



**UNIVERSITY OF<sup>TM</sup>  
KWAZULU-NATAL**  

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**INYUVESI  
YAKWAZULU-NATALI**

**FOUNDATION PHASE EDUCATORS' UNDERSTANDING OF EMOTIONAL  
INTELLIGENCE**

**By**

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degree of**

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**January 2022**

## **SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION**

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

**Supervisor:** Dr. V. Jairam

**Signed:**

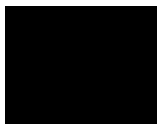
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## **ABSTRACT**

Emotional intelligence is a relatively new concept of interest within the educational context as it is believed to promote growth and development in both educators and learners. The purpose of this study was to explore foundation phase educators' understanding of emotional intelligence. It sought to develop an understanding of the ways in which foundation phase educators conceptualise emotional intelligence in order to enhance the growth and development of both educators and learners. Teachers often experience high levels of stress due to the demanding nature of their jobs. They are continuously pressed for time, experience heavy workload, unruly learners and have to cater to the demands and expectations of parents. Extant literature indicates that emotional intelligence has the ability to enhance personal, social, and academic performance. However, there is no evidence of studies that have been conducted with foundation phase Educators and their understanding of emotional intelligence. Mayer and Salovey's ability model of emotional intelligence was chosen for this study as it is closely aligned with the purpose of this study, which was to explore foundation phase educators' understanding of emotional intelligence. The model conceptualises emotional intelligence as a form of intelligence as it involves a series of mental abilities. This study underpinned a qualitative approach located within an interpretivist paradigm. Eight foundation phase educators from an independent school in the Umlazi District were selected as participants using purposive sampling. Through the use of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions this study intended to interpret and describe how the concept of emotional intelligence is understood by foundation phase educators and why it is understood in the way that it is. The findings indicate that foundation phase educators are aware of important aspects of emotional intelligence and acknowledge the value of possessing or developing their emotional intelligence skills for effective teaching and learning. However, they lack a deep understanding of emotional intelligence which implies that their exposure to emotional intelligence skills and/or training is limited. It was suggested that educators engage in appropriate emotional intelligence teacher training to develop a critical understanding of the concept and what it entails and also be included in emotional intelligence curriculum development to implement a relevant and appropriate emotional intelligence curriculum for foundation phase learners.

*Keywords:* emotional intelligence, foundation phase, teaching, education, EI training

## **Table of contents**

<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION TO STUDY</b>	<b>12</b>
1.1 Introduction	12
1.2 Location of the Study	12
1.3 Purpose of the study	12
1.4 Rationale	13
1.5 Significance of the study	14
1.6 Objectives	15
1.7 Research Questions	15
1.8 Theoretical framework	15
1.10 Overview of research project	16
1.11 Chapter Conclusion	17
<b>CHAPTER TWO</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	<b>18</b>
2.1. Introduction	18
2.2. Understanding Emotions and Intelligence	19
2.3. The birth of EI	20
2.4. The concept of EI	21
2.5. EI and its impact on Teaching	24
2.6. Chapter Conclusion	26
<b>CHAPTER THREE</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK</b>	<b>27</b>
3.1. Introduction	27
3.2. Models of EI	27
3.2.1. The Ability Model	28

3.2.2. The Mixed Models	30
3.2.2.1. Daniel Goleman’s Competency Model	30
3.2.2.2. Reuven Bar-On’s Model of Emotional-Social intelligence	31
3.3. Rationale for theoretical framework	31
3.4. Chapter summary	35
<b>CHAPTER FOUR</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>RESEARCH METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>36</b>
4.1. Introduction	36
4.2. Research Question	36
4.3. Research Design	36
4.3.1. Interpretivist Paradigm	37
4.3.2. Qualitative Approach	38
4.4. Sampling	40
4.5. Data Generation	41
4.5.1. Online Focus group discussions	41
4.5.2. Online Semi structured interview	42
4.6. Trustworthiness	43
4.6.1. Credibility	44
4.6.2 Dependability	45
4.6.3. Transferability	45
4.6.4. Conformability	46
4.7. Ethical Considerations	47
4.8. Chapter Conclusion	48
<b>CHAPTER FIVE</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS</b>	<b>49</b>
5.1. Introduction	49
5.2. Pseudonyms	49
5.3. Data analysis: themes	50
5.3.1. Empathy	50

5.3.2. Perceiving emotions	59
5.3.3. Understanding emotions	73
5.3.4. Managing Emotions	87
5.3.5. Classroom Environment	101
5.3.6. Teacher-student relationship	107
5.3.7. Communication	111
5.4. Summary of findings:	115
5.4.1. What is foundation phase educators' understanding of EI?	115
5.4.2. How Emotionally Intelligent foundation phase educators are?	117
5.4.3. Why do foundation phase educators understand EI in the way that they do?	117
5.5. Chapter summary	118
<b>CHAPTER SIX</b>	<b>119</b>
<b>CONCLUDING DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS</b>	<b>119</b>
6.1. Introduction	119
6.2. Summary of research chapters	119
6.3. Summary of research findings	120
6.3.1. Empathy	120
6.3.2. Perceiving emotions	121
6.3.3. Understanding emotions	121
6.3.4. Managing emotions	121
6.3.5. Teacher-student relationships	121
6.3.6. Classroom environment	122
6.3.7. Communication	122
6.4. Reflections on foundation phase educators' understanding of emotional intelligence	122
6.4.1. Teaching emotional intelligence in the foundation phase	123
6.4.3. Emotional Intelligence teacher training	124
6.4.4. Designing an emotional intelligence curriculum for the foundation phase	124
6.5. Reflections on the Ability Model of Emotional Intelligence	125
6.6. Reflections on methodology	127
6.7. Recommendations for further studies	128

6.8. Limitations	128
6.9. Conclusion	129
<b>REFERENCES</b>	130
Appendix A: Request for permission from school principal	150
Appendix B: Permission from school principal	151
Appendix C: Permission to conduct study in KZN DoE	153
Appendix D: Ethical Clearance	154
Appendix E: Informed consent document	155
Appendix F: Interview Schedule	158
Appendix G: Focus Group Discussion Schedule	159
Appendix H: Turn it in report	161
Appendix I: Editor report	162

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

EI	Emotional Intelligence
EQ	Emotional Quotient
IQ	Intelligence Quotient
KZN	Kwa-Zulu Natal
DoE	Department of Education
4IR	Fourth Industrial Revolution

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION TO STUDY**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to make use of a set of skills in order to recognise, understand and appropriately react to emotions and emotional situations (Allen, MacCann, Matthews & Roberts, 2014). Psychologists Salovey and Mayer were amongst the first to coin the term emotional intelligence (EI) in the scientific literature in 1990, defining it as “the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions” (1990, p. 189). Currently, EI is becoming a popular topic of interest among many professionals. As a result, this study aimed to explore how the concept is understood by foundation phase educators.

#### **1.2 Location of the Study**

This study was carried out at a private school located in the township of Umlazi, Durban. The school opened in January 2019 and is the first private school located within a township in Durban. Umlazi is one of the largest townships in South Africa, with a population of over 400, 000. Approximately, 30% of homes in Umlazi are in informal settlements. Many learners who attend the school come from impoverished backgrounds. A large number of learners live with their grandparents and/or other family members, while their parents live in other provinces or away from home. As a result of this, many learners do not have the necessary support at home. Their grandparents are often uneducated, or illiterate. Recently, private and government investors have shown a keen interest in uplifting the area. There have been a number of new developments in the township, such as schools and shopping malls.

#### **1.3 Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study was to explore foundation phase educators’ understanding of EI. This study sought to develop an understanding of the ways in which foundation phase educators conceptualise EI in order to enhance the academic and social growth and development of both educators and learners.

## **1.4 Rationale**

I was initially introduced to the concept of EI during an EI training programme aiming to make educators aware of its benefits for teaching and learning. I am employed at an independent school in Durban that offers EI lessons to all learners from Grade R to Grade 12. As a result, all educators were introduced to and trained on how to use and execute the EI curriculum. EI does not form part of the South African, Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement. However, it is a compulsory subject at the aforementioned school.

Most educators believe that EI can promote academic success, interpersonal skills, problem-solving thinking, and is a valued skill that can be carried over to adulthood. The school also acknowledges EI as a fundamental skill necessary for academic growth and development. Research by Valente, Monteiro and Lourenco (2018) on the relationship between teachers' EI and classroom management shows that “a teacher who presents emotional perception and expression skills easily perceives the students’ emotional state and adapts their behaviour...” (p.748). Considering that EI can promote growth and development in both teachers and learners and is supported by research (Denham, Bassett, & Zinsser, 2012; Dolev & Leshem. 2016; Valente, Monteiro & Lourenco, 2018), I decided to explore foundation phase educators’ understanding of EI.

Learners in the foundation phase are at a crucial stage in their development as the first years of a child’s life can determine future progress (Maguire et al., 2016). This means that the knowledge and behaviours experienced at a young age form a foundation from which further development can take place as the child develops into adulthood. It should be made clear here that the target audience for this study was foundation phase educators as they are key role players in the education of children.

In addition, a literature search shows there is no evidence of studies that have been conducted in this specific area. Therefore, my interest in EI also stems from the lack of information surrounding this area of foundation phase educators’ understanding of EI. A clear gap exists in the literature in this regard.

## 1.5 Significance of the study

Teachers often experience high levels of stress due to the demanding nature of their work. They are expected to operate in an environment where they are continuously pressed for time, includes heavy workload, unruly learners and the demands and expectations of parents. They are also faced with challenges and issues related to the educational ecosystem. As a result, teaching is a highly emotional and stressful profession (Krishnan & Awang, 2020).

In South Africa, learners are often faced with daily challenges at home and/or school which in turn affects their development and future progress. Some of their challenges may include the cultural, linguistic, or financial aspects which are common in South Africa. Some learners may perform poorly at school as a result of the above-mentioned challenges, or some may be unable to maintain meaningful relationships. A teacher with an understanding of EI is best suited to provide support and guidance to the above-mentioned learner as their emotional skills can guide them to communicate clearly and lead learners in a way that creates productive interactions. Asrar-ul-Haq, Anwar and Hassan (2017) claim that teachers with good EI show improved performance. Valente, Monteiro and Lourenco (2018) believe that “a teacher who presents emotional perception and expression,” (p. 748) is able to perceive learners’ emotional state and adapt their behaviour accordingly, thereby improving classroom management.

The World Economic Forum, 2020 lists EI 6<sup>th</sup> in the top 10 skills needed to thrive in the fourth industrial revolution. Asrar-ul-Haq, Anwar and Hassan (2017) claim that “despite the advancement in technology and educational reforms, the educational institutes face certain challenges and issues related to the education system,” (p. 87). However, if efforts are made for teachers to develop their emotional competencies, such challenges will be met easily, as EI serves a significant tool that helps teachers to adjust their emotions and meet the societal challenges that disturb the balance of their emotions.

In South African, approximately 60% of first graders will ultimately drop out, rather than complete 12th Grade. Findings show that dropping out of school results in poorer psychological, physical, social, and economic health (Lamb & Markussen, 2011). As a result, EI has become a key factor in the educational environment as it contributes to the improvement of teaching practice, enhanced health and mental well-being of teachers, and has an impact on students’ educational development. In addition, Denham, Bassett and Zinsser (2011) found that parents and teachers are important

agents in socialising children's EI. Thus, educators who are able to perceive, manage, understand and regulate their own emotions, are better equipped to develop or enhance the EI of their learners.

## **1.6 Objectives**

This study was guided by the following objectives:

- To explore foundation phase educators' understanding of Emotional Intelligence.
- To explore how emotionally intelligent foundation phase educators are.
- To explore why foundation phase educators understand Emotional Intelligence in the way that they do.

## **1.7 Research Questions**

This study was guided by the following research questions:

- What is foundation phase educators' understanding of Emotional Intelligence?
- How emotionally intelligent are foundation phase educators?
- Why do foundation phase educators understand Emotional Intelligence in the way that they do?

## **1.8 Theoretical framework**

For the purpose of this study, Mayer and Salovey's (1997) ability model of emotional intelligence was used. The model conceptualises EI as a set of mental ability and defines it as "the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions" (Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2008, p.4). According to their definition, EI qualifies as a form of intelligence as it involves a series of mental abilities. This also means that EI can be enhanced and developed through training (Keefer, Parker & Saklofske, 2018).

The ability model specifies that cognitive processing is related to emotions and vice versa, and comprises four hierarchically linked ability areas, which include perceiving emotions, facilitating thought using emotions, understanding emotions, and managing emotions (Kanesan & Fauzan, 2017). According to Mayer, Salovey and Caruso (2008), EI conceptualised as an ability "shows incremental validity for predicting socially relevant outcomes" (p.2).

For this reason, the ability model of emotional intelligence had been chosen for this study as it is closely aligned with the purpose of this study, which was to explore how EI is understood by foundation phase educators at an independent school in the Umlazi District, in order to enhance the emotional development of both educators and learners.

In order to explore foundation phase educators' understanding of EI, the ability model was the most fitting model to apply to this study as it highlights how educators at the school reason, understand and manage their emotions.

## **1.9 Methodology**

The findings of this study were steered by a set of opinions, beliefs and views, as these consist of participants' subjective realities. The data generated "shed light on how shared meanings inform or structure the social world and the study of the social world" (Schaffer, 2015, p. 1). As a result, this study rested within an interpretivist paradigm. Participants were recognised as producers as well as products of a social system. The data generation methods included focus group discussion and semi-structured interviews, aimed to explore foundation phase educators' understanding of EI, through the meaning that participants assign to the phenomenon.

In addition, this study fell under a qualitative approach as it aimed to interpret, decode and translate the meaning people bring to the concept EI. This type of research works with a series of data from these representations which are interpreted to find themes and patterns of knowledge.

## **1.10 Overview of research project**

**Chapter One** discussed the context and background of the study. It includes an outline of the rationale, purpose, significance of the study and the research questions. It also includes an introduction to the concept of EI, which forms the basis of the study.

**Chapter Two** consists of a literature review.

**Chapter Three** discusses a theoretical framework guiding the study.

**Chapter Four** discusses the research design, methodology, research paradigm, research sample and methods used in the study.

**Chapter Five** presents and analyses the data generated for this study. It also includes a discussion of findings.

**Chapter Six** is the final chapter of the study, which presents a concluding discussion on the findings. These findings reflect the nature and purpose of the study, which was to explore foundation phase educators' understanding of EI.

### **1.11 Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter provided an overview of the study. It includes an introduction, the location of the study, its purpose, the rationale and significance of the study. It also includes the objectives, research questions and an overview of the theoretical framework and methodology. Lastly it provided a brief overview of the research project from chapter one to chapter six.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1. Introduction**

The previous chapter discussed the context and background of the study. It included an outline of the rationale, purpose, and significance of the study, and the research questions posed. It also included an introduction to the concept of EI which forms the basis of the study. This chapter reviews current literature on EI, in terms of its history and development. It further discusses the concept of EI in terms of pedagogical implications.

The study of EI is fairly recent and has been around for approximately 30 years (Zeidner, Matthews & Roberts, 2012). The body of literature surrounding the topic rapidly expanded in 1995 due to the exposure it received in the media, as well as the claims that were made at the time (Mayer, Roberts & Barsade, 2008). Over the years, many definitions of EI have surfaced. Reuven Bar-On (2010) defined EI as an array of interrelated emotional and social competencies and skills that impact intelligent behaviour. Daniel Goleman (1995) defines EI as the ability to identify, assess and control one's own emotions, the emotion of others and that of groups. Mayer and Salovey (1990) defined the term as the ability to monitor one's own and others' emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use the information to guide one's thinking and actions. These definitions are taken from some of the most influential contributors to the study of EI and all these definitions have a common underlying concern, viz. an individual's ability to recognise, understand, and manage emotions.

Imagine an educator in a classroom of forty young learners. Most are second language speakers of English, and speak loudly as the educator walks in, ten minutes late, after a meeting with a disgruntled parent. She does not have the necessary worksheets for the lesson as the photocopier ran out of ink two days ago. She has marks due by midday, a compulsory workshop at two o'clock and extracurricular activities from half-past-three. As she walks into the classroom two learners are spitting profanities at each other over a chair.

This is a daily struggle for educators. It is difficult to remain positive or maintain a positive environment for optimal teaching and learning. However, an emotionally intelligent educator will

be optimistic and hopeful in the face of such challenges. This educator will have a strong sense of self-awareness and will be able to recognise and manage their own emotions so as to communicate positively and guide thinking and behaviour (Krishnan & Awang, 2020).

## **2.2. Understanding Emotions and Intelligence**

For many centuries, philosophers have debated over emotions and intelligence, and which is more important (Motallebzadeh, 2009). They have argued about trusting the system of logic rather than being controlled by desire. The Stoic philosophers of Ancient Greece believed that ‘logic was superior to feelings’ (Mayer, Robert & Barsade, 2008, p.508) and that emotions such as fear and envy arose from false judgement. They believed that a person who attained ‘moral and intellectual’ perfection would not experience these feelings. It was also believed that people could agree to rational arguments, but often disagree with feelings (Phelps, 2006). The belief that logic was valued over feelings was further illustrated by Stoic philosopher Marcus Aurelius, who reasoned “Let no emotions of the flesh, be they of pain or pleasure, affect the supreme and sovereign portion of the soul [i.e., reason]. See that it never becomes involved with them: it must limit itself to its own domain, and keep the feelings confined to their proper sphere” (cited in Konstan, 2005, p. 229).

However, this view was not accepted by all. Charles Darwin was of the opinion that emotions were adaptive and necessary for survival (Konstan, 2005). Darwin believed that emotions exist as they serve an adaptive role and motivate people to respond quickly to stimuli in the environment (Ciarrochi, Forgas & Mayer, 2006). During his research into the expression of emotions to support his theory of evolution, he proposed that emotions evolve and adapt over time. He argued that all humans and animals show emotion through similar behaviour and that emotions evolved and allow humans and animals to survive and reproduce (Ciarrochi, Forgas & Mayer, 2006). The sentimentalists of 18th century Europe also considered emotions as valuable (Schmitter, 2021). They supported the idea that feelings were truer than reason and that truth can be found in one’s feelings and intuition.

Over the years the study of emotions, their interaction with cognition as well as its valuable role in relationships and communication have subsequently become widely accepted. Research into

emotion and cognition and how they interact is increasingly widespread (Colverd & Hodgkin, 2011), and has led to research into EI.

### **2.3. The birth of EI**

As EI research developed, researchers began to recognise the correlation between emotions and cognition. Researchers such as Edward Thorndike and Howard Gardner developed their theories of social intelligence and multiple intelligences, respectively, as they understood that people learn in different ways (Sfetcu, 2020).

Thorndike defined social intelligence as “the ability to understand and manage men and women, boys and girls - to act wisely in human relations” (Kihlstrom & Cantor, 2000, p.564). Gardner's multiple intelligences suggest that people have different types of intellectual abilities such as musical intelligence or linguistic intelligence. He rejected the idea that a single set of intellectual capability existed as he believed that traditional ways of measuring intelligence, such as using IQ tests, were limited and restrictive, and often missed out on other intelligences (Yaumi et al., 2018).

Building on this knowledge, Payne, a doctoral student, was the first to use the term emotional intelligence in his PhD thesis which he completed in 1985 (Mayer, 2004). He stated that emotional intelligence involves creatively related fear, pain and desire, and highlighted the fact that many of the problems facing society today are the direct result of emotional ignorance (Rivers & Brackett, 2020).

In 1990, psychologists Salovey and Mayer began doing research on people's abilities and how emotions relate these (Zeidner, Matthews, & Roberts, 2012). They found that some individuals had a greater capacity than others when it came to processing emotional information and using it to guide thinking and behaviour (Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2008). As a result, they published their landmark article *Emotional Intelligence*, defined it as the ability to monitor one's own and others' emotions, to discriminate between them, and to use the information to guide one's thinking and actions (Salovey & Mayer, 1990), becoming the leading proponents of emotional intelligence. A few years later, writer and psychologist Daniel Goleman released his best-selling book titled, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*. The book sparked an enormous amount

of interest within the media and the general public, “owing to its extraordinary claims” (Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2008, p.4). Goleman wrote that EI was both an “answer to the violence plaguing our schools and as powerful and at times more powerful than IQ in predicting success in life” (Brackett et al. 2011, p. 89). In a later book, which focused on the application of EI in the workplace, Goleman describes the concept “as an array of positive attributes including political awareness, self-confidence, conscientiousness and achievement motives rather than focusing only on an intelligence that could help individuals solve problems effectively” (Brackett, Rivers & Salovey, 2011, p. 89).

The interest in EI rapidly gained momentum. Professionals began to make use of EI techniques and strategies in their businesses and daily practices. However, research on the topic was premature (Allen, MacCann, Matthews & Roberts, 2014). As a result, there was a lack of consensus over how to define and measure EI (Allen, MacCann, Matthews & Roberts, 2014). Fortunately, together with the rising interest in the concept came several competing theoretical models. Researchers began to make important strides towards understanding EI, its nature, components, and development (Allen, MacCann, Matthews & Roberts, 2014).

#### **2.4. The concept of EI**

Globally, researchers (Valente, Monteiro & Lourenco, 2018; Latiff, 2017; Riego de Dios, 2020, Richards, 2020; Aritzeta et al., 2016; Hamid, Suriansyah & Ngadimun, 2019; Tominey et al., 2017) have argued that emotional intelligence has the ability to enhance personal, social, and academic performance.

A study by Ibrahim et al. (2018) aimed to reveal the potential contributors of EI on working relationships, with clients and decision-makers postulating that EI is important in human relationships, where, through understanding their own and others’ emotions, individuals may be better equipped to understand and respect one another.

A study by Asrar-ul-Haq, Anwar, and Hassan (2017) investigating the impact of EI on teachers’ job performance found that it has a significant impact on teacher job performance. The study highlighted that in order for teachers to transfer knowledge in the proper way, they should have

effective skills, both physically and emotionally, that is, EI. The study goes on to state that the social pressures on teachers can result in emotional challenges, however if a teacher focuses on developing their emotional abilities, they will be equipped to manage their emotions and meet the societal challenges that disturb the balance of their emotions.

A study done by Thomas, Cassady and Heller (2017) explored the influence of EI on undergraduate academic performance. They found that students with high levels of EI enjoyed higher levels of academic performance over their university career. The study emphasised that emotionally intelligent students are better equipped to handle the complex social-emotional environment within the academic sector.

Molero et al. (2021) conducted a systematic review of the Influence of EI and burnout syndrome on a teachers' wellbeing. They found that EI gives teachers the ability to regulate emotions, making her stronger in terms of daily decision-making within the teaching environments. The study also highlighted that EI is a capacity that should be developed in teachers as it is a key factor for the success of education. Through the positive reinforcement of EI, stress levels and anxiety are reduced which leads to improved teaching practice, health and mental wellbeing of teachers. Similarly, a study by Kamboj and Garg (2021) analysed the extent to which intrinsic factors like EI and resilient character traits impact on the psychological wellbeing of schoolteachers. They established that EI has a significant impact on the psychological wellbeing of teachers.

A study conducted by Ahad et al. (2021) explored the relationship between work attitudes, organisational commitment, and EI among vocational college teachers in Malaysia. The results showed that there is a significant positive relationship between EI and work attitudes as good emotions give a good boost to one's attitude in carrying out tasks. It also found that positive EI can lead to good organisational commitment. The study highlighted that effectively nurtured EI provides a good indicator of a teacher's behaviour regarding task management.

A study conducted by Chandra (2020) analysed the perception of academic stress as experienced by students and coping strategies using their EI during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was concluded that many students started diverting themselves to various creative activities and taking up courses that helped them learn new technical skills. Thus, students tried to cope with the negative effects arising from the pandemic by using EI and distancing themselves from boredom and depressive thoughts.

The study highlighted that the dramatic change brought about by COVID-19 has had a negative impact on educational institutions, educators, students and their families and their emotional, social and financial well-being. Education institutes around the world were shut down, teachers and students were required to work online. This change disturbed the entire process of teaching and learning. Teachers, students and parents were forced to adapt quickly to the new changes to stay afloat. The uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic caused immense stress and confusion to many individuals and could affect the education sectors for many years to come. Thus, it is crucial to improve the mental health of vulnerable populations. EI needs to be implemented at all levels of education as the concept is rooted in the understanding of emotions, helping oneself to direct the emotional reactions and labeling the experiences of different emotions and helping others to understand and channel their emotions. John (2021) claims that individuals with high EI are better able to withstand stressful situations and are less likely to negatively impact their mental health.

It is clear from these studies that EI is a multifaceted concept that is influenced by social and environmental factors. It consists of mental skills, abilities, and capacities relating to emotions and cognition and how they interact. Research on EI has proved to have a positive effect on humans and how we communicate, deal with stress and anxiety, and manage relationships (Mayer, Roberts & Barsade, 2008). Overall, acquiring emotional intelligence can aid in effectively overcoming life's challenges.

In the current literature, EI is conceptualised as an ability, a trait, and a combination of the two known as a mixed model. As a result, three dominant models of EI exist, which have strengthened the conceptualisation of EI. These include the ability model, the trait model and the mixed model. The ability model focuses on an individual's ability to process emotional information and how it is used to navigate one's social environment (Drigas & Papoutsi, 2018). This model uses ability-based tests to measure EI. The trait model refers to an individual's self-perceptions of their emotional abilities (Abacioglu, Volman & Fischer, 2019). Their abilities are measured using self-reports. The mixed model combines components of both the trait and ability model when examining EI. It represents aspects of an individual's personality, as well as the ability to motivate oneself in social and emotional situations. It also makes use of self-reports as a measurement tool (Brackett, Rivers & Salovey, 2011).

Despite the controversies surrounding EI, it is still recognised as a valuable concept. Some propose that understanding one's emotions and the emotions of others is the key to a satisfying life (Drigas & Papoutsis, 2018). For many years, cognitive intelligence or IQ has been at the forefront as it measures how successful people are in areas such as memory and problem-solving. However, the concept of EI acknowledges that there are other ways of being intelligent, and provides a new way to understand and manage thinking and behaviours. It also suggests that it is a skill that can be developed throughout one's life (Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2008).

## **2.5. EI and its impact on Teaching**

EI as a concept has become a key factor in the educational environment as it is believed to contribute to the improvement of teaching practice, mental well-being of teachers and has an impact on student development (Barlozek, 2013).

Educators have an emotionally laden job as they are required to nurture, influence, mediate and educate students in a positive manner. They are required to maintain good relationships with unruly students and demanding parents, while trying to overcome the challenges present within a schooling environment. The role of an educator is both physically and mentally demanding. In addition, the expectations of educators during this time of rapid technological advancement are crucial as educators are no longer the primary source of knowledge.

Safina et al. (2020) explored EI in teachers' activities at two state universities in Russia. Their aim was to help educators acquire effective skills to build optimal relationships by measuring the development level of students' EI. They found that developed skills of EI are of great importance to teachers and children as it enhanced successful social interaction. This study also highlighted that "a modern teacher... does not take priority when organising cognitive activity" (p. 62) due to the "intensive development of information technologies [which] provide people with unlimited access to information" (p. 62). Thus, there is a shift in the primary role of an educator, where she/he is no longer the primary source of knowledge, but is expected to develop personal abilities within students that provide a basis for EI. Furthermore, the World Economic Forum (2016) considers EI to be one of the top ten skills needed to thrive in the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR).

Therefore, learning to teach involves not only mastering how to teach content matter, but also how to recognise and manage emotions for constructive teaching and learning to take place. Teaching is a social activity that involves people coming together in a social space, one in which emotions influence both teachers' instructional practices as well as the student's response to the experience of teaching and learning (Richards, 2020). It is also stated that emotions play a major role in teaching and how students respond to what they have learned. Thus, teaching not only involves the transference of knowledge, but it also includes emotional aspects of teaching and learning.

Krishnan and Awang (2020) conducted a study that investigated the role of EI in teaching. They found that EI plays an important role in every aspect of a teacher's life and highlighted that EI should be developed amongst teachers as it helps to maintain balanced and trusting relationships, to understand others better and clearly interpret behaviours. This study indicated that EI training can be effective to address stress related issues and can positively affect students as teachers will be able to create a healthy environment if they are able to identify and understand the needs of students.

Dolev and Leshem (2016) investigated the impact of a teacher-centered EI training on teachers' EI. They found that the training programme was perceived by the participants to have enhanced their competencies which included self-awareness, empathy, and interpersonal relationships. These are all associated with effective teaching. The shift in self-awareness also enhanced their awareness of students' emotions and their EI competencies, which encouraged them to change the ways they view and interact with students. Teachers have become more attuned to emotional situations in the classroom and more often addressed them which contributed to better class management and improved climate.

It is evident that emotional intelligence can be enhanced with proper guidance and training. It is also clear that an understanding of emotional intelligence will enable educators to manage their emotions and those of their students and communicate effectively. Mangla (2020) studied the relationship between EI and teaching attitudes of B.Ed. students. The results indicated that students who have better EI have a positive attitude towards teaching. The study also highlighted that EI plays a vital role in the achievement and success of students. Richards (2020) states that an effectively positive environment puts the brain in the optimal state for learning resulting in minimal stress and maximum engagement with the material to be learned.

A study by Estrada et al. (2021) investigated whether EI influences academic performance and the role of compassion and engagement in education for sustainable development. The study found that EI positively relates to compassion and higher levels of commitment, which led to better academic performance. Furthermore, the study highlights that the Sustainable Development Goals, set up by the United Nations to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all by the year 2030, places the human being in the centre of sustainable development and emotional learning as a priority. To achieve these goals fundamental transformation is required in citizens, their actions and behaviours as well as the ways in which society functions. These transformations are heavily dependent on the role that education plays in the process. The study goes on to state that EI allows us to solve problems effectively and to work cooperatively with others, which is crucial for achieving personal and professional sustainability. It encourages individuals to adopt innovative solutions for a more sustainable construction of life paths. Therefore, to build socially sustainable organisations, young individuals must be trained to be compassionate as part of their education. This includes training teachers appropriately in EI to impart an education for sustainable development.

If we look closely at EI and what it entails, one can recognise the need for EI in teaching. South African educators and students are often faced with daily challenges, which affect performance and development. Current studies have investigated directly how EI can influence academic and social performance. However, only a few studies have explored how EI is understood by educators. This is the gap that the current study aims to fill. Exploring the ways in which foundation phase educators understand EI can pave the way for further recommendations regarding the use of EI and its pedagogical concerns.

## **2.6. Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter reviewed the body of literature surrounding emotional intelligence. It covered early research that contributed to the study of EI, its popularisation, growth, and development. This chapter also covers the ways in which emotional intelligence has been conceptualised over the years and provides an understanding of its implication within the educational sector. Upon review of the literature, it is evident that there is insufficient research on foundation phase educators' understanding of emotional intelligence. The following chapter discusses the theoretical framework guiding the study.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

The previous chapter reviewed extant literature on educators' understanding of EI within schools, universities, and training colleges. It discussed the concept of EI and its relevance to educators, learners and the larger educational sector. In addition, it specifically discussed the implications of EI in teaching. This chapter surveys and provides the theoretical framework that underpins this study.

Over the past 30 years there has been a resurgence of interest in the study of EI. It began with Mayer and Salovey who introduced the first construct of the concept, provided a definition, and made suggestions about its measurement (Mayer et al., 2011). Following this development Goleman published his book *Emotional Intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ*, which shot EI through public and private sectors alike. The popularisation of EI brought many misconceptions about the construct that were beyond its scope and original definition (Mayer & Caruso, 2008). Goleman claimed that EI “accounts for 80 percent of work performance and life success” (Waterhouse, 2006, p. 253). It is believed that these claims were made to attract a commercial audience, while scientists struggled to develop EI as a valid psychological construct. As a result, it became increasingly important for scientists and researchers to properly clarify and develop a robust, consistent and therefore trustworthy construct of EI. In doing so, factors such as intelligence, personality, temperament, information processing and emotional self-regulation were considered in the conceptualisation of EI, which led to the belief that EI may be multifaceted and could be studied from different perspectives (Fiori & Vesely-Maillefer, 2018)

#### **3.2. Models of EI**

The widespread interest in EI and its implication on the various sectors of life resulted in the development of several EI constructs. Each strives to conceptualise EI in their own way and provide specific descriptions, definitions and measures. The three most popular models will be discussed to provide the reader with context and understanding. Each of these models view EI differently with overlapping or common underlying aspects. They conceptualised EI either as an

ability or a combination of ability and personality characteristics, known as mixed models (Dhani & Sharma, 2016).

Mayer and Salovey developed the ability model of EI, which has been the most influential in scientific literature (Kewalramani, Agrawal & Rastogi, 2015). They claim that the use of the term EI stresses the concept of an intelligence that processes and benefits from emotions. From this perspective, EI is composed of mental abilities, skills or capacities (Mayer et al., 2011). In simple terms, this model views EI as a form of intelligence.

The mixed models of EI includes Goleman's competency model and Bar-on's Model of emotional-social intelligence. They are considered mixed models as they consist of personality characteristics mixed in with the abilities of emotional intelligence (Livesey, 2017; Bhochhibhoya & Branscum, 2015). Goleman's model suggests that "Emotional Intelligence is observed when a person demonstrates the competencies that constitute self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and social skills at appropriate times and ways in sufficient frequency to be effective in the situation" (Livesey, 2017, p. 26). Bar-on's model of emotional-social intelligence suggests that EI is "an array of non-cognitive capabilities, competencies, and skills that influence one's ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures" (Newsome et al., 2000, p. 1007).

Mayer and Salovey's ability model will be used as the theoretical framework for this study, thus this model will be discussed in detail. The mixed models will not be used in this study, however, they will be discussed briefly to provide the reader with an understanding.

### **3.2.1. The Ability Model**

Mayer and Salovey's model is the only ability model that exists and is the most widely accepted model of EI. The model is divided into four ability branches, which are hierarchically arranged from the most cognitively basic to the most complex ability (Brackett et al., 2016). The first branch is concerned with perceiving emotion, the second branch involves facilitating thought using emotion, the third branch deals with understanding emotion and the fourth branch discusses the management of emotions (Caruso et al., 2015). Each of these branches will be discussed below:

- (1) Perceiving emotions concerns the ability to accurately perceive emotional content within an environment that includes non-verbal signals such as facial expressions, body language,

tone of voice or pictures. This branch also concerns the ability to be self-aware of emotions and to express emotions and emotional needs accurately to others (Pasha, 2016). An educator who is skilled in emotion perception can identify emotions and thoughts in their own physical states, as well as in students' facial expressions, vocalisations, postures, and movements. This skill will enable an educator to gain information about his/her students and provide appropriate guidance. The basic component of this branch is the ability to recognise non-verbal perception and expression of emotions and to distinguish between emotions that are accurate, or inaccurate, and honest, or dishonest (Elfenbein & Maccann, 2017).

(2) *Facilitating thought using emotions* involves the ability to use emotions to promote thinking and cognitive activity. This includes the analysis of, attendance to, or reflection on emotional information which assists higher-order cognitive activities such as reasoning, problem-solving, decision-making and consideration of the perspectives of others (Dhani & Sharma, 2016). This branch involves the ability to distinguish among the different emotions one is feeling and to identify those that are influencing thought processes by directing attention to important information. An educator skilled in facilitating thought using emotions is able to select and prioritise cognitive activities that are most conducive to their current mood as well as change their mood to fit a given situation in a way that would enhance educator-learner relationships. The educator would also be able to conduct more effective problem-solving, reasoning, and decision-making through creative endeavours. Essentially, this branch demonstrates the ability of emotions to communicate with the cognitive system to enhance thinking and behaviour.

(3) *Understanding emotions* deals with the knowledge and understanding of emotions and the relation between emotions. It involves an understanding of the ways that emotions change over time and the way they blend together to form complex emotional experiences. It includes the ability to understand which situations will lead to certain emotions and how cultures may differ in their evaluation of emotions (Olderbak, Semmler & Doebler, 2018). This branch deals with the ability to understand that emotions convey meaning. An educator skilled in understanding emotion is able to identify complex emotional messages,

potential actions, and the transition relationships between emotions. For example, a skilled educator would be able to recognise that a student is getting frustrated through subtle changes in tone or expression and offer appropriate guidance as he/she is able to label and categorise emotions. Norboevich (2020), states that “a full understanding of emotions evokes an understanding of the meaning of emotions coupled with the ability to reason about these meanings” (p.101).

(4) *Managing emotions* refers to the ability to manage emotions effectively which includes regulation of one’s own and other’s emotions and responding appropriately. It also includes the ability to stay open to both pleasant and unpleasant feelings and the ability to reflectively connect or detach from an emotion (Caruso, 2015). An educator skilled in emotional management has the capacity to maintain, shift and cater emotional responses, either positive or negative, to a given situation. They are able to evaluate strategies to control emotions and manage emotions within oneself and their students to achieve a desired outcome. For example, an educator with high-level emotion management skills is able to maintain a positive mood in a challenging situation or recovering quickly from being angry.

### **3.2.2. The Mixed Models**

#### **3.2.2.1. Daniel Goleman’s Competency Model**

This model focuses on workplace success and was designed specifically for this purpose. For the purpose of this model, Goleman defines EI as a group of skills that enable the best leaders to maximise their own and their followers’ performance (Goleman, 2012). He also defined emotional competence as a learned capability based on EI that results in outstanding performance at work (Goleman, 2000). Goleman’s model differed from the ability model as he added a few personality traits such as trustworthiness, self-confidence, empathy and teamwork (Kanesan & Fauzen, 2019). He believed that EI was a “latent inborn talent” (p. 46), and that emotional competencies were not innate talents but can be learned and developed (Gayathri & Meenakshi, 2013).

### **3.2.2.2. Reuven Bar-On's Model of Emotional-Social intelligence**

According to this model, emotional-social intelligence is “a cross-section of interrelated emotional and social competencies, skills and facilitators that determine how effectively one can understand themselves and others, express themselves, relate to others and cope with daily demands” (Bar-On, 2006, p. 5). The purpose of this model is to assess personal qualities that enable an individual to possess better emotional well-being (Razzaq, 2016). It emphasises how personality traits influence a person's general well-being and relates to the potential for performance and success, rather than performance or success itself. As a result, it is considered as process-oriented rather than out-come oriented (Gayathri & Meenakshi, 2013).

It is often argued that the mixed models of emotional intelligence focus more on personality traits instead of emotional intelligence, and that the construct encompasses multiple aspects of emotional and personal knowledge, which are loosely related to emotional intelligence (Gayathri, 2015; Zeidner, Matthews & Roberts, 2004). Brackett et al. (2016) also argue that Goleman's description of EI encompasses “a plethora of valued, nonintellectual human characteristics that are beyond the scope of emotional intelligence, strictly defined” (p.514).

### **3.3. Rationale for theoretical framework**

Emotional Intelligence has the ability to help teachers deal with stress (Meridan-Lopez, Bakker & Extremera, 2019), it has a positive effect on employee engagement of teachers (Sudibjo & Sutarji, 2020), and is critical in the process of teaching as many of the problems that arise in teaching are rooted in the way teachers handle their own feelings as well as those of their students (Ghanizadeh & Moafian, 2009). Evidence has shown that addressing and nourishing EI within the context of education contributes to academic and life success. It is therefore crucial for educators to develop their EI skills to enhance the quality of their teaching as these skills influence student engagement, classroom management, attachment to school, and academic performance.

Darwin claims that emotions have adaptive values in preparing humans to respond to changes in the environment (Tyng, 2017). However, in order to respond appropriately one needs to be able to recognise, regulate, understand, and manage emotions in ways that influence or promote positive behaviours. The ability model states that “Emotional intelligence involves the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they

facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth” (Mayer & Salovey, 1997 p. 10). It suggests that emotions are crucial for humans as it provides opportunities for individuals to learn to process and use emotions intelligently. As a result, this model has strong potential to inform, shape, and enhance educational practices and the impact of emotional intelligence is particularly powerful when interventions are grounded in theory and empirical evidence.

Fiori and Vesley-Maillefer (2018) believe that the ability model is the mainstream model of EI as it has received widespread acknowledgement and use and has been foundational in the development of other EI models. Brackett et al. (2016) claim that the ability model has been called the “gold standard” (p. 515) in emotional intelligence research, probably due to the fact that it predicts certain outcomes over and above general intelligence and personality.

It is for this reason that Mayer and Salovey’s ability model was chosen for conducting this study. The model specifically combines ideas from the areas of intellect and emotion and acknowledges that emotions can be intellectually analysed and recognised. It suggests that emotions convey meaning and that an individual’s ability to appropriately respond to those meanings can be enhanced and developed as they work through the four hierarchically arranged ability branches. It clearly states that emotional intelligence must be developed strategically starting with basic ability components such as recognising non-verbal perception and expressions of emotions, to higher-level complex abilities such as the ability to prolong or detach from an emotional state. More importantly this model postulates that emotional intelligence should be conceptualised as a form of intelligence because it includes sets of mental abilities that can be learned.

The first branch of the ability model refers to the perception of emotion and the ability to identify emotions in oneself and others. It specifically deals with non-verbal reception and expression of emotion (Emmerling, Shanwal, & Mandal, 2008). This skill is crucial for foundation phase educators as learners in this phase are young and are often unable to express themselves using words. They rely on educators to acknowledge their non-verbal expressions. For example, if a learner is sad, he/she may sulk or withdraw from classroom activities, another learner may cry or bury their head in their arms. To build a positive learning environment, the educator must investigate why a learner is expressing these emotions. Learning to identify emotion is important for relationship building between educator and learner. However, an educator is only able to

identify these emotions if he/she is aware of their own emotion and is able to deal with them effectively (Nguyen, 2019). Once skilled in the perception of emotion an educator is able to enhance relationship building effective communication, as he/she is aware of their own emotions as well as those of others, and is able to provide the necessary support. In addition, this ability is also crucial for educators who teach second language learners as being perceptive of non-verbal emotion is sometimes the only way to effectively communicate with second language learners.

The second branch of the ability model involves using emotions to facilitate thought and refers to the capacity of emotions to guide the cognitive system and promote thinking. It helps to direct thinking towards matters that are truly important (O'Connor et al., 2019). This means that an educator skilled in using emotion to facilitate thought is able to use his/her emotions to guide daily processes such as decision-making and problem-solving by selecting thoughts that are appropriate for classroom engagement. This branch also includes creative thought processes that can enhance decision-making and problem-solving within the teaching and learning environment (McCleskey, 2012).

The third branch deals with understanding emotions and includes the ability to understand that emotions convey meaning and are associated with specific sets of actions (Caruso et al., 2015). This skill is important for educators, as it enables one to understand what they are feeling, and to reason about how they will act upon it. For example, an educator may experience a feeling of anger toward a disrespectful learner, and may feel that it is unfair for him/her to experience this on a regular basis. An educator skilled in understanding emotions will acknowledge that his/her feeling of anger is associated with specific sets of possible actions such as peacemaking, attack, retribution, or withdrawal to seek a sense of calm, however he/she will select the action that is most appropriate for effective classroom management (Olderbak, Semmler & Doebler, 2018).

The fourth and final branch refers to managing emotions and involves the ability to regulate one's own and other's emotions and deal with those emotions effectively. It also includes the ability to stay open to both pleasant and unpleasant feelings and the ability to reflectively connect or detach from an emotion (Caruso, 2015). Educators are faced with frustrating and challenging situations on a daily basis, however an educator skilled in this area is able to manage and regulate his/her emotions to deal with these frustrating and challenging situations in a way that enables both educator and learner to move forward while acknowledging both the positive and negative emotion

and how they affect the situation. This process can enhance effective communication and positive growth and development between educator and learner.

As foundation phase educators work through each branch, they are able to apply the specific skills within the teaching and learning environment to create a positive teaching and learning environment, to enhance effective communication, build trustworthy relationships, and ultimately become emotionally intelligent educators.

In addition, emotional intelligence measured as an ability correlates with important outcomes in the domains of health, relationships, academics and the workplace (MacCann et al., 2020). It measures EI using performance tests, which score individuals based on their capacity to perform certain mental tasks (Carson, Carson & Birkenmeier, 2000).

Mixed models use self-reports to measure one's ability to cope with environmental demands and pressures rather than cognitive abilities. Participants estimate and report on their own or others' capabilities, instead of demonstrating them (Jordan, Aston-James & Ashkanasy, 2006). Even though self-reports are quick, easy, and inexpensive, they are problematic, as they overlap with existing personality measures and capture perceived abilities, which are vulnerable to faking as participants can make up answers for positive scoring. The study of the reliability and validity of self-report have not been undertaken or published (O'Connor et al., 2019). According to Brackett et al. (2016) the validity of the performance measure of EI has been demonstrated in multiple studies. They also stated that studies have shown that measuring EI as an ability compared with self-reports is a more efficacious method for predicting academic success. As a result, the performance measures are preferred as other people's views of an individual performance are more reliable than their self-reports.

It is important to note that a perfect measure of emotional intelligence does not exist, as the field is still in its developmental phase. Even though the performance measures are preferred, it also has limitations, in that they do not capture the real-time application of emotion knowledge (Rathore & Chadha, 2015). EI is a complex construct and there is still much to explore. The general consensus is that it is difficult to measure EI, and that no truly robust measure exists.

None of the measurements discussed above were used in this study. However, they were discussed to highlight the evidence and trends that currently exist in emotional intelligence literature.

### **3.4. Chapter summary**

This chapter provides the theoretical framework of the study in order to explore foundation phase educators' understanding of emotional intelligence. The existing models and definitions were reviewed, and Mayer and Salovey's ability model was discussed in detail as the chosen model for the theoretical framework. Furthermore, the measurement of each model was discussed briefly. This chapter also provides a rationale for the chosen framework and why it is relevant to this study. The following chapter will discuss the research design of this study and will include the methodology, research paradigm, sampling methods, and the ethical principles that guide it.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **4.1. Introduction**

The previous chapter provided a thorough review of the concept of EI, the most popular models of the concept, and a rationale for the chosen framework. This chapter will specifically focus on the research methodology. This includes an overview of the research question and the research design. It reviews the Interpretivist Paradigm and why it was chosen as well as the Qualitative Approach and how it underpinned this study. In addition, purposive sampling, online focus groups, discussions, and semi-structured interviews are discussed. This chapter also focuses on aspects of trustworthiness, credibility, dependability, transferability, conformability, and ethical considerations.

#### **4.2. Research Question**

In an attempt to explore how foundation phase educators understand emotional intelligence, this study focused on the following research questions:

- What are the foundation phase educators' understanding of emotional intelligence?
- How emotionally intelligent are foundation phase educators?
- Why do foundation phase educators understand emotional intelligence in the way that they do?

#### **4.3. Research Design**

A research design is intended to provide an appropriate structure for conducting a specific study. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018), research design refers to the overall strategy that a researcher chooses to integrate the different components of the study in a coherent and logical way, thereby ensuring that the research problem is effectively addressed. This study was located within an interpretivist paradigm and was supported by a qualitative approach.

### **4.3.1. Interpretivist Paradigm**

The interpretivist paradigm is based on the belief that reality is subjective, multi-layered, and socially constructed (Dean, 2018). This means that its purpose is to explore the meanings that participants place on a specific social situation and to acknowledge that a single phenomenon can have multiple interpretations. It recognises that individuals, with their own varied backgrounds, assumptions, and experiences contribute to the on-going construction of reality (Wahyuni, 2012).

This study rests within an interpretivist paradigm, as it is concerned with understanding and interpreting the meanings foundation phase educators attach to the concept of emotional intelligence at an independent school in the Umlazi District. The study focused on the importance of understanding a situation through the eyes of the participants and aims to gather a deep understanding of emotional intelligence by exploring how foundation phase educators understand the concept within their environment.

According to Phothongsunam (2010), an interpretivist researcher becomes part of the research as a meaning-maker interacting with the other meaning makers and as a result the research becomes the construction of meaning between the participants. As the researcher of this study, I was part of what was being researched, and not separated from it. As a foundation phase educator I have my own beliefs and opinions about emotional intelligence and how it is understood. However, I want to know how other foundation phase educators from different backgrounds understand emotional intelligence. Thus I was involved in the meaning-making process by interacting with participants during the data gathering process. To avoid researcher's bias I ensured that questions were simple, ordered from general to specific questions and were free of words that could introduce bias. Data was analysed with a clear, unbiased mind and pre-existing assumptions were kept at bay. Wahyuni (2012) claims that interpretivist researchers favour interaction and dialogue with participants, as they believe that the social world is constructed by human beings, and that it is people who give meaning to their social world. As a result, this study recognised participants as producers of a social system and prioritised the natural forms of communication and interaction that took place during the data gathering process. In addition, Phothongsunam (2010) claims that the strength of the interpretivist paradigm comes from its naturalistic approach as it relies on natural forms of

human communication. Thanh and Thanh (2015) note that interpretivists draw on a range of methods, tools and techniques to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Thus, this study made use of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions to gather data and investigate how foundation phase educators perceive and make sense of emotional intelligence within their environment. This allowed for the richness in the insights gathered.

Adopting an interpretivist paradigm enables a researcher to provide an in-depth understanding of a specific social construct as the researcher aims to uncover inside perspectives of social phenomena from its participants (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). It highlights that true knowledge can only be obtained by deep interpretation of the subject and subscribes to what is called constructivism, which refers to the ability to construct knowledge rather than just passively take in information (Rahi, 2017). As a result, interpretivist researchers prefer to work with qualitative data, which provides a rich descriptions of social constructs.

#### **4.3.2. Qualitative Approach**

Qualitative research cannot be attached to a single specific definition as it “includes a vast range of kinds of research, has a wide range of meaning and covers a heterogeneity of fields” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018, p. 305). However, many researchers have attempted to define qualitative research and what it entails. Palic et al. (2015) state that qualitative research is “an umbrella term covering an array of interpretative techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world” (p. 5). Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2020) believe that qualitative research is an approach that allows for the examination of people’s experiences in detail by using a specific set of research methods such as in-depth interviews, focus groups discussions, observations, content analysis, visual methods and life histories or biographies. Alharahsheh and Pius (2020) argue that qualitative research is a strategy for systematic collection, organisation, and interpretation of textual information.

In simple terms, qualitative research is used to discover and gain an in-depth understanding of individual experiences, thoughts, and opinions to delve deeper into the phenomena under study.

The aim of qualitative research is to understand the social reality of individuals, groups or cultures as closely as possible to the way in which participants feel and live it (Mohajan, 2018). It is inductive and exploratory in nature, as it seeks to explain how and why a particular phenomenon operates as it does in a particular context (Flick, 2018). It is subjective, in-depth, interpretive, and open-ended.

Qualitative researchers study participants in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning individuals bring to them (Bridget et al., 2014). These researchers immerse themselves into these natural settings to gain perspective of their participants and the phenomena under study. This allows for direct interaction with participants. A variety of methods are used for data generation, and include interviews, focus group discussions, open-ended questionnaires, and participant observation (Aspers & Corte, 2019).

Through the use of a variety of methods in qualitative research, rich, detailed data is gathered, which leaves the participants' perspectives intact (Nyumba et al., 2017). It provides multiple contexts for understanding the phenomena under study. Qualitative researchers are able to obtain a more realistic view of the lived world that cannot be understood or explained in numerical data (Nyumba et al., 2017). The results gathered from qualitative research provide a holistic view of the phenomena under study, and can be helpful in pioneering new ways of understanding or responding to local situations, conditions, and needs of participants (Silverman, 2016).

This study falls within a qualitative approach, as it aims to interpret, decode, and translate the meaning people bring to the concept of EI. It aims to make sense of and understand how emotional intelligence is understood by foundation phase educators. Conducting research in qualitative settings is beneficial to both the researcher and participants as research is conducted in natural settings, which makes participants feel comfortable (Miller & Minton, 2016). The main reason for choosing a qualitative approach is that it allowed the researcher to develop an understanding of how each participant made sense of their world and experiences with emotional intelligence. This approach provided the most apt way in which to answer the research question, which was to explore how foundation phase educators understand emotional intelligence. This study did not seek to make generalisations, but rather, sought to describe what understanding and meaning

foundation phase educators in this particular context, attached to the concept of EI. The data gathered was interpreted and was used to understand and improve ways in which these educators engage with the concept of emotional intelligence within the foundation phase.

#### **4.4. Sampling**

Purposive sampling was used to select participants for this study. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique commonly used with qualitative studies (Taherdoost, 2016). According to Palinkas et al. (2016), purposive sampling is used to identify and select information-rich participants related to the phenomenon of interest. It enables researchers to deliberately select specific participants who are able to provide important information that cannot be obtained from other choices. Similarly, Chivanga and Monyai (2016) state that purposive sampling allows researchers to select participants whom they judge to be most able to provide the information required to answer the research question. One of the benefits of purposive sampling is that it enables the researcher to eliminate potential participants who will not provide relevant data (Acharya & Prakash, 2013). It is inexpensive, and concentrates on participants who are particularly suitable for the purposes of the research (Singh & Masuku, 2014). Purposive sampling allowed me to make specific choices about which groups of people to include in a sample based on their knowledge and experience.

Eight foundation phase educators were purposely selected as participants for this study. These educators are employed at an independent school in the Umlazi District of Kwazulu-Natal Province. The school has a strong focus on EI and offers it as a subject to all learners from Grade 1 to 12. Some educators at the school have had extensive training in EI and teaching it as a subject. Other educators, who have only joined the school recently, have had little to no training, however they have been introduced to EI teaching material. Within the sample selected for this study, four educators have had extensive EI training, while the remaining four have only been introduced to EI teaching material. The foundation phase team at the above-mentioned school is made up of nine educators including myself. Thus, eight educators were selected as participants while I served as the researcher. These educators were specifically selected as they are all foundation phase educators who have varying levels of exposure to EI. They teach learners ranging from Grade R

to Three, and are all South African females aged between 25 and 40. There are no male educators within the foundation phase team.

