



**NOVICE TEACHERS' STORIES OF LIVED EDUCATIONAL  
EXPERIENCES: NEGOTIATING DILEMMAS IN CLASSROOM  
PRACTICE DURING COVID-19**

by

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## **SUPERVISOR'S AUTHORISATION**

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

Supervisor: Professor Daisy Pillay

Signed: .....

Date: .....

## DECLARATION

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## ABSTRACT

This study on “*Novice Teachers’ stories of lived educational experiences: Negotiating the dilemmas of classroom practice during a pandemic*” explores the everyday lives of three South African novice teachers teaching in different schooling contexts (rural, urban, and deep rural) during the COVID-19 pandemic. It zooms in and out of their everyday personal-professional experiences to make meaning of the dilemmas they encountered in their practice during the pandemic.

Framed by Rodgers and Scott (2008) conceptual framing and the dilemmatic space framework, this study brings to the surface the voices of novice teachers as they transition from university to the complex educational experience of school, which was further complicated in 2020 and 2021 by a pandemic. Drawing on a narrative inquiry approach within the interpretive paradigm, stories of their everyday practice during the pandemic opened up opportunities to explore and understand the perspectives which shaped their decisions and choices inside and outside the classroom.

The stories generated from various creative methods, including artefact inquiry, memory drawings, photovoice, collage inquiry, and unstructured interviews, provided the openings for teachers to remember their past and freely share the rich and complex stories of their experiences. The data analysis foregrounds a range of emotions and feelings and significant relationships that shaped the telling of the stories of their experiences during the pandemic. During the pandemic, the novice teachers found themselves in a new environment that required different kinds of personal and professional support to navigate their way and strengthen their everyday practice.

This study has heightened my awareness of novice teachers’ lived experiences and what they are and do to negotiate a complex educational terrain in their everyday lives. This research highlights that novice teachers confronted various situations during the pandemic in their unique schooling contexts. The study found that the novice teachers’ experiences were linked to their past experiences, and their childhood and schooling years were pivotal in shaping the perspectives and choices they made during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this to my late father, Imran Bux. Dad, although our lives' journeys forced us to be apart, the memories you left behind have been the driving force behind my ambition. I wish you were here to witness everything I have achieved. However, I believe God has given me my own guardian angel to watch over me through every step of my life journey. The love you have given me lives in my heart forever. I love you.

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## **ACRONYMS**

COVID-19: Coronavirus disease of 2019

B. Ed: Bachelor of Education

NT: Novice teacher

PPN: Post Provisioning Norms

SMT: School Management Team

ELRC: Education Labour Relations Council

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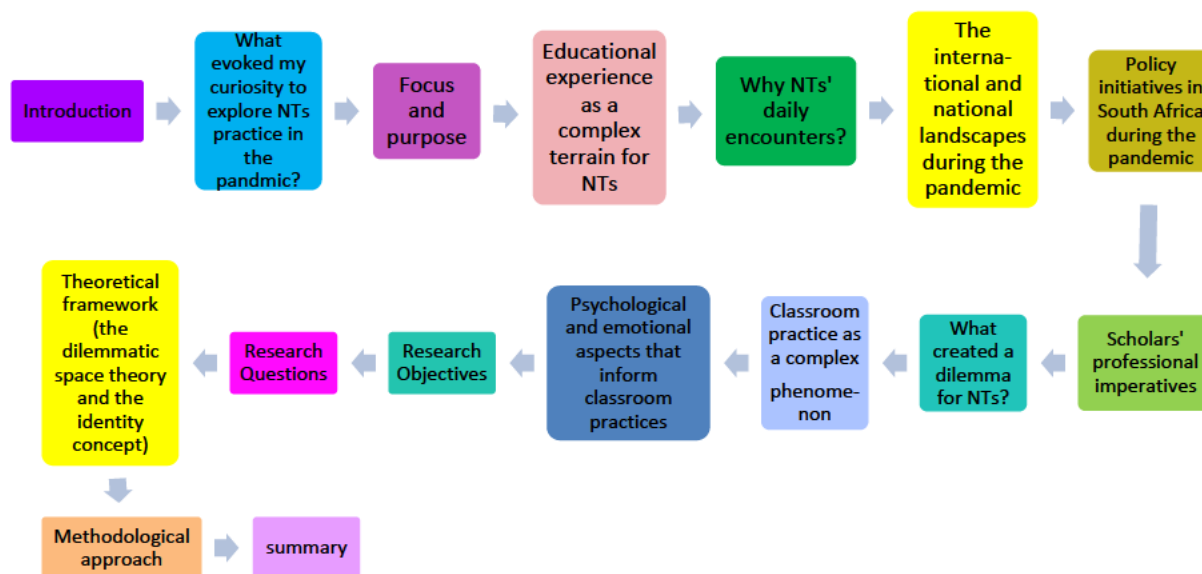
# CHAPTER ONE

## MAPPING OUT THE STUDY

### 1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the focus and purpose of this research study. The motivation for and background to the study are discussed to elucidate the importance of understanding novice teachers' (NTs') everyday lived experiences as they negotiate and engage in classroom practices. The participating novice teachers' storied lives allowed me to zoom into and understand the choices they made and how they negotiated their respective situations during the COVID-19 pandemic in urban, rural, and deep rural school contexts. I discuss my personal and professional rationale for focusing on these stories that were experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic and also present the research objectives, the key research questions, the methodological approach that I followed, and the theoretical framework in which the study was embedded.

The thesis does not include a separate literature review chapter as scholarly views are presented throughout the discourse. My discussions refer to key debates and findings in earlier studies that explored novice teachers' everyday experiences and practices in diverse educational contexts. Based on a comprehensive literature review, I developed themes to illuminate the issues and trends highlighted by key scholars and South African educational policies relating to the experiences of NTs. As the pandemic was a novel experience for people globally, I applied earlier theories and findings to illuminate the experiences of NTs during the conditions they experienced. These scholarly conversations guided my study in my effort to contribute to the field of novice teachers' professional experiences and judgments of classroom practices. I utilize the dilemmatic space framework as proposed by Fransson and Grannäs (2013) throughout the discourse, and this framework is complemented by the concept of identity as posited by Rodgers and Scott (2008). The first chapter is concluded with an overview of the six chapters that are composed around the storied lives of Zee, Kaniso and Siphon (pseudonyms) that reflect my scholarly explorations of their lived experiences during the pandemic.



**Figure 1.1: Diagrammatic presentation of the chapters**

## 1.2 What Evoked My Curiosity to Explore NTs' Practices During the Pandemic?

A conversation with an NT friend who taught at a private school during the pandemic awakened my interest to explore NTs' experiences in urban, rural, and deep rural contexts during this pandemic. My conversation with my NT friend progressed as follows:

**NT friend:** do you know how to use MS teams? I need to learn how to teach using this platform by Monday. I am so stressed out!!! I don't know of anyone else to ask. I still need to go through the content, I am struggling to cope because I lost my grandfather as well plus I need to familiarize myself with how things need to be done.

**Me:** oh no! I am so sorry about your loss. I haven't used teams before. Can you not ask someone you work with?

**NT friend:** NO! I did try to ask for help but everyone says that I should watch a YouTube video! I have no time! Parents are irate and anxious. I hope things settle down so we can go back to the normal way of teaching. If they suggest going back to school, I can only imagine what more I'd need to do. Literally nobody is helping me. I wish I wasn't teaching. Its so different from being at campus and teaching practice. It's just too much for me to handle.

**Figure 1.2: Conversation with a NT friend**

After this revelatory conversation with my NT friend, I came across an article in the *Daily Maverick* (Davis & O'Regan, 2021, p. 1) that was headed: "We can get no education; COVID has turned our schooling crisis into a ticking time bomb". An excerpt from the article really

evoked my curiosity and I resolved to explore NTs' lived experiences in diverse school contexts during the pandemic. The following is the extract that prompted my reaction:

“The amount of school time that South Africa’s children have missed over 18 months may never be recovered - and experts warn that it could mean a generation [that is] disadvantaged into adulthood. A decline in understanding and skills has already been seen” (p. 1).

The article pointed out that teachers were expected to ensure that the content that had been lost for 18 months would be recovered. Teachers were placed in a challenging situation and burdened with unrealistic demands. The gap in learners' understanding and skills was evident and the burden was thrust on teachers' shoulders to restore what had been lost in a limited time frame. Deeply touched by this dilemma, I drew on information from newspaper articles, my interaction with NT friends, scholarly articles, and revised education policies for COVID-19.

I must iterate here that this thesis does not have a separate literature review chapter as my review of the relevant literature that I perused was continuous. My insights based on the literature are thus presented throughout the chapters.

### **1.3 Focus and Purpose**

The focus of this study was to explore the stories of three NTs who freely shared their experiences of classroom practices during the COVID-19 pandemic. These NTs were purposively selected to represent urban, rural, and deep rural South African school contexts. The study zoomed in on the classroom situations that these NTs experienced as teachers in their own right during the pandemic. I was curious to understand the *what?* experiences of the NTs, and asked *how?* they negotiated their situations in their diverse settings. My conversation with my NT friend who taught at a private school had inspired me to explore how NTs in less privileged public schools experienced teaching and learning during the pandemic. Pitsoe (2013) argues that adverse working conditions in certain schools, coupled with a lack of support, insufficient involvement in decision making, low salaries, and terrible conditions of service, contribute to the perception of the low status of teaching in public schools in South Africa. Conversely, the privileged position of private schools has been cited as a dividing factor that favours the wealthy and leaves the less privileged far behind.

These considerations, among others, guided my exploration of three NTs' memories and stories of their diverse teaching contexts. They also underpinned the critical lens that I used to reflect on both the positive and negative experiences of NTs' classroom situations during COVID-19.

#### **1.4 Arts-Based Methods: Exploring Key Considerations for the Conceptualisation of the Study**

Based on my emerging insights and the questions that repeated in my mind, I wrote a poem that expressed my concerns about what teaching during the pandemic was like for NTs like myself. Writing a Pantoum poem to express my ideas and thoughts about being a teacher and the effects of the pandemic on teachers' personal and professional lives and practices assisted me in crystalizing the focus of this study. According to Owton (2017), poetic inquiry is a therapeutic process of engaging with and living in the world. My poem attempted to capture multiple moments, intensities, and layers of struggles and reads as follows:

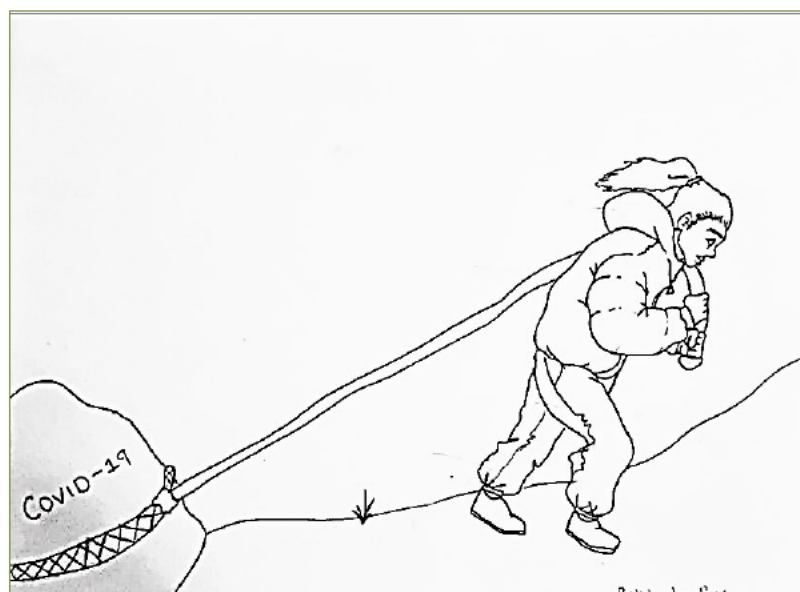
##### **Being a novice teacher during COVID-19**

Being a novice teacher during COVID-19 is challenging.  
Ensuring learners' safety and managing the curriculum is unbalancing.  
The pressure placed on teachers by stakeholders is overwhelming.  
The loss of lives and teaching time is saddening.  
Ensuring learners' safety and managing the curriculum is unbalancing.  
While audibility is baffling, a mask and social distancing are compelling.  
The loss of lives and teaching time is saddening.  
A shift to online learning is troubling; we pray the curve is flattening.  
While audibility is baffling, a mask and social distancing are compelling.  
Being a novice teacher during COVID-19 is challenging.  
A shift to online learning is troubling; we pray the curve is flattening.  
The pressure placed on teachers by stakeholders is overwhelming.

To create the poem, I considered various key ideas and concepts that informed the topic of this Master's dissertation. I felt that the poem highlighted the personal and professional experiences of teachers and uncovered the dilemmas teachers face when they make professional judgements in challenging situations. In my poem phrases like *A mask and social distancing* and *We pray the curve is flattening* point to teachers' personal and heartfelt experiences. At the same time, *...online learning is troubling*, *The pressure placed on teachers by stakeholders is overwhelming*, and [being a] *novice teacher during COVID-19 is challenging* expose a range of both personal and professional forces that played out in teachers' lives during COVID-19. This insight guided me to develop the topic: ***Novice teachers' stories of lived educational experiences: Negotiating dilemmas in classroom practice during COVID-19.***

According to Pitsoe (2013), teachers with specific attributes are more likely to leave the profession than others when adversity strikes. Supporting NTs is thus fundamental in assisting them during their transition from university to the classroom where they have to adapt to policies and educational realities. Strom, Martin, and Villegas (2018) argue that a lack of stability in a school may cause some NTs to change schools or leave the profession to protect their own mental and physical health. Therefore, when I wrote the poem, I envisioned how the COVID-19 educational context could have been experienced by NTs personally and professionally, and how their experiences and perceptions could have impacted their classroom practices.

Linda Theron, who is cited by Bober (2011), describes drawing as an effective arts-based way of encouraging people to express what they are thinking, feeling, longing for, or experiencing. This method explores both good and the bad experiences. The purpose of the following drawing I created was to express my thoughts and feelings by visually illustrating what it was like to be a NT during the COVID-19 period.



**Figure 1.3: NTs' quandary: perceptions of classroom practices during COVID-19**

The message that this drawing elucidates is that I, like many other NTs, was confronted with adverse situations on a daily basis during COVID-19. More particularly, teachers' responsibilities escalated, as is depicted by the heavy incline that we needed to climb. The rock

in the drawing symbolises teachers' heavy workload and their multiple duties and responsibilities as reflected in the document *Standards and procedures for the containment and management of COVID-19 in schools* (Department of Basic Education, 2021). The person dragging this heavy burden is the NT who had to execute many diverse tasks and adhere to obligations that were often unfamiliar and difficult to negotiate. It seemed an uphill journey for most!

Bober (2011) argues that drawing enables creators to freeze and study their memories, aspirations, and thoughts. This drawing helped me to reflect on my memories of my experiences while I was a student-teacher when I struggled to balance a heavy workload, deadlines, creating exciting lessons, adapting to the school curriculum for the Grade, and maintaining classroom discipline. Negotiating these different responsibilities was very challenging, and each left me feeling overwhelmed and anxious as I was uncertain whether I was making appropriate choices in the various situations I was placed in. These experiences and the uncertainties I felt compelled me to explore the lived experiences of other NTs during the pandemic. I wanted to understand how NTs in urban, rural, and deep rural contexts managed the many duties and responsibilities that were complicated by the pandemic. NTs' lives are complex but were further complicated by the pandemic during which revised policies and new protocols required teachers to embrace a complex stance while promoting health safety and balancing the curriculum.

In the process of conceptualising the study, I also created a reflective collage (Appendix 3) after considering the background and the personal and professional rationale that had inspired me to engage in this study. It was from these reflections that I selected the key concepts that this study addressed. The creation of the reflective collage assisted me in visually identifying ideas in the literature that were pivotal to this study. Creating this collage thus helped me construct a 'lens' that I could use when weaving together meaningful words and images to convey emerging themes. Butler-Kisber and Poldma (2010, p. 3) identify the attributes of collage making in qualitative research as "a reflective process and a way of conceptualizing ideas". After reflectively cutting out phrases, words, and images from various sources, themes emerged through the physical process of grouping, arranging, and rearranging these in sections that I labelled 'background', 'professional rationale', and 'personal rationale'. As I reflected on key ideas in each section, I was able to make connections and group similarities together using different coloured shapes.

In conceptualising the study, another pivotal collage that I created (Figure 1.2) reflects my understanding of the shifts and the emotional upheaval the lockdown engendered.



**Figure 1.4 : Collage: The impact of COVID-19 restrictions and lockdown**

I created this collage on the strength of Butler-Kisber and Poldma’s (2010) contention that collage making and concept mapping are means of formulating ideas and articulating relationships to help understand, arrange, and rearrange ideas visually. The purpose of the above collage was to visually arrange the ideas of my literature review to understand, merge, and unpack the diverse views of scholars.

After identifying the themes in this reflective collage, I used poetic inquiry to help me develop key concepts that would be applicable to this study. According to Prendergast, Leggo, and Sameshima (2009), poetry is best suited for special, strange, and mysterious moments when bits and pieces suddenly coalesce. As a result, another Phantom poem was developed using six phrases to reflect the ideas that I had consolidated in the collage:

## **The Influence of COVID-19 on Education**

COVID-19 influenced strict implementation of rules.  
The virus placed constraints on many different schools.  
As the limitation of tools, dilemmas and anxiety grew,  
Complex classroom situations fuelled.  
The virus placed constraints on many different schools.  
Novice teachers' experiences in the workspace seem cruel.  
Complex classroom situations fuelled.  
The mental health of teachers should be protected like jewels.  
Novice teachers' experiences in the workspace seem cruel.  
As the limitation of tools, dilemmas and anxiety grew,  
The mental health of teachers should be protected like jewels.  
COVID-19 influenced strict implementation of rules.

In creating this poem, I considered the key ideas and concepts that would be pivotal to my study. The poem thus highlights both personal and professional situations and feelings that NTs may have encountered. Metaphorical ideas such as *The mental health of teachers should be protected like jewels* guided me to better understand teachers' personal experiences, while *Complex classroom situations fuelled* and *Novice teachers' experiences in the workspace seem cruel* pointed me towards efforts to better understand NTs' professional encounters and experiences. These original perceptions assisted me in developing the key concepts that I discuss in the sections below.

### **1.5 Educational Experiences as a Complex Terrain that NTs Must Negotiate**

#### **1.5.1 NTs as newcomers to the educational field**

NTs are new to their profession and naturally have little experience. Meyer (2002) describes NTs as newcomers to the educational field who generally have zero to three years' experience. During this time, NTs experience many negative feelings such as being lost due to insufficient support, fear as they struggle to balance their personal and professional lives, and anxiety as they battle with challenges to adapt to their work environment. Hobsen, Ashby, Malerez, and Tomlinson (2009) argue that support for NTs by means of induction and mentoring programmes has been successful in numerous cases as such encouragement minimises isolation and loneliness and enhances confidence and professional growth. Additionally, Gagen and Bowie (2005) add that novice teachers often experience stress when they start teaching, thus support is vital for their growth and development in the profession. Flores (2006) avers that many NTs are required to figure out for themselves how to cope with their new responsibilities at a school even though they are inexperienced and do not receive much support. In support of

Flores's (2006) view, Fantilli and McDougall (2009) argue that new teachers are given the same responsibilities as teachers with many years of service, which can be overwhelming for someone new to the field. Being a NT with little experience and minimal support often places them in a predicament and many struggle to cope in the classroom.

### **1.5.2 International and national imperatives that shaped the educational landscape during the pandemic**

The COVID-19 pandemic and high-level lockdown placed enormous stress on the education system in South Africa and around the world. Large gatherings were prohibited, which meant that many schools and universities were shut down. Apart from the health concerns that many individuals faced, there were massive concerns about how teaching and learning should be discontinued and for how long. An American-based study by Mecham, Newell, Reina and Stewart (2021) highlights that the pandemic placed heavy constraints on learners around the world, especially on those from poor backgrounds and disabled learners. The latter study highlights that policies to combat COVID-19 focused on social distancing, reduced contact sessions, and limited opportunities for students to learn, which adversely stifled age-appropriate development during that time.

Ramrathan (2020) highlights that the main concern due to school closure was curriculum coverage as little or no consideration was given to the high expectations on teachers and how these unfamiliar educational demands would affect their personal and professional lives. Many teachers reportedly experienced stress due to the demand for sustained standards and teachers' and learners' continued achievement regardless of various challenges and adversities (Runhare, 2021). According to a policy document that was issued by the National Department of Basic Education titled *2020 Recovery plan for post-COVID-19 lockdown*, teachers had to work longer hours to ensure that all educational demands were met (Department of Basic Education, 2020b). Dawadi, Giri, and Simkhada (2020) highlight that changes in educational practice due to COVID-19 created challenging conditions that teachers had to negotiate. The state's response to the pandemic included trimming the curriculum and deciding what content to teach or leave out in order to make up for the loss of teaching time (Department of Basic Education, 2020a, p. 15). These measures were implemented with a seeming disregard for the reality that a full curriculum needed to be delivered to learners who were promoted the next year, and that the future curriculum would be based on prior learning the previous year. Moreover, Dawadi, Giri, and Simkhada (2020) signalled more danger, arguing that priority was placed

only on covering curriculum content instead of developing skills in students and providing extra teachers to support their continued development. The *Daily Maverick* cites Green School SA (2020, August 19) that highlighted that many South African teachers felt extreme pressure due to very unrealistic targets. Runhare (2021) emphasises that NTs' classroom responsibilities became overwhelming in the new teaching environment and often placed them in chaotic situations that were difficult to control.

In essence, the pandemic forced many South African schools into heavy lockdown with limited access to contact learning. I was curious to understand how teaching and learning would be conducted in diverse schooling contexts, particularly in those where learners had limited access to technology. This study provided opportunities for my NT self to understand how the pandemic influenced NTs' practices in a variety of school contexts.

### **1.5.3 Policy initiatives in South Africa during the pandemic**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, schools were placed in complete shutdown. The Minister of Education, Angie Motshekga (2020), announced the phased return to school in Government Gazette No. 43465 that was released in June 2020 (Department of Basic Education, 2020). The state's response to education during COVID-19 was curriculum recovery, which included shortening school holidays to recover lost teaching time. According to the document issued by the Department of Basic Education entitled *2020 Recovery plan for post-COVID-19 lockdown*, all June examinations in 2020 in all grades were abolished to recover time for teaching and learning (Department of Basic Education, 2020b). Ramrathan (2020) argues that, while abolishing June examinations would buy more teaching time, learners learn more before a test, and that retaining this examination would have created space for more meaningful learning by learners who had been absent for school for some time. Apart from adjusting to the revised curriculum, teachers were required to refer to the *Policy handbook for educators* (Department of Education, 2003), which mandates teachers to enact multiple roles beyond mere traditional instrumentalist responsibilities. These roles (such as being pastoral caregivers, leaders, learning mediators, assessors, lesson designers, and subject specialists) were not very easy to negotiate during COVID-19 conditions as their complexities placed NTs under additional stress due to the need for remote teaching and learning and, eventually, in their everyday classroom practices once they returned to school.

In 2020, the policy titled *Standard operating procedure for the containment and management of COVID-19* (Department of Basic Education, 2020c) was released in schools and mandated the additional duties and roles that teachers were required to implement. Once schools reopened after lockdown, they were prohibited from accommodating full classroom enrolments on one day. They also had to ensure that the policy for learner health safety and social distancing was followed to the letter. These policies were reportedly underpinned by research that had been conducted nationwide by the National Education and Development Unit to establish the learning state during the COVID-19 pandemic. The International Labour Organization (ILO) (2021) revealed that schools were to implement one of three timetabling models and accommodate class enrolment according to their preference. Schools had to implement one of the following models: (1) weekly rotation of grades/learners per grade; (2) daily rotation of grades/learners per grade; (3) hybrid or splitting the school day into two 5-hour sessions. The various policies enforced by the pandemic compelled teachers to work in a limited time frame while taking on multiple roles, responsibilities, and duties to ensure that teaching and learning continued in a safe space not only for their learners, but also for themselves.

#### **1.5.4 The consequences of professional imperatives**

The COVID-19 pandemic created major shifts in education and evoked curiosity on how teachers implemented everyday classroom practices. According to Jansen (2020), a challenge many South African schools faced during COVID-19 was their inability to fully access online learning due to the socio-economic standing of large numbers of learners. A great divide was identified between schools in privileged and those in disadvantaged areas. Ramrathan (2020) contends that digital learning created further inequalities because many South African learners had no internet access or use digital technology. Poor network coverage was also experienced in disadvantaged and particularly rural geographic locations. Furthermore, Dawadi, Giri, and Simkhada (2020) explain that additional time had to be allocated to provide teachers with training to enhance their online platform skills, but many were not involved in such programmes. Moreover, accessing these programs reportedly made many teachers feel overworked as it impinged on their personal time when parents and learners demanded attention and response to queries any time of the day or night. It has also been argued that the pandemic placed many learners at a disadvantage in an already divided education system (Ramrathan, 2020).

Apart from the environmental challenges that impacted teaching and learning, NTs felt overwhelmed by high expectations and the educational demands that schools and various stakeholders placed on them. According to Amin and Mahabeer (2021), these stakeholders included administrators, parents, other staff members, students, unions, and the community which often had unrealistic expectations of teachers. Strom, Martin, and Villegas (2018) argue that the sudden and unexpected change in classroom environment, the unavailability of resources, and unpredictable incidences placed unprecedented constraints on teaching and learning.

As teaching and learning shifted to technological platforms while the entire educational system was being adjusted, ensuing chaos mounted and impacted teachers' everyday practices as they had to adapt to new methods to execute their duties. Social distancing created unprecedented distancing in teacher-learner and learner-learner relationships. Teachers had to move away from their inviting and welcoming classroom environments and endeavour to embrace an online approach to teaching and learning, which was new and often inaccessible to many. During the confounding time of the COVID-19 pandemic, NTs in particular may have felt lonely, isolated, and intimidated by the demand for sustained standards regardless of the pandemic. Tait (2008) adds that, in addition to these feelings, NTs seemed afraid to ask for support when faced with a challenge as they feared they might appear incompetent or even unprepared. The numerous shifts teachers had to contend with due to COVID-19 had consequences for the choices and judgments teachers made and impacted their perspectives that shaped the way in which they negotiated their practices (Mumtaz, Hussain, Baqar, Anwar and Bilal, 2021).

### **1.5.5 Global and national concerns engendered by the pandemic**

The COVID-19 pandemic posed serious concerns in educational systems globally. Efforts to contain COVID-19 prompted the unscheduled closure of schools in more than 100 countries worldwide, and school closures reportedly left over one billion learners out of school in March 2020 (Bytsebier, 2022). This phenomenon undoubtedly impacted novice teachers in diverse contexts where they were bound to face dilemmas every day. Not coping with these dilemmas could constrain teaching and learning due unexpected shifts in NTs' values and the tension they experienced.

### 1.5.6 What made the pandemic a dilemmatic situation for NTs?

According to Maskit and Orland-Barak (2011), the transition from being a student teacher in an educational institution to being a teacher in a real-life classroom is very complex. IGI Global (2017) shares a similar view by highlighting that the transitional phase can be a terrifying experience during which many NTs struggle. As NTs begin their journey, they experience a myriad challenges, difficulties, struggles, and setbacks as they manage their roles as new professionals in the initial years of their working lives (Tait, 2008). The everyday classroom predicaments that NTs face affect the choices they make, especially when their values are in tension. Gündogmus (2018) explains that ‘challenges’ are the difficulties teachers experience in the classroom on a daily basis. These include the ‘unreadiness’ of students, student absenteeism, and learners’ and parents’ lack of interest juxtaposed by a high demand for teacher excellence. Teachers' everyday classroom encounters thus shape their overall educational experiences.

According to Fransson and Grannäs (2013), teachers often find themselves in situations where there is no right way to act, but only a way of acting for the best. Dilemmas arise when teachers' values are in contention as they are placed in situations that require significant thought before a decision is taken. During COVID-19, teachers were placed in situations that they were not prepared for, and this was even more stressful for novice teachers who were still negotiating their positioning in the profession. Strom, Martin, and Villegas (2018) refer to this uncertainty as ‘teacher chaos’ which occurs when teachers must meet the many demands they face and are thus placed in chaotic and challenging positions.

Fransson and Grannäs (2013) explain that teachers and other professionals that deal face-to-face with others have a great responsibility as they are expected to perform duties that are mandated by policies. NTs are new in the teaching and learning world, which means that many may struggle to adapt to demanding policies that guide their duties and responsibilities. During 2019-2020, the educational requirements as stipulated in the *Standard operating procedure for the containment and management of COVID-19* and the *2020 recovery plan post COVID-19 lockdown* challenged and tested the capacity of teachers. According to Mecham, Newell, Reina and Stewart (2021), such policies stretched demands on teachers to the limit and added additional stress to NTs’ already difficult transitioning into the educational environment.

In south African schools, teachers are required to achieve curriculum goals, adopt multiple teacher roles, and perform teacher duties according to educational policies. In this demanding world, NTs struggle to maintain a balance between their personal and professional lives, particularly if they experience a lack of support. Strom, Martin, and Villegas (2018) explain that NTs' interactions with colleagues, parents, and school stakeholders could hugely influence how they enact their teaching responsibilities. Fransson and Grannäs (2013) explain that teachers' obligations and commitments change as societal demands change, which means that teachers are expected to meet the expectations of society as well as school-based stakeholders.

The choices that NTs make regarding their practice are influenced by multiple forces such as one's self-concept, relations, school context, personal and professional experiences, values, and beliefs that shape their perspectives regarding challenging situations. This study explored the lived experiences of novice teachers as they narrated them, and their memories of their different classroom practices - such as curriculum implementation, coping ability, time management, supportive workspace, school deadlines, parent-teacher relationships, and their ability to adapt to the new workspace - were examined. In general, both novice and more experienced teachers experience moments of tension in their classrooms where their choices shape their experiences. However, as NTs are at the entry point of their profession, they should be studied as a separate category from the general body of teachers due to their lack of experience in actual classroom settings where they are required to adjust to demands that are unfamiliar to them.

### **1.5.7 Classroom practice as a complex phenomenon**

I refer to the lived experiences and classroom practices of NTs as these concepts entail their daily tasks in an educational setting. These tasks include NTs' day-to-day responsibilities and activities that are not necessarily carried out in face-to-face encounters in the classroom. NTs' various roles and responsibilities include lesson preparation, maintaining classroom discipline, planning and administering assessment tasks, meeting administrative deadlines, ensuring the safety of learners, curriculum implementation, and many more. These roles and responsibilities do not all directly influence the teaching and learning of 'content'; however, they contribute holistically to the educational experiences of all teachers (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p. 1028).

Preservice teachers' everyday encounters during their training shape their understandings, and their understandings in turn shape their encounters (Temperly, 2007). While teacher education programmes do create opportunities for student teachers to understand the complexity of their chosen profession within diverse schooling contexts, NTs' encounters in the first three years of teaching are challenging. They thus require support and guidance that cannot be offered through educational programs alone but are also gained through their own experiences and encounters. Therefore, in view of the additional uncertainties and anxieties initiated by the pandemic and the conditions under which teachers had to work, the impact of COVID-19 on the personal and professional experiences of NTs and the choices they made were explored.

### **1.5.8 Psychological and emotional impact of COVID-19 on NTs**

Zaki (2008) explains that teachers are highly effective and promote motivation among their learners when they have a healthy mental state. Similarly, Hart (1994) highlights that psychological distress and low morale negatively impact the overall work experiences and quality of life of teachers in general. In their work environment, teachers encounter situations throughout their personal and professional lives that either enable or constrain their psychological and physical well-being. Caspersen and Raaen (2014) highlight that NTs feel invisible during the transitional phase from university to the classroom. They experience many overwhelming situations while adapting to their work environment, and their personal and professional encounters influence how well they balance their educational and personal lives. During the COVID-19 pandemic, all teachers were expected to meet high educational demands while having minimal to no contact with their learners in a normal classroom setting. Therefore, for teachers to enhance their effectiveness, there was a need to balance their psychological wellness and their everyday predicaments.

Various studies allude to the difficulties that NTs encountered during the lockdown as they negotiated situations that were uncommon to their expected classroom practices. They were confronted with new realities of schooling and practices while working remotely. For instance, they needed to balance curriculum challenges and large classes while adapting to online teaching. This research expanded on earlier investigations on NTs by zooming into the complexities of their experiences of everyday realities as they negotiated adapted practices during the pandemic in diverse school contexts. In essence, the three NTs' complex lives were explored through a narrative lens that was used to zoom into the meanings they attached to

their challenges during COVID-19. This study thus used stories of their everyday practices to make meaning of the complex situations they experienced during the pandemic.

## 1.6 Theoretical and Conceptual Framing

### 1.6.1 Framework of dilemmatic spaces

The study's main focus was to explore situations that NTs confronted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Areas that were investigated were the choices they made and why, what created dilemmas for NTs and why, and what perspectives informed the NTs' decisions and choices in these situations. Zooming into NTs' experiences and understandings was critical in addressing the focus and purpose of this study and in understanding the multiple forces that impacted their approach to teaching and learning during COVID-19.

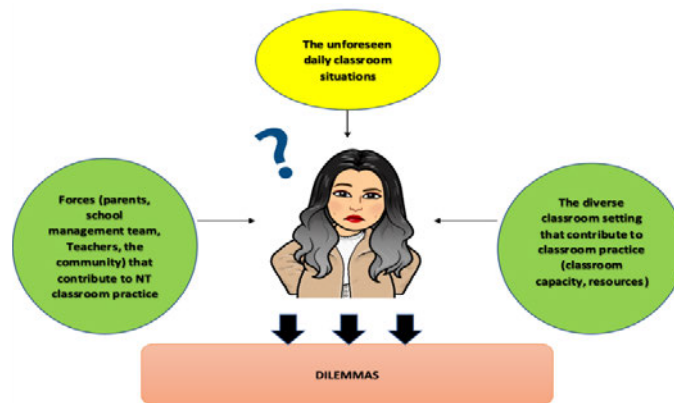


**Figure 1.5: My Collage on the dilemmatic space framework**

I found that the dilemmatic space framework was the most appropriate for this study as could be used to illuminate and understand NTs' experiences of their daily challenges. According to Honig (as cited in Fransson & Grannäs, 2013), dilemmas are ever-present in people's lives. Teachers in general face daily dilemmas irrespective of their years of experience in the teaching environment, and these dilemmas vary from person to person. Cuben (as cited in Fransson & Grannäs, 2013) explain that some dilemmas become recurring problems that teachers continue to struggle with. During COVID-19, NTs were placed in numerous dilemmatic spaces, and the

study thus used the dilemmatic space framework to understand the dilemmas that NTs experienced and how they negotiated the everyday personal and professional dilemmas they faced. Furthermore, Fransson and Grannäs (2013) argue that, while one intends to solve a problem, it can result in more, and thus experiencing dilemmas can be very challenging.

The following diagram is a visual representation of how I used the dilemmatic space framework to explore the dilemmas NTs experienced during COVID-19, and how they negotiated these dilemmas.



**Figure 1.6: My diagram to illustrate the dilemmatic space framework**

An integral part of the dilemmas NTs experience is that they are placed in situations where their choices depend on their values and perspectives. The dilemmatic space framework (Fransson and Grannäs, 2013) posits that one’s functioning within a particular environment consists of a situation (dilemma), multiple forces at play (parents, the principal, the school management team [SMT], classroom setting, availability of resources), and the self (beliefs, values, perspectives, and knowledge). Everyday dilemmas that impact teaching and learning, and thus classroom practice, include unforeseen situations such as ill- discipline, underprepared lessons, lack of learner progress, failure to adapt to the school culture, and various incidences that affect teachers' classroom practices negatively (Strom, Martin and Villegas, 2018). Such multiple forces also include demands from parents, high SMT expectations, a host of administrative tasks, a lack of resources, limited classroom capacity, and a disadvantaged school setting. The ‘self’ comprises the values, beliefs, perspectives, and knowledge that influence how the NT negotiates classroom demands and unexpected realities in the educational context.

Fransson and Grannäs (2013) highlight that, while a particular situation can be viewed as a dilemma by one NT, the same situation can be viewed through a different lens by another who may feel more positive. Moreover, the way teachers view a situation might not be the same as the lens through which a principal, learner, parent, or departmental official views the problem. Scherff (2008) states that teacher narratives provide compelling means for better understanding their teaching experiences, and I followed this advice by eliciting the narrative stories of three participating NTs.

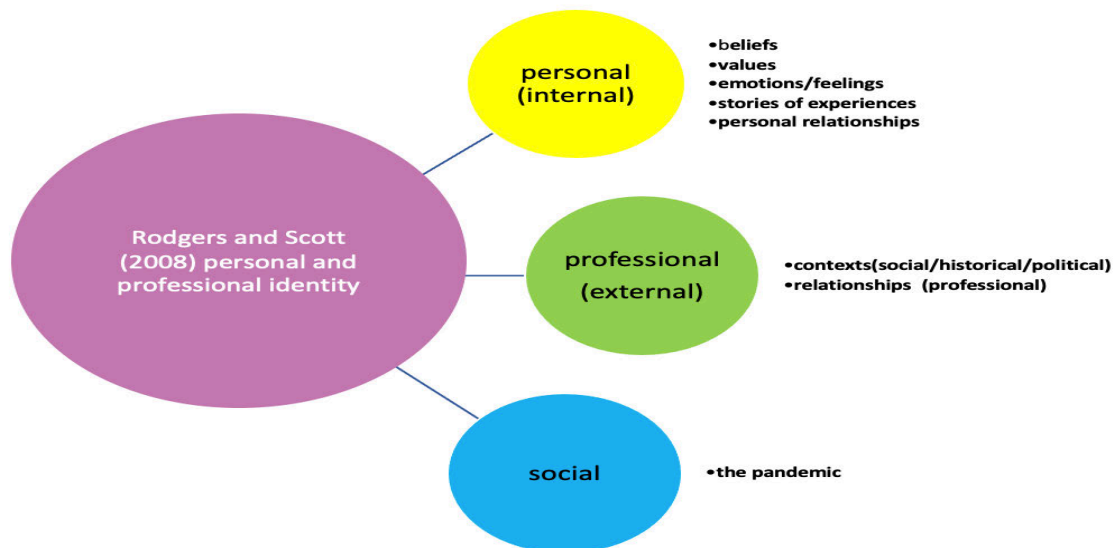
By employing the dilemmatic framework, I first aimed to understand the dilemmas that the NTs faced during the pandemic. I needed to identify *what* their dilemmas were and *what caused* these adverse factors or incidences. The second step was to understand the complex forces at play and *how* these generated dilemmas for NTs during the pandemic. I also needed to determine *who* was affected by the dilemmas the NTs experienced. The third step focused on the *decision/choices* that the NTs made to negotiate these dilemmas, whether their responses were appropriate or not (Fransson & Grannäs, 2013).

The self plays a significant role in the decisions and choices one makes to negotiate one's dilemmas, and the NTs' values, beliefs, perspectives, and knowledge were therefore explored to determine what part these played in their choices to negotiate the practices they employed. I also endeavoured to expose the tensions they experienced due to the dilemmas they encountered. I was cognisant that each NT might not experience the same dilemma as the others, and that they would not negotiate their dilemmas in the same way.

### **1.6.2 The personal and professional identity framework**

Rodgers and Scott (2008) argue that teachers are individuals who bring their own personal and professional identities into the classroom. They state that identity involves an interplay between internal forces (personal experiences, emotions, stories) and external forces (contexts, relations). Rodgers and Scott (2008) highlight that there are four basic assumptions of personal and professional identity formation which are that: (1) identity is formed within social, historical and political contexts; (2) that identity is formed through emotions, experiences and relationships with others; (3) identity is ever changing and multiple; and (4) identity involves meaning making through constructed and reconstructed stories over time. Rodgers and Scott (2008) further argue that the social context of individuals influence how they desire to be identified as well as how they identify others. For instance, teachers who negotiate different

social contexts unlock spaces where they form and manifest multiple aspects of the self and their relationships that are shaped by their experiences (Rodgers & Scott, 2008), and this process contributes to how they make meaning of situations (Fransson & Grannäs, 2013). The self therefore does not exist in isolation; hence, the personal and the professional identity cannot be separated (Rodgers & Scott, 2008). Figure 1.7 illustrates this framework:



**Figure 1.7: Diagram of the personal and professional identity framework**

Understanding personal identity answers the ‘*Who am I ?*’ question about an individual. It involves the self as the personal dimension that is shaped by one’s history, society, experiences, and culture (Rodgers & Scott, 2008). For NTs, the question about what their professional identity is, is answered by the question: ‘*Who am I as a teacher and professional?*’, and the answer is informed by the individual’s beliefs and values (Rodgers & Scott, 2008). It pertains to acting, understanding, and being’ a professional during one’s career as a teacher (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). The emotional and personal aspects of teacher identity influence the way in which teachers teach in the context in which they teach (Rodgers & Scott, 2008). Teachers’ personal identity thus shapes how they act and make meaning of their professional experiences in a school context where their personal beliefs, values, and perspectives shape their professional actions.

### **1.6.3 Why does the identity concept complement the dilemmatic space framework?**

In this research study, the dilemmatic space framework (Fransson & Grannäs, 2013) was deployed as the key theoretical framework, but it was complemented by Rogers and Scott's

(2008) explanation of identity. Rodgers and Scott (2008) argue that teachers are individuals who bring their identity into the classroom, and that identity has been and is shaped by internal and external forces. The identity concept offered me a lens to understand NTs' personal and professional experiences and to understand how these shaped their professional practice in the context of the pandemic. I could thus foreground a particular teacher identity for each NT.

The dilemmatic space framework zooms into the tensions NTs negotiate to make meaning of their perspectives that influence their decisions. In terms of the dilemmatic spaces framework, NTs are placed in different situations within their workspace every day, and here they are influenced by diverse forces (Morrow, 2007). I chose this framework as it has "the potential to elucidate and deepen [our] understanding of the complexity of teachers' everyday work practices" (Fransson & Grannäs, 2013, p. 4). These forces may relate to the different views and situations of learners, teachers, parents, officials, or even school scenarios. As the dilemmatic space framework was complemented by the identity concept, I was enabled to zoom into the complex lives of the NTs and their experiences of educational practices during the pandemic. I was thus able to understand the situations they experienced, the choices they made and why, what created dilemmas for them, and what perspectives or identity features influenced their decisions and choices.

## 1.7 Research Questions

Three key research questions were formulated to inform this research and to help me explore and understand the lived experiences of NTs during the COVID-19 pandemic in KwaZulu-Natal.

These research questions were:

- (1) *What are novice teachers' stories of their everyday educational experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic?*

The key phenomenon in research puzzle one was NTs' stories of their everyday teaching practices during the pandemic. According to Clandinin (2016), sharing stories enables a researcher to gain in-depth understanding of the lived, relived, told, and untold experiences of research participants.

- (2) *How did the novice teachers' personal and professional experiences shape their professional practice during the COVID-19 pandemic?*

The key phenomenon in research puzzle two was NTs' experiences of the teaching and learning practices they employed during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Strom, Martin, and Villegas (2018), changing environments, resource availability, and unpredictable class incidents enable or constrain teachers' classroom practices. By addressing this research puzzle, I was able to zoom into the personal and professional experiences of NTs to understand their teaching and learning practices during the pandemic.

(3) *What informed the novice teachers' perspectives in negotiating their classroom practices during the COVID-19 pandemic?*

The key phenomenon in research puzzle three was the NTs' perspectives and how these helped them to negotiate teaching and learning practices in a time of unprecedented challenges in education. According to Fransson and Grannäs (2013), teachers often find themselves in situations where their values are in tension when they have to choose the most effective teaching and learning practices. By addressing this research puzzle, I was able to zoom into NTs' choices and explore the beliefs and knowledge that informed their negotiation of their personal and professional situations during the pandemic.

## **1.8 Methodological Approach**

I utilised a qualitative research approach within the interpretivist paradigm. This study generated rich, in-depth stories of three NTs' experiences of their practices during the pandemic. Narrative inquiry was used as the methodological approach as this allowed me to explore authentic stories of NTs' lived educational experiences. The main intent of a narrative inquirer is to interrogate participants' experiences to gain deep understanding of their lived experiences in a particular context (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This study zoomed into the experiences of three NTs in three diverse school settings in the KwaZulu-Natal Province in South Africa. The field texts that I collected from each participant were obtained by means of various research instruments. By analysing these texts, I formulated cohesive stories that were then recreated by me into storied narratives. These recreated stories were analysed to the point where I understood them and could make meaning of the NTs' lived experiences in their diverse contexts during COVID-19. The methodological approach is discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.

## 1.9 Organisation of the Thesis

**Chapter one** provides an overview of this study. I elucidate its purpose, focus, and context as well as my personal rationale for exploring NTs' lived experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. I present scholarly justification for the use of arts-based methods to explain and illustrate my conceptualisation of this study. I present information on its theoretical and conceptual framing and discuss how this lens enabled me to zoom into the lives of my NT participants. To conclude, the three research questions that gave impetus to this study and the methodological approach that I employed are briefly presented.

**Chapter Two** provides a detailed discussion of the research design and the methodology that I employed. I highlight the inclusion criteria for the involvement of the NT participants and discuss the profile of each. I also discuss why narrative inquiry embedded in the interpretivist paradigm was adopted and reflect on the methodology that I used to reconstruct the NTs' stories. The discussion is juxtaposed with debates by key scholars in the field of teacher memory and story work. The trustworthiness, believability, reliability, and plausibility of this study are argued. I conclude this chapter by presenting the limitations and discussing the ethical considerations that I adhered to.

I present the storied narratives of the three research participants in **Chapters Three** (Zee), **Chapter Four** (Kaniso), and **Chapter Five** (Sipho). I analyse and interpret these stories by focusing on one NT participant per chapter. Section A of each chapter foregrounds the NT's reconstructed storied narrative to respond to research question one: *What are NTs' stories of their everyday educational experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic?* Section B of each chapter presents my analysis and interpretation of the narrative as I respond to research question two: *How did the NTs' personal and professional experiences shape their professional practices during the COVID-19 pandemic?* Section C of each chapter responds to research question three: *What informed the NTs' perspectives as they negotiated their classroom practices during the COVID-19 pandemic?* I conclude each chapter by providing my overall conclusions pertaining to each NT participant.

**Chapter six** provides an overall summary of the findings. I present a review of this thesis and highlight my overall learnings as they emerged from this study. The theoretical contribution of this research is discussed and suggestions for future research are offered. I conclude by

presenting my understanding of policy and practice implications for NTs as well as my final reflections.

### **1.10 Chapter Summary**

In this chapter I presented an overview of the purpose and focus of this study. I provided my personal and professional rationale for exploring NTs' lived experiences during the pandemic in diverse school contexts. An overview of the methodological approach and key concepts that were pertinent to this study was presented. I briefly reviewed key debates, South African educational policies, and issues pertaining to teachers' lived experiences of teaching and learning realities during the COVID-19 pandemic. I explored some scholarly discussions on teachers' and NTs' everyday challenges and explained how I conceptualised the study by utilising arts-based methods (poetry, drawings, and collage making). I alluded to educational policies and the shifts in educational experiences that were compelled by the pandemic. I elucidated the theoretical framework that I employed by referring to the dilemmatic space and the identity concept in relation to NTs' lived experiences. I concluded with a summary of the chapter contents as presented in this thesis.

In Chapter Two I present the research methodology and design that I adopted. I discuss my reasons for selecting this methodology and design and describe the research processes such as the selection of participants and the research sites. The data production methods are also clearly explained. I then describe the data analysis process, discuss ethical issues, explain how trustworthiness was achieved, and acknowledge the limitations that the study encountered.

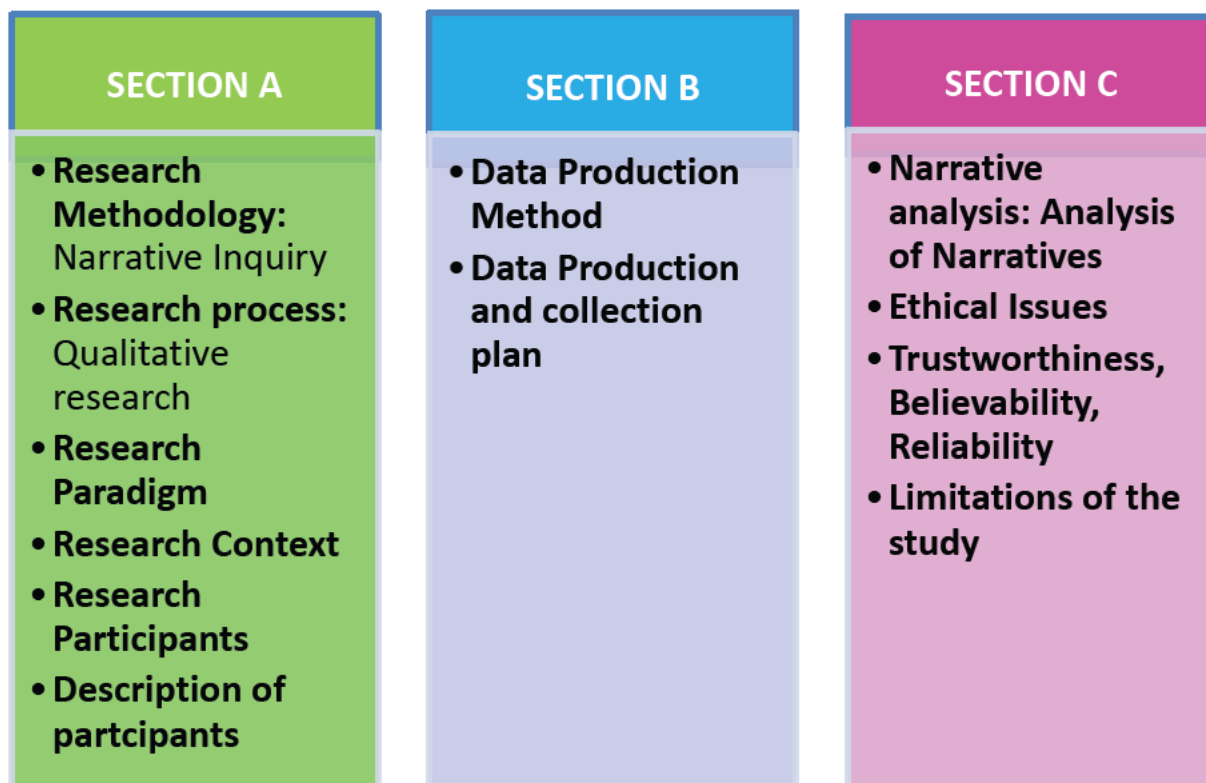
## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter presented an overview of the focus, purpose, background, and motivation for exploring NTs stories of their lived experiences during the pandemic. I review literature on key debates and issues of teachers' experiences during COVID-19. The scholarly discussions I review focus on NTs' everyday challenges, educational policies, and shifts in educational experiences that were compelled by the pandemic. The dilemmatic space theoretical framing that underpinned this research is further discussed in relation to NTs' professional and personal identity concepts.

This chapter highlights the methodological approach and design that I used to generate data. My reasons for selecting the research methodology and design that I chose, the research process, the research paradigm, the selection of participants, the research context, as well as a description of each participant are presented. The data production method and the tools I used to generate data are clearly described. I explain that these methods provides a lens to explore and understand the personal and professional lives of NTs during COVID-19. The methods I utilised to generate data were appropriate as they evokes and triggered memories and feelings that, when analysed, elicited deep, rich information about the participants. The data analysis method, the data interpretation process, ethical issues, trustworthiness, and the limitations of this research project are presented unreservedly.



**Figure 2.1: Diagram presenting an overview of Chapter Two**

## 2.2 Structure of the Chapter

This chapter is divided into three sections:

**Section A:** In this section, a discussion of various aspects in the research methodology and research design is provided. This section also highlights the research context and a brief background of the selected research participants.

**Section B:** This section provides a discussion on the research plan, data production methods and the data generation tools adopted in this study.

**Section C:** In this section, the analytical framing and production of the storied narratives is discussed. This section also provides a discussion on ethical issues, trustworthiness, believability, reliability, and the limitations of the study.

## 2.3 Section A: Research Methodology and Design

In this section I discuss the research methodology and design that I employed to execute the study. The following diagram is a visual representation of the various aspects that is highlighted in this section. This visual was developed to guide my writing of Section A.

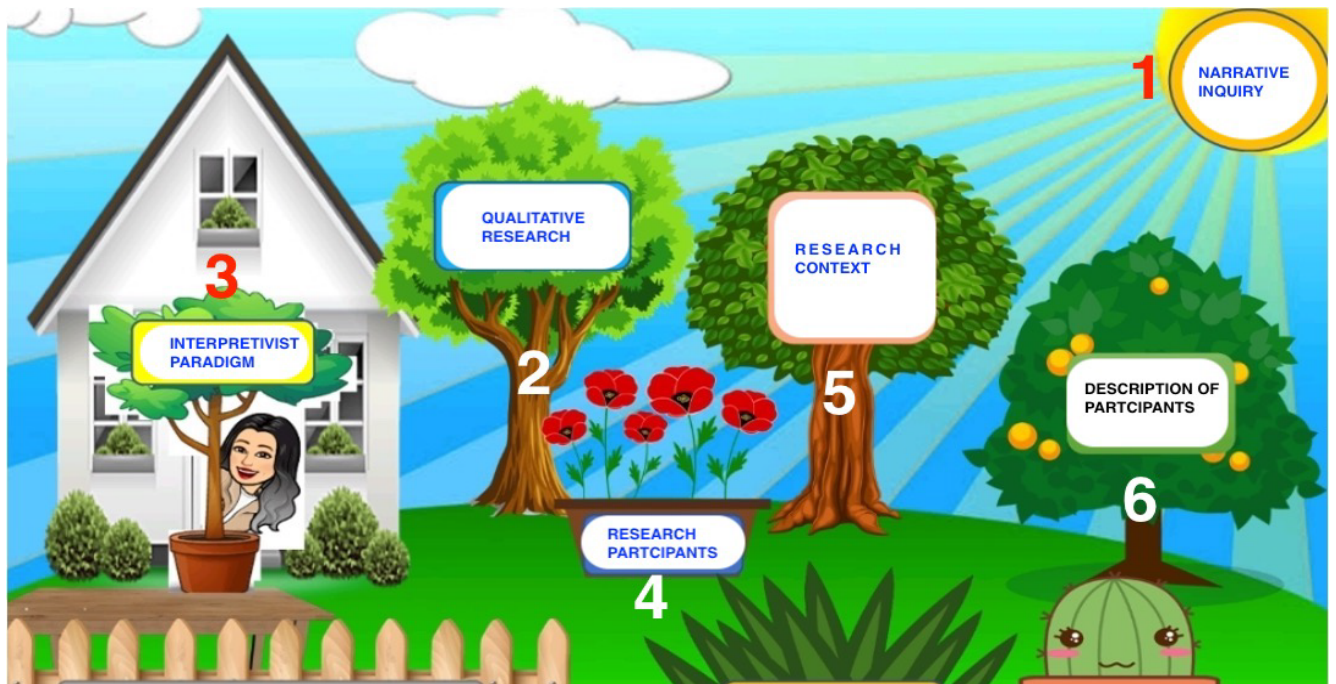


Figure 2.2: Structure of Section A

### 2.3.1 Narrative inquiry

Narrative inquiry was adopted to explore the stories of three NTs’ lived experiences to highlight their dilemmatic teaching and learning encounters during COVID-19. I explored the NTs’ perspectives in their efforts to negotiate everyday classroom practices that were intended to generated learning during the pandemic. Narrative inquiry is defined as a research strategy that a researcher (narrative inquirer) uses to study the lives of individuals by accessing their authentic life stories. Narrative inquiry is a technique of inquiring and probing into experiences through the “collaboration between narrative inquirer and participants, over time, in a series of places, and in social interaction with milieus” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). ‘Temporality’, ‘sociality’, and ‘place’ are distinctive features of narrative inquiry as they assist the narrative inquirer to access stories of the lives of participants (Clandinin & Huber, 2010, p. 1). Temporality (time) recognises that people have a past, present, and future. Sociality (space) recognises the importance of interactions and a relationship between the researcher (narrative inquirer) and the participant. Place refers to a specific location where inquiry and events take place. Thus time, space, and place play a definitive role when the stories NTs are shared with an inquirer.

The rationale for accessing such stories was that I need to understand the *what?* and *how?* experiences of NTs’ dilemmas of classroom practices (i.e., teaching and learning practices) as

well as their perspectives when they negotiated these challenges (either successfully or unsuccessfully) during COVID-19. Teachers' stories is an effective method of eliciting recall, memory, reliving, and sharing of experiences of teachers' personal and professional encounters that either positively or negatively shaped their experiences. According to Scherff (2008), NTs' stories can be used as a vital tool to revisit experiences to provide opportunities for reflection. Scherff (2008) further states that teachers' narratives provide compelling means for better understanding their experiences of classroom practices. Teachers' shares stories provide insightful information on educational professionals' real lived and told experiences while they also illuminate the '*what*' and '*how*' of their classroom practices.

### **2.3.2 The qualitative research approach**

According to Bryman and Bell (2015), the qualitative approach is known based on non-statistical data that provide descriptive information to develop an understanding of what is being observed. The qualitative approach involves the use of human perceptions, feelings, and attitudes and allows the capturing of in-depth information about the phenomenon under study. This study yielded rich information through narrative inquiry on the experiences of NTs' classroom practices during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Clandinin (2016), narrative inquiry needs to elicit detailed, rich data that emerge from the lived and narrated experiences of participants by the narrative inquirer to make meaning of how these stories contribute to the study of human life.

For such studies texts are elicited and re-created. Polkinghorne (1994) highlights that the temporal unfolding of events affects, limits, and contributes to such field texts' quality in support of the research. To enhance the quality of the field text I obtained, I used artefact inquiry, audio recording, the photovoice method, memory work, collage inquiry, and poetic inquiry. These instruments generated field texts that elicited rich and saturated data from the selected participants. The data source were accessed in the form of stories and, from these stories, the lived experiences of the NTs were extracted and analysed. As this qualitative research intended to search for a deep and profound understanding of the ways in which the NTs experience their classroom practices during the COVID-19 pandemic, all these methods were highly suitable.

### **2.3.3 Research paradigm**

This narrative inquiry was embedded in the interpretivist paradigm. According to Thanh and Thanh (2015), this paradigm allows researchers to view the world through the perceptions and experiences of participants. Interpretive researchers do not seek the answers for their studies in rigid ways. But instead, they approach the reality from subjects, from people who own their experiences and are of a particular group (Thanh and Thanh, 2015). Interpretivism is inclusive because it accepts multiple viewpoints and allows different individuals from different groups to share their experiences. The interpretivist paradigm assumes multiple perspectives, which makes it an inclusive paradigm. My rationale for selecting this paradigm was to understand NTs' experiences of classroom practices during COVID-19, and I thus needed to zoom into NTs' perspectives of negotiating teaching and learning practices.

#### **2.3.4 Research context**

This study was conducted in KwaZulu-Natal Province in South Africa. The three NTs who were involved had less than three years' experience in the profession. This criterion was established to ensure that the study remained relevant and current. These NTs had been teaching in three diverse South African schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. These schools were located respectively in an urban, rural, and peri-urban area. This diversity was purposive to ensure that data of such diverse settings were elicited. Participants were selected from the peri-urban iLembe district, the deep rural Zululand district, and the urban Umlazi district in KwaZulu-Natal. However, all three the schools were characterised by a low socio-economic status. Participants were selected to represent the Intermediate and Senior phases of the schooling system in South Africa.

#### **2.3.5 Selection of participants**

The focus of this small-scale qualitative research study was to understand the lived experiences of a specific group of NTs who were employed in schools in diverse settings during the COVID-19 pandemic. Narrative inquiry often relies on a small sample size for rich data collection. Purposive sampling (Maree, 2007) of three participants was used based on their limited years of experience in the profession and their employment in either the intermediate or senior phase during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The three schools that were selected were categorised as Quintile 1. Quintile ranking is based on the level of poverty or "the socio-economic status (SES) of the area or location of a school" (Bayat, Louw, & Rena, 2014, p. 186). According to this system, South African schools are

ranked “from the poorest to the least poor” (Veriava & Wilson, 2005, p. 10). In this system of categorization, schools are divided into five levels, referred to as ‘quintiles’, where Quintile 1 refers to the poorest schools and Quintile 5 represents the most well-to-do schools. Although all the schools were ranked as Quintile 2 and 3, they were located in different settings. This helped me to understand how NTs in poor urban, peri-urban, and rural schools experienced teaching and learning during COVID-19.

Below is a profile of each of the research participants at the time the study was conducted. Pseudonyms are used to ensure their confidentiality and anonymity.

**Table 2.1: Profile of the research participants**

Name of research participant	Gender	Race	Quintile ranking of school	Age	Experience in the profession	Grades taught	Phase of teaching
Kaniso	M	African	2	32	2 years	5/ 6/ 7	Intermediate and senior phase
Zee	M	African	2	27	1 year	4	Intermediate and senior phase
Bisi	M	African	3	24	3 years	6/7	Intermediate and senior phase

### 2.3.6 Profiles of the participants



#### 2.3.6.1 Kaniso

This participant was a 32-year-old African male. He taught at a quintile 2 primary school that was located within the iLembe district. Kani had two years’ teaching experience and taught

Mathematics, Natural Science, Technology, and Economic Management Science in Grades 5, 6, and 7 – i.e., in the intermediate and senior phases.



#### **2.3.6.2 Zee**

Zee was a 27-year-old African male. He taught at a quintile 2 primary school that was located in the Umlazi district. Zee had one full year of teaching experience and taught Isizulu, Social Sciences, and Creative Arts in Grade 4 (i.e., the intermediate) and the senior phase.



#### **2.3.6.3 Siph**

This participant was a 24-year-old male. He taught at a quintile 3 primary school that was located in the Zululand district. Siph had three years' teaching experience and taught Isizulu, Mathematics, Technology, English, and Economic Management Science in Grades 6 and 7 (i.e., in the intermediate and senior phases).

### **2.3.7 Synthesis of Section A**

In Section A I discussed the research methodology, the research design, and the a profile of each of my participants. In the next section, Section B, I elucidate the research plan and the data production methods that I employed.

## **2.4 Section B: The Research Plan**

### **2.4.1 Narrative inquiry**

This qualitative study uses narrative inquiry to generate a rich body of texts reflecting NTs' experiences of their teaching and learning (classroom practices) during the COVID-19

pandemic. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), narratives consist of storylines, characters, and settings that are either influenced by or influence NTs' lived experiences. This was a suitable form of enquiry as the study aimed to explore the complexity of NTs' everyday classroom experiences and their choice of practices during COVID-19.

According to Clandinin (1990), it is essential that the three tenets of narrative inquiry are implemented to improve the quality of a narrative. When conducting a narrative inquiry, we are zooming into the complex lives of participants and their emotions associated with their experiences. It is fundamental to understand that the dimension of time strengthens the trust and relationship between the narrative inquirer (me) and participant. The awareness of time influence the composing of a narrative text that is nuanced, textured, thick, and rich in data.

The dimension of space in a narrative study is finding a space that is inviting and welcoming for participants to feel comfortable sharing their stories and experiences. According to Clandinin (1990), place refers to where the action occurs, which is where characters are formed and live out their stories. According to Clandinin (2016), narrative inquiry allows narrative inquirer's and participants the freedom to use various research tools to yield rich data when sharing stories of their experiences. This study thus resolved to use artefact inquiry, the photovoice method, memory work, collage inquiry, and poetic inquiry as instruments to generate rich field texts. These chosen data production methods were deemed suitable for this research study as they elicited memories that were reflective and thus supported the topic under investigation.

#### **2.4.2 Artefact inquiry**

I was first introduced to object or artefact inquiry during my studies for my honours degree and found this exercise so intriguing that I resolved to use it in this study. In 2021 I was a tutor for the Teacher Identity and Teacher Change model at a tertiary institution and I decided to also create a 'self-box' like my students. This process engendered happy, proud, sad, and heartfelt emotions. I really wanted to give my participants the freedom to be as creative as possible in their thinking when choosing objects for their self-box activity.



**Figure 2.3: Example of my self-box**

According to Grisoni (2012), an artefact can be viewed as a transitional object, and selecting such objects entails a process of crafting and creating a space that elicit the meaning of that object. I embraced Leitch’s (2008, p. 152) idea and represented my “inner and outer self” by integrating artefact inquiry and the creation of a self-box. The art of creating a self-box is a method of collecting objects/artefacts and placing them into a box. The outside represents one’s outer self and the interior contains objects that we hold dear. Leitch (2008) argues that a memory box is similar as it creates a space for generating rich written and visual legacies of people’s lives. Turkle (2007) emphasises that we think with the objects we love, and we love the objects we think with. This means that the objects that hold fond memories for us are the objects we are drawn to when asked to recall special memories. Similarly, when asked to reflect on a negative memory, we are drawn to objects that share stories of negative experiences in our lives. Objects have a way of connecting individuals to feelings and thoughts (Turkle, 2007). In this research study asked the participants to take and share photos of their self-boxes. These photographs then elicited conversations between the narrative inquirer and participants about the objects that they had chosen to place in their self-boxes. Some of the objects were too big to fit into the box yet they were deemed paramount to that specific NT’s experiences. The participants were asked to include three to five objects that they had had from the beginning of their professional career until the time of the study. These objects had to reflect what being a teacher during COVID-19 meant. This activity responded to the research question: *What are NTs’ stories of their everyday educational experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic?*

### 2.4.3 The photovoice method

I initially learnt about photovoice during an online learning session that I attended in 2020. I was tasked to create a timeline in which I captured digital photographs of important events in my life. The photographs were originally taken by different photographers using hand-held cameras and recaptured by me using my smartphone. These photographs evoked different memories in people when they look at them. The capturing of such photographs enabled me to reflect on my childhood and narrow the selection to the ones that evoked memories of strength, sadness, and courage.



**Figure 2.4: Photovoice images that evoked reflective memories**

Booth and Booth (2003) define the photovoice method as the use of photography to view and make meaning of the world through the lens of the photographer. Mitchell (2011) argues that photographs form part of visual research that can utilise drawings, videos, drama presentations, cartoons, graffiti, maps, diagrams, web graphics, and symbols (p. 12). Mitchell (2011) further highlights that photovoice also includes the capturing of existing photographs that prompt the reflective process or tell a story. According to Hergenrather, Rhodes, Cowan, Bardhoshi, and Pula (2009), the use of photovoice in a qualitative study enables participants to record their response and reflect on their strengths and concerns through photographic images. However, it involves more than taking photographs and speaking about them through narratives. Burke and Evan (2011) argue that the use of photographs in a qualitative study allows creativity, critical thinking, and reflection. Photovoice is thus a form of visual research that employs photography “to consider the possibilities for visualizing [e.g., what the dilemma is through the eyes of

participants] and shifting the boundaries of knowledge” (i.e., sharing the meanings and stories behind the photographs) (Mitchell, 2011, p. 52).

I therefore asked my participants to take three to five photographs using their smart phones of what they regarded as safe and unsafe spaces in their respective teaching environments during COVID-19. At the end of the allocated school day, the participants shared their photographs via WhatsApp. This was before individual online meetings that created a space for discussion between the participants and me. This research instrument was used to generate data in response to the question: *How do NTs’ personal and professional experiences shape their professional practices during the COVID-19 pandemic?* Each NT shared his unique photographs that they felt were important in telling their stories of their experiences as NTs during COVID-19.

#### **2.4.4 Memory work**

I initially learnt about memory work and memory drawing in during my studies for my Honours degree. I was tasked to draw a picture of an early childhood memory that was significant. I was surprised as my mind was filled with negative memories of my childhood as learner in a Quintile 2 school. Having completed the memory drawing, I was able to understand how my own experiences of being an underprivileged learner had played a huge role in the teacher I had become. I found that I constantly aimed to improve the teacher I had become. It was at this point that I realised how important the influence of a teacher is on the lives of learners. Recalling, revisiting and reflecting on my childhood memory drawing encouraged me to aspire to be a better teacher; one that would leave a positive memory in the minds of those I taught.

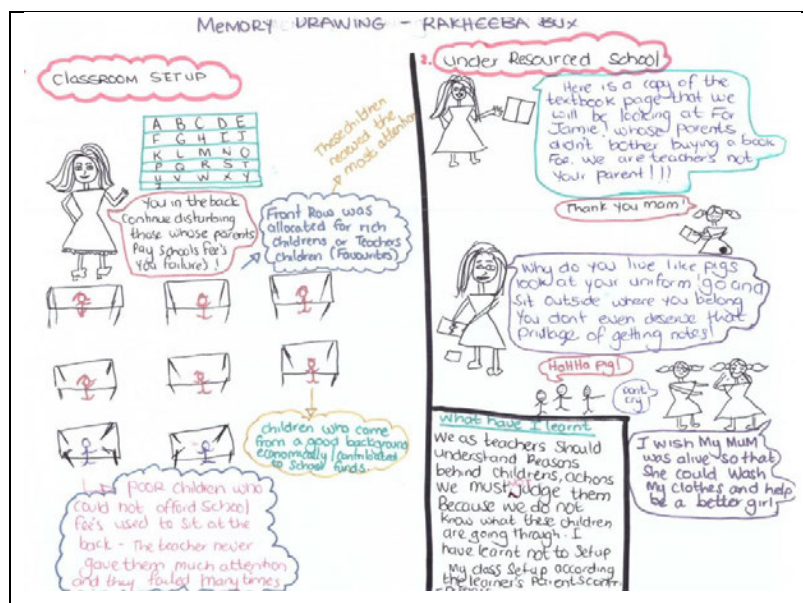


Figure 2.5: Example of a memory drawings

According to Weber (2008), memory drawings help us to access those “hard-to-put-into words” of knowledge that, if left unchecked, remain dormant. Samaras (2011) highlights that the use of creative methods such as drawings helps to stimulate a quality self-reflection process. Pithouse-Morgan, Pillay, and Mitchell (2019) highlight that memories play a crucial part in our understanding how teachers think and act; they argue that recalling and reflecting on memories assist teachers in becoming more alert in their actions and guide them to contribute to adjusting their own behavioural patterns. Memory work enables us to revisit our past memories, reflect on those memories, and make meaning of the influences those memories have on our personal and professional lives.

I therefore asked the research participants to think about two memories (a positive and a negative one) of being in the classroom during COVID-19. The participants then had to draw an image on an A4 page that best illustrated the positive and negative experiences they had uncouncted as NTs. This research instrument was used to generate data in response to the following research question: *What are NTs’ stories of their everyday educational experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic?* The stories of their experiences were unique to each NT.

### 2.4.5 Collage inquiry

According to Pillay, Ramkelewan, and Hiralaal (2019), the process of collaging is simple yet creative and allows access to various concepts and ideas regardless of participants’ artistic ability. It is a hands-on activity that portrays ideas, messages, and experiences visually.

Butler-Kisber (2010) highlights that collage inquiry is used as a reflective process as well as a way of visually presenting ideas.



Figure 2.6: Example of a collage

The collage is a poster or visual representation created by the use of images and cuttings (also words and text) from magazines, the media, and any other print materials that say something about a phenomenon. This genre of arts-based methods enables individuals to reflect on and work in reverse by recalling incidents from a particular time at a particular place, and even in a particular space. Collage inquiry enables individuals to freely express their feelings, reflect on their experiences, and recall encounters in a creative way.

I learnt the true power of collage inquiry in 2020 during my B. Ed Honours study in the Teacher Development discipline. In a module *Teacher Identity and Teacher Change* I was tasked to create a collage to reflect on past and present events that had shaped my personal and professional identity. I remember writing in my journal how impossible it would be for me to find images and texts from a magazine that would describe my life. After browsing through a magazine, I was surprised by how many memories were evoked. I was able to paste images of those hard-to-speak-about events onto a poster which visually told many stories of my past and present and reflected both the good and the bad. This activity helped me to understand how my past events contributed to the person I was personally and professionally.

Here is a narrative excerpt that I extracted from my 2020 journal that I wrote during my collage inquiry task:

*I never thought about how difficult it can be to create a collage about myself. I have browsed through magazines in search of a particular image to represent the memory I have in my mind. After 20 minutes of browsing, I finally sat back frustrated, as I could not find what I was looking for to best describe incidents in my life.*  
*Journal Entry (August 2020)*

This next excerpt was extracted from my 2020 journal after I had created the collage:

*I tried so hard to control the pictures I found to best describe my memories. I then realised that this is supposed to be fun, and I should let the images control the process of evoking memories I've never thought about. It was at this point I started to run out of chart paper as I could not fit all the images I found about myself in just one magazine.*

*Journal Entry (August 2020)*

My experience of creating just one collage opened new ideas about the various ways in which collage inquiry can be used, such as a reflection task, a visual guide, a way to find similarities and make connections, as well as a way of making meaning of the stories the participants held.

Recalling my own experiences, I asked my research participants to cut out images and words from old magazines and/or newspapers and to create a collage that would be presented and discussed in an individual virtual meeting with me. The participants were free to use any big piece of paper or cardboard on which they could paste the images to best illustrate and reflect on their experiences as NTs. This collage making responded to the following research question: *How did NTs' personal and professional experiences shape their classroom practices during the COVID-19 pandemic?*

#### **2.4.6 Unstructured interviews**

According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2001), an interview is a written or verbal conversation between two people where in-depth knowledge can be acquired. In this study, unstructured interviews were conducted verbally by me (the interviewer) with each participant

(the interviewee). These interviews were conducted on a one-on-one basis. According to Polkinghorne (1995), interviews are the most frequently used instrument to generate storied narratives in narrative inquiry. The nature of this interview method allowed me to probe deeper by asking additional questions if I needed clarity on the feedback that was provided. As a narrative inquirer I was aware of my role as a narrative inquirer with an agenda, and I asked probing questions when I needed to know more about a specific response. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007), research participants may respond to a question in their own words; it is therefore fundamental to be flexible and allow free-flow responses from participants. During the interviews, I asked one main question while the follow-up questions were based on the individual's response to the main question. The conversations that followed were thus free and informative.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the research participants were interviewed virtually and were given the opportunity to share their feelings, emotions, and experiences frankly and without judgement. The information elicited from the unstructured interviews responded to the research question: *What informed the NTs' perspectives of negotiating classroom practices during the COVID-19 pandemic?* There was no interview schedule with a list of questions for the reasons I stated above. For instance, I asked: "Tell me the story of your experiences as a novice teacher during COVID-19." According to Polkinghorne (1995), if stories are to be told effectively, the interviewee's responses should not be limited to narrowly defined answers based on specific questions. I thus heeded this advice.

Throughout each unstructured interview I had to ensure that I created a comfortable space for my participants to share their experiences freely. I audio recorded the interviews with their permission for future feedback and listened attentively to the tone of their voices and their responses to the key and probing questions. The responses that I received assured me that my role as a narrative inquirer was successful and that I had created a safe and comfortable ambiance.

#### **2.4.7 Data collection plan**

Based on the research puzzles that I had formulated to guide the generation of the data, my plan to collect the data was set in motion. The following table succinctly outlines the processes and methods that guided the data collection process.

**Table 2.2: Research design to address the research questions**

Research Puzzle	Research Method	Research Instrument	Field Texts
1. What are NTs' stories of their everyday educational experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic?	Narrative inquiry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Memory drawing</li> <li>• Artefact inquiry</li> </ul>	NTs' visual stories
2. How did NTs' personal and professional experiences shape their professional practices during the COVID-19 pandemic?	Narrative inquiry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collage inquiry</li> <li>• Photovoice inquiry</li> </ul>	NTs' written/oral stories NTs' visual stories
3. What informed the NTs' perspectives as they negotiated their classroom practices during the COVID-19 pandemic?	Narrative inquiry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unstructured interviews</li> </ul>	NTs' oral stories

### 2.4.8 Synthesis of Section B

In this section I discussed my research plan and the data production methods I utilised. I described the array of research instruments I used to generate data and to ensure reliability and believability. To avoid influencing the data that I elicited, I shared examples of each research instrument that were not directly linked to the data but that illustrated how the participants could create their own versions of memory drawing, collage making, photovoice, and artefact inquiry (self-box). I also met online with my participants individually and not as a group because I did not want one participant's data to be influenced by the others. I acknowledge that, I had a research agenda and that it could influence the types of data I wanted versus the types of data I obtained. However, I refrained from influencing the data I obtained and probed for their authentic answers without coercion or undue influence. I present the analytical framing of the study in Section C below.

## **2.5 Section C: Data Analysis and Interpretation**

According to Polkinghorne (1994), data analysis in a narrative study requires the narrative inquirer to unfold prior actions and events by breaking down pieces of field text and analysing each story to create one big story. Such storied narratives are grouped into plots and themes to ensure order and create meaningfulness. According to Polkinghorne (1994), the final story must fit the events while reflecting meaningfulness and order. The explanatory and interpretative layer, or analysis of narrative, occurs when the findings are interpreted. I therefore zoomed into the experiences of the participating NTs and merged their experiences into a meaningful story. Analysis of narratives is done through the inductive mode, which entailed moving from pieces of field text that revealed the experiences of each participant to a collective piece of field text that told the whole story. According to Clandinin (2016), no rules govern the use of materials that are deemed suitable or the preferred mode of investigation in a narrative inquiry. I therefore conducted my narrative analysis using various data instruments to ensure plausibility. The emerging data were analysed and interpreted by using two layers of analysis: narrative analysis and the analysis of narratives. According to Polkinghorne (1995), analysis of narratives “moves from stories to common elements” while narrative analysis “moves from elements to stories” (p. 12).

### **2.5.1 Narrative analysis: Reconstructing the NTs’ stories to elicit data**

Narrative constructions enabled me to acquire a deeper understanding of how these three NTs made meaning of their lives as they engaged in events and gained experiences during the pandemic. The construction of their stories occurred through the narration of stories of self, while co-construction occurred when I received their stories and then engaged with them through various processes. As a narrative inquirer I had to become an active listener before I could reconstruct the NTs’ narratives. The discussion below highlights the process that I followed to reconstruct the stories into text.

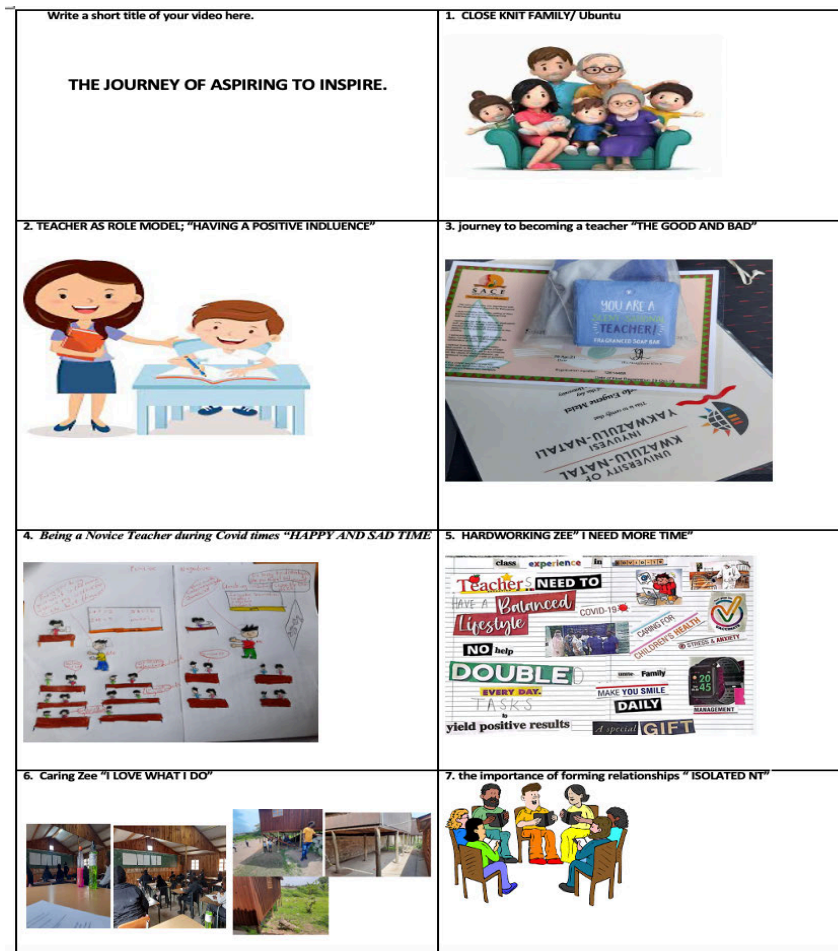
The first level of narrative analysis consisted of working with the raw data that had been generated by means of the participants’ memory drawings, collages, photovoice presentations, the unstructured interviews, and the self-boxes they had collated. According to Polkinghorne (1995), the narrative analysis process allows narrative inquirers’ to collect descriptions of events and configure them by means of a plot into a story. In this process the data need to be integrated and interpreted by ‘emplotting’ the narrative. While working with the first participant’s data, I found that creating my own visuals (collages and concept mapping) really

guided my thinking. Moreover, during a Master study support group meeting, my supervisor made a recommendation that evoked creative ideas so that I was able to plot events as experienced by each participant. My supervisor suggested that I should imagine creating a movie about Zee's life and to think about the scenes that I would include in that movie. I left that meeting feeling excited to create a storyboard to help me textualise my participants' stories as part of the first level of analysis. According to Naicker, Pillay, and Blose (2020), the process of creating a storyboard helps one to organise and arrange a story in an 'emplotted' sequence as a text of visual images. I first started by intensively emerging myself in the data of each participant. I had audio recorded each virtual meeting and listened to these recordings repeatedly. While transcribing the conversations, I paid close attention to the way in which my participants responded. Polkinghorne (1995) highlights that paying attention to the inner feelings, struggles, and emotional state of participants elicits important data.

After emerging myself in the raw data, I looked for important plots that needed to be incorporated into the storyboard as representative of the story of each participant. Visualising and incorporating these scenes was important and revealing. I had to choose images that best captured critical moments as highlighted in each plot in my participants' lives. To select images that best described a scene in the storyboard, I had to be intensely familiar with the data that I had generated. According to Naicker, Pillay, and Blose (2020), a researcher's positionality is made visible in the type of visuals she chooses for and the manner in which she composes the emerging plot where judgements are made visible. Polkinghorne (1995) explains that, as plots start to take form, crucial events in a story become apparent. Once the critical events had been 'emplotted' in the form of a storyboard, I was able to visually make meaning of the story that would be reconstructed for each participant. According to Polkinghorne (1995), such stories are a reconstruction of a series of events that produced a specific outcome.

The storyboard below was created as a visual tool to help me write the story of my first participant, Zee. This was presented at a critical group meeting. After the meeting I went back to the storyboard with a more open mind and made some changes. The challenge of writing such stories is to choose what best needs to be included. When my storyboard was presented to others who looked at it more critically than I had, it focused my gaze and I adopted a more subjective stance. When guided by critical friends, narrative inquirers become more open minded and bring in aspects to the plot that had been overlooked (Naicker, Pillay, and Blose, 2020). I thus agree with the notion that the critical friend "...becomes a useful sounding board

in keeping the researcher’s gaze on key life experiences that link to the purpose and focus of the study” (Schuck & Russell, 2008) as cited in (Naicker, Pillay, and Blöse, 2020, p. 9).



**Figure 2.7: Zee’s storyboard**

Polkinghorne (1995) highlights that events that might have seemed insignificant at a particular time may have later significance and affect an outcome. After creating the storyboard for each participant, I went back to the data to see if there was anything I had left out. I understood that narrative analysis would be about “how the stories are produced” (James, 2017, p. 3104), and that the storyboards I created would be critical tools to help me access each participant’s story versus the story I might have wanted to tell. Polkinghorne (1995) highlights that when generating stories, the contextual features that give meaning to events need to be clear so that their contributions to the plot are understood. Having so much data to work with for each participant, the storyboard helped me visualise their stories and ensure that key events were systematically aligned (Polkinghorne, 1995). I could not merely ‘put together’ events as they had to be drawn together and aligned into a systematic whole.

Polkinghorne (2007) describes narrative inquiry as a study of stories of lived experiences. It is a self-reflective research methodology that aims to understand and make meaning of the lived and narrated experiences of people that are clarified in stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I understood my role as a narrative inquirer and that I had to make sure that the stories were nuanced even though my agenda was to answer the research questions. I thus wanted the stories to align with my research agenda while I remained aware of the supportive, caring, and comforting role I had to play as a narrative inquirer. According to Polkinghorne (1995), the final story must fit the data while engendering meaning and order that are not apparent in the data at first.

As the first level of analysis, I worked with one participant's data at a time in order to create a storyboard before reconstructing their stories. The second level of analysis followed later, where I discuss the deconstruction of NTs' stories in the next section. In this approach I followed Polkinghorne's (1995) advice, which was that the outcome of narrative analysis would be a story, while the purpose of narrative analysis would be to produce stories as the outcome of my research (p. 15).

### **2.5.2 Analysis of the narratives: Deconstructing and working with the NTs' stories**

The second level of analysis, analysis of narratives moves from stories to common elements and narrative analysis (first level) moves from elements to stories (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 12). Analysing narratives is a process of development to produce new stories. For me it was like unpicking the tapestry of each story to respond to the research questions. According to Polkinghorne (1995), at the end of the configuration process the story must fit all the events in the plot. The configuration process happens after the entire body of data has been collected, and then all the data are grouped into themes or plots. The data production methods I employed helped me to obtain plausible data, which started with creating the storyboards. This helped me to create plots and themes from the raw data in order to re-story the lives of my participants. This narrative analysis process was conducted in response to research question 1.

To analyse the narratives as the second level of analysis, I used the concept mapping tool to help me deconstruct the stories in response to research questions 2 and 3. I emerged myself in the data and used a big sheet of chart paper on which I started to draft the themes in the data. I broke down each research question and zoomed into each narrative to best respond to the

research question under focus. Harris (2012) emphasises that data can be useless without the skills to understand and analyse them. My task was to configure data elements into stories that gave meaning to the data and contributed to the purpose and goal of the study.

Butler-Kisber and Poldma (2010, p. 4) assert that concept mapping "...is a visual means of expressing ideas held in the mind". I thus used concept mapping as a tool to interpret and analyse my three participants' storied narratives individually. The three participants' stories are presented in Chapter Four, Chapter Five, and Chapter Six respectively. I first analysed each story to look for themes to best describe particular events that responded to my research questions. After reading the narratives, I wrote down key words onto my concept map and I then interpreted the data. It is crucial for data to be interpreted and represented carefully (Cresswell, 1998). I grouped together relevant and crucial events as well as ideas that I slotted into themes. According to Gibson (2006), narrative thematic analysis is an approach that involves the coding of data, which refers to grouping together data under a specific category for analysis. I thus developed themes by grouping certain experiences, opinions, and ideas together. In this process I was cognisant of the fact that people respond differently to similar events (Polkinghorne, 1995).

### **2.5.3 Achieving trustworthiness, believability, reliability, and plausibility**

As I conducted a qualitative research study, I engaged in multiple methods of generating data so that I could gain deep insight and full understanding of the phenomenon under study. According to Connelly and Clandinin (1990), the narrative inquiry relies on criteria other than validity, reliability, and generalizability (p. 7). To ensure that this study avoided generalisation, the uniqueness of each participant's field text focused on his personal and diverse experiences of the classroom during COVID-19, and this uniqueness means that I could not generalise their experiences to all NTs.

According to Polkinghorne (1995), a narrative study is plausible and understandable when the narrative inquirer presents a story that serves to compose disparate data elements into a meaningful and understandable story of actions. Therefore, after I had transcribed the field texts and created the storied narratives, these stories were sent to the relevant participant to ensure that I had not misinterpreted the data. This member checking process also ensured the validity and believability of the narratives. According to Polkinghorne (1995), in judging the creditability of a story it is fundamental to ensure that there is accuracy in the data and

plausibility in the plot. My use of triangulation thus engenders confidence in the data as I could ensure that the events I described had occurred (Polkinghorne,1995). The multiple methods of inquiry I used thus ensured the dependability of the data and rigor in the study.

The diverse methods of data collection elicited richer data than one method of data collection would have achieved, and this strengthens the trustworthiness of the study. Trustworthiness was also reinforced by keeping the participants' voices clear throughout the narrative analysis and analysis of narratives. Direct quotations are used to ensure that the authentic voices of the participants are heard which, according to Patton (2002), supports believability. Moreover, according to Blumenfeld-Jones (1995), the believability of a narrative study is strengthened when arts-based methods are used. I thus used various arts-based methods to generate field texts from which I reconstructed the stories of the NTs' experiences of classroom practices during COVID-19.

#### **2.5.4 Ethical considerations**

Adhering to ethical issues in any study is the researcher's responsibility. I obtained three gatekeepers' permission to conduct the study before I recruited the three NTs. Ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant body at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and permission to conduct research in the three schools was obtained from the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Basic Education prior to conducting the study. The participants voluntarily signed informed consent letters. Due to the emotional and sensitive nature of narrative inquiry, I provided my participants with the details of a practicing psychologist should they need one. However, this study did not cause emotional harm to any of my participants.

The identities of my participants and their schools remain protected as I use pseudonyms. In the photovoice images, names of people and places are blurred in consideration of confidentiality and anonymity. Neutral language was used to ensure that no emotional harm would affect the participants. Clandinin (2016) urges narrative inquirers to ensure that their participants' feelings and emotions are protected, especially as recalling and revisiting experiences may result in negative emotions and even trauma. My participants were told that they could withdraw from the study at any time. I was also sensitive to their needs and understood when they would not be available for a virtual meeting or a conversation. None of the participants withdrew and all three willingly agreed to participate in this research study.

### **2.5.5 Limitations of the study**

According to Clandinin (2016), a guideline for narrative quality is that the narratives need to be authentic. I was conscious of the fact a participant's story might be misunderstood or misinterpreted and that such insights might then be cast in a negative light. To avert this challenge, I used various tools to generate meaningful, rich data. The narratives are detailed and authentic and I sent each participant their re-storied narratives for member checking to avoid misinterpretations.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions that limited face-to-face interaction, the study was conducted online using various online platforms such as Zoom, WhatsApp messenger, email, and voice notes. The use of online platforms limited challenges as network coverage was fine; however, as my participants had diverse responsibilities, receiving the data from a participant on time was often a challenge. Some lost friends and family members and I had to be patient with them during their time of grieving. I set reasonable time frames and arranged virtual meetings at times that were considerate of my participants' diverse schedules. I also used online platforms that were familiar to the participants and that they felt comfortable using. When conducting a narrative inquiry online, it can be challenging to form a relationship with the participant and building trust and openness was initially a challenge. However, I constantly reassured each participant that the safety of his identity would be upheld. Eventually I was heartened by the friendship that I had built individually with each participant by the end of this study. In narrative inquiry participants may feel frustrated if they have to revisit specific memories that negatively influenced their lives. I was thus mindful of their emotions and remained patient when I conducted the narrative inquiry.

I also rigorously acknowledged all the authors whose work I used.

### **2.5.6 Synthesis of Section C**

I discussed the processes of data analysis and interpretation. I also referred to my adherence to all ethical considerations and the manner in which I achieved trustworthiness, reliability, believability, and plausibility. In conclusion, I discussed the limitations of this research study.

## **2.6 Overview of the Data Presentation and Discussion Chapters (Chapters 3, 4 and 5)**

Each chapter is divided into three sections:

**Section A:** In this section, the first level of narrative, or the narrative analysis, (Polkinghorne, 1994) is presented. I reconstruct each participants' story of his experiences of being a NT during COVID-19. The first level of analysis was conducted after processing the raw data that were generated using memory drawings, a self-box, the photovoice method, unstructured interviews, and collage inquiry. After collecting and generating the stories the participants had told of their experiences, I adopted the responsibility of a narrative inquirer and processed the complexity of their lived experiences as multiple stories. As a narrative inquirer, I was aware of my subjective positioning and experiences as a novice teacher myself, and I was cognisant of how these might shape my reconstruction of the storied narratives. I created a storyboard to help me plot critical events and I chose images that would best describe each crucial event, as proposed by Naicker, Pillay, and Blose (2020). At the first level of analysis, I addressed the first key research question: *What are novice teachers' stories of their everyday educational experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic?*

**Section B:** As the second level of analysis - or what Polkinghorne (1995) refers to as the analysis of narratives - this section provides a deconstruction of the participants' storied narratives. This analytical layer responds to the second research question: *How did the novice teachers' personal and professional experiences shape their professional practice during the COVID-19 pandemic?* I used concept mapping (Butler-Kisber & Poldma (2010) as a tool to zoom into their storied narratives and adopted a critical perspective to explore their personal and professional experiences and the meanings they adopted/created/recreated to shape their professional practices as novice teachers. Concept mapping offered me a way to visually explain and then textually represent the personal and professional experiences that shaped the participants' professional practices. Having identified codes and creating themes in response to the research question, I worked with these themes to develop appropriate narrative plots for analysis. I used Rodgers and Scott's (2008) and Fransson and Grannäs's (2013) ideas of personal and professional identity, and I could thus recognise the multiple forces that shaped how the participants experienced their professional practices. In section B, I thus identified the internal and external forces that impacted the participants' classroom experiences during COVID-19 and I develop a visual diagram to illustrate Rodgers and Scott's (2008) explanation of how personal and professional experiences impact a teacher's practices.

**Section C:** In this section I present an analysis of the participants' perspectives that underpinned the manner in which they negotiated their classroom practices. I used the

dilemmatic space framework to answer the third key research question: *What informed the novice teachers' perspectives in negotiating classroom practice during the COVID-19 pandemic?* I used concept mapping as a tool to help me map out the perspectives, beliefs, and values that helped each participant negotiate the dilemmas they experienced in the classroom. When using the concept map, I was able to clearly identify the dilemmas that they had encountered. I developed a visual diagram of the multiple forces that impacted the participants and explain the factors that created these dilemmas for them. I also elucidate the perspective they adopted to help them decide how to negotiate the dilemmas they faced. I highlight the values that helped him cope with tension and explain how these values impacted their classroom practices during the pandemic. I use the dilemmatic space framework (Fransson & Grannäs, 2013) as an analytical tool to support my analyses in Section C.

## **2.7 Authentic Language as a Key Component in the Participants' Stories**

Before the narratives are presented, I must iterate that the authentic voices of the participants were paramount. The conversations I had with them were therefore transcribed verbatim and presented as such in this thesis. Our conversations were conducted in English although this is not the mother tongue of the participants. However, they naturally and comfortably presented their stories in this language. Some linguistic errors may therefore be present in the stories that I present, but these are part and parcel of the real people whose real-life stories were pivotal to my investigation.

## **2.8 Chapter Synthesis**

This chapter was divided into three sections: Section A: Headwork; Section B: Fieldwork; and Section C: Text work (van Maanen, 1979). Section A provided a detailed account of the research design and methodology that I employed. I explained that I conducted a qualitative study that was embedded within the interpretivist paradigm. I therefore employed narrative inquiry as the research methodology of choice. In Section A I also highlighted the context in which this study was conducted, the criteria I used for the selection of my three participants, and I presented their profiles. In Section B I provided a detailed account of each research instrument that I used with examples of each. These were memory drawing, artefact inquiry (Self-box), photovoice, unstructured interviews, and collage inquiry. In Section C I provided a detailed discussion of the data analysis and interpretation methods that I used, and I highlighted how I conducted narrative analysis and the analysis of narratives. I concluded

with reference to the ethical issues I adhered to and how I achieved trustworthiness and plausibility. The limitations of this research study were also discussed.

I present how I conducted both the first and second levels of analysis - narrative analysis and the analysis of narratives - for each of my participants individually in Chapter Three, Chapter Four, and Chapter Five. I first reconstructed their stories in response to research question 1, and then I deconstruct the data to respond to research questions 2 and 3. The stories of each of the three participants are interpreted and analysed in a separate chapter. The stories are presented unedited in the first person to give credence to the participants' voices. I used these stories to zoom into the lives of the NTs as they assisted me in making meaning of their lived experiences during COVID-19, with specific focus on their teaching and learning foci and hence their classroom practices. I concluded this chapter with an overview of the three sections that divided each data presentation and discussion chapter.

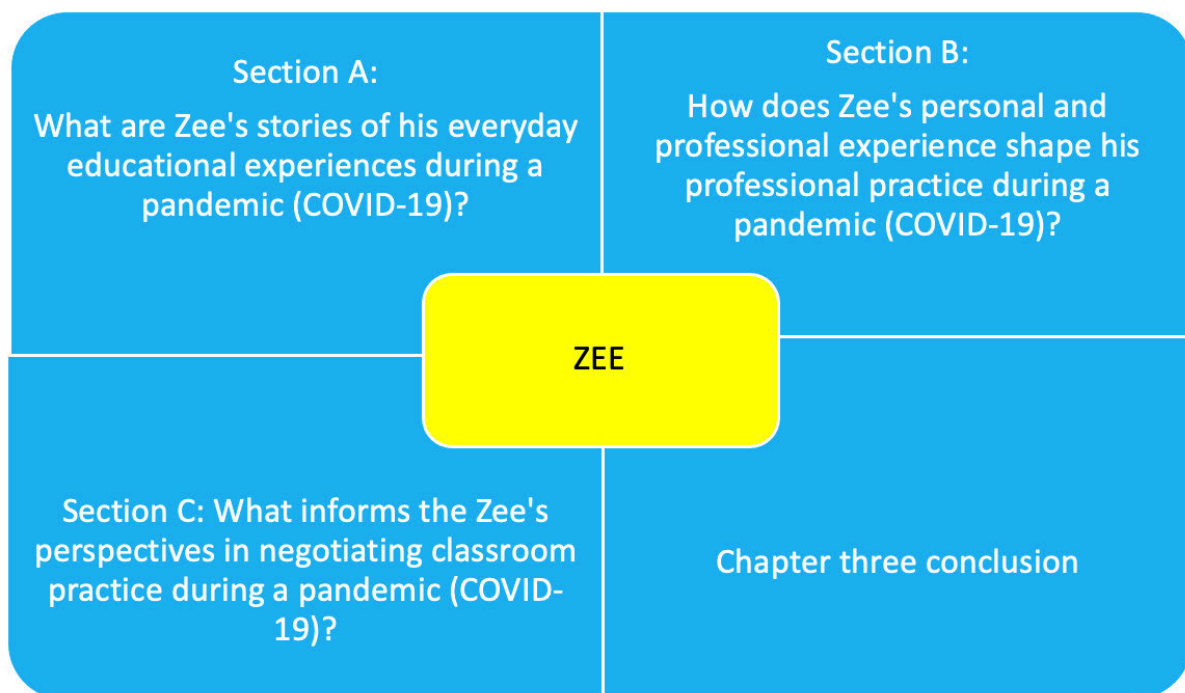
## CHAPTER THREE

### ZEE'S STORY: *ASPIRING TO INSPIRE*

#### 3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I highlighted the research design and methodology that I had used and I described the research instruments that I had employed to generate data. The focus of this chapter is to present and analyse Zee's reconstructed stories of his classroom experiences in a Quintile 2 school in KwaZulu-Natal during the COVID-19 pandemic.

I reconstructed Zee's story from a range of data collection tools. I use the pseudonym Zee to refer to this participant. Throughout this chapter, excerpts from my reflective journal are referred to as I present my experiences as the narrative inquirer in conjunction with the data that I generated from Zee.



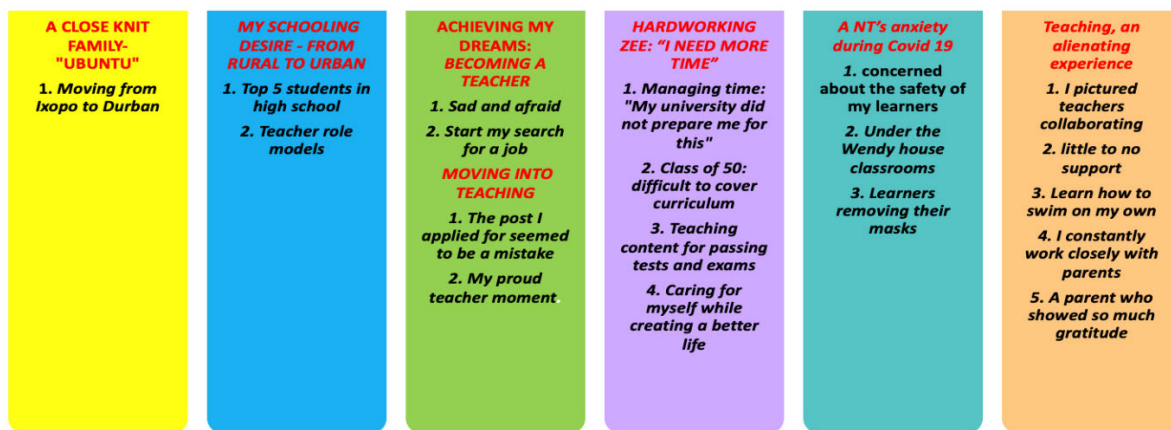
**Figure 3.1: Diagrammatic summary of my analysis of Zee's narrative**

#### 3.2 Zee's Story

##### 3.2.1 Section A: A reconstructed storied narrative of Zee's experiences

In this section I present a reconstructed storied narrative of Zee's experiences in response to the first key research question: *What are novice teachers' stories of their everyday educational experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic?* The story was reconstructed after working with

the raw data that had been generated by means of Zee’s collage, photovoice, memory drawing, unstructured interview, and self-box with the purpose of yielding thick descriptive data (van Maanen, 1979; Leeds-Hurwitz, 2020). I endeavoured to capture the nuances and complex experiences of Zee’s everyday experiences as a novice teacher during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2021. The following diagram was developed to arrange and identify the critical plots and subplots in Zee’s narrative that responded to research question 2: *How did the novice teachers’ personal and professional experiences shape their practice during the COVID-19 pandemic?*



**Figure 3.2: Plots and critical events that impacted Zee’s educational practice**

### ZEE’S STORY...

I am a 27-year-old African male. My first teaching experience was at a Quintile 2 primary school within the Umlazi district. I have one full year of teaching experience and teach IsiZulu, Social Science, and Creative Arts in Grade 4 intermediate and senior phases.

#### **A close-knit family creates a sense of ‘Ubuntu’**

*I remember living on the farm with both my parents during my early childhood at Ixopo from 1994 until 2009. My mother stayed at home with my siblings while my father moved to Durban to work there in 1973. My father worked in order to create a more stable environment for me and my family who later moved to Durban in 2013. The home where we lived in Durban was filled with love and care for each other. Ubuntu as I should say was ‘practised’ in our home. I have never seen my parents argue or shout at each other. They were very timid and spoke respectfully to each other. In our home, we believe that when one person is going through a sad or happy time, we all should bear and share that emotion and experience. Nobody felt as if they*

*are going through things alone. When we had disagreements with our siblings, we resolved the issue by sitting together and speaking about it. If the problem cannot be resolved amongst each other, our father would step in and fix the problem. Amongst my five siblings, we share a close bond, and we are used as role models in the community of how sibling relationships should be.*

### **Moving from Ixopo to Durban**

*I moved to Durban towards the end of 2010 to live with my father so that I could attend an urban school. Every day my father would prepare my meals, ensure that I had neat clothes for school. He also helped me with my homework. Spending those four years alone with my father was beneficial to the person and man I became. My father was a very open-minded person. I could speak to him about anything.*

### **Schooling life: From rural to urban**

*I went to Ixopo Village Intermediate School from 2003 till 2010. While attending the rural school in Ixopo, I always had a desire to attend an urban school because I often heard good stories about the student success rate while reading the newspapers as well as the good pass rate in matric. I always believed that the schools in the urban areas were better, and I wanted the same success academically.*

*I attended high school from 2011 till 2015 at Margot Fonteyn Secondary School in Durban. My high school experience was different to my primary school experience in the rural area. I recall experiencing my primary education with limited resources compared to the school where I completed my secondary school education in Durban. I was also given a wide variety of subject courses to choose from at Margot Fonteyn Secondary School.*

*I AM SO EXCITED! I wanted to know more about Zee's life, but he always drifted away from the topic. I really wanted to know more about his family and life growing up with the motive of understanding why he is the way he is as a teacher. I probed a lot when I saw a small picture in his collage about family which I was able to get AFTER 3 WEEKS 😊*

*Journal Entry (November 2021)*

### **A top-5 student in high school**

*I watched how my teachers taught, and I wanted to be just like them. Mr. Khumalo offered to help the top 5 achievers with their tertiary application in high school. I, fortunately, happened to be one of the five students. Mr. Khumalo helped me during the mid-term of matric in 2015 with my application to the University of KwaZulu-Natal to pursue my dream of becoming a teacher.*

### **Teacher role models**

*My love for the teaching profession began as early as my primary school years. My primary school teacher, Mrs. Dlamini, always showed us love and care. I also wanted to look at my students with the same care, love, and respect that my teachers looked at me. My teachers played a huge role in shaping how I handle my classroom situations as a teacher now. I hope that one day I have the same positive influence over my students as my teachers had on me.*

*Zee spoke so respectfully about his teachers in primary and high school. I must add that I always felt respected during my virtual meetings with Zee. His voice and tone created much room for deep conversations. I can see Zee's caring, respectful and honest character through general discussions. He is even apologetic when the network gives us a hassle!*

*Journal Entry (November 2021)*

### **Achieving the dream: Becoming a teacher**



**Figure 3.3: Zee's self-box: "Objects of my journey to my profession"**

### Sorrowful and afraid

In 2016, I started my journey towards obtaining my Bachelor of Education degree at the University of KwaZulu-Natal where I then moved into the campus residence. This decision meant I had to leave my whole family for the very first time. As much as I was happy to be on route to achieving my dreams, my first memory of being at university was sad and empty; however, this experience shaped me in a positive light because it had somehow become more responsible and independent.

### Starting his search for a job

After graduating, I felt proud of achieving my goal of becoming a qualified teacher. Before finding a job, I knew that the next step was to finalise my SACE application. I would often go to the SACE office only to be sent home empty-handed. After the many failed visits, I felt an enormous weight off my shoulders once I finally had that document in my hand. I was ready to finally start my search of finding a job. After six months of waiting, I finally found a job as a qualified teacher in IsiZulu.

### Moving into teaching

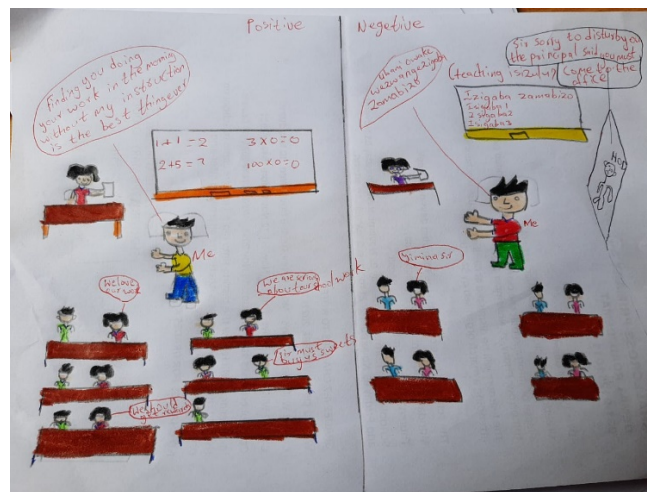


Figure 3.4: Zee’s memory drawing: “Happy and sad moments of being a teacher”

### Applying for a post that didn’t exist

At the beginning of 2020, I found a vacancy for a permanent teaching post at a school in Chatsworth. I was so excited to be in the classroom to fulfil my duties as an educator. I remember being ecstatic to teach in class when I got a visit from the HOD advising me that I needed to visit the principal. Upon my visit to the principal’s office,

*I was told that the school is over PPN, and the post I applied for seemed to be a mistake, as the school had no vacancy for a permeant teaching post. I was extremely disappointed and discouraged. The following three-line haiku poem sums up my feelings after receiving the bad news about my job from the principal.*

### **Negative feelings caused by a negative experience**

***Could not teach lesson  
Three months working, no income  
Pack my stuff and leave***

*I was called back after one month after being dismissed. This negative experience constantly reminds me how hard I have worked to have the things I have achieved in life. I was appointed at the same school after the post mistake was rectified.*

### **A proud teacher moment**

*I was extremely stressed as I did not know what to expect when I walked into my Grade 4 classroom. My thoughts were filled with all the wrong things that could occur in a class with Grade 4 learners left unattended. To my surprise, I walked into a classroom with learners quietly seated at their tables doing their incomplete work from the previous day. At this moment, I have never felt prouder of being a teacher because in front of me sat well-disciplined learners with no instruction from an adult as to what they need to do. I know that whatever it is I am doing, I am doing a great job at it. I am always understanding and approachable to my learners as I believe that children need to be understood from diverse perspectives. I never want my learners to feel alone or disadvantaged in any way.*

**Managing time: Being unprepared for the challenge** (see next page)

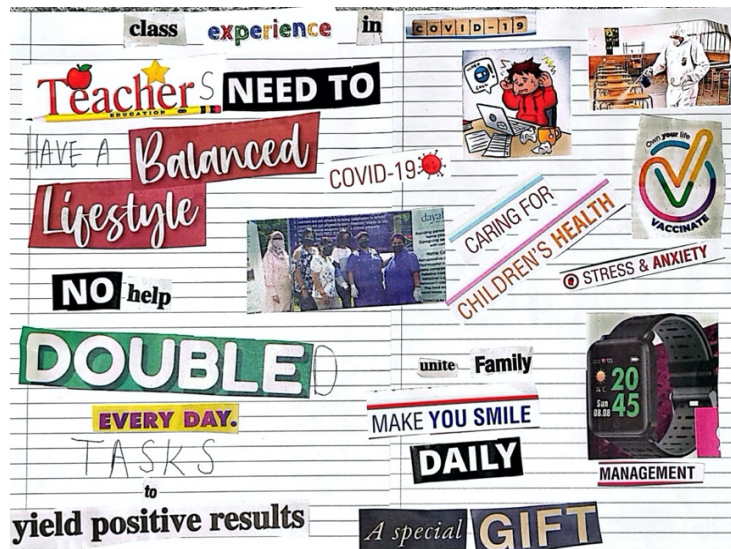


Figure 3.5: Zee’s collage: “My experiences during COVID-19”

*My first year of teaching experience had been far beyond what my university prepared me for. I felt very challenged by being a new teacher during COVID-19. One of the most challenging aspects of teaching during COVID-19 was managing my time to cover what the curriculum required. I felt the timelines were unreasonable, and teachers would soon experience burnout.*

#### **A class of 50 learners: Difficulties in covering the curriculum**

*My class consisted of 50 learners who were then split into two groups. The rotational approach to learning, which was initiated by the school for returning learners, meant that group 1 would attend the first week, and the following week would be allocated for group 2. By the time group 1 comes back after one week, I would have to repeat lessons to refresh their memory because they would forget the work that was taught. I had to prepare individually for each group to avoid leaving out content in error or confusion. Due to the rotation of groups and repeating lessons when learners forgot their work, it was difficult for me to cover everything as per the curriculum.*

#### **Teaching content to ensure tests and exams were passed**

*Taking into consideration that I teach Grade 4 learners who are very playful and have a low attention span, I was running out of time to cover everything, which resulted in teaching content that was fundamental for passing tests and exams. Weekly*

*rotation had a negative effect on learning as students would take their week off as if it was a short holiday and would hardly ever complete the tasks given to them.*

*During our unstructured interview, Zee hardly zoomed into his personal life. I wanted to know who Zee is personally, so I probed to understand Zee's life outside of school. I did not get much into his personal life because Zee always relates his personal self to his professional self. I understand that the personal and professional cannot be separated; however, I need to know what in Zee's personal life contributes to his professional life. I guess I will learn more through another research instrument.*

*Journal Entry (November 2021)*

### **Creating a better life: Caring for self**

*My life as a teacher had officially taken up my personal life. I found myself working during and after work hours. After school, I would go home and prepare a meal before preparing for the next school day. I currently live alone, so there are not many responsibilities apart from caring for myself. Care for myself was crucial to be a better teacher. I know the taste of poverty and in anyway I don't wish to go back to it. I believe that by working hard just like my father, I will be able to create a better life for myself and my family.*

*'Zee's life outside of school was just as demanding as his life in school. We had to plan closely how we would shift our virtual meetings during his free periods at school.*

*Journal Entry (September 2021)*

### **Experiencing anxiety during COVID-19**



**Figure 3.6: Zee's photovoice: "Safe spaces: My classroom - Concern for the safety of my learners"**

*Most of my time at school is spent in my classroom due to my school not having a staff room. I take the utmost pride in ensuring that I have a neat, hygienic, and safe classroom for my learners. I took it upon myself to maintain a classroom setup of learners seated one meter apart; I would also use sanitizer to clean their tables and provide additional hygiene products to my learners. I was always concerned about the safety of my learners and myself.*



**Figure 3.7: Zee’s photovoice: “Unsafe spaces: Structure of classrooms and learners’ safety”**

*The school I teach at has a high enrolment rate because it is easily accessible to the community. The school has approximately 60 percent of normal-built classroom structures to accommodate learners. The remaining 40 percent of classrooms are Wendy houses built above ground level. My classroom is a Wendy house. My most immense anxiety is during rainy weather, when I am generally in a class filled with 50 learners with the fear that the structure of my class will not bear the weight of 51 individuals. There were many times when I walked into my classroom and felt unsteady.*

#### **Learners’ rebellion: Removing their masks**

*Apart from the inside of the Wendy house classroom structure, I noticed that learners often removed their masks during physical education and rested underneath these classrooms. When I approached these learners, they told me that they were finding it difficult to breathe while participating in the outdoor lesson. I decided to stop the*

*lesson because I did not know which was more important. My concern grew as I had to ensure that learners participated in the lesson while still ensuring that they were in a safe space, which made it difficult for me to be everywhere at once. I fear that my learners could injure themselves while playing under the Wendy house classrooms one day, and I have a fear that it may collapse due to the weight it carries.*

*When Zee spoke about his class enrolment of 50 learners, I must admit I was SHOCKED! How does he remain so calm after being in a room of 50 Grade 4 learners?*

*Journal Entry (November 2021)*

### **Teaching as an alienating experience**

*When I imagined a teacher's life at school, my memories were filled with the close relationships between my teachers and their colleagues, a supportive structure holding teachers together. I pictured teachers collaboratively working with parents to ensure learning is at its best. I have never imagined a teacher feeling isolated or left to work independently because that is something I have never witnessed while being a student.*

*Today is my last Zoom meeting with Zee. We had an excellent conversation and spoke about his recent accomplishment and milestone in his personal life! I am so grateful for the friendship that we have built while engaged in the roles of narrative inquirer and participant.*

*Journal Entry (November 2021)*

### **Little to no support**

*During my experience of being a novice teacher at my current employment, I struggled to adapt and learn how things are done at the school with little to no support from my colleagues. The school I work at has no staff room, so teachers are based within their classrooms throughout the school day. This made it very difficult for me to form a relationship with my colleagues. My university prepared me to be a teacher with the knowledge I need to teach the content; however, the everyday tasks of a teacher were new to me. I found myself in desperate need of support and mentoring in which I had to learn by myself. I felt as if I depended on my colleagues and became an irritant whenever I asked for help, and I received very rushed feedback. I am not sure if it was due to COVID-19 and teachers having to deal with their own work that made everyone so unsupportive. I believe that if teachers could work together, they will be able to overcome many challenges at school. Sometimes when teachers*

*interact and brainstorm there is room for growth and improvement on the current challenges teachers face.*

### **Learn how to ‘swim’: A lonely experience**

*I realized that I was in deep waters, and I had to learn how to swim on my own. For me, forming relationships with colleagues and parents is fundamental to the growth between each other and achieving the educational goals of learners. I feel that by experiencing the challenges I have experienced alone, taught me a lot. I am now used to the way things are happening in my classroom and school during COVID-19 and can get through each day as opposed to the first few months of teaching during the pandemic. It must be made aware that the COVID-19 teaching experience is my first ever experience of having to teach after being a qualified teacher, so I do not know if my challenges would have been less if COVID-19 was not around.*

*I could hear the disappointment in Zee’s voice today when he spoke about how isolated he felt being in a new environment with no support.*

*Journal Entry (November 2021)*

### **Working closely with parents**

*In the school's community, the parents are very involved and supportive in their children's educational performance and maintaining discipline. I was able to form a strong relationship and worked closely with parents whenever I experience challenges with learners' educational outcomes. The parents in the community become very sensitive when learners do not perform well. One of the measures I take to manage challenges I experience with some of my learners is reporting the incident to the parent. I believe that every teacher deals with classroom situations differently. Parents play a big role in helping teachers negotiate the complex educational experience of schooling. Parents can help children in ways that teachers can't, which is more of a personal approach to discipline and reinforcing learning at home. The parents would randomly check if the learner did the homework correctly, and if there were additional work they could cover with their children.*

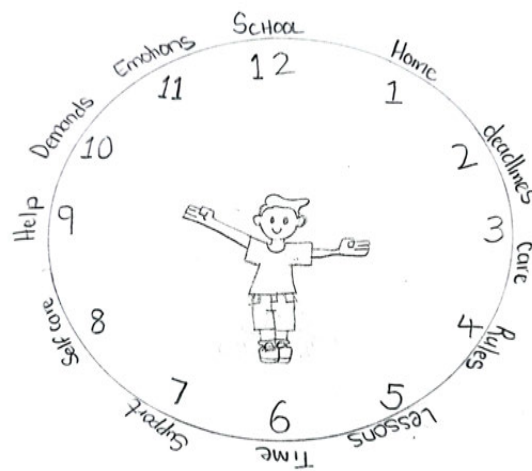
### A parent who showed gratitude

*I love what I do, and it warms my heart when I am reminded of my positive influence through my learners. The challenges of being a new teacher often left me feeling discouraged. I remember being approached by one of my students who brought a gift from home. I was so grateful as I often felt that my hard work was never acknowledged; not that I needed it to be due to my passion for the profession. What touched me the most about that gift was the message from a parent which read: “Thank you for being the teacher of change, I can see how much Linda has improved in her work through your teachings”. Whenever I am experiencing a bad day, I always reflect on the positivity that comes with being a teacher and how much we are changing lives.*

*I am so surprised how much support Zee receives from the parents in the community and how he can still maintain a healthy relationship even during COVID times.*

*Journal Entry (November 2021)*

### 3.2.2 Synthesis of Section A



Drawing of Zee : COVID-19 'An Isolated NT'

**Figure 3.8: My synthesis drawing of Zee's story**

In synthesising Section A of Zee's reconstructed story, I developed the above drawing to capture my learnings from Zee's storied experiences as a NT during COVID-19. The clock best captures Zee's life as a teacher and person. I included words that Zee used to describe the many duties and experiences that he encountered during his everyday classroom practice. I

drew Zee in the middle of the clock to illustrate how he had to work around the clock to avert the challenges he experienced.

Zee's narrative taught me that his beliefs, values, and perspectives during his childhood and right through to adulthood contributed to how skilfully he managed his day-to-day duties as a teacher, irrespective of the limited support he received. The main plot that highlights the critical experiences that shaped how Zee managed his encounters during the pandemic is that he initially found "*Teaching an alienating experience*", but he developed supportive relationships with parents when his colleagues did not support him. Chanock (2001) highlights that the teaching experience is a difficult adjustment for NTs with little knowledge of navigating through roles, responsibilities and duties with no support.

Zee's relationship with his father as a teenage boy positively shaped him into becoming a caring and hardworking male NT. The critical sub-plots that highlight the qualities that Zee picked up from living with his father are:

- "*Concerned about the safety of my learners*", and
- "*Moving from Ixopo to Durban.*"

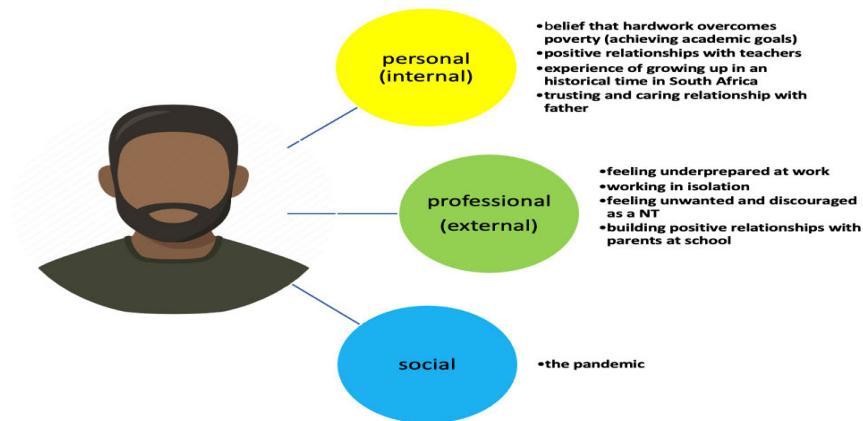
Zee highlighted the critical need to form relationships for educational growth during COVID-19 in his school environment, which he argued would contribute hugely to the overall performance and growth of learners and teachers. Despite some negative experiences during Zee's practice, he found positivity and motivation to work hard and to ensure that he would bring positive change to his school.

### **3.2.3 Section B: Interpretation and analysis of Zee's story**

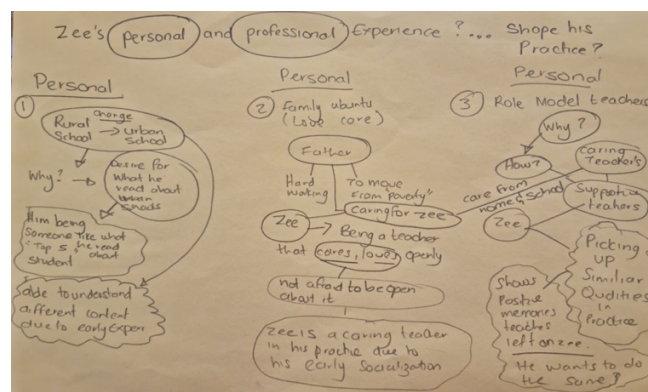
In this section, I analyse and interpret Zee's storied narrative. In this second level of analysis I respond to key research question 2: *How did the novice teachers' personal and professional experiences shape their practice during the COVID-19 pandemic?*

Concept mapping was used as a tool to assist me in unpacking the NTs' personal and professional lives. It helped me to make explicit the meanings that Zee embraced from these experiences and dimensions. According to Butler-Kisber and Poldma (2010), concept mapping is often used in the early brainstorming stage of research and is used as a reflective way of

thinking to elicit unconscious thoughts about the data and/or to make links. As an analytical tool, I drew on Rodgers and Scott’s (2008) explanation of personal and professional identity in shaping teachers’ professional practice to zoom into and analyse the critical personal and professional experiences that influenced how Zee conducted his professional life.



**Figure 3.9: Zee’s personal and professional experiences that shaped his classroom practice**



**Figure 3.10: Concept map of Zee’s personal experiences**

### 3.2.3.1 Experiences of caring and trusting relationships as Zee grew up

Van Wel (1994) highlights that parents exert a powerful influence on their child’s life, and often positive parental qualities are unconsciously picked up by a child and emulated throughout adulthood. Stambaugh, Hector, and Carr (2011) highlight that parents are generally critical role players in shaping their children’s coping abilities and sense of acceptance. These are crucial aspects that help people manage their problems from childhood to adulthood. Wang (2022) argues that parents bear the main responsibility as caregivers and educators during a

child's early years, and their supportive role is essential for the social, emotional, and cognitive development of their child. Wang (2022) further argues that a strong parent-child relationship provides opportunities for growth due to emotional coaching and support during early childhood, which is then passed on through socialization into adulthood. Zee spent his early school years with his father and only later lived with both his parents. He described his relationship with his parents and siblings as follows:

*Every day my father would prepare my meals, ensure that I had neat clothes for school, and even helped me with my homework...The home I lived in at Durban was filled with love and care. I have never seen my parents argue...They were very timid and spoke so respectfully to each other...we share a close bond that even the community would use us as an example of how sibling relationships should be.*

Zee grew up in a home that was infused with care, love, and respect. His father was affectionate and caring which speaks to Zee's socialization as a caring and nurturing individual that was disrupted by a single story of masculinity. Stambaugh, Hector, and Carr (2011) and Wang (2022) argue that positive parent-child bonding provides feelings of warmth, care, sensitivity, and an appreciation of self and influences the actions of the child and the well-being of other individuals around him. Zee used his personal experiences of parental trust and care to aspire to be a teacher who would form sound relations with his learners and offer them care. His childhood experiences in a home filled with love, care and support helped him develop self-confidence and find the motivation to strive towards success.

### **3.2.3.2 Diverse schooling contexts and learning experiences**

Zee was 27 at the time of the study, which means he was born during a critical historical time that marked South Africa's transition to democracy. Since 1994, South Africa's new democratic government has committed itself to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals that are premised on the human right to basic education for all, which is enshrined in *The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996*. The year 1994 also introduced a period when South Africa initiated near-universal access to basic education, although the system was and continues to be fractured by racial inequality and a poor-quality education for the majority of learners (Soudien, 2007). For Zee, who lived with his family in rural Ixopo, this shift signalled a hopeful and promising life and opportunities for him as a Black child. Zee now had access to schools that were well functioning. While attending primary school in Ixopo in mid-2000, Zee also expressed the desire to move to a better resourced school in an urban area. He stated:

*I went to Ixopo village Intermediate School from 2001 till 2009. While attending the rural school in Ixopo, I had a desire to attend an urban school because I often heard good stories about the student success rates.*

Motala, Dieltiens, and Sayed (2009) remind us that, while many learners have physical access to schools, they “do not have access to the content knowledge and skills necessary to reach the required levels of achievement and competency” (p. 252). Zee demonstrated determination to disrupt the stereotypical view of poor Black boys in rural contexts who abandon school at a young age in order to seek a living. While poverty directly affects affordability and the potential benefits of meaningful access to education (Motala, Dieltiens, & Sayed, 2009, p. 252), Zee was hopeful of being successful and overcoming poverty:

*I know the taste of poverty and in anyway I don't wish to go back to it. I believe that by working hard just like my father, I will be able to create a better life for myself and my family.*

Zee moved to Durban in 2010 to attend a school in the urban area to fulfil his dream of receiving what he felt was the best education for him. Zee watched his father work hard to give them a better life and he believed that the only way to create a better life for himself and his family was through hard work. Zee had a strong mind-set and was focused on achieving the goals he had set since his childhood:

*Mr. Khumalo offered to help the top 5 achievers with their tertiary application in high school. I happened to be one of the five students...I am always understanding and approachable teacher to my learners as I believe that children need to be understood from diverse perspectives.*

Zee's educational experiences in both urban and rural schools helped him to understand the diversity of learners in his professional practice. Rodgers and Scott (2008) and Lipponen and Kumpulainen (2011) highlight that purposeful action by teachers helps to shape learners' identity in different social contexts. This held true for Zee, as he was inspired by his teachers and strove to emulate their positivity.

### **3.2.3.3 School teachers as role models**

Lunenberg, Korthagen, and Swennen (2007) argue that little is known about whether teachers succeed in serving as role models for their students, and particularly if they do so consciously. Chung, Marvin, and Churchill (2005) argue that teachers' personal encounters either at school with their learners, in their homes where their diverse values and beliefs are grounded, or within the community where relationships are formed, shape how they use their qualities in the

classroom to build meaningful relationships. During Zee's experience of being a learner at the schools he attended, he always looked up to his teachers and they were the inspiration for his decision to become a teacher. He stated:

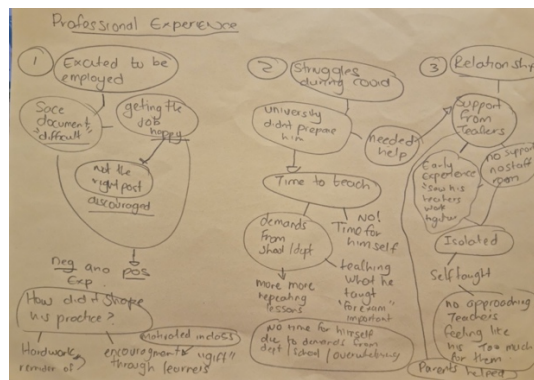
*My love for the teaching profession began as early as my primary school experience. I watched how my teachers taught, and I wanted to be just like them... My teachers played a huge role in how I handle my classroom situations to this day. I look at my students with the same care, love, and respect that my teachers looked at me... I never want my learners to feel alone or disadvantaged in any way. I hope that one day I have the same positive influence over my students as my teachers had on me.*

Teachers' positive qualities influence their learners and overall classroom quality (Chung, Marvin, & Churchill, 2005). Zee's teachers played a significant part in his positive moulding as they demonstrated love and care for their learners. Zee's exposure to a positive schooling environment inspired him to become a teacher with an inclusive classroom. Pillay, Ramkelewan, and Hiralaal (2019) highlight that teachers' personal experiences and views unknowingly shape how they conduct their professional practice. Zee's desire to be a teacher role model for his learners was established by his personal experiences of teacher role models and his deep-rooted belief that learners should not be disadvantaged or marginalised due to contextual disadvantages at school, irrespective of the area where a school is located.

### **3.2.4 Theme synthesis**

#### ***3.2.4.1 Positive relationships promote hope, love, care and support in the classroom***

The discussion presented under the theme: *Zee's personal experiences that shaped his professional practice* highlighted the importance of experiencing healthy, caring, and respectful relationships in the home and at school. In Zee's case, such personal experiences shaped his views and perspectives about his professional practice in a positive way. Zee's personal experiences of diverse school contexts also shaped how he made meaning of his learners and practice. According to Buehl and Beck (2014), teachers' beliefs influence their practice in the ways in which they teach, act, and perform their duties in the school setting. Zee's positive outlook on his professional practice was inspired by his personal experiences of what a classroom should be like, and particularly by his teachers who were his role models. He valued an environment that would be inclusive and welcoming to his learners (Senol, 2021). Zee aspired to promote hopefulness, care, and respect in his classroom to contribute towards the overall quality of his professional practice in a classroom environment that was warm and welcoming (Chung, Marvin, & Churchill, 2005).



**Figure 3.11: Concept map of Zee’s professional experiences**

### 3.2.4.2 From a hopeless to a hopeful novice teacher

Lazarus (1999) describes hopeful and hopeless as emotions caused by either a positive or negative encounters. Bullough (2011) describes a hopeful teacher as a teacher that finds happiness in teaching and promotes the well-being of teachers and children to engender a positive school experience. Bullough argues that hopelessness is a mixture of emotions such as fear and anxiety. Cherrington (2017) suggests that positive teachers promote the development of their own hope as well as the hope and identity in the learners that they teach. In 2019, Zee was extremely excited to start his teaching experience after obtaining his Bachelor degree in education.

*At the beginning 2020, I had finally found a vacancy for a permanent teaching post at a school in Chatsworth, only to be told that there was a mistake with the post... I was extremely disappointed and discouraged. I could not even continue my lesson, knowing that I would have to pack up my stuff at the end of the school day until the Department of Education rectified the mistake. This experience left a negative mark in my memory of being a new teacher full of excitement and then being left sad and discouraged.*

Zee’s determination to start his career as a teacher left him feeling discouraged due to his negative experience when he was dismissed for a month due to an error with his appointment. Mutemeri and Chetty (2011) emphasise that new teachers often feel unwelcome in their environment which also contributes to their negative feelings. Lopez (2010) argues that teachers are often discouraged by their work environment; however, hopeful teachers promote ripples of hope despite their situation. As a new teacher, Zee was excited and energetic, but was deeply disappointed and discouraged when he was dismissed through no error of his own. He felt naturally demotivation to teach and carry out his duties although he had embraced his role as a profession with gusto. He felt that all his hard work for a better life had been to no avail. Lin (2009) and Cherrington (2017) admit that being a new teacher who faces many

obstacles may result in a decline in performance. After a month of being unemployed while the Department resolved the error in Zee's appointment as a permanent teacher, he was called back to serve in the same school. He thus secured a permanent position in 2020. Despite the adversity he faced, he remained positive:

*This negative experience constantly reminds me how hard I have worked to have the things I have achieved in life... A gift from the learner made me feel recognized because we are so caught up in our duties as teachers that we don't realize how much we are changing lives... I know that whatever it is I am doing, I am doing a great job at it... I have never felt so proud of being a teacher because in front of me sat well-disciplined learners with no instruction from an adult as to what they need to do.*

Zee used negative experiences and hardships in his profession as a reminder to stay positive in the classroom. Lopez (2010) argues that hopeful teachers spread hope by motivating and encouraging a hopeful lifestyle in others, regardless of their negative encounters. Zee's job was a reminder of his hard work and both his negative and positive professional experiences encouraged him to be a better teacher. Hopeful individuals demonstrate better coping ability and a sense of well-being; they take on more complex goals and, in a negative situation, show greater agency to solve problems (Snyder, Cheavens, & Sympson, 1997; Cherrington, 2017). Zee found encouragement through his learners in difficult times and this motivated him to keep striving to be his best teacher self. Apart from the systemic failure that negatively impacted Zee's perception of his position as a NT, his preparedness to fulfil his teacher role was critical in ensuring that he remained equipped with knowledge, skills, and motivation to carry out his everyday duties.

#### **3.2.4.3 Struggles as a novice teacher during COVID-19**

Zee had to face reality and he admitted: "My university did not prepare me for this". The *National Qualifications Framework Act: Revised Policy on the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications* (Nzimande, 2015), emphasises that a University should take responsibility for preparing teachers and ensuring that they are equipped with content knowledge, practice-based skills, and are capable of performing all the daily tasks that teachers are required to do. Stanulis, Wexler, Pylman, Guenther, Farver...White (2019) argue that universities often send out complying mentors who fill in the required documents without having content knowledge to provide meaningful feedback (Meyer, 2002; Farrell, 2016). The only classroom experience Zee had was gained during short periods of teaching practice in his university years. Zee thus encountered many challenges when he first entered the classroom:

*My first year of teaching experience had been far beyond what my university prepared me for. My university prepared me to be a teacher with the knowledge I need to teach content; however, the everyday tasks of a teacher were new to me.*

The above excerpt highlights Zee's professional struggles in negotiating and adapting to his professional duties. His professional experience of not receiving sufficient training during university made him feel underprepared as a teacher, especially during COVID-19. Ncube, Mammen, and Molepo (2012) argue that the main cause of NTs' struggles with time management is caused by a mismatch between what the teacher education program and policy framing for teacher development expect, and what actually occurs in practice. NTs' sense of under preparedness is often exacerbated by their poor time management skills. Zee found this to be a real challenge during the pandemic:

*One of the most challenging aspects of teaching during COVID-19 was managing my time. I felt there was not enough time to cover what the curriculum required. I felt the timelines were unreasonable, honestly, and teachers would soon experience burnout... I would have to repeat lessons to refresh their memory because they would forget the work that was taught. I had to prepare individually for each group to avoid leaving out content in error or confusion...it was difficult for me to cover everything as per the curriculum. Taking into consideration that I teach Grade 4 learners who are very playful and have a low attention span... I was running out of time to cover everything, which resulted in teaching content that was fundamental for passing tests and exams.*

Zee highlighted his struggle to manage his time. Harris and Anthony (2001) argue that teaching is not a profession that can be taught and practiced in a straight-forward way; rather, it requires the ability to grow through experiences both positive and negative while learning through practice because classroom situations are ever changing, not constant. As a NT, Zee had to teach during a critical time and he was deeply concerned that his Grade 4 learners would suffer due to inappropriate exam-based practices. This dilemma was disconcerting for him. Ramrathan (2020) avers that limited time to teach content in preparation for examinations and little time to teach everything in the curriculum have implications for teachers who take on the role of decision makers who have to decide what content should be taught or left out, which is a dilemma that Zee also faced.

Zee's personal life was also on hold as he tried to negotiate the demands due to COVID-19 restrictions. He said:

*My life as a teacher had officially taken up my personal life because I found myself working during and after work hours. After school, I would go home and prepare a meal before preparing for the next school day. I currently live alone, so there are not*

*many responsibilities apart from caring for myself, but it is crucial for me to care for myself to be a better teacher.*

Zee's personal life was absorbed by his duties as a professional teacher. Ramrathan (2020) highlights that little consideration was given to teachers' personal and professional lives in the development of the revised curriculum during the pandemic. Zee's professional experience of being underprepared to take on the demanding role of being a teacher during COVID-19 placed him in a situation where he had to choose the content he should teach due to insufficient time. The unexpected demands on teachers' time and responsibilities resulted in the loss of time for self-care, which is fundamental in teachers' ability to execute their duties and sustain their focus in the classroom (Strom, Martin, & Villegas, 2018). Zee worked hard during and after school and was prepared to use his personal time to ensure that he would be prepared for the next school day. According to Long (2009), if novice teachers are required to adapt to a sudden change they feel overwhelmed, and this often affects their mental health, places them under emotional pressure, and results in low personal accomplishment.

The above analysis points to the systemic failure of a program and a school that failed to support the professional experiences of a novice teacher. This systemic failure exposes a mismatch between what teachers are expected to do according to policies and programs versus what takes place in the classroom where teachers often struggle to meet unrealistic demands. The challenges that Zee encountered also exposed the under-preparation of NTs. Clearly, NTs are equipped with content and theoretical knowledge, but a lack of practical classroom management skills makes their workspace challenging. Zee struggled at first as he did not have the required skills to manage his day-to-day tasks in the classroom. Moreover, induction and mentoring were not provided during the pandemic as teachers worked in isolation, and this lack of support left Zee feeling stranded. However, Zee's strong professional desire to have an inclusive classroom compelled him to devise creative initiatives to enhance the quality of his classroom practices.

#### ***3.2.4.4 Investing in relationships with parents***

As the teachers in his school were restricted to their classrooms, it made Zee feel isolated, particularly as he was a new teacher during the pandemic. All NTs require support to cope with their duties, but he had to devise his own approach to grasp the gist of what was required of him. Pitsoe (2013) argues that novice teachers often feel isolated as they are left in limbo and

have to contend with unsupportive relationships among school stakeholders. They thus often struggle to cope with their duties and many are erroneously perceived as incompetent. Zee said:

*The school I work at has no staff room, so teachers are based within their classrooms throughout the school day. This made it very difficult for me to form a relationship with my colleagues... I have never imagined a teacher feeling isolated or left to work independently because that is something I have never witnessed while being a student.*

Zee felt that forming professional relationships with his colleagues would be fundamental to his professional growth and development. Mukeredzi, Mthiyane, and Betram (2015) highlight that it is fundamental for NTs to have a supportive work environment in order for them to grow.

Zee did not experience this at first, as he stated:

*I struggled to adapt and learn how things are done at the school with little to no support from my colleagues. I felt as if I depended on my colleagues and became an irritant whenever I asked for help, and I received very rushed feedback. I realized that I was in deep waters, and I had to learn how to swim on my own.*

Zee did not know if the things he was doing were correct. He knew he was struggling and the only way he could overcome this was by teaching himself. Zee's unwillingness to approach teachers after he had received rushed feedback alienated him from them. Senior teachers who should have acted as mentors did not do so, either because they lacked mentoring knowledge and skills or they had an enormous workload that resulted in providing rushed feedback to Zee. Ncube, Mammen, and Molepo (2012) comment that, when NTs are exposed to a new workspace, it can be difficult for them to approach colleagues for assistance. When NTs do not receive support from their colleagues, it makes them isolate themselves to protect themselves from being perceived as incompetent (Pitsoe, 2013). However, Zee used this isolation as an opportunity for growth and to bond with the parents of his learners:

*I feel that by experiencing the challenges I have experienced alone, taught me a lot... Thankfully, I was able to form a strong relationship with parents in my situation. I constantly work closely with parents whenever I experience challenges with learners' educational outcomes. The parents in the community become very sensitive when learners do not perform well.*

Zee was unable to engage in teamwork and collaboration with his colleagues due to their aloof disposition, but he believed that the parents played a significant role in how he achieved academic progress among his learners. Chung, Marvin, and Churchill (2005) highlight that strong parent-teacher relationships increase the educational outcomes of learners and result in academic growth. Parents are critical stakeholders in the education of a child (Strom, Martin and Villegas, 2018), and Zee intuitively and wisely embraced their support for the benefit of his learners.

The above analysis revealed the powerful relationship Zee was able to form with parents, and this helped him in his professional practice during the pandemic despite the fact that he had to work in isolation with a lack of mentoring and induction opportunities. Zee embraced a team player identity to form a trusting and collaborative relationship with parents. This supported him in ensuring that the quality of his professional practice was inclusive despite the many obstacles that were endemic to the impact of the pandemic.

### **3.2.5 Theme synthesis**

The key theme that emerged from Zee's deconstructed narrative is: Parental support fosters improved teacher practice through informal learning communities.

The discussion that I presented under the theme: *Zee's professional experiences that shaped his thinking about his classroom practice* highlighted the impact of systemic failure on NTs. This was evidenced by the professional and personal challenges that Zee experienced when his job placement was in jeopardy. Poor implementation of policy requirements placed Zee in a negative space when he felt unprepared for his professional challenges in the classroom as there was no induction or mentoring from the school. Zee struggled as he lacked the skills to manage his day-to-day tasks and increasing educational demands caused by the pandemic. He wisely chose the path of developing parent-teacher relationships to enhance his classroom quality and professional practice.

### **3.2.6 Synthesis of Section B**

While reflecting in Section B on my synthesis of Zee's narrative, I developed a haiku poem to highlight the critical personal and professional experiences that shaped Zee's professional practice. According to Wu, Klyen, Ito, and Chen (2017), a haiku poem is a traditional Japanese art form that allows an individual to express facts, reasoning, and emotions in a compact way. This poem was composed as I reflected on Zee's world:

*Systemic failure  
Quality classroom practice  
Form trust, inclusive*

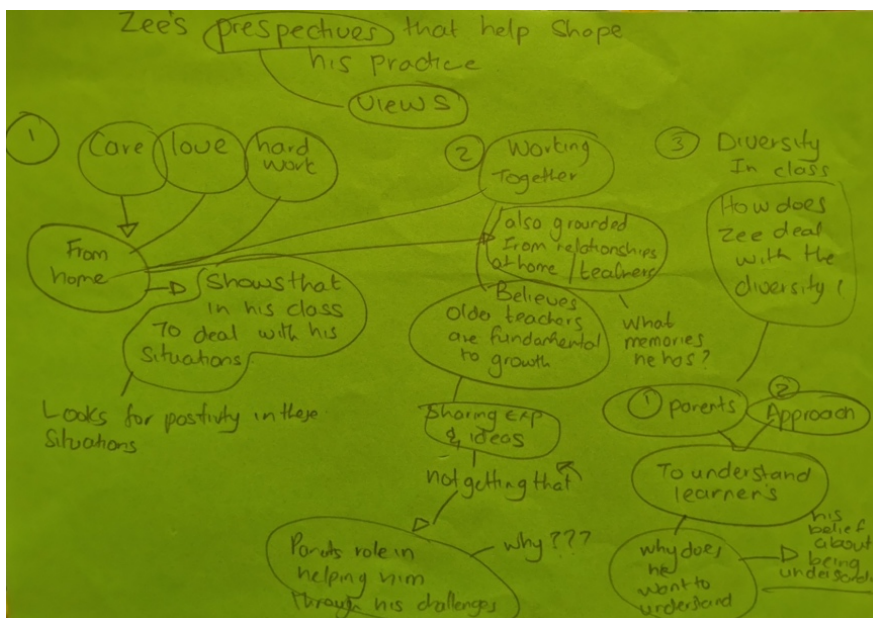
During the pandemic, Zee's first teaching experience as a NT was overwhelming due to his duties and novel educational demands. Zee felt underprepared by his tertiary education and, amidst this adversity, he experienced isolation due to a lack of support by his colleagues.

However, his innate wisdom and intuition guided him to form strong relationships with parents. He thus gained their support during the pandemic and learnt to cope with educational deadlines.

I conclude that Zee is an intuitive teacher who aspires to promote a caring, safe, welcoming, and inclusive classroom. He finds ways to enhance his classroom quality and professional practice as he wisely relied on the support of parents during the pandemic. Both personal and professional experiences shape professional practice based on internal forces like an individual's beliefs and values, and external forces like context and relationships (Rodgers & Scott, 2008).

### 3.2.7 Section C: Interpretation and analysis of Zee's narrative

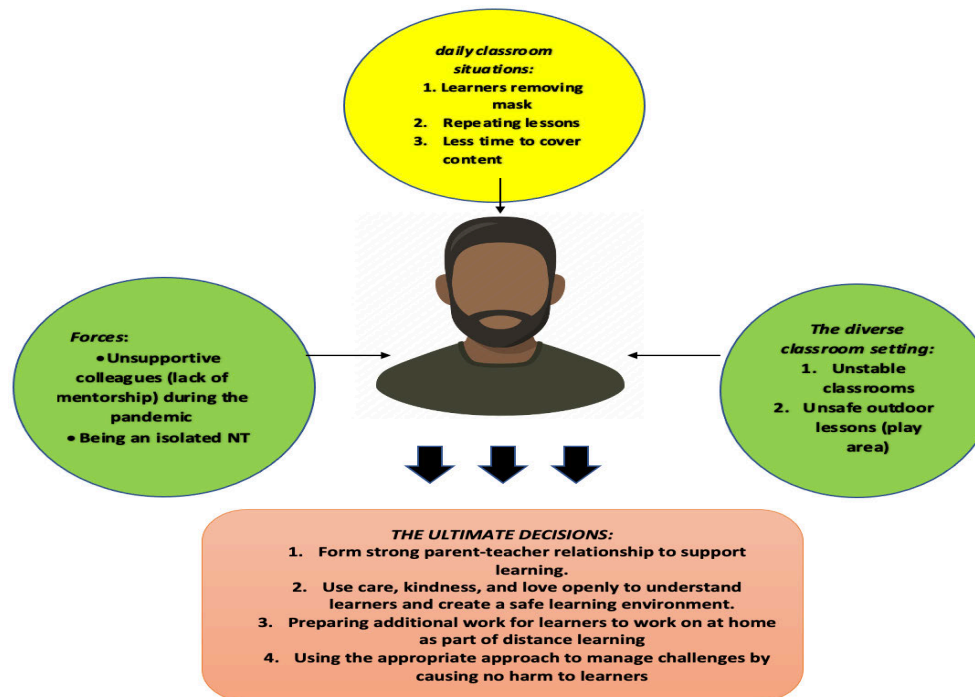
In this section I present my analysis of Zee's everyday encounters to make meaning of the perspectives that helped him negotiate his classroom practice. I use the dilemmatic space framework to zoom into the dilemmas and decisions that Zee experienced and made in response to key research question 3: *What informed the novice teachers' perspectives in negotiating classroom practice during the COVID-19 pandemic?* I used concept mapping to plot Zee's various perspectives that were identified in his storied narrative. This helped me to make meaning of how he was assisted and what helped him as NT to negotiate his classroom practice.



**Figure 3.12: Concept map of Zee's perspectives on classroom practice**

The concept map in turn guided me to create a visual diagram of Zee's encounters in the classroom as well as his perspectives that helped him make the decisions that guided him in

negotiating the dilemmatic situations in his classroom. The dilemmatic space framework was used as a critical aspect in my understanding of the dilemmas Zee encountered, and how he addressed or resolved them. Zee’s voice is presented unedited in italics.



**Figure 3.13: Zee’s dilemmatic spaces**

Based on the question: “What values, beliefs, and priorities informed Zee’s perspectives in negotiating his classroom practice?” the following themes emerged.

### **3.2.7.1 Working together: The importance of a supportive workplace**

Zee believed that it was fundamental to implement and maintain a collaborative workspace for growth to occur at his school, irrespective of the impact of the pandemic. As a learner, he had witnessed his teachers working as a team to ensure that teaching and learning was at its best. According to Mitchell and Weber (1999), the way towards returning and reviewing something in various manners with new viewpoints, and to make meaningful and productive changes in the future, is known as productive remembering. Zee firmly understood what relationships between colleagues should be like. He said:

*When I imagined a teacher's life at school, my memories were filled with the close relationships between my school teachers and their colleagues; a supportive structure holding teachers together. I pictured teachers collaboratively working with parents to ensure learning is at its best.*

Zee's childhood experience of watching collaboration amongst his teachers left him with the expectation that the relationships between colleagues should be collaborative. Zee felt disappointed when he did not receive this support in his work environment. He stated:

*Forming relationships with colleagues is fundamental to the growth between each other and achieving the educational goals of learners which I was not receiving at my workplace. I believe that if teachers could work together, they will be able to overcome many challenges at school...being a new teacher and having support from older teachers can be so beneficial because they can teach you how to manage your day-to-day tasks or even the classroom problems faced, due to the experience they have.*

Being a NT and feeling isolated at first negatively influenced Zee in his day-to-day practice. He felt during the pandemic that he could really have benefitted from the mentorship of senior teachers as they were more experienced and could have helped him through the challenges he faced. Zee believed that building relationships within his school environment would have provided multiple perspectives in negotiating his classroom practice. Mullen and Klimaitis (2019) state that teachers who work together create a space to share their ideas, experiences, and situations to improve the quality of their teaching and the learning of their learners. Zee felt that, as a NT, he was isolated, and it was difficult for him to learn what was expected of him regarding his duties while teaching during COVID-19. Based on his own earlier experiences, his beliefs, values, and perspectives underpinned his need to develop supportive relationships and he deliberately set out to forge parent-teacher relationships and to cultivate a caring and supportive classroom for his learners.

### ***3.2.7.2 A relationship of love, care, and kindness in the classroom during the pandemic***

Even as a NT Zee was conscious that care, kindness, and love should infuse his classroom practice as he had been exposed to those qualities in his teachers and family throughout his early childhood. These qualities were evident in his concern for his learners' safety in his presence and absence. A teacher's qualities influence learner behaviour and performance in either positive or negative ways, and they either build or break teacher-learner relationships (Chung, Marvin, & Churchill, 2005). Zee stated:

*I constantly worry about learners' safety in my absence, where they usually play and hang out. I fear that my learners could injure themselves while playing under the Wendy house classrooms one day and I have a fear that it may collapse due to the weight it carries...I took it upon myself to sanitize my learners' desks... I had to ensure that learners participated in the lesson while still ensuring that they were in a safe space which made it difficult for me to be everywhere at once... In our home...nobody feels as if they are going through things alone.*

Zee's personal and professional experiences of being exposed to an environment of closeness, togetherness, love and care helped him identify harmful situations. He dealt with that by adopting a gentle and dedicated approach to his learners, and Zee embraced a responsible role in his learners' lives. It is important that teachers are aware of possible danger that can cause learners harm, and this was particularly pertinent during the COVID-19 pandemic (Jansen, 2020). Zee was always surrounded by caring people in difficult times during his childhood, and he thus believed that his learners should not feel isolated or left out, especially as the pandemic could cause severe emotional damage. Zee said:

*The COVID-19 pandemic was challenging... I often felt that my hard work was never acknowledged, not that I needed it to be due to my passion for the profession... I love what I do, and it warms my heart when I am reminded of my positive influence through my learners.*

Even though the pandemic was challenging for many individuals, Zee found inspiration through his learners. He was working in an environment where there was no support, and this made him work longer hours and harder to cope with the many duties, demands, and expectations in the educational context. Gagen and Bowie (2005) highlight that NTs experience a stressful work environment and are emotional sensitive in the initial phase of teaching. Zee felt that his work was not appreciated as he was new to the field and finding his feet. However, his view of using love, kindness, and care was not unnoticed by his learners and their parents. A parent showed special gratitude for the positive influence he had on a child, which made Zee feel that he was using the right approach despite working in isolation. Zee believed that using actions that exuded care, love and kindness would increase inclusivity and form a safer and trusting relationship between him and his learners during the pandemic.

### **3.2.7.3 Dealing with diversity in learners' situations**

Teachers experience many situations in their practice that place their values in tension under scrutiny (Fransson & Grannäs, 2013). The new rules and ways of teaching and learning during the pandemic placed Zee in situations where he had to choose the best approach and the best solution without causing emotion or physical harm, while at the same time following COVID-19 protocols. Zee said:

*During one of my physical education lessons, I noticed that many of my learners had removed their masks. When I approached these learners, they told me that they were finding it difficult to breathe while participating in the outdoor lesson. I decided to stop the lesson because I did not know which was more important...protecting my learners...During the week break during rotation, learners would hardly ever*

*complete the tasks given to them... parents advising me that they are taking their children away for the week after their rotation...I believe that every teacher deals with classroom situations differently. I have my own beliefs that to manage challenges in the classroom. It is fundamental to observe and understand from multiple ways why things are happening the way they are.*

Zee believed that, due to the diversity of learners in his classroom, the situations he encountered would always be diverse. He tried to manage this by understanding why things were happening the way they did. Zee first determined what had caused the problem, and then respond to the situation by “choosing the right approach”. Scherff (2008) endorses this notion. Zee had to decide if allowing the learners to remove their masks during physical education was going to cause harm or, by prohibiting them from removing their masks, limit their oxygen intake. The pandemic created challenging conditions for teachers (Dawadi, Giri, & Simkhada, 2020), and Zee decided to stop physical activity as he was unsure if activity was more fundamental than protecting the health of his learners. His beliefs were unique to his values and concern. Zee used an understanding approach before making a decision that would be in the best interest of his learners. He may not have shared the same view in handling his classroom situations, but he believed that he took measures that enhanced positive behaviour and academic outcomes. Polkinghorne (1995) highlights that, while teachers may experience similar situations, every teacher has a unique reaction in response to their insights. Zee commented:

*One of the measures I take to manage challenges I experience with some of my learners is reporting the incident to the parent. Parents support teachers a lot, and they collaboratively work together to ensure that learning and discipline are maintained... I feel that parents play a big role in helping teachers achieve educational goals and that parents can help children in ways that teachers can't, which is more of a personal approach to discipline and reinforcing learning at home... [I received] a message from a parent who showed so much gratitude towards my influence over their child's progress...*

Zee foregrounded a sound teacher-parent relationship as parents are critical role-players in collaboratively enforcing positive learner outcomes because they deeply affect learner behaviour. Teachers who maintain good teacher-parent relationships can link this approach to deep-rooted experiences that shaped their practice (Chung, Marvin, & Churchill, 2005). Zee found that his approach to report directly to the parents produced a visible improvement in his learners' behaviour and academic progress. He was brought up in a household where parents played a positive role in his life and education, which is why he felt that parents would have a positive influence on their children to achieve good educational outcomes through the challenging time of COVID-19. According to Scherff (2008), teachers who are able to revisit

their own experiences reflect on their practice with the purpose of better understanding and supporting their learners. Zee was aspired to improve his classroom practice by being more inclusive, offering a safe and welcoming environment, and being a teacher that left a lasting print on his learners.

### 3.2.8 Synthesis of Section C

In writing my analysis of Zee in Section C, I adopted similar ideas as in Section B. I also created a haiku poem to best capture the perspectives that helped Zee negotiate his practices during the pandemic:

*In isolation  
parents are fundamental  
Informal support*

When Zee had not received support from his colleagues, he approached parents to play a critical role in ensuring that learning occurred at home. Zee's view that education grows through teamwork influenced his decision to find school stakeholders that would help him negotiate specific challenges in his practice. As times during the pandemic were so sensitive, and he understood how parents felt about education, he negotiated positive outcomes for his learners by involving their parents. He understood their diversity and respected all. The themes that highlight the critical relationships and support that helped Zee negotiate his classroom practice are:

- *Working together: the importance of a supportive workplace, and*
- *Dealing with the diversity of learners and situations.*

During Zee's childhood, he did not feel isolated as he was surrounded by his parents, siblings, and teachers who reassured and supported him. Due to the pandemic, Zee felt that his Grade 4 learners needed a responsible teacher who offered care, safety, and love when they were troubled as well as concern for their academic progress. He did not want his learners to feel isolated in a challenging time when new ways teaching and learning were introduced. Zee resolved to using new approaches to make his learners feel safe, cared for, and understood. He negotiated noticeable improvement in their transition from traditional ways to the new normal ways of teaching and learning. The theme that highlights the approaches that helped Zee negotiate his classroom situations is:

- *A relationship of love, care, and kindness in the classroom during the pandemic.*

### 3.3 Conclusion

In this chapter I offered my analysis and interpretation of Zee's experiences as a NT during the pandemic. Excerpts from his narrative were analysed to respond to the three research questions:

- Sections A: *What are novice teachers' stories of their everyday educational experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic?*
- Section B: *How did novice teachers' personal and professional experiences shape their professional practice during the COVID-19 pandemic?*
- Section C: *What informed the novice teachers' perspectives in negotiating classroom practices during the COVID-19 pandemic?*

The purpose of this chapter was to present an analysis and interpretation of Zee's lived personal and professional experiences that shaped his professional practice and underpinned the perspectives, values, and beliefs that influenced how he negotiated his dilemmas.

Based on my analysis as presented in Sections A, B and C, my overall interpretation of Zee's lived experiences in an urban school context highlights the systemic limitation in formal university and school contexts to provide opportunities for developing professional skills that would have capacitated him to better deal with the dilemmas he encountered. This gap in the formal sites for NT development highlights the impacts of personal and professional tensions that emerged in the time of crisis, the most curial being the poor preparedness of professionally qualified NTs to make professional judgements in such demanding situations. Universities undeniably have to equip student teachers with the knowledge to teach content (Ncube, Mammen, & Molepo, 2012). However, they do not prepare beginner teachers to teach under unforeseen conditions (Jansen, 2020), crises, and natural disasters.

My analysis in Section B revealed that social distancing and the fact that teachers like Zee were confined to their classrooms meant that his professional learning and collegial support were minimal during the pandemic. Such isolated positioning therefore means that knowledge and the skills to deliver instruction were limited.

In Section C, I revealed that Zee's personal dilemmas were: managing his time, content coverage, and ensuring that all learners were engaging in the learning programme within the

limitations of the rotational program that had been introduced in schools to curb close physical contact. Calvert (2016) avers that teachers who have agency act purposefully because they are aware of their part in their professional growth and the professional growth of others. Caught in the trap of limited skills to address the complicated requirements for schooling caused by the pandemic, Zee experienced various inner personal tensions as: (a) he had to keep all his learners safe, (b) cover subject content within a rotational program, and (c) help learners manage their time during rotational breaks.

Internal and external factors such as personal traits, the school's context, the impact of systemic shortcomings, and motivation to grow professionally influence teachers to act within their agency (Calvert, 2016). Given that he experienced no caring and respectful relationships at his school, Zee's choices to negotiate his dilemmas were influenced by his personal beliefs and values. Therefore: (a) He exercised agency to move beyond the school and seek support from informal systems (i.e., parents) to avoid working in isolation; and (b) He emerged as a strong person with values such as respect and compassion. For example, he resolved to and managed to forge positive teacher-learner and teacher-parent relationships in the face of the pandemic. His parent-teacher relationships were instrumental in fostering the achievement of educational goals as the parents facilitated learning after school hours.<sup>1</sup> Zee's relationship with parents was reciprocal, as these like-minded people who shared his values of education created informal learning communities at home to manage learning limitations during the pandemic. Although these communities of learning were informal between Zee and parents, their formations speaks to the dilemmatic space framework. Zee, a NT who was faced with the dilemma of isolation in a time of crisis, chose to negotiate his challenges of time management and curriculum coverage within a demanding teaching and learning rotational program by forming informal learning communities with the parents of his learners.

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<sup>1</sup> It is acknowledged that learners' actual outcomes in terms of academic achievement were beyond the scope of this study. However, Zee's insistence on the positive relationships he had forged with parents during this time of strife was inspirational as he created informal learning communities that were beneficial for his learners.

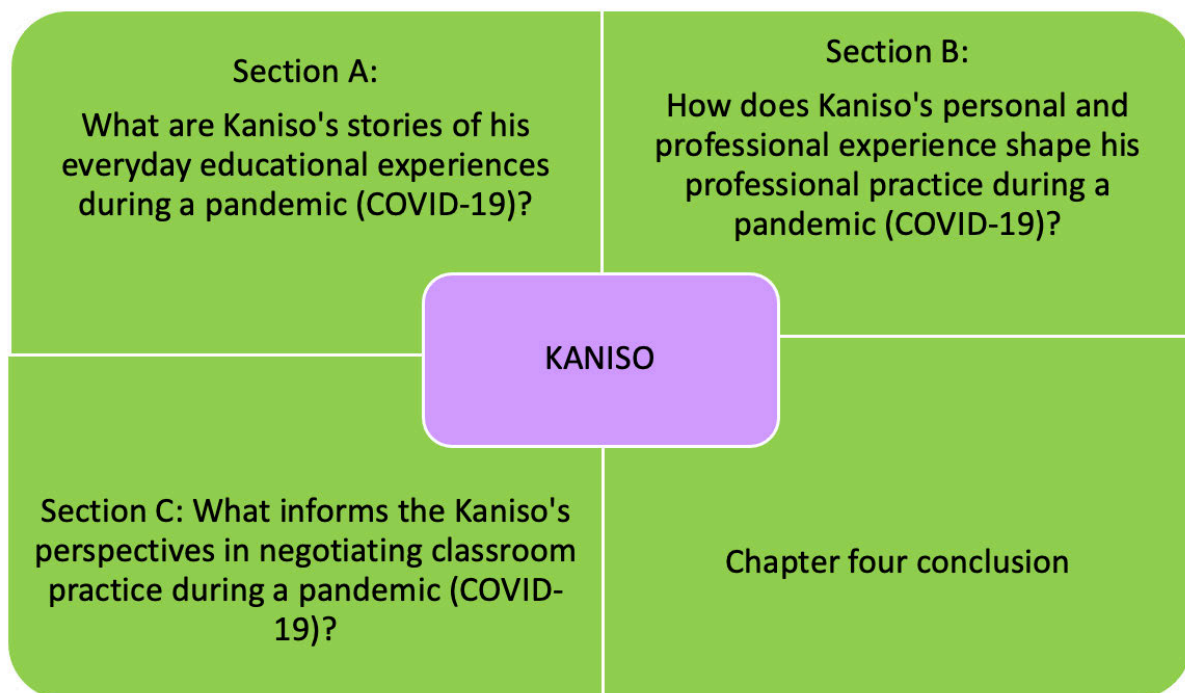
## CHAPTER FOUR

### KANISO'S STORY: *TURNING THE NEGATIVES INTO POSITIVES*

#### 4.1 Introduction

I constructed the first participant's story in Chapter Three. I then reconstructed and deconstructed it to answer the three key research questions. My analysis and interpretation of Zee's story engendered a deep understanding of Zee's life as a NT in the pandemic. I explored his personal and professional experiences and discovered how these shaped his thinking about his classroom practice. The previous chapter also highlighted Zee's perspectives that helped him negotiate the dilemmas he experienced during the pandemic.

In this chapter I present my analysis and interpretation of the story of the second participant, Kaniso. He is an African male and was 32 at the time of the study. He was employed at a Quintile 2 primary school in the iLembe District. He had two years' teaching experience in Mathematics, Natural Science, Technology, and Economic Management Science for Grades 5, 6, 7, which means he had taught in the intermediate and senior phases of the South African schooling system. His narrative is presented verbatim and I present excerpts from my reflective journal as I reflect on my experiences as a narrative inquirer during the data generation process.



**Figure 4.1: Summary of my analysis of Kaniso's story**

## 4.2 Kaniso's Story

### 4.2.1 Section A: Kaniso's reconstructed story

The reconstructed storied narrative of Kaniso's experiences is presented in this section to respond to the first key research question: *What are novice teachers' stories of their everyday educational experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic?* The story was reconstructed after processing the data that emerged from Kaniso's story. I used his collage, photovoice, memory drawing, unstructured interview, and self-box with the purpose of capturing in-depth information about how Kaniso experienced COVID-19 as a NT in a Quintile 2 school in a deep rural school context. The following diagram provides a visual overview of the plots that I developed through arranging and identifying critical events that best responded to research question 2:

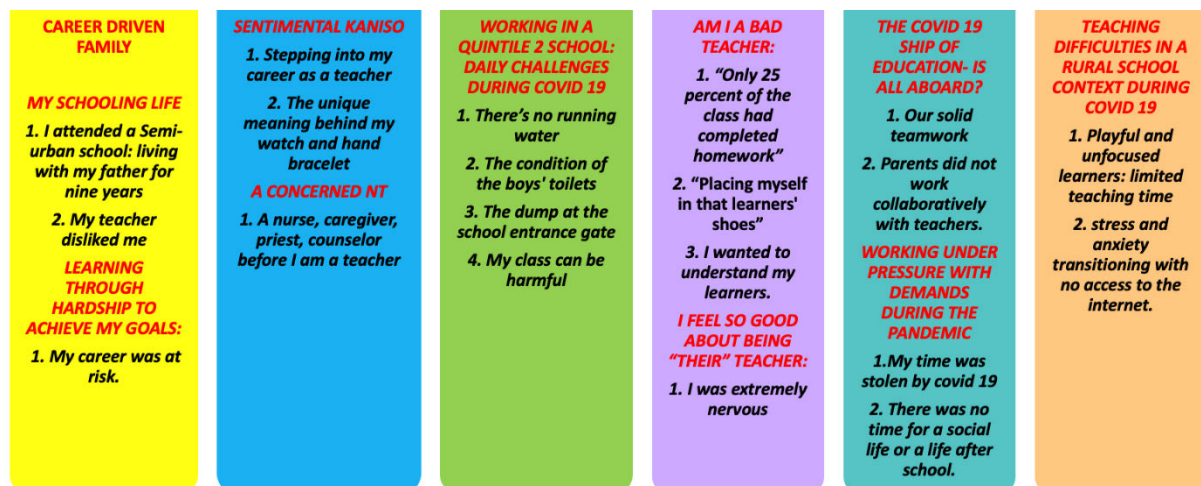


Figure 4.2: Plots and critical events that impacted Kaniso's educational practice

## KANISO'S STORY

### Living with a career-driven family

*I was born on 14 February 1989 in a working-class family. I am the eldest son in my family with a younger brother. I live with both my parents in our happy home in Mandeni, a small town on the north coast of KwaZulu-Natal. My father worked as a senior financial clerk in parliament, which was based in Pietermaritzburg before his early retirement in 2003. My mother is a departmental head at a school in the iLembe district. Growing up with my father and watching him work hard despite the many*

*obstacles we faced as a family, his sacrifices inspired me because I became a hardworking man like him.*

### **Schooling**

*In 1995 I moved to Pietermaritzburg to live with my father where I lived and pursued my schooling career at Mahlabathini primary from 1995 to 2001 and Mahlabathini High from 2002 till 2006. The semi-urban schools were located in Ulundi and had essential infrastructure to support us, like running water, electricity, and sufficient resources. My father and I had a great relationship. When my father retired and decided to move back to Mandeni in 2003, I chose to remain and finish my school life in Ulundi. I spent nine years of my life alone and lived as a tenant from 2004 till 2006 to complete my schooling. I enjoyed the independent teenage life. My mother is the strict parent, always making sure that my sibling and I are on the correct path with our studies and career choices.*

*I feel like without my father's approval I would not be confident enough to stay as a tenant despite being so persistent about it at that time because I knew my mother would not give in so easily.*

### **A disapproving teacher**

*2006 was a memorable year. I was in the most crucial year of my school life. My teacher disliked me so much that I was not allowed to be in the classroom when that teacher taught. I had to find ways of learning that subject outside of school. At my school, there was only one teacher teaching this subject. At some point, I wanted to hate the subject just because of how that teacher made me feel. Fortunately, I was able to pass that subject and become a specialist in that exact subject when I qualified as an educator.*

*I was interested by Kaniso's mentioning his teacher that disliked him; yet he ended up being a teacher in the exact same subject. The name of the subject is hidden to protect and respect the participants' wishes as this subject was taught by one particular teacher. Kaniso mentioned living alone in his teenage years... I am curious to know more about his life during this time...let's probe!*

*Journal Entry (November 2021)*

### **Learning through hardship to achieve his goals: A career at risk**

*From 2002 to 2006 during my teenage years in Pietermaritzburg, placed me in many troubling situations with my friends. It was easy for me to lose track without a parent. I learnt the hard way that not all friends are good friends. I was falsely accused of being in the wrong and part of a crime my friends committed. The charge against me for being falsely accused of crime during my teenage years was ongoing right until my qualification as a teacher. The process of fighting for my innocence to be where I am today was hard. Unfortunately, I was only proven innocent after my qualification.*

Court Judge: *What are you going to tell your learners?*

Me: *I will share with my learners to be wise when choosing their friends because a friend can make you and a friend can break you.*

*My own experiences have influenced the decisions and choices I make as a teacher. I have always wanted to be a person who has so much influence on others. I chose this profession to be the change that positively shapes my learners.*

*OKAY, I WASN'T EXPECTING THAT RESPONSE! I honestly thought that Kaniso was going to tell me that his career-driven family contributed to how he carried himself. Honestly, I am so pleased that Kaniso was so comfortable sharing such a personal experience in his life with me and I am moved by how that experience influenced positively who he is as a person. I didn't see that coming!*

*Journal Entry (November 2021)*



**Figure 4.3: Kaniso's self-box: "My sentimental objects"**

### **Stepping into the teaching career**

*In 2019, I wanted a particular shoe to “step” into my career as an educator. I remember going with my father to Mandeni from Empangeni to look for a specific store. The shoes from my graduation seemed like quite tired shoes. Thankfully, I found the store and my dad bought the pair for me. At that time, I did not have any money, and I was so excited to have shoes of such excellent quality. I cherish that pair as it is a consistent reminder of my excitement while stepping into my career after overcoming so many hurdles.*

### **A watch and a bracelet: Sentimental reflections**

*Another sentimental object is a watch I purchased on the 14<sup>th</sup> of February 2020 with my first birthday bonus. I use the watch every day for school to remind me of the value of time and balance that I as a new teacher had to have during the pandemic. The bracelet has such a unique meaning to me. On days that I use the white bracelet, I expect good things. It expresses that I am in a good mood and good things will happen. On the days that I use the black bracelet, I know my day is going to be rough. The bracelets are black and white; however, they hold a different meaning of good and bad moments.*

*Today we had many laughs! I feel I got to know Kaniso is better because our conversations aren't strictly for the purpose of me answering my research questions. We speak like we have known each other for a very long time. We even make jokes about each other when we speak just to break the ice now and then.*

*Journal Entry (November 2021)*

### **A concerned novice teacher: A nurse, caregiver, priest, counsellor**

*Being a teacher means that I have to take on many roles. COVID-19 has affected the lives of many teachers, parents, and learners. During my teaching experience, I had to play the role of a nurse, caregiver, security guard, priest, and counsellor. Every day before the start of my morning lesson, I talk to my learners and offer some motivational support to them for 5 minutes. Many learners face challenges at home where their parents are ill or they experienced a death in the family. This is very traumatizing for these little Grade 5 children. I always encourage my learners to keep their focus despite the many challenges they face. Sometimes I would tell my learners that their parents want them to do well and not lose hope. Often, after our morning*

*talk sessions, learners will be emotional and cry. This means that I have to spend additional time comforting that learner as the conversation made them sensitive. There are also times when I leave my class and attend to learners who are not feeling well before teaching. I do not neglect my learners; I offer care, which is crucial for being a teacher, especially with the younger learners. There is no use teaching if learners are troubled because they won't learn. Growing up I was taught to show care for those under my supervision, like the care our parents showed us.*

#### **Working in a Quintile 2 school: Daily challenges during COVID-19**



**Figure 4.4: Kaniso's photovoice: "Unsafe spaces: water shortage"**

*The school where I teach falls in the Quintile 2 ranking, which means that there is low state allocation and the school exists in under-funding and under-resourced spaces. This is a massive concern for me, especially during COVID-19. At school, there's no running water. Before COVID-19, learners used to drink from the JoJo tanks using their hands. Water often leaks out from the JoJo tank and causes dampness. This was a huge concern for me as well as my colleagues. We had to think of ways to ensure that learners still had access to water while not being so exposed to easily contracting the COVID-19 virus. Every class has a 20 litre bucket and beaker that learners now use to drink water. The school stopped learners from going to the taps to protect them.*

### Contextual challenges: Condition of the boys' toilets



**Figure 4.5: Kaniso's photovoice: "Unsafe spaces: The boys' toilet"**

*Another major concern for me was the condition of the boys' toilets. The toilets are in an awful condition with no running water as well. When I captured the picture of the school toilet, I was very quick because I did not want to be in there for long due to the smell. I feel it is unsafe because there are no sanitary and personal hygiene products readily available to learners. It is also not a good sight.*

### The unhygienic school premises



**Figure 4.6: Kaniso's photovoice: "Unsafe spaces: The entrance gate"**

*The nearby people throw their dump and burn it at the school entrance gate. This is very unhygienic and unsafe because it often leaves a hole in the ground when the dirt is burnt. The rain fills those holes, and it becomes muddy. Learners are exposed to this every day. All that dump around can be a possible hideout for snakes and dangerous creatures.*

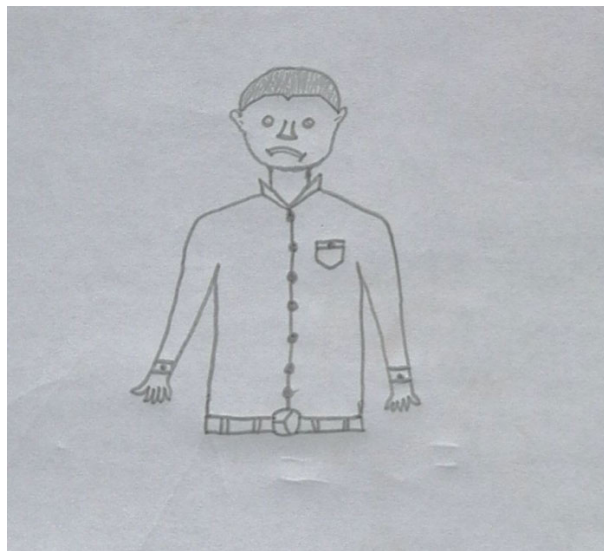
### A harmful classroom environment



**Figure 4.7: Kaniso's photovoice: "My unsafe and safe classroom areas"**

*For me, my classroom can be seen as a safe and unsafe space. I would classify areas in my classroom as unsafe because a small portion of my class is used to store cement, paint, and some other building equipment. I feel that this area of my class can be harmful to my Grade 5 learners as many objects can hurt them. I also don't find anyone cleaning and disinfecting those spaces. My classroom also makes me feel safe as I think I have more control over the tidiness and hygiene around me.*

### Questioning his worth as a teacher



**Figure 4.8: Kaniso's memory drawing: "I felt very sad and overwhelmed"**

*During 2020, I experienced many challenging situations; however, one situation stood out for me. I had given my Grade 5 learners homework, and only 25 percent of the class completed what was required of them. A learner with incomplete work showed no respect towards me as a teacher. The learner shouted: "I don't have the time to do*

*the homework as you expect me to do too many things. Every day, you keep telling me to use a mask, sit down, and sanitize!"*

*I was speechless as I did not know how to respond to this learner who spoke arrogantly. This learner felt as if I was targeting them. I felt sad because I was able to see that this learner started to dislike the subject I taught after this incident. This took me back to my own experience of being a student and my dislike of a teacher and the subject I was deprived of learning. I knew I had to change this cycle where a learner dislikes a subject because of the teacher. From my experience of being a student, I learned that when you are unhappy in your classroom environment, you start to dislike whatever is taught in that environment.*

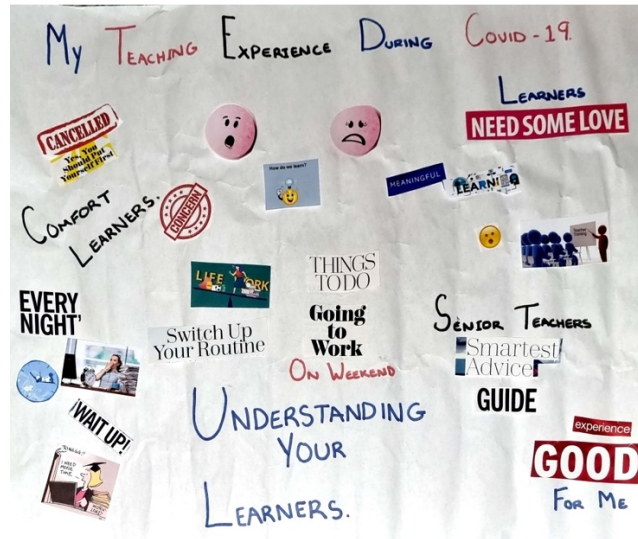
### **Placing himself in a learner's shoes**

*My response to the disrespectful learner was: "I am placing myself in that learner's shoes." I spoke to him/her. I first understood that these are young learners who are used to playing with their friends, sharing books, and walking around the class. With COVID-19, they are separated from their friends, so they are already annoyed when they come to class because they already know that I am going to say: "Don't touch each other; don't play; stand/sit alone; use your own book..."*

*Teaching Grade 5 learners under these restrictions is like putting petrol in the fire because they are already frustrated, and that frustration is taken out on the teacher. The emotion of learners has changed from the start of COVID-19. It is important as a teacher to understand what that learner is going through.*

*I could hear that when Kaniso spoke about a learner's dislike of his subject it troubled him so much for some reason. I was curious, and as I was about to probe Kaniso, he instantly reflected back on his experience of being a learner and his encounter with a teacher. I expected to hear some sort of hate for his teacher; however, Kaniso did not portray that in his tone or words.*

*Journal Entry (October 2021)*



**Figure 4.9: Kaniso’s collage: “Managing my COVID-19 encounters**

### **Wanting to understand his learners**

*My constant reminders to sanitize, use a mask, and social distancing, created anger and stress in my learners. I had many questions, such as: “What do I do with this learner?” “What is my responsibility towards this learner?” and “Am I a bad teacher?”*

*I then stepped back and started to think critically. I knew that if I called the parents, the learner already knew that he would face some punishment at home because our culture teaches us to respect our elders. Parents do not take the issue of disrespect lightly, and the discipline would have just created more hatred towards me. I know that my cultural belief would label this learner as arrogant, but I wanted to understand this learner and why he behaved the way he did. I asked myself:*

*“Could it be my classroom setting? Is it because they are forced to use their masks? Are they upset to be isolated from their friends?”*

*I questioned all these aspects because I wanted to understand my learners.*

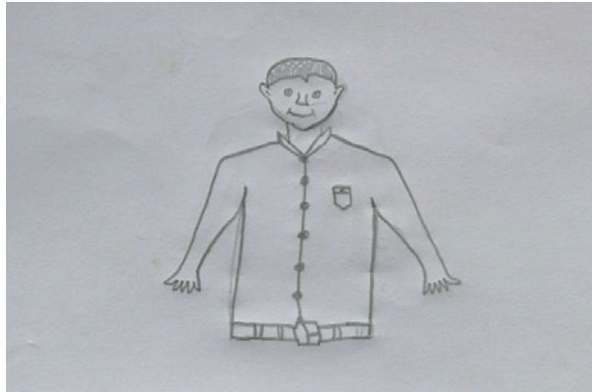
*Wow! Did Kaniso just describe a dilemmatic situation and how he negotiated it without me directly asking him? I really want to probe him for my understanding of why and what influenced his approach to this dilemma...*

*Journal Entry (October 2021)*

*When Kaniso shared his drawing with me I was so surprised at how just one simple drawing had so many stories behind it! I must be honest: I was not expecting that drawing to have the*

*ability to share such a powerful story due to how simple it was. I guess it's true, "a picture can tell many stories".*

*Journal Entry (October 2021)*



**Figure 4.10: Kaniso's memory drawing: "Feeling good about being 'their' teacher"**

#### **Being extremely nervous**

*In 2020, my Grade 5 learners were asked to do a play in front of the school staff. The play focused on sharing experiences during COVID-19. The learners in my class had to prepare and write down in English their experiences during the pandemic. I was extremely nervous because my learners communicate mostly in isiZulu, their home language. I did not know if my learners were going to pronounce words in English correctly. I must say that I was so proud when my learners stood in front and spoke in fluent English about their challenges during COVID-19. The entire staff was so impressed, and this made me feel so good about being "their" teacher. My hard lessons in life have helped me to make responsible and considerate choices in the everyday situations I face in my classroom actions. I truly learnt the influence and power of a teacher on learners.*

*I had to postpone two sessions with Kaniso due to the unforeseen admin workload he had. I think it will be best that we speak when he has a clear head. I also do not want my participants to feel overwhelmed by me and participate for the sake of it.*

*Journal Entry (October 2021)*

### **The COVID-19 ship of education: All aboard for solid teamwork!**

*Being a teacher in a rural school during COVID-19 meant we had to ensure that all school members were aboard. The principal, teachers, and the heads of department worked together as a team to ensure that no teacher felt unsupported. I personally think that our solid teamwork is most important and why we are still standing strong in the rural context. When I needed help, I would go to a senior teacher who would always willingly offer support. The senior teachers were so experienced that they would even identify a situation before it happened and advise you on approaching specific learners. Female teachers often support learners needing 'a mother's touch'. Being a male teacher, it becomes difficult for learners to approach you as they would if you are a female.*

### **Lack of parental support**

*I was getting the support I needed from my colleagues, but for things to sail smoothly, I needed to call a meeting with the parents to work together during COVID-19 learning restrictions. The parents were given the tasks required to continue while the learners were at home. I even created WhatsApp groups so that parents could ask for clarity and answers to cross-check against the learners' responses. Some of the tasks required learners to go on the internet or visit a library, but due to COVID-19, the library was not available to the community. I would always advise the parents to allow their children to use their smartphones to access the internet for tasks that required more extensive work.*

*In many cases, the parents would agree; however, some learners came to class with incomplete work the next day. When the learner is questioned about why they haven't completed their work, they would say their mother "had no data" or their parent "did not allow them to use the internet". This became very challenging as it felt like some parents did not work collaboratively with teachers.*

*I know how disappointed Kaniso felt when parents did not show support because I could sense from his voice that he wanted that same effort and commitment from parents. But no matter how hard he tried...he wasn't getting it!*

*Journal Entry (October 2021)*

### **Working under pressure to cope with unprecedented demands: Lost time**

*The COVID-19 teaching experience as a novice teacher was very exhausting for me. I struggled with time as I felt that much of my time was stolen by COVID-19 demands in education. The first challenge I struggled with was the submission from the school to the department, which was previously done by hard copy documents physically submitted to the circuit. With the COVID-19 restrictions, teachers had to attend back-to-back workshops to learn how to adapt and submit these documents using alternative ways. These workshops were in place to equip teachers with skills and knowledge to transition from the traditional submissions to the new way of submission.*

### **No time for a social life or a life after school**

*As a novice teacher, I would complete my typical day-to-day lessons at school, and when I went home, I would work on the documents that needed to be submitted to the circuit. It was so challenging because, at some points, I would have to make a call to my colleagues at 10 pm to ask for assistance. I would go to bed at 11 pm and wake up at 5 am for the next school day, and it was tiring. I even attended school during the weekend to complete office work due to COVID-19 claiming the lives of staff. There was no time for a social life or a life after school. The challenges of COVID-19 were overwhelming, but I personally believe that this experience has taught me how to work in complex situations.*

*Indeed, I am facing many obstacles in my practice. However, I feel undefeatable by the experience of working under so much pressure and demands. COVID-19 has prepared me to be a teacher who can manage any challenge they face. I would say that this was a bad experience with positive self-building abilities for teachers.*

*I WAS BLOWN AWAY BY THIS RESPONSE! I just sat and listened to how Kaniso was convincing me of how positive the COVID-19 teaching experience had been for him. I agree with him... I never really saw it through his lens, but now I can understand why he says experience makes him "undefeatable". I will be honest... I never expected this response!*

*Journal Entry (November 2021)*

## **Teaching obstacles in a rural school context during COVID-19:**

### **Playful and unfocused learners and limited teaching time**

*My class enrolment consists of 45 learners before being divided into groups. The rotation of learners was done daily hence 'one day in and one day out'. We preferred daily rotations instead of weekly rotations because the learners are small, and if we had to teach them for a week and give them a break of a week, they would come back 'clean and forgotten'.*

*While learners are grouped randomly, I often noticed that one group would work faster and grasp knowledge quicker than the other group. I would have to find additional time to work with the group that found it challenging to keep pace. I often experienced 45 percent of my learners attending school 15 minutes late; this means that I lost 15 minutes of teaching time that I would have to try to catch up. Fifteen minutes of the next lesson got used to make up for time lost.*

### **Stress and anxiety during transitioning and no access to the internet**

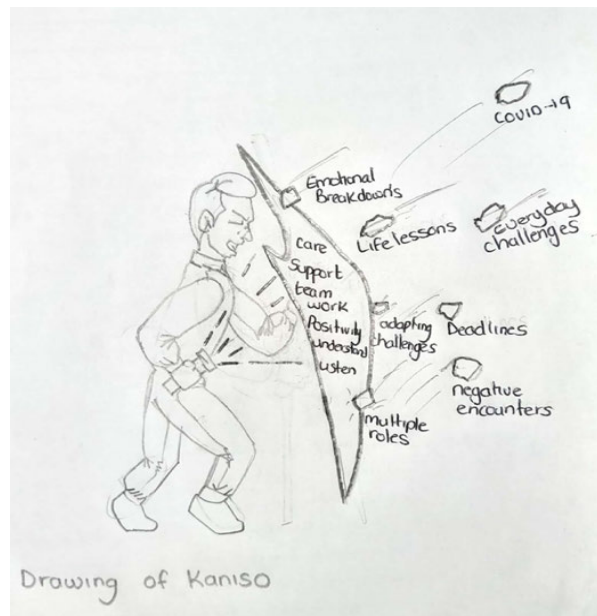
*In a rural school context, we experienced tremendous stress and anxiety transitioning from traditional teaching methods to adapting to a new teaching and learning approach. The Department of Education had advised the schools with no ability to work remotely to give learners a lot of weekly tasks to work with at home. This was challenging because I was required to mark and provide feedback on all tasks.*

*I couldn't give feedback on incomplete homework due to the learners being in a position with no access to the internet or inability to visit the library. If the school were in a position with sufficient resources, the teaching and learning would have been improved. I would have loved to include visuals to make my lessons more exciting. At least then, learners would not be so discouraged, angry, and easily distracted.*

*Why, why, why? This is the second time in the week that Kaniso and I could not have a virtual meeting. A tower was destroyed due to the heavy rain in his area. I'm feeling so overwhelmed and nervous because I feel like I haven't done much work this week with my participants... **WORRIED!!!***

*Journal Entry (November 2021)*

## 4.2.2 Synthesis of Section A



**Figure 4.11: Synthesis drawing of Kaniso’s story**

To help me reflect on my learning from this descriptive layer of the analysis in the research process (also referred to as the narrative analysis, or drawing on data from various data sources), I drew an image that best captured my learning from Kaniso’s reconstructed story. The image above shows Kaniso holding a torch (his beliefs, values and perspectives) while stones (his daily challenges) are thrown at him. These metaphors resemble the many dilemmas he faced during COVID-19 with little support from parents. Representing his story in text enabled me to understand the complex part of his story as parts of self. Stories of ‘self’ reveal past and present personal and professional experiences that can shape teachers’ beliefs, values, and approach to situations.

## 4.2.3 Section B: Analysis of Kaniso’s story

In this section, I present the second level of analysis of Kaniso’s story to respond to key research question two: *How did novice teachers’ personal and professional experiences shape their professional practice during the COVID-19 pandemic?* Together with the dilemmatic framework (Fransson & Grannäs, 2013), I also draw on Rodgers and Scott’s (2008) views on identity as an analytical tool to make meaning of the nuanced personal and professional experiences that shaped Kaniso’s professional practice. A concept map (Figure 4.12) was used as a thinking tool to zoom into Kaniso’s multiple stories within a story which I emplotted to

reveal the critical events that shaped his personal and professional life. Kaniso's voice is presented verbatim in italics.

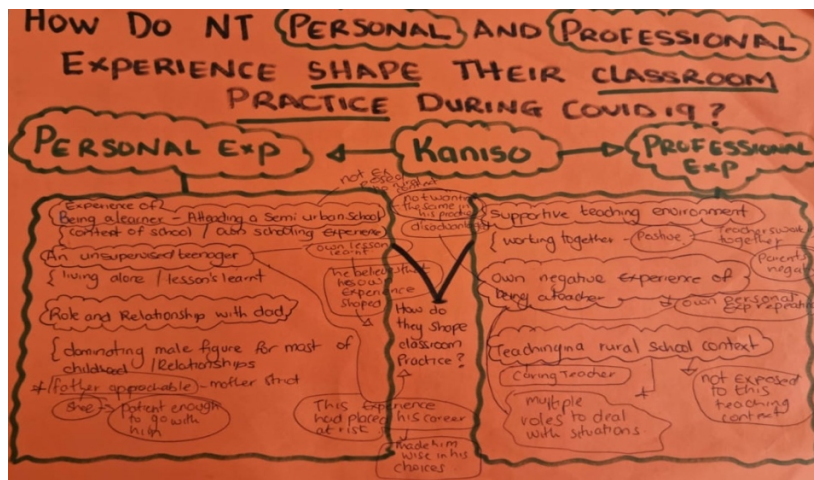


Figure 4.12: Concept map of Kaniso's personal and professional experiences

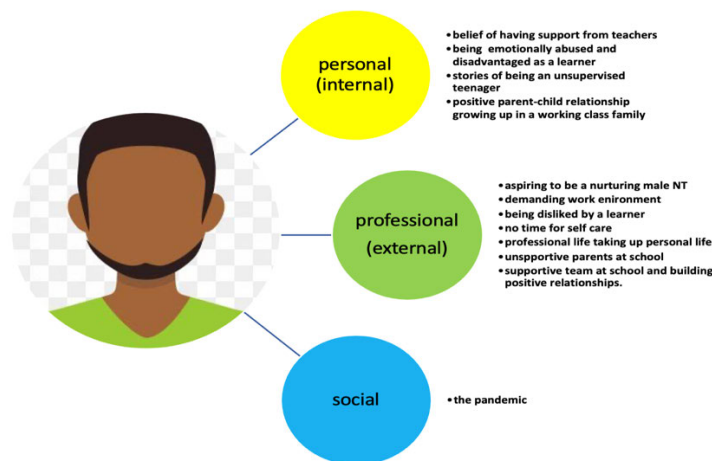


Figure 4.13: Kaniso's personal and professional experiences that shaped his professional practice

#### 4.2.3.1 Parent-child relationships in a working-class family

Barbarin and Richter (2013) highlight that the political transition that began in the 1990s influenced changes in family life, the climate of child development, and prevailing norms about gender roles in South Africa. Barbarin and Richter (2013) further argue that African families were drawn to urban areas in hopes of better access to education, jobs, and decent housing. Kaniso came from a working-class family who made a home in a historically Black township in Mandeni. While Stambaugh, Hector, and Carr (2011) argue that children who have working

class parents often feel deprived of parental love, Kaniso's experience was different. His mother worked as a teacher and his father worked as a senior financial clerk, and they provided excellent role models for Kaniso and his sibling. Kaniso's choice to move to Pietermaritzburg with his father to complete his schooling enabled a caring and close relationship to develop between him and his father:

*In 1995, I moved to Pietermaritzburg and attended my entire schooling career while living with my father. My father and I had a great relationship...watching him work hard despite the many obstacles we faced as a family, his sacrifices inspired me because I became a hardworking man like him. My mother stayed back in Mandeni with my younger brother. I would describe my mother as being a strict parent...without my father's approval I would not be confident enough...my mother would not give in so easily...I always encourage my learners to keep their focus despite the many challenges they face...to do well and not lose hope...I offer care...Growing up I was taught to show care for those under my supervision like the care our parents showed us.*

Kaniso's personal experience of having an approachable father and a strict mother inspired him to be more aware of his role as a carer in his professional practice. He aspired to be a teacher that learners would not be afraid to approach. Kaniso's personal experience of growing up with his father influenced his professional actions and his demeanour as male teacher that could adopt a caring role to promote hope, encouragement, and motivation among his learners. Biddulph (2002) highlights the importance of having the right kind of male teachers that have deep inner manhood and qualities of bravery, strength, and protectiveness. The above excerpt highlights the support, care, and confidence Kaniso received from his father who would make decisions that his mother would not agree with. Kaniso aspired to support his learners in the same way to give them confidence in knowing that they were not alone during the challenging times of the pandemic. Some research has highlighted that teenagers limit the disclosure of events to parents to protect themselves from unwanted parental supervision, reprimands, conflict, and authority (Solomon, Warin, Lewis & Langford, 2002) to maintain an unsupervised teenage lifestyle (Prager, 1995). Kaniso's life in Pietermaritzburg where he shared an approachable relationship with his father was different to his life at Mandeni where his mother held sway with a strict hand. Kaniso as a teenager had the desire to explore. He was susceptible to curiosity and peer influence, which placed his values in tension when he remained in Pietermaritzburg instead of moving back to Mandeni with his father to join the family.

#### **4.2.3.2 An unsupervised teenage boy**

Tavernier and Willoughby (2012) point out that teenagers are at their most vulnerable stage when they are without adult guidance, which often leads to a desire for exploration due to their

freedom, and this freedom often results in trouble. Prager (1995), Tavernier and Willoughby (2012) suggest that post-pubertal physical appearance prompts parents into thinking that their children are now more responsible. During 2003, Kaniso's father retired early and moved back to Mandeni to the family home. Kaniso was a teenager who was comfortable in his environment. He had his own opinions and views, and was not ready to leave everything behind in Ulundi:

*I stayed back alone and lived as a tenant from 2004 till 2006 to complete my schooling in Ulundi. I enjoyed the independent life...I enjoyed having that freedom while being a teenage boy...It was easy for me to lose track without a parent reprimanding me. I had joined the wrong group of friends...I was easily influenced into bad things... not all friends are good friends...I was falsely accused of being in the wrong and part of a crime my friends committed...my career was at risk...I was asked in court what will I tell my learners.*

The personal experiences of Kaniso as an unsupervised teenager influenced his thinking about the critical role that any adult supervision has on a child. In his classroom practice, he aimed to ensure that learners felt surrounded by teachers who cared for them. Tavernier and Willoughby (2012) emphasise the important role that adults play during the teenage years of their children. They should monitor their behaviour, actions, and maintain order and control. Kaniso believed that his role as an adult in his learners' lives can somehow help them negotiate their negative encounters through his guidance. His experience of being in a situation where his career was at stake opened a new way of looking at his professional life. He believed that his guidance was fundamental in keeping learners from going astray, as he had done without his parents' and teachers' support. Saenz (2015) highlights the important role of teachers who guide learners to self-discovery, especially if they felt incompetent while growing up. Aizer (2004) emphasises that adults influence children irrespective whether they are supportive or not. Adults' behaviour and demeanour shape children's behaviour, beliefs, and values. Kaniso's experience of living an independent life without parental support and guidance, when he often found himself in troublesome situations, was exacerbated when he did not feel safe and loved in the school environment where he was emotionally abused by a teacher.

#### **4.2.3.3 Emotional abuse and exclusion**

Nearchou (2018) defines emotional abuse by teachers as behaviour that is expressed either verbally or non-verbally. Gehlbach, Brinkworth, and Harris (2012) argue that such emotional abuse includes exclusion from classroom activities as well as negative comments that result in emotional and social effects on a learners' functioning and progress. McEvoy (2005) and

Hascher and Hagenauer (2010) posit that when educators induce fear instead of respect, they become unapproachable, disliked, avoided, and learners often do not progress well in their subjects. Nearchou (2018) concurs that the effects of emotional abuse and school exclusion have long-term implications. Such abuse can for instance impede the transitioning period into adulthood. Kaniso attended two semi-urban schools in Ulundi. During his high school career he experienced emotional abuse, exclusion, and bullying as he was targeted by a teacher. He experienced a challenging educational environment and felt deprived of having access to learning:

*During 2006, I had encountered an experience in the most crucial year of my school life. One of my teachers disliked me...I was not allowed to be in the classroom when that teacher taught... I had to find ways of learning that subject outside of school. I felt deprived of the opportunity to learn that subject. At some point, I wanted to hate the subject just because of how that teacher made me feel. Fortunately, I was able to pass that subject and become a specialist in that exact subject when I qualified as an educator...as a NT during the pandemic... I attend to learners who are not feeling well before teaching...I spend additional time comforting that learner as the conversation made them sensitive.*

Kaniso's negative experience of being an emotionally abused learner erupted in anger and he began to hate the subject. This negative encounter inspired him to find ways to positively shape his learners and to make them feel safe. He reverted to comforting rather than excluding them. Kaniso changed the way he reacted to his negative experience by specialising in the subject he had previously hated. He aspired to understand why learners behave the way they do to best deal with such situations in his classroom. His personal experience shaped the way he conducted his professional practice and he used care, love, support, and approachable relationships to inspire his learners. He learnt to enforce discipline and learning without excluding learners due to their behaviour. Kaniso's was sensitive to his learners' adversities conscious of their sensitivities when he approached adverse situations in his classroom.

#### **4.2.4 Theme synthesis**

##### ***4.2.4.1 Nurturing relationships that foster a positive and inclusive learning environment***

The discussion that I presented under the theme: *Kaniso's personal experiences that shaped his thinking about his classroom practice* highlighted the importance of a male teacher taking on a nurturing role while openly demonstrating love, care, and approachability in his classroom. Valuing positive supportive relationships was shaped by the experience of growing up in a stable, close-knit family with a nurturing father. It taught him to value caring

relationships. His negative experience of being emotionally abused inspired him to focus on creating a classroom that would be inclusive and would have a positive influence on his learners. Kaniso used his experience of no adult supervision during his teenage years to encourage a trusting relationship between himself and his learners. Rodgers and Scott (2008) highlight that personal relationships influence professional practice positively or negatively as they depend on the individual beliefs and values of those involved. Kaniso used negative personal experiences to create positive teacher-learner relationships and a welcoming, inclusive classroom atmosphere.

In addressing the question: How did Kaniso's professional experiences shape his professional practice? the following themes emerged:

#### ***4.2.4.2 Adopting multiple roles as a male NT***

Hansen and Mulholland (2005) highlight that the actions of affectionate males may likely be associated with undesirable physical contact such as hugging. In school context, male teachers may thus be monitored and admonished when they show nurturing behaviour without concern for their actions of care. Gosse (2011) concurs, highlighting that there is a perception that male teachers' roles should be non-nurturing compared to that of their female colleagues, which suggests that males are seen as less equipped to work with children as they may be accused of inappropriate conduct at school. However, Rogers, Nielson, and Santos (2021) argue that male teachers can and do provide emotional support by taking on a nurturing fatherly role to help children with their emotive and social needs. During the pandemic, Kaniso realised the importance of taking on multiple roles as it assisted him in dealing with the emotional state of learners and many other aspects that contributed to his classroom practice:

*Being a male teacher, it becomes difficult for learners to approach you as they would if you are a female... I had to play the role of a nurse, caregiver, security guard, priest, and counsellor. Every day before the start of my morning lesson, I talk to my learners and offer some motivational support to them. I always encourage my learners to keep their focus despite the many challenges they face...Female teachers often support learners needing a mother's touch.*

Kaniso believed that not all learners in his classroom would relate to a male figure that was approachable and caring as learners might be socialised differently. Hansen and Mulholland (2005) emphasise that male teachers generally find it problematic to display affection because such a demeanour is commonly ascribed to females. However, this did not bar him from

displaying love and care in his classroom. He wanted to work closely with female teachers to deal with situations during COVID-19 that he felt required female intervention. Kaniso's early socialization taught him to openly show love and care without restricting those roles to a gender.

Kaniso used motivational talks to build a trusting relationship with his learners because he did not want them to feel as if they were alone during the emotional chaos the pandemic created. He aspired to be a kind, comforting, and understanding teacher. He understood that that all learners are unique and need support in different ways. He challenged stereotypical notions and aspire to be a nurturing male teacher. Gagen and Bowie (2005) highlighted that balancing a demanding workload while offering care and compassion can be challenging for a NT. However, Kaniso's compassion assisted him in maintaining the emotional well-being of his learners. The pandemic created a demanding work environment for teachers, but Kaniso embraced his responsibilities and executed his duties with professionalism in his classroom.

#### ***4.2.4.3 A heavy workload and unrealistic demands during the pandemic***

Richmond, Cho, Gallagher, He, and Petchauer (2020) argue that the COVID-19 pandemic created a spike in the need for resources, teacher distance training, and the implementation of additional health measures. Richmond et al. (2020) state that the District Office relied heavily on teachers to access and create additional resources to ensure the continuity of learning activities for learners with no access to online platforms. This meant that teachers were expected to take on additional responsibilities while they and their learners were expected to meet educational goals as per the curriculum. Minkos and Gelbar (2021) refer to the reality of increased stress and trauma among learners, arguing that this increased the personal and professional demands on teachers.

Kaniso struggled to balance his personal and professional roles as a NT as those roles were rarely separated during the pandemic. He said:

*I would complete my typical day-to-day lessons at school, and when I went home, I would work on the documents that needed to be submitted to the circuit. It was so challenging... I would go to bed at 11 pm and wake up at 5 am for the next school day, and it was tiring...There was no time for a social life...I even attend school during the weekend to complete office work...In a rural school context...we have no running water... We had to think of ways to ensure that learners still have access to water while not being so exposed to the COVID-19 virus. Every class has a 20 Litre bucket and beaker that learners now use to drink water...to protect them...we had experienced*

*tremendous stress and anxiety transitioning from traditional teaching methods to adapting to a new teaching and learning approach. The department of Education had advised the schools with no ability to work remotely to give learners a lot of weekly tasks to work with at home...I was required to mark and provide feedback on all tasks. I couldn't give feedback on incomplete homework due to the learners being in a position with no access to the internet or inability to visit the library...It was overwhelming.*

The above excerpt highlights the day-to-day personal and professional demands Kaniso and other teachers had to face. These high expectations contributed to his loss of a sense of well-being during the pandemic as he felt emotionally and physically exhausted while teaching in a school with insufficient resources to work remotely. Long (2009) suggests that it is important for NTs to create a balanced professional life while learning and navigating their duties. Kaniso found it difficult to ensure that his classroom practices were executed according to the Department's revised expectations; however, he aspired to be effective even in an under-resourced school by working long hours and providing additional support for his learners. Kaniso was struggling to meet all expectations as he had to ensure that the classroom was safe for his learners, cover the curriculum, and meet deadlines while completing and marking volumes of tasks to give weekly feedback to 45 learners. Kaniso thus sacrificed his weekends and personal time. He lost sleep to ensure that he could improve the teaching and learning process in a rural context while working closely with his colleagues. While Kaniso was struggling to balance the day-to-day expectations of his role as an educator, he was further challenged when he tried to enforce and follow safety protocols in his classroom.

#### **4.2.4.4 Being disliked by a learner**

Saleem and Muhammad (2020) highlight that many teachers, often unknowingly, place themselves in a challenging relationship with learners due to their negative emotional expressive behaviours in the classroom. Richmond et al. (2020) aver that teachers feel overwhelmed by the additional duties and take on a strict teacher role to maintain order in the classroom. Saleem and Muhammad (2020) concur that non-serious teacher roles open up spaces for disrespect, anger, and challenging learner behaviour when learners feel emotionally targeted in the sudden shift from non-serious to serious teacher roles. Kaniso aspired to take on a caring, approachable, and understanding teacher role, he caused anger in a particular learner during the pandemic:

*A learner showed no respect towards me and my role as a teacher. The learner's response was "I don't have the time to do the homework as you expect me to do too many things. Every day, you keep telling me to use a mask, sit down, and sanitize..."*

*My teacher responsibilities created anger and stress in my learners because of my constant reminders to sanitize, use a mask, and social distance...I felt sad...I was able to see that this learner started to dislike the subject I taught after this incident. This took me back to my own experience of being a student and my dislike towards a teacher... I knew I had to change this cycle where a learner dislikes a subject because of the teacher... I know that my cultural belief would label this learner as arrogant, but I wanted to understand the learner... Is it because they are forced to use their masks? Are they upset to be isolated from their friends? I questioned all these aspects because I wanted to understand my learners.*

The above excerpt highlights the understanding teacher role Kaniso aimed. He understood that learners became frustrated away from the traditional classroom and were not used to being separated from friends, reprimanded for walking around, or told throughout the day to do things to protect their physical and mental health. Kaniso also identified that the learner acted against his cultural belief and he was curious to understand why the learner had responded in that manner. Kaniso aspired to understand the learner rather than let the past repeat itself by changing what he referred to as the “cycle of bad teacher-learner experiences”. His compassionate approach to his learners helped him identify and resolve the issues to ensure positive change. Kaniso aspired to be a teacher who acknowledged learners’ diversity and personal problems. His desire to positively influence his learners prompted him to find ways to improve the education they received in a rural school during the pandemic. Faced with poor access to resources and limited to no access to libraries and the internet, he maintained strong work relations with his colleagues to support him.

#### ***4.2.4.5 Supportive and collaborative experiences in the workplace***

Pitsoe (2013) and Mukeredzi, Mthiyane, and Betram (2015) contend that it is fundamental for NTs to have a supportive work environment for self-growth and development in the profession. Mutemeri and Chetty (2011) focus on the importance of having supportive school stakeholders to assist NTs in their already stressful work environment so that they can embrace balanced and emotionally stable practices. Kaniso struggled as a NT to balance his classroom duties with others and he experienced various dilemmas in his professional practice. He wisely sought assistance from parents and school stakeholders, and found supportive teacher-teacher relationships to guide him in the school where limited resources were available during the pandemic:

*I would always advise the parents to allow their children to use their smartphones to access the internet for tasks that require more extensive work. In many cases, the parents would agree; however, that learner comes to class with incomplete work...When the learner is questioned about why they haven't completed their work,*

*they would say their “mother had no data” or “their parent did not allow them to use the internet”. This became very challenging as it felt like some parents did not work collaboratively with teachers. We had to ensure that all school members were “aboard”. The principal, teachers, and the departmental heads worked together as a team to ensure that no teacher felt unsupported... I personally think that our solid teamwork is most important and why we are still standing strong in the rural context.*

The above excerpt highlights that, while Kaniso received an excellent response from teachers and their willingness to help a NT, he did not receive the same support from parents. Teamwork between teachers and various school stakeholders plays a pivotal role in ensuring that teaching and learning continues smoothly in a rural school context despite restricted access to a library and the internet. Kaniso aimed to utilise various methods to ensure that teachers, parents, and learners were working towards a common goal, so no learner was deliberately disadvantaged during the COVID-19 pandemic. The collaboration between Kaniso and his colleagues created a supportive team as teachers could approach others for help as COVID-19 was a new experience for novice and senior teachers alike. Teachers were offering support throughout the day, after work hours, and in the late hours of the night, which showed their determination to meeting educational demands in a school with lack of resources and lack of access to necessities to work remotely. Kaniso aspired to be a teacher who would be able to teach under challenging circumstances and in adverse workspaces, and he believed that self-growth occurred through his personal and professional experiences.

