trustworthiness and Believability

It is critical in all research, and especially in interpretivism research, to be credible and trustworthy (Bertram & Christiansen, 2019). I therefore provide detailed descriptions of my participants, discuss the study's background, and acknowledge my responsibilities as a researcher to ensure the validity of my work. This transparency adds to the trustworthiness of my research. Furthermore, by meticulously recording the research methodology that I employed, I ensure the dependability of the findings. I offer a thorough description of the methods I used to gather the data, the criteria used to choose the participants, and I explain any adjustments I made to the research design while the study was underway. This openness makes it possible for other researchers to verify my findings. Scholars of narrative inquiry indicate that conducting an audit trail is a standard procedure in interpretive research (Carcary, 2009). As I conducted my research, I carefully recorded everything I did, particularly how I gathered and analysed the data.

Additionally, I used triangulation to increase the trustworthiness of the study. A rich set of data was obtained by using of a variety of data collection techniques, which is increases the study's credibility. Lastly, I used member-checking to ensure participant confirmation of my interpretations (cite). This entailed presenting my findings to the participants and taking their comments into account to increase the study's validity and rigor, as advised by Loh (2013). Loh (2013) also argues that it is morally correct to give respondents access to their data, to view the conclusions derived from their responses, and the opportunity to voice any opinions.

3.8 Researcher Reflexivity

For this study to be credible and ethically sound, researcher reflexivity was essential, as expressed by Bertram and Christiansen (2019). I critically examined my positional complexity, biases, presumptions, and the possible impact of my role on the data and

participants during the course of the study. I did this by routinely interacting with a critical friend who was a PhD student in the Teacher Development Studies discipline. This friend offered insightful criticisms of my methods and interpretations and I was able to challenge my preconceptions, recognise and fix my blind spots, and keep a balanced viewpoint thanks to these exchanges. This procedure supported the reliability of the results and enhanced the breadth of my study.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

Due to the complex nature of the research procedures that I used, it was important to adhere to all ethical considerations (Arifin, 2018). Therefore, the rights and well-being of the novice teachers were ensured while I also ensured the integrity of the study.

The first principle I considered was autonomy as I was obligated to ensure the autonomy of all those who participated in the study. This means that I needed the voluntary consent of everyone who participated in the study and I had to ensure that they had the right to withdraw at any time without any repercussions (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). The participants were thoroughly informed about the nature of the research, its objectives, potential benefits and risks, as well as their rights (Arifin, 2018).

Non-maleficence was the second ethical consideration. According to Bertram and Christiansen (2014, p. 66), my study should “do no harm to the research participants or to any other people”. Personal information about participants is sometimes made public, and this might have a detrimental impact on them. As a result, the participants had to understand how the data would be released for public review. In principle, this implies that all those who participated were guaranteed that their names would not be attached to any data that they contributed (Phelan & Kinsella, 2013). The identity of the participants and their schools will thus be protected by not revealing actual names but by substituting them with pseudonyms. This will preserve their confidentiality and anonymity.

The third ethical consideration I adhered to was beneficence. This means that the research was beneficial to the participants and will remain so for other researchers and the general public should any be interested in this field (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). I effectively conveyed the possible benefits of the research to the participants and other stakeholders and envisage that the findings will make a valuable contribution to the education profession.

Due to the emotional nature of the investigation and the sensitivity involved when conducting a narrative inquiry and the elicitation of data on the role of PLCs on the lived experiences of novice teachers, I provided my participants with the contact details of a psychologist employed by the UKZN. Also, I obtained informed consent from the Department of Basic Education and a signed gatekeeper's letter from the principal of the high school where the study was conducted. I set up a meeting with the principal to identify myself, go over the objectives and purpose of the study, and obtain his approval. The teacher participants also signed an informed consent form.

The participants' anonymity will be maintained via the following measures:

- I use pseudonyms in this report instead of actual names.
- I use a pseudonym for the school where the study was conducted.
- I saved all the data on password-protected storage devices.
- I assured the participants of their confidentiality and fully explained to them how the data would be handled.
- I made sure the participants were aware of their right to privacy and how their data would be treated before obtaining their informed consent.

Relational ethics highlights the need to treat participants with dignity, consideration, and responsibility, especially in qualitative studies that explore individual experiences (Ellis, 2007). I therefore approached the study participants with sensitivity as I understood that sharing their narratives might entail vulnerability. I gained their trust by being open and honest about the objectives, methods, and ways in which their input could influence the outcomes of the project.

A sensitive awareness of the power dynamics between researcher and subjects was necessary. By providing them with opportunities to review and clarify their contributions, I made sure that the participants felt a sense of ownership of their stories. I took care to accurately portray their voices and I avoided any bias or misunderstanding that would skew their experiences. I also let my participants choose where and when we could meet and made sure they felt secure enough to tell their stories in a safe setting. They thus felt comfortable and opened up when they narrated their experiences. To reduce any potential harm, I was mindful of the emotional response some participants might have during data collection, and I ensured their privacy

during our meetings at the school.

3.9 Limitations of the Study

Although narrative inquiry offers valuable insights into individual experiences, it has some drawbacks. Among these are the possibility of subjectivity in interpretation, the difficulty of preserving researcher reflexivity, and the problem of extrapolating results outside the particular narratives under study (Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022). I addressed these limitations by maintaining reflexivity at every stage of the investigation and continuously considered my role, prejudices, and impact while interpreting the data. I maintained the integrity of the participants' stories by using their direct words in this report, as proposed by Eldh et al. (2020). Closely matching my interpretations with their experiences was necessary to make sure that the narratives represented their voices. Moreover, I triangulated the data of the memory drawings, artefact inquiry, and unstructured interviews, and this created a comprehensive and nuanced picture of their experiences, as advised by Bertram and Christiansen (2014). By utilising this methodology, I was able to address the research questions thoroughly while guaranteeing that the results accurately reflected the viewpoints of the participants.

Given that the research was conducted using novice teachers from a selected South African public school, the results may vary should a similar study be conducted in another school. The functioning of PLCs in other locations may be impacted by social, institutional, and policy variations that may restrict the applicability of the insights gained in this study to other educational contexts. Therefore, I highlight the context-specific character of this study and emphasise that the results are indicative of the unique institutional, social, and policy environment of the selected school in South Africa. However, the rich, contextual data that this dissertation provides may encourage or appeal to policymakers and teachers in other contexts who are faced with comparable issues.

A notable problem I encountered was that it was difficult to find participants who met my inclusion requirements. A potential participant withdrew from the study just before the data generation process and needed to be replaced on short notice. To overcome the difficulty of finding participants who met the inclusion requirements, I networked by contacting colleagues, school leaders, and teacher associations to find novice educators who were actively participating in PLCs. I carefully explained the study's objectives to potential

participants and highlighted that their involvement could enhance PLCs and aid in the development of ECTs. This process facilitated the recruitment of suitable participants.

I recognize that there may be bias in my study because I am an ECT at the same school as my participants. As an insider researcher, my familiarity with the school setting and shared experiences with participants may have impacted how I evaluated narratives and selected data excerpts. I did, however, take a number of measures to lessen the limitations and improve the validity and plausibility of my results. First and foremost, I critically examined my positionality and any biases throughout the study process to maintain a reflexive approach. In order to guarantee triangulation and offer a thorough understanding of participants' experiences outside of my own viewpoints, I also used a variety of data sources, including memory drawings, object inquiry, and unstructured interviews. Furthermore, I engaged with relevant literature to critically assess my findings, challenging any preconceived notions and ensuring that my judgments were based on proven theories and scientific data rather than personal opinions. By using these methods, I aimed to honour the validity and trustworthiness of the different research processes while also recognizing the complexities associated with insider research.

3.10 Chapter Summary

Chapter three elucidated the research methodology that was employed and I discussed the suitability of the qualitative, interpretivist approach for the purpose of this research. I explained that narrative inquiry had been selected to investigate the role of PLCs in the professional lives of ECTs. The chapter covered the participant selection technique as well as the data generation techniques (memory drawings, artefact inquiry, and unstructured interviews). I also discussed the data analysis methodology, trustworthiness measures, ethical concerns, and study limitations, and stressed the significance of upholding participant anonymity and ethical integrity at every stage of the research process. I alluded to my awareness that narrative inquiry would necessitate a deep connection with individuals and their narratives as stories offer deep, complex insights into people's lived experiences. I also explained that I understood the need for respectful engagement with the context and individual viewpoints to comprehend the intricacies of the participants' experiences.

The discussion of the methodology illuminated my understanding of the dynamic processes that would be required to engage in qualitative research. I explained that I needed to identify

emergent themes and overcome unforeseen obstacles that would need reflexivity and flexibility. This chapter brought to light my ethical obligation to balance my interpretive position as a researcher with the genuine representation of my participants' voices, and I acknowledged my obligation to maintain sensitive in my efforts to use narrative techniques to highlight the human aspects of ECTs' professional growth.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE EARLY CAREER TEACHERS' NARRATIVES

4.1 Introduction

In Chapter three, I outlined the research design and methodology and described the narrative inquiry approach and the data collection methods in some detail. I explained that I had used memory drawings, object inquiry, and unstructured interviews as the data collection tools. Chapter four expands on the methodological approaches by presenting the participants' narratives to elicit insight into their professional and personal growth via the prism of their lived experiences. In this chapter, the data are presented, analysed, and interpreted in response to the first research question: "*What are ECTs' narratives of their professional experiences?*"

This research question zoomed in on the everyday experiences of the participating ECTs who were members of PLCs. I selected narrative plots to focus on the critical incidents that had shaped their professional experiences in the early years of their careers (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Ikpuri & Peter, 2024). Illeris's (2009) three dimensions of learning framework served as a guide for explaining the narratives generated from the novice teachers to address the research questions. The three learning dimensions proposed by Illeris (2009) provided me with a helpful framework for understanding the intricacies of the professional learning processes that had shaped the in ECTs' development driven by PLCs. The concepts content, incentive and interaction assisted me to unpack the narratives and to understand how the early career teachers had grown both personally and professionally.

According to Illeris (2009), content (the information or knowledge that is being learned), incentive (an individual's urge to learn), and interaction (how individuals engage with the content and with one another during the learning process) should all be taken into account in the quest to understand learning because they are all related and equally important.

Furthermore, the framework emphasises that social interaction (interactions with others and contextual variables), emotional experiences (emotions and incentives), and cognitive processes (learning new information and abilities) are drivers of meaningful learning experiences. My role in this chapter is that of a researcher and narrator as I explore and explain the stories of my participants. I present data that were generated from three different

research tools, namely unstructured interviews, object inquiry, and memory drawings to unpack the narratives. The chapter is divided into three sections. Section A is composed of the narratives of Mr Ross, Section B is composed of the narratives of Ms Priya, and Section C is composed of the narratives of Mr Carson. The selected excerpts that I draw on to address research question one focus on the everyday encounters and situations these ECTs faced and they expose how they developed the capacity to improve and grow personally and professionally.

4.2 Section A: Mr Ross's narratives

To explore Mr Ross's experiences and the manner in which he negotiated his development as an early career teacher, I selected four snapshots of his narratives to highlight the particular issues and challenges that he had shared with me. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) propose that such experiences can be analysed to better understand growth and becoming. As the researcher, I developed themes to represent these experiences. These themes are: Feeling intimidated; Gendered relationships of care, Mr Ross as a respected and hard-working role model; and Forging connections and navigating conflict in the PLC.

4.2.1 Biographical details

According to Fantilli and McDougall (2009), 'intimidation' describes the difficulties and demands that new teachers encounter in their early years, and such challenges can impede their ability to advance professionally as well as their readiness to ask for help.

Mr. Ross was a 24-year-old novice teacher at the time of the study. He had begun his teaching career at the beginning of 2023 and had been teaching for just under two years when the study was conducted. He taught at Pearson High,¹ which is a quintile 5 girls' high school in the Umlazi district. This was the first and only school where Mr Ross had taught after graduating with a Bachelor of Education degree and a Bachelor of Education Honours degree in 2023. He was qualified as a FET Physical Science and Geography teacher; however, as a first-year teacher he taught Physical Science and Mathematics (Grade 8 Mathematics, Grade 9 Mathematics, and Grade 10 Physical Sciences).

¹ Pseudonyms are used for the school and all persons referred to in the field work.

4.2.2 Feeling intimidated

As a novice teacher, Mr Ross had numerous difficulties in the classroom. He felt stressed and uncertain because of his demanding schedule, his inability to maintain classroom order, and his lack of confidence to teach maths as he had not specialised in this subject. Gagen and Bowie (2005) concur that early career teachers often experience numerous challenges in their initial years and therefore need assistance.

According to Mr. Ross, one of the biggest challenges in his first few months was lesson planning. He learned the content he had to teach every day by staying up into the early hours of the morning. He then had to figure out the best way to teach the material so that students would grasp it. Moreover, he had to locate the best resources that would work for both himself and his students:

When I first started teaching, I didn't enjoy teaching because it was very overwhelming. There was a lot to do. I think you don't know the demands until you're actually in the classroom. University doesn't really prep you for what to expect in the classroom. You have issues with learner discipline. You have issues with the different levels of learners academically, and trying to teach learners who had such a short attention span was a struggle. I struggled to come down to their level and deal with this content I was unsure about, and how to teach it.... If I could describe one aspect of it, it's when it comes to lesson prepping. When I first started, lesson prepping was very difficult for me. Every day I used to stay up until like 11 or 12 o'clock at night, just doing prep because I knew that for every class that I had to see, I needed to feel confident and prepared. So, the only way for me to feel confident was to prep. So, these preps used to take a lot longer for me. Because I wanted my lessons to go perfectly, I made sure I went the extra mile with my preparation. I made sure I covered any questions that they could ask me. So, those preps were very stressful.

The above excerpt emphasises Mr Ross's initial feeling of being intimidated as a Mathematics and Physical Science early career teacher. He was also challenged by the uncertainties he experienced in the school where he was posted. Fantilli and McDougall (2009) state that, because novice teachers are exposed to the same expectations as seasoned educators, they frequently feel that the demands on them are intimidating. ECTs may find themselves in challenging circumstances and many struggle to adapt because they lack support and expertise. Mr Ross's expressions of fear and his acknowledgement of his lack of

expertise to negotiate the classroom context testify to this. Intimidation and uncertainty represent a serious threat to a novice teacher's emotional health and professional confidence. Therefore, the incentive (Illeris, 2009) for Mr Ross to do rigorous lesson planning and preparation was initially motivated by emotional pressure and a sense of fear. Developing understanding of the subject content was a way to conquer his classroom challenges and grow in confidence. This attitudinal drive underpinned Mr Ross's early professional learning experiences.

4.2.3 Gendered relationships: The need to set personal-professional boundaries

According to Gosse (2011), there is a belief that male teachers should play a less nurturing role than their female counterparts. This implies that male teachers are viewed as less suited to work with children as they might be accused of acting inappropriately, particularly in the school environment (Gosse, 2011). Mr Ross's innocent encounter with a grade 8 girl who was infatuated with him was a significant learning experience during his first year of teaching. He told the story of a learner who was so infatuated with him that she would bring him drawings and letters. At first, he perceived these gestures as innocent, but eventually he realised that her behaviour had become inappropriate. As Mr Ross lacked experience in such matters, he initially did not view this as a matter of concern. This student did not have a father and Mr Ross didn't see any harm in the conversations he had with her and the endearing letters and objects she and other students gave him. Gosse (2011, p. 9) states: "Male teachers may act as role models for both boys and girls who are lacking them at home and in their larger communities". Similarly, Mr Ross felt a sense of empathy for the learner as he could relate her need to his experience of the loss of his father when he was 21 years old. However, he was quite concerned when he received a letter with indecent content. He described this experience as follows in the vignette below:

I did feel bad listening to her stories. She was a grade eight pupil, so this was not something that I was used to. Obviously, it was the first time I taught in a school. At university, we learned that learners come with certain experiences and traumas, and we need to be sensitive about it and respect that. So, I didn't think anything of it. I never discouraged her from coming to me, although our school has strict rules and policies. We always get told that when it comes to personal issues and learners sharing things with us, we should not entertain it because we are not the guidance counsellors of the school. We are just teachers. So, when learners come with certain

issues, we are supposed to advise them to go see the guidance counsellor. But this was a little girl who had just entered high school, and I felt bad about turning away a child. I never saw anything wrong until the day she handed me an inappropriate letter. This made me feel uncomfortable and question if my support all this time had led to this inappropriate act. I was just trying to be sensitive to her and I didn't have the heart to discourage her from sharing. Now, at this point, I was unsure how to handle the situation. I needed to tell someone about it.

My PLC offered me the space and support with this dilemma I faced. In 2024, I ended up taking her class for Mathematics. So, it was a bit different. They advised me on how to manage teacher-learner relationships and how to safeguard ourselves as teachers. Okay, so, because we are males, when a learner wants to have a support session or individual help during breaks, they (the PLC) told me that a learner should not come alone. Learners must come in groups of two or more if they want help. This is because male teachers and students cannot be alone in a room. This is to safeguard teachers and learners as well. The other issue is that sometimes learners start rumours. Fake rumours about teachers and students can be harmful. But now, when it came to this girl, it wasn't any math help or math related. She just wanted to come to talk to me. Luckily, another teacher from my PLC suggested that if this learner needed help regarding work, then I had to send her to her instead. She was a female. So, I was very grateful for that.

The above snapshot highlights the emotional struggle Mr Ross encountered as an early career teacher in an all-girls' school. The literature stated that the issue of managing girl learners with emotional and personal problems is real, but without the necessary knowledge and expertise to counsel and support learners with emotional and psychological problems, early career male teachers may find themselves in a dilemma (Fransson & Grannas, 2013). These authors aver that traditional ways of looking at such dilemmas may no longer apply, as specific situations occur in which people need to react according to values, obligations, or commitments and, in such situations, there is often no easy way to respond.

As an early career teacher, Mr Ross's choice to support his learners in the all-girls' school where he taught with understanding and care was challenging. In this context, it is pertinent to understand that traditional and conservative approaches continue to shape how male teachers should support their learners, particularly as girl students may misinterpret male

teachers' attention and their intention to care for and support them. Therefore, when Mr Ross found supportive and more experienced colleagues in the PLC and the guidance counsellor, he was enabled to employ appropriate measures to deal with teacher-learner relationship challenges. Although Mr Ross had initially seen himself as a 'father-figure', which was a responsibility he had taken on in his family after the passing of his dad, he was advised to set and adhere to professional boundaries. The PLC member who volunteered to help the troublesome student was a way to provide the support the learner needed.

According to Mr Ross, this event highlighted the complexities of being a male teacher at an all-girls' school and how inadequately prepared he felt as a first-time teacher to negotiate teacher-student relationships. Understanding the school culture and routine practices was important, and he was able to learn this from more seasoned educators, even if this learning was in tension with his former values and perspectives. Schools are critical sites for reproducing gender stereotypes and gendered constructions of girl learners, and Mr Ross had to learn this the hard way.

4.2.4 Becoming a respected role model

In 2024, Mr Ross was given his first form class to teach. In this context, a form class is a group of learners assigned to a certain teacher who serves as their form teacher for the year and marks their register on a daily basis. Initially, he embraced the traditional understanding that he should be a strict teacher, particularly as he was male. According to Richmond et al. (2020), most novice teachers adopt a strict teacher persona in order to maintain classroom discipline as they feel overburdened by their multiple responsibilities. Thus, the initial role that Mr Ross adopted as a form teacher was that of a strict, cold teacher who wanted this class to fear him, thus avoid any problems. He highlighted this approach in the excerpt below:

During my first week with them, I was very strict with this new class. I didn't tolerate any nonsense or any noise. I wanted to set my tone from day one. During our first day together, I went over the entire school code of conduct. I wanted my class to know what I expected from them and how they should behave. I definitely scared them that week.

Becoming a non-traditional teacher was not something Mr Ross considered at first. However, his personal experiences as an older sibling to his sister had been a powerful force that had shaped his nurturing persona. According to Rodgers and Scott (2008), personal relationships

can have a positive or negative effect on teachers' professional lives, depending on their values and beliefs.

However, through his engagement with members of his PLC who were also form teachers, his awareness that being a form teacher was an important, complex role and that he did not need to be so strict all the time was deepened. He needed to be a positive role model for his learners and not someone who had to be feared (Lumpkin, 2008). Heeding this advice, over time his confidence and ideas shifted and he grew fond of his class and became much warmer towards them. In turn, Mr Ross's class grew very fond of him and they treated him with a great deal of respect. On Mr Ross's birthday, his form class gave him a file which included letters from every learner. They verbalised their appreciation and praised him for the positive impact he had on them. He stated that this file was something that he would always hold dear as it reminded him of the impact that he had on learners:

This year, I was really surprised on my birthday because they got me this file. The title of this file was: "Best wishes from your first form class. Happy birthday". This file is something that I hold very dear to me. I think I will hold it dear for the rest of my teaching career. In this file, every single pocket has a letter from each learner in my class, and it's all little messages from each and every one of them, wishing me happy birthday but also telling me what I mean to them and the influence I have on them. The file made me really happy, really emotional, because I didn't realize the influence that I as a teacher could have on these learners, and the messages were really touching. Looking at the first letter in this file, the cover says "Happy birthday, Mr Ross slash Dad". And it's weird because when they first came to school, I told them that in school your teachers are your teachers. We're not here to be your dad. We're not here to be your brothers or sisters. But, somehow, we still end up taking on this parental role. One of the messages from a student was the following: "Dear Sir, you remind me so much of my dad. It gives me so much joy to wish you a very happy birthday and a joyous birthday".



Figure 4.1: Good wishes from Mr Ross’s learners

One of the things that stood out was the perception that my class had formed of me. They spoke about my involvement in nurturing them and settling them into high school. Some of the things I did went against the traditional, strict roles...such as baking cupcakes for them on special occasions. I also gave them motivational talks on a regular basis, and I enjoyed joking with them and making them laugh. Also, I was surprised that they had noticed I was studying for a post grad degree whilst being their teacher and they began sharing what they wanted to study when they finish school. I think my hard work was one of the reasons they built a lot of respect for me.

