Teacher agency: A case study of Mauritius

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Declaration

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

I, WEDSHA APPADOO-RAMSAMY, declare that

1. The research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research.

2. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

3. This thesis does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.

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WEDSHA APPADOO-RAMSAMY

8th February 2022

Names and Signatures of Supervisors

Name: Professor Michael Anthony Samuel   **Name**: Professor Aruna Ankiah-Gangadeen

8th February 2022   8th February 2022

Abstract

This study explores the phenomenon of teacher agency within a dynamic socio-cultural space where a landmark national schooling curriculum policy reform was introduced by Mauritian educational authorities. It contributes to an understanding of teachers' experiences, their interpretations of their experiences and the ways in which they exercised agency as they revisited pedagogies and personal beliefs in relation to a changing macro-policy and micro-institutional environment.

A narrative inquiry methodology within an interpretivist paradigm was adopted to immerse in teachers' multi-layered experiences. Data was produced through various methods: interviews, classroom observations, informal conversations and artefact construction activities that triggered responses and provided insights into teachers' biographical experiences, beliefs and practices. The data was re-presented through an ethnodrama of interlocuting participants. This creative form enabled me to co-construct three-dimensional characters inhabiting complex temporal and spatial dimensions.

The fieldwork revealed that teachers' personal and professional experiences could not be isolated from an evolving broader global space grappling with digital pedagogical evolution. Furthermore, unique nationalistic strategies to enhance the country's small island developing state socioeconomic landscape exerted additional pressure on teachers' choices of representation of their actions. Teachers' career experiences reflect divergent agencies and agendas characterised by fluid, complex and complementary contradictions and stabilities. An assessment and performativity regime of outputs of the schooling system featured prominently as a backdrop.

The thesis developed a model of *diffracted and entangled agencies that emphasise a kaleidoscope of possibilities* of understanding teacher agency. Rather than being conceptualised as a stable characteristic trait of teachers, teacher agency was seen as constantly adapting to temporal and spatial changes, adopting new beliefs, revisiting past experiences and reconstructing their professional roles. Teacher agency was further considered as dialogical choices of representations amongst varied audiences, co-participants and role-players, with varied agendas.

This study's unique contextual policy reform parameters are potentially representative of any significant change that causes diffraction of a relational teacher agency. The thesis emphasises agentic responsiveness to space and time specificities that intersect with teachers' personal and professional experiences. Teacher agency is not simply a singular identity and political construction, but also a strategic negotiated shifting set of performances of responsiveness to situational contexts that in themselves are not stable, or coherent. The report concludes with the theoretical, methodological and contextual implications of the proposed reconceptualised notion of teacher agency, discusses the study's limitations, and highlights the possibilities for future research.

Key words: *Diffracted and entangled teacher agency, narrative inquiry, ethnodrama*

Dedication

To Jevin Ramsamy, my life partner,

whose belief in me has guided me in this journey.

Without your support and love this dream would have stayed a dream.

Thank you…

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List of abbreviations

CIE   Cambridge International Examinations

CPD   Continuing Professional Teacher Development

CPE   Certificate of Primary Education

EP   Extended Programme

MIE   Mauritius Institute of Education

MoE   Ministry of Education

NCE   National Certificate of Education

NCF   National Curriculum Framework

NYCBE   Nine Years of Continuous Basic Education

PGCE   Post Graduate Certificate in Education

PSAC   Primary School Achievement Certificate

PSEA   Private Secondary Education Association

SIDS   Small Island Developing States

TVET   Technical and Vocational Education and Training

UNESCO   United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation

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CHAPTER 1

Situating the phenomenon in the context of the study

1.0 Introduction

As teachers negotiate their professional selves in changing environments, their choices, actions and decisions are influenced by multiple forces within their personal and professional spaces. The ways in which teacher agency is impacted by changes within their micro-institutional and macro-policy environments have been conceptualised in recent studies (Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2015; Biesta, Priestley & Robinson, 2017; Oolbekkink-Marchand, Hadar, Smith & Helleve, 2017; Tao & Gao, 2017; Pappa, Moate, Ruohotie-Lyhty & Eteläpelto, 2017; Erss, 2018; Bergh & Wahlström, 2018; Ryder, Lidar, Lundqvist & Östman, 2018; Tran, 2018). As an important concept in the literature on change, an understanding of teacher agency informs policy making and the design of professional workshops to assist teachers in times of reform. These previous studies focused on the ways in which teachers exercise their agency when renegotiating professional roles, especially within micro-institutional spaces. In this study, I aim to extend the existing literature on teacher agency by understanding why they react to their changing professional landscapes in the ways they do. What explains the enabling and constraining impact of these forces on teacher agency?

Curriculum policy reform is an endemic characteristic of an evolving education system. The agendas for such reform that aligns with or jettisons previous curriculum design are motivated by a range of forces within and outside the schooling system. This thesis examines how these shifts are interpreted and reimagined by teachers as they exercise their agency in line with changing conceptions of their roles, identities and conceptions of professionality. The study is located within the space of the small island developing state of Mauritius, 53 years after its independence from colonial rule. The overarching, evolving agenda of school curriculum reform in the local context was to fashion a localised relevant Mauritianisation of the curriculum endeavour. This bounded space constitutes the context in which broader elaborations of the phenomenon of teacher agency are explored.

In 2017 the Mauritian educational authorities introduced a significant national curriculum reform that sought to address critiques of an education system that is increasingly being characterised as failing to develop a more egalitarian and democratic responsiveness to the socio-economic demands of the country (The World Bank, cited in Nadal, Ankiah-Gangadeen & Kee Mew, 2017). Two systems of educational provisioning were emerging as perhaps unintended consequences of earlier educational reform over five decades post-independence. On the one hand, the competitive education structure has arguably fostered the development of an elite class of educational achievers while on the other, children with academic difficulties have been marginalised. These two groups seem to be delineated across historical class lines with only occasional disruptions which tended to be over-celebrated as evidence of a social meritocractic schooling system (Sandel, 2020). What explains the continued disadvantages and underachievement of the majority of learners from poor socio-economic echelons, and how were teachers complicit or not with this agenda? How do teachers respond to reform that aims to depart from traditional examination-oriented strategies to assist students to develop skills for employability? How do teachers negotiate their agency and roles in such a drastically changing macro-policy environment? These considerations led me to engage with the notion of teacher agency as potential leverage for change in an evolving educational landscape in a small island developing state context. Could teachers make a difference? How? What impedes their action?

Chapter overview
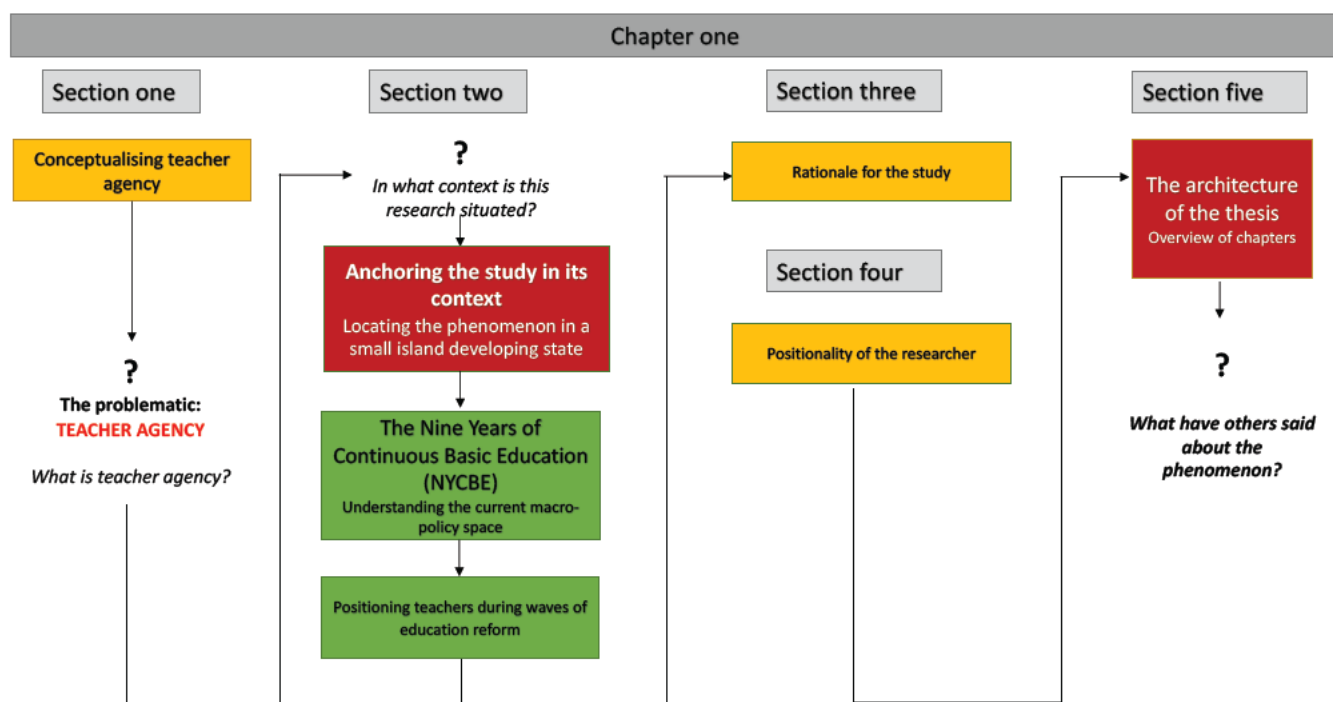
Figure 1: Orientation to chapter one

Section one of this chapter introduces teacher agency and sets out the aim of this study on teacher agency in a context of policy and curriculum reform. In order to anchor the study within the site of data production, in **section two**, I introduce Mauritius as a small island developing state. Despite its smallness, this site serves as a dynamic sociological space that can be used to understand macro issues related to teacher agency and policy implementation. Therefore, in this section, I also introduce the current macro-policy landscape and position teachers during waves of reform to better understand their evolving roles and agency.

I explain the rationale for the study in **section three**. In **section four**, I reflect on my positionality as a researcher and the influences of my biographical experiences on the choice of study. This study involves my interpretations of teachers' experiences and agency as they go through a changing macro-policy landscape. As an insider, it is important to acknowledge my subjective involvement in data gathering and the theorisation of the phenomenon.

Finally, in **section five,** I provide an overview of the chapters that reflects the structure of this thesis.

1.1 Conceptualising teacher agency

1.1.1 What is agency?

Agency is defined as a deliberate choice of action that is shaped by individuals' interpretations, understanding and, consequently, their responses to specific situations (Biesta & Tedder, 2006). This phenomenon has been studied from different perspectives as researchers seek to understand how and why individuals choose to act the way they do. For instance, Bandura (2006) explained agency from a psychological perspective whereby individuals demonstrate an inner capacity to act but are nevertheless enabled and constrained by the social structures that they have constructed. This leads the argument to the sociological perspective in which Giddens (1984) argues that an agent may choose to act in a specific manner but is guided by knowledge about social conditions. Agency is therefore not constant as social conditions are always evolving. Thus, the choice to exert a particular form of agency may also be dependent on "responses and adjustments to the changing power dynamic" (Fu & Clarke, 2017, p. 586). For instance, a person's choice to rebel during the struggle for independence is enabled or constrained by the changing environment and the power dynamics of self and others. However, a person may not choose to rebel to the same extent in a stable and meritocratic environment. While these are contextual forces, the impact of temporal forces on agency cannot be disregarded. For instance, a historical perspective of agency acknowledges the influence of the past on one's present actions (Fu & Clark, 2017). In line with this perspective, it can also be argued that agency is an outcome of reactions to institutions and these reactions are often collective (Fu & Clark, 2017). Historically, people have collectively reacted to social changes when they feel threatened by those changes and as Seixas (2012) observed, human beings are "active participants in the making and unmaking of the world" (Seixas, 2012, p. 540 cited in Fu & Clark, 2017, p. 587).

Most of the perspectives discussed above acknowledge the importance of social structures in triggering one's agency. It can therefore be deduced that agency is an inner capacity that is manifested as a result of being influenced or triggered by one's social structures. Human beings are sociologically termed as social creatures who exist through interactions with other human beings and within a regulated social space. Therefore, if social structures powerfully mould the individual's actions and reactions, to what extent is he/she autonomous? For instance, even if

an individual is privileged with autonomy in his/her workplace, he/she still exists within a regulated structure where job outcomes are linked to accountability and responsibility to the company and colleagues within the structure. Therefore, is agency a disposition (including attitudes, beliefs, values) that is largely internal and linked to cognitive traits? Or is it a set of practices, actions and behaviours in a setting that includes self and others? Instead of limiting agency to a fixed inner capacity, it can be conceptualised as one which involves a dialogical process of becoming. Thus, as the individual undergoes identity changes in different contexts and work (and personal) situations, he/she may exercise different types of agency which are enabled or constrained by forces within that environment. People are always experiencing changes in their personal and professional spaces and identity is moulded in response to personal and professional expectations and roles. As identity evolves (changing beliefs; inhabiting different cultures; or adhering to firm sets of beliefs and principles), one's agency is also impacted. For instance, a passive individual who prefers to inhabit a comfort zone may display rebellious traits with regard to a changing political environment. Hence, both internal and external forces influence one's identity, roles and agency.

As highlighted above, agency cannot be understood solely as an inner capacity; the choices that individuals make are guided by various forces. This leads to Priestley, Edwards, Priestley and Miller's (2012) observation that, instead of asking 'What is agency?', researchers should question*, 'How is agency possible?'* and *'How is agency achieved?'* (ibid. p. 196). These 'how' questions have been explained from an ecological perspective by Emirbayer and Mische (1998). The ecological perspective is influenced by Brofenbrenner's (1977) ecological model which comprises the enactment of self within spatial and temporal spaces. According to this 1998 model, an individual's actions are always influenced by *changes in the context* that he/she inhabits. However, prior to this, Brofenbrenner (1977) noted that there is no harmonious relationship between the individual and the context; instead, he identified a lack of explanation of how *personal characteristics and time* influence identity in the changing context. In his ecological model, Brofenbrenner also highlighted the important role played by the *person's own driving forces* in relation to his/her spatial and temporal spaces. Human beings are not necessarily the producer of their own development or outcome; socio-political-economic influences guide/ impact developmental changes. Based on these observations and limitations, Emirbayer and Mische (1998) proposed the 'chordal triad of agency' to show how agency is linked to *past*, *present* and *future*. The researchers believe that agency as an individual action cannot be divorced from temporal forces. One's present actions are outcomes of experiences

that are constructed or altered in line with personal and contextual forces. Moreover, individuals are exposed to different opportunities, such as the context of reform in a teacher's life, where agency can be reviewed and reflected upon (Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen & Hökkä, 2015) based on new experiences and challenges. Therefore, 'time' becomes an important force in the understanding of agency.

Hence, it is important to examine teacher agency in relation to spatial and temporal forces. Before understanding these forces, in the next section I relate the key concept of 'agency' to a theoretical understanding of **teacher agency** – the phenomenon of the study.

1.1.2 What is teacher agency?

While the opening sections introduce agency from a broader perspective, for the purpose of this study, it is important to understand agency as exercised by teachers who are constantly making choices and decisions with regard to their pedagogical practices as they prepare students academically and holistically. Similar to the discussion on agency in the previous section, teacher agency can be studied as an inner capacity (Bandura, 2006) guided by personal desires, notions of pedagogy, beliefs and principles or as actions; but these actions take place within macro-policy and micro-institutional spaces.

Teachers exercise agency in different ways – for instance, in the classroom, the teacher is the decision-maker and the leader while, in the staff room, he/she is part of collective professional experiences (Wenger, 1998; Tao & Gao, 2017; Bergh & Wahlström, 2018) and the type of agency displayed is often guided by collective needs and is also a response to policy dictates or school administrators' expectations. Thus, teacher agency includes, and also transcends personal enactment of self-chosen roles and decision-making within the professional environment (such as schools or classrooms). It is not "just the outcome of teachers' judgements and actions but is also shaped by the structures and cultures within which teachers work" (Biesta, Priestley & Robinson, 2017, p. 39).

Teacher agency is therefore a complex phenomenon that emanates from a range of sources:

- within the *personal* dimensions of self – emanating biographically and socially within home, family and community spaces (Ryder, Lidar, Lundqvist & Östman, 2018; Biesta et al., 2017; Pappa et al., 2017; Priestley et al., 2015).

- within and across *professional* terrains – that orientate teachers' conceptions of what is feasible in specific kinds of regulatory environments that shift possibilities over time and space (Tran, 2018; Ryder, Lidar, Lundqvist & Östman, 2018; Themane & Thobejane, 2018; Oolbekkink-Marchand, Hadar, Smith, Helleve & Ulvik, 2017; Singh-Pillay & Samuel, 2017; Tao-Gao, 2017; Pappa et al., 2017; Pantic, 2015; Toom, Pyhältö & Rust, 2015). These terrains are sometimes described as localised or more macro-oriented.

- within different *institutional space*s, such as classrooms, staff rooms and professional development classes (Fullan, 2013; Samuel, 2008; Molla & Nolan, 2020; Imants & Van der Wal, 2020).

Forces emanating from these different sources influence teacher agency and explain variations in the nature, degree and purpose of teacher agency. For instance, the ethos within a particular school system (where teachers are working or have been schooled) may affect teachers' conceptions of teaching and professional identity. Hence, the space within that institution may impact the way in which the teacher decides or chooses to act. Along with influences from their micro-institutional space, comprising the school ethos, infrastructure and management, the policy environment is a dominant dynamic space that influences teachers' professional roles and agency. Their agency cannot be dissociated from a macro-policy space with policy dictates and political decisions, and one which is influenced by changes taking place in education systems internationally. Thus, some recent research (Tran, 2018; Tao & Gao, 2017; Nguyen & Bui, 2016) on teacher agency focuses on teachers' agentive role in a macro-policy environment – for instance, it is observed that, in some cases, teachers' choice of actions impacts the proper implementation of policy. In order to understand how and why teacher agency differs and is exerted in varying degrees, recent research has focused on *social justice considerations* (Robinson, 2021), *teacher talk* (Biesta et al., 2017) and *beliefs* (Biesta, Priestley & Robinson, 2015) that influence agency while teachers negotiate with past, present and future dimensions (Priestley et al., 2015). In this study, I understand teacher agency as shaped by forces emanating

from a changing policy environment, intertwined with micro-institutional expectations such as standardisation and accountability. In going through changes brought about by policy change, do teacher beliefs and talk evolve? Do they enable or constrain agency?

The aim of this study is therefore to understand teacher agency as a phenomenon that is constantly influenced by a dynamic macro-policy environment. This environment exerts forces that may enable or constrain agency as it influences the professional roles of teachers, their personal or professional beliefs, and their micro-institutional environment which responds to policy expectations. Having shed light on the phenomenon and the aims of this study, I now anchor the study within the context of small island developing states (SIDS). It is important to have a conceptual understanding of the site of data production as the context assists in understanding macro-policy and micro-institutional forces that shape teacher agency.

1.2 Anchoring the study in its context

As a Mauritian, a student and a professional, I have experienced multiple reforms which were guided by political, social and economic aims such as social mobility, inclusive education and global recognition. Each time a reform is implemented, I come across varying reactions from teachers and other stakeholders (parents, teacher educators, rectors and managers). Whenever changes occur in the local education system and subsequently to teachers' routine experiences, they react through rebellion, acceptance, anger, frustration or confusion. Currently, the country is going through multiple reforms (since 2017) that have challenged the traditional beliefs and practices of many English teachers[1] who are used to grammar-oriented teaching, rote learning and an emphasis on written work. For instance, traditional grammar books have been replaced by standardised textbooks that focus more on the development of speaking, listening, reading, writing, critical and creative skills. While the holistic development of the student has always been the teacher's concern, nevertheless, for years, teachers have responded to examination-oriented demands from different stakeholders and have devised and used pedagogical strategies in line with these expectations. However, the new reform brought significant changes to teachers' professional roles. Reactions to change vary and teachers expressed different views about their changing

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[1] The study is delimited to English teachers as English is a core subject in the new reform (and has always occupied a central position in Mauritian education as the education system follows the British colonial system, and also due to its global positioning). As an English teacher I also came across the views of my colleagues who are transacting the new curriculum.

professional space. Some showed resistance and expressed the desire to continue to teach the way they have been teaching. Some worried about the examinations and whether the reform catered for students' preparation for Cambridge International Examinations (CIE)[2] at higher secondary levels. However, there were also some teachers who remained passive amidst the turbulence of expectations – they did not react and waited for the reform commencement date; expressed willingness to embrace the reform and made sure that they adhered to it. What explained that passivity? I became aware that, sometimes, some of these 'passive', voiceless workshopped teachers' voices resounded with critiques of the reform in staff rooms and other meeting places. Divergent actions and reactions could be observed and I was intrigued by what could be generating such a multiplicity of responses between and even within different teacher voices.

These reflections about how teachers may have been acting are not separate from my own personal beliefs about what is considered to be the agenda underpinning the reform initiatives; no-one is completely neutral with regard to how to interpret teacher actions. The element of doubt regarding my own links to an interest in the context, provided an impetus to research the processes of responsivity to the policy reform environment in a more systemic way. This turbulent changing space prompted me to ponder what caused these varying reactions and agency. For instance, teachers within my social circle often complain that their voices are not being heard or their opinions are not taken into consideration during the design of policy and reform. To what extent are these complaints a central concern of the policymakers? Were the opinions of teachers worthy of any serious consideration as they embrace new curriculum policy reforms? In order to come up with effective teacher development programmes, is it not important to consider teachers' actions and reactions to this macro-policy environment? I was faced with many questions in the process of implementing this new curriculum.

Thus, in this section, I anchor the study within the conceptual context of Mauritius as a small island developing state that will assist a holistic understanding of the complex phenomenon of teacher agency as teachers experience policy and curriculum reform.

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[2] While the national policy framework is geared towards lower secondary (Grades 7 to 9), upper secondary (Grades 10-13) prepares students for CIE.

1.2.1 Locating the phenomenon in a small island developing state

Small island developing states have been theorised as a group of small islands with "similar characteristics" (Crossley, 2016, p. 10) such as the need to improve access to education and quality education, or even the need to tackle economic vulnerabilities. They often look up to 'bigger' states (Nadal, Ankiah-Gangadeen & Kee Mew, 2017), but their aspirations to situate themselves within the global landscape are often revisited due to struggles and difficulties faced. Mauritius is a small state that carries a colonial legacy (educational, cultural, political, linguistic) and during its 53 years of independence, the country has tried to overcome social, economic and cultural vulnerabilities through education that would pave the way towards economic success and social integration. Whilst the definitions suggest uncontested agreement about the definition of SIDS as being linked to demographic profiles and geographic scales, below, I situate Mauritius conceptually within the SIDS emergent literature in order to understand how, despite its smallness, this data production site can shed light on the complexity of the phenomenon of teacher agency in ways that cannot be captured in bigger states. This brief categorisation of SIDS literature also provides a lens to show that the operational definitional characteristic of the label "small island developing states (SIDS)" as marginalised and in need of external intervention has been informed by historical and theoretical biases. There is a need to understand SIDS as mutating conceptually in terms of who constitutes the chief proponents of the research agendas, from within or outside, or in mutual reciprocal relationships with the small contexts.

Studies on SIDS span three generations (Mariaye, 2016):

- the first generation emphasises the problematic of smallness and focuses on deficiency and vulnerability[3] (Crossley, 2016; Jules & Ressler, 2016; Mariaye, 2016);
- the second generation overemphasises the exotic and essentialist nature of small islands and also celebrates the uniqueness and problems of SIDS;
- the third generation points to the distinctiveness of SIDS and emphasises the need to treat small states as having strengths instead of ecological weaknesses (Jules & Ressler, 2016; Mariaye, 2016; Samuel & Mariaye, 2017).

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[3] Comprising geographical, climatic, economic and other weaknesses.

My study is situated within this third generation that highlights the need to explore the nuances and complexity of "lived experiences of SIDS institutions, individual and nations, and their collaborating partners." (Mariaye, 2016, p. 15). Mauritius is, thus, a researchable laboratory where smallness can enable bigger states to gain a better understanding of macro issues as teachers negotiate their roles and agency within a layered spatial and temporal space with nationalistic agendas, colonial heritage, global recognition and evolving cultural trends such as digitalisation.

According to Crossley and Sprague (2017), research on education in SIDS is of global relevance as small states have "been among the first to extend the boundaries of basic education to prioritise secondary and higher education and, in tune with early EFA (Education for All) agendas, to reprioritise adult and lifelong learning" (Crossley, Bray & Packer, 2011). Prioritisation of education in small states arises from the need to create an educated workforce that will contribute to the country's economic development and decrease poverty (World Bank, 1995). The *UNESCO Education Strategy 2014-2021* emphasises the relationship between education, national economic growth, the global economy and social mobility. The Nine Years of Continuous Basic Education (NYCBE) reform is informed by this education strategy as it aims to equip students with basic education that will develop "a literate and trainable workforce" (UNESCO, 2014). The new policy highlights the use of pedagogical strategies that depart from traditional rote learning and examination-oriented strategies and focus instead on skills development to equip Mauritians professionally. The aim is to reduce competition that arises from an examination-oriented structure that equips students with qualifications but does not enable them to secure a job. For instance, from 2010 to 2014 (prior to the reform), the number of unemployed graduates increased by 9.5% (*Report of the Director of Audit*, 2015). Hence, in order to ensure economic development, the emphasis should not be on qualifications alone; there is a need to enhance the skills required by the job market. Thus, the aim of the new reform is to review this examination-oriented and competitive education structure that prioritises qualifications.

Education is valorised as the ladder to personal and national success, and Mauritius has upheld the image of a successful education system by being affiliated to the Cambridge international education institution and producing qualifications that are globally recognised; by ensuring an

educated nation with compulsory and free education up to 18-20 years[4]; and, by being affiliated with foreign universities (Nadal, Ankiah-Gangadeen & Kee Mew, 2017) in bigger states such as the United Kingdom (UK), France and Australia so as to produce students with globally recognised qualifications and also to attract foreign students. However, the educational system is not only a celebrated attempt to help people enhance their social status. In 2016, prior to the Primary School Achievement Certificate (PSAC)[5], the pass rate stood at 69.4% for boys and 80.3% for girls (*Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, 2019). Consequently, at a very young age (around 10 years old), some students were penalised by a system that valorised academic success and stigmatised those who failed the examinations. This did not, however, dilute the value of education as a "prized commodity" (Nadal, Ankiah-Gangadeen & Kee Mew, 2017, p. 199) that paves the way for social rewards in the form of a good job that helps to improve one's social status. Educational achievements and qualifications are seen as reflecting one's social identity[6] and this has led to the marginalisation of students who did not perform well academically. In order not to be stigmatised as a failure and as uneducated, many parents have exerted pressure on their children to succeed academically as education is viewed "as a core instrument to retain their places in higher strata or to access those strata" (Bray, 2020, p. 3). This persistent focus on education has given rise to a parallel private tutoring system which offers students additional classes in order to produce good results. Teachers and parents value private tutoring; ironically, while the state provides education for all by offering free education, parents invest in private tuition due to persistent fear of failure.

What explains this massive investment in private tutoring by parents? Why, even in the face of a new reform that emphasises the need to depart from traditional teaching, do teachers and parents continue to adopt conventional examination-oriented strategies? In 2012, the Mauritian government regulated private tutoring in lower primary school (Grades 1 to 4). However, even after the implementation of the NYCBE, it continues to dominate the education landscape. Bray (2020) explains this phenomenon as a culture which is deeply rooted in Mauritian society

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[4] Free primary and secondary schools regulated by the state.

[5] The NYCBE comprises two national examinations – the PSAC at primary school level in Grades 5 and 6 and NCE at secondary school level in Grade 9. The PSAC examinations replaced the Certificate of Primary Education (CPE), also known as the rat race (Ministry of Education & Scientific Research, 2001).

[6] This firm belief in the educational system as one that enhances social status and identity by offering qualifications that improve one's job prospects has not changed with the new reform, as the aim is still to improve the economic and social landscape of the country. However, the reform includes those who are considered as academic failures in the mainstream education system.

that does not question the system; instead, people practise what is termed 'managed intimacy' (Lowenthal, 1987; Bray, 1991; Mariaye & Samuel, 2016),

> "Small state inhabitants learn to get along…with folk they would know in myriad contexts over their whole lives. To enable the social mechanism to function without undue stress, they minimise and mitigate over conflicts. They become experts at muting hostility deferring their own views and containing disagreement and avoid dispute in the interest of stability and compromised." (Lowenthal (1987) cited in Bray, 1991, p. 21)

This 'politeness culture' with 'managed intimacy' stifles the voices of various stakeholders such as parents and teachers, who do not question the overemphasis on educational success, marginalisation of students with academic difficulties and the persistence of a paid and unregulated schooling structure. Does this culture give rise to compliance? Teachers voiced their fears and desire to preserve past practices when the NYCBE reform was introduced. Their voices were heard within private spaces such as schools and during workshops, but how do they represent their agentic selves in this changing environment?

The education system in Mauritius has ensured quality education through its affiliation with the Cambridge international examination institution, reflecting the conceptualisation of small states as vulnerable ones that need support from bigger states. However, the national reform reflects the country's acknowledgement of the need to address particular local needs instead of considering itself as a smaller version of larger states (Bray, 2016). Nevertheless, the current social, political, cultural and economic landscape is one that is an outcome of colonial history, post-independence socio-economic reconstruction and current forces of globalisation (Ankiah-Gangadeen & Nadal, 2017). This nuanced landscape offers researchers the possibility of understanding macro issues, such as those related to teacher agency and policy reforms, by examining small states. In the next section, I discuss the macro-policy landscape in order to situate teachers within a socioculturally shifting landscape as they negotiate their agency in a changing policy space.

1.2.2 Education policies in Mauritius

During its 53 years of independence, Mauritius, like many other ex-colonies, has experienced various education and curriculum reforms – often influenced by social, cultural, economic and political factors. The post-independence era emphasised the importance of education as a ladder to improve the country's financial situation by creating an educated workforce and enabling it to gain global recognition. In the 1960s and 1970s, the state made provision for free basic education (literacy and numeracy at primary school level) in line with increasing social demand for education and, consequently, social integration. In 1977, access was extended (*The Development of Education*, 2008; Bah-Lalya & Sukon, 2011) to include free secondary education.

In this section, I sketch the contextual landscape of the Mauritian macro-policy environment. I introduce the context of the recent policy framework (the NYCBE and National Curriculum Framework (NCF)) within which my study was conducted. This historical policy analysis assists me in reflecting on how different reforms, with an emphasis on the current one, yield different spaces and negotiations for teachers in terms of their roles and agency.

1.2.2.1 Understanding the current macro-policy landscape

In this section I highlight the changes to the Mauritian education system brought about by the current policy, the NYCBE (2017), and the reviewed NCF (2017). While this section focuses on current policy reform, in sections 1.2.2.2 and 1.2.2.3, I locate this reform within a wider landscape of shifts in trajectories of educational reforms as I focus on teachers' evolving roles and agency. Before analysing current educational reform, it is important to understand the structure of the Mauritian education system based on current policy as highlighted in the figure below from the NYCBE (2017, p. 17) policy document.

Early Childhood Education

- Children with enriched preschool experience and confidence for future learning.

- Compulsory one year pre-primary education
- Professionalisation of the ECE sector

All children ready for Primary School

Basic Education (9 years)

- Well-rounded individuals
- Readiness for next stage of differentiated education (general/technical/vocational)

- Early Support Programme for early intervention
- Improved pedagogy
- Adapted interventions for children with special needs
- Holistic education
- Institutionalisation of new assessments for meaningful learning
- Elimination of PreVocational stream
- Extended stream for low-ability students
- Increased autonomy to Zone Directorates and Schools

All children achieve national standards of learning

Upper Secondary/ Technical Education

- Universalisation of secondary education
- Students with essential abilities for progressing along their chosen career path
- Students developing as global citizens
- Revalorised and attractive TVET sector

- Broadening of curriculum for greater relevance to 21st Century realities
- Sustaining holistic education
  Academies for Excellence in Education
- Making TVET an attractive, opted-for pathway
- Polytechnic education
- Regional scholarships

- Improved learning out-comes for all
- Highy skilled TVET graduates ready for labour market

Well-rounded and responsible citizens, equipped with the knowledge, skills and right attitudes for further education and future employment and driving Mauritius' vision for national development

Figure 2: The Mauritian education structure (NYCBE, 2017, p. 17)

The figure shows the different phases in the Mauritian schooling system. This study is limited to the Basic Education phase which comprises Grades 1 to 9:

- from Grades 1 to 6 students attend primary school in preparation for the Primary School Achievement Certificate (PSAC); after which they progress to Grade 7 in regional schools (schools within the educational zone where the student resides[7]); and

- from Grades 7 to 9 students attend secondary school preparing for the National Certificate of Education (NCE) exams; after which they progress to upper secondary to take part in CIE or to professional specialisation in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET).

This new reform applies to state secondary schools (state-owned) and schools regulated by the Private Secondary Education Association (PSEA). While all state schools follow the government policy and are funded by the government, PSEA regulated private schools are divided into two categories – those that are fully funded by the government and follow the government policy and, those that are regulated by the PSEA but are fee-paying and follow international curricula, such as Cambridge International Examinations. Confessional schools in Mauritius, regulated by the PSEA and officially labelled as private schools, often refer to schools imparting religious knowledge such as Catholic schools like Loreto colleges and Saint Esprit Colleges; Hindu Girls' College; and Muslim Girls College. However, those schools do not restrict access to specific religious groups. Besides, these schools are not only religious-oriented, but they comprise specific ethos and culture that are preserved while adhering to the government policy. State schools are not necessarily homogenous. They may have slight variations as they are regional schools which are geographically distributed and include those considered as 'star schools' for high academic performers. In terms of the new reform, some state schools are being transformed into Academies for students who excel in the NCE examinations. While these two categories of schools adhere to the national policy reform, there are private fee-paying schools which follow international curricula and are not part of this reform.

Having painted a picture of the Mauritian school structure, I move to a discussion on the current policy. The NYCBE was introduced in 2017 and was in line with the government's *Economic Mission Statement* "of making Mauritius attain high-income country status by 2030" (NYCBE, 2017, p. 1). National examinations at Grade 6 in primary school have been the priority of teachers, students and parents in the post-independence era. These examinations gave students,

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[7] The country comprises five educational zones.

irrespective of their social status, the opportunity to access 'star' colleges – nationally celebrated colleges comprising what is known as the academic elite of Mauritian society. However, despite their focus on academic success, these examinations were criticised for engendering competition that killed students' creativity and critical skills as the focus was on rote-learning and the volume of work completed. Different governments have tried to abolish this competitive system, also known as the 'rat race'. In 2001, the government adopted a policy, *Ending the Rat Race in Primary Education*. It eliminated the competitive ranking system of the Certificate of Primary Education (CPE) at Grade 6 and many secondary schools were built to reduce the pressure to access star colleges. However, students still felt the pressure to achieve good results to gain access to 'star' schools that continued to enrol those with the best academic results; thus, ranking was replaced by grading. The NYCBE is an attempt to eradicate this competitive system as there are no longer 'star' schools and allocation is within educational zones. However, national competition has shifted to Grade 9, the NCE, where, as discussed below, students compete for a seat in Academies.

This reform introduced various changes in the Mauritian education landscape and triggered mixed feelings, reactions and actions among teachers. To better understand their changing roles and agency, I highlight the major changes brought about by this policy:

- This new policy integrates the 'extended programme' (EP), those who did not pass the PSAC examinations, within the mainstream. Prior to the NYCBE reform, pre-vocational schools catered for the needs of students with academic difficulties ("different abilities, aptitudes and learning paces" (NYCBE, 2017, p. 24)). Apart from learning difficulties, "the profile of these students is generally characterised by a number of factors, social and other including negative school experiences and health problems in some cases, that have led to coping difficulties, lack of motivation and self-confidence" (*The Four-Year Extended Programme*, 2017, p. 4). Given an examination-oriented system that mainly focuses on pass rates, these students have been stigmatised. Despite receiving pre-vocational training in specific schools, they were differentiated from the mainstream as failures. In 2018, 6 243 students were enrolled in pre-vocational[8] schools and only 1 676

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[8] Those schools emphasised the need to equip those students with vocational skills, "including technical skills as well as personal and employability competences" (NCF, 2009, p. 183).

moved to professional training after three years (Grades 7 to 9) of pre-vocational education (*Digest of Education Statistics*, 2018). Thus, there were many school dropouts as the system prioritised students who could succeed academically. The NYCBE reform includes these students within the mainstream by providing them with an adapted curriculum that aims to develop essential basic competencies (NYCBE, 2017) such as reading, writing and numeracy.

The inclusion of the EP is in line with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's (UNESCO) *Basic Education for Africa Program* (BEAP):

> "Instead of equipping a narrowly selected elite for further academic education, the role ascribed to basic education becomes that of preparing an entire age group for integration into adult society…into the world of work…and for further studies as applicable in a general perspective of lifelong learning." (NYCBE, 2017, p. 3)

Hence, the objective is to abolish the 'rat race' and the obsession with pass rates in favour of basic education for all. The presence of the EP within the mainstream challenges earlier conceptions of secondary schooling as consisting of students who are academically ready for CIE. Instead, academically low-achieving students are given a chance to embrace secondary schooling and prepare for their future by being provided with an adapted curriculum and resources within the mainstream.

Furthermore, the inclusion of the EP in the mainstream is a direct response by the Mauritian government to Goal 4 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals to ensure quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all students (NYCBE, 2017, p. 5). Adherence to international goals reflects the government's desire to sustain an internationally recognised education system and to consequently benefit from international funding to ensure the smooth continuation of inclusive education and provide Mauritians with basic education.

However, as an insider researcher, I observed the gap between policy and praxis as many teachers found teaching EP students a daunting experience. These teachers had been teaching students who were academically prepared for secondary schooling, and teaching EP was new to them. As reflected in the following profile of EP students in

The Four-Year Extended Programme (2017), it would require more preparation for examinations:

> "Students concerned may function in a stressed mode, may not have basic scholastic/social skills and executive functions, may not be fluent/ proficient in any languages necessary for lessons and assessments, may sometimes not have the pre-requisites to understand the ongoing lesson, may generally, have difficulties to build up meaningful relationships with peers and the Educators [teachers].
>
> It is felt that, prior to getting the students to embark on learning their subject matter, they must be provided with positive experiences that would contribute to develop in them vital personal skills, ensure their psychological and emotional well-being and restore their self-confidence and self-esteem. Developing a greater interest in school would certainly trigger in them a new motivation to learn and succeed. As importantly, they should feel supported on all sides whether at school or at home." (p. 4)

Mainstream teachers were expected to change their teaching strategies, which were more geared towards examination preparation, in order to cater for the above needs. These teachers were not properly prepared and trained to devise new strategies to teach such students. This newness and sudden change in their professional duties represented a professional difficulty that gave rise to resistance. Moreover, due to the stigmatised identity of the EP students, smooth integration into the mainstream was challenging as they still experience marginalisation within the micro-institutional space. Teachers' resistance also echoed the pressure they felt to prepare these students for the NCE examinations as they feared that not all EP students will be able to achieve the requisite level for these examinations. However, I also noted that not all teachers react with confusion, anger or frustration to teaching EP; some show willingness to 'help' these students to achieve basic proficiency in general core subjects such as English, Mathematics and French. This reform has undoubtedly challenged teachers' earlier conception of secondary school teaching and they are expected to unshackle themselves from traditional beliefs and practices. Thus, I sought to understand what explains the different reactions among teachers.

- Another major change brought about by this reform is the introduction of standardised textbook from Grades 7 to 9. Prior to the reform, teachers could choose books that would assist teaching and learning based on students' academic level. Consequently, different schools had the freedom to choose books that they deemed appropriate for the

preparation of students in Grades 7 to 9. However, with the NYCBE standardised textbooks were introduced to prepare all students in a similar way. There were mixed reactions from teachers: the prescribed books were perceived as inappropriate for academically high performers; the book was activity-based and the Mauritian secondary structure has been a results-oriented one where the priority was to practise exercises in line with the English language examination format. According to my peer teacher colleagues and some teachers that I met during the policy standardisation workshops (2017), the book was not in accordance with "the examination paper layout" (that is, the normative patterns of standardised national testing assessment regimes). Therefore, they expressed their preference for books with practice examination papers or grammar exercises. Hence, I questioned whether standardisation was disrupting the traditional practices of many teachers. Do teachers feel empowered by a standardised textbook that prepares students nationally for the NCE examinations? Do they struggle to preserve their safe zone with previous teaching material? Do they feel deprofessionalised with no choice and say in the selection of teaching material? These questions aroused my interest in why teachers react in different ways to this changing environment and what explains the varied reactions.

- Furthermore, the NYCBE introduces Academies and TVET. Previously, students remained in their current schools after Grade 9 and were prepared to take part in the CIE in Grade 11. As per the new reform, after the NCE examinations at Grade 9, students who do not meet the criteria to move to Grade 10 will be channelled to TVET, while those who excel in the examinations may move to Academies or opt to remain in their current school. This reform placed additional pressure on schools regulated by the PSEA as some schools comprise academically very low performers, sometimes with more EP classes than mainstream classes. Therefore, it is anticipated that many students from these schools will move to TVET and the school population will decrease drastically. Many teachers in these schools express concern about the possible closure of some due to the decreasing student population. Moreover, the PSEA offers financial grants to these schools based on pass rates for Cambridge examinations but, with this reform, they will have fewer students for CIE. Hence, in its initial phase, this reform created confusion, a lack of transparency and additional stress among some teachers who are unsure of the stability of their future professional trajectories in the changing environment.

Therefore, by introducing various changes in the professional micro-institutional space, the NYCBE activates a particular challenge for teacher agency. The reform initiatives set out above fundamentally alter multiple structures within the schooling sector, generating much turbulence amongst teachers who do not see themselves fully represented in the new system. For instance, how is teacher agency impacted by fear of the possibility of school closures? In response to this possibility, do schools put more pressure on teachers to produce higher pass rates? Do teachers have to devise additional strategies to ensure higher pass rate? Do they lose their freedom due to the use of prescribed books?

Along with these changes that triggered varying reactions from teachers as their professional roles and spaces are redefined, the NYCBE brought about another change – an NCF (NCF, 2017). The NYCBE seeks to redefine quality education with a focus on the development of 21st century skills and students' holistic development in order to prepare them for future career trajectories. Hence, curricula (different subjects) have been reformed to cater for these expectations. For the purpose of this study the focus is the English NCF (2017) as the participants comprised of English teachers (see chapter three). The NCF was developed by the Mauritius Institute of Education[9] (MIE) and the Ministry of Education (MoE) taking into account the social and economic needs of the local context in a global space of change; the need to value multiple intelligences instead of focusing on examination-oriented models; and the need to re-invent teaching strategies in line with technological evolution.

Hence, while embracing the new reform, teachers are forced to review or reflect on their current teaching strategies. Do they reconsider their roles and agency? Which policy changes do they feel most at odds with? At times, when engaged in a curriculum reform, teacher roles are not necessarily redefined. With minor changes to a curriculum, teachers continue to teach the way they have been teaching. However, the NCF 2017 brought about specific changes. For instance, for the English curriculum, teachers previously taught English language and Literature in English separately, and prioritised English language that was examined each year through local examinations. Consequently, teaching literature was considered optional by some schools (and teachers). Moreover, schools were free to choose different textbooks to teach literature.

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[9] Founded in 1973, the MIE is a teacher education institution that also assists the Ministry of Education in curriculum planning and development (Mariaye, 2016).

However, the new curriculum introduced standardised textbooks for Literature in English, just as it did for English Language and a compulsory literature component is included in the national examinations. Furthermore, the NCF emphasises literature's contribution to the communicative approach and the development of 21st century skills. Thus, teachers had to review their teaching practices and tools such as textbooks. While in line with the previous curriculum, teaching literature was optional as it was not a component included in the examination paper. Henceforth, with the new curriculum, literature has become a compulsory component. This inclusion has led some teachers who had been marginalising the literature component to review their teaching strategies.[10] How do teachers negotiate and experience difficulties with this sudden move from an examination-oriented approach to a focus on the holistic development of the student instead of results-driven strategies?

The above mentioned are some of the changes that may trigger teachers' reflections on their common professional practices and unsettle some who have been teaching in specific ways for a long time. In order to understand the impact of curriculum change on teachers' practice, it is important to understand the ways in which teacher roles are presented in the 2017 NCF. Teachers are expected to (NCF, 2017, p. 17):

- identify the different abilities and needs of each student and use a wide range of teaching methods (it should be noted that this reform emphasised the importance of inclusive education and the use of differentiated teaching in order to cater for the needs of students with different levels of academic performance);
- monitor students' learning and growth, and pay attention to any signs of student disengagement (through formative and summative assessments);
- provide counselling, guidance and motivation to students;
- guide students to recognise their strengths and weaknesses;
- consolidate students' self-esteem;
- participate in the development of learning support materials and other resources; and
- engage in networking to promote best practices in supporting students.

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[10] It should be noted that the new curriculum emphasises the need to distance from grammar-oriented learning and to adopt a more holistic approach by promoting usage. However, the examination components regarding grammar items, for instance, did not change and this may influence teachers' decision to continue teaching the way they have been doing.

The roles of teachers specified in the NCF do not depart from those expected in the teaching profession. However, previously teachers and schools chose to emphasise results and at times students with academic difficulties were unconsciously marginalised. Here, the focus is on catering for these students' needs – the emphasis is thus on inclusive education and differentiated teaching. While teachers' roles as guides (responsible for ensuring academic performance) are highlighted, it should be noted that it is not always possible for teachers to give attention to every student, especially if the class is large. Teachers may face more challenges teaching a large class and it may be difficult to provide guidance and counselling to every student and to consolidate his/her self-esteem. As teachers embark on a new curriculum with the changes specified above with reference to the English curriculum, it becomes challenging to transact the curriculum, cater for students' needs and ensure that they are ready for examinations. Although these roles have always been the centre of teachers' professional choices, practices and decisions, their emphasis on the curriculum and policy narratives may compel teachers to rethink their roles and identity. While some teachers have been working with academically good students, others have been struggling to teach basic language proficiency; some were already teaching literature, with others focusing only on language and preparing students for examinations; and some teachers focus on the volume of classwork and homework with repetitive paper practice and grammar exercises while others engage students in activities. These are some examples of the different experiences that could explain the varying reactions to the reform.

With reference to improving students' performance, teachers are also expected to be involved in continuous professional education in order to prepare for changing times. This is highlighted in the NYCBE, which states that "(t)eachers' professional competence will be continually improved in pedagogy, instructional skills, classroom practices and adolescent development" (p. 25). From the onset of this reform, professional workshops have been conducted by the MIE to prepare teachers and there were varying reactions to these:

- some teachers felt empowered as they were receiving professional guidance and tools and were at the same time revisiting teaching strategies;
- some expressed a lack of interest, claiming that the workshops were similar to what they were taught in their Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE); and
- some only attended the workshops because they were compulsory.

Do these varying reactions impact teaching or choices made in the classroom? While the purpose of the workshops was to empower teachers as agents transacting a new curriculum, there may be a feeling of deprofessionalisation as teachers were increasingly constructed as needing to question or revoke their current teaching strategies and beliefs. As with any major reform, their identity as a teacher was considered as being challenged and their reactions often mirror their choices, actions and decisions. For instance, a teacher who is feeling deprofessionalised may react passively in class, experience work dissatisfaction or face difficulties in confidently transacting the curriculum. A teacher who feels empowered may enthusiastically transact the curriculum and devise new teaching strategies to develop students' skills and prepare them for examinations. On the other hand, someone who is forced to attend the workshops but who thinks that nothing new is being learnt may experience frustration and feel that teaching time is being wasted.

Thus, through this study I aimed to understand what forces within this changing space influence teachers and how they react to these forces. Most importantly, how will these teachers act as they brace themselves for these changes and challenges – by preserving their traditional teaching strategies and refusing change; responding passively to policy dictates; or by using this platform of change to be empowered and innovating new strategies to participate in curriculum making?

1.2.2.2 Positioning teachers during waves of education reform in Mauritius

Teachers have been constructed in different ways through different policy initiatives in Mauritius. By historically analysing the different policies and their conceptions of teachers, I situate my study in the broader macro-policy environment that influences teachers' roles and agency. The transaction of the new policy cannot be separated from the existing macro-policy culture and landscape in understanding the forces enabling and constraining agency. Table 1 below presents a historical analysis of official educational policies and reforms that form part of the Mauritian educational landscape. The chronological presentation of the policies captures the shift from pre-independence to post-independence (current) Mauritian society (discussed after the presentation of table) as policy is a dialogical process with the past. One column includes the goals and main focus of the policies which highlights the country's need to respond to international institutions such as UNESCO and the World Bank, and to the country's socio-economic expectations. In another column I emphasise the ways in which teachers, the main

implementers of the policies, have been presented. This is followed by an analysis of their experiences and responses to the reforms in order to understand the types of agency that they normally exercise in times of change. This policy analysis provides a better understanding of a policy landscape that influences teachers' roles and agency in a changing macro-policy environment. As highlighted in the table, despite some resistance, teachers comply with policy expectations and participate in curriculum making. However, as noted earlier, I witnessed divergent views among teachers as a new policy was introduced and I sought to understand why they become curriculum makers despite their resistance, confusion and fear in the midst of change. Furthermore, apart from this dominant macro-policy landscape that shape their roles and agency, what other forces enable or constrain their actions? Why do teachers react differently in similar macro-policy or sociocultural contexts? As the study is situated within a policy reform context, the table below assists my understanding of how teachers are expected to act and whether these actions diverge from policy expectations or always lead to policy implementation.

YEAR	EDUCATION & CURRICULUM REFORM	MAIN FOCUS OF REFORM	FOCUS ON TEACHERS/ TEACHERS' ROLES	ANALYSING TEACHER EXPERIENCES AND RESPONSES TO REFORM	REFLECTION ON THE CONCEPTIONS OF TEACHER AGENCY
1957 (Pre-Independence)	*1957 Education Act*	A structured system of education, including a National Curriculum Advisory Board to ensure that the curriculum contributes to holistic development of students.	Registration process for authorisation to teach – teachers were registered on the following grounds: good character, medically fit and possession of prescribed qualifications.	• The regulations and authorisation created a formal space within which teachers could exercise their agency. • They were expected to have a good character in order to be role models. This is one way in which their actions, decisions and choices would be limited – their agency will be guided by the way they **need** to present themselves. • With proper qualifications teachers will be better equipped to exercise agency by developing and implementing different teaching strategies. These criteria are still relevant in the current education system (NYCBE) – possession of prescribed qualifications ensures that quality education is delivered by qualified teachers. For instance, the current system emphasises quality through professional education as it empowers teachers in the development of teaching strategies.	Teachers expected to be well equipped through relevant qualification in order to contribute to **curriculum making**
1982 (Post-Independence)	*Amendment to Education Act*	Reduce educational expenditure.	Closing 21 private secondary schools without compensating teachers; this "led to strikes and general unrest in the education sector, [and] demotivated the teaching force" (*Master Plan*	• In this context, the government prioritised expenditure reduction over teachers' job security. A lack of job security may lead to passive agency or refusal to contribute to implementation processes. Does valuing teachers enable agency?	Showing **resistance** when teachers' job security is threatened

			of Education for the Year 2000, p. 13). Salaries, a factor influencing teacher motivation – teachers voice against the system.	• Samuel (2014) observed that in times of reform, influenced by their social and political context, teachers may enact agency by speaking out against a particular system in order to achieve social justice. But are these voices always heard or taken into consideration? Speaking out against reforms may be a form of active agency, but to what extent are the voices heard within the macro-policy environment and to what extent do the conditions within which teachers are forced to work change?	
1997	*Master Plan of Education*	Increase access to education with the Jomtien's Conference goals of 'education for all'; ensure funding from institutions such as UNESCO and the World Bank; aligning with the government's agenda for change. The National Centre for Curriculum Research and Development (NCCRD) was	Highlights that past failures of education policy include insufficient involvement of different partners, including teachers – therefore, teachers' contributions to policy implementation were acknowledged. Teachers were consulted during the implementation process – a sharp contrast with earlier policies in which teachers were merely viewed as passive implementers. The government recognised the social changes that took place after independence and aimed to address the problems encountered (high repetition rates, competition and rise in private tuition, drop-outs) – these problems could not be addressed in	• A paradigmatic shift is noted in the way in which teachers are perceived – they are valued as the implementers of curriculum. This shift gave rise to active agency as teachers contributed to the implementation of the reform as 'valued' stakeholders. • It can be interpreted that teachers' involvement in this reform was geared towards enhancing the delivery of quality education and to empower teachers in order to improve national results. It should be noted that despite the fact that these teachers were bounded within a space of performativity and accountability, they chose to become curriculum makers and work within the regulated space. • Does the setting up of a Teacher's Council contribute to active agency? This political decision can be interpreted as a way of respecting teachers' voices – a shift from previous educational changes. By feeling valued or respected, teachers may choose to work hard and improve results. However, the opposite may also occur as they may gain	Teachers valued as essential to **curriculum making** Teachers question salary scale and show **resistance**

		established to ensure that the curriculum is relevant to the social and economic realities of the country.	isolation. The views, understanding and support of teachers were recognised. As highlighted in the document, the education sector involves many people and decisions could not be imposed by the government – collaboration of teachers in implementation was vital. A Teacher's Council was established to improve teachers' conditions of work. Performativity was highlighted as teachers' inability and lack of training was considered one of the causes of low performance in schools. Therefore, there was a need for teacher training so as to empower teachers. Teacher salaries led to demotivation and resistance. The government tried to convince teachers that international standards were being respected.	confidence and choose to continue to teach the way they were teaching as they will not fear losing their jobs or other threats. • This document also points to the need for teacher training as a way to empower teachers. • It should be noted that salary was a deprofessionalising force that led to resistance. Despite being politically valued in the policy making process, teacher agency is influenced by financial stability.	
2001	*Ending the Rat Race in Primary Education*	Ending extreme competition during the CPE and increasing	Teachers were expected to change teaching strategies in line with the elimination of the 'rat race' (a highly	• Teachers were expected to review their pedagogy to fit the reformed education structure and to eliminate 'unnecessary competition' in relation to political expectations. Are they compelled to do so because	Teachers were expected to review pedagogical strategies –

		access to education; building new state secondary schools.	competitive examination at Grade 6 level); upgrading teacher skills; regional posting of teachers in state secondary schools.	they exist within a regulated macro-policy context or could they choose to continue to teach the way they had been teaching? This reform can be compared to the current NYCBE. Similar to the elimination of CPE during this reform, the NYCBE includes the elimination of competition and pressure at Grade 6 level. In cases where teachers are expected to review their pedagogical strategies and expectations, to what extent do they abide by policy and change pedagogical strategies? • It should be noted that regional posting was imposed on teachers in this reform. Their choice or freedom, as experienced in the past in their choice of schools, was curbed. This situation persists in the current reform context. It may give rise to rebellion or dissatisfaction.	**curriculum making** and at times **preserving past ways of teaching**
2006	*Towards a Quality Curriculum (TQC)*	Readjusting educational practices in line with social, economic and technological changes.	Acknowledging that teachers are "important actors in any curriculum change" (p. 16) – similar to 1997 *Master Plan of Education.* Emphasis on teacher training before they join the profession and intensive training for those already in it.	• Politically acknowledging the importance of teachers as curriculum makers may be interpreted as a way to empower teachers as active contributors to policy and curriculum reform. Meanwhile, teachers were acknowledged as 'curriculum makers' who abide by curriculum aims, objectives and expectations without resistance. However, in order to implement the curriculum, again, the emphasis is on teacher training. It can be observed that teacher training is a recurrent theme in most reforms. Is this repetition deprofessionalising, or empowering? According to Robinson (2012), teacher education and training often acts as a control mechanism as teachers are trained to behave and teach in a particular way. Thus, does teacher training curtail agency in some cases?	Empowering teachers as **curriculum makers**

2009	*Education and Human Resources Strategy Plan 2008-2020* (EHRSP)	'Quality education for all'; adapting to increasingly globalised environment; the need for curriculum reform; process of learning prioritised over content of learning.	Teacher education/ teacher accountability and failure rates/ teachers empowered as 'role models'.	• Again, the emphasis is on teacher education. Is it indeed a controlling structure that limits and pressurises teachers through accountability and performance (Mitchell, 2016; Samuel, 2008)? According to Mitchell (2016), these controlling structures can be resisted; to what extent can they be resisted? Teacher education might act as a controlling structure, but does it empower or disempower? At some point, teachers might find themselves in perpetual need of professional development and education. It cannot be denied that teachers exist within an evolving society where they have to embrace change as a normal part of teaching. For instance, in the current digital era, teachers cannot renounce the use of technology completely. Therefore, teacher training is required to trigger active agency.	Much emphasis on teacher training in order to empower teachers to contribute to **curriculum making**
2014	*Education Reforms Action: 2008-2014*	'Learning for all' – emphasis on access and equity.	Teacher training and capacity building; reviewing pedagogical practices in line with access and equity.	• The focus of this reform is no different from previous ones. However, it should be noted that the emphasis is on equity. Nonetheless, teachers will have to operate within accountability and performativity structures. They will be motivated to devise new strategies to cater for 'all', but they will also be answerable to different stakeholders as the system is still examination-oriented. In this situation, do teachers choose to teach for 'all' and activate new reform or do they choose to continue to teach the way they have been teaching and ensure good results?	Focus is on access and equity – **curriculum making** or **preserve past practices?**
2017	*Nine Years of Continuous Basic Education*	In line with the government's Economic Mission	Teacher training; proficiency in mastery of digital tools; some teachers will be working in extended stream	• It should be noted that this reform introduces something new – standardised textbooks at lower secondary level. Is teacher agency undermined or celebrated with the standardised use of textbooks?	Standardised textbooks – **passivity**, **curriculum**

		Statement; textbook production and standardisation by the MIE.	(low performers) and special training will be given to those teachers; some teachers will be working with upper secondary students in Academies (specialised in specific subjects); the pressure and competition of the CPE is shifted to Grade 9 National Examinations (lower secondary level).	Is it a form of professionalisation or deprofessionalisation of teachers? By ensuring standardisation, teacher autonomy may be curtailed to some extent. However, some teachers may still choose to teach the way they have been teaching. • While in the previous policy, equity was related to reviewing pedagogy, in this reform it involves changing micro-institutional structures to cater for all. Technically, there are no failures as students are promoted to extended classes where despite academic weaknesses, they are prepared for the national examinations. How do teachers act and react in this changing context?	**making** or **preserving past practices?**

Table 1: Analysing the wave of education reform in the Mauritian context

The above table analyses the different reforms and the ways in which teachers have been positioned during these changes. The regulated structures that have emanated from these reforms influence the ways in which teachers perceive themselves in the current context. This table presents the argument that teacher agency is influenced by various forces within the macro-policy context which include regulatory structures such as teacher training regimes to support policy reform, the use of standardised textbooks to enact the change agenda, and the endorsement of performativity and accountability pressures within the schooling system. It is argued that this macro-environmental space has influenced teachers' conceptions of their job security and satisfaction, and respect for their own profession. Collectively, these shifting policy climates shape and are shaped by individual teachers as they reposition themselves within the macro-policy context.

As noted in the table above, from the time preceding independence, emphasis has been placed on equipping teachers to be sound curriculum makers and to have the necessary qualifications. It should be noted that these teachers are not 'makers' who are involved in the policy making or design but instead they become 'makers' who introduce and implement the curriculum at the micro-institutional level. Post-independence reforms have seen continuing emphasis on teacher education, teacher training and even standardised textbooks that will assist teachers in becoming curriculum makers. It can be observed that teachers rarely resisted the changes brought about by these reforms. For instance, the repeated emphasis on teacher training to adapt and respond to national macro-policy reform initiatives has been embraced as empowering and has not sparked resistance.

An anomaly is, however, noted in the 1982 and 1997 policies, where teachers collectively showed resistance as they felt that their job security was threatened or they were not satisfied with the salary adjustments proposed by new reforms. Teachers' leverage of salaries and conditions of service to resist is highlighted in the following extract from the *Master Plan of Education* (1997), which challenged teachers for their resistance to the agenda for their professional responsibilities to the schooling project:

> "For teachers, the main preoccupation was salary. We are aware that the success of the implementation depends to a large extent on **teachers, who constitute the essential link with students**. Teachers claimed that the Master Plan did not address the issue of salary, **which they stated was the main factor of teachers' motivation.** Teachers have persistently asked for **a review of their status, which they considered has been downgraded over the years** in terms of salary and relativity with other grades. The

Master Plan could not address this problem because the whole issue of salaries and conditions of service was not within its jurisdiction. We strategically requested ILO [International Labour Standards] to conduct a special seminar on the status of teachers **to create greater confidence and transparency among the teaching community** and to ensure that international standards were being observed in this area. The Teachers' Unions were appreciative of this initiative, although **they were expecting the Master Plan to fully consider the salary issue**." (p. 38) (emphasis added)

As highlighted in bold in the above extract, teachers were acknowledged as central participants in policy implementation and students' performance. The extract suggests that policymakers were concerned to position teachers as 'professionals' rather than as salaried workers. This could be considered as downplaying teachers' 'worker identity' as the policymakers stated that teachers should raise concerns about salary matters with an international labour forum whilst the local macro-administrative context was emphasising that it could not address their dissatisfaction. The matter was considered 'not within its jurisdiction', and a 'strategic' seminar was conducted to develop "greater confidence and transparency among the teaching community'. In effect, the Master Plan was indeed suggesting that teachers were subjected to preferred professional conduct, superseding pragmatic working conditions. Teachers interpreted such disregard of their working conditions as ignoring them as key agents in the schooling system.

This above extract also suggests that teachers correlate policy reform with improved status, professional respect and higher salaries. They believe that, if they are expected to do more, they should be adequately compensated. However, the administrative authorities (policymakers) chose to emphasise the role of teachers as agents contributing to curriculum making. This marginalisation of teachers' needs and silencing of their voices may have created a sustained legacy which fosters passive agency amongst teachers that might constrain their agentic choices.

Acknowledgement that teachers are crucial to policy implementation is also highlighted in the 2006 "*Towards a Quality Education*" policy reform (Ministry of Education, 2006) which celebrates teachers as "important actors in any curriculum change" (p. 16). However, this celebration is accompanied by the preface:

"No reform will ever be effective unless they (teachers) are trained and supported continuously at school level, **prior to the introduction of the change[11],** and also throughout the duration of the reform process." (ibid.)

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[11] Bold in original text

The policy emphasised that professional training is a form of empowerment that will ensure teachers' positive agency in the transaction of new curricula. It elaborated that "(a)ll teachers will be required to undergo professional training before they join the profession" (ibid.) and that "all practising teachers will also need to follow an intensive continuous training programme, through a series of workshops, seminars, school-based training sessions to support the reform process" (p. 17). The intersection of the responsibility of the teacher education and training institutions and their qualifications suggests a supportive reform environment which aims to elevate teachers as knowing and acting agents in the curriculum policy changes. Whilst these initiatives were largely interpreted as positive impetuses to elevate the standards of schooling practice and quality, some teachers (especially those who had operated and sustained the former schooling system without formal qualifications) considered them as somewhat judgmental of their professional (though not certified) expertise. This could also be considered as undermining teachers' sense of their professionality and agentic capabilities in relation to new policy expectations. Have such policy narratives and expectations of the past and more recent efforts of policymakers been interpreted as empowering, or as an imposition? Some teachers may interpret them as highhanded, leading to passive implementation with no room for contestation. Despite being celebrated earlier, their professional skills and contributions are reduced to insufficiency. The need to be professionally trained in order to be considered and treated as professionals is disempowering rather than affirmative.

Another example of the reconstructive role of policy in redefining teachers is noted in a report by the MoE (*Education Reforms in Action: 2008-2014)* which presents the need for teachers to review their pedagogical practices and beliefs as an inescapable reality:

> "At a time when there is a popular and universal cry for innovation in the school and the classroom, School Heads and **teachers cannot be allowed to remain in their comfort zone**, falling back upon traditional headship and pedagogical practices. Capacity building has thus become a standard feature of the Mauritian educational landscape." (Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 83) (emphasis added)

The authoritative dictates in these policy documents present teachers – their roles, identities and agency – as technicians who are responsible for delivering state goals. In the process, autonomy, freedom of choice and opinions are curtailed. As part of global educational plans for the development of 21st century skills, the policy presents the view that it is obvious to expect teachers to embrace change and contribute to the fulfilment of policy aims and

objectives. The hidden message of the motivation for the reform suggests that teachers are essentially resistant to change and should be leveraged out of past habituations and routines. However, do teachers always react passively to such policy dictates? Is the preservation of past practices synonymous with a desire to stay in a 'comfort zone', or is it confidence and belief in a particular way of teaching? It is arguable that the policy dictates have had the effect of casting the education system in a mode of perpetual deficiency that needs to be overhauled to fit new agendas. Managers and administrators in the school/educational system (including perhaps teacher education institutions) are cast as responsible for ensuring this overhaul. The choice of agency, despite powerful policy claims of 'teacher empowerment', paradoxically requires teachers, managers and teacher education institutions to capitulate to policy dictates.

The agenda of reconstructing teacher agency is again accented in the *Ending the Rat Race in Primary Education* (Ministry of Education, 2001) policy dictates, and in the NYCBE (2017). Teachers are expected to review past ways of teaching to help change the system. It is ironic that the content of policy imperatives is motivated by the need to activate an agenda of reducing emphasis on unbridled competition amongst learners and to devise new ways of realising greater social justice within the schooling system. Yet, the agents who are to realise these changes, namely teachers, are increasingly constructed as expected to comply with state agendas. These two reforms bring important changes to the Mauritian education landscape and to teachers' roles. For instance, they de-emphasise the competitive 'rat race' which calls for changes in teachers' pedagogical strategies which were initially geared towards students' performance to gain access to star schools. Yet, teachers are increasingly limited in their choice of teaching tools. More standardised textbooks are introduced to ensure that classroom activities comply with policy dictates, and teachers are expected to activate support for the introduction of the EP which is mooted to introduce differentiation in a streamlined programme to cater for learners within specific learning challenges. These reform initiatives are mandated despite the critique offered by some teachers who believe that the full realisation of social justice for learners from indigent communities, or the challenges of managing a differentiated education system are merely delaying the resolution of a broader Mauritian sociological challenge. In the midst of such changes, teachers are expected to review, reinterpret and/or change their roles and agentic choices. In such circumstances, to what extent do teachers learn simply to comply and act as curriculum makers of the new reforms? Do they feign compliance and continue to teach the way they have been teaching, or do they engage in a repeated cycle of continuing teacher training? Are these conflicting and paradoxical agendas of empowerment

and disempowerment of teachers through multiple standardisation operations fostering teacher passivity? Is all of this merely a strategy by teachers to retain their jobs?

It is observed that the reforms have aimed to provide students with equal access to education, prepare them to be part of an international landscape and equip them with skills required in the labour market. However, in the process of prioritising students, teachers have generally been portrayed as deficit and in need of professional 'empowerment' to assist the authorities in evolving curriculum-making processes. This might be considered a dominant feature of the post-independent Mauritius policy climate which paradoxically upholds teachers as valued essential stakeholders of the education system and as agents of change.

These reforms bring changes to the professional space of the teacher who is expected to respond positively and contribute to curriculum making. As pointed out by Priestley, Biesta & Robinson (2015), teachers are simultaneously products of past histories, active in current contextual institutional spaces and are expected to engage to create an alternative future educational system. Such agentic reconceptualisations are, nevertheless, being shaped by and are shaping the policy macro-systemic climate within which teachers operate. Their professional resistance and capitulations are sociologically, politically and personally part of teacher agency. How do teachers respond to forces within these spatial and temporal dimensions and how is agency enabled or constrained within these changing policy landscapes?

In the following section, I reflect on the conceptions of teacher agency during policy implementation and why a new study is required to understand the ways in which teachers exercise agency in times of policy reform.

1.2.2.3 Reflecting on conceptions of teacher agency during policy implementation

Table 1 provided a review of policy reforms in Mauritius and situated teachers within this macro-policy landscape. As shown in the last column of the table, teachers exercise agency in different ways as they negotiate their roles and identities in times of reform. But what explains these different actions and reactions?

- **Teachers' mixed reactions to policy dictates**: During the introduction of the reform, I came across confused, scared and hesitant teachers who verbally resisted it and

expressed a strong desire to preserve past practices. Given such critique, what explains the majority of teachers' current involvement in curriculum reform? The literature suggests that some teachers support policy narratives and intentions due to their desire to promote students' further educational development (Priestley et al., 2015; Osborn, Croll, Broadfoot, Polard, McNess & Triggs, 1997). Such aspirations are rooted in firm beliefs such as the teacher's role as a pedagogical guide contributing to students' holistic development. These teachers feel accountable to their students. When policy dictates also prioritise students' holistic development, teachers adapt more willingly. Thus, macro-policy dictates easily cascade into micro-institutional, 'teacher intentionality' (Ryder et al., 2018) and 'teacher beliefs' (Biesta et al., 2015). Nonetheless, when policy dictates conflict with teachers' deep intentionality and belief system, they tend to feign compliance with them and continue to teach as they have always taught. Teachers' powerful internal forces and strong desire to safeguard their personal intentionality and beliefs dominate their pedagogical action.

- **Teachers' reactions to professional development:** In order to equip teachers for policy implementation, much emphasis is placed on teacher education (initial pre-service education) and professional development (continuing professional in-service development). Exposure to professional programmes at either level might assist teachers with varied teaching approaches, serving as a form of teacher empowerment. As Ryder et al. (2018) noted, at times new policy reforms can give rise to 'creative tension' as they act as a catalyst that prompts teachers to review their past pedagogical strategies and beliefs (their initial teacher education) as they transact new curricula in a new era. However, at times teachers may also feel deprofessionalised as the authorities place more, or repeated, emphasis on the need for continuing teacher development (CPD) programmes. As revealed in Table 1, recurrent cycles of teacher development may send a negative signal to teachers that they need professional assistance, or are professionally inefficient. The ways in which teachers interpret such policy recommendations and dictates may also influence the type of agency they enact. It can be argued that the ways in which the CPD is presented could lead practising teachers to either feel empowered or not. Such activities could activate them as innovative curriculum makers. However, if teachers feel deprofessionalised through the CPD interaction, they will likely resist or continue to teach the way they have been teaching.

Nevertheless, the agenda of the CPD activities or policy orientation workshop could serve other purposes. These professional programmes could also provide teachers with a platform to socialise and develop collective bonds to confidently implement the reform. In such a case, curriculum reorienting and policy implementation could become an enjoyable process that develops communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) which activate the sharing of positive emotions fuelled by a collective spirit. Oolbekkink et al. (2017) acknowledge the need for teachers to develop solidarity to express a 'contested agency'. This entails engaging in collective dialogue to resist imposition on their individual selfhood as professionals. It suggests the importance of a group "willing to fight for their professional values and beliefs" (p. 43).

This again highlights that teacher agency is an intersection of internal personal and broader communal sets of forces. Communal spaces allow teachers to critically share how their specific schooling contexts enable or impede their growth. Such reflection demonstrates that teachers are consciously aware of the power of external forces such as the school environment and broader sociocultural perspectives that influence their agency. They also reflect on the resources and infrastructure available to them in their school. For instance, limited resources at school do not necessarily translate into passive agency. From their peers, they learn that teachers' interpretations of their working space may vary and influence their agency (Imants & Van der Wal, 2020). A teacher may thus interpret limited resources as an opportunity for personal contributions and be actively involved in curriculum making.

- **The influence of years of experience:** The review of the policy directives in this chapter highlighted the importance of professional training for both working and new teachers. However, agency also depends on years of experience. For instance, new teachers implementing a policy for the first time might show less resistance and may not have experienced policy fatigue. Moreover, these teachers may not have 'nostalgic memories' (Ümarik & Goodson, 2018) of past practices. They may therefore be more willing to become active curriculum makers than those who may feign compliance, resist change, or express negative emotions to changes. More experienced teachers have gone through various phases of sociocultural changes. For example, some experienced Mauritian teachers may have been part of the education system since the 1970s and

1980s, and they may have felt the pressure to equip students with qualifications and prepare them as a future workforce to contribute to the country's developing economy. During the 53 years since independence, these teachers may have experienced multiple policies, changing work contexts, historical periods and socioeconomic challenges. Some may also have felt disillusioned with policy reforms (Godson & Ümarik, 2019) which may give rise to passive implementation of new policies. In such cases, nostalgia, disillusionment and policy fatigue may constrain their agency. Hence, as pointed out by Priestley et al. (2015), temporal dimensions, including past personal and professional experiences influence agency to a large extent. However, it should be noted that even newly recruited teachers may show resistance and experience nostalgia. They also have past experiences as learners within the schooling system, such as having their own teachers as role models and wishing to use strategies that were used to teach them. Agency should therefore be understood as a simultaneous manifestation of temporal forces (teachers' personal and professional experiences) and external forces exerted by the macro-policy environment.

- **Teachers responding to other stakeholders:** Besides matters related to teacher education and qualifications, teachers being coerced into serving learner needs, and/or teaching experience and temporality driving conceptions of teacher agency, the review of policy directives also highlights that teachers are often constructed by policy as agents bound by state directives. Within policy, teachers are celebrated as crucial stakeholders in policy implementation, but this includes the expectation that they are ultimately responsible for students' performance. The state agenda thus requires that teachers ensure high levels of learner performance. Other factors that may impact students' performance such as socioeconomic and sociocultural issues, are often ignored. Policy narratives are preoccupied with the need to embrace change and prepare students within a changing global landscape. Teachers are viewed largely in relation to the need for them to enact pedagogical strategies to respond to changing trends and students' demands. Therefore, while policy aims and objectives are geared towards global requirements (equipping students with 21st century skills, respecting children's right to education and providing education to all, enhancing quality education to prepare a better future work force), challenges brought about by the wider sociocultural environment, or the specific challenges facing teachers in enacting these changes in

localised schooling contexts are largely ignored. In this way, teachers could be considered technicians that carry out the state agenda.

This reflection on the roles and agency of teachers enabled me to trace the influence of policy narratives and expectations on teacher agency. It highlighted the need to understand the internal and external forces that impact teacher agency as they navigate a changing context. The wider sociological environment is often underplayed and teachers are perhaps expected to achieve much more than what is feasible. Therefore, a new study is required to address this gap. My study foregrounds how teachers interpret these multiple dimensions in their daily interactions as professionals within situated classroom spaces with specific learners in current institutional contexts.

Having introduced the phenomenon and anchored it within the context of the study, the following section presents the rationale for the study.

1.3 Rationale for the study

In conducting this study, I aimed to contribute to a better understanding of teacher agency in a dynamic macro-policy environment which is influenced by sociological forces and which enables or constrains teacher agency. I foreground the roles of teachers in curriculum making despite their resistance, confusion or fear of change that is expressed whenever a reform is introduced. Moreover, as discussed in chapter two, the ways in which teachers choose to enact their agency is influenced to a large extent by their ecological space (past and present experiences and future professional trajectories). I aim to extend the theoretical understanding of teacher agency as one which is enabled or constrained by various temporal and spatial forces by showing the impact of the interwoven micro-institutional, macro-policy and personal spaces on teachers' choices, actions and decisions.

Teachers' roles and professional identities are fluid and dependent on changing temporal and spatial forces. Hence, policy designers, curriculum developers, and teacher education and training educators and institutions would benefit from a better understanding of why teachers choose to exercise their agency in the ways they do in changing times. Teachers' agency should, therefore, be understood as a complex phenomenon that cannot be simplified but

should be understood as an amalgam of different experiences due to forces emanating within the macro-policy space and the socio-cultural context they inhabit. Teachers will also benefit from this study, as its findings could inform strategies to cater for their professional needs (CPD), and wellbeing as well as to empower them to be agentically engaged in curriculum making in changing times. Many teachers believe that they are expected to play the part of compliant technicians who lack free will and freedom in implementing a new policy. Understanding what enables and constrains their agency could empower them as, despite being marginalised during policy making, they are nevertheless key agents who contribute to curriculum making and policy implementation. Thus, the success of reforms relies to a large extent on teacher agency.

Furthermore, a study of teacher agency is not limited to the local site of production but extends to global concerns as changing micro-institutional and macro-policy contexts are challenges that teachers face in different countries[12]. Teachers also tend to consider themselves as victims who are deprofessionalised by policy dictates that are imposed on them (Biesta, 2010; Erss, 2018). Despite such pessimism, it cannot be denied that teachers are the implementers of policies and they often have to negotiate a path between the idealism of the policy and the reality of schools and students' needs. Hence, understanding how the forces emanating from the macro-policy space influence agency may guide policy makers in formulating policy that responds to teachers' micro-institutional realities. Similarly, limited school infrastructure and resources may constrain agency. Better understanding of how teachers negotiate their autonomy and respond to accountability pressures in such a micro-institutional environment may help school management to assist teachers during implementation of a reform.

The aim of this study is not to attempt to find solutions to the ways in which teachers implement policies but to understand how the ways in which they exercise agency (act, react, decide and choose) are influenced by forces that enable and constrain their agency. Is their agency a culmination of their biographical experiences? Or, is it guided by professional pressures such as standardisation and accountability within the school context? Understanding what triggers

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[12] For instance, studies conducted by Erss (2018) on curriculum implementation in Estonia, Finland and Germany; Mitchell (2016) on curriculum making in a hypersocialised space; Nguyen and Bui (2016) on English language policy in Vietnam; Tan (2016) on the new curriculum reform in China; and Pantic (2015) on teacher agency during the implementation of new policy in Scotland.

or influences teachers' agentic selves may assist in designing teacher education programmes and in enabling smoother policy implementation.

1.4 Acknowledging my positionality

Acknowledging the influence of my professional identity and professional space on my positionality as a researcher is important, but my biographical experiences as a student and a Mauritian are also of major relevance. Since my childhood I have repeatedly heard that students need to excel in the English language. I was trapped in routine rote learning, doing exercises that were at times burdensome and could not be understood rationally. As a student, I felt much pressure to succeed. My parents, and Mauritian parents in general, became complicit in an agenda of activating this rat race which included the need for out-of-school private tuition that would prepare us (Mauritian students) for national and international examinations (Bray, 2009; Paviot, 2015).

When I joined the teaching profession, I became aware of the struggles and difficulties faced by teachers as macro-systemic reforms and their consequences were incorporated into the everyday world of teachers. Faced with the 2017 NYCBE reform, I found myself in a turbulent space with my colleagues, the teachers I met during workshops and myself experiencing a multiplicity of actions, reactions, emotions and beliefs. This reform motivated my study to understand teachers' choices, decisions and actions in this evolving context. I found it intriguing that one new reform in 2001 almost two decades ago was prefaced with a by-line "Ending the rat race in primary education and breaking the admission bottleneck at secondary level: The way forward" (Ministry of Education and Scientific Research, 2001). Did the 2017 policy reform titled "Inspiring every child" (Ministry of Education and Scientific Research, 2017) potentially offer anything new to teachers? Could teachers break out of the cycle of the rat race with pedagogical practices geared towards examination-oriented outcomes?

1.5 Overview of chapters

The first three chapters – one to three – locate the study contextually, theoretically and methodologically as follows:

Introduction:

- **Chapter one** introduced the phenomenon of teacher agency within a dynamic macro-policy and socio-cultural space where a national policy reform has recently been introduced and is being implemented. The site of the study was also introduced, focusing on teachers' roles and agency – concerns that transcend the local site of data production. This macro-policy space is one which is evolving and responding to national and international imperatives. By positioning teachers in this evolving space, I emphasise the impact of temporal and spatial forces on the ways they choose to enact their agency. I also highlighted the rationale for the study, and acknowledged my positionality as a researcher in investigating teacher agency within a changing policy environment.

Literature review and theoretical framework:

- **Chapter two** discusses the phenomenon of teacher agency theoretically by reviewing the existing literature and identifying the theoretical gap. In this chapter, I also introduce a proposed theoretical framework that assisted me in the research process. The theoretical foundation in this chapter also guided the formulation of my critical questions which assisted in designing instruments and provided a temporary lens for analysis.

Research Methodology:

- The choice of research methodology is explained in **chapter three** with a focus on the narrative inquiry and co-construction of narratives to represent teachers' voices and experiences as they interpret and exercise agency. The data production instruments and sampling are explained with close reference to ethics and validity. This chapter also discusses data analysis and leads to the next phase – data representation and narrative analysis.

Chapter four comprises the choice of representation and the descriptive and evaluative analyses, while chapters five and six offer further thematic and philosophical insights into the phenomenon.

Analysis:

- In **chapter four (PART 1)** I introduce the chosen form of representation for the descriptive and evaluative dimensions of analysis – the ethnodrama. This part of the chapter highlights the relevance of this mode of representation in the co-construction of narratives. The title and structure of the ethnodrama are justified before presenting the participants' narratives through emblematic dramatic characters.

- **Chapter four (PART 2)** comprises the ethnodrama – with the descriptive analysis in Acts I to III and the evaluative analysis in Act IV which emphasises the disruption of the researcher as she engages in choral exchanges with the emblematic characters while conducting a cross-case analysis.

- **Chapter four (PART 3)** includes a dramatic analysis of *The Cockroach* (the chosen title of the ethnodrama) which is a continuation of the evaluative analysis from the previous part. Common themes highlighted in Part 2 are analysed with an emphasis on the myriad of forces that influence agency and give rise to specific types of agency.

- While the previous analysis chapters answer the 'what' and 'how' critical questions, in **chapter five** I provide an analysis of emerging themes through an analytical framework – Barad's theory of diffraction. In this chapter, I engage in thematic analysis that paves the way towards a more abstract and philosophical understanding of diffracted teacher agencies in changing times. I also point to the different types of agencies that are exercised by teachers as they negotiate their roles and identities in spatial and temporal dimensions that are always in flux.

Concluding thoughts:

- In **chapter six**, I engage with 'so what?' and 'now what?' questions as I provide concluding thoughts and philosophical insights into the problematic of teacher agency. The thesis is discussed in this chapter, with an emphasis on diffracted and entangled agencies – the complexity of agencies that emanate from entangled experiences and which become more dominant in times of change. I also highlight the study's theoretical, methodological and contextual implications before reflecting on the limitations and

suggestions for further research. I reflect on my transformation as a researcher and end the thesis with Act V of the ethnodrama, *The Cockroach*, to highlight the continuum of possibilities of diffracted agencies and how my study has opened doors to further research on the complexity of multiple forms of diffracted and entangled agencies.

The organisational chart below captures the different phases of the thesis research and writing process. The first introductory chapters inform the data production, interpretation and analysis and assist me in the generation of a philosophy – *Diffracted agencies: A kaleidoscope of possibilities*.

INTRODUCING THE STUDY
CONTEXTUALLY, THEORETICALLY AND METHODOLOGICALLY

REPRESENTATION & ANALYSIS
DESCRIPTIVE, EVALUATIVE, THEORETICAL & PHILOSOPHICAL

CHAPTER 1
Contextual

CHAPTER 2
Theoretical

CHAPTER 3
Methodological

CHAPTER 4
Representation

CHAPTER 5
Theoretical

CHAPTER 6
Philosophical

Conceptualising teacher agency

A theoretical understanding of the phenomenon of teacher agency

Selecting a research approach
- Interpretivist paradigm
- Qualitative research design
- Life history approach
- Narrative inquiry methodology

PART 1
INTRODUCTION TO ETHNODRAMA

Evaluative
- Cross-case analysis
- Act IV

?
WHY?

THE THESIS
Diffracted agencies within an ideologically bounded space

Anchoring the study in its context

Conceptual: Reviewing existing literature

Explaining choice of representation

PART 3
DRAMATIC ANALYSIS

Dialoguing with original theoretical lens

Theoretical, contextual and methodological considerations

Identifying the theoretical gap

PART 2
DRAMATIC REPRESENTATION
The Cockroach

Proposing an analytical lens

Limitations

?
Where will the study be conducted?

Emerging CRITICAL QUESTIONS

Gathering data
- Data production tools
- Validity
- Ethical considerations

?
What did the field reveal?

?
What is the link between the descriptive and evaluative analysis and the reviewed literature and theoretical framework?

Thematic analysis

Future research

?
From which theoretical lens will the phenomenon be studied?

Descriptive analysis
- Acts I to III

Revised theoretical framework
DIFFRACTED AGENCIES

Concluding reflections

Rationale for the study

?
How will I analyse data produced?

?
What sense am I making of the findings?

The Cockroach
Act V

Positionality of the researcher

Designing a theoretical framework

Anticipating analysis

?
SO WHAT?
NOW WHAT?

Figure 3: Architecture of the thesis

1.6 Chapter synthesis

This chapter foregrounded the dynamic macro-policy space of the site of data production. The site was conceptualised as a small island developing state. Despite its smallness, this site will enhance understanding of salient issues related to policy implementation and teacher agency. The phenomenon of teacher agency is studied within this evolving macro-policy space. Teacher agency is influenced by forces within this space that may enable or constrain agentic choices. Understanding why teachers choose to exercise agency in particular ways will benefit policy makers, professional development programmes and teachers. Teacher agency was introduced in this chapter and in the following chapter, I engage in theoretical discussion of this phenomenon. The literature review in chapter two also assisted in the design of a theoretical lens to guide data generation and analysis.

CHAPTER 2

A literature review towards a theoretical framework

2.0 Introduction

Chapter one introduced the geographical context and the policy background of the study. It presented key concepts relating to agency more generically (and hinted at some examples of its connection to teacher agency). In this chapter, I immerse myself more specifically and critically in a review of the literature on teacher agency. As noted previously, agency is a complex phenomenon that cannot be located simplistically as a psychological trait. Moreover, it cannot be confined to the simple definition of one's ability to act in a specific situation. The dimensions of temporal and spatial analysis also informed broader conceptions of agency. This chapter focuses on understanding the forces that influence one's agentic capacity and how teachers as a specific group of professionals located in a macro contextual space (internationally and nationally) and more defined institutional settings at a relatively micro level exercise agency. An analysis of existing literature enables me to better understand the phenomenon and identify the gap. I also present the critical questions that guided the research. At the end of this chapter, I propose a temporary theoretical framework that emanated from the literature review and theoretical perspectives which formed the basis for the design of the research instruments.

Chapter Overview
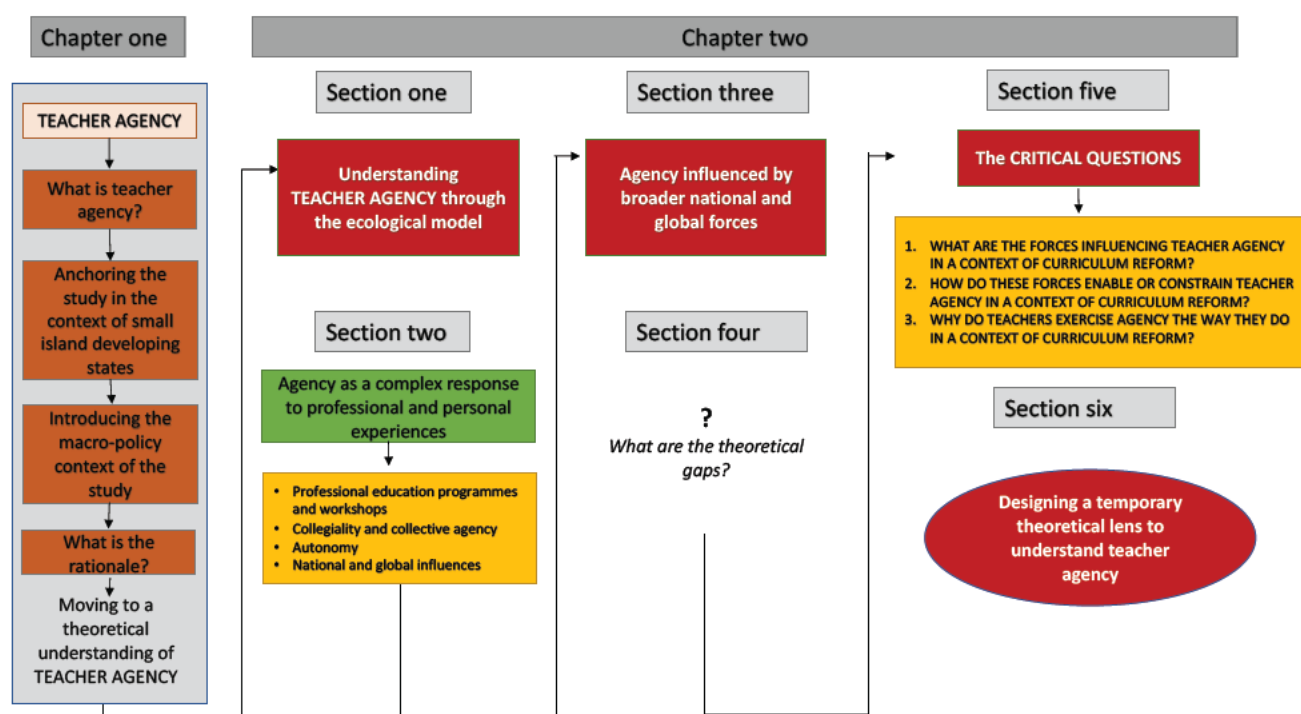
Figure 4: Orientation to chapter two

In chapter one I explained the rationale and choice of studying teacher agency as emanating from my personal experiences as a teacher who finds herself in a tumultuous changing context (due to the introduction of a new policy) imbued with cultural, political, economic and social specificities. While teacher agency was briefly introduced in the previous chapter, in this chapter, I develop a theoretical understanding of such agency by reviewing the existing literature and emphasising shifts in the phenomenon's paradigmatic arguments.

An understanding of what teacher agency is and how it is achieved (chapter one) paves the way for a review of the literature on the forces that enable or constrain agency in the **first section** of this chapter. Teachers are not isolated individuals but are constantly influenced by their surroundings and experiences (past, present and future). Thus, in this section, I employ Priestley et al.'s (2015) ecological model of teacher agency to understand the forces that emanate from their biographical experiences, their current workplace and their future aspirations. This model identifies three dimensions (iterational, practical-evaluative and projective) that influence agency; however, I extend this theoretical understanding by focusing

on the coexistence of these three dimensions and how teachers negotiate their roles, identities and choice of agency while simultaneously confronting the ecological forces from these dimensions. Therefore, in **section two**, I probe further into what gives rise to the various pragmatic ways in which teachers exercise agency.

Sections one and two shed light on teacher agency and note that contextual forces (personal and professional experiences within micro- and macro-policy environments) shape their actions, decisions and choices. In **section three**, by adopting a sociocultural lens, I go beyond the ecological model of teacher agency to emphasise its complexity as being shaped by coexisting social, cultural, economic, policy forces.

In **section four**, I address the gap in the body of literature and in **section five**, I formulate my critical research questions in order to address the identified gap. Finally, **section six** presents a temporary theoretical lens to study why teachers exercise agency the way they do in a time of change. This theoretical lens played an important role in choosing the methodology for this study.

2.1 Understanding forces impacting teacher agency through an ecological model

As noted in chapter one, agency could be considered as being influenced by one's inner capacity to act. However, this section argues that it is also influenced by the teacher's situational and sociological context. These contextual features include the macro-policy discussed in the previous chapter. The impact of these forces on teacher agency has been theorised by Priestley et al. (2015) through the ecological model of teacher agency which, as discussed in this section, includes not only personal, but more localised micro-institutional forces embedded within macro-terrains.

Priestley et al. (2015) adapted Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) model to explain how agency – more precisely teacher agency – is expressed in concrete situations under the influences of time and space. Their ecological model is based on the influence of spatial and temporal forces within the iterational (past), practical-evaluative (present) and projective (future) dimensions as illustrated in the following model.
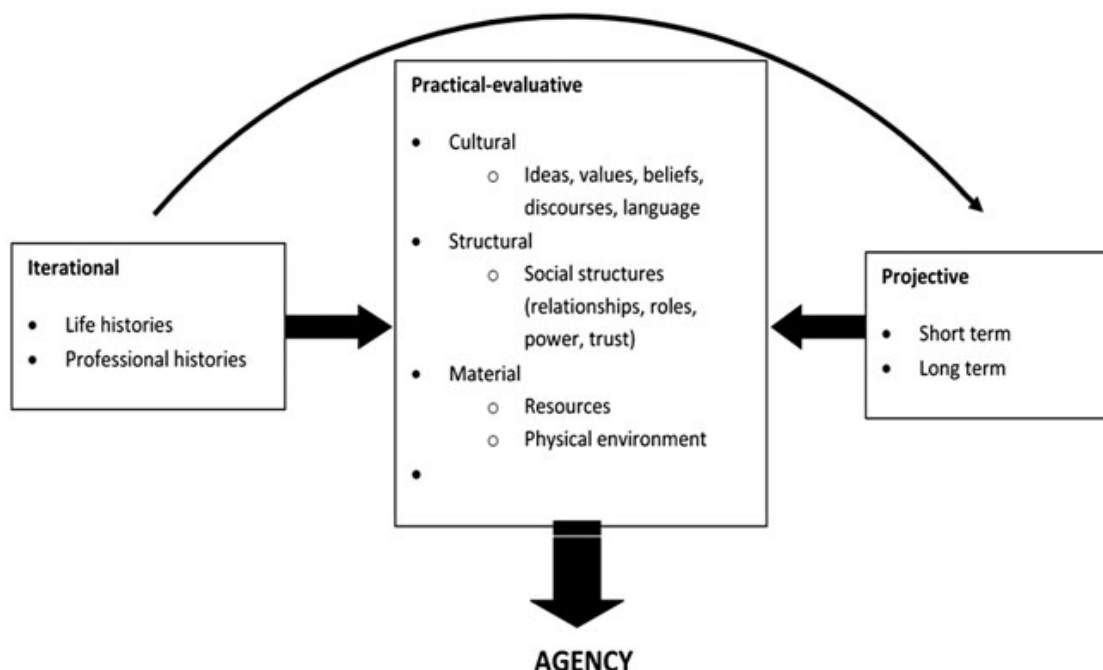
Figure 5: The ecological model of teacher agency (Priestley et al., 2015)[13]

The model shows that agency is an outcome of past, present and future personal and professional experiences. Current choices of agency are therefore a product of past life/personal histories and future short/long term motivations and expectations. However, it should be noted that there are no categorical boundaries between the past and the present; one's enactment of agency in the present is influenced by past experiences and can therefore be interpreted as a dialogical interaction comprising backwards and forwards vacillations (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Priestley et al.'s (2015) ecological model of teacher agency has been employed in many recent studies (Oolbekkink et al., 2017; Tao & Gao, 2017; Singh-Pillay & Samuel, 2017; Biesta et al., 2017; Themane & Thobejane, 2018) in order to understand the forces that trigger teacher agency. The different dimensions in **Figure 5** are discussed in the sub-sections below.

2.1.1 The iterational dimension

Despite following specific routines and patterns of behaviour, according to Emirbayer and Mische (1998), individuals "are able to recognise, appropriate and refashion past patterns of behaviours and experience as they seek to manoeuvre among repertoires in dealing with present

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[13] First published in Priestley, Biesta and Robinson, 2013.

dilemmas and engage in expectation maintenance in their orientations to the future" (Priestley et al., 2015, p. 4). This observation is adapted to understand teacher agency as according to Priestley et al. (2015), teachers' present agentic choices are also influenced by past experiences, namely a repertoire of biographical experiences that include both personal and professional experiences. For instance, professional education and communication with colleagues give teachers the opportunity to revisit past experiences and to shape their present actions. Furthermore, while preparing a lesson, teachers may revisit their past experiences as students and follow strategies used by their teachers. According to Priestley et al. (2015), a wider repertoire of experiences, for example, a teacher who has worked in other professions before joining teaching, may contribute to more creativity and innovation. Similarly, in implementing a new policy, teachers may revisit past experiences of reforms – if these were associated with positive emotions and satisfaction, they may engage in curriculum making; while, if they had bad experiences of past reforms as students, they may resist changes brought about by the new reform and continue to teach the way they have been teaching. Hence, according to the iterational dimension of the ecological model of teacher agency, past experiences may enable or constrain teacher agency. While I acknowledge that teachers' present experiences are to a large extent informed by past ones, a wider repertoire of past experiences of policy implementation does not necessarily empower them. Experiencing too many policy reforms may give rise to policy fatigue (Sayed & Jansen, 2001; Samuel, 2014) and despite past agentic action as curriculum makers, the teacher may show resistance or be passive. Moreover, the teacher may be experiencing personal problems at the time a reform is introduced and despite past experiences, may prioritise personal concerns and thus, not revisit or refashion routinised behaviours. Teachers, therefore, are influenced by past experiences that appear to enable or constrain their agency. These forces lead to passive or active agency. For instance, constructed as passive technicians who respond to policy-driven and market-driven expectations, these teachers react passively and with compliance instead of being active agents engaged in redesigning, innovating and challenging their practices (Molla & Nolan, 2020). However, it should be noted that when teachers are complying with policy narratives and dictates, or appear to be implementing the curriculum unquestioningly, that could also be interpreted paradoxically as a form of active agency. For instance, a silent protest may be seen as an example of passive agency, but this action is an active one whereby the teacher is showing his/her disapproval of proposed policy changes. In this case, this silent protest is a conscious choice and not a sign of capitulation.

2.1.2 The projective dimension

Emirbayer and Mische (1998) explain that the projective dimension is motivated by a personal need to change the future and, as highlighted by Priestley et al. (2015), this implies "that people who are able to form expansive projections about their future trajectories might be expected to achieve greater levels of agency" (p. 5). This suggests that, for instance, a reward mechanism such as the possibility of promotion or a higher salary may enable agency. In line with this argument, do teachers who do not desire a reward stagnate and become passive policy implementers? This presumes that the micro-institutional climate of a school context permits the realisation of a projective alternative future. The projective dimension and teachers' aspirations are not necessarily self-oriented (promotions, job security and salary) but may be geared towards students' welfare and interests (Priestley et al., 2015). Similarly, if they work within a school environment that ensures professional satisfaction, their projective aspirations may be channelled towards enhancing the school's reputation. However, does the absence of personal or professional goals, aspirations and motivations constrain agency? My study came to be concerned with how these past and future dimensions co-exist and interact to influence the nature of the teachers' articulation of their agency. These iterational and projective dimensions are also embedded in historical and sociological localities of a changing environment of policy reform.

2.1.3 The practical-evaluative dimension

In the practical-evaluative dimension, Priestley et al. (2015) argue that teachers' enactment of agency in the present cultural, structural and material context is shaped by "the availability of physical resources and the nature of physical constraints" (p. 7). According to their study, teachers in schools that were able to afford better resources enacted a higher degree of agency compared to those in schools with limited resources. Thus, if teachers are given an autonomous space to devise innovative strategies, they may act as active agents and may cultivate projective aspirations to contribute positively to the school's reputation. In implementing a reform, teachers who are better equipped with teaching materials will therefore display more active agency. However, as noted earlier, teachers may experience policy fatigue. In such cases, do they exercise active innovative agency in the presence of proper resources and school infrastructure? My study acknowledged that even though the past and the future dimensions co-existed, the teachers were also exercising management of their present contexts.

The ecological model of teacher agency helps to understand the forces that influence, enable or constrain agency. However, the dimensions identified by Priestley et al. (2015) provide a relatively defined micro-systemic analysis of teacher agency, without due consideration to the intersection with other dimensions of a broader macro-policy and sociological environmental spaces. Whilst acknowledging the formulation of agency as a fluid dialogical engagement with teachers' past, present and future conceptions of self and action, current models of teacher agency tend to be essentially parochial. In order to shed more light on this complexity and other forces that enable an understanding of the intersection of the psychological, historical, social, economic, political, cultural and the personal dimensions that enable and constrain agency, in the next section I show how agency is an outcome of multiple inputs and negotiations. These include professional education programmes and workshops, collegiality and the development of collective agency among groups of teachers beyond individualistic pursuits; and varying levels of autonomy that collide and influence one another.

2.2 Agency as a complex response to personal and professional experiences

In this section, I present a review of the extant literature on teacher agency to better understand the forces that enable and constrain agency. As highlighted in section 2.1, biographical experiences (personal and professional experiences) are important forces that influence teacher agency to a large extent. The teacher's upbringing, exposure to cultures, the school he/she attended, the ways in which he/she was taught and his/her relationship with his/her teachers are but some of the elements that contribute to his/her conceptions of teaching and learning. As the teacher embraces teaching as a career, goes through professional education and builds new relationships within his/her school environment, that person's identity is further transformed. In the process, agency is continually shaped in response to the teacher's institutional environment (Fu & Clarke, 2017) or the social context.

Beliefs (Biesta et al., 2015), perceptions and conceptions of teaching might be influenced by parents, teachers or the school ethos; however, biographical experiences cannot be understood in isolation when studying teacher agency. Instead, both biographical and professional experiences shape the teacher's identity and influence his or her enactment of agency. For instance, the ways in which teachers will act or react to changes in their place of work often

depend on their personal beliefs. Some may choose to continue to teach the way they have been teaching instead of changing strategies if they have firm belief in their teaching philosophy. According to Biesta et al. (2015), these beliefs are coupled with teachers' ambitions or personal goals.

Furthermore, Biesta et al. (2017) explain that teachers' goals and beliefs should be understood through what they termed the 'age-effect' and the 'generation-effect'. Teachers of different age groups and from different generations may react differently to reforms based on their desire to review or preserve traditional pedagogical practices, their resistance or adherence to change, their ambitions and desire for promotion, the need to retire to a safe zone or the need to speak out against changes. I also believe that, in the context of my study, the 'generation-effect' cannot be reduced to its relation to age group; it may also refer to teachers who have taught during times of different reforms. For instance, a teacher who recently joined teaching and is experiencing a reform (as a teacher) for the first time might not react and act in the same way as someone who has experienced multiple reforms. As noted by Ryder, Lidar, Lundqvist and Östman (2018), teacher agency "is a long-term practice rather than a set of actions at a specific point in time" (p. 539) and this is a form of accumulated experience that will depend on the temporal factor. As teachers accumulate experiences – the 'age effect' – their choices, reactions and actions may differ. Consequently, a teacher with 20 years' experience and family commitments might be careful when choosing to speak out or rebel against an institutional structure due to the need for job security.

Therefore, unlike the dimensions presented by Priestley et al. (2015) in the ecological model of teacher agency, an understanding of agency cannot be limited to present actions or choices. As Ryder et al. (2018) argue, it is not limited to present enactment of agency but instead, as noted at the end of the last section, other broader dimensions influence agency. Priestley et al. (2015) discussed how past experiences and future aspirations influence present agentic choices, but can the present be dissociated from past and future dimensions? Is the present a reworking and reinterpretation of roles and agency? Hence, agency is an ongoing process and a complex response to personal, professional and sociological experiences. Could teacher agency also encompass a deliberate effort to leave behind elements of their own heritage in order to tackle more immediate selected preferences? My review of the literature seemed to point to the tendency of previous research to aim to codify and essentialise the spheres of influence, whereas my own experiences were seemingly pointing to a more complex intersection of

multiple influences. How was I to make sense of this, especially when some targeted agentic choices were being directed by policy reforms themselves? Could policy also have played a role in curtailing or enabling teacher agency? In the sub-sections below, I engage in a discussion on salient forces identified in the existing literature, but emanating largely from policy perspectival initiatives, which aimed to direct new agendas for teacher professionality that influence teacher agency. Within the local Mauritian context, the accompanying orientation to policy reform initiatives was usually activated by policymakers themselves and their agents to ensure adherence to new expectations. They were understandably offered as forms of capacity or professional development.

2.2.1 Professional education programmes and workshops

The ecological model of teacher agency emphasised the dominance of professional experiences in the choice of agency. In this section, I highlight the role of professional education and workshops in triggering agency. During policy reforms, workshops are sometimes conducted to equip teachers with knowledge of curriculum implementation. The knowledge shared by facilitators orienting teachers to the new reform is expected to empower the teacher to contribute to curriculum making. However, Themane and Thobejane (2018) highlight teachers' complaints about the mismatch between theory and practice. Sometimes, the professional workshop serves as a confidence booster but, once in the classroom the teacher is left with his/her individual agentic decision and choices about how to teach despite the theoretical knowledge received. What are the forces that influence the teacher's agency in the space of the classroom? Are biographical experiences (personal goals, beliefs and conceptions of teaching) the only driving force that impacts agency? I believe that the teacher's collegial support, school infrastructure, relationships with different stakeholders and professional education at the beginning of his/her career, may also influence agency in these moments of change.

As noted above, professional workshops are designed to be empowering but it has also been noted that teacher professional development programmes are often interpreted as a form of disguised control (Erss, 2018) whereby empowerment training limits certain pedagogical practices. For instance, teacher professional programmes sometimes homogenise teachers using 'a one-size-fits-all' approach (Singh-Pillay & Samuel, 2017). Teachers react differently to these homogenising structures – for instance, by speaking out against the policy, resisting changes or being compliant. Hence, in what ways do professional programmes trigger teacher

agency? Do they empower teachers to become curriculum makers or do they ensure standardisation and thus encourage passivity?

Agency is important in the development of professional identity (Kayi-Aydar, 2017) since, in choosing how to act, the teacher is allowing his/her self-transformation by different forces emanating from his/her micro-institutional environment or the broader macro-policy environment. Therefore, understanding teacher agency in line with professional development programmes may contribute to the development of teacher education programmes as new policies are implemented.

2.2.2 Collegiality and the development of collective agency

Collegiality is an important force that influences and gives rise to varying levels of agency. In some cases, collegial bonding is not limited to the professional space, transcends professional experiences (trustworthy colleagues or friends) and boosts teachers' confidence. For instance, in implementing a new curriculum, teachers may contribute to curriculum making if other colleagues are also doing so. If there is resistance from peers, they may also reflect the group spirit. Hence, collegiality and peer influence (Tao & Gao, 2017; Bergh & Wahlström, 2018) are important forces that may enable or constrain agency. According to Nguyen and Bui (2016), "collaboration is at the epicentre of stimulating teachers' multiple intelligences, intellectual creativity, and innovating teaching interventions" (p. 100). These collegial experiences are termed 'relational agency' by Pappa et al. (2017) as they highlight the importance of sharing experiences and knowledge with colleagues in the enactment of agency. For instance, teachers of different age groups may work together by adopting innovative strategies, or even digital support, while implementing a new curriculum. If left on his/her own, a teacher may show reluctance to do so due to a lack of confidence or fear of embracing innovative practices.

Collegiality and empowerment can also be studied in the form of teachers' talk (Biesta et al., 2017). Such talk is not only therapeutic as teachers share their fears and problems with regard to teaching, but it also reinforces their confidence. Dialogue or conversations allow teachers to shape their ambitions and desires (Biesta et al., 2017), similar to what Priestley et al. (2015) argued in the projective dimension. For instance, the collective spirit may trigger agency as teachers choose to work additional hours for the benefit of students (improving results) or to secure a promotion. Dialogue may also lead to conflict (Oolbekkink et al., 2017) within a

department. Conflict may suggest a refusal to embrace collective agency in order to act in line with one's beliefs and personal goals. However, at times, a teacher's identity commitments or personal goals do not necessarily tally with his/her colleagues' collective experiences. In such a case, does collegiality constrain agency? When peers in a department share similar beliefs and interpretations of present conditions, does the teacher with different beliefs embrace passivity and follow the peers?

Hence, it can be observed that collegiality could be considered not simply as a personalistic dialogicality; it could also be linked to matters of expression of empowerment as teachers attempt to make sense of the sources of their alienation and marginalisation. It could therefore be argued that collegiality can be considered as a force of co-opting individualist patterns of shared commonality which may be an indirect means of deprofessionalising teachers. The reviewed literature has focused on how collegiality triggers active agency, but can collegiality also give rise to passivity? For instance, collegial bonds create a kind of safe zone for teachers wherein they may choose not to transact a new curriculum because the whole department has chosen this course of action. However, collegiality, like individual experiences, is a response to forces emanating from macro-policy and micro-institutional spaces. Thus, further research is needed on how contextual forces which seem driven by agendas of open dialogicality, might paradoxically be contributing to normalising strategies that give rise to collective beliefs and agency. This section highlights that seemingly collegial engagements might be motivated by paradoxical elements.

2.2.3 Varying levels of autonomy experienced by teachers

Teachers' professional spaces also comprise varying levels of autonomy and standardisation within the regulated structures (macro-policy and micro-institutional). For instance, teachers are sometimes satisfied with the privileged autonomous space at their workplace; or they may feel stifled in an over-regulated space. However, autonomy may exist through varying levels – a teacher may have the freedom to conduct his/her classes using innovative strategies, but lack freedom in the preparation of formal assessments which are expected to be standardised. How is teacher agency influenced by the levels of autonomy that teachers experience? According to Erss (2018), one definition of teacher agency is "autonomy put into action" (p. 244) whereby teachers use the freedom given within their professional space to innovate, create and act as curriculum makers. Similar to Erss' (2018) study in Finland, Tan (2016) observes with

reference to the New Curriculum Reform in China (NCRC) that the absence of examination pressure gives the teacher an autonomous space to come up with customised, innovative strategies to enhance teaching and learning.

However, autonomy does not always enhance agency. Erss (2018) observes that teachers do not always behave as active agents when given freedom since some of her participants chose to stay in their comfort zone despite being provided with proper resources and infrastructure. Why do the teachers choose to act in this way? As a limitation to her study, Erss (2018) acknowledges that these choices of agency may also depend on social contexts. Teachers inhabit an ideologically constructed space with political, economic and social expectations. Thus, is autonomy a simulation? Are teachers indeed free to decide or, for instance, are their actions consciously/unconsciously guided by examination pressure or performativity pressure from different stakeholders? These questions are embedded in Erss' (2018) study that questions whether teachers are still able "to enact agency after a long period of being tightly regulated by accountability mechanisms and forced to follow prescriptive curricula" (p. 243). Consequently, she suggests that the historical trajectories of teacher agency within specific localised contexts (with specific localised ambient social, political and cultural conditions) might produce tendencies towards ritualised practices which are difficult to alter (Erss, 2018).

Moreover, autonomy cannot be reduced to enjoying freedom at work as this concept is more complex. Pappa et al. (2017) define autonomy by showing that the meaning attributed to it depends on the context,

> "Amongst colleagues, autonomy concerned a feeling of being valued for one's work performance and contribution of experiences, while amongst stakeholders it involved joint decision making by having a say in matters of pedagogy as well as communication and cooperation with parents." (p. 8)

Autonomy is conceptualised here as how 'free' or valued the teacher feels while negotiating with colleagues and different stakeholders. This feeling may give rise to empowerment whereby teachers feel valued and contribute actively to, for instance, the implementation of a new curriculum. On the other hand, teachers may feel insignificant (or frustrated) and therefore choose to be passive implementers of curricula.

Just as the way the teacher feels about his/her professional space and self-valorisation within the micro-institutional environment may enable or constrain his/her agency, as discussed at the

beginning of this section, standardisation may also impact one's agency. Some policy reforms propose standardised ways of assessing students. Teachers may express dissatisfaction with such centralised hegemonic control of assessment processes within schools. Others may or may not be aware of their agentic possibilities and may implement centralised 'control' tendencies unquestioningly. However, examination pressure or standardisation processes are not always equivalent to a decrease in autonomy and a constrained agency. Erss (2018) notes that regulated standardised spaces with performativity structures may be considered as a "normality" (p. 248) by some teachers. This space provides them with a sense of authority to decide and act, thus, legitimising their choices and decisions (Erss, 2018).

2.3 Agency influenced by broader national and global forces

The ecological model of teacher agency assists in understanding how teacher agency is a product of various dimensions guided by personal and professional past and present experiences, and future aspirations. However, these dimensions are influenced by broader national and global forces.

One's life history and experiences cannot be separated from local and global contexts. According to many studies, the national context, as part of a broader global context, is an important factor in understanding teacher agency (Erss, 2018; Tran, 2018; Oolbekkink-Marchand et al., 2017; Nguyen & Bui, 2016). The national context comprises specific forces within regulated macro-policy and micro-institutional spaces. A country's type of government, economic situation or social limitations may trigger different forms of agency. For instance, Erss (2018) observed that when teachers are required to swear allegiance and loyalty to a state agenda, they are more likely to downplay (it should be noted that there is a choice to exercise agency) their levels of autonomy. The allegiance and oath, in Erss' (2018) study with reference to Germany, ensures teachers' job security. Consequently, German teachers who participated in the study choose to exercise their agency within a regulated space (with boundaries and rules). Similarly, Oolbekkink-Marchand et al.'s (2017) study involving participants from Norway, Israel and the Netherlands observed that some teachers exercise agency within their bounded space and fulfil their professional goals with regard to the micro-institutional boundaries (such as the school ethos and standardised pedagogical practices within the school). Does swearing allegiance to a common nationalistic agenda or a micro-institutional agenda always have oppressive features? I foreground my study in a macro-policy space in which

teachers are experiencing new forms of standardised regulations (such as standardised textbooks) and a sociological space in which examination results are highly prioritised. The study will, therefore, contribute to a better understanding of how teachers negotiate their bounded space and how they exercise agency within that particular space.

Hence, instead of limiting the understanding of teacher agency to the ecological dimension of the teacher, I adopt a sociocultural lens to understand the intricacies and multiple layers of influences, as teachers exercise agency in times of reform. In the ecological model of teacher agency, Priestley et al. (2015) acknowledge the dominant influence of the teacher's contextual space (the emphasis is on the micro-institutional space) as, for instance, within the practical-evaluative dimension, the teacher's school ethos and micro-institutional infrastructure impact the ways in which agency is exercised to a large extent. Even in the iterational dimension, the teacher's biographical experiences are largely influenced by that particular individual's social, cultural and economic reality. My study aims to expand the boundaries of space, as defined by Priestley et al. (2015), to extend to more macro-systemic levels. This broader definition crosses national boundaries to also include globalised discourses influencing teacher agency.

While it is important to understand agency within an overarching global climatic space, the impact of differing experiences within specific sociocultural landscapes should also be acknowledged. Consequently, teacher agency has been studied through the specificities of unique sociocultural contextual settings by researchers such as Toom, Pyhältö and Rust (2015), Pantic (2015) and Ryder et al. (2018). These researchers emphasise various social and institutional structures that influence the ways in which agency is exercised. Firstly, the national macro-policy structure comprises one of the structures within which teachers enact agency to negotiate their identities as they embrace or rebel against changes brought about by reforms. These framing contextual settings also embed power relations which activate teachers to negotiate their professional identities through their relationships with stakeholders at points within the often hierarchically organised continuum. For instance, teachers in some contexts may be expected to adhere strictly to policy dictates and abide by the ministry's expectations. Their contribution to curriculum making is perhaps confined within the ambit of the macro-regulated policy environment. Furthermore, teachers are usually expected to comply with Rectors and other administrators to ensure standardisation and the preservation of hegemonic values within the schooling environment. Nevertheless, upward accountability to administrative and structural stakeholders cannot be understood as completely subordinated or

static since power relations between teachers and the authorities are also dynamic and evolving. Therefore, teacher experiences within their sociocultural reality – comprising their workplace, macro-policy environment and at times their political reality – are a "central shaping influence" (Ryder et al., 2018, p. 540) on agency. However, teachers activate types of agency which entail making sense of standardisation and accountability pressures exerted by macro-policy and micro-institutional structures. This sense-making presents value-based judgements promoting notions of being a 'good' or 'bad' teacher which emanate from within broader sociocultural expectations. For instance, a good teacher may be interpreted as one who contributes to good academic results or as someone who contributes to the holistic development of the student and prepares the latter for the future.

Whilst the dominant external regulatory forces are dominant influences on agency, it should also be noted that teachers' biographical experiences and the teacher's inner capacity to act (which is influenced by personal beliefs and indoctrination) are as important in understanding the ways in which agency materialises. According to Pantic (2015), agents are "embedded in their contextual conditions, yet [are] capable of transforming these conditions" (p. 760). The ability to transform the contextual conditions will depend on teacher beliefs and how they interpret their autonomy to exercise change. This might be influenced by the teachers' personal need for job security which might co-opt them to not experience autonomy. Furthermore, the action of their colleagues as a collective could also impede or enable such engagement. Teacher agency is thus relationally and situationally constructed to realise professional transformation: some teachers might choose passivity to remain in a safe zone with no threat to their job, salary or future ambitions such as promotion. This choice is also a personal matter of interpretation.

As discussed below, the review of the existing literature on teacher agency assisted in identifying the gap and in the development of my critical questions.

2.4 Identifying the gap

The current literature on teacher agency identifies forces that trigger or influence agency in various ways. The importance of teachers' local and global contexts, and the ways in which they negotiate their roles and agency within those macro-policy environments are highlighted in the reviewed literature. Current research on teacher agency mainly focuses on the influences exerted by the macro-policy and the micro-institutional contexts on teacher agency. However,

these studies tend to focus on specific forces, such as a study of teacher beliefs (Biesta et al., 2015), understanding the impact of teacher talk (Biesta et al., 2017) and studying the impact of autonomy in different geographical contexts (Erss, 2018). Despite the theorisation of the ecological model of teacher agency by Priestley et al. (2015), recent research has not brought together the impact of the iterational, projective and practical-evaluative dimensions on teacher agency. Furthermore, different contexts offer different understanding of teacher agency. For example, as highlighted in chapter one, as a small state, Mauritius reflects the struggle that small states encounter as they engage in policy making and implementation. Such a site of study, along with its social, cultural, political and economic specificities, can bring out the nuances of teachers' agentic actions as they interpret their professional roles in a changing environment. Does the changing environment involve only macro-policy changes as accentuated in the existing literature? Moreover, my study extends the existing literature on the forces exerted within the micro-institutional space on teacher agency. Micro-institutional environments are not uniform. Teacher experiences and interpretations of their roles, decisions, choices and actions should be understood as a complex phenomenon arising from multiple types of working environments – that is, different types of schools. Nothing appears stable and certain; old habits and rituals are continually being challenged and revisited personally, professionally, sociologically, politically and technologically. Teachers are more embattled with a multitude of changes. How do they find voice and agency?

2.5 Critical Questions

The critical questions emerging from this review of existing studies and the gap in relation to teacher agency are:
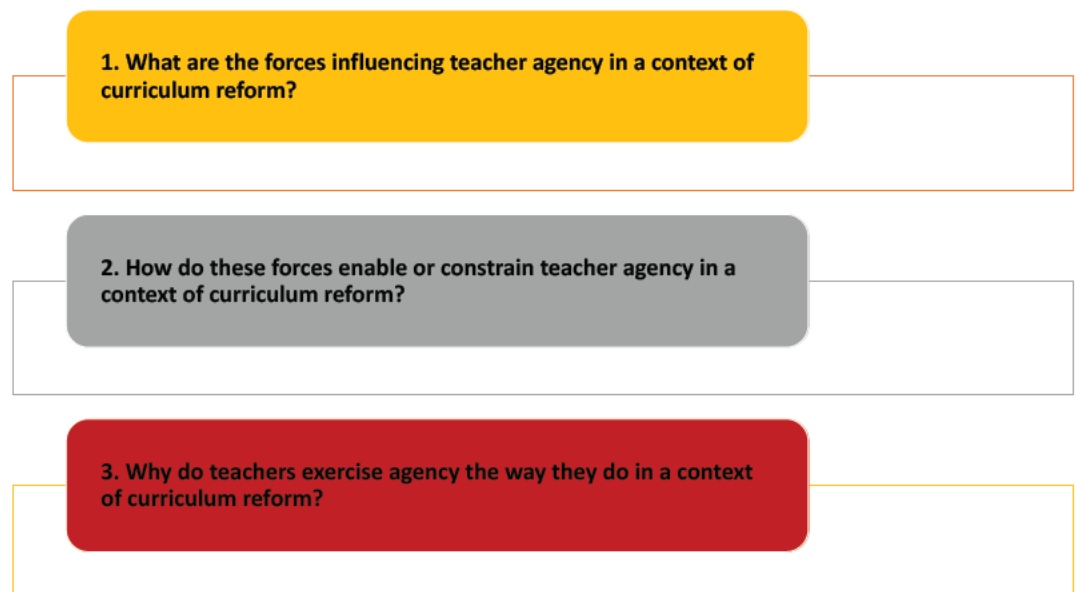
Figure 6: Critical questions

1. *What are the forces influencing teacher agency in a context of curriculum reform?*

As highlighted in the existing literature, teacher agency does not only involve an individual's inner capacity to act; both internal (forces that trigger that inner capacity) and external forces influence agency. The extant literature identified various forces such as fluctuating levels of autonomy, standardisation, collegiality and reforms as key forces that influence agency. It is also observed that such forces cannot be decontextualised – the teacher's sociocultural environment varies and its impact on the individual includes historical, cultural, economic and political factors. Moreover, the ecological dimensions (past, present and future) inhabited by the teacher vary depending on the type of school he/she is working in, and his/her biographical experiences and future aspirations. Hence, in this study I seek to identify (**what**?) the forces (those identified in the reviewed literature and those that are not) that influence teacher agency in a time of change.

2. *How do these forces enable or constrain teacher agency in a context of curriculum reform?*

The forces identified have different impacts on teacher agency – it is observed that some enable agency while others constrain it. Teachers respond differently to the different forces and their responses (reactions, beliefs) are shaped by the sociocultural and ecological forces mentioned above. For instance, some degree of autonomy may not always give rise to active agency where teachers express satisfaction with the work environment and willingly innovate and actively implement new curricula. Instead, autonomy may give rise to stagnation as teachers may take their autonomous space for granted and knowing that they have the support of the school administration and that their job is secure, they may become passive and enjoy a comfort zone. This particular question foregrounds my interest in the processes by which teachers activate their agency in situated specific contexts. The emphasis on the "**how**" is noted in my critical question.

3. *Why do teachers exercise agency the way they do in a context of curriculum reform?*

Teachers respond to various forces such as the relationship with colleagues, the school ethos, personal beliefs, professional development programmes and the changing policy environment. The purpose of this thesis is to understand the experiences of teachers – their roles, identities, personal and professional struggles; how they interpret these experiences and why they exercise agency in particular ways. As noted earlier in the policy review and the reflection of teacher agency as they transact different reforms, teachers exercise different types of agency – compliance, passivity, active contribution, rebellion. Why do they exercise these types of agency? Why do the types of agency differ despite similar cultural beliefs or similar social experiences? Why do they react differently to the forces identified? At this point of the study, and as highlighted in the reflection at the beginning of **chapter one**, there is a myriad of ways in which teachers respond to their changing policy environment and similarly multiple ways in which they choose to exercise agency. I therefore want to understand why teachers exercise agency in these different ways. This constitutes the philosophical dimension of the critical research question of the study, which will reflect firstly, on

the explanations provided by the teachers themselves, as well as my own analytical reflections on these dimensions influencing teacher agency. A comparison with the extant literature and original theoretical framework constitutes this phase of the study focus.

A common thread in these critical questions is the curriculum reform context. I have chosen to limit my study to the context of curriculum reform as a context of change during which teacher agency is studied as emanating from individual and contextual forces as teachers reflect on their experiences in this particular moment of change. My interest lies in understanding whether the ambient contextual force of policy reform asserts particular kinds of activation of teacher agency.

In order to respond to these critical questions while theorising teacher agency, in the next section, I present a proposed temporary theoretical lens for this study.

2.6 Designing a temporary theoretical lens to understand teacher agency

Priestley et al.'s (2015) theoretical lens – the ecological model of teacher agency – helps in understanding how past experiences and future motivations shape agency in the present. However, as discussed in this chapter, while agency is influenced by the iterational, practical-evaluative and projective dimensions, they overlap and forces within each dimension influence one another. Moreover, these dimensions are part of a broader sociological space. Guided by my critical questions and a review of the existing literature on teacher agency, in this section, I propose a theoretical lens that will assist me in theorising teacher agency within a context of change.

Education reforms, including curriculum reforms, come with prescribed duties and teachers have for a long time been perceived as 'agents of the state' (Carrim, 2003) who are constrained by the macro-policy environment. Coupled with this ideologically constructed space, the teachers often find themselves within a bounded micro-institutional environment with varying levels of autonomy. However, as discussed in earlier sections in this chapter, teacher agency gradually evolves from personal and professional experiences. These spatial influences

contribute to different forms of agency. For instance, in line with the reviewed literature, teachers seem to exercise agency in three different ways that are influenced by temporal forces:

- The teacher is often seen as someone who is merely delivering the dictates of policy as a passive implementer – caught in a process of 'deliverology' (Kelly, 2008). Such teachers are present-oriented as they are merely adhering to the current macro-policy and micro-institutional dictates. They do not question the content. What explains this form of agency? Teachers caught up in a process of delivery may be responding passively due to their sociocultural or even political contexts. Sometimes teachers may prefer to deliver curriculum content unquestioningly so as not to be accountable for students' performance. Therefore, the practical-evaluative dimension may influence this form of agency. Moreover, some teachers may be frustrated with or fatigued by multiple reforms and end up delivering instead of innovating and assisting in curriculum making. Or, in some cases a lack of motivation, such as a better salary or promotion, may constrain the teacher's agency and give rise to deliverology. Deliverology, therefore, cannot be understood as a simple way of passively enacting agency, as this choice is influenced by various forces.

- Moreover, a teacher that chooses to deliver curriculum content unquestioningly is still contributing to the implementation of the curriculum – 'curriculum making' (Lambert & Morgan, 2010). Curriculum making is an empowering choice where teachers choose to be actively involved during the implementation of new policies. Some teachers may perceive teaching as a vocation and choose to invest their time in developing strategies to contribute to proper implementation in favour of students. Active agency can also be guided by aspirations for promotion. Therefore, this form of agency is often perceived as future-oriented.

- Consequently, along with curriculum making and deliverology, the teacher may find himself or herself practising 'strategic mimicry' (Mattson & Harley, 2003) during which he/she adheres to policy aims and objectives, but at the same time preserves past ways of teaching (past-oriented). 'Strategic mimicry' may sometimes arise from a response to multiple reforms, a lack of trust in national policy, a supportive micro-institutional environment or the rebellious nature of a person. The teacher may be

involved in curriculum making but teaching strategies will be preserved. Some teachers may be unconsciously contributing to curriculum making while they believe they are rebelliously performing strategic mimicry.

Therefore, the ways in which teachers choose to exercise agency (deliverology, active agency, or strategic mimicry) are complex choices triggered by spatial and temporal forces. A teacher may choose to exercise agency in different ways. The diagram below is a proposed temporary theoretical lens to study teacher agency in a time of curriculum reform.
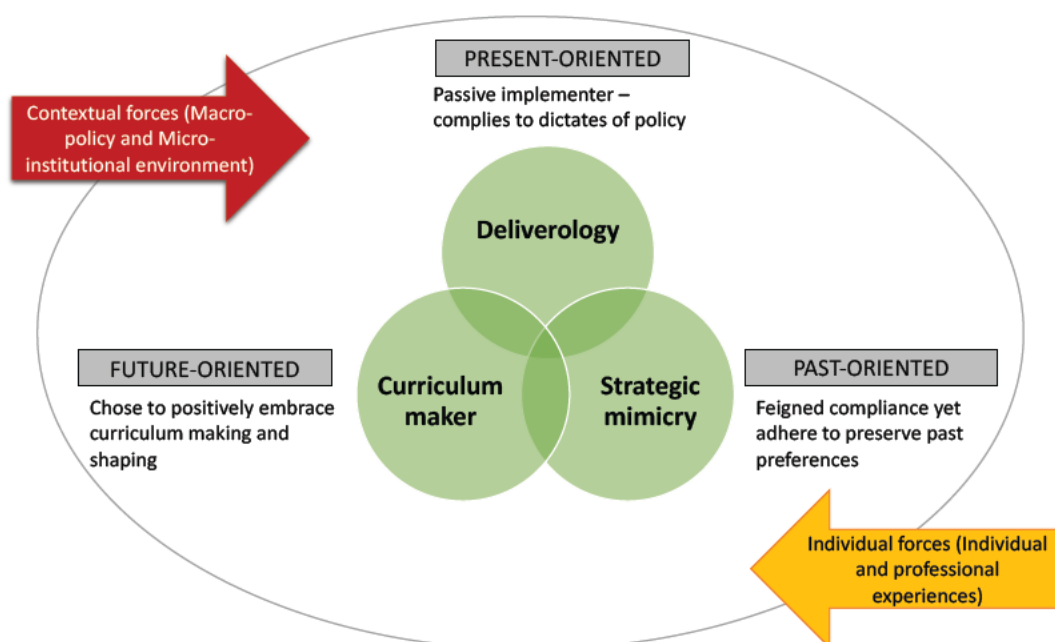
Figure 7: A spatial and temporal model of teacher agency

As elaborated in chapter three, this theoretical lens guided my methodological choices. It shows how teachers exist within a space that is influenced by forces emanating from the macro-policy context, micro-institutional structures and biographical experiences. This space is one that is constantly evolving and dependent on temporal forces.

2.7 Chapter synthesis

While the previous chapter identified the problematic and situated the study within a local macro-policy landscape, this chapter presented paradigmatic arguments related to the phenomenon of teacher agency. The policy analysis conducted in chapter one raised questions relating to the forces that enable and constrain agency beyond the macro-policy environment and why teachers exercise agency differently in the same macro-policy contexts. The reviewed literature on teacher agency emphasises other forces, through the ecological model of Priestley et al. (2015), such as biographical experiences, which impact teachers' choices and actions. However, the extant literature is limited to the enactment of agency within micro-institutional structures in a broader macro-policy space, and in my study I wish to go beyond this space in order to understand how other forces, such as the national agenda and globalisation, influence agentic actions. Moreover, past and present experiences, and future motivations are dialogical and as highlighted in my designed theoretical lens at the end of this chapter, teacher agency may be exercised in different ways at different points in time. Thus, the policy analysis and analysis of the existing literature in chapters one and two assisted me in the formulation of my critical questions. In order to respond to the critical questions, I designed a temporary theoretical lens that further assisted me in choosing my methodological approaches to understand teacher agency. These are discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3

Interpreting teacher agency through teachers' stories

3.0 Introduction

The previous chapters anchored the study geographically and theoretically. In chapter two I also presented the theoretical framework I designed to assist the data generation process. In this chapter, I provide a justification for the chosen methodological approach to gather and analyse data. In order to understand why teachers choose to exercise agency the way they do I adopt a qualitative approach, using a narrative inquiry methodology within an overarching life history research tradition. The aim of using a narrative inquiry approach is to treat teacher agency as a complex phenomenon that cannot be reduced to an objective or single truth. Using narrative inquiry, through an interpretivist paradigm, this study acknowledges and prioritises the participants' subjective voices in the shaping and interpretation (Ankiah-Gangadeen, 2013) of personal and professional experiences and in the construction of their life histories. Hence, this chapter assists me in the methodological design of this study and the systematic generation and analysis of data by valorising validity and ethics.

Chapter overview
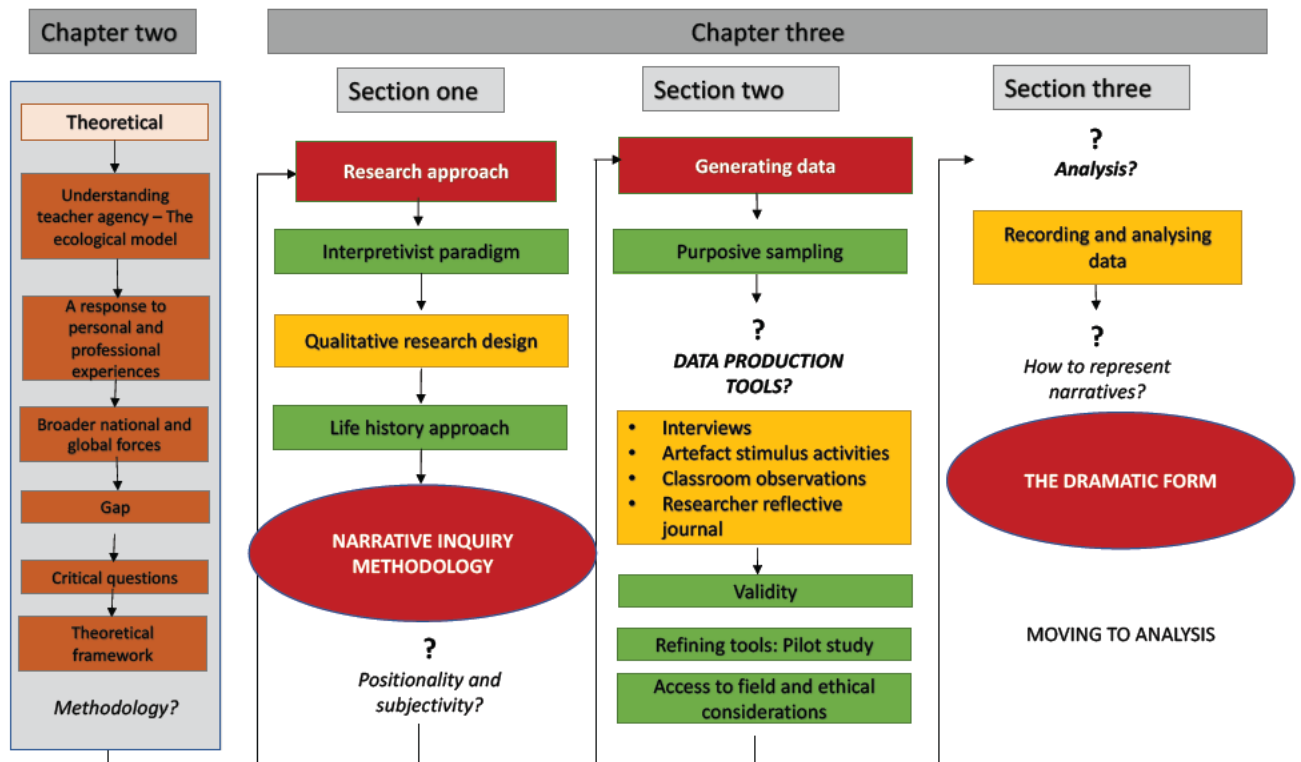
Figure 8: Orientation to chapter three

In **section one**, I justify the chosen research approach with a focus on the paradigmatic concern that led to the choice of a qualitative research design and consequently, the life history approach that helps to understand the multiple interpretations and multiple truths represented in the participants' life histories. As I justify my choice to immerse myself in the truth making of participants, I discuss the use of the narrative inquiry methodology to gather and represent my data. In this section I also reflect on my positionality and my contribution to data collection as I prepared to enter the field.

In the **second section**, I discuss the choices made as I activated the study – the sampling process before designing the data collection tools; the selected methods to produce rich data; the pilot study which I conducted in order to enhance my data gathering tools; the ways in which I ensured validity; and the ethical considerations before, during and after accessing the field.

This leads to the **third section** where I discuss the data analysis process and choice of representation as I activate the descriptive, evaluative and philosophical analyses of the study.

3.1 Selecting a research approach to study teacher agency

3.1.1 Choosing the interpretivist paradigm

A research paradigm influences the way in which a phenomenon is studied and also helps in the selection of data production tools and the analysis process. For the purpose of this study, I adopted an interpretivist paradigm (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000; Quaye, 2007) which involves meaning-making through subjective interpretations of data as the researcher and participants are positioned within an evolving sociocultural landscape. Experiences are always in flux and similarly, teacher agency, roles, and experiences are products of evolving social realities. The ways in which teachers interpret their roles and agency can be studied by adopting an interpretivist paradigm that does not reduce experiences to an objective or single truth, but acknowledges the multilayered possibilities and interpretations (Quaye, 2007). Moreover, the researcher's subjective interpretations are important in meaning-making – unlike the positivist paradigm that separates the influence of the perceiver from interpretations and collection of data. However, despite including reflexivity by acknowledging researcher positionality and the thickening of data during production and analysis, reliability may be questioned when adopting the interpretivist paradigm due to the researcher's subjective involvement in the interpretation process. I chose a range of data production tools to ensure reliability and member checks were included to involve the participants in the production of data.

3.1.2 Choosing a qualitative research design

In line with the interpretivist paradigm, I used a qualitative research design to produce data. As explained by Creswell (2009), qualitative research is a means of "exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 4). As explained by Denzin and Lincoln (1994), it focuses on understanding and interpretations of experiences:

> "Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive naturalistic approach to its subject matter…qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involved the studied use of and collection of

a variety of empirical materials…that describe routine and problematic moments and meaning in individuals' lives." (p. 2)

Thus, qualitative research does not aim to find universalist solutions or to predict actions; it comprises a research approach with an understanding of the researcher's own 'natural setting', which in the case of my study is the macro-policy and micro-institutional environments, in order to make sense of the phenomenon. The problematic moment in this study on teacher agency, refers to the current policy reform which has triggered teachers' reactions to their personal and professional identity, their roles and their agentic choices. In order to capture the complexity of experiences as teachers negotiate their agency impacted by internal and external forces, various data production methods were used to produce rich data. These multiple methods were also used to reduce the influence of subjectivity and the positionality of the researcher. In contrast to quantitative researchers' beliefs in one truth, this qualitative research involves acknowledging multiple truths and interpretations of these truths.

Therefore, in this study, the focus is on understanding why teachers exercise agency the way they do. In order to answer this philosophical question, it is important to understand their professional and biographical experiences that lead to their agentic choices. Moreover, their experiences are constantly evolving within a dynamic social landscape that exists within a broader global space. The qualitative research design allowed me to immerse myself in the lives of the teachers and understand the ways in which they exercised agency as they negotiated their roles and experiences in a changing context of reform. Consequently, as discussed below, I chose a life history approach to capture the complexity of teacher experiences and the ways in which they exercise agency.

3.1.3 Choosing a life history approach

I chose to study the phenomenon of teacher agency from a life history approach that emphasises the lives lived by participants, the forces influencing their choices and the multiple interpretations of their experiences. This approach assisted me in exploring participants as active agents of stories narrated and unfolding (Sosulki, Butchanan & Donnell, 2010, p. 37); and the ways in which they choose to represent themselves. As Samuel (2009) noted, life history is not a documentation of truths but the "act of telling the story is a process of recording how the teller of the tale presently sees her position to the subject/topic being discussed" (p. 3). In line with my paradigmatic perspective, this approach captures the complexity of

experiences as participants revisit their past and present experiences, and future aspirations. Moreover, the context of reform triggers the teachers' lived experiences – stories they remember, the ways in which they choose to narrate the stories, and conscious and unconscious choices/acts of repressing certain stories/truths. This approach helped me to understand the nuances of teacher agency – that is, what are the forces that influence their choices and actions; how they respond to these forces; and why they enact specific types of agency (curriculum maker, deliverologist or strategic mimicry). It thus enables me to understand teacher agency as an outcome of multi-layered human experiences within a dynamic social landscape infused with political, historical, cultural, economic and global influences.

Furthermore, the life history approach allows the researcher to be surprised by new interpretations that were initially not anticipated (Samuel, 2009). While the study is set against the backdrop of the extant literature that reveals identified forces that impact teacher agency, through the life history approach, I sought to identify other forces that exist within the regulated and unregulated spaces of the participants; the complex nuanced experiences emanating from personal experiences and professional choices; and understand why they exercise agency the way they do. One limitation to this approach is that, as stories are constructed, co-constructed, and represented, meanings shift (Clark, 2007) and even the 'truth' represented by the researcher is a limited claim. In order to enhance the richness of the data despite this limitation, multiple methods were used to produce data, including artefacts to trigger participants' memories, and member checks while working on the analysis of data.

As discussed below, in order to produce rich data from the life histories and to represent participants' stories, I chose a narrative inquiry methodology.

3.1.4 Choosing the narrative inquiry methodology

In reviewing the existing literature, I observed that most of the studies on teacher agency have been conducted using a case study approach (see Themane & Thobejane, 2018; Tran, 2018; Oolbekkink-Marchand et al., 2017; Mitchell, 2016; Priestley et al., 2012). This approach allows the researcher to focus on the phenomenon in a specific context. According to Yin (2009), case study research focuses on understanding a real-life phenomenon in-depth, with an emphasis on contextual conditions. Through these case studies, teacher agency has been theorised as a complex phenomenon where teachers make choices and take decisions triggered by their

contextual reality or changes. The focus of these case studies has thus been the context – the school or micro-institutional space inhabited by the teacher – and how the teacher negotiates his/her identity and agency in such a space. However, the workplace is only one of a number of forces that impact agentic choices. The macro-policy (including the micro-institutional) context, life histories and biographical experiences within the iterational dimension, negotiations with various stakeholders, and the teacher's future ambitions and motivations simultaneously influence the ways in which teachers choose to exercise agency. Therefore, I selected the narrative inquiry methodology, which enabled me to understand the multiple forces emanating from these temporal and spatial dimensions, and understand how the teacher interprets his/her role, identity and position within a context of change as he/she decides how to act, and what decisions and choices to make. The relevance of spatial and temporal dimensions is highlighted by Clandinin (2007) who asserts that, "context matters, [and] human interaction and humans are embedded in context, and people, cultures, and events have histories that affect the present" (p. 11). At the same time, these dimensions capture the significance of context (the site of data production) in the interpretation of experiences.

Through narrative inquiry, I constructed and co-constructed teacher stories. As noted by Clandinin and Huber (2002), the "narratively constructed" (p. 161) experiences allowed me, as the researcher, to immerse myself in the lives and professional milieu that the teachers inhabit. It was expected that their interpretations of this milieu would differ due to varying biographical experiences, thus providing a complex understanding of teacher agency. As pointed out by Connelly and Clandinin (1990), people live 'storied lives' in storied landscapes (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Caine, Estefan & Clandinin, 2013) and the complexity of teachers' experiences and enactment of agency can be captured through their storied narratives as they relate their professional and personal experiences. Thus, teacher agency was studied through their multilayered experiences as they negotiate past (iterational), present (practical-evaluative) and future (projective) within a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, moving "inward, outward, backward, forward, and situated within a place" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 49). This 'inward, outward, backward and forward' movement helped me to understand how teachers negotiate their agentic choices and actions in an evolving sociocultural landscape. At times, the teacher chooses to exercise agency through deliverology; while the same teacher may actively contribute to curriculum making by devising new strategies and embracing policy changes; or, at times, may feign compliance and perform strategic mimicry. Push and pull forces are responsible for the overlapping of these forms of agency and this three-dimensional

storied landscape brought forth the complexity of the phenomenon.

3.1.5 Positionality and subjectivity

Narrative inquiry involves the researcher's participation and interpretations in the construction and co-construction of narratives. As explained by Clandinin and Connelly (2000),

> "Narrative inquiry…is collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in the same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling the stories of the experiences that make up people's lives, both individual and social." (p. 20)

The relationship between the researcher and the participants, and the influence of the researcher on the participants' lives cannot be ignored. The research involves the active participation of both the researcher and the participants, and they are all evolving in a dynamic space impacted by temporal forces. It should also be noted that the participants' lives are not perceived as deficit and that the researcher does not adopt an authoritative position, but instead creates a trustworthy space for sharing of experiences. However, this methodological approach is often perceived as highly subjective. As stated by Marshall and Rossman (2011), "(l)ike any method that relies on participants' accounts, narratives may suffer from recalling selectively, focusing on subsets of experience, filling in memory gaps through inference, and reinterpreting the past" (p. 153). The process of re-construction of narratives is therefore, a challenging one where the researcher is subjectively involved in interpretations of produced data. However, co-construction allows the researcher to member-check with participants and to engage with their interpretations of experiences. Moreover, from the onset of this study, my position as the researcher was explained as it is acknowledged that the production of data involved my subjective positioning and the ways in which I related to the participants as both an outsider and an insider. Thus, as I found myself in the midst of the participants' stories, I needed to be conscious of the overlapping of my experiences with the participants' understanding of their socio-cultural realities. As an insider, I share their social, cultural, economic and political landscape that is part of biographical experiences; I also share with them experiences, as a student and as a teacher, of the current education system with multiple policies that have framed the current education structure. This positioning may have brought an element of trust to the participant-researcher relationship as we could both relate (as teachers) to the current policy context.

Nevertheless, power relations are also infused in this researcher-participant bond as they may refrain from sharing certain information with a textbook writer, part-time lecturer and head of department, which are additional roles that I inhabit within this changing landscape. Moreover, my own sense of my role and teacher identity is not static; I too was equally influenced as I read and re-read my contextual spaces and roles both as an educational practitioner, and as a researcher researching other teachers. We are simultaneously, as researcher and researched, of the same space and time, but our shifting worldviews are constantly in flux. I too felt that I was being researched by my participants. During one of the first interviews, a participant asked me whether I was one of the writers who were involved in writing the standardised textbook that accompanied the reform. She stopped, showed hesitation and asked this question before continuing to express her views on the reform. Another example occurred after the recorded interview, during an informal conversation, when the participant asked me what my views were on the MIE Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) courses; she wanted to know whether I was judging her views. Thus, it was important to talk to the participants and to make them feel at ease – to assure them that their stories and their opinions matter independent of who I am professionally, as once in the midst of their lives, I was the researcher and not the writer, teacher or lecturer. Nonetheless, the participants' silences, hesitation and fear of judgement also contributed to a better understanding of their experiences and their own interpretations of their identity, roles and agency.

It is thus crucial to devise ways to reduce the level of subjectivity, and accordingly, multiple methods were used to produce rich data, including artefacts to trigger the participants' past experiences and future motivations. I also assured the participants that they were not being judged or criticised, that information shared would remain confidential, and that they would remain anonymous in order to protect their identities and stories. In the initial phase of the study, some prospective participants showed hesitation and refused to be part of it for fear of negative consequences from schools and other authorities. Convincing prospective participants that their experiences and stories would be respected and gradually developing a trustworthy relationship was challenging. Hence, it was important to progressively enter these teachers' stories and to be part of their lived experiences in order to construct reliable stories that reflect the ways in which they exercise agency in times of change.

3.2 Generating data

3.2.1 Using purposive sampling to select the participants

Given that the aim of qualitative research is to explore and provide insight into the complexity of a phenomenon, a small sample of six participants was selected. According to Creswell (2014), narrative research normally involves one or two participants as the focus is on depth rather than breadth. The aim is to produce rich data which are meaningful (Hitchcock & Hughes, 2003) and diverse. The six participants from different types of schools (discussed in the sampling categories below) provided an array of biographical experiences[14] as I sought to understand the ways in which they exercise their agency. Moreover, qualitative research involves purposeful or deliberate sampling (Yin, 2011; Creswell, 2014) of participants or sites that will best assist the researcher in understanding the phenomenon. However, this deliberate choice should not bring elements of bias to the study but should also allow space for challenging views of the phenomenon. Therefore, I chose participants from different types of schools, of different ages, teaching different grades in different geographical locations for maximum variation and in order to generate rich data. The purposive sampling was also thematically designed as age, school type and whether the participants had attended professional workshops comprise the iterational, practical-evaluative and projective dimensions in Priestley et al.'s (2015) ecological model of teacher agency.

The purposive categories in the table below enabled me to select participants that could provide relevant information (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016) on the phenomenon of teacher agency. The purposive sampling categories are explained below.

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14 These varied biographical experiences enabled me to interpret the multiple internal and external forces that influence teacher agency with teachers of different ages, personal beliefs, professional experiences and working environments.

Participants	Age			School Type		Location		Grades			Attended Professional Training (related to the current reform)	
	Biographical profile			*Professional context*		*Geographic environment*		*Teaching at school level*			*Professional context*	
	Iterational & projective dimensions			*Practical-evaluative dimension*		*Practical-evaluative dimension*		*Micro-policy environment*			*Macro-policy environment*	
	<30	30-40	>40	State Secondary Schools	PSEA-regulated Schools	Rural	Urban	7	8	9	Attended	Not attended
1	X			x		x		x			x	
2		x		X		x			X			x
3			x	X			x	x		x	x	
4	X					x		x				x
5		x			x	x			X		x	
6			x		x		x	x		x		x
	2	2	2	3	3	4	2	3	3	2	3	3

Table 2: Purposive sampling grid

- The participants are teachers involved in preparing students for the NCE examinations as part of the NYCBE reform; they thus teach Grades 7 to 9. In order to narrow down to one subject area, the sample comprised only English teachers as English is a dominant core subject (highlighted in chapter one) and various reforms focus on the need to enhance English language teaching.

- The participants' different age groups meant that the sample comprised teachers that were exposed to different types of reforms at different points in time. The age groups also signal varying levels of professional experiences. Participants' agentic choices may/may not be directly related to pedagogical experiences, the number of schools in which they have worked, or the diverse types of students they have worked with.

- As noted in chapter one, the participants were chosen from two categories of schools in Mauritius. This gave me a range of data as participants' experiences varied as they worked with students at different academic levels, worked with different school infrastructure, negotiated professional identity in schools with a different ethos and negotiated relationships and agency as they responded to the demands of different stakeholders.

- I chose teachers from different geographical locations as I wanted to understand the impact of the rural and urban culture (sociocultural influences) on teachers. However, Mauritius is a small island where rural and urban locations are proximate (Ankiah-Gangadeen, 2014). There may be micro-cultures within specific regions but nevertheless, a rural area may be close to the capital (ibid.); thus, the influence of rural or urban cultures on teacher agency may be minimal in certain cases. However, it was observed that in two schools in rural locations, participants struggled to teach and use the English language because most students responded in Creole. Furthermore, teachers that work in state secondary schools normally work in the region where they live while this is not necessarily the case for those who work in PSEA-regulated schools. Hence, choosing teachers from different geographical locations enhanced interpretations of teacher agency as teachers may face difficulties that are specific to certain locations.

- Before the implementation of the reform, some teachers had attended professional training workshops organised by the Ministry that included an introduction to the new standardised textbook. As highlighted in the literature review, various reforms emphasise the importance of teacher training in order to enhance teaching strategies. What is the impact of teacher training on agency? To what extent did it enable or constrain teacher agency? Hence, my sampling also considered teachers that attended and did not attend professional training workshops.

These purposive sampling categories added to the richness of the data produced during the construction of the participants' stories and enabled me to immerse myself in the multiple truth making of participants with varied experiences as they were located in a changing context of reform. After designing the sampling categories, I selected and designed my data production tools, which are discussed in the next section.

3.2.2 Selecting and designing data production tools

Data was produced over six months during the period 2018-2019, prior to which gatekeepers' authorisation was received and the study was explained to the participants before they signed the informed consent form. In order to produce rich data, I used multiple methods of data production – interviews, classroom observations, informal conversations, and artefact activities. The participants were from different schools across the country and I had to plan my meetings with individual participants to collect rich data and also to meet them, know them and build a trustworthy relationship. Following the pilot study (see section 3.2.3), the interview schedules were enhanced in order to trigger more responses from participants and to elicit more information on their personal and professional experiences. There were some barriers to data production such as the need to reschedule meetings due to unforeseen circumstances experienced by both the participants and the researcher. However, data production was completed within six months as planned.

The different data production tools were selected and designed to produce data that would help answer the critical questions. The interviews, artefact activities and classroom observations enabled me to be in the midst of the participants' personal experiences and professional lives and thereby derive a better understanding of their personal/professional space, roles and agency. Being in their midst in their classroom, staffroom, school yard and other sites in the

school, helped me to better understand their micro-institutional spaces and how they negotiated their roles and agency within that space. The school ethos and their relationships with colleagues, management and the school administration were also important in understanding their roles and position within that professional space. Moreover, I met two participants outside the school premises in more informal settings, a coffee shop and a restaurant. The first was hesitant to share certain information at school and asked me if we could meet somewhere else for the interviews and the second had many responsibilities and work at her school. She, therefore, proposed that we meet for coffee as she finished work early on that day. These different settings made it possible to capture other nuances (regarding their professional beliefs, choices and agency) that were not apparent during our conversations at school. There was less hesitation, and they shared more about their personal experiences and how and why they exercised certain types of agency. Furthermore, during the classroom observations, I was allowed into their private spaces of the classroom and as I watched them delivering their lessons, I could understand why they exercised a certain type of agency. For instance, I saw how a class with a large number of students could constrain the choices they make during the curriculum transaction; how their beliefs in the importance of examinations influenced examination-oriented teaching with an emphasis on examinable components; and how autonomy in the classroom enabled agency as they embraced innovative strategies to enhance teaching and learning. My field notes – before, during and after my interactions with the participants – enabled me to reflect on their stories and assisted in the construction of their life histories. In the following sub-sections, I discuss the multiple tools used in data production.

3.2.2.1 Using semi-structured interviews

Narrative inquiry requires the creation of a trustworthy space where participants are free to converse and share their life stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2013). According to Clandinin (2013), "[c]onversations are not guided by predetermined questions, or with intentions of being therapeutic, resolving issues, or providing answers to questions" (p. 45). Instead of using strict structured sets of questions, semi-structured interviews allowed me to engage with the participants with reference to key forces that may influence their agency, such as their micro-institutional environment or their personal experiences as a student. Conversing with the participants also involves the inquirer's listening skills (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Hitchcock & Hughes, 2003;). By listening to and immersing myself in the narrative landscape

of the participants, I was able to "probe into experience that takes the representation of experience far beyond what is possible in an interview" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 109). Moreover, to probe deeper into the biographical experiences, I included artefact activities (discussed in section 3.2.2.2) that engaged the participants in further interpretations of and reflections on their shared stories and experiences. Participants were also able to initiate their own conversations; I did not limit the interview to the set questions but gave them the space to share their stories. I was, therefore, able to identify unanticipated events (Ankiah-Gangadeen, 2014) that influenced teacher agency; for example, one participant shared how her divorce was impacting her choices in class and the ways in which she perceived her role as a teacher.

Four in-depth dialogical semi-structured **interviews** of approximately 45-60 minutes were scheduled and conducted with each participant at her convenience (see **Appendix 4** for interview schedules). Semi-structured interviews were appropriate for this study as this type of interview "often generates unexpected complexities and highlights broader research dilemmas" (Brown & Danaher 2017, p. 1). Through these interviews, I reflected on the stories narrated by the teachers and proceeded to the construction and reconstruction of their life stories.

The interview questions assisted me in establishing the biographical profile of the participants – the influence of their home environment and parents on their professional choices; the influence of their school teachers on the way they teach; how who they are professionally and personally was also shaped by their school ethos as students and as professionals; how their future aspirations and motivations influence their professional choices; and their experience(s) of reform(s) – in order to understand the internal (personal beliefs, goals, aspirations) and external (macro-policy and micro-policy) forces that enabled or constrained agency. The set questions allowed participants to reflect on these forces as they narrated their life histories with movement from the present (their current professional and personal lives) to the past (memories, desires, goals, regrets, fears) and then the future (aspirations, promotion, further studies, objectives). This movement was, however, not linear, as the questions allowed the participants to revisit past experiences and to reflect on current choices – there was therefore repeated backward and forward movement in time which assisted me in the creation of three-dimensional characters in the representation of the life histories. In order to allow participants to engage with their own stories as they shared their experiences, I did not rely strictly on the order of questions in the interview schedules but instead spontaneously connected the questions to what they were sharing. This required my concentration and reflection on the stories that were being narrated

and instead of focusing too much on the field notes during the interviews, I preferred to note the participants' silences, expressions, reactions and hesitation. Thus, there was a natural flow in the conversation as I listened and asked probing questions to make sense of their experiences. However, post-interview field notes became crucial in recording and reflecting the stories shared. As the participants felt more at ease, they delved deeper into memories and shared personal stories about their childhood, student life and professional choices; and this information became central to my understanding of forces that were enabling and constraining their agency. I also had post-interview informal conversations (that were off the record[15]) which contributed to textured data that assisted in maintaining authenticity about interpreted life stories during the construction and co-construction of narratives. For instance, one of the participants shared personal challenges that were affecting her professionally – divorce and emotional turmoil that influenced the way she perceived her role as a teacher, her patience levels, her frustration, her anger towards school management and regrets over her professional choices. Hence, it was important to make participants feel relaxed in order to understand them better and to reduce subjectivity in the way in which they are represented in the narratives. She was eventually comfortable with me recording these personal experiences as her data.

Furthermore, although the interviews were generated in a multi-lingual country, the participants predominantly used English and there were only minor instances of the use of Creole and French. This observation became telling in light of their professional choices since, as English teachers they were against the use of Creole in class and valorised the language they were teaching. Their personal choices were, thus, shaped by their professional identity. This choice of language reflects the professional priority given to the language they teach and also highlights the resistance that many participants expressed in relation to the use of other languages during teaching. It may therefore reflect their professional need to preserve the value associated with the English language.

With participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded in order to engage with their narratives during interviews. The audio-recording was helpful, as it enabled me to revisit the participants' narratives and to interpret their meta-statements which Kathard (2009) described as the "places where the participant stops and reflects on what was said." (p. 25). Furthermore,

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[15] To uphold ethical standards and respect participants' privacy, they were informed that off the record conversations would be part of the interpretation and construction of stories.

as elaborated below, artefact stimulus activities accompanied the interviews and contributed to the construction of the teachers' biographies.

3.2.2.2 Designing artefact stimulus activities

Artefact stimulus activities here refer to activities that involve the use of printed documents, collage, poems, and the 'Tree of Life' diagram (adapted from Merryfield, 1993). These activities are used to trigger participants' memories and to help them reflect on their experiences, choices and actions. An individual story is incomplete if it only focuses on present experiences; these activities assisted me in producing rich data that reflect the influence of spatial and temporal forces on teacher agency as the participants visited their past, talked about their present and reflected on their future. They thus enabled me to delve deeper into their biographical experiences (personal and professional) and their interpretations of their roles and agency in a changing policy context. Moreover, by involving the participants in these activities I offered them the opportunity to choose the ways in which they wanted to represent themselves and they played a more active role in the co-construction of narratives. The following artefact stimulus activities were used:

- **Biographical data sheet and adjectives to describe oneself**

  In order to familiarise myself with the participants, before the first interview, a biographical data sheet was sent to them (see **Appendix 4**). It included a question on how the participant would describe herself and I used that description to come up with adjectives that could be used to describe them. These adjectives shed more light on the participants (biographical profile) and triggered further conversation about who they are and what influences their personal or professional choices. Each adjective was written on a card, as represented below.

Friendly		Devoted

Strict		Patient

	Disciplined	
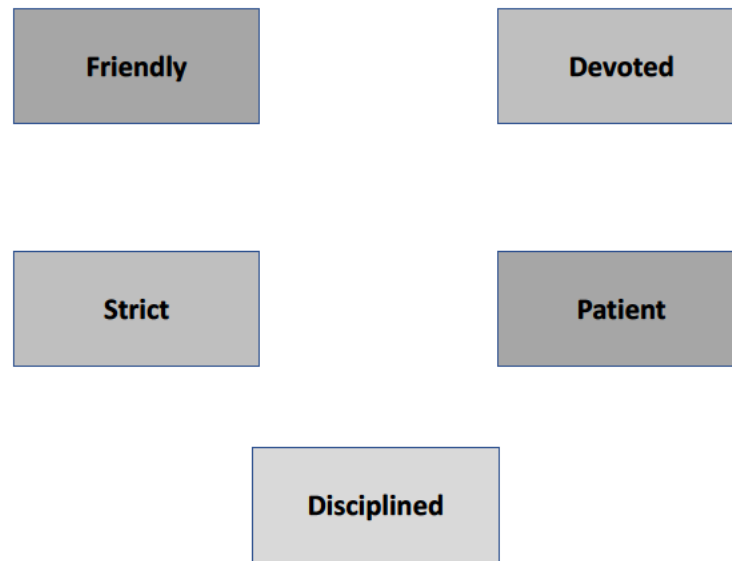
Figure 9: Example of cards with adjectives to describe oneself

In cases where participants did not write much about themselves, after asking them to tell me more about themselves, I either used cards that I had already prepared with adjectives or I wrote new adjectives on blank cards for the activity. It was interesting to note how each word triggered different sets of reactions and how this activity helped me to better understand the participants. Their beliefs, pedagogical principles, personal traits and priorities as a person and as a teacher provided insights into the ways in which they enact their agency.

- **Autobiographical stimulus activity – *Tree of Life***

The *Tree of Life* activity was adapted from Merryfield (1993) and Rodrigues, de Pietri, Sanchez and Kuchah (2018). The participants were asked to draw a tree and focus on three parts – the roots, trunk and branches. Before conducting my first interview with the participants, aside from the biographical data sheet, I also sent them the drawing below with an emphasis on the branches, leaves, trunk and roots.
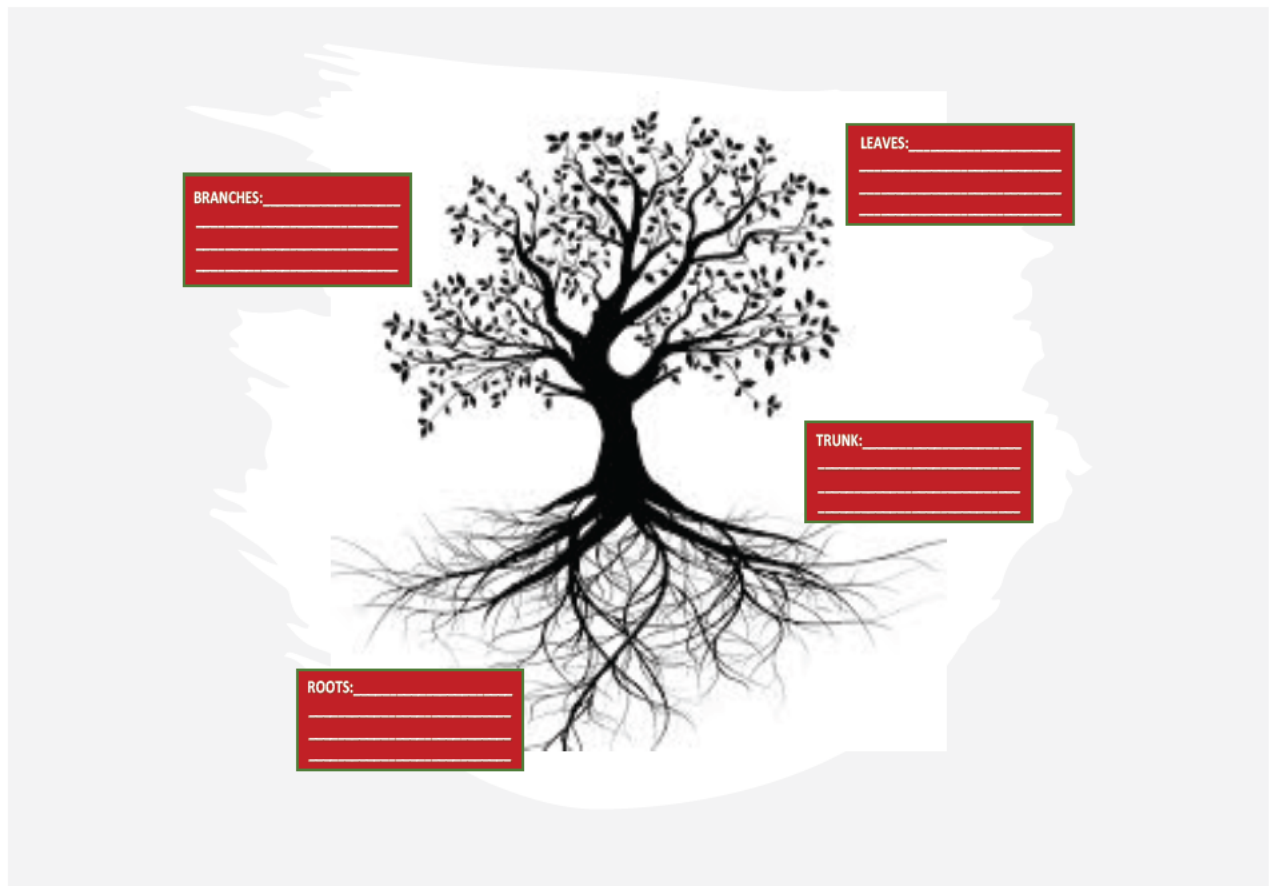
Figure 10: *Tree of Life* activity

The participants were asked to reflect on their personal and professional experiences and to write about the signification of each of the parts in the diagram. A *Tree of Life* normally symbolises personal development and focuses on individuality (choices, beliefs, emotions). By reflecting on what each part of the tree represents in their life, participants reflected on:

- *past experiences (iterational dimension)*: personal and professional growth; who/what influenced their career choices; who/what influenced their pedagogical choices; collegial support and professional growth or support from family members and friends; and, fear, confusion, hesitation, confidence, satisfaction and other emotions expressed at the beginning of their career.

- *present experiences (practical-evaluative dimension)*: how they became who they are; who contributed to their current identity, personality and role; and, who represents their support as they teach and embrace a new policy – family, school, colleagues, students.

- *future aspirations and motivations* (projective dimension): what their expectations are; in which direction they are moving – career path, further studies; their multiple responsibilities; experiencing satisfaction and dissatisfaction with regard to teaching practice and students' performance and holistic development; challenges, fears and how they plan their future; and their aims, objectives and desires.

Thus, this activity triggered participants' memories and helped them to think about how they interpret their personal and professional experiences (see **Appendix 14** for samples of the *Tree of Life* activity).

Along with the biographical data sheet, this activity enabled me to immerse myself in the participants' lives and stories – to know them better and to understand what shapes their actions, decisions and choices. It was also interesting to note that personal and professional experiences were embedded as participants reflected on their life experiences. It should, however, be noted that most participants did not complete the *Tree of Life* diagram because of their hesitation to commit themselves to what they interpreted to be a judgement of their artistic drawing expertise, during the interview. Instead, I allowed them some time to write or discuss their interpretations of the different parts of the trigger stimulus diagram depicted above. I also used the information acquired through this activity to prompt further and ask more questions that did not necessarily figure in the interview schedules. For instance, a participant identified all the parts with her friend who had been very supportive as she went through some personal problems – for her, that friend is a crucial component of her professional success and satisfaction. Further questions were therefore asked about the problems she was facing, what initially constrained her actions and choices and how her friend helped her during that challenging situation. Thus, the diagram assisted me in writing three-dimensional narratives about my participants and this activity also allowed them to participate in the co-construction of the narrative record as they chose and interpreted ways in which they wanted to be represented. At the end of the activity I drew fruit and flowers on their *Tree of Life* and asked them how they would interpret those; this also yielded important information about what they interpret as rewarding. For some the reward involved their salaries while for others, it was their contribution to their students' future and performance. This activity was thus considered a valuable stimulus that allowed me as the researcher to immerse myself in the storied landscapes of the participants. It also created a relaxed and trustworthy environment where participants could share their personal stories.

- **Collage artefact stimulus**

During this activity, participants were asked to interpret collaged extracts related to the curriculum reform. I selected extracts from the NCYBE and NCF that relate to performativity, accountability, professional development and teaching strategies (related to the English language).

"teachers develop their own set of criteria depending on what they seek to achieve by the end of the lesson"

"Major steps will be taken to improve the quality of teaching by strengthening the professional development of teachers"

"Effectiveness in educational delivery is best ensured through a greater degree of autonomy to schools. With more responsibility for academic outcomes, schools will consequently have more management discretion to introduce new methods of teaching and learning, sometimes collaboratively with other schools in their Zones."

"in order to achieve the aims set by the English curriculum, teaching and learning should be more situated and adapted to meet the needs of our learners, for who English is often a foreign language."

"Educators …need to be prepared to deliver the curriculum effectively. They must be empowered to cope with students' learning demands, step into the digital learning environment…"

"every person in the system has to be held accountable for accomplishing her assigned task"

"teachers contextualise linguistic input by drawing from the different languages in the Mauritian environment and ensure social relevance."

"All Educators [teachers] will have a specified number of hours of professional development that will sustain their mastery of knowledge and enhance their pedagogical skills for the effective delivery of the curriculum"

Figure 11: Collage stimulus activity

The selected extracts prompted the participants' responses on teaching the new curriculum. They were asked to reflect on the collage and choose which extract they agreed and disagreed with. Each extract triggered experiences within the macro-policy and micro-institutional contexts and assisted them to reflect on their roles and identities as they experience a new reform and are expected to review their pedagogical beliefs and practices.

- *"In order to achieve the aims set by the English curriculum, teaching and learning should be more situated and adapted to meet the needs of our learners, for who English is often a foreign language"* (NCF 2017, p. 47) and *"teachers contextualise linguistic input by drawing from the different languages in the Mauritian environment and ensure*

social relevance" (ibid.) – both quotes refer to English teachers' choice of language and agency within a multilingual class as they transact a new curriculum. These include choices that they made to cater for the needs of students and the strong beliefs that dominated their practice such as the need to valorise the English language and to only use that language in class.

▪ *"every person in the system has to be held accountable for accomplishing her assigned task"* (NYCBE 2017, p. 14) – here the participants reflected on how accountability is infused in policy narratives. "Every person" can also be interpreted as not only teachers but may also include Rectors and management.

▪ *"Major steps will be taken to improve the quality of teaching by strengthening the professional development of teachers"* (NYCBE 2017, p. 12); *"All Educators [teachers] will have a specified number of hours of professional development that will sustain their mastery of knowledge and enhance their pedagogical skills for the effective delivery of the curriculum."* (NYCBE 2017, p. 25) and *"Educators ... need to be prepared to deliver the curriculum effectively. They must be empowered to cope with students' learning demands, step into the digital learning environment ..."* (NYCBE 2017, p. 11) – as highlighted in **chapter one**, many policy reforms have emphasised the need for professional development programmes to empower teachers to deliver the curriculum. This extract triggered the participants to reflect, interpret and react to the need for professional training as empowering, deprofessionalising or compulsory. The third quotation also indicates the policy objective of teachers using digital tools to respond to students' needs and a changing environment, which is important in understanding the extent to which teachers embrace changes or the extent to which, at times, their willingness is curtailed or reinforced by school infrastructure and support.

▪ *"Teachers develop their own set of criteria depending on what they seek to achieve by the end of the lesson"* (NCF 2017, p. 47) – here, the participants reflected on autonomy and their personal contribution to the implementation process.

▪ "*Effectiveness in educational delivery is best ensured through a greater degree of autonomy to schools. With more responsibility for academic outcomes, schools will consequently have more management discretion to introduce new methods of teaching*

and learning, sometimes collaboratively with other schools in their Zones" (NYCBE 2017, p. 14) – while the standardised textbooks ensure common fulfilment of the aims of the NYCBE reform, this quotation reflects a certain level of autonomy to cater for the needs of different types of students.

This collage activated the participants' reflection and assisted me in gaining a deeper understanding of the ways in which they represent themselves in times of reform. Furthermore, alongside the collage activity, I brought along copies of the NCF 2017 and NYCBE 2017 (some pages chosen at random). These policy documents triggered further responses about policy implementation and challenges. This activity brought out interesting revelations about how some participants confused the policy documents with the standardised textbooks, and most had not gone through the official policy documents prior to the interview. While it is expected that when a reform is introduced, teachers read and implement the policy document, it was revealed during the field work that their understanding of the reform is informed by the media, workshops and interaction with colleagues.

- **Artistic artefact stimulus activity**

This activity was carried out to collect personal data. The participants were asked to identify a poem that mirrors their experiences during the curriculum reform and to reflect on their choice. The activity enabled the participants to prompt their inner speech and take it outward to the researcher for feedback (Samaras, 2011). It should be noted that most participants did not select a poem, perhaps suggesting a limitation to artefact activities as they may be considered too time-consuming for participants who have busy work schedules. However, this problem was anticipated and participants that failed to select a poem were asked to present their interpretation of an ideal teacher through a drawing. Nevertheless, they showed resistance to drawing and during one interview (the first interview where the activity was conducted), when asked to draw, the participant asked me whether I had any poem in mind which she could refer to. Fortunately, I was proactive and had brought a set of five poems (see **Appendix 4)** that I chose at random based on poems that were being taught at school. There was a positive response as participants chose one or at times more poems from the selection to interpret and reflect on their professional roles and identities as they embraced a new reform. This activity was used during the last interview as it allowed participants to reflect on their stories and the ways in which they represented themselves as they narrated their experiences to me.

It should be noted that most of these activities, such as the choice of selected extracts for the collage and copies of policy documents, were chosen by me in order to guide participants' responses in relation to the focus of the study – the forces that influence agency and why they exercised agency in specific ways. As part of the co-construction of stories, the subjectivity and intrusion of the researcher cannot be ignored. However, the multiple artefact activities alongside the numerous methods of data collection ensured reliability and validity and reduced subjectivity as data was analysed and interpreted. Furthermore, these activities sought to enable added voice as the participant was involved in self-representation and an interpretation of her experiences. Silencing the voice of the participant would have given the researcher too much authority, and this could have led to increased subjectivity. These artefact stimulus activities prioritised the voice and interpretations of the participants in the construction and co-constriction of narratives.

3.2.2.3 Classroom observation

The classroom is an important space where teachers' interpretation and enactment of agency can be understood as this is where they are seen in action. As Connelly and Clandinin (2000) explain, in-classroom experiences comprise the forces and stories within the micro-institutional landscape and merge with policy expectations from the broader macro-policy landscapes. Therefore, classroom observations were carried out to serve as a trigger during interviews and the construction of narratives. As part of the narrative inquiry, I did not limit myself to the words of the participants, but immersed myself in their personal/professional space as they experienced and implemented the new curriculum (see **Appendix 5** for classroom observation template).

During the observation, I noted aspects that could be used to trigger further reflection on agentic choices from participants during the post-observation informal conversations or interviews. For instance, in response to the lack of interest among some learners in her classroom, one participant was using different strategies (including teacher tips from the standardised textbook) to ensure that learning was taking place. She used innovative strategies in the implementation of her lesson. However, when teaching Grade 9 students who were preparing for national examinations, this participant adopted different strategies – mainly examination-oriented activities. These varying observations of the same participant assisted in further probing during

the post-lesson interviews and informal conversations to understand why she adopted different ways of teaching and what explained her agentic actions. A discussion on my observations also allowed participants to reflect on their choices and actions that are at times unconsciously or tacitly selected.

Furthermore, through the classroom observations, I could enter the physical and private space of the participant as she exercised agency. That space was nevertheless, regulated by the school, the timetable and the number of minutes allocated for the class, and the number of students and classroom management which sometimes constrained the participant's agency. The ways in which the class was conducted revealed the influence of standardisation, degree of autonomy and micro-institutional regulations on teachers' agency. For instance, the choice of innovating and using new strategies to cater for students' needs that contrasts with the strict chalk and talk with an emphasis on quantity of work, is influenced by the expectations, intrusion and regulations of the school management and administration. Seeing the participants in action and how they use the space of the classroom to implement the curriculum and exercise their agency contributed to a better understanding of experiences shared during the interviews.

3.2.2.4 My reflective journals

The contribution and subjectivity of the narrative inquirer is part of the construction of stories and acknowledging one's positionality and reflecting on one's research journey can add more layers of interpretation to data gathered and analysed. Before, during and after interactions with the participants (interviews, informal conversations and classroom observations) I recorded my reflections. Through this activity I interpreted participants' stories and observations, and made and noted interpretations that I cross-checked with participants on our next meeting. In this way I decreased subjective biases and foregrounded the participants' voices in the co-construction of their shared stories. The reflective exercise also allowed me to step back and think about or look at the narratives; think about the intricacies, the silences, the reactions, actions and hesitation of the participants. It assisted me in going beyond what was observed to interpret what was heard and seen.

3.2.3 Refining the data generating tools: The pilot study

A pilot study was conducted prior to negotiating entry to the field in order to refine the interview schedules and fieldwork planning (Yin, 2011). The participant for the pilot study was a colleague – an English teacher from the school where I worked. She was chosen as she was teaching the English language to Grade 8 students, and was involved in the implementation of the new curriculum. Besides, I could conduct the interview with her during my free period which coincided with hers. It should be noted that permission had to be obtained from the school management – the school gatekeeper – in order to conduct the pilot study during working hours. As the Head of Department, I did not want to impose the pilot study on any teacher, and instead initially selected three teachers whose free periods coincided with mine and who were teaching lower secondary and were involved in the reform. The study was explained to them, but one was busy with corrections and work while the other showed hesitation. Their choices were respected, and this experience was helpful in preparing me for field negotiations and respecting participants' refusals, hesitation and fears of participating due to personal reasons.

Once the teacher agreed to participate, she was properly introduced to the study, and was given the informed consent form to sign. She had many questions, and my interaction with her was helpful in the familiarisation process with participants during fieldwork. I was thus able to anticipate possible questions or queries from participants in order to build a trustworthy relationship with them. Once the consent form was collected, she was mailed the biographical datasheet, and I requested that she mail it back to me at least a day before the first interview.

When I received the biographical datasheet and studied it, I realised that I could use some of the words in her description of herself to trigger further in-depth responses relating to her personal and professional experiences. Using this artefact as a triggering device had not occurred to me initially, but I decided to print and cut out five of the words that she had used – 'friendly', 'passionate', 'eager to learn', 'open-minded' and 'discipline'. Those were used during the interview to construct the participant's biographical profile and allow her to reflect on her own description and how it related to personal and professional experiences. She was asked which of these words she most identified herself with and why. What seemed simple descriptive words gave way to reflection and memory in the process of story construction.

Through this process I also realised the importance of being a "sympathetic listener" (Hitchcock & Hughes, 2003, p. 193) in order to engage empathetically (Fontana & Frey, 2005) with the participant. Instead of dominating the interview space, I allowed the interviewee sufficient space to offer insight into the phenomenon. At the end of the interview, I asked whether she wanted to add anything that I had not questioned her about, and she related an emotional experience in her previous school that contributed to her professional choices. I thus recognised that it was important to allow the participant to re-direct to other issues she considered important. The interview schedule was accordingly revised.

In reviewing the interview schedule for the pilot study, I also included a ***Tree of Life*** activity (adapted from Rodrigues et al., 2018) in this interview. The participant was asked to identify people or experiences that she could relate to the important components of her tree of life – the branches, trunk, leaves and roots. The information gathered contributed to the three-dimensional construction of the participant as someone whose experiences and, consequently, actions were influenced by past, present and future dimensions. This interview was recorded, and while listening to it, I realised that by respecting the participant's need for time to reflect, repeat some information, and share emotional experiences, I was able to harvest quality data in the study of teacher agency as personal and professional experiences comprise the iterational, practical-evaluative and projective dimensions highlighted in chapter two.

Before piloting the second interview schedule, I observed one of the participant's classes. I did not need to review the questions as such, but I realised that observing the 'teacher in action' in the classroom helped me to link my interview questions relating to the forces of the macro-policy context to strategies and materials used during the class. Moreover, the participant responded very well to the collage activity that was mailed to her beforehand. However, I realised the importance of numbering the collage items for better interaction with the participant during the interview.

Conducting the pilot study therefore, helped me in refining my interview schedules and in enhancing the skills required to conduct such interviews such as being an empathetic, patient listener who prioritises the participants' voices and stories.

3.2.4 Ensuring validity

It is important to ensure validity and reduce subjectivity when conducting qualitative research, as internal and external validity may be threatened due to wrong inferences made by researchers. Qualitative researchers should identity potential threats and plan how to address them. In qualitative life history research like this study, the researcher immerses himself/herself as an insider in the lives of the participants during the meaning-making process. The level of subjectivity thus cannot be denied. A further concern is the extent to which participants' experiences are accurately presented and interpreted by the researcher. The researcher's interpretations cannot be devoid of subjectivity; however, validity checks can be performed to ensure the most accurate interpretation and presentation of the data gathered.

The different validity checks discussed below were employed to ensure the validity of the data from different standpoints – the participants, the researcher and the reader (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

- As highlighted in the previous section, data was produced through multiple methods (interviews, artefact stimulus activities, classroom observations, informal conversations) over a period of six months in order to have prolonged engagement with the participants. The use of different types of data production, known as triangulation, is important in qualitative studies in order to ensure coherent thematic analysis (Creswell, 2014). The data generation methods included visual and oral data – different types of data that enhanced the construction of narrative representations of participants' experiences and their interpretations of agency.

- Interview transcripts were shared with the participants through member checks, so that they could indicate information they wanted to include or exclude. In life history research, trust should be built between the researcher and the participant and the participant's choice of self-presentation should be respected. For instance, at times during an interview, participants shared personal information that they did not wish to be used/revealed during the analysis and their wishes were respected. It is advised that member checks should be done with a polished version of the data (Creswell, 2014), such as a description or the narratives. However, I chose to conduct the member check

with the early representation of the interview transcript. I initially used pseudonyms[16] for each participant, but the form of representation partly arose from the need to safeguard their anonymity as despite the use of pseudonyms, participants and schools could have been identified. Moreover, as a narrative inquirer, I had to protect the identity and stories of my participants. Furthermore, due to the smallness of the island, many participants feared that they would be easily recognised, and school specificities were at times easily identifiable. Thus, the choice to do member checks with the interview transcripts rather than the dramatic representation. The choice of the final representation of the field data and validation of the ethnodrama are discussed further in chapter four, part one.

In order to establish transferability of data, I have provided thick descriptions of interviews, activities and classroom observations through tabular presentations and colour coding of emerging themes (see **Appendices 8, 9** and **10**). Interview transcripts, classroom observations and reflective journals were gradually tabulated while conducting field work, and recurring themes were identified and coded. These themes helped me in constructing the ethnodrama representation, from which other themes emerged through a grounded analysis approach (discussed in section 3.3).

- Subjectivity is part of the qualitative narrative inquiry methodology, but researchers should ensure that they do not allow their personal beliefs or practices to influence their interactions with participants. 'Empathic neutrality' (Patton, 2002) should be maintained despite insider positionality and this was attained by using different artefact activities that prioritised revelation and presentation of truths by the participants. As discussed earlier, my researcher's positionality was acknowledged at the beginning of the study as it is important to address issues relating to one's positionality in order to enhance the quality of research during data collection and production (Berger, 2013).

- In order to ensure credibility, peer debriefing was conducted with colleagues to confirm that interpretations of the data gathered were not influenced by insiderness and other

16 In conducting the research and transcribing the interviews, pseudonyms were used. However, for the ethnodrama, I chose to represent types of teachers rather than individual participants. I, therefore, used a different set of pseudonyms for the ethnodrama characters.

subjective opinions. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), peer debriefing is a "process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind" (p. 308). In this case, the 'disinterested peers' were two English language teachers – one teaching lower secondary and involved in the implementation of the reform and the other teaching upper secondary and not involved in the reform implementation at the time. These two teachers were given the dramatic representation to go through and their input and the discussion that followed helped in ensuring that insiderness and subjectivity were not influencing the representation.

The above means were adopted in order to ensure trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.2.5 Gaining entry to the field and upholding ethical considerations

Before accessing the field, I applied for ethical clearance from the University Ethics Committee and for gatekeepers' permission. Once ethical clearance was received (see **Appendix 1**), gatekeepers' letters (see **Appendix 2**) were sent.

In line with the purposive sampling discussed earlier, my study included two categories of schools – one regulated by the Ministry of Education (MoE) and one by the PSEA. For the state schools regulated by the MoE, letters were sent to the ministry with a list of geographically scattered schools, for "maximal variation" (Flick, 2009, p. 122) that fulfilled the criteria from the purposive sampling grid. For the PSEA regulated schools, letters were sent directly to the managing committees of individual private and confessional schools. Once access was granted, I visited the schools to meet the Rectors, explain the purpose of the study and lay a foundation of trust. In some cases, Rectors refused access as they did not want students or teachers to be distracted from school activities and assessment. It should be noted that some PSEA regulated schools also refused access due to the smallness of the island and the fear of leaking information about the school ethos or management. The same problem was encountered in some cases where the school granted access for research, but the participants were afraid to share information even though they were assured that confidentiality and anonymity would be respected. Some expressed fear and reacted pessimistically the moment they were told the

interviews would be recorded. Building a trustworthy bond between researcher and participant thus took time despite gatekeeper access being granted. Once contact was made with the Rector and then the Head of Department, I visited the participants and immersed myself in their professional spaces (staffrooms, classrooms or even having an informal conversation in the school garden) in order to create a strong trustworthy bond and to gain a better understanding of their professional experiences. Thus, when the interviews were conducted (before conducting the interviews, participants were given an informed consent form – see **Appendix 3**), the participants were more relaxed about sharing their life histories and experiences. However, it should be noted that the participants were chosen by the Rector or Head of Department; this may explain their fear of disclosing personal and professional information as they feared being monitored by a hierarchical authority. In some instances, the Rector or Head of Department pre-selected teachers for reasons they did not divulge to me. At times this caused participants to be fearful about divulging certain information. For instance, one participant hesitated during our first visit because she was worried that information provided during the interview would be shared with her Head of Department. Another teacher refused to participate because she apprehended losing her job. Hence, the choices of participants by authoritative figures like the Rector or Head of Department problematised trustworthiness. However, the fact that participants were reassured that the boundaries of ethics, confidentiality and anonymity would be adhered to, facilitated more open dialoguing during the interviews.

The participants' constant fear that their identity might be revealed, or that information shared might reach their superiors, motivated me to conduct research on a mode of representation of data that would ensure confidentiality and respect their identities. Hence, I constructed three emblematic characters (with fictitious names) to represent the six participants in an ethnodrama instead of writing their biographies (more details on the construction of the ethnodrama and its characters are provided in chapter four, part one). Moreover, during the member checks, participants were encouraged and empowered to choose the ways they wanted to represent themselves and to withhold any information that they were not at ease with. It should also be noted that participants' real names were not used during transcribing or analysis of data from classroom observation sheets and the reflective journal; instead, pseudonyms were given to each participant as follows: Miriam, Arpita, Vidousha, Mehreen, Khushi and Amelia.

Hence, my priority as the researcher was to ensure confidentiality and anonymity as I embarked on the construction of trustworthy relationships in order to better understand the multiple truths of the participants' personal and professional experiences.

3.3 Anticipating analysis

3.3.1 Recording data

Before entering the field, I planned different ways of recording data.

- Interviews were recorded and during the interviews, short handwritten notes were made. To ensure that no problem was encountered during interviews, I used two recording devices. It should be highlighted that written notes were not the priority and I chose to listen to and engage with participants' shared experiences and responses. However, following each interview, I recorded my views and reflections in a reflective journal. The interviews were then transcribed (see **Appendix 7** for a raw transcript prior to the cleaning process). The transcripts included facial expressions, hesitation[17], questions and other important reactions from the participants.

- Observation sheets were used to record the classroom observations (see **Appendices 5** and **9**). These included observation of the participant, the choices she made during her teaching, students' reactions, her focus, materials used, day and time of observation and my reflective notes during the observation. It should be noted that after the observation, informal conversations were conducted with participants to thicken reflections made during observation.

- I kept a reflective journal where I recorded observations and personal reflections during interactions with participants, and before and after meetings with them (on days when classroom observations or interviews were conducted).

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17 Facial expressions, hesitation and other reactions were noted during the interviews.

3.3.2 Analysing the data

3.3.2.1 Transcribing the data

After conducting the first interview, I personally transcribed it in order to familiarise myself thoroughly with the participant's story. I paid attention to the words, expressions, silences, pauses, hesitation, tone and facial expressions (that were noted as field notes during the interview). Transcribing is not a literal process of writing conversations; a transcription should assist the researcher in the creation of rounded storytellers (the participants) who are involved in the complex narration of past and present experiences, moving backwards and forwards (Clandinin, 2000) in time as they represent themselves through stories of their lives. In transcribing the first interview, I listened to the recording multiple times in order to familiarise myself with the data collected and to ensure that I was not missing important data or misinterpreting any idiosyncrasy. Once the transcription was complete, I read the transcript multiple times, and ensured that anonymity was respected by using pseudonyms instead of participants' real names, and by removing the names of schools or persons that could be easily identified. As noted earlier, participants mainly used the English language with rare occurrences of the Creole language; however, during the classroom observations and informal conversations, they sometimes shifted to Creole. Some also used Creole during their classes while responding to students' needs and to ensure that understanding was taking place. During the informal conversation, the shift to Creole may indicate a relaxed conversation where participants felt free to share their views and experiences. Therefore, while I did not face any translation challenges in transcribing the interviews, I ensured that the natural setting and language shifts are included in the representation of narratives.

3.3.2.2 Analysing the transcripts and data collected

I used **grounded theory analysis** which involves systematic steps (Corbin & Strauss, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to interpret the data collected.

- After data collection, I engaged in open coding with line-by-line interpretation of interview transcripts, reflective notes and classroom observation notes. This initial phase (level one) of **narrative analysis** involved a process of disassembling and reassembling (Yin, 2011) of data while working on the (co-construction of)

participants' narratives. Following transcription of the interviews, I tabulated the transcript and colour coded the data thematically. This representation helped me to analyse what new forces had been identified during the data gathering process. While some of the thematic categories (see **Appendix 8**) emanated from an *a priori* categories of forces identified in the existing literature in chapter two, the colour coding refining process also included categories emerging from the data with minimal *a priori* expectations (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

- Similar colour coding was employed for the classroom observation sheet and the reflective journal (see **Appendices 8, 9** and **10**). This initial analysis phase helped me to familiarise myself more with the data and to produce rich data by visiting and revisiting it, and by understanding the different layers of dialogue within the data sets.

- This led to the next phase of narrative analysis – the writing of narratives. I chose to write/represent the narratives – interpretations of data from interviews, classroom observations and reflective journal – through an ethnodrama (discussed in chapter four). Dramatic representations allow the researcher to present the overlapping past, present and future experiences of individuals. For instance, Lynn Becker Haber's *Playlet in Two Voices* (Clandinin, 2007) captures the teacher voice and observations of the student's behaviour. She presents classroom life as one that offers a possibility of understanding the present and the future. Vanover (2016) acknowledges that, unlike narratives, the ethnodrama allows the researcher to give voice and space to teachers to tell their own stories. Similarly, this "three-dimensionality-on-paper" (Clandinin, 2007, p.592) representation has allowed me to show the complexity of agency in times of change.

- In the next phase (level two), I conducted dramatic analysis of the first three acts of the ethnodrama. I undertook a cross-case **analysis of dramatic narratives** by using colour-coding to develop thematic categorisations emanating from similar and dissimilar experiences of the emblematic characters of the ethnodrama. I also included myself, the researcher, in this act to show the disruption and interpretations emanating from this cross-case analysis (elaborated in chapter four).

- After this second level of analysis, I moved to an **extended thematic analysis** by engaging with the themes emanating from the evaluative level two analysis. To thicken my analysis and to move towards a philosophical understanding of the phenomenon, I chose an **analytical framework** to assist further analysis.

These different levels of analysis assisted me in interpretations and abstractions of the data gathered and led to the philosophical conclusion of this study on teacher agency.

3.3.2.3 Representing the narratives

Writing the narratives was not an easy task. I had to stay true to the stories told and to ensure anonymity at the same time. Before choosing the form of representation, I thought about various ways to represent the narratives and to capture the participants' life history in a form that echoes the complexity of experiences that I came across as I conducted this research, the dynamic temporal and spatial forces and the multiple ways in which agency was exercised. Initially, I thought of representations through autobiographies that could capture the nuances of participants' experiences and give them a voice, using the first-person narrative. However, what emerged as dominant in my colour coding and analysis of the transcripts was the centrality of different types of spaces that were part of a teacher's reality – personal spaces (for instance, unregulated tuition space), the school environment, professional meeting spaces during professional development programmes, staffrooms and classrooms. I wanted these spaces to form part of the representation and it was difficult to represent them in autobiographies. Meanwhile, the autobiographies would be individually centred on the participants and I wanted to create fictitious characters who could not be identified in order to protect their identity. Reflections on the mode of representation led me to the dramatic representation (Knowles & Cole, 2008; Ely, 2007; Mattingly, 2007) through which I could fictionalise the characters – emblematic characters instead of providing biographical information about individual participants – and give them a voice that would realistically mirror their storied landscapes and experiences in a context of reform.

The drama format comprised temporal and spatial dimensions as the Acts move from one movement in time to another and as characters reflect on past, present and future dimensions related to their experiences. Clandinin (2007) observed that in drama representation, "the substance of the temporal happening, the contextualisation, offers readers layered, nuanced

pictures that make sense of often puzzling, complex events – pictures meant to trigger understandings, feelings, and considerations about past, present and future" (p. 590). Thus, the dramatic representation was seen as a representational form that would capture the teacher's ecology as her agency is impacted by a myriad of influences within the macro-policy and micro-institutional environment.

The dramatic script became a reflection of the data generated from the six participants, but compressed into three emblematic characters. While the dramatic script involved interpretations of data collected from the different data collection tools, some dialogues are taken from interview transcripts with minor changes so as to echo the voices of the participants while respecting anonymity. Even if the participants' individual traits and biographical experiences are not celebrated as individual life stories, the aggregation into emblematic characters creatively offered me the opportunity to present the intertwining life histories of teachers as they face similar struggles while negotiating their agency in a changing environment. Furthermore, the diversity of experiences is maintained as I interweave participants' words, actions and emotions in the construction of these characters. Hence, the presentation of the emblematic characters in the ethnodrama reflected my, the researcher's, interpretations (Polkinhorne, 1995; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) of 'lives as told' (Clandinin, 2013). Furthermore, while I tried to stay true to the multiple voices of my participants, the emblematic characters and the representational choice of the ethnodrama allowed me to use the personal pronoun 'I'. As the playwright, I show my presence in their layered, storied landscape (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Such involvement of the narrative inquirer in the construction of participants' stories in a drama representation is explained by Becker (1995),

> "'Becoming the other' or using the first-person pronoun 'I' helps me get beyond the limits of being in the 'researcher' mode. This kind of writing seems to be more honest in some ways than writing that aims to be 'objective'." (Clandinin, 2007, p. 592)

Hence, the dialoguing emblematic characters capture the nuanced storied landscape of teachers and also include my subjective interpretation of their stories as a narrative inquirer (the construction of multi-dimensional emblematic characters is further discussed in chapter four).

As explained by Clandinin (2007), the complexity of multi-dimensional spaces and the presentation of round characters could be achieved through this chosen representation,

"In its three-dimensionality-on-paper, drama can broaden understanding of themes, metathemes, contexts, social/political/cultural/economic surrounds, the players, the complex researcher, and the pulse of the story. Furthermore, the flow of time inherent in drama need not be linear but can dip back and forth between futures, pasts, and presents." (p. 592)

Indeed, this mode of representation assisted in my analysis of themes (autonomy, accountability, unregulated and regulated spaces, teacher emotions, etc.), subthemes (examination-oriented agency, empowerment, deprofessionalisation, etc.); understanding of what influences agency, how agency is influenced and why teachers exercise agency in specific ways; my reflection, growth and disruption as a researcher; and the temporal influences of past and present experiences and future motivations. It provided a nuanced understanding of the phenomenon and allowed me to conduct a descriptive and evaluative analysis to identify and abstract the themes emanating from the study. In chapter four, part one, I provide further justification for this chosen mode of representation.

3.4 Chapter synthesis

This chapter presented a justification and discussion of the methods chosen to conduct this study and to gather data in line with the designed theoretical framework in **chapter two**. While this chapter discussed the anticipated analytical process, the following one details the choice of representing the data through an ethnodrama. Thus, in chapter four I emphasise the representational choice of analysing the narratives – including both the study's descriptive and evaluative phases of analyses.

CHAPTER 4

Dramatic representation and analysis

4.0   Introduction

This chapter on the representation of the participants' stories comprises **three parts** in which I engage in a descriptive and evaluative analysis of data gathered through a dramatic representation. The first part introduces the ethnodrama *The Cockroach* and discusses the choice of representation. The second part comprises the ethnodrama script with a first description level of data analysis (Acts I to III) of the raw data produced in the study. This part also includes an evaluative cross-case analysis in the fourth Act of the drama. The third part outlines the extension of the analytical procedures towards further evaluative analysis as I engage in thematic clustering of the earlier descriptive drama script, *The Cockroach*. This is constituted as Act IV of the ethnodrama. It should be noted that Acts I to IV are part of the ethnodrama representation of the data collected and interpreted, while Act V in chapter six is a fictionalised Act that demonstrates the complexity of teacher agency in times of change.

Chapter overview

Each part of this tripartite chapter is prefaced with its own introduction, highlighting its focus, followed by an overview of the structure of the argumentation. **Part 1** may be considered as a justification for the choices made around ethnodrama as a representational device for analysis; **Part 2** presents the format of the ethnodrama as a descriptive representation of the field; and **Part 3** aims to refine more abstractly the themes that emerge from this representational form. The motivations for these representational choices as deepening analytical choices are elaborated in each part's introduction and overview.

Chapter three

Methodological

Research approach

Generating data

Ethical considerations and validity

Anticipating analysis

?

Representing and analysing data

Chapter four

Part 1

Choice of representation

Teacher agency within varied spatial realities

Title and structure of ethnodrama

Moving to a dramatic representation

Part 2

ETHNODRAMA *The Cockroach*

- Acts I-III: Descriptive analysis
- Act IV: Evaluative analysis (cross-case)

?

Themes emanating from ethnodrama?

Part 3

Further analysis DRAMATIC ANALYSIS

?

Which themes cut across the dramatic representation?

MOVING TOWARDS FURTHER ABSTRACTION

Figure 12: Orientation to chapter four

4.1 PART 1
Representing the participants' narratives through ethnodrama representation

4.1.1 Introduction to Part 1

Representation of participants' narratives is the core of narrative inquiry and helps explore themes related to the phenomenon under study (Ely, 2007; Mattingly, 2007). The process of representing participants' stories involves revisiting (Polkinghorne, 1995) transcripts and field notes. Representations should be an authentic (Germeten, 2013) interpretation and construction of the participants' complex life stories. Therefore, selecting the right form of narrative is a crucial analytical component that captures multiple layers of the participants' stories. In this chapter, I discuss the choice of a dramatic representation that captures the internal and external forces that influence teacher agency as they negotiate their roles within a changing macro-policy and broader sociological space.

Furthermore, the choice of an ethnodrama allows me to blend my researcher reflections with the participants' life histories in the co-construction of narratives. As observed by Clandinin (2013), narrative inquirers are not objective researchers; the researcher's interpretations and life stories are relational and embedded in those of the participants. I was deeply aware of my complicit (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) co-construction in activating the participants' reflections on their roles and conceptions of being a teacher as I negotiated the fieldwork for this study. I do not present my voice as an authoritative one that "detract from rather than add to the principal participants' stories" (Saldana, 2005, p. 19); instead, I create a 'three-dimensional space' (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2000) which valorises the participants' voices, experiences and stories. Thus, the first three descriptive Acts of my ethnodrama celebrate the participants' layered stories. At the same time, acknowledging my complicity, I create a space for my voice in the evaluative cross-case analysis in Act IV.

Part one is important in introducing and justifying the use of the ethnodrama as a representational mode to capture the complexity of teacher agency in changing times.

Overview of Part 1

Before engaging in the first and second levels of analysis in the following parts (Parts 2 and 3), I introduce the drama as a representative structuring device. The colour coding of transcripts and field notes helped me to identify forces that influence agency in times of reform. At the beginning of this part, I justify the choice of the ethnodrama as I situate the phenomenon within varied spatial realities. I then explain the choice of a title for the ethnodrama as it echoes the complexity of teacher experiences and agency as they negotiate their roles in a changing environment. In the last section, I shed light on the structure, characters and setting of the ethnodrama, before moving to the dramatic presentation of participants' stories in Part 2.

4.1.2 Teacher agency within varied spatial realities

As a representational mode, an ethnodrama was crafted to present a particular chosen time frame within educational curriculum reform processes in the Mauritian context. I chose to situate the ethnodrama within the second year of the recent reform, the NYCBE in Mauritius. This period allowed me, as the author/researcher of this ethnodrama, to provide a theoretical temporality which would have afforded the participants sufficient time to be exposed to the new reform, and to establish positionalities about its merits and constraints, and therefore be better able to articulate their levels of responsiveness, which is not a passive act, to the environmental educational space. The characters do not directly depict individual participants; instead, they are fictionalised abstractions that cumulatively represent voices inhabiting different spaces – the private schools, the confessional schools, the state secondary schools and shadow schooling (private tuitions). The dramatisation of the private tuition space in the ethnodrama emanates from data gathered during interviews where teachers compare their experiences at school to those of the private tuitions. Most participants referred to this private space which appear to be an important space that has influenced their past as students and their present as teachers.

This fictionalisation draws from raw data gathered in the field which points to key recurrent issues with regard to negotiating the curriculum reform space. Consequently, it allows me to blend facts (verbatim words from interview transcripts) and fiction (interpretation of the participants' narratives) in the representation of emblematic characters that negotiate these different spaces and whose agency is often a product of these spatial influences. The verbatim

words from the fieldwork phase are valued as they assist in the creation of authentic fully-rounded characters that are exercising agency in multiple ways within specific macro-policy and micro-institutional contexts. My intention was to imbue the textual representation of the narrative record with characters which appear credible to any reader within the macro-policy and micro-institutional spaces. The verbatim words also allow me to preserve the essence of the narrative environment and experiences of the storytellers (Spaulding, Banning, Harbour & Davies, 2009).

This new representational form constitutes an abstraction and a form of initial analysis that coheres the raw data into more cognate processed units that aggregate the social and spatial dimensions of the work contexts within which my participants worked. Aggregation further enabled me to protect the participants' anonymity, especially since any attention to individual specificities of the interviewed participants would easily be identifiable within a small island context where there is usually intimate knowledge of the unique characteristics of schooling contexts. Given that Mauritius only has approximately 400 secondary schools, any depiction of the specificity of contexts would undermine the confidentiality and anonymity promised to the participants. Yet, as the researcher, I was keen to acknowledge the contextual landscape of the schooling contexts which constituted a major influence on teacher agency; hence, the emblematic characters enable anonymity and confidentiality but also, more importantly, allowed me as the narrator of the ethnodrama to foreground matters of immediate contextual believability for readers of this thesis in the Mauritian context who could see themselves represented in the unfolding contextual spaces of credible depicted schooling environments.

Fictionalisation within an ethnodramatic representation was preferred to verbatim dramatic representation since the drama format highlights a dialogicality amongst interlocutors, valuing the experiences and voices. I also chose not to silence my own voice in this depiction and the drama format allowed my presence as a co-participating actor in the drama. Participants insisted that they should remain anonymous for fear of being identified as too overtly critical in a space where compliance in implementing policy dictates is, according to their worldview, the expected norm. I was also aware that the act of fictionalising and the construction of an ethnodrama mediated my researcher presence within the data production processes.

The choice of spatial contexts in the creation of this ethnodrama allows me to show that agency is not solely a product of the specific spaces within which the fieldwork data itself was

produced, since the aim is to elevate the fieldwork to locate it within broader theoretical landscapes. The landscapes are the worlds which the original participants reflected or commented on during data production. These connected spaces are reimagined in the construction of the drama space of the ethnodramatic representation. The space activates a conception of a framing rather than a deterministic environment within which to explore the phenomenon. The teachers' connections beyond the immediate specificities of space during fieldwork are also connected into complex spatial contexts which the ethnodrama aims to represent. These multi-layered spatialities (sometimes also spanning different temporal confines) which the ethnodrama flows into and out of, capture the encircling levels of space that surround teacher agency, experiences and practices. Constructing an ethnodrama thus entails a creative, elaborative project connecting the (parochial) fieldwork to broader (theoretical) spatialities. It is acknowledged that although the ethnodrama might appear at first glance to be a strongly "field-sensitive" endeavour, it is already a form of an initial level of analysis that embeds abstractions at a more theoretical level.

In the last Act of the opening drama (Act IV), I adopt a grounded approach to analysis to generate further levels of analysis by categorising and organising themes that emerge from the first three Acts. In this way, this second level of analysis is carried out through a data-driven approach where the fieldwork and the representative ethnodrama comprise the newly constituted data which are analysed with minimal *a priori* expectations from any imposed theoretical framework (Freeman, 1996; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The original literature and theoretical frameworks about teacher agency are temporarily suspended in order to resist 'theory-led' analysis and the confirmation of predetermined categories (McAdams, 2012). I again reflect on my representational choice of the analysis in this thesis when I choose how to conclude this innovative methodological representational form in the closing section of the thesis: the final Act V of the ethnodrama. Unlike Acts I to IV, Act V is not data-driven, but rather by the elaboration of the constructed thesis.

4.1.3 Choosing the title of the ethnodrama

I have chosen to name this ethnodrama, *The Cockroach*. The title was inspired by a poem that was used as part of an artefact activity during data collection. Many participants identified with this poem as a cockroach is described in a confused manner, experiences a sudden change and is also depicted as one that is unconsciously trapped in repetitive behaviour. Moreover, the title

echoes the disruption experienced by teachers as they exercise agency in changing times – disrupted teaching practices, beliefs and even conceptions of professional identity.

4.1.4 Structure of *The Cockroach*

The ethnodrama has been structured into four Acts, explained below. The table provides a brief introduction to the fictionalised characters:

Characters	Description
Maya	▪ A teacher who works in a privately-owned school in a rural area, regulated by the PSEA. She has been working as a teacher for 10 years.
Sara	▪ A teacher who works in a confessional Catholic school in an urban area, regulated by the PSEA. She has taught for 20 years.
Veena	▪ A teacher who works in a state secondary school in a rural area. She has been working as a teacher for 10 years and has worked in four different state secondary schools in different geographical areas.
Wedsha	▪ Researcher, introduced as chorus voice in Act IV.

Table 3: List of characters

Act I is an introduction to the characters' macro-policy context. Policy documents and the standardised MIE textbook are used as props to present the need to explore agency as an interaction between human (actors) and non-human (objects/ texts) elements, capturing the authenticity of teacher experiences during the reform. The three fictionalised emblematic characters, Sara, Maya and Veena, come from confessional, private and state schools, respectively. As co-teachers within a broader Mauritian educational landscape, they are brought together at a workshop organised for English teachers at the MIE. In line with the reform orientation of new policy imperatives, the MIE, which is the sole teacher education institution in the country, was mandated to oversee the strategy of familiarising the prospective implementers with the expectations of the new educational policy. The reform-related

workshop is chosen as a common space where these three characters from different school realities can meet and share their experiences and enactment of agency. The choice of the MIE as the location is very significant as, during the data production phase, it was noted that many participants equated the reform with the MIE, especially since the institution produced the reform documents and textbooks. Therefore, the location is strategic in that it reflects the micro-policy context and provides common terrain for the three characters to meet. During their interactions in this Act, the teachers, as dramatic agents, explain why they choose to exercise agency in specific ways. Act IV elaborates on the synthetic views of how they understand what these forces of influences are.

In Act II, as the setting shifts to an informal space, namely the canteen, the characters' discussion moves from the formalised macro-policy structures that enable or constrain their agency to personal experiences that have moulded them into their professional selves. They share anecdotes of the time when they were students; for instance, how their family members or peer teachers influenced them. These anecdotes assist in understanding teachers' professional identities and choices which shift across time and space(s), into various sources of influence of both a formal and informal character. Foregrounded in this Act are forces emanating from their micro-institutional spaces, suggesting that agency is a complex, nuanced, simultaneous interaction between macro-, meso- and micro-levels of engagement. It is acknowledged, therefore, that like all narrative construction, this ethnodrama constitutes a level of analysis already abstracting from the raw data produced in the field.

While the micro-institutional spaces are highlighted in Act II, Act III comprises three scenes with the characters in their classrooms. This representation was constructed based on classroom observations, interviews and informal conversations with the participants. The scenes juxtapose contrasting classroom spaces in which the characters are seen enacting agency. In addition to the regulated classroom spaces of formal schooling environments, this Act also presents the non-formal practices of private tutoring which constitutes a parallel kind of schooling/educational system that sits alongside the regulated formal system. Ever-present knowledge of the force of non-formal schooling emanates from data production where participants reflected on their own classroom practices being moderated by the culture of performativity. These levels of encircling systems are developed further in Act IV.

Saldana (2005) proposes different ways in which the researcher can be made part of the ethnodrama: as a leading character, the character's best friend, a chorus member, an offstage voice, an extra or a servant. He adds that despite reflexivity being an important component of qualitative research, the researcher "could detract from rather than add to the principal participants' stories" (Saldana, 2005, p. 19). However, it cannot be denied that the researcher is crucial in the co-construction of narratives when adopting a narrative inquiry methodology. As noted by Clandinin,

> "We are not objective inquirers. We are relational inquirers, attentive to the intersubjective, relational, embedded spaces in which lives are lived out. We do not stand metaphorically outside the inquiry but are part of the phenomenon under study." (Clandinin, 2013, p. 24)

I, therefore, deliberately chose to be part of this drama as a disrupted choral voice that offers a synthesis and reflection on emerging common themes. Act IV serves as **level two analysis** and I acknowledge my role as simultaneously data producer and data analyser in this representational product. This Act takes place on stage with the characters – Wedsha, Sara, Veena and Maya – entering and exiting the stage as a cross-case analysis is performed in the production of thematic categories. The tempo of this Act is a very fast one that captures the complexity of teacher agency, experiences and identities in a changing macro-policy context.

4.1.5 Cross-case analysis

The descriptive analysis, Acts I to III, was initiated by 'line-by-line' (Charmaz, 1990, 1994; Jeong, 2009) coding of the interview transcripts (including artefact activities), classroom observations notes and reflective journals (explained in chapter three). The categories or themes that emanated from this coding process were used in the construction of the ethnodrama representation. Consequently, as I engaged in hypothesis generation in my grounded analysis (Freeman, 1996), my emerging thematic categories were also influenced by some *a priori* categories from the initial colour coding discussed in chapter three. As stated by McAdams (2012), "researchers do not start out as clean slates" (pp. 18-19); however, the qualitative researcher should provide interpretations that go beyond "predetermined categories" (ibid.). Hence, I reflected further on themes emerging from the descriptive and evaluative acts, as discussed in Part 3, and prioritised my interpretations of the dramatic representations. I tabulated the emerging categories (see **Appendix 11**) and this process guided my extended level two analysis with a set of new literature to make sense of emerging themes. Sub-themes

were further refined (see **Appendices 12** and **13**) to develop the thematic clusters discussed in Part 3 of this chapter.

A synthesis and analysis of the thematic clusters emerging from Act IV and the discussion in Part 3 assisted me in constructing my analytical framework (Jeong, 2009) in chapter five.

4.2 PART 2
The Cockroach: Dramatic representation

4.2.1 Introduction to Part 2

In the previous part, I explained the choice of the ethnodrama to capture the complexity of teacher agency in a co-construction of narratives. In this part, I represent my first and second levels of analysis through the ethnodrama, *The Cockroach.*

As a narrative inquirer, I am interested in exploring "the stories people live and tell" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 17) and the dramatic representation of participants' narratives in this chapter allows me to enter their storied landscapes. As the participants reflected on interview questions and artefact activities, they revisited past experiences and their forward and backward movement in time gave rise to complex and multi-layered stories. Thus, to preserve the authenticity of the participants' stories, in the ethnodrama I deliberately present them as not coherent, stable, or rigid. These stories are transactional (Dewey, 1981; Clandinin, 2007) and I, therefore, locate them within dynamic spaces (macro-policy, micro-institutional, personal) within which stories are 'lived and told' (Clandinin, 2007). This representational choice allows me to situate three-dimensional (Clandinin, 2013) characters within a sociologically evolving space.

Instead of seeking a categorical cause and effect analysis, I show how teachers' voices and agencies fluidly intermingle in the complexity of human and non-human influences. There are dynamic and complex forces that influence, and trigger teacher agency and the analysis provided in this chapter highlights these personal, social, institutional and macro-environmental interactivities.

Overview of Part 2

This dramatic representation comprises the descriptive and evaluative analysis. The **first three Acts** constitute the first level analysis of participants' narratives while the **fourth** provides a cross-case analysis of the themes that emerged from the first level analysis. This cross-case dramatisation also allows the researcher's voice to mingle with the multiple perspectives and voices of the participants to reveal the complexity of agency and experiences.

4.2.2 *The Cockroach*

ACT I

This Act takes place in a classroom in the MIE building. Teachers are attending a workshop on English Language Teaching in the context of the NYCBE reform. Three teachers are seated (on the right side of the stage) around a table working on some activities.

The set comprises the teachers' table, chairs, some worksheets, a collage with quotes from policy documents[18], additional extracts from the policy documents, and some sheets of poems, the standardised MIE textbooks and a scheme of work belonging to one of the teachers. On the left side of the stage, there is a big rectangular table with chairs around it.

Maya: Wow… we are going to be here for a long time! [*sighs*]

Sara: Come on! At least we are having a workshop! Besides, we are already making friends [*smiles excitedly*]! Maybe we are going to learn something new! *Ki zot panse?*[19]

Maya: Are you fooling yourself? Something new? I went to the workshop for teachers working on the Extended Programme last time and it was everything that I had learnt during my PGCE. Nothing new….

Veena: I also attended that workshop. You're right; it was a waste of time. I haven't done my PGCE but still I found it very theoretical and …well, a waste of time. So, are you both teaching on the Extended Programme? I'm not; I just attended the workshop because my colleague couldn't.

Sara: I'm also the facilitator of the Extended Grade 7 at school. It's fun [*broad smile*].

Maya [*interrupts*]: The students cannot even speak or write English! They shouldn't even be at school!

Sara: I wouldn't say that! I cannot speak to them in English, and it's the first time in my career that I'm forced to use French and Creole in my class, but I'm happy helping these students.

Maya: In my school, English teachers are scolded if they are caught using other languages, but my students won't understand anything if I use only English! Do you think many students speak English at home? I believe that if you speak Creole they will understand better!

Veena: But Maya, we are English teachers! I've read some of the reform documents and if I'm not mistaken it is emphasised that we need to expose students to the language being taught. If

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18 See **Appendix 4** for the stimulus instrument used during the data production fieldwork.
19 Mauritian Kreol (MK); translated as "What do you think?"

I use Creole or Bhojpuri in class, students are going to write compositions with different languages. Trust me, some students do! They are already writing in abbreviated forms because they are too exposed to text messages and social media, now they use other languages in class! This will surely have a negative impact on their language development! And who will be responsible for their failure in English language? Me! The teacher!

Sara: I totally understand you. Even I correct compositions and face the same problems. I am ALSO strict about the use of English language. I generally tell my students to speak to me only in English but students on the Extended Programme are different.

Veena: I'm not saying I'm against use of other languages. I'll just share something with you, girls… When I joined my current school, I taught *Macbeth* and spoke only English during my teaching. Whenever I asked the students if they had understood, they nodded affirmatively. One day my Head of Department (HOD) called me and asked me what was happening with that class. I was surprised and told her how wonderful it was working with the students and that they understood the explanations. To my great disappointment, she told me that learning wasn't taking place and the students had complained about my class. That was a big shock! Actually, the students hadn't been able to follow my explanations because they were in English! After that I had no choice but to change my strategies, but still, I firmly believe that an English class should be conducted in English!

Maya: Well [*laughs*], try to speak English to some of my students!

Lights dim and the spotlight is on the left side of the stage as five students enter the stage and sit around the rectangular table. Maya moves to that table.

Student 1: Mis, ki pou fer zordi?[20]

Maya: We will continue where we stopped last time. Copy this sentence*: "They are sitting under the tree."*

Student 2: *Mis, redir*[21].

Maya: Zey are sitting under ze tree. [*Moves to the centre of the stage and speaks to the audience*] Did you hear that? I'm forced to speak like that in class. If I use correct English, they don't understand! What should I do? [*The students exit the stage. The spotlight follows Maya as she moves back to the activity table.*]

Maya [*addressing her colleagues*]: Anyway, what I like about teaching Extended class is that there are no examinations, no strict scheme of work and no correction of copybooks! [*Closes her eyes and smiles*]

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20 MK; translated as, "Miss, what will we do today?"
21 MK; translated as, "Miss, say it again."

Sara [*shakes her head disapprovingly*]: Maya, I cannot understand your mind-set. I believe teaching is a vocation, a passion…This is what is preached in my school. My students are my priority.

Veena: It's a vocation for me too but we cannot fool ourselves with an ideal picture of teaching either …

Sara [*interrupts Veena and changes the subject*]: I don't know about you girls but I'm so happy to be attending the workshop. The best part is that it's being conducted during the holidays. My priority is always my students and I hate it when there are workshops during school days! Why sacrifice my classes for workshops? Well, I should also confess that if the workshop had been held during the first or second term holidays then I might not have turned up. Teachers are not well paid in this country and you're not just teaching but also mothering, disciplining, policing and so on. So, I deserve my holidays!

[*Maya and Veena look at each other and smile*]

Veena: We totally agree with you on this one. We deserve our holidays!

Maya: Well, I also agree with something you said earlier, at least we are having a workshop. When we think about it, we do not have enough professional development workshops which really help us with our teaching [*shakes her head in disappointment*]. The same chalk and talk. I wish there were workshops that could make us more confident about our teaching strategies…more sharing…

Sara: Lucky me! At school we have regular reflection sessions among colleagues during which we share our strategies.

Maya: It's not only the sharing. I think we need to be updated about innovative teaching strategies and techniques which we can use in class today – the 21st century smart generation cannot be taught the way we were taught. My PGCE, which I completed five years back, was very theoretical and sometimes you ask yourself whether the lecturers are aware that what they are teaching cannot be applied in all school contexts. This workshop is the same thing…[*pause*] but I must admit that I have learnt certain things while speaking to you girls.

Veena [*smiles*]: So, you agree this workshop is not completely useless?

Maya: I still don't believe this workshop will help…whatever I will learn from this workshop will be of no use to my students and my school!

Sara [*tired of Maya's pessimism, attempts to change the subject by focusing on the activity that they were given*]**:** Hey, I think we need to complete this group work like good students! We have to produce a collage by choosing a quote from reform documents; the one we agree

with most and the one we disagree with …we can refer to the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) and the NYCBE documents. *C'est vraiment difficile*[22]…

Maya [*seems lost*]: Reform documents? Which documents?

[*Pause as the others look at her with a mixture of shock and surprise, while Maya is handling the documents. She seems to be seeing these for the first time.*]

Maya: But we can just check this MIE book [*holding the standardised textbook with a smile*].

Sara [*unable to understand her reaction*]*:* Why this book? The policy documents will help us with the aims and objectives of the reform.

Maya: But isn't it the same? Why read these bulky documents? Sorry, but if you were working at my school – a school that emphasises work, work, and work – you'd know that it's a waste of time to read these! I have more important things to do! [*Angry tone*]

[*Sara and Veena ignore her and have a look at the collage. Maya ends up looking at the collage, shakes her head in disapproval and utters "What?" many times while going through the extracts. Finally, she murmurs, "So unrealistic!" and turns to the poem extracts on another activity sheet.*]

Maya: *Ayo!*[23] I hate cockroaches!

Veena [*exclaims while Sara stares angrily at Maya for having disrupted her reflection on the quotes from the policy documents*]: WHAT?

Maya [*making a disgusted expression*]: This poem from Halligan, 'The Cockroach'…

Sara [*calmly, suppressing her anger*]: This is for the second activity, my dear.

Maya: What? Come on, it's just an activity, not an assessment. Relax and enjoy yourselves a bit. Hmm, I was reading this poem and…Oh, let me read some verses from the poem.

Veena: But we have to complete this activity…

Maya [*ignores Veena and reads the poem. Sara and Veena listen*]:

> *"I watched a giant cockroach start to pace,*
> *Skirting a ball of dust that rode the floor.*
> *At first he seemed quite satisfied to trace*

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22 French; translated as, "It's really tough"
23 MK; the expression is here used to show disgust.

A path between the wainscot and the door,
But soon he turned to jog in crooked rings,
Circling the rusty table leg and back,
And flipping right over to scratch his wings –
As if the victim of a mild attack
Of restlessness that worsened over time.
After a while, he climbed an open shelf
And stopped. He looked uncertain where to go.
Was this due payment for some vicious crime
A former life had led to? I don't know,
Except I thought I recognised myself."[24]

Veena: Hmm, I must say that it's a very interesting one. What were you thinking, Maya?

Maya [*smiles*]: You'll think I'm crazy, but … [*pauses, reflecting on the lines while staring at the poem*]. This cockroach is struggling, trying to find its way…This is similar to my experience as a teacher. I struggle to find means and ways to ensure my students understand and put into practice what they have studied. We are struggling to find OUR way during this reform. We don't have enough information about it. I feel helpless at times as students are also lost and confused, just like the cockroach. I really don't think that the best interests of these students have been taken into consideration for this reform! I wouldn't say it's a *'vicious cycle'*[25] as the poet puts it, but it's definitely an endless cycle where we are constantly looking for solutions.

Sara: I think we're all confused. [*Veena nods approvingly*]

Veena: But, at the same time, it's not the first time that we're going through a reform. Remember the Obeegadoo reform[26]?

Maya: *Enn lot reform ki pa'nn servi gran soz*[27].

Sara: *Ah, non, c'était une bonne réforme!*[28]

Veena [*continues*]: I had to shift to another school because my results were good and my parents had decided to move me to a 'better school'. But I faced adaptation difficulties. I couldn't make friends easily, I couldn't adapt to the new teachers, the way of working, the

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24 From a collection of poems in *Songs of Ourselves* (2005), p. 171.
25 She equates 'vicious crime' with 'vicious cycle'.
26 During that reform (2001) the focus was on regionalisation where students were allocated a secondary school that was within their geographical region in an attempt to decrease competition to secure a seat in a 'star school' (termed star schoo with regard to academic performance). In the process many schools were constructed and some were converted into form six schools (Grades 12 to 13). Many students changed schools if they had good results for their Cambridge School Certificate (Grade 11).
27 MK; translated as, "Another reform that did not bring much change".
28 French; translated as, "Oh no, it was a good reform."

pace…Oh my God! It was horrible! So, ya we're confused and showing hesitation but it's normal…we need to adapt to the changes.

Maya: I understand your point. We need to adapt and these changes will always take place but how can you adapt with something that you can't understand?

Veena: Maya, I'm sorry, but in the case of the current reform, if you go through the reform documents, maybe the aims and objectives will be clearer to you. I agree it is confusing to some extent and I was just thinking that it may be because we are used to a way of working and now, we are being asked to change.

Maya: Ok, if it's so simple, then how would you react to this quote, ***"every person in the system has to be held accountable for accomplishing her assigned task"***.

Sara: Ya, I saw that one…

Maya [*interrupts Sara*]: How can I be ACCOUNTABLE for something that is not clear to many people? Teachers, parents, students…so many people don't understand what the reform entails? Actually is there a reform? I am just teaching the way I was teaching during the last reform. I need to prepare my students for Cambridge and that's it! *Sa pann sanze avek reform*![29]

Sara: But, reform or not, you are accountable! As teachers we have to fulfil our duties and I think this is what is meant by "assigned tasks".

Veena: Right, I agree. We are being paid for the job, so…

Sara: So, I am accountable to parents, to students…

Maya: Hmm, to the school…

Veena: To ourselves, we are being paid for this job. If students fail, we fail…

Lights dim and there is a spotlight on the left hand side of the stage as Veena's Rector, a student and her parents enter the stage and sit around the rectangular table. Veena moves to that table.

Rector: Veena, this student has failed two terms and the parents are really upset.

Student's Mother: *Mo tifi inn dir mwa zot nek get fim*[30].

Veena: *Madam, c'est la classe de GP (General Paper), on regarde les films et on discute.*[31]

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29 MK; translated as, "That did not change with the reform!"
30 MK; translated as, "My daughter told me that they just watch films."
31 French; translated as, "Madam, it's the GP class, we watch the films and we discuss."

Student's Father: *Alor, ou pe fer ou travay, be kouma li'nn fel ankor?*[32]

Rector: *Monsieur et madame, je vous assure que Madame Veena fait de son mieux.*[33]

Veena [*to the student*]: You should work harder, my dear.

Student: But ma'am it's true. I haven't understood how to do a proper composition or how to answer those comprehension questions.

Exit the parents and student.

Rector: Veena, I'm not questioning your strategies, but remember, if students fail, we also fail.

Veena: I'll see how I can help her, Mr Sam. [*Veena moves back to the activity table as the spotlight shifts to that table and the Rector exits the stage.*]

Maya [*continues conversation*]*:* Ya, I'm being paid for the job. I go to class, conduct my lessons, correct students' work, prepare assessments, BUT I can't be the sole one accountable! Students are no longer interested in their studies. They don't read, they don't do their work; they are just on social media…

Sara: Wow, do you hate teaching?

Maya: What? No! I'm just realistic!

Veena: Sara, you cannot deny that many students are no longer interested in their studies. Maya, you mentioned technology and when I was going through the collage, this quote struck me, ***"Educators…need to be prepared to deliver the curriculum effectively. They must be empowered to cope with students' learning demands, step into the digital learning environment…"*** I'm someone who is really in favour of using technology…in fact even if mobile phones are banned in class, during my oral classes I often ask students to record themselves and critically assess their performance and you must see how excited they are while doing that exercise! Sometimes I even use my personal laptop to teach literature.

Maya: Stepping into the digital learning environment [*sarcastic tone*] …this is nonsense! I'm not even allowed to use my tablet in class! [*Mocking tone*] What provision is the government making for us to step into the digital environment? Actually, we have to do a complete reform – not of teachers, not of this NCF, but of schools, management…

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32 MK; translated as, "So, you are doing your job, then how did she fail again?"
33 French; translated as, "Sir and Madam, I assure you that Mrs Veena is trying her best."

Veena [*interrupts*]: SORRY Maya, that wasn't…hmm what I wanted to share is that when I read this quote I thought about the recent cases where students are filming teachers or other students being beaten in class. Do you think we are ready to help students to step into the digital environment? Technology is not being handled properly by this new generation.

Maya: Girls, you've heard about the recent case where a teacher was physically attacked by a student? How do we cope with this kind of student? [*Angrily*] I have students who always misbehave in class. How do I cater for their demands? In fact, that was my point; I refuse to be accountable…

Sara: I can't argue on these points. I think I'm just very happy where I work and teaching is my passion. I enjoy a certain freedom in my school and even during this reform we're free birds! When I saw this quote from the collage, I thought of my school, ***"Effectiveness in educational delivery is best ensured through a greater degree of autonomy to schools. With more responsibility for academic outcomes, schools will consequently have more management discretion to introduce new methods of teaching and learning, sometimes collaboratively with other schools in their zones."*** To me this autonomy, this freedom… [*pauses, searching for words*] … I really feel like a bird, [*laughs*] my wings aren't clipped.

Maya [*laughs mockingly*]*:* Oh my dear Sara, your wings aren't clipped, but some people have different experiences.

Veena: *Maya a raison*[34], Sara. I've worked in different state secondary schools and sometimes it depends on the Rector, Deputy Rector and others. Teaching is not a merry-go-round ride, but surely a roller coaster. There are changes in the syllabus, the intake of children, the curriculum, and, as a teacher, I need to constantly adapt. With the reform we need to meet the government's expectations…

Maya [*interrupts*]: AND the expectations of the school management in the case of private schools…Well, I don't care about the government's expectations; to me what matters is the school…I don't want to lose my job.

Sara: I'm sure it's different where you work but government's expectations matter when you have to prepare students for examinations – for NATIONAL examinations! We're still teaching the way we used to before the reform but in the end, we'll have to conform to the requirements of the examinations…

Veena: Do we have a choice? If students fail, teachers are blamed. So, like I said, we have to adapt to the new changes.

[*They all look at one another. Light fades. Curtains.*]

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34 French; translated as, "Maya is right".

ACT II

The teachers have been given 45 minutes' break. As the curtains open we see Veena, Maya and Sara eating at the canteen. They have coffee and some snacks in front of them and they seem to be engrossed in conversation.

Veena [*excitedly*]: I became a teacher because that was the only job I could dream of. With both mum and dad being teachers, well, I couldn't dream of anything else [*smiles broadly*].

Maya: I had no choice. It was not my dream job [*sad tone*]. When I'd completed my course at the university, I sold products from door to door and waited impatiently to get a proper job. I was SO frustrated! My parents were worried too. They thought that, with a degree in English, I would easily get a job. You know how the English language is perceived…

Veena: *Mo kone*[35]! At a point I was planning to do a degree in French, but my family was more in favour of English. The English language is so valued, yet it's true; it's not easy to get a job. You know, I was also doing a music course while I was studying for a degree in English and, when I completed my degree, I got a job as a music teacher first, then after a year…finally, I became an English teacher! Still, music is my passion. [*Smiles, thinking how she enjoys teaching music at home*]

Sara: My passion is teaching English! And counselling my students! I don't imagine myself in a different job…I'm a satisfied teacher [*laughs*].

Maya: I'm not a satisfied teacher. I do the job because I need the money. If I had the choice, I'd have preferred to be a lawyer [*smiles*].

Sara: But Maya, don't you enjoy teaching at all?

Maya: [*sighs*] I'm currently going through a hard time with my husband and my priority is not teaching. I'm sorry, but I'm questioning who I am [*laughs sarcastically*]. So, whether I like teaching? Hmm, I used to be more patient even if my school is very strict but lately I feel tired and fed up…[*pause*]

Sara: Sorry, I thought you hate teaching as you sound so pessimistic at times.

Maya [*instead of showing anger or disapproval, Maya smiles as she becomes nostalgic, thinking about her school days as a student*]: When I was a student, I enjoyed my English classes and there was one teacher, Mr Ryan. It was SUCH a pleasure to be in his class [*laughs, surprising the others with her sudden shift of mood*]! He was even helping students on Sundays. *Zot pou krwar*[36]? That's called passion! When I joined teaching, I used techniques I'd learnt

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35 MK; translated as, "I know!"
36 MK; translated as, "Can you believe that?"

from him in my class but… [*pause; tone suddenly changes to a sad one*] …it was useless. The students I had couldn't understand anything. Their level was too low. So, I had to forget the innovative techniques and use chalk and talk.

Veena: I've worked in many state secondary schools and it's true that sometimes we can't teach the way we were taught. The students simply don't respond.

Sara: My teachers didn't inspire me, but I had lecturers during my PGCE course who did. Some of them were so good! They came prepared, had PowerPoint presentations and had such confidence when they spoke! Wow! I was amazed by their professionalism and I adopted many of the strategies they'd used in their classes.

Veena: Oh, I won't say no teacher inspired me. In fact, I had an English teacher, Mr. Ajay. He taught us *Macbeth* and you just had to listen to him…those words and quotations still echo in my ears [*closes eyes and smiles*]. Actually, he is the one who influenced me to become an ENGLISH teacher.

Maya: I don't think we can be like the teachers we had. Students have changed and the level of indiscipline is worsening day by day. And, I'm sorry to say, but being an English teacher is no longer glamorous.

Veena: *Tu n'as pas tord*[37]. Ever since the introduction of Creole in primary schools, students are barely making any effort to speak English! When you ask them to try to express themselves in English, they ask you if they can speak French! But what about English? I try to expose them to reading by conducting a class library every Friday; I use songs in my class and give them the lyrics and we sing together…I've used so many strategies to help them. In fact, I even think that the activities from the MIE textbook are so interesting because they allow students to use English but then again, these students need to listen to the language and be more exposed! I even bring my laptop and speakers to class to use the CD[38] but… I wish the infrastructure at school was better.

Sara [*sympathising*]: Oh, Veena! Poor you! At my school we're so privileged! We even have a language lab! Our department is provided with a laptop and, above all, we have the support of the Rector!

[*Veena thinks about the state schools she has worked at and she envies Sara's situation.*]

Veena: Did you all attend the first workshop when the MIE books were introduced?

Sara: *Wi*[39].

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37 French; translated as, "You're right."
[38] A CD accompanies the MIE textbook for oral practice exercises.
39 French; translated as, "Yes."

Maya: I didn't. Are you all using the MIE textbook?

Veena: Isn't it compulsory? I wasn't aware that we had a choice…

Sara: Well, I don't believe I'll be preparing my students for examinations if I use that book ONLY! Yes, the school has prescribed it and we've[40] done SOME activities, but that's not the main textbook. We're using *Alter Grammar Practice*…

Veena: But I don't think the focus of this curriculum is grammar…[*pause*] but I'll not deny that we need some grammar practice. That's why, in my school, we're also using *Alter Grammar Practice* as a revision book.

Maya: At my school, we've definitely prescribed the book but we have TWO other books AND we've to give a lot of grammar homework. In fact, we rarely use the MIE textbook as it's loaded with activities and I can't manage an undisciplined class. I prefer not to do the activities!

Sara: I totally agree with you about the activities. I'm not against activities as I believe in the complete development of the child – academically, yes, but personality building is also important. Besides, I hate chalk and talk, BUT do you think the exams will be activity-based? We need grammar, we need writing, we don't need SO MANY activities! You think activities will prepare them for Cambridge SC (School Certificate) and HSC (Higher School Certificate)? The Cambridge exams are written papers, part from Oral English with a 12% weightage and students sometimes even skip that exam because they believe it's not important. So, we need to train students for Cambridge. They need a credit in English to get a good job![41]

Veena: I won't disagree about the importance of obtaining a credit but I don't really agree with you about the MIE textbook…I like the book, specially the literature textbook. It's well organised and I just go by the book.

Sara: I prefer to have the choice to choose a literature text which is appropriate for my students' needs! You know, in fact we've not changed anything at my school…*réforme, ou pas*[42]…we continue to teach with the same materials, the way we have been teaching!

Maya: Same here, nothing has changed! [*nods affirmatively*]

Veena: Well, I like the book. By the way, don't you use the CD from the textbook for oral practice?

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40 'We' refers to the department.
41 A credit is equivalent to 60% and the Public Service Commission and other institutions often demand a credit in English for some jobs in Mauritius.
42 French; translated as, "Reform, or not".

Maya: Veena, the aim is to teach them how to write! Why are you wasting your time with listening activities?

Sara: Come on, Maya. Think about oral skills which is one of our targets, and part of the Cambridge examinations. We have to prepare them for oral exams. AND it's also important to be tech savvy in this digital age. I even use WhatsApp groups to communicate with my students – sharing notes, revision exercises – at any time of the day! So, when I think about it, I am definitely not teaching the way I [*emphasis on 'I'*] was taught! [*laughs*]

Veena: Oh! I will not use my personal time, after school hours, for schoolwork! I need my break from school! So, no WhatsApp! Actually, I am already involved in the school PTA[43], helping students with Model United Nations competition, Spelling Bee Competition and so much more! I've set up a play for my students in order to help them improve their language and other skills, in line with the reform…Now, using my free time to continue teaching? No, way!

Sara: I agree, but technology…

Veena [*interrupting her*]: Technology? I used to work in another state school where I had to bring my laptop and my literature movies, but there was no Internet! So, how's the ministry helping? On top of that WE teachers are answerable to different stakeholders…when I set up that play, some students asked me if they were going to be assessed on the play. If you're doing something that's not examinable, parents will complain. It's complicated! We're compelled to teach in an exam-oriented manner.

Maya: The vicious cycle! Do we really have a choice? We try to innovate, we try to help, but at the end of the day, we need to explain why students have not worked well. Should we really go the extra mile?

Veena: To be frank, sometimes I'm confused. It's not like we don't try, but we don't get adequate support from school…you know, recently I went to the school library to make some photocopies on literary devices and some exercises for the Grade 7 students. Well, I was told that the photocopy machine was booked for some administrative purposes. After school hours, I went to do the photocopies on my own. I came back the next day and distributed the sheets. The problem was…most of the students did not pay…they could not pay…so…What I want to say is that when your school infrastructure and students limit your desire to do something, to fulfil the aims and objectives of the reform, then it's DISCOURAGING!

[*Sara's phone beeps. She receives a WhatsApp message from her colleague and smiles. As she is writing back to her colleague, Maya goes to buy another coffee. Veena looks around.*]

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[43] Parents Teachers Association

Sara [*still smiling*]: That was my colleague. We are preparing our common assessment question papers for next year and she's just uploaded it on our WhatsApp group.

Veena [*surprised*]: You text each other during holidays? To prepare question papers?

Sara [*happy and proud*]: Holidays, weekends, any time…we have a very strong bond in the English Department. Hmm, by preparing the question papers earlier we reduce the load of work for next year. It's a pleasure working in collaboration. We're not scared of reforms as we always help each other. We even do peer teaching. During our tea break we discuss our teaching practices and make sure that we are not lagging behind. Unfortunately, we don't have a common period on our timetable when we could discuss. The Rector was ready to help, but the PSEA wouldn't allow[44]… [*annoyed tone*].

Veena [*genuinely impressed*]: I'm impressed…you seem to be more friends than colleagues. *Alor, zot zwenn mem apre ler lekol*?[45]

Sara: *Ah, non*![46] After school hours, it's hectic! So many teachers have personal commitments. However, [*smiles*] sometimes we come to school very early in the morning…occasionally, we even skip the assembly. Recently we were strictly reprimanded as it's compulsory to attend the morning assembly. Never mind, then we had a department meeting during our lunch break [*broad smile*]! Oh! Sometimes, even teachers from other departments help.

Veena: I cannot imagine teachers from other departments helping in my school. Actually, teachers from other departments complain that English teachers are not doing enough, that's why students are not working well in other subjects too. So, with English as the medium of instruction and due to the pressure associated with Cambridge examinations, our department has so much pressure! [*Laughs mockingly*] Accountability is higher. It's as if we are responsible for the success of all departments!

Sara: Everybody should take his responsibility. You cannot be accountable for a student's lack of understanding of physics concepts for instance.

Veena: *Enfin*[47], teachers from other departments won't help; they're themselves complaining about their work load.

Sara: Well, I believe the work load is the same for everyone, but collaboration is important. For instance, this year I had help from the French department to teach my students the active and passive voices because it made more sense to them in French. When I get the opportunity to help in other departments, I also do [*looks very proud*].

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44 Timetables and the number of working hours are regulated by the PSEA.
45 MK; translated as, "So, do you even meet after school hours?"
46 MK; translated as; "Oh, no!"
47 French; translated as, "Well".

Veena: I don't know what to say…[*pause*]…I can't imagine being so involved. By the way, we also have common tests. It's important to make sure that everybody is teaching examinable components. We don't want some students complaining that a particular teacher hasn't completed that part and so on.

[*Maya comes back with her coffee*.]

Maya: What are you girls talking about?

Veena: Common assessments.

Maya: You also have common assessments?

Sara: Ya, I do [*Veena also nods affirmatively*].

Maya: Hmm, we have MANY common assessments. The school wants to make sure that we have work to correct [*looks disgusted as she thinks about her school*]. Let's say common assessment is equal to punishment [*laughs*].

Sara: At my school, it's part of the policy. We all decide what we want to include in the common paper.

Veena: And what about the HOD[48]? She doesn't impose her decisions when she checks the scripts?

Sara: We're a team and the HOD also is part of the team. We help one another with proof reading and she's here to guide, not to impose!

Veena [*appearing discouraged and confused*]: Our experiences as teachers differ so much. The same national aims and objectives, but we have different experiences in different schools.

Maya: Forget the national aims and objectives, we're teaching students for Cambridge and I'm sure you'll all agree that with each changing government, the education system undergoes changes.

Sara: I agree, the experimentation goes on, but what about the students? What about the teachers?

[*With these questions, lights dim. Curtains*.]

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48 Head of Department

ACT III

SCENE I

The curtains open with white smoke on the stage signalling a flashback as Maya remembers a day at school. This scene takes place in Maya's classroom with a Grade 8 class of 20 students. The walls are empty; a withering plant, a pencil case, a ruler, her scheme of work, two books and Maya's smartphone are on her table. Maya is writing on the whiteboard. Students are seated; some are writing in their copybooks and others are fighting (making a lot of noise). Maya does not seem to care and appears mechanically involved in her teaching.

Kelvina [*shouts*]*:* Hey, give me back my pen!

Avinash: Come and take it if you dare! [*laughs loudly; only a small group of students is trying to concentrate and is copying the notes that Maya is writing on the whiteboard.*]

Maya [*shouts*]: Stop it!

[*Silence in class.*]

Maya [*angry tone, looking furiously at the class*]: Always the same people disturbing the class! Avinash, stand up! I told you to write the explanation and examples in your copybook. We only have 20 minutes left before the bell goes. Bring your copybook to my table immediately!

[*Maya sits at her table to check the copybook. She writes in the copybook. The other students seem to be scared of her, but murmur and look around, lacking concentration. In the meantime, the Rector is walking outside the classroom and peeps inside. Maya becomes more conscious but continues her correction. The Rector enters the classroom; he is greeted by the students who immediately turn silent and Maya stands up. The Rector stands in front of the class and scolds Maya.*]

Rector: Why is your phone on the table? Don't you know that you're not supposed to bring or use your phone in class? I think it was made clear by the school management that teachers will not bring their phones in class. If you use your phone in class, how will you concentrate on your teaching?

Maya: But I was going to use the phone for…

Rector [*interrupting Maya*]: For what? Texting? Calling? What are you teaching to the students? You should be a role model!

Maya: But…

Rector [*interrupting her again*]: I don't want to listen to your 'buts', rules are rules. So, no phone in class! [*Tone rising.*]

[*The Rector moves to the centre of the stage with a spotlight on him. He speaks to the audience.*]

Rector*:* I'm answerable to the management and I should make sure that the teachers are not using their phones in class. It's not that I'm happy with these excessive rules and regulations but I'm accountable to the management when there are failures. Besides, it's difficult for me to know who's using his phone or laptop for personal work and who's using it for teaching. So, it's simpler to ban phones and laptops in class.

[*The spotlight dims as the Rector moves back to where he was during his interaction with Maya.*]

Maya: I was going to use my phone to ask them to listen to a song and…

Rector: A song? Do you think the class is for entertainment?

Maya [*tired and helpless*]: I am sorry.

Rector: Now start doing some serious work.

[*The Rector leaves the classroom and exits the stage. Maya sits down, looks at the student's copybook and screams at the student.*]

Maya: I want to see the signature of your parents in this copybook tomorrow! Is that clear?

Avinash [*fearlessly*]: *Wii, Mis*[49]. [*He walks back to his chair and smiles at his friends. He demonstrates no respect for the teacher's authority.*]

Maya: No respect or shame! [*Shakes her head to express her disapproval and dissatisfaction*]

Shania [*hesitant*]: Miss.

Maya: Yes.

Shania: Miss, I don't understand the word 'gla, gla gla-moo-'.

Maya [*stands up immediately and picks her ruler*]: What? I need to explain every little thing again and again. [*Uses the ruler to point at the sentence and reads aloud*] 'Rita wore a glamorous dress.' Glamorous means stylish, beautiful, 'zoli' [*translating beautiful in Creole to have an affirmative reaction from Shania*] Ok? Hurry up kids as we need to correct Exercise 2 on Adjectives and then you will leave your copybooks for me to check whether you are doing all your homework and classwork.

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49 MK; translated as, "Yes, Miss."

Dan [*yawning and talking at the same time*]: *Misss, pa p konpran*[50]! What it is, an adjective?

Kelvina [*frustrated*]: Miss I do not find the adjective in this sentence....

[*It is 2.30 p.m., the last bell rings and the students scramble out of the classroom.*]

Maya [*moves to the middle of the stage and addresses the audience*]: No respect, no greetings. Is this called teaching? Teaching is not my dream job…I'm not passionate about teaching [*pause and feeling dejected*] … With pressure from school, time constraints due to the timetable, with a difficult home environment, with changing curriculum and examination pressure… [*Breathing heavily, suffocating, closes eyes*]. My personal problems pressurise me further, I'm unhappy at home, unhappy at work… [*failing voice*] I am verbally abused at home and in turn I verbally abuse my students…what am I doing? Why? I'm tired. [*Points at the plant on her table*] I'm like this plant. The plant needs sunshine and water, otherwise it will wither. That's exactly what is happening to me! I'm withering in this school and I must admit, my chaotic personal life is also contributing to my state! How I wish I could work as I do during tuitions[51] at home! [*heavy sigh*] I'm so free and comfortable at home.

[*Maya exits stage. Six new students, dressed in different school uniforms, enter the classroom. There is a shift from Maya's classroom at school to her private tuition classroom at home. The Grade 9 students take their seats and start working in groups. After some minutes Maya enters the stage, casually dressed, carrying her laptop and some books. Her phone is still on her table; she puts her books on the scheme of work so that it is no longer visible to the audience. She has a broad smile and seems very happy.*]

Maya: Hi, everyone.

Students: Good afternoon, Miss.

Neila: How was your day, Miss?

Maya: Oh, as usual; tiring! But, now my day is brightening [*smiles broadly*]. So, have you done your work?

Ram: We had some difficulties, but fortunately, you sent us those worksheets and notes on WhatsApp. The notes are very helpful!

Amelia: Indeed! I could easily complete the homework with those notes! In fact, I also used the link you attached. The notes are very clear. Thanks, Miss.

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50 MK; translated as, "Miss, I don't understand!"
51 Giving private tuition after school hours is a common practice in the Mauritian context.

Maya: You're welcome, Amelia. I have downloaded a song on my phone. We'll listen to that first, then… [*two students are talking and not following her instructions*] …hmm, Rita and Gary, please follow kids.

Rita and Gary: Sorry, Miss.

Maya: So, I want you to listen carefully to the song. Pay attention to the rhyme scheme and choice of words. After listening to the song, we'll have a PowerPoint presentation on stylistic devices. If you have questions, note them down, you may ask me after the song. Shall we start?

Students: Yes, Miss!

[*Lights dim with Maya enjoying her teaching. Curtains.*]

SCENE 2

This scene opens with a Grade 8 classroom with 30 students. Students are pasting posters on the walls – each group has written a paragraph on a question set by the teacher and they are pasting their posters excitedly, laughing and commenting on their friends' posters. It's 8.30 a.m., the first period of the day. Sara enters her classroom, carrying a laptop bag, and another bag with her speakers, markers and other materials. She looks tired, but enthusiastic. She is greeted by the class. Some students volunteer to help her connect her digital equipment. After around five minutes the class settles down with students being seated in small groups of five.

Sara*:* I want to see some smartphones on the table, check your notes on the edmodo website where I've shared notes with you.

Kelly: Miss, we have only two phones on our tables.

Rami: Miss, no Internet connection…hmm we've got three phones with mobile data in my group.

Sara: It's fine. As long as the group is able to follow.

Kareena [*shyly*]: Miss, if the Rector catches us using the phone…

Sara [*interrupting her*]: Come on! It's not the first time we're using digital support…phones aren't allowed for your own benefit, so that you concentrate on your studies. Here we're using the phones for teaching. Understand, Kareena? Don't worry, that's my responsibility, if the Rector asks anything I'll explain…

Kareena: Ok, Miss.

[*Sara recaps the previous class, gives instructions to the students. She walks around and checks the posters; she adopts a friendly attitude but scolds students when something is wrongly done. In the meantime, the crowded class is booming with noise.*]

Sara [*speaks assertively; raising her tone*]: You're here to work, so stop talking and work!

Some students [*together*]: Sorry, Miss.

Sara: We don't have the whole day. We have only two periods that are shortened because of the long break[52]. So, please concentrate and work!

[*Students work silently.*]

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52 Long lunch break shortened due to a staff meeting.

Sara: Now that you've successfully completed this task, let's discuss the strengths and weaknesses of your composition.

[*She opens her laptop – the laptop belongs to the department and was provided by the Rector. At the beginning of the class, the students connected her projector. She projects a PowerPoint chart with the strengths and weaknesses highlighted.*]

Sara: You can see that most of you had difficulties in introducing your composition. It's a narrative composition, be more creative…avoid clichéd beginnings.

[**Kareena** is taking a picture of the slide.]

Sara: Kareena, what are you doing again? Follow my class kid…I'll mail you this presentation!

Kareena: Sorry, Miss. I'd some Internet problems at home, that's why…

Sara: Ok, those who wish to take pictures may, but please do it discretely. The others, don't worry, I will mail the presentation to you as usual. Let's continue…

Sharon: Miss, *j'ai pas compris quelque chose*[53].

Sara [*firmly*]: How many times have I told you to use English? Try my dear. If you don't try, how will you be ready for oral examinations in two years[54]?

Sharon: Sorry, Miss. Hmm, I…I haven't understand…

Sara: Understood… [*some students are murmuring and laughing in a group; Sara reprimands them*] …Didier and group! Follow the class or I'll send you to the Rector's office! [*The students apologise and keep quiet*]. So, Sharon?

Sharon [*smiles*]: Yes, I haven't understood.

Sara: See, this is called trying!

[*Sara continues her class. Five minutes before the class ends, she informs the students that they will have a common assessment the following week and they are given some homework from a grammar book. The bell goes; some students help her to pack her equipment and some remove the posters from the walls. Lights dim. Curtains.*]

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53 French; translated as, "I haven't understood something".
54 Referring to the Cambridge Oral examinations for O level students (Grades 10-11).

SCENE 3

This scene opens with a classroom of 40 students. It's the third period (after the short break). Some students are eating, some are talking, and others are completing their homework (to be corrected in some minutes). Veena enters the classroom (carrying her MIE literature book and her pencil case) and greets the class. Some students stand up and greet her, while others continue what they are doing. Veena is angry; she raises her voice and asks everybody to stand. The class settles down and tries to concentrate.

Veena*:* Today we'll continue the poem, *The Grass Cutter*. You were asked to draw what you've understood from the poem. Put your drawing on the table. [*She walks around and checks the students' work; complimenting some of them. Those who haven't completed their work are scolded*.] Who wants to come in front of the class and explain her drawing? [*No response from the class*] If nobody volunteers, I will choose someone from the class.

Deepshika: What do we need to do, Miss?

Veena: Explain why you have represented the poem by…

Deepshika [*enthusiastically; interrupting Veena*]: Ok, Miss. I'll explain mine.

Veena: Ok, Deepshika.

[*Veena helps her to paste her drawing on the whiteboard. Deepshika explains her drawing, but faces some difficulties as she struggles to find the right words to do so.*]

Veena: Let me help you, Deepshika. So, you [*speaking to the class and pointing at the drawing*] can see that she's drawn mountains, rivers, birds and even big trees. This is a beautiful representation of nature. Right, Deepshika? Can you tell why you drew all these?

Deepshika: Hmm, to show where they are.

Veena: They, who?

Deepshika: Miss, the boy and the girl.

Veena: And what do we call them in literature, girls?

Neha: Characters, miss!

Veena: Exactly, well done! Now, I will ask the class some questions.

Donna [*sitting right at the back*]: Miss, I can't see the drawing.

Veena: Those at the back, please bring your chairs in front if you can't follow. [*Some students show no interest and stay at the back. Veena prefers to ignore them and continue her class.*]

Veena [*aside; to the audience*[55]]: A class of 40 students! We were promised fewer students per class by the Ministry. When the promise wasn't fulfilled, my colleagues and I complained about the class size to the management and to the ministry, but nothing has been done! How am I expected to teach these students and make sure that learning is taking place? If I reprimand those at the back, those who want to study will be penalised. What do I do? [*Desperate tone*]

[*Veena moves to her desk. Some students bring their drawings to her. She corrects these and gives them feedback. Someone interrupts the class.*]

Messenger from administration: *Madam, bannla pe rod ou dan biro*[56].

Veena [*distracted from her work*]: *Hmm, pou ki zafer*[57]?

Messenger: *PTA, madam. Ena renion zordi tanto*[58].

Veena: *Wi, kan klas fini mo vini*[59].

Messenger: *Madam zot bizin ou deswit*[60].

Veena [*exasperated, but smiles*]: *Ok, mo pe vini*[61].

[*Exit Messenger.*]

[*Veena goes to the whiteboard, writes classwork on the board and addresses the students*].

Veena: Work on the following while I go to the office.

Neha: But, Miss, the bell will go soon.

Veena: Then start working and complete it as homework.

Veena exits classroom.

[*Lights dim. Curtains.*]

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55 During this aside, the students can no longer be heard.
56 MK, translated as, "Madam, they need you in the office."
57 MK, translated as, "Hmm, for what?"
58 MK, translated as, "For PTA, Madam. There's a meeting this afternoon."
59 MK, translated as, "Yes, when the class is over, I'll come."
60 MK, translated as, "Madam, they need you immediately."
61 MK, translated as, "Ok, I'm coming."

ACT IV

In this scene, the researcher, Wedsha, addresses the audience. When the curtains open, she is standing in the centre of the stage wearing a white dress. Wedsha's eyes are closed. Sara, Veena and Maya, wearing black robes, are seen running across the stage in different directions; thus, creating an unsettling opening for the audience. The stage becomes dark and only Wedsha can be seen in the spotlight. She opens her eyes and addresses the audience.

Wedsha: Teachers' decisions, choices, actions…in a time of change as they're transacting a new curriculum, why do teachers act the way they do? There are so many forces influencing them…too many! Where should I start…[*silence*]…**results**! Why are teachers so preoccupied with results?

The voices of Sara, Veena and Maya can be heard as the spotlight moves from one character to another in a frenzied manner. Wedsha is still in the centre of the stage and looks distracted as she looks in different directions to listen to the different voices.

Veena: Come on, we work for the results!

Maya: My students should succeed in their exams.

Sara: We have to produce results!

Veena: The education system has always been exam-oriented.

Maya: We're accountable!

Veena: We plan our work and EXECUTE accordingly.

Sara: We don't execute, we TEACH!

Wedsha: Why are they so exam-oriented? Is it the school's expectations? The ministry? Parents? [*Maya, Sara and Veena come forward on the stage and they address each other and the audience.*]

Sara: The SC results weren't so good in my school and we're currently facing a lot of pressure. We need to develop new strategies and conduct more assessments to improve results.

Maya: I'm so tormented by my own problems that I can't imagine myself giving much time to my students. Last year I even asked some of them to come for revision classes at home and I wasn't charging them as some couldn't afford to pay. My point is: I wasn't helping them because I wanted them to pass their exams, but mostly because I care for their future and I want to see them successful – have a good job and be respectful…

Veena: You can't deny that we're currently working in a product-oriented way. We have to produce results!

Sara: It's true! This has always been my philosophy. I want my students to leave school with a personality that will help them in their work, family life… I want my students to develop various skills, such as writing skills, which will help them in the future. At the same time, my school is like my home and I care about its reputation. Failure rates will have a negative impact on my school and I can't accept that!

[*Silence. Exit Sara, Maya and Veena.*]

Wedsha [*addresses the audience*]: When we listened to these teachers earlier, we understood that the school and relationships with colleagues or other stakeholders within that **school environment** seems to mould their professional identity. At the same time, **private tuition** is providing an unregulated space for teachers like Maya…but, the shadow of **accountability** persists even in this 'free' space. **Different teaching spaces**, different reactions! Then, do the schools where these teachers work make a difference in the way they work?

[*Suddenly, Maya's voice is heard and the spotlight follows her as she enters the stage. The spotlight shifts to the other characters as they address the audience.*]

Maya: Yes, it does! I've been working in a school which functions like a form of dictatorship. We don't have a voice, we can't question anything and we are always reprimanded. So, that's sometimes discouraging. Besides, the load of work and being scolded because you are SUPPOSEDLY responsible for students' failure... YES, your place of work makes a difference. BUT I don't think it's only the school. Look at me, I'm aware that my personal problems are frustrating me and I can't give myself fully to my work. It's not just the school…

Sara: She's right. My daughter is currently doing Grade 11 and much of my time is spent helping her for that Cambridge School Certificate exam. I'm not able to help my students as I used to because I'm constantly tired and worried for my daughter.

Veena: I'm sure there are so many other things that influence our way of thinking, but we can't deny that the school and especially this exam-oriented structure controls the way we act, behave or think!

Maya: We have to embrace changes. I don't think we have a choice. And, my school still functions in the same way. I don't expect it to change unless the management changes! We continue to teach the way we have been teaching. But, yes, I'm investing a lot of time in my tuition. I need to prepare my students for their national examinations AND the Cambridge examinations! At least there I can teach the way I want to teach…no restrictions, no strict scheme of work, no Maya you can't do this or you can't do that…Well, at work I can't go against my Rector, I still need my job!

Veena: Sometimes we prefer not to voice our thoughts to Rectors or Deputy Rectors, because we choose to stay in our comfort zone and because some of us have financial commitments.

Sara: My school allows us the space to voice but I won't go against them…I need my job too. I need to save money for my daughter's future! Besides, I never face any problem there. I have the freedom to use strategies that I want…

[*Silence. The spotlight moves back to Wedsha who addresses the audience.*]

Wedsha: They're facing so much pressure. However, some teachers enjoy a free space to act within a school that supports their agentic choices. Still, accountability exerts pressure on them. They are **accountable** to the government, to the institution where they work and also the language they are teaching. Does **teaching the English language**, a core subject and a global language, motivate active agency?

[*Spotlight shifts to the characters as they answer Wedsha's question.*]

Veena: Are the way we act and the decisions we make related to the subject we are teaching? Well, take the results in English for Cambridge, it's worse than last year, why? Because students are no longer interested in reading. There's no reading culture! When I correct compositions sometimes I question my own teaching! They can't write proper English. On top of that, I have to do remedial work if a student fails in other subjects that are taught in English. Sorry, English isn't a privilege even if I love the subject, or I love TEACHING the subject!

Sara: You know what's the irony? Students are more exposed to the language than we were but still...it's true, students' performance in the language is deteriorating…it's sad, ten years back, before this digital craze, it was such a pleasure teaching English AND correcting those compositions…

Maya: English, I love teaching English…I try to teach the way I was taught, make my students love the language the way I did, but it's a challenge. Sometimes I'm discouraged, but sometimes I find myself working on multiple ways to teach this beautiful language.

[*Characters exit. Spotlight shifts to Wedsha.*]

Wedsha: So, teaching English is not merely constraining teachers. Some teachers are actively involved despite the changing socio-cultural environment or the prevalence of a **digital culture**. Hmm, the digital culture…is it so bad? I'm sure it can assist teachers in the implementation of a new curriculum. There's a range of tools and strategies that can be used to enhance learning. Instead of reading Shakespeare, students can watch a Shakespeare movie and understand stage directions much better than while reading. I think that digital support MUST be used if we really want the attention of this new generation.

[*Spotlight moves to each character who addresses the audience.*]

Veena [*enters the stage and addresses the audience*]: Students switch off very easily when you use chalk and talk. Sometimes, I feel like I'm the only one talking in class. But, for instance, last time we listened to a song together and commented on the song…you should have seen their enthusiasm!

Wedsha: So, it helps… [*interrupted by Maya's voice as she enters the stage*].

Maya*: Is using digital support a choice? I use digital support in my tuition but at school I limit myself to chalk and talk. I don't have a choice as I'm closely monitored. Well, not only me, but all the teachers. But, I'm not against technology …and that doesn't stop me from using it in my teaching. Recently I created a WhatsApp group for my school students. We shared Cambridge papers, answer key questions and so on. If the school knows I'll be severely reprimanded, but I'm not doing anything wrong and the proof is I never engage in any personal conversation with the students. It's purely professional!

Wedsha: Choices are influenced by the school environment, not only a personal desire or willingness. So, is the school so constraining?

Sara: I can't imagine teaching without digital support. It's not only the demands of the students, whom we are calling the new generation, but I believe that we should also evolve with the demands of the time. We live in a digital era too, not only students. Therefore, I refuse to restrict my teaching to the way I was taught, THAT IS, chalk and talk! Besides, unlike certain schools, in my school we welcome evolution! The school has invested so much in laptops, recently projectors, a language laboratory, audio-visual room…so it'll be ungrateful on our part, as teachers, if we shun technological support!

Veena [*addresses Sara*]: If the school infrastructure supports digital evolution, then why not! But if your school limits the use because it's costly or for whichever reason, then it's frustrating because many teachers want to use digital assistance…but…

Maya [*interrupts Veena*]: Do parents expect us to use digital support? If you use digital support, they may complain that the work is not being done. Just like my Rector, Deputy Rector or Manager, parents also expect that you chalk and talk, correct work, give assessment, give results and make sure that the students pass. So, are we not limited due to the intrusion of these various stakeholders?

Wedsha: The decision to act the way they are acting is not a simple choice. There are so many barriers…infrastructure, stakeholders, personal choices and…what about **professional workshops**? I'm sure those workshops equip teachers to embrace digital support. They are empowered by these workshops…or… do they perceive them as unimportant?

[*Maya, Sara and Veena address each other, creating the atmosphere previously prevailing during the workshop. They display an intimacy that reflects their shared experiences.*]

Veena: That workshop was the usual one… we did learn certain things. Unfortunately, as usual you can't use those techniques in class.

Sara: As usual? Sorry, Veena, but my PGCE or some professional workshops have contributed a lot to the way I teach. I think, theoretical or not, we can't deny the importance of these workshops, especially, when you're having a reform…

Veena: But, Sara, even if you attend a workshop and understand all the aims and objectives of the reform, the aim is still examinations, students' performance, and so on. So, what was interesting was that the workshop allowed us to share our experiences. We realised that we were going through some similar confusion or problems and…

Sara: And we became good friends! We stay in contact and help each other…we share notes, discuss teaching techniques…so, it wasn't useless! I like these workshops! Remember when we had some confusion regarding an activity in the Grade 7 MIE textbook …we were confused how to proceed because we had students who were barely responding to the strategies we were using. The discussion on WhatsApp gave us a gallery of possibilities and doing the activity in class was really fun!

[*The characters' voices gradually become inaudible.*]

Wedsha [*to the audience*]: These teachers are displaying a **collaborative spirit.** The professional workshop has empowered them by allowing them to bond. But does collective spirit alone make a difference? Some teachers have the support of the department or the Rector in innovating strategies, creating a digital space for teaching and learning, choosing specific textbooks, but a teacher can still decide to be passive despite these positive forces. So, what explains their agency? An **inner capacity**, concern for students, **beliefs**, sense of responsibility… Is this sense of responsibility or concern related to an **exam-oriented culture**?

[*The voices of the characters can be heard again.*]

Veena: We badly need to improve the Cambridge results. This is the priority.

Maya: Yes, but the new reform is important too. If students don't perform well for the national exams they will move to polytechnic schools. My school consists of low performers and with this reform most of them will move to polytechnics if we don't improve results. Suddenly, I'm forced to acknowledge the importance of these exams because otherwise with a limited number of students, my school may have to close in the near future. So, do I have a choice?

Veena: In that case, I agree. But still Maya, we don't teach FOR the national examinations. You've seen the gap between those two exams? Even if the student passes with flying colours

in English in Grade 9, that does not mean the student is ready for Cambridge Grades 10 and 11. So, I plan my teaching accordingly. For instance, even if summarising isn't part of the Grade 9 paper, I'm teaching that to prepare my students for Cambridge.

Sara: You're both right! We're also facing that fear of a decreasing number of students due to polytechnics. ANYWAY, I believe we're accountable to that student, national or Cambridge, we need to prepare the student for the future…

Maya: Our teaching philosophies or beliefs may be different, but we're still **working in a standardised way**. We all have common assessments in our schools and I'm sure those assessments ensure that we are preparing students for their specific examinations. Hmm, we're also using the MIE textbooks, well even if just to do some activities…we're all designing our assessment or exam papers in line with the specimen paper for the national examinations…so, I believe that our way of teaching, our personal goals and our BELIEFS may differ, but we're all sailing in the same direction…

Veena: AND in the same sea! Whether there's a reform or not…whether we're English teachers or just ANY teacher, we are sailing in turbulent waters. **Students are more and more undisciplined**. They don't have respect for teachers…we are not valued. Education is free, books are free, Cambridge exams are paid for by the government, transport is free for students…so, they no longer value education… I'm definitely not saying all of them but in many schools, teachers can no longer manage a class. Students do not listen to teachers and if you scold them, they bring their parents to school and complain about you.

Maya: There ARE serious students too. In my private tuition I don't have discipline problems.

Sara: Maya, this is the point that Veena is making. Does it mean that when they pay for education, in this case tuition, then they show respect? But, at school do they take everything for granted because education is free?

[*Silence. Sara, Maya and Veena exit the stage.*]

Wedsha: These teachers are experiencing a time of change and this changing environment is influencing or triggering their actions, choices and decisions. BUT, the time of change is not only related to the reform, but problems of indiscipline, the digital evolution and its impact on teaching and learning, students' changing interests, the position of the English language in the local context despite being a global language, changing institutional realities as Rectors, Deputy Rectors and other stakeholders adapt to new policy, parents' expectations and a persistent exam-oriented culture. So many layers of complexity as these teachers interpret and understand their roles in a volatile social, cultural, economic and political system…. making sense locally and globally as they decide to exercise agency the way they do in this changing context…

[*Darkness. Curtains.*]

4.3 PART 3
A dramatic analysis of emerging themes

4.3.1 Introduction to Part 3

While the second part of this chapter provided a first and second level analysis by capturing participants' narratives and experiences, in this part I engage in a dramatic analysis to deepen my understanding of themes and to provide further thematic and philosophical abstractions in later chapters.

As highlighted in Act IV of *The Cockroach*, teacher agency is an outcome of multiple forces, such as:

- Teachers' level of freedom within the school environment
- National and school-oriented standardisation processes
- Different stakeholders' expectations
- Preparing for examinations
- Professional workshops
- Digital evolution
- The changing role of English language
- Changing culture – indiscipline
- Teachers' own beliefs and personal motivations

As discussed in Part 1, the above thematic categories emerged from a grounded analysis of the dramatic representation of *The Cockroach*, Acts I to III. These categories were further refined (see **Appendices 11** and **12**) to produce thematic clusters that were subsumed under broader themes (see **Appendix 13**) which are discussed in this part.

Overview of Part 3

In this third part of this chapter, I engage in further reflection on the forces that influence teacher agency by conducting a dramatic analysis of *The Cockroach*; comprising further analysis of salient features emanating from teachers' negotiation of identity, roles and agency in a context of reform. Act IV allowed other layers of meaning to the stories of Sara, Veena

and Maya to emerge as there is a shift from their dramatic roles as characters to choral voices who universally echo the concerns, dilemmas and challenges experienced by teachers in a changing policy environment. The data gathered was further abstracted in that Act and in this part of chapter four, I engage in further abstraction with a dramatic analysis that comprises a reflection on the external and internal forces that influence teacher agency.

4.3.2 Agency as an outcome of internal and external forces

Sara, Maya and Veena are emblematic characters who reflect the universality of teachers' personal and professional experiences in a changing reform context. Despite working in different types of schools, they are all depicted as agents who are struggling as they negotiate evolving roles and identities in a changing environment.

In this section I extend the cross-case analysis from Act IV to provide further insights into thematic strands emanating from the dramatic representation. It is observed that there are forces enabling and constraining agency and that these forces exist within different spaces occupied by teachers. In turn, these spaces are influenced by beliefs, norms and traditions that shape teachers' choices, decisions and actions. The following sub-sections shed light on some of the common forces that influence the emblematic characters. As pointed out in the discussion below, at times the characters display similar types of agency, but they also show different reactions and agency despite experiencing similar influences.

4.3.2.1 Another policy…

I conducted my study during a time of reform as I had encountered varying reactions and actions from colleagues and other teachers that I met during the introduction of the reform. This multiplicity intrigued me and I wanted to probe further in order to understand why teachers exercise agency the way they do. When I gathered data, the complexity and impact of multilayered temporal and spatial forces on teacher agency was revealed. Given that the study was conducted during the introduction of a reform and because policy forms an integral part of education structures, one common denominator was the force exerted by the macro-policy environment.

When it comes to the policy, the characters have a plethora of reactions: unsure of the policy objectives and continue to teach the way they have been teaching; waiting for the examination paper specimen to review ways of teaching; the need to embrace certain standardisation processes such as the introduction of the Extended Programme and the prescription of the standadised textbook; and, above all, uncertainty and confusion with regard to the introduction of a new policy. Some teachers (depending on their years of professional experience and including the experience of multiple reforms as students) may be going through policy fatigue due to repeated shifts in policy. From 2001 to 2017, the Mauritian education system went through five policies that compelled teachers (whose perceptions of the reform have also been shaped by their experiences of some of the reforms as students) to review their pedagogical beliefs and practices, and their roles and agency have undergone various changes. For instance, they have embraced a new pedagogical philosophy that emphasises equality rather than competition; they have experienced the regionalisation of schools and the elimination of star schools; they have seen repeated emphasis in multiple policies on professional training and education; and the most recent policy has introduced inclusive education with the Extended Programme, standardised textbooks, and the transformation of certain schools into Academies. Hence, policy fatigue caused by these various changes may influence teachers' readiness to exercise agency. However, this multiplicity of changes may be adopted as the new norm rather than expecting continuity and stability. For instance, Maya referred to the predictability of policy reforms which Sara terms "experimentation". This reaction may lead to teacher paralysis and compliance, where teachers deliver the curriculum unquestioningly or they continue to teach the way they have been teaching as they await another policy. For instance, for Maya, the policy is not her priority.The performance of her students and responding to the expectations of her school management matter most in order to safeguard her job.

However, the participants are all responding to the reform – by complying or by feigning compliance, by resisting or feigning resistance, and by being passively or actively involved. For instance, Sara enjoys the autonomy and support she receives at school, and is actively involved in developing innovative strategies to respond to her students' needs. However, despite streaks of resistance to preserve past pedagogical beliefs and practices, she complies with policy demands, as reflected in this quote: "We're still teaching the way we used to before the reform but at the end, we'll have to conform to the requirements of the examinations…" (Act I) and Veena responds to her statement with a question, "Do we have a choice?" (Act I). These observations reveal the predominance of examinations. These teachers are therefore

choosing what they want to adhere to; while the policy celebrates the development of multiple skills such as critical, creative and communication skills, they prioritise examinations, explaining the choices they make when it comes to the standardised textbook as elaborated below.

4.3.2.2 The compulsory textbook and workshops…

The emblematic characters react differently to the standardised textbooks, but all agree that the book should be prescribed. The controlling mechanism is sustained by the ministry, and the characters do not speak out against this standardisation despite their different set of beliefs when it comes to the selection of a textbook. They choose to comply and meanwhile continue to use previous pedagogical tools. Prior to the NYCBE reform, secondary schools relied on commercialised textbooks that were prescribed by individual schools, thus, allowing some degree of autonomy to schools. The introduction of standardised textbooks has curtailed this autonomy and the characters express paradoxical views about the textbook – empowering and providing assistance to teachers; has to be prescribed but not needed in class; deprofessionalising and forcing teachers to change strategies; and, not valued as it is not aligned with the examination paper format. Examination-oriented teaching is prioritised (as discussed in the previous section) for fear of not producing results through activity-based teaching (included in the standardised textbooks). The teachers feel safer with traditional comprehension or grammar books. For instance, Veena and Sara choose to continue to use the books used while transacting the previous curriculum and Maya's school management impose practice and grammar books. The MIE book is designed to enhance creativity and enable students to develop independent learning and critical skills. However, the teachers show a preference for traditional textbooks – this may be a desire to preserve previous ways of teaching, or it might highlight the dominance of the examination-oriented culture where, as noted by the characters, time is not wasted on activities. Antithetical to this reaction of marginalising the book, one character confuses the book with the policy document – not as in alignment with the curriculum, but as the curriculum document itself. This confusion may highlight an unconscious reason underlying the choice of the book: since it represents a control mechanism, it ensures that the policy is being implemented. The dominance of the MIE is reflected in this perception – the blurred lines between the book, the policy documents and the professional workshops.

In a way, some teachers might see the standardised textbooks as 'crutches' provided by the MIE (the institution that wrote and produced the textbook along with the ministry) to assist teachers; thus, the need to slavishly follow the dictates of the book which is interpreted as synonymous with the policy document. The image of 'crutches' may imply that teachers are presented as cripple, deficient, incomplete and thus dependent on policymakers, textbook writers and professional development programmes to assist policy implementation. However, compliance is not the only form of agency. Instead, teachers infuse some degree of selective choices when using the MIE textbook – using alternative theoretical, pedagogical models of teaching and learning language. Moreover, at times the 'crutches' are interpreted as "a waste of time" (Act I) as captured in Veena's and Maya's negative reactions to the professional workshops conducted by the ministry and the MIE in an attempt to empower teachers to embrace the new policy. Such reactions may arouse a feeling of deprofessionalisation and despite being well-intentioned, in the name of teacher development, may be perceived as a way of standardising teaching approaches, thereby curtailing their agency.

Similar to their reaction to the standardised textbooks, the characters react differently to the workshops conducted by the MIE to assist policy implementation. The workshops are perceived as a waste of time, especially by those who have a PGCE – they refer to repetition of content material and not acquiring any new knowledge. However, the characters are compelled to attend the workshop by their respective schools. They unwillingly embrace the policy dictates and act as agents of the policy. As an exception, Sara feels empowered by the workshops, but her reaction can be explained by a positive experience of her professional education classes at the MIE. It is also interesting to note that while the characters cannot dodge the workshops, as they have to abide by the demands of their school management and administration, they nevertheless choose whether or not to do their PGCE which is a professional recommendation from the ministry before joining teaching and is emphasised as a prerequisite for teaching in the policies. For Sara, the PGCE empowered her with innovative teaching strategies, but to Maya, in a performative macro-structure and dictatorial micro-structure, these strategies are meaningless, which explains her devaluing of professional education and training. Sara enjoys professional education classes, looks forward to workshops, works collectively at school and obediently works within the autonomous space provided by her school. Consequently, her empowerment can also be interpreted as a need for 'crutches' or a self-imposed limitation on her agency.

4.3.2.3 Innovating is challenging…

> *"...we can't teach the way we were taught. The students simply don't respond."*
> *(Veena, Act II)*

In their quest to enhance teaching and learning, and respond to students' needs, the characters in *The Cockroach* voluntarily embrace digital support. The need to embrace digitalisation may have been officialised in the policy documents, but these teachers are seen as agents who have been embracing the demands from this evolving landscape. New teaching tools such as social media, laptops, projectors, smartphones and others are used to adapt to this evolutionary process – teaching in the digital era. These tools reflect the evolving digital society and how teachers are expected to adapt their teaching strategies to changing trends. Mauritian schools have audio-visual rooms, lecture theatres/TV rooms, laptops and projectors, language labs and other technological assistance[62], but these teachers still use traditional ways of teaching. Internet connectivity is not a reality in most schools, and teachers often go the extra mile to introduce digital support in their classes. It is observed that all the characters are active agents who are ready to embrace digital support – Maya's use of social media after school hours; collective demand for laptops and a language lab by Sara and her colleagues; and Veena's personal investment by bringing her laptop and other technological equipment to class. This agency is not only curtailed by the lack of micro-institutional resources but also by students' misuse of technology, as expressed by Veena,

> *"...I thought about the recent cases where students are filming teachers or other students being beaten in class. Do you think we are ready to help students step into the digital environment? Technology is not being handled properly by this new generation." (Act I)*

Teachers, therefore, show reluctance to use technological support. However, it can also be observed that students relate to technological tools, and they are able to enhance learning. Despite the fear of misuse of technology, this motivation from students (showing an interest in the use of new pedagogical tools) creates a sense of empowerment which contrasts with the demotivation from stakeholders which deprofessionalises these teachers. Paradoxical to their desire to cling to traditional approaches such as during the use of standardised textbooks, the

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[62] There is limited technical preparedness to embrace the digital environment – depending on the school. For instance, Sara's school is more technologically equipped than the other schools. Moreover, the characters note that these technological tools have to be shared with other teachers in the school. Hence, the use of these tools cannot be optimised.

characters express their willingness to embrace sociocultural changes such as the dominance of digitalisation. Consequently, they feel crippled by traditional modes of teaching within an examination-oriented structure that focuses on results rather than acclimatising to students' evolving learning needs. Most of the schools do not promote the use of these pedagogical tools so as not to distract students from their results-driven objectives. These technological tools are not perceived as pedagogical but are mainly associated with entertainment as reflected in Maya's Rector's response or Veena's students' responses.

While all the characters are digitally competent, the use of technological support depends on the school infrastructure. Sara, for instance, confidently uses digital tools at school as she is supported by her Rector and colleagues – she is also provided with facilities such as a language laboratory and a department laptop. However, there are restrictions within that empowering and autonomous space. It is observed that she chooses to use smartphones during her teaching even though phones are not allowed during school hours. Her daring action is a culmination of the micro-institutional support and trust – however, it should be noted that there is no misuse of digital support (not being used for personal purposes) as she is using innovative strategies to equip students for examinations.

Her agency can be explained by what Buchanan (2015) called 'stepping up' – a choice of agency whereby teachers choose to transcend professional commitments while still being accountable for students' performance. This 'stepping up' action will be difficult within a regulated school environment like Maya's. She tries to challenge the school's authority by introducing technological teaching aids, but is reprimanded. However, the strict regulated school environment does not curtail her agency completely as she chooses to use social media to circulate notes and examination papers due to the pressure to produce good results. Her choice is guided by the need to show her competence through her students' results. This may explain why she dares to use social media despite what she termed as the dictatorial structure – she can justify her act as one that is geared towards fulfilling the school's performance objectives. Buchanan (2015) observed in her study that some teachers 'step up' while others 'push back' (teacher resistance to pressure). However, in this results-oriented structure, we do not see teachers like Maya and Veena stepping up. Accountability pressures are too strong, and they instead choose to stay in their 'comfort zone'. They try to 'step up' – Maya's use of smartphones in class or Veena's use of visual aids – but they are controlled by parents and

Rectors. Their agency is bounded by those stakeholders who preserve traditional pedagogies that cater for the production of results.

Thus, the characters use digital tools to enhance students' performance, for instance: by Maya, to ensure that learning is taking place and students are ready for examinations; by Sara, to supplement textbooks and other teaching materials towards the fulfilment of examination objectives; and by Veena, to expose students to new knowledge (in her General Paper class) and to teach drama as a genre. However, as noted, both Veena and Maya are deprofessionalised as they are expected to perform in a mechanical manner and to quantify their performance through students' results.

4.3.2.4 Negotiating emotions and self-worth…

While the previous sections focused on observations made with regard to external forces exerted by the macro-policy and micro-institutional spaces, in this section I highlight the powerful internal force that shapes teacher identities and guides choices of agency – the characters' feelings. The emblematic characters' agency is associated with overlapping emotional conditions. Maya is an example of someone who is going through some personal problems and she seems to be expressing her frustration by imposing her authority on her students at school. Her vulnerability can be interpreted as a manifestation of her personal issues, but it is noteworthy that she happily conducts her private tuition despite her fragile emotional state. On the other hand, she expresses anger and suffocation after the visit of the Rector.

The Rector can be described as what Foucault (1979) termed 'technicians of behaviour' (Ball, 2003) who control teachers' behaviour through subservience. The Rector's presence is always felt, and Maya's actions and behaviour are curtailed due to that persistent overpowering gaze. While the classroom is a space where the teacher enacts her chosen agency, Maya's agency within that space is regulated by the Rector's unexpected but regular inspections. Her choice to deliver and give much classwork and homework is a response to that systemic conditioning at school. While in her private tuition, teaching is presented as therapeutic, at school she is miserable – she continues to teach the way she was teaching prior to the reform; does not show any interest in the reform; and prioritises students' performance as she is answerable to the school management. She is presented as a bird with clipped wings – experiencing suffocation

that arises from a strict school culture dominated by the production of results. The burden of accountability to the school constrains her agency.

Fullan (2012) notes that accountability can be used as a non-judgemental strategy for improvement whereby teachers are empowered and move towards capacity-building. In Maya's case, the opposite is observed. She is afraid of the consequences of failing to produce results – fear of losing her job and of being punished with an excessive work load. However, it is noteworthy that despite her fear of losing her job, requiring her to abide by the school regulations (using grammar books, traditional teaching strategies and focusing on the quantity of corrected work), she sometimes rebels by secretly using social media to continue teaching after school hours. Her dedication to her students gives rise to rebellion and curriculum making. However, this dedication is also directed by students' results – she works with academically low performers and has to work beyond school hours in order to ensure good results. She is therefore, indirectly complying with the school's demands.

In a workplace, emotions are often expressed through a continuum of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. According to Song, Gu and Zhang (2020), satisfaction is "associated with the reward that teachers derive from students' success and their evaluations of the work environments in terms of developing their capabilities to bring about such success" (pp. 8-9). However, the emblematic characters' workplaces (including Sara's workplace where there is a strong emphasis on the holistic development of students) is defined by good results. This definition of students' success deprofessionalises the teacher who perceives teaching as a vocation or a dedication to the holistic development of the student. For instance, despite Sara's satisfaction with her school environment that allows her to 'serve' (she perceives teaching as a vocation and passion) her students, she is stressed after the announcement of Cambridge SC results because her interpretation of the new policy is that there will be more pressure on schools regulated by the PSEA to produce good examination results and some schools might close as a result.

This product-oriented dissatisfaction forces Sara to shift her active agency to deliverology with a focus on traditional grammar practice and other examination-oriented demands. Her perception of teaching as a vocation and a passion clashes with the performativity ideology; with reference to examinations, she said, "If students fail, we fail" (Sara, Act I). She is

momentarily demotivated and associates her self-worth with pass rates, but she prioritises her job security – she needs to cater financially for her daughter and wants to preserve her school's reputation. Her demotivation is redirected to motivation by marginalising vocation and centralising performativity and job security. Performativity and accountability, therefore, have a pull force that stifles agency to some extent. As observed by Englund, Frostenson and Beime (2019), the performativity mechanism involves internal regulation and self-control; similarly, Sara is conscious of her choice of compliant agency in favour of her school's reputation and job security. She is conditioned by the ideological examination-oriented system to produce results, otherwise she will be compelled to judge herself as a failure.

Lack of self-worth and recognition by other stakeholders therefore cripple teacher agency. The characters also mention indiscipline problems where teachers' security is threatened. For fear of being harmed by students, teachers choose compliance over resistance. The school's emphasis on students' wellbeing and the marginalisation of teachers' emotional state creates a situation where teachers willingly or unwillingly have to comply with the demands of stakeholders. They reinforce their comfort zone by responding obediently to the school's performance expectations.

Similarly, Maya's frustration that was discussed in the previous section can be interpreted as a lack of self-worth at school as she is disrespected by both the Rector and her students, along with the pressure of producing results. In contrast to Maya, Sara's feeling of fulfilment and her confidence are the outcome of self-worth emanating from collegiality. Despite the pressure to produce results, Sara is empowered and contributes happily to curriculum making – innovating strategies, embracing digital support, preparing common assessments – as a valued member of her department. Chen's (2019) recent study on teacher emotion highlights the positive emotion produced by colleagues' support. While collegial competition was dominant in his study, in Sara's case, her department works as one unit – the new curriculum is transacted by respecting each member's opinion without power relation issues. Despite the performative structure, Sara does not express any threat with regard to her colleagues. Instead, she is excited by the work they've accomplished as a team.

The feeling of self-worth is, therefore, guided to a large extent by the ideological structures within the macro-policy and micro-institutional spaces. Sara's school management treats the teachers with respect and creates a regulated autonomous space for them to thrive; moreover,

the school's family culture creates allegiant teachers who will feel worthy if the school's reputation is maintained through good results. On the other hand, despite the strictly regulated space of Maya's school, she works very hard (including engaging in teaching via social media after school hours) to demonstrate her worth to her Rector. Hence, these characters' emotions and agency largely result from interactions with colleagues, responses from stakeholders and regulations within the micro-institutional space.

4.3.2.5 Responding to stakeholders' demands…

In a time of change (Fullan, 2015) – implementing a new curriculum and embracing an education reform – teachers face more "emotional demands" (Chen, 2019, p. 1) from different stakeholders. Internal and external forces clash and give rise to varying emotions, influencing agency. Teachers are expected to change their strategies, and they may react confidently and happily by embracing newness as in the case of Sara, who describes teaching EP as "fun" and exciting as she develops new strategies and "helps" the students. For Veena teaching goes on as usual, and she is hesitant to innovate because, as reflected in the classroom scene, she experienced parental pressure. Veena showed some willingness to embrace change, for instance, by planning a play as a teaching strategy or using PowerPoint presentations for her classes, but she is stopped by parents and students who restrict her choices and actions to exam-oriented, traditional strategies. Her demotivation, disappointment and frustration shift her agency from active curriculum making to deliverology in the implementation of a new policy.

Maya also expresses dissatisfaction and frustration as she responds to stakeholders' demands but in her case the school dominates her choices and feelings. She is angry and feels demotivated; she feels overloaded with schoolwork and expectations, and for her, transacting a new reform adds to her burden and suffocation. In her case, the school administration and management curtail her agency and are responsible for negative emotions. Maya is also struggling with personal pressures and emotional dilemmas, which intensify her dissatisfaction and frustration. Hence, personal and professional spaces and experiences merge and give rise to a complex set of emotions that influence agency.

Moreover, according to Toropova, Myrberg and Johansson (2020), dissatisfaction is a result of the "diminishing prestige of the teaching profession together with dissatisfying working environment" (p. 2). A dissatisfying work environment was observed, as highlighted in the

case of Maya; furthermore, all the characters complain about the lack of respect of the teaching profession in the current social landscape. However, to add to Toropova et al.'s (2020) observation, the subject being taught also arouses levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. The characters express demotivation with regard to English language teaching. English is not only an essential global language, but one that is prioritised as a core subject in the Mauritian education system. They express negative emotions because students are not responding positively to their teaching. Veena is forced to use the French language as to her disappointment, students do not understand her class when it is conducted in English. She does not choose to use French voluntarily but is compelled to do so as students complained to her Head of Department (HOD). Despite her disappointment, she has to abide by the HOD's authority. Moreover, the characters face accountability pressures from other departments as they are blamed for failure in other subjects (it should be noted that most of the subjects, apart from language subjects, are conducted in English). Hence, teaching English becomes a stressful experience instead of an enjoyable one. The characters feel undervalued because their work is judged to a large extent on examination results or numbers on a report. The additional investment of these teachers is praised if good results are produced – this lack of recognition may constrain their agency (Molla & Nolan, 2020).

Hence, the changing socio-cultural environment and implementation of policy reforms – together with responses from other teachers, parents, Rectors and school management – generate teacher stress, fatigue and burnout (Mulholland, McKinlay & Sproule, 2017), leading to demotivation, disempowerment and deprofessionalisation.

4.4 Chapter Synthesis

The first part of this chapter served as an introduction to the dramatic representation of narratives in the next part. The structure of the ethnodrama helped to understand the choice of the different spaces in the co-construction of narratives. The purpose of each Act was also highlighted, with close reference to level one and level two analyses.

The second part of this chapter provided a first level analysis by capturing participants' narratives and experiences in the form of an ethnodrama. This representational choice also allowed me to provide a second level analysis with emerging recurring themes that were thematically analysed. Part two revealed that teacher agency is an outcome of multiple forces

in the personal and professional spheres of teachers' experiences. Different teachers negotiate their identities differently, but the similarity of experiences within a common macro-policy and sociocultural context, alongside individual internal forces, brings about myriad ways of exercising agency.

In the third part of the chapter, I engaged in further abstraction of the themes emanating from this cross-case analysis through a dramatic analysis of *The Cockroach*. I extended my reflection on and analysis of internal and external forces such as teacher emotions, self-worth, responses to stakeholders' demands, reactions to an evolving space, and standardisation and accountability pressures from the macro-policy and micro-institutional environment. While most of the external forces such as policy dictates, professional workshops and collegial support have been reviewed in extant literature, external force such as performativity culture and internal forces such as emotions and self-worth emanate as new forces and require new literature for further abstraction (as discussed in Part 3).

These stages of analysis – descriptive and evaluative – enabled me to represent the three-dimensional stories of my participants, understand the multi-layered truths and experiences, and enrich my understanding of the complexity of the coexisting forces that influence teacher agency. In the following chapter, I engage in further abstraction and move towards a philosophical understanding of the ways in which teacher agency is exercised in a context of reform.

CHAPTER 5

Understanding the complexity of teacher agency through diffraction

5.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I engaged in descriptive and cross-case analysis of the stories of the emblematic characters in an ethnodrama. Adopting a grounded approach, I immersed myself in the co-construction of the life histories of the emblematic characters, bringing out how they exercised agency in a time of change. While level one analysis (the representation of data through the ethnodrama) assisted me in understanding and describing the forces that enable or constrain agency in a time of change, level two analysis (an analysis of the dramatic narratives) involved deeper reflection on emerging themes through a cross-case analysis.

As I gradually move from being the data producer to the researcher who is more theoretically conscious of the multi-layered forces that impact teacher agency, I allow myself to be disrupted. The construction of life histories presents researchers with the opportunity "to be able to think and look at the world for its blurry bits, its complexities and complications" (Samuel, 2009, p. 16). As a researcher, I immerse myself in the world of the participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000); thus, growing and learning (Clandinin, 2007) in the process of storytelling (through the ethnodrama representation) and interpretation of the participants' stories. While, at the beginning of the study, I engaged in understanding the forces enabling and constraining agency, the descriptive and evaluative analysis brought "fresh illuminations" (ibid.) that revealed the complex interweaving ways in which agency is exercised in times of change. Hence, I adopted an analytical framework to extend the thematic analysis in chapter four, part three, in order to understand the paradoxical ways in which agency is exercised; for instance, how one individual teacher can enact agency in various ways.

In order to understand the ambiguous and complex ways in which agency is exercised as teachers negotiate their roles within changing social structures, I adopt a post-structuralist analytical framework to shed light on the thematic discussion emanating from the study.

Instead of interpreting participants' lived and told stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), post-structuralist analysis focuses on the "broader social discourses shaping that person's story of experience" (Clandinin, 2007, p. 55). Therefore, both the interpretivist paradigm of narrative inquiry and the post-structuralist paradigm comprise the understanding of relational concepts of experience; that is, an understanding of human experiences within a dynamic sociological landscape. Furthermore, as acknowledged by Clandinin (2007), when engaged in narrative inquiry, researchers become part of a "liminal space where conceptual boundaries are still in the making" (p. 59). I find myself in that 'liminal space' where, in order to better understand the nuanced forms of teacher agency as they exist within dominant social structures, I adopt Barad's (2007, 2010, 2014) theory of diffraction (as discussed in 5.1.2) to capture the diffractive multiple possibilities in which an individual may exercise agency. By adopting this post-structuralist analytical framework, I am not erasing the stories (Clandinin, 2007) and interpretations of my participants' experiences. Instead, I wish to go beyond the dichotomous representation of agency as being enabled or constrained.

Therefore, while the original lens and reviewed literature assisted in understanding teacher agency as one which is moulded by biographical forces (including sociological ones that constantly influence teachers' roles and identity – on personal and professional levels), this chapter reveals the multi-layered coexistence of further possible forms of agency as teachers negotiate their identities and agency within dimensions which are always in flux – temporal (construction and reconstruction of past, present and future) and spatial (evolving local, global, transnational, digital and macro-policy) dimensions.

This study is located during an important change – policy and curriculum reform – that allowed the surfacing of the complexity of teacher agency as teachers negotiate their professional identities and personal beliefs within a changing context. Hence, alongside the embedded temporal and spatial forces, teachers have to negotiate their identities, roles and agency as they transact the new reform. Their experiences of these embedded forces thus give rise to multiple forms of agency that are elaborated at the end of this chapter.

Hence, this chapter provides thematic abstraction of themes derived from chapter four by adopting the diffraction analytical lens which captures the plurality of teachers' experiences, the diffracted forms of agency and the negotiation of teacher agency within embedded temporal and spatial dimensions. These thematic building blocks pave the way to answer the

philosophical questions – ***So what, and now what?*** – in chapter six as I discuss diffracted agencies within an ideologically bounded space.

Chapter Overview

The following diagram represents the process of analysis in this chapter, where I provide further abstraction of themes discussed in chapter four by adopting an analytical framework.
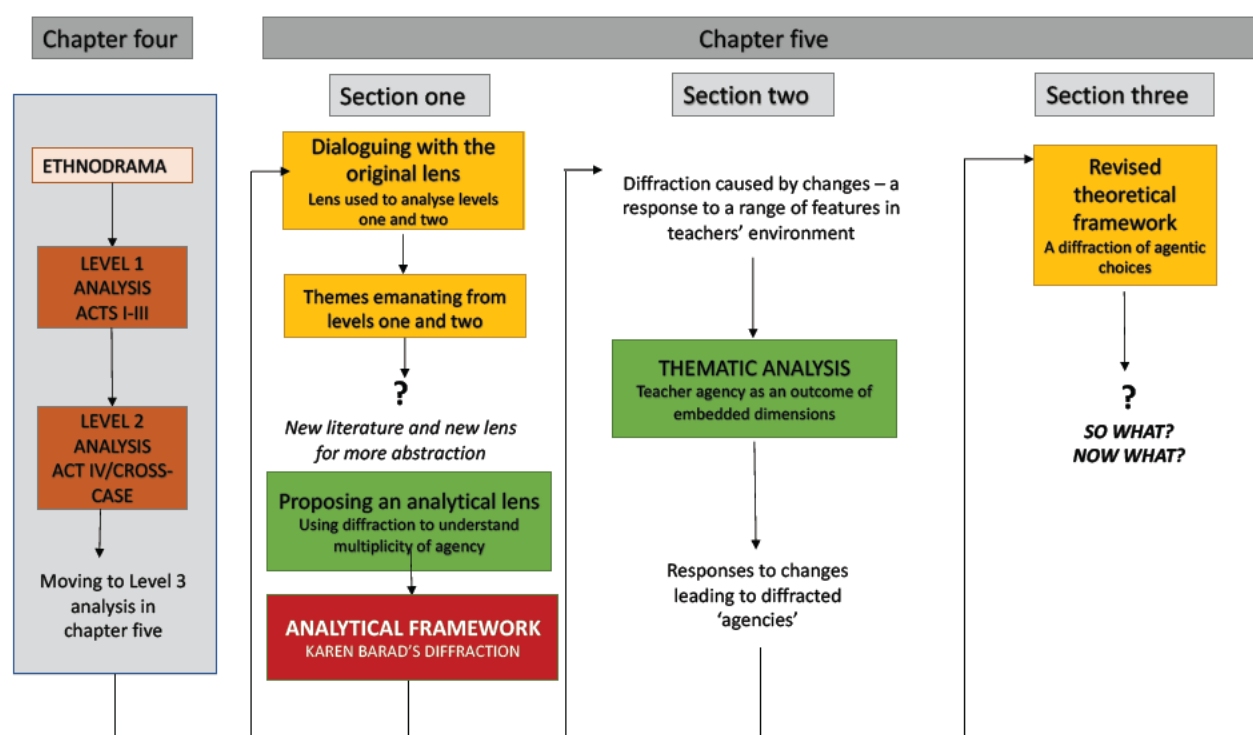
Figure 13: Orientation to chapter five

As elaborated in chapter two, the existing literature identifies various types of forces that enable or constrain agency. In chapter four, new forces were observed and analysed through the ethnodrama. However, instead of dichotomously enabling or constraining agency, it was observed that various forces coexist and, at times, were exercised by the same individual. In order to capture this complexity, an analytical lens was adopted to provide further abstraction of themes that were identified and evaluated in chapter four. Therefore, this chapter comprises the following sections that assist me in answering the philosophical question: ***Why do teachers exercise agency the way they do?***

- **Section one** of this chapter begins with a dialogue with the original lens and explains why an analytical framework, with reference to additional sets of literature, was needed to revise the original lens. I explain the choice and relevance of using Barad's (2007, 2010, 2014) concepts of diffraction and entanglement to understand the complex ways in which teacher agency is exercised in a time of change.

- In the **second section,** I thematically explain how the complexity of teacher agency emanates as a response to the multi-layered spaces which the teacher inhabits – especially, negotiating changes brought about by globalisation, the digital evolution, the performativity culture and conditioning within micro-institutional spaces. The discussion in this section engages the debate that multi-dimensional teacher agencies are not constituted diametrically or dichotomously. Instead, fluid, complex, and complementary contradictions and stabilities characterise the entangled nature of teacher agencies. Beyond pedagogical considerations, a web of possibilities and links to personal, social, political, cultural and econometric agendas merge in this conception of teacher agencies.

- These entangled dimensions assist me in revising the theoretical lens in **section three** and in discussing the different (but uncountable) ways in which agency is exercised. This section discusses forms of agencies that emerged from the study, but I acknowledge that further research in different changing contexts could be conducted to identify other diffracted forms of agencies (elaborated in chapter six while discussing the study's limitations).

The abstracted themes and the discussion on diffracted agencies in this chapter lead to a philosophical discussion and implications of the phenomenon in the following chapter.

5.1 Dialoguing with the original theoretical lens

The original theoretical lens (detailed in chapter two) was designed with close reference to the reviewed literature on teacher agency and the ways in which agency is exercised (Mattson & Harley, 2003; Carrim, 2003; Kelly, 2008; Lambert & Morgan, 2010); choices of agency in times of reform (Erss, 2018; Tran, 2018; Oolbekkink-Marchand et al., 2017; Nguyen & Bui, 2016); and the ecological model of teacher agency (Priestley et al., 2015). The literature review at the beginning of the study which guided the original design of the fieldwork, revealed the dominance of accountability (Ryder et al., 2018; Erss, 2018) and limited autonomy (Tan, 2016; Pappa et al., 2017; Erss, 2018) as powerful forces that influence teachers' choices of agency. Their actions and reactions to, for instance, policy reforms, were presented as guided by the choice of how to respond to accountability and standardisation pressures within macro-policy and micro-institutional contexts. As highlighted in chapter two, most researchers explained agency through:

- an ecological model with a focus on the systemic structural levels of operation along temporal dimensions of the past (iterational), present (practical-evaluative) and future (projective) (Priestley et al., 2015); and
- sociological frameworks with a focus on spatial dimensions (cultural, social, political and economic) (Toom, Pyhältö & Rust, 2015; Pantic, 2015; Ryder et al., 2018).

These choices of agency were analysed (descriptive and evaluative levels) through the temporary theoretical lens proposed in chapter two.
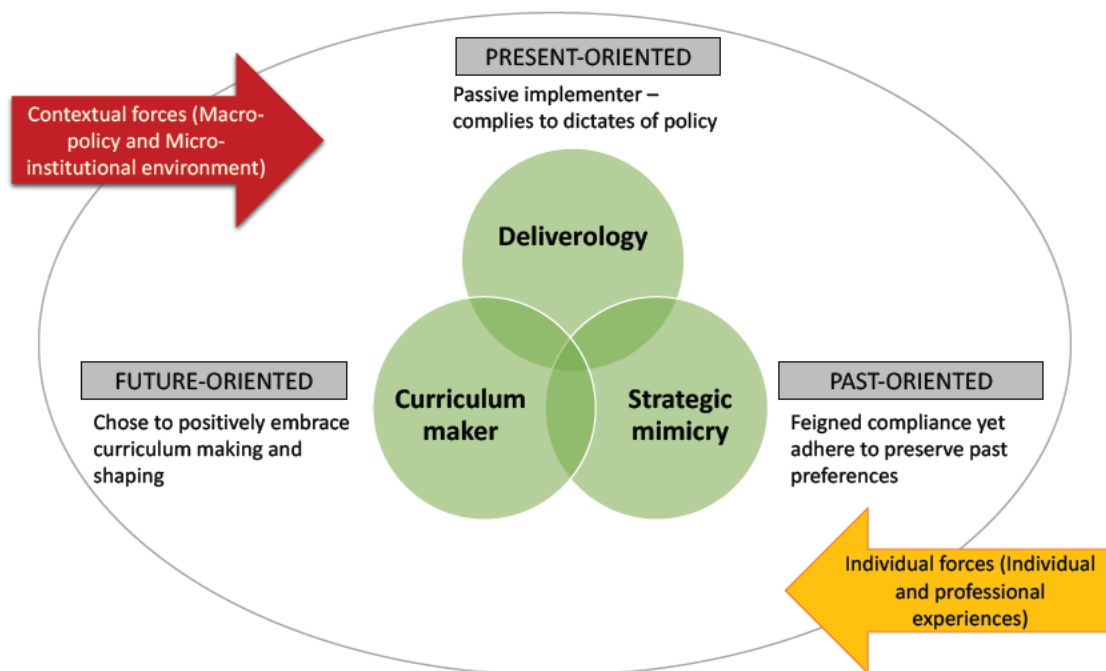
Figure 14: Theoretical lens designed and proposed in chapter two

In the original theoretical framework, teacher agency was presented through strategic mimicry, deliverology and curriculum-making (Mattson & Harley, 2003; Carrim, 2003; Kelly, 2008; Lambert & Morgan, 2010; Ball et al., 2012; Priestley et al., 2012; Pring, 2013; Mitchell, 2016). However, observations and reflections during the descriptive and evaluative analyses allowed me to look at these forms of agency more critically, as elaborated below.

- Strategic mimicry (Mattson & Harley, 2003) is performed by teachers who wish to preserve past practices but feign compliance and continue to teach the way they have been teaching. It is interpreted here as compliance with the rhetorical values of new professed overt forms, but teachers deeply harbour a valuing of the old. This is a kind of expediency to project an image of loyalty and servitude to the hierarchical authorities which may be guided by the need to secure one's job. This form of agency strategically appears as if compliance is adhered to but in private professional spaces such as the classroom, teachers resort to teaching according to the worldviews which sustain their personal interpreted values. It thus seduces policy managers, or even researchers, to believe that change is indeed enacted and valued because professed overt declarations

are made about the new policy. It will, of course, make it difficult to research the phenomenon because teachers are likely to profess what they believe they are expected to profess. The life history approach allowed me to understand the deeper implications – teachers exercise agency in the form of strategic mimicry as their stories presented a multi-layered interpretation of why they exercise agency in this way, and it is observed that the simultaneous coexistence of multiple forces complexifies strategic mimicry which is explained through diffraction into different forms of agencies in section 5.3.

- Furthermore, the study is situated in a context of reform (Mitchell, 2016; Tan, 2016; Ryder et al., 2018) in which experienced teachers with firm pedagogical beliefs and practices are attempting to justify the preservation of traditional/past practices in the face of change as a means of surviving within a changing environment. Hence, these teachers may choose to present themselves as supportive of the new policy, yet privately, they enact their original perspectives, thereby sustaining the past despite the promulgation of a new direction.

- Apart from strategic mimicry, deliverology (Kelly, 2008; Ball et al., 2012; Pring, 2013; Mitchell, 2016) was identified as a way in which teachers exercise agency. Finding themselves implementing multiple reforms may at times give rise to policy fatigue and consequently to passive deliverology where teachers implement curricula unquestioningly. Their compliance with policy demands, in this case, is not due to blind faith in the system or appreciation of the new policy. Instead, they find themselves in a system of change in which policymakers and politicians make decisions, but teachers' choices and actions are marginalised. However, deliverology could also be interpreted as a means to preserve one's safe zone – some teachers enjoy autonomy and collegial bonds and feel empowered in their micro-institutional space. Instead of rebelling against or resisting change, these teachers prefer to 'deliver' unquestioningly.

- Moreover, it was noted in the original theoretical framework that teachers exercise agency through curriculum making (Lambert & Morgan, 2010; Priestley et al., 2012). Curriculum makers are future-oriented as they comply with accountability (Buchanan, 2015) to macro-policy and micro-institutional demands within a performativity structure (Perryman & Calvert, 2020; Edgington, 2016) and are often willing to change

their pedagogical strategies for the purpose of curriculum making. I also noted the nuances in the term 'curriculum making' – a curriculum maker can be someone who passively adheres to accountability and standardisation and prefers to implement the official curriculum unquestioningly. Moreover, due to the need for job security or because of financial commitments, teachers may choose to implement the curriculum but do not necessarily believe in the policy. For the same reasons, while being critical of the reform during teacher talk (in the staff room or during workshops), some teachers may still be compelled to implement the curriculum without resisting school management or the ministry as they need to preserve their jobs or due to a strong belief that nothing will change as they have engaged in resistance in the past without satisfactory results. Thus, due to a loss of faith that their views and suggestions will be considered, teachers may passively implement the curriculum. Others might be actively involved in implementation because they believe in the policy and these teachers often demonstrate active participation in the creation of new pedagogical tools and practices. They are creatively involved in the implementation process and experience job satisfaction. Thus, curriculum making is a complex practice that may simultaneously involve resistance, passive and active reactions, and creativity.

- While curriculum makers will be initially interpreted as those who enthusiastically and willingly engage in curriculum implementation, the nuances highlighted above reflect the multi-layered ways of interpreting curriculum making. Thus, a curriculum maker is not necessarily passively complying with policy dictates but may also question the policy and express dissatisfaction. For instance, teachers may show dissatisfaction (Toropova, Myrberg & Johansson, 2020) with examination expectations which they believe may not be in line with the skills developed during class and which are designed to preserve a performativity culture, or which are reproductions of previous policy. Such curriculum makers may be actively involved in adhering to policy demands, but they may question their actions when preparing students for examinations.

Hence, what can be observed through these reflections, post-data collection, is the need to refine the above theoretical framework to capture the complexity of teacher agencies in a context of reform.

5.1.1 Themes emanating from descriptive and evaluative levels

The above theoretical lens was used to engage with the following critical questions in the descriptive and evaluative analyses represented in the form of the ethnodrama in chapter four:

- ***What are the forces that influence teacher agency in times of reform?***
- ***How do these forces enable or constrain teacher agency in times of reform?***

The following multiple forces (sub-themes) were identified in the analysis process:

- Teachers' degree of freedom within the school environment
- National and school-oriented standardisation processes
- Collective support and bonding
- Responding to different stakeholders
- Professional workshops
- The digital evolution
- The changing role of English language
- The changing school culture
- Teachers' own beliefs, emotions and personal motivations
- Reforms and other changes

These forces were subsumed under the broader thematic clusters discussed in the third part of chapter four:

- Another policy
- The compulsory textbook and workshops
- Innovating is challenging
- Negotiating emotions of self-worth
- Responding to stakeholders' demands

It was shown that these forces emanate from the different spaces (regulated and unregulated) inhabited by the teachers at personal and professional levels. Indeed, as proposed in the theoretical framework in section 5.1 (and in chapter two), these forces give rise to deliverology, strategic mimicry and active curriculum making. However, as I engaged in the cross-case

analysis in Act IV of the ethnodrama, I allowed myself to be disrupted, to question my beliefs as an insider and to be more critical as I engaged in an analysis and understanding of participants' stories. I observed that these multiple forces are not singular ones that separately impacted the choices of teacher agency. Instead, they are embedded in a complex web of possibilities, and all these themes are relational and impacted one another. Moreover, it was observed that there were degrees of continuity and divergence that, at times, shift and evolve within the same individual or across the different types of teachers represented by the emblematic characters. This complexity renders the types of agency enacted by the teachers at different moments in time unpredictable. Despite experiencing similar social, economic, political and cultural changes, and despite similar formal and informal teachings received since their childhood, the teachers at times display different ways of exercising agency. Various forces that give rise to this unpredictability – different school environments (including infrastructure limitations and varying levels of autonomy), personal problems (such as divorce and financial commitments) and firm beliefs that are preserved despite changing sociocultural trends (such as the refusal to embrace digital changes). Therefore, agency is exercised in multiple ways and these cannot be categorised or understood as binaries of passivity and activeness.

Consequently, based on the data gathered and analysed, I acknowledge that different types of teacher agency overlap; but my original theoretical framework restricted the enactment of types of agency to the discrete forms of deliverology, strategic mimicry and/or curriculum making. The Venn diagram of the original lens illustrated clearly that at times, for instance, a teacher may choose to be only a curriculum maker, while at other times he/she may choose to display both curriculum making and deliverology. However, this theoretical lens did not capture the more complex fluidity that was emanating from the cross-case analysis. It should be noted that my use of the term 'messiness' to depict teacher agency does not denote disorder, but is instead used to capture a vibrant, dynamic and complex space inhabited by teachers as they exercise their multiple agencies. The 'messiness' includes:

- the embedded spatial forces which could not be restricted to curriculum reform, but extended to other dominant changes such as globalisation and digitalisation;
- the embedded temporal forces that could not be dissociated – the coexisting dimensions of past, present, and future; and

- the multiple forms of agency that were exercised (explained in the last section of this chapter) by the teachers.

I needed to capture the embedded and messy micro-institutional and macro-policy environment inhabited by teachers in order to gain a better understanding of the ways in which agency is exercised. I wanted to depart from diametrically oppositional binaries of passive and active agency. Through my analysis of the fieldwork data, I came to interpret that the forces of influence over teacher agency could not be disaggregated into neat categories as in a dialysis which separates particles into enabling or constraining entities. Furthermore, as noted earlier, the Venn diagram used for the initial theoretical framework pointed to the possibility of teachers at times exercising only strategic mimicry, deliverology or curriculum making. However, the fieldwork data is more complexly pointing to coexisting, multiple forms of agencies that can be exercised by the same individual. In order to abstract these descriptive and evaluative analyses, I chose an analytical framework that assisted me to understand the complexity of teacher agency in times of change.

5.1.2 Proposing an analytical lens for further abstraction

In order to abstract the themes emerging from the ethnodrama, I designed a tabular representation (see **Appendix 11**) to analyse the themes and concepts that were contradicting and/or complementing the literature review. The table also helped me to highlight new thematic strands and key recurring ideas, and to read new literature to make more sense of the data. I then produced a conceptual map (see **Appendices 12** and **13**) to organise thematic clusters and super-ordinate groups. Through this revised grounded analysis, I observed that the performativity culture dominated teachers' agency. Overall, this performativity space was a messy one that comprised forces emanating from globalisation and digitalisation. The immediacy of localised contexts merged with the frames of referential forces from afar. It was important to understand this embeddedness to explain why teachers exercise agency in particular ways. In addition, agency was exercised in complex ways to respond to these temporal and spatial dimensions. In order to understand this messiness, I chose Barad's (2007, 2010, 2014) diffraction and entanglement theory as an analytical lens, which is explained in the following section.

5.1.2.1 Understanding diffraction

As highlighted in the previous sections, the first and second levels of analysis revealed the multiple and complex ways in which agency is exercised by teachers as they negotiate changes such as during a reform. These forms of agency coexist and appear innumerable (further research may reveal other ways in which agency is exercised). To better understand this complexity, I initially thought of the metaphor of diffraction of light waves. Diffraction (Newton, 1704; Cowley, 1995) involves the change in the direction of light waves as they hit an obstacle or go through an aperture. My data has shown that there is an embeddedness and complexity in teacher experiences and, hence, their choice of agency. Diffraction seemed to be a suitable metaphor to explain my phenomenon since, as illustrated below, the diffraction of light reveals differences.
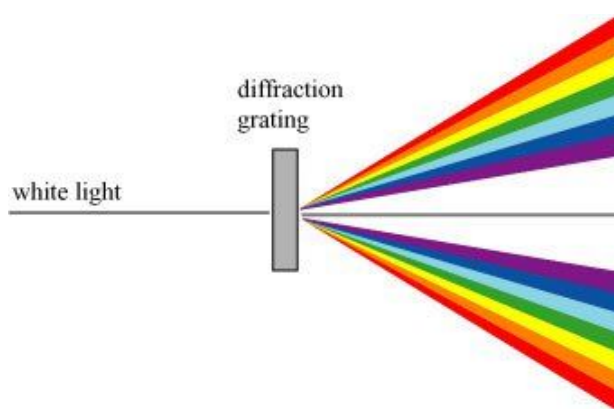
Figure 15: Diffraction of white light[63]

In this diagram, when white light passes through a diffraction grating[64] with apertures, it diffracts into several beams of different wavelengths and these beams travel in different directions. Diffraction can be used as a metaphor to explain teacher agency in times of change. As presented in the cross-case analysis in Act IV of the ethnodrama, teachers exercise agency in multiple ways – at times, embedded in the specificities of their current locations. Moreover, as captured in the diagram below, these forms of agency emanate as a response to multiple changes occurring within the overlapping *macro-policy and micro-institutional spaces*.

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[63] Diagram obtained from https://physics.stackexchange.com/questions/233925/diffraction-of-light-and-separation-of-its-colors

[64] A diffraction grating is "a plate of glass or a mirror that has equidistant parallel grooves engraved on its surface and that diffracts light, often more strongly than a prism" (https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095717880). It disperses a beam of various wavelengths into a spectrum (https://www.britannica.com/technology/diffraction-grating).
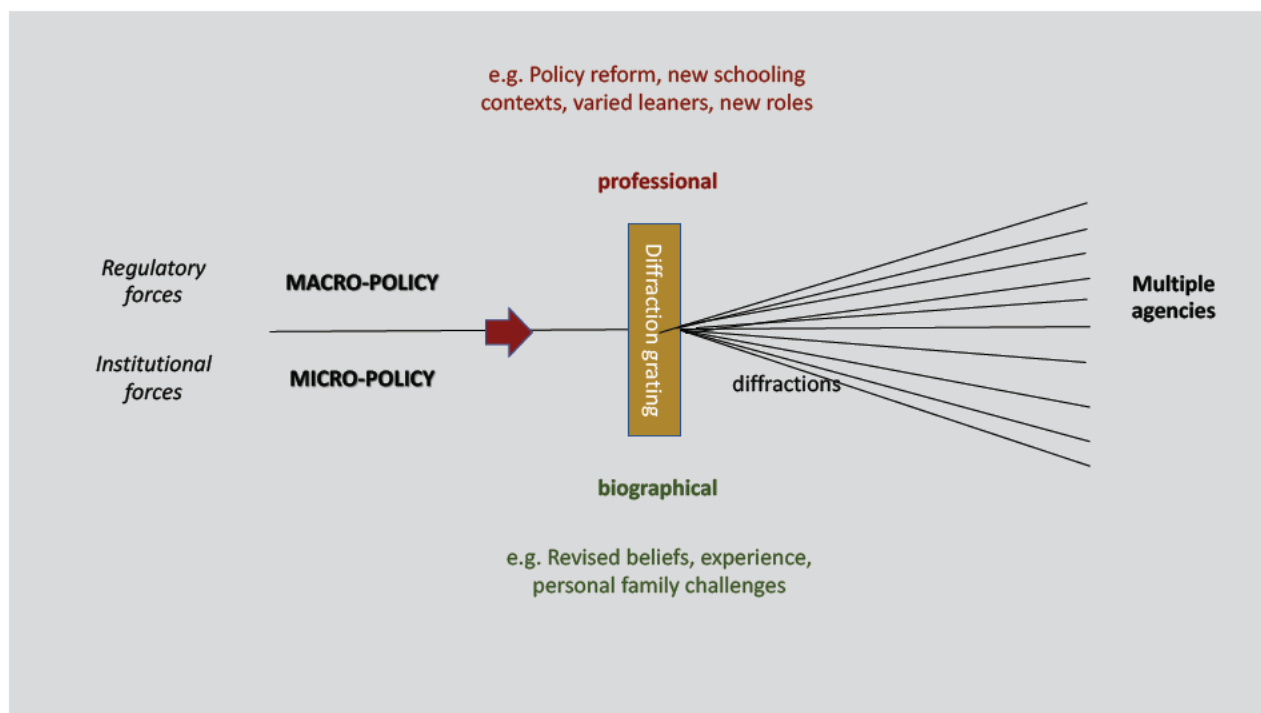
Figure 16: Using diffraction of white light to understand multiple agencies

The above diagram is an adaptation of the diffraction metaphor to better understand the phenomenon of teacher agency. The **white light** represents policy which can be further abstracted as representing the macro-policy regulatory forces originating from politicians and policy makers' agendas, and the micro-policy institutional forces that emanate from the school management's agendas (students' performance, financial grants, school reputation, and ethos). Policy is a powerful force that influences teacher identity, roles and beliefs and often requires teachers to reconsider teaching practices and beliefs. However, policy is not an isolated force but one which is influenced and shaped by sociocultural changes that take place at both local and global levels. As noted in the diffraction model, when going through an aperture(s), white light diffracts. The **apertures on the diffraction grating** can therefore be interpreted as various changes taking place at the macro-policy, micro-policy, post-colonial, global and technological levels, such as globalisation, digitalisation and an evolving multilingual context. Consequently, when white light (represented by the red arrow) or as represented in the diagram above, policy, goes through the apertures and is influenced by the changes, it also impacts teacher agency. These contextual forces are further coupled with teachers' professional and biographical experiences. Therefore, in this diffraction analogy, the **diffraction grating** could represent the changes that teachers experience *biographically* (such as revisiting beliefs with

experience and age, undergoing personal family problems that may be unsettling or the need to safeguard their job) and *professionally* (such as a reform, a new school/work context, teaching different types of students with different levels of difficulties, or a new role within the school structure). Along with the spatial forces mentioned earlier, biographical and professional experiences are also influenced by temporal forces such as job experience, firm beliefs that are carried from childhood to adulthood, past experiences as a student, future motivations for job promotion or a change of job. For instance, teachers who have experienced multiple policies may exercise agency differently from those who recently joined the profession. Similarly, teachers whose family members were/are teachers might adopt more traditional practices and may resist change due to firm beliefs about the traditional education structure that is highly examination-oriented, which has been imparted to them since childhood. However, even someone who was influenced by a specific teacher or family member may choose to adopt a different pedagogical principle as the purpose of education and the policy requirements are constantly being revisited in a dynamic and evolving social, cultural, economic and political landscape. Hence, here, the diffraction grating is representing the turbulent and evolving spatial and temporal dimensions that influence policy (white light) and give rise to **diffraction** of multiple forms of agency.

The diffraction theory thus captures the complexity of different types of agency exercised in different intensities with respect to the nature of the change that is being experienced. As discussed below, this diffraction is further abstracted using Barad's diffraction theory as an analytical framework.

5.1.2.2 Barad's theory of diffraction – an analytical framework

The diffraction metaphor prompted me to read further and use an analytical framework – Barad's theory of diffraction – which acknowledges the coexistence of "patterns of difference" (Barad, 2007, p. 71). Barad uses **diffraction** to explain the existence of a multiplicity of possibilities to understand a phenomenon or how a phenomenon functions instead of restricting one's understanding of phenomena in terms of binary opposites (Barad, 2014; Murris & Bozalek, 2019). When analysing a phenomenon, for instance, race, the focus is often on the 'self' as opposed to the 'other' or 'powerful' as opposed to 'powerless'. Barad's theory highlights the need to go beyond these black and white descriptions to acknowledge the existence of a colour gradient. Through diffractive reading (Barad, 2007, 2014; Murris &

Bozalek, 2019), she explains that understanding a phenomenon is complex as individuals are related to other individuals and materials and this relational connection is one which is embedded and complex. An action is therefore the result of a response to multiple relational experiences. This causes **entanglement** as it becomes difficult to conclude that, X causes Y; instead, X may cause an infinite number of possibilities and, furthermore, X is dynamic and evolving.

Hence, Barad's concept of diffraction captures the complexity of rooted beliefs, especially those countering a simplistic binary structure that orders life and experiences in terms of dichotomous opposites such as self/other, I/we or black/white. In the same vein, Barad (2010) observes that the concepts of space and time cannot be understood and limited to continuity and homogeneity because there exist multiple possibilities of experiences (possibilities that transcend binary opposites). These possibilities are often intertwined and there is no clear demarcation between them. As Barad (2010) points out, "entanglements are not the intertwining of two (or more) states/entities/events, but a calling into question of the very nature of two-ness, and ultimately of one-ness as well." (p. 251) Therefore, she argues that there is a need to look at actions and experiences as part of deconstruction, de-continuity and multiplicity. While in the original theoretical lens I acknowledged the coexistence of three identified types of agency (curriculum making, deliverology and strategic mimicry), this theory provides me with a lens to understand the multiplicity of agencies and how these different forms of agency coexist as teachers negotiate their professional selves in changing times.

Therefore, as an analytical tool, diffraction enables an understanding of teacher agency which cannot be limited to either passive or active, or deliverology or curriculum making. While the original theoretical lens was limited to the coexistence of deliverology, curriculum making and strategic mimicry, this analytical framework emphasises the dialogical relationship between multiple or even uncountable ways of exercising agency. For instance, temporal forces cannot be reduced to a strict understanding of the influence of the past on the present and of the present on the future. However, there is a dialogical relationship between past, present and future. For instance, at times teachers may reconstruct their past by selecting memories that respond to current micro-institutional expectations. They may revisit their past depending on what they are aiming at for the future. For example, a teacher who as a student (childhood experiences) was part of a strict performativity culture, but who has joined an education system that diverges from performance measuring tools like examinations, may initially express dissatisfaction and

may question the current (present) micro-institutional context. However, the need for a future promotion within that same context, including autonomy and innovative practices, may compel her to revisit her past (or it can be an unconscious action) and decide to reconstruct it as one where the performativity culture did not work. Thus, beliefs will be revisited and the to and fro movement between past, present and future cannot be clearly demarcated. Instead, it is messy and dialogical, and thus complexifies the understanding of experiences and how/why they influence agency. Beliefs and actions are evolving and are always in flux with respect to new experiences and situations and past, present and future motivations are revisited, questioned and at times reconstructed.

Barad's theory may thus be used to understand the impossibility of separating experiences – personal and professional – that exist simultaneously and shape agency as the teacher adapts to evolving social, cultural, economic or political landscapes (including both spatial and temporal dimensions).

This theory, however, has limitations, including:

- entanglement might perpetuate notions of inertia, due to the view that everything could be relatively interpreted;
- multiplicities can be interpreted as far too complicated to understand and thus inactivate action or reflection;
- it could be considered as entrapment – especially for the less theoretical practitioner; or
- it celebrates multiplicities of truth which are entangled and requires further research on each of the entangled or relational connections between things and individuals.

Nonetheless, as discussed below, this analytical framework assists me to better understand the phenomenon.

5.1.2.3 Analysing teacher agency through diffraction

As observed in the previous sub-sections, Barad's theory of diffraction highlights the complexity of examining a phenomenon as there exist multiple possibilities of doing so. Similarly, teacher agency is a complex phenomenon that is the outcome of multiple co-existing influences, such as a teacher's experience of the influences of globalisation and, at the same

time, the need to abide by a nationalistic agenda which seeks to cater for the specific needs of the population (such as particular employability skills development responding to the country's demands, and also responding to cultural specificities). The teacher has also been indoctrinated with a set of beliefs that may be changing in the current policy environment, or policy dictates that call for a redefinition of the teacher's pedagogic role. Thus, agency is also diffracted as teachers negotiate changing roles and identities in an environment that is always in flux.

What further complicates a simplistic understanding of teacher agency is the notion of plurality which means that teacher agency is not about a single teacher but should be understood as collective dynamic experiences of many teachers (Nguyen & Bui, 2016; Pappa et al., 2017; Tao & Gao, 2017; Bergh & Wahlström, 2018; Holloway & Brass, 2018; Molla & Nolan, 2020) acting in concert with one another, influencing and mediating one another's experiences and practices, which points to further embeddedness. These interactions are not only between persons, but also with the codified/regulated space of the institution one operates in, as well as the broader administrative and policy ambiance of the employer or the government. The mediating influences are themselves constantly undergoing change. Moreover, these diffractions may also be encountered within an individual, and shift over different contexts and temporal dimensions. A teacher's identity is not fixed but one which is constantly in the making while internal and external forces impact his/her conceptions of teacher identity, role and agency. As the teacher negotiates these changes emanating from spatial and temporal dimensions, he/she may exercise agency in multiple ways.

Furthermore, Barad's conception of an entangled spatiality allowed me to understand my emerging thematic considerations with fresh eyes. I thus reinterpret **teacher agency as a phenomenon that is multiple (more than one form can be exercised at a time) and in flux** – always evolving and always influenced by changes, resources and resistances that shift in multiple fluidities and networks spanning personal, political and cultural spatialities. This notion of an entangled spatiality includes temporal and physical spatial dimensions, but also embeds psychological and sociological characteristics. For instance, a teacher's choice of agency ten years ago during a policy reform is not necessarily similar in the current context as his/her social, cultural, economic and digital landscapes are different and continuously changing. Thus, even the spaces inhabited by these teachers exert different levels of force and influence at different times. These shifts are likely to be understood as discontinuous with the

agendas and selections that even a single individual himself/herself made in earlier times and, moreover, are likely to also shift and diffract into a myriad of possibilities.

Therefore, Barad's diffraction theory and the complexity of entanglement allow me to study teacher agency not as a linear process of chronological action-reaction choices, but as multiple forms of agency that are exercised simultaneously in embedded temporal and spatial dimensions. In the next section, I focus on the porous diffraction grating which represents the spatial and temporal changes that are experienced by teachers and give rise to diffraction.

5.2 The reform – a change that foregrounds diffracted agency

A change normally refers to something different – a different experience or new ways of looking at something which is introduced. It does not necessarily carry a negative connotation as changes can be embraced, questioned, challenged, feared or even create confusion. For the purpose of this study, curriculum and policy reform constituted the changing environment in which teacher agency was studied. In line with the diffraction theory, it should be noted that curriculum reform represents the diffraction grating which is not a solid block, but is permeable and could potentially influence teachers' beliefs, actions and choices. The complex ways in which agency is exercised may arise from teachers' responsiveness to changing micro-policy and macro-policy environments that cannot be professionally ignored. It can also be deduced that the officialised reform accentuates certain aspects of the teaching environment and the teacher's role and identity – for instance, while the teacher has always been responding to local and global pressures in the creation of a future workforce, the (policy) reform triggers reflection on the ways they are teaching, activating potential satisfaction and dissatisfaction in their place of work. Concomitantly, this might induce a sudden realisation that teachers are expected to revise pedagogical strategies to meet the needs of a changing context. Meanwhile, in this changing context, teachers could reflect on their identity, roles and beliefs. My study which drew on these reflections and which was produced through a life history approach and represented through an ethnodrama revealed an embeddedness of multiple diffracted experiences. The teacher's world of change is infused with elements of personal beliefs, the school ethos, globalisation discourses, the national agenda and other social, cultural, economic and political changes simultaneously acting in concert. This messiness gives rise to diffracted and multiple forms of agencies.

In reviewing the existing literature in chapter two, it was observed that forces like accountability (Ryder et al., 2018; Erss, 2018), professional workshops (Themane & Thobejane, 2018; Erss, 2018; Singh-Pillay & Samuel, 2017) and autonomy (Tan, 2016; Pappa et al., 2017; Erss, 2018) (forces made more prevalent during a reform) tend to be represented as the dominant forces of external influence on teacher agency. These forces have always been present in teachers' professional space, but the reform expectation in the current Mauritian context tends to emphasise teachers' need to operate within a regulated space with set norms whilst simultaneously affording greater autonomy to teachers to choose their professional actions in line with policy expectations. In reacting to these forces, teachers exercise different forms of agency. It is important to note that these forms of agency or even teachers can be studied from different perspectives. Situated in a changing policy environment, teacher agency can be interpreted in different ways from different perspectives, for instance, from the perspective of a policy maker, the Rector or parents. While the impact of these stakeholders on teachers' choices of agency is highlighted by participants, it should be noted that their choices are often reactions to contextual forces such as:

- the micro-institutional structure (imposing standardisation, limiting or allowing autonomy, regulating the working space with disciplining actions);
- the macro-policy environment (compulsory professional workshops with policy dictates which may be perceived as empowering or deprofessionalising, imposing standardised textbooks, including the Extended Programme and forcing teachers out of their comfort zone to adopt new teaching strategies and philosophies);
- global pressures and national agendas (the national need to make sense in a global and changing environment – devising new ways of teaching and the development of skills as a response to a globally changing labour market); and
- increasing digitalisation that emphasises the use of technology in the teaching environment (using technological tools to assist teaching and learning and to respond to students' expectations while at the same time preserving traditional pedagogies which have led to positive results).

Situated within these fluid and interwoven spaces, teachers exercise multiple forms of agency. To extend this observation, diffraction and entanglement may be used to show that there are

numerous ways in which agency is exercised and that these are often embedded within a complex web. For instance, a teacher may deliberately choose to be a passive deliverologist in a micro-institutional regulated space, but actively challenge conventional practices by embracing digital resources in a personal unregulated space, such as during private tutoring. That same teacher may choose to continue to teach certain components of the syllabus the way he/she was teaching before the reform as those practices were successful in producing the expected results in an examination-oriented macro-policy culture. Shifts or mutations in the types of agency exercised do not therefore depict the teacher as unstable. Instead, the new lens allows me to interpret teachers as evolving and active constructors of themselves as teachers and their ambient environments. They are actively negotiating simultaneously with their personal needs (financial stability, desire for a promotion and job satisfaction) and their professional relationships (with colleagues, hierarchical members of the school and the macro-policy expectations). This on-going negotiation also calls for the need to constantly evolve and adapt one's professional identity or personal needs to changing contexts.

Hence, reforms, though dominant, only provide potential changing micro- and macro-policy environments amidst which teachers make more interwoven agentic choices. These multiple and entangled dimensions are discussed below.

5.2.1 Teacher agency as an outcome of interwoven dimensions

The analytical framework assisted me to develop greater clarity about the nature of teacher agency and in answering the question that echoed in my mind after conducting the descriptive and evaluative analyses: "Why do teachers exercise agency in complex, entangled and turbulent ways?" Indeed, if teachers inhabit interwoven spaces as discussed above, these experiences predispose them to a dialogical contested personal and professional identity which culminates in evolving messy forms of exercised agency. Moreover, the diffracted forms of agency are caused by a multiplicity of changes (or evolving trends) that occur simultaneously in teachers' professional spaces. The forces emanating from these changes and how they influence teacher agency are discussed in the following sub-sections with reference to further abstraction of the thematic categories originating from the descriptive and evaluative analyses in chapter four.

5.2.1.1 Globalisation: Negotiating the past, present and future

As highlighted in chapter two, the context of a country (Nguyen & Bui, 2016; Oolbekkink-Marchand et al., 2017; Erss, 2018; Tran, 2018) has an impact on teachers' choices of agency. For instance, an individual's choices are guided by cultural expectations, the economic situation and availability of resources or political stability and instability. Similarly, postcolonial landscapes have specific influences on agency. A teacher who inhabits a postcolonial landscape belongs to a generation of teachers who have been contributing to the country's economic, political and socio-cultural stability. During the post-independence era, policies such as the 1997 *Master Plan of Education* were geared towards inclusive education (also strongly emphasised in the NCF 2017) and the production of quality results which aimed to position the country internationally. This policy brought about an examination-oriented culture that focused on academic results and consequently, meritocratic ascendance to better job prospects and a better standard of living. Therefore, teachers acted as curriculum makers who contributed to the social and economic development of Mauritius. The past experiences (Priestley et al., 2015) of these teachers are invaded by the repetitive emphasis on results, which created a competitive social and economic environment as parents valued education as a passport to success. Consequently, the production of results quantified education, leading to an over-emphasis on private tuition, the glorification of star schools and the marginalisation of academically low performers. This performance-oriented reality became the shadow of teachers who have experienced multiple reforms or those who have been in the profession for a long time. The impact of this past on the present is, however, not a linear and simple one. For instance, despite possessing qualifications, many Mauritians struggle to obtain jobs and with a rising standard of living, climbing the social ladder becomes a challenge. Furthermore, with more emphasis on the development of critical, creative and digital skills for functional needs, parents have realised the insufficiency of a strict performance-oriented culture. As noted in chapter one, their dissatisfaction materialised in the elimination of the 'rat race'. However, at the same time results/performance are markers of students' success for different stakeholders (parents, politicians, school management and teachers) and it becomes difficult to embrace new pedagogies. Parents and teachers' past experience of success also reinforce their belief in the performance-oriented structure and explain the need to preserve past practices.

Thus, in such a postcolonial context, education is often perceived as an opportunity to climb the social ladder through qualifications and meritocracy, despite the struggle to get a job in line

with the qualifications achieved. Many teachers in postcolonial contexts might arguably be engaged in a quest to re-imagine the forces of marginalisation and subjugation of past times and systems. Moving beyond such habituated and hegemonised worldviews might be considered as an endemic feature of a postcolonial quest. Simultaneously, politicians or other stakeholders could be considered as investing in educational strategies and educational design policy reforms (as is evident in multiple campaigns to revamp the formal schooling curriculum) that are presented as enabling the country to compete in a global market economy. The ways in which teachers negotiate these multiple agendas of resistance and adherence to global hegemonies and nationalistic agendas in relation to their personal options construct their interpretations of teacher agency.

A further feature is that the participants in this study are teachers of the English language – a language with a superior status (during the colonial period and currently as a global language) that could be considered as both a legacy of the colonial system and a liberating opportunity to mediate with a globalised language. These macro-political forces coalesce in the being and becoming of a teacher of English where the education sector prioritises English as a core subject and the main medium of instruction to ensure global and transnational participation. This need to create a positive national and global reputation and ensure economic development and global recognition fosters a strong performance culture with an emphasis on examination results that permeate this small island developing state. An agenda of ambitious ascendance, bolstered by a fetish for examination results and learner performance are seen as proxies of teacher competence. Many teachers, therefore, create parallel teaching spaces such as private tutoring to ensure the productivity of the system. This is not just a personal, but also a political choice, even though it may not be overtly expressed in these terms by teachers. Therefore, teachers find themselves negotiating global expectations, ensuring national success, perhaps also dealing with their personal need to improve their economic or social status, keeping their jobs and fulfilling parents' expectations with regard to the pass rate.

The types of agency chosen and exercised in this complex space with interwoven influences from national and global pulls cannot be understood through binary explanations of passive and active agency. More importantly, in this complex environment, the aim is sometimes not exclusively curriculum making and renegotiation of the terms of reference set out for teachers; it could simultaneously embed elements that orchestrate the fulfilment of teachers producing better examination results. This explains why some teachers (despite their critiques of the

performativity culture of schooling) prefer to continue to teach the way they have been teaching as they may have firm belief in the effectiveness of their strategies to produce these results.

To add another interwoven dimension to the postcolonial discourse, these countries often have to negotiate 'smallness' in a globally evolving landscape. SIDS are often considered by powerful outsiders and those who consider themselves insiders as victims of vulnerability representations (Crossley, 2016; Mariaye, 2016; Jules & Ressler, 2016; Nadal, Ankiah-Gangadeen & Kee Mew, 2017). This creates a tendency to capitulate to international hegemonic norms. If situated in a global landscape, the national agendas of these small states are often marginalised in favour of global norms. Examples include centralising the global English language while expressing disregard for the use of the mother-tongue and valorising international examining bodies despite the existence and promulgation of indigenous ways and goals in national policies.

When faced with a national reform, teachers are overtly critical. They refuse to comply with policy dictates or to be actively involved in localised curriculum making as they choose to prioritise global demands. For instance, they prioritise Cambridge international examinations and the curriculum aims and objectives of these examinations. Despite having to transact the new national curriculum, teachers have a tendency to valorise such international examinations and teach accordingly. Thus, while the new policy emphasises functional skills development and 21st century skills, teachers continue to teach the way they have been or at times choose to adhere to curriculum changes with regard to that particular international body. This can be interpreted as a form of self-conditioning as teachers willingly choose to disregard national agendas by continuing to teach the way they have been teaching.

This situation is doubly problematised when teachers who, in addition to having inherited a colonial past, are subjected to the global predominance of the English language. While this language is prioritised by most teachers (apart from those teaching other languages) as a language of instruction (and also one in which to respond to questions and to show understanding of different subjects such as the sciences, accounting and others), the English teacher experiences the pressure of enhancing language proficiency in English in order to also cater for the success of students in other subjects. This colonial ideological mechanism of prioritising the hegemonic language is sustained by different stakeholders who choose to preserve the linguistic domination of the English language. The umbilical link to the English

heritage is thus connected via the choice of the Cambridge examinations system, which allows the domination of the English language as the language of instruction for most subjects. This domination is evident amidst options within the Cambridge curriculum to encourage the development of indigenous ways of knowing and cultural forms of localised knowledge. The situation burdens teachers with performativity and accountability pressures as results in the previously colonial language and the currently global language are used as benchmarks of success in a students' schooling as well as teachers' capacity.

The above-mentioned experiences and dimensions inhabited by the teachers are entangled. As highlighted in this section, the teacher has to negotiate local and global needs simultaneously, which impacts agency in complex ways. Furthermore, past colonial footprints, present neo-colonial reality and the ambition to be part of a thriving future global landscape are enmeshed.

5.2.1.2 Memory construction: Choosing how to represent the self

In life history research with co-construction of narratives, it is important to acknowledge the complex process of truth making (Denis & Marschall, 2015) as teachers choose specific ways of representing themselves. In chapter four, the importance of the teachers' past can be observed as crucial in the understanding of the present and in determining future trajectories. They showed resistance, confusion and a sense of loss in the face of a changing macro-policy context. As noted in the previous section, they are entangled in neo-colonial, global and local dimensions. However, these dimensions are also infused with nostalgia and memories. The way they choose to represent themselves impacts on their agentic choices.

Memories – both individual and collective – are always in the process of construction and reconstruction and "forms of remembrance and forgetting are contingent on context and purpose" (Denis & Marschall, 2015, p. 2). When teachers are involved in teacher talk (Biesta et al., 2017) or when they share their experiences with a researcher/colleague/family member, a sifting process is activated whereby they choose to remember memories/experiences depending on how they want to represent themselves. For instance, in a context dominated by a performativity culture, the teacher will often choose to represent himself/herself through a professional identity devoted to that particular structure. The same teacher may choose to forget bad experiences as a child/student and celebrate performance and productivity (of themselves and their learners) in their present circumstances. The teacher has been

indoctrinated/conditioned/predisposed from a very young age to perceive performance as a normative educational structure – his/her personal success as an individual has been in line with learners' academic results and professional choices made in line with those results.

This explains the dominant influence of performance despite policy declarations to implement a curriculum that emphasises holistic development and 21st century skills as an alternative and more learner-centred route to performance. For instance, despite using a standardised text that caters for the development of language proficiency, some teachers continue to teach the way they have been teaching or to use books they have been using that are more in line with preparing students for examinations. This as much critiques teachers' actions as it does the assessment regimes that, despite professed shifts, still celebrate habituated conventional routines. They challenge and resist changes as they express nostalgia for a dominant past structure and habits. This form of agency and action is reflected in Denis and Marschall's (2015) words, "Memory is always a re-creation, using the past to make sense of and adapt to the present." (pp. 4-5) However, this memory and choice of agency is not only individualistic but a collective one as most teachers have similar reactions and value the examination system by resisting change – they are all part of a conditioned bounded space that moves in one direction, that of sustaining the performativity structure. They feel lost and confused as they find themselves in an impasse as they reconstruct the present by preserving the past. Consequently, they prioritise the end product – the exams – over the process which is the gradual development of skills. While Barad's theory (2010) highlights a 'disruption of continuity' (p. 240), here we can deduce that despite going through the reform (the diffraction grating), some teachers may choose continuity. The powerful selection of memories and nostalgia for a dominant glorified past explains teachers' choice to continue to teach the way they have been teaching. However, this is not a universal situation as some teachers will embrace the changes brought about by globalisation and digitalisation. Traces of discontinuity will be felt as teachers are entangled in choices of preserving the past, valorising the present local and international needs, and aiming to keep pace with globalisation and future social, cultural and economic demands.

Moreover, the dilemma, confusion and dissatisfaction expressed in relation to the current reform reflect a desire to preserve past practices and to extend these to the future. Teachers are not the only stakeholders preserving this glorified past. Policy makers, teacher educators and politicians translate their desire for change into the aims and objectives of a reform that seeks

to divert from traditional competitive examination-oriented practices, but nevertheless all emphasise the importance of examinations. Parents express satisfaction with good results; PSEA regulated schools are rewarded by financial grants for the pass rate in Cambridge internal examinations; teachers' teaching strategies are monitored to ensure the quantity of practice; and textbooks that reflect examinable components are valorised over those with activities to develop creative and critical skills. Hence, as teachers, and other stakeholders embrace and implement the new curriculum, the shadow of the past performativity culture pervades the professional and personal memories of these stakeholders.

Therefore, along with waves of change (globalisation, national agendas, reforms, emphasis on 21st century skills, current economic situation) embedded temporal forces (past, present and future) influence teacher agency and give rise to diffraction. In the next section, I discuss another layer of entanglement arising from digital changes as teachers negotiate their professional self in a world dominated by digitalisation.

5.2.1.3 Digital resources: Challenging conventional notions of teaching

Digital evolution – at times seen as a distraction and at times as pedagogical support – has brought various changes to the education sector. Digital support and technological tools have to be adapted to school infrastructure depending on the economic situation of a country. The introduction of technology in the education system has not been the priority of policymakers as, despite the fascination with digitalisation and globalisation, the dominance of social media and the prevalence of smart technology, education is viewed as the medium through which social status can be improved and local/global reputation can be sustained. Traditional pedagogies have borne fruit when it comes to achieving 'good' jobs on meritocratic grounds with secondary school and university qualifications. Besides, education is free, international examinations are paid for by the government and there is free transport for students. With such high investments in the education system, investment in improving the digital infrastructure in schools was not the priority. However, policies hinted at the need for teachers and school management to embrace digital support and keep pace with the evolving landscape which was seen as alignment with the trends sweeping global reform initiatives in education. In order to be seen as part of these global trends, the government became involved in multinational collaborative projects which redirected the national system. It distributed tablets to students as pedagogical support, and schools receive financial grants for audio-visual rooms or lecture

theatres. While the importance of digitalisation is acknowledged, the strict performance structure valorises traditional teaching strategies and results in fear of changes brought about by digitalisation. Recent studies in the Mauritian context that provide a critical overview of the rise of information technology in education point to these agendas as not purely pedagogical but also political manoeuvring (Oojorah, 2018; Payneeandy, 2018).

However, as I write this chapter in a time where the COVID-19 pandemic has compelled teachers, parents, students, school administration and management to adopt technological tools to ensure that teaching and learning is on-going (Murphy, 2020; Carrillo & Flores, 2020; Pham & Ho, 2020), I am compelled to consider the impossibility of rejecting the wave of digitalisation and the need to embrace change. Teachers are expected to negotiate their professional choices in this changing environment. As observed in the ethnodrama, some of the emblematic characters are at ease with the use of digital tools to enhance teaching and to implement the reform, but the micro-institutional space restricts their choices, along with parents who wish to preserve traditional teaching strategies[65]. Moreover, the performativity culture discussed in the previous section dominates teachers' choices and digital resources are sometimes perceived as challenges to conventional notions of teaching. For instance, some teachers and management prefer to use traditional teaching methods that have supported them in producing results instead of using PowerPoint presentations, or audio support or indeed multiple Internet and technological devices. Some teachers fear that students will digress from performance (with a focus on the quantity of written work produced) if technological tools are used. The fear of disrupting current teaching practice (and deeply ingrained beliefs about effective teaching and learning methods) and the need to abide by stakeholders' demands often gear teachers' choices towards the preservation of a safe zone for traditional teaching strategies.

However, these choices are not simplistic and straightforward as teachers also have to adapt their strategies to changing demands as students' interest in a topic may sometimes be triggered by the use of technological tools[66]. This push is heightened by the younger generation of

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[65] It should be noted that parents also had to embrace changes during the COVID-19 pandemic as modes of teaching had to be reviewed. The main concern of different stakeholders during this time was ensuring that teaching is taking place.

[66] It should be noted that my study was limited to state schools and private/confessional schools, but as indicated in chapter one, there are also private fee-paying schools in Mauritius, such as Le Bocage International School and Lycée Labourdonnais, where the integration of digital tools in academic teaching and learning is a reality. Including teachers from these schools in the study would have added another layer of experiences and diffracted agency.

learners' keen interest in technological modes of communication. While the question of whether digital tools help or distract students is an ongoing debate, teachers' choices are often guided by limited digital infrastructure and a lack of professional support to respond to students' evolving learning needs. Some schools may give teachers the autonomy to use digital tools to assist teaching, but the emphasis continues to be on examinations and performance – thus, teachers sometimes choose to, or are compelled to, favour examination practice over teaching and the adoption of evolving digital tools. Again, teachers find themselves caught between dominant past performativity-oriented strategies and pressure to embrace the less known (digital tools) in order to make sense in a broader international landscape. Consequently, even though recent policy documents acknowledge the need to embrace digital resources, the school infrastructure preserves conventional modes of teaching – mobile phones are sometimes banned in class, Internet connections are not always available at school or teachers are monitored by different stakeholders (parents, Rectors) to control the use of digital devices. Investing in digital infrastructure thus does not tally with the demands of an examination-oriented culture and stakeholders' fear that students will be distracted, or teachers' performance will be diluted with the use of digital resources. Moreover, at times digital resources are not embraced by certain schools because of budget constraints. These tools become optional choices that may enhance teaching, but which are often not the priority of school management. Multiple agendas thus compete for attention.

Hence, alongside globalisation and postcolonial changes, teachers have to negotiate their professional choices in a digitally evolving space which functions as another layer of change that impacts agency.

5.2.1.4 An educational space dominated by the performativity culture

Teachers' experiences are embedded as they negotiate their professional identities in changing global, digital and local spaces. However, as discussed in the previous sub-sections, performativity is a dominant discourse that pervades the professional experiences of teachers in this dynamic context. Hence, it is important to understand how this culture invades the macro-policy space and influences teacher agency and why teacher agency is often a response to performance narratives.

Being part of entangled spaces, teachers inhabit a performative space defined by binary opposites, that is, academic success or failure. In line with Barad's theory (2007, 2010, 2014), binary oppositions are not real representations (but simplistic ones that often nullify multiple possibilities) and, similarly, the obsession with pass and failure rates is often to the detriment of average students who need special attention from teachers. Instead, teacher talk, decisions, choices and concerns are geared towards decreasing the failure rate and increasing the pass rate. What explains this conscious or unconscious choice is that, within this examination-oriented structure, teachers' 'performance' (Locke, 2015; Holloway & Brass, 2018; Perryman & Calvert, 2020) is scrutinised, and academic results are viewed as the hallmarks of good and bad teachers. The conception of 'performance' is one that transcends professional identity and has been part of the teachers' personal indoctrination since childhood – for instance, the competitive examination structure where they needed to do well to gain access to a 'star' school, or private tuition as a compulsory 'option'. Therefore, performance and results pervade teachers' memories and experiences.

Hence, it can be observed that even in entanglement, certain features dominate; however, according to Barad (2010), the entanglement theory also highlights a "disruption of continuity" (p. 240). As teachers embrace changing trends and agency is diffracted into different wavelengths, the dominance of performativity may fade. Barad's theory is a deconstruction of binaries and, as teachers embrace evolving trends and show some resistance to this culture, its pivotal place in their lives may be reconsidered. For instance, despite the overpowering presence of this culture, indoctrinated as normative and crucial for a child's success, teachers still have students' well-being and holistic development in mind as they embark upon their professional journey. They respond to macro-policy and micro-institutional demands by producing results in order to prove themselves professionally in an examination-oriented space. Nevertheless, their beliefs and inner motives to support the students' learning path, may give rise to resistance.

Thus, inner and external forces are entangled as teachers negotiate their professional identity and agency in a dominant performativity culture. This culture is a common thread that exerts its force on the temporal and spatial dimensions inhabited by teachers. Their past childhood experiences were dominated by success and a quantification of classwork and homework in order to succeed; in their present, as professionals they experience self-worth with regard to the production of good pass rates; even within the unregulated space of private tuition,

performance is still a key driver as the tuition teacher is expected (by parents) to prepare students for examinations and to enhance results; moreover, in the future, whether that teacher will be termed a 'good' or 'bad' teacher will relate to the performance of his/her students which is often equated with the teacher's success. Hence, performativity is deeply enmeshed in the personal and professional experiences of teachers. Furthermore, as noted earlier, strong belief in this culture pervades micro-institutional, macro-policy and even unregulated private tuition spaces.

5.2.1.5 Paradoxical reactions to conditioning mechanisms

In an evolving digital and global landscape, policy reforms are often synonymous with changing pedagogical practices, revisiting beliefs, responding to stakeholders' expectations and conscious awareness of implementing a policy to respond to a changing social, economic or cultural space. This complex source of change sends ripples that influence teachers' agency. Moreover, this changing space is entangled and cannot be dissociated from the conditioning mechanisms imposed by the macro-policy and micro-institutional structures, which restrict teachers' actions and choices. These conditioning mechanisms include standardisation, controlled autonomy, accountability and restricted micro-institutional infrastructure (Priestley et al., 2015; Tan, 2016; Pappa et al., 2017; Ryder et al., 2018; Erss, 2018). Consequently, teachers exist within a bounded space in which they respond to stakeholders by complying with these conditioning structures. Embedded with agency oriented towards fulfilling stakeholders' expectations in line with the macro-policy dictates of performance, teachers also exist in different micro-institutional realities.

Schools have a specific ethos, and rules and regulations that bind the teacher to a specific set of behaviours. It can therefore be argued that teachers are constantly monitored through a surveillance mechanism that dictates their actions in a disguised manner – for example, by threatening their job security, limited school infrastructure or imposing standardisation strategies. Analysed from this perspective, the teacher would seem to be like a caged bird with clipped wings – the cage representing the limited space to act and the clipped wings the rules and regulations controlling internal forces like beliefs or emotions. The Cartesian concept of 'I think, therefore I am' (Descartes, 1637) is deconstructed as teachers find themselves in a panopticon (Foucault, 1975) regulated space with policy dictates, parents' complaints, and the school's constant checking (classroom observations of teachers, verification of teaching notes,

assessments). While their professional identity is a subset of their overall biographical experiences, these teachers' thoughts, beliefs and emotions are controlled. Their marginalisation contributes to stifling the voices of rebellion as resistance is, at times, punished by threatening job security or, at other times, unheard.

However, teachers also impose restrictions upon themselves – they are consciously involved in the perpetuation of this bounded space:

- they choose to comply with disciplining mechanisms despite complaining in private spaces;
- they convince themselves that they are victims in a controlling structure and therefore cannot challenge preconceived ideas or traditional practices; and
- at times they delude themselves into believing that passivity and compliance are the normative expected behaviour within their micro-institutional space.

Teachers may also sometimes derive satisfaction within this systemic conditioning; for instance, responding to discipline-oriented micro-institutional structures and producing good pass rates creates a sense of satisfaction based on quantitative results. This positive emotion channels teachers' desire to engage in active implementation of the curriculum. However, negative quantitative proof such as a rise in failure rates may give rise to teacher fatigue and consequently, teachers passively comply with the dictates of school leaders by adopting remedial action to prove their worth to different stakeholders.

It can be noted that while teachers are responding to these various obstacles and their agency is diffracted into multiple forms, they nevertheless function within a bounded conditioned space. Both teachers and other stakeholders aim to achieve student success, but the means differ. For instance, parents and Rectors (and sometimes even teachers) prioritise the performativity-regulated structure to ensure the production of good academic results. Teachers, on the other hand, are responsible for the holistic development of the student but are regulated through standardisation and accountability structures to 'perform'. Thus, they 'perform' within a conditioned space.

5.3 Diffracted agency: A revised theoretical framework

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, the original theoretical lens did not capture the complexity of multiple agencies. I therefore present a revised theoretical framework in this section rooted in the diffraction analytical framework and the intertwined forces emanating from the embedded spatial and temporal forces. This section comprises the building blocks that flow into the construction of the thesis. Understanding the different ways in which teachers exercise agency captures the complexity of diffracted agencies in times of change. This revised theoretical framework may also assist future research in understanding teacher agency as a complex phenomenon whereby agency transcends passive and active binaries and should be understood as comprising intertwined entangled layers. As noted in the previous section, the different types of agency emanate from a complicated interwoven web of experiences. It can be deduced that, in response to these influences, teachers do not exercise agency in homogenous or stable ways; their agentic choices are continuously disrupted yet in dialogue with each other, such that the different forms of agency exist simultaneously. As highlighted in the previous sections of this chapter, this entanglement responds to the conception of teacher identities as fluid, ever mutating and responsive to a set of internal and external forces. The revised theoretical framework is presented below.
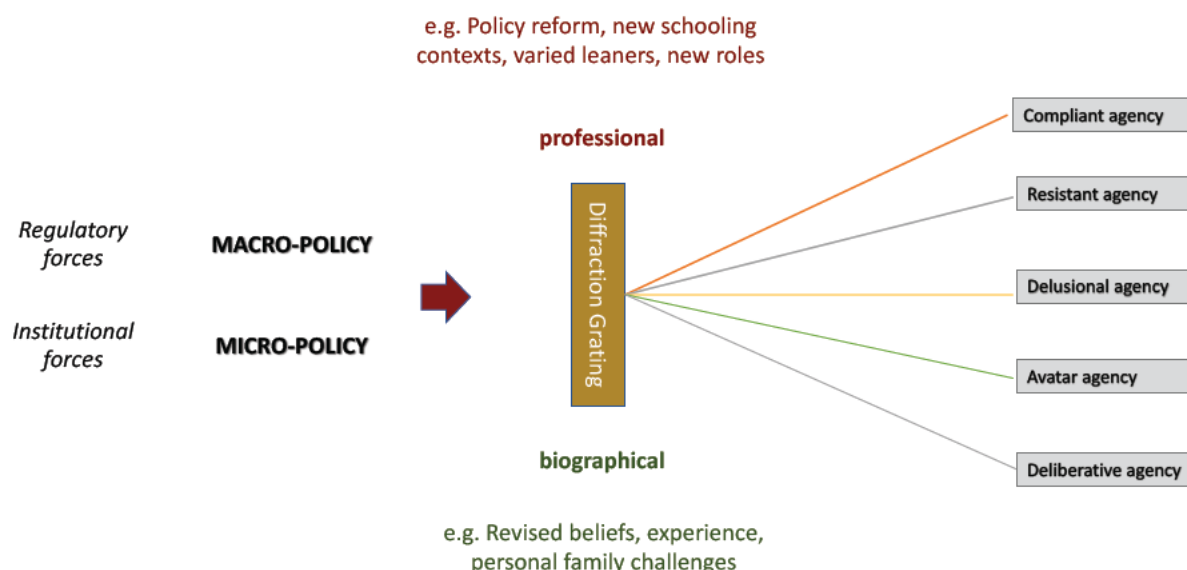
Figure 17: A multiplicity of agentic choices[67]

The most important change brought to this revised theoretical lens is the multiple forms of agency influenced by spatial and temporal forces that, as discussed earlier, are themselves not uni-directional, as they too are continually being reinterpreted in reactive forces to varying contexts, audiences and purposes. These forces are mutually inclusive and are capable of being reinterpreted and recalibrated with teachers' chosen strategies for how they represent themselves.

I have labelled the forms of agency that emerged from this study. However, it should be noted that the diffraction analytical lens acknowledges the presence of continuous, multiple, never-ending dimensions of possibilities of ways in which agency is enacted and why. Therefore, this lens may assist future researchers in understanding other forms of agency that emanate as a response to various changes within a dynamic micro-policy and macro-policy environment. The above diagram emphasises the coexistence of multiple forms of agencies in individual teachers and collective groups of teachers.

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[67] In this diagram, emphasis is placed on the diffracted agencies emanating from the fluidity of personal and professional experiences within a continuously changing space influenced by macro and micro policies. The messiness and entanglement are captured in chapter six in order to highlight the complexity of multiple ways of exercising agency that may coexist as an individual teacher may exercise various types of agencies depending on the dynamic social, cultural, political, policy and economic landscapes.

In the next sub-sections, I further analyse the types of agencies that emerged from my study and explain why these particular types of agencies are exercised by teachers. I also highlight the messiness as an individual teacher does not exercise only one form of agency but depending on contexts and time, even the dichotomy of passive and active agency is rendered problematic – a teacher who at one point during the reform or in one particular space acts compliantly, may in other situations resist, question or express dissatisfaction with the reform. Hence, despite my categorisations of the agencies below, it should be noted that these multiple agencies are possibilities of agencies that can be exercised by an individual teacher or a collective group.

5.3.1 Compliant agency

Compliance is a dominant form of agency chosen by teachers during reforms or other changes (such as digitalisation and globalisation). While compliance is defined as an act of obeying orders, rules and requests (Cambridge Dictionary Online, 2020) and carries a connotation of passivity, it is observed that, at times, teachers willingly choose to comply with policy dictates, micro-institutional regulations, parents' close monitoring or political representations and expectations. These teachers have to negotiate national and global pressures, and compliance is often perceived as a passive act of meeting stakeholders' expectations. As discussed earlier, compliance may also arise from selective reconstruction of an idealised past performance structure that teachers refuse to challenge as it is the core of their personal and professional beliefs. Alternatively, at times, awareness of the lack of free will may give rise to compliance but provoke feelings of dissatisfaction and demotivation, leading to temporary resistance or strategic mimicry. Moreover, at times, the school ethos such as respect for teachers and a focus on the holistic development of the child, may support compliance. Teachers who have spent many years in such a working space may embrace a lived ethos of rituals and habits that are accultured as normative patterns of action. They may comply with such a structure that provides a comfort zone for them to thrive. As noted earlier, the current reform brought many changes to teachers' professional beliefs and practices, such as standardised textbooks, including students with academic difficulties in what were initially considered as 'mainstream classrooms' or the need to enhance critical and creative skills while equipping students with language proficiency. Some teachers may adhere to and show compliance with these professed aims and changes brought about by the reform as, despite firm personal and professional beliefs in the performativity culture with more emphasis on examinations, they may also desire change

and the need to evolve from a persistent culture based on performance. In such cases, they will show compliance and become active curriculum makers despite phases of doubt, confusion and inner resistance.

5.3.2 Resistant agency

Unlike binary opposites and in line with Barad's notion of 'discontinuity', resistance and compliance are part of the same spectrum and often coexist. Some teachers resist change and cling to past practices and beliefs. The resistance mainly occurs at the level of teacher talk as teachers engage in criticism and show disapproval of current structures or proposed changes. Resistance should not only be interpreted in overt pedagogical action (as in classroom teaching and learning strategies). It could include the ways in which teachers choose to represent their professional identity in specific situational contexts. For example, as highlighted by Samuel (2014), in South Africa, the voice of teachers emerges as a counterforce to oppressive educational designs during the 1970s. In such contexts, teachers' voices encapsulate resistant agency, but in the case of Mauritius, it is observed that teachers' resistant voices echo in private spaces, mainly during teacher talk. However, silence prevails during the public implementation process of a new policy or curriculum. In this case, resistance is an agency that is limited to private spaces and is often neutralised by public obedience to policy dictates (hierarchical decisions by politicians, policy makers or the school management) and also a firm belief in a performativity culture that has persisted since the country achieved independence in 1968. More overt resistance is also controlled by teachers' concerns about their need for financial stability and to safeguard one's job. Thus, while in their private spaces teachers portray themselves as victims who are not involved in policy making decisions and are therefore confused about the aims, objectives and implementation processes of the reform, they nevertheless adhere to imposed curriculum reform initiatives, with whose dictates they do not always necessarily agree. Despite traces of resistance, they comply with policy dictates and performance expectations by preparing students for examinations in order to produce good grades that will satisfy the different regulatory stakeholders. Therefore, at times, there is unwillingness to translate talk into action and resistance remains a purely rhetorical strategy to cope with the teachers' environment. Moreover, resistance is often curtailed by strong ideological forces which infuse the national agendas framing the school context. For example, the school's ethos might prioritise compliance with a performativity culture or might (un)consciously promote fear regarding job security. The management environment may

restrict or promote teachers' autonomy and thus their latitude to engage in resistance. Furthermore, macro-hegemonic forces might be operationally filtered through international institutions that fund or regulate the national education system. Therefore, despite internal resistance supported by the school ethos, both the schools and teachers who resist change end up realigning themselves with the dominant professed dictates of the central policy.

5.3.3 Delusional agency

The term 'delusion' refers to a psychotic symptom where an individual "holds a false belief firmly, despite clear evidence or proof to the contrary" (Harvard Health Publishing, 2019). Delusional agency does not refer to false or true beliefs that are dichotomous; instead, by choosing this term, I want to highlight the choice of firmly adhering to or preserving one's pedagogical beliefs and practices. At times, teachers are conditioned into a set of behaviours and beliefs (on both professional and personal levels). For instance, the glorification of a performance-oriented structure that has produced results and enabled Mauritians, regardless of their ethnic identity (in a multi-ethnic society) and previous social identity to climb the social ladder on meritocratic grounds, has normalised and reinforced teachers, parents and other stakeholders' belief in the success and validity of the performativity culture. Additionally, there are perceived benefits of receiving positive outcomes of complying with a competitive examination-oriented agenda: examination results enhance the reputation of schools and teachers who are individually demarcated as 'successful' teachers based on their students' performance. This persistent glorification is maintained even if achieving a better standard of living depends on other factors such as employment prospects and the economic situation of the country; and teachers do not always work with students who are considered as academic high-flyers and can therefore sometimes be dissatisfied with their results. Hence, when a policy seeks to revisit this culture, it is often greeted with resistance and doubt. When a policy seeks to revisit this culture, it is often greeted with resistance and doubt. As pointed out in chapter two, teachers and other stakeholders have, on occasion, overtly questioned and challenged performance-oriented strategies and such resistance has led to the elimination of the 'rat race' at primary school level. This is proof of teachers' acknowledgement that there is a need to revisit performativity-oriented strategies. However, during the more recent reform initiatives some teachers firmly held to their belief in the performativity culture despite their own perception that it is harming students. Yet, they choose to continue to teach the way they have been teaching. They thus refuse defamiliarisation and continue to work towards performativity

goals – producing results. In this respect, teachers might be considered to be purveyors of a cultural obsession with competition and getting ahead amongst their learners and class units, whilst simultaneously professing to value a more holistic personal developmental schooling agenda. These seemingly contradictory elements infuse a delusional ambiguity. For instance, some teachers feel empowered by the new curriculum and the accompanying standardised textbook as they are able to go beyond rote-learning and grammar practice to assist students in developing various skills. However, they are obsessed with the examination paper (components, format, etc.) that comforts them into thinking that they are preparing their students for the examinations. Thus, their firm belief in performance in examinations prevails and explains the delusional agency.

5.3.4 Avatar agency

In a digitally evolving landscape, an avatar represents a chosen virtual image of an individual – this avatar can be a reflection of the person's traits or can be based on repressed traits. While teachers negotiate their new identities in an evolving society, they hide behind avatars – they juggle identities while aiming to be part of the changing times. For instance, teachers choose to comply with policy dictates, but after school hours they actively shift to curriculum makers who voluntarily teach students by adopting technological tools during private tutoring. They adopt different roles and agencies to suit the demands of highly competitive customers[68] and allow themselves certain autonomy to devise strategies that are restricted or curtailed in the regulated school environment. While at school, they perform deliverology and even adhere to limited use of technological support or comply unquestioningly with micro-institutional restrictions (actions that do not respond to the changing times), yet after school hours in their personal unregulated space, they adopt an avatar of a technologically proficient teacher. They, nevertheless, still exist within an overarching performativity culture; in fact, they offer personal contributions to enhance results by preparing students for the national examinations (the same aim as the school) within an unregulated space. It should also be noted that, according to Bray (2020), teacher identity and agency within that unregulated private tuition space, is related to the teacher's need to improve their financial status or overall income. However, my study observed that financial enhancement or security is not the only force that explains the

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[68] Private tuition is a commercialised platform where teachers charge parents for coaching students for examinations. However, transcending this business metaphor, it is observed that teachers also feel empowered in an unregulated space that does not limit specific practices, especially those geared towards changing teaching and learning trends (Bray, 2020).

persistence of private tutoring in Mauritius. Instead, teachers use the autonomy provided within this unregulated space to feel professionally empowered by embracing digital support and innovative strategies, and they express job satisfaction and happiness within this particular space. This is notable, especially when their own school institutional culture overtly resists (or disallows) the use of technological modalities in their pedagogy. Similar to the school in terms of aims and objectives (preparing students for examinations), the private tuition space nevertheless, contrasts with the conditioning mechanism sustained by school administration and management. It can be argued that some teachers experience autonomy of choices and action within the school regulated space when it comes to teaching strategies and teaching tools. However, unlike the unregulated space, these 'autonomous' teachers are still regulated by timetables, standardised textbooks, class size, limited school infrastructure and sharing technological tools with other departments. Hence, teachers choose different avatars as they juggle their roles, identities and agencies within regulated and unregulated spaces.

5.3.5 Deliberative agency

Agency can also be the deliberate strategic choice of a selected representation of self. It is also observed that teachers make deliberate choices:

- by complying with and pleasing stakeholders by upholding an examination-oriented teaching approach/culture with an emphasis on quantity of work rather than personality building, or an emphasis on summative assessment as opposed to formative assessment;
- by being curriculum makers who unquestioningly follow policy dictates and use or refer to provided materials (standardised textbooks, policy documents and materials from standardisation workshops); or
- by continuing to teach the way they have been teaching as they consciously choose to valorise global institutions such as the University of Cambridge, and valorise the aims and objectives of CIE curricula.

Even the remembered past is a deliberate choice – some teachers reconstruct their past memories by remembering and valorising the part of the system (for instance, the performative structure) that helped them or culminated in their present identity as a teacher. They selectively suppress negative experiences, such as adaptation difficulties while experiencing a new policy, competitive pressure and the near compulsory need to take private tuition; and the over-

emphasis on examinations instead of their own holistic development. Even if these experiences are remembered, they are repressed as teachers consciously celebrate the dominance of the Cambridge examinations results, percentage pass and laureate scheme. It cannot be denied that these teachers are an outcome of their personal experiences in a developing country that uses education as a passport to success and this deliberative agency tallies with the economic needs of their micro and macro contexts.

5.4 Chapter Synthesis

This chapter provided a thematic and philosophical analysis that answered the critical question: *Why do teachers exercise agency the way they do?* Supported by an analytical framework – Barad's 'diffraction theory' – that allows disruption and a deconstruction of binary representations, this analysis offered thematic and philosophical insights into the phenomenon of teacher agency in times of change, such as how the reform represents the diffraction grating that renders embedded experiences and forces within the temporal and spatial dimensions more prominent and leads to multiple agencies. While the extant literature has explained agency as an ecological and sociological phenomenon, this chapter has shown the turbulence, complexity, fluidity and coexistence of diffracted agencies as teachers exist simultaneously in different spatial and temporal dimensions. A closer analysis of the thematic strands of embedded spatial and temporal forces and the impact on agency sheds light on the reasons why teachers exercise agency, not in the simplistic dichotomous way that I started with at the beginning of this thesis, but through complex and entangled ways. The deep analytical abstraction provided in this chapter paves the way for the following chapter where I engage in developing the thesis and extending the understanding of why teachers exercise agency the way they do. The final chapter comprises my concluding thoughts with regard to the '**so what**' and '**now what**' of the study – emphasising its theoretical, contextual and methodological implications, limitations and further research; the disruption I experienced and my reflection on my positionality.

CHAPTER 6

Diffracted agencies – A kaleidoscope of possibilities

6.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed the need to invoke an analytical framework in order to understand how the multiple thematic layers emanating from the analysis work. I thus used Barad's notion of diffraction to discuss the messiness and embeddedness of teacher experiences and how teacher agency is diffracted into multiple forms. It was observed that an individual teacher could exercise different types of agencies in different spaces (such as in the regulated and unregulated space; in the classroom; the staffroom; or even during workshops) and as a response to personal and professional experiences. This multiplicity gives rise to messy and embedded possibilities for the ways in which teacher agency may be exercised. As I near the end of this study, I highlight the possibility of an array of diffracted agencies and multiple ways in which they are entangled, which further complexifies the outcome of this research. In this chapter, I therefore offer philosophical insights into my study on diffracted teacher agencies by situating these multiple agencies within a bounded space in which the performativity culture is highly dominant. Moreover, as temporal and spatial dimensions are constantly in flux and embedded, these multiple agencies are not coherent or pulling in the same direction but, instead, are entangled and relational. This new way of looking at teacher agency also compels me to reflect on my personal transformation as I move from dichotomous ways of examining the phenomenon and acknowledge that I am also part of the infinite entangled and diffracted spatial and temporal dimensions.

Chapter overview
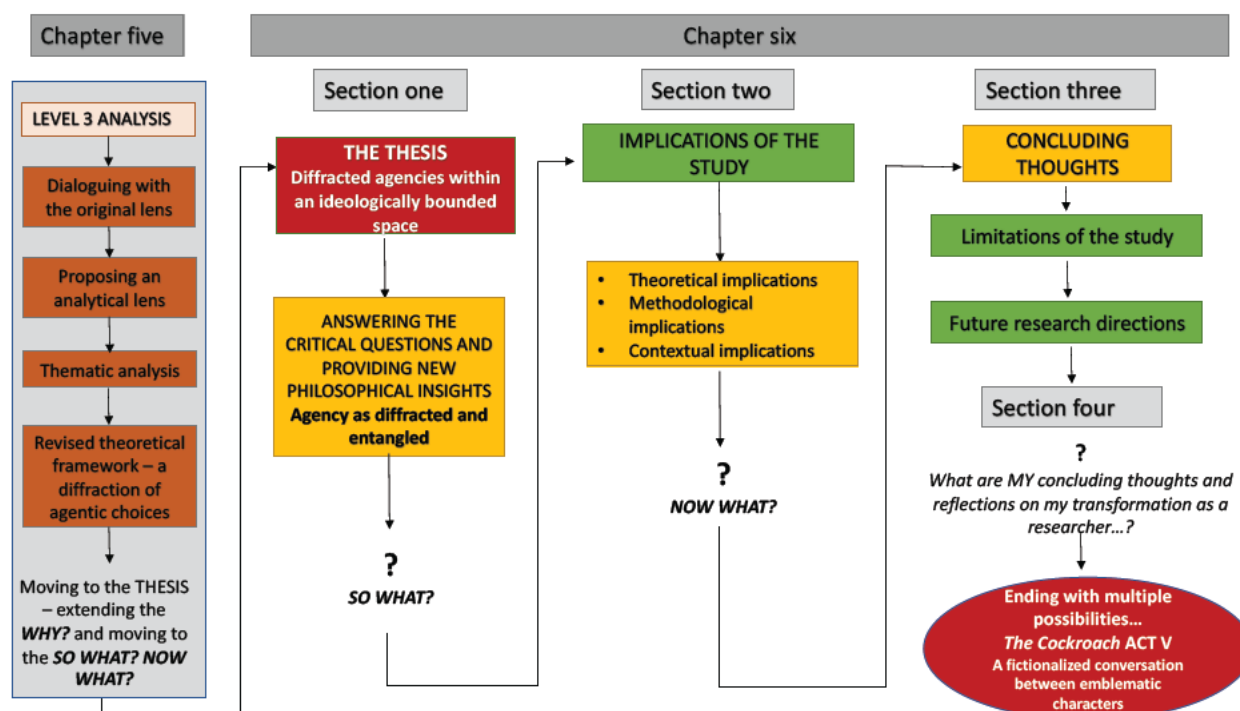
Figure 18: Orientation to chapter six

As highlighted in the graphic orientation above, in **section one** of this chapter, I move towards more philosophical abstraction by extending a theoretical understanding of diffracted agencies within a bounded space. This theory is used to explain why teachers exercise agency in complex, diffracted and entangled ways as they are always in the becoming, negotiating personal and professional identities, roles and beliefs within dynamic temporal and spatial dimensions.

In the **second section** of this chapter, I discuss the philosophical insights and implications of the study with close reference to theoretical, methodological and contextual contributions. These concluding thoughts aim to offer new ways of thinking that emphasise the study's contributions to the body of knowledge. In **the third** section I acknowledge the limitations of the study. Given that diffracted agencies hint at unlimited possibilities to examine the phenomenon, I also identify new avenues for research that have opened up as a consequence of this study.

Before closing the thesis, in **section four**, I reflect on my positionality and transformation as a researcher and, instead of concluding with closure, I capture the fluidity and entanglement of diffracted agencies in a final Act of the ethnodrama, *The Cockroach*; this time offering a fictionalised conversation between the emblematic characters as they are immersed in the implementation of the reform.

6.1 Understanding diffracted agencies

Further abstraction of the thematic threads with the assistance of an analytical framework paved the way towards a more philosophical understanding of the phenomenon of teacher agency. As observed, various forces influence agency and these forces are part of a social, cultural, economic and political space which is always in flux. It was also highlighted that, as a response to these multiple diffracted forces, teachers exercise agency in multiple ways. However, agencies are not diffracted in an exact or stable format, or in specific ways – as discussed in the last section of chapter five, diffracted agencies highlight the coexistence of embedded pluralities containing elements of consistency, yet at times also bear the seeds of their own contradictions. Thus, just as the forces influencing agencies are complex and embedded, diffracted agencies are entangled. Moreover, these agencies are diffracted within a bounded space – as observed in the analysis in chapter five, the performativity culture pervades the actions, decisions, and choices of various stakeholders, including teachers. This bounded space is, nevertheless, not interpreted as one which is solid and permanent, but one that is fluid and also influenced by changes (global, local, policy, economic). In the following sub-sections, I expand the analysis by theorising agency as *Diffracted agencies within a bounded space*.

6.1.1 Exercising agency within an ideological performativity space

Ideology, initially defined by Marx and Engels (1932) as a 'false consciousness' propagated by those in power for economic exploitation, can be explained as the declared belief system of the powerful which is paraded as a targeted value that all should achieve. This classical definition is problematic due to the strict duality it presents between 'true' and 'false' consciousness. Moreover, this definition posits the victimisation of individuals who are portrayed as homogenised, categorised and completely devoid of free will and are manipulated to follow 'false consciousness'. Throughout my analysis in chapter five, I embraced the possibility of discontinuity and multiplicity and the deconstruction of binary opposites.

Consequently, when applied to the performativity culture, ideology cannot be restricted to the classical interpretation of the opium of the masses but, instead, encapsulates divergent truths that emanate from various institutions and the individual himself/herself. These truths are infused in the individual through a range of experiences and beliefs (temporal dimensions) and through relational connections with people and places (spatial dimension). I am not claiming that ideology does not comprise a dominant belief system or that manipulation is absent but, going beyond the oppressive nature of ideology, I wish to capture the dominant shared belief in a structure that has been rewarding and which is, therefore, solidly anchored in the national psyche and agencies.

While, in classical Marxism, ideology carries a negative connotation in relation to 'false' propagation of ideas, it should be acknowledged that ideology also brings benefits to groups of people. When applied to the Mauritian context and to the performativity culture, the performativity ideology has been rewarding to the nation through the creation of an educated workforce, enabling social mobility based on a meritocratic system; and, consequently, reinforcing the country's economy and international reputation. In this case, ideology is the shared belief among politicians, policy makers, teachers, parents and other stakeholders in a culture that has contributed to economic, social and cultural success. Such firm shared belief explains the resistance to change, compliance with the persistent examination-oriented educational environment and the confusion expressed by teachers about whether or not to change their professional beliefs and practices.

Teachers, therefore, inhabit a bounded space which is nevertheless permeable as external forces such as globalisation, digitalisation and a focus on skills development affect them and influence their agencies. These external forces and the embedded impact of temporal forces, which are not simple linear movement from past, to present and future, problematise the durability of this ideologically bounded space within which agencies are diffracted. Therefore, while the performativity ideology is dominant and influences agency, it is not permanent, but is impacted by dynamic external forces; is questioned, revisited and is gradually undergoing change. Nevertheless, the strong force it exerts on teacher agencies and its entrenched cultural meaning cannot be ignored. For instance, the performativity ideology may enable the upper classes (or aspirant middle class) to preserve an elite system of education (the rat race or the race for academies as discussed in chapter one). Therefore, as part of this ideological agenda, teachers

and other stakeholders become complicit in maintaining schooling and education in the interests of certain social classes.

This analysis further moves towards an understanding of agency as a phenomenon that will always be in the making, diffracted into multiple possibilities as teachers (despite inhabiting an ideologically bounded space) negotiate internal and external forces that are always in flux.

6.1.2 Theorising diffracted agencies within a bounded space

In the context of this study, as discussed earlier, teacher agency predisposes teachers' actions, decisions and choices while implementing a curriculum or policy. This agency is one which evolves within a space regulated by micro and macro structures that emphasises adherence to standardisation and accountability. Over and above the holistic development of students, these regulated structures equip them with academic results to pave future career paths. Policymakers, teachers, politicians, Rectors and parents have a common agenda of student success. Hence, ideally, teacher agency should also have been geared towards curriculum making and student success[69]. However, the enactment of agency is complex and involves a kaleidoscope of possibilities as teachers are continuously responsive to a different range of features (emotional, cultural, professional) in their environment.

As noted earlier, the multiple forms of agency are not simplistic but entangled. For instance, a teacher may choose to comply with the regulated structure at school and limit his/her teaching practices to the demands of the micro-institutional hierarchy, but at times, he/she may show signs of resistance by introducing new ways that are strictly forbidden by the school such as the use of mobile phones in teaching oral English; or, the teacher may decide to embrace changes and use digital tools in the unregulated tuition space to conduct teaching. What is interesting is that all these types of agencies are nevertheless directed towards the same goal – performativity. Compliance, resistance or even the choices made within the unregulated space are directed towards curriculum making and the production of results that show the efficiency of the teacher, the success of the education system and students who are equipped with

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[69] All stakeholders aim for student success but such success can be defined differently – for parents, it signifies a qualification that will assist their children to acquire a 'good' job, ensure financial security and improve their social status; for teachers 'student success' will be synonymous with self-worth as students' results will reflect stakeholders' perceptions of them as 'good' or 'bad' teachers; and, for school management, 'student success' will be related to the school's reputation and results-based financial grants obtained from the MoE and PSEA. Hence, while all stakeholders aim for student success, the perspective employed to examine such success varies.

qualifications to join the future labour force. Hence, at times, some teachers have a degree of autonomy, some comply with standardisation, and the actions of some are constantly monitored. Nonetheless, they are all conditioned and bounded within the dominant performativity space discussed in the previous section. I depict this fluidity in the representational diagram below which suggests that diffracted agencies do not always move in specific, clear, predictable linear directions. Instead, the notion of a diffracted teacher agency is best depicted as erupting and disaggregating and congregating in an entanglement of multiple possibilities. Some are more directional and others more convoluted.
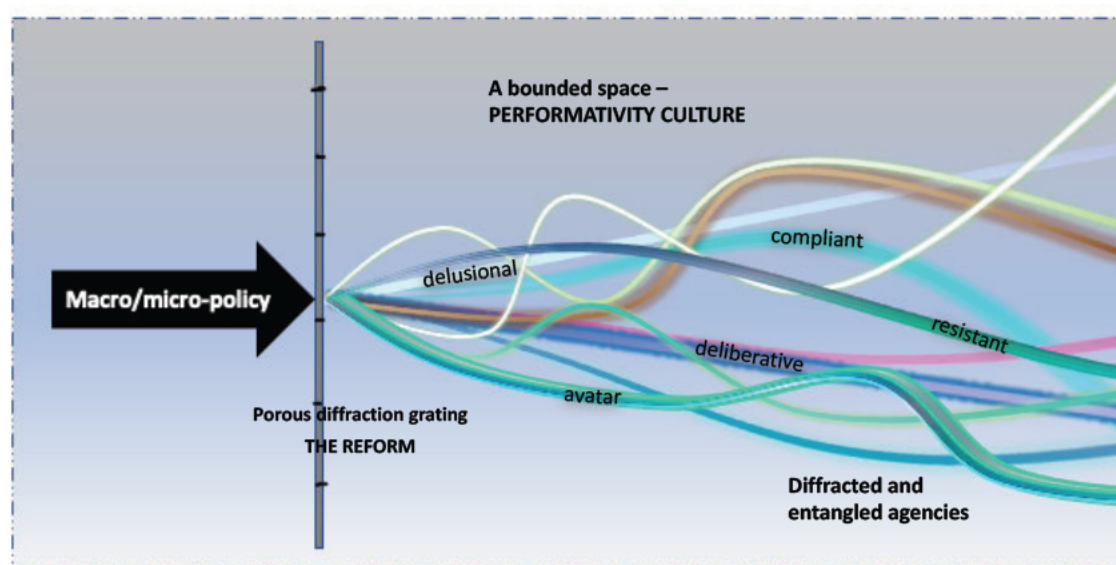
Figure 19: Diffracted and entangled agencies within a bounded space

As observed in the previous chapter, macro and micro policies are inescapable realities in teachers' professional experiences. Their professional decisions (including personal decisions such as the choice of working in a particular school or working for a promotion for better financial rewards), choices and actions are always in the making as a confluence of forces exerted by the macro-policy environment and the conditioning mechanism within the micro-institutional space influence them. However, teachers' professional identities, agencies and roles are questioned, challenged and revisited whenever they face changing conditions, such as during major national reform initiatives, as described at the onset of the fieldwork after the most recent Mauritian curriculum policy reforms were introduced. Thus, agency is diffracted into multiple forms of agencies as teachers negotiate their identities, revisit their experiences and make decisions (which are not linear and simplistic) as they experience changes. The

diffractions also capture teachers' resistance to simplistic complicity with the agenda of capitulation. Teachers are not, therefore, wholly complicit in supporting the middle class values encapsulated within the performativity culture; they also deflect and diffract such notions and create environments for leaners to engage more critically with imposed nationalistic agendas. However, resistance to such impositions is often relatively suppressed in public spaces and classroom spaces might be considered as largely dominated by the public expected discourses of co-option to a national agenda.

Furthermore, while the context of this study is that of the curriculum reform, it should be noted that the ***diffraction grating*** within which teacher agency is exercised can represent any change that results in the entanglement of different types of agencies. These filtering grating circumstances could arise from various dominant ambient influences. Diffraction gratings may not be confined to macro-systemic or structural/institutional forces, but could also be characterised by personal, social and cultural conceptions of filters which teacher agents may be encountering. In implementing the reform, teachers are faced with a changing policy environment which triggers their reflection on their choices and decisions; and how these are regulated by various structures functioning in parallel within the macro-policy context, the micro-institutional and/or personal spaces. Therefore, the policy reform represents a change that gives rise to multiple agencies as it is reinterpreted and responded to by active teacher agents. I chose to represent the diffraction grating as one which is porous or comprises multiple slits to reflect the turbulence of a dynamic changing environment. The reforms themselves do not exist in isolation or are not negotiated and implemented in isolation. Rather, the change is influenced by various forces – stakeholders' agendas, global push and pull factors, and national objectives. This complexifies the diffraction of agency further as this diffraction is not permanent, but one which is always evolving and changing.

It should be noted that the onset of the new curriculum policy constituted the diffracted grating which explores the nature of the context within which the study was conducted. As indicated in the analysis of the fieldwork, this grating activated a diffraction of multiple possible enactments and conceptions of teacher agencies. A possible explanation as to why this policy reform as a grating yielded such diverse responses could be explained by acknowledging that the grating itself (national curriculum policy reform) is not a homogeneous, static, uncontroversial or mono-dimensional constitutive entity. It, therefore, invites multiple reactions to its varied elements. The grating consists of polyvocal elements too: policy is

considered as an amalgam of multiple interests (sometimes even contradictory) aiming to serve multiple audiences, their agendas and intentions. This reinforces the argument, as noted in chapter 5, that the grating itself consists of multiple apertures. These apertures allow varied divergent forces such as social, cultural, economic, and political interests embedded within and alongside the grating. When teachers engage with specific elements of this porous and multi-dimensional constituent grating, then it influences which type of agency they choose to activate. Since the grating is poly-constituted, agency is simultaneously diversified into complex layers of diffractions.

The above argument can be captured in the diagram below (**Figure 20**) which depicts how the grating itself is not neat, but messy and rough. Perhaps the conception of a diffused reflection might be appropriate here as an analogy to denote how light from a regular source (e.g. teachers) strikes an uneven/unequal/ irregular/unpolished/ rough surface (the grafting: the new curriculum reform policy). The reform then comes to be interpreted as porous in that it allows agentic choices to intersect and overlap in the bounded space of the performativity culture. This diagram foregrounds the dialogical interactivity associated with making-meaning of any grating.
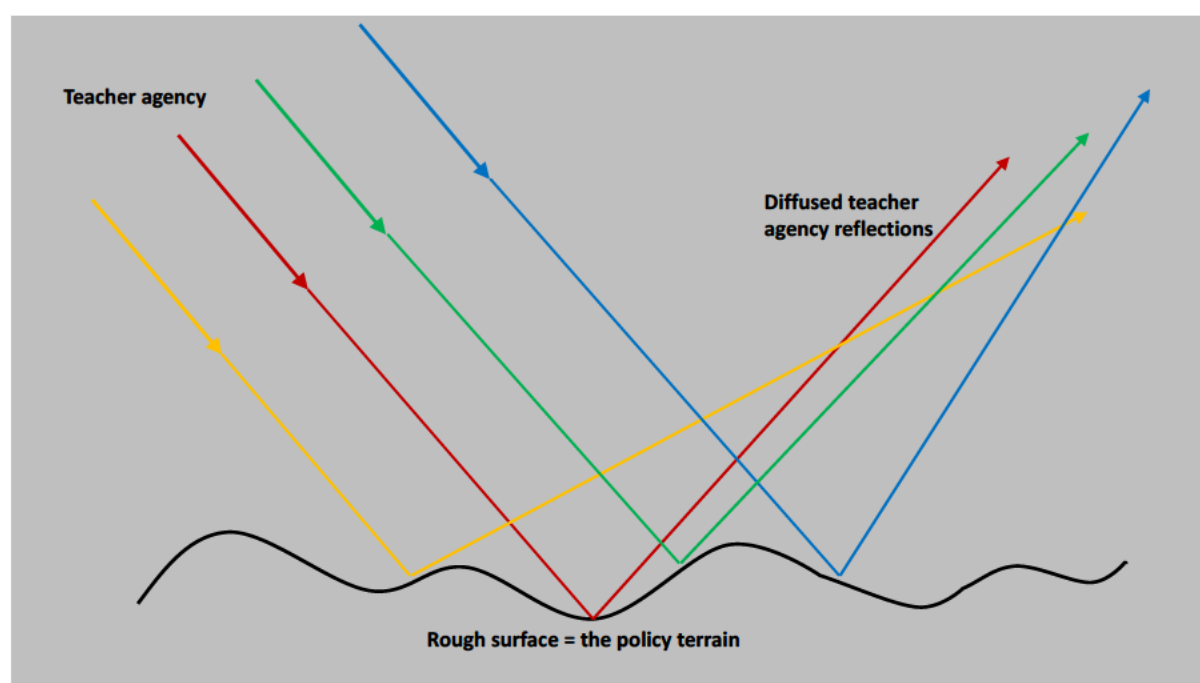

Figure 20: Multiple diffusions of teacher agency activated by a rough policy terrain

Consequently, this interpretation leads us to further analysis, namely that during a reform, other unsettling experiences or moments of change emanating from the wider social and academic environment related to education and schooling matters, or theoretical or political conceptions of knowledge engagement may impact agency. Additionally, the contextual space (including matters such as the health or environmental status of the contextual setting) within which the reform itself is being implemented activate or mediate possible specific potential responses. Furthermore, economic agendas could come to be infused into the grating and its apertures. For instance, a teacher who chooses to continue to teach the way he/she has been teaching may be compelled to revisit teaching strategies in a moment of change brought by the COVID-19 pandemic where online teaching accompanies the reform. Similarly, a teacher who been rebelling against the reform, or has been practising 'strategic mimicry' may review his/her agency during an inflation in order to protect his/her job for financial security reasons. There are multiple other possible forces such as interference of stakeholders and political change that will create more complexly interwoven entanglement of agencies. Hence, the grating is porous as the experience of the reform is fluid and one with possible challenges and adaptations.

In theory, many sources within and around the grating itself, including parents, the wider community, political apparatuses, and training institutions could offer sources of reconstituting the grating (reform) itself. Moreover, this grating comprises apertures which constantly introduce new forces within and around the grating (or specifically within the policy reform itself) that will cause the diffracted agencies to be further diffracted and entangled. Therefore, diffracted agencies are not limited to forces enabling or constraining these agencies, as these forces are themselves in flux and always changing. This symbolical grating with apertures representing various forces that exist simultaneously as a reform gives rise to the phenomenon where teachers exercise agency in complex, entangled and turbulent ways as captured in the figure below.
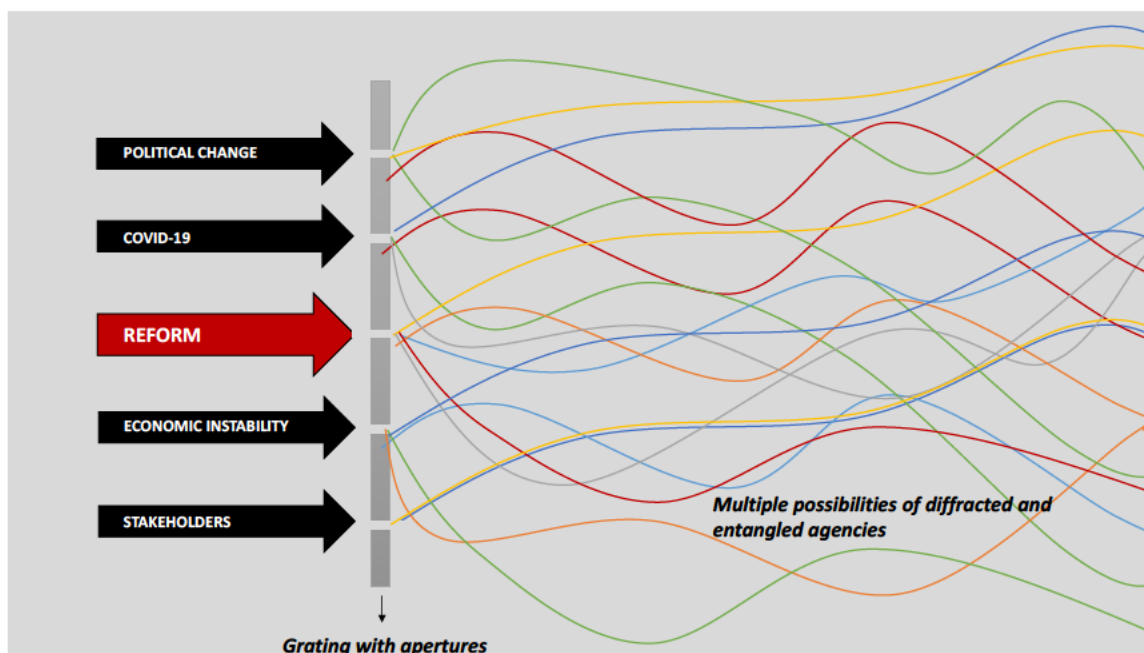
Figure 21: Grating with apertures producing multiple possibilities of diffracted and entangled agencies

Consequently, it is observed that the way in which these agencies are exercised is messy and many types of agencies are exercised by the same individual – at times in different spaces (during a workshop, in the Rector's presence, in the staffroom, the classroom and in the private tutoring space) and while responding to different stakeholders (policy makers, parents, Rectors, management, teacher educators). Hence, as illustrated in the figure above, the different forms of agencies are entangled. I have included some forms of agencies that emerged from my study that were discussed in the last section of chapter five but, as noted, diffraction of agencies is multiple and infinite. Had the study been conducted with different teachers (different gender or subjects, from other types of schools, from other countries or as countries experience the COVID-19 pandemic and revisit teaching strategies), other forms of agencies could have been observed.

By further extrapolation, these entangled agencies are regulated consciously or unconsciously within a bounded space that, whilst dominated by a performativity ideology, embeds other nuanced elements. This ideological space includes the internal and external forces that influence the teacher's choice(s) of agency(ies). Internal forces will, for instance, include the teacher's own upbringing and schooling and the firm belief in a structure that ensures a good job and better standard of living based on good academic performance. They may also include

the postcolonial need to prove a country's capacity by being educated and performing well in an international landscape. These internal forces are embedded with external forces such as globalisation, digitalisation and reforms – changing environments that invoke the need to revisit one's professional role and identity.

Consequently, I have chosen to represent this bounded space with dotted lines to represent permeable boundaries which are in flux and are influenced by other forces. For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic has compelled many countries to rethink firm beliefs in a performativity ideology in favour of equipping students, and future citizens, with knowledge and other skills (critical, analytical, digital). The need for digital skills in workplaces has also created demand for the use of digital support to prepare students for future employment. Moreover, performance-oriented teaching strategies have contributed to more competitiveness among students who enrol for after school private tuition instead of relaxing or developing other skills for their holistic development. This situation might influence the choices of parents and teachers and they may rethink the preservation of this performativity culture. Hence, this space is porous and dynamic – influenced by changing trends and social, cultural, economic and global concerns.

Thus, while, as highlighted in the review of the existing literature in chapter two, other studies have emphasised the enactment of agency within the micro-institutional environment (which is regulated by standardisation, varying autonomy levels and accountability), in this study the emphasis is on the entangled forms of agencies which are enacted by teachers as they are influenced by biographical forces, macro-policy agendas, micro-institutional regulations and unregulated spaces such as private tuition. Furthermore, these forces are situated within a bounded performativity-oriented space.

6.2 Philosophical insights and implications of the study

I initially conceptualised teacher agency as an inner capacity to act, but one which is influenced by macro-policy and micro-institutional forces. During my research study (which increasingly became more sensitive to the balancing of ecological and sociological perspectives), I became more aware of forces generated from a diverse and contested range of biographical and professional experiences. In the existing literature, teacher agency often manifests in the form of deliverology, curriculum making and strategic mimicry and the focus is on forces impacting

agency as binary opposites – constraining and enabling. However, in this study, it has been argued that teacher agency should be understood as a set of actions, decisions and choices that emanate from entangled experiences that are catalysed, in particular, by fluidly evolving local and global spaces.

Hence, while the **critical questions** have been answered, new insights have shed light on the restrictive nature of their formulation. For instance, in answering the questions: **'What are the forces that influence teacher agency?'** and '**How do these forces enable or constrain agency?'** I observed and described forces like personal beliefs, autonomy, standardisation, examinations, professional workshops and policy implementation. However, what is not highlighted in the existing literature is how these forces are enmeshed and emanate from co-occurring, multiple changes, as elaborated in chapter five. Hence, these forces cannot be understood as binary ones that at times enable and at other times constrain agency. Instead, they are messily diffracted and give rise to multiple entangled forms of agency. Furthermore, as I embarked on understanding **'Why teachers exercise agency the way they do in times of curriculum reform?'** (the third critical question), I noted that the policy reform acts as a change that generates reflection by teachers on their professional space and roles, and also their personal beliefs and preferences. However, the reform does not trigger these forms of agencies. Instead, the policy only serves as a catalyst to make a series of multiple diffracted and entangled agencies more visible. Consequently, other changes coexist alongside changes brought about by the reform, such as:

- globalisation and pressure from international institutions such as examinations bodies;
- fast-evolving digital trends that create the possibility for new teaching and learning tools; and
- other socio-cultural changes, such as demands from job markets, a rise in indiscipline or a dwindling culture of reading.

These changes catalyse the messiness, as teachers have to negotiate their agencies as a response to different changes. As noted earlier, **in this study the reform is representative of any change that causes diffraction, but the messiness emanates from entangled personal and professional experiences within a dynamic sociocultural dimension.**

In the sub-sections below, I discuss the philosophical relevance of the phenomenon with emphasis on its theoretical, methodological and contextual implications.

6.2.1 Theoretical implications

The multiple forms of agency exercised in diffracted ways are mainly strategic and deliberate ones that materialise as a response to personal and stakeholders' expectations. An independence of self is observed as teachers make conscious choices of exercising agency in specific ways. For instance, aware of how they are expected to operate within a socially, politically and economically bounded space regulated by macro-policy boundaries, some teachers deliberately pretend to be compliant. For fear of losing their jobs or being tagged as a 'bad' teacher, *compliant agency* is adopted. For instance, a teacher may choose to comply with traditional methods of teaching rather than using digital support as parents or Rectors may interpret such support as a distraction or may believe that the teacher is not doing his/her job. To avoid criticism or judgement within a dominant performative space, the teacher may choose to comply with stakeholders' expectations. Their dissatisfaction surfaces when talking with colleagues (in the staffroom or during workshops), which may indicate rebellion, but they nevertheless continue to respond to their bounded performativity space as they adhere to a system that evaluates performance based on results. Thus, they are consciously *choosing* a representation of self. Therefore, teachers cannot be categorised as docile or agentic and it cannot be deduced that a docile teacher is passive and a deliverologist who fears criticising or challenging educational structures. Instead, compliance and resistance, including potential rebelliousness, are various forms of agencies that may emanate from the same individual.

6.2.1.1 The plurality of teacher agency

The literature on teacher agency has gradually moved from the simplistic notion of agency being an inner capacity to act to one that acknowledges that the capacity to act is influenced by various forces. Thus, while the multiplicity of forces is theorised (without emphasising complexity and entanglement), the plurality of agency is not. Instead, the nature of being agentic has been represented dichotomously as passive and active. My theory of diffracted agencies points to the various possibilities of agencies occurring at the same time, *embedded, fluid and turbulent*. Teachers do not choose to deliver and resign themselves to deliverology throughout their teaching career; nor do they decide to practise strategic mimicry only when

faced with a reform. Instead, agency is exercised in diffracted and embedded ways during different stages and phases of the teacher's professional life. There may also be personal triggering forces, like family problems, aiming for a promotion, negotiating their roles in times of change or implementing new curricula. This biographical dimension is acknowledged in Priestley et al's (2015) ecological model of teacher agency. My analysis suggests that this ecological model includes negotiation of past, present and future temporal dimensions (iterational, practical-evaluative and projective), but that these are not necessarily neatly compartmentalised as separate forces at particular moments in time giving rise to one particular form of agency. These temporalities are simultaneously negotiating past, present and future aspirational and representational forms of teacher agencies within the same individual, ever mutating and responsive.

Similarly, I noted that even biographical heritages and experiences are always in flux and are constantly influenced (in an embedded way) by other forces and changes. As a response to these personal forces, a teacher may choose to be an active curriculum maker to achieve a promotion or to comply with the school's controlling mechanism as he/she may need to protect his/her job due to financial commitments; or the teacher may respond passively due to lack of motivation for promotion or rewards. Thus, who the teacher was as a student or as a child (influenced by his/her own school ethos, for instance) does not necessarily culminate in the type of agency which is enacted, but is questioned, challenged and revisited. Our past (personal, social, cultural or educational schooling) experiences are not deterministic, but merely catalytic to serve as a potential resource for teacher agentism.

Moreover, the same individual exercises different types of agencies during a single day depending on expectations from stakeholders (Rectors, parents, the ministry). For instance, they may show resistance to change during teacher talk; adhere to traditional practices in the classroom; innovate and immerse in the digital space during private tuition; and, pretend to be compliant while dealing with a parent or the Rector. Hence, this study suggests the need to look at teacher agency as the manifestation of multiple types of agencies which, as illustrated in section 6.1, are embedded by teachers as they respond to expectations within a conditioned space. Furthermore, these agencies are not teachers' negative reactions against policymakers, their dissatisfaction with the school environment or their resistance to political changes. This plurality is in fact an outcome of the clashes between internal and external forces which give rise to a set of behaviours.

6.2.1.2 Teacher agency within an ideologically bounded space

Various studies in different countries have highlighted similar enabling and constraining forces such as accountability, standardisation and autonomy. However, the dominant influence of the performativity culture on the ways in which teachers act has not been highlighted. I do not claim that the performativity culture is wrong and that it is influencing teachers to act in a certain way to oppress them. Instead, what I observed is that this culture is a dominant shared ideology which is glorified by stakeholders as a system which has borne fruit through enhancing the economic and social landscapes of the country. This nationalistic ideology predominates as teachers (and other stakeholders) hold tightly to this culture and are always assessing their actions, revisiting their beliefs and negotiating their roles in an ideology which does not always necessarily match global expectations, or which should be revisited in line with current local expectations. They do not reject change, but their agencies are diffracted and reflect their mixed reactions to embracing changes. Hence, the pressure exerted by this performativity culture gives rise to the internal and external clashes discussed in the previous section. The current policy is an attempt to move away (but not wholly as the examinations are still highly valued and the centre of the reform) from this performance-oriented culture, but teachers are still monitored to produce results. For instance, at school, teachers are regulated by the need to enhance the school reputation by:

- producing results; the need to valorise quantity over quality and examination exercises practice over holistic development of students;
- prioritisation of traditional strategies that have proven successful over innovative practices that match the students' needs;
- parental monitoring and expectations; and
- packed time tables that emphasise classroom teaching time.

Even in the private tuition space, teachers comply with examination expectations and are monitored by parents who are competitively involved in enhancing their children's performance. Most importantly, teachers construct boundaries around themselves – for instance, often a teacher or parent that inspires them is someone who has contributed to their own results and this creates an idolisation of a performance structure where they bound themselves in that space dominated by a specific set of beliefs emanating from cultural and

personal experiences. It is also observed that, despite their complaints and disapproval of examination-oriented practices, teachers may choose to continue to use (in an English classroom) grammar-oriented practices (which hearken back to older approaches to language pedagogy) instead of adapting their practices to changing cultural and social demands or more recent language pedagogical possibilities. Ironically, their resistance to innovation reflects the entrenchment of a conservativist approach. Yet, this is consciously selected as a strategic means to valorise the performance-oriented structure and emphasise the need to produce results. However, it cannot be denied that the teachers are themselves products of a system that has conditioned them with the normativity of this performativity structure and that this has reinforced their belief in this structure by providing them with qualifications that have allowed them better job prospects.

As an extension to the theory on teacher agency, it can be thus deduced that teachers exercise entangled forms of agencies but within an ideologically bounded space. It is observed that the choices and decisions they make are influenced by that performativity space which is in turn influenced by local postcolonial needs for success, global changes and the modernisation of the education structure and students' changing responses to education. Meanwhile, this ideological space is one which is also changing – a performativity culture in a postcolonial country ensures academic success and meritocratic enhancement of social identity; however, it is not one that will remain unchanged. Other skills such as critical skills or communication skills have been prioritised in the new policy (2017 NYCBE and 2017 NCF) in view of developing skills that will assist students personally and professionally in the future, not only by producing good results and accumulating qualifications but also to enhance their employability. Hence, the performativity ideology is being revisited to some extent as, at the same time, it is noted that while the policy emphasises holistic development, schools, parents and even teachers still firmly believe in and preserve the performance-oriented structure. This ideologically-bounded space is thus one that acts as a comfort zone for parents, schools and teachers – parents believe in the success of the education system and their wards if the latter pass formal assessments and examinations; school management expresses satisfaction with a high percentage pass rates; while teachers prove their self-worth when their students (at school or in private tuition) produce good results.

While the study is limited to teacher agency, further research could be conducted to understand the influence exerted by parents and schools within this ideologically bounded space.

6.2.2 Methodological implications

As highlighted with regard to the theoretical implications, teachers' experiences are multiple and even if at times they collectively reinterpret the past, individuality and the uniqueness of experiences should be acknowledged. The chosen methodology enabled me to immerse myself in the lives of selected teachers as they negotiate their professional identities and exercise different types of agencies to please or respond to different stakeholders. The plurality of teacher agency was captured through the multiple truths of the participants whose messy narratives as past, present and future overlap, offering me a glimpse into the complexity of the phenomenon. Moreover, the representation and co-construction of the narratives in the form of an ethnodrama highlighted the transition of teachers among various spaces, the temporal embeddedness of their experiences and also my disruption as a researcher. Indeed, the diffracted forms of agencies and an understanding of the ways in which agencies are entangled was made possible through the representation and co-construction of narratives in the form of a drama as emblematic characters are seen exercising multiple forms of agencies in turbulent dimensions but within a bounded ideological performative space.

6.2.2.1 Selected 'truths' and contextual reality

In private spaces, teachers often resist, show disapproval of policy decisions or claim a lack of transparency and teachers' lack of involvement in designing policies. However, they exist within a performativity structure that has existed for a long time and teachers expressed fear of sharing their stories. They go through selective choices of memories while narrating their stories and, as Murris and Bozalek (2019) argued, "the past is open and can be re-worked" (p. 6). Did they rework their past while narrating their stories? I made use of different artefacts to trigger their memories but each time they consciously or unconsciously moved back to examinations. The multiple obsessive references to examinations may also hint at how they choose to represent themselves as teachers who are actively contributing to a dominant examination structure. In doing so, they gain a sense of self-worth and feel like powerful members of the education system. However, the fear that their words might be contested was always present and they often asked, 'But what do you think?' thereby showing the dominance of conditioning mechanisms and awareness of the expectation of compliance.

6.2.2.2 Entangled experiences and positionality

My positionality was also an important element that might have influenced the construction and co-construction of stories. As Barad (2012) observed, the researcher is part of the diffracted and entangled experiences and truths that come out of a study, as researchers are "part of the world's differential becoming" (p. 77) and there is no "absolute insides or outsides" (p. 9). Hence, the positionality of the researcher was also redefined in the course of this study. In the ethnodrama, I allow myself to be disrupted and include my narratives and reflection in Act IV. This dramatic space echoes my immersion in the lives or life histories of the participants who, at times individualised and at times representing a collective voice[70], exercise entangled forms of agencies as they negotiate their roles and identities in a changing landscape.

The co-construction and interpretation of narratives increase subjectivity even if ethical considerations are upheld or reflexivity is included. My presence in the lives of the participants as an insider (an educator) and as an outsider (textbook writer and lecturer) may have catalysed the filtering of memories or fear of sharing in the initial stages. As an insider I was an accomplice in the pressure to comply with the examination culture despite at times resisting; like the participants, I have been conditioned by similar ideologies which explain a parallel in the ontological positions of the participants and researcher. Hence, entanglement here includes the impossibility of dissociating the participants' and the researcher's experiences. Consequently, the relationship and trust constructed welcomed me into the complex experiences of the teachers and revealed how they exercised multiple agencies as they implemented new curricula and policy, as they dealt with changing socio-cultural landscapes and as they embraced evolving digital teaching and learning tools.

6.2.2.3 Narrative inquiry and ethnodrama

Choosing ethnodrama as a mode of representation offered the opportunity to recreate stories by staying true to the data. The emblematic characters represent the universality of experiences. While the different characters reflect different biographical experiences and represent different types of micro-institutional spaces, it is interesting to observe the entanglement of their experiences and how the different life stories fuse into common 'truths' – why they exercise agency(ies) the way they do. Before choosing this particular mode of representation, I tried to

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[70] This emphasises the flexibility of the methodology to accommodate such variations.

represent the stories through biographical narratives, but the embeddedness of experiences, temporal and spatial dimensions and of the negotiation of times of change could only be achieved through the three-dimensional space of the drama. Moreover, the ethnodrama allowed me to bring out the entanglement whereby a single teacher may exercise agency in different entangled ways simultaneously: in regulated and unregulated spaces; in dealing with students, Rectors and parents; and in sharing with their peers during workshops and at school. The ethnodrama, therefore, assisted me in acknowledging the plurality of agency. Even if narrative inquiry is not a completely grounded analysis as to a large extent the construction of the ethnodrama was theory-led, this mode of representation offered me the opportunity to abstract ordinates and super-ordinates with new sets of reading and with an analytical lens. Thus, this methodology allowed me to creatively represent the complexity of experiences and teacher agency through a blending of hypothesis testing and generating approaches.

6.2.3 Contextual implications

Contextual implications involve both the global macro-context and the micro-Mauritian context where the study was conducted. Mauritius has been proving its worth in the international landscape by reviewing its educational policies and emphasising a performativity structure that has enhanced social and economic stability. In this particular context, it is observed that a bounded performativity space is ideologically sustained, and teachers are entangled in a plurality of agencies as they negotiate their roles and identities within the bounded, and within a broader global context.

6.2.3.1 The dominant local culture in a globally changing context

As observed in chapter two, based on the limitations of the existing literature, teacher agency should be understood as emanating from specific contextual spaces and experiences and it cannot be compared or generalised. Indeed, teacher agency may vary depending on, for instance, types of micro-institutional realities. Just as the reality and ethos of schools in the same country vary, at times teachers' experiences in a particular national space are unique. For instance, the persistence of the performativity culture as a legacy of early postcolonial Mauritius, along with the needs of a market economy, pervade the memory and perceptions of the current cohort of Mauritian teachers. They continue to teach in the ways they have been teaching, express a lack of trust and confusion in relation to the examination paper format, and

at times refuse to adhere to new strategies in standardised textbooks because of their conviction that the performativity structure is the best. This reflects the national agenda for economic development and to ensure an educated workforce for the future – an idea that has persisted in the postcolonial psyche. Despite the emphasis on the performance of the teacher, the competitive production of results and quantification of work in the form of assessment and correction, teachers work towards the fulfilment of performance-oriented rewards. However, as noted earlier, the performativity structure is also evolving. Teachers show awareness of the need to prepare students for evolving expectations, such as equipping them with digital tools that are pervading industrial sectors in the current global landscape. Consequently, they show resistance by adopting digital tools even if these are banned by the school or perceived as a distraction by parents. Thus, the performativity culture is dominant in this context and is also being influenced by socio-cultural evolution. Further research could be conducted in other SIDS to understand the performativity mechanism and its impact on agency, policy development and teacher education. Furthermore, while the performativity culture is a core driver of teachers' diffracted agencies, it is observed that they lay more emphasis on CIE and have a tendency to assign more importance to this global/international institution than local ones. This may signal the strong grip of a British institutional legacy and the need to preserve the colonial supremacy of British language and education. It may also signal a lack of trust in local institutions or it may be a choice that assists in ensuring international recognition of the Mauritian education system. Around 160 countries across the world follow the Cambridge programme, and it would be interesting to understand the ways in which teachers in other countries respond to this examination body – is it given the same value and prioritised, or are local institutions given similar value? Hence, this study highlighted the turbulent and evolving global pressures on how local teachers identify their roles and identities, and in turn exercise their agencies.

6.2.3.2 'Managed intimacy' of teachers

As noted in chapter one, there is a dominant culture of 'managed intimacy' (Lowenthal cited in Bray, 1991; Samuel & Mariaye, 2016) in Mauritius whereby teachers can be interpreted as becoming "experts at muting hostility deferring their own views and containing disagreement and avoid dispute in the interest of stability and compromised." (Bray, 1991, p. 21). This explains diverging teacher talk and agency in public spaces, such as that of the classroom, and in private spaces of professional reflections by teachers, such as in the staff room or with peers

during professional workshops. These varying forms of agency activate into the schooling context a seemingly passive notion of teachers, which might not be manifested publicly. However, this politeness culture may be interpreted as a superficial one as teachers are seen as deeply critical and in public spaces, they manage how they are being read. For instance, they project a compliant image of a state technician who is marginalised in policymaking. Despite this marginalisation, they are implementers of curriculum who, as discussed, through the entanglement of diffracted agencies, exercise different layers of agentic actions. At times portrayed as victims who negotiate limited autonomy and accountability pressures, teachers are curriculum makers who are responsible for the proper implementation of policy aims and objectives. Despite being side-lined during policymaking and the creation of a standardised mechanism to implement the policy, a shift from powerless victims to powerful agents can be observed. For instance, despite repression of digital tools, in their private spaces, they engage in the creative use of technology in their teaching. Similarly, even if the policy aims to change the traditional focus on examinations, these teachers powerfully preserve traditional practices. Hence, teachers strategically engage with their representations and agencies in particular ways that are responsive to the forces creating diffraction of agencies.

6.2.3.3 Multiple agencies, but moving in the same direction

While the study focused on the phenomenon of teacher agency, it is observed that in this context with the dominant examination-oriented structure, teacher agency is highly influenced by different stakeholders. Rectors and Deputy Rectors (school administration and management) impose regulations and control on teachers and ensure that they adhere by means of standardisation, accountability pressures and enhancing the school's reputation through the production of good results. Parents monitor teachers' choices of strategies and performance and judge them as good or bad teachers depending on students' results; meanwhile, parents preserve the private tuition system and expect teachers to respond to the competitive need for higher success rates. The ministry reviews policies and at times proposes new aims and objectives to prepare students for evolving global demands. While all these stakeholders are responsible for the types of agency exercised as a response to their needs, it is interesting to observe that all of them, including teachers, are moving in the same direction – compliance with a performativity culture that produces results and has helped the country in its development and global acceptance and recognition. Hence, the bounded space is one occupied by all these stakeholders with a common aim of success and further research could be

conducted to provide a deeper understanding of the influence of these stakeholders (with similar agendas) on the production of diffracted and entangled agencies.

6.2.3.4 Relevance of diffracted agencies for policy and teacher education

An understanding of diffracted and entangled agencies will assist policymakers in developing policies that respond to the needs and expectations of teachers who are struggling with internal and external forces as they find themselves in a changing environment with a persistent performativity culture. Teachers are not villains (those who are always challenging the relevance of reforms or questioning standardisation processes such as imposed textbooks) or victims (voicing their marginalisation and absence in the policy making process), but complex individuals whose agencies are always evolving. Teachers' reactions to reforms should not be marginalised as emotional reactions of unsatisfied professionals who refuse to adapt to new policy narratives or who resist any change; but, instead as the people that implement the reforms, teachers' agencies and the forces generating these diffracted agencies should be taken into consideration by policy makers. This understanding may result in policy-making processes that value teachers' contributions, roles, experiences, and agencies, and consequently, assist in the formulation of policies that acknowledge the nuanced and dynamic professional environment of teachers (macro- and micro- policies).

Moreover, teachers' responsiveness is often an outcome of their own contradictions and complex identities as they revisit past experiences, acknowledge present evolving trends and fear a changing but inevitable future. Therefore, exposing teachers to drastic changes through policy reform does not give rise to a smooth transition from past practices to a changed one. Instead they (and other stakeholders) should be prepared for newness. As stated in previous chapters, workshops are conducted to guide teachers through the change and they follow professional education programmes to equip them with pedagogical strategies and understanding of their professional environment. However, despite being empowering to some, the workshops are at times perceived as deprofessionalising. For instance, instead of guiding teachers through the policy (aims, objectives, changes), they attend workshops on how to use the standardised textbooks. This explains why teachers confuse the policy document or narrative with the standardised book and why there is more resistance at the beginning of the reform. Furthermore, only selected teachers attend these workshops, and due to loaded timetables, preparation of students for examinations and other professional responsibilities,

often what is learnt or reflected during the workshops does not cascade to other teachers. Hence, assisting and equipping teachers with more policy knowledge will provide a better sense of direction and may give rise to less resistance, especially at the beginning of the reform which is greeted with confusion, doubt and resistance.

Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that teachers do not have fixed identities, but their roles, identities and agencies are part of a fluid social, cultural, economic and political context. A policy should thus be introduced in different phases in order to acclimatise and empower teachers and ease implementation.

6.3 Limitations and future research

6.3.1 Limitations of the study

- Data was collected over six months and, during that period, different triggering strategies and artefacts were used to thicken data and to probe teachers to reflect further on their biographical and professional experiences. However, the time devoted to data collection was limited and more light could have been shed on other forms of teacher agency if teachers' implementation of the curriculum could have been observed for a longer period of time; more interviews and informal conversations with the participants could also have provided richer insights into biographical experiences; and more light could have been shed on agency within unregulated spaces with observation of teachers in a private tuition space. More time with the participants would have allowed me to further understand the back and forth movements as teachers construct, deconstruct and reconstruct memories, and their selective choices of a particular representation of the self.

- Despite the use of purposive sampling, the sample comprised only female teachers. The schools that agreed to participate in this study were those with a higher number of female teachers. Hence, teachers chosen by the Rectors or Heads of Department to participate represent this skewed gender bias. If both male and female teachers had been part of this study, another perspective could have been included – that of gender realities and experiences of teachers in the professional space. It should, however, be

noted that the majority of teachers of English in Mauritian secondary schools are females, and the sample reflected this demographic profile.

- Moreover, apart from the types of schools included in the research (state secondary and private/confessional schools), there are other types of schools that do not follow the national policy and adhere to international ones. Understanding teacher agency among teachers in these schools could have added to the understanding of other forms of diffracted agency as the focus of these schools is the development of holistic skills and these are fee-paying schools where the influence of parents as stakeholders might be more powerful (accountability to parents).

- For the purpose of this study, as explained in chapter one, I restricted myself to English teachers due to the dominant presence of English as a core subject in the Mauritian education system. However, more layers of diffracted agencies could have been observed if other subjects had been considered; for instance, the struggle of oriental language teachers as they negotiate agencies in a contextual space which is influenced by globalisation and the dominance of the English language.

6.3.2 Future research

The theory of diffracted agencies emphasises plurality, dis(continuity), embeddedness and fluidity. Hence, it is argued that there are multiple layers of teacher agency that coexist in the messy and turbulent changing landscapes inhabited by the teachers. This entanglement paves the path for **future research**:

- to identify other forms of agencies;
- to study diffracted agencies in other contexts (for instance, whether this performativity ideology is dominant in other SIDS and whether it influences agencies in similar ways as observed in this study) and whether the performativity culture pervades teachers' memories and produces nostalgia;
- to use a sample that comprises both genders in order to shed light on other cultural implications that may influence agency;
- to understand the multiple agentic predispositions of various types of teachers (such as those teaching ancestral languages or other subjects that are not centralised as core subjects in the policy reform);

- to understand teacher agency in new spaces such as that of the private tuition which has been an important space referred to by most participants; so, conducting future research that includes observations of teachers in this particular private space or teachers that are involved only in private tuition but do not work in a regulated school space.
- to understand the dynamic influence of changing times, such as the current digital phenomenon in teaching following the COVID-19 pandemic; and
- to identify other dominant forces that explain why teachers exercise agencies in such a diffracted, embedded and complex manner.

6.4 Moving towards the end…diffractions

6.4.1 My transformation in the journey

The theory of diffracted agencies has culminated in a range of possibilities to examine the phenomenon of teacher agency; thus, closure cannot be achieved and instead I move towards the end of this journey by opening doors to future research on the ways in which teachers exercise multiple agencies as they negotiate their complex identities within a fluid professional environment that cannot be detached from entangled memories and experiences. However, as I move towards the end of this thesis report, I reflect on my journey. At the beginning of this study, my mind was teeming with innumerable reasons why teachers exercise agency the way they do. I thought of forces within their environment that enable or constrain their agency – limiting myself to a dichotomous representation of experiences. As I went through the existing literature on the phenomenon, I came across a range of forces that influence agency, but I was still looking at teachers as active or passive and the existing literature did not capture the nuances of agencies. I thought about overlapping ways in which agency is exercised and wanted to probe deeper into this complexity.

As I started data production I immersed myself in the lives of my participants and the complexity intensified – the participants were struggling with performativity pressures from different stakeholders (micro-institutional, macro-policy, parents, and themselves); they were negotiating their identities in changing times (policy reform, language issues in relation to the English language due to sociocultural changes, globalisation, digitalisation); some were going through personal problems that were influencing their professional identity, roles and actions;

and some were negotiating different roles in different spaces (personal, regulated micro-institutional, unregulated tuition space). Hence, my understanding of agency was no longer aligned with a binary representation of active and passive depictions; and the entanglement of experiences within spatial and temporal dimensions compelled me to consider the plurality of agency. Consequently, I was no longer the teacher, but I was looking at the phenomenon from different perspectives – at the level of policy, school management, parents' expectations, teacher educators and teachers' experiences. These levels are embedded and I depicted this complexity through the ethnodrama that captures the entanglement of experiences and the multiplicity of agencies.

This multiplicity and diffraction does not lead to a simplification of the understanding of the phenomenon. Instead, it gives rise to more considerations about teacher agency and how to assist them in transacting new policies. Professional workshops are conducted, policy documents are available, standardised textbooks accompany the implementation process and examination specimen papers are available to teachers. However, detaching from routinised behaviours, revisiting past memories and reconsidering firm beliefs are not easy, and may trigger passive compliance, resistance, strategic mimicry, and at times active curriculum making without believing in one's actions. Therefore, are these forms of professional support sufficient? Should teacher counselling and reflection exercises not be part of the system? Should teachers be professionally accompanied only at the introductory level of a policy, or is policy implementation (especially one involving major changes) not a gradual process? It is also important to understand the persistent need of other stakeholders to safeguard this performativity culture despite acknowledgment of the need to embrace change. Hence, the purpose of this study is not to provide closure or solutions, but diffracted agencies is theorised as a kaleidoscope[71] of possibilities, and this multiplicity arises from embedded experiences.

As I near the end of this thesis, I also experience the dominant influence of a new change that is reshaping roles, agencies and identities – the COVID-19 pandemic – and further research on how this change, coupled with other changes mentioned earlier, including the reform, gives rise to other complex layers of agencies. To capture this ongoing complexity and diffracted agencies, I choose to end this thesis with Act V of the ethnodrama – *The Cockroach.*

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[71] The term kaleidoscope captures the multiplicity of possibilities represented through the diffracted agencies.

6.4.2 A fictionalised representation of the kaleidoscope of possibilities of diffracted agencies

This Act is a fictional one set two years after the previous Acts in chapter four. The reform is no longer something new as teachers are now in the middle of the implementation process and are preparing students for examinations. This movement in time is to capture the evolving roles, identities and agencies of teachers. I also introduce another change (the COVID-19 pandemic) in this fictionalisation that is impacting the social and temporal dimensions inhabited by the teacher. In including this change, I want to highlight the fluidity of experiences and how the porous diffraction grating, representing the reform in my study, is influenced by internal (new challenges as teachers reconsider teaching practices) and external (forces exerted on the macro- and micro-policy context by the pandemic and other changes) forces. I also want to emphasise that the bounded performativity space is evolving as teachers struggle with the need to continue teaching (for holistic development of students and to prepare them for the future workforce) and to prepare students for examinations despite the difficult time prevailing globally. I seek to capture the dominance of the performativity culture in the chosen setting (a workshop on the marking of national examination scripts) and how teachers exercise diffracted agencies as they negotiate these changing contexts.

The fluidity of experiences and entanglement of agencies presented in this fictional conversation between the emblematic characters introduced in chapter four reflect the plurality of agencies, and the entangled and evolving experiences, and most importantly, that my study is not providing a conclusion or solution to the phenomenon of diffracted agencies. Instead, it is opening doors to future research for a better understanding of teachers' responsiveness to a dynamic personal and professional environment.

This short Act ends with a new change, and here I want to point to how teachers are always negotiating changes; and also that resistance, compliance, satisfaction, confusion, fear, dissatisfaction, empowerment, deprofessionalisation, active curriculum making and other forms of agencies and reactions are multiple, infinite and always responsive to changing contexts.

ACT V

This Act is set two years after Maya, Sara and Veena met at the workshop depicted in Act I. They are attending a workshop (conducted in a school during the school holidays) on a marking exercise for the Grade 9 National Examinations.

During lunch time, Maya, Sara and Veena are sitting in the school garden. They are reflecting on the current workshop and sharing their experiences. The macro-policy workshop context and the micro-institutional location blend with the informal setting of the garden. The characters are wearing colourful shirts to reflect the embeddedness of their experiences and their diffracted agencies.

Veena: What do you think about the exam paper? I'm not happy with the level...it's so easy for my students. I don't feel I'm preparing them for Cambridge exams…

Sara [*interrupting Veena*]: We can't complain. I believe the paper caters for students with varying academic levels. Even those with some difficulties can attempt this paper…don't you think so?

Veena [*not seeming convinced*]: Ya…but they won't be ready for Cambridge.

Maya: They've been through a difficult year. I'm happy the paper won't be too difficult. At least they will pass! [*She laughs*] Otherwise, I would be answerable… [*using a different tone, trying to imitate her Rector*] "Why did your students fail? You didn't give them enough work during the confinement? …Were your students present?" …and on and on…

Sara [*frowning*]: We shouldn't be answerable for that! I have worked so much during the confinement…

Veena: Some didn't ...

Sara: Ya, but I did, and it wasn't easy. So, if students do not work well, we can't be answerable! I have to prepare my students; my daughter is also having her examinations…We are doing so much!

Veena: Well, we have been preparing them since Grade 7, so, I believe they are ready. But I'm still convinced that…

Maya [*interrupting Veena*]: The students need a lot of practice…I mean, yes, we've taught them…they've practised a lot of grammar. And, I'm even using the MIE book. Students like the activities. But, you know my school, once I was even scolded by the Rector who thought

that students were playing games instead of learning. So, for the moment, practice, practice and practice…

Veena: Same in my class. We've worked so many examination papers. I must say that we were scared for no reason. The specimen exam paper is not so different from the previous one. So, work is ongoing…I'm finally going back to the books I've been using before the reform.

Sara: I've also settled with past books as there's basically no change in the exam paper.

Veena: My classes are still so crowded, and I'm tired with corrections. Let's hope that they will consider our suggestion to decrease the class size.

Maya: By the way, how was teaching during the confinement?

Veena: Tiring! It was such a mess at the beginning! It was difficult for some students to cope with Zoom, Teams…

Maya [*interrupting Veena and sounding annoyed*]: Difficult? It was horrible! Some students had no access to Internet. Fortunately, I already had WhatsApp groups for some students. At a point, I started enjoying it, but then we had to report regularly to the Rector.

Sara: Poor you! It wasn't easy, but a different experience…

[*Lights dim as their voices gradually die down. Curtains.*]

6.5 Chapter synthesis

This chapter captured the complexity of diffracted teacher agencies and how these agencies are entangled in embedded experiences influenced by spatial and temporal dimensions. As highlighted in the chapter, the theory of diffracted agencies has various theoretical, methodological and contextual implications. However, there are limitations that can be addressed as further studies are conducted on this plurality and complexity. As I reflect on my positionality and growth along the journey of this study, I emphasise the kaleidoscope of possibilities of examining the phenomenon and instead of providing closure, I highlight the disruption and the need to embrace plurality in order to better understand teacher agencies as a responsiveness to embedded and fluid macro-policy, micro-policy and personal experiences.

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Appendices

APPENDIX 1

Ethical clearance from University of KwaZulu-Natal Ethics Committee

UNIVERSITY OF ™
KWAZULU-NATAL

INYUVESI
YAKWAZULU-NATALI

04 December 2018

Mrs Wedsha Appadoo-Ramsamy 218081666
School of Education
Edgewood Campus

Dear Mrs Appadoo-Ramsamy

Protocol reference number: HSS/1983/018D
Project Title: Teacher agency: A case study of Mauritius.

Full Approval – Expedited Application

In response to your application dated 30 October 2018, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application 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.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

....
Prof Shenuka Singh (Chair)

/px

cc Supervisor: Prof M Samuel and Dr A Ankiah-Gangadeen
cc. Academic Leader Research: Dr Simon B Khoza
cc. School Administrator: Ms S Jeenarain, Ms M Ngcobo and Mr SN Mthembu

APPENDIX 2

Template: Letter to gatekeepers for access to secondary schools

To:
....
....

From:
Mrs Wedsha Appadoo-Ramsamy
Hindu Girls' College
Date:...........

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: Authorisation to enter school premises to conduct research

I am Mrs Wedsha Appadoo-Ramsamy, Educator at Hindu Girls' College. I also work as part-time lecturer at the Open University of Mauritius.

I am currently enrolled on a PhD in Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban, South Africa. My supervisors are Professor Michael Samuel, University of KwaZulu-Natal and Dr. Aruna Ankiah-Gangadeen, Mauritius Institute of Education. My research project is entitled: *Teacher agency: A case study of Mauritius*. The aim of my study is to understand teacher agency in a context of curriculum reform as teachers are experiencing the 2017 Nine Years of Continuous Basic Education (NYCBE) reform – what enables or constrains teacher agency in such a context).

The participant will be one English language teacher teaching Grades 7, 8 or 9 (lower secondary) from the English Department of your school. For the purposes of data collection, I will observe him/her during 3 English lessons and conduct four interviews at the teacher's convenience. The interviews will be around 45 to 60 minutes each. The following activities will be carried out during the interviews to prompt participants' responses on their experiences of the curriculum reform: artefact stimulus and collage stimulus activities.

It would therefore be appreciated if permission for same could be granted. I wish to assure you that I will be present merely as an observer and will not intrude in the running of the lesson in

any way. Should my presence have adverse effects on the class, I will leave the premises immediately. All considerations pertaining to ethics of consent, anonymity, right to withdraw, safe keeping of all research records and for the disposal of information are covered by the UKZN Ethics committee requirements which are available for inspection on request. All participants will be issued consent forms outlining the research focus and the necessary clauses that address their constitutional rights pertaining to privacy.

If you wish to have any further information about any aspect of the study, feel free to contact me on **59246828** or by email: wed_wesh@hotmail.com. You may also contact my supervisors by email (samuelm@ukzn.ac.za and a.ankiah@mieonline.org) or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee on the following contact details:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION
Research Office, Westville Campus
Govan Mbeki Building
Private Bag X 54001
Durban
4000
KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA
Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609
Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Thanking you in anticipation.

Yours faithfully,

@Ramsamy

Mrs Wedsha Appadoo-Ramsamy

APPENDIX 3

Informed consent form for participants

Dear _____

I am Mrs Wedsha Appadoo-Ramsamy, Educator at Hindu Girls' College.

I am currently enrolled on a PhD in Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) in Durban, South Africa. My supervisors are Professor Michael Samuel, University of KwaZulu-Natal and Dr. Aruna Ankiah-Gangadeen, Mauritius Institute of Education. My research project is entitled: ***Teacher agency: A case study of Mauritius*** The aim of my study is to understand teacher agency as teachers are experiencing the 2017 Nine Years of Continuous Basic Education (NYCBE) reform – what enables or constrains teacher agency in such a context.

My interest in the topic is due to my position as an educator who is currently experiencing an education policy reform. Agency has been interpreted conventionally as an inner capacity to act or as the act of exerting power residing in individuals. I wish to probe deeper into the phenomenon of teacher agency for a better understanding of the ways in which teachers interpret agency in a context of reform.

Data will be collected from Grades 7, 8 or 9 English language teachers/educators.

It would be appreciated if you agree to participate in the study. Should you be agreeable to do so, this will entail being interviewed on your personal and professional experiences as a teacher (comprising four interviews of around 45 minutes). There will be 3 classroom observations. Clarifications or information may be sought related to these observations. You will be requested to relate your teaching experiences in this context of reform. The interviews will be tape recorded with your permission. They will take place in settings and during timings that are convenient to you. The following activities will be carried out during the interviews to prompt participants' responses on their experiences of the curriculum reform: artefact stimulus and collage stimulus activities – you may contact me for further information related to the activities. Should you have to travel to reach these locations, travelling expenses will be covered by me.

It is understood that you may refrain from answering questions you are not comfortable with or revealing information considered personal or confidential. You may also withdraw from the study at any point without any prejudice to you. Please note that there are no financial or other benefits for participating in this study. Your contribution will however be considered invaluable in investigating an area which will help in a better understanding of teacher agency and how agency is enacted in times of reform. You are assured that your input will be treated confidentially. Your anonymity is also guaranteed. Data will be stored as soft copies and discarded after 5 years. Please note that any available compensation or medical treatment will be provided if injury occurs to you as a result of study-related procedures.

If you wish to have any further information about any aspect of the study, feel free to contact me on 59246828 or by email: wed_wesh@hotmail.com. You may also contact my supervisors by email (samuelm@ukzn.ac.za and a.ankiah@mieonline.org) or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee on the following contact details:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION
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4000
KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA
Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609
Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Should you be agreeable to participating in the study, you are requested to read and sign the following consent form:

I _____ have been informed about the study entitled *Teacher agency: A case study of Mauritius* by Wedsha Appadoo-Ramsamy.

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.

I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits that I usually am entitled to.

I have been informed about any available compensation or medical treatment if injury occurs to me as a result of study-related procedures.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher on **59246828** or by email: wed_wesh@hotmail.com.

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

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION
Research Office, Westville Campus
Govan Mbeki Building
Private Bag X 54001
Durban
4000
KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA
Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609
Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview / focus group discussion YES / NO
Video-record my interview / focus group discussion YES / NO
Use of my photographs for research purposes   YES / NO

_____   _____

Signature of Participant   **Date**

_____   _____

Signature of Witness   **Date**

(Where applicable)

_____   _____

Signature of Translator   **Date**

(Where applicable)

APPENDIX 4

Interview schedules (semi-structured interviews 1,2 & 3)

Semi-structured interview 1 [SS1]

Biographies of teachers of English in Mauritius:
Interpretations of teacher agency

*The purpose of this interview is to establish a **biographical profile** of the participant teachers of English. It aims to reflect on what they consider to be the factors influencing their choices of becoming a teacher of English (past); how they choose to teach English in their specific school contexts (present); and what motivate their choice at the present moment (future aspirations).*

This interview aims to establish a relationship of trust between researcher and participants.

Questions:
- Can you tell me about yourself?

<u>Stimulus Activity 1:</u>

i.   A **biographical data sheet** is given to the participant before conducting this interview. It is collected from the participant in person or through email.

Biographical Data Sheet

Participant's Name:_____

Sex:_____

Age:_____

Address:_____

Mobile phone number:_____

Email address:_____

Place of work:_____

Total years of experience as a teacher:_____

Academic Qualifications:_____

Professional Qualifications:_____

Primary school attended:_____

Secondary school attended: _____

Have you taught in other countries? If yes, where?_____

Family members/relatives in the teaching or education

profession:_____

_____

How would you describe yourself?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

ii.   Around 5-6 **words** are selected from the description and written on cards. If a participant has not written sufficiently in the description, then 5 cards with the following prepared **adjectives** will be used: friendly, strict, disciplined, devoted and patient.

Then the participant is asked the following questions:

- I came across these words in your description on the biographical data sheet, can you choose one word which best describe who you are?

- Why have you chosen this word? And, which word will be the least important in describing who you are?

- Which **primary and secondary schools** did you attend?
  o   Tell me about your experiences as a student (Prompts: the ways in which you were taught/ your favourite teacher)

- What do you think should be the **role of a teacher of English within the present Mauritian context**?

  o   Do you deem this role to be limited to subject teaching? Can you tell me why/how?
  o   How is this role different /similar to your own past teachers?

Stimulus Activity 2:

i.   A *Tree of Life* sheet is given to the participant two days prior to the interview.

Autobiographical stimulus activity: *Tree of Life*

Complete the following diagram. Reflect on your personal and professional experiences and write about the signification of each of the following: the branches, the leaves, the roots and the trunk.
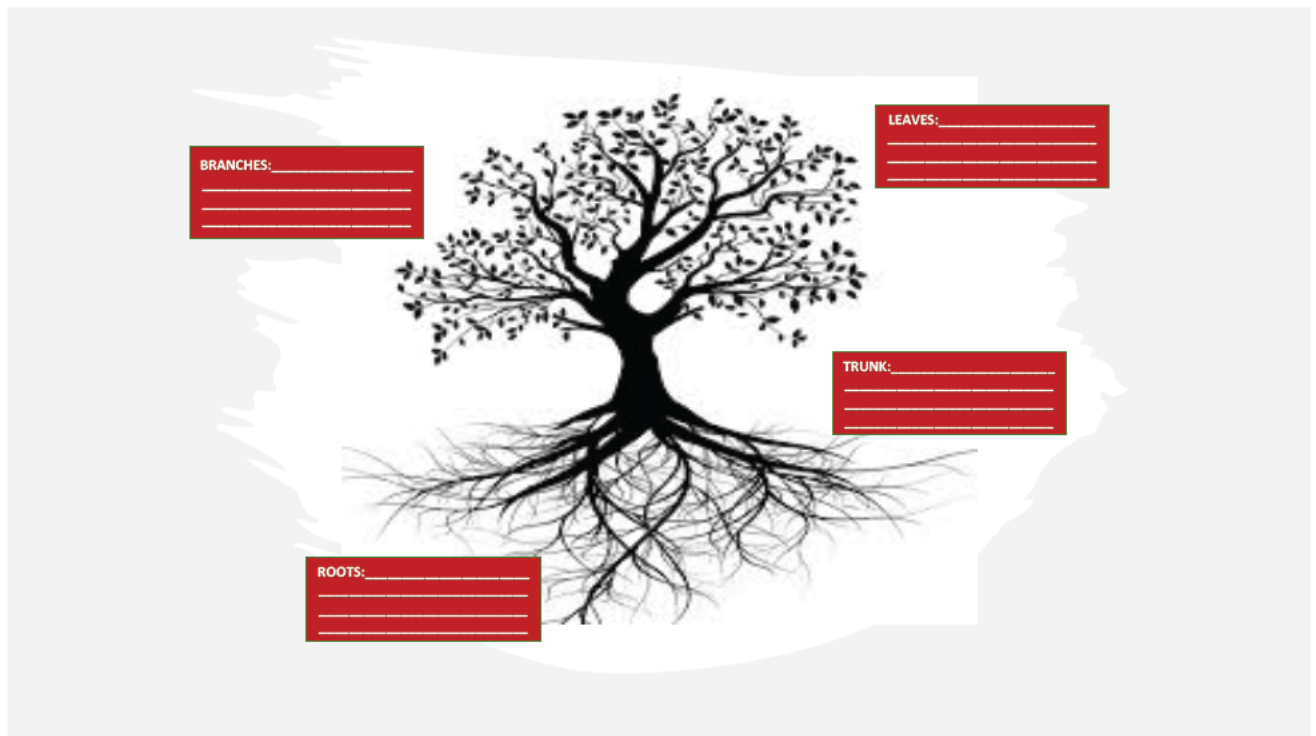
The participant will be asked questions based on the information provided for the above.

<u>Prompts:</u>

- Why did you **choose to become a teacher**?

    o Was your choice influenced by anyone (Further prompts: family members, teachers, friends)?

    o How did they influence you?

    o Do you share similar /different views about teaching from these persons?

    o Why/why not?

- Once this sheet is returned to me, I will add flowers and fruits on the drawing. During the interview, the participant will be asked:

- Now, how would you interpret the flowers and fruits on your tree of life?

- I noted (in the biographical data sheet) that you have been teaching English for x years.

- o   Would you consider the teaching of English as your long-term career goal?
- o   What do you like/not like about the teaching of English?

- What would you consider to be some of your **personal priorities** as a teacher?
  - o   (Prompts: Holistic development of the child? 21st century skills focus? Emotional agency?)
  - o   What influences your choice of priorities?
  - o   Have these priorities changed over time?
  - o   How? Why? Why not?

- What influences the type of **strategies** that you use in the teaching of English?
  - o   Have your teaching strategies changed over time?
  - o   If so, how?
  - o   Why/ why have they not changed?

- Before we end this interview, is there any question you would have liked me to ask you? Or anything you wish to share, that was not mentioned, about who you are?

[Length: Approximately 45-60 minutes]

Thank you for participating in this interview.

Semi-structured interview 2 [SS2]

Mauritian teachers of English and the macro-policy context:
Interpretations of teacher agency

*The purpose of this interview is to establish **how, what and why chosen forms of teacher agency are selected and enacted** by teachers of English in the specific changing policy context of Mauritius as they engage with a series of national curriculum policy.*

The participants will be presented with a stimulus of quotations from the present new reform to activate their reflection.

Questions:

- **Workshops** have been conducted by the Ministry of Education to orientate teachers to the new education and curriculum reform.
    - o   Have you attended any of these workshops?
    - o   How helpful were these workshops?

- What do you think about the **goals of the new curriculum** for English language teaching/learning and assessment as suggested by the new reform?
    - o   Do you think that these goals are achievable?
    - o   Why/ why not?

- How far does the new curriculum influence your **choice of teaching/learning and assessment strategies** as a teacher of English? Can you explain how/why?
    - o   Could you give me one example of how your pedagogical (teaching, learning, assessment) strategies have changed – if they have?

- Which **language/s** do you use the most in **everyday non-school interaction**: English, French, or Kreol?
    - o   In which contexts do you most use these (different) languages?
    - o   Whom do you most communicate with in English, French and Kreol?

- o Is the choice of language deliberate? Why? Have you thought about its possible influence on the teaching/learning of English?

- What is your view about the use of **many languages** within the English **language classroom**?
    - o What explains your view about the use of many languages in the English classroom?

- What is your view about the (use/value/ focus) effectiveness of the **prescribed new textbooks** for the English subject to support the new curriculum reform?
    - o Name one example about a part/section of the textbook that you most agree or disagree with?
    - o Why do you dis/agree with this section?

- How do you accommodate **students with different profiles** within your teaching? (teaching strategies/types of tasks/assessment mode)
    - o How would you describe these students?
    - o How do these student characteristics influence/not your teaching strategies as a teacher of English?

- What do you think about the use of **technological digital support** to assist the teaching of English?
    - o How often do you use technological digital media in your English classroom?
    - o Why? Why not?
    - o What do you consider to be the value/not of digital technological media to support English language pedagogy?

- **Collage artefact stimulus**: Collage of policy quotes

Collage Artefact Activity

Reflect on and interpret the following collage of extracts from the Nine Years of Continuous Basic Education (NYCBE) and National Curriculum Framework (NCF) (2017).

o   The following collage represents some quotations from the new curriculum reform.

o   Which of these quotations do you most agree/ disagree with?

o   Why?

o   What other goals do you consider could/should be included in policy reform documents?

Additional questions will be asked in line with participants' responses. Also, photocopies from policy documents will be used as additional trigger.

Please note that additional questions or existing questions can be asked in relation to classroom observation.

[Length: Approximately 60 minutes]

Thank you for participating in this interview.

Semi-structured Interview 3 [SS3]

Mauritian teachers of English and the micro-institutional context:
Interpretations of teacher agency

*The purpose of this interview is to establish the extent to which **the specific micro-contextual institutional environment influences teacher agency**. The interview will also focus on the kind of collegial relationships being activated (or not) in this context.*

*The interview will conclude with a synthetic overview of the participants' interpretations of their identity as a teacher and the expression of agency **within the present environmental context at micro-(institutional) and macro-(societal and policy) level.** This will be conducted through the selection and discussion of an artistic artefact to stimulate reflection.*

Questions:

- Tell me more about the **department** in your present school.

  o What kind of relationship do you share with members within your department?

  o Do you work together? Describe an activity of this collaboration.

  o Do you conduct cross-curricular activities?

  o What explains the ways in which you interact (or not) with your colleagues within the department/across departments in this school?

- What kinds of support do you receive/not from the management in the implementation of the curriculum?

- What explains this kind of support/lack of support? What do you consider to be the **enabling and/or constraining features** which influence your **role as a teacher** of English in this school?

- How do you carry out your duties within this situation?

- **Artefact stimulus**

Poem interpretation

This task requires you to select a poem that represents your teaching experiences during the curriculum reform. This artefact activity will help in providing a better understanding of the ways in which you view yourself as a teaching in the context of curriculum reform.

Task:

- Select a poem that represents your teaching experiences during the curriculum reform.
- Reflect on the selected poem.

Related Interview Questions:

o You were asked to select a particular poem that best represents you as a teacher of English in the present Mauritian context.

o Tell us about the poem you have selected and why it best represents your interpretation of your role as a teacher of English in the Mauritian context.

o What enables or prevents you from being this ideal teacher of English?

Additional questions may be asked in line with chosen poems.

Please note that in case participants have not gone through poems, a set of five poems (see below) will be brought along and they will be allowed to go through and engage in a conversation in line with above questions.

Poem 1:

Hawk Roosting[72]
By Ted Hughes

I sit in the top of the wood, my eyes closed.
Inaction, no falsifying dream
Between my hooked head and hooked feet:

[72] https://allpoetry.com/Hawk-Roosting

Or in sleep rehearse perfect kills and eat.

The convenience of the high trees!
The air's buoyancy and the sun's ray
Are of advantage to me;
And the earth's face upward for my inspection.

My feet are locked upon the rough bark.
It took the whole of Creation
To produce my foot, my each feather:
Now I hold Creation in my foot

Or fly up, and revolve it all slowly -
I kill where I please because it is all mine.
There is no sophistry in my body:
My manners are tearing off heads -

The allotment of death.
For the one path of my flight is direct
Through the bones of the living.
No arguments assert my right:

The sun is behind me.
Nothing has changed since I began.
My eye has permitted no change.
I am going to keep things like this.

Poem 2:

My Shadow[73]
By Robert Louis Stevenson

I have a little shadow that goes in and out with me,
And what can be the use of him is more than I can see.
He is very, very like me from the heels up to the head;
And I see him jump before me, when I jump into my bed.

The funniest thing about him is the way he likes to grow –
Not at all like proper children, which is always very slow;
For he sometimes shoots up taller like an india-rubber ball,
And he sometimes gets so little that there's none of him at all.

He hasn't got a notion of how children ought to play,
And can only make a fool of me in every sort of way.
He stays so close beside me, he's a coward you can see;
I'd think shame to stick to nursie as that shadow sticks to me!

One morning, very early, before the sun was up,
I rose and found the shining dew on every buttercup;

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[73] https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43196/my-shadow

But my lazy little shadow, like an arrant sleepy-head,
Had stayed at home behind me and was fast asleep in bed.

Poem 3:

<div align="center">

I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud[74]
By William Wordsworth

</div>

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced; but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
A poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company:
I gazed—and gazed—but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

Poem 4:

<div align="center">

The Cockroach[75]
By Kevin Halligan

</div>

I watched a giant cockroach start to pace,
Skirting a ball of dust that rode the floor.
At first he seemed quite satisfied to trace
A path between the wainscot and the door,
But soon he turned to jog in crooked rings,
Circling the rusty table leg and back,
And flipping right over to scratch his wings –
As if the victim of a mild attack
Of restlessness that worsened over time.
After a while, he climbed an open shelf
And stopped. He looked uncertain where to go.

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[74] https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45521/i-wandered-lonely-as-a-cloud
[75] *Songs of Ourselves, Vol.1.* (2014), p.171.

Was this due payment for some vicious crime
A former life had led to? I don't know,
Except I thought I recognised myself.

Poem 5:

The Chimney Sweeper[76]
By William Blake

When my mother died I was very young,
And my father sold me while yet my tongue
Could scarcely cry " 'weep! 'weep! 'weep! 'weep!"
So your chimneys I sweep & in soot I sleep.

There's little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head
That curled like a lamb's back, was shaved, so I said,
"Hush, Tom! never mind it, for when your head's bare,
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair."

And so he was quiet, & that very night,
As Tom was a-sleeping he had such a sight!
That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned, & Jack,
Were all of them locked up in coffins of black;

And by came an Angel who had a bright key,
And he opened the coffins & set them all free;
Then down a green plain, leaping, laughing they run,
And wash in a river and shine in the Sun.

Then naked & white, all their bags left behind,
They rise upon clouds, and sport in the wind.
And the Angel told Tom, if he'd be a good boy,
He'd have God for his father & never want joy.

And so Tom awoke; and we rose in the dark
And got with our bags & our brushes to work.
Though the morning was cold, Tom was happy & warm;
So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm.

[Length: Approximately 60 minutes]

Thank you for participating in this interview.

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[76] https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43654/the-chimney-sweeper-when-my-mother-died-i-was-very-young

APPENDIX 5

Classroom Observation template

English lessons will be observed - one class is equivalent 35 to 45 minutes depending on schools selected.

3 classroom observations per participant will be conducted (from January 2019 to July 2019). Observations will be on teaching English language and literature in English in Grade 7/8/9.

Observations will be followed by an informal interaction to discuss observation. Informal interactions will not be tape recorded, but notes may be taken in the process.

Participant: _____ Date & Time: _____ Session: _____		
Teaching of English Lessons/ Unit or Component from Textbook	**Teaching Strategies** (Including words/actions of participant/ quotes from participant)	**Notes**

Related post-lesson informal interview questions (or questions that can be included during formal semi-structured interviews – **Appendix 4**):

- You were doing _____ during the class, can you tell me why?
- Why were you using this particular strategy?

Other questions will be formulated based on observations conducted.

APPENDIX 6

Data production plan

CRITICAL QUESTIONS	SOURCES OF DATA & NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	INSTRUMENTS	TIMELINE FOR COLLECTION	ANTICIPATED ANALYSIS STRATEGY	DATA STORAGE	NOTES
Sample: Purposive selection of 6 participants (teachers of secondary schools).						
1. What are the forces influencing teacher agency? **2. How do these forces enable or constrain teacher agency?** **3. Why do teachers exercise agency the way they do?**	Interviews (45-60mins) Classroom Observation *Number of participant: 1*	Pilot Interview Schedules Pilot Class Observation Schedule	January 2019 January 2019	Refinement of interview questions; preparation of follow-up questions Write-up of field notes; analyse observations in line with teacher agency.	Tape-recorded interviews will be stored as soft copies. Observation field notes will be filed.	**<u>Pilot phase</u>** will contribute to a refinement of questions and identification of forces influencing agency. For the purpose of the pilot study, **only one participant** will be involved to contribute to the refinement of my instruments. Establishing researcher's own dialogicality.

| 1. What are the forces influencing teacher agency? (Operational question) | Interviews (45-60mins): 4 interviews per participant **Number of participants: 6** | Interview Schedules | January –June 2019 | Transcribe interview; identify gaps and seek clarification; select relevant information and write storied narratives; identify forces influencing agency and establish emerging themes; categories will be refined in the process. Emic approach: interviews will help researcher in identifying forces influencing agency. Etic approach: interviews will consider the ecological dimensions conceptualised by Priestley, Biesta and Robinson (2015). | Tape-recorded interviews will be stored as soft copies. | **Semi-structured interview 1:** *The purpose of this interview is to establish a* **biographical profile** *of the participant teachers of English. It aims to reflect on what they consider to be the factors influencing their choices of becoming a teacher of English (past) and how they choose to teach English in their specific school contexts (present).* **Semi-structured interview 2:** *The purpose of this interview is to establish* **how, what and why chosen forms of teacher agency are selected and enacted** *by teachers of English in the specific changing policy context of Mauritius as it engages with a series of national curriculum policy.* |

2. How do these forces enable or constrain teacher agency? *(Descriptive question)*	Interviews (45-60mins)	Interview Schedules	January – June 2019	Establish and analyse links between forces influencing agency and how do these forces influence agency.	Tape-recorded interviews will be stored as soft copies.	**Semi-structured interview 1:** *The purpose of this interview is to establish a* **biographical profile** *of the participant teachers of English. It aims to reflect on what they consider to be the factors influencing their choices of becoming a teacher of English (past) and how they choose to teach English in their specific school contexts (present).*
	Collage Artefact stimulus activity (included during interviews)	Collage (included in activity description sheet)		Collage will work as a stimulus to trigger participants' reflections on their current experiences; their reactions to and interpretations of extracts from new policy and curriculum reform will help in a better understanding of how identified forces influence agency.	Observation schedules will be filed.	
	Artefact Stimulus activity (included during interviews)	Activity description sheet		Artefact stimulus activity will trigger teachers' inner reflection on experiences/ selection and interpretation of chosen poems will help in a better understanding of how identified forces influence agency.		**Semi-structured interview 2:** *The purpose of this interview is to establish* **how, what and why chosen forms of teacher agency are selected and enacted** *by teachers of English in the specific changing policy context of Mauritius as it engages with a series of national curriculum policy.*
	Classroom observations (3 observations per participant; followed by informal interactions)	Classroom observation schedule		Classroom observations: write field notes during observation and analyse observation schedules and post-interview responses to		

	Number of participants: 6			understand teachers' enactment of agency. Emic approach: data collection methods will help researcher in understanding, interpreting and representing why teachers interpret agency the way they do. Etic approach: interviews will consider the ecological dimensions conceptualised by Priestley, Biesta and Robinson (2015).		**Semi-structured interview 3:** *The purpose of this interview is to establish the **influence or not of the specific micro-contextual institutional environment on teacher agency**. The interview will also focus on the kind of collegial relationships being activated or not in this context. The interview will conclude with a synthetic overview of what kind of teacher the participants interpret themselves to be, and how they interpret their **agency within the present environmental context at micro-(institutional) and macro-(societal and policy) level.*** In case participants fail to select and reflect on a poem option 2 from interview schedule will be used. The artefact

						stimulus activity will be mailed or handed to participants. Classroom observations will help in the construction of thick description and participants will be observed in their physical school environment (classroom) as they enact agency during implementation of new curriculum. Classroom observations will be followed by an informal interaction with participants (a more relaxed interaction contrasting with the 'formal' interview).
3. Why do teachers exercise agency the way they do? *(Philosophical question)*	Interviews (45-60mins) Collage Artefact stimulus activity	Interview Schedules Collage (included in activity	January – June 2019	Analyse the link between the what, how and why to understand teachers' interpretation of agency. Establish and analyse links between forces influencing	Tape-recorded interviews will be stored as soft copies.	Identifying and analysing links between the operational, descriptive and philosophical critical questions.

	(included during interviews)	description sheet)		agency and how do these forces influence agency. Collage will work as a stimulus to trigger participants' reflections on their current experiences; their reactions to and interpretations of extracts from new policy and curriculum reform will help in a better understanding of how identified forces influence agency.		*Semi-structured interview 2:* *The purpose of this interview is to establish* **how, what and why chosen forms of teacher agency are selected and enacted** *by teachers of English in the specific changing policy context of Mauritius as it engages with a series of national curriculum policy.*
	Artefact Stimulus activity (included during interviews) *Number of participants: 6*	Activity description sheet		Artefact stimulus activity will trigger teachers' inner reflection on experiences/ selection and interpretation of chosen poems will help in a better understanding of how identified forces influence agency. Classroom observations: write field notes during observation and analyse observation schedules and post-interview responses to identify instances of and understand teachers' enactment of agency.		*Semi-structured interview 3:* *The purpose of this interview is to establish the* **influence or not of the specific micro-contextual institutional environment on teacher agency.** *The interview will also focus on the kind of collegial relationships being activated or not in this context. The interview will conclude with a synthetic overview of what kind of teacher the*

				Emic & etic approaches		*participants interpret themselves to be, and how they interpret their **agency within the present environmental context at micro-(institutional) and macro-(societal and policy) level.***

APPENDIX 7

An exemplar of an interview transcript

W: Ok, shall we start Mehreen?

M: Yes.

W: So today's interview is focused on knowing you more – so, your personal experiences and professional experiences. On your biographical datasheet you wrote that you are a teacher still in the learning process.

M: Yes.

W: Why this description?

M: Errr because er as you can see education is dynamic, in the sense that economy is evolving, the world is changing and one of the criteria, one of the… if I can say, er one of the objectives of the education is to make a person become a life-long learner person and therefore we should be bearing in mind that the world is changing rapidly, evolving for each…I mean, every day we are facing new challenges, new issues so we have to bear in mind that we need to learn, we just can't get stagnant, we just can't get like restricted to whatever I have learnt and whatever I have mastered is enough because I would say education is as deep as the ocean so it still needs some discovery so I believe that I am a teacher who is still learning because I cannot er block myself in a cube and say I'm a teacher and these are the skills that I know but I should be like the a bird if I can say in the garden trying to explore each and every day not only the garden that it is right now but there are so many other gardens that we have.

So basically yes, I am someone who is still learning. Not only learning academic stuffs because I am a teacher. I need to be able to er adapt myself to my learners, to my students and they are human beings, they have their flaws, they have their weaknesses and as someone who is trying to show them the way of progress I believe that I need to have a good relationship with them as well. And not everybody has the same family background, for example, not everybody comes from the same milieu so I need to know about them. I still learn about them each and every day and basically I have so many classes, we got so many pupils so I need to learn. I mean, I need to er to be at ease with my students, to learn about their weaknesses where do they find that there are some shortcomings that I may help them to overcome for example… so still in the learning because I'm teaching but I'm learning at the same time.

W: Now can you tell me a little bit more about, you know what kind of a person are you? Who is Mehreen? [smiles]

APPENDIX 8

Extract from Miriam's transcript with notes and thematic colour coding

MIRIAM INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS-CODING & ANALYSIS	
INTERVIEW 1	**COLOUR CODE**
Monday 20th May 2019 8.30-9.15 (45 minutes) **Transcript Code:** W: Wedsha (Researcher) M: Miriam[77] (Participant)	AUTONOMY STANDARDISATION COLLECTIVE EXPERIENCES BIOGRAPHICAL EXPERIENCES PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY/PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT MICRO-INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT SIDS/MULTICULTURAL/MULTILINGUAL/POSTCOLONIAL REFORM ACCOUNTABILITY NEW FORCE(S) IDENTIFIED

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[77] Pseudonym

Section	Transcript	Notes	LR/TF	CQ	New
1.	M: …so yes basically this is it. **This is not my dream job** I, I, **I in fact feel more at ease when I am giving tuition because this is my comfort zone, in my home and I can teach in any way I want.** If today my student is not feeling ok and she wishes to cry, I let her cry and I have like, not more than 10 students in one batch at my home and I can control them and **they actually learn (emphasis) when they are at my home because I can do anything that I want.** If I want to sit in a particular way I can, if I want to er.. behave in a particular way I can, if I want to be moody I can (laugh) but here nooo you have people coming to er y-you…in fact you have student who might be reporting you for using er Creole. You maybe have students who are going to report you for not working enough because if you do not give enough homework you are not working enough. So, yes.	Repetition of 'not my dream job'. Comparing tuition space to school space – difference related to autonomy.	Autonomy – private tuition, but what about at school? Lack of autonomy at school – pressure, fear, anger… **Main Idea: AUTONOMY – REGULATED VS. UNREGULATED SPACE**	<u>What are the forces that influence teacher agency?</u> <u>How do these forces influence agency?</u>	Shadow teaching/private tuition termed as 'comfort zone' – a space that influences agency in class. Is agency in class and in tuition expressed differently? Why? How? The private tuition space is also equated to autonomy. According to Miriam learning takes place in this space compared to school. Is this a reference that reflects the lack of autonomy at school?
2.	M: It has been er… it has been quite a journey I would say because **I started as a very raw raw raw (laugh), unpolished er kind of teaching where**	Raw – lack of experience/amateurism. She said that she did whatever she wanted – freedom, autonomy, personal	Professional experiences /	<u>What are the forces that influence teacher agency?</u>	Agency limited by fear emanating from barriers that she believes have been

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	I would do whatever I want and **then conditioning happened through how the school wants you to perform, how the school want you to behave, how you are expected to be around er students because I have this… no barrier kind of.. no barrier kind of relationship with each and every one. I can blurt out my whole life history with anyone.**	agency to act, decide, etc. This agency is gradually transformed with the lack of autonomy in her professional space – barriers, boundaries, limitations…even her relationship with students is controlled, thus limiting her agency. Fear to share 'story' with her colleagues.	autonomy/ micro-institutional environment **Main Idea: AUTONOMY WITHIN MICRO-INSTITUTIONAL SPACE**	<u>How do these forces influence agency?</u>	imposed by institution – LACK OF AUTONOMY

APPENDIX 9

Extract from Mehreen's classroom observation sheet with notes and thematic colour coding

Day/Date/Time	Lesson/ Textbook	**Observation** (including participant's words)	**Notes**
Wednesday 3rd April 2019 at 9.35 (35 minutes class)	Literature in English Poem: *The Grass Cutter* **Textbook**: *Magical Encounters* (MIE)	A crowded classroom of 40 students. The focus of the class was on setting, characters and actions. "Who wish to come in front and explain her drawing to her friends?" Two students came in front of the class and explained their drawing. They had difficulties in expressing themselves and the teacher had to guide/monitor them closely. Their drawings were very well done and captured their understanding of the poem and they seem to have verbal communication difficulties and the teacher had to be next to them throughout the activity. After the first presentation, two more students were invited to come in front of the class but the were hesitant and one student replied, '*penkor fini*' (translated as 'she has not finished yet'. Despite the difficulty she was facing, the teacher encouraged students to come in front of the class	During the class observation I noticed that while the teacher was helping the students who presented their work in front of the class, students at the back were either talking to each other or doing work related to other subjects. This shows the teacher's difficulty of managing the big class. Prior to the reform, the ministry had ensured schools that class size will be reviewed and this would have helped with the activity-based classes but class size seems to be a problem in Mehreen's case. In the previous class the participant had asked students to draw/interpret their understanding of the poem –not merely following teacher's tips in the standardised literature textbook from the MIE but also using innovative strategies in the process of **curriculum making.** The teacher wanted to use a learner-centred approach but the inability of students to express themselves fluently made her task difficult. The use of creole by the student shows the inability of the latter to express herself in English. The reform emphasises teaching students for the functional use of the language. Indeed, the activities devised by the

		by praising their drawings, smiling to them, and even speaking to them in a very clam manner. She adopted a friendly approach.	teacher is geared towards enhancing functional use of the language – **curriculum making.**
		She questions students about the choice of colours in their drawings and she related this to an explanation of the atmosphere in the poem.	Strategies were being adapted to the students' needs and performance level.
		She even added a touch of humour with reference to a student's drawing, "Why is Sarja singing lalala, not lololo, or lilili?"	The class laughed at her question, but once she continues the explanation those who were doing their personal work continued to do so – difficulty in managing the whole class due to the class size.
		She then asked the students to read some verses together and when reading about the 'dreamy child', she told them that she would explain metaphor later.	
		When the bell goes she had to stop her explanation and told the students that she will continue later.	

APPENDIX 10

Extract from my reflective journal on Miriam with notes and thematic colour coding

Section	Researcher's Reflective Journal Notes	Notes	LR/TF/Methodology	CQ	New
1.	She then showed me her scheme of work with strict classwork and homework. I asked her if they use this standardised scheme – she told me they have to as students' copybooks are checked by the manager and **the management expects quantity and not quality.** She even told me that because I was coming for observation she asked students to do some corrections on the board but otherwise she merely comes to class and put the answers on the board – the students just note down answers as understanding the question is not an issue to her, the management will merely be happy with the quantity. She further adds that she knows that her students do not understand anything and she is not helping them, but she does not have a	Standardised scheme of work at school which has to be strictly followed. Quantity of work completed and corrected mattered; therefore, there was a lot of pressure on the teacher. Forced compliance. Her job was restricted to given work and correcting. She had no time to test or enhance learning due to the pressure from the management. She believes that she has to comply – job security?	Micro-institutional environment Obedience and compliance – agency Professional identity within a regulated space	<u>What are the forces that influence teacher agency?</u> <u>How do these forces influence agency?</u>	

	choice. **She said, for example, today she has corrected adjectives and her students do not even know what is an adjective but at least when the management will be checking the copybooks they will see a lot of work in there.** She emphasised that she hates giving homework but she does not have a choice. Not only the teaching, but even assessments are standardised instead of being based on performance of students. Even the assessment scripts are checked by the manager. For Miriam, this is too much pressure – she questions these practices – are they worth it?	Lacks agency – just obey and comply. Standardisation of assessments. Her correction of assessment scripts is scrutinised by the management – lacks autonomy	Standardisation within micro-institutional space but not according to macro-policy context (not in line with reform).		

APPENDIX 11

Thematic analysis table

THEMES	SYNTHESISING LEVEL 2 & LEVEL 3 ANALYSIS			
	CONVERGING	**DIVERGING**	**Contradict or complement LR?**	**NEW? SURPRISING?**
	Personal experiences, how far do they influence my professional choices?			
My personal goals and beliefs…	▪ Personal beliefs, principles, upbringing, etc. influence choices and perception. ▪ It can be observed that the teachers" personal goals and agency are often influenced by salary. For instance, despite the fact that Sara perceives teaching as a vocation and enacts agency in favour of students' needs, she points that "Teachers are not well paid in this country…" (Act I) So, salary is a motivation. Similarly, Veena acknowledges her accountability as she is paid for the job (Act I).	▪ For instance, Sara perceives teaching as a vocation and a passion, but her agency is not only an inner strength emerging from her beliefs. Instead this agency is also an outcome of her professional space. She states in Act I, "I believe teaching is a vocation, a passion…This is what is preached in my school." So, her agency and even her beliefs are an outcome of the micro-institutional ethos – she is supported by the school structure to enact agency the way she does. Sara's firm beliefs are different from for instance Maya who perceives teaching as a way of fulfilling her financial commitments; however, these beliefs would maybe not have been triggered	▪ The LR draws the link between personal experiences and one's professional space. This observation therefore expands an understanding of the overlapping dimensions within the ecological model of teacher agency – the iterational and the practical-evaluative dimensions.	Even if agency is an inner strength, that inner strength is triggered by spatial and contextual forces.

Wedsha Appadoo-Ramsamy
The role of beliefs in teacher agency (Biesta et al. 2015) and how beliefs influence professional actions – are beliefs strong influences that can reshape one's agency despite for instance strict regulated micro-institutional spaces?

Wedsha Appadoo-Ramsamy
Concepts of moral agency (Molla & Nolan, 2020, Teacher agency and professional practice; school ethos (Donnelly, 2012) and the educative environment of teachers (Higgins 2006, Dewey's conception of vocation) + Tsang 2018 – negotiating moral agency and professional obstacles

Wedsha Appadoo-Ramsamy
Situational factors influencing individual agency (Kingston et al. 2007)

Wedsha Appadoo-Ramsamy
Salary is just one force but teacher satisfaction/wellbeing can influences teachers' action (projective dimension) to a large extent – Toropova et al. 2020; Song et al. 2020)

APPENDIX 12

Thematic clusters

APPENDIX 13

Thematic conceptual map

Teachers' degree of freedom within the school environment

National and school-oriented standardisation processes

Collective support and bonding

Responding to different stakeholders

Professional workshops

Digital evolution

Changing role of English language

Changing school culture

Teachers' own beliefs, emotions and personal motivations

Reforms and other changes

Agency as an outcome of internal and external forces

Another policy…

The compulsory textbook and workshops…

Innovating is challenging…

Negotiating emotions of self-worth…

Responding to stakeholders' demands

APPENDIX 14

Exemplars of *Tree of Life* activity

LEAVES
The happy times waiting for me. Green, the happiest of colours

BRANCHES
The aims and objectives I ve set for myself

TRUNK
My family who s been there for the biggest support ever.

ROOTS
My beliefs in myself. To overcome everything negative and move on to a better version of myself. Also, my friend who was really helpful.

MIRIAM

LEAVES
My students who breathe in knowledge to make them good human beings. They may dance whichever way they want(how to tackle issues) in accordance to the wind direction (challenges they meet in life). The leaves beautify the plant. Ultimately, they become the pride of the root, the trunk and the branches.

BRANCHES
Without the help of the school administration and good school infrastructure, my aim of inculcating knowledge to my pupils will not be met. The branches spread around in different directions, similarly different school admistration operates differently.

TRUNK
My profession as a teacher: It needs my dedication and motivation   to handle both administrative work(branches) and my students learning growth (the leaves)

ROOTS
My family who always hold me firmly in all that I do. They are my support system.

MEHREEN

BRANCHES
Teachers/lecturers/spiritual gurus

LEAVES
Friends/life partner

TRUNK
God/belief

ROOTS
Parents/values

AMELIA

APPENDIX 15

Turnitin report

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This serves to confirm that I have edited the thesis, "Teacher agency: A case study of Mauritius," by Wedsha Appadoo-Ramsamy, student number: 218081666.

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Yours sincerely,

(Ms) Deanne Collins (MA)