The educators were approached during a foundation phase staff meeting, where I introduced my study, the research questions, and the aim of the study. I also informed the educators of the expectations and the time required to conduct online interviews and focus group discussions. Due to COVID-19 rules and regulations all interviews and focus groups discussions had to be held online using the Google Meet Video Conferencing Platform. At the end of the meeting, I offered the educators a short information pack, which detailed all the relevant information regarding my study, together with a consent form if they chose to participate. I reassured them that all personal details will be confidential and that they can remove themselves from the study at any stage if they become uncomfortable, with any consequences. All eight educators chose to participate, thus a sample of eight foundation phase educators were selected from a research population which consists of foundation phase educators within primary schools in South Africa.

## **4.5. Data Generation**

### **4.5.1. Online Focus group discussions**

Focus group discussion is a research technique used in qualitative research to gain an in-depth understanding of social issues, through group interaction (Ciesielska & Jemielniak, 2018). The group often consists of carefully selected individuals from similar backgrounds or experiences. A chosen topic or phenomena is discussed during focus group discussion to identify and explore how people think, experience and understand the phenomena under study (Nyumba et al., 2017). The researcher is considered as the facilitator during focus group discussions as he/she leads and steers the discussion, while allowing participants to interact with each other (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). The researchers' reliance on the interaction within the group is crucial as it allows for the participants' views to emerge, yielding a collective rather than an individual perspective (Scheelbeek, 2020). It is from the interaction that data is generated, hence the dynamic of the group is important. Focus groups discussions offer qualitative researchers an efficient method of generating data. The thoughts and beliefs of the group can be captured at one time and the free-flowing discussion allows for rich data to be generated. In addition, a more relaxed environment

is created within a group, as opposed to one-on-one interviews. In a group, participants may feel more comfortable expressing their views when they are shared by others (Dilshad & Latif, 2013).

This study made use of online focus group discussion to generate qualitative data based on participants' attitudes, perceptions, and opinions about EI. Participants were presented with a comic strip, which was used to encourage discussion about EI. Questions were based on the comic strip and its relations to emotional intelligence. The use of the comic strip was deliberate, as it encouraged in-depth discussion about EI without direct questioning of each participant. Instead, each participant offered their input within the context of the comic strip and this created a safe space as the focus was the comic strip and its correlation to emotional intelligence. Thus, participants shared their experiences, opinions and views about emotional intelligence through the use of the comic strip. The comic strip showed two friends, Calvin and Susie, and took as its subject matter the expectations people have for one another. The focus group discussion was conducted online using Google Meet, due to COVID-19 restrictions. It took place during school hours after all learners had been dismissed, and was recorded with permission from each participant. Seven out of the eight participants attended.

#### **4.5.2. Online Semi structured interview**

According to Wishkoski (2020), semi-structured interviews is a qualitative data generation strategy in which the researcher asks participants a series of predetermined but open-ended questions. Philipps and Mrowczynski (2021) note that semi-structured interviews provide qualitative data and create an understanding of a given phenomenon for both the researcher and the participant, stating that a semi-structured interview setting is a “co-constructed interface between interviewer and interviewee, which can serve as a space for information sharing, confrontation, reflection and learning,” (p. 61). During semi-structured interviews the researcher serves as the interviewer and explicitly asks questions relating to the core elements of the phenomenon under study (Adams, 2015). Semi-structured interviews are flexible to new ideas and provide opportunities to spontaneously explore topics relevant to the phenomenon in question (Alshenqeeti, 2014). It is the responsibility of the interviewer to ensure data is captured in key areas, while allowing flexibility and for participants to bring their own personality and perspective to the discussion.

For the purpose of this study, online semi-structured interviews were used to generate data from individual participants. The interviews were based on a mock scenario in which a frustrated educator reacts to one of the learners in her classroom. Please see excerpt below:

*Peter is a learner in Miss Troy's class. He is a quiet learner, who struggles to concentrate on schoolwork and prefers to be alone. Miss Troy is an excellent teacher. She feels frustrated and helpless when she asks Peter a question, in the classroom and he just stares back at her. This makes her lose her temper and she shouts at him: "Peter, you idiot! You are wasting my time. You belong at a school for retards!"*

Participants were asked specific questions relating to the mock scenario and the relevance of emotional intelligence to the scenario. The aim of the semi-structured interview was to establish how participants understood and experienced emotional intelligence. Each interview was conducted online using Google Meet due to COVID-19 rules and regulations. Participants were offered the opportunity to choose a time slot that was most suitable to them to ensure comfort and to reduce any possible interruption during the interviews. All interviews were conducted on school premises during school hours, when educators had a free period. Their classrooms were used for the interview.

#### **4.6. Trustworthiness**

According to Connelly (2016), trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to the degree of confidence in data, interpretation, and methods used by means of which to ensure the quality of a study. Elo et al. (2014) state that the aim of trustworthiness in qualitative research is to support the argument that the research findings are worth paying attention to. Furthermore, Anney (2014) believes that qualitative researchers consider dependability, credibility, transferability, and conformability as trustworthiness criteria to ensure the rigour of qualitative findings.

Qualitative methods are often criticised for the lack of clarity of research purpose, rigour, and validity (Shufutinsky, 2020). This is probably because qualitative studies are open-ended, interpretive, and naturalistic. Unlike quantitative studies, qualitative studies are concerned with understanding human behaviour, rather than discovering facts. They assume that there are multiple

realities, whereas quantitative studies assume a fixed and measurable reality. Within qualitative studies, data is collected through participant observation and interviews, while quantitative data is collected through measurables (Almalki, 2016). One of the main benefits of qualitative studies is that participants provide rich descriptions of their experiences, and it is the evaluation of this rich data that provides understanding and/or solutions to complex phenomena (White et al., 2012). Thus, it is the rigour of qualitative research that permits it to be acceptable and in order to achieve trustworthiness researchers need to demonstrate to its readers the procedures used to ensure that its methods are reliable (Loh, 2013). As a result, the following criteria, highlighted by Anney (2014) will be used to discuss the trustworthiness of this study, credibility, dependability, transferability, and conformability.

#### **4.6.1. Credibility**

This refers to the confidence that can be placed in the truth of the research findings (Noble & Smith, 2015). Henry (2015) states that a qualitative researcher establishes rigour of the study by adopting credibility strategies, such as triangulation and/or prolonged engagement in the field.

Within this study methodological triangulation was an important aspect to ensure credibility of research results. Methodological triangulation involves using more than one kind of method to study a phenomenon and helps researchers to cross-examine the integrity of participants' responses (Bekhet et al., 2012). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) state that confidence in a study can be achieved through methodological triangulation, as this procedure attempts to explain more fully the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint. They also claim that exclusive reliance on one method may distort a researcher's view of the particular reality that is under investigation. Whereas a combination of methods can offer a more balanced and detailed picture of the phenomena under study, which can result in more credible findings. Thus, this study made use of focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews to generate data.

To further enhance credibility of the research results, I immersed myself in the participants' world. This technique is known as prolonged engagement, and involves spending extended time with

participants in their environment to develop a greater understanding of participants' culture and context (Sarma, 2015). As an educator who is also employed at the aforementioned school, I was able to spend extended time with the participants and observe those aspects that may have been missed during interviews or focus group discussions. I was able to witness what occurred on a daily basis, before or between interviews, and what exists in the underlying stories beneath the current narratives. This strategy helps to minimise the distortion of the information that may arise due to the presence of a researcher. It also helps to understand core issues that might affect the quality of data (White et al.,2012).

#### **4.6.2 Dependability**

Dependability refers to the stability of findings over time and deals with the consistency and reliability of the research findings (Chowdhury, 2015). It is important to trustworthiness as it establishes the research findings as consistent and repeatable (Tong & Mary, 2016). Dependability can be established if the research process is logical, traceable, and clearly documented (Loh,2013). Within this study it is evident through the layout of each chapter that each step was clearly documented, logical and traceable. In order to establish further dependability the code-recode strategy was used. This strategy required the researcher to code the same data twice by allowing at least one or two weeks to pass between each coding. Moon et al. (2016), claim that if the coding results are in agreement after allowing a suitable time to pass between each coding, this enhances the dependability of a study. Within this study the results from each coding was compared and it was found that they were in agreement. Thus enhancing the dependability of this study. This process helped the researcher to gain a deep understanding of data patterns and improved the presentations of final data (Anney, 2014).

#### **4.6.3. Transferability**

Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of a qualitative study can be transferred to other texts with other respondents (Hadi, 2016). According to Burchett et al. (2013), a researcher can facilitate transferability through the use of purposive sampling. By providing detailed descriptions of participants and how they were purposely selected, a researcher can enhance transferability of the study. This study made use of purposive sampling and provided a detailed

description of participants and how they were purposely selected (see 4.4. Sampling). Purposive sampling refers to the selection of individuals, based on specific purposes associated with answering the research questions (Taherdoost, 2016). It helps the researcher to focus on key informants who are particularly knowledgeable about the phenomena under study (Treharne & Diggs, 2015). Within this study all foundation phase educators were selected as participants as they all had some knowledge of emotional intelligence, its possible impact on learners and how to teach emotional intelligence content within the classroom. All eight educators decided to be part of the study.

#### **4.6.4. Conformability**

Conformability refers to the degree to which the data accurately represent the information that participants provided and that the interpretations of those data are not invented by the researcher (Elo et al., 2014). Shufutinsky (2020) believes that conformability can be achieved through the “Use of self” (p. 51), which refers to the “conscious use of one’s whole being in the intentional execution of one’s role for effectiveness in whatever the current situation is presenting” (p. 51). This simply means that a researcher ought to be aware of certain aspects of the self which include self-awareness, situational awareness, self-exclusion, and the capacity for reflection, feedback, and mindful consideration (Shufutinsky, 2020).

Self-exclusion was practiced during this study, where the voice of the researcher was removed in order to focus solely on the experiences of the participants (Collins & Cooper, 2014). As a researcher I acknowledged that I have my own values and beliefs, yet I ensured that these values and beliefs were not insinuated while structuring questions and during the interview process. I also maintained a level of self-awareness throughout the research process to ensure pre-existing assumptions were kept at bay. Gunawan, 2015, states that mindfulness or self-awareness of the researcher is crucial to achieve confidence in research findings as it enables a researcher to respond to their external environments more effectively, allowing them to have better awareness of their research, their participants, and their own involvement. As a result, all transcribed texts were examined with a level of self-awareness which prevented the researcher’s personal biases from influencing findings.

The Terryan approach was also used to enhance trustworthiness. This approach allowed the researcher to decode data to form themes and patterns, however, participants' stories are told from their perspective using their exact words. This approach captures the phenomena of the participants as close to their personal experiences as possible (Shufutinsky, 2020). Thus semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were recorded, and data analysis included verbatim descriptions of participants to support findings.

Qualitative researchers are often considered as the main instrument of research as qualitative findings are heavily dependent on the interpretation of the researcher (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). However, in order to convince readers that qualitative findings are plausible, unbiased and trustworthy, the researcher needs to portray a certain level of self-presence to address the potential bias (Shufutinsky, 2020). Thus, the 'use-of-self' is vital to the trustworthiness of a qualitative study.

#### **4.7. Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations refer to the principles and values that ought to be followed when doing research within the social sciences (Resnik, 2018). It ensures that no harm is caused to society or specific individuals during the research process. It also prevents researchers and organisations from acting in harmful ways (Banegas & de Castro, 2015). Ethical considerations were followed throughout this study. Written permission to conduct this study was granted by the University of KwaZulu-Natal, and the Department of Education. Permission was given by the school principal to conduct research on the school premises, and all participants provided written consent to participate in the research and for them to be recorded.

The principle of beneficence was also maintained throughout this study. Beneficence is an ethical principle, based on the act of doing good for others or promoting the good of research participants (Gardner et al., 2012). The findings of this study aimed to benefit participants and researchers alike as it contributes to the existing knowledge of foundation phase educators' understanding of EI. In addition, participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. They were informed that their identities would be protected through the use of pseudonyms and that the data that was

generated would be stored safely. Participants were also told that they were able to withdraw from the research at any stage without any consequences.

#### **4.8. Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter has provided a comprehensive view of the research methodology of this study. It includes the research design, selection of participants and data generation methods. It also highlighted aspects of trustworthiness and ethical considerations such as informed consent, beneficence, anonymity and confidentiality. The next chapter will offer a presentation of the research findings and analysis.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

#### 5.1. Introduction

The previous chapter presented the research methodology, which included the research questions and research design. This chapter presents data generated from the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The video recordings of the interviews and focus group discussion were transcribed and analysed to develop themes. A discussion of the findings will be provided in this chapter.

#### 5.2. Pseudonyms

To respect participants' confidentiality and protect their identity, each participant was allocated a pseudonym. According to Lahman et al. (2015), a pseudonym is a fictional name assigned to give anonymity to a person, group or place.

**Table 5.2.1**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Pseudonyms</b>	<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Age</b>
Participant 1	Catherine	B.ed Foundation Phase	30
Participant 2	Elizabeth	B.ed Foundation Phase	28
Participant 3	Charlotte	B.ed Intermediate Phase	26
Participant 4	Beatrice	B.ed Foundation Phase	25
Participant 5	Diana	B.ed Foundation Phase	27
Participant 6	Victoria	B.ed Foundation Phase	39
Participant 7	Alice	PGCE (foundation phase)	30
Participant 8	Margaret	B.ed Foundation Phase	29

### **5.3. Data analysis: themes**

Presented below are the themes that emerged from the data production methods.

#### **5.3.1. Empathy**

Empathy emerged as one of the major themes in this study. It refers to the ability to share and understand the feelings of another person (Ioannidou & Konstantikaki, 2008) and involves the ability to recognise others' feelings, the causes of these feelings, and to be able to participate in the emotional experience of an individual without becoming part of it (Ioannidou & Konstantikaki, 2008). Stojiljkovic and Zlatkovic (2012) state that empathy is about spontaneously and naturally tuning into the other person's thoughts and feelings. Furthermore, Ratka (2018) describes empathy as the process of understanding a person's subjective experience by vicariously sharing that experience, while maintaining an observant stance. Empathy is considered to be a powerful communication tool for educators as it caters for effective problem solving and idea development. It also enables adequate communication between educator and learner, preventing conflict (Cameron et al., 2019). In addition, it plays a critical interpersonal and societal role, enabling sharing of experiences, needs, and desires between individuals and providing an emotional bridge that promotes prosocial behavior (Riess, 2017).

The quotes below reflect participants' views and thoughts about the theme of empathy, and are cited verbatim from the interview findings as well as the focus group discussions.

#### **Interview findings**

The comments below were in response to the questions participants were asked during the interview process. See Appendix F for interview schedule.

Catherine:

*“I think what makes a good teacher is someone... who cares about teaching and loves teaching, and also cares about the learners outside of teaching.”*

*“I’ll just ask him something outside of the schoolwork, maybe how was your morning or something and see if that will lift him up and get him to talk.”*

Showing care and concern for learners displays empathy. This comment indicates that Catherine cares about her learners and all factors that contribute to their development, which may include emotions, social, psychological and/or physical aspects. Meyers et al. (2019) claim that teacher empathy refers to the degree to which a teacher works to deeply understand learners’ personal and social situations. The second comment indicates that Catherine tries to make learners feel comfortable by asking relatable questions. In so doing, she is also gathering emotional information from the learner through his response. Her comments also indicate that she does not agree with the manner in which Miss Troy handled the situation with Peter. This implies that Miss Troy needs to be more caring and open to the emotional needs of her learners. Catherine’s comments suggest that she is empathetic and portrays empathy in her classroom.

Elizabeth

*“We don’t know the child’s history, because maybe that’s what the teacher needs to do, go and see the child’s history. Why is the child so quiet? Maybe the child has a personal issue at home.”*

*“So basically, she’s telling the other kids not to care about other people’s feelings. Because, firstly, you’re calling the child ‘idiot, you belong to a retarded school’. Now, that obviously is playing on the child’s emotion, because now he’s probably feeling quite upset about the situation.”*

Elizabeth is concerned about the factors that may be affecting Peter’s behaviour. Her desire to understand the situation and the feelings of Peter indicate that she is empathetic as empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another person. The second comment refers to Miss Troy and the message she is sending out to her learners. It suggests that Miss Troy does not care about the feelings of others. This indicates that Elizabeth understands the importance of being empathetic by recognising others’ feelings and the causes of those feelings. It is therefore possible that Elizabeth has the ability to share and understand the feelings of another person.

Charlotte

*“A teacher who can find solutions to problems. An excellent teacher, uh, is a teacher that can be approachable. And yeah, understanding can be helpful at all times.”*

*“it could be her lack of understanding the child, just the lack of understanding the child would lead her to acting the way she did, because if she understood what the child was going through, what help he needed, she could have had a better way of handling the situation.”*

*“I would have made means to find the problem... so I can get a better understanding of why Peter is acting the way he is acting. Is it because he cannot understand the work or is it emotional problems? Is he going through something and then I will take measures.”*

Charlotte describes an excellent educator as someone who “*can find solutions to problems*” and who is understanding. As mentioned earlier, empathy is a powerful communication skill and is crucial for problem-solving and avoiding or preventing conflicts. In addition, understanding is a key component of empathy, as it refers to one’s ability to share and understand the feelings of another person. This comment highlights two important aspects of empathy, thereby indicating that Charlotte has a good understanding of the concept, and what it entails. Her second comment refers to Miss Troy’s lack of understanding, yet it specifically highlights the benefits of being empathetic, as it enables you to develop an understanding of a situation and the related emotions. The third comment indicates that Charlotte is a natural problem solver. This quality is crucial for empathetic communication. Charlotte seems to have an in-depth understanding of empathy and probably displays this as an educator.

Beatrice

*“I feel that she should be more understanding. Firstly, observation should have taken place over a period of time. And she's trying to get the work done, instead of actually understanding the child. They could be like other background issues, family issues, and personal issues that are going on with the child or even at school, but we are unable to notice.”*

*“...emotionally, you got to put aside your feelings... you got to be much more patient and ask the child, how are you feeling today? And that's like some simple questions, you get an understanding of the child, and how the child is feeling.”*

In response to how she feels about Miss Troy’s reaction, Beatrice places emphasis on understanding the learner. She comments that Miss Troy “*should be more understanding*” and observant. She also highlights that there could be other issues affecting the learners that Miss Troy failed to notice. This comment indicated that Beatrice disagrees with Miss Troy’s reaction and in doing so she provides possible solutions. These solutions, which include developing an understanding of the learner, observing the learner and exploring his social situation. indicate that Beatrice has an understanding of empathy, which plays a critical interpersonal and societal role, enabling sharing of experiences and providing an emotional bridge that promotes prosocial behavior (Riess, 2017). Her second comment indicates that she is able to focus on learner development without involving her own emotions. This is a crucial component of empathy, as Ioannidou and Konstantikaki (2008) describe empathy to be the process of understanding a person’s subjective experience by vicariously sharing that experience while maintaining an observant stance. Beatrice also makes reference to being patient and showing care by asking learners about their feelings. This indicates that she has a good understanding of empathy and displays this with her learners.

Diana

*“Obviously, a lack of understanding how to deal with the child and a lack of understanding of the child.”*

*“Well, there's two things I would have done, is make sure I have the background information of the kids to understand what's happening and talk to the parents to see if it's an ongoing thing at home, or if it's an environmental thing.”*

Diana's comment on Miss Troy's lack of understanding indicates that she places great value on understanding her own learners. As noted earlier, understanding the feelings of another person is a key feature of empathy. Diana's second comment is in response to how she would handle the situation with Peter. She indicates that acquiring "*background information of the kids*" is important "*to understand what's happening*" as well as talking to the parents of the learners to establish if the behaviour is the same when he is at home. This indicates that Diana is concerned about the learner's social situation and is determined to gather information to enhance the teaching and learning process. Arghode, Yalvac and Liew (2013) state that teachers who exhibit empathy, effectively recognize, care about, and respond to learners' needs and concerns. Thus, it is possible that Beatrice has a good understanding of empathy and how to display this quality in her classroom.

Victoria

*"I thought that her reaction to him was rude and abrupt. And I also feel that she shouldn't have used the word idiot. Due to the fact that it plays on the child's mind, I also feel what you speak into a child's life becomes a reality."*

*"...try and use different interventions to try and get the child to open up."*

Victoria's response to Miss Troy's reaction indicates that Miss Troy is not sensitive to Peter and his feelings. She disagrees with Miss Troy's reaction as she believes that "*what you speak into a child's life becomes a reality*" and in this case Peter was called an idiot. Victoria's comment indicates that she cares about her learners' feelings and the way in which she communicates with them. Riess (2017) states that empathy enables us to perceive the emotions of others and resonate with them emotionally and cognitively. Thus Victoria can be considered as an educator who displays empathy. Her second comment is in response to how she would handle the situation with Peter. It indicates that she is sensitive to learners' emotional needs and is willing to try "*different interventions to try and get the child to open up.*" Her comments suggest that she has an understanding of empathy and its importance for educators.

Alice

*"Well, I definitely don't agree with her reaction...if the child is already not talking, or if he's shy, or whatever the reason is, it can be a language barrier, or it can be, that he's experienced a lot of*

*stress at home, or that he can't cope with his emotions. So I would suggest for a child like that, to encourage the learner to first maybe talk or whisper in your ear or to be more compassionate towards the learner... so that they feel safe."*

*"Well, I think firstly, you have to have a relationship with each learner, to understand the learner because I think it's difficult for a learner especially if they're young, to open themselves up to learn something new."*

*"I wouldn't push them too much... I will talk to the parent and just inform them that the child is struggling a bit and that they should encourage the learner to talk in class or to participate, or maybe just find out what is the underlying issue... I will try not to make the learner feel humiliated in front of the class, or feel different in the class, because I do believe once a learner feels that they are not the same as the rest, you are setting them up for failure."*

Alice's comments are a response to Miss Troy's reaction. She clearly disagrees with Miss Troy's reaction, points out possible challenges that Peter may be facing, and also provides possible solutions to handle the situation appropriately. Her solutions include aspects such as encouragement, compassion, and ensuring learners *"feel safe"*. This indicates that Alice shows care and concern in response to learners' positive and negative emotions, and is able to respond compassionately, without losing focus of the teaching and learning process. She cares about how her learners feel, and is willing to share and understand their feelings, which is the root of empathetic qualities. Her second comment indicates that an excellent educator will *"have to have a relationship with each learner, to understand the learner"*. This comment highlights two important aspects of empathy, relationship building, and understanding of another person's feelings. Morelli et al. (2015) claim that empathy allows educators to deepen relationships with their learners. In addition, Alice's third comment indicates that she is sensitive to her learners' emotional needs and/or boundaries. She states that *"I wouldn't push them too much...maybe just find out what is the underlying issue"* and *"I will try not to make the learner feel humiliated"*. This comment indicates that she cares about her learners, their challenges and how she makes them feel. As a result, we can conclude that Alice has a fairly good understanding of empathy and displays this with her learners.

Margaret

*“...you have to get to know the child and understand the child - so I would always love to build a relationship with that child because some of the children - when they don't talk to you - I try for them to open up to me and eventually be comfortable enough to tell me what's wrong...”*

*“Because a lot of children don't put their hand up and then I will just ask them even if they say it's wrong, I'll say you must try... I almost make it like a game so... if it's wrong... you must try again or have a think and I'll come back to you or something like that... I don't make them you know, feel that they got it wrong.”*

*“You're saying the child is an idiot and you're making that child feel sad, so she needs to have empathy and show emotional intelligence.”*

Margaret's response to how she would handle the situation with Peter indicates that she values understanding her learners and building relationships with them. She further states that she tries to get them to “open up” to her and be “comfortable enough to tell me what's wrong”. This comment highlights three components of empathy which include understanding the feelings of another person, interpersonal skills and effective communication. As stated earlier, empathy is the ability to share and understand the feelings of another person (Ioannidou & Konstantikaki, 2008), it enables the sharing of experiences and/or needs (Riess, 2016) and adequate communication between the participants of the educational process (Stojiljkovic & Zlatkovic, 2012).

Margaret's second comment is in response to how she would handle the situation. It indicates that she is sensitive to the emotional needs of her learners and creates an environment where learners feel safe to communicate and respond. Her final comment responds to Miss Troy's reaction. Margaret disagrees with Miss Troy's reaction, saying it makes the “child feel sad”. Once again she displays empathy, as she shares and understands how Peter feels. In addition, Margaret was the only educator who made direct reference to empathy, as she commented that Miss Troy “needs to have empathy”. Margaret's comments and responses indicate that she is aware of the importance of empathy in the classroom and has a deep understanding of how to make use of empathy.

The responses from Alice, Diana, Beatrice, and Charlotte highlighted that it is important to “*understand the child*”, in order to engage with his/her emotional experience. Elizabeth and Catherine expressed the need to “*know the child's history*” and “*care about the learners outside of teaching*”, while Victoria emphasised that it is important to “*use different interventions to try and get the child to open up*”. Even though all these educators described how to be empathetic, Margaret was the only educator who stated that educators “*need to have empathy.*”

### **Focus group findings**

The comments below were in response to the questions participants were asked during the focus group discussion. See Appendix G for Focus Group Discussion Schedule. The textual statements below further reflect educators’ views, thoughts and understanding about emotional intelligence and the theme of empathy.

*Beatrice: We do know some of the learners in our class, they are very quiet, and they don't like to participate, but then when we do speak in a caring manner towards them, they will break free from their quietness and answer questions.*

Beatrice’s comment is in response to what she thinks about emotional intelligence. It highlights that educators need to “*speak in a caring manner*” in order to encourage learners to “*break free from their quietness and answer questions*”. This comment indicates that educators must be able to show that they care about learners when speaking to them. Thus, they must be considerate of the words they use, and how they make learners feel. Beatrice is referring to empathy, namely the ability to understand and share the feelings of another, and has highlighted it as an important component of emotional intelligence.

*Diana: So, the first thing I picked up on, was I felt sad in the sense, at the amount of peer pressure that the children are feeling at such a young age, and they're looking for the easy way out. And there could be many reasons behind that.*

Diana's comment refers to her thoughts on Calvin's response to his friend. It indicates that she feels "sad" due to "*the amount of peer pressure that the children are feeling at such a young age.*" The fact that she is able to feel what Calvin is possibly feeling shows that she is empathetic. She also points out that "*there could be many reasons*" for Calvin's response, which indicated that she is sensitive and open to the possible challenges he may be facing.

Alice: "*I found that if there's a child that's giving you problems, almost every time it's important to talk to the child individually and ask them, 'Listen what's going on?'*"

Alice's comment is in response to the question of what role educators play in the way learners understand EI. Her response indicates that educators need to be empathetic as they need to "*talk to the child individually*" to understand their problems. As mentioned earlier, understanding and sharing the feelings of another is a core component of empathy. Her comment also indicates that by being empathetic in the classroom, learners will observe and imitate similar behaviour, thus educators play an important role in the way learners understand emotional intelligence.

The responses from Beatrice, Diana and Alice reveal that they are able to share in the feelings of their learners. Diana states that she feels "sad" due to "*the amount of peer pressure that the children are feeling at such a young age.*" Alice and Beatrice indicate that if their learners have "*problems*" or "*don't like to participate*", they "*talk to the child individually*" or "*in a caring manner*". Catherine, Elizabeth, Charlotte, and Margaret did not make any reference to empathy during the focus group discussion.

When viewed through the theoretical lens that underpinned this study, the theme of empathy can be considered under the first branch of Mayer and Salovey's ability model, which is divided into four ability branches that are hierarchically arranged from the most cognitively basic to the most complex ability. The first branch is concerned with perceiving emotions and even though Mayer and Salovey do not make use of the word "empathy" in this branch, it is still referred to, as this branch involves the ability to accurately perceive emotional content within an environment that includes non-verbal signals such as facial expressions, body language, and/or tone of voice. In light of the ability model, empathy can be considered to be one of the basic skills required for the development of emotional intelligence skills, as the model states that emotional intelligence ought

to be developed strategically, starting with basic ability components, such as recognising non-verbal perception and expressions of emotions, to higher-level complex abilities, such as the ability to prolong or detach from an emotional state. From the responses collected above, it is clear that these educators are able to accurately perceive the emotional content within their classrooms and understand the feelings of their learners. This is evident in their statements such as it is important to *“understand the child”*, or to *“know the child's history”* and *“care about the learners outside of teaching”*. They highlight the *“need to have empathy”* or to *“use different interventions to try and get the child to open up”*. They also make an effort to *“talk to the child individually”* or *“in a caring manner”*. They seem to care about the feelings of their learners and strive to understand these feelings. This suggests that they have a superior understanding of empathy and how to be empathetic. A study conducted by Dolev and Leshem (2016) investigated the impact of a teacher-centered EI training on teachers EI. They found that the training programme was perceived by the participants to have enhanced their competencies, which included empathy and interpersonal relationships. Another study conducted by Chandra (2020) highlighted that COVID-19 has had a negative impact on educational institutions, including educators. The changes it implies have disturbed the entire process of teaching and learning, and educators were forced to adapt quickly to them, which caused immense stress and confusion. Thus, it is crucial for education professionals to be skilled in emotional intelligence as the concept is rooted in the understanding of emotions, helping oneself to direct the emotional reactions and labeling the experiences of different emotions and helping others to understand and channel their emotions. John (2021) claims that individuals with high EI are better able to withstand stressful situations, and are less likely to negatively impact their mental health. Thus, a superior understanding of empathy and how to be empathetic is an important component to becoming an emotionally intelligent educator.

### **5.3.2. Perceiving emotions**

Perceiving emotions is a major theme that emerged in this study. It refers to the ability to accurately perceive emotional content within an environment, specifically non-verbal signs such as facial expressions, body language, or tone of voice. It also includes the ability to be self-aware of emotions and to express emotions and emotional needs accurately to others (Pasha, 2016). An educator skilled in perceiving emotion can identify emotions in their own physical states and thoughts as well as in students' facial expressions, vocalisations, postures, and movements. This

skill will enable an educator to gain information about his/her students and provide appropriate guidance. Perceiving emotions is the first branch of Mayer and Salovey ability model of EI and is considered as the first step to becoming emotionally intelligent.

The comments below reflect participants' views and thoughts about the theme of managing emotions.

## **Interview Findings**

Margaret

*"...she didn't really get to know the child, or ask him questions about what is going on... Maybe he's going through something, and she doesn't know about it."*

*"it's the way you handle yourself in the classroom."*

*"If I do shout at the child, or I see they're very sad, I actually apologise to them... I apologise for what I did and then I make them understand what they did, for me to... shout at them. I am a very emotional person. And I can I just pick up when, when a child is angry at me or when they sad."*

*"...she needs to have empathy and show emotional intelligence for her to actually approach what she is doing in the classroom, but only if she is aware of what she's doing."*

Margaret's comment is in response to what factors may have played a role in how Miss Troy handled the situation. She comments that Miss Troy *"didn't really get to know the child, or ask him questions about what is going on... Maybe he's going through something, and she doesn't know about it."* This comment suggests that Miss Troy is probably unaware of Peter's emotion or if *"he's going through something"*. By pointing this out, Margaret is alluding to the importance of being perceptive in the classroom. Her second comment is in response to what makes an excellent teacher. She states that *"it's the way you handle yourself in the classroom"*. Even though this comment is vague and open-ended, one can assume that because EI is the subject of discussion, Margaret is referring to the way educators portray their own emotions in the classroom. She probably highlighted this point because she is aware that the emotions an educator brings into a classroom is often noticed by learners. Margaret's third comment refers to her experience of a challenging situation. She states that *"If I do shout at the child, or I see they're very sad, I actually*

*apologise to them.*” She also states that *“I am a very emotional person. And I can I just pick up when, when a child is angry at me or when they sad.”* This comment implies that Margaret is able to perceive emotions, as she is able to notice is *“very sad”* or *“angry at me”*. She also states that she makes *“them understand”*, which implies that she is able to perceive the emotional content within her environment and explain it to learners. Her fourth comment refers to whether Miss Troy displays traits of an educator who is emotionally intelligent. She highlights that in order for Miss Troy to *“show emotional intelligence”*, she needs to be *“aware of what she's doing”*. This implies that Margaret has a good understanding of perceiving emotions and it’s importance for educators. She is probably skilled in this area.

Alice

*“I have two learners that are not really talking. The one... she doesn't understand English... but... I make her feel at ease, because I'll make her laugh at times just to let her know, she's still okay. The other learner... he is... very shy. So... what I do is, I am very patient with this learner. I don't force them, I don't pick on them. I will still call them to my desk and ask them questions even if he's not answering me.”*

*“I will try not to make the learner feel humiliated in front of the class or feel different in the class because I do believe once a learner feel that they are not the same as the rest, you are setting them up for failure.”*

*“...she's definitely displaying that anger, and losing your temper, and scaring them and you know, it is saying that working from fear will give you the results you want. That's what it's showing the learners.”*

Alice’s comment refer to her experience of a challenging situation. She states that she has *“two learners that are not really talking.”* However, she still makes them feel involved by making *“her laugh at times just to let her know she's still okay,”* or by calling *“them to my desk and ask them questions even if he's not answering me.”* This comment indicates that Alice is able to perceive the emotional climate in her classroom and is possibly skilled in this area. Her second comment

refers to how she would have handled Miss Troy's situation. The opening sentence of her comment refers directly to how she would make learners feel. She states that *"I will try not to make the learner feel humiliated in front of the class or feel different in the class because I do believe once a learner feel that they are not the same as the rest you are setting them up for failure."* This comment indicates that Alice is able to accurately perceive emotions within herself and her learner, which further highlights her skill in this area. Her third comment refers to the message that Miss Troy is displaying to her learners about emotional intelligence. Alice states that Miss Troy's behaviour, *"is saying that working from fear will give you the results you want"*. She also states that Miss Troy is *"scaring them"*. Her comment implies that she disagrees with Miss Troy's display of negative emotions, as it suggests that Miss Troy is unaware of her emotions and how they affect her learners. By highlighting Miss Troy's inability to perceive emotions, Alice is emphasising the importance of this skill.

Victoria

*"The teacher grabbed the learner by the back of his shirt and was screaming profusely at the learner. And I had to jump in and I had to simmer the situation down because I felt like the action that the learner had actually done did not deserve the punishment that she was handing down to the learner."*

*"There's obviously something wrong, and it's not Miss Troy's fault that the child is the way the child is, and that's something that she's missed the mark on."*

*"The way you come across to a learner, and that has a lot to do with the way the child feels, with the way the child speaks, with the way the child acts... But I feel emotional intelligence is everything that has to do with the way the teacher actually speaks, portrays herself because that in fact has a bearing on the child's behaviour, the way the child speaks, the things that the child does."*

Victoria's comment is in response to whether she has witnessed or experienced a challenging situation. She states that she witnessed a teacher grab a *"learner by the back of his shirt and was screaming profusely at the learner."* She goes on to state that *"I had to jump in and I had to simmer*

*the situation down, because I felt like the action that the learner had actually done did not deserve the punishment that [the teacher] was handing down to the learner.”* This comment indicates that Victoria is able to accurately perceive emotions, and can identify emotions in others through vocalisations. Her second comment is in response to how she would have handled Miss Troy’s situation. She highlights that *“there’s obviously something wrong”* and Miss Troy has *“missed the mark”*. This comment indicates that Miss Troy was unable to perceive her emotion and that of Peter’s, where as a result, she became frustrated and had an outburst. By highlighting Miss Troy’s inability, Victoria is also highlighting the importance of being able to identify emotions in learners and being self-aware of emotions. Her third comment refers to what emotional intelligence means to her as an educator. She implies that it is the ability to be self-aware of emotions and how they are expressed. She comments that it is the *“way you come across to a learner, and that has a lot to do with the way the child feels, with the way the child speaks, with the way the child acts.”* She goes on to state that *“emotional intelligence is everything that has to do with the way the teacher actually speaks, portrays herself because that in fact has a bearing on the child’s behavior, the way the child speaks, the things that the child does.”* Victoria’s comment suggests that she has a good understanding of or perceiving emotion and acknowledges it as a key component of EI. Her fourth comment is in relation to what role does an educator play in how learners develop EI.

She indicates that educators play a major role as they *“should actually pick it up”* and *“should be able to judge where the child is at”*. She also states that the educator should *“work hand in hand and try portray the best”*. Her comment indicates that she acknowledges the important role that educators play in developing learners' emotional intelligence. It also indicates that in order for an educator to offer support and guidance, he/she needs to be able to *“pick it up”* or *“judge where the child is at”*. It is possible that she is referring to the ability to be perceptive. In doing so, she is also highlighting that she possibly displays this skill in her classroom.

*“I think that the teacher should actually pick it up, because she should be able to judge where the child is at... and she should in fact work hand in hand and try and portray the best... For instance, if you feel that the child, on an emotional level, is not out there - is a very shy and timid person - emotionally something has to have been driving that in order for the child to be very shy and*

*withdrawn. So you have to pick up on that and you have to start using the correct words and portray the correct behaviour.”*

Diana

*“I think I can just pick it up that she is quite aggressive. She is making him feel like he has a complex, like there's something wrong with him. Her approach is not a good one.”*

*“.. And also speak to the learner one on one in a quiet environment to see what may be bothering the child. Yeah, and definitely not use language like idiots.”*

*“Well, the child won't want to have to interact with the teacher or come to the teacher with any issues or problems - not a safe environment. She's also making the learner feel like there's something wrong with the child and he doesn't belong. He doesn't belong at the school. That's concerning.”*

Diana's comment refers to her thoughts and feelings about Miss Troy's reaction. Diana's opening sentence indicates that she is able to easily perceive emotion as she stated that *“I can just pick it up that [Miss Troy] is quite aggressive.”* She states that Miss Troy is *“making [Peter] feel like he has a complex, like there's something wrong with him.”* This comment indicates that Miss Troy is unaware of Peter's feelings and how she is making him feel. It suggests that Diana considers the ability to perceive emotions as important, especially in the classroom. Diana also indicates that she disagrees with Miss Troy as she states that *“her approach is not a good one”*. By disagreeing, Diana is indicating that the ability to perceive emotions is crucial for educators and she possibly employs this skill in her classroom. Diana's second comment refers to how she would have handled Miss Troy's situation. She states that among other methods, she would *“speak to the learner one on one in a quiet environment to see what may be bothering the child.”* This comment indicates that she is willing to gain information about her students and provide appropriate guidance. It suggests that she considers perceiving emotions as an important skill for effective learner development. Her fourth comment refers to the message that Miss Troy displays to her learners about emotional intelligence. Diana's comment indicates that Miss Troy is creating an environment where learners *“won't want to have to interact with the teacher or come to the teacher with any issues or problems”*. She also states that Miss Troy is *“making the learner feel like there's*

*something wrong” and that “he doesn't belong”. Her comment implies that Miss Troy is unable to accurately perceive emotional content within an environment. It suggests that Diana values this skill and possibly displays it in her classroom.*

Catherine

*“...I think the first one is just to walk away from the learner and go to the other learner that would just lift up your moods.”*

*“I think no. Because if you are emotionally intelligent, you never lose your temper. And even if you see that, okay, now I'm going to lose my temper, you know that you need to walk away or you need to do something else. So I don't really think she's emotional intelligence.”*

*“Emotional intelligence means that you need to be in control of your emotions, no matter what. You must be going through something big at home, or in the school, but you don't need to show it to other people. You need to be in control of your emotions, and always consider other people's emotions as well.”*

Catherine's comment refers to how she would handle a challenging situation. She states that she would *“walk away from the learner and go to the other learner that would just lift up your moods”*. This indicates that Catherine is self-aware of her emotions, as she is able to perceive her emotions and *“walk away”*. It also indicates that she is able to perceive the emotions of her learners as she will *“go to the other learner that would just lift up your moods”*. Her second comment refers to whether Miss Troy displays traits of an educator who is emotionally intelligent. Her comment indicates that Miss Troy does not display traits of an educator who is emotionally intelligent, as she lost her temper. Catherine highlights that if you are going to lose your temper, you should *“know that you need to walk away or you need to do something else”*. She implies that Miss Troy was unable to do this as she is not self-aware of her emotions. By highlighting Miss Troy's inability to be self-aware of her emotions, Catherine is indicating that she values this skill as an educator and its importance to the development of an emotionally intelligent educator. Catherine's third comment is in response to what emotional intelligence means to her. She highlights that *“you need to be in control of your emotions, and always consider other people's emotions as well.”* The

ability to consider other people's emotions is underpinned by perceiving emotions accurately, where it is necessary to be able to notice non-verbal signs such as facial expressions and/or body language. By highlighting this point, Catherine suggests this is an important skill for an educator.

Beatrice

*"Firstly, observation should have taken place over a period of time. There could be like other background issues, family issues, and personal issues that are going on with the child or even at school, but we are unable to notice it, because the teacher is putting more effort into getting the work done."*

*"...as she shouts at him and calls him a very harsh name, this will impact the child to always want to hold back from learning or wanting to speak out... it also gives a negative impact on the teacher... other learners will not even want to participate in the class. But she doesn't realise what her behaviours are doing to the other learners."*

*"So she's not actually portraying a welcoming environment where it's okay to feel sad..."*

*"we need to be subconscious... maybe one of the children put their head down – we need to know personally, what was going on with the child, or maybe the child had a bad day at home."*

Beatrice's comment refers to her thoughts and feelings about Miss Troy's reaction. She states that Miss Troy should have done *"observation... over a period of time"* in order to establish if the learner had issues that were not previously noticed. Beatrice is highlighting Miss Troy's inability to accurately perceive emotions in her learners, and by doing so, she is indicating that she values this skill as an educator. Her second comment is in response to Miss Troy's reactions. Beatrice states that Miss Troy's reactions *"will impact the child to always want to hold back from learning or wanting to speak out"* and that *"she doesn't realise what her behaviors are doing to the other learners"*. This comment indicates that Miss Troy is unaware of her emotions and those of her learners as a result they *"will not even want to participate in the class"*. Beatrice's is once again highlighting Miss Troy's inability to perceive emotions and in doing so is highlighting its importance for educators. Her third comment refers to the message that Miss Troy is portraying

about emotional intelligence. Beatrice indicates that Miss Troy is not creating “*a welcoming environment where it's okay to feel sad...*”. She implies that Miss Troy is unable to accurately perceive emotional content within an environment. This suggests Beatrice values this skill as an educator. Her fourth comment refers to what emotional intelligence means to her. She indicates that educators need to be aware and able to notice if “*one of the children put their head down*” and what that could possibly mean. In this comment, Beatrice is unknowingly referring directly to the ability to accurately perceive emotions, specifically non-verbal ones. This indicates that she is aware of the importance of this skill. However there is no evidence to indicate that she is skilled in this area.

Elizabeth

*“Because if she keeps on shouting at poor Peter, he's obviously not going to respond well to you. And you can clearly see that when he's being very quiet and shy, and he's not responding to anything she's asking him to do.”*

*“And then they come obviously, looking for me to see like, look, this child is doing this, this and that. And then I'm like, okay, but why is this child doing this? Then they tell me their feels, and then I go in, and then I go to the child, and I say, hey, look, this is what you need to do.”*

*“I get really angry inside, but then I know, because I've got so many faces looking at me, and I have to compose myself... I just take a quick walk outside... and that's actually helped. My kids are like, ma'ams going outside, ma'ams going outside, and then when I come back in, they ready.”*

*“... if she's studying the signs of the classroom... I will probably go to the child and kneel down and ask him, for example, on a piece of paper and ask him questions, so he can communicate to me.”*

*“For me, it's just being aware and careful of your own feelings. Because obviously, you need to be aware of yourself before others. Because if you are not aware of your feelings, and you might be upset, and then you don't know what the next person is feeling, and your anger or upset goes*

*on to that person, now you just affected their emotional feelings. So you need to be aware of yourself and your feelings...”*

Elizabeth's first comment is in relation to her thoughts and feelings about Miss Troy's reaction. She indicates that if Miss Troy *“keeps on shouting at poor Peter, he's obviously not going to respond well”*, as a result he is *“being very quiet and shy”*. Elizabeth's comment indicated that Miss Troy is unable to notice how she is making Peter feel. By highlighting this, Elizabeth is suggesting that she values the ability to accurately perceive emotions in order to provide appropriate guidance. Her second comment refers to whether she has witnessed a teacher during a challenging situation. She indicates that she has *“and then they come... looking for me”* to engage with the learner. She also indicates that she tries to establish *“why is this child doing this”* and *“what you need to do”*. This comment indicates that Elizabeth is trusted in terms of accurately perceiving emotions and she helps other educators. This indicates that she is possibly skilled in this area. Her third comment is in response to how she would handle a challenging situation. She states that she takes *“a quick walk outside... and that's actually helped”* as her learners notice this and what is expected of them. Thus, *“when I come back in, they ready”*. This comment indicates that Elizabeth is able to perceive the emotional content in her classroom and has ensured that her learners are able to do the same when they say *“ma'ams going outside, ma'ams going outside”*. Elizabeth's fourth comment is in response to how she would have handled Miss Troy's situation. She states that *“... if she's studying the signs of the classroom... I will probably go to the child and kneel down and ask him, for example, on a piece of paper and ask him questions, so he can communicate to me”*. By simply indicating that Miss Troy should be *“studying the signs of the classroom”*, Elizabeth is referring directly to the ability to accurately perceive emotional content within an environment. This suggests that Elizabeth does this in her classroom and is therefore skilled in this area. Her fifth comment refers to what emotional intelligence means to her. She highlights that it involves *“being aware and careful of your own feelings... before others”*. She also states that if *“if you are not aware of your feelings... your anger or upset goes on to that person, now you just affected their emotional feelings.”* This comment indicates that Elizabeth is able to identify emotions in her own physical states and in others, which is a crucial skill for foundation phase educators.

Charlotte

*“I feel that as a teacher she should have tried to figure out first what causes or what is the reason behind Peter's look.”*

*“I think because as teachers we are in front of the learners on a daily basis, the learners get to pick up the good and the bad that we do. So if she is not portraying qualities of a good teacher, not controlling emotions and all of that, then the learners would not get the sense of what an emotionally intelligent educator is.”*

Charlotte's comment is in relation to her thoughts and feelings about Miss Troy's reaction. She states *“that as a teacher [Miss Troy] should have tried to figure out first what causes or what is the reason behind Peter's look.”* This comment indicates that Miss Troy ought to have been perceptive, and she was not. By highlighting this point, Charlotte is indicating that, as an educator she values the skill to accurately perceive emotions. Her second comment refers to what message is displayed by Miss Troy to her learners about emotional intelligence. In this comment, Charlotte highlights that learners are perceptive and can *“pick up the good and the bad that we do”*, thus it is crucial for educators to be able to identify emotions in their own physical state in order to provide appropriate guidance and display *“what an emotionally intelligent educator is”*. By highlighting this point, it is suggested that Charlotte does value perceiving emotions as a key component of EI. However, there is no evidence that she is skilled in this area.

Based on the evidence received from the interviews, it seems Margaret, Victoria, Alice, Diane and Elizabeth are skilled in perceiving emotions as they make reference to the ability to *“pick up”* if someone is sad or aggressive and they indicate that it is important to be considerate of the *“way the child feels, with the way the child speaks, with the way the child acts”* and be aware of how the teacher *“portrays herself because that in fact has a bearing on the child's behaviour”*. The comments from Catherine, Beatrice and Charlotte have indicated that they view the ability to perceive emotions as crucial for educators. However, there is insufficient information to indicate that they are skilled in this area.

### **Focus group findings**

The comments below reflect participants' views and thoughts about the theme of managing emotions.

Diana: *"And just the use of language, I feel it's like a cry for help. He, kind of, worded himself a lot differently. So, there's definitely a need for someone to sort of step in and help."*

Diana's comment refers to her thoughts on Calvin's response. She makes specific reference to his "use of language" and indicates that she feels "it's like a cry for help", suggesting that Diana is able to perceive non-verbal signs.

Margaret: *"...when he got his mark and he's showing off the C, he's kind of accepted it. Maybe he wasn't happy about it, but he's like 'I got a C' and then you can see the expression of the other boy like... 'Why would you want to get that?' And then you can see [Calvin's] shy and... he's hiding there. So...I think that's why he said, it's just a lot easier for him... so... he had to make an excuse to say why he had that C."*

Margaret's comment refers to what may have played a role in Calvin's response. She makes reference to Calvin's friend's "expression" and indicates that that may have led Calvin to respond in the way she did. This comment indicates that Margaret is able to identify non-verbal signs and how they affect those around you.

The following comments are in response to what role do educators play in how learners value EI.

Diana: *"...as teachers, be very aware of certain things that kids may say, like warning signals when they they're falling apart... little cracks like within the comic strip in the way in which he worded the response... a teacher who has emotional intelligence who's clued up and being able to see, OK, that child clearly has more going on than than just a child that gets Cs."*

In this comment, Diana is highlighting the need to be cognisant of non-verbal signs such as the ones noticed in the comic strip. She indicates that educators need to be "very aware of certain things that kids may say" and "warning signals when they they're falling apart". She goes on to state that an emotionally intelligent educator is able to do this. Diana's comment suggests

that she probably practises this with her learners and it also suggests that she views this skill as an important component of emotional intelligence.

Beatrice: *It's the way that we perceive ourselves in the classroom.*

Beatrice's comment indicates that she is aware of the importance of being able to identify emotions in one's own physical state.

Elizabeth: *"When I introduced it at the beginning of the year to my kids... they said it's about our emotions... and then I explained to them about emotional intelligence. And... now they seem more aware of their friends."*

This comment indicates that Elizabeth is teaching her learners to perceive emotions as part of emotional intelligence. It suggests that she is possibly skilled in this area as she is able to teach her learners about it.

The comment received from the focus group discussion indicate that Diana, Margaret, and Elizabeth are skilled in perceiving emotional content within an environment, specifically non verbal signs. They make specific reference to being aware of learners' *"use of language"*, *"warning signals"* or *"expressions"* as these may be *"a cry for help"*. Beatrice highlighted the importance for educators to be perceptive of their own emotions. However, there is insufficient information to indicate that she is skilled in this area. The remaining participants did not make any reference to perceiving emotions during the focus group discussion. Based on the responses it is evident that most of the educators are skilled in identifying emotions in their own physical states and perceive emotional content within their classrooms. Elfenbein and Maccann (2017) claim that the basic component of perceiving emotions is the ability to recognise non-verbal perception and expression of emotions, and to distinguish between emotions that are accurate or inaccurate and honest or dishonest.

When viewed through the theoretical lens that underpinned this study, the theme of perceiving emotions is the first and most basic branch of Mayer and Salovey's ability model of EI. It refers to the perception of emotion and the ability to identify emotions in oneself and others, specifically concerning non-verbal reception and expression of emotion (Emmerling, Shanwal, & Mandal,

2008). This skill is crucial for foundation phase educators as learners in this phase are young and are often unable to express themselves using words. They rely on educators to acknowledge their non-verbal expressions. For example, if a learner is sad, he/she may sulk or withdraw from classroom activities, another learner may cry or bury their head in their arms. To build a positive learning environment, the educator must investigate why a learner is expressing these emotions. It is believed that an educator is only able to identify these emotions if he/she is aware of their own emotion and is able to deal with them effectively (Nguyen, 2019). In addition, this ability is also crucial for educators, who teach second language learners as being perceptive of non-verbal emotion is sometimes the only way to effectively communicate with second language learners.

Based on the comments received during the interviews and the focus group discussion, all educators alluded to the ability to perceive emotions. Some went further and provided examples of how to do this, while others only highlighted its importance for educators. This indicates that these educators are aware of the concept of perceiving emotions, what this involves, and its relation to emotional intelligence. However, they may not refer to it as perceiving emotions. Many educators made reference to “*understanding*” or “*being aware*” of emotions while describing the concept of perceiving emotions. Beatrice is the only educator who made use of the word “*perceive*” when she commented “*It's the way that we perceive ourselves in the classroom*” in response to the role educators play in how learners value EI. Mayer, Salovey and Caruso (2008) claim that some individuals have a greater capacity than others when it come to processing emotional information and using it to guide thinking and behaviour, however they also state that this is a skill that can be developed throughout one’s life. Krishnan and Awang (2020) conducted a study that investigated the role of EI in teaching, and found that EI should be developed amongst teachers, as it helps to understand others better and clearly interpret behaviours, which may include non-verbal signs. Another study done by Ibrahim et al. (2018), which aimed to reveal the potential contributors of EI on working relationships with clients and decision-making, found that through understanding of their own and others’ emotions, individuals may be better equipped to understand and respect each other. From the comments received above and the reviewed studies it is clear that EI is a multifaceted concept as it consists of mental skills, abilities and capacities relating to emotions and cognition and how they interact. However, according to the above-mentioned researchers, EI can have a positive effect on educator and how they communicate, deal with stress

and anxiety, manage relationships and can essentially aid in effectively overcoming the challenges faced in the education environment.

### **5.3.3. Understanding emotions**

Understanding emotions is an additional theme that emerged in this study. It deals with the ability to understand that emotions convey meaning and are associated with specific sets of actions (Caruso et al., 2015). This includes knowledge and understanding of emotions and the relation between emotions. Understanding emotions is a crucial skill for educators as it enables them to understand what they are feeling, and reason about how they will act upon. In addition an educator skilled in understanding emotions will acknowledge that his/her feeling of anger is associated with specific sets of possible actions and will select the action that is most appropriate for effective classroom management (Olderbak, Semmler & Doebler, 2018). Understanding emotions is the third branch of Mayer and Salovey's hierarchical ability model of EI and they claim that an educator skilled in understanding emotion is able to identify complex emotional messages, potential actions and the transition relationships between emotions.