Mr. Ross emphasised the emotional dimension of being a teacher. This is in line with Rogers, Nielson and Santos (2021), who highlight that male teachers can and do offer emotional support by adopting a protective fatherly position to assist students with their emotional and social needs. The learners’ acknowledged him as a caring and supportive teacher and their empathy was enhanced by their awareness that he was also a ‘learner’ as he was engaged in postgraduate studies and this inspired them to perform well academically. The cultivation of mutual respect between Mr Ross and his learners forged healthy relationships, academic excellence, and responsible behaviour. However, forming respectful and supportive teacher-learner relationships is a complex process that requires the breaking down of traditional

barriers that create false binaries. In this context, it has been argued that the emotional and academic dimensions of support and care are central to the experiences of ECTs (Le Cornu, 2013). Not only did Mr Ross have an influence on his all-girl form class, but they had a significant influence on his psychological and personal well-being.

When considering interaction as a dimension of learning (Illeris, 2009), it is evident that Mr. Ross embraced interaction to develop as a teacher. By developing deep connections with his students and giving them direction based on the support and care his colleagues in the PLC provided, Mr Ross became more confident and was able to reconstruct his role as a teacher. He went from being an overbearing authority figure to a compassionate teacher, and this stance promoted both parties' emotional development and academic/professional performance.

4.2.5 Forging connections and navigating conflict in a PLC

Teachers' identities, beliefs, and behaviours are shaped by, among others, their professional relationships, and supportive relationships are crucial for today's ECTs (McEvoy et al., 2019). According to Mr Ross, the professional relationships he forged as a new teacher enhanced his growth as they increased his confidence and ability to improve his practice:

The biggest takeaway from my PLC is the relationships that I developed with other teachers. Personally, I am a very introverted person. I do not like asking for help. That's just how my personality is. But what changed about me through my participation [in PLCs] is that I started engaging a lot. Firstly, I started building relationships with all the other teachers in my department. And through this, through these relationships, what came was collaborative learning. I began to learn a lot from the experienced teachers, and I was being mentored by the more experienced teachers. They always told me that anything I needed, any support I needed, they were there to mentor me, so I was very grateful for that. And whenever I had any questions or needed any clarity or support, I felt very welcome, and they were very approachable. Anything I needed. I could go to them and we could sit for long periods of time discussing school matters. We all had the same focus, which was improving student outcomes.

Mr Ross highlighted that forming relationships with seasoned educators and receiving mentoring from them were beneficial for his development. He argued that he had been guided

and supported that that this had enhanced his teaching and classroom management skills. This finding is consistent with what Bascia (2014) argues, which is that constructive and collaborative relationships among teachers are necessary for PLCs to be successful. The professional support and guidance that Mr Ross found provided incentives for him to build positive relationships with his colleagues as part of his early professional development. However, working with unsupportive and toxic co-workers who continually silence early career teachers can cause emotional discomfort, as Kelly et al. (2019) testify. Mr Ross had to contend with such a colleague:

For example, we both teach grade 9 Mathematics. Now, my classes happen to be doing better than her classes. And when she sees this, she always says it's because I was given better classes and she was given a weak class. However, obviously, this is not the case. The other issue is that she talks to us very rudely. And this is in front of students. She's much older than us, she's close to retirement, so she views us as young people like we're inferior, but that's still no way to talk to your fellow colleagues.

The narrative above exposes a critical issue that Mr Ross had to deal with in the PLC as he referred to the complexity of forging professional relationships as a beginner teacher. The excerpt highlights how, as younger co-workers, he and colleagues like him felt vulnerable when senior staff members' attitude and behaviours negatively impacted their early professional learning experiences, particularly in a PLC where cooperation, support, and professional development should have been key foci (Bascia, 2014). In a professional environment, the kind of behaviour Mr Ross referred to can impede teamwork, good communication, and the PLC's overall productivity. Notwithstanding the difficulties, Mr Ross underlined how crucial it was for him and others to preserve cordial working relationships and to use the PLC as an environment where collaboration and respect were paramount.

4.2.6 Synthesis of Section A

In conclusion, Mr Ross's stories demonstrate the intricate and diverse nature of ECTs' growth. His early work experiences included negotiating teacher-student relationships, developing a connection with his first-form class, and overcoming conflict and professional relationship challenges. His experiences included stressful lesson preparation and other challenging hurdles that he as an ECT had to overcome. His involvement in a PLC was essential to this journey as it provided direction and gave him a sense of community. His stories also highlight the fact that, despite their potential for transformation, PLCs are not

without problems. However, by means of resilience and selective collaboration, Mr Ross discovered methods to optimise his development and establish the groundwork for his ongoing advancement as a teacher.

4.3 Section B: Ms Priya's narratives

In this section, I present five narrative snapshots to highlight the critical incidents and experiences that Ms Priya negotiated in her classroom as an early career teacher.

The themes that emerged are: Nurturing unity in a divided class; Learning the value of emotional support; Transitioning is complex; and “Better than expected”.

4.3.1 Biographical details

At the time of the study, Ms Priya was a 25-year-old female novice teacher who taught at Pearson High, which was the second school of her career. She had previously worked at another all-girls' high school for three months after completing her degree. Ms Priya completed a Bachelor of Education degree majoring in Life Sciences (FET phase), and Mathematics and Technology (senior phase). She also held a Bachelor of Education Honours degree with Educational Psychology as her major. She had started her teaching career in the middle of 2022 and she had been teaching for two and half years by the time she participated in the study. Her experience included grade 8 and 9 Natural Sciences, grade 10 and 11 Life Sciences, grade 8 to 11 Mathematics, and grade 10 Mathematical Literacy. She was a member of a Mathematics PLC.

4.3.2 Forging unity in a divided class

ECTs frequently face complicated interactions in dynamic classroom settings that test their pedagogical knowledge and flexibility. According to Toom and Husu (2021), such challenges can transcend to worthwhile change for personal and professional development.

I chose the narrative snapshot below because it captures the prevailing problem of navigating divided and diverse classrooms, which was a problem that Ms Priya had to face as a novice teacher:

So, this class was my form class. I picked them up at grade 8 level. I think it was term three and, yeah, ...they were seen as a very troublesome class. Lots of behaviour issues, always being followed up with regard to discipline, that kind of thing. But I think the major issue when I did take them, I noticed, was they were in no way a

bonded form class. So, they all had issues with each other. They would pick on each other about the smallest of things, and there was absolutely no unity. They either had issues at home, broken homes, an absent parent, a deceased parent, or kids that were being abused...physically abused or sexually abused. So, obviously, having known that, I realized that these kids obviously didn't intend to react the way they did. They just needed some kind of love. They needed to feel seen and heard.

The above excerpt illustrates the complexities of diverse classrooms that are inhabited by learners who each bring with them different personal experiences of family, communities, cultural practices, beliefs, and values (Toom & Husu, 2021). This troublesome class made Ms Priya feel completely overwhelmed, and she sought assistance from members of her PLC. Following her PLC colleagues' advice, she learned to be understanding of her students' backgrounds, to show compassion, and to resolve conflicts in private rather than in public. This was a significant step in her personal development, and she underlined how important it was for her to understand children's backgrounds and offer emotional support.

Students can become more self-assured, safe, and empowered in the classroom if they develop resilient and compassionate relationships with their teachers (Zheng, 2022). Additionally, good teacher-learner relationships help learners to build favourable relationships with their classmates (Zheng, 2022). When Ms Priya began showing compassion toward learners who did not feel a sense of acknowledgement and belonging as they did not receive care at home, the relationships and care within the class began to improve. She recalled this process as follows:

This was done around February, so this was done under the pretence of, let's have a class Valentine's Day, that kind of thing. So that's why the heart and the whole pink background...yes, that was in February. This canvas [pointing at a poster] was made by my form class. It was a class activity that I initiated. I wanted to do something creative with them as that way they would be excited about it, and my goal was to make them work together and bond during the activity. So, basically, it was to bring a sense of unity amongst the learners in my class. It's a heart [image on the poster] that's filled with all their fingerprints. So, it was their way of showing they were bonded; they had made their mark. They could exist together in a good, loving environment. That was the whole point behind this.

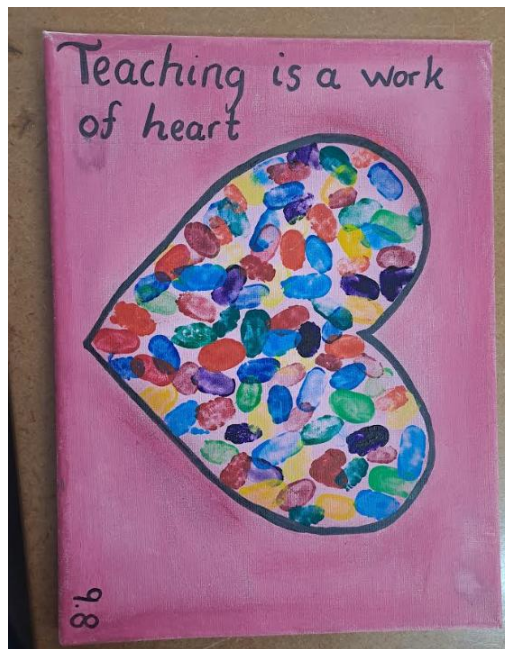


Figure 4.2: Poster reflecting learners' perception of bonding

Ms Priya creatively titled this poster: 'Teaching is a work of heart'. This title emerged from an art-based activity that she conducted with her diverse group of learners. This object is a canvas with the thumbprints of every student in her form class inside a heart, which was a way for each learner to feel acknowledged, visible, and present. She acknowledged how this tangible act of creative collaboration opened up a space to promote a sense of connectedness despite the learners' differences. Ms Priya recognised that "*all can exist together*" if she was able to create "*a good, loving environment*" (Ms Priya, personal communication, 2024).

As an early career teacher, Ms Priya understood that the classroom was a complex space, but by creating a positive classroom climate she allowed her learners to forge healthy relationships and adopt a collaborative learning space. According to Ikpuri and Peter (2024), moving beyond just teaching and being a deliverer of content is an important incentive to become a different, more positive and effective kind of teacher.

4.3.3 Becoming more than a 'traditional' teacher

To become an effective and compassionate teacher, Ms Priya resolved to be more than just a source of information and knowledge. She related this resolve as follows:

Because I didn't teach them, the only time I did see them was during registration, and so I would try and use those times to develop them and assist them and move past their differences. That's just one of the activities that we did. So, during morning

registration, when we did have time, I would try to do small activities like this, just to help them bring out the better side of them. And so, I think besides the teaching aspect, on a personal level, I sort of developed into a mentor and to be this sister, mother figure for them, because a lot of them didn't have that from where they were coming. I think that was the major changing point for them, because once they received that attention and affection, it ultimately improved everything else. Their behaviour, their academics...it was a ripple effect that had to start somewhere.

The above excerpt highlights Ms Priya's awareness of the multiple responsibilities she had as a novice teacher. Fantilli and McDougall (2009) argue that learning to be a mentor and encouraging creative, collaborative experiences with care and joy are critical for improving learning and introducing new ways of being and acting in the world. Ms Priya's resilience and her knowledge of the value of providing emotional support are symbolised by this canvas (Figure 4.2) on the wall in the back of her classroom. According to Ms Priya, PLC sessions entailed discussing classroom concerns and reassuring members that issues were not unique. Different approaches to problem-solving were provided by experienced PLC teachers, which aided in analysing problems and finding resolutions. Illeris (2009) highlights that the dimension of interaction focuses on the social setting and interactions there that facilitate teacher learning. This dimension highlights how the learning process is shaped by elements such as friendship, social experiences, and teamwork. According to Ms Priya's story, the ideas she developed due to the advice of PLC members motivated the creative and other activities she introduced to encourage healthy social relationships and a positive classroom atmosphere.

4.3.4 Embracing the value of emotional support

Teachers frequently serve as trusted individuals for pupils who are experiencing emotional stress. However, for some teachers this role may result in secondary traumatic stress disorder and psychological strain (Ormiston et al., 2022). Ms Priya referred to the psychological toll her role of teacher imposed on her when she became the confidante of learners who dealt with troubling issues like abuse, mental health disorders, and a lack of support. She discussed situations when she herself felt vulnerable, such as when she helped a learner who had been diagnosed with depression and anxiety and when she attended to a learner who then opened up about sexual assault. She narrated these experiences as follows:

Okay, so one of the things I struggled with most as a new teacher was learning to adapt to learner-related issues and assist them. So, a lot of the times learners look to you for guidance, especially as a new or young teacher. They build this perception that you will understand and relate to them more than others would. So, I had quite a few instances when learners would come to me and share their personal problems, which obviously I did not mind, but I realized that it put a lot of pressure on me, because I realized that a lot of times I couldn't help them, and instinctively, that's the first thing you want to do when someone shares a problem with you, especially when it's a young kid. So, one of those situations was when a learner came to school a bit late, and I took her outside because I could see she was not looking herself. After just keeping her outside, she started to cry. And obviously, as a teacher, you don't push boundaries, so you don't ask questions unless the child is ready to speak. So, after a while, she expressed how upset she was and how she felt victimized by a parent because she was being assaulted sexually at home. It wasn't as extreme as what she thought sexual assault was and she never tried to speak to anyone. But it had built up to the point where she knew it was wrong and that she needed to seek help. So, I had to reach out to teachers who she felt comfortable with and who had access to external help that we could tell this child about to get her the help that she needed.

Ms Priya's experience demonstrated how teachers frequently take on the role of guidance counsellors and caregivers. Being seen as a trustworthy person places a teacher in a space where emotional support must be given and where a learner can be comforted. The development of openness and trust in teacher-learner relationships is complex and risky as students who are encouraged to feel comfortable and safe while asking teachers for help in this setting may often relapse and blame the teacher for their situation (Zheng, 2022). Teachers often face unique difficulties due to this additional responsibility, as they have to strike a balance between professional boundaries and sensitivity while attempting to help students access outside resources and support (Lindqvist, 2019). Ms Priya's story brought to light the value of establishing trustworthy, caring environments where students feel valued and supported as well as the need for teacher professional support spaces where early career teachers can share their everyday situations and discuss their ideas or traumatic and challenging experiences.

The literature highlights the need for teachers, and especially ECTs, to open up their thinking and to understand their roles beyond merely that of delivering content knowledge (Cotter, 2019). Adopting new ideas to negotiate the complexities of schooling can be facilitated by PLC members who assist ECTs to improve their ability to handle their everyday challenges and to enhance their classroom skills (Cotter, 2019).

4.3.5 Transitioning from student teacher to professional educator

Novice teachers encounter various difficulties when they transition to the school setting because they must adjust to learner demographics, teaching philosophies, the school culture, and burdensome administrative processes (McCormack et al., 2006). Their effectiveness as teachers and their professional identity may be influenced by their ability or inability to cope with this process.

As ECT, Ms Priya taught at two different schools in the first two years as a qualified teacher. She described the difficulties of transitioning from Ambretal High to Pearson High in 2022. Having transitioned between schools, she was confronted with varying approaches to staff dynamics, administrative duties, student engagement, and school culture in general. Strict administrative standards, a hands-on approach to multiple teaching tasks, and mandated involvement in committees and extracurricular activities had all been emphasised at her former school. Her present school, on the other hand, provided better departmental support and assistance, more efficient administrative procedures, and optional extracurricular participation. The following is a snapshot of these experiences:

In my experience, adapting to school requires a lot of time and effort, because the dynamics of each school are different, especially if you are transitioning between schools. For me, I was in a school where things were done a bit differently. One of those things was that everyone had to be part of a committee for the betterment of the school, and at the school I am currently, that is completely optional. So, you aren't compelled to participate in after-school activities, sporting activities, or weekend or fundraising activities, and it has been a big change for me. Another thing I noticed was the social economic background of the learners. My previous school was a lower socioeconomic kind of school.

Ms Priya recalled a critical encounter with some learners:

One of the things I recall is I was teaching a lesson. This was an Natural Sciences lesson. I had already taught this particular section at my previous school, and when I joined this new school, they were a little bit back on content, so I had to re-teach this topic. We spoke about mechanical ways to maintain plantations. At my previous school to make it relevant for those learners, we spoke about them helping their parents or grandparents to pull out the weeds from the garden or from where they planted their food. And when I started using this kind of example at my current school, I was quickly met with responses such as: “Why would they be helping?” and “Why would they be in the garden? They can just have a garden guy or hire someone to do it”. And being a new teacher, I realized, okay, I have to really understand the kids that I'm working with to make things relevant for them.

Ms Priya's experience emphasises the importance of recognizing each school's specific socioeconomic and cultural context and to understand how these aspects influence learners' understanding and engagement. Her insight emphasises how important it is for teachers to modify their methods and examples to fit the real-world experiences of learners in order to make teaching relevant and relatable. This illustrates the wider understanding that adaptability, cultural sensitivity, continuous learning, and an environment-adjustment process are necessary for effective teaching.

In this process, being accountable is key, which is a factor that Ms Priya also shared:

At my former school, we were not expected to capture our own marks on SASAMS, because it was an HOD's job or that of the educator who did the media work. The same applied to setting out work and printing. At my school right now, we simply fill in a little page stating what needs to be printed, how many copies, etc., and then it's done, and we pick it up. At my previous school, we had to sort of be more involved in that whole dynamic.

Collegiality and care are imperatives that Ms Priya also highlighted:

I think the relationships we had within our departments were also a bit different. Here, [at Pearson High], we are so close that it really helps the entire teaching process as well as the adapting, because they were able to help me transition and understand how the school is run and what needs to be done; what is allowed, not allowed, in terms of everything from admin, to teacher conduct, to lessons, to

activities within the school. So that was extremely helpful in adapting to being out of school and especially the transition between schools.

Induction and mentoring to support the transitioning of novice teachers into a new school culture are highlighted in the above excerpts. These opportunities foster collegiality and care and ensure positive professional experiences by ECTs. Ingersoll and Strong (2011) highlight the importance of thorough induction and mentorship programs to promote collegiality, facilitate the transition into a new school culture, and lower attrition among ECTs. Along with promoting professional development, such support systems also help ECTs to feel emotionally well and to embrace a sense of community and shared accountability within the school.

Supporting teachers as professionals who need time to better serve the needs of their learners is a valuable step in ECTs' professional development. Not being overwhelmed with administrative work enables early career teachers to focus on their new teaching communities and learning, and this enables them to embrace diversity within the school culture and to adopt sound teaching practices. Such opportunities offered Ms Priya the time and space to re-evaluate and modify her teaching style and ideas in situated and meaningful ways. Moreover, feeling a sense of belonging through collegial support gives ECTs the professional and emotional support they require to develop new and different perspectives, ideas, and contextually relevant approaches to negotiate the complexities and cultural forces shaping their teaching lives and work (Schuck et al., 2018). The interaction Ms Priya highlighted emphasises the social component of early professional learning experiences, as posited by Illeris (2009). Through meaningful interaction, collegial relationships can assist in negotiating the contextual forces that impact the acquisition of knowledge and teachers' personal development.

4.3.6 Finding PLCs “*Better than expected*”

Ms Priya sketched a memory of an incident she recalled while she reflected on her early career experiences and the role the PLC played in her learning. Entitling this sketch "*Better than Expected*", she highlighted a special memory of her very first PLC meeting.

Memory drawings, according to Weber (2008), provide access to implicit knowledge that could otherwise go unnoticed, while Samaras (2011) avers that drawings and other creative techniques promote in-depth self-reflection. Hence, we can revisit prior experiences, think

back on them, and analyse how they have influenced our professional and personal growth through memory work.

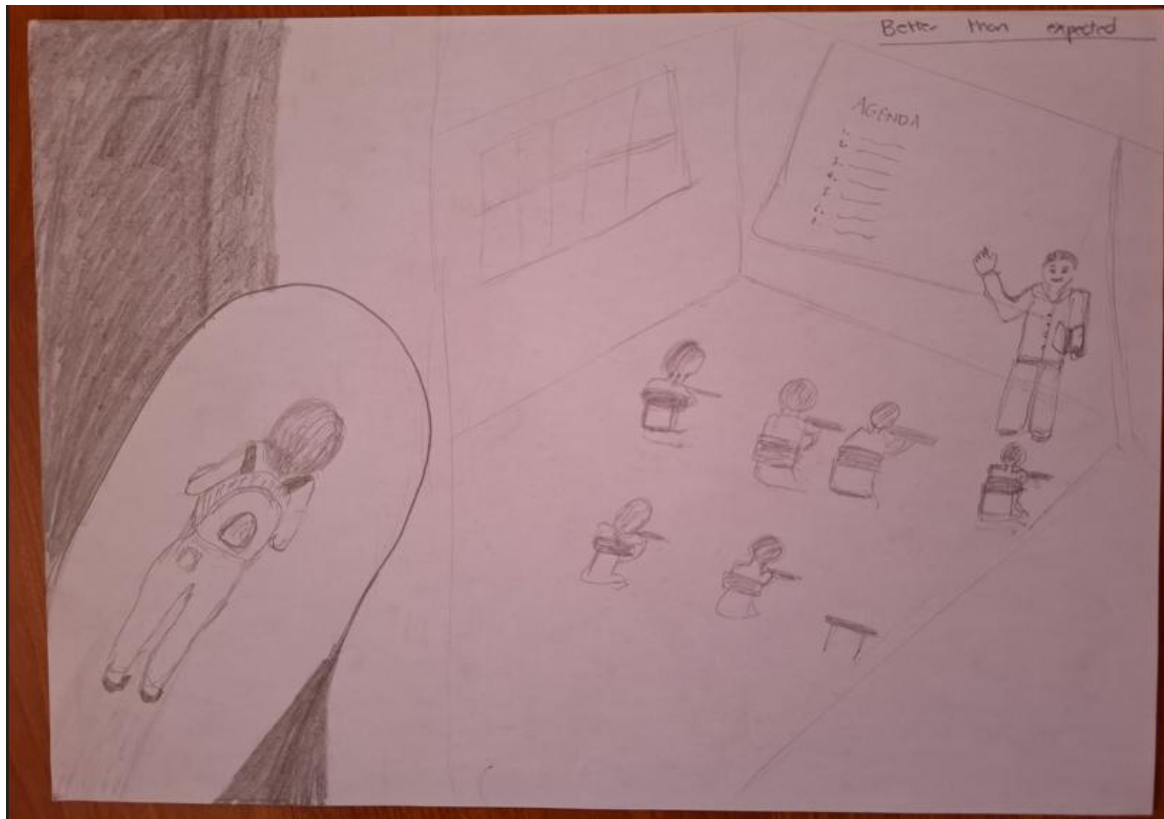


Figure 4.3: Art-based memory work that illustrates a special experience

Ms Priya’s experiences as an early career teacher at a PLC meeting are highlighted below:

The drawing is based on my first meeting with my PLC. The entire thing just depicts my emotions before and after the meeting. So, this was the first time I actually met my entire department that I was working with. This is where I met the team. I figured out who I would be working with, and then I realized their willingness to assist. Initially, it was my fear and personal feelings that were negative, but once I had entered [the venue], the meeting was actually a positive one, so that's why it's captioned “PLC was better than expected”. Having walked in, I felt like a learner all over again, carrying doubt, uncertainty, and confusion. This meeting was attended by all the mathematics teachers and headed by our HOD. For me, it was as if I was walking from darkness into the light, which is represented by the contrast between the dark shading and the bright room.

By likening herself to a student and learner, Ms Priya conveyed her feelings of vulnerability. She used the metaphor of going "from darkness into light" to represent the PLC's transformational influence on her self-esteem and career development, as well as the sense of community and belonging she acquired under the members' support.

Illeris's (2009) incentive dimension was highlighted by the motivating and volitional aspects of learning Ms Priya referred to. She felt optimistic, inspired, and confident because of the support and camaraderie she had encountered at the meeting, which acted as positive incentives. This change in emotion demonstrates how positive interactions in PLCs can strengthen the learning incentive component, ultimately improving ECTs' involvement and professional growth.

4.3.7 Synthesis of Section B

Ms Priya's journey as an ECT was presented in Section B, which focused on her critical experiences and important incidents in her growth as a novice teacher and member of a PLC. Her stories demonstrated the transforming effects of building resilience and unity in her classroom and highlighted the emotional and professional difficulties she experienced in helping students who were burdened by emotional trauma. Ms Priya's development as a reflective and compassionate teacher was demonstrated by her capacity to adjust to different school cultures and meet the emotional needs of her students. She was able to negotiate her early teaching career with growing confidence and adaptability thanks to the crucial advice, emotional support, and useful tactics the members of her mathematics PLC provided.

4.4 Section C: Mr Carson

In this section, I present four narrative snapshots of the manner in which Mr Carson negotiated his classroom as an early career teacher and I highlight critical incidents and experiences that Mr Carson shared with me. The themes that emerged are: "Guided hands"; Thrown into the deep end; The Hogwarts painting; A novice teacher's story of fostering creative practices in his department; and Professional conflict: Clashes within Mr Carson's PLC.

4.4.1 Biographical details

Mr Carson is a male novice teacher who began teaching in the middle of 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. He had had 4 years of teaching experience at the time of the study. He

took up his first teaching position at Pearson High. Although he majored in English and Life Orientation in his undergraduate Bachelor of Education degree, he taught grade 8 to grade 12 English Home Language at Pearson High. He was a member of an English HL PLC.

4.4.2 “Guided Hands”: Thrown into the deep end

Mr Carson avidly related his experiences of being an ECT during the COVID-19 pandemic:

When I joined the school, it was in the midst of COVID-19. In fact, there were many senior English teachers in the school but due to the pandemic they were forced to retire for their own safety. Therefore, as soon as I joined the school, I was thrown into the deep end with this Matric [grade 12] class. I was very overwhelmed. Not just because I suddenly had to teach Matric, but due to the pandemic as well. This was a new situation for everyone. And school was not school as we knew it. The whole education system was modified. We were teaching half the class on alternate days to reduce the number of learners in the school, and we had to repeat the lesson over two days. Also, there was a change in the curriculum and assessments as well. It wasn't easy to adapt to the COVID education system. I felt overwhelmed and I felt isolated. I was new, I had no relationships with any colleagues. Starting your teaching career during the pandemic was the worst possible time. The other issue was I couldn't approach teachers because teachers were afraid of human contact due to the pandemic. Throughout the school there was absolutely no socialization. Teachers stayed in their classrooms all day with their masks and gloves on. Everyone was just afraid of contracting the virus.

For early career teachers, the COVID-19 pandemic was fraught with previously unheard-of difficulties as they had to learn how to start their teaching careers in the middle of a worldwide disruption (Kaden, 2020). Even if early career teachers had had solid training during their teacher education programs, they were ill-prepared for the manner in which classrooms were transformed during the pandemic (Kaden, 2020).

However, Mr Carson had to step up to the challenge as an ECT. A key memory of his teaching experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic was that he was assigned to set a grade 12 exam question paper in his first year of teaching. He was put in this position because the school had lost two teachers, and he was inexperienced and afraid. Despite his lack of

familiarity with the subject matter, Mr Carson had to step up to the challenge. He described this experience as follows:

Unfortunately, it was during the COVID period, and the school had lost two of the elderly teachers, not to COVID, but because their families did not want them to be in the environment. So, when I entered the school in 2020, I was immediately pushed into grade 12; two classes because they had lost two teachers, so they had no option but to make me set a paper because there were only three Matric teachers available for eight classes at that time. So, I mimicked what had been set in a past paper. However, I was not aware of the challenge I was setting for myself. Remember, I was a new teacher. I had not even read the novel or the drama, and I set Paper two, the drama section, which was Hamlet. So, I tried to mimic questions to the best of my ability. But they were absolutely incorrect.

The above excerpt highlights Mr Carson's lack of content knowledge as an English subject teacher. Student achievement is greatly influenced by a teacher's insightful subject-matter knowledge, which is essential for teacher and assessment effectiveness. According to Al Ibrahim et al. (2023), learning outcomes can be improved by teachers who possess strong subject area competence. As a result of this discrepancy, Mr Carson was left feeling overwhelmed by the task at hand as it was a lot to take in:

I knew I had done something wrong. My HOD sat me down, she guided me from the title to the headings to the extracts and the questions and mark allocation, as well as the guidelines for answers. Although it was the first time, it was a lot to take in, but I can take in a lot of information when listening. I applied everything and reset the paper, and it was perfect. So, the feeling after that was satisfaction and acknowledgment that not only was I an educator who had to teach, but I was also an educator who could learn, and I applied that role in my classroom as I moved forward. Apart from wanting to teach and educate, I also learned from my learners. So, self-satisfaction was the outcome of this experience.

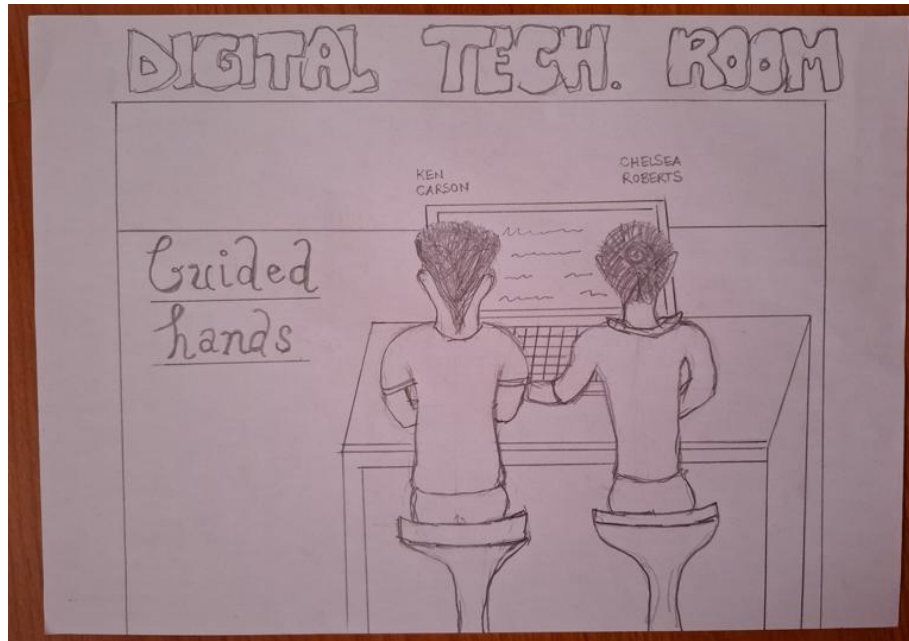


Figure 4.4: Mr Carson’s memory drawing of setting a question paper

Mr Carson’s story serves as an example of the psychological strain that results from taking on important tasks without any prior training or assistance, such as teaching Matric students and setting tests (Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021). His sense of isolation was made worse by the pandemic, which eliminated opportunities for informal learning and traditional types of collegial engagement.

Mr Carson’s memory drawing expresses the experience of himself and his HOD setting an exam using a laptop. The title of the memory drawing, ‘Guided Hands’, relates to the drawing of Mr Carson sitting next to his HOD who is holding his arm, guiding and teaching him to set an assessment task. Mr Carson gained vital knowledge and skills from his HOD. This experience relates to the first dimension of learning as posited by Illeris (2009), namely the content dimension. Mr Carson’s ability to develop both technical and content exam question paper setting skills is a strong indication of this dimension. His unfamiliarity with Hamlet and the botched first paper he set highlight that content knowledge and expertise are important for setting meaningful assessment tasks and being a knowledgeable teacher. He gained competency by adopting a deeper understanding of content and skills under the direction of his HOD. This supports Illeris’s (2009) claim that learning happens when one gains subject-specific insights, which are crucial for professional development. Being a learner was an affirmative position for Mr Carson as an ECT. Moreover, the classroom was a fertile laboratory where he could expand his thinking and ideas as well.

4.4.3 The Hogwarts painting

A successful classroom and effective educational practices are based on a strong teacher-student relationship, which affects many facets of the learning process for both the teacher and the student (Cui, 2022). Strong teacher-student relationships can improve teachers' general wellbeing by boosting their enthusiasm and lowering emotional weariness (Cui, 2022).

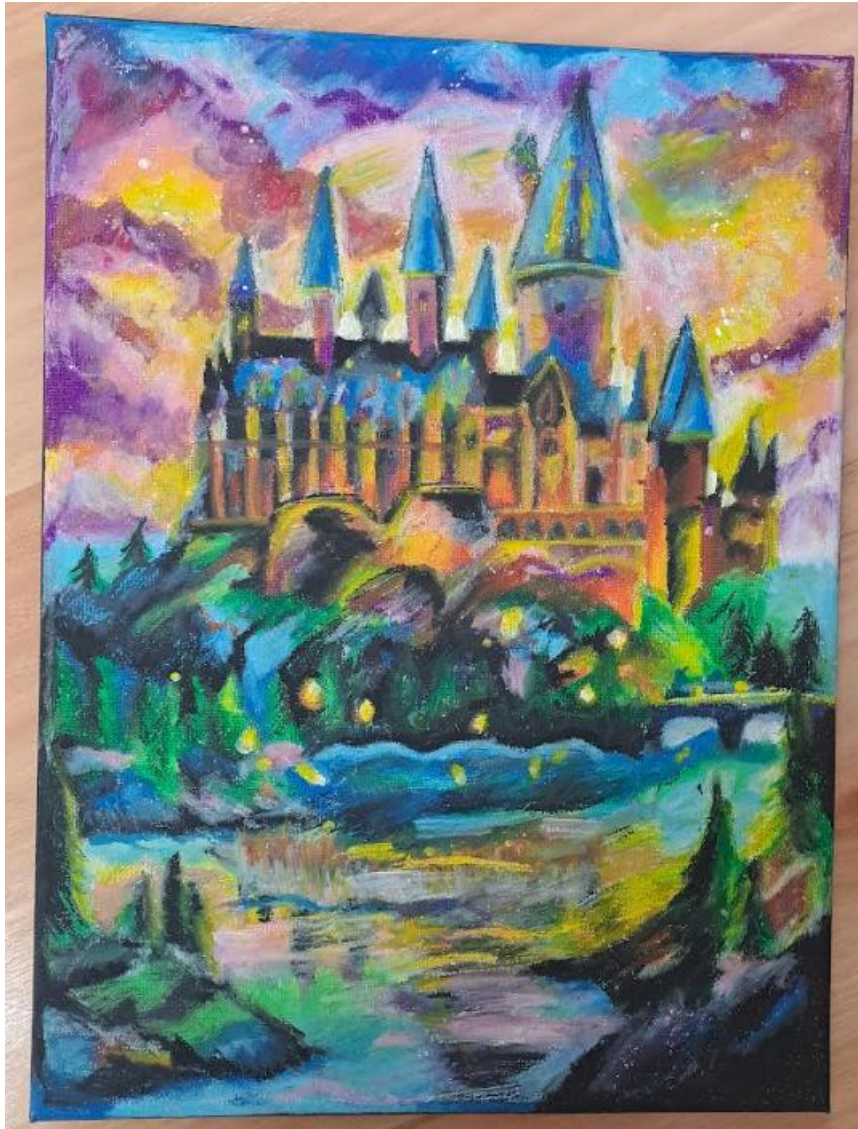


Figure 4.5: Painting by one of Mr Carson's students
(Permission was granted by Mr Carson on 23-08-24)

The painting Mr Carson possessed of Harry Potter's castle was given to him in 2022 by a student I shall refer to as Stacy. The painting demonstrates the 15-year-old learner's artistic talent as well as their shared passion for the Harry Potter stories and art making, which

seemed to be suppressed in many schools because of the traditional emphasis on academic and book knowledge. Mr Carson narrated this experience as follows:

In 2022, after COVID, school went back to normal and I was given a grade 8 form class. And currently, in 2024, I still have them as my grade 10s. The majority of them stayed together. And I was still a novice teacher regardless of the two preceding years because due to COVID there wasn't really school until 2022. During that period, 2020, 2021, school was not school. As a class and a form teacher, and through sharing and talking, the learners got to know that I am a deep, deep Harry Potter fan. And we were talking about talents, and obviously, what your parents do and where you are from. And this learner – a quiet, mousey learner - said that she was artistic. And all I said was, 'Okay, so show me your talent.' And a few months later, she returned with the castle of Harry Potter and handed it to me as a token of appreciation. When I received this painting, I actually teared a bit. It made me quite emotional, because it is beautiful, and I saw a deeper meaning other than a picture. I saw the love that another human being who had just met me showed for both myself and our passion for art making.

This was a moment when Mr Carson realised that he had a passion for creativity and he acknowledged that the learner had inspired him with new ideas. His passion for art motivated him to introduce art-infused ideas into his English Paper 3 (creative writing) and his teaching.

As you know, I teach English Home Language, and I do not only focus on the academic side. There's a lot of creativity that has to come from myself and the learners because we do Paper 3, which is creative writing. Being forced to focus only on academics meant that there was no allowance for creativity in the classroom because of the stereotypical idea that there's no scope in our country for creativity. So, I was forced to go the total academic road. Being inspired, I regained my confidence to express myself through my hands and to see the English subject as a space to express myself even better in words.

By encouraging creativity instead of sticking to a traditional textbook approach, Mr Carson demonstrated his recognition of English as an academic and artistic language. This change highlights how creativity is crucial for encouraging learners' self-expression and engagement.

Mr Carson outlined how a more creative approach had transformed his teaching of English, a subject he had formerly deemed boring, into an transforming experience. He claimed that working with kids and specific artefacts, like this painting, had inspired his own creativity that had been dormant for many years. According to Turkle (2007), people can relate their ideas and feelings to objects (Turkle, 2007) and they love to use artefacts when they think. To become a better teacher, Mr Carson infused his lesson plans with inspiration and creativity, which improved his practice overall.

4.4.4 A novice teacher's story of fostering creative practices in his department

According to Rinkevich (2011), promoting creativity in the classroom improves student enthusiasm, engagement, and performance. Teachers can harness learners' creative potential by implementing creative teaching techniques that make the classroom more dynamic and engaging (Rinkevich, 2011). Mr Carson explained that he used the Hogwarts painting to inspire other teachers to incorporate it into the English curriculum for grade 9:

Last year I was in charge of coordinating grade 9 English. And I think it was term 2 that I had to set the English Paper 3 exam, and what I did in this exam was, for one of the essay questions I used a picture of this exact painting. Obviously, we are a department, and my paper has to be moderated by all grade 9 teachers as well as my HOD. And they were so amazed by this picture because they had not seen something like it before. So, they queried me, and I told them that this had been painted and given to me in 2022. During that meeting, I explained to my department how this learner had helped to stimulate my creativity and now I want to give my learners something to allow them to become more creative. And you know, even when we were marking the paper, the teachers were so impressed with this picture. Because this picture was so abstract and learners had the freedom to interpret it in whatever way they wanted, and many wrote such deep and beautiful essays. And I think this moment really inspired my colleagues because now, when we teach English Paper 3, we teach it in such a creative manner. We've been using a lot of abstract pictures or drawings and given the learners' the freedom to interpret these and write as they feel. We have learned that we do not have to be rigid and strict and constantly follow the rules in Paper 3. We also believe that Paper 3 now has to move with the times and become a creative paper. They have now incorporated this painting idea. So, the painting is a reminder of my work in the PLC. It may have taken two years to get there, but it finally did.

Mr Carson's story serves as an example of how one creative idea and perspective can spur the members of a PLC to embrace change in their teaching practice. Mr Carson's initiative encouraged teachers in his department to change their approach to teaching in order to better meet the interests of learners and promote a creative culture. This notion is supported by Owen (2014), who states that PLC participation can result in shifts in teaching methods that better suit the interests of students.

Illeris's (2009) interaction dimension underscores this theme as it emphasises the value of the relationship between teacher and learners, collaboration in PLCs, and the transformational potential of shared experiences for professional development. Mr Carson implemented and maintained creative curriculum improvements through collaborating with his colleagues, which is a process that is supported by Illeris's (2009) theory that learning takes place in and through social settings (in this case PLCs). The above narrative demonstrates that novice teachers can significantly influence the curriculum and enhance their colleagues' teaching techniques, especially if they collaborate in PLCs.

4.4.5 Professional conflict: Clashes within Mr Carson's PLC

Conflict is defined by Dunn (2023, p. 28) as “an explicit disagreement or a perceived shift in interest between two or more groups”. Despite his positive experiences of the role of PLCs in his early career, Mr Carson acknowledged that clashes did arise due to diverse personalities and strong opinions. His thoughts are shared below:

Okay, so again, we are all human beings there. We all have different personalities, and there are constant clashes between personalities and their views on how a certain aspect should be taught or certain aspects should be addressed. One issue that constantly arose regarded marking [assessment]. In our department, how we mark our English papers, we don't mark our classes' work in entirety. Instead, each teacher is assigned a section to mark. What we do is we divide the paper according to marks so that each teacher has the same amount of work to mark. In that way it's fair. However, we have constant clashes among our teachers due to the standard of marking. For example, some teachers mark too leniently and some mark too strictly. Educators often feel that their learners are being victimized or that certain classes are being favoured. The issue of being biased results in the double checking of scripts or taking them to our HOD for clarity about the marks awarded.

But at the end of the day, there is always that voice that comes in that says, “We are not here for our personal gain, we are here for the learners, and they are most important”, and you'll generally find this voice of reason coming from our HOD, our Head of Department. We then realize our purpose.

As a voice of reason and solidarity, the HOD is essential in resolving any disputes that arise in a department. Mr Carson claimed that the HOD frequently reminded the group of their mandated commitment to the learners’ success and encouraged teachers to put the group's objective above their own (Vescio et al., 2008). For early career teachers, it is important to develop professional relationships that encourage collaboration and support the common goal and vision of all teachers, which is to ensure the development of their learners. Collective and collaborative sharing spurs creativity and encourages growth as a team. Successful teaching is enhanced and obstacles are overcome when commonality is embraced (Ikpuri & Peter, 2024).

4.4.6 Synthesis of Section C

Mr Carson’s stories of his early professional experiences illustrated the need for openness to be a lifelong learner and demonstrated the importance of confidence and agency to challenge traditional and conservative ways of teaching. He acknowledged that the importance of learning from significant others – mentors, learners, artefacts – was central to the struggles and development of an ECT. Mr Carson's experiences also highlighted early career teachers as sources of new ideas and ways of thinking that can break down barriers that constrain creativity and thought. However, his stories revealed that, while PLCs he had joined were spaces for mutual learning and cultivating professional relationships, they were also spaces that were exposed to tension and conflict because of diverse perspectives and fixed beliefs of some members. Fortunately, when the members of his PLC experienced tension, the HOD intervened and guided the group to focus on their mandate: to always attend to the needs of the learners. These encounters that Mr Carson shared show how crucial mentoring, creativity, and collaboration are for members of an ECT to grow on both a personal and professional level.

4.5 Chapter Summary

Chapter four centred on the diverse experiences of three ECTs as they negotiated the intricacies of their professional lives. A recurring theme that emerged from the narratives of

Mr Ross, Ms Priya, and Mr Carson is that the classroom is a dynamic and demanding environment that necessitates flexibility, resilience, and dedication to foster deep connections between teachers and learners. A positive classroom environment where all students feel included and have a voice and where their viewpoints and experiences are valued can be fostered when teachers forge respectful relationships between themselves and their learners as well as among the learners.

The discourse also emphasised the importance of creating many types of knowledge—self, content, contextual, classroom, and institutional—that are suited to different school contexts. These can be discovered through observation, artefacts, mentors, and learners. Ms Priya served as an example of how reflective practice, emotional support, and PLC assistance can enable individuals to overcome obstacles and develop self-confidence. Additionally, Mr Carson's journey highlighted the creative contributions of ECTs in questioning the perpetuation of conventional practices and illuminating the transformative power of mentorship, while it also showed that tensions might erupt within PLCs that are forums where differing viewpoints need to be accommodated.

In summary, Chapter four demonstrated how ECTs may develop on both personal and professional levels if they are positively influenced by mentorship, supportive relationships, and a readiness to accept different ideas to conquer the challenges both within and outside the classroom.

To enhance my learnings that were related to the research questions, I composed a five-line tanka, which is a poetic form that is distinguished by its minimalist syllable structure per line (57577). According to Furman and Dill (2015), the conventional format of Tanka material shifts the viewpoint in the third line, moving from the first two lines' observation of an image to the final two lines' personal response to it. To express the main points in a few lines, I chose to use the succinct format of the tanka. I had to carefully choose my words and ideas from the chapter summary because a Tanka is minimalistic (Furman & Dill, 2015). I present the tanka and a synopsis of my interpretation below:

Turbulent Beginnings, Empowered Futures

Conquer challenges

 Negotiating viewpoints

 Foster connections

 Transformative mentorship

 Voice different viewpoints

This poem captures the foundational stories of the ECTs as they negotiated their professional lives. It focuses on how these ECTs overcame obstacles, formed connections, and progressed through mentorship while negotiating multiple points of view. These experiences are consistent with Illeris's (2009) theory of learning, which highlights the interrelated role of the cognitive, emotional, and social aspects of transformative learning. Although Illeris's (2009) theory was developed for broader settings, my research clarifies how these components appear in the context of PLCs for ECTs. It demonstrates that the development of ECTs is influenced not only by cognitive enrichment, but also by emotional resilience and meaningful social connections in dynamic educational settings.

CHAPTER FIVE

LEARNING LANDSCAPES

5.1 Introduction

In Chapter four, the ECTs' personal and professional learning experiences that had been facilitated by PLCs were highlighted through the presentation and analyses of their narratives. Chapter five now focuses on the role of PLCs in teacher engagement and how they influence ECTs' learning and development.

The emerging data are presented, analysed, and interpreted in response to research question two: *“How does novice teachers' participation in PLCs enhance their early personal and professional learning?”*

By posing this research question, I intended to examine the ways in which novice teachers' participation in professional learning communities advanced their thinking and perspectives at both personal and professional levels in the early phase of their careers. This research question was process-oriented and centred on the function of PLC involvement and how it aided or benefited novice teachers' early learning and development. Illeris's (2009) three dimensions of learning framework served as a guide for interpreting the novice teachers' narratives. The three learning dimensions proposed by Illeris (2009) provided me with a helpful framework for understanding the intricacies of the learning processes the ECTs were exposed to in the context of PLCs.

My role in this chapter is that of both researcher and narrator as I delved deeply into the data to understand the stories of my participants. I utilise data that were generated from three different research methods, namely unstructured interviews, object (artefact) inquiry, and memory drawings. Chapter five is divided into three sections. Section A is composed of the narratives of Mr Ross, Section B is composed of the narratives of Ms Priya, and Section C is composed of the narratives of Mr Carson. The selected excerpts address research question two as they focus on the everyday situations the ECTs faced and how the PLCs, as complex spaces, served to develop their capacity to think differently. Three themes were identified and are presented in each section.

5.2 Section A: Mr Ross

I present four narrative snapshots from Mr Ross's narratives to highlight the processes that assisted him as an ECT on both a personal and professional level. These themes are: Mr Ross's introduction to a PLC; Mentorship by a fellow PLC member; and Collaborative support for personal and professional learning.

5.2.1 Mr Ross's narrative of his first PLC encounter

As outlined in Chapter four, PLCs are complex construct that are moulded by elements such as self, content, context, classroom, and institution. Mr Ross needed guidance and support in the early professional years of his teaching life at Pearson High where he taught English to grade 12 learners. According to Mr Ross, every subject-related department held a PLC session weekly at the school. He was eager to learn and wanted to connect with those who taught English to enlist their help and advice. According to Feiman-Nemser (2003), inexperienced educators desire to discuss curriculum implementation, receive recommendations for meeting the unique needs of each student, and gain knowledge from more seasoned colleagues in their respective fields. PLCs are regarded as informal social learning spaces that have the potential to improve job performance, especially in knowledge-intensive institutions (Lecat et al., 2019). Teachers can benefit much from social interactions with management, their colleagues, and other individuals in such spaces. Framed by Illeris's (2009) theory of learning, I was assisted to think about and explain Mr Ross's motivations for wanting to join the science and math PLCs and to understand the ways in which the PLC-system would support his learning in an all-girls' school.

I was very overwhelmed in my initial few weeks; in fact, I could say the first few months at the school. When I arrived at the school, I quickly learned that every Friday afternoon was allocated to PLC meetings. So, how it works, is every department in the school has PLC meetings on Fridays from 13:30 to 14:30. On Fridays, our learners finish school at 13:30, so we have one hour. I would say every Friday we meet, unless our school has something else planned. For example, staff meetings, or workshops. But most Fridays, our PLC meetings take place. When I entered the school, I was eager to learn and be mentored by the others. I realized that for me to grow and develop the best way to do this would be to learn from the other teachers, and thankfully, most of the teachers in this PLC are highly experienced math and science teachers. They've been teaching these subjects for many years. I was the only novice joining without any professional experience. There were other

teachers in my PLC who joined at the same time as me, but they came from other schools. So, I think I was really excited to meet these other teachers, get to know them, become friends, and develop relationships with them. In that way, I know that I can always go to them whenever I need assistance.

Mr Ross's narrative illustrates his understanding that a PLC would help teachers transition from being inexperienced to becoming confident and creative teachers. His initial enthusiasm for participating in the PLC was an innate drive for professional growth, which is consistent with Feiman-Nemser's (2003) claim that ECTs actively seek guidance, curriculum insights, and teaching methodologies by interacting with seasoned colleagues.

The emotional relief Mr Ross felt after learning about access to a PLC emphasises that novice teachers might view such bodies as spaces where they will receive support and experience collegiality. However, Mr Ross's need of such a space also highlights the sense of isolation he felt as an early career teacher. This is in line with Illeris's (2009) interaction dimension of learning, as Mr Ross's experience highlights the connection between social engagement and personal growth while his story highlights the social element of teacher learning. Illeris's framework emphasises the crucial need for interaction among ECTs who rely on external input to help them adjust. Mr Ross's story reveals that he viewed interaction with more seasoned peers as essential to speed up his learning, given that he was the only novice teacher in the department. He stated:

When I joined these meetings, our HOD actually came with an agenda. He had a list of things [to discuss]. The school management team [SMT] had their own meetings. So, those matters are first relayed to the HODs, and then the HODs relay them to us. There's certain things that they need to discuss with us. The first thing we do is get through that agenda. Usually, it's about the program of assessment, dates of school events, when certain things are due, what's happening this term...you know, anything important that's coming from the principal and senior management. First, we get through that, then we have a discussion about our subject where we engage with content. We all need to make sure that we basically work at the same pace. We all need to work at the same pace. It's a problem if you're working slower or faster than the other teachers who are teaching the same content. Once that is completed, the meeting becomes a free platform for teachers to discuss any matters that they want to.

Everyone engages and discusses. It's a great platform to seek help or advice or tips, and sometimes even just to vent.

The ability to 'vent' during a PLC meeting implies that these gatherings offer opportunities for essential emotional outlet in addition to being formal learning structures. This balance between top-down managerial directives and bottom-up collaborative learning highlights that PLC meetings are (or should be) structured. The PLC's function in linking administrative needs with foundational professional development is highlighted by this dual structure (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009)

5.2.2 Mentorship offered by a fellow PLC member

"Mentoring is the personal guidance provided, usually by seasoned veterans, to beginning teachers in schools" (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011, p. 3). For ECTs, mentorship is necessary as it offers them specialized assistance that addresses their individual needs and helps them face obstacles. While thinking back on his early career experiences as a member of a PLC, Mr Ross drew a picture of himself as he was 'growing' in the classroom. This picture symbolizes his transformation and the shift in his thinking and ideas due to his participation in PLC meetings. Apart from positioning himself in the drawing, Mrs Ndlovu features prominently as she was a fellow member of his PLC who, in his view, was an essential part of this growth and learning. His drawing was titled 'Confidence Unfolded'.

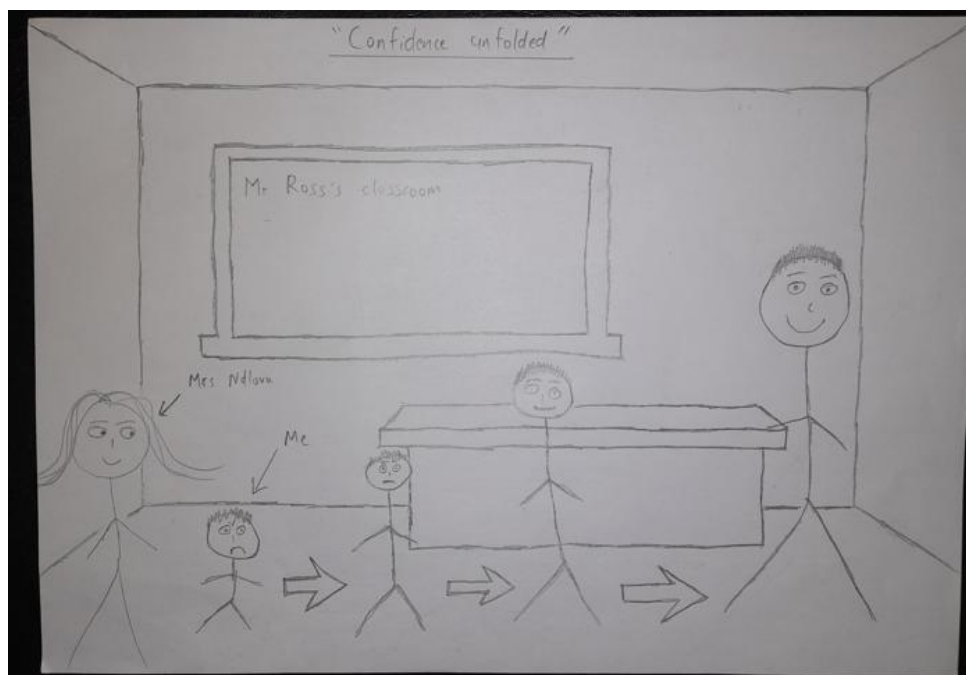


Figure 5.1: Memory drawing by Mr Ross

Mr Ross recalled his early experiences of feeling intimidated and uncertain due to his inability to handle an excessive workload and the challenging nature of teaching mathematics. His thoughts are captured below:

If I just choose one moment, it's when I got mentored by another teacher - another maths teacher. At first, I just struggled with the content. You know, even though...the Department provides with an annual teaching plan, and this is what we have to teach, I still didn't know how to teach it, or what aspects to focus on, or what to leave out. So, there was a lot of uncertainty with that regard for me. Because of this, I struggled with my lesson planning. It took me way too much time compared to other teachers.

Mr Ross was anxious when he had to explain math concepts that he did not thoroughly understand because he was not qualified to teach the subject. His distress and self-doubt increased as he struggled to simplify the material for the learners. At first, Mr Ross prepared his lessons in a tedious and stressful way, as he spent hours attempting to understand the material before he would teach his learners. His confidence suffered as a result of these early setbacks and he began to doubt his ability as a teacher. Mrs Ndlovu (pseudonym), a seasoned maths teacher, threw a lifeline to Mr Ross to ease his struggles. Despite joining Pearson High at the same time as he did, she had extensive experience as a maths teacher at other schools. Mr Ross viewed her as the most approachable mentor as they had joined Pearson High as the same time:

There was another teacher that's much more experienced. So, actually, I went to her a lot for support. She was very supportive, very helpful, very friendly, and whatever questions I had, she was always there to answer them and help me with anything... But when I actually entered the classroom space and delivered this content, there were lots of instances in my first year when I needed a lot of guidance and a lot of help with the content. Even though it was merely grade 8 and grade 9 math, I still needed help, and Mrs Ndlovu was so influential in my career. Whenever I had a question, needed any clarity, any support, she was always willing to help me. Not once did she get fed up or annoyed with me. Whenever I needed anything, she was willing to help me. She provided me with the notes that she had created and told me what to focus on and what to leave out. She sent me e-textbooks and tools to use. If I struggled to answer a maths problem, I'd go to her and she would show me how to do it. She was really brilliant in maths.

The above excerpt highlights the regular coaching that Mr Ross received from Mrs Ndlovu. According to Ali et al. (2018, p. 507), coaching is “a one-on-one relationship where a coach supports, collaborates with, and facilitates an individual’s learning by helping the individual to identify and achieve future goals through assessment, discovery, reflection, goal setting and strategic action”. By working alongside him as a coach, Mrs Ndlovu helped him to become a capable maths teacher. Mrs Ndlovu’s support entailed practical guidance on pedagogy, classroom management, and lesson planning ideas in addition to the extensive subject-matter expertise she shared as a mentor. This practical assistance was a hands-on mentorship experience that offered tailored assistance for Mr Ross to meet his needs (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). She ensured that Mr Ross not only understood the subject matter, but that he also had the confidence to teach it as she helped him to grasp mathematical ideas and then to model various approaches to teach his students.

5.2.3 Coaching came with experience

Mr Ross’s participation in PLCs offered him opportunities to work alongside colleagues with years of subject content knowledge and a repertoire of approaches and resources to support meaningful teaching. Mrs Ndlovu exposed Mr Ross to a range of resources, such as worksheets and online links, which greatly streamlined and reduced the time required for lesson preparation. Mr Ross gradually started to feel less afraid of the subject thanks to her coaching. He stated:

She wasn't a novice teacher. That's what the difference was. She came with many years of experience. She had taught at different schools and different grades. But she was a maths teacher, and she had a lot of experience. So, I think we took to each other because we both started off new, and because she was experienced and I was nervous. She was also fond of me; one thing she told me was she wished she had a son like me. We had a good relationship; a very open, friendly relationship where I felt very comfortable and safe to talk to her. I felt she was very approachable. I felt that more experienced teachers would have judged me for not knowing the content well, and for asking stupid questions. But with Mrs Ndlovu, I felt so safe.

The excerpt above describes the relationship between Mr Ross and his mentor-coach, Mrs Ndlovu. Her nurturing approach made Mr Ross experience a sense of comfort and he was able to pluck up the courage to take risks and to ask ‘stupid’ questions. As a mentor with vast

experience of teaching in different schooling spaces, she had an expansive and approachable manner, and their working relationship developed into solid collaboration over time. The shifts that occurred in Mr Ross's maths teaching practice amplify the value of mentoring and emphasise that working side-by-side in a coaching relationship can enhance classroom practice, foster confidence, and build the morale of beginner teachers.

Teachers who have strong collegial and collaborative relationships are likely to thrive personally and professionally, according to Vangrieken et al. (2015). When mentors enable novice educators by exchanging knowledge, materials, and methods with them, this teacher collaboration greatly enhances ECTs' classroom practices (Vangrieken et al., 2015). In Mr Ross's view, he benefited significantly from a supportive relationship that blossomed due to his membership of a PLC.

5.2.4 Coaching as a driver of ECTs' personal and professional learning

Mr Ross benefited from his membership of a PLC as the relationships he forged with seasoned educators resulted in mentorship and collaborative learning. He was offered channels for personal learning and attitudinal change, particularly as he was assisted to resolve classroom management issues. As a novice teacher, Mr Ross was frustrated and discouraged when he felt undermined by learners who perceived that he lacked authority. However, collaborating with more experienced co-workers turned this challenge into important learning experiences. He shared the following narrative in this regard:

I did engage with the other teachers in my PLC and noted how they actually dealt with discipline. They gave me many different tips and tricks on how to improve my classroom management. What my HOD advised me was referral forms. So, our school has a policy. Every teacher has referral forms. If a learner is disruptive or any issues you are having with them, for example incomplete homework, incomplete classwork, or talking in class, you fill out a referral form. Once a learner has accumulated three forms, they have to attend detention on Fridays. Other teachers told me about the tricks that they were using in their classrooms to maintain classroom discipline. So, the tip that I use the most is, if I'm teaching and if a learner starts to talk, I immediately stop teaching. Once they see that I've stopped teaching, they sort of sort themselves out. They become quiet and they realize I'm not going to teach them. So, the classroom is thereafter quiet and I can resume teaching. This is a tip that I use every day, and it works quite effectively. If I'm being disturbed too often, what another

teacher told me was to make the learner stand up. Okay, so the learner will stand up, and then also this sets an example for all the other learners. Once they see that I set an example with one learner, the rest of them get scared as well. They also advised me on things that I should not be doing. They told me that I should not scream at the learners because this doesn't really help with classroom discipline. Sometimes learners, their aim is to agitate you. They want to see a reaction out of you, so avoid screaming and do not show them that you are losing your cool. Something else they advised is do not kick a learner out of the classroom because you're not allowed to do that. So, under no circumstances are you allowed to kick a learner out of the classroom. You're not allowed to use any vulgar language and you're not allowed to be rude or disrespectful to learners.

During informal conversations with PLC members, Mr Ross acquired useful perspectives and strategies. This collaborative learning experiences show that Mr Ross was able to acquire efficient classroom management techniques with the help of his PLC members and that he was enabled to develop a deeper understanding of maths content. These dimensions - incentive and content- that were present in Mr Ross's narrative (Illeris, 2009)- highlight the incentive dimension that takes into account the motivational factors that affect learning in positive and in situated ways. By utilizing collective and collaborative sharing and feedback offered by members of the PLC, early career teachers may be enabled to form meaningful relationships with their learners and to engage in processes that develop ideas and understanding for new ways of strengthening disciplinary expertise during their early years of teaching.

5.2.5 Synthesis of Section A

In summary, Mr Ross's narratives demonstrate that PLCs can greatly assist ECTs. Structured managerial input sessions can complement mentorship and coaching sessions to allow ECTs to learn and network with their more seasoned colleagues. Mr Ross's experiences foreground practice-based ways of understanding. In his experience, PLCs offered a meaningful support structure and enabled Mr Ross to overcome the tension of transitioning from university to the classroom. He was also able to develop the inner desire and agency to seek ways to refine his teaching practice (García & Weiss, 2019).

5.3 Section B: Ms Priya

I selected three narrative snapshots from Ms Priya's stories of her early professional learning and aver that her experiences highlight that PLCs can assist ECTs to develop personally and professionally. The themes that emerged are: Structured support; Gaining control; and Expanding and enhancing teaching resources through PLC support.

5.3.1 Structured support as a means to address concerns

PLCs foster a shared commitment to a school's success as they enhance the experiences of seasoned educators while supporting the professional development of individual teachers (Michelen, 2011). When teachers work collaboratively, they create an atmosphere for the exchange of concepts and methods that ultimately support and enhance the educational experiences of learners.

According to Ms Priya, her HOD usually led the PLC sessions that were attended by all math teachers. The meetings were guided by an agenda and term plan. After all the points on the agenda had been addressed, everyone could contribute to general conversations in which concerns or issues were addressed:

Our HOD usually runs it. He has an agenda that we have to follow through. So first we'll discuss school issues. So, anything that needs to be relayed to us from management or that's been done at school that we need to be made aware of, that gets done. And then we look at our subject. So, curriculum coverage, any changes to the syllabus, any shuffling of content, setting of tests...yeah, that's about it. And then, in those meetings, we also bring up any issues we have. So, if any educator is facing any challenges, that's the time and place that we get it done. It's an open platform for teachers to freely engage and interact and discuss. It varies from time to time with regard to the issues. One of the issues might be discipline. Discipline, I think, comes mostly from the more experienced teachers. It's not that they can't handle disciplinary issues, but I think they always relate to how things were when they started teaching and how it's constantly changing for the worse. Well, that's what they seem to bring up. Besides discipline, the other issues would just be following the ATP and maybe we don't agree with a certain aspect, or the ATP requires too much, and we're struggling for time. So those things get discussed, because we need to have a plan moving forward so it sits. We're all in the room, we'd rather bring it up and discuss what we're going to do.

Often times we get resources from them. Well, we have a group of about 10 teachers, so a lot of them have a lot of resources and knowledge of subject as well as resources to support teaching. So, when I started coordinating grade 8 maths, the HOD gave me a file that had a lot of grade 8 content, and he was able to provide that to me. So, I think that was a guide also. Besides that, he had past years' papers. So again, it just gives you a sense of what's expected, especially because you don't want to drop the standards of the school or what's expected of, like, the maths curriculum. So, I use those as guides to set papers and emphasise sections.

Ms Priya's story emphasises that the PLCs she attended were well organized and that various approaches were used to support teachers. It may thus be argued that a PLC may serve as a forum for both cooperative problem-solving and the dissemination of administrative requirements of managers. She claimed that she had joined a PLC because she had been seeking direction. She believed that being with colleagues who taught the same subject would help her to access resources and to better navigate her teaching. She relied on experienced teachers to guide her as she realised that they had a wealth of experiences, which she lacked (Lecat at al., 2019). Hence, her more seasoned colleagues assisted her by responding to her concerns about ATP compliance, disciplinary matters, and the teaching pace that was required.

Ms Priya was given a teacher's grade 8 file, which she found exceedingly helpful. This 'gifting' demonstrates that PLCs can be used to support and guide novice teachers who need to improve their practice. This cascading approach of transferring educational materials to Ms Priya as a novice guaranteed consistency in her teaching standards and enhanced her understanding of the topics she had to teach. This file was an example of a 'cascade model' that enhanced her professional development by assisting her to access educational content and procedures and this, in turn, ensured consistency in her teaching standards. Kennedy (2005) argues that such a top-down approach makes it easy for novice teachers to access knowledge and to optimally utilise the teaching materials they have access to.

Ms Priya's story reflects the incentive component of Illeris's (2009) learning theory, particularly as she had an instinctive need (thus the incentive) to connect with experienced educators at her school. Additionally, Illeris's (2009) interaction dimension of learning is

reflected in the social learning processes that occurred during conversations, resource sharing, and group reflections on common difficulties.

Ms Priya's narrative highlights that mentoring can rely on traditional approaches such as passing on old resources to ECTs to address their fears of being overwhelmed by the workload. Ms Priya showcased the collaborative strength of a powerful teaching community as she was enabled to maintain curricular standards and to make a significant contribution to a particular grade level when she utilized the resources and insights of experienced teachers.

5.3.2 PLCs as a driver of the acquisition of classroom management skills

All ECTs who enter the classroom for the first time experience disciplinary and classroom management challenges. According to Shank and Santiago (2021), new teachers frequently feel unable to deal with classroom management challenges because they lack the necessary training and practical strategies. This is in line with Fantilli and McDougall (2009), who express that teacher education programs only address traditional classroom management needs and don't go beyond the environment of respectful learners who respond well to such methods.