#### **4.2.5 Theme synthesis**

The key theme that emerged is: Adopting multiple NT roles to foster positive teacher-learner and collegial relationships.

The discussion that I presented under the theme: *Kaniso’s professional experiences that shaped his thinking about his classroom practice* highlighted the importance for teachers to adopt a highly sensitive and understanding role in their classrooms during the pandemic when learners were already emotionally uneasy. Kaniso took on a caregiver teacher identity in the rural school where he taught during the pandemic. Kaniso’s experience of learners' emotional breakdown, declining academic performance, compounded by unprecedented COVID-19 demands, created a difficult space for him to work in. The demands on teachers during the pandemic compelled Kaniso to adopt unhealthy and imbalanced personal and profession lives. In conjunction with a demanding workload and challenging classroom situations when Kaniso enforced mandatory COVID-19 protocols, he sacrificed his personal time during weekends to help finish office

work so that he could focus on his classroom duties. This speaks to his determination and dedication to ensure that he met all educational goals. Kaniso struggled to manage his duties and responsibilities as a NT in an under-resourced rural school; however, he aspired to improve education in this context by developing strong and collaborative relationships with colleagues and provided support and ideas for a way forward for all his learners.

#### **4.2.6 Synthesis of Section B**

My reflections on Section B was crystallised after I had created a 3-line haiku poem to highlight the key factors of Kaniso's personal and professional experiences that shaped his professional practice. Prendergast, Leggo, and Sameshima (2009) argue that the use of poetry in qualitative analysis provides a focused and clear way of representing participants' data to express their critical experiences, identities, places, relationality, hopes, fears, or desires.

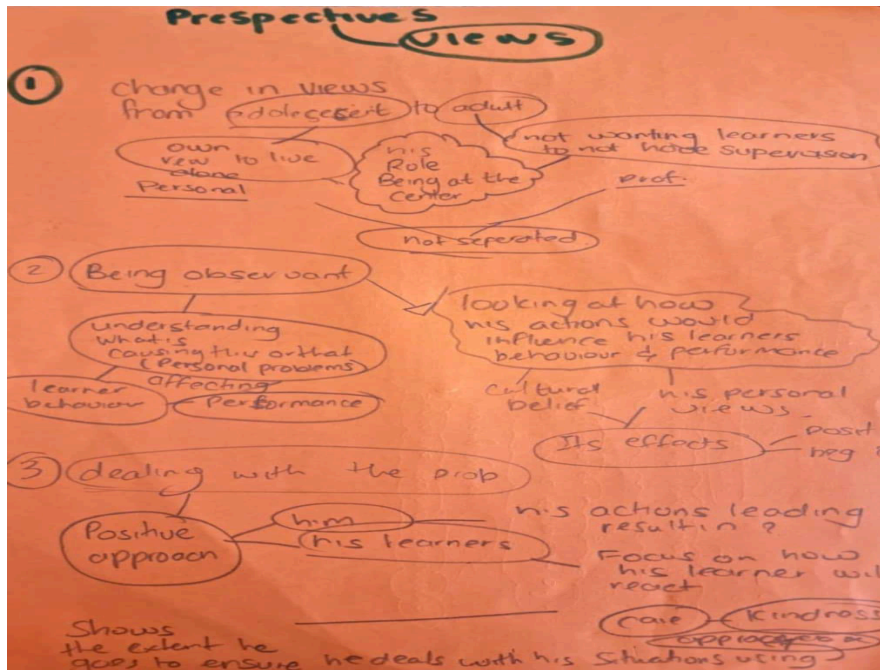
***Demanding workload***  
***Positive relationships***  
***Dual role male teacher***

Kaniso's personal and professional experiences cannot be separated as they influenced the fundamental caring, approachable, understanding teacher that Kaniso became. Both his personal and professional experiences shaped Kaniso to become a young teacher who is able to adapt to different school contexts. During the pandemic he adopted multiple roles to ensure that his learners had an approachable male figure that openly showed care and compassion in a time of adversity. Kaniso ensured that his learners had a fair and equal chance to achieve the set educational goals despite the school context he worked in. His demonstrated sound attributes as he wanted to understand the diversity of learners in his classroom with the aim of building positive relationships with his learners and colleagues. Kaniso used multiple approaches to give of his best and dealt with his classroom dilemmas in a way that caused no emotional harm to his learners. Rodgers and Scott (2008) argue that both personal and professional experiences contribute to the way in which teachers handle and manage their professional practice, and this notion held true for Kaniso during the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### **4.2.7 Section C: Interpretation and analysis of Kaniso's narrative**

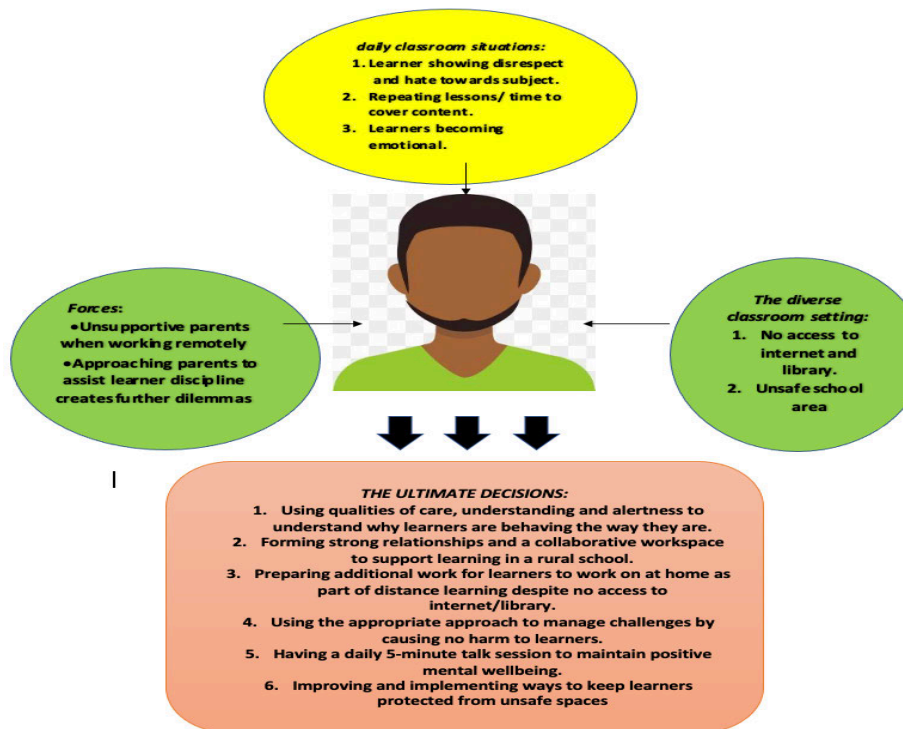
In this section I analyse Kaniso's storied narrative as the second level of analysis to respond to key research question 3: *What informed the novice teachers' perspectives in negotiating their classroom practices during the COVID-19 pandemic?* I used the dilemmatic space framework (Fransson & Grannäs, 2013) as an analytical tool to zoom into the dilemmas, decisions, and

choices Kaniso made, and I highlight the beliefs, values, and perspectives that shaped how he negotiated his classroom encounters. I used concept mapping to help me map the various perspectives that helped Kaniso negotiate his classroom practice. After creating the concept map, I developed a visual diagram using Frannson and Grannäs's (2013) dilemmatic space framework to plot Kaniso's various dilemmatic experiences, the multiple forces at play, and the ultimate decisions he took to negotiate these dilemmas.



**Figure 4.14: Concept map: Perspectives on how Kaniso negotiated his classroom practice**

In developing this concept map, I asked: *What values, beliefs, and priorities informed Kaniso's perspectives in negotiating his classroom practice?*



**Figure 4.15: Kaniso's dilemmatic spaces**

#### 4.2.7.1 *Creating positive and trusting relationships with all role players*

Kaniso deeply reflected on his childhood and how he experienced negative encounters as an adolescent. The reflexive process assisted him in understanding that learners are unique and have their own opinions and views, which contribute to how they behave, react, and cope with their school life. Kaniso said:

*I could not imagine how hard it would be to move back to Mandeni...I was very stubborn at that time and wanted to do what I believed was right for me.*

Kaniso understood that he had once been a learner who had his own views and opinions that were not same as those of his parents and teachers. His opinions were unique to his beliefs at that young age, when he felt he could make choices independently. Kaniso's perspectives as a teacher were influenced by his experiences and the lessons he had learnt as a young man. He ensures that his learners had adult supervision and guidance as he believed that the lack of support might result in learners making unwise decisions, as he had done when he was a teenager. Teenagers are at a vulnerable age when they are easily influenced by their peers and (Tavernier & Willoughby, 2012). Kaniso believed that having various views and opinions regarding a situation provided a lens to view the exact situation from different perspectives. This view depends on people's diverse values, priorities, and knowledge (Fransson & Grannäs,

2013). It is fundamental that teachers view situations from various lenses with the purpose of understanding why things are happening the way they do (Fransson & Grannäs, 2013).

#### ***4.2.7.2 An observant, understanding, and caring NT in a welcoming classroom***

Kaniso believed that the best way to deal with situations in his classroom started by understanding his learners and what they were going through. He had to get to the root of the problem. Kaniso's views about managing his classroom dilemmas might not have been the same as those of other teachers (Fransson & Grannäs, 2013), but he adopted the qualities of understanding and alertness to identify what his learners were going through and how they were reacting to the changes that were compelled by the pandemic. Kaniso believed that his learners were emotionally affected by COVID-19 and that they required care, sensitivity, and understanding. He understood that they were impacted by external factors that caused changes in their behaviour and educational progress:

*Many learners face challenges at home where their parents are ill or experienced a death in the family. This is very traumatizing for these children...The emotion of learners has changed from the start of COVID-19... because they are already frustrated, and that frustration is taken out on the teacher...I wanted to understand this learner... I had many questions like; What do I do with this learner? What is my responsibility towards this learner? Am I a bad teacher? My response to this experience was 'placing myself in that learner's shoes'... I often experience 45 percent of my learners attending school 15 minutes late; this means that I lost 15 minutes of teaching time that I would have to try to catch up. Fifteen minutes of the next lesson gets used to make up for time lost.*

The above excerpt reveals Kaniso as an understanding and caring teacher who accommodated his learners even when they came late. Kaniso looked at his learners in the hope of bringing positive change to their lives. When Kaniso mentioned waiting 15 minutes for the tardy learners, it revealed his belief that no child should be left behind as he did not know why they were late. Kaniso's alertness to the change in learners' behaviour made him curious to determine what caused this change in their behaviour. He wanted to understand what his learners were experiencing and why, in order to handle the situation in the right way. He foregrounded his responsibility as a teacher and thus looked for the best way to approach an adverse situation. He believed that COVID-19 had emotionally affected his learners from his observations of their tardy attendance, inability to be punctual, disrespect, and their declining academic performance. Kaniso also desired to adopt creative initiatives to enhance his classroom practice and environment, but was prevented from doing so by the lack of resources in the school:

*From my experience of being a student, I learned that when you are unhappy in your classroom environment, you start to dislike whatever is taught in that environment... I would have loved to include visuals to make my lessons more exciting. At least then, learners would not be so discouraged, angry, and easily distracted while learning during COVID-19.*

According to Robinson (2013), teachers need to avoid just transmitting information; instead, they should teach learners how to learn and use methods that will keep them curious about learning. Kaniso believed that creating an environment in which his learners would be happy would build positive teacher-learner relationships and improve learning performance. Kaniso felt emotionally affected when he was seen as a bad teacher, which influenced his decision to mend his relationship with the learner who had been disrespectful. Masinga (2012) explains that it is essential to reconnect with the past and the emotions we felt because it helps us come to terms with these incidents. When Kaniso reflected on his experience of having a teacher whom he disliked, he resolved the incident with his learner as he did not want to be labelled as a bad teacher that left a negative mark on a learner. We gain strength by revisiting those incidents and resisting certain ideologies (Masinga, 2012). Kaniso's creative thinking to enhance the way he taught so that learners are excited to learn despite the workload points to that belief in him as well. Kaniso went beyond the call of duty to ensure that his learners received the best care and education they needed during COVID-19. He valued and forged open relationships with teachers and learners by caring, understanding, and creating a welcoming classroom during COVID-19. This helped him develop beneficial approaches to deal with the dilemmas he encountered.

#### ***4.2.7.3 Choosing positivity: avoiding emotional harm and challenges in the classroom***

As we live life through our experiences, we create our own stories from which some valuable lessons can be learned (Masinga, 2012, p. 123). However, our lives are filled with dilemmas that are ever present (Fransson & Grannäs, 2013), and we thus need to make the choice to approach these dilemmas without inflicting harm on others. Kaniso faced his dilemmas with positivity that was informed by his negative experiences:

*I am facing many obstacles in my practice. However, I feel more undefeatable by the experience of working under so much pressure and demands. COVID-19 has prepared me to be a teacher who can manage any challenge they face. I would say that this was a bad experience with positive self-building abilities for teachers.*

It is difficult for NTs to meet the demands they encounter while working under pressure (Ncube, Mammen, & Molepo, 2012). For Kaniso, the experience of being a NT during COVID-

19 shaped him positively as he had learnt to stop and reflect before he reacted impulsively. He believed that his actions could negatively or positively influence outcome based on his approach. Kaniso reflected on an incident when a learner was disrespectful as he wanted to understand the approaches he could take to deal with the situation despite his own cultural beliefs being in tension:

*I knew that if I called the parent, the learner already knew that they would face some punishment at home because our culture teaches us to respect our elders...the discipline would have just created more hatred towards me...I wanted to understand this learner and why they behave the way they did... we must first understand that these are young learners who are used to playing with their friends, sharing books, and walking around the class... With COVID-19, they are separated from their friends; they are already annoyed...because...I am going to say: don't touch each other, don't play, stand/sit alone, use your own book, etc.*

The above excerpt highlights that although Kaniso's cultural belief was grounded on respect for the elders, he did not reprimand his learner for being disrespectful towards him. Kaniso wanted to know why this learner continued to be disrespectful despite knowing the consequences of his actions. Kaniso did not want to go to the parent because he knew that the learner would be more upset and dislike him even more. A decision that is made, whether it is right or wrong, solely depends on the person viewing the situation (Fransson & Grannäs, 2013). Kaniso chose to do what would be beneficial to the majority (Fransson & Grannäs, 2013) without creating emotional harm by taking the learner to principal. He tried instead to understand where this anger was coming from. Kaniso negotiated his dilemma by speaking to the learners and creating an understanding relationship. He believed that the relationship would not have improved if he had chosen the disciplinary route. He this negotiated adverse classroom situations in a way that caused no ill feelings, no emotional harm, and no negative mark on his learners. Kaniso's passion for his profession was revealed in every action he took as a teacher. He went the extra mile for his learners while his personal encounters had shaped him into a teacher who looked for the light even in darkness.

#### **4.2.8 Synthesis of Section C**

The following Haiku poem was developed to help me crystallise my analysis of Section C. It highlights the critical perspectives that guided Kaniso to negotiate his practice. According to Prendergast, Leggo, and Sameshima (2009), poetry is a creative language-based process that synthesises and crystallises experiences and views.

*The diverse beliefs*  
*Understand, Care for learners*  
*Approach with no harm*

Kaniso's perspectives that helped him negotiate his classroom practice had been shaped by his personal and professional encounters as a teenager and as a novice teacher. Kaniso managed his classroom situations by trying to understand what had caused the problems he faced. Kaniso approached his learners with love, care, and understanding and ensured that no emotional harm further impacted his learners because COVID-19 had already placed them in emotional tension. Temperley, Wilson, Barrar, and Fung (2007) suggest that teachers' everyday encounters and their training shape their understandings, and their understandings shape their encounters. Kaniso formed positive, trusting, and supportive relationships with his learners which created a space for all to share their diverse views, opinions, and beliefs. He prioritised being an understanding, approachable, and observant teacher who created a welcoming environment for his learners where change in poor behaviour, negative emotions, and declining academic performance could be generated. Kaniso believed that, by choosing the appropriate approach to dilemmatic situations, he would create a space for love and discipline without inflicting harm.

### **4.3 Conclusion**

In this chapter presented my analysis and interpretation of Kaniso's teaching experiences during the pandemic in a rural school context. I analysed his storied narrative in Sections A, B, and C to respond to the three research questions. This chapter highlights the nuances of the personal and professional experiences that shaped Kaniso's professional practice. I do so by zooming into the beliefs and values that drove his choices in negotiating his dilemmas during the pandemic. As a novice teacher, Kaniso brought his own beliefs, attitudes, and values into his rural school classroom (Merseeth, Sommer, & Dickstein, 2008).

My overall interpretation of Kaniso's experiences as a NT in the pandemic highlights resource limitations, an unsafe school setting, and emotional implications that hindered the functionality of schooling. These limitations and gaps highlight the personal and professional tensions that Kaniso experienced as the following: (a) teaching limitations such as limited access to resources and unsafe school infrastructure for learners; (b) a tight timeline to cover curriculum content while balancing NT duties with no support from parents; (c) socially constructed

meanings of male and female roles that challenged this male NT's approach in managing learners' emotional trauma caused by the pandemic.

Gender roles are constructed by people, groups and societies based on their beliefs and expectations associated with a specific gender (Blackstone, 2003). Against the gap in the realities of this NT's complexities, he experienced inner personal tensions as follows: (a) He had to balance his values of using care, love, and understanding as a male teacher to manage learners' emotional well-being and increase learner performance; (b) He had to ensure that his learners were safe and equally benefit in education quality despite the limitations in technology and resources; (c) He had to promote a positive learning community to foster positive relationships for growth regardless of limited parental involvement.

Teachers with agency resist being passive when responding to opportunities, and they make choices that enable them to achieve learning goals (Calvert, 2016). Given the multiple personal and professional tensions that were generated during the pandemic, Kaniso's choices in negotiating his dilemmas were sound.

- Kaniso used his agency to seek help from his female colleagues to foster nurturing support for learners who were not comfortable with a male figure. Calvert (2016) highlights that supportive learning communities create a space for professional learning and continuous growth.
- Kaniso exercised his agency to create a collegial learning community with other teachers to manage the challenge of unsupportive parents.
- His values of care, love, and respect enabled a trusting, supportive and understanding teacher-learner relationships.
- Kaniso's value for education in a rural context influenced him to think about creative initiatives to ensure that learning continued despite the limitations and complexities that the pandemic engendered.

In speaking to the dilemmatic space framework, I highlight that Kaniso, as a NT, made choices that guided him to effectively negotiate emotional learners, unsupportive parents, and his duties. This was achieved through nurturing teacher-learner relationships that fostered learner well-being and an inclusive classroom where learner isolation was disrupted. He valued positive and supportive collegial (formal) learning communities to promote educational growth

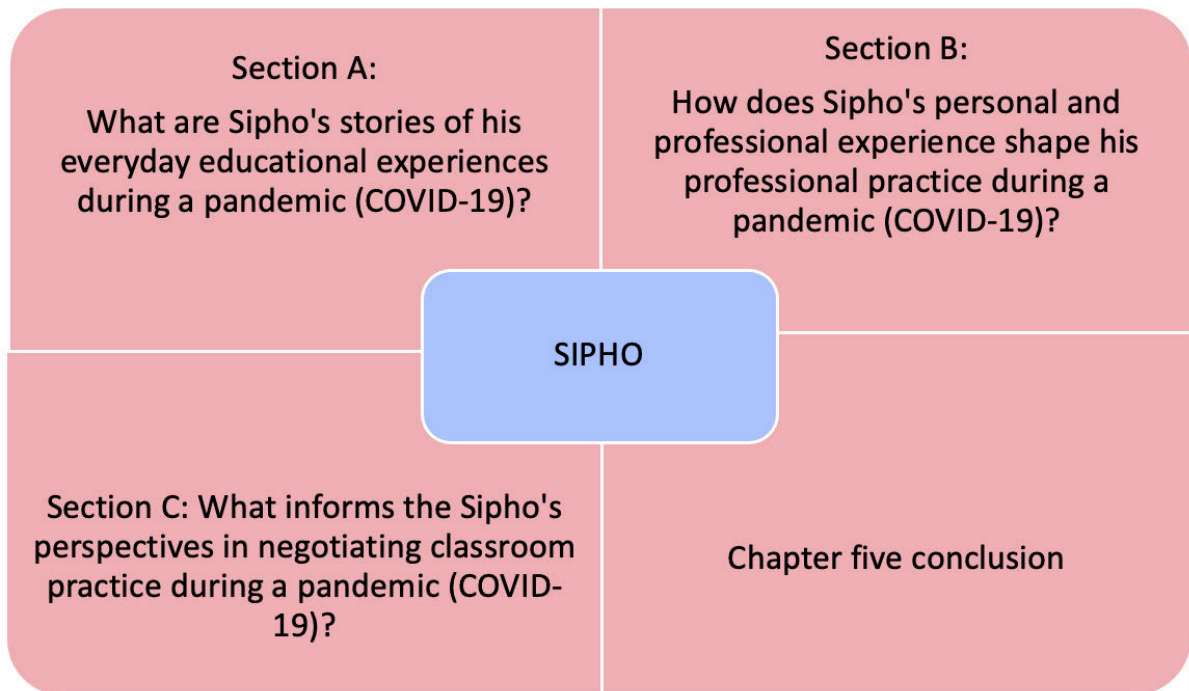
during the pandemic regardless of the challenges entrenched in the rural context where he was employed.

**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**SIPHO'S STORY: *ASPIRING TO FACILITATE***  
***POSITIVE CHANGE IN A RURAL SCHOOL***

**5.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter I analysed the story of Kaniso, the second participant, by re- and deconstructing his story to answer the three key research questions. My analysis and interpretation of the data I had obtained from Kaniso were presented as I zoomed into his life as a NT during the pandemic. I evaluated Kaniso's beliefs, values, and perspectives to make meaning of the choices and decisions he made regarding his classroom practice.

In this chapter I provide my analysis and interpretation of Siphos's story. Siphos was 24 years old when the data were collected from him while he was teaching at a rural Quantile 3 primary school in the Zululand district. He had three years of teaching experience in IsiZulu, Mathematics, Technology, English and Economic Management Sciences in Grades 6 and 7 (the intermediate and senior phases respectively). He had one year's teaching experience before the pandemic and two years' experience during the pandemic.



**Figure 5.1: Diagram of my analysis of Siphos's story in three sections**

## 5.2 Siphó’s Story

### 5.2.1 Section A: Siphó’s reconstructed story

In this section, a reconstructed storied narrative of Siphó’s experiences is presented to respond to the first key research question: *What are novice teachers’ stories of their everyday educational experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic?* The storied narrative was constructed after processing the raw data that I had obtained by means of Siphó’s collage, photovoice, memory drawing, unstructured interview, and self-box with the purpose of capturing and zooming into experiences of his classroom practice during COVID-19. The diagram below is an overview of the critical plots and events in Siphó’s story that addressed the first research question.



Figure 5.2: Plots and critical events that impacted Siphó’s educational practice

### SIPHO’S STORY

#### **Growing up with his grandmother: The power of the Christian faith**

*Since the year 1997 till 2022, I grew up and lived in a rural area called Gingindlovu with my maternal grandmother and my six siblings. My mother was unemployed, and she could not raise seven children. My grandmother holds a special place in my life. Although there were seven grandchildren living with her, we all were treated equally. She was excellently able to play the role of a mother and father to my siblings and me. I believe that my grandmother’s experiences of bringing her children up enabled her to pick up on how boys and girls behave, and from that, she was also able to understand which role she needed to take on to deal with specific issues. My grandmother ensured that we grew up in the direction of being a Christian and being*

*a believer in the Christian faith. She always ensured that we did things the right way and taught us to be respectful, have good morals, and always remember the life we call "home."*



**Figure 5.3: Siphho's Artefact: "My grandmother"**

*Siphho speaks highly of his grandmother and her role in his life when he grew up. I hear a lot of emotions in his voice when he speaks about this dominant female influence. I want to probe to understand what it was like having a female figure and how he was able to learn about male stuff...pensive...*

*Journal Entry (November 2021)*

### **Educational experiences in Gingindlovu: Imitating teachers**

*During 2003 to 2009, I attended Lashowe primary school, and from 2010 to 2014, I attended Mweni High which were both situated in Gingindlovu, a rural township. While attending Grade 7, my teacher called my friend to write on the chalkboard, and I would get so disappointed that I was not chosen. I always gathered the neighbours after school and during the weekend where we would have spelling tests so I could play "the teacher". I used to mark old exercise books, write on the walls, and pretend it was a chalkboard. I even pretended the trees were my students. I used to imitate my teachers. I would sign on papers as exam papers and carry myself in a way that my teachers did. I always liked being a pretend teacher, but I feel that this was a calling for me towards my passion. I knew that teaching was something I was passionate about when I was in high school, and I still found myself enjoying the process of imitating the teachers in my school.*

*Whenever Sipho reflects on the things he used to do in his childhood that involved teaching, he laughs at how much he wanted to be a teacher and the extent he would go to pretend to be a teacher during his childhood.*

*Journal Entry (November 2021)*

### **A teacher who believed in him**

*In 2014, on the last day of Matric exams, my Economics teacher bought two other students and me different gifts. When I got home, I was excited to open the gift to see what I had received. Upon opening the gift, I saw that it was a Bible, and on the back of the page was written: "Stay focused". I tried to understand why my teacher had bought me a Bible and not T-shirts or chips like the others. I then realized that my grandmother's teachings of being a good Christian and my Christian belief were visible to my teacher and other people around me. That Bible is a part of my everyday life as a person and even as a teacher. It has shown me a clear direction of where I want to be as a Christian. The Bible has more meaning to me now than it did in 2014 because it has been with me through my journey of being a teacher and has kept me closer to God. I look at my Bible to remind myself how much my teacher believed in me. Her wise words to always "stay focused" motivate me.*

### **The first of the family to attend university**

*At the end of 2014, I applied for my tertiary education. I got accepted in 2015 to study towards a Bachelor of Education degree. I was the first in my family to attend university and the first graduate. In 2018 I qualified as an educator, which was one of the most significant achievements in my life. My grandmother was not able to attend my graduation due to her condition. I remember taking the graduation book to her just so that she could see my name as a graduate in that book. My key goal was to make my grandmother a proud woman. In 2016, before teaching practice, I remember not having shoes. My grandmother bought me a pair of formal shoes, and she said: "I bought you these shoes, so you must keep them until you work because I will not have more money to buy you another pair. I used this one pair of shoes throughout my degree until I could buy another pair.*

*During the self-box session, Sipho shared what the Bible meant to him and his Christian faith. I probed to understand where exactly this strongly grounded Christian belief was coming from. Was it his childhood? Was there someone he grew up with? I need to know more!*

*Journal Entry (November 2021)*

### **Working for the things he wanted**



**Figure 5.4: Sipho's self-box: "My meaningful objects"**

*What I noticed at this point in the study is that Sipho always tries to link special moments to his grandmother. When I looked at his self-box I was so heart touched at how each object had its unique touching story behind it.*

*Journal Entry (November 2021)*

*Growing up with my six siblings and my grandmother was difficult, and "things" were not given to us easily. We had to work in the cane fields on Saturdays and got paid for cleaning up the cane to buy the things we wanted. The only things we got were the things we bought. In 2015 my grandmother said to me: "For you to have nice things like the children at 'varsity, you need to go and work for it so that you don't feel left out".*

*It was my first time going to university, and I had nothing - no shoes and no bag. After getting paid for cleaning the cane, I went to buy myself a bag and belt with my grandmother. I still have the bag and belt that I bought in order to "fit in" at*

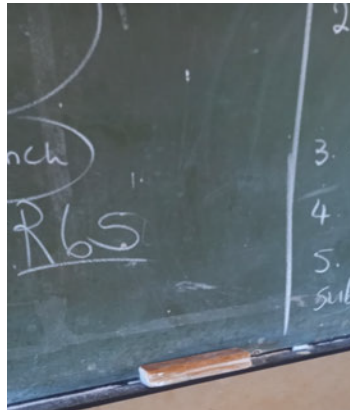
*university. It is very special to me because I remember how I used to work in the sun so that I could buy those things. Some may think that growing up without a father figure meant that I struggled as a boy, but I feel that I learned how to be a "man" by staying with my grandmother.*

*Today, our conversation was very touching. I learnt about Siphos childhood and how he had to work for what he wanted. When he spoke about the shoes his grandmother bought and after seeing the condition he treasured it, made me understand the value these shoes hold for him.*

*Journal Entry (November 2021)*

### **The start of his career: Gaining something but losing more**

*In 2019 I started work at a rural school in Gingindlovu, working at an SGB post. One of the objects I hold very dear to me as a beginning teacher is my chalkboard and my duster, because it is a daily reminder for me of how much I used to love writing on the board as a child and how far I have come. It reminds me that I live my childhood dream of being a teacher.*



**Figure 5.5: Siphos photovoice: “My chalk board”**

*In December 2019, the Department told us that schools would be closed due to the COVID-19 virus. I was not a permanent teacher, which meant that I would not get paid for the months that schools were shut down. In 2020, when the Minister of Education announced that all teachers needed to go back to school despite the first wave of COVID-19 being extreme, many teachers were concerned about their health. I personally was more focused on going back to school, and less on the possible danger COVID-19 would have on my health. My health was not my concern. My focus was on being at work and not being at home. I felt that being at work would get me*

*that permanent post I worked for. In 2020 I did get the post, but I lost a big part of me in 2021. My grandmother passed on while I was a part of this study, and it really affected my life emotionally as a teacher and person. I gained something good, but I lost something greater.*

*I felt the pain in Siphos voice during an unstructured interview where I wanted to know more about his grandmother and if he still lived there. In our second conversation in September, he mentioned his mum had passed on... I now know the reason Siphos speaks so highly of his grandmother and instead of saying he lost his grandmother in our 2nd conversation he said he had lost his mother, which points me to the bond of a mother and son as opposed to grandmother and grandson. I sense a strong bond.*

*Journal Entry (November 2021)*

*It's the first month of my field work and I just found out that one of my participants lost his mother. I feel extremely anxious, not because it will impact my study, but because I am scared that I may add to his already stressful life. I don't want him to feel overwhelmed and neither do I want him to withdraw due to feeling pressured. I think I will let things calm down.*

*Feeling scared, emotional, and stressed out! What do I do?*

*Journal Entry (September 2021)*

### **A classroom where language barriers dominate**

*I was teaching in the school I am currently employed at before COVID-19 and during the COVID-19 experience. Being a new teacher in a class where most learners have language barriers is extremely challenging. I never thought that the language barrier would affect my teaching because we are aware that the education system expects lower grades to be taught in their home language. I teach Grade 6 and 7 learners, assuming teaching and learning would be easier than in a lower grade. In my Grade 6 and 7 class, I had to deal with learners that cannot read and write. I had to constantly give learners extra time to work through their tasks, tests, and whatever content was taught, considering that this was in 2019, before COVID-19.*

### **Unable to meet educational demands**

*I would say that 2020 and 2021 were extremely challenging for me because I could not give those learners extra time as we had limited time ourselves. The more time I*

spent teaching and making them understand the content, the more time was taken up from the next chapter that was expected to be taught. I found myself unable to meet educational demands because the Department had time allocated for specific content. I spent so much time on the learners who could not write or read properly. I failed to finish the content that was required as per the revised curriculum plan. Before COVID-19, I used to group the bright learners with the learners that were struggling to understand content. Due to COVID-19 and learners maintaining social distancing, it was difficult to encourage peer support like I normally would.

Wow! I did not expect that Sipho was going to say that about Grade 6 and 7! When Sipho mentioned language barriers I wanted to know which grades specifically could not read and write. I must admit, I was one of those people who thought that teaching a higher grade would be more manageable.

Journal Entry (September 2021)

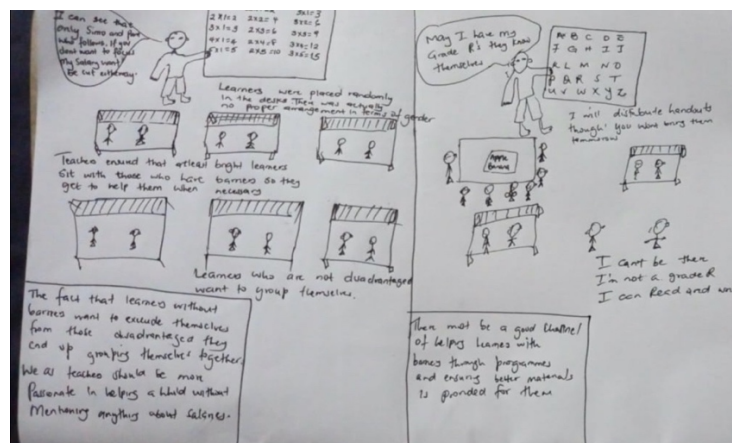


Figure 5.6: Sipho’s memory drawing: “*Negative and positive experiences in my classroom*”

### A frustrated new teacher

During 2020, I had a lot of unfinished content that was expected to be completed soon, which was making me feel incredibly frustrated and emotionally exhausted. I remember calling the learners "a bunch of losers" because I was overwhelmed with all my duties, and the learners were not taking their work seriously. I felt as if I was the only one trying to reinforce learners' progress, and I was spending time preparing reading and writing exercises to improve their language ability. When the learners

came back to class without completing their work, it gave me the impression that they were not taking my efforts seriously. After saying those harsh words out of frustration to the learners, I felt extremely terrible because, as a teacher, it was not a nice thing for me to say despite my emotions.

### **“Neqiya!” - Lashing out in anger**

Due to COVID-19, there are many additional things that teachers need to ensure. The school placed emphasis on teachers ensuring that learners were using their masks properly in the classroom. My added responsibility was to ensure that my learners were using their masks. Considering that I am also currently struggling with learners that have language barriers. I remember teaching, and while I was teaching, learners were being so noisy and disruptive; the same learners were struggling with the content. When I turned around, I saw one learner without a mask. I was furious because I was reminded of how much was expected of me. The learner without a mask had chubby cheeks, so I said to that learner, "Neqiya!" out of anger. The entire class started to laugh loudly, and I could see a little anger in that learner.

### **Calming an unsettling situation**

I then realized what I had said was wrong of me. I didn't think at that specific moment that I was in any way saying something specific about the learner's looks or appearance and that other learners would imitate me in what I said. I also thought about the consequences I would face if that learner reported this incident to their parent and I was on edge. One of the learners laughed so loudly to the extent that the neighbouring teacher came to see what was happening. The teacher and I both tried to calm down the situation. I realized that if I had been teaching at another school, I would have been in some huge trouble if a colleague had found out in the same way.

When Sipho said he had called the learners “a bunch of losers” I could hear a lot of regret as he tried to reassure himself that he wasn't a bad teacher but rather the situation he was in that was making feel in a certain way pushed him to a point where he said something without meaning. I did not judge Sipho for saying what he did because I don't know his feeling and emotions. Could it be his personal and professional feelings of being overwhelmed? Losing his grandmother then being overworked with learners that didn't want to learn?

Journal Entry (December 2021)

### **A teacher's actions impact learners**

*As a human being, you sometimes say and do things now and then realize that it shouldn't have been done or said. This was a negative experience for me because I realized that, as a teacher, I need to be mindful of how my actions impact the learners I teach. I feel that a lot of my frustration comes from the fact that these learners fail to focus on their work and show interest. I also understand that sometimes, saying bad things to them out of anger lowers their self-esteem and doesn't help their progress. It does become frustrating as a new teacher to have a situation where you have these demands, and then learners are causing chaos.*

### **Initiating positive change in a rural school**

*As a new teacher in a rural school context and having experienced being in a rural school throughout my own schooling, I wanted to change the perception that, in rural schools, there's poor education, learners are failures, they are unfocused and unwilling to learn. In doing so, I came up with an idea which I proposed to the principal and other teachers. I wanted to change learners' bad behaviour and poor performance by taking what I call the "reward approach" to help facilitate learning. I wanted to stimulate learning by rewarding learners who performed well and encourage other learners to work harder to receive a reward. I thought that this approach would motivate learners in multiple ways. I wanted to implement this in my first year of teaching, which was 2019 because I saw that the school did not think of ways to improve learners' performance. After each term, learners would receive a trophy, a certificate, or a prize which depended on how well they performed. In 2021, the school did not implement this approach due to COVID-19, and the learner performance rate dropped. I went to the extent of writing letters for sponsorships; one of the sponsorships we received was watches and stationery from KFC. The principal, teachers, and parents were pleased with the outcome of this approach.*

*Wow! The extent to which Siphon went in order to get learners to learn shows me a side of Siphon that is determined to change the way things are done at school positively. I want to know why Siphon chose to teach in a rural school. Could there have been a personal influence over his choice to teach and improve the education there?*

*Journal Entry (November 2021)*

### **Improving education in a rural school: Giving back to the community**

*I understand that learners are different in every classroom. I ensure and try to include ways of teaching that benefit all learners. As a new teacher, I try very hard to incorporate and encourage the weak learners. Whatever resources the school has, I utilise them to the best I can. Where there is a space for increasing our resources, I seek a lot of help from other schools in the community by getting resources that can benefit my learners. My networking skills have improved a lot in getting resources at the school I teach. I teach the way I do to give back to my community that I live in, by providing good education. I place the learners' textbooks next to my table; I feel that the books are safe next to me, so learners have limited access to these books. It helps me know that I can keep the little resources that the school has in good condition to use them in the many more years to come.*



**Figure 5.7: Siphho's photovoice: "Safe space in my classroom"**

### **Creating a safe environment for learners**

*In my classroom there is a place where I feel extremely on edge when students are left alone or if they go near that area. It makes me anxious. I tried to make it known that the area is a "no-go zone". On the table, there are pieces of planks that are left there. I fear that what if a fight breaks out, and one learner uses that to cause harm to another learner.*



**Figure 5.8: Sipho’s photovoice: “An unsafe space in my classroom”**

#### **A specific classroom arrangement**

*Due to COVID-19, I wanted to ensure that learners are allocated a specific seat to limit their movement during their weekly rotation. I labelled each table and who will be seated at that table for the rest of the week. I also ensured that my classroom setup was in the best interest of my learners’ safety and health during the pandemic. In doing so I had some ease that my classroom was a safe space for my learners. I would not find myself stressing that a learner was at harm due to my lack of ensuring extra precaution was taken.*



**Figure 5.9: Sipho’s photovoice: “My safe space: My classroom setup”**

### **Unsafe practices during COVID-19**

*At school, we had individuals employed to screen learners before entering the class, ensuring learners were using their masks upon entry and sanitizing learners' classroom area in-between lessons. Although those individuals sanitized, whenever a learner left the class for the break, I still felt that the area where learners drink water is unsafe. Learners are still drinking with their hands and their mouths are close to the taps. I encourage my learners to bring a bottle because they can easily spread or contract the virus by drinking from those taps used in the same way by the whole school. I really believe that employing those dedicated individuals who were screening learners took a lot of the added responsibilities that teachers would have had.*



**Figure 5.10: Sipho's photovoice: "Unsafe space: The school's water taps"**

### **Teaching practices during the pandemic**

*Due to the pandemic and schools having the rotation of learners, it was complicated to teach two classes with approximately 20 learners in each of 4 groups. The rotation was done weekly, and I honestly felt like this was creating more work for teachers. I say this because I experienced that when I taught a chapter to group 1, they returned without remembering what was taught. I did not want them to fail, so I used to teach lessons again, create additional supportive tasks that learners could work with while they were on their week off. I encouraged the school to use WhatsApp to communicate with learners and their parents while they were working on their tasks at home. Teachers used to brainstorm, and when I came up with ideas, they were impressed because those ideas were doable. I would send through work via WhatsApp to the parents; if they had no WhatsApp, they would use their neighbour's phone. In the*

situation where they had no access at all to the internet, I would send a hard copy of the tasks with a learner that stayed nearby.



Figure 5.11: Siphó's collage: "My experiences as a novice teacher during COVID-19"

### No parental support

Teaching under the circumstances with learners struggling to learn as quickly as the Department expected delayed me in finishing the syllabus. Teaching learners to the best as you can with no support from parents becomes a lot for the teacher to cope with alone. Many times, parents said they did not understand the work or English and that they were not teachers to assist their children. The parents were unable to help, the learners were not cooperating, and I was just left to figure it out independently.