The following responses reflect participants' views and thoughts about the theme of understanding emotions and are cited verbatim from the interview findings as well as the focus group discussions.

### **Interview Findings**

The comments below were in response to the questions participants were asked during the interview process. See Appendix F for interview schedule.

Margaret

*“So maybe she's just frustrated herself, or she's angry. That could be one of the situations, maybe she's using her anger and taking it out on the child. Maybe she does have a temper problem. And obviously, someone will have to watch her and then only once she's aware of it, then she can change herself.”*

*“I have experienced it where I shout at the child, but obviously don't tell them that you're an idiot, you wasting my time. But then I do feel bad about it. If I do shout at the child, or I see they're very sad, I actually apologise to them... I apologise for what I did and then I make them understand what they did, for me to say something like that.”*

*“I'm more controlled and confident when I have an idea. But when I'm put under pressure, my confidence goes down. Because then it seems like I'm not prepared. But it's because in my head, I'm trying to overthink it, because I do overthink.”*

Margaret's comment refers here to the factors that may have played a role in the way Miss Troy handled the situation. Margaret's comment indicates that Miss Troy may have been “*frustrated herself*” or angry and as a result was “*taking it out on the child*”. She also states that “*maybe she does have a temper problem*” and will only become “*aware of it*” if “*someone will watch her*”. She suggests that Miss Troy is unable to understand what she is feeling and thus unable to reason about how she will act upon it. Margaret's comment implies that she is aware of the importance of understanding your own emotions and how to deal with them. Margaret's second comment is in response to whether she has experienced something similar to Miss Troy. She comments “*I have experienced it where I shout at the child... but then I do feel bad about it*”. This indicates that she does not have the ability to understand what she is feeling and select the appropriate action. If she feels “*bad about it*” and has to “*apologise to them*”, it indicates that she did not respond appropriately for effective classroom management. Margaret's third comment states that “*I'm more controlled and confident when I have an idea. But when I'm put under pressure, my confidence goes down*”. This indicates that she understands her feelings, but is unable to reason about how she will act upon it and as a result her “*confidence goes down*”.

### **Alice**

*“Well, I definitely don't agree with her reaction. And the fact that she's losing her temper, at this learner is gonna, it's actually going to have a bad influence on the learner... Or maybe she's even experiencing emotional stress herself or she can't cope with her own emotional stuff, and then she's taking it out on the child or bringing it to work.”*

*“What I usually do is if I feel like I'm gonna lose my temper, or I'm going to lose it, I just ask the assistant to please take over the class for a while.”*

*“...if you leave everything at the gate, once you enter the school... because obviously the learners, they need you. And you've got to take all of your problems that you are experiencing at home or outside... you can't take it into the school. What it means to me is being able... to separate your emotions, if you left the home feeling angry or mad, you don't take that mood into the classroom... and also... being able to say, ‘Okay, I need a break’, or being able to identify when you can't handle it anymore, or when you're not coping, and then just taking a break...”*

Alice's comment is in response to Miss Troy's reaction and the factors that may have played a role in her actions. Alice states that *“I definitely don't agree with her reaction”*, she is *“losing her temper”* and that's going to *“have a bad influence on the learner”*. This indicates that Alice acknowledges the importance of understanding emotions and knowing how to deal with them and the possible consequences of not being able to appropriately deal with emotions. Alice's second comment refers to how she would react in a challenging situation. She highlights that *“if I feel like I'm gonna lose my temper... I just ask the assistant to please take over the class for a while”*. This implies that Alice is able to understand why she is feeling a specific way before it becomes unmanageable and she is also able to choose the most appropriate action which is to *“ask the assistant to please take over the class for a while”*. There is a strong possibility that Alice is skilled in understanding emotions. Her third comment is in response to what emotional intelligence means to her. In this comment she highlights leaving all personal problems *“at the gate”*, being *“able... to separate your emotions”* and not *“take that mood into the classroom”*. In addition she comments that you need to be *“able to identify when you can't handle it anymore, or when you're not coping, and then just taking a break...”*. This comment implies that Alice is able to understand her emotions and whether they are appropriate to help her at her job as an educator. If not, *“you leave everything at the gate, once you enter the school”*. She understands that taking certain emotions into the classrooms may have a negative effect on her learners. Her comment also suggests that she is *“able to identify”* certain negative emotions and choose the most appropriate action to deal with those negative emotions. Based on Alice's comment, it can be concluded that

she has a fairly good understanding of her own emotions and also has developed a specific set of actions to deal appropriately with her emotions.

## **Victoria**

*“Obviously I feel an individual capacity for a person of a certain age... adding all of this onto whatever is supposed to be done in the classroom becomes a whole lot and they are unable to keep a balance and they're unable to structure themselves in order to do one task at a time.”*

*“Oh yes, I was very frustrated in my personal capacity. Yes, the first term and I have spates where I am very frustrated.”*

*“I literally went up to the person. By that time the smoke was coming out of my ears. I went up to the person and I picked him up from the chair and I said to him, ‘now I want you to please go outside’ and then I when I asked the learner to go outside, then I asked myself, is that something that I should be doing? Because I feel like you just need to calm down.”*

Victoria’s comment is in response to what may have caused Miss Troy’s frustration. Her comment implies that Miss Troy was struggling to manage her emotions due to the stress an educator experiences at school. She also comments that *“they are unable to keep a balance and they're unable to structure themselves in order to do one task at a time”*. She is probably referring to educators when she says *“they”*. It seems that Victoria resonates with this feeling as an educator. She states that, *“Obviously I feel...”*, which implies that Victoria may also struggle *“to keep a balance”* or *“structure”* herself as she is unable to understand her emotions and the messages they convey. Victoria's second comment responds to whether she has experienced something similar to Miss Troy. She states that she has had a similar experience and *“was very frustrated”* and still has *“spates where I am very frustrated”*. This implies that Victoria is aware of her feelings, but is unable to understand what they mean or how to deal with them. She states that she has felt frustrated in the first term, and still has *“spates where I am very frustrated”*. This indicates that even though she has experienced this feeling of frustration many times, she is still unable to understand the feeling and associate the appropriate action. Victoria’s third comment refers to the way she handled a challenging situation in her class. She states that there was *“smoke was coming*

*out of my ears”*, which indicates that she was angry or aggravated. She also stated that she had asked herself *“is that something that I should be doing? Because I feel like you just need to calm down”*. This comment suggests that Victoria experienced a specific negative feeling and acted upon it without understanding her feelings and without reasoning about how she will deal with it. As a result she had to question her own actions. Victoria’s comments indicate that she is not skilled in understanding emotions and associating appropriate actions to the emotions.

## **Diana**

*“Well, her reactions are not good. I think she's just adding to the problem. Uhm, the way she speaks to him, the language she uses, the tone. I think I can just pick it up that she is quiet aggressive. She is making him feel like he has a complex, like there's something wrong with him. Her approach is not a good one.”*

*“I don't see anything to be honest. She may be good at admin work. She may be good at creating content, but on a level of a learner that needs emotional help, definitely not.”*

*“Yeah definitely. Recently I feel, with my own personal issues that I've got going on - that definitely makes me feel like things are worse than they are. So you have to kind of keep yourself in check and how you respond to your kids.”*

*“I definitely feel that kids learn not only work, but learn from how the teacher conducts herself emotionally and they learn by example, so I think they definitely would follow the teacher. How the teacher carries himself and how they interact with other people. They definitely would copy that.”*

Diana's comment refers to her thoughts and feelings about Miss Troy’s reaction. She indicates that Miss Troy’s *“reactions are not good”* and that *“she's just adding to the problem”*. She also refers

to Miss Troy's use of "language" and "tone" and indicates that "she is quite aggressive". This comment implies that Miss Troy is displaying negative feelings in an inappropriate manner. Diana seems to disagree with Miss Troy's reaction as she states that "her reactions are not good". This suggests that Diana acknowledges the importance of understanding emotions and reacting appropriately. Diana's second comment is in response to whether she thinks Miss Troy is an excellent educator. Her comment highlights that Miss Troy may be good at teaching content but unable to understand her own emotions as well as her learners. Diana states that Miss Troy "may be good at creating content but on a level of a learner that needs emotional help, definitely not". This implies that Diana values the ability to understand emotions and the meaning they convey. Diana's third comment refers to whether she has experienced something similar to Miss Troy. She indicates that she has, and also understands that her "own personal issues" make her "feel like things are worse than they are. So you have to kind of keep yourself in check and how you respond to your kids". This suggests that Diana is able to understand her emotions, however, there is insufficient information to indicate whether she is able to reason about how to deal with those emotions. Diana's final comment is in response to whether an emotional atmosphere in the classroom will aid the emotional development of learners. She states that "I definitely feel that kids learn not only work, but learn from how the teacher conducts herself emotionally and they learn by example". This suggests that she is aware of the importance of understanding emotions and reacting appropriately, as this does affect learners' development, because "they definitely would follow the teacher; how the teacher carries himself and how they interact with other people." Diana's comments indicate that she is aware of the importance of understanding emotions and reacting appropriately. However, there is still insufficient information to indicate that Diana is skilled in understanding emotions.

Catherine

*"I've been in that situation, but I think the first one is just to walk away from the learner and go to the other learner that would just lift up your moods"*

*“I think I would have asked him...the same question, but in a different way”. And see if he will answer, and if he still doesn't answer, I'll just ask him something outside of the school work, maybe 'how was your morning', or something, and see if that will lift him up and get him to talk.”*

*“I think, no. Because if you are emotionally intelligent, you never lose your temper. And even if you see that, okay, now I'm going to lose my temper, you know that you need to walk away or you need to do something else. So I don't really think she's emotional intelligence.”*

Catherine's comment is in response to whether she has been in a similar situation as Miss Troy. She indicates that she has and in response to the learners she just “walk [ed] away from the learner” and went “to the other learner that would just lift up your moods”. This implies that Catherine understood the situation and which emotions it would lead to, thus she chose to “walk away from the learner and go to the other learner that would just lift up your moods”. Olderbak, Semmler & Doebler (2018) believe that understanding emotions refers to the ability to understand which situations will lead to certain emotions. Catherine's comment implies that she did understand the situation and her emotions and thus was able to reason about how she will act upon her emotions. Catherine's second comment refers to how she would have handled Miss Troy's situation. She states that “I think I would have asked him... the same question, but in a different way. And see if he will answer, and if he still doesn't answer, I'll just ask him something outside of the school work, maybe how was your morning or something and see if that will lift him up and get him to talk”. This suggests that Catherine is able to understand that there may be several emotions at play within the learners and is trying to elicit the dominant emotion in order to decide how to react appropriately to the learner. It indicates that she understands that emotions convey meaning and are associated with specific sets of actions. Catherine's third comment is in response to whether she thinks Miss Troy displays traits of an educator who is emotionally intelligent. Catherine highlights that if you are emotionally intelligent you are able to understand your emotions and the message they convey. You will be able to understand that “okay, now I'm going to lose my temper,” but I need to react appropriately, thus I “need to walk away, or... do something else.” Catherine's comment implies that she is able to understand emotions and select the most appropriate action for that emotion.

Charlotte

*"...she cannot control or manage her emotions and she cannot understand his emotions and she cannot use her emotions in a positive way."*

*"So if I say use her emotions in a positive way, yes, she gets frustrated, but it should push her to be able to help Peter. Rather than telling Peter that he's an idiot."*

*"Firstly, I think she does not understand emotions... If she's frustrated, she can just say whatever and that is wrong, so she's not emotionally intelligent. Because, if you are emotionally intelligent, you are able to deal with it even if you are stressed."*

*"Well, it means that I should be able to have my feelings and emotions under control. I need to be able to find ways to deal with my emotions no matter what I'm going through. Uhm, no matter how frustrated or angry I can get, I have to find ways so that I can live with people in society."*

Charlotte's comments refer to her thoughts and feelings about Miss Troy's reaction. She states that Miss Troy cannot *"understand [Peter's] emotions and she cannot use her emotions in a positive way"*. This comment implies that Charlotte sees the values in being able to understand emotions and use them *"in a positive way"*. Charlotte's second comment is an extension of the first comment. She states that Miss Troy's frustration *"should push her to be able to help Peter"*. This indicates that Charlotte understands that emotions convey meaning and that if skilled in this area, one is able to reason about how they act upon the emotions. Charlotte's third comment refers to whether Miss Troy displays traits of an emotionally intelligent educator. Charlotte makes direct reference to Miss Troy's inability to *"understand emotions"*. She implies that if Miss Troy was emotionally intelligent she would be *"able to deal"* with her emotions *"even if you are stressed"*. Charlotte's comment suggests that she views an emotionally intelligent educator as someone who can *"understand emotions"* and *"deal with it"*. This indicates that she has a good understanding of this EI skill. Charlotte's fourth comment concerns what emotional intelligence means to her. She highlights that emotional intelligence is about having your *"emotions under control"* and being *"able to find ways to deal"* with emotions *"no matter what I'm going through"*. In this comment, she implies that it is important to control, manage, and understand emotions in order to deal with them appropriately, *"so that I can live with people in society"*. Her comment suggests that she

acknowledges the importance of understanding emotions and the ability to reason about how to act upon it. There is insufficient information to suggest that Charlotte is skilled in this area.

## **Elizabeth**

*“Well, first of all, Miss Troy doesn't have a lot of patience. Because if she keeps on shouting at poor Peter, he's obviously not going to respond well to you. And you can clearly see that when he's being very quiet and shy, and he's not responding to anything she's asking him to do.”*

*“...majority of the time us teachers, who do have personal issues from home, we come to school with a smile on our face and we leave it behind.”*

*“...she's not showing you her emotional intelligence right there. Because with what I've been doing with my kids, you need to ask, ‘why are you feeling like this? Why? Why are you feeling this way?’ Or, like your emotions, like, ‘are you upset? Are you angry?’... she's not taking into account that this child's emotions are at play. So she's not thinking about him.”*

Elizabeth's comment is in relation to her thoughts and views about Miss Troy's reaction. She highlights that Miss Troy is unable to read or understand Peter's emotions as *“she keeps on shouting at poor Peter... and you can clearly see that when he's being very quiet and shy, and he's not responding.”* This comment implies that Elizabeth values the ability to understand emotions and the messages they convey. Her second comment refers to the possible factors that may have played a role in Miss Troy's reaction. She states that educators often have personal issues to deal with, but *“come to school with a smile on our face and we leave it behind”*. This comment implies that Elizabeth is able to understand her emotions, however there is insufficient information to indicate that she is able to reason about how to act upon them. Elizabeth's third comment refers to whether Miss Troy displays traits of an emotionally intelligent educator. She indicates that Miss Troy is not concerned about Peter's feelings and that *“she's not taking into account that this child's emotions are at play”*. She highlights the need to ask learners questions such as *“Why are you feeling this way?, are you upset? Are you angry?”* in order to understand their emotions and decide how to deal with it. This implies that Elizabeth is able to understand the emotions of her learners

and the messages they convey. However, there is insufficient information to indicate that she applies this to her own emotions or if she is skilled in this area.

## **Beatrice**

*“But she doesn't realise what her behaviors are doing to the other learners. So I think she also needs to have maybe a five minute break between sessions and just breath... and I think everything needs to be through respect.”*

*“And also you're venting your anger on a child. So I don't think that's something that you have to do. You have to think very carefully about what you're going to say in the class. Because for what we say, the learners actually imitate you. And they want to be like you. So you have to always be conscious of what you're saying, and put yourself out there and present yourself to something that the learners will look forward to.”*

*“...you got to go out and look for the meaning, read, enhance our knowledge, ask what is your opinion about this, gather everybody's opinion and then look at yours and say 'okay, this is how they did it, how can I adapt myself to that situation without hurting others?' 'Oh, okay, this is a happy situation, I want to share it with everybody, because I want to see everybody happy and it worked for me, it may work for you'.”*

Beatrice's comment refers to her thoughts about the words Miss Troy used. She indicates that Miss Troy is unaware of the implications of her actions and should have coping mechanisms to deal with them. She states that Miss Troy *“doesn't realise what her behaviors are doing to the other learners”* and she *“needs to have maybe a five minute break between sessions and just breath...”*. This comment implies that Beatrice sees the importance of understanding emotions and reacting appropriately. Her second comment is in response to whether she thinks Miss Troy displays traits of an emotionally intelligent educator. She implies that she disagrees with Miss Troy's reaction and that educators need *“think very carefully about what you're going to say in the class”* because *“learners actually imitate you”*. She also states that educators *“have to always be conscious of what you're saying”* and present themselves in a good manner.

Beatrice's comment suggests that as an educator she values the ability to understand emotions and associate it with the appropriate behaviour in order to "*present yourself [as] something that the learners will look forward to*". However there is insufficient information to indicate that Beatrice is skilled in understanding emotions. Her third comment refers to whether she thinks EI is important for educators. She indicates that in order for educators to develop their EI, they need "*to go out and look for the meaning, read, enhance our knowledge, ask what is your opinion about this?*". She also indicates that it is important to share emotional intelligence knowledge and select the most appropriate methods for your classroom. She states that it's important to "*gather everybody's opinion and then look at yours and say 'okay, this is how they did it, how can I adapt myself to that situation without hurting others?'... 'okay, this is a happy situation, I want to share it with everybody because I want to see everybody happy' ...*". Her comment implies that she values the need to understand emotions and how they affect a given situation. It also implies that she acknowledges that in order to develop as an emotionally intelligent educator, one must be able to understand their own emotions and reason about how to act upon them.

Based on the comments reviewed above, Catherine and Alice seem to be the only two educators who display skills in understanding emotions. Catherine displays an ability to manage and regulate her own emotions as well as those of her learners. She states that if learners do not respond to a specific question, she will ask "*the same question, but in a different way. And see if he will answer, and if he still doesn't answer, I'll just ask him something outside of the school work, maybe how was your morning or something and see if that will lift him up and get him to talk.*" In reference to her own emotions she states that she feels frustrated she will "*walk [ed] away from the learner*" and go "*to the other learner that would just lift up your moods*". Alice indicates that she is able to manage her emotions as she can "*separate [her] emotions*" and "*identify when [she] can't handle it anymore*". Margaret, Diana, Charlotte, Elizabeth, and Beatrice display a good understanding of their own emotions, however there is no evidence to suggest that they are skilled in this area. Victoria does not display any skill in this area.

## Focus Group Findings

The comments below were in response to the questions participants were asked during the focus group discussion. See Appendix G for Focus Group Discussion Schedule. The statements below further reflect educators' views and thoughts about the theme of understanding emotions.

Diana: *“Emotional intelligence, for us, is something interesting because we have different cultures of children that I'm teaching. It's important to have an understanding of how to approach different scenarios and conflicts appropriately in regard to their backgrounds and what their life is on a day-to-day basis. So, I've found that quite important for the school we teach at.”*

Diana's comment concerns her thoughts about EI. She indicates that *“it's important to have an understanding of how to approach different scenarios and conflicts appropriately”*. This comment implies that she considers EI as an important skill for educators and in doing so, she specifically highlights the ability to *“understand...how to approach different scenarios and conflicts appropriately”*. Her comment suggests that is aware of the importance of being able to understand emotions and which situations will lead to certain emotions. There is no evidence to indicate that she is skilled in understanding emotions.

Charlotte: *“I feel like it's important to teach the growing generation about being emotional intelligent. It's important to understand our feelings. I feel, as adults, we have had a problem understanding our feelings and controlling them. So, I feel like if we teach the younger generation emotional intelligence, then it would be wise and they would grow wiser. I feel it's good for them.”*

Charlotte's comment is also in relation to her thoughts about EI. She directly refers to the importance of understanding our feelings. She states that adults sometimes have *“a problem understanding our feelings and controlling them”*. However, we should be able to *“teach the younger generation emotional intelligence”*. This comment implies that she views the ability to understand emotion as a crucial skill for developing emotional intelligence. However, there is no evidence to indicate that she is skilled in this area.

Catherine: *“I think emotional intelligence is very important, especially for us. I think teachers, and also as adults, we deal with so many learners and different cases. So, it's*

*important to understand and to not let your personal issues affect your work, and also to understand that you come from different backgrounds. So, what might be important to you, to me it must just be silly. I need to understand that, to me it might be silly, but to you it's very important."*

Catherine's comment concerns her thoughts about EI. She states that "*emotional intelligence is very important... for teachers*" as we need to "*understand and... not let your personal issues affect your work, and also to understand that you come from different backgrounds.*" Catherine's comments highlight the need to understand our emotions and how they may "*affect your work*" and social experiences. Her comment indicates that she acknowledges the importance of this skill.

Elizabeth: "*So emotional intelligence, for us, is important, and being able to know how to handle our learners, as well, how to handle our emotions when coming to school.*"

Elizabeth's comment is in relation to her thoughts about EI. Elizabeth indicates that "*emotional intelligence, for us, is important*" as it enables us "*to know how to handle our learners, as well, how to handle our emotions when coming to school*". Her comment indicates that she sees the importance of understanding emotions and how they may affect our actions. There is no evidence to indicate that she is skilled in this area.

Diana: "*So, I would say that we act as models. They model our behaviour so we have to be very aware of how we react to certain situations because they are like sponges. They absorb everything they see, and sometimes we are not aware of how we react. Therefore, you know we have to be very cautious with the children. I don't know if this is the second part, but we need to, as teachers, be very aware of certain things that kids may say, like warning signals when they they're falling apart.*"

Diana's comment is in response to the role that educators play in how learners value emotional intelligence. She indicates that it is crucial for educators "*to be very aware of how we react to certain situations*" as learners "*absorb everything they see*". Furthermore, she indicates that teachers also need to "*be very aware of certain things that kids may say, like warning signals when they they're falling apart*". Her comment indicates that educators need to have an understanding of not only their own emotions, but also those of their learners, in order to provide the best support

and/or react appropriately to those emotions. It implies that she understands the importance of having this skill, however there is no evidence to indicate that she is skilled in this area.

Responses from the focus group discussion indicate that Diana, Charlotte, Catherine and Elizabeth acknowledge the ability to understand emotions and the relation between emotions, as a key component to emotional intelligence. However, there was no reference to specific skills during the focus group discussion. The remaining participants did not make any reference to the skill of understanding emotions during the focus group discussion. Based on these responses, it can be concluded that even though educators acknowledge the importance of this skill, they are not skilled in understanding that emotions change over time and blend together to form complex emotional experiences. Olderbak, Semmler & Doebler (2018) believe that understanding emotions refers to the ability to understand that emotions provide us information about what we are experiencing and help us know how to react.

When viewed through the theoretical lens that underpinned this study, the theme of understanding emotions is the third branch of Mayer and Salovey' ability model of EI. They claim that each branch represents a group of skills that proceed developmentally from basic tasks to more challenging ones. The developmental progression in the third branch begins with the ability to label emotions, and to differentiate between emotional states and their specific causes. Norboevich (2020) states that "a full understanding of emotions evokes an understanding of the meaning of emotions coupled with the ability to reason about these meanings" (p. 101) An educator skilled in this area would be able to recognise that a student is getting frustrated through subtle changes in tone or expression, and offer appropriate guidance as he/she is able to label and categorise emotions. Based on the comments collected from the interview and focus group discussions, most educators are able to label their emotions, however they seem to struggle with recognising the message that is conveyed by that emotion. Even though there are two educators who display that they are skilled in this area, they only display basic skills of understanding emotions. Thus, it can be concluded that all educators require the development of this emotional intelligence skill. A study conducted by Chandra (2020) analysed the perception of academic stress as experienced by students and coping strategies using their emotional intelligence during the pandemic. The study highlighted that its dramatic implications had a negative impact on educational institutions and educators, and thus, it is crucial to be implemented at all levels of education, as the concept is

rooted in the understanding of emotions, and helping oneself to direct the emotional reactions; labelling the experiences of different emotions; and helping others to understand and channel their emotions. Another study by Ibrahim et al. (2018) aimed to reveal the potential contributors of EI on working relationships with clients and decision-making, found that through understanding of their own and others' emotions, individuals may be better equipped to understand and respect one another. Krishnan and Awang (2020) conducted a study that investigated the role of EI in teaching and they established that EI should be developed amongst teachers as it helps to maintain balanced and trusting relationships, to understand others better and clearly interpret behaviours. They also found that EI training can positively affect students, as teachers will be able to create a healthy environment if they are able to identify and understand the needs of students. Thorndike, an influential contributors to the development of the concept of EI, states that "the ability to understand and manage men and women, boys and girls" (p.86) is crucial "to act wisely in human relations" (Kihlstrom & Cantor, 2000, p 564).

#### **5.3.4. Managing Emotions**

Managing emotions is another major theme that emerged in this study. It refers to the ability to manage emotions effectively, and involves regulation of one's own and other's emotions in order to respond appropriately (Fiori & Vesely-Maillefer, 2018). It includes the ability to stay open to both pleasant and unpleasant feelings, and the ability to reflectively connect or detach from an emotion (Caruso, 2015). It is considered to be an important skill for educators as it enables them to evaluate strategies to control and manage emotions, which includes their own emotions and their students, to achieve a desired outcome. It is the fourth component of Mayer and Salovey's ability model, which posits that educators skilled in this area are also able to manage and regulate their emotions to deal with frustrating and challenging situations in a way that enables both educator and learner to move forward. They also highlight that this process can enhance effective communication and positive growth and development between educator and learner.

The responses below reflect participants' views and thoughts about the theme of managing emotions and are cited verbatim from the interview findings as well as the focus group discussions.

#### **Interview Findings**

The comments below were in response to the questions participants were asked during the interview process. See Appendix F for interview schedule.

Margaret

*“So I feel that if she's teaching for a long time, she should know how to handle the learner. Because for me, when I first started teaching, it is very frustrating, because you don't know what you're getting into. Because you haven't experienced those children before. Only once you've experienced those kind of children, that's how you get to handle them. So that's how I view it. Maybe she doesn't have a lot of experience, that is why she handled it that way.”*

*“And I think it's because maybe she's not getting through to him. Maybe she needs to change her way. Maybe she's an excellent teacher in the classroom, but maybe she just doesn't know how to handle that one child in particular.”*

*“Yes, I have. But obviously, I don't tell the child those words. I have experienced it where I shout at the child, but obviously don't tell them that you're an idiot, you wasting my time. But then I do feel bad about it. Because then the next day, I know that doing the same thing is not going to help, shouting at that child is not going to help. And then I just change my approach... And then eventually, when I get really very frustrated, that's when I send them to the HOD, because there's nothing else that I could do, because talking to them is not going to help, putting them on a timeout is just something fun.”*

Margaret's comment is referring to her thoughts and feelings about Miss Troy's reaction. She indicates that Miss Troy “*doesn't have a lot of experience, that is why she handled it that way*”. Margaret also comments that “*when I first started teaching, it is very frustrating because you don't know what you're getting into.*” This suggests that Margaret shares some of the frustration experienced by Miss Troy and possibly struggles to manage her own emotions at times. Margaret's second comment is in response to whether she thinks Miss Troy is an excellent teacher. Her comment can be considered contradictory as she states that “*Maybe she's an excellent teacher in the classroom, but maybe she just doesn't know how to handle that one child in particular.*” This indicates that Margaret agrees that one can be an excellent teacher, even though they may not have

the ability to manage their emotions effectively. Caruso (2015) claims that an educator skilled in managing emotions is able to manage and regulate his/her emotions to deal with frustrating and challenging situations in a way that enables both educator and learner to move forward. Margaret's comment suggests that she does not have an understanding of how to manage emotions. Her third comment refers to her own experience of a challenging situation. It indicates that she does not have effective methods to manage her emotions as she states that *"when I get really very frustrated, that's when I send them to the HOD, because there's nothing else that I could do, because talking to them is not going to help, putting them on a timeout is just something fun."* This comment indicates that she does not know how to manage her emotions in a way that will enable both educator and learner to move forward.

### **Alice**

*"It can be that she, maybe she has a lot of work, or maybe the child or the learners in the class are a bit out of control. Or she is stressed or maybe the learners are all misbehaving on that specific day. Or maybe she's even experiencing emotional stress herself, or she can't cope with her own emotional stuff, and then she's taking it out on the child or bringing it to work. Or maybe she's getting impatient with the child for not being able to learn."*

*"I think it definitely happens and I do think if it happens, and you made a mistake, or maybe you lost your temper, I do think that it is important to go to the child or go talk to the learner, afterwards and just talk calmly to the learner and explain to the learner, why you're feeling the way you feel and that you're not angry, upset with them. I do think that happens. I think a lot of teachers, they are still human, but they need to, if they make a mistake, they need to fix it."*

*"What I usually do is if I feel like I'm gonna lose my temper, or I'm going to lose it, I just ask the assistant to please take over the class for a while... I just need to go outside for a few minutes. And yes, so that's usually how I handle it. Or a lot of the times it's not the best thing to do. But if I see that specific activities is not keeping their attention, I'll switch activity and maybe do some artwork..."*

Alice's comment is in response to what factors she thinks played a role in the way Miss Troy handled the situation. She highlights several possible factors and also refers directly to emotional management when she states that maybe Miss Troy "*can't cope with her own emotional stuff*". Alice's reference to emotional management indicates that she is possibly aware of her own emotions, however there is insufficient evidence to indicate that she is able to manage her own emotions effectively. Alice's second comment refers to her views on an outburst of an excellent educator. She indicates that it is possible for an excellent educator to make a "*mistake*" or "*lose your temper*". She also indicates that if the above does happen, the educator must "*explain to the learner, why you're feeling the way you feel and that you're not angry, upset with them*". Alice's comments indicate that she does not have effective methods to manage her emotions as her solution is "*to fix it... if they make a mistake*". Alice's third comment is in response to how she would handle a frustrating situation. She indicates that if she feels like she is going to lose her temper, she asks "*the assistant to please take over the class for a while*", or she will "*switch activity and maybe do some artwork...*" with learners. Her last two comments can be considered as contradictory as she indicates that it is human to make mistakes or lose your temper, however she also has coping mechanisms for certain classroom situations. Due to the inconsistency, it is suggested that Alice is aware of her own emotions and is able to manage them occasionally. However, she does not have a deep understanding of managing emotions and what it entails.

Victoria

*"I feel, maybe she's just frustrated on the level that she feels that she's a good teacher and she's not having an impact on him. I also feel that she feels like she's putting in a lot and she's just not getting anything out. So I basically feel, its her frustration levels. It could be personal, could be also driven on her personal capacity, maybe home or any other scenarios on her personal level that's also adding to the fact that she feels that school and a combination of her personal life is just adding on her pressure that she's just now venting on this child."*

*"I would think she's sending out a very negative - it's just negativity all around, because she's portraying to the learners that, my frustration is not being vented out in a correct manner and it's*

*going to be a negative connotation that's now being imposed and it's going to start affecting the learners, so for me it's just negativity all around.”*

*“I think it was someone that was being rather stubborn. They had done something in class and I asked them to stand up and the learner just refused to even look at me or... do what I was asking them to do. I literally went up to the person... I went up to the person and I picked him up from the chair and I said to him, “now I want you to please go outside” and then when I asked the learner to go outside, then I asked myself, is that something that I should be doing? Because I feel like you just need to calm down, so, actually I did catch myself in the process, because I realised that the learner had driven me to a point where I just wanted to go there and smack him. But yes, I did catch myself and I was quite aware that I was reaching that point... So I did realise what had happened and when he went to the door I said to him, “you know what? I'm kind of tired. Just sit here and do not even move.”*

*“...one of the things I've actually been doing for the past few years... I generally just switch off. I block it off. I don't think about it because the more you think about it, the more you spiral out of control. And I try to deal with one aspect at a time, and if I feel that it's beyond my control then I seek help.”*

Victoria's response is in relation to the factors that possibly played a role in the way Miss Troy handled the situation with Peter. Victoria highlights that Miss Troy may be frustrated due to a combination of personal and school related issues and as a result she had an outburst when Peter did not respond in her class. Victoria's comment indicates that she resonates with Miss Troy and possibly experiences the same feeling at times. Victoria's second comment indicates that she disagrees with Miss Troy's reaction as it is *“sending out a very negative - it's just negativity all around”*. She also indicates that Miss Troy's *“frustration is not being vented out in a correct manner”* and will start *“affecting the learners”*. This comment suggests that Victoria is aware of how educators should manage their emotions in the classroom. The third comment refers to the way Victoria handled a challenging situation in her classroom. She implies that she had lost her temper, however was able to control herself as she became *“aware that I was reaching that point”*. Victoria's reaction indicates that she is aware of her emotions and is able to manage them. Her

final comment explains how she manages her emotions. She indicates that she sometimes withdraws herself from the situation in order *“to deal with one aspect at a time”* and if *“it’s beyond my control then I seek help”*. Caruso (2015) states that managing emotions refers to the ability to reflectively connect or detach from an emotion, and an educator skilled in managing emotions is able to evaluate strategies to control emotions and manage emotions within oneself and their students to achieve a desired outcome. From the comments, it can be concluded that Victoria has certain skills required for managing emotions, as she implies that she is able to detach from an emotion and evaluate strategies to control emotions, however, there is insufficient evidence to indicate if she is able to manage emotions effectively, which includes regulation of one’s own and other’s emotions, and responding appropriately.

Diana

*“Yeah definitely. Recently I feel, with my own personal issues that I’ve got going on - that definitely makes me feel like things are worse than they are. So you have to kind of keep yourself in check and how you respond to your kids. Yeah, I mean the school that I’m in has a mixed sort of ability of kids in our class, which is very frustrating for us teachers. It’s hard to learn how to adapt your work into different areas for kids to be better susceptible to it. Especially, when you have such a mixed ability, it does get frustrating.”*

*“Well, definitely take a moment to breathe. The one thing I do is count to five. If it gets really bad, I kind of just make sure, let the kids do something they’re able to do by themselves for 10 minutes and then give myself a bit more time to just sit away from them in the classroom, to just gather my thoughts. You need to just pull yourself out of the situation.”*

Diana’s comment refers to her experience of a challenging situation. She makes reference to keeping *“yourself in check and how you respond to your kids”*. However she does not mention how to keep *“yourself in check”*. She indicated that *“it’s hard to learn how to adapt”* and *“it does get frustrating”*, which suggests that Diana may struggle to manage her emotions. Her second comment refers to the techniques she uses to keep herself from having inappropriate outbursts. She indicates that she has to *“take a moment to breathe”* and that she is able to withdraw herself from the situation by allowing *“the kids do something they’re able to do by themselves for 10*

*minutes*". This comment suggests that she is probably aware of emotions, however, she does not have a good understanding of how to manage emotions effectively.

### **Catherine**

*"I think she shouldn't have behaved that way. She shouldn't have lost her temper. I think she should have just maybe approached the learner in a different way, not lose your temper in front of the learners."*

*"I've been in that situation, but I think the first one is just to walk away from the learner and go to the other learner that would just lift up your moods."*

Catherine's response is in relation to her thoughts and feelings about Miss Troy's reaction. She indicates that she disagrees with Miss Troy's reactions by stating that *"I think she should have just maybe approached the learner in a different way, not lose your temper in front of the learners."* This comment indicates that Catherine tries to manage her emotions to the best of her ability. It indicates that she is concerned about learners and how they will respond to her if she reacts inappropriately. Catherine's second comment refers to how she would handle a challenging situation. She indicates that she would withdraw herself from the situation *"and go to the other learner that would just lift up your moods"*. This comment suggests that Catherine understands how to effectively manage her emotions and regulate her own and other's emotions in order to respond appropriately. Thus it can be concluded that Catherine has a fairly good understanding of managing emotions.

### **Elizabeth**

*"...we don't see if you having outbursts with the other kids as well because majority of the time us teachers, who do have personal issues from home, we come to school with a smile on our face and we leave it behind."*

*“we need to be able to compose ourselves and not be frustrated in the moment. Yes, we do get frustrated, but an excellent teacher needs to be patient, calm and be caring to a learner...”*

*“I get really angry inside, but then I know because I've got so many faces looking at me and I have to compose myself to a point I'm like, 'okay, don't get too angry'. So I will stop what I'm doing, go to my desk and I let them carry on, make the noise, do whatever they want. Because if I give my outburst, then they're gonna see that. What I've done a few times ... I just take a quick walk outside my door for a few minutes, and I come back in to compose myself, and that's actually helped.”*

Elizabeth's comment is related to the factors that may have caused Miss Troy's reaction. She indicates that educators often *“have personal issues from home”* yet *“come to school with a smile on our face and we leave it behind”*. This comment suggests that Elizabeth is able to separate her personal emotions from her work related emotions. Her second comment states that educators *“need to be able to compose”* themselves and *“not be frustrated in the moment”*. This comment indicates that Elizabeth is aware of the importance of managing emotions. Her third comment is related to how she would handle a challenging situation. She states that even though *“I get really angry inside... I know because I've got so many faces looking at me... I have to compose myself.”* This comment implies that Elizabeth is aware of her emotions and how they may change over time. It also indicates that she cares about how she makes her learners feel. This is further highlighted by her comment that *“if I give my outburst, then they're gonna see that”*. In the same comment she also mentions that she takes *“a quick walk outside... for a few minutes and I come back in to compose myself.”* This suggests that Elizabeth does employ basic methods to manage emotions. Upon review of all her comments, it seems that Elizabeth does display characteristics of an educator who is able to manage emotions however this is at a very basic level as there is no evidence of her ability to regulate her own and other's emotions or her ability to reflectively connect or detach from an emotion.

Charlotte

*“It says that she's an excellent teacher. So my thoughts about the teacher was that although she's an excellent teacher, she cannot control or manage her emotions and she cannot understand his emotions and she cannot use her emotions in a positive way.”*

*“I think her not being able to control her emotions. Whatever words that come to her mind she utters, so I feel like one, she could have been under stress, which is not a reason to say stuff like that to a child or two, anyone for that matter.”*

*“Well, controlling my emotions. What did I mean by controlling my emotions? Just having ways to get them in control. If you are faced with a situation that would make you angry, having ways of... finding ways so that you can just calm down and not say things that you're going to regret. We get angry and sometimes we can get into physical fights, but if you can manage your emotions and control them, no matter how angry you can get, you are able to keep them under control.”*

Charlotte's comment relates to whether she thinks Miss Troy is an excellent teacher. She states that although the script says that Miss Troy is an excellent teacher, *“she cannot control or manage her emotions and she cannot understand his emotions and she cannot use her emotions in a positive way”*. This comment suggests that Charlotte probably disagrees with the statement that Miss Troy is an excellent teacher as she is unable to control and manage her own and Peter's emotions. Charlotte highlights an important aspect of emotional intelligence, which includes managing emotions. This implies that she is aware of the importance of managing emotions and its relation to emotional intelligence. Charlotte also highlights that Miss Troy *“cannot use her emotions in a positive way”*. This is an important component of managing emotions as Caruso (2015) states that an educator skilled in this area is able to control emotions and manage emotions within oneself and their students to achieve a desired outcome. Charlotte's second comment refers to the possible factors that led Miss Troy to have an outburst. Her comment refers directly to Miss Troy's inability *“to control her emotions”* and she implies that even though an educator may be *“under stress”* it *“is not a reason to say stuff like that to a child or to anyone”*. It is clear that Charlotte disagrees with Miss Troy's reaction and in doing so she is expressing her awareness of managing emotions and its importance for educators. In her third comment, Charlotte explains what she means by

*“control your emotions”*. She indicates that it involves *“having ways to get them in control”*, so that when *“you are faced with a situation that would make you angry”*, you have ways to *“just calm down and not say things that you're going to regret”*. Furthermore, she states that *“if you can manage your emotions and control them, no matter how angry you can get, you are able to keep them under control”*. From these comments it is clear that Charlotte has a deep understanding of managing emotions as it involves the capacity to maintain, shift and cater emotional responses, either positive or negative, to a given situation.

### **Beatrice**

*“...maybe she can tell Peter, can you please go and sit in the quiet area, get your work done when you come back you can give me your answer. Instead of just shouting at him. She can tell him to think about it, come back, and then we can solve it.”*

*“And so I think she's not giving the learners options to actually put out their feelings out there and develop from there and know the real world. So it will actually become much more difficult for the learners and challenging when they face much more harsh situations... and they won't know how to handle themselves... and that's when they fall academically.”*

*“So I think if she took like, smaller steps of helping herself reduce everything, balancing her life, that won't have happened and won't have impacted the child... So we always have to look at our ourselves, we have to keep analyzing ourselves, look at our surroundings, how can we adapt ourselves, put ourselves into that situation?”*

Beatrice's comment is in response to Miss Troy's reaction to Peter. She provides an alternate solution to shouting at Peter, which implies that she disagrees with the way Miss Troy handled the situation. As a result it is indicated that Beatrice values the ability to manage emotions for oneself and learners. Her comment also indicates that she is considerate of Peter's feelings as she would *“tell him to think about it, come back, and then we can solve it”*. Beatrice's second comment refers to the message Miss Troy portrays through her actions. Beatrice indicates that Miss Troy is *“not giving the learners options to actually put out their feelings out there and develop from there and*

*know the real world*". This implies that learners are not given the opportunity to learn how to manage their emotions, purely because their teacher, Miss Troy is unable to manage her own emotions. Beatrice highlights that as a result of Miss Troy's inabilities *"it will actually become much more difficult for the learners, and challenging when they face much more harsh situations... And they won't know how to handle themselves."* This comment indicates that Beatrice acknowledges the importance of being able to manage emotions, however, there is insufficient evidence to indicate if she has an understanding of managing emotions. The third comment refers to Beatrice's thoughts and feelings about Miss Troy's reaction. She indicates that if Miss Troy *"took... smaller steps of helping herself reduce everything, balancing her life, that won't have happened and won't have impacted the child."* This comment suggests that if Miss Troy was skilled in managing emotions she would have taken the necessary steps to *"help herself"*. Beatrice also highlights that teachers need to *"keep analysing ourselves, look at our surroundings, how can we adapt ourselves."* These are important components of managing emotions, as it involves the ability to regulate one's own and other's emotions and respond appropriately. It also includes the ability to stay open to both pleasant and unpleasant feelings.

Once again, Beatrice's comments indicate that she is aware of the importance of managing emotions, however, there is insufficient evidence to indicate if she has a good understanding of managing emotions.

The above responses indicate that two out of the eight educators have a fairly good understanding of managing emotions. Charlotte makes several comments about managing and controlling emotions. She also indicates that it is necessary to be able to regulate your emotion by stating that *"if you are faced with a situation that would make you angry"*, you have to find *"ways so that you can just calm down and not say things that you're going to regret"*. Similarly, Catherine vehemently disagrees with Miss Troy's reaction and does not provide any possible justification for her behaviour, which indicates that Catherine values that ability to control and manage emotions effectively; and she probably displays this in her classroom. She is also aware of how to regulate emotions as she states that she would *"go to the other learner that would just lift up your moods."* The remaining educators are aware of their emotions and have coping mechanisms to manage their emotions, however they do not display an understanding of regulating their own or

their learners' emotions in order to respond appropriately. They refer mainly to *"leav[ing] the classroom, to breathe"*, but do not provide evidence of how learners' emotions are taken into consideration.

### **Focus group findings**

The comments below were in response to the questions participants were asked during the focus group discussion. See Appendix G for Focus Group Discussion Schedule. The statements below further reflect educators' views and thoughts about the theme of managing emotions.

Charlotte: *"So, I felt he didn't really have a way of keeping his feelings or emotions in control or managing his stress, because I feel like it's stressing him that he got a C, that he didn't get an A, I feel like it's the pressures from the society and the parents."*

Charlotte's comment relates to her thoughts on Calvin's response. She makes a specific reference to Calvin's inability to manage his emotions. This implies that she values the ability to manage emotions as it may help reduce stress and/or *"pressures from the society and the parents."*

Diana: *"...alot of the kids don't even learn emotions because we live in a society where our faces need to be covered. They are put into different situations and the kids are now so isolated at home that their parents are afraid to send them to the parks to play with their friends. Maybe Johnny slaps Ben or whatever on the playground and they're not being exposed to those situations in a more frequent manner whereas, previously it was so safe to not wear a mask and play with other kids. And the kids - when they are in that situation... they don't know how to react. They don't know how to control their emotions and they don't know how to treat other children because they're not around children as often as they used to because of the pandemic. As time goes on and our world is sort of facing these problems, the kids need that support more than ever."*

Diana's comment refers to the importance of EI for learners. She indicates that due to the pandemic, children are *"not being exposed to those situations"* that can allow them to gain experience in managing emotions. In addition, she states that children *"don't know how to control their emotions and they don't know how to treat other children because they're not around children as often as they used to because of the pandemic."* Her comment implies that managing

and controlling emotions is a crucial skill. Furthermore, she highlights the point that in an ever changing world “kids need” emotional intelligence skills “more than ever”.

The following two comments relate to participants' views as to whether they value IQ over EQ or vice versa.

*Diana: So I was thinking about this other day. I feel that our world we're living in now, our curriculum, especially, compared to the world we're living in now is so old school... It will be so much more beneficial if we taught kids how to behave and how to act in certain situations because, they will succeed far more in life, having those fundamental sort of characteristics and abilities, than having a piece of paper that says you did this level, this grade or whatever.”*

Diana's comment indicates that she values emotional intelligence skills. She states that “*if we taught kids how to behave and how to act in certain situations... they will succeed far more in life.*” This comment implies that she acknowledges the value of being able to manage emotions in everyday life.

*Elizabeth: “...you also have to be emotionally stable for your academics. When you look further into your career, you've got to be emotionally ready to take on that academic part... So for example, if you want to be a doctor, you have to make sure that emotionally, am I ready as I may be dealing with people's lives every day. If you're emotionally ready for that, then you can have your academics.”*

Elizabeth's comments make reference to emotional stability or emotional readiness. In order to achieve any of the above one needs to be able to effectively manage emotions. Thus, her comment indicates that she also values EI skills and the ability to manage emotions which is a key component of EI.

The responses from the focus group discussion indicate that Charlotte, Diana and Elizabeth recognise and understand the importance of managing emotions. However, they do not display any distinct skills to indicate that they are fully skilled in managing emotions. The remaining

participants did not make any reference to managing emotions during the focus group discussion. Based on the responses, it is evident that even though these educators are aware of their emotions and those of their learners, they are not always in a position to maintain, shift, and cater emotional responses in a given situation. They may have a deep understanding of managing emotions yet may lack the capacity to instill this in their classrooms. Mayer and Salovey claim that as educators work through the fourth component of the ability model, they will be able to apply the specific skills within the teaching and learning environment to create a positive teaching and learning environment, to enhance effective communication, build trustworthy relationships and ultimately become emotionally intelligent educators.

When viewed through the theoretical lens that underpinned this study, the theme of managing emotions is viewed through the fourth and final branch of Mayer and Salovey's ability model of emotional intelligence. As mentioned previously, the model is divided into four ability branches that are hierarchically arranged from the most cognitively basic to the most complex ability. The fourth branch is concerned with managing emotions, and refers to the ability to regulate one's own and others' emotions and deal with those emotions effectively. Beltman and Poulton (2019), claim that the need to regulate emotions in order to neutralise potentially negative or emotionally harmful situations is the hidden curriculum for teachers. They also state that the capacity for teachers to manage their own emotions is recognised as an important aspect of emotional intelligence as it enables them to remain open to a wide range of emotions and recognise the value of feeling certain emotions in specific situations. Based on the comments above, it seems that most educators are able to recognise their emotions and manage them in a way that provides temporary relief. They state that when they are frustrated they "*send [learners] to the HOD, because there's nothing else that I could do*" or they "*take a moment to breathe*" or some "*catch [themselves] in the process.*" This indicates that most educators have basic skills to regulate their own and their learners' emotions. However, this is not developed to the point where educators can manage emotions effectively. Two out of the eight educators show a good understanding of managing emotions effectively as they display the ability to maintain, shift, and cater for emotional responses. They make reference to their own and learners' emotions and highlight that educators need to use "*emotions in a positive way*" and find "*ways to get them in control*" or "*so that you can just calm down and not say things that you're going to regret*". A study by Asrar-ul-Haq, Anwar and Hassan (2017) investigating the impact of emotional intelligence on teachers' job performance found that

EI has a significant impact on teachers' job performance. They state that the social pressures on teachers can result in emotional challenges, however if a teacher focuses on developing their emotional abilities, they will be equipped to manage their emotions and meet the societal challenges that disturb the balance of their emotions. Another study by Safine et al. (2020) explored EI in teachers' activities at two state universities in Russia. Their aim was to help educators acquire effective skills to build optimal relationships by measuring the development level of students' EI. They highlighted that "a modern teacher... does not take priority when organising cognitive activity", due to the "intensive development of information technologies [which] provide people with unlimited access to information." Thus there is a shift in the primary role of an educator, where she/he is no longer the primary source of knowledge but is expected to develop personal abilities within students that provide a basis for emotional intelligence. Therefore, learning to teach involves not only mastering how to teach content matter but also how to recognise and manage emotions effectively for constructive teaching and learning to take place. Dolev and Leshem (2016) investigated the impact of a teacher-centered EI training on teachers' EI. They found that the training programme was perceived by the participants to have enhanced their emotional intelligence competencies. They also found that teachers had become more attuned to emotional situations in the classroom and more often addressed them which contributed to better class management and improved climate. Thus, it is clear that an understanding of emotional intelligence will enable educators to manage their emotions and those of their students effectively.

### **5.3.5. Classroom Environment**

Classroom environment emerged as a theme in this study. It is a less popular theme within emotional intelligence, however, it is still relevant due to its relationship to classroom environment. Aritzeta et al. (2015) claim that the study of emotions in classrooms is central to understanding motivation and learning patterns among learners. Li, Huang and Li (2021), state that classroom environment refers to "the atmosphere, ambiance, tone, or climate that pervades the particular educational setting" (p. 3). In simple terms, it deals with the social, emotional, and instructional elements of a classroom and involves the way learners and educators feel, communicate, and layout their classroom. Aritzeta et al. (2015) state that the classroom environment involves a "complex combination of information processing and emotional responding that might influence students' learning process" (p. 6), and thus, in order to create an

appropriate classroom environment for effective teaching and learning, it is vital for educators to develop their own emotional intelligence. In addition it is believed that educators have the strongest and most direct impact on students' psychological experience in the classroom.

The responses below reflect participants' views and thoughts about the theme of classroom environment and are cited verbatim from the interview findings.

### **Beatrice**

*"We could observe... If the child needs extra help or needs a psychologist or somebody to help or if the parents are separated, you can take the initiative as a teacher to give extra time in the morning... You can even appoint a buddy system, where one of the learners can also help the child finish the homework... And if the child doesn't have friends, you can create an activity during break time where all the learners don't have to feel like they are outsiders or they don't have friends... And then you will see there's a much brighter and happier environment."*

*"So it depends on the environment that she puts out there for the learners. So she's not actually portraying a welcoming environment where it's okay to feel sad... and it's okay to feel over happy sometimes... she's not giving the learners an opportunity to make a mistake, and learn from their mistakes."*

*"So we always have to look at ourselves, we have to keep analysing ourselves, look at our surroundings, how can we adapt ourselves, put ourselves into that situation. And I will say give a welcoming learning environment."*

*"...it's not much of a welcoming environment whereas the teacher is encouraging the child to actually answer, even though the answer might be wrong. So, there needs to be a give and take situation and encourage the child... you can say "try, let's try" and help him..."*

*“...as long as you motivate them and... say ‘well done, that is very good. I’m so proud of you’... and it is simple things like that and... it makes them feel good. So I think for me the strategy of actually... providing a good environment in the class.”*

Beatrice’s comment is in response to what qualities make an excellent teacher. In this comment she refers to ways in which one can be an excellent teacher. She indicates that to create a *“brighter and happier environment”*, a teacher can offer *“extra time in the morning”*, *“appoint a buddy system”*, where learners can help each other or *“create an activity... where all the learners don’t have to feel like they are outsiders or they don’t have friends.”* By highlighting various ways of improving the classroom environment, Beatrice is suggesting that it is important to create a positive classroom environment for successful teaching and learning to take place. She is also highlighting that a positive classroom environment is characterised by positive emotions. Beatrice’s second comment is in response to what message Miss Troy is sending out about emotional intelligence. Her comment indicates that the message sent out by Miss Troy *“depends on the environment that she puts out there for the learners”*. Beatrice also highlights that Miss Troy is *“not actually portraying a welcoming environment... where it’s okay to feel sad... and it’s okay to feel over happy sometimes.”* This comment implies that Miss Troy is not creating an environment where learners can freely express their emotions, thus, she is not *“portraying a welcoming environment.”* It suggests that Beatrice acknowledges the importance of the emotional component when developing a positive classroom environment.

Beatrice’s third comment is in response to whether emotional intelligence is important for teachers. Her comment speaks to the importance of emotionally intelligence for educators. She states that *“we always have to look at ourselves, we have to keep analysing ourselves, look at our surroundings, how can we adapt.”* She concludes by saying that teachers also have to *“give a welcoming learning environment.”* By commenting on classroom environment during a specific emotional intelligence question, Beatrice is highlighting that she is aware of the important relationship between emotional intelligence and classroom environment.

Her fourth comment refers to what could have caused Miss Troy’s reaction. Here she highlights Miss Troy’s behaviour, and what should have been done. She states that Miss Troy is not creating *“much of a welcoming environment where the teacher is encouraging the child to actually answer,*

*even though the answer might be wrong*". She also indicates that Miss Troy should "*encourage the child*". By highlighting Miss Troy's inability to create "*a welcoming environment*", Beatrice is conveying that she values the importance of creating a positive classroom environment where learners are encouraged "*even though the answer might be wrong*". Beatrice's fifth comment is in response to what she would do in a challenging situation. She states that she would "*motivate them*" and "*make them feel good*" in order to provide "*a good environment in the class*". This comment highlights that Beatrice is aware of the importance of emotions when developing a positive classroom environment.