According to Ms Priya, engaging in a PLC was pivotal for her in creating successful classroom management techniques. She stated:

During our meetings, we discuss issues that we've had within the classroom. All the teachers share ways in which they manage these issues, and that's how it's helped us. So, some of the issues they have are mostly discipline-related, whether it is learners being disruptive, not paying attention, or just issues between learners. Obviously, some are not aligned with similar situations, so we express how they have dealt with it, which helps me in my classroom management. For instance, some ideas they suggest would be not scream and shout at the whole class, but to rather single out and talk to them individually, that kind of thing. Those techniques help you with your day-to-day teaching.

Another suggestion was to keep the kids mindfully occupied at all times, like having worksheets on hand and projecting activities for the class. One of the things every teacher told me was not to teach for the whole lesson. Because then you are getting the learners to a point where they stop listening, or they don't feel like they participated. So, teach for a while and then let them be deeply occupied. I think that

manages the classroom better, because the kids have enough time to work by themselves, or work with others, rather than you teaching for five to six hours every day and tiring yourself.

PLCs are essential for the development of new teachers, especially in areas like classroom management (Hirsch et al., 2021). As outlined above, Ms Priya's PLC network gave her an invaluable structure that aided her early professional learning as an ECT. Being guided by a senior colleague and participating in PLC meetings where issues were discussed and shared increased her self-confidence and enabled her to manage a variety of classroom situations. Interacting with experienced colleagues also helped her to adopt suitable techniques and strategies and to share her own experiences with others who had a sympathetic ear. The emotional comfort she gained knowing she was not alone was profound.

The idea that good teaching is as much about relational competence as it is about knowledge of the subject is reinforced by Ms Priya's narrative of networking to gain emotional support. The support that Ms Priya was offered in the PLC eased her sense of loneliness and increased her confidence in herself. Thus, for her, the PLC became a multifaceted platform that echoed the three dimensions of learning as proposed by Illeris (2009): content (the procedures and techniques she picked up), incentive (the emotional reassurance that her challenges could be dealt with), and interaction (the discussions and conversations she had with colleagues). Ms Priya's experiences suggest that authentic sharing without fear and anxiety can help novice teachers to adapt and improve their classroom management abilities, which are necessary processes for meaningful teaching and learning (Qu et al., 2024)

5.3.3 Expanding and enhancing teaching resources through PLC support

In order to help new teachers to overcome the difficulties of early career teaching, PLCs are needed because they encourage collaboration and resource sharing (Mabunda & McKay, 2024). According to Ms Priya, her participation in her PLC had a significant impact on her use of teaching resources as it gave her access to a variety of resources and materials that improved the quality of her teaching. Ongoing professional growth is essential for ECTs who rarely have the vast library and pedagogical toolkits that more experienced teachers have. Her thoughts are presented below:

Yes, that's one of the most beneficial things about the PLC, [as it facilitates] constant sharing of documents and resources that help us teach. Some of the documents they send are via your WhatsApp groups. This makes it extremely accessible and easy to

save and use. I usually save these documents on my laptop in relevant folders. This makes it is easy to project and use them in lessons. Others come from their knowledge of textbooks. So, they all refer us to different textbooks and which topics to use from which textbooks. You see, unfortunately, I did not have much knowledge about the contents of textbooks or any recommendations before I joined my PLC. I relied on their knowledge and guidance to use such resources. Textbooks can be very vast and designed according to a previous syllabus and ATPs. In our school, learners are given textbooks; however, it was suggested by my PLC that those [the ones they had] lacked challenging questions and to rather use a different one. I also used the suggested textbook to make worksheets for the learners. Other times, they will share other resource materials. One of those resource materials that was sent to me by another educator was a website which can be used for maths. This website allows you to do sections that need visuals, like graphs. He had been using it to teach a variety of sections and therefore recommended it to me. They have also given me files with documents, assessment tasks, and worksheets to use for all the different grades that I teach. These documents guide me to plan lessons and emphasise things as I teach in class. It is also essential in the setting of tests and exams to maintain the standard of testing.

PLCs create spaces for collaborating with different colleagues who have diverse experiences. They provide access to different sources of knowledge that are both virtual and tangible. Access to a variety of resources via social media, websites, documents, and other relevant platforms gives members of an ECT the opportunity to employ a range of educational materials such as documents, assessment tasks, and relevant worksheets. Chauraya and Brodie (2017) highlight that PLCs provide a platform for collaborative learning and professional development that are both essential in an environment with a variety of educational needs and limited resources. A key advantage of being supported by the members of a PLC is the emphasis on collaborative learning as teachers share resources, strategies, and experiences. By providing an inviting setting for teachers to exchange ideas and resources, PLCs contribute to the development of a culture of continuous learning and improvement (Bascia, 2014). In this context, Illeris's (2009) dimensions of learning offered a helpful theoretical framework to examine Ms Priya's experiences. The actual resources she obtained, such as textbooks, worksheets, and electronic resources, enhanced her teaching repertoire and clearly demonstrated the content dimension of her needs and experiences. Additionally, the

interaction dimension was equally important as Ms Priya's PLC functioned as a forum for communication, mutual knowledge acquisition, and information exchange.

Furthermore, the informal manner in which Ms Priya learned, such as the spontaneous sharing of resources and WhatsApp conversations, demonstrates how professional development is changing today's educational environment. This challenges the idea that formal workshops and planned training sessions are the only ways in which teachers can learn professionally.

Ms Priya's experiences serve as a significant illustration of how PLCs can help novice teachers to fill the resources gap how they can encourage collaboration and shared growth. The findings propose that resource sharing, as part of professional interactions, will improve ECTs' ability to become the teachers they would like to be.

5.3.4 Synthesis of Section B

It is undeniable that Ms Priya's development as an ECT was greatly aided by her involvement in a PLC. The scheduled sessions offered an open cooperative forum for discussing issues like curriculum pacing and discipline. She received helpful teaching resources and direction through resource sharing and mentoring, which lessened her workload and aide her to uphold standards. Her classroom management abilities were also improved, and the PLC members helped her to adopt practical methods to involve her learners and to establish a supportive classroom atmosphere. Moreover, informal conversations about resource sharing and WhatsApp communications helped her to become more secure and flexible (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009).

5.4 Section C: Mr Carson

I selected three snapshots from Mr Carson's narratives to highlight the ways and processes in which PLCs can assist ECTs on both a personal and professional level. The themes that emerged are: PLCs: A culture of trust and support; Navigating professional responsibilities through PLC support; and Broadening pedagogical perspectives through collaborative learning.

5.4.1 PLCs as the drivers of a culture of trust and support

Positive relationships and trust allow teachers to be open with one another to the point where they can discuss classroom management and methodology issues with their peers (Akinyemi et al., 2020). The assistance that teachers receive from their colleagues makes them feel

secure and supported and it instils confidence among group members. Mr Carson stated that, during his first year of teaching, he had struggled with classroom management. Fortunately, his PLC created a forum for building trusting professional relationships and colleagues helped and coached him to manage a classroom with a large number of students through challenging situations. He shared that younger members of his PLC were able to ask more seasoned educators for guidance on how to deal with challenging circumstances. Mr Carson emphasised the value of having experienced teachers who were able to recognize when he as a novice was experiencing difficulties. He was grateful that they were willingly offer support, even if they were not asked. These compassionate teachers elicited his trust and supported him both personally and professionally:

So, no one actually wants to be seen as wrong or incapable. But I guess it's like an untold thing where if you see someone struggling, you approach them in a friendly way and just assist them. One such incident was when we had a staff meeting and the principal wanted us as form teachers to give the girls a talk on personal hygiene since it was summer. Now, I am a male teacher in a girls' school and I obviously felt very uncomfortable to have this discussion with my form class. Thankfully, immediately after the staff meeting, one of my closest colleagues in my PLC told me that they would not mind coming to my class during registration and giving this talk to the girls. We have our motherly figures in our department who can gauge that someone is struggling and they volunteer to assist without a teacher asking for help. There were instances when I tried and help my team without them having to ask.

It is evident from Mr Carson's narrative that establishing a culture of mutual support and trust was a fundamental component of the PLC he participated in. According to Hallam et al. (2015), the success and efficacy of a PLC are impacted by team collaboration, which is facilitated by trust. A key trait of Mr Carson's PLC was the members' intuitive sense of collective responsibility and they quietly but instinctively identified when a colleague had difficulties. This tacit agreement encouraged the teachers to aid one another without waiting for direct requests for assistance, and in turn created a supportive environment that directly promoted growth. This notion is supported by Khasawneh et al. (2023, p. 450), who aver that "teacher collaboration is an essential element in the professional development of educators as it cultivates a sense of responsibility within the organizational setting".

According to Mr Carson, seasoned teachers used their sensitivity and intuition to identify when a new teacher was struggling. This suggests that such teachers contribute to the development of an atmosphere where vulnerability is greeted with empathy rather than condemnation and where direction is offered without passing judgment. This supportive culture is especially important for ECTs. Although ECTs might be reluctant to publicly admit their difficulties, the proactive support of more seasoned educators helps them to build their confidence and advance their careers. In addition to assisting new teachers in overcoming their challenges, this support system's warm and welcoming demeanour establishes the groundwork for continuous involvement in their PLC (McCormack et al., 2006). Moreover, Mr. Carson's story demonstrates a reciprocal relationship as he also assisted others. The act of stepping into a colleague's classroom demonstrates Mr. Carson's agency and capacity to help others, even in small ways. Mr. Carson and his colleagues in the PLC provided mutual support, shared their experiences, and worked together to overcome various obstacles. Such interactions are explained by Illeris's (2009) interaction dimension which proposes that relationships that are trustworthy, supportive, and positive are essential for learning, which is applicable to ECTs

5.4.2 Navigating professional responsibilities by utilising PLC support

According to Zeichner et al. (2024), teacher preparation programs are frequently criticized for failing to include some critical abilities that are necessary for preparing teachers for their multiple roles. This gap can lead to problems with teacher effectiveness (Zeichner et al., 2024). Mr Carson's progress towards mastering the complex procedures of external English oral moderation was a key takeaway of his involvement with his PLC and even informal meetings with other colleagues. These procedures had never formed part of his university training. He narrated his experiences as follows:

Firstly, I've learnt a lot. Again, being a novice teacher, a fairly new teacher, there's a lot in my subject that is needed from us, both internally and externally, and I've learned multiple things during these meetings and even in informal meetings that I was not exposed to in my studies. This made me feel overwhelmed and inadequate at first. Like for example, oral moderation happens internally and externally in our circuit. I did not know it was done in such an extensive way. There are multiple forms that need to be filled out, and an average taken stats done for each learner and each educator. This is obviously a lot of paperwork and I needed a lot of clarity and hands-on assistance on how to do it. I was told that these moderations are done in a

very particular manner and can get nit-picky. So, that's roughly 200 learners and seven educators, and any of us can get picked to go as our HOD exposes us every year. She allows a Matric educator to prep this work by themselves, and she overlooks it- in that growing us as individuals, professionally and personally. When my HOD offered me the opportunity to attend external moderation, there was no way I would turn that opportunity down. I was nervous but I wanted to be exposed to it and learn how to do it. So, when I had prepared for my turn, my HOD assisted me by correcting my errors and showing me what needed to be done and how to do it. When there's someone by your side guiding and teaching you something, it makes you feel confident. This better prepared me for future moderation sessions. And now I can even help train the next teacher who has to go for external moderation.

Mr Carson's story shows how PLCs can help ECTs gain confidence and competence if members provide both technical assistance and one-on-one support. He was able to learn how to handle the technical procedures involved in external moderation with the help of his HOD and with the joint assistance of experienced colleagues. This involved filling out several forms, calculating averages, and keeping track of statistics for teachers and students. At first, this extensive task, that involved over 200 students and multiple teachers, appeared intimidating. However, Mr Carson was able to gain confidence and independence thanks to the HOD's strategy of progressively including him in these duties under her supervision. By giving him this responsibility as an ECT, she was empowering him as a teacher. PLCs enable ECTs to gain greater autonomy and proficiency in their professional roles by including this kind of hands-on learning.

Mr Carson's experience highlights that PLCs can offer a regulated, supportive setting that gives new teachers the tools, knowledge, and self-assurance they need to successfully handle administrative duties. This knowledge was not just theoretical or academic in Mr. Carson's case. Working with PLC members who were more seasoned in the procedural parts of moderation made it extremely contextual and useful. The PLC gave him access to tacit knowledge, which is generally excluded from formal teacher preparation programs. According to Illeris (2009), being internally motivated and receiving encouragement cultivate a desire to learn and to assume greater responsibilities, which held true for Mr Carson.

In conclusion, Mr Carson's positive experiences of participating in a PLC serves as an example of how these communities can assist ECTs in their professional and personal development. ECTs can improve their professional competence by working together to acquire critical skills, which is a process that was omitted in their formal training.

5.4.3 Broadening pedagogical perspectives through collaborative learning

This theme reveals that Mr Carson's involvement in his PLC broadened his knowledge and perspective on teaching literature, notably the novel *The Life of Pi*. Moreover, it illustrates how an ECT's teaching style can be improved through collaborative learning. Being a novice teacher, Mr Carson first read the novel from a single point of view which emphasised its emotional elements. However, after discussions with PLC members, he adopted the more analytical, clinical interpretations shared by his colleagues, and this enabled him to view the story from a different viewpoint. Vescio et al. (2008) argue that PLCs encourage ECTs to reflect on the way they teach and allow them to adopt more appropriate pedagogical methods. In this context, Mr Carson stated the following:

Let's take, for example, Life of Pi. The end of part one is a very emotional chapter; that was my understanding. But I've seen, rather, I've heard, other teachers justify it as it can be quite clinical as well, with no emotions to it when you look at it from the point of the author. In that other view, I also see the truth of what's being explained, and I've now started to teach both methods; both the emotional and the clinical. So, I learned one method and then also learned another method from another teacher, who is an educator from my PLC, and now I am teaching it both ways to my learners. Other teachers suggested having conversational prompts in the class to bring about different perspectives related to the story. Also, 'Life of Pi' is a new novel; well, a relatively new novel that was [recently] introduced into the curriculum, so in a way we are all learning it together and helping one another. It's the same with poetry. Poems are open to interpretation. It's a lengthy process to analyze [a poem] and so our team usually meets to discuss the essence of the poem and what to emphasise to the learners.

By interacting with PLC members and being receptive to different perspectives, Mr Carson adopted a reflective stance, which is essential for development and advancement. His recognition of several teaching philosophies demonstrates his improved adaptability to a range of instructional approaches. Illeris's (2009) content dimension of learning can be used

to categorize this kind of professional learning. Through his participation in the PLC, Mr Carson was exposed new perspectives which combined the clinical and emotional responses to the novel. This experience demonstrates how valuable PLCs are as they can expand the teaching skills of new teachers. Moreover, Mr Carson's story demonstrates that PLCs benefit not only individual teachers, but every member of the PLC as it provides a forum for critical discussion and collaborative problem-solving.

5.4.4 Synthesis of Section C

Mr Carson's stories illustrate that PLCs help ECTs to develop their professional skills, build trust, and embrace teamwork. The members of his PLC offered vital advice regarding classroom management, administrative duties, and teaching methods. He was able to ask for advice because of the culture of mutual trust, and his transition into teaching was made easier by the intuitive assistance of more seasoned colleagues. His experiences of teaching literature and external English moderation demonstrate that PLCs can enhance pedagogical views and offer hands-on learning opportunities. By combining clinical and emotional approaches to literature interpretation, Mr Carson enhanced his lessons and demonstrated that PLCs allow ECTs to develop both professionally and personally in a nurturing environment.

5.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter explored ECTs' engagement with PLCs and revealed how this involvement can improve their personal and professional development. According to the findings, PLCs were multifaceted social spaces for teacher learning as they allowed the teachers to transition along a continuum from traditional, top-down approaches to forging dynamic, collaborative relationships. The three ECTs' experiences highlighted a variety of ways of engagement inside PLCs. Mr Ross outlined how mentorship and organized sessions offered a basis for better understanding subject matter or the content of the topics that needed to be taught. Through ongoing coaching experiences, his confidence to teach maths improved and he gained self-assurance and agency regardless of his novice status. Ms Priya demonstrated the advantages of resource sharing and collaborative forums, which lessened her workload and enhanced her classroom management skills. Lastly, Mr Carson's experiences showed how PLCs may influence ECTs by fostering trust, collaboration, and teaching abilities. His experiences as a language teacher and as someone who participated in external English moderation demonstrated that PLCs can provide practical learning opportunities that blend professional proficiency with personal development.

Overall, the findings highlight that ECTs' involvement in PLCs is diverse and multifaceted, involving informal mentoring, group problem-solving, and formalized supervision. Together, these components help to establish a nurturing atmosphere that develops new teachers' professional knowledge and confidence. It is therefore argued that PLCs become essential venues for fostering the overall growth of ECTs while preparing them for life-long learning and an openness for new ways of thinking, knowing, and practicing as successful teachers.

Chapter five examined how ECTs' involvement in PLCs improved their early professional and personal development, and in response to research question two I present a Tanka poem followed by an interpretive paragraph to synthesize the key concepts I learned based on Illeris's (2009) theory of learning. I entitled this poem: *Learning together*

Learning together

Practical learning
 Collaborative forums
 A continuum
 Multifaceted spaces
 Learning opportunities

The poem highlights the dynamic, collaborative, and practical aspects of learning with the aid of PLC members while it also reflects on the varied experiences of ECTs. These results are consistent with Illeris's theory of learning, which emphasises the integration of cognitive, emotional, and social elements. PLCs' diverse characteristics enable a range of learning possibilities, from collegial collaboration to mentoring, all of which support emotional and cognitive development. This demonstrates that PLCs foster ECTs' personal growth in addition to enhancing their professional knowledge, while they also encourage lifelong learning and receptivity to new ideas and teaching methods (Steadman, 2021).

CHAPTER SIX

BELONGING THROUGH BECOMING

6.1 Introduction

In Chapter five, I highlighted the various ways in which PLCs function as dynamic venues for support, mentoring, and collaboration, and I also delved into how selected ECTs perceived their involvement in PLCs. The chapter shed light on the interactions and procedures that occurred in PLCs and that helped the ECTs to deal with the difficulties of their career paths. The findings emerged from the narratives of three ECTs. Building on these findings, Chapter six explores the particular learnings from these situations in more depth by focusing on the personal and professional levels of the participants' experiences.

In this chapter, data generated from the three ECTs' narratives are presented, analysed, and interpreted to address the question: *“What personal and professional learnings occur in novice teachers that support their development when they engage in PLCs?”* This research question zoomed in on the particular kinds of learning that the novice teachers acquired through their participation in PLCs. The purpose was to make explicit the personal and professional dimensions of these teachers' growth in PLCs as social spaces of supportive professional learning.

To address the above question, I also utilised Illeris's (2009) framework of the three dimensions of learning which served as a guide for the interpretation of the narratives in my quest to make sense of the intricacies of the learning processes that impacted ECTs who were members of PLCs.

Chapter 6 is divided into three sections. Section A is composed of the narratives of Mr Ross, Section B is composed of the narratives of Ms Priya, and Section C is composed of the narratives of Mr Carson. Data were generated using three different research strategies, namely unstructured interviews, object inquiry, and memory drawings. Emerging themes were drawn from the teachers' narratives to address the research question.

6.2 Section A: Mr Ross

I selected three snapshots from Mr Ross's narratives to highlight the particular kinds of learning that he as a new teacher had acquired through his participation in PLCs. These

themes are: Acquiring content knowledge and building self-confidence; Acquiring classroom management skills; and Aspiring to be a teacher mentor.

6.2.1 Acquiring content knowledge and building self-confidence

Havran (2017) has demonstrated that participation PLCs significantly increases ECTs' confidence and degree of readiness so that they excel in a subject area. According to Mr Ross, the PLC helped him develop his understanding of subject content and to evolve from uncertainty to confidence in his ability to teach mathematics. This kind of professional learning aligns with the content dimension of learning as proposed by Illeris (2009). As a novice teacher who had not majored in mathematics, Mr Ross initially struggled to grasp the material. Nonetheless, he acquired the knowledge and skills required to effectively teach the material under the guidance and mentoring of Mrs Ndlovu, who was an experienced teacher but also a new member in the PLC:

There are many benefits. My PLC has impacted me in a number of ways. As I mentioned earlier, I think the biggest takeaway would be learning the content. I spoke about Mrs Ndlovu and how she mentored me and taught me the grade 9 maths content. In my first year, we were both teaching grade 9 math, so we worked very closely together. And despite not being a maths major, I learned the content. She helped me learn the content, and now I'm so comfortable with the content, and I even enjoy teaching the content. I feel so confident and comfortable with it now. And in fact, I can even say that maths is my favourite subject to teach at this moment. Besides grade 9, she helped me with other grades as well. This year I had to teach grade 10 math lit. Now for me, somehow math lit was even more challenging. When I was in high school, I did pure math, not math lit. It's not that math lit was hard, it was just confusing or challenging because it required more comprehension and understanding rather than actual math skills. It's much different from the math that I did in school. Mrs Ndlovu is also an experienced math lit teacher, and because of our relationship, she helped me develop in math lit as well. She shared with me all the resources and materials that she used to use.

As outlined in the narrative above, PLCs potentially cover any deficiencies left by gaps in initial teacher education programs as they become informal but extended training spaces for teachers. This resonates with Vescio et al. (2008), who contend that PLCs promote professional development by matching teachers' unique requirements and real-

time difficulties. Through shared experiences and insights, novice teachers expand their content knowledge and improve their methods of teaching (Vescio et al., 2008). Mr Ross developed a strong grasp of the Mathematics curriculum thanks to the guidance and assistance he received from his team.

His initial difficulties eventually gave way to confidence and she even a passion for teaching grade 9 mathematics. This newly acquired mastery not only increased his professional proficiency, but also made him feel enthusiastic and happy about teaching Mathematics, which he began to view as his favourite subject to teach. Mr Ross's newfound passion for mathematics demonstrates how an optimistic mindset is fostered by emotional security that is engendered by a PLC. For instance, in addition to acquiring increasing understanding of subject matter, members of the PLC, particularly Mrs Ndlovu, acknowledged and supported his efforts, thereby validating his professional growth.

Mr Ross and Mrs Ndlovu's professional relationship exemplifies the importance of interaction, which is Illeris's (2009) third dimension of learning. The PLC differs from traditional professional development workshops in that it provides continuous, real-time feedback. Mr Ross's growing confidence to teach the subjects Mathematical Literacy and Mathematics demonstrates the significant role the PLC played in his acquisition of adaptable teaching practices across varied subject areas. This shows that PLCs support the professional development of novice teachers as they provide opportunities for collaborative content mastery. Moreover, the guidance Mr Ross received emphasises how crucial it is that seasoned teachers assist novice teachers in gaining subject matter competence, which in turn improves their effectiveness as teachers and enhances their professional identities.

6.2.2 Acquiring classroom management skills

Classroom management is fraught with many difficulties for ECTs. According to Saleem et al. (2021), new teachers often feel unprepared to handle the classroom effectively. This theme focuses on how Mr Ross's membership of a PLC helped him improve his ability to effectively handle classroom discipline, which was an area where he struggled as a novice teacher. When he began teaching, Mr Ross believed his challenges with learner discipline were unique to him due to his youthful appearance. However, after consulting with the members of the PLC, he came to the conclusion that classroom management was a problem that all teachers faced regardless of their experience level. His thoughts are captured below:

I was very scared entering the classroom. When I did my teaching practice, the school that I went to allocated me to relief duties [batting] the entire day, which was not very fair. Literally every lesson every day, relief. I barely got time to do observations or even teach any lessons. It was a horrible experience. I was a student teacher, it was the first time I did teaching practice, and all of those relief classes. They didn't take me seriously at all. I felt helpless, like I had no control. Because of this experience, I knew I had to make an impression on the learners at my new school so I wouldn't have issues with discipline. Therefore, when I joined my PLC and saw all the older, experienced teachers, one of the first pieces of advice that I asked for was how to manage discipline and how to assert myself as a strict or scary teacher. You know, when I started, I thought it was just me that had issues with discipline. Maybe because I was new, because I was young, I figured it was only I who had these issues. But through engaging with the others, other members, I learned that they also had the same issues. They were in my shoes at one stage. And with their experience, they were able to train me and teach me how to deal with discipline, and up till today, I still use their tips and tricks in my classroom, and it's been really helpful and effective. Having good classroom management is so important. It can literally break you or make you as a teacher. I love my job.

By interacting with experienced PLC colleagues, Mr Ross acquired insightful knowledge and useful strategies for handling classroom behaviour, and these strategies and tactics enabled him to foster a positive learning environment in the classroom (García & Weiss, 2019). Creating such a social learning space aligns with the interaction dimension of Illeris's (2009) learning theory. Sharing and getting feedback through collaboration with colleagues with diverse experiences made his interactions meaningful, and he was able to apply this guidance to everyday situations in the classroom.

The vulnerability and insecurity that ECTs frequently feel when they walk into the classroom are highlighted by Mr Ross's experiences. Mr Ross aspired to be a teacher who could take charge of his classroom. This motivated him to be a lifelong learner and to participate regularly in PLC meetings so that he could move beyond his struggles as an ECT and become a capable educator. Vescio et al. (2008) agree that educators value the support of PLCs and the ideas and tools shared in these spaces to enhance their professional practice.

Mr Ross's identity as a young male teacher was more than just a functional responsibility (Rodgers & Scott, 2008). He claimed that being a teacher who could negotiate the complexity of the classroom was central to being a 'good' teacher. He stated that classroom discipline could "*literally break you or make you as a teacher*", and this view highlights how important classroom discipline is for both job retention and job satisfaction (Buckman & Pittman, 2021). Gaining classroom management expertise strengthens one's sense of professional identity and supports Illeris's (2009) notion that acquiring ideas and content knowledge expands one's thinking about everyday practices as an ECT.

6.2.3 Aspiring to be a teacher mentor

Grimm (2024) highlights the importance of shared professional development, which entails collaborative opportunities for learning when teachers work together to enhance their professional abilities and teaching skills. Grimm adds that teacher leadership within PLCs greatly contributes to shared professional learning and advanced teaching practices (Grimm, 2024). Mr Ross aspired to eventually advance his role in his PLC into a position where he could share a mentorship space. As he received guidance, encouragement, and support as a novice teacher, he was motivated to reciprocate and draw on his experiences to become a mentor to other novice teachers:

Firstly, I'm a lifelong learner. Every time when I come to PLC meetings, I know that I'm gonna learn something new. And no matter how many meetings I attend, how experienced I am, I'm always willing to learn new things. And, you know, be open to new ideas and engaging with others. I hope that my role in my PLC will change, and I could be a mentor. In fact, this year we had a new teacher who joined our department. She's fresh out of university. Because we both are the young ones [in the department], we developed a close relationship and she often comes to me for help. I feel very happy and willing to help her. It makes me feel like one of the seasoned teachers! Even presently, as a novice, I want to contribute and share the ideas that I have acquired as a postgraduate student and the new debates and knowledge around teacher development.

The above narrative demonstrates that Mr Ross's PLC served as a space where he could acquire leadership skills and a sense of responsibility (García & Weiss, 2019). Mr Ross considered himself a lifelong learner, and this demonstrates his openness to learning new things and collaborating with others. Even in his novice position, he tried to make a

meaningful contribution to his PLC by exchanging ideas and creating a caring, respectful, trusting PLC space. His desire to help upcoming beginners was a significant transition from being a person who received assistance to a person who became a leader who contributed to the learning community. This finding is consistent with Illeris's (2009) incentive dimension of learning, which holds that incidences of both professional and personal development are fuelled by internal motivation and emotional engagement. Furthermore, his stories emphasise Illeris's (2009) interaction dimension, which contends that social involvement, shared expertise, and teamwork enhance professional development.

Mr Ross's narratives highlight the fact that PLCs are spaces where ECTs can develop a sense of responsibility and purpose and where they can aspire to become future leaders while they also support ongoing professional learning. Mr Ross illustrated that PLCs may foster attitudinal shifts and intrinsically motivate proactive teachers who are committed to collective improvements in the teaching profession when they support others (Ikpuri & Peter, 2024).

6.2.4 Synthesis of Section A

Mr Ross's narratives demonstrate how PLCs can support ECTs' transition and early professional experiences. His narratives highlight the complex lives and everyday tensions that ECTs experience and emphasise that PLCs, as social spaces, can open up opportunities for reflection and feedback from others in order to move beyond just acquiring classroom management techniques. Transforming oneself personally and professionally means being open to ongoing shifts of knowledge and agency (Ikpuri & Peter, 2024) and allows one to think differently about negotiating everyday classroom situations. PLCs encourage ECTs to embrace lifelong learning and to aspire to become leaders in their teacher communities. These spaces develop reflective teachers who are dedicated to helping and mentoring aspiring new teachers.

6.3 Section B: Ms Priya

I selected four snapshots from Ms Priya's narratives to highlight the particular kinds of learning that she as a new teacher acquired due to her participation in a PLC. These themes are: Gaining expertise in managing administrative responsibilities; Shifting focus from syllabus completion to teaching for deeper understanding; Obtaining a balance between work and personal life; and Evolving her teacher identity through PLC participation.

6.3.1 Gaining expertise to manage administrative responsibilities

In their early years of employment, ECTs frequently struggle to handle the many administrative duties they need to shoulder (Corbell et al., 2010). This perspective aligns with Fantilli and McDougall's (2009) argument that the challenges faced by new teachers when they juggle their administrative and teaching responsibilities emphasise the necessity for support networks to facilitate their transition. Admin responsibilities can be overwhelming for ECTs and can leave no time for their professional learning (Wahab et al., 2021). Admin work can thus lead to teacher de-professionalising as many tend to merely try to survive their routine practices with no time for thinking about teaching and the classroom in new and different ways. However, due to her involvement in a PLC, Ms Priya was able to develop in such a manner that she learnt to handle both her administrative duties and teaching responsibilities.

As a novice teacher, Ms Priya first encountered difficulties with parent-teacher conferences, document moderation, and completing the required paperwork for internal and external assessments. She needed a deeper understanding of these responsibilities which she had not been prepared for as a preservice student at university. Her thoughts are expressed below:

I needed help with admin work. So, because you aren't really taught how to do it at university level, it just depends on the school that you're at and how they run things. I needed my PLC to assist me with the moderation of documents. So, there were our tests, our assignments, our exams, pre- and post-moderation... I had obviously never done that before, so I needed help with that. There is a range of paper work to complete for each formal task completed and they are all needed for filing as well as the moderation process. Besides having to learn how to complete the forms, this process is steered by the PLC. Members of the department work together to complete moderation, sign off documents, and analyse results. Then there is also internal and external moderation. So, all the documents that go along with that, I needed the assistance to know how to fill them in. And there are the diagnostic sheets and our files that we need to save for moderation. With regard to admin, I'd say they [PLC members] also helped me to deal with parent-teacher conferences. I was intimidated by the idea of meeting parents and formed my own criteria of what I might need to mention to them, but when I discussed this with my colleagues, they were able to narrow down my ideas and establish points that needed to be emphasised at these meetings. They gave me tips on the manner to address behaviour issues, academic

shortcomings, and overall suggestions a parent might need to hear. This was extremely useful as they were guiding me from a parent's perspective themselves. I now use their suggestions to prioritize what to talk to the parents about and how to conduct the entire meeting.

The excerpt highlights the importance of interaction for learning to be meaningful. In her PLC, Ms Priya was able to draw on the feedback and experiential knowledge of her colleagues and she was capacitated to adapt her approach to administrative duties in the context of her particular school. She emphasised the importance of understanding the school culture and managing routine practices and habits. Her experiences demonstrate that PLCs are essential spaces for situated learning, which occurs when new information is learned within the environment in which it is used (Owen, 2014).

In this process of learning, Ms Priya developed holistically. She felt reassured that she could handle different facets of her professional work and that she could develop beyond just teaching subject content. This analysis foregrounds the holistic nature of early professional challenges and the need for PLC spaces to facilitate the development of the personal dimension of teachers, such as confidence and ability, so that they will establish healthy parent-teacher relationships. The personal and emotional dimensions are intertwined with the professional abilities of teachers (Steadman, 2021).

The PLC experience makes explicit how the interaction dimension of learning played out in Ms Priya's experiences and how learning was jointly developed through peer interactions and a shared approach to moderation and documentation (Illeris, 2009). Furthermore, the practical, administrative skills Ms Priya acquired, like effectively completing documents for moderation, filling out diagnostic forms, and learning how to conduct parent-teacher conferences, exemplify Illeris's (2009) content dimension of learning. The deep understanding of the professional knowledge she required as a classroom teacher was necessary for Ms Priya to be able to effectively negotiate the complexity of her educational experiences, as Fransson and Grannäs (2013) aver. Ms Priya's experiences serve as an example of how PLCs can be instrumental in novice teachers' ability to bridge the gap between formal training and the situated, cultural and practical demands of teaching (Zeichner et al., 2024).

6.3.2 Shifting her focus from syllabus completion to teaching for deeper understanding

Ms Priya's participation in her PLC shifted her teaching from a technical instrumentalist approach that focused on completing the syllabus to prioritizing deep, meaningful student understanding. As a novice teacher, Ms Priya initially felt the pressure to cover all the content required by the annual teaching plan (ATP) (Petersen et al., 2020). However, through ongoing meetings with her PLC, she learned the importance of teaching with a focus on learners' comprehension rather than rushing to finish the syllabus:

Okay, so with regard to the classroom, I'd say that I needed my PLC to assist me with the way we teach. So, it's not necessarily the content, but they helped me with techniques and methods. Certain sections require a certain type of teaching, and I think, overall, they emphasised that you should teach to make learners understand rather than to just to finish the syllabus. We decided this as a PLC, because we did have an incident with our grade 10s when we were trying to cover the syllabus fast. Because the curriculum is so vast and it is much different from the pace of grade 9 work, we had fallen behind. Trying to catch up with the ATP was very stressful, and so and we didn't realize that because we were rushing to cover work the learners had difficulty understanding it. We only picked this up once they did informal tests and such, and we realized that they showed no understanding. So, as a PLC, we decided, based on our grades and our topics, what we would cover and how we would cover it in the best possible way so that learners would actually understand rather than us just rushing to complete the work. Educators shared ideas on methods they had found successful over time as well as methods to test learners to best prepare them for exams. The same applied to an incident with grade 8s, where we relooked at their topics and discussed as a PLC which topics to engage in further because they would build the foundation for every grade to follow. We worked closely with teachers teaching the upper grades to best identify what skills and sections needed to be targeted before the FET phase.

Ms Priya's experience exemplifies a pedagogical shift from content delivery to teaching for meaningful learning and understanding. The PLC's collective reflection on sound teaching experiences helped Ms Priya and her colleagues to acknowledge the negative impact of rushing through content without ensuring that students would fully grasp the material. According to Petersen et al. (2020), content coverage alone can impede students' ability to acquire critical thinking and comprehension skills. Ms Priya's PLC acknowledged that, while

syllabus completion was a goal, the true objective was to ensure that learners truly understood the concepts. As a result, the PLC helped her to adopt a more thoughtful and learner-centered approach, and she learnt to prioritize teaching methods that would promote deeper understanding over merely ticking off content covered as required by the syllabus (Vescio et al., 2008).

Ms Priya's inner drive to enhance student learning, spurred by the PLC's collective reflection and the identification of learning gaps, demonstrates Illeris's (2009) focus on incentive for teacher learning. Through meaningful engagements and interaction with her colleagues, Ms Priya was able to rethink her approach and open up her perspectives on teaching, allowing her to transcend beyond the mere delivery of content which is a traditional approach that continues to dominate many classrooms. Her involvement in the PLC assisted her to engage in collaborative problem-solving, meaningful feedback, and decision-making strategies (Ikpuri & Peter, 2024).

As an ECT, Ms Priya developed confidence to move beyond the desire to ensure syllabus coverage and she started to work towards depth of learning. This shift highlights that PLCs can serve as 'change agents' that guide ECTs and imbue them with the capacity to rethink and reimagine their teaching priorities, thus leading them to become thinkers and to see teaching as intellectual work.

6.3.3 Achieving a balance between work and her personal life

Work-life conflicts have been shown to have a detrimental effect on job satisfaction, and their prevalence raises the possibility that teachers will consider quitting their jobs (Cho et al., 2023). Therefore, maintaining a healthy work-life balance is essential for the efficacy and wellbeing of teachers, including ECTs.

Learning how to attain a healthy balance between her job and personal life was one of the most important lessons Ms Priya took away from her involvement with the PLC. She revealed that, as a novice teacher, she used to put work before her own leisure, which is a common challenge many teachers face. However, as demonstrated below, Ms Priya gained valuable insights for better workload management due to the guidance of her PLC colleagues:

Personally I think that, as a novice teacher, you tend to prioritize work. You don't want to be seen as underperforming or be in a situation where you aren't providing

enough for learners. As a new educator you are already seen as young and inexperienced so I thought I had to spend a lot of time preparing and completing work so I could maintain good standing within my school. And so, what I needed was advice from my PLC and their guidance as to how to balance work and personal life so I wouldn't experience burnout and fatigue. One of the things I started early in my career, based on their advice, was to do school work at school as much as possible, and finish whatever I could during working hours, even during free lessons, so that it's less work to take home. This is because, based on what they said, they had spent a lot of time doing work at home, and then it cut down on their family time, and the stress from work just carried over, and it was just a continuous cycle. So, I don't take marking home and will try to finish it at school. This has helped me create boundaries with work as well as set myself personal time rather than continually working. As a teacher, you are already tired at the end of the school day, and not creating personal space creates an exhausting cycle. Another method that they suggested was not teaching till end of the lesson. This allows me time in class, to correct work, mark books, allow learners to go through their work and ask for clarity. I can give them an activity to do and then I can walk around during class time and mark books. It's methods like this that help me avoid taking work home or staying in later to mark learners' books.

ECTs like Ms Priya frequently experience a great deal of pressure to be recognized as efficient in their work. This pressure may emerge as the urge to put work before personal life, which can result in burnout and a poor work-life balance. Teachers may develop burnout as a result of extended stress, which is linked to both poor confidence in their abilities to execute their work and low morale. According to Khan et al. (2014), workload is a main source of teacher stress and burnout.

By sharing her story of losing family time which resulted in stress and a poor work-life balance, Ms Priya was motivated to safeguard her wellbeing. She obtained the incentive to negotiate a work-life balance following the advice of her PLC members and she was able to manage both her work and private lives better. Illeris's (2009) content dimension is evident in the beneficial methods she adopted based on the advice of members of her PLC, and her life became much more balanced. Furthermore, her innate motivation to safeguard her well-being is a clear example of the incentive component. She prioritized her own health by following

the advice of her PLC members who understood the detrimental effects of burnout. Finally, the interaction dimension manifests in the encouraging conversations she had with PLC members as they aided her in achieving a better work-life balance.

Ms Priya's narrative shows that PLCs are spaces where novice teachers can develop and embrace multiple responsibilities for personal growth. It is in these spaces that new teachers are given sound advice on how to manage their wellbeing as well as their responsibilities as teachers. The advice that Ms Priya received enabled her to acquire the knowledge and capacity to engage meaningfully with her different responsibilities and to avoid burnout (Lancu et al., 2018)

6.3.4 PLC participation encourages evolving teacher identities

In the first stages of their careers, novice teachers tend to start forming their professional identities. Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) emphasise how context, the self, emotions, and other people all influence the transformation of teacher identities. They contend that teachers' identities are dynamic and that they are continually reshaped by their experiences, connections, and environment. This was also true for Ms Priya. As a result of her involvement in a PLC, she experienced an incredible shift in her identity as a teacher, particularly as she transitioned from an implementer and deliverer of knowledge to a confident, thoughtful teacher.

When you mentioned confidence, one of the main things that I was reminded of was there was a teacher in our PLC who was able to assist me with teaching pure maths grade 10 and 11 for the first time. So, since it is a lot of new content, it was quite difficult to manage. He was generally ready to assist me in going over the work or teaching me content that I might have forgotten, or just show me ways in which I should teach it. And he would also tell me, like the time frame, which parts to focus on. That kind of thing. That made me feel much more confident because, at first, it is overwhelming, and you take that pressure upon yourself to prepare the kids, and sometimes you go overboard, or you waste too much time, and then you end up in a more stressful situation. So that guidance assisted me in managing my time. I think that's a big aspect that helped me [become] confident [with] time management. And then, besides that, they always check up on me. At first, I would say I was much more fearful of the new content and intimidated with teaching a new subject. And then, now it's much easier. There's less panic. It's a more steady and smooth process. Now

teaching those classes, it's the same concept, you just feel more confident after a while and when you know you're supported by those teachers around you because they're always available to assist you.

Ms Priya received valuable guidance from an experienced colleague in the PLC so that she understood the curriculum's intricacies. She was able to prepare her students more effectively and in a stress-free manner thanks to this mentorship, which was crucial in helping her create efficient time management techniques. This form of professional learning falls under Illeris's (2009) first dimension of learning, namely the content dimension. This is evident in Ms Priya's narrative of how her colleague helped her learn grade 10 and 11 maths content. Ms Priya's emotional development is reflected in the incentive dimension, as her PLC's guidance and assistance boosted her self-esteem and lessened her sense of insecurity. Lastly, the interaction dimension is a crucial component of this change as working together with PLC members promoted ongoing feedback, experience sharing, and contextual learning.

Essentially, Ms Priya's early professional experiences went beyond her need to merely acquire the skills to impart content information, and it is clear that the PLC was instrumental in shaping who she became as a teacher. Ms Priya's development emphasises how important PLCs are in helping ECTs develop their identities so they can face their everyday challenges and the complexities of being teachers who need to be agentic beings as well (Ikpurī & Peter, 2024).

6.3.5 Synthesis of Section B

Ms Priya's experiences and learning emphasise how important PLCs are for ECTs' development on both a personal and professional level. By engaging in collaborative exchanges, she was encouraged to shift her prior narrow perspectives of teaching and traditional methods. The turning point occurred when she transitioned from being a nervous ECT into a self-assured, creative thinker. The fact that Ms Priya bridged the gap between her formal education and the demands of teaching showcases the value of the collective learning PLCs encourage. Moreover, her learning highlights the value of these communities as they foster ECTs' growth and shape their evolving professional identities.

6.4 Section C: Mr Carson

I selected three snapshots from Mr Carson's narratives to highlight the particular kinds of learning that new teachers may acquire when they participate in PLCs. The themes that emerged are: From classroom teacher to examiner; Becoming a leader teacher who guides underperforming schools; and Expansion of vocabulary and insight into the English language.

6.4.1 From insecure classroom teacher to competent examiner

PLCs have been demonstrated to improve new teachers' abilities by offering cooperative settings for professional development (Cotter, 2019). In a similar vein, Rigelman and Ruben (2012) argue that ECTs who participate in PLCs appreciate peer inputs that result in better teaching methods. According to Mr Carson, his involvement in his PLC contributed to his professional development as he was assisted to acquire the necessary skills to set exam question papers at a desired standard. As a novice educator who was not familiar with the format and specifications of English examination question papers, Mr Carson relied on his PLC's direction and mentoring to increase his proficiency in this area. He shared the following narrative:

First, I've learned that my team has helped me as a new educator. They have helped me in setting examination questions papers through the course of the years...and I feel I have grown exponentially. I've mastered quite a lot of exam sections, specifically for grade 9 papers. I can now single-handedly set an entire paper worth 70 marks. That was how they have grown me. I was new to the subject and I had no idea of the type of questioning or the sections on which questions needed to be set. The thing that I struggled with the most was the different levels of questioning when setting an exam paper. I knew that, according to the CAPS, document we have to set a paper according to Bloom's Taxonomy. But I did not trust my judgment when it came to the 4 levels of difficulty because, as you know, we have learners of different academic abilities. So, I knew I had to cater for the high flyers as well as those that were struggling to meet the pass mark. Another colleague assisted me by reviewing my paper and doing Bloom's Taxonomy with me. She also gave me past years' papers that I used as a guide. Referring to these papers, she also emphasised the different techniques of testing, which allowed us to cater for all learning capabilities. I started to use techniques like visuals, open-ended questions, and current world issues that learners can relate to.

Mr Carson's story demonstrates how novice teachers can be assisted by PLC members to address the unique difficulties they face in attaining real-world directed, meaningful, and professional development. Setting examination question papers necessitates knowledge of assessment theories such as Bloom's Taxonomy, varied techniques, and knowledge of curriculum regulations. Mr Carson's development emphasises the importance of the mentorship he received from his PLCs colleagues. He made great progress with their help, especially when it came to setting grade 9 English exam papers. He went from knowing little about sections in the paper and questioning strategies to being able to independently set 70-mark question papers. The PLC's collaborative environment guided Mr Carson and offered him the support he needed to further this skill.

Mr Carson struggled with self-doubt at first, but as he received acknowledgement from his colleagues, he began to exhibit creative abilities and his confidence increased. This is consistent with Cotter's (2019) finding that PLCs can significantly boost ECTs' efficacy and confidence in themselves. Illeris's (2009) incentive aspect of learning, which connects confidence in oneself and emotional involvement to professional competence, explains this emotional shift. Moreover, Illeris's (2009) content dimension is demonstrated by the development of Mr Carson's professional abilities and the information he acquired about Bloom's Taxonomy, the exam framework, and a variety of testing techniques. Finally, the interaction dimension is also evident in his development because he relied on collaboration with his PLC colleagues to help him improve his skills (DuFour et al., 2006).

Mr Carson shifted from uncertainty to self-assurance by perusing and emulating previous exam questions and embracing the feedback his colleagues provided. This theme emphasises the importance of PLCs in helping new teachers become proficient and confident, thereby training them for their role (Mabunda & McKay, 2024).

6.4.2 A leader who guides his own and learners from an underperforming school

According to Bhushan (2018, p. 3), teacher autonomy entails “the capacity, freedom, and/or responsibility to make choices concerning one's own teaching”. Autonomous educators are inclined to make notable improvements to their teaching methods when they actively participate in self-motivated professional development (Rarasati & Pramana, 2023). Teachers who are allowed to select their own professional development pathways are

therefore dedicated to their work and have a robust sense of who they are and want to become (Rarasati & Pramana, 2023).

According to Mr Carson, while he initially felt unprepared for the reality of teaching, he acquired the skills and self-assurance that were necessary to succeed in the job. He attributed his growth to the mentoring, direction, and the experiences he had shared with members of his PLC. In 2024, he became a 'lead teacher'. His role as lead teacher was to teach and support Matric learners at a local underperforming school in an effort to increase their pass rate:

Then my second one is I came in as a novice teacher. I knew absolutely nothing other than the studying that I had done. I was book smart, but not practice smart as I had no gained any experience yet. So, through my team I was assisted and uplifted and guided. Every member...actually, of my department...I learned a lot from them and I retained that knowledge. And this references the fact that I'm now currently a lead teacher for grade 12s at another school that is underperforming. As you know, if you fail English Home Language you fail the year. Since this underperforming school is located near Pearson High, our school has taken up the responsibility of assisting the learners. Being one of the lead educators, I and two other colleagues take it as a personal challenge to best equip these learners so that they can improve their results. These sessions are held after school hours when the learners come to our school and we take turns teaching 1-hour sessions. We teach about 80+ learners at a time in our school hall. This is extremely rewarding as we see learners who are dedicated and enthusiastic and who just need guidance. Even though there are so many learners, their work ethic and behaviour are commendable. Being a lead teacher has given me a lot of self-satisfaction and fulfilment. I now utilize whatever knowledge they [PLC members] have given me. I spread it across to others, specifically students. So, I still feel like there's a circle going around, because those students are going to respond in exams that teachers will mark; they will learn the same concepts that I viewed in a different way, and they will thereafter share it with other learners.*

Mr Carson's transformation from an ECT to a lead teacher demonstrates the extent to which PLCs can develop ECTs' leadership capacity. This is achieved when members encourage novice teachers to be confident and to engage in ongoing learning. According to Grimm (2024), teacher leadership develops when they interact with other teachers, teacher leaders,

and the members of their professional learning communities. By interacting with more seasoned colleagues, Mr Carson developed the capacity and knowledge to work with diverse learners in different schooling settings. His advancement to the position of lead teacher exemplifies the transformative power of PLCs that allows professional development so that such teachers will transcend the individual and focus on the collective. Mr Carson's consistent participation and leadership that were fuelled by emotional fulfilment, self-assurance, and professional fulfilment reflect the incentive dimension of Illeris's (2009) theory. As a novice teacher, he felt compelled to use his expertise and abilities to help students of another school who were at risk of failing.

The reciprocal learning process that Mr Carson describes (embracing the knowledge his PLC members shared and in turn sharing it with learners) stands out as a unique feature of his learning. This process exemplifies Illeris's (2009) interaction dimension, which holds that learning is fundamentally social and supported by collaboration and shared knowledge.

For any ECT, becoming a lead teacher is a significant shift in both their personal and professional lives as it shows how much their confidence, knowledge, and capacity to help others have grown. In a professional sense, it signifies a change from being a learner in the PLC to a leader who can significantly contribute to the education field. He showed autonomy and became an agent of change by integrating the new ideas and information that were shared with him to enhance student outcomes in another school setting.

6.4.3 Expansion of his vocabulary and insight into the English language

To effectively fulfil the requirements of their students and adjust to an ever-changing educational environment, educators must embrace the challenge to become lifelong learners. According to Hursen (2013), educators must be lifelong learners in order to fulfil the demanding duties placed upon them and they must have a beneficial impact on the attitudes, actions, and lifestyles of their learners.

When this theme emerged, I examined how Mr Carson's involvement in his PLC aided his development as an English teacher, particularly in terms of vocabulary enrichment and the comprehension of the nuances of the English language. Although he was qualified as an English teacher, Mr Carson acknowledged his own limitations. He credited his PLC members

for helping him to better grasp intricate concepts in poetry and figurative language. He described this learning in this regard as follows:

In all honesty, when we are born, we know nothing. We continue to learn as much as we can. Although I am an English teacher, I don't know every single word or concept that exists in the language that I'm supposed to be teaching. Through my department, through my team, I've gained a lot of knowledge on vocabulary that I never thought of or used before; on concepts such as things in poetry, figurative language. It's not clean cut such as that's the way it is full stop. There's deeper meanings in figurative language. And through my team, in all honesty, I have learned that you cannot read one side of the mirror. Although it gives you one reflection, there's still something hidden behind it that we cannot see, and we as educators have to dig deeper. And that has grown me in my vocabulary and my understanding. But it also spreads to the examination part. Although I may have set an exam, when a learner is answering that exam, I cannot go directly to MY answer, because that's MY thought process. My team has taught me that you have to look at it from the eyes of the learner and their mindset. You have to be fair as they are probably 15 to 16 years old. They do and think totally differently from us. So, my team has helped me gain that ability. They taught me so much to gain knowledge and also gave me an understanding to look through their eyes and their minds. Don't focus on what you believe is right. Rather have an open mind and the willingness to learn. This is one of the key factors of being a successful English teacher in the long run.

By collaborating with his PLC colleagues, Mr Carson discovered that teaching English was more than just the superficial interpretation of questions and fixed answers. He learnt that it also entailed identifying deeper meanings and viewpoints that went beyond his initial understanding. This method not only improved his own understanding of the English language, but also changed the way he taught as it allowed him to take into account other interpretations, including those of his learners. This shift in his understanding that his learners were also knowledge-makers was enlightening. He went from solely relying on his own ideas to recognizing and respecting the various viewpoints of his learners, which was a profound shift in perspective that enhanced both his professional and personal growth.

The three dimensions of learning in Illeris's (2009) model provided a theoretically rich lens through which I could examine Mr Carson's growth. His enhanced use of vocabulary and

enriched content knowledge reflect the development of the content dimension as proposed by the framework. The interaction component is also illuminated by the social and collaborative aspects of learning Mr Carson embraced inside the PLC, as he was receptive to learning from both his learners and his colleagues. Lastly, the incentive component is evident in his recognition of his own limitations and his consequent desire to increase his knowledge and perspectives.

In conclusion, Mr Carson's narratives serve as an example of how PLCs foster professional confidence and educational humility. In addition to demonstrating the professional growth of Mr Carson as an ECT, these narratives highlight the larger function of PLCs as they have the potential to transform teacher identities and encourage teachers to be reflective (Prytula & Weiman, 2012).

6.4.4 Crucial learnings drawn from the collective narratives of the three participants

The collective accounts of Mr Ross, Ms Priya, and Mr Carson demonstrate how PLCs provide ECTs with opportunities for both professional and personal development. The function of PLCs in developing confidence, adaptability, and reflective teaching methods is a recurrent theme throughout their experiences. While Ms Priya's experience showed how collaborative exchanges helped her evolve from a frightened novice to a confident, creative educator, Mr Ross's participation in PLCs showed how continuous feedback and reflection enabled him to traverse the challenges of classroom management. Similarly, Mr. Carson's progress in exam setting and leadership within his PLC demonstrates how hands-on mentorship helps ECTs develop competency and eventually contribute to their larger teaching communities. In all three stories, PLCs are shown to be lifelong learning facilitators that inspire ECTs to adopt new teaching approaches, broaden their professional horizons, and undertake leadership positions. Above all, these narratives demonstrate that teacher development encompasses more than just technical proficiency. It entails a social and emotional transformation that moulds teachers into confident, devoted professionals who are committed to their profession and their students.

6.4.5 Synthesis of Section C

The narratives shared by Mr Carson demonstrated how PLCs can help ECTs to grow both personally and professionally. He went from battling to set examination question papers to becoming proficient in this skill as he was constantly exposed to colleagues who offered practical guidance. The support he received ultimately helped him to set question papers that accommodated a range of learner capabilities. His PLC also empowered him to become a lead teacher, as he was soon appointed to coach matric students toward better results. In this manner he was able to share his knowledge with learners from an underperforming school. Furthermore, his participation in the PLC expanded his knowledge of the English language and promoted learner-centred teaching methodologies as he learnt to embrace a variety of literary interpretations. Mr Carson's stories demonstrate that PLCs can help students and teachers as they are spaces where they can foster competence and self-assurance and engage in creative and critical thinking.

6.4.6 Chapter Summary

Chapter 6 explored some particular professional and personal experiences of the participating ECTs that were enhanced through their involvement in PLCs. The stories that Mr Ross, Ms Priya, and Mr Carson shared served as primary examples of how PLCs can promote teacher development and help ECTs to bridge the gap between classroom realities and formal teacher training. This chapter emphasised the close connection between the personal and professional aspects of teaching as the arguments illuminated how ECTs who were members of PLCs had become effective, reflective teachers and active members of the educational community.

Mr Ross highlighted the significance of reflection and feedback when he, as a novice teacher, tried to manage the intricacies of teaching. He was able to adopt sound classroom management strategies and soon developed extensive skills thanks to his involvement in the PLC. He was reminded of the importance of lifelong learning and was inspired to extend his skills as a mentor inside and outside the school. In a similar vein, Ms Priya's stories emphasised how the PLC helped her change her emphasis from desiring to simply finish the curriculum to her vision to encourage greater competence in her students. She gained self-assurance, improved her administrative skills, and acquired the capacity to manage her personal and professional lives through collegial interactions, which ultimately shaped her professional identity. Mr Carson's experiences served as an example of how PLCs can enable ECTs to develop if they offer hands-on coaching and expose novice teachers to shared

learning. His work as a lead teacher and his experiences of learning to set examination question papers of the desired standard demonstrate that PLCs can advance learner-centred teaching approaches and broaden professional knowledge.

Collectively, the stories revealed that the PLCs that impacted these teachers were not only spaces for professional growth, but they also served as a catalyst for personal development. The novice teachers were encouraged to grow into reflective, self-assured, and flexible teachers who would always be dedicated to their students and the teaching profession as a whole.

The key concepts and understandings that my analyses in the current chapter highlighted emerged from my efforts to address research question three. My understanding and learnings are crystallised in a Tanka poem, and the pivotal results that relate to Illeris's (2009) framing are then summarised in an interpretive response.

Shaping the Teacher Within

Gained self-assurance

Hands-on coaching and learning

A catalyst

To promote life-long learning

Advance teaching approaches.

This poem encapsulates the essential components of professional and personal development that ECTs may acquire when they become involved in PLCs. The poem emphasises the pivotal roles of self-assurance, practical coaching, and PLCs' transformative role as spaces that promote long-term learning and the improvement of teaching techniques. Based on to Illeris's (2009) theory that combines the social, emotional, and cognitive elements of learning, the poem illustrates that PLCs are able to foster an atmosphere where these three elements come together. Mentorship, feedback, and collaborative learning help ECTs to gain professional knowledge and to grow emotionally and socially into resilient teachers. My research thus clarifies that PLCs may function as dynamic environments that support ECTs' lifelong learning trajectories through the encouragement of their professional and personal development (Hudson, 2024).

CHAPTER SEVEN

LEARNINGS AND A NEW BEGINNING

7.1 Introduction

This research project focused on the narratives of early career teachers about their early professional experiences and the role PLCs played in their development. My primary motive for researching this phenomenon stemmed from my limited understanding as an early career teacher about what occurred in my everyday practice as I negotiated the complexity of teaching in an all-girls' classroom in a public-school setting. I had personal experience with the difficulties of adjusting to the intricate reality of teaching in a South African public high school after completing formal education at a South African university. Feelings of isolation, emotional overload, and self-doubt clouded my early experiences, and I even began to reconsider my choice of profession. These difficulties propelled me to join the Mathematics PLC as I felt I needed assistance to deepen my subject matter knowledge as I had not specialised in teaching maths. Hence, I had to draw on my limited schooling experiences as a maths learner to prepare lessons and adopt teaching approaches for the diverse learners that I encountered on a daily basis.

This research study has profoundly opened my mind and perspectives as a researcher and ECT teacher. I was able to shift my thinking and I now better understand ECTs' early professional experiences and the learning that PLCs induce. I view PLCs not only as spaces where teachers' current work-related problems can be resolved, but as a learning environment where complex, practice-based understandings of teaching can be developed and shared.

Drawing on the narratives of the early career lives of Mr Carson, Ms Priya, and Mr Ross, I was able to reflexively consider the notion that learning to teach is a deeply unique and complex experience. It is both an individual and a collective process in a profession where the inextricable links between the private self and the public/professional self are a given (Palmer, 1997). Through the different learning processes I drew on, I was able to make meaning of ECTs' early professional experiences and their perceptions of the role of PLCs in their lives. A key finding that emerged is that PLCs are potent spaces for developing nurturing mentorship practices. They also encourage and engender networking among colleagues with diverse experiences, sharing and listening, self-reflection, and collective

reflection. They also allow ECTs to become more proficient subject content deliverers and the implementers of policy (Silver, 2016). As a teacher-researcher, my view of PLCs is that they are complex yet transforming spaces for cultivating not only teachers' professional knowledge and skills, but also the emotional fortitude and self-assurance required to be open-minded and flexible to new and different ways of thinking and teaching. The scholarly perspective I offer through the generation, analysis, and interpretation of teachers' narratives goes beyond viewing PLCs as just a tool for technical support. I view it as a dynamic space where teachers with diverse experiences can meet, share, give feedback, build mentoring relationships, and coach ECT's to develop new knowledge and facilitate personal and professional growth.

This Master's research project was constructed in seven chapters. This chapter presents a reflective glance at the study and sheds light on how this research learning experience has illuminated my perspectives as a teacher and developed my scholarly insights as a researcher.

7.2 Overview of the Dissertation

In Chapter one, the study's background and my motivation for exploring novice teachers' growth through PLCs were thoroughly explained. The chapter focused on the emotional and professional obstacles that frequently accompany early teaching experiences as I highlighted the problems faced by ECTs as they transition from theory to practice. I explained the value of PLCs as I described them as encouraging, cooperative settings that are essential in fostering ECTs' development. My personal rationale was explained as I acknowledged that I also focused on my own experiences as a new teacher and that I explored the revolutionary influence PLCs had on my professional journey. The foundation for the exploration of ECTs' narratives was laid by the study's clearly established purpose as well as its main research objectives and research questions.

Chapter two included an in-depth literature review on novice teachers' professional development through PLCs, with a focus on the developmental requirements and obstacles that ECTs have to face. The importance of PLCs as reflective and collaborative settings that promote professional development and ease the transition into teaching was underlined throughout the chapter. The South African setting was specifically examined, with emphasis on how systemic issues affect PLC effectiveness. The theoretical framework, which was based on Illeris's (2009) theory of learning, provided a prism through which I viewed the complex development of ECTs who were members of PLCs. The review emphasised how

PLCs can help new teachers develop their professional identities, gain confidence, and participate in reflective activities that foster individual and group development. Ultimately, the chapter emphasised the significance of developing structured and teacher-led PLCs to improve meaningful learning for both educators and students, and I also established the groundwork for the methodological evaluation that would follow in Chapter three.

Chapter three described the methodology for this study, and I emphasised the use of a qualitative, interpretivist approach centred around narrative inquiry to investigate the lived experiences of ECTs involved in PLCs. The chapter explained the methods utilised to generate the data, namely memory drawings, object inquiry, and unstructured interviews. I also described the participant selection procedure that had been used to recruit the three participants. These methods made it possible to examine the participants' career and personal paths in great detail. The chapter also covered the data analysis process, emphasising the importance of strict procedures and reflective practices to assure trustworthiness and believability. The dedication to participant confidentiality and upholding ethical integrity throughout the study were among the ethical factors that were highlighted. The chapter concluded with my acknowledgment of the limitations of the study. I also reaffirmed the importance of narrative inquiry in addressing the intricacies of new teachers' growth in PLCs.

Chapters four to six presented the ECTs' unique and evolving narratives of the hurdles they faced and the successes they achieved. The chapters emphasised the dynamic nature of the classroom setting and the importance of adaptability, resilience, and strong teacher-student bonds. Each chapter was concluded with a Tanka poem followed by a succinct interpretive response to the respective research questions that were addressed in each chapter.

In Chapter four, titled *The Early Carrer Teachers' Narratives*, I presented the following poem to highlight my overall learnings for research question one:

Turbulent Beginnings, Empowered Futures

Conquer challenges
 Negotiating viewpoints
 Foster connections
 Transformative mentorship
 Voice different viewpoints

This poem captures the foundational stories of ECTs as they negotiate their professional lives. It focuses on how ECTs overcome obstacles, form connections, and progress through mentorship while negotiating multiple points of view. These experiences are consistent with Illeris's (2009) theory of learning, highlighting the interrelated role of the cognitive, emotional, and social aspects of transformative learning. Although Illeris's theory generally applies to broader settings, my research clarifies how these components appear in the context of the role of PLCs in the professional and personal lives of ECTs. It demonstrates that the development of ECTs is influenced not just by cognitive acquisition, but by being open to different viewpoints and diverse voices through creative mentorship opportunities and meaningful social connections in dynamic educational settings.

In Chapter five (titled *Learning Landscapes*), I presented the following Tanka poem in response to research question two to illuminate my nuanced understanding of ECTs' involvement in PLCs and how this improved their early professional and personal development.

Learning together

Practical learning
Collaborative forums
A continuum
Multifaceted spaces
Learning opportunities

The poem highlights the dynamic, collaborative, and practical aspects of learning in PLCs while reflecting on the varied experiences of ECTs there. These results are consistent with Illeris's theory of learning, which emphasises the integration of cognitive, emotional, and practical elements. PLCs' diverse characteristics enable multifaceted /learning possibilities, from collegial collaboration to mentoring, all of which support emotional and cognitive development. This demonstrates how PLCs foster ECTs' personal and professional knowledge creation, encouraging lifelong learning and receptivity to new ideas and methods across a continuum of approaches and models.

Chapter six, *Belonging Through Becoming*, explored the ways in which the three ECTs' involvement in PLCs promoted their professional and personal development. The key concepts and understandings were also crystallised in the following Tanka poem:

Shaping the Teacher Within

Gained self-assurance

Hands-on coaching and learning

A catalyst

To promote life-long learning

Advance teaching approaches.

This poem encapsulates the essential professional and personal development components that ECTs acquire from their involvement in PLCs. It emphasises self-assurance, practical coaching, and PLCs' catalytic function in promoting long-term learning and improving teaching approaches, teacher-learner relationships and teacher-teacher relationships.

According to Illeris's theory of learning, which combines social, emotional, and cognitive elements, the poem illustrates how PLCs foster an atmosphere where these three elements come together to advance a complex understanding of what it means to teach, and how early professional experiences can serve as a catalyst for cultivating new perspectives and opportunities to enhance the culture of teaching and learning in situated meaningful ways.

7.3 Shifts in my Understanding of ECTs

My understanding of ECTs has changed in light of the study's findings. For instance, a key finding is that a dynamic interaction is generated between professional and personal learning when ECTs participate in PLCs. I now understand how and why ECTs continue to function in challenging educational settings, as collaboration, reflection, and mentoring are essential for teachers' development. According to the findings, ECTs flourish when given opportunities to participate in collaborative, encouraging environments that promote reflection and provide real-world, experiential learning opportunities. The results also emphasise the value of collegial relationships and emotional support, as such support enables members of ECTs to develop their professional identities and confidence and to transcend beyond merely surviving in the classroom to actively influencing their learners through appropriate teaching practices.

7.4 Theoretical Learning

This research study has profoundly influenced me as both a researcher and an educator in a KwaZulu-Natal school. Before doing this study, I knew very little about how PLCs could help ECTs in ways other than just solving their current work-related problems. I have gained

an appreciation for the complex relationship between professional skill development, personal development, and the collaborative potential of PLCs as a result of my exploration into the stories of Mr Carson, Ms Priya, and Mr Ross.

In response to Illeris's theory of learning, which combines social, emotional, and cognitive elements, the interpretive Tanka poem illustrates how PLCs foster an atmosphere where these three elements come together. Hands-on mentoring experiences, feedback, and collaborative learning facilitate ECTs commitment and motivation to grow emotionally and socially, allowing them to become more open-minded, confident and caring teachers. My research illustrates PLCs as dynamic, relational spaces that can support ECTs' lifetime learning trajectories by encouraging meaningful, mutual, and multiple ways for professional-personal development.

7.5 Personal Growth and Reflection

7.5.1 Personal-professional learning

The pantoum poem below highlights my thoughts and feelings about the important role that support networks (PLCs in my case) played in the pivotal stages of my personal and professional development.