### Being organized: A saving grace

The teachers in my school are very supportive and have assisted me when I needed help, but this was something beyond my control or theirs. One of the things that helped during COVID-19 was my organisational skills. Being organised saved me from being in a position of total chaos mentally. Imagine teaching two grades which seems like four sets of learners, but you must teach them twice. That is time-consuming and confusing if you do not keep track of what content was taught to which group, etc. Although my life at school was demanding, I could still have a balanced life after school; however, I would often take my work frustration out on the people outside of my professional life.

*Throughout the fieldwork with Siphon, I allowed him more time to work on his photovoice, memory drawing, and collage. I had to take into consideration that he had already been facing challenges emotionally. I wanted to create a space for Siphon that was not overwhelming, and I did so even though generating data took longer and went over two months.*

*Journal Entry (December 2021)*

### **A misunderstanding with a colleague**

*Before learners attended school in 2021, teachers had to go to school for two weeks to prepare for their return. I remember saying something jokingly. I said that I was not feeling well, and once I had the heater on in the car, and when my temperature was checked, it showed "high", so I said, "Oh no! I have a temperature!" I said this as a joke to my colleagues, not thinking anything of it, which placed me in a situation.*

### **A polite apology soothes angry feelings**

*The following week one of my colleagues tested positive, and I was on my way to the principal's office when another colleague approached me. My colleague shouted at me, saying that I knew I was sick and infected the other teacher. I did not want the learners to see how this teacher was behaving, so I went to the principal's office. My colleague continued to pass remarks about me because of the silly jokes I had made. I knew that if I stood there any longer, I would have argued and fought with my colleague, but I wanted to be professional and act professionally. I politely apologised for joking in the way I did and assured my colleague that I was not sick, nor did I have COVID-19. My belief in life is always to make peace. I did not want my joke to become a misunderstanding to become why I have a terrible relationship with my colleague.*

*When Siphon mentioned the fact that he is always joking, I felt that although he had faced a lot emotionally, he was still able to laugh through the pain. His constant reminders throughout our meetings of how much he meant well despite the many mistakes shows me how regretful he is in negative experiences. I constantly assured him that this is a space of no judging...  
Lighten up, Siphon!*

*Journal Entry (November 2021)*

### Aiming to be a good teacher and colleague

*I always believe that if something is upsetting another person, it should be communicated to maintain a healthy relationship. I have learned a lot from my mistakes as a teacher, and I never want to leave a negative mark on any learner's life. I have seen that through my own experiences and my Christian faith that we all make and learn from our situations, I may have started off being someone who is new to the field and put in a situation that made me frustrated to a point where I acted unprofessionally; however, those negative experiences allowed me to think and understand my learners and their feelings before I react to a situation. I am not a bad teacher or a bad colleague. I work hard to ensure that even kids in the rural areas can have the best education and I feel discouraged when there is no teamwork between learners and teachers. If everyone is able to work together, I believe that rural schools would withstand the many challenges we face.*

#### 5.2.2 Synthesis of Section A



**Figure 5.12: Synthesis drawing of Siphos story**

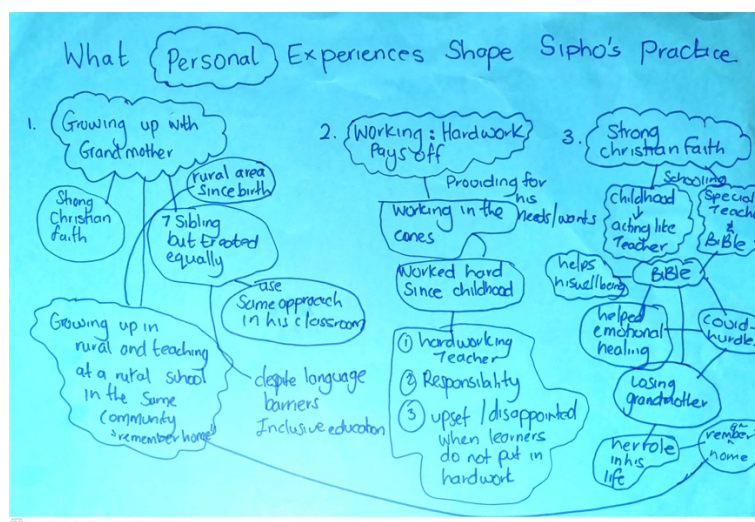
To synthesise Siphos reconstructed story, I created a drawing to visually represent my key learnings of his everyday experiences during the pandemic. The drawing shows the two sides of Siphos experiences during COVID-19. The right is dark with clouds that symbolise the hardships in Siphos personal and professional life. It also reflects the many adverse situations that Siphos faced as a NT, such as insufficient teaching time, the loss of his grandmother,

unsupportive parents, the challenge of language barriers, the inability to meet demands and deadlines, frustration, and emotional exhaustion. The left side of the drawing represents, the sunny side, represents the positivity that Siphso experienced as a NT, such as implementing the ‘reward approach’, his networking skills to improve the quality of education and resources in a rural school, receiving sponsorships to help stimulate learning, protecting the school’s resources for the future, being organised to ensure there was order in the way he taught, and working collaboratively with colleagues and members of the SMT to maintain and brainstorm new ways of improving their teaching. Both the positive and negative experiences in Siphso’s life encouraged him to improve his personal and professional self.

### 5.2.3 Section B: Interpretation and analysis of Siphso’s story

In this section, I analyse and interpret Siphso’s storied narrative as the second level of analysis to respond to key research question 2: *How did the novice teachers’ personal and professional experiences shape their practice during the COVID-19 pandemic?* The concept map below was used as a tool to unpick Siphso’s story. Plots of the events and happenings in Siphso’s life emerged that were fundamental in responding to the second key research question. The following critical plots of Siphso’s personal experiences that shaped his practice are:

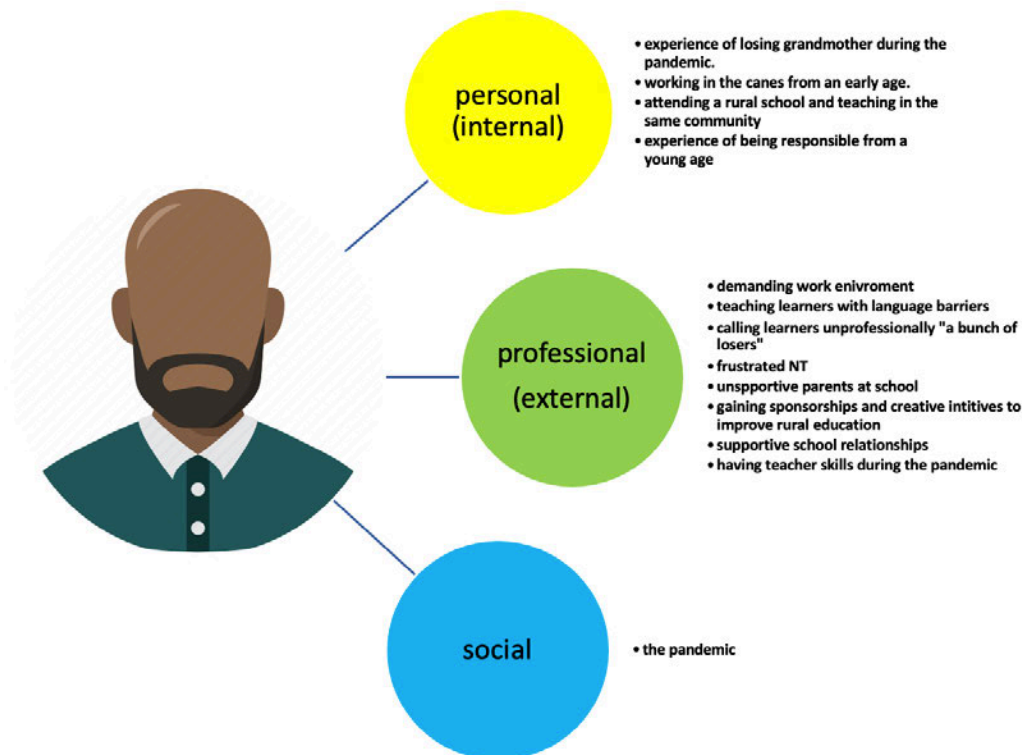
- Loss of his grandmother, and
- Working in the cane fields to earn money.



**Figure 5.13: Concept map of Siphso’s personal experiences that shaped his practice**

I used Rodgers and Scott’s (2013) explanation of personal and professional experiences that shape professional practice as an analytical tool to zoom into the critical personal/professional

encounters in Siphó’s life. The following diagram visually presents the personal, professional, and social forces that influenced Siphó’s professional self and his practice.



**Figure 5.14: Siphó’s personal and professional experiences that shaped his professional practice**

### 5.2.3.1 His grandmother’s passing

According to Brysiewicz (2008), the loss of a loved one most commonly evokes emotions that are associated with anger and sadness. Eppler (2008) argues that while it is obvious that a death of a loved one may create emotional imbalance, many individuals block out the loss by finding comfort and happiness in memories. Eppler further highlights that anxiety due to losing a loved one is often expressed in isolation due to disbelief and grief. According to Koblenz (2016), individuals unknowingly change their behaviour while going through their grieving period, which may come across as selfishness. Siphó spent 24 years living with his grandmother and she took on the role of both parents for him and his siblings. Siphó described his close relationship with his grandmother as follows:

*My grandmother holds a special place in my life. Although seven grandchildren were living with her, we all were treated the same...My grandmother was not able to attend my graduation due to her condition. I remember taking the graduation book to her just*

*so that she could see my name as a graduate in that book. My key goal was to make my grandmother a proud woman...She taught us to...remember the life we call home... In 2019, I started work at a rural school in Gingindlovu, working at an SGB post... I got permanent in 2020...My grandmother passed on, and it really affected my life emotionally as a teacher and person. I gained something good, but I lost something great...I was frustrated.*

Sipho's personal experience of living with his grandmother and seven siblings in a home where they were all treated equally inspired him to be a teacher that would aim to treat all learners in his classroom equally despite their strengths and weaknesses. According to Edwards and Edwards (2016), teachers' personal and professional identities are expanded by their past experiences and encounters as well as the influences culture and context. Sipho regarded his grandmother as his mother, which points to the close bond he shared with her. He tried to ensure that his grandmother would part of his journey into adulthood every step of the way. Sipho's grandmother's teaching of remembering "home" may have influenced his decision to teach and serve the same community he had lived in throughout his life by working in a local school. Florio-Ruane and Williams (2008) assert that culture, history, and the society we grew up in shape who we are in our profession as teachers. Sipho's loss of his grandmother placed him in an emotional state that affected how he executed his classroom practice at school. Despite the emotional stress and frustration that Sipho was experiencing due to the educational demands on teachers, Sipho's loss of his grandmother added to his already stressful and emotional life as a NT. Sipho's personal experiences of being a rural child meant that he had high expectations of his learners based on the things he had done during his childhood to achieve success.

#### ***5.2.3.2 Working in the cane fields to be self-sufficient***

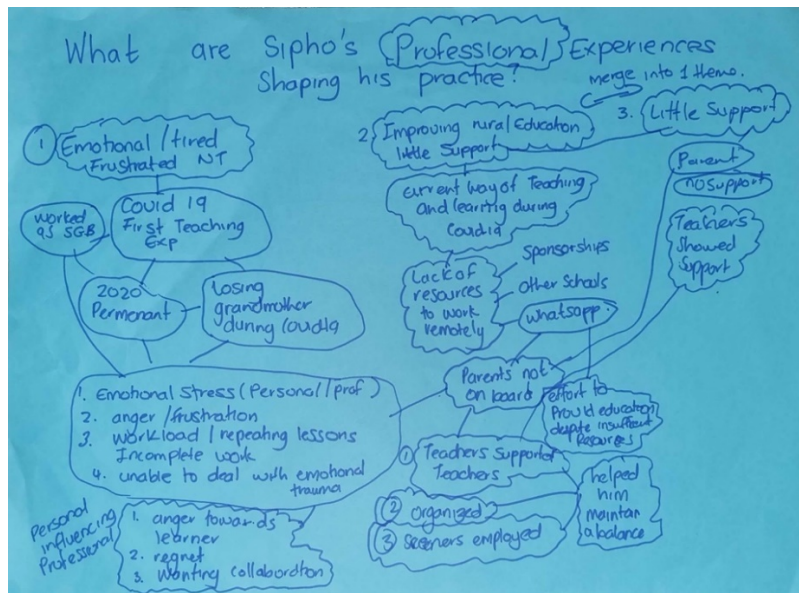
Bray and Brandt (2007) highlight those children who grow up in financially disadvantaged households engage in adult activities like farming, cooking, and cleaning to earn an income even at a very young age. Reskin and Padavic (1994) define child work (or labour) as a series of activities where goods and services are produced in exchange for pay and support. Child work is thus socially and culturally constructed (Punch, 2003). Claster and Blair (2017) highlight that peers, family, teachers, parents, and self-experiences influence an adolescent's desire to seek employment for improvement in their living conditions. Sipho's social and cultural experiences of living in a household where his grandmother was the sole provider for him and his seven siblings created a financially restrictive living environment. Sipho and his

siblings thus felt compelled to seek part-time employment to sustain themselves and help support their grandmother financially:

*Growing up with my six siblings and my grandmother was difficult, and "things" were not given to us easily. We had to work in the cane fields on Saturdays and got paid for cleaning up the cane to buy the things we wanted. The only things we got were the things we bought. My grandmother said, "For you to have nice things like the children at 'varsity, you need to go and work for it so that you don't feel left out." I remember how I used to work in the sun so that I could buy those things. Some may think that growing up without a father figure meant that I struggled as a boy, but I feel that I learned how to be a "man" by staying with my grandmother.*

Sipho believed that even though he had been raised by a dominant female figure, he was not robbed of the opportunity to be shaped into a man despite not having a dominant male figure as a role-model. His personal experience of working in the cane fields to earn an income shaped him into being responsible and hardworking from an early age, which stood him in good stead in his professional practice as a teacher. Pithouse-Morgan and Mitchell and Pillay (2014) highlight that being aware of ourselves as individuals and teachers promote growth and transformation in our practice. Sipho's social and cultural influences taught him that, to achieve success, hard work was fundamental, especially for a rural child. He aspired to be a teacher who would encourage his learners to work hard. Florio-Ruane and Williams (2008) contend that teachers' personal experiences shape their values, beliefs, and expectations. Sipho's personal experiences created an expectation of how children from a rural school should think, act, and behave to better their lives. When his learners did not cooperate to achieve what was expected, it evoked anger in Sipho which created further frustration. Sipho's negative emotions and challenges as a NT were exacerbated by language barriers in the classroom, and his personal experience of losing his grandmother during the pandemic placed him in a situation where he retaliated against a learner by uttering a retort that he knew was inappropriate coming from a teacher.

#### **5.2.4 Theme synthesis (see next page)**



**Figure 5.15: Concept map of Siphos professional experiences that shaped his practice**

#### 5.2.4.1 Personal experiences and emotions shape professional thinking

The discussion that I presented under the theme *Siphos personal experiences that shaped his professional practice* highlighted the importance of close family relationships that construct meanings of who we are as individuals and professionals. These relationships shape our choices, decisions, and expectations of others as well as how we think about the people we interact with (Farrell, 2006). During the pandemic, Siphos lost his grandmother which created an emotional space that he as a grandson and NT had to negotiate. He was inspired by his grandmother’s teachings throughout his life, and this influenced his decision to become a teacher in the rural community where he had grown up. It was his desire to give something back to his people and Siphos thus also tried to imitate his wise and giving grandmother when he reinforced equality in his classroom. His personal experience of working in the cane fields to earn money shaped his thinking as a teacher when he expected his learners to work as hard as he had to achieve their educational goals during the pandemic. Siphos believed that, even in a rural context, teacher-learner teamwork would create a promising future for rural children.

Siphos professional experiences that were critical in shaping his classroom practice were:

- Calling his learners “a bunch of losers”,
- Striving to improve rural education during the pandemic, and
- Supportive relationships and teacher skills.

#### 5.2.4.2 *Calling his learners “a bunch of losers”*

During the pandemic, policy demands mandated teachers to perform their duties in particular ways, and NTs in South African struggled with these unexpected demands (Farrell, 2006). In the midst of these adversities, language barriers were also experienced in the classroom. Berteram (2001) states that reverting to English as a language of teaching and learning is a massive struggle for many learners in public schools. Bertram adds that language barriers add an additional layer of complexity to rural schools, both for teachers and learners. Dale and James (2015) highlight that a change in educational demands and learning conditions can create an unwelcoming and overwhelming environment, especially for NTs, as their anxiety and feelings of isolation are exacerbated. Teaching is an emotional engagement between learners and teachers as learners require constant reassurance, guidance, and support (Nieto, 2003). For Siphso, teaching during the pandemic brought additional educational demands and deadlines to meet and caused frustration in the classroom. He said:

*During 2020, I had a lot of unfinished content that was expected to be completed soon, which was making me feel incredibly frustrated and emotionally exhausted. I remember calling the learners "a bunch of losers" because I was overwhelmed with all my duties, and the learners were not taking their work seriously. I felt as if I was the only one trying to reinforce learners' progress... I knew that I was not meeting deadlines.... My added responsibility was to ensure that my learners were using their masks...When the learners came back to class without completing their work, it gave me the impression that they were not taking my efforts seriously. It does become frustrating as a new teacher to have a situation where you have these demands, and then learners are causing chaos...While I was teaching, learners were being so noisy and disruptive...When I turned around, I saw one learner without a mask. I was furious because I was reminded of how much was expected of me. I said to that learner, "Neqiya", out of anger... I think I got frustrated and said things out of frustration because I felt that they were not working with me...I had to deal with learners that cannot read and write...*

Siphso believed that learners should work collaboratively with teachers to progress. His anger and frustration point to his emotional state as a NT teacher in a very challenging environment where he had to deal with personal and professional demands. Farrell (2006) points out that NTs' lives are complex because they are responsible for managing their classroom while performing duties and tasks that are new to them. This makes it difficult for them to balance their personal and professional lives. Due to the deadlines and the additional demands on him, Siphso was struggling to balance his emotions during the pandemic. Meyer (2002) contends that the first few years of teaching are generally a challenging time when many NTs struggle to adapt to their work environment. The normal demands Siphso had to contend with and the additional responsibilities due to COVID-19 caused frustration as well as emotional and

physical exhaustion. According to Gagen and Bowie (2005), teachers often feel overwhelmed by their duties and the demand to meet deadlines and they often deny the impact of their own adverse emotions and personal traumatic experiences. Siphso aspired to be a teacher who would improve education in the rural community where he had grown up; however, when his learners showed disrespect, he was concerned that they were not serious about their education. Retaliating in anger was caused by frustration at his learner's nonchalant attitude and the high expectations others had of him to cope during the pandemic. Despite Siphso's emotional and inappropriate response in a tense and challenging situation, he resolved to find his equilibrium and focus on delivering quality education in the rural school where he taught.

#### ***5.2.4.3 Striving to improve rural education during the pandemic***

According to Pillay and Saloojee (2012), there is a limited chance of obtaining meaningful education in most rural schools due to a combination of poverty, lack of encouragement from teachers, and a poor education. Mampane and Bouwer (2011) also highlight that many township schools have limited access to textbooks and learning material due to extreme poverty. They also state that many learners engage in alcohol and drug abuse instead of buying learning material when they have funds. Slam (2004) emphasises that people who live in rural areas have limited access to services and they have to travel long distances if they wish to benefit from the opportunities offered to people who live in better serviced areas. However, Deaton (2012) found that many teachers in rural school settings promoted a productive learning environment despite the many limitations they experienced, while Dennis (2012) argues that learners become motivated to learn when their teachers use various methods of teaching to cater for their needs, regardless of the conditions. Richie and Wilson (2000) argue that teachers' encouragement drives learners to become invested in meaningful learning. It is important that teachers forge healthy relationships with their learners if they wish to achieve healthy classroom conditions (Mokhele, 2006). Siphso's experience of attending rural schools in his personal life and teaching at a rural school in his professional life exposed him to diverse socially constructed meanings and perceptions of education. He aspired to be a teacher in a rural context that aimed to challenge the view that all rural educators fail their learners. He stated:

*As a new teacher in a rural school context and having experienced being in a rural school throughout my own schooling, I wanted to change the perception that in rural schools, there's poor education, learners are failures, they are unfocused and unwilling to learn... I wanted to stimulate learning by rewarding learners who performed well and encourage other learners to work harder to receive a reward... I*

*saw that the school did not think of ways to improve learners' performance... In 2021, the school did not implement this approach due to COVID-19, and the learner performance rate dropped. I went to the extent of writing letters for sponsorships; one of the sponsorships we received was watches and stationery from KFC... Whatever resources the school has, I utilise them to the best I can. Where there is a space for increasing our resources, I seek a lot of help from other schools in the community by getting resources that can benefit my learners... I place the learners' textbooks next to my table... It helps me know that I can keep the few resources that the school has in good condition to use them in the many more years to come... I encouraged the school to use WhatsApp to communicate with learners and their parents while they were working on their tasks at home...if they had no WhatsApp, they would use their neighbour's phone. In the situation where they had no access at all to the internet, I would send a hard copy of the tasks with a learner that stayed nearby... I did not want them to fail.*

Sipho took ownership of his task as a teacher in a deep rural context by being resourceful. His own personal and professional experiences in rural schools, where diverse constructed meanings impacted him, inspired him to invest a lot of effort in the way he taught. The above excerpt highlights Sipho's dedication to improve the quality of education he provided at the school where he taught. He believed that sufficient resources would enhance learners' progress. He wanted to ensure that teaching and learning would continue during the pandemic without causing so much strain on teachers and learners. He endeavoured to improve the accessibility of resources and implemented a reward approach to motivate learning. These actions point to his concern for his learners as he wished that they would benefit even if they did not have the means to work remotely. Sipho preserved and protected the few resources that his rural schools had by focusing on academic success through improved service and protecting learners' safety during the pandemic. Slam (2004) highlights that there are certain values and perspectives that are subconsciously instilled in rural people and that these values shape their personal and professional thinking which, in turn, impacts their practice. Apart from Sipho's desire to procure and protect more resources for the school, he enhanced service to and opportunities for his learners. When he struggled in his duties as a NT, he did not sit back and blame his circumstances, but set out to develop a network of support and positive work relationships that enhanced his teacher skills and professional practice.

#### ***5.2.4.4 Supportive relationships and teacher skills***

Farrell (2006) highlights that NTs are expected to manage the same workload as more senior teachers even without proper induction and support. Samuel (2009) alludes that, in the absence

of mentoring and support, NTs take the route of teaching in the way they were taught, whether or not they are doing things right. According to Eby, Lockwood and Butts (2006), a supportive school environment promotes supportive relationships among colleagues and enhances personal and professional growth. The *Norms and standards for educators: Integrated strategic planning framework* (South African Government, 2011) emphasises that all teachers are expected to have the competencies and skills to administer, lead, and manage and to be lifelong learners and effective assessors. Siphso, who was new in the profession, at first struggled to balance his duties as a teacher, and therefore he sought help from parents and colleagues:

*Teaching under the circumstances with learners struggling to learn as quickly as the Department expected delayed me in finishing the syllabus. Teaching learners to the best as you can with no support from parents becomes a lot for the teacher to cope with alone. Many times, parents said they did not understand the work or English and that they were not teachers to assist their children. The parents were unable to help, the learners were not cooperating, and I was just left to figure it out independently... The teachers in my school are very supportive and have assisted me when I needed help, but this was something beyond my control or theirs. One of the things that helped during COVID-19 was my organisational skills. Being organised saved me from being in a position of total chaos mentally. Imagine teaching two grades which seemed like four sets of learners, but you must teach them twice. That is time-consuming and confusing if you do not keep track of what content was taught to which group, etc.... Although my life at school was demanding, I could still have a balanced life after school.... I really believe that employing those dedicated individuals who were screening learners took a lot of the added responsibilities that teachers would have had.*

Siphso believed that the most fundamental support needed for learning to continue at home depended on the supportive role of parents. However, he did not receive the expected support from parents which resulted in him overloading himself with his duties, repeated lessons, and added classroom chaos when learners were at school on their allocated days. Christie (2001) highlights that some parents are not involved in their children's educational lives as they believe that it is the responsibility of the school to facilitate learning. Siphso aspired to be a teacher who liaised with his colleagues so that he could manage his duties during the pandemic. However, he felt that teachers had limited control over what occurred at home during rotation when learners were required to work independently. His dedication and organisational skills were then deployed to help him through the challenging times of COVID-19. He was able to use his skills to keep track of the content that needed to be taught and that had to be repeated to the four groups allocated to him. Even though parents were not supporting teachers from home, his colleagues and the individuals who had been employed to screen learners absorbed a lot of added responsibility and he was able to have a life outside the school, which eventually

helped him balance his life. When there was limited support, he used his competencies to assist him execute his professional duties. Claessens, Tartwijk, Pennings, Van der Want, Verloop, and Wubbels (2016) highlight that healthy teacher-learner, teacher-parent, and teacher-teacher relationships are fundamental in maintaining emotional, physical, and educational well-being in the school context.

### **5.2.5 Theme synthesis**

The discussion that I presented under the theme *Sipho's professional experiences that shaped his professional practice* revealed a frustrated and overwhelmed NT who had to work in a demanding space. He experienced many disruptions in this professional practice and his personal and professional emotions were severely influenced by the pandemic. His teacher values were in tension and he even found himself saying something in anger that he admitted he should not have said. During the pandemic, many schools were expected to work remotely and Sipho, who taught at a rural school, devised creative initiatives to promote meaningful learning in this challenging context. He lacked parental support but used his colleagues and his teacher skills to ensure that learning continued.

### **5.2.6 Synthesis of Section B**

Prendergast, Leggo, and Sameshima (2009) argue that writing poems to analyse insights into experiences, identities, and relationships provides a focused perspective on phenomena that might otherwise be murky. To synthesise my understanding of Sipho's experiences as explored in Section B, I developed a three-line haiku poem to highlight my key learnings of Sipho's personal and professional experiences that shaped his professional practice:

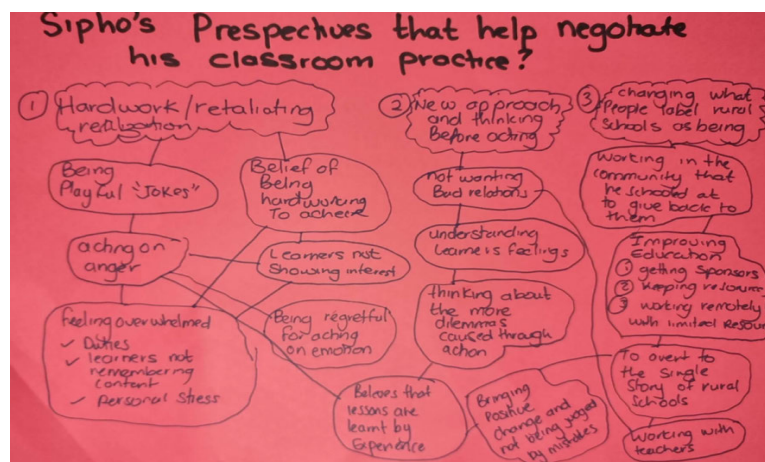
*Frustrated teacher  
Improving rural schooling  
Support, skills, balance*

Sipho's personal experience of having a grandmother who treated all her grandchildren equally inspired him to be a teacher who would promote equality in his professional practice. He imbibed values due to his upbringing when he was taught to "remember home"; this influenced his professional dedication to serve the community in which he had grown up by teaching at a local school. His personal experience of working as a child in the cane fields inspired him to encourage his learners to work hard to achieve academic excellence even if they were enrolled at a rural school. He believed that working hard was the only way to achieve greatness. Sipho's personal experiences inspired him to be a teacher who would be responsible, hardworking, and

accountable. The stress, anxiety, anger, and emotional harm caused by the loss of his grandmother, repeating lessons, and learners' inability to follow protocols placed Siphon in a situation where he acted inappropriately in anger and frustration. Siphon's frustration was also inflamed by a lack of parental support. However, while COVID-19 protocol demands put Siphon in a challenging space, he valued the support of his colleagues, individuals who screened the learners, and his teaching and organisational skills, and he was able to maintain a balance between his personal and professional life.

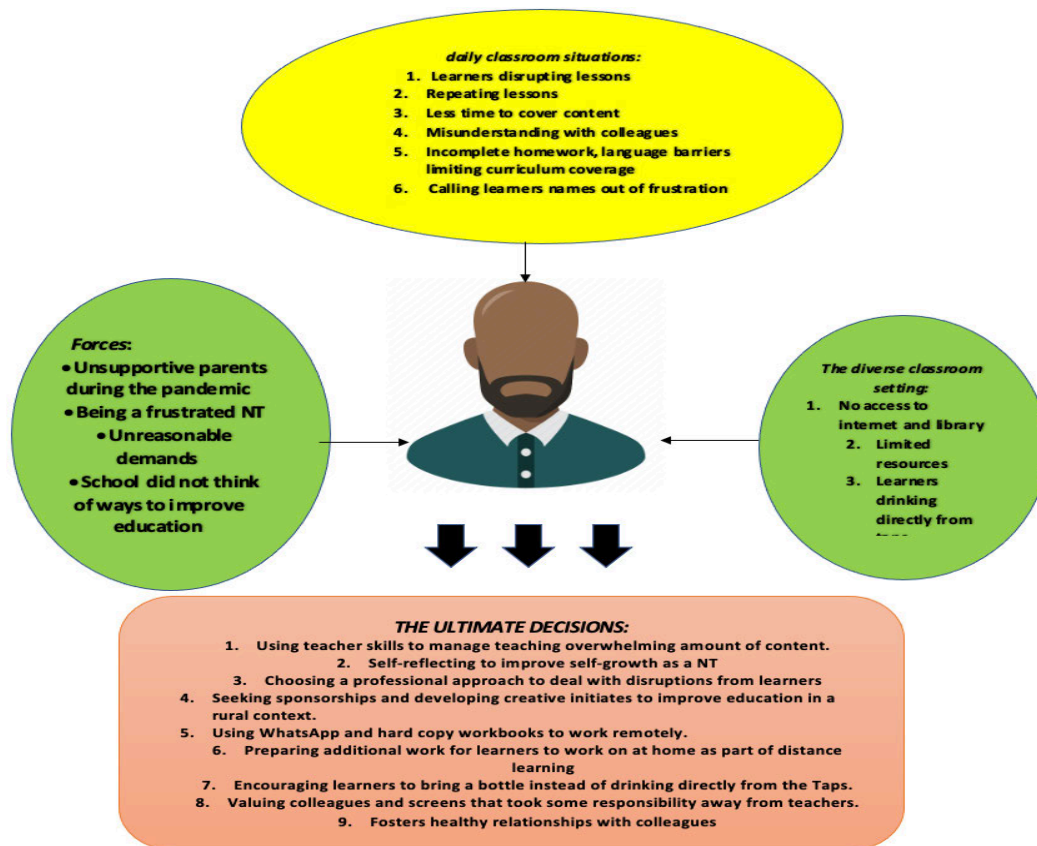
### 5.2.7 Section C: Interpretation and analysis of Siphon's story

In this section I present, analyse, and interpret Siphon's story in response to the third key question: *What informed novice teachers' perspectives in negotiating their classroom practice during the COVID-19 pandemic?* I used concept mapping to help me plot the various perspectives that helped Siphon negotiate the dilemmatic situations he encountered in his classroom.



**Figure 5.16: Concept map: Siphon's perspectives on negotiating his classroom practice**

The dilemmatic space framework (Fransson & Grannäs, 2013) was used as an analytical tool to visually present Siphon's beliefs, values, and perspectives. I also focus on the multiple forces that were brought in tension by his dilemmas. The diagram of his dilemmatic space summarises the ultimate decisions that Siphon made to negotiate his challenges during the pandemic.



**Figure 5.17: Siphon's dilemmatic spaces and how he addressed them**

### 5.2.7.1 Self-reflection fosters self-growth

As a NT during the COVID-19 period, Siphon found himself in many unpleasant situations. These encounters made Siphon reflect more consciously on the way he reacted to such situations and how this impacted his professional practice:

*I am still young and playful. I played a joke about being sick and having a high temperature at school in front of my colleagues, who later tested positive. I also remember calling the learners "a bunch of losers" because I was overwhelmed with all my duties and the learners were not taking their work seriously.*

Siphon's idea of a joke was viewed differently by others because everyone has different perspectives, beliefs, and values (Fransson & Grannäs, 2013). When making a joke about being COVID positive, Siphon did not think he would offend a colleague, and neither did he call his learners "a bunch of losers" because this was how he really felt about them. He acted and reacted in frustration and anger as his work environment made him feel as if his hard work was not taken seriously. Siphon's experience of being an overwhelmed NT during the pandemic placed him in a situation where he did not consider the consequences of his words and how

they would affect those around him. He believed he was a hardworking, responsible, and accountable teacher and that his learners' performance was a reflection of his influence on them. Siphso believed that when his learners were not performing well, it was a bad reflection on his teacher self. He reflected honestly and frankly on some negative experiences when he poorly negotiated professional situations during the pandemic:

*As a human being, you sometimes say and do things now and then realise that it shouldn't have been done or said. This was a negative experience for me because I realise that, as a teacher, I need to be mindful of how my actions impact the learners I teach. I feel that a lot of my frustration comes from the fact that these learners are disadvantaged and have language barriers, but they fail to focus on their work and show no interest.*

Siphso felt that, if his learners were not doing their work or were disruptive, they had no interest in the work. He believed that hard work was a symbol of one's passion to achieve one's goals, and he felt that his learners were not working hard enough to achieve academic growth. Florio-Ruane and Williams (2008) highlight that teachers' personal and professional identities cannot be separated as both influence their reactions, beliefs, and expectations even if a certain reaction contradicts their ideology. Siphso said:

*After saying those harsh words out of frustration to the learners, I felt extremely terrible because, as a teacher, it was not a nice thing for me to say despite my emotions...my Christian faith is visible to those around me.*

Siphso's Christian values guided him to reflect on the way he came across to others. He did not want to appear arrogant, childish, or inadequate. He realised that he should not have acted in anger but should have controlled his emotions and dealt with the situation in a professional manner. Siphso chose to use negative encounters as a lesson to reflect on the consequences before reacting to a situation. Callero (2003) highlights that the reflective process assists us in understanding our particular actions and the beliefs that influence how and why we negotiate our encounters the way we do. Siphso believed that self-reflection created a space for his self-growth. I endorse this notion, for when we reflect on our experiences, we are able to think about the way we handled a situation and improve how we manage future situations.

#### **5.2.7.2 Prioritising positive choices: The right approach in unpleasant situations**

Siphso's experience of reacting emotionally to challenging situations changed the way in which he dealt with negative encounters. During 2021, a colleague accused him of infecting another colleague with the COVID-19 virus. This disturbed him greatly:

*My colleague shouted at me, saying that I knew I was sick and infected the other teacher... I knew that if I stood there any longer, I would have argued and fought with my colleague, but I wanted to be professional and act professionally. I politely apologised for joking in the way I did and assured my colleague that I was not sick, nor did I have COVID-19.*

Sipho's experience of being reprimanded by a colleague was embarrassing. However, he contained the situation by controlling his reaction so that he would not exacerbate the dilemma that already existed in his workplace. Fransson and Grannäs (2013) state that the way in which an individual negotiates a dilemma may create further dilemmas, therefore it is fundamental to ensure that one's choices and actions restore equilibrium. Sipho believed that if he had responded equally emotionally and in retaliation to justify himself, he would have caused an unpleasant relationship that would have resulted in a tense working environment. He also thought of his learners and knew it would be inappropriate if they witnessed two teachers arguing. He stated:

*My belief in life is always to make peace. I did not want my joke to... become why I have a terrible relationship with my colleague. I am not the person to stop speaking to someone and have something against them... if something is upsetting another person, it should be communicated to maintain a healthy relationship. I have learned a lot from my mistakes as a teacher, and I never want to leave a negative mark on any learner's life...I may have started off being someone who is new to the field and put in a situation that made me frustrated to a point where I acted unprofessionally. Still, those negative experiences allowed me to think and understand my learners and their feelings before I react to a situation.*

The negative experiences that Sipho encountered in the workplace changed his view on how he should handle tense classroom situations thereafter. He understood that valuable lessons are learned through experiences that cannot be taught by another person. Sipho's critical perspective about negotiating his dilemmas was to think about the consequences of his actions and to stop negative responses before they escalated the tension. Sipho emphasised that his mistakes did not define the teacher he was in the classroom:

*I am not a bad teacher or a bad colleague... I work hard to ensure that even kids in the rural areas can have the best education and I feel discouraged when there is no teamwork between learners and teachers. If everyone is able to work together, I believe that rural schools will outstand the many challenges we face.*

Sipho's experiences as a rural learner motivated him to strive for positive change in similar school settings. Meyer (2002) suggests that if all school role-players are aboard, that's when actual change begins. Sipho thus actively worked to demonstrate his view that resources, educational growth, and teamwork were fundamental in bringing a positive change to a rural

school. He believed that a NT's mistakes should not determine teacher competency and that all encounters should be used to improving the teacher self regardless of the conditions of the school. Siphso believed that his new approach to unpleasant situations would define him as a teacher who aspired to disrupt adversity and calm conflict.

### ***5.2.7.3 Changing perceptions about rural schools***

Siphso's desire to change how others viewed rural schools was fundamental to his practice. He therefore needed to change the quality of education in his school:

*As a new teacher in a rural school context and having experienced being in a rural school throughout my own schooling, I wanted to change the perception that in rural schools, there's poor education, learners are failures, they are unfocused and unwilling to learn...I teach the way I do to give back to my community by providing good education. I place the learners' textbooks next to my table... books are safe next to me... learners have limited access...It helps me know that I can keep the few resources that the school has in good condition to use them in the many more years to come.*

Siphso believed that, by serving the community in which he had grown up, he would positively change the lives of his learners. His actions would thus disrupt the single story of what people assumed about rural schooling. He prioritised the growth and development of children in the community. Siphso's dedication to safeguard the school's resources was influenced by his deep-rooted belief that he needed to ensure that the future generation will have access to resources for their meaningful education. Apart from protecting the school's resources, Siphso found ways to increase the quality of his rural learners' performance:

*My teacher believed in me...As an NT... I wanted to stimulate learning by rewarding learners who performed well and encouraging other learners to work harder to receive a reward. I thought that this approach would motivate learners in multiple ways...parents, teachers were impressed with the outcome.*

Siphso's belief that the reward approach would motivate learners to achieve academic growth was acknowledged as a success after the parents and teachers had visibly seen improvements in the learners' progress. His conscious decision to achieve sound educational outcomes in a rural school opened new ways of thinking about his practice and how he should deal with challenging situations. His own experiences as a rural learner prompted creative ideas. He obtained sponsorships and brainstormed ways of working remotely despite being in a rural context. He aspired to be a teacher who positively influenced his learners just as his teachers had left a positive mark on his life.

### 5.2.8 Synthesis of Section C

When reflecting on my synthesis of Section C, I developed a three-line haiku poem to crystalize my key learnings of Sipho's various beliefs, values, and perspectives that guided him to negotiate his classroom dilemmas:

*Choose the right approach  
Reflection fosters self-growth  
Improve rural school*

Sipho's perspectives that shaped his practice and guided him to negotiate his classroom encounters were influenced by critical personal and professional experiences during his life. Sipho, a dedicated NT who believed that hard work would inspire his learners, negotiated their academic growth despite language barriers and other contextual adversities. He believed that it was his responsibility to ensure that his learners performed well. Even when he retaliated inappropriately due to personal and professional stress, he resolved to control his emotions and anger in future to avoid such predicaments. His negative reactions towards a colleague and learner were caused by the demands of his job, learners' lack of interest, and being misunderstood. This negative response to negotiate challenges made him realise that he did not want his actions to define him as arrogant, inconsiderate, and irresponsible. Sipho used the reflective process to consider his actions, and he resolved to be his best teacher self by adopting a new way of negotiating any challenges in his practice. Sipho believed that crucial lessons were learned through experiences and that such lessons could not be taught by others. His critical perspectives in negotiating his classroom practice were:

- thinking about the consequences of his actions; and thereby
- creating a professional workspace to foster good relationships with his colleagues and learners.

During Sipho's schooling at a rural school, he believed that rural schools were neglected, learners were failures, and poor education was provided. He wanted to change that perception of by teaching in the community where he had grown up. Sipho felt that his contribution would benefit and safeguard the few resources that the rural school had, and he obtained more by asking for sponsorships. He believed that learners would perform well if they were motivated, which was one of the reasons why he implemented a reward system to promote educational growth.

### 5.3 Conclusion

In this chapter I provided my analysis and interpretation of Sipho's personal and professional experiences of his practices during the pandemic. The discourse in this chapter, as in the preceding two chapters, was to respond to three research questions. This helped me to understand Sipho's storied experiences of being a NT during the pandemic in school in a deep rural setting. I focused on making meaning of the choices he made to negotiate his dilemmas and the driving beliefs, values, and perspectives that guided him to avoid negativity and make positive decisions that would enhance his educational practice.

Based on my analyses in Sections A, B and C, my overall interpretation of Sipho's storied experiences highlights his personal and professional emotional frustration that was exacerbated by an increased workload and a lack of collaboration from parents in an under-resourced school during the pandemic. Gaps in the formal site highlights Sipho's multiple tensions:

- As a NT his frustrations were enhanced by emotional trauma in his personal life, and this negatively affected his professional practice.
- Unfocused learners and lack of parental support impeded remote learning during the pandemic.
- His rural school was unable to obtain sufficient resources to facilitate both contact and distance learning.
- He experienced undue stress due to insufficient time to cover syllabus content.
- He had an overwhelming number of groups to teach on a rotational basis.
- His learners experienced language barriers.

Thomas and Beauchamp (2011) highlight that NTs initially experience difficulties in their everyday practice such as disciplinary problems, insufficient resources, many demands by the school system, and a heavy work load. Against Sipho's multiple professional tensions, he also experienced personal inner tensions due to his values and beliefs, but he resolved to:

- Encourage his learners to attain academic excellence to challenge the perception of poor rural education.
- Ensure that no emotional harm would be inflicted on his learners by being a mindful NT to foster equality.
- Improve the quality of education he provided despite the lack of resources in his rural school.

Given the tension between multiple forces and his values in a highly complex time, Siphó's *beliefs, values, and perspectives* manifested in his choices to best negotiate his situation:

- He exercised agency by seeking resource support from formal schooling institutions and non-educational institutions within the community to foster and promote learning.
- He exercised his teacher skills to manage his time and keep track of multiple rotational groups.
- His belief in being a responsible NT with agency helped him promote a safe learning environment for his learners during the pandemic.
- He used his personal-professional identity to reflect on his teacher self and negotiated and changed his negative actions to become a more mindful teacher and colleague.

Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) highlight that identity is shaped and reshaped in relation to context, the self and other individuals. This was also true for Siphó:

- His perspective that his learners had an adverse socio-economic standing prompted his decision to utilize both electronic and traditional teaching methods to accommodate all his rural learners.
- Siphó valued and utilized healthy collegial relationships to counteract unsupportive parents and improve the learning conditions in his deep rural school.

As underpinned by the dilemmatic space framework, I highlight that Siphó as a NT effectively negotiated his dilemmas by taking the initiative to address the limited resources in his school, to positively channel his stress and frustration, to work diligently towards covering the curriculum, to counteract poor parental support by recruiting the support of his colleagues, to forge healthy relationships with colleagues, and to enhance his teacher skills through self-reflection so that he would foster educational growth during the pandemic.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 6.1 Introduction

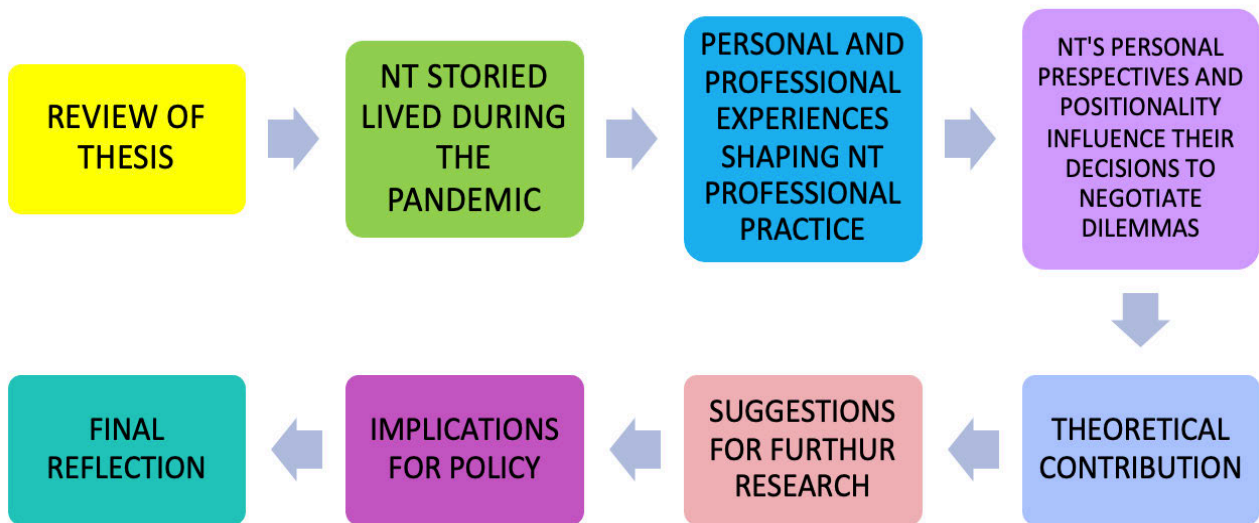
I presented the analysis and interpretation of the everyday storied experiences of Zee, Kaniso and Sipho in the previous three chapters in response to the three research questions that drove the focus and purpose of the study. The three questions were divided into three sections.

- Section A: *What are novice teachers' stories of their everyday educational experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic?*
- Section B: *How did novice teachers' personal and professional experiences shape their professional practice during the COVID-19 pandemic?*
- Section C: *What informed the novice teachers' perspectives in negotiating their classroom practice during the COVID-19 pandemic?*

This chapter presents a reflective review of this thesis from Chapters One to Chapter Six. I provide an overview of my personal and professional learning in response to the three NTs whose lives I studied based on the three research questions this study posed. The methodological learning of this research is presented in the overview of Chapter Three. I highlight my theoretical learnings and reflect on the contribution of my research to scholarly insights based on Fransson and Grannäs's (2013) dilemmatic framework and Rogers and Scott's (2008) explanation of teacher identity. Some suggestions are provided for further research that can expand our understandings of teachers' experiences during a pandemic. To conclude, I present some final reflections on this research journey with reference to the practical implications of this study.

This narrative inquiry zoomed into the stories of three NTs' lived experiences of teaching during the pandemic in three diverse South African school contexts. This research made visible the diverse values, beliefs, and perspectives that shaped what and how these NTs negotiated the dilemmas they faced and what positioning they adopted to overcome adversities. Each of the three NTs had less than three years' teaching experience in either urban, rural, or deep rural schools. The study opened up and deepened my understanding of novice teachers' complex

lives and the relations they forged and approaches they adopted in their professional choices during the pandemic.



**Figure 6.1: Visual summary of thesis overview**

## 6.2 Overview of the Thesis

**Chapter one** highlighted the focus and purpose of exploring NTs' stories of their everyday experiences and how they negotiated their dilemmas during COVID-19. My own teaching experience started during school-based teaching practice as part of my university education. This experience left me feeling overwhelmed and anxious. It was a struggle to negotiate the complexity of schooling and I questioned my capacity to make professional judgements and choices without the support of the mentor teacher assigned to guide me. With the advent of the pandemic, many changes in terms of educational requirements, duties, and responsibilities drove my curiosity to explore NTs' practices during this complex time. After a period of strict lockdown, the Minister of Education, Angie Motshekga (2020), announced the phased-in return to school in June 2020. The phasing-in approach required Grades 7 and 12 to return to school in June 2020, and Grades R to Grade 11 returned between July and August. Teachers were required to follow the *2020 Recovery plan for post-COVID-19 lockdown* (Department of Basic Education, 2020b) and implement new duties and roles as stipulated in the *Standard operating procedure for the containment and management of COVID-19* (Department of Basic Education, 2020c). According to the International Labour Organisation (2021), the *National education and development unit research report* revealed three timetabling models (daily,

weekly, and hybrid) for schools according to their preferences. It was interesting to zoom into the storied lives of the NTs and develop a deeper, more insightful scholarly understanding of how context played a role in their teaching experiences under COVID-19 in light of so many limitations, expectations, and new demands on their daily duties.

In **Chapter Two** I explored critical scholarly debates and perspectives on NTs' everyday experiences of classroom challenges, educational policies, and educational shifts caused by the pandemic. I explained that my use of the dilemmatic space framework (Fransson & Grannäs, 2013) would be complemented by Rodgers and Scott's (2008) explanation of identity, as this would enable me to understand the NTs' dilemmas. I was able to zoom into the complexity of NTs' practices where multiple forces were at play (unforeseen challenges, relations, and diverse school settings). The dilemmatic framework (Fransson & Grannäs, 2013) enabled me to understand NTs' positionality and the diverse choices they made to negotiate their dilemmas during the pandemic, while Rodgers and Scott (2008) helped me understand and explain how and what informed these NTs' perspectives in the execution of their practice. The debates and trends that were explored in the literature I reviewed were dominated by themes that exposed teachers' everyday professional duties, their challenges, the shifts in educational routines (as mandated by the *Standard operating procedure for the containment and management of COVID-19, 2020*), and various policies for teaching, learning, and assessment (e.g., *Recovery plan for post-COVID-19 lockdown, 2020b*) due to the pandemic.

In Chapter two I also presented the methodology that I employed to execute this study. I adopted a narrative inquiry approach within the interpretive paradigm. I was thus able to explore the lives of NTs through stories of their practice during the pandemic. The stories generated data that I obtained through various methods. The data analysis process evoked emotions and feelings and foregrounded relationships of the significant others that the NTs reflected on while telling their stories and relating their experiences during the pandemic. I used artefacts, memory drawings, photovoice, collage inquiry, and interviews to create a space for the NTs to recall and revisit their past and freely share deep stories of their experiences. This methodological approach enhanced my knowledge and sharpened my understandings of the world of NTs and their practice. The multiple methods of generating data also rendered the stories valid and plausible.

As a narrative inquirer who needed to obtain rich data from descriptive qualitative stories, I needed to keep in mind the three key tenants of narrative inquiry.

- Temporality enabled me to understand that my participants had past and present experiences that shaped them professionally.
- Sociality enabled me to understand the critical role of relationships between the participants and myself if I wanted to really understand the kinds of stories they shared.
- Place enabled me to understand the importance of creating a welcoming setting for my participants to freely share their stories without being judged. Place also influences the kinds of detailed stories participants told.

I thus concur with Scherff (2008), who highlights that NTs' stories should provide compelling meaning for a better understanding of classroom practice in various contexts during the pandemic. As a narrative inquirer, I could access insightful information of the real lived experiences of the NTs through their stories. The variety of methods I used provided a host of nuanced stories that occurred in time, space, and place and I could pose probing questions to merge all their experiences into a meaningful story of NTs' lived experiences during the pandemic. My reflective knowledge of their stories and thick descriptions of NTs' lives enabled me to deepen my understanding and to paint an authentic picture of each NT's experiences and practice during the pandemic.

I presented my narrative analysis and interpretations of the three participants' stories in **Chapter Three** (Zee's), **Chapter Four** (Kaniso's), and **Chapter Five** (Sipho's). Each chapter was structured into three sections, and each section responded to a research question. I present my overall learnings in relation to each research question across all three participants in a later section.

### **6.3 Methodological Reflections**

This study was conducted at a very complex time when many COVID-19 restrictions were in place. Due to the context in which NTs taught and the fact that contact meetings had to be limited, I conducted my research using online platforms such as WhatsApp, Zoom, and voice calls to generate data. Keeping in mind the key tenants of narrative inquiry, I had to ensure that my participants felt safe when sharing their stories. By listening in a non-judgemental way to

these stories, I was able to form trusting relationships with the participants even though this study was conducted online. I decided against group sessions with my participants as I felt that one NT's response might influence how the others responded to questions/activities. In conducting this study, I learnt the importance of creating a safe and objective space that enabled me to connect deeper, and I could thus reconstruct in-depth understanding of the stories the NTs had narrated about their experiences. I virtually met with each participant to arrange suitable times to avoid them feeling pressured in their already stressful lives. During the voice/video call meetings, I became an active listener and demonstrate ethical care for my participants. We did experience unforeseen personal challenges along the way such as sickness, the loss of loved ones, and being overwhelmed by our personal duties. However, I constantly prioritised my participants' emotions and feelings and I adopted a patient and understanding role. As a narrative inquirer, I had to constantly question and acknowledge my beliefs, values, and perspectives and judge how they might influence the stories I constructed using that of each participant. Once the stories had been transcribed, each participant reviewed his story to confirm that it was authentic.

#### **6.4 Value of the Study**

This Master's research expands our knowledge of NTs' personal and professional experiences, values, and intentions. Moreover, even though the findings are not generalised, the gist of the themes may enhance our understanding of what might shape NTs' choices when they have to negotiate their classroom practice during times of adversity (such as a pandemic) in diverse school contexts. I was able to generate findings that contribute to existing literature on *Shifts in educational experience: Teachers' everyday classroom challenges* by highlighting that the context in which NTs teach plays a role in the types of challenges they encounter and how they respond to shifts in education, as was mandated by the need to continue teaching and learning practices regardless of the pandemic.

The findings of this research study assists in understanding the complexity of NTs' professional lives when developing and implementing policies that they are required to follow while balancing their responsibilities, particularly in the context of a pandemic. This study contributes to the existing literature on the *Shifts in education* in the context of a pandemic, as the NTs highlighted their struggles with curriculum coverage and the need to adopt multiple roles. The findings should benefit other NTs, various school stakeholders, university faculties of education, and teacher preparation. This study may also be informative for individuals

concerned with NT professional development and contributes to debates on the broad theme: *Novice teachers' experiences and their coping strategies in negotiating dilemmas.*

## **6.5 Summary of Key Findings**

### **6.5.1 Novice Teachers' storied lives during the pandemic**

In composing NTs' stories of their everyday experiences during the pandemic, it was fundamental that my participants' voices were heard in the construction of their narratives. To give precedence to the importance of their voices (Polkinghorne, 1995), I presented their stories in the first person (in italics). The dimension of time strengthened the relationship between me (narrative inquirer) and my participants, which contributed to composing narrative texts that were textured, nuanced, and thick.

The descriptive stories enable the reader to capture authentic emotions and events as narrated by the NTs. Narrative constructions enabled me to acquire a deeper understanding of how these three NTs made meaning of their lives through events and experiences in during the pandemic. My analysis of these stories allowed me to understand their diverse personal and professional identities and the nuanced values, beliefs, and perspectives that shaped their everyday dilemmas. The stories also enabled me to connect with my participants by going through the process of their constructed narratives of their lives and making meaning of their past and present experiences as they described them. This study enhanced my understanding of the power of stories as portals through which to revisit and recall past incidents that provide opportunities for reflection and development our understanding of a studied phenomenon.

### **6.5.2 Personal and professional experiences that shaped the NTs' professional practice**

The collage below helped me to visually present my interpretations and key learnings of Zee's, Kaniso's, and Siphos' storied lives. It enriched my insight and assisted me in writing the paragraph that follows. These instruments highlight the identities of the NTs that had been shaped by a particular personal-professional value or experience that had, in turn, shaped their professional practice.



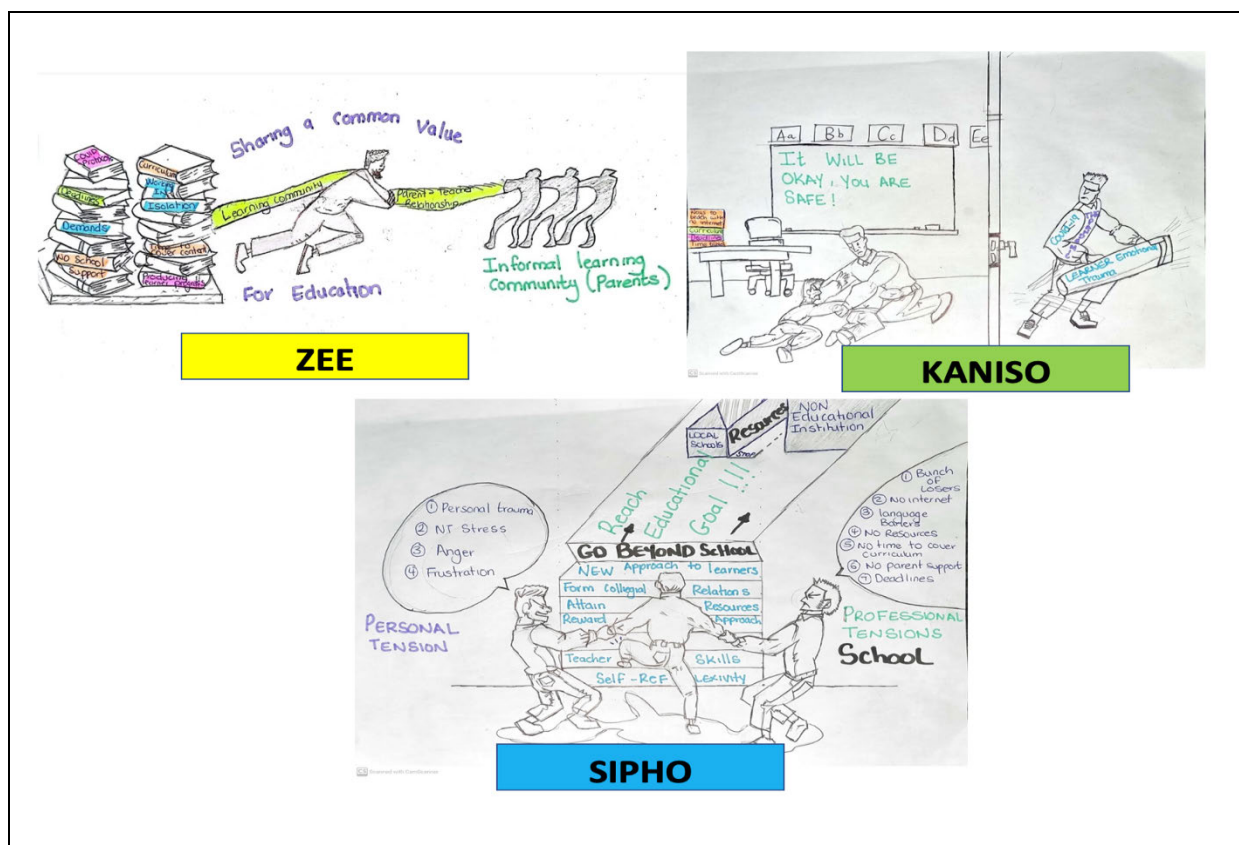
**Figure 6.2: Interpretative collage: The professional identities of the participants as shaped by their experiences**

Rodgers and Scott (2008) highlight that one's personal and professional identities are shaped by experiences, and those experiences in turn shape professional practice. Zee's value of supportive relationships (both formal and informal) was shaped by his personal experience of living in a supportive community with his parents. Kaniso's value of care for his learners was influenced by his personal experience of minimal parental support in his childhood. Sipho's value of a positive culture of teaching and learning in a deep rural school was influenced by his personal and professional experiences of growing up and teaching in his rural community. The three NTs experienced similar challenges such as time management and curriculum coverage. Rodgers and Scott (2008) highlight that teachers' personal identity that has been shaped by history, culture, and beliefs influences how they teach in the school context they find themselves in. Zee foregrounded a team player identity due to his personal-professional experiences. Kaniso foregrounded a teacher-caregiver identity that was influenced by his personal experiences. Sipho foregrounded an ownership identity as a resourceful teacher who took ownership of the area where he lived and taught. With reference to Rodgers and Scott, my study found that relationships were vital for the NTs to function during the pandemic. These went beyond the classroom as Zee sought parental support, Kaniso sought collegial support,

and Siphon sought collegial support from teachers outside his school. The variations in the relationships that each novice teacher adopted were influenced by his personal values and beliefs that were relational to the teaching contexts in and through which he determined his position as a particular kind of teacher self.

### 6.5.3 NT's personal perspectives and positionality

In reflecting on the dilemmatic framework, the three drawings below present an interpretation of the NTs' self as a team player (Zee), a nurturer and caregiver (Kaniso), and a resourceful decision maker (Siphon). The images highlight the 'pulling' and 'pushing' forces that impacted the NTs during the pandemic in their respective schooling sites. Importantly, it illuminates the stance each adopted to negotiate a way out of adverse situations and how they constructed themselves as unique and with some sense of agency.



**Figure 6.3: Interpretive drawing of the three NTs' efforts to negotiate dilemmas**

I used the dilemmatic space framework (Fransson & Grannäs, 2013) and Rodgers and Scott's (2008) identity lens to zoom into the NTs' lives as I wanted to, amongst other things, identify their tensions and explore the causes of these tensions. This lens enabled me to identify the

NTs' dilemmas and understand the perspectives that informed the choices they made to negotiate their dilemmas. I concluded that the choices they made to negotiate their dilemmas were shaped by particular perspectives that framed their teacher positions.

- Zee's team player identity shaped his perspective of a non-supportive school. He thus negotiated this dilemma by developing informal learning communities with parents. These informal learning communities shared a common value for education to achieve curriculum goals during the pandemic in his urban school. In working with parents, Zee established a horizontal relationship with them instead of a hierarchical one with his colleagues as he felt that his voice mattered more in the former.
- Kaniso's teacher caregiver identity shaped his perspective of emotionally troubled learners and guided him to negotiating this dilemma by being a caring, approachable teacher in a rural context during the pandemic. Although he worked to cultivate a nurturing male role, some learners were not prepared to accept a caring male teacher, probably as they had been socialised to believe that this role belongs exclusively to women (Rogers, Nielson, and Santos, 2021). Kaniso then sought the help of female colleagues to assist him with specific learners to address their emotional needs during the pandemic.
- Siphon's ownership identity shaped his perspective of a school with insufficient resources. To negotiate this dilemma, he used his resourcefulness to seek support from other schools and businesses so that he could improve the culture of education in his deep rural school.

It is acknowledged that the NTs' choices to negotiate their respective dilemmas may not be shared by other NTs as everyone is entitled to his own beliefs, values, and perspectives about their practice. Fransson and Grannäs (2013) argue that a dilemma is socially constructed due to structural conditions and relationships in teachers' everyday practice. The latter scholars further highlight that teachers' dilemmas are often influenced by the context in which they find themselves. With reference to the dilemmatic framework, my study argues that the choices that the NTs made to negotiate the challenges that the pandemic engendered were relational to the context they worked in as well as their positionality.

## **6.6 Theoretical Clarification**

This study has heightened my awareness of NTs' lived experiences and what they are and do to negotiate the very complex education terrain in their everyday lives. This research highlights

that, during the pandemic, NTs confronted a variety of situations in their unique schooling contexts. They experienced dilemmas such as additional duties and responsibilities that were enforced by the Department and their SMTs due to the pandemic. The NTs found themselves in a new environment where they require different kinds of personal and professional support to navigate their way and strengthen their practice. Along this continuum, the three NT participants focused on relationships that were key for them: teacher-parent relationships (Zee), teacher-learner relationships (Kaniso), and teacher-school relationships (Sipho), and they negotiated their dilemmas through these key supportive relations during the pandemic with relative success.

The study found that the NTs' current experiences were linked to their past experiences, particularly childhood schooling events, that were pivotal in shaping the perspectives and choices the NTs made. In using the dilemmatic space framework (Fransson & Grannäs, 2013), this study was able to identify the dilemmas the NTs faced every day and to zoom into their values that were in tension and thus exacerbated the dilemmatic spaces they were in. Rodgers and Scott's (2008) explanation of personal-professional identity also enabled me to zoom into the very complex lived experiences of the NTs as they negotiated their practice in their various schooling contexts during the pandemic. It was heartening that I could make meaning of the many perspectives that shaped their choices as teachers with the capacity to construct their own professional identities during the pandemic.

## **6.7 Suggestions for Further Research**

This research study focused on exploring NTs' stories of their everyday practice during the pandemic to understand how they negotiated their personal and professional dilemmas in three South African schools. This research study was limited to three male NTs who respectively taught in urban, rural, and deep rural school contexts during the pandemic. It will be interesting to expand the scope of this study by listening to the stories of other educational practitioners, such as senior teachers and learners, to explore their lived experiences and unpick their negotiation of dilemmas during the pandemic. It can also be enlightening to zoom into the lives of student-teachers to generate stories of the type of dilemmas and support they experienced during school-based teaching practice during the pandemic.

### 6.7.1 Implications for policy development

This study highlighted multiple NT experiences in three diverse school contexts during the pandemic. As part of the literature study, South African educational policies that informed teacher duties and responsibilities during the pandemic were perused. It was clear that teachers had to fulfil their everyday teacher roles according to the *Department of Basic Education Policy Handbook for Educators- ELRC* (Department of Basic Education, 2003) while they also needed to carry out additional duties as stated in the *Standard operating procedure for the containment and management of COVID-19* (Department of Basic Education, 2020c). The standard operating procedure policy highlighted that teachers had to ensure that schools were COVID free. They were required to reinforce frequent handwashing and ensure that learners were not touching their faces or teasing others for being ill. Additionally, teachers were required to break down instructions and teach learners about hygiene and the pandemic apart from teaching the curriculum. The *2020 Recovery plan for post-COVID-19 lockdown* (Department of Basic Education, 2020b) required teachers to cover content in a limited time and exclude examinations. They also had to exercising patience with divergent learner behaviours and parents demands until a routine had been established. Teachers were required to monitor learners during their breaks to ensure that lunch and utensils were not shared. They also needed to be skilled enough to identify learners who required emotional support. The policies that directed teachers' roles compelled them to ensure learners' safety and the transmission of knowledge and skills with little consideration for how they were expected to fulfil these duties on a sustained basis when their own lives were at risk or their families in trauma.

This study found that NTs struggled to manage their multiple roles and responsibilities in compliance with these policies. As a NT researcher, I sympathise with the difficult spaces that these new teachers were placed in during the pandemic while they needed to adjust to standard and new policies alike. Policymakers must consider that NTs are required to perform the same duties and carry the same workload as experienced teachers. The personal and professional lives of *all* teachers should be considered when developing policies that provide limited personal time for teachers to prioritise self-care. Policymakers should also consider that, what is intended in a policy, is seldom enacted in the classroom due to unforeseen circumstances that either restrict or disrupt learning. To foster teacher development imperatives, consideration and support should be given to teachers' mental, physical, and emotional state as they perform

their multiple duties and responsibilities during a time of adversity, as was experienced during the pandemic.

### **6.7.2 Implications for practice**

It is acknowledged that NTs experienced challenging situations during the pandemic when their values, beliefs, and perspectives shaped how they negotiated their dilemmas in their practice. This study highlights that NTs require support to help them adjust to the work environment that is directed by South African educational policies. A positive climate that cultivates opportunities for NTs to function optimally is paramount. The study urges that their diverse social and professional relations should be nurtured as it is these relations that support and enhance NTs' learning and development – especially during a pandemic. Teacher training programmes should also be designed to equip all teachers with the skills to transition from traditional to distance teaching and learning practices.

### **6.8 Final Reflections**

After conducting this research, I concluded that the NTs' personal and professional experiences were pivotal in shaping their professional practice. Each NT's choice of how they would best negotiate their dilemmas was uniquely underpinned by their beliefs, values, and perspectives.

This study shifted my perspective on learning communities and I now understand that they may occur both formally and informally amongst individuals who share a common vision for supporting teaching and learning. This study also influenced my NT self to take a more mindful and self-reflective approach towards enhancing my own professional development. I understand now how personal-professional experiences influence NTs' perspectives and choices and shape their practice. My knowledge of the educational system that is now implemented in South African schools has been extended. Sadly, I am now also conscious of how many learners did not have access to online platforms to continue their learning during the pandemic. This is a lesson that all educational specialists and policy makers should take to heart when they issue directives and allocate resources that are intended to support teaching and learning, particularly in rural schools.

The following Tanka poem, complemented by a drawing, captures my final reflection on this study that I conducted as a NT researcher. As a NT with teaching experience in an urban school context, this research equipped me with knowledge of the everyday realities of NTs in

diverse school contexts and how they were impacted by the pandemic. Every NT has unique experiences that shape the choices they make and execute in their professional practice. The COVID-19 pandemic was a new experience for everyone. I do not claim that all NTs experienced the same dilemmas and negotiated their dilemmas in the same way as those who participated in the study but being a NT myself, I also experienced dilemmas that were complex to negotiate.

**NTs' development in a unique context**

*Teacher, new to field  
Feed on tertiary knowledge  
To adapt and grow  
Series of experiences  
Transform their knowledge and skills*



**Figure 6.4: My drawing that symbolises NTs' self-transformation**

For instance, I had to choose between achieving my academic goals and caring for my mother while she was ill. Both these situations caused tension but they were equally important to me. However, I was determined to transform myself personally and professionally through this study. This transformation occurred through learning from other NTs' stories that exposed their complex lives and illuminated how their courage and determination drove their choices. Their example helped me to learn, develop, and make choices in my own personal and professional life. It is an inspiring experience to be a NT in development as I am going on many challenging journeys just like a caterpillar, so that I can one day fly like a butterfly on a journey of self-discovery, transformation, and development.

I conclude this thesis with the following quote:

*"Self-transformation is not just about changing yourself. It means shifting yourself to a completely new dimension of experience and perception."*

*-Jaggi Vasudev-*

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## **APPENDICES**

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## APPENDIX 1: PROTOCOL 1- ETHICAL CLEARANCE



01 October 2021

Rakheeba Bux (216001486)  
School Of Education  
Edgewood Campus

Dear R Bux,

**Protocol reference number:** HSSREC/00003353/2021

**Project title:** Novice Teachers stories of lived educational experiences: Negotiating the dilemmas of classroom practice during a pandemic.

**Degree:** Masters

### Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 14 September 2021 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

**Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.**

This approval is valid until 01 October 2022.

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.

**All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.**

HSSREC is registered with the South African National 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](mailto: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: PROTOCOL 2 - PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH



**KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE**

EDUCATION  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**OFFICE OF THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT**

Private Bag X9137, PIETERMARITZBURG, 3200  
Anton Lembede Building, 247 Burger Street, Pietermaritzburg, 3201  
Tel: 033 392 1051

Email: buyi.ntuli@kzndoe.gov.za

Enquiries: Buyi Ntuli

Ref.:2/4/8/7133


Miss Rakheeba Bux  
4Davaram Street  
Queensburgh  
**DURBAN**  
4093

Dear Miss Bux

### PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **"NOVICE TEACHERS STORIES OF LIVED EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES: NEGOTIATING THE DILEMMAS OF CLASSROOM PRACTICE DURING A PANDEMIC"**, 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 27 July 2021 to 31 August 2023.
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 Miss Phindile Duma 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.

  
Dr. EY Nzama  
Head of Department: Education  
Date: 27 July 2021

GROWING KWAZULU-NATAL TOGETHER



## APPENDIX 4: RESEARCH QUESTION ONE PROMPT

**RQ 1: *What are Novice Teachers' stories of their everyday educational experiences during a pandemic (COVID-19)?***

### **A.) Memory Drawing**

I will ask the participants to think back on their everyday experience of their classroom practice. The following question will be asked:

***Recall two incidents during your classroom practice that evoke positive and negative memories of being a Novice teacher? (One positive and one negative)***

The participants will be asked to:

- On a blank piece of paper, the participants will be asked to draw a one picture of a negative memory story and on a separate page, draw a picture of a positive memory story.
- The participants will be asked to send a picture of their memory drawings via WhatsApp/email.
- Include as many details as you can remember about the incident.
- They should not concern themselves about whether their drawing is "good" or "neat."
- I will assure them that they only need to disclose information that they feel comfortable sharing.
- The participants will also be asked to remember to respect others' rights to privacy and dignity and to use pseudonyms [false names] when you refer to actual people and schools etc.)
- The participants will be asked to give the drawing a title and write a few sentences or send a voice note describing what the drawing explains.

### **B.) Artefact Inquiry**

I will ask the participants to choose any four objects from their school/ classroom that they have had while teaching during COVID-19 current. The participants will be asked to think about the incidents, experiences, and meaning behind each chosen object and share a story about that object via Audio recordings/zoom meeting/video clip. Only share stories that they are comfortable with. The participants will give their artefact a title and provide a picture of each artefact.

The participants will be asked the following probing questions:

- What does this object have to do with my life as a NT during COVID-19?
- Describe the emotions evoked by the artefact?
- Which artefact describes fonder or/ and less fond memories of your educational experience of being a NT?

## APPENDIX 5: RESEARCH QUESTION TWO PROMPT

**RQ 2: *How do NT personal and professional experience shape their professional practice during a pandemic (COVID-19)?***

### **A.) Collage inquiry**

I will ask the participants to collect old newspapers or magazines prior to the collage inquiry activity. The question driving the collage activity will be:

***Compose a collage that responds to the question “My experiences of being in the classroom during Covid.?”***

The participants will be asked to:

- Cut out pictures to best describe their feelings as a NT during COVID-19.
- The participants will be asked to create a visual story of their classroom practice during COVID-19 times.
- The participants will arrange pictures and words that describe the good and bad experiences of being a NT and their classroom practice during COVID-19.
- The participants will be asked to share their collage and explain the story behind the arrangement of words and pictures via a zoom meeting.
- Give your collage a title.

### **B.) Photovoice**

Each participant will have a different image that shares a different story of their own experiences of their classroom practice during COVID-19.

***Question: Take 3-5 photographs of safe and unsafe spaces in the school setting.***

- Label safe and unsafe spaces as headings on an A4 page.
- Under safe space, place photographs and share a short story
- Under unsafe space, place photographs and share a short story about the photographs.
- The participants will share their own perspectives, concerns, and strengths of their experiences as lived during COVID-19 through photographs.
- A zoom discussion will be done to share stories through photographs and reflect on the safe and unsafe spaces of their classroom practices during COVID-19.

## APPENDIX 6: RESEARCH QUESTION THREE PROMPT

**RQ 3: *What informs the Novice Teachers' perspectives in negotiating classroom practice during a pandemic (COVID-19)?***

### **A.) Unstructured interviews**

In an unstructured interview ONE main question will be asked to understand Novice Teacher's experiences in their classroom during the pandemic. Probing questions are thematically organized:

#### **1. Tell me your story/stories of being in the classroom during the pandemic**

- **Personal challenges** of everyday classroom everyday classroom practice as a NT?
- **Professional challenges** of everyday classroom practice as a NT?
- What were the enabling/hopeful moments in the classroom? WHY?
- What did you feel when you were faced with particular situations in the classroom?  
How did you respond to the situation and why?
- What **beliefs and values** influenced the choices you made as a NT to negotiate these challenges?
- **What personal and professional relationships/significant others** did you find to be significant to your classroom experiences during COVID-19?
- What kind of **support** did you find helpful as a NT in your daily classroom practice?

## APPENDIX 7: LETTER TO THE PARTICIPANT

Dear Sir/Madam

I, Rakheeba Bux, am a Master's degree student (full thesis) 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: *Novice Teachers stories of lived educational experiences: Negotiating the dilemmas of classroom practice during a pandemic*. The purpose of this study is to understand how Novice Teachers experienced and negotiate their classroom practices during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The objectives of this study are:

1. To explore NT's stories of their everyday educational experiences during a pandemic (COVID-19).
2. To explore NT's experiences of their classroom practice during a pandemic (COVID-19).
3. To understand how NT's perspectives help in negotiating classroom practices during a pandemic (COVID-19).

I selected you as one of my participants because you meet the selection criteria of being a Novice teaching in the intermediate and senior phase at a school based in either of the following districts (ilembe, Zululand, Umlazi) during COVID-19.

I would like for you to share your experiences of being a Novice Teacher during Covid-19 to contribute to the research on Novice Teachers experiences of classroom practices. As this study is using narrative inquiry as a research method, I will be looking at past and present practices. I aim to 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 experiences using memory drawings, unstructured oral interviews, collage inquiry, artefact inquiry, poetic inquiry and photo-voice.

Given that the study is drawing on the individual's memories of particular nodal moments and critical experiences of their classroom experiences during COVID, 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 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 psychologist XXX Email: XXX@gmail.com Contact Number: 08XXX.

**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:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Contact Number</b>	<b>Email address</b>
Professor Daisy Pillay (Supervisor- UKZN)	082 XXX	XXX@ukzn.ac.za
<b>HUMANITIES &amp; SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION</b> Research Office, Westville Campus Govan Mbeki Building PrivateBagX54001 Durban 4000 KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA	<a href="tel:27312604557">Tel:27312604557-</a> <a href="tel:27312604609">Fax:27312604609</a>	Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za
Rakheeba Bux (Researcher)	061 XXX	XXX@stu.ukzn.ac.za

Thank you

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Miss Rakheeba Bux

## APPENDIX 8: PARTICIPANT DECLARATION

### INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

#### PARTICIPANT DECLARATION OF CONSENT

The title of the research dissertation: *Novice Teachers stories of lived educational experiences: Negotiating the dilemmas of classroom practice during a pandemic.*

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (Full name/s of Participant) have been informed about the study entitled: *Novice Teachers stories of lived educational experiences: Negotiating the dilemmas of classroom practice during a pandemic*, by Rakheeba Bux. 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](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

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

		Do consent	Do not consent
1	Consent to Rakheeba Bux conducting research.		
2	Consent to Rakheeba Bux to use photographs provided by the participant.		
3	Consent to Rakheeba Bux to use artefacts provided by the participant.		
4	Consent to Rakheeba Bux to use collages provided by the participant.		
5	Consent to Rakheeba Bux to use memory drawings provided by the participant.		
	Consent to Rakheeba Bux to use poetic inquiry to generate stories of the participant lived experiences.		

	Consent to Rakheeba Bux to use unstructured interviews as a data generation method.		
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Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/2021

## APPENDIX 9: LETTER TO THE PRINCIPAL

4 XXX street  
BXXXXX  
QXXXXXXh  
4XXX  
14 June 2021

The Principal  
XXXXXX School  
IXXXXXX  
H XXXXX Reserve  
4XX0

### REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Dear..... (Principal) of .....

I trust you are well. My name is Rakhee Bux, I am currently pursuing my studies towards a Master of Education Degree (Full Dissertation) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, School of Education, Edgewood campus.

My specialisation is in Teacher Development Studies. As part of the requirements for the degree, I will be conducting a research study titled: *Novice Teachers stories of lived educational experiences: Negotiating the dilemmas of classroom practice during a pandemic*. The purpose of this study is to understand Novice Teachers everyday experiences and the situations they negotiated in their classroom practices during the COVID-19 pandemic. The questions I seek to answer are:

1. What are Novice Teacher's stories of their everyday educational experiences during a pandemic (COVID-19)?
2. How do Novice Teacher's experience classroom practice during a pandemic (Covid19)?
3. What informs the Novice Teacher's perspectives in negotiating classroom practices during a pandemic (COVID-19)?

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 One Novice Teacher from your school as a participant in this study.

The data production process will involve the generation of the novice teacher's stories of personal experiences using memory drawings, unstructured oral interviews, collage inquiry, artefact inquiry, poetic inquiry and photo-voice. 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 individual's memories of particular nodal moments and critical experiences of their classroom experiences during COVID, 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 and Zoom. Therefore, it will not interfere with the day-to-day activities of the school. The data collection and production will start from

July- October 2021 and will take place at a time convenient to the Novice 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. 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 me or the UKZN Humanities & Social Science Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Contact Number</b>	<b>Email address</b>
Professor Daisy Pillay (Supervisor- UKZN)	0XXX	XXX@ukzn.ac.za
<b>HUMANITIES &amp; SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION</b> Research Office, Westville Campus Govan Mbeki Building PrivateBagX54001 Durban 4000 KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA	<a href="tel:27312604557">Tel:27312604557-</a> <a href="tel:27312604609">Fax:27312604609</a>	Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za
Rakheeba Bux (Researcher)	XXX	2XXX@stu.ukzn.ac.za

Thank you

---

Miss Rakheeba Bux

## APPENDIX 10: PRINCIPAL DECLARATION

### INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

#### PRINCIPAL DECLARATION OF CONSENT

The title of the research dissertation: *Novice Teachers stories of lived educational experiences: Negotiating the dilemmas of classroom practice during a pandemic.*

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (Full name/s of Principal) have been informed about the study entitled: *Novice Teachers stories of lived educational experiences: Negotiating the dilemmas of classroom practice during a pandemic*, by Rakheebea Bux. I hereby grant permission to the researcher to conduct research using a participant 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, so should they 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.

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:

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4000  
KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTHAFRICA  
Tel: 27312604557 -Fax: 27312604609  
Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

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

		Do consent	Do not consent
1	Consent to Rakheebea Bux conducting research.		
2	Consent to Rakheebea Bux to use photographs provided by the participant.		
3	Consent to Rakheebea Bux to use artefacts provided by the participant.		
4	Consent to Rakheebea Bux to use collages provided by the participant.		
5	Consent to Rakheebea Bux to use memory drawings provided by the participant.		

	Consent to Rakheeba Bux to use poetic inquiry to generate stories of the participant lived experiences.		
	Consent to Rakheeba Bux to use unstructured interviews as a data generation method.		

Signature of Principal \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/2020

## APPENDIX 11: TURNITIN ORIGINALITY REPORT

### Masters Full Thesis Draft July VERSION

#### ORIGINALITY REPORT

<b>5</b> %	<b>4</b> %	<b>1</b> %	<b>1</b> %
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

#### PRIMARY SOURCES

<b>1</b>	<a href="http://researchspace.ukzn.ac.za">researchspace.ukzn.ac.za</a> Internet Source	<b>2</b> %
<b>2</b>	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net">hdl.handle.net</a> Internet Source	<b>&lt;1</b> %
<b>3</b>	Submitted to University of KwaZulu-Natal Student Paper	<b>&lt;1</b> %
<b>4</b>	<a href="http://journals.ukzn.ac.za">journals.ukzn.ac.za</a> Internet Source	<b>&lt;1</b> %
<b>5</b>	<a href="http://journals.sagepub.com">journals.sagepub.com</a> Internet Source	<b>&lt;1</b> %
<b>6</b>	Donald E. Polkinghorne. "Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis", International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 1995 Publication	<b>&lt;1</b> %
<b>7</b>	Submitted to Stadio Holdings Student Paper	<b>&lt;1</b> %
<b>8</b>	<a href="http://www.tandfonline.com">www.tandfonline.com</a> Internet Source	<b>&lt;1</b> %