### **Diana**

*"Well, the child won't want to have to interact with the teacher or come to the teacher with any issues or problems - not a safe environment."*

*"Being kind and calm and creating a good environment for learning."*

Diana's comment is in response to what message Miss Troy displays to her learners on emotional intelligence. She indicates that Miss Troy is creating an environment that is "*not... safe*" as "*the child won't want... to interact with the teacher*" or go "*to the teacher with any issues or problems*". This comment suggests that Diana views an "*unsafe*" classroom environment as one where learners are unable to interact with the teacher. It indicates that she is aware of the importance of emotions and their relationship to classroom environment. Diana's second comment refers to what qualities make an excellent teacher. She indicates that an excellent teacher is someone who is "*kind and calm*" and able to create "*a good environment for learning*". This comment indicates that Diana is aware of the importance of creating "*a good environment for learning*" and its emotional components.

### **Alice**

*"So I would suggest... to encourage the learner to... talk or whisper in your ear or to be more compassionate towards the learner and so that they feel safe, because it also can be that they don't*

*feel safe in the classroom... or they feel intimidated. So they need to feel safe and free and to express themselves.”*

*“I think it's difficult for a learner especially if they're young, to open themselves up to learn something new, if they don't feel safe, and if they don't feel happy in the class environment.”*

Alice's comment refers to her thoughts and feelings about Miss Troy's reaction. In this comment she states how she would handle the situation. She indicates that it is important *“to encourage the learner”* and *“be more compassionate towards the learner... so that they feel safe”*. She highlights that learners *“need to feel safe and free and to express themselves”*. Even though Alice does not refer directly to the classroom environment, she is alluding to the idea of creating an environment where learners *“feel safe and free and to express themselves”*. This suggests that she is aware that it's important to consider how learners feel in order to create a positive classroom environment. Her second comment refers to the qualities that make an excellent teacher. In this comment she refers to how an excellent teacher ought to make learners feel. She indicates that in order for young learners *“to open themselves... to learn something new”*, they need to feel *“safe”* and *“happy in the class environment”*. This comment suggests that Alice is aware of the importance of creating a positive classroom environment for successful teaching and learning.

### **Margaret**

*“For me, it's patience. It's empathy. Because in the classroom, that's what you need... It's also organisation, it's the way you handle yourself in the classroom. It's the love that you have, and motivation is one of them as well...”*

Margaret's comment refers to what qualities make an excellent teacher. She indicates that *“patience”*, *“empathy”*, *“organisation”*, *“love”* and *“motivation”* are *“what you need... in the classroom”*. Even though Margaret does not refer directly to classroom environment, she is alluding to it by stating that these are the factors required in the classroom. Her comment suggests that she is aware of the importance of creating a positive classroom environment and its relationship to emotions.

Based on the comments above, four out of eight educators made reference to classroom environment and its relationship to emotional intelligence. Beatrice, Alice and Diana made direct reference to classroom environment as they commented on the importance of creating a “good”, “happier” and “welcoming” environment for learning. Margaret was the only educator who did not make a direct reference to classroom environment but alluded to it by stating that “patience”, “empathy”, “organisation”, “love” and “motivation” are “what you need... in the classroom”. The remaining educators did not make any reference to classroom environment.

### **Focus group findings**

No evidence of this theme was found in the focus group discussions.

When viewed through the theoretical lens of this study, the theme of classroom environment is not included in Mayer and Salovey’s Ability Model of emotional intelligence. However, it surfaced as an important theme for the above educators. Based on their comments, only four out of eight educators made reference to classroom environment and how this relates to emotional intelligence. Their comments indicate that they are aware of the importance of the emotional component when creating a positive environment for learners, which suggests that they possibly aim to create a positive environment in their own classrooms. The remaining educators made no reference to classroom environment and no evidence of this theme was found in the focus group discussions. A study by Dolev and Leshem (2016) investigated the impact of a teacher-centered EI training on teachers’ EI. They found that, due to their training, teachers had become more attuned to emotional situations in the classroom and more often addressed them which contributed to better class management and improved climate. Li, Huang and Li (2021) claim that a positive classroom environment can be achieved if educators are sensitive and responsive to students’ academic and emotional needs. They also claim that the emotional experiences of the educator and the learners in class contribute to the establishment of a positive classroom environment, which in turn sets a tone, influencing emotion perception, experience and expression. Landau and Meirovich (2011) state that a positive classroom environment is linked to goal-directed behaviour and positive affective outcomes, including emotional competence, enjoyment, interest and motivation. Furthermore, Arizeta et al. (2015) noted that emotional experience is an integral component of all school activities, as it not only plays a key role in learning, but enhances achievement over time.

### **5.3.6. Teacher-student relationship**

Teacher-student relationship was a theme that emerged in this study. It was a less dominant theme within emotional intelligence, however it includes important components of emotional intelligence. García-Moya, Brooks, and Morena (2020) believe that positive teacher-student relationships enable educators to create classroom environments more conducive to learning and meet students' developmental, emotional, and academic needs. A positive teacher-student relationship is characterized by respect, warmth, and trust. These qualities are considered to be crucial for students' development as they provide a feeling of security and belonging (Aldrup, 2018). As a result, building a positive teacher-student relationship can be considered as an important goal for educators. However, in order to foster positive relationships with students, educators need to develop their own emotional intelligence as “teachers’ emotions correlate with their well-being and the quality of their teaching” (Aldrup, 2018, p 131). In addition, Koca (2016) states that teacher-student relationships play a prominent role in the development of competencies in early school-age years and the quality of the relationship is significantly related to teachers’ emotional experiences.

The responses below reflect participants’ views and thoughts about the theme of teacher-student relationships and are cited verbatim from the interview findings as well as the focus group discussions.

### **Interview Findings**

The comments below were in response to the questions participants were asked during the interview process. See Appendix F for interview schedule.

#### **Margaret**

*“...you have to get to know the child and understand the child - so I would always love to build relationship with that child because some of the children - when they don't talk to you - I try for them to open up to me and eventually be comfortable enough to tell me what's wrong or ask them questions or give them a sticker to make them feel comfortable to say something to me.”*

Margaret's comment is in response to how she would handle Miss Troy's situation. She indicates that she would build a *"relationship with that child"* in order for him *"to open up"* and *"be comfortable enough to tell me what's wrong"*. This comment suggests that Margaret values the benefits of a positive teacher-student relationship and believes that understanding and encouraging learners are important aspects of relationship building. It is possible that Margaret builds positive teacher-student relationships with her learners.

Alice

*"...you have to have a relationship with each learner, to understand the learner, because I think it's difficult for a learner especially if they're young, to open themselves up to learn something new, if they don't feel safe, and if they don't feel happy in the class environment."*

Alice's comment refers to what qualities make an excellent teacher. She states that *"you have to have a relationship with each learner, to understand the learner"* and they need to *"feel safe and...happy"*. She indicates that this is particularly important for young learners *"to open themselves up to learn something new"*. Alice's comment suggests that she acknowledges the importance of considering learners' emotions as well as her own when building relationships. It also suggests that she values positive teacher-student relationships in her classroom and aims to develop positive relationships with her learners.

**Victoria**

*"So what I've also realised is that if you get a learner to trust you... become friends with the learner itself, it starts to form a relationship and that allows any child to be able to respond to something that you are saying."*

Victoria's comment is in response to how she would handle Miss Troy's situation. She states that *"if you get a learner to trust you"* or *"become friends with the learner... it starts to form a relationship and that allows any child to be able to respond to something that you are saying."* Her comment highlights that positive relationship building is based on trust. Aldrup (2018) states that a positive teacher-student relationship is characterised by respect, warmth, and trust. Thus,

Victoria's comment suggests that she understands the importance of trust when developing a positive teacher-student relationship and possibly displays this in her classroom.

Charlotte

*"if I cannot control my emotions, it's going to be hard for me to interact with other people and it's going to be hard for me to build relationships."*

Charlotte's comment is in response to what emotional intelligence means to her. She states that *"if I cannot control my emotions, it's going to be hard for me to interact with other people and it's going to be hard for me to build relationships."* Her comment suggests that she acknowledges the important relationship between emotional intelligence and the ability to build positive relationships.

Elizabeth

*"And then to get a teacher to call you an idiot, retard, obviously, you don't want to develop a relationship with a teacher, especially when there's a teacher that's not supporting you."*

Elizabeth's comment is in relation to her thoughts and feelings about Miss Troy's reaction. She indicates that by calling a child an *"idiot"*, he will not *"want to develop a relationship with a teacher, especially when there's a teacher that's not supporting you."* Her comment suggests that an educator's behaviour in the classroom and how he/she makes learners feel is an important component for positive relationship building. She also indicates that it is imperative for educators to be supportive in order to develop a positive teacher-student relationship.

The comments received during the interviews show that five out of eight educators made reference to the theme of teacher-student relationships. Elizabeth, Charlotte, Victoria, Alice and Margaret commented on *"building relationships"*. They highlighted that learners need to feel supported, *"comfortable"*, *"safe"* and *"happy"* in order to *"form a relationship"* with their teacher. Charlotte was the only educator who refers to her own emotions and how it will affect relationship building.

She indicated that *“if I cannot control my emotions, it's going to be hard for me to interact with other people and it's going to be hard for me to build relationships”*. The comments suggest that these educators are aware of the important relationship between emotional intelligence and the ability to build positive teacher-student relationships. The remaining educators did not make any reference to teacher-student relationships.

### **Focus group findings**

The comments below were in response to the questions participants were asked during the focus group discussion. See Appendix G for Focus Group Discussion Schedule. The statements below further reflect educators' views and thoughts about the theme of teacher-student relationships.

Margaret: *“...if we explain to the children what is happening, if we make them understand, I feel that they would understand what we're trying to say to them. In that way we can build a relationship with them. For me that's important.. .so, I think if we explain to the children we will build a relationship.. .make them understand our intention behind why we do something, that's when they will start to relate to what we're saying to them.”*

Margaret's comment is in response to her general thoughts about emotional intelligence. She highlights that it is important for learners to *“understand what we're trying to say”* in order to *“build a relationship with them”*. She states that by providing explanations to certain actions, learners *“will start to relate to what we're saying to them”*. Her comment suggests that in order to build positive relationships with learners, it is crucial for them to understand the intentions of their teacher. It suggests that she is aware of the importance of building positive teacher-student relationships. There is insufficient evidence to indicate that she portrays this in her classroom.

Margaret was the only educator who made reference to the theme of teacher-student relationships during the focus group discussion. Her comment suggests that she is aware of the importance of building positive teacher-student relationships. The remaining educators made no reference to teacher-student relationships during the focus group discussions.

When viewed through the theoretical lens of this study, the theme of teacher-student building is an uncommon theme within emotional intelligence, however it does include importance aspects of emotional intelligence, as it deals with how educators and learners feel towards one another. Based on the comment received, only five out of eight educators commented on teacher-student relationships, and factors that contribute to creating a positive teacher-student relationship. Most of the educators highlighted the learners' feelings when discussing teacher-student relationship. Whereas, only one educator made reference to her own emotions and how these can affect teacher-student relationships. The comments indicate that these educators are aware of the importance of building positive teacher-student relationships, and how they are affected by teacher's emotional intelligence. Safine et al. (2020) explored EI in teachers' activities at two state universities in Russia. Their aim was to help educators acquire effective skills to build optimal relationships by measuring the development level of students' EI. They found that developed skills of EI are of great importance to teachers and children as it enhanced successful social interaction. Another study by Krishnan and Awang, (2020) investigated the role of emotional intelligence in teaching. They found that EI plays an important role in every aspect of a teacher's life and highlighted that EI should be developed amongst teachers as it helps to maintain balanced and trusting relationships. A study by Ibrahim et al. (2018) which aimed to reveal the potential contributors of EI on working relationships with clients and decision-making, found that EI is important in human relationships as through understanding of their own and others' emotions, where individuals may be better equipped to understand and respect each other. In addition, Mayer, Roberts and Barsade (2008) also claim that research on EI has proved to have a positive effect on humans and the way in which we communicate, deal with stress and anxiety, and manage relationships.

### **5.3.7. Communication**

Communication was a less dominant theme that emerged in this study. It was not a common theme of emotional intelligence, however it has been included due to its relationship to emotional intelligence within the educational context. Petrovici and Dobrescu (2014) claim that it is important for educators to understand the role of emotional intelligence in developing interpersonal communication skills as educators with developed communication skills are more effective in all segments of the teaching process. Communication constitutes the process of

transmitting and receiving ideas, thoughts, and feelings that are understood by the people involved. Within the school environment, communication is of utmost importance, as it includes teacher-to-student communication, student-to-student communication, teacher-to-teacher communication, teacher-to-parent communication, teacher-to-administration communication or administration-to-parent communication, in order to ensure an effective teaching and learning experience for all learners. The perception of an educator often dictates the classroom environment and the overall cohesiveness of all those involved in the teaching and learning process. Thus, educators require effective communication skills for the transmission of knowledge, classroom management, and successful interaction with those involved in the teaching and learning process.

### **Interview Findings**

The responses below reflect participants' views and thoughts about the theme of communication and are cited verbatim from the interview findings. They are in response to the questions participants were asked during the interview process. See Appendix F for interview schedule.

Catherine

*"...maybe not getting support from the learners parents, when she talks to them about the learners problems, so they don't support her. Maybe that caused her to act that way."*

Catherine's comment is in reference to what may have caused Miss Troy to lose her temper. Catherine states that maybe Miss Troy is *"not getting support from the learners parents, when she talks to them about the learners problems"*. Her comment suggests that, due to the lack of effective communication between teacher and parent, Miss Troy is struggling to cope with classroom management. It indicates that Catherine has considered and possibly values effective communication with parents in order to improve the learning experience in the classroom.

**Elizabeth**

*"So that's where she needs to go and speak to her colleagues to get some feedback. Say, look, I have this issue with this child, how do I manage with him? Because he's not communicating with*

*me? Maybe get another teacher to come in, swap lessons to see if that child communicates with that teacher...”*

Elizabeth’s comment is in response to whether Miss Troy is an excellent teacher. Her comment states that Miss Troy should *“speak to her colleagues to get some feedback”* in order to enhance communication with the specific learners. She also states that *“another teacher”* should *“come in, swap lessons to see if that child communicates with that teacher”*. This comment suggests that Elizabeth is aware of the importance of communication not only between teachers but also between teacher and student.

### **Beatrice**

*“I think other teachers maybe could get involved and help one another. And stop the situation from going any further.”*

*“And somebody higher than her or somebody in her group to actually help out. She needs to maybe speak out, although it may not be personal or anything, but she needs to speak out.”*

Beatrice’s comment is in relation to her thoughts and feelings about Miss Troy’s reaction. She states that *“I think other teachers maybe could get involved and help one another. And stop the situation from going any further”*. Her comment indicates that other educators ought to communicate with Miss Troy regarding her negative behaviour, before it gets any worse. In order to tackle a delicate situation such as Miss Troy’s behaviour, effective communication skills are required. Thus, Beatrice’s comment suggests that she acknowledges the importance of effective communication skills, and how these can assist in the teaching environment.

Beatrice’s second comment is in response to whether Miss Troy displays traits of an emotionally intelligent teacher. She states that someone ought to *“help out”* Miss Troy as *“she needs to maybe speak out”*. This comment implies that a colleague of Miss Troy should communicate with her regarding her actions in order to provide her with a safe space to express her feelings. It suggests that Beatrice values effective communication skills within her own team and is aware of how effective communication skills can prevent outburst or mismanagement of emotional response.

Margaret

*“But she can always ask her colleagues or you know get help from somebody else rather than just handling it herself. Because she's taking out all that anger and just putting it on the child, but she doesn't actually know what's going on.”*

Margaret’s comment is in response to whether Miss Troy displays traits of an educator who is emotionally intelligent. She states that Miss Troy should *“ask her colleagues or... get help from somebody else rather than just handling it herself”*, as she is *“taking out all that anger and just putting it on the child but she doesn't actually know what's going on”*. This comment indicates that Miss Troy is unable to manage her emotions and in order to help her, she should *“get help”* or communicate with someone that can assist. By highlighting this Margaret is indicating that she values effective communications skills as it can help others manage their emotions in a better way.

Based on the comments collected during the interviews, four out of the eight educators made reference to communication. Elizabeth, Margaret, and Beatrice referred to teacher-to-teacher communication in their comments. Whereas Catherine made reference to teacher-to-parent communication, and vice versa. All of the above educators implied that it is crucial for educators to *“get help”*, *“speak out”*, or *“get some feedback”* regarding their thoughts and feelings in order to prevent them from reacting inappropriately. Their comments indicated that they value the ability to effectively communicate with each other, their students and/or parents.

### **Focus group finding**

No evidence of this theme was found during the focus group discussion.

When viewed through the theoretical lens of this study, the theme of communication involves aspects of emotional intelligence. Zlatic et al. (2014) claim that educators need to recognise that people are emotional beings, and they should take that into account through their communication when delivering information and/instructions. Based on the comments received, only four

educators highlighted the need for effective communication between teachers, between teachers and students, and between teachers and parents. Their comments suggest that they view effective communication skills as a necessary tool for classroom management or the successful management of emotions. The remaining educators made no reference to classroom environment, and no evidence of this theme was found in the focus group discussions. A study done by Yousefi (2006) investigated the relationship between EI and communication skills in university students. They found that EI was positively associated with communication skills. Yusof and Halim (2014) state that in a classroom, there are learners with varying abilities and capabilities. In order to encourage each learner through their learning journey, educators need to adopt effective communication skills. Nguyen et al. (2019) claim that effective communication minimises the potential of unkind feelings during the process of teaching and learning. In addition, Petrovici and Dobrescu (2014) state that evaluating the level of EI in educators is essential for developing efficient communication, intellectual, and emotional skills. They go on to state that emotional intelligence focuses on basic human skills, on the ability to control our feelings, and the ability to create positive interactions. Thus, the ability to communicate effectively for the benefit of a positive interaction may constitute an example of emotional intelligence in action. EI is therefore considered to be a critical driver of effective communication.

#### **5.4. Summary of findings:**

The purpose of this study was to explore foundation phase educators' understanding of emotional intelligence guided by the following research questions:

- What is foundation phase educators' understanding of EI?
- How Emotionally Intelligent foundation phase educators are?
- Why do foundation phase educators understand EI in the way that they do?

##### **5.4.1. What is foundation phase educators' understanding of EI?**

Based on the summary of findings, foundation phase educators are aware of important aspects of emotional intelligence and acknowledge the value of possessing or developing their emotional intelligence skills. They were also able to recognise that emotions play a crucial role in teaching. However, their understanding of the concept of emotional intelligence is limited. Even though they highlighted important aspects of emotional intelligence, the evidence showed that they lacked a

deep understanding of it. Empathy was a skill that was highlighted by all. Educators displayed a deep understanding of this concept as they described the ways in which this skill was used in their classrooms. All educators made reference to perceiving, understanding, and managing emotions, yet only displayed a basic understanding of these components. Some educators indicated that they struggle with the management of emotions which suggests a lack of skills in this area. Only a few educators highlighted communication, classroom environment and teacher-student relationship. Their comments indicated a strong awareness of the concepts, but only a basic understanding of the skills involved. Educators have heightened awareness of their own and their students' emotions, however their understanding of emotional intelligence is limited.

The findings indicate that educators need to develop their emotional intelligence skills in order to be successful members of the twenty-first-century teaching and learning process, which is structured around the need for students to develop new skills in order to survive and thrive in a rapidly changing world. This not only refers to the technological changes, but also to the cognitive and educational changes. Considering all the technological development and the changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, the education system needs to be fundamentally reconfigured to emphasise higher order cognitive processes such as critical thinking, creative problem-solving, curiosity, and adaptability powerful learning of this nature demands well-prepared educators, who can draw on advances in cognitive science and are strategically organised in the classroom and in cyberspace. Safine et al. (2020) highlight that “a modern teacher... does not take priority when organising cognitive activity” due to the “intensive development of information technologies [which] provide people with unlimited access to information”. Thus, there is a shift in the primary role of an educator, where she/he is no longer the primary source of knowledge, but is expected to develop personal abilities within students that provide a basis for EI. Furthermore, the World Economic Forum (2016) considers EI to be one of the top ten skills needed to thrive in 4IR. With this in mind, learning to teach involves not only mastering how to teach content matter, but also how to recognise and manage emotions for constructive teaching and learning to take place. Chandra (2020) states that the dramatic change brought about by the pandemic has had a negative impact on educational institutions, educators, students, and their families and their emotional, social and financial well-being. For this reason, it is crucial to improve the mental health of vulnerable populations. EI needs to be implemented at all levels of education as the concept is

rooted in the understanding of emotions, helping oneself to direct emotional reactions and labelling the experiences of different emotions and helping others to understand and channel their emotions.

#### **5.4.2. How Emotionally Intelligent foundation phase educators are?**

Evidently, the participants in this study display a basic understanding of emotional intelligence. Based on Mayer and Salovey's ability model of EI, the participants need to successfully work through each branch of the ability model so as to master their EI skills or abilities. The ability model is hierarchically arranged and represents a group of skills that proceeds developmentally from basic tasks to more challenging ones. As mentioned earlier, the first branch is concerned with *perceiving emotion*, followed by the ability to *facilitate thought using emotion*, the third branch deals with *understanding emotion*, and the final branch discusses the *management of emotions* (Caruso et al., 2015). Even though the participants of this study highlighted their awareness of and acknowledged the importance of perceiving, understanding, and managing emotions, they showed a lack of deep understanding for each concept. Empathy was the only theme of which educators displayed a deep understanding, and were able to describe ways in which this concept was used in their classrooms. Thus, based on the findings and in light of the theoretical framework, participants lack a deep understanding of emotional intelligence.

#### **5.4.3. Why do foundation phase educators understand EI in the way that they do?**

The findings of this study indicate that educators have a limited understanding of emotional intelligence, which implies that their exposure to EI skills and/or training is also limited. One of the participants made specific reference to the emotional intelligence curriculum that was used for foundation phase learners at the school. When asked what EI means to her, she commented that *"from that EQ that we do, it's like, the behavior of ourselves... it's like every aspect that you have to learn, that book that we do. It teaches you about love, about caring, about friendship, it's all of that put together for me"*. This comment implies that participants' main source of emotional intelligence knowledge and skills is a booklet that was specifically designed for young learners aged six to nine years old. Evidently, educators require appropriate emotional intelligence teacher training to develop a critical understanding of the concept and what it entails.

## **5.5. Chapter summary**

The purpose of this chapter was to present the research results of this study. The data was analysed and discussed in terms of the key research questions, the literature reviewed, and the theoretical framework. The following chapter will discuss the study conclusion, implications, and limitations.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUDING DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

#### 6.1. Introduction

The previous chapter offered a presentation of the analysed data and a discussion of the findings in light of the theoretical framework and the literature reviewed. This chapter will prove that the proposed research questions of this study were answered and that the objectives were achieved. In this study, foundation phase educators' understanding of EI was explored. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion were used to explore educators' understanding and perspectives of EI, how emotionally intelligent foundation phase educators are and why foundation phase educators understand EI in the way that they do. Furthermore, this chapter provides a general outline of this research study, which will include a summary of the chapters and the research findings, reflections on foundation phase educators' understanding of EI, the ability model and the methodology used. Lastly, recommendations for further studies and a brief conclusion is provided.

#### 6.2. Summary of research chapters

This study consists of six chapters as explained below:

**Chapter One** provided a background and an introduction to this study. It includes a brief overview of the study, together with the location and the purpose of the study, which was to explore foundation phase educators' understanding of EI. It also includes an outline of the rationale, significance of the study and the objectives. The research questions that guided this study are also provided in this chapter. The questions are as follows:

- What is foundation phase educators' understanding of EI?
- How emotionally intelligent are foundation phase educators?
- Why do foundation phase educators understand EI in the way that they do?

An overview of the theoretical framework was provided together with the methodology. Thereafter an outline of all chapters is presented.

**Chapter Two** included the literature review which presents current literature on foundation phase educators' understanding of emotional intelligence. This chapter presented a critical evaluation of the current literature in relation to the research phenomena under investigation. The literature was reviewed according to specific themes which include: emotion and intelligence, the emergence of EI, the concept of EI and EI in teaching. This process ensured insight into what other researchers were claiming about foundation phase educators' understanding of EI.

**Chapter Three** provided a detailed outline of the theoretical framework that underpinned this study. It included an introduction, a discussion of the models of EI, which included Mayer and Salovey's ability model and the mixed models by Goleman and Bar-On. A rationale for the use of Mayer and Salovey's ability model was also provided.

**Chapter Four** provides a comprehensive view of the research methodology of this study. It includes the research questions as well as the research design, which states that this study underpinned a qualitative approach located within an interpretivist paradigm. A discussion of the interpretivist paradigm and the qualitative approach was also provided. This chapter highlighted the sampling technique used to select participants as purposive sampling was used to identify and select information-rich participants related to the phenomenon of interest. Data generation methods were also discussed, together with aspects of trustworthiness, credibility, dependability, transferability, conformability, and ethical considerations.

**Chapter Five** provides an outline of the data generated during the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. It included a presentation of the analysed data and a discussion of the findings based on the themes that emerged during the data analysis process. A summary of the themes will be provided.

### **6.3. Summary of research findings**

#### **6.3.1. Empathy**

The findings indicate that participants are able to share the feelings of their learners and that they are able to accurately perceive the emotional content within their classrooms. This is evident in

their statements, such as, it is important to “*understand the child*”, or to “*know the child's history*” and “*care about the learners outside of teaching*”. They also highlight the “*need to have empathy*” or to “*use different interventions to try and get the child to open up*”. They seem to care about the feelings of their learners and strive to understand these feelings, which suggests that they have a superior understanding of empathy and how to be empathetic.

### **6.3.2. Perceiving emotions**

Based on the comments received during the interviews and the focus group discussion, all educators alluded to the ability to perceive emotions. Some went further and provided examples of how to do this, while others only highlighted its importance for educators. This indicates that these educators are aware of the concept of perceiving emotions, what it involves, and its relation to EI. However, they may not refer to it as perceiving emotions. Many educators made reference to “*understanding*” or “*being aware*” of emotions, while describing the concept of perceiving emotions.

### **6.3.3. Understanding emotions**

The findings indicate that most educators are able to label their emotions, however they seem to struggle with recognising the message that is conveyed by that emotion. Even though some educators display that they are skilled in this area, they only reveal basic skills of understanding emotions.

### **6.3.4. Managing emotions**

In this study, participants indicated that they are able to recognise their emotions and manage them in a way that provides temporary relief. They state that when they are frustrated, they “*send [learners] to the HOD, because there's nothing else that I could do*” or they “*take a moment to breathe*” or some “*catch [themselves] in the process*”. This indicates that most educators have basic skills to regulate their own and their learners’ emotions.

### **6.3.5. Teacher-student relationships**

The findings indicate that five out of eight educators commented on teacher-student relationships and factors that contribute to creating a positive teacher-student relationship. Most of the educators highlighted the learners’ feelings when discussing teacher-student relationship. Whereas, only one

educator made reference to her own emotions and how this can affect teacher-student relationships. The comments indicate that these educators are aware of the importance of building positive teacher-student relationships and how this is affected by a teacher's EI.

#### **6.3.6. Classroom environment**

The findings indicate that educators are aware of the importance of the emotional component when creating a positive environment for learners. This suggests that they possibly aim to create a positive environment in their own classrooms. However, only four out of eight educators made reference to classroom environment. No evidence of this theme was found in the focus group discussions.

#### **6.3.7. Communication**

Based on the comments received, only four educators highlighted the need for effective communication between teachers, between teachers and students, and between teachers and parents. Their comments suggest that they view effective communication skills as a necessary tool for classroom management or the successful management of emotions. The remaining educators made no reference to classroom environment and no evidence of this theme was found in the focus group discussions.

### **6.4. Reflections on foundation phase educators' understanding of emotional intelligence**

EI is a new and developing concept in the educational context. According to Mayer and Salovey, individuals need to develop four basic skills in order to be emotionally intelligent. These include the ability to perceive emotion, understand emotion, facilitate thought using emotions, and managing emotions. Based on the data generated, foundation educators lack a deep understanding of EI and thus are not considered emotionally intelligent. The data demonstrates that foundation phase educators have emotionally laden jobs as they deal with large groups of young learners, with varying learning abilities and receive little support from parents. As a result, they struggle with emotional management of learners and experience additional emotional pressure due to personal circumstances. The data shows that educators have a heightened sense of awareness of their own and learners' emotions, however they lack the skills required to tackle situations in an emotionally intelligent manner. Meridan-Lopez, Bakker and Extremera (2019) claim that EI has the ability to help teachers deal with stress and is critical in the process of teaching as many of the problems that

arise in teaching are rooted in the way teachers handle their own feelings as well as those of their students. Even though educators showed a heightened sense of awareness for emotions, the findings indicate that they have a limited understanding of the highlighted themes except for empathy. They indicated that they experience several emotions in a day and often struggle to manage stressful situations in a positive manner. Furthermore, they find classroom management to be challenging at times. Despite their challenges, it seems that educators make use of coping mechanisms that provide temporary relief or solutions. As a result, Ghanizadeh and Moafian (2009) argue that it is crucial for educators to develop their EI skills to enhance the quality of their teaching, as these skills influence student engagement, classroom management, attachment to school, and academic performance. They also believe that addressing and nourishing EI within the context of education contributes to academic and life success. The findings highlighted that educators understand EI differently. Some educators have developed their understanding of EI from basic curriculum training, while others have heard about the concept during school related discussion. Overall, their responses indicated that there is a need for structured EI training in order for educators to engage with EI concepts, abilities and skills and deepen their understanding of the concept. Krishnan and Awang (2020) state that EI should be developed amongst teachers as it helps to maintain balanced and trusting relationships, so as to understand others better and clearly interpret behaviours. They also highlight that EI training can be effective to address stress related issues, and can positively affect students as teachers will be able to create a healthy environment if they are able to identify and understand student need.

#### **6.4.1. Teaching emotional intelligence in the foundation phase**

Educators often strive to help learners master basic skills such as reading and writing or adding and subtracting. They also encourage learners to develop a strong background in other areas, such as science, history, or languages. EI should be considered one of those ‘subjects’ in the foundation phase that educators strive to help learners master as it is an important skill for learners and educators. Pekrun (2014) states that emotional intelligence has been shown to have a significant impact on important life outcomes. EI as a subject in the foundation phase should also be assessed or examinable since it involves mastering important skills that have a significant impact on important life outcomes. If it is taught as an examinable subject, emphasis will be placed on teaching and learning EI concepts and skills within the foundation phase. Learners will be

encouraged to concentrate only on EI during a specific time on the timetable and educators will be forced to develop their own EI knowledge and skills in order to ensure that learners are receiving the best education.

### **6.4.3. Emotional Intelligence teacher training**

Only one participant mentioned appropriate teacher training for teaching emotional intelligence in the foundation phase. She also indicated that she underwent basic EI training, however it was insufficient to provide learners with the best experience. She indicated that training took place only once. Continuous EI teacher training is key for successful EI skills development in educators and learners. Based on the findings from this study, it is evident that educators require on-going EI teacher training. Some of the participants that do teach EI in the foundation phase, and they do so based on the limited training they received as a once-off occurrence. O'Connor, Fish and Yasik, (2004) state that teachers' knowledge and experience influence the processes of lesson presentation. They state that novice educators spend more time focusing on lesson content and spend less time reacting to and altering their plans to meet their students' learning needs, which suggests that expert teachers help create an environment more conducive to learning. It is therefore crucial for educators to be experts in teaching EI, and in order for that to happen, continuous EI teacher training is required, where educators are provided with the knowledge and skills needed to be effective EI educators.

The need for continuous EI teacher training ought to be supported by all stakeholders, from all levels, within the educational context. This includes educators, principals, district officers and the department of education. EI teacher training can be done at schools or at any training college as part of the teaching training courses. EI committees should be formed to supplement the training process and provide necessary workshops for educators. Educators should be guided in terms of the knowledge and skills they develop during EI teacher training so as to become proficient in teaching emotional intelligence.

### **6.4.4. Designing an emotional intelligence curriculum for the foundation phase**

During the interviews and focus group discussions, none of the participants mentioned how the emotional intelligence curriculum at their school could be modified to provide relevant content for EI development. Some did indicate that they believe EI to be superior to academic intelligence as

EI prepares learners to survive in an ever changing world as compared to attaining a degree. I believe that providing learners with relevant emotional intelligence skills development will equip them for a better future. To do this, a relevant and relatable emotional intelligence curriculum ought to be provided to learners. It should be based on and structured around the specific issues that are experienced at the school. The current EI curriculum focuses mainly on enhancing positive emotions and includes topics such as friendship, love and/or building a friendly classroom environment. Even though these topics are important for young learners, it ignores the struggles that learners face at home within their family, or the struggles they face at school due to their disadvantaged backgrounds. Thus, I suggest developing an emotional intelligence curriculum that includes the input of educators who engage with these learners on a daily basis.

foundation educators can collaborate with EI experts to create and implement a relevant and appropriate emotional intelligence curriculum for foundation phase learners. Together, they can decide on the topics and areas of concern that need to be addressed through the EI curriculum. Outcomes must also be discussed to ensure learners' progress and development. Ramparsad (2001) states that educators' involvement in curriculum development is necessary as they act and reflect on society's needs in each stage of development. He states that an educators' role in curriculum development is dictated by the needs of society, which implies that the curriculum has to have a direct relationship to society's needs. Rampersad (2001) also states that the Department of Education needs to allocate more time to "conduct massive in-service programmes if teachers are to make a genuine impact in the curriculum development process," (p. 287) as the majority of the teachers in South Africa are under-qualified and lack the necessary skills to participate fully in curriculum development.

### **6.5. Reflections on the Ability Model of Emotional Intelligence**

Mayer and Salovey's ability model of emotional intelligence is based on the premise that emotional intelligence skills and abilities can be enhanced and developed through training or practice. Based on the model according to which EI is conceptualised, it is understood as a set of mental abilities and consists of four hierarchically linked ability areas, which include perceiving emotions, facilitating thought using emotions, understanding emotions, and managing emotions (Kanesan & Fauzan, 2017). All participants in this study made reference to most of these important

components of EI. They highlighted the importance of these components for educators and learners and indicated that educators should find ways to identify their weaknesses and improve their EI skills and abilities. According to Mayer and Salovey, an emotionally intelligent individual is able to pay attention to, use, understand and manage their emotions. All participants indicated that educators must be able to pay attention to the needs of their learners, and use, understand and manage their emotions, so as to ensure learners are able to grow and develop in a conducive environment where their emotional and academic concerns are taken into consideration. Thus, the ability of EI was significant in this study as it was closely aligned to the purpose of this study which was to explore how EI is understood by foundation phase educators, in order to enhance the emotional development of both educators and learners. As a result, this model has strong potential to inform, shape, and enhance educational practices.

It is also important to note Mayer and Salovey's model is the only ability model that exists and is the most widely accepted model of EI. However, it is not without limitations. Many have criticised the way in which the ability model measures emotional intelligence, as it makes use of performance measures where participants rate themselves based on specific scenarios. These performance measures have been criticised for not capturing the real-time application of emotion knowledge (Rathore & Chadha, 2015). In light of this, the general consensus is that it is difficult to measure EI, and that no truly robust measure exists, as there is still much to explore.

In contrast to the criticism, Fiori and Vesley-Maillefer (2018) believe that the ability model is the mainstream model of EI, as it has received widespread acknowledgement and use and has been foundational in the development of other EI models. Brackett et al. (2016) claim that the ability model has been called the "gold standard" (p. 515) in emotional intelligence research, probably due to the fact that it predicts certain outcomes over and above general intelligence and personality. The model specifically combines ideas from the areas of intellect and emotion and acknowledges that emotions can be intellectually analysed and recognised. All participants acknowledged that they are responsible for developing learners' emotional intelligence but only if they are able to successfully analyse and recognise their own emotions. It is therefore crucial for educators to capitalise on the strengths of the ability model to ensure that emotional intelligence skills development is successful for both educators and learners in the foundation phase.

## **6.6. Reflections on methodology**

The purpose of this study was to explore foundation phase educators' understanding of EI. To explore this phenomenon a qualitative approach was employed to examine educators' emotional intelligence experiences in detail. Palic et al. (2015) state that qualitative research involves the use of in-depth interviews, focus groups discussions to describe, decode and translate the meaning of certain naturally occurring phenomena in the social world. Through the use of a qualitative approach together with semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions I was able to get a better understanding of foundation phase educators' understanding of emotional intelligence through first hand experiences, truthful reporting and quotations of actual conversations. The interpretivist paradigms ensured that it was possible to understand and interpret the meanings foundation phase educators attached to the concept of EI, and that I focused on the importance of understanding the situation through the eyes of the participants in order to gather a deep understanding. According to Phothongsunam (2010), an interpretivist researcher becomes part of the research as a meaning-maker interacting with other meaning makers, and as a result the research becomes a construction of meaning between the participants.

The aim of this study was to develop an understanding of those educators employed at an independent school in the Umlazi District. Thus, all foundation phase educators at this school were selected as participants using purposive sampling. According to Palinkas et al. (2016), purposive sampling is used to identify and select information-rich participants related to the phenomenon of interest. Some of the selected participants had extensive training on EI and teaching it as a subject. While other educators had little to no training, however, they were introduced to the EI teaching material. As an employee of the above-mentioned school, participants were easily accessible. During the online semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion, participants were asked open-ended questions so as to obtain information relevant to the research study.

The only problem encountered during this research study was related to the availability of one participant, who was unable to join the online focus group discussion. Thus, only seven participants were involved in the focus group discussion. All participants were present for their individual semi-structured interviews. Permission to conduct interviews and this research study

was granted by all stakeholders including the Department of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, principals and educators who served as participants.

I believe that the methods employed in this study were appropriate and necessary to answer the key research questions. foundation phase educators were able offer their thoughts and views on their understanding of EI, where these thoughts and views were interpreted in order to provide a way forward for both educators and learners.

### **6.7. Recommendations for further studies**

The findings of this study imply that it is crucial for educators to be EI. Through the study, participants were given the opportunity to reflect on EI and its importance for educators. It was established that there is a need for educators to develop their EI in order to be successful in an ever-changing world.

This study also highlighted a need for emotional intelligence teacher training. The findings indicate that educators in this study had limited exposure to emotional intelligence. Their only reference was their personal experience and the specific curriculum that was specifically structured for foundation phase learners. To develop a critical understanding of emotional intelligence and what it entails, educators ought to undergo EI teacher training either at their schools of employment or at their training colleges.

In addition, EI should become common practice at schools, universities, and training colleges. It should be incorporated in all teaching courses considering the rapid changes that are taking place globally and specifically within the educational contexts. Educators require emotional intelligence skills to enhance the quality of their teaching.

### **6.8. Limitations**

- **Implementation of data generation methods:** This study made use of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Upon review, it would have been beneficial to address the research question using one more data generation method that differed from generating through verbal discussions. For example, a questionnaire could have been used together with interviews and focus groups discussions as this could future enhance the

credibility of this study. However, due to COVID-19 restrictions and time constraints a questionnaire was not used in this study.

- **Researcher bias:** Participants were chosen from a group of educators at the researcher's place of employment. Thus, there was a possibility of researcher bias on perspectives of the findings. However, the data gathering process and problem statement were examined throughout the study to ensure conformability of the study.
- **COVID-19 pandemic:** Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, data gathering posed a limitation. Online interviews and discussions meant that the researcher lost the ability to observe participants' expression and/or body language.

## 6.9. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore foundation phase educators' understanding of emotional intelligence and to develop an understanding of the ways in which foundation phase educators conceptualise EI in order to enhance the growth and development of both educators and learners. I became interested in this topic when it was introduced at my place of employment, where it was highlighted that EI can promote academic success, interpersonal skills, problem-solving thinking, and is a valued skill that can be carried over to adulthood. I recognised it as an important skill for foundation phase educators as foundation phase educators form the premise from which further development can take place as learners develop into adulthood. Thus, by exploring foundation phase educators' understanding of emotional intelligence, this study paved the way for further development regarding foundation phase educators' EI.

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## APPENDIX A: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION FROM SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Dear Mr Foster,

I trust you are well.

As you may know, I am currently completing my Masters of Education at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal. I will be researching Foundation Phase Educators' understanding of Emotional Intelligence.

As part of my studies I am required to conduct interviews and discussions with Foundation Phase educators at Canaan College. Due to Covid-19 rules and regulations all interviews and discussions will be done using online video conferencing platforms. The interviews should take no longer than 30 minutes and discussions should run for a duration of 45 minutes. The interviews and discussions will be done as educators are available and will not disrupt any teaching or learning. Interviews and discussions will be recorded, with educators' permission.

This e-mail is to request permission to conduct this study at Canaan College with its educators as participants.

*If permission is granted, the permission letter must be presented as an official document bearing either a school stamp or letterhead. An electronic communication is accepted provided that a corresponding e-mail address is attached.*

Best Regards

Mrs Verusha Naidoo

**APPENDIX B: PERMISSION FROM SCHOOL PRINCIPAL**



**CANAAN COLLEGE**  
INSPIRE | INNOVATE | ACT

30 September 2020

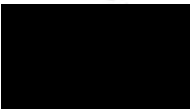
To whom it may concern;

This letter serves to confirm that **Mrs Verusha Naidoo, ID number: 890921 0219 08 9** is granted permission to conduct online interviews and discussions with Foundation Phase educators at Canaan College.

Interviews and discussions will be recorded, with educators' permission.

Kindly contact me for any further information if necessary.

Warm regards,



Mr M. Foster

**Executive Head**



031 941 4620 | [INFO@CANAANCOLLEGE.CO.ZA](mailto:INFO@CANAANCOLLEGE.CO.ZA) | [WWW.CANAANCOLLEGE.CO.ZA](http://WWW.CANAANCOLLEGE.CO.ZA)  
17 ISILO DRIVE, UMLAZI V, UMLAZI 4089  
Edinvest School Opco (Pty) Ltd trading as Canaan College Umlazi | Directors N Khambule, E Steyn, K Joshua | Reg No 2016/522281/07

## APPENDIX C: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT STUDY IN KZN DOE



**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 3921063 / 033-3921051

Email: Phindile.duma@kzndoe.gov.za  
Buyi.ntuli@kzndoe.gov.za

**Enquiries:** Phindile Duma/Buyi Ntuli

**Ref.:**2/4/8/10006

Mrs V Naidoo  
PO Box 2112  
**VERULAM**  
4340

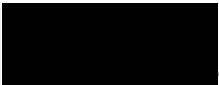
Dear Mrs Naidoo

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

Your application to conduct research entitled: **"FOUNDATION PHASE EDUCATORS' UNDERSTANDING OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AT AN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL IN THE UMLAZI DISTRICT"**, 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 01 March 2021 to 01 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/Mrs Buyi Ntuli at the contact numbers above.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

**UMLAZI DISTRICT**

  
**Dr. E.V. Nzama**  
Head of Department: Education  
Date: 03 March 2021

GROWING KWAZULU-NATAL TOGETHER

## APPENDIX D: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



06 January 2021

Mrs Verusha Naidoo (220108392)  
School of Education  
Edgewood Campus

Dear Mrs Naidoo,

**Protocol reference number:** HSSREC/00002176/2020

**Project title:** Foundation Phase Educators' understanding of Emotional Intelligence at an Independent School in the Umlazi District

**Degree:** Masters

### Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 24 November 2020 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 07 January 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)

/ms

### Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephones: +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 E: INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT**

### **INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT**

#### **Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research**

Dear Educator,

My name is Verusha Naidoo and I am currently completing my Masters of Education at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal. I will be researching the area of Emotional Intelligence. As part of my studies I am required to conduct interviews and discussions with foundation phase educators. Due to COVID-19 rules and regulations all interviews and discussions will be done using online video conferencing platforms. The interviews should take no longer than 30 minutes and discussions should run for a duration of 45 minutes. The interviews and discussions will be recorded, with your permission.

You are invited to consider participating in my study that involves foundation phase educators' understanding of emotional intelligence. The aim and purpose of this study is to explore how emotional intelligence is understood by foundation phase educators. The study is expected to involve eight foundation phase educators, all of which are employed by Canaan College – Umlazi.

#### **Possible Risks or Benefits**

There is no risk involved in this study except your valuable time. Neither is there any direct benefit to you. However, the findings of the study could be beneficial to all foundation phase Educators.

#### **Confidentiality**

The information provided by you will remain confidential. Only the principal investigator (myself) and the project supervisor will have access to the information. Your name and identity will not be disclosed at any time. All identities will remain anonymous through the use of pseudonyms. All records and documentation will be password protected. All transcripts or handwritten documentation will be stored and locked in a secure cupboard.

**This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (approval number: \_\_\_\_\_)**

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact the researcher, contact details as follows:

**Verusha Naidoo**

**Cell: 084 31 77 468**

**Email: [verushanaidoo@hotmail.com](mailto:verushanaidoo@hotmail.com)**

**Or supervisor:**

**Dr V Jairam**

**Cell: 082 770 0509**

**Email: [jairam@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:jairam@ukzn.ac.za)**

**Or the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:**

**HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION**

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Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

I..... (full names of participant)  
hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project. I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

**In addition, I hereby provide consent to:**

Audio-record my interview / focus group discussion                      YES / NO

Video-record my interview / focus group discussion                      YES / NO

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## **APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

### **Interview Schedule**

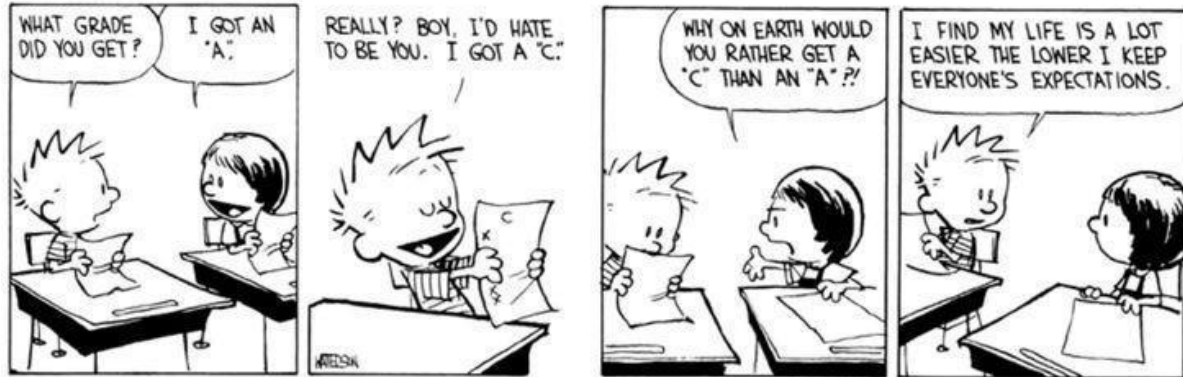
Peter is a learner in Miss Troy's class. He is a quiet learner, who struggles to concentrate on schoolwork and prefers to be alone. Miss Troy is an excellent teacher. She feels frustrated and helpless when she asks Peter a question, in the classroom and he just stares back at her. This makes her lose her temper and she shouts at him: "Peter, you idiot! You are wasting my time. You belong at a school for retards!"

### **Questions**

1. What are your thoughts/feelings about Miss Troy and her reaction?
2. What factors do you think played a role in the way Miss Troy handled the situation?
3. In the story Miss Troy is described as an excellent teacher. What qualities do you think makes an excellent teacher?
4. In your teaching experience have you experienced anything similar?
5. If you were Miss Troy, how would you have handled the situation?
6. Does Miss Troy display traits of an educator who is emotionally intelligent? Explain.
7. What message is displayed to her learners on emotional intelligence?
8. What does emotional intelligence mean to you?

## APPENDIX G: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION SCHEDULE

### Focus group discussion



### Calvin and Hobbes comic strips:

Conversation between Calvin and his classmate Susie. Calvin is an intelligent, six-year-old boy who hates school. He lacks any self-discipline or concentration and has a habit of getting into trouble. He hates school, however expresses his intelligence by having a very expanded vocabulary and contemplating issues.

### Questions:

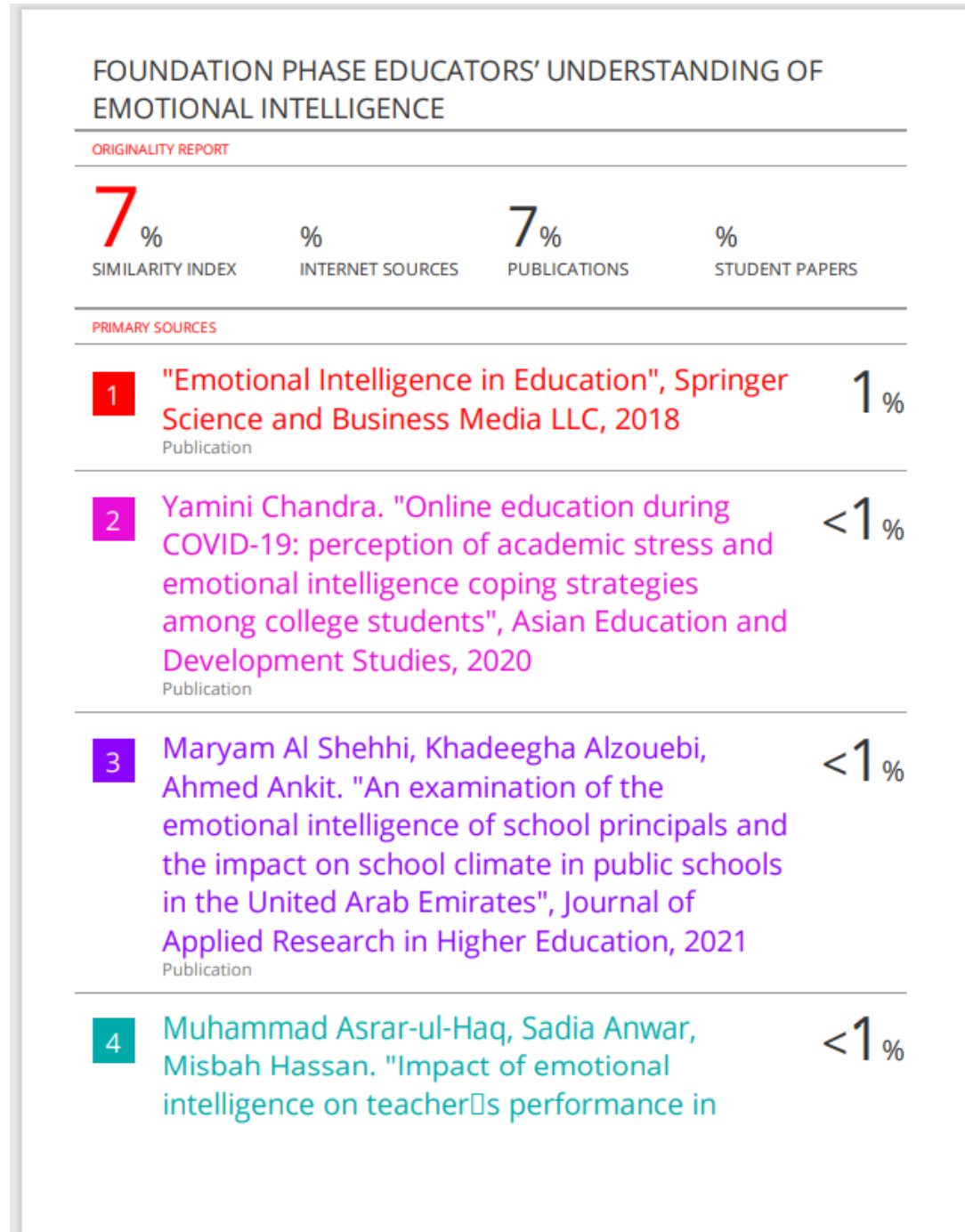
1. What are your thoughts on Calvin's response to his friend?
2. What factors do you think played a role in his response?
3. What do you think has influenced Calvin to think the way he does?
4. What qualities do you think separate Calvin from his friend?
5. If you were Calvin's friend, how would you respond to him?
6. As an educator cascading the new curriculum to your learners, what role do you think, educators and parents play in terms of the type of intelligence that is valued at school or home?
7. Do you value I.Q. above E.Q. or vice versa or both? Why?

### Additional questions:

1. What are your views (thoughts and feelings) about Emotional Intelligence?

2. What do you think emotional intelligence means for learners?
3. Do you believe that teaching Emotional Intelligence is crucial? Why?
4. How do you feel about your children learning about Emotional Intelligence? Does it have any implications in terms of culture and traditions?
5. Do you think that parents feel a similar way about their children developing emotional intelligent skills at school?
6. Emotional Intelligence is a key feature of the school, however it is not an examinable subject. Do you think it should be given the same amount of attention as other subjects?

## APPENDIX H: TURN IT IN REPORT



## APPENDIX I: EDITOR REPORT

**GENEVIEVE WOOD**

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**EDITING CERTIFICATE**

LANGUAGE EDITING SERVICES

Date: 2021/12/18

This serves to confirm that the document entitled:

**FOUNDATION PHASE EDUCATORS' UNDERSTANDING OF EMOTIONAL  
INTELLIGENCE**

**By**

**VERUSHA NAIDOO**

has been language edited on behalf of its author, with recommendations for improvement.

Genevieve Wood  
PhD candidate  
Wits University