A Newbie's Journey

My career as a teacher

Theory to practice, daunting and vast

Responsibilities, challenges

Support needed for growth

Theory to practice, daunting and vast

PLCs: an open, accepting and friendly space

Support needed for growth

Communities of wisdom and guidance

PLCs: an open, accepting and friendly space

Responsibilities, challenges

Communities of wisdom and guidance

My career as a teacher

My primary motivation for exploring the topic under investigation stemmed from my observations of events and practices in everyday classroom settings in the high (secondary) school. As an early career teacher, I personally experienced the difficulties of adjusting to the intricate reality of teaching in a South African public high school immediately after completing formal education at university. A sense of isolation, the burden of an emotional overload, and self-doubt characterized my early experiences, to the extent that I even began to reconsider my choice of profession. These difficulties made me realise how important it would be to ‘belong’ to a supportive community that would promote my professional and personal development.

Having engaged with such a community, I now realise how important it is to use narratives and storytelling as channels for comprehension and development (Huber et al., 2013). My empathy and admiration for the common challenges educators face and the victories they achieve are profound. Moreover, I now understand the imperatives of persistence, flexibility, and introspection as they are key to overcoming teaching and research challenges.

7.5.2 How I have changed

As a result of this study, I am now a more reflective and confident researcher and teacher. I acknowledge the value of making connections and establishing networks, looking for shared solutions, and embracing lifelong learning. In addition to reaffirming my dedication to the teaching profession, this experience has increased my faith in the capacity of PLCs to significantly improve the lives of novice teachers and their learners. This research has been enlightening for me both personally and professionally and it has capacitated me with profound skills that will direct my future work as a teacher and advocate of school-based teacher development.

7.6 Methodological Learning

The use of narrative inquiry as a qualitative research approach has been incredibly eye-opening and has elucidated insightful information about the topic as well as my own research methods. As I employed a qualitative, interpretivist framework, I was able to explore the lived experiences of ECTs and the role that PLCs played in their development in great detail. As I reflected on how I should adhere to the standards for quality in narrative inquiry, I made sure that my study and the finding that emerged would be trustworthy. To achieve this, I

encouraged authenticity, respected all ethical issues, and protected the confidentiality of the participants throughout the study.

One of the most important lessons I learnt is that narrative inquiry is highly suitable for capturing the complexities of participants' experiences (Webster & Mertova, 2007). I acquired extensive knowledge of how ECTs manage their professional development by employing arts-based data collection methodologies, namely memory drawings, object inquiry, and unstructured interviews. Nonetheless, these approaches had some limitations. For example, I had to be adaptable and receptive during the unstructured interviews, which was challenging when discussions took an unexpected turn. Moreover, maintaining ethical conduct while gathering rich data necessitated ongoing evaluation and modification.

Not every part of the study process went according to plan. Making sure that the memory drawings and artefact inquiries evoked the level of introspection I had envisaged was an unforeseen challenge. I learned from this how crucial it is to provide participants with precise instructions while making room for genuine expression. However, maintaining coherence and depth in the narratives while conducting the analyses was the most difficult task. It required careful consideration and introspection to strike a balance between respecting the opinions of the participants and creating a coherent analysis.

If I were to conduct another narrative inquiry study, I would focus more on pre-research preparation to improve my facilitation of the data generation processes. My advice to future researchers who contemplate narrative inquiry is to embrace the methodology's unpredictability while staying grounded in ethical principles and the need for trustworthiness. The versatility and capacity to highlight the distinct voice of each participants were what gave this narrative inquiry its depth, and it is these attributes that render such studies both demanding and fulfilling.

7.7 Moving Forward

7.7.1 Implications for schooling and everyday classroom practice

My research has the potential to significantly influence educators as the findings may encourage thoughtful collaboration and improved teaching approaches not only among novices, but among seasoned teachers and mentors as well. This study has changed my perspectives of both teaching and research and has motivated me to emphasise reflective

learning and collaboration in my teaching. In order to support and encourage ECTs, I intend to incorporate more organized mentorship and collegial engagement opportunities into my school as I and my colleagues go forward. Furthermore, my research may inspire colleagues to strengthen their current PLCs by improving their involvement, fostering a culture of support, and ensuring ongoing learning both inside and outside their respective schools.

7.7.2 Implications for further research

Future studies might look at exploring the long-term effects of PLCs on learner outcomes and teacher retention as well as how they evolve over time. Furthermore, I am interested in how online PLCs might help teachers connect in broader contexts and overcome geographical constraints. These directions will allow me to continue contributing to the teacher development field.

7.7.3 Implications for policy and CPD support for ECT development

In order to encourage ECT development, my research emphasises the value of establishing collaborative spaces like PLCs. It suggests that policy should prioritize developing structured but flexible venues for mentorship and peer networking. CPD programs should prioritize personal and professional development, ensuring that ECTs get subject-relevant opportunities to develop and interact with new ideas and, in the process, cultivate emotional confidence and collegial support. Policies should also support school administration in actively encouraging PLC participation, giving ECTs the time and resources they need to participate fully in the varied learning opportunities.

7.7.4 Norms and standards for teacher development

Although it serves as a fundamental framework for directing teacher development, the *Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa, 2011–2025* falls short in meeting the particular requirements of ECTs. According to my research, ECTs need structured PLCs and specialized CPD programs to close this gap because they are at a pivotal point in the development of skills and professional identities. This research highlights the need for policy refinement to clearly address the complex opportunities and challenges of ECTs' formative teaching years by illustrating how PLCs promote mentorship, collaboration, and reflective practice. If this advice is heeded, it will guarantee that ECTs are supported once they enter the field and that the larger strategic aims of teacher education frameworks will then be successfully extended.

7.8 Conclusion

This study shed light on the significant influence of PLCs on novice teachers' personal and professional development. By exploring three novice teachers' narratives, I discovered that PLCs provide crucial spaces for engagement, support, and development during the challenging early phases of a novice teacher's careers. My participants' narratives demonstrated how PLCs may be accessed to address issues such as curriculum delivery, classroom management, and emotional resilience in a transformative way. The analyses of the narratives they shared evoked a sense of community and professional identity associated with PLCs. It was clearly revealed that PLCs offer safe spaces for new educators to evaluate their methods, look for guidance, and exchange their stories.

Moreover, the findings revealed that PLCs enhance ECTs' learning in a number of ways. On a personal level, PLCs promote confidence and emotional wellbeing by encouraging engagement and eliminating feelings of isolation. Professionally, they facilitate the improvement of teaching methods, classroom management techniques, and reflective practices that close the knowledge gap between classroom teaching and theory. According to Illeris's (2009) theory of learning, these results demonstrate the multifaceted learning that occurs when educators work together and focus on content, incentives, and interaction.

Although my research emphasizes the many advantages of PLCs in supporting ECTs, it's crucial to recognize their limitations as well. One significant limitation of the PLCs in my study was that they largely served as subject departments, with meetings occasionally prioritizing administrative responsibilities above real professional learning. Consequently, there was less opportunity for mentorship, profound pedagogical engagement, and transforming educational experiences. Furthermore, it's possible that the weekly one-hour meetings were insufficient to support ongoing professional development, especially in areas like instructional techniques and teacher knowledge development. Interpersonal conflicts inside the PLCs also became a problem, occasionally impeding members' ability to freely collaborate and share expertise. These disagreements and the PLCs' structural restrictions show that, although they provided ECTs with invaluable support, they also had limitations that need to be taken into account when evaluating their overall influence on professional development and teacher induction.

By responding to the three research questions, this study highlights that novice teachers' involvement in PLCs might be a transforming experience rather than just a collaborative instrumental practice. It emphasises how these community spaces may assist in [re]creating ECTs into self-aware, creative, and passionate life-long learners who have the capacity to cultivate productive relationships with other teachers and learners as professionals who can mediate the complexities of teaching and diverse classrooms. Additionally, this study shows how beneficial mentorship, resource sharing, and collaborative problem-solving are for promoting both individual and group development in the teaching profession

As I conclude, I recognize the study's broader ramifications. PLCs serve as more than just instrumental spaces for professionals encountering the complexities of public schools. They might serve as approaches and ways to think about fostering an environment of mutual support and ongoing learning in schools. The insights acquired here encourage policymakers and educational leaders to prioritise organised, inclusive, and sustainable school-based PLCs that cater to the interests and needs of ECTs.

By supporting ECTs, we not only ensure their development, but also the success of learners and the improvement of the teaching profession. As teachers, we must strive to create environments where collaboration, development, and resilience are foregrounded. If we do this, we shall pass on a legacy that will leave a permanent mark of approval on the pages of the book that future educators will write.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1	UKZN ethical clearance
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Appendix 1- UKZN ethical clearance



09 July 2024

Pranav Harripersadh (218003274)
School of Education
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear P Harripersadh,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00007171/2024

Project title: Narratives of novice teachers personal and professional development through professional learning communities

Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 12 June 2024 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.

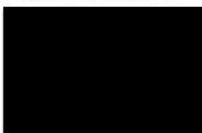
Incidents of adverse events and serious adverse events (AEs and SAEs) should be reported in writing to HSSREC, the study sponsors, and any regulatory authority (where appropriate), within 7 working days of the occurrence for local sites and 14 days for all other South African sites.

This approval is valid until 09 July 2025.

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 Health Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)
/dd

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 2- Department of Education: permission to conduct research



KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE
EDUCATION
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

ANNEXURE C

OFFICE OF THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

Private Bag X 9137, PIETERMARITZBURG, 3200

Ref No.: 2/4/8/191

Anton Lembede Building, 247 Burger Street, Pietermaritzburg, 3201

Email: buyi.ntuli@kzndoe.gov.za

Tel: 033 392 1051

Enquiries: Mrs B. T. Ntuli


Mr Pranav Harripersadh
85 Drakensberg Street
SHALLCROSS
4093

Dear Mr Harripersadh

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **"NARRATIVES OF NOVICE TEACHERS ON THEIR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES (PLCs)";** in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the Intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from **03 June 2024 to 31 December 2027**.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Mrs Buyi Ntuli at the contact numbers above.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.


Mr G.N. Ngcobé
Head of Department: Education
Date: 03 June 2024

GROWING KWAZULU-NATAL TOGETHER

Appendix 3- Research instrument one prompt

RQ 1: What are novice teachers' stories of participation in PLCs?

1. Memory Drawing

Prompt 1: Think back on your experience as an early career teacher in a professional learning community. Draw a picture that captures any key event, challenges, or personal development you've had through your participation in a professional learning community.

Guidelines and Instructions

Participants will be asked to recall their experiences as novice teachers participating in a PLC. The following instructions and prompts will aid in the drawing.

- ❖ Reflect on your journey as a novice teacher participating in a professional learning community.
- ❖ Think about a significant moment, challenge, breakthrough, or personal growth you've experienced throughout your engagement with PLCs. Try to remember and revisit in detail your thoughts, feelings and personal meanings attached to this unique experience.
- ❖ Can you create a memory drawing that represents this experience?

Instructions for Memory Drawing

- ❖ One page will be required for this activity.
- ❖ Using either a pen, pencil, or crayon of your choice draw an image for the experience described above.
- ❖ You are allowed to add words, phrases, or speech bubbles to your drawing.
- ❖ Neatness, accuracy, or expertise is not necessarily is not the focus of the memory drawing, but rather the experience and meaning attached to the drawing.
- ❖ Participants will be guided and reminded to make use of pseudonyms and not use real names and places to protect the rights and dignity of other individuals and institutions.
- ❖ I will assure them that they only need to disclose information that they feel comfortable sharing.
- ❖ Provide a suitable title for your drawing.
- ❖ Reflect on your thoughts, feelings, and choices of color or word uses and attach symbolic meanings to your memory drawing.
- ❖ Write a short paragraph to describe your memory drawing or send a voice note to explain the memory drawings.
- ❖ Participants can forward their drawings and write-up or voice notes using either WhatsApp or email.

Appendix 4- Research instrument two prompt

RQ 2: How does novice teachers' participation in PLCs enhance their early professional learning?

Object Enquiry

Prompt 2: Choose one or two objects from either their classroom or school environment that you use every day.

Guidelines and Instructions

They will be asked to share why they chose those objects, reflect and revisit either positive or negative experiences and stories, and attach any sentimental meaning associated with their chosen objects. The participants will then be required to write – up about the objects they chose and share a short voice note or video. They will be reminded and reassured that they must only share experiences and stories that they are comfortable with sharing. The write-up must include a title and picture of the objects chosen.

The following Prompts and Questions will assist to facilitate the activity with comfort and understanding.

1. Choose an artifact(s) that symbolizes an important moment in your development as a novice teacher in PLC. What is the significance of this artifact to you?
2. How does each object evoke memories and feelings of your experiences in a PLC?
3. In what ways do these objects demonstrate the usefulness of collaborative learning?
4. How do these objects symbolize your development as a teacher?
5. What story does this artifact tell about your personal and professional development?

Appendix 5- Research instrument three prompt

RQ 3: What personal and professional learning happens for novice teachers' development through PLCs?

Unstructured interviews

One interview will be conducted per participant in this study. In the unstructured interview, participants will be asked a main broad question to gain an understanding of the stories of their participation in PLCs. Additionally, I will ask probing questions that will guide and invite members to share their professional development experiences, perceptions, and stories within their PLCs.

Main Prompt

Could you discuss your experiences as a novice teacher in a PLC and how your involvement has impacted your professional growth.

Appendix 6- Letter to the participant

LETTER TO THE PARTICIPANT

Dear Sir/Madam

I, Pranav Harripersadh, am a Master's degree student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, School of Education. My specialization is in Teacher Development Studies. As part of the requirements for the degree, I will be conducting a research study titled: **Narratives of novice teachers on their personal and professional development through Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)**. The aim of this study is to collect and analyse narratives from novice teachers about their personal and professional development in the context of professional learning communities.

The objectives of this study are:

1. To explore novice teachers' stories of their participation in PLCs.
2. To find out how novice teachers' participation in PLCs enhance their early professional learning.
3. To understand what personal and professional learning happens for novice teachers' development through PLCs.

I selected you as one of my participants because you meet the selection criteria of being a novice teacher with five or less years' experience who belongs to a professional learning community.

I would like for you to share your experiences of being a novice teacher belonging to a PLC and how this has contributed to your personal and professional development. As this study uses narrative inquiry as a research method, I will be looking at past and present practices. I aim to meet you in person or use online platforms to meet with you and have discussions and generate data which will only be used for the purpose of this study. The data production process will involve the generation of the novice teacher's stories of personal and professional experiences using memory drawings, unstructured interviews, and object inquiry.

Given that the study is drawing on the narratives of novice teachers on their personal and professional development through Professional Learning Communities, I assure you that the

study will not compromise teaching and learning time as it will be conducted after school hours. This also includes using online platforms such as WhatsApp / Zoom and will take place at a time convenient to the novice teacher as a participant. If your participation in the study awakens any feelings of discomfort, I will be providing my participants with the details of the referred counselor, Dr Angeline Stephens. (Dr Angeline Stephens – 033 342 7779/stephens@ukzn.ac.za)

Please note that:

- Data will be stored in secure storage and destroyed after 5 years.
- The choice to participate, not participate or stop participating in the research is left on to the participant. He/she will not be penalized for taking such an action.
- All confidentiality will be guaranteed by using the pseudonyms to protect the school and the participant’s anonymity.
- Any information given by the participant cannot be used against him/her, and the collected data will be used for purposes of this research only.
- The participant’s involvement is purely for academic purposes only, and there are no financial benefits involved.
- If you require any information about this study upon its completion, I will be most willing to provide you with this at the end of my study.

For any enquiries regarding this study please feel free to contact me or my supervisor Professor Daisy Pillay. You may also contact me or the UKZN Humanities & Social Science Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

Name	Contact Number	Email address
Professor Daisy Pillay (Supervisor- UKZN)	[REDACTED]	pillaygv@ukzn.ac.za
HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION Research Office, Westville Campus	Tel:27312604557- Fax:27312604609	Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Govan Mbeki Building PrivateBagX54001 Durban 4000 KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA		
Pranav Harripersadh (Researcher)	██████████	218003274@stu.ukzn.ac.za

Thank you

██████████

Mr P.Harripersadh

Appendix 7- Participant declaration (unsigned)

PARTICIPANT DECLARATION

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

PARTICIPANT DECLARATION OF CONSENT

The title of the research dissertation: *Narratives of novice teachers on their personal and professional development through Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)*.

I, _____ (Full name/s of Participant) have been informed about the study entitled: *Narratives of novice teachers on their personal and professional development through Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)*, by Pranav Harripersadh. I hereby grant permission to be a participant in this study. I understand that I have willingly agreed to participate in this research study and that I am at liberty to withdraw from the research study at any time, so should I desire. I also understand that my name, name of the school, and my responses will be kept confidential. If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study, I understand that I may contact the researcher or the supervisor.

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about any aspect of the study or the searchers then I may contact:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION
Westville Campus
Govan Mbeki Building
Private Bag X 54001
Durban
4000
KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTHAFRICA
Tel: 27312604557 -Fax: 27312604609
Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

I hereby **provide/ do not provide** consent to :

		Do consent	Do not consent
1	Consent to Pranav Harripersadh conducting research.		
2	Consent to Pranav Harripersadh to use photographs provided by the participant.		
3	Consent to Pranav Harripersadh to use objects and/or drawings provided by the participant.		

4	Consent to Pranav Harripersadh to use memory drawings provided by the participant.		
5	Consent to Pranav Harripersadh to use unstructured interviews as a data generation method.		

Signature of Participant _____

Date: ____/____/2024

Appendix 8- Letter to the principal (gatekeeper)

P. Harripersadh

S [REDACTED] ss

4093

The Principal

XXXXX

XXX

XXX

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Dear(Principal)

I trust you are well.

My name is Pranav Harripersadh. I am currently pursuing my studies towards a Master's of Education Degree at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, School of Education, Edgewood campus. My specialization is in Teacher Development Studies. As part of the requirements for the degree, I will be conducting a research study titled: **Narratives of novice teachers on their personal and professional development through Professional Learning Communities.** The aim of this study is to collect and analyse narratives from novice teachers about their personal and professional development in the context of professional learning communities (PLCs). This study intends to increase understanding of how PLCs contribute to the growth, support, and professional learning of novice teachers in their early years of teaching by investigating their experiences and perspectives.

The research questions I seek to answer are:

1. What are novice teachers' stories of participation in PLCs?
2. How does novice teachers' participation in PLCs enhance their early professional learning?
3. What personal and professional learning happens for novice teachers' development through PLCs?

As this study is using narrative inquiry as a research method, I will be looking at past and present practices. I hereby request your approval to conduct a study with two Level One Teachers from your school as participants in this study. The data production process will involve the generation of the novice teacher's narratives of personal and professional experiences using memory drawings, unstructured interviews, and object inquiry. All data that will be collected will be used for my research project report. Permission is also requested from you for the publication of the findings in the form of research reports and publication in research journals. You will be informed if such publications take place.

Given that the study is drawing on the narratives of novice teachers on their personal and professional development through Professional Learning Communities, I assure you that the study will not compromise teaching and learning time as it will be conducted after school hours using online platforms such as WhatsApp/ Zoom and/or in-person interactions and will take place at a time convenient to the level 1 teacher as a participant.

The data collection and production will start from May 2024 and will take place at a time convenient to the Level One Teacher as a participant. The participant will be apprised of the research process, his/her participation and his/her rights in the research processes, through the informed consent form. His/her permission will be sought prior to his/her participation in the data collection process. The research is scheduled to take place once you have granted permission and after ethical clearance from the university has been obtained. Permission is also going to be sought from the Department of Education to conduct the study.

Please note that:

- Data will be stored in secure storage and destroyed after 5 years.
- The choice to participate, not participate or stop participating in the research is left on to the participant. He/she will not be penalized for taking such an action.
- All confidentiality will be guaranteed by using the pseudonyms to protect the school and the participant’s anonymity.
- Any information given by the participant cannot be used against him/her, and the collected data will be used for purposes of this research only.
- The participant’s involvement is purely for academic purposes only, and there are no financial benefits involved.
- If you require any information about this study upon its completion, I will be most willing to provide you with this at the end of my study.

For any enquiries regarding this study please feel free to contact me or my supervisor Professor Daisy Pillay. You may also contact the UKZN Humanities & Social Science Research Ethics Committee. Contact details are as follows:

Name	Contact Number	Email address
Professor Daisy Pillay (Supervisor- UKZN)	[REDACTED]	pillaygv@ukzn.ac.za

<p>HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION Research Office, Westville Campus Govan Mbeki Building PrivateBagX54001 Durban 4000 KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA</p>	<p>Tel:27312604557- Fax:27312604609</p>	<p>Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za</p>
<p>Pranav Harripersadh (Researcher)</p>	<p>██████████</p>	<p>████████████████████</p>

Thank you

████████████████████

Mr Pranav Harripersadh

Appendix 9- Principal declaration (unsigned)

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT TO CONDUCT RESEARCH
PRINCIPAL'S DECLARATION OF CONSENT

The title of the research dissertation: *Narratives of novice teachers on their personal and professional development through Professional Learning Communities (PLCs).*

I, _____ (Full name/s of Principal) have been informed about the study entitled: **Narratives of novice teachers on their personal and professional development through Professional Learning Communities** by Pranav Harripersadh. I hereby grant permission to the researcher to conduct research using a participant/s from my school. I understand that the participant has willingly agreed to participate in this research study and that she/he are at liberty to withdraw from the research study at any time, should they so desire.

I also understand that the name of the school, name of the participant and their responses will be kept confidential. If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study, I understand that I may contact the researcher or the supervisor. I am aware that if I have any questions or concerns about my rights as the Principal of the study participant, or if I am concerned about any aspect of the study or the researcher then I may contact:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION
Westville Campus
Govan Mbeki Building
Private Bag X 54001
Durban
4000
KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA
Tel: 27312604557 -Fax: 27312604609
Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

I hereby **provide/do not provide** consent to:

		Do consent	Do not consent
1.	Consent to Pranav Harripersadh conducting research.		
2.	Consent to Pranav Harripersadh to use photographs/pictures/writings provided by the participant.		

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL: _____

DATE: _____/_____/_____