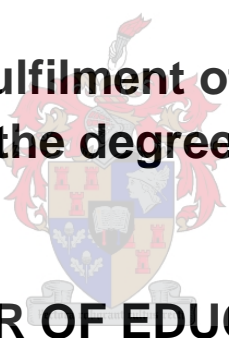


**REFLECTIVE PRACTICE AS A MECHANISM FOR  
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A NARRATIVE  
INQUIRY**

**BY**

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**Thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for  
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## **REFLECTIVE PRACTICE AS A MECHANISM FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY**

### **ABSTRACT**

As a novice teacher I experienced many difficulties and obstacles in my first two years of teaching in a South African context. This experience was further disempowering as there were no support programmes like induction or mentoring programmes in place to support the transition from student to teacher and to grow professionally. It thus became my concern to ascertain the possibilities of professional development through reflective practice, to highlight some of the strategies which might bring about change, however imperfect, and to consider the human agency in all of this.

The focus of the study is particularly on reflective practice as a potential process of professional development and a self-support mechanism for novice teachers. It thus is a study of processes to encourage and maintain a teacher's professional development. I tell of my lived experience as a novice teacher through narrative inquiry. The data comprises of journal entries and field notes which were constructed from conversations and observations. Main ideas were developed within my narrative to analyse the narrated text. Four main themes emerged from my global analysis of data. These are: lack of support; lack of an induction programme; engaging in self-support activities to grow professionally; and the importance that agency plays in this process of personal and professional development. Based on this study of my personal experience as a novice teacher, it would seem that becoming a reflective practitioner could indeed contribute to a sense of empowerment and serve as a support mechanism in personal and professional development.

## **REFLEKTIEVE PRAKTYK AS 'N MEGANISME VIR PROFESSIONELE ONTWIKKELING: 'N NARRATIEWE ONDERSOEK**

### **SAMEVATTING**

As 'n nuweling-onderwyser het ek baie probleme en struikelblokke in my eerste twee jaar van onderwys in 'n Suid Afrikaanse konteks ervaar. Hierdie ervaring was verder ontmagtigend aangesien daar geen ondersteuningsprogramme soos induksie en mentorskap in plek was om die oorgang van student tot onderwyser en professionele groei te ondersteun nie. Ek het my dus daarvoor begin ontferm om die moontlikhede van professionele ontwikkeling deur die praktyk van refleksie te ondersoek en lig te werp op strategieë wat moontlike veranderinge teweeg kon bring en menslike agentskap in alle betrokke prosesse kon inwerk.

Die fokus van hierdie studie is op reflektiewe praktyk as 'n potensiële proses vir professionele ontwikkeling en 'n self-ondersteunende meganisme vir nuweling-onderwysers. Dit is dus 'n studie van prosesse wat professionele ontwikkeling aanmoedig en volhou. Ek maak gebruik van narratiewe ondersoek om my beleefde ervaring as 'n nuweling-onderwyser te deel. Die data bestaan uit joernaalinskrywings en veldnotas wat saamgestel is vanuit gesprekke en waarnemings. Kernidees is binne die narratief ontwikkel om die verhaalde teks te analiseer. Vier hooftemas is identifiseer vanuit die data-analise. Dit is onder andere: gebrek aan ondersteuning, gebrek aan 'n induksieprogram, gebrek aan self-ondersteuning om professioneel te groei en die rol van agentskap in die proses van persoonlike en professionele ontwikkeling. Gebaseer op die studie van my persoonlike ervaring, wil dit voorkom dat indien 'n nuweling-onderwyser ontwikkel as 'n reflektiewe praktistyn, dit inderdaad tot 'n sin van bemagtiging kan bydra en ook kan dien as 'n self-ondersteunende meganisme in persoonlike en professionele ontwikkeling.

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## CHAPTER 1

### RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

***Active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds which support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends, constitutes reflective thought.***

**- John Dewey, How We Think**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

Teaching, unlike other professions, such as medicine and law, require newly qualified teachers (NQTs) to assume full professional responsibilities from the first day they enter a classroom (Killeavy, 2006:168). In recent years a number of models have been developed to describe teacher development, but one common feature that stands out is the first stage, the survival stage (Smith & Sela, 2005).

As a novice teacher, I experienced many difficulties and obstacles in the first two years of teaching in a South African context. I felt confident at first having had experience from teaching overseas for six years. This confidence soon disappeared when I was faced with the realities of teaching in a different context. Lortie (1975) describes the transition from the teacher training institution to school classrooms as something that can be characterised by a type of reality shock in which the ideals that were formed during teacher education are replaced by the reality of school life. As a novice teacher, I also had formed ideals and had expectations as to what my first years of teaching would be like in a different context. My experience can definitely be characterised as one of reality shock, when the expectations of support and guidance I had envisioned were not realised.

The initial process of novice teachers entering the teaching profession can further be challenging if there is no form of support through induction or mentoring programmes. Initial teacher experiences often leave novice teachers feeling vulnerable and even confused. Arends and Phurutse (2009:31) stress the importance of support to beginner

teachers as this has been found to be a major factor in determining whether such teachers stay in the profession for any length of time. In the absence of support, a high number of beginner teachers have difficulty coping with the school environment and, as a result, develop burnout symptoms and choose to leave of the system (Arends & Phurutse, 2009:31).

There is no greater period for the development of novice teachers than the initial induction into the teaching profession. Novice teachers enter the profession with high expectations for themselves as well as high expectations for their learners. Bartell (2005) argues that nearly every study of retention in the teaching profession identifies the first three years as the riskiest on the job; the years in which teachers are most likely to leave. Bartell (2005:3) emphasises the fact that the early years of teaching are characterised by a “sink-or-swim” or “survival” mentality because we have often failed to provide for careful support and thoughtful development of teaching expertise over time.

Lortie (1975) indicates that the transition from college student to school teacher has often been described as abrupt and Farrell (2003) also states that this is often a sink-or-swim experience. Novice teachers are confronted with the demands of the job directly and need to adapt and draw on personal resources in order to survive and progress. Calderhead and Shorrock (1997) indicate that the socialisation into a new school setting is a demanding and powerful process which often results in beginning teachers changing themselves in order to fit in with the school’s values and practices. Professional socialisation into teaching requires agency from teachers.

## **1.2 Context and research rationale**

I ventured into this study because it is my concern to ascertain the possibilities of professional development through reflective practice; to highlight some of the strategies which might bring about change, however imperfect, and to consider the human agency in this. It is thus a study of processes to encourage and maintain the teacher’s professional development. Education is regarded as the social space and in which influences, interaction, collaboration, and personal and professional development take place. Since initial experiences play an important role in further career development, I

feel that it is important to have a comprehensive understanding of these experiences and support mechanisms, be they formal or self-support mechanisms, that act as both a 'survival tool' and a means that can lead to successful professional development of teachers. Flores and Day (2006:220) are of the opinion that both the influence of the school context and the personal background and experiences during pre-service education are important variables to be taken into account in the assessment of early teaching experiences.

### **1.3 Reason for embarking on this study**

Three major elements supported the construction of this study. One was to develop clear insight on the augmentation of reflective thinking of teachers, especially novice / beginner teachers. The second was to investigate ways which are pertinent to the needs of teachers, especially novice teachers, that will encourage reflective practice. The third element was to convey the impact of reflective practice and other factors on my own educational practice and professional development.

By sharing my story, I want novice teachers to realise that they are not alone in the difficult transition process from student to teacher. I wanted to invite the readers into my world and, in a sense, make them part of my 'lived' experiences. I hope that my narratives can be inspiring to the reader and that the reader might be able to use it as motivation to encourage his or her own personal and professional development. I also hope that my narratives can inspire veteran teachers to begin to get involved with their own development, by sharing what they have learned with the new group of teachers entering the teaching profession.

As a novice teacher, I felt isolated and that I had no voice. Through this study I want to be heard, as indicated by Goodson (2000:16) with regard to the teacher's voice:

The notion of the teacher's voice is important in that it carries the tone, the language, the quality, the feelings that are conveyed by the way a teacher speaks or writes. In a political sense the notion of the teacher's voice addresses the right to speak and be represented. It can represent both the unique individual

and the collective voice: one that is characteristic of teachers as compared to other groups.

Krieg (2010:57) is of the opinion that developing a teacher identity is an ongoing and multifaceted process and this process involves finding a voice amid the clamour of other often contradictory voices and complex conditions in which teachers find themselves. Within my school context, I found the following to be problematic: lack of support; support from top structures like the education department; and lack of collegial support. For a novice teacher it can be very overwhelming and disempowering if structured support programmes are not in place, nor implemented. As is evident through the literature review, many solutions can be offered, but as teachers are unique and the situations and contexts that they find themselves in are unique, they are mainly responsible to search for solutions themselves to make a change in their professional lives. I want to suggest the way that helped me and encouraged my own development, which was to become a reflective practitioner.

#### **1.4 Goals and objectives of the study**

Novice teachers need to have command of critical ideas and skills and, equally important, the capacity to reflect on, evaluate and learn from their teaching so that it continually improves (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005:3). The goal of this study is to show that survival is possible for novice teachers with or without structured support programmes in place.

The following research considerations were investigated before considering the research questions:

1. Does this research project clearly address a problem or an issue that is currently experienced in the teaching profession?
2. Can the research project contribute to the researcher's reflection (ability to reflect) as a professional?
3. Can the research enhance the professional life of the researcher and provide new understandings of practice?

4. Can the researcher report the research to audiences who might be able to use the information to improve their own practice as well?

The central research question to explicate this research is “*Can reflective practices serve as self-support mechanisms for novice teachers?*”

Sub-questions included:

1. Can reflective practice (RP) enable professional development (PD) of teachers?
2. Does RP hold the potential for improving the teaching and learning process?

The purpose of this study therefore is to give a description of my RP and PD experiences as a novice teacher. The aim is to suggest frameworks of reflective practice to help teachers organise their knowledge and their thinking so that they are able to also accelerate their professional development throughout their careers. Although the study will focus on the conceptual map novice teachers need to begin to navigate their pedagogy, it is also aimed at encouraging veteran teachers to instil RP on their own teaching career. In this study I document my own experiences as a novice teacher in a particular context and focus particularly on reflective practice as a potential process for professional development and self-support mechanism for novice teachers.

Calderhead and Gates (1993:1) draw on the work of Dewey (1933) whose work has been exceptionally influential on reflective practice. Dewey (1993), cited in Calderhead and Gates (1993), mentions the distinction between action based on reflection and action that is impulsive or blind, and his emphasis on the need to develop certain attitudes of open mindedness and skills of thinking and reasoning in order to reflect.

Boreen, Johnson, Niday and Potts (2000:68) are of the opinion that reflection is essential to a fully lived professional life, and among teachers the finest are those who consider their progress in the classroom, who ponder effective strategies and devise creative classroom activities, who practise reflection to set personal and professional goals, and who think on their feet as they teach.

Boreen, Johnson, Niday and Potts (2009:56) contend that systematic reflection is needed to enrich a novice's understanding, especially at the beginning of his or her career. According to Boreen *et al.*, (2009:56), reflection:

- Helps beginning teachers organise their thoughts and make sense of classroom events
- Leads to professional forms of inquiry and goal setting
- Promotes a model of learning that views teaching as an ongoing process of knowledge building

When teachers become reflective practitioners, an internal change occurs. Teachers can identify what the needs are in their practice and can become pre-emptive in initiating their own development.

I chose narrative inquiry as a vehicle to describe and make sense of my experience of being a novice teacher and my path on becoming a reflective practitioner. Connelly and Clandinin (1990:2) define narrative inquiry as the study of the ways in which humans experience the world. This type of inquiry is appropriate to my study as I feel that the reader can gain a sense of my struggles, experiences, and the different phases I encountered in becoming a reflective practitioner.

## **1.5 Thesis outline**

### **Chapter 1: Rationale for the study**

In Chapter 1 I place the importance on the catalyst of this narrative study about my life as a novice teacher.

### **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

Chapter 2 documents and reviews the supporting literature for this study. The literature review's purpose was to gain deeper understanding. This deeper understanding suggested a conceptual framework to give meaning to the research. Reflective practice, novice teachers, induction / mentoring programmes and professional development are the terms that emerged from the literature review.

### **Chapter 3: Research Methodology and Design**

Chapter 3 provides the conceptual framework within which the research was addressed and the methodology of the research process is outlined.



## **Chapter 4: Presentation of Data**

In Chapter 4, the researcher's narrative of lived experiences as a novice teacher is presented.

## **Chapter 5: Analysis of Data**

In Chapter 5 the data / findings are discussed, as outlined in Chapter Four. The data are analysed within the conceptual framework described in Chapter Two. The criteria identified for the analysis are the parameters within which the analysis was conducted.

## **Chapter 6: Findings and Conclusions**

This chapter summarises the report and sums up the perspectives on the research questions as gleaned from the data. Recommendations are made in terms of further studies.

### **1.6 Conclusion**

In Chapter 1 I orientated the reader regarding the motivation, objectives and my research questions. I highlighted the relevance and value that research can have on the reader. The relevant terms are discussed briefly, and a brief description of the research design and methodology of the study is given. In Chapter 2, I present a literature review that pertains to this study. The proposed thesis outline is also provided.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Introduction

The term reflective practice and how it links to professional growth in teachers have become quite prevalent in recent years. Calderhead and Gates (1993:1) write that terms such as reflective teaching, inquiry orientated teacher education, teacher as researcher and reflective practitioner, have become quite prolific in discussions of classroom practice and professional development. Dewey (1910) emphasised the importance of reflective thinking, and characterised it as a sense-making process. Professionals who seek change within their practice reflect on their practice. Hence, whether you are a prospective or novice teacher or a veteran teacher with years of experience, you will be faced with new educational changes every day, thus reflection becomes a powerful vehicle for learning.

According to Calderhead and Gates (1993:1), it is frequently presumed that reflection is an intrinsically good and desirable aspect of teaching and teacher education, and teachers, in becoming more reflective, will in some sense be better teachers. These claims have rarely been subjected to detailed scrutiny. Willis (1999:91) describes reflective practice as a cyclical activity in which practitioners are engaged in the following way:

In the reflective practice cycle practitioners begin by giving attention to the purposive activities which make up their practice. They then examine them to see to what extent the activities which actually occurred, were what were planned, critique these activities in different ways and determine corrective action for a further episode of practice which is then to be examined in turn and the cycle continues.

Action research is also often described as cyclical processes of enquiry that involve different steps. It is not a new form of educational research. Action research is a kind of research that has re-emerged as a popular way of involving teachers, so that they can

have a better understanding of their work. Later in this discussion, the similarities between reflective practice and action research will be highlighted.

## **2.2 Reflective Practice**

Diverse interpretations of RP and what it encapsulates can be valued. Theorists often emphasise different aspects of the process, as seen through the literature review. Boreen *et al.*, (2000:68) are of the opinion that reflection is essential to a fully lived professional life and that, among teachers, the finest are those who consider their progress in the classroom; who ponder effective strategies and devise creative classroom activities; who practice reflection to set personal and professional goals; and who think on their feet as they teach.

Reddy and Menkveld (2000) are of the opinion that reflection is conceptualised through varying orientations of teacher education programmes and consequently has acquired a wide range of meanings associated with the term. Teachers are thus able to evaluate their practice by using their own knowledge, as well as the knowledge or advice gained by collaborating with colleagues to improve the teaching and learning process. From this, we draw personal conclusions as to why things turn out the way that they do. How much of what we know and think in our classrooms is very dependent on how well we know ourselves. We explicitly reflect on these experiences and hypotheses to have a better understanding of our own and other peoples' experiences and knowledge. Each teacher brings experiences of their previous schooling into their present schooling environment.

Reflective teachers are those who give a considerable amount of time and thought to analysing teaching and learning experiences in order to make better and more informed decisions about their teaching and learning for learners. In regard to beginning teaching, two areas of decision making that represent a particular challenge are motivating students to learn and managing the classroom. In these two areas, as in all other areas, careful thought has to be given to understanding why particular events take place and what actions can be taken so that better learning and teaching can be the result.

Taggart and Wilson (2005:1) are of the opinion that reflective thinking is the process of making informed and logical decisions on educational matters, then assessing the consequences of those decisions. Singh (1996:350) states that RP can lead to teachers recognising themselves as active agents in the learning process. These reflections occur out of the educational context that teachers find themselves in. Reflective practice also serves as a means to enquiry and a human interest. It is shaped by values and beliefs. Evaluation seems to be part of human nature. It forms part of an instinctive need to make judgments and express opinions on how to do things better. Evaluation is a fundamental part of the teaching process. I define reflective practice as a teacher having the ability to see the 'bigger picture'; being able to step back and evaluate one's practice, to see what the needs are of learners and how you as a teacher can adapt, or change your approaches.

As teachers we evaluate our teaching practice to inform our decisions and planning of our practice. According to Singh (1996:350), reflective practice has the potential to change teachers' self-understanding and even transform teachers' practices and work situations. These attributes show what kind of facilitation reflective practice can bring and what transformative changes it can bring to a teacher's practice. RP can thus be seen as a mode that integrates or links thought as well as action by means of using reflection. It basically involves thinking about and critically analysing your actions with the aim of improving your professional practice. By using RP you are able to question what, why and how you do things and ask what, why and how others do things. As a teacher, you seek to find alternatives, keep an open mind and compare and contrast ideas and suggestions. By becoming a reflective practitioner, a teacher draws meaning from the practice by studying the behaviours and methods that are used inside the classroom, with the determination to change things for the better.

Successful RP involves the consideration of one's own experiences and those of colleagues, together with the integration of both empirical and theoretical knowledge (Singh, 1996:352). It is through these processes that an individual is able to learn from experiences. In a sense, teachers review and evaluate their teaching and compare it

with the results that were sought after. As a teacher, one needs to be able to make informed and logical decisions on educational matters. After reflecting about these matters, teachers then have to assess the consequences of their decisions.

The emphasis on the need for reflective practice comes largely from the work of Schön (1983, 1987). Schön (1983) discussed the distinction between *reflection-in-action* and *reflection-on-action*. Schön (1987:22) describes that *reflection-in-action* is one's spontaneous ways of thinking and acting, undertaken in the midst of action to guide further action. This enables the teacher to gain insight into the classroom dynamics while they are at work. In a sense, the educator needs to have the ability to 'think on their feet' and be adaptable in any classroom situation.

*Reflection-on-action* consists of reflection after the event, and includes a kind of metacognition, or thinking about the thoughts and reflection gathered during the action (Schön, 1987:22). Ghaye and Ghaye (1998:3) propose that reflection on action is not just about learning from experience in a private and solitary way; it is about knowledge production that has the potential to enlighten and empower teachers. The teacher that engages with *reflection-on-action* after a lesson is over, might consider the following: what kinds of decisions did I make during the lesson? What responses and reactions from the student affected those decisions? What was I thinking about and feeling during the lesson? In reviewing approaches to reflective teaching, Farrell (1998) adds a third concept: *reflection-for-action*.

Farrell (1998:12) describes *reflection-for-action* as proactive in nature, using ideas from their *reflection in action* and *on action*; teachers can plan reflectively for future lessons or for other professional activities. Schön (1983) believed that reflection leads to better action, whilst Calderhead and Gates (1993:1) observed that it is frequently assumed that reflection is an intrinsically good and desirable aspect of teaching and teacher education and that teachers, in becoming more reflective, will in some sense be better teachers. Bannink and Van Dam (2007:81) reports on a "reflective practicum" at the very beginning of a pre-service teacher education course that interconnects prior beliefs, reflection in action and reflection on action and that, in principle, models a complete reflection cycle.

Through the literature review, teachers are revealed as accountable, responsible and liable individuals, which in turn can be summarised into two words 'reflective professionals'. The theories and belief systems that these 'reflective professionals' have has an influence on their classroom management and control. Schön (1984) is of the opinion that reflecting will lead to better action. Zeichner and Liston (1996:6) describe a teacher who is reflective as one who examines, frames, and attempts to solve dilemmas of classroom practice; is aware of and questions assumptions and values he or she brings to teaching; is attentive to the institutional and cultural contexts in which he or she teaches; takes part in curriculum development and is involved in school change efforts; takes responsibility for his or her own professional development. Reflective practice has been described as a concept that does not consist of a series of steps or procedure. Rather, it is a holistic way of meeting and responding to problems, as stated by Zeichner and Liston (1996:9).

Calderhead and Gates (1993:2) list the following as the aims of reflective practice.

- To enable teachers to analyse, discuss, evaluate and change their own practice, adopting an analytical approach towards teaching;
- To foster teachers' appreciation of the social and political contexts in which they work;
- To enable teachers to appraise the moral and ethical issues implicit in classroom practices, including the critical examination of their own beliefs about good teaching;
- To encourage teachers to take greater responsibility for their own professional growth;
- To facilitate teachers' development of their own theories of educational practice, understanding and developing a principled basis for their own classroom work;
- To empower teachers so that they may better influence future directions in education and take a more active role in educational decision making.

Singh (1996:352) elaborates on the work of Hart (1990) who names three resources to develop the knowledge base teachers need to improve their work, their professional theories and their work situation.

- **Experiential ways of knowing:** The personal experiences of the teachers and what others have experienced and their knowledge that they add to the experience is a great source of knowledge for reflective practice. Teachers operating exclusively from within their own field of experience as determined by their class background, ethnicity, gender and organisational positioning may have a limited perception (Singh, 1996:352). Understanding the role of ones' personal and professional values in this process is thus very important. Values give teachers a sense of personal identity. Values to a large extent motivate teachers and provide them with reasons for why, what and in what manner they are teaching.
- **Empirical ways of knowing:** Quantitative and qualitative research evidence about life in classrooms is important in establishing the possibilities for improving work relations between teachers and students (Singh, 1996:352). It is important to take note of how teachers use evidence to reflect on the quality of teaching and learning. Reflection can therefore be seen as something that is evidence-based.
- **Theoretical ways of knowing.** Theories provide teachers with a structured set of propositions and common language – key concepts or metaphors with which to talk about and share their understandings of the teaching and learning (Singh 1996:352). The past few years has seen an increase in research findings about how children learn. An awareness of these findings and the importance thereof is an appropriate background for anyone who is reflecting upon the best ways to teach children. The ultimate task of a teacher is more than just a social activity. The teacher needs to have the ability to transform a social situation into an educational process. In order to do so, a professional frame of reference and theoretical concepts need to be adopted. Theoretical concepts are needed to enable a critical examination of current changes in teaching; for assessing the

initiatives in which the restructuring of the learning area is embedded; and for pointing to possible alternative directions teachers may pursue (Singh, 1996).

Reddy and Menkveld (2000) draw on the work of Van Maanen (1977) to distinguish the following forms of reflection.

- Technical Reflection focuses on classroom competency and effectiveness that can be demonstrated by measurable outcomes (Reddy & Menkveld, 2000). In such a technical orientation, reflective questions focus on making the teaching / learning process more effective and efficient (Van Maanen, 1977, cited in Reddy & Menkveld, 2000:178). Questions about the purpose, value and goals of schooling are not examined by this type of reflection, and thus it is considered to be narrow in scope.
- Practical / problematic reflection is concerned with the resolution of problems which occur within regular contexts of teaching, yet defy easy routine solutions (Reddy & Menkveld, 2000:179). The teacher is placed in a position where he / she is able to question learner-teacher behaviour in an attempt to observe if goals and objectives are met.
- Critical reflection incorporates moral and ethical criteria such as whether important human needs are being met in the discourse about practical actions (Reddy & Menkveld, 2000: 179).

The different types of reflections as discussed (Singh, 1996; Van Maanen, 1977; Schön, 1983, 1987; Farrell, 1998) have commonalities, and, for me, the most prominent ones that stand out are empowerment, professional and personal growth and agency. Experiential ways of knowing (Singh, 1996) can be linked with technical reflection (Van Maanen, 1977) and reflection for action (Farrell, 1998). Within these three concepts / constructs, the teacher takes into account her or his personal experiences and draws upon that of others. Another commonality is the importance of making the teaching and learning efficient and effective. The last factor that links these three concepts together is that the teacher plans reflectively for future lessons.



Empirical ways of knowing (Singh, 1996) can be linked with practical reflection (Van Maanen, 1977) and reflection in action (Schön, 1983, 1987). Within these three concepts, evidence is needed for what happens in the classroom so that relationships between learner and teacher can improve. Another commonality between these constructs is that the teacher reflects upon a problem and seeks ways of improving it and finding solutions. The last factor that links these three concepts is that it is usually triggered by something; for example, when we realise that our existing knowledge is no longer helping us to teach confidently. Further action is thus indicated.

Theoretical ways of knowing (Singh, 1996) can be linked with critical reflections (Van Maanen, 1977) and reflection on actions (Schön, 1983, 1987). Dewey (1933) argues that there are certain qualities that reflective practitioners require for their development: qualities of open-mindedness, wholeheartedness and a sense of responsibility. By using these qualities and theories, the reflective practitioner as a researcher can be provided with more structure. Through critical reflection, the teacher reflects on a deeper level to make sense of her / his practice. By reflecting on action, one reflects after the situation occurred, and deliberates what can be done for future improvements. Ghaye and Ghaye (1998) are of the opinion that RP is a research process in which the fruits of reflection are used to challenge and reconstruct individual and collective teacher action. By engaging critically in one's practice, one can make broader sense of teaching and learning.

### **2.3 Defining Action Research**

Action research has played a growing role in the field of education in recent years because of its promise of improving teachers' practice, strengthening the connection between research and practice. Action research is known by many other names, including participatory research, collaborative inquiry, emancipatory research, action learning and contextual action research (Creswell, 2008). All of the above are variations of action research. Different definitions of action research have materialised over time in an attempt to validate this kind of research methodology as it was sceptically looked at by many researchers. The following definitions have been chosen to place emphasis on

how action research can lead to empowerment and the emancipation of educators as well as to show its connection to reflective practice.

As in RP, the teacher needs to unfold what happens in a situation and try to find solutions to improve what had taken place. By doing this, a form of self-reflective inquiry is undertaken, as mentioned above. Glanz (2003:18) asserts that action research is conducted by practitioners to improve practices in educational settings and, like other types of research, utilises an array of methodologies and approaches. My view of action research is that it aims to improve one's practice as well as the situation that this practice takes place in. More broadly, it can be said that action research is beneficial to any teacher who is concerned with the quality of his / her practice. AR provides the teacher with the possibility to reflect on the practice of the educator. AR is used to solve a specific educational problem and it seeks to obtain solutions to the problem. It gives teachers the ability take action and to do so by taking on the role of researcher and participating in the research.

Action research differs from traditional research in three ways (Glanz, 2003:19):

- Action research is often less sophisticated than traditional methods that incorporate, for example, complicated statistical techniques.
- Action research is utilised primarily by practitioners to solve specific problems.
- Findings from action research are often not generalisable to other groups and situations.

Creswell (2008) is of the opinion that, out of all the research designs, AR is the most applied and practical design, because action researchers explore a practical problem with the aim of working towards developing solutions to the problem. Action research has some unique attributes. These attributes differentiate them completely from other research methodologies. AR places a lot of emphasis on a specific problem that the researcher studies systematically to ensure that intervention which is informed by theoretical consideration takes place. Creswell (2008) argues that the scope of action research provides a means for teachers in schools to improve their practice of taking action and to do so by participating in research.

Such research is more geared to improving societal issues. It also provides a design that encourages collaboration among school and community participants to help transform schools and educational practices (Creswell, 2008:599). In spite of the emphasis on self-research in action research, most contemporary studies in educational action research also stress the need for colleagues to collaborate. Typically, this principle signifies that colleagues who share one another's interest in certain kinds of autonomy and change would collaborate, observing one another's practice, when invited, in order to provide a balance to the practitioner's possibly biased self-perception. This helps to prevent us from fooling ourselves. For this to work, the collaborating teachers would need to have, or build, a large measure of mutual trust. Creswell (2008) suggest that the most recent attribute represents the participatory, emancipatory or community action research approach in which groups assume responsibility for their own emancipation and change.

Glanz (2003:19) lists the following benefits of action research:

- It creates a system-wide mind-set for school improvement and a professional problem-solving ethos. It encourages change in schools.
- It enhances decision making that creates a greater sense of competency in problem solving and making instructional decisions. In other words, action research provides an intelligent way of making decisions. The major consequence of this is that educators take more control of their professional lives, thus enabling them to develop their professional judgement and moving towards emancipation and autonomy.
- It promotes reflection as well as self-assessment. Teachers are encouraged to reflect on their own practice and create ways of improving it.
- It instils a commitment to improvement on a continuous basis. It positions teachers as learners who seek to narrow the gap between practice and what their ideal vision for education is.

- It creates a more positive school climate in which an environment that is conducive to learning is created.
- It has a direct impact on the practice.
- It empowers those who participate in the process.

AR as a disciplined inquiry is an invaluable tool that allows educational leaders to reflect on their practice. Practitioners often avoid doing research for many reasons. One of the foremost reasons is that teachers do not realise that implementing action research is not necessarily time consuming or as intricate as they might assume.

Teachers who are really bothered about improving their school and practice will prioritise their responsibilities and apply suitable energies towards undertaking some form of action research. In both RP and AR teachers seek to empower themselves; they want to change situations and elements of constraints in order to reach the objectives that they have set out for themselves and their learners. The striking similarity between AR and RP is that teachers seek to improve their practice by studying problems that they are faced with. They then reflect about these problems, collect and analyse data and then implement changes to improve their situation.

Both RP and AR encourage positive change for both learning and teaching. Effective decision making and problem solving skills can improve as well and improvements are instilled on a continuous basis. Action research and reflective practice has a direct impact on teachers' practice and understanding of practice. Lastly, action research and reflective practice encourages teachers to take responsibility for their own development and encourages the development and implementation of agency to improve practice.

## **2.4 Professional Development**

Education in South Africa is always a contested and controversial subject. In a society like this it is particularly important that teachers are included and given the necessary professional development to keep up to date with the changes in education. Transformation brings change and new policies; this creates a need for teachers to develop professionally even after they have completed their initial teacher education.

Mosoge (2008) states that it is especially teachers trained in South Africa prior to 1994 who are most likely to be pressured by the reforms in education, and that the success of reform implementation requires the effective and meaningful professional development of teachers. PD has been given a number of meanings in an array of academic readings. It has been linked with key terms like improvement of the school employees' skills, attitude and knowledge of the teachers' subject matter.

Hargreaves and Fullan (1992:2) are of the opinion that one way of providing teachers with 'opportunities to teach' is to equip them with the knowledge and skills that will increase their ability to provide improved opportunities to learn for all their pupils. According to Craft (1996:6), professional development is sometimes used in a broad sense and seen as covering all forms of learning undertaken by experienced teachers, from course to private reading to job-shadowing, but it is also sometimes used in the narrower sense of professional courses. As mentioned before, our education system is often faced with rapid changes and demands for improving quality, thus educators have a need to improve their skills through practices like in-service education and training (hereinafter referred to as INSET and professional development). Reddy (2001:138) contends that professional development and INSET processes may either enable or inhibit the democratic processes of self-development and self-determination, depending on the nature of the opportunities provided to participants.

In contrast to this observation of professional development, Mosoge (2008) links the human capital theory as an orienting theory for professional development. The human capital theory states that there is a growing realisation that people are the key to the economic competitiveness. When you invest money into something you expect to gain something from it. We as teachers are merely seen as the work force that undertakes the responsibility of ensuring that the institution flourishes academically. PD can have an impact on improving and supporting educational processes, as well as giving sustaining support and improving the practice of the teacher.

Craft (1996:6) lists the following reasons for undertaking professional development and why it is a fundamental part of the educational practice:

- To improve the job performance skills of the whole staff or groups of staff;
- To improve the job performance skills of an individual teacher;
- To extend the experience of an individual teacher for career development or promotion purposes;
- To develop the professional knowledge and understanding of an individual teacher;
- To extend the personal or general education of an individual;
- To make staff feel valued;
- To promote job satisfaction;
- To develop an enhanced view of the job;
- To enable teachers to anticipate and prepare for change;
- To clarify the whole school or department's policy.

Mosoge (2008:164) proposes that at the core of any professional development is the idea of improvement of an individual through self-development. There needs to be a sense of commitment from the individual who is going through professional development to be developed as a person (as a whole). Teachers should be more open to the idea of becoming an improved teacher leader. Teachers should see themselves as professionals. As such they should belong to a professional body; they should have had specialised training in a specific subject; they should be knowledgeable about their subject; should accept being accountable for their position at school; and be responsible for improving their practice continuously.

Professional development can be an effective process if opportunities for further growth are made available to teachers. The aim after implementation is surely to empower teachers. In other words, for schools to attain the goals and outcomes set out by provincial and local government, teachers have to improve their practices and performance in a continuous manner. For the above to materialise, teachers need to be

professionally developed so that they have a clear understanding of what is expected of them and for what they are accountable. Professional development can contribute to the success the teacher has with their learners, as well as to the success of the school. It should be implemented and encouraged as an on-going process whereby teachers are presented with learning opportunities. Reflective practice, as discussed, has the potential for professional development. This is an important element of and central to this study.

Villani (2002:12) asserts that beginner teachers benefit from on-going professional development in a number of aspects of their teaching responsibilities, including classroom management; curriculum standards and assessments; alternative ways to meet the needs of diverse student populations; promoting parent and community involvement; problem solving; conflict resolution; and time management. The general focus for the early years of teaching in gearing towards professional development should be on engaging the individual teacher in reflection and action on pedagogy. Bartell (2005:61) asserts that the focus of professional development activities is to help expand the teacher's knowledge; acquaint teachers with specific curricula or district practices; expose them to new ideas and strategies; and provide a context for further learning.

## **2.5 Bell and Gilbert's (1994) model of Professional Development**

One of the models for the evaluation of the effectiveness of the process of teacher development is that of Bell and Gilbert (1994). Bell and Gilbert (1994) developed this model from a three-year study project in New Zealand. The Bell and Gilbert model deals with aspects of teacher professional development, namely the personal, professional and social development of the teacher. Although the personal, professional and social level of development is discussed in other models, the Bell and Gilbert (1994) model describes the different sub-levels / -stages within the personal, professional and social development levels. This gives the Bell and Gilbert (1994) model a greater range for interpretation and discussion. Personal development is considered crucial to teacher professional development by Bell and Gilbert (1994).

They identify different levels and stages of professional development which include the following:

- **Personal development (Attending to feelings)**

The motivation at this level deals with acceptance of teaching as problematic, dealing with restraints and feeling empowered. According to Bell and Gilbert (1994), this development is usually private, having been self-initiated and -sustained. Bell and Gilbert (1994:486) write that teachers are seeking new teaching suggestions that work and new theoretical perspectives from which to think about their teaching and that teachers want to feel better about themselves as teachers. This type of personal development might occur because of the individual teachers' deliberation or because of discussions that take place at school for school development purposes.

- **Professional Development (Development of ideas and classroom practice)**

This aspect encourages teachers to become researchers. Teachers want to value their ideas of teaching and knowledge from their students and about their teaching. Some teachers want to be empowered by their teaching, and what to empower their learners as well with knowledge. In this stage of development, teachers engage cognitively. According to Bell and Gilbert, (1994:491) cognitive development includes the following:

- Clarifying existing concepts and beliefs;
- Obtaining an input of new information by listening and reading;
- Constructing new understanding by linking the new information with existing ideas;
- Considering weighing up and evaluating the newly constructed understandings;
- Accepting or rejecting the new constructions;
- Using newly accepted understandings in a variety of contexts and with confidence.

With regard to the development of their classroom practice, teachers do the following, according to Bell and Gilbert (1994:491)

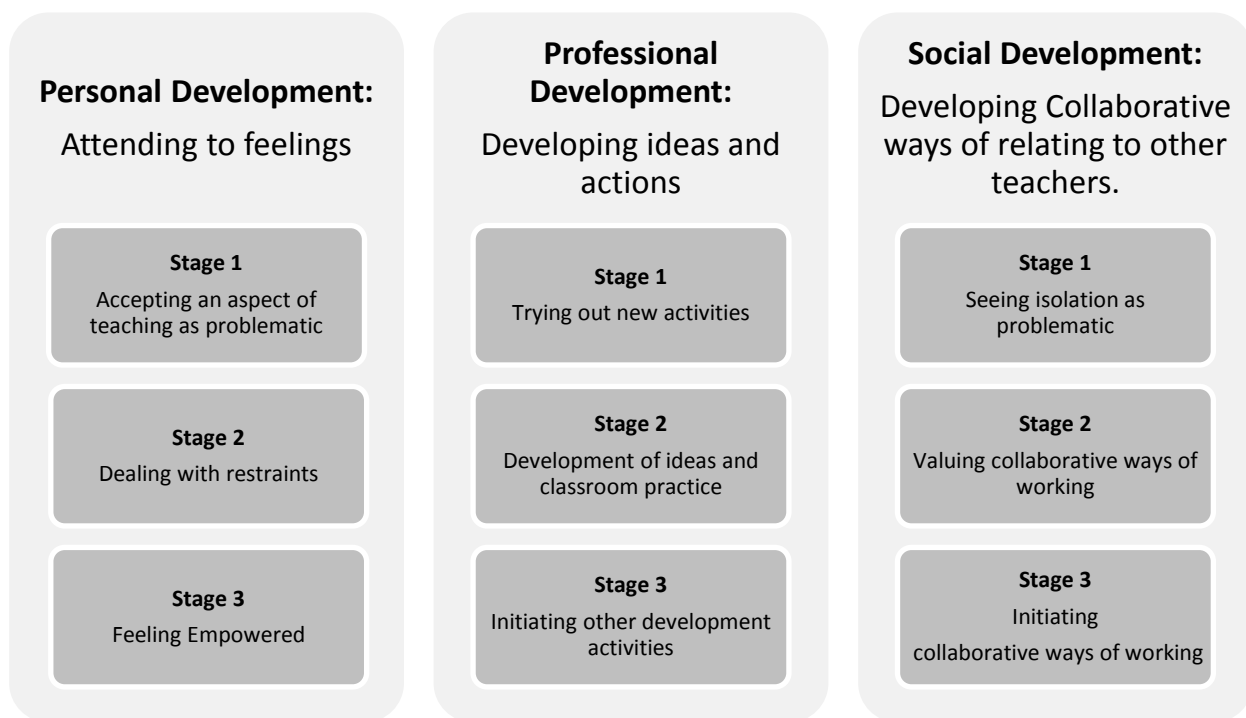
- Obtain new suggestions for teaching activities;
- Consider themselves visualising and planning their use in the classroom;



- Adapting and using the new activities;
- Sharing classroom experience with others.

- **Social development (Developing collaborative ways of working)**

Teachers often find themselves working in isolation. They are given a curriculum, which is often packed, and a classroom and it is expected of them to deliver this curriculum effectively and efficiently. Other factors and challenges that might infringe the delivery of the curriculum are often not considered. Bell and Gilbert (1994:493) write that, when teachers developed more, they began to actively seek and initiate those activities and relationships with other teachers, which they felt fostered their development. Collegiality and ways of working together are valued in this type of development. These categories are developed around indicators which are presented in Figure 2.1.



**Figure 2.1: An overview of teacher development**

**Source: Bell and Gilbert (1994:485) adapted by Reddy (2001)**

I use the indicators presented in Figure 2.1 as an analysis tool and discuss this in more detail in Chapter 5.

## **2.6 Novice Teachers**

Novice teachers are seen as newcomers into the school community and novices need support and guidance. In mediating their entry into this profession, this reality should be taken seriously. This means that they should be provided with access to information and assistance. The metaphor commonly used to describe entry into teaching has been “sink or swim”. It is a metaphor that most teachers can relate to, and most can recall vividly the often painful details of their trial years in the classroom. Recollections of feeling discouraged when they were unable to translate into successful practice what they had been taught through their initial teacher education programmes in higher education and pre-service observation are often uttered.

Kaufmann and Ring (2011:52) use the term spark-plug-go-getter to refer to a beginner teacher. On entering the profession, I was filled with enthusiasm and a love for my subject. I had high expectations for myself and for my learners. Kaufmann and Ring (2011:52) warn that the spark-plug-go-getter who enthusiastically enters the profession can be at risk of burnout without a plethora of supports to guide and reinforce confidence, which at the same time provide pathways to leadership and professional development. Upon entering and starting my tenure, I expected that support in the form of either an induction programme or mentoring would be given, but such forms of support were non-existent. Kaufmann and Ring (2011:53) conclude that having well-designed coaching and other forms of encouragement drawn from internal and external sources may reduce the disillusionment that some new teachers experience.

Davies (2008:3) writes that good teachers and good teaching have been shown by numerous research studies to be critical elements which make the difference in effective early-years education programmes. The initial years of teaching are considered to be the most demanding and testing years for novice teachers. Typically, novice teachers struggle to survive from day to day, and it is most likely that they can become disheartened and leave their initial teaching posts. Flores and Day (2006) argue that most of the studies of new teachers highlight the sudden and sometimes dramatic

experience of the transition from student to teacher. Chuene, Lubben and Newson (1999:24), from years of teacher watching in school, affirm that pre-service teachers have long developed theoretically uninformed, underdeveloped and pedagogically naïve views or conceptions about teaching.

Lortie (1975) is of the opinion that the transition from the teacher training institution to school classrooms is characterised by a type of “reality shock” in which the ideals that were formed during teacher education are replaced by the reality of school life. Initial teacher experiences often leave novice educators feeling vulnerable, and even confused. Literature on teacher development indicates that good teaching develops over time and that teachers have different learning and support needs at particular stages of their career. Davies (2008:3) states that becoming a good teacher is a process that begins with initial teacher preparation and progresses through a series of stages from novice to expert status.

## **2.7 Understanding the Stages of Teacher Development**

Teachers have to go through different stages to become more experienced and better equipped teachers. The skills of new teachers develop over a period of time. Induction appears to be an important stage that presents specific challenges and learning needs for new teachers and Bartell (2005) argues that induction cannot be considered in isolation because it forms part of the continuum of development that transpires over a career of teaching. The development that Bartell (2005) is proposing takes place in a specific context that moulds teacher perceptions and the practice of teaching. Bartell (2005:21) reiterates the fact that we now understand the complexity of teaching expertise as it develops over time and recognise that even well-prepared beginning teachers are still novices and have much to learn.

Berliner (2001:21) proposes that there are five stages to consider in the journey one takes from being a novice to becoming an expert teacher. The first stage is the novice stage. Many teachers in their first year of teaching are considered to be in this stage. During this stage the teacher engages with real classroom situations and is expected to conform to the rules and to what is expected of him or her. The second stage of development is the advanced beginner stage. Many teachers in their second and third

years in the profession are in this developmental stage. Berliner (2001:22) asserts that this is the stage when experience can meld with verbal knowledge; similarities across contexts are recognised; and episodic knowledge is built up.

As experience, knowledge and familiarity are gained, the advanced beginner becomes a competent performer. In the third stage of development, the teacher feels more competent to make informed decisions. Through the experience they now have, they are able to differentiate between what works and what cannot. Berliner (2001:23) states that, because teachers are more personally in control of the events around them, following their own plans and responsibilities and responding only to the information that they choose to, teachers at this stage tend to feel more responsibility for what happens. The fourth stage is known as the proficient stage. Teachers who are in their fifth year of teaching are considered to be in this stage. In this stage teachers are more instinctive and spontaneous.

According to Berliner (2001:23), the proficient performer, however, while intuitive in pattern recognition and in ways of knowing, is still analytical and deliberative in deciding what to do. The last stage of development is that of expert teacher. This stage is characterised by the following distinctive features. Teachers in this stage of development are now in their comfort zones. Berliner (2001) uses the term “go with the flow”. When irregularities occur, expert teachers bring deliberate analytic processes to solve the situation, and when there are no anomalies; experts appear to be reflective about their performance.

Hargreaves and Fullan’s (1992) research focused on forms of teacher development and understandings of teacher development that are more humanistic and critical in nature: forms that argue that teacher development involves more than changing teachers’ behaviour, it also involves changing the person the teacher is.

## **2.8 Five Phases Experienced by First-year Teachers**

In order to fully comprehend the experiences of beginner teachers, it is important to look at the phases experienced by first-year teachers. Villani (2002:5), who adapted work by Moir (1999), identified the five phases presented in Figure 2.2.

<b>Phase 1 – Anticipation Phase</b>	Before entering the profession, teachers are idealistic, excited and very anxious to start their career. They are entering the unknown, and this is accompanied with feelings of uncertainty.
<b>Phase 2 – Survival Phase</b>	<p>During the first few weeks on entering the school, the new teacher is bombarded with a variation of problems and situations that he or she did not anticipate.</p> <p>Besides planning and preparing lessons, the teacher is also responsible for doing administrative tasks and organisational tasks like establishing classroom routines and extra-mural activities.</p>
<b>Phase 3 – Disillusionment Phase</b>	<p>Towards the end of the year, teachers begin to question their commitment and their competence.</p> <p>This phase has been described as the toughest and most challenging phase for new teachers.</p>
<b>Phase 4 – Rejuvenation Phase</b>	During this phase teachers feel rested and re-energised. This phase occurs during the first half of the year. Teachers usually feel that they have a better understanding of the job.
<b>Phase 5 – Reflection Phase</b>	During this phase teachers get the opportunity to reflect and review their curriculum, management and teaching strategies. This is a time of self-analysis. This is a time to reflect on what happened, what went well and how things can be done differently.

**Figure 2.2: Five Phases experienced by first-year teachers**

**Source:** Adapted from Moir, 1999, in Villani, 2002:5

## 2.9 Pre-service practicum

New teachers bring varying backgrounds, motivations, experiences and preparation levels to their initial teaching experience (Bartell, 2005:1). The pre-conceived ideas and ideals concerning the teaching profession are moulded and formed by the above-mentioned characteristics. Flores and Day (2006:220) assert that both the influence of the school context and the personal background experiences during pre-service education are identified as important variables to be taken into account in the assessment of early teaching experiences.

For most student-teachers the teaching practice period gives them an opportunity to firstly apply the principles of teaching and learning that they have been trained in as well as giving them an opportunity to reflect on whether teaching is the career that they want pursue. Chuene *et al.*, (1999) discovered that conflicting guidance was provided by the lecturers and the supervisory school teachers during the pre-service training. This meant that what novice teachers learned in their teacher programmes was not the same as what they experience in the real situation. This also is in conflict with their own ideas about teaching and what it entails.

Tickle (1994) is of the opinion that, in sad contrast to other professions; many new teachers are left to struggle with the multifaceted and challenging demands of their first job completely by themselves. In some instances, novice teachers find themselves in complete professional segregation. They often are not exposed to the reality of teaching and what it entails during their initial training. Farrell (2003:95) asserts that the transition from the teacher training institution to the secondary school classroom is characterised by a type of reality shock in which the ideals that were formed during teacher training are replaced by the reality of school life. This period can also be described as a challenging journey from survival to success and high-quality teaching.

Maynard and Furlong (1993) describes the initial teacher preparation period as one of a succession of stages: early idealism, survival, recognising difficulties, hitting the plateau and moving on. It is expected that student teachers have to assist the teacher, learn as much as possible about the work and learn about the management and running of a school, as well as learn about the community in which the school is situated.

Bartell (2005:3) is of the opinion that it can also be said that the challenges of the increasing numbers of teachers who enter classrooms without strong academic preparation are magnified. In a study conducted by Chuene *et al.*, (1999) one of the findings was that teacher education is perceived to be failing in preparing candidates for school realities, but teachers expect student teachers to be prepared and competent in the classroom, and some even increase the workload and responsibilities of the student teachers. Many student teachers can be taken advantage of through this. Barry and King (1999) argue that each practice must progress in comprehensiveness and demands towards the goal of bringing student teachers to the point of functioning as autonomous teachers.

Chuene *et al.*, (1999) suggest that different programmes could be set up for pre-service teachers to have a sort of school-based teacher education programme with a “week at college” and “a week in the field”, so that people (pre-service teachers) can be given more time to understand what is happening in schools. This will also give pre-service teachers a sense of what to expect and what will be expected of them once they have entered the education field as a professional. Through teaching practice, pre-service teachers can gain self-confidence and be able to break “stage fright”.

## **2.10 The Challenges of Novice Teachers**

After more than two decades after Chuene *et al.*, (1999) statement novice teachers still appear to experience the same kind of problems. In addition to having trouble with day-to-day planning, novice teachers struggle with classroom management, which often ranks top of the list of challenges, as seen below.

Gordon and Maxey (2000, as cited in Villani, 2002:4) identified the following high priority needs for beginning teachers:

- Managing the classroom
- Acquiring information about the school system
- Obtaining instructional resources and materials
- Planning, organising and managing instruction, as well as other professional responsibilities

- Assessing students and evaluating progress
- Motivating students
- Using effective teaching methods
- Dealing with individual students' needs, interests, abilities and problems
- Communicating with colleagues, including administrators, supervisors and other teachers
- Communicating with parents
- Adjusting to the teaching environment and role
- Receiving emotional support

A synthesis study conducted by Barry and King (1999) of the work of Veenman (1984) identified the following difficulties that beginner teachers face.

- **Reality shock**

This is the kind of shock that novice teachers get when they enter the teaching world and discover that their preconceived ideas of teaching are nothing like reality. During pre-service education, students build up an image of their ideal teaching situation and what they would like to achieve (Barry & King, 1999:393). A study of teacher education students found that they tended to believe they would experience less difficulty than the “average first year teacher” concerning a number of tasks (Villani, 2002:4).

- **Changes in behaviour and attitude**

Barry and King (1999) ascribed this to a change from teacher-centred to student-centred learning and / or a change from a liberal to a more conservative view of education and teaching.

Veenman (in Barry & King, 1996:393) also lists 24 of the most frequently perceived problems of beginning teachers. The five most serious of these problems are: classroom discipline; motivating learners; dealing with individual differences; assessing learners' work and relations with parents. Farrell (2003:95) concludes in his study that new teachers have to deal with many influences during the first year, two of which include structural influences and personal influence. Farrell (2003:95) defines structural



influence as things that happen at the classroom level, school level and the societal level. A new teacher has to adjust and adapt to the school's climate and culture, as well to the school community. Farrell (2003:95) defines personal influences as coming from other persons with whom the teacher interacts, such as students, colleagues, administrative people in the school and parents.

### **2.11 The needs of Novice Teachers**

Experienced teachers and novice teachers have different needs. Experienced teachers, for example, may be familiar with the school's policies and practices, as well as the school's culture. Novice teachers may require assistance in a variety of areas, for example: classroom management, curriculum standards and assessment, problem solving and time management, to mention but a few. Veenman (1984:153-156) articulated the needs of teachers well by ranking the ten most reported problems that novice teachers experienced: classroom discipline, student motivation, dealing with individual differences among students, assessment of student work, interaction with parents, organising work, obtaining sufficient materials for adequate instruction, dealing with students' personal problems, heavy course loads with inadequate preparation time, and getting along with colleagues.

According to Burgess (2001), an inexperienced young teacher is the most valuable investment that a school can have in future achievement and success. Novice teachers enter the profession with a fresh vision and new thinking, but often do not get the support they need to put their ideas into practice. As a result, good novice teachers are often cast off. The support offered to teachers by the Education Department and the school at which the teacher serves varies from context to context and ranges from formally planned induction programmes to minimal or non-existent support mechanisms. In the latter instances, novice teachers are compelled to engage in self-support mechanisms. Novice teachers need the depth and richness of focused support in order to survive in the classroom.

### **2.12 Induction defined**

According to the literature, the initial years of service are generally considered to be the first one to three years of teaching (Bartell, 2005; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005;

Strong, 2009). Researchers refer to these years as the induction period. The induction period can be described as a distinctive and critical stage in the learning to teach continuum. Bartell (2005:5) describes this time as the period in which the novice teacher becomes more familiar with the job responsibilities, the work setting, and professional norms and expectations. Induction can thus be viewed as a system that may provide orientation into the schooling context, as well as function as a support mechanism for new teachers. The entry period of a novice teacher can often be described as a fundamental period in their careers during which different approaches to teaching and learning must be acquired.

Killeavy (2006) advocates that induction is a collective professional issue and emphasises a whole-school approach to professional development. The intense pressures from educational authorities and school management makes it a necessity for support structures to be in place to help beginner teachers. Killeavy (2006:169) states that teachers, particularly those new to the profession, need to develop skills that enable them to cope with the pressures of an increasingly demanding society.

An effective developmental programme begins with a teacher induction programme for first-year teachers. Effective entry into professional development is facilitated by a first-year teacher induction programme that includes a mentoring component (Brock & Grady, 2000:93). The purpose of the induction programme would be to prepare beginning teachers for the transition from the university to the reality of classroom teaching. Induction programmes are a means to acquaint new teachers with the school culture and to assist them in analysing and handling commonly encountered problems (Brock & Grady, 2000:93).

Killeavy (2006) is of the opinion that an induction phase offers opportunities for new teachers to become habituated to learning from the beginning, and to be afforded opportunities to consult and collaborate with their colleagues to engage collectively in the learning profession. Killeavy (2006:171) furthermore is of the opinion that early professional development beyond the induction year may focus on deepening the NQT's (newly qualified teacher) reflection skills, linking theory and practice, enhancing instructional performance and clarifying professional values.

Kaufmann and Ring (2011:52) warns that the spark-plug-go-getter who enthusiastically enters the profession can be at risk of burnout without adequate support to guide and reinforce confidence and at the same time provide pathways to leadership and professional development. Kaufmann and Ring (2011:53) conclude that having well-designed coaching and other forms of encouragement drawn from internal and external sources may reduce the disillusionment that some new teachers experience. Flores and Day (2006:220) identify both the influence of the school context and personal background experiences during pre-service education as important variables to be taken into account in the assessment of early teaching

Different perspectives on education are formed at this time and in most cases the values and ideas assimilated during this period are used throughout the individual's career in teaching. For this reason, support, guidance and orientation programmes are highly needed and recommended by researchers (Tomlinson, 1995; Villani, 2002; Strong, 2009). Ingersoll (2001) discovered a strong link between the perennially high rates of novice teacher attrition and the shortages that seem to perennially plague teaching. Ingersoll's (2001) data showed that widely publicised staffing problems are to a substantial extent a result of a large number of teachers departing from teaching long before retirement. One of the reasons could be the disillusionment that leads young teachers to leave teaching. Over the years a growing number of countries have developed and implemented induction programmes that are specifically aimed at providing support, guidance and orientation for novice teachers.

There are a number of purposes behind teacher induction programmes (Tomlinson, 1995; Villani, 2002; Strong, 2009). Among these are support, socialisation, adjustment development and assessment. There are also different types of activities of teacher induction, for example classes, workshops, orientations, seminars and mentoring. According to Strong (2009:2), with the twenty-first century well on its way, induction and mentoring for novice teachers have increased in popularity in the United States to the extent that as of 2008 induction was mandated and funded in 17 states. These types of programmes take time and money, knowledge and expertise and collaborations and

partnerships among schools and educational districts and must occur on both a provincial as well as a national level.

### **2.13 Features of a successful Induction Programme**

Induction programmes are designed to best suit the context in which the novice teacher begins his / her tenure. One of the most recognised models of new-teacher support programmes in the United States was developed by the members of the New Teacher Center (NTC) at the University of California. According to Strong (2009:9) this programme has six goals.

- Its first goal is to develop teacher capacity as defined in the *California Standards for the Teaching Profession*.
- Secondly, to direct support towards improving student achievement.
- Thirdly, to use formative assessment practices to guide support.
- Fourthly, the programme aims to document professional growth over time.
- Fifthly, the programme aims to model and encourage ongoing self-assessment and reflection.
- Lastly the programme aims to foster collaboration and leadership among teachers.

In this programme, novice teachers have a full-time mentor. Each mentor only has 15 novice teachers, and these teachers must be visited at least once a week. Novice teachers have to stay in the programme for two years. Mentors are veteran teachers who have been carefully selected. After three years of working with novice teachers, mentors can return to full-time teaching. Mentors attend a five-day mentoring course to be taught about coaching, mentoring and the use of formative assessment tools. Goals that are based on the teaching standards of California have to be set early in the academic school year. Mentors have to observe each novice teacher at least one hour a week. The key factors that stand out in the above programme are student achievement, professional growth and leadership and collaboration among teachers.

Induction programmes for novice teachers exist in other countries. They have salient features and they are functional in different educational contexts. Strong (2009:16) identifies the following commonalities among them: a culture of shared responsibility

and support; interaction of new and experienced teachers; a continuum of professional development; down-played assessment; clearly defined goals; adequate political, financial, and time commitments by relevant authorities. Some of the programmes are state funded. If considered applicable and practicable in South Africa, these will however be costly.

A successful induction programme as defined by Bartell (2005) is one that has effective plans for support of all novice teachers and recognises and builds on the knowledge and experience that novices bring to the classroom. It can assist novice teachers in overcoming what is weak or lacking, and extend learning so that the novice teacher can move to higher levels of accomplished teaching. Bartell (2005:9) further asserts that teachers will be more inclined to stay and make a long-term contribution if they feel challenged and fulfilled in their work. Katz and Feiman-Nemser (2004:115) propose that strengthening the quality of beginning teaching through serious induction efforts will strengthen the case for ongoing professional development as part of the work of all teachers.

## **2.14 Understanding Mentoring**

Many studies have been conducted to investigate the partnership between mentors and novice teachers. Villani (2002:7) asserts that studies provide clear indications of the positive impact these relationships have on novice teachers' orientation to the school system, socialisation to the school culture and improved effectiveness in promoting student learning. Strong (2009:6) asserts that, while mentoring is a term that is often used synonymously with the term *induction*, it refers to one aspect of an induction support programme only, and is thus subsumed in the notion of induction rather than synonymous with it. Mentoring programmes can vary from a single contact session between a mentor and mentee at the beginning of a school term, to a highly-structured programme involving more recurrent meetings. This has increasingly become one of several approaches to assist novice teachers as they develop their practice during the earliest years of their careers.

The idea of having a mentor brings feelings of having someone that will be dedicated to helping one learn and succeed. Strong (2009:3) describes mentoring as a bridge that

can lead to *teacher effectiveness*, a concept that describes the quality of teachers in terms of the outcomes of their teaching, namely student learning and achievement, student engagement in the learning process, and the context of their teaching, which is sometimes described as the culture of the school. Mentors thus have the power to influence how effective the teacher's teaching is.

## **2.15 Four Ways in which Mentors can support Novice Teachers**

Villani (2002:9) points out four ways in which mentors can support novice teachers:

- **Provide emotional support and encouragement.**

On entering the profession, many novice teachers have doubts about being able to face the difficult challenges that occur in the classroom. Villani (2002:9) asserts that, while novice teachers leave for many reasons, those who have had mentors said repeatedly that it was the support and encouragement of the mentor, that gave them the ability to see that it is possible to become competent and successful. Hearing words of encouragement and support also helps boost the confidence level of someone in their aims to perform as best as they can.

- **Provide information about the daily workings of the school and the cultural norms of the school community.**

For a novice teacher, it is important to know the policy and mission statement of the school. Novice teachers need to have a sense of what kind of school culture and climate the school has, in order to slot in and become part of the school's visions and ideals. Villani (2002:11) reiterates that novice teachers need to know the cultural norms before they can decide which ones they want to follow.

- **Promote cultural proficiency regarding students and their families.**

Novice teachers often misread or misinterpret a learner's classroom behaviour, because they are unfamiliar with the cultural diversity of their learners. It is therefore crucial that mentors teach techniques that address possible failure in communication and understanding to novice teachers (Villani, 2002).

- **Cognitive coaching.**

Villani (2002:11) stresses that when a mentor coaches a novice teacher, significant growth is possible for both of them. Cognitive coaching can be done through a process of pre-observation and non-judgmental observations. Promoting self-reflection and self-inquiry are two key strategies for successful cognitive coaching.

Harrison, Dymoke and Pell (2006), in their study of the conditions that promote best practice in the mentoring of beginning teachers, conclude that best practice or “developmental mentoring” involves elements of challenge and risk-taking within supportive school environments with clear induction systems in place and strong school ethos in relationship to professional development. The study also concludes that it is through effective mentoring that beginning teacher education can adopt a learner-centred approach, modelled on the best practice found in pupil-centred classrooms (Harrison *et al.*, 2006:1055). Bartell (2005:23) concedes that, while novices will probably continue to be assigned the same responsibilities as the experienced teacher, a support system to help the new teacher gain skills and to apply practices can help to provide that transition from student to teacher.

## **2.16 Agency and Structure**

A society can be characterised by the life it is given by the different social groups inhabiting it. The social forces within a society have the ability to further shape and control these different identities. Agency can be described as having the power to make one’s own decisions. Baez (2000) uses the term “free will” to describe agency. By contrast, structure refers to the recurrent patterned arrangements which seem to influence or limit, and also enable, the choices of individuals and opportunities that they have. Baez (2000) uses the term “constraints” to describe structure. Different points of departure (perspectives) and assumptions shape the identity of the individual. The power the teacher has (agency) and the constraints (structure) that they often find themselves working in often has an influence on their “performance”. Flores and Day (2006) concur that it is clear from studies that coping with the demands of teaching and its inherent tasks entails a continuing process of analysis of one’s own beliefs and practices.

Zeichner and Tabachnick (1985) conducted a two-year longitudinal study of the development of teacher perspectives of four beginner teachers in the United States. They examined the individual responses of the four teachers to the institutional contexts in which they worked and the nature of the formal control mechanisms which existed in their schools. These researchers adapted an elaborated version of Lacey's (1977) construct of social strategy to describe the quality of individual responses to institutional pressures and utilised an adaptation of Edward's (1979) framework of "institutional control mechanisms" as a heuristic device for examining formal attempts within the schools to direct actions of teachers. The study raised questions about the commonly accepted view of an inevitable loss of idealism during induction into teaching. Zeichner and Tabachnick (1985) assert that first-year teachers are seen as vulnerable and uninformed. They assert that, willingly or unwillingly, beginner teachers are cajoled and moulded into shapes acceptable within their schools.

Kahn (2009) provides an interesting perspective on the interplay between context and agency in terms of Archer's realist social theory. Although this refers to an academic context, it provides space for inference to a teaching setting such as the one described in this study. The interplay as discussed in Kahn (2009) links deliberative reflections about contextual factors and how these might influence the practice of academics. First appointments require (novice) teachers to take on significant responsibility for the selection of practices. Agency therefore plays a role in the development of such practices, but such agency is affected by the social conditions and cultural factors at play in the context. Fanghanel (2004) focuses on teaching and identifies a range of social and cultural constraints on agency. Archer (2008) focuses on the development of professional identity of young academics and relates this to the dominant socio-cultural discourses. She suggests that agency is determined by these structural influences and is expressed in relation to personal understandings of the context of structure and factors influencing activities. Such personal powers include intentionality and the capacity to engage in deliberation.

Archer (2000:7) suggests that a realist approach to social theory begins by presenting a sense of self that is prior to sociality. In other words, there is a sense of self that could



determine actions and practices despite the structure within the defined reality. Archer (2000) suggests further that it is the pursuit of specific projects driven by concerns held by the individual that ensures that individuals engage with the constraints and enablements deriving from the social and cultural contexts. These concerns that she indicates are self-worth within the social and cultural contexts, as well as physical well-being and performative achievement in the exercise of skilled expertise. This could lead to progressive concrete courses of action driven by concerns which could then become practices. This trajectory is driven by inner conversation or reflexive deliberation on oneself and one's concern in relation to society (Archer, 2007), helping to explain why individuals act in particular ways in given contexts.

Archer (2007) discusses the role of contextual continuity or discontinuity in triggering distinctive patterns of reflexive deliberation. She mentions four modes of activity, one of which I feel is related to my study: autonomous reflexives. This she describes as reflexive individuals who engage in action primarily on the basis of solitary internal conversations prioritising performativity in relation to their practice. She adds that autonomous reflexives develop as individuals and prioritise employment-related concerns in the face of contextual discontinuity. Archer (2007) further argues that it is through the progressive specification of action in social contexts that the agency of the individual emerges.

These ideas provide a broader background to the ideas of agency and structure and link to possible ways in which I might describe my own activities as a novice teacher developing as a reflective practitioner. It is particularly the contextual discontinuities and continuities that I feel link to my study and which are of value in my understanding of my development in the context of my practice.

## **2.17 Conclusion**

In Chapter 2, I have discussed various aspects of reflection and professional development, as well as factors to facilitate them. I also discuss the dilemma of novice teachers; inductions and mentoring possibilities and the role of agency and structure.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

#### 3.1 Introduction

The basic logic of a research design can be summarised as follows: it is a plan for collecting and analysing data to answer a research question (Slavin, 2007:9). Mouton and Marais (1990:193), explains that a research design is an exposition or plan of how the researcher decides to execute the formulated research problem. They add that “The objective of the research design is to plan, structure and execute the project concerned in such a way that the validity of the findings are maximized”.

Theoretical positions or traditions sometimes called paradigms exist which serve as useful guidelines to researchers. The choices of tradition as well as the research methods are in a sense determined by the theoretical position chosen or privileged by the researcher. However, the theoretical positions are in no way fixed or rigid rules, but guiding frameworks which can be adapted to the research context and emergent process. According to Ponterotto (2005:128), a research paradigm sets the context for a researcher and guides the researcher in philosophical assumptions about the research and in the selection of tools, instruments, participants and methods used in the study. This idea coincides with what Lichtenberger and Ogle (2008 cited in Wheeldon, 2011) assert, namely that there are three core issues in planning any research, which involve considering the goals of the research; the kind of data needed to address the goals; and how it can best be gathered. Wheeldon (2011:100) is of the opinion that it is important to remember that a study’s design often reflects the assumptions of a researcher about the best approach to explore a research question. My study essentially fits what is described as the interpretive paradigm (Kelly and Terreblanch 1999)[ see details later].

In this study, presented as my narrative, I make my personal and professional experiences as a novice teacher the central focus of the research. I made the following considerations in deciding on a research design:

- I wanted to capture the essence, difficulties and complexities a novice teacher encounters without structured support programmes that can lead to professional

development being in place. Through Narrative Research I was able to capture these elements, as Narrative Research focuses on the lived experience of individuals.

- Connelly and Clandinin (1990:9) describe the multiple “I’s” and assert that “I” can speak as researcher, teacher, man or woman, commentator, research participant, narrative critic, and as theory builder. Connelly and Clandinin (1990:9) furthermore assert that, in the writing of narratives, it becomes important to sort out whose voice is the dominant one when we write “I”. In this study / narrative I become multiple “I’s” as I am the participant and the researcher. The dominant “I” that I wanted to express in this research is that of a novice teacher giving a voice to her experiences.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000:2), whose work was inspired by John Dewey, assert that experience is a key term in diverse inquiries. Narrative inquiry is a human activity that is developed through experiences. According to Connelly and Clandinin (1990:2), the main claim for the use of narrative in educational research is that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. Narrative Inquiry is thus the study of how humans live, experience and interact within their own stories and those of others.

According to Clandinin, Pushor and Orr (2007:21), narrative inquiry is a methodology that frequently appeals to teachers and teacher educators. Clandinin *et al.*, (2007) ascribe this type of appeal to the fact that the comfort associated with narratives and stories carries into a sense of comfort with research that attends to teachers’ and teacher educators’ stories. Narrative inquiry is much more than just reliving and documenting stories. It has complex phases and dimensions as well. Creswell (2008:512) defines narrative research as a distinct form of qualitative research; a narrative typically focuses on studying a single person, gathering data through the collection of stories, reporting individual experiences, and discussing the meaning of those experiences for the individual. This especially fits the research that I engaged in.

This study is unique as it was conducted at and data were gathered from one specific school in the Western Cape Province of South Africa. The study was based on experiences within my own school context, starting with my tenure at a secondary school as a novice teacher. In this study I tracked my own experiences as a novice teacher in a particular context and focused particularly on reflective practice as a potential process of professional development and self-support mechanism for novice teachers.

The following considerations were investigated before considering the research questions:

1. Does this research project clearly address a problem or an issue that is currently experienced in the teaching profession of novice teachers?
2. Can the research project contribute to the researcher's reflection (ability to reflect) as a professional?
3. Can the research enhance the professional life of the researcher and provide new understandings of practice?
4. Can the researcher report the research to audiences who might be able to use the information to improve their practice as well?

The central research question to explicate this research is *"Can reflective practices serve as self-support mechanisms for novice teachers?"*

Sub-questions include:

1. Can reflective practice enable professional development of teachers?
2. Do teachers who engage in RP develop agency of self-socialisation?
3. Does RP hold the potential for improving the teaching and learning process?

### **3.2 Research Orientation**

Ponterotto (2005:128), who draws on the work of Denzin and Lincoln (2000b), contends that the paradigm selected guides the researcher in philosophical assumptions about the research and in the selection of tools, instruments, participants and methods used in the study. This is often termed methodology. This research project is framed by the

interpretive paradigm. The interpretive paradigm sees the world as inter-subjective. Terre Blanche and Kelly (1999:124) mention that interpretive research relies on first-hand accounts; tries to describe what it sees in rich detail; and presents its findings in engaging and sometimes evocative language.

In this research study it is my accounts of lived experience that will be interpreted. O'Brien (1998:10) contends that the interpretive paradigm contains such qualitative methodological approaches as phenomenology, ethnography and hermeneutics characterised by a belief of a socially constructed subjectively-based reality that is influenced by culture and history. The aim of the interpretive paradigm is to show how interpretations can make sense and give meaning to experiences, in this specific study, the interpretations of the researcher's experiences. Proponents of constructivism (interpretivism) emphasise the goal of understanding the "lived experiences" from the point of view of those who live it day to day (Schwand, 1994, 2000, cited in Ponterotto, 2005:129).

I developed detailed and accurate accounts of my experiences and the different self-support mechanisms that I used to show my overall development as a novice teacher, so that the reader could have a vivid account and point of departure as to my experiences. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state in their book that narrative becomes a way of understanding experience. In using narrative inquiry as my vantage point, I had a point of reference.

### **3.3 Research Methodology**

This study falls under the broad idea of qualitative research processes. Denzin and Lincoln (2000b), cited in Ponterotto (2005:128), define qualitative research as a broad class of empirical procedures designed to describe and interpret the experiences of research participants in a context-specific setting. Slavin (2007:121) describes qualitative research as research that emphasises elaborate description of social or instructional settings. The intention of qualitative research is to explore a social phenomenon by placing the investigator in the situation and to produce information on any given setting in its full richness and complexity (Slavin, 2007). As both the researcher and the participant, I placed myself in the school setting itself and

investigated change in my given setting. The product of this qualitative study is a thick description of narrative accounts.

### **3.4 Characteristics of Qualitative Research**

Slavin (2007:124-125) outlines the following characteristics of qualitative research:

- Qualitative research uses the natural setting as the direct source of data and the researcher as the key instrument. I dealt with the research topic from my own perspective as a novice teacher and discussed the research in its natural setting, unrestricted from any controlled conditions. This tone was evident throughout the whole research process.
- Qualitative research is descriptive. The experiences and stories lived by both the researcher and the participant is depicted in a way that gives the reader a sense of understanding what the “lived” experiences were like.
- Qualitative research is concerned with process, rather than simply with outcomes or products. Connelly and Clandinin (1990:2) argue that the study of narrative the way that humans experience the world and that this general notion translates into the view that education is the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories; teachers and learners are storytellers and characters in their own and other’s stories. I was interested in the process that novice teachers experience and the stories that they have to share about what they encounter and what shapes them into what they think are effective teachers.
- Qualitative research includes inductive analysis of data. I did an internal analysis from my own journals, as well as the journals and semi-structured interviews and tape recordings. I considered the data that were collected from my personal reflections in journal entries to be the most important source of information.

### **3.5 Narrative Inquiry**

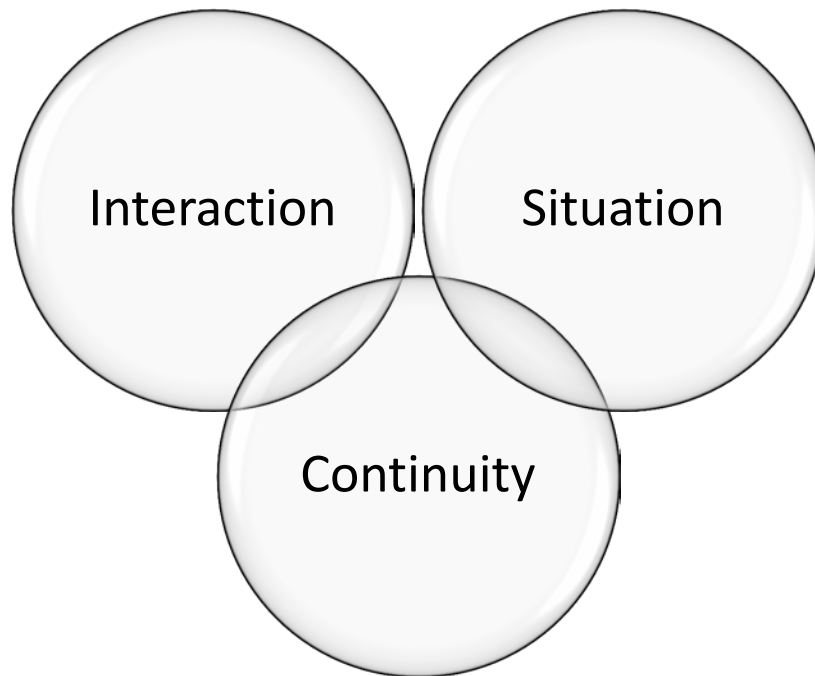
Coulter, Michael and Poynor (2007:103) assert that narrative inquiry is widely recognised as a viable approach to conducting qualitative research. Narrative inquiry has long been perceived as a pedagogical tool.

A narrative research design was used in order to accurately capture the relevant information needed for this particular research study. Narrative research design comprises a distinct form of qualitative research. It is increasingly used in studies of educational experiences, because human beings are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990:2). Gay, Mills and Airasian (2009: 384) define narrative research as the study of how different humans experience the world around them, and it involves a methodology that allows people to tell the stories of their “storied lives”. By engaging in this type of research, I aimed to understand and make sense of teacher development in terms of reflective practice and professional development, through reframing my past, present and future as a teacher through my own perspectives and understandings.

Connelly and Clandinin (2000:47) write:

Arguments for the development and use of narrative inquiry come out of a view of human experience in which humans individually and socially lead storied lives. People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000:49) proposed the three-dimensional space narrative structure of interaction, continuity and situation that creates a “metaphorical” inquiry space that defines a narrative study.



**Figure 3.1: Three-dimensional space narrative**

**Source: Based on Clandinin and Connelly (2000)**

What follows below is a discussion of the three-dimensional space narrative presented graphically in Figure 3.1 involves the following:

- **Interaction**

The personal interaction based on an individual's feelings, hopes, reactions and dispositions as well as the social interaction to include other people and their intentions, purposes, assumptions and points of view.

- **Continuity**

A consideration of the past that is remembered; the present relating to experiences of an event; and the future, looking forward to possible experiences.

- **Situation**

As researchers construct their own or someone else's story, they would include information about the following: Information about the context, time, and place within a physical setting with boundaries and characters' intentions, purposes and different points of view (Creswell, 2008:521).



Clandinin and Connelly (2000) later extended this three-dimensional space narrative and assert that, in order to fully comprehend what narrative inquiry is, you need to understand what is central to it: three-dimensional inquiry space, with its dimensions of temporality, sociality and place. The temporality dimension is the past, present and future events and people under study. The sociality dimension points to both personal and social conditions. They propose that narrative inquiry attend the feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions and moral dispositions of the person, whether inquirer or participant. Lastly, the place dimension draws attention to the specific concrete, physical and topological boundaries of place where the inquiry and events take place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It is imperative to attend to all three dimensions simultaneously in narrative inquiry.

In narrative research designs, researchers describe the lives of individuals, collect and tell stories about people's lives, and write narratives of individual experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

Individuals construct the target of narrative inquiry as a qualitative research method to gain a better understanding of a phenomenon in its natural setting. O'Dea (1994:167) describes the process of narrative inquiry as follows:

The point of the process is to encourage practitioners to reflect deeply and discerningly on their teaching practice, to see it from a variety of perspectives, to uncover and bring to conscious awareness the multiple levels of presuppositions that inform their perception and which determine (often unconsciously) their interpretation of particular situations. Most of all the point of the process is to empower teachers to step outside of societal norms and expectations and to find themselves in the crucible of daily pedagogical practice. The point of the process, in short, is 'authenticity' to enable teachers to voice honestly and truthfully their perceptions of the events that occurred in their classrooms. Such 'truths' leave room for the irreducible complexity of classroom practice while yet offering penetrating, important insights into teachers' experience of it.

Different factors within education influenced the development of narrative inquiry. Cortazzi (1993, cited in Creswell, 2008:513) suggests that there are three factors that influenced the development of Narrative Inquiry. Firstly, there currently is an increased emphasis on teacher reflection. Secondly, more emphasis is being placed on teachers' knowledge – what they know, how they think, how they develop professionally and how they make decisions in the classroom. Thirdly, teachers seek to bring teachers' voices to the forefront by empowering teachers to talk about their experiences.

Lawson, Parker and Sikes (2006:57) argue that narrative inquiry is fundamental to human understanding, communication and social interaction and it makes sense to use it to investigate these very things. I used autobiographical writing with the intention of making sense of my practice and life as a teacher. Coulter *et al.*, (2007:107) advocate that, through the process of reflection, making connections between past and present events and speculating about future implications, teachers will experience awakenings (new ways of telling stories) and quite possibly transformations (reliving stories with changed actions).

In this narrative study, my aim was to collect data from my own experience and to construct a narrative based on the experiences and the meanings that contributed to my experiences. People tell stories every day; it is a natural in our existence. Narrative inquiry is able to capture the everyday, normal form of data that is familiar to individuals (Creswell, 2008). Clandinin and Connelly (1994; 2000) have argued that it is through storytelling that pre-service / novice teachers engage in transformative pedagogical work.

Conle (2003:3), cited in Coulter *et al.*, (2007:106) discusses the use of narrative as curricula in the education of pre-service teachers stating:

.....the purpose of such narrative curricula is to serve in the field of teacher development and in certain forms of moral education....It encompasses not only what is explicitly learned but also what is learned practically, at a more tacit level touching not only on the intellect, but the moral practical imaginative realm.

I questioned and reflected on my experiences. According to Creswell (2008), narrative inquiry seeks to understand and represent experiences through the stories individual(s) live and tell. Threaded throughout this narrative research is my concern to ascertain the possibilities of professional development through reflective research; to highlight some of the strategies which might bring about change, however imperfect, and to consider the degree to which human agency influences this phenomenon. It is thus a study of processes to encourage and maintain teacher development. In a sense education becomes the social space in which influences, interaction, collaboration, personal and professional development takes place.

### **3.6 Key Characteristics of Narrative Inquiry**

Creswell (2008:517) classifies seven characteristics that are central to narrative research: individual experiences, chronology of the experiences, collecting individual stories, restoring, coding for themes, context or setting and collaborating with participants. The aspects that this research aimed to address and the reasons why narrative inquiry methodology was appropriate for this study are presented below. The study was undertaken with the following in mind:

- To seek understanding and to represent experiences through the stories of individuals. Through the narratives the researcher and participant can investigate and delve deeper into the teaching profession as practiced in reality.
- To minimise the use of literature and to focus on the experiences of individual(s). Narrative research allows the researcher holistically to investigate the phenomenon with all its intricacies.
- To analyse the stories by identifying themes or categories of information. Narrative research has a holistic quality that focuses on the fundamental human experience (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990:2). The aim of this research was to capture these experiences and to arrange them under themes or categories.
- To situate the story within its place or setting. The central focus of the research study was the teaching experience. Clandinin and Connelly (2004:19) assert that experience comes narratively and therefore educational experience should be studied narratively.

- To evaluate the study on the basis of depth, accuracy, persuasiveness and realism of the account. Connelly and Clandinin (1990:2) are of the opinion that people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories about them, and write narratives of experience.

These were all considered during my research, and find expression in the discussion of the data. I chose a narrative inquiry, because I wanted to give a voice to my experiences. By engaging in this type of research, I aimed to understand the professional development of novice teachers through the use of reflective tools. Narrative inquiry allowed me to document the personal experiences in an actual school setting; it was practical and offered specific insights. By conducting narrative studies. I could strengthen the research practitioner within myself. Creswell (2008) asserts that this may help reduce a commonly held perception by practitioners in the field that research is distinct from practice and has little direct application. In addition to this, this narrative study gives a voice which is rarely heard to experiences such as mine. I also chose a narrative design because the stories that are told follow a chronology of events. The study followed my experiences before and during my entry into the teaching profession.

### **3.7 Data Collection and Methods**

Understanding my past as well as the present and future is another key element in narrative research (Creswell, 2008:518). Chronology is a key term in, enabling the researcher to analyse and write about an individual's life and experiences. I was interested to determine what choices were made and what the reasons for such choices were; and what can or have been done to enable professional development. This research report thus includes a discussion about the sequence of events in the researcher's life, reflecting experiences from my past and present lived experiences. Rich data will reveal the perspectives and understandings of the researcher.

The main form of data collection involved keeping journal records. Daily and weekly journals captured the essence of my experiences. Gay *et al.*, (2009:374) are of the opinion that daily journals kept by teachers provide first-hand accounts of what is

happening in the classroom and provide a glimpse of the school from another perspective. These journals contain guided reflection entries. An autobiographical writing style was used to construct my lived experiences. Coia and Taylor (2001) affirm that the educational significance of autobiography lies in its ability to enable people to understand their present experiences and those yet to occur. This type of writing style contributed by enriching the narrative and assisting me to understand past events and experiences that have influenced my experiences with the phenomenon that was being investigated.

The journal entries centre on my personal and professional experiences. Using journal writing as a form of gathering data seemed appropriate as it provided information of both a personal and professional nature. In these journal entries I described and recorded the following:

- My daily experiences in a classroom setting. The things that went well in my lesson and things I needed to change or adapt. Most of the entries are in the form of reflections.
- Short notes on informal chats that I engaged in with colleagues.
- Notes on my own practice – feelings and suggestions.

I analysed my narrative by looking at themes and patterns of personal and professional growth and the role that reflection played in fostering such growth. Within the analysis, I looked at the different factors that played a role in fostering these concepts. Highlighting the themes and patterns in the story, I hoped to give the reader a comprehensive understanding of the factors that influenced my years as a novice teacher.

Other forms of data collection included observation and field notes. Field notes were used to document accounts and also to document important aspects of the school context related to socialisation and induction of novice teachers. Creswell (2008) proposes that the advantage of observation is to record information as it occurs in the actual school setting, to study the behaviour of the school, as well as to study individuals who might have difficulty in verbalising their ideas. The data collected from the observations provided further ideas for the development of the narrative. The aim of these narratives was to strongly suggest that perhaps all novice teachers need a place

to share their stories about public education in order to identify what their common experiences say about teaching and education.

### **3.8 Data Analysis**

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) note that humans are storytelling organisms who individually and collectively lead storied lives. This is the reason for generating data through storytelling or sequencing and arranging data in some order to be narrated as a story. The meta-narrative thus was constructed out of the journals, and field notes recording observations. Essentially I developed interpretations of my reflections with a view to linking my reflections with professional development.

Gay *et al.*, (2009:449) suggest that, when analysing qualitative data, the process should be focused on becoming familiar with the data and identifying potential themes; examining the data in depth to provide detailed descriptions of the setting, participants and activity; and categorising and coding bits of data to be grouped in themes.

This to and fro movement to make sense of the data and construct the story-truth is best described by Polkinghorne (1995):

Narrative analysis requires testing the beginning attempts at employment with the database. If major events or actions described in the data conflict with or contradict the emerging plot idea, the idea needs to be adapted to better fit or make sense of the elements and their relationships. The creation of a text involves the to and fro movement from parts to whole that is involved in completing a finished text.

The identification of themes provides the complexity of a story and adds depth to the insight about understanding individual experiences (Creswell, 2008). These themes are presented after retelling the story. In narrative inquiry, the process of data analysis involves synthesising the data into an explanation that requires recursive movements from the data to the emerging plot, always testing the story with the data base Polkinghorne (1995).

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. Braun and Clarke (2006) define thematic analysis as a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting repeated patterns (themes) of meaning within the data. In other words, thematic analysis enables the researcher to further interpret aspects of the research topic. Gay *et al.*, (2009) suggest listing themes that the researcher has seen emerge in the literature review and in the data collection; focusing on patterns that emerge, events that keep repeating themselves and key phrases that occur.

I hope that by reading this research project novice teachers will be able to identify with my experiences and the stages I went through as a novice teacher. My journals were analysed to derive an accurate interpretation of emergent patterns and themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) further contend that thematic analysis can be an essentialist or realist method, which reports experiences, meanings and the reality of participants, or it can be a constructivist method which examines the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within a society. The aim is to analyse the data in a manner so as to “unravel and unpick the surface of reality”. The level at which the themes will be identified will be on a latent / interpretive level. My aim was to analyse my narrative by extricating the emerging themes and to identify features or elements that give my narrative a particular shape, form and meaning. Braun and Clarke (2006) assert that, for latent thematic analysis the development of the themes themselves involves interpretive work, and the analysis that is produced is not just descriptive, but is already theorised as well.

A process of coding was used so that data could be organised into meaningful groups. Coding is the process of categorically marking or referencing units of text (e.g. words, sentences, paragraphs, and quotations) with codes and labels to indicate patterns and meaning. This helps the researcher to reduce the data into a form that is manageable. Creswell (2008:521) states that the identification of themes provides the complexity of a story and adds depth to the insight about understanding individual experiences. Codes identify a feature of the data that appears interesting to the analyst, and refer to the most basic segment or element of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a

meaningful way regarding the phenomenon (Boyatziz, 1998, cited in Braun & Clarke, 2006).

### **3.9 Analysis of Narrative Data**

Winberg (2002) explains that there are three main ways of analysing narrative research, namely structural analysis (which involves analysis at the text level), linguistic analysis (also known as 'micro analysis', which operates at the micro individual level) and discourse analysis (which operates at the socio-cultural or macro level). In this research I made use of structural analysis and discourse analysis. According to Winberg (2002:4) structural analysis allows the narrator to structure and sequence events in a particular way because he / she knows the outcome and will impose the logic of the outcome on the described event. Structural analysis will also be constructive in clarifying emerging themes. Lichtman (2010:190) defines structural analysis as analysing the structure of the text content in terms of syntax and semantics, and as a technique of data analysis dealing with naturally occurring written discourse. Discourse analysis was undertaken to help me make sense of the text produced in my meta-narrative. Gee (1991, cited in Winberg 2002) affirms that discourse analysis should reveal deeper levels of values, attitudes, beliefs, theoretical positions, and assumptions.

Chronology also plays an important part of in analysis as, firstly, my international experience forms part of my early teaching career and this will be discussed and analysed briefly. My initial teaching experience covered two years. I deal with the experiences of that time as one period and not as individual years.

Work consulted for my literature review that I feel might assist with interpretation of themes are mentioned briefly. I firstly draw upon Villani (2002:5) who adapted Moir's (1999) five phases experienced by first year teachers. Newer models have been developed over the past few years, but I specifically selected this one because I felt that these stages stood out as particularly applicable to my early teaching career. The different phases identified include the following: Anticipation phase; Survival phase; Disillusionment phase; Rejuvenation phase; Reflection phase.



Secondly, I felt that the work of Bell and Gilbert (1994:495) who developed a framework within which the three aspects of teacher development (cognitively and temporarily separated from each other) to highlight the multi-faceted nature of teacher development could be applicable to my work (see Chapters 2 and 5). The analysis discussed according to Bell and Gilbert (1994) in my opinion encapsulates and examines the different aspects of my personal and professional development as a novice teacher. In this study, however, I place more emphasis on the personal and professional dimensions and the three phases within each dimension to describe my development as a teacher. Data from my narratives were analysed (Refer to Chapter 4). In Chapter 5, my narrative is analysed in terms of personal and professional development, using Bell and Gilbert's (1994) model of teacher development.

Another theoretical aspect derived from the literature review that influenced my analysis and discussion is reflection. I have drawn on the work of Reddy and Menkveld (2000) who adapted categories of reflection developed by Van Maanen (1977). These categories are as follows: Technical reflection; practical reflection; and critical reflection. Each of these levels of reflection was used to interpret the data, to show how the different levels of reflection led to my professional development.

The above levels of reflection are also linked to the ways of knowing in reflective practice as mentioned by Singh (1996:352).

- Experiential ways of knowing about the educator's own personal experiences.
- Empirical ways of knowing through the use of qualitative research to gather knowledge and evidence of school life and to establish ways improvement.
- Theoretical ways of knowing what tools educators can use to help identify possible choices for actions they may take.

These perspectives on ways of knowing played a role in the analysis of my narrative to provide meaning and reveal underlying perspectives to my experiences as a novice teacher. This speaks directly to my stated central and subsidiary research questions.

### 3.10 Reliability

Connelly and Clandinin (1990:7) state that narrative research designs rely on criteria other than validity, reliability and generalisability. Kelchtermans (1999:13) explains that reliability refers to the “repeatability” of the study and to the degree the research outcomes are independent from the research procedure. In order to control the subjectivity of the study, I documented my own activities and reflections during this research process. Data recording my intuitions, feelings and assumptions were arranged according to themes emerging from the narrative and written down so that further steps could be taken in the analysis of data. In order to ensure validity and reliability in this study and not to “fake the data” (Connelly & Clandinin 1990:10), I used a collection of field notes and journal entries to guarantee that the quality of the data was both reliable and valid.

### 3.11 Validity

In qualitative research, validity is the degree to which qualitative data accurately gauge what we are trying to measure (Gay *et al.*, 2009).

Gay *et al.*, (2009:376-377) list the following steps to be taken to ensure the validity of research:

- Prolong participation at the study site to overcome distortions produced by the presence of researchers and to provide yourself with the opportunity to test biases and perceptions.
- Establish structural corroboration or coherence to ensure that there are no internal conflicts or contradictions.
- Establish referential adequacy – that is, checking that analysis and interpretations are accurate and reflect the documents and recordings of data collected as part of the study.
- Collect detailed descriptive data that will permit comparison of a given context (e.g., classroom / school) to other possible contexts to which transfer may be contemplated.

I believe that having considered this adequately ensures that my data are to all intents and purposes valid and reliable. I was acutely aware of the influence of bias and subjectivity and constantly took steps to avoid these potential problems.

### **3.12 Conclusion**

In this Chapter an explanation has been given of my choice of research design and methodology, as well as the criteria used to evaluate my data.

## CHAPTER 4

### PRESENTATION OF NARRATIVE

***Stories and narratives, whether personal or fictional provide meaning and belonging in our lives. They attach us to others and to our own histories by providing a tapestry rich with threads of time, place, character even advice on what we might do with our lives. The story fabric offers us images, myths and metaphors that are morally resonant and contribute both to our knowing and our being known..... The narrator too has a story, one that is embedded in his or her culture, language, gender, beliefs and life history. This embeddedness lies at the core of the teaching-learning experience.***

***(Witherell & Noddings, 1991:1-3)***

#### 4.1 Introduction

Threaded throughout this narrative are my experiences as a novice teacher and the difficulties and obstacles I have had to overcome to be recognised as an effective teacher. In order for the reader to fully grasp and get a sense of the person that I am, it is imperative that I mention some of my life-changing moments. To achieve this end, I include experiences from my own schooling, as well as early career experiences gained while working in administration and also as a teacher. Later I focus on my experiences as a novice teacher at a specific school that I was appointed at. Some parts of my story are from personal recollections of my life experiences and choices made and others, particularly my work experience, are drawn from journal entries I have been keeping since my appointment. I rely on the categorisations of Clandinin and Connelly for narrative enquiry and develop my narrative to describe important instances of interaction (personal and social), continuity of my story as my work life unfolded particularly as a teacher and this is developed against the backdrop of the situation in which I worked, the physical setting with its boundaries and characters and intentions.

The format and layout of this chapter is a meta narrative constructed from journal entries and organised into a “readerly” format as presented through headings and sub headings.

#### **4.2 Experiences of School and Post School Education**

I can clearly recall my first day of school. I was eager to learn and explore. I remember that I could not fathom why the other children were crying when they had to say goodbye to their parents, because I was prepared for my parents to leave. From an early age my parents emphasised the importance and value of a good education. My parents became the key players in my education. I worked diligently at school, because there was no greater pleasure in seeing how proud they were, whenever my name was called out to be on stage to accept an academic award. I enjoyed my schooling very much and always prioritised school work and studying during both the primary and the secondary phase of my schooling.

I never had any interest in the field of education as a career, though. I was brought up with the understanding that I could choose any career path I wanted to, except education, as teachers were poorly remunerated at that time. During my grade 11 year, I started to develop an interest in Psychology. I wanted to know how the mind works and why people behave and act the way that they do. My father was not too happy about the choice, but later on encouraged me to do what I felt most passionate about. I completed my school career in 1997, and then started undergraduate studies at the University of Stellenbosch in 1998, where I enrolled for a Bachelor of Arts (hereinafter referred to as BA degree).

I remember that my first year at University was difficult. At the time South Africa went through many changes and even though racial segregation was said to be banished, it was clearly still seen at the university at that time. Integrating with the other students was difficult, in the sense that they did not hide the fact that people of colour were not welcome in this historically predominantly white setting. Regardless of some of the students’ actions, learning continued to take place. One of the things that I remember was, that I was told by senior students that BA stands for “bugger all”. This meant that

even after you obtained your degree, there was nothing that you could do with it. I strongly believed that I would accomplish something with my BA degree.

Upon receiving my BA degree, I decided to work for a year and a half as an administrative clerk. During that time I read about people travelling to Asia and teaching English there for a living. The prospects of living and teaching in another country soon became more appealing to me. I started doing some research on the internet, and I found a vast amount of information. The only criteria for most of the overseas teaching posts were that you had to be from an English-speaking country and that you were in possession of a three / four year degree. I left South Africa with a feeling of accomplishment, as I could finally use my BA (bugger all) degree for something.

#### **4.3 International Teaching Experience**

Even though I felt a sense of accomplishment at having been accepted for a teaching job in Taiwan, I was soon overcome with feelings of nervousness and anxiety. I had no prior teacher training and I did not know what to expect once I arrived in Taiwan. Upon my arrival I was informed that, before I would start teaching, I would have to participate in a one-week induction programme. After the induction programme I felt confident that I had pertinent knowledge for living and working effectively in Taiwan and I had an adequate support network of co-workers.

I soon discovered that teaching is considered one of the most important professions in Asia. The teaching profession was one that was valued highly, and teachers were respected with a sense of respect that I cannot recall ever experiencing in South Africa. In my first year of teaching at a language school and a kindergarten I soon discovered that I enjoyed teaching. I did not only enjoy teaching, but I enjoyed seeing how I could make a difference in the lives of young people. This was something that I had always wanted to do. When my one-year contract ended, I applied for another teaching post at a well-known and respected private school in Taiwan, to which I was appointed.

In the first two weeks I participated in a vigorous two-week induction programme. This training was more intense than the training I received at my first school, where I was one of three novice teachers receiving training. During this induction programme I was

one of 750 novice teachers. The training was interactive and allowed me to gain basic teaching skills, become more familiar with the curriculum and to learn how to teach it effectively while taking into account my own individual style of teaching.

I felt that the training was an empowering refresher course as I could build onto my prior knowledge and experience of teaching in Taiwan. During the two-week induction programme I also had the opportunity to observe classes, as well as present a mock teaching demonstration coached by an experienced teacher. Some of the topics that were covered in the training sessions were: successful cross-cultural communication; working with students with special needs; effective learning games and activities; review of advanced grammar concepts; team work; class management and problem solving; and maximising your effectiveness in the classroom.

The values of the school were to nurture the development of the whole child. Education was described as something that addresses the development of all children's capacities, whether physical, emotional, artistic, social or moral. The educational approach strove to be child-centred. The curriculum that the school offered was theme-based, flowing from the children's own interests and allowing students to learn by doing real things in real situations. The subjects were integrated in a manner that provided meaningful and multi-sensory learning. I was provided with quality training, supervision and the necessary support, services, and resources. During training we were encouraged to implement our own and creative activities. We were also encouraged to grow personally and professionally, and were provided with opportunities for development and advancement.

The two-week programme was followed by further training sessions after one month, three months, six months and nine months. The follow-up training sessions provided me with an opportunity to take the next step in my teaching and knowledge by building stronger working relationships with my co-teachers and the rest of the staff. At the end of the nine-month follow-up training sessions I received a TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign language) certificate that is accredited in all Asian countries. The certificate states that the subjects recognised and accredited include: classroom management, total physical response, audio lingual methods, style flexing, lesson planning, dual

language weaving, community language learning, accelerated reading, mind mapping and communicative approach. The company also offered additional teacher training to mature teachers (teachers in their second, third or fourth year). Mature teachers were also afforded the opportunity to hold positions in teacher management and training or to become involved in curriculum development, writing or other special projects.

In my second year of teaching at the language school I was appointed as the Head of Native Speaking Teachers (hereinafter referred to as HNST). The basic responsibility of the HNST was to represent the students and the Native Speaking Teacher (NST). The HNST had to accept accountability for the NST's teaching quality and professional conduct and the impact that these have on students. The HNST also had to work directly with management to ensure that the language schools performed competently. Listed below are some of the duties that I had to perform:

#### Administrative Duties:

- Maintaining a daily log of activities that took place at the branch.
- Tracking the contract cycles of the Native speaking teachers.
- Regular English Teacher Observations.
- Regular English Teacher work Appraisals.
- Maintaining and updating English Teachers files.
- Managing English Teachers and arranging substitutes or leave of absence.
- Providing branch and English teaching training to new and current staff members.

#### Communicative Responsibilities

- Conduct Weekly and Monthly Theme training at the branch.
- Maintain monthly reports and address with feedback.
- Communicate, explain and help plan extra-curricular activities and special events.
- Meet with the branch director and manger on a regular basis.
- Consult school about class changes.



### Problem solving responsibilities

- Represent English Teachers in conflict situations.
- Buffer possible trouble situations to reduce the stress on the teachers and school.
- Deal with problems quickly and professionally.
- Document major problems with specific teachers.
- Follow procedures for involuntary termination of Teachers.

As a HNST I also had to participate in numerous training sessions. I felt that these training sessions offered a sense of empowerment and it also gave me a platform to develop professionally. In my fourth year of teaching I was bestowed an award in recognition of outstanding accomplishments and contributions to the language school and students given by the board of directors in Taipei County. After teaching in Taiwan for six years, I decided that it was time to take what I had learned and plough it back into my own country.

I applied to enrol for the Post Graduate Certificate course (hereinafter referred to as the PGCE course) at the University of Stellenbosch in 2009. I have to confess that I was unaware of the changes that South Africa's education system was undergoing at the time of application. Outcomes-based education was a term with which I soon had to become familiar.

#### **4.4 Pre-service Teaching Experience**

The duration of the PGCE course was one year. I felt relatively confident, because I was exposed to some of the skills of teaching. I expected that the course would enable me to gain more insight into the current teaching situation that South Africa was facing, as well as to develop and feel more empowered as a professional. At orientation I was surprised to find out that many of my class mates were only doing the course because they wanted to teach overseas. The common feeling amongst them was that there was no hope for South Africa's education system and few or no measures in place to salvage it.

The PGCE course had positive and negative aspects to it. The course was structured well, but the content did not seem to fit in well with what was currently happening and what we as novice teachers needed to be prepared for. We were expected to think out “of the box” continuously. Ideas from some fellow students which were not practical in the real South African teaching world were praised unceasingly. We were encouraged to have thoughts on Utopian Education systems. During the PGCE course we were trained in the latest classroom management skills, curriculum development, philosophies of education, sociology of education, and active and co-operative learning techniques, to mention but a few. The things mentioned are important, but there is so much more to teaching that helps to shape a teacher, than just to show them and to familiarise them with new ‘tricks’ of the trade. It seemed that some of the courses overlapped one another, leading to duplication of content and materials. My school teaching subjects or curriculum studies were English and Life Orientation.<sup>1</sup> The Life Orientation course was very informative. I felt ready and confident to present lessons in this subject.

In my opinion, the English course did not in any way prepare me for the real teaching and delivering of a lesson in a classroom situation. The focus of the course was more on the history of English. We were told informally that there were outcomes and they needed to be achieved in a lesson, but we were not formally taught on lesson planning skills, curriculum development in the English subject, programmes of assessments and work schedules. I felt embarrassed during my teaching practice when I had to ask a teacher to explain the programmes of assessment to me, because I could not answer her when she asked me a question about it.

The English course focused on English and its international context and approaches to teaching additional languages. We had to hand in ten-page essays on subject matter that held no relevance to teaching the subject. A one-hour workshop on grammar was presented, which I felt was meaningful, but one can only do the minimum in such a

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<sup>1</sup> Life Orientation is the study of the self in relation to others and to society. It concerns the personal, social, intellectual, emotional and physical growth and development of learners and the way in which these dimensions relate to each other and are expressed in everyday life.

short period of time. Instead of feeling prepared and confident upon entering my teaching practice (practicum), I felt confused, because I did not know whose ideals and visions to follow, the English lecturer's or my own vision, which I felt was more realistic.

#### **4.5 Teaching Practice / Practicum**

I was aware that I had to grasp as much as I could during my teaching practice, as that was the only time that I would live and experience what happens in real teaching situations. I wanted to gain core ideas and inculcate a broader understanding of teaching and learning that would give me traction on later development. Exposure to teaching practice involved three months. We were divided into groups and the schools were pre-selected by the PGCE coordinator. Our group had an orientation at the school before our practicum would start. This made it much easier for us, because we could familiarise ourselves with the layout of the school. All the resources that the school had were also available to us.

During the teaching practice period it was expected of me to observe the teachers and the learners. I was required to teach a certain number of lessons (eight) that had to be evaluated by the teacher. A University supervisor was required to attend and evaluate one of the classes I presented. The University supervisor generally helps by giving feedback on the teaching performance as well as playing a role in assessment. The following duties were expected of me: Teaching Grade 8-12 English Additional Language; Teaching Grade 8-12 English Home Language; Teaching Grade 8-11 Life Orientation; Co-operating with Department Head and fellow Colleagues; Co-ordination of lesson material and lesson plans; Preparation of assessments for English Additional Language and Life Orientation; Peer observations; Instructing and evaluating learners; Maintaining classroom discipline; and providing feedback to learners.

Personally I felt that a lot more exposure to the actual business of teaching was needed and essential. The three months of exposure was too short to grasp and take in everything that happens at a school. It was a time to observe and learn about learners and teachers and to put some theory into practice and to get helpful feedback about teaching.

After the completion of the course, and the knowledge that I had a teaching post for the coming year (2010), I felt that I had some knowledge and confidence to start my tenure as a teacher in South Africa. Thoughts of my first few weeks' teaching abroad came back and I was confident that this new experience would be positive and life changing. Teaching is a profession in which individuals like myself choose to make a difference in working with young people. Teaching had been rewarding, meaningful and stimulating in the past, and I wanted to build onto this and empower not only myself professionally but also help in the empowerment of the learners that I would encounter and work with.

#### **4.6 First year of full-time Teaching**

This part of my narrative is a discussion of the school context and details experiences I had as a novice teacher at a South African school. This formed an important narrative for reflection as I purposefully recorded my experiences in a professional journal, highlighting critical incidents that I felt contributed to my development as a novice teacher. These are chronologically presented as incidents in my first two years as a (novice) teacher. I later reflect on these at various levels to make meaning and interpret to what extent I could discern moments and incidents of professional development. . I present the data as sections or themes I developed from my journals and personal notes developed during my initial career as a teacher. I firstly discuss the school context and then present more details of the recorded experiences I felt were significant in this story.

#### **4.7 The School Context**

Before 1987, the norm in the area where the school is located in was that, after completing grade 8 at a primary school, you had to commute to surrounding areas like Bellville, Elsies River or even Cape Town if you wanted to further your schooling. When the secondary school opened its doors, it became of cardinal importance in this specific area as it could cater to the needs of its community. Immediately the learners from the surrounding primary schools could gravitate into the high school and there was continuity, and in this respect the school became very important to the community. The learners from the three neighbouring primary schools had first right of admission to the high school.

When the school opened its doors, most of the learners who attended were from middle class homes. After 1994, the parents who could afford it were able to enrol their children in former Model C schools.<sup>2</sup> The high school could not compete with this and was thus forced to open its doors to learners from mostly working class families. From conversations with colleagues, I came to the conclusion that, after 1994, the school slowly started to lose its main vision, which, at the time, was academic and performance driven. The school is a community-based school and the misconception is that attending school it is not about performance; but about bringing education to the masses. This type of mentality created a situation in which parents lacked the support base they needed to create support for their children and learners, in turn, also adopt this kind of attitude. If the high school's results are compared to other disadvantaged schools, this school's matric results are still above any of those schools, but the results have declined from formerly achieving a pass rate of 98% in Grade 12 to 87%. While this high school is not able to compete with former Model C schools, it is able to compare results with schools in the same situation. Due to this type of standing, parents who cannot meet the expenses of sending their children to former Model C schools apply for positions at the school.

In 2010, 1194 learners were enrolled at the Secondary School. In 2011 the numbers increased to approximately 1250 learners. The school is a dual medium (Afrikaans and English) school. The majority of learners are Afrikaans speaking even though some of them are enrolled in an English home language class. The majority of the learners are coloured, but approximately 90 black learners are enrolled at the school. The school has 41 teachers; 22 are Afrikaans speaking and nine are English speaking. The overall generic academic performance of the school in 2009 was as follows: The total pass rate for grade 12 was 87% (an improvement on 81% for 2008). The total pass rate of the grade 11s was 73.1%, for grade 10 it was 67.8%, grade 9 attained 68.4% and grade 8, 90.8%. The top grade-12 learner at the school obtained two distinctions in 2009. The

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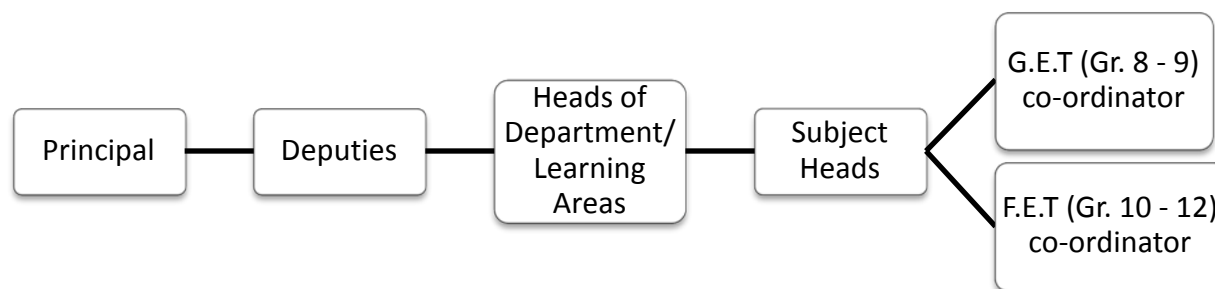
<sup>2</sup> Former Model C schools are schools that were reserved for white students during the apartheid era. They are government schools that are funded to a large extent by the governing body of the school.

overall generic academic performance in 2010 was as follows: the total pass rate for grade 12 was 57% (a decline from 87% in 2009); in grade 11 it was 65%; grade 10 achieved 66.2%; grade 9 56% and grade 8, 93%. The overall generic academic performance for 2011 was as follows: grade 12 achieved a rate of 88.2%; for grade 11 it was 66%; grade 10 attained 55%; grade 9, 56% and grade 8, 93%.

The school is set in a predominately middle class area, with working class areas on its outskirts. The typical learner attending the school is not middle class, which is characteristic of the environment, but comes from a working class home, and parents who do blue-collar work. Parents are economically less well-off and often destitute, hence finding it difficult to provide financially for their children. They work as much as they can, and in the process they do not have time to see to their children. Teachers at the school often pointed out that individual learners who gave the most trouble almost always came from homes where family life had been disrupted and impacted on by poverty, unemployment and crime.

Most of these learners' parents could also be classified as part of the 'lost generation'. The lost generation refers to those who were part of the struggle and liberation process in South Africa. These are the individuals who left school with minimum qualifications, often without having completed matric. Some of the learners' parents are illiterate and are unable to assist their children with their school work. Socio-economic status and family life therefore play a big role in determining the types of learners at the secondary school. As much as the teachers at school convey their grievances over poor learner behaviour, they also emphasise that it is essential to have a sympathetic understanding for what happens in the lives of the learners we taught and the community we served. The problems that these learners experienced are worse than that of learners in more affluent areas. Some of the main problems that the school is saddled with are that of broken families and drug and alcohol abuse and teenage pregnancies.

The school also has a structured management system in place. This structure is illustrated in Figure 4.1.



**Figure 4.1: Management team**

Figure 4.1 depicts a very hierarchical organisation in which most communication is uni-directional. Decisions largely follow a top-down route, with little discussion and deliberation. This forms part of the structure into which novice teachers are introduced and has implications for exercising agency.

#### **4.8 School Climate**

From a geographical point of view, climate refers to the average weather or atmospheric conditions over an extended period over time in a particular location. School climate is a metaphor for the conditions within the confines of a particular school over a period of time. In terms of the school's climate, an area where learners can come into a safe place that is conducive to learning as well as progress is suggested. The particular secondary school's climate reveals an imbalance with regard to the number of teachers and the number of learners. The current teacher to learner ratio in lower grades is 1-52 and the higher grades have a ratio of 1-49. That, from the learners' perspective, means a lack of attention and space. In education you need space, but when classes are crowded with more than 40 learners, learners start to compete for attention and that is when conflict develops. A space of conflict is then created. Classes with fewer learners create a different climate, where fewer conflictive situations occur.

School climate is important as it needs to also address the immediate community and around those a school culture is created. As a teacher I feel that the climate of a school

has an important influence on how functional a school is and the effect it has on both its teachers and the learners. An important aspect of a school's climate should be a vision of creating high levels of learning and achievement in learners.

#### **4.9 School Culture**

School culture at this secondary school is very passive, although there is a clear culture of punctuality, dress code, and improving discipline at school. The school starts at exactly 8:00 in the morning, and learners as well as teachers are expected to be at school at that time. The learners come to school neatly dressed, and almost everyone wears the prescribed uniform. The school does not have organisations and extra mural activities, and the result of this is limited learner involvement in activities beyond normal classroom interactions. The school has limited resources and this also contributes to the lack of sporting activities and achievements. The school does not offer many sporting codes, apart from netball and soccer for girls and cricket and soccer for boys. Learners who are interested in playing other codes of sports are encouraged to join the local community clubs. The limited options provided to students for extra mural activities have created what I can describe as a culture of mediocrity. Students do not strive to do well and seem to have a sense of "depression" about the future. The school does not provide a positive perspective or challenge to learners and this culture does not promote a striving for excellence.

#### **4.10 The Teachers**

All the teachers at the secondary school are qualified teachers with years of teaching experience. However, it has been noted through observation that some of the 'mature' teachers have become too blasé about pass rates in their classes. They have created comfort zones and have nestled into their comfort zones. Professional development is not offered to teachers from the district offices of the provincial education department. Developing professionally is left up to the teachers and they have to seek and sometimes create this type of development to compete in the work place.

Workshops are rarely held to help and support teachers in the needs that they voice. Through observation it was noted that some teachers have become despondent and discouraged, because they rarely get acknowledgement for their efforts. It is important



for teachers to motivate themselves to improve and to do better, but with the lack of support and opportunities this can become less easy and fade as well. Ultimately it makes sense that a positive performance culture will, in turn, benefit the learners at the school. The teachers agree that it is a teacher's job to prepare learners to become more independent, creative and critical adults. The general culture of just getting by seems to be pervasive and has also affected teachers' attitudes to their work and children. There seems to be a culture of just doing the bare minimum required and a view that teaching is just a job that needs to be done within particular working hours.

#### **4.11 First year of Teaching in Practice (2010) - Early Career Work**

I experienced a variety of emotions when I found out that I got a post at my old high school. Although it was not my first choice, I encouraged myself to take this opportunity in both hands and to make the best of the situation. Most importantly, I was interested to see how well I could adapt to teaching at a South African school. I knew that this experience would only help me grow and develop into a better teacher. I felt relatively confident and I knew that I would be a confident and, what was more important, an effective teacher. I was familiar with the area, the school context, the school culture and some of the teachers by whom I had been taught were still at the school.

I was told by some of my colleagues not to have any pre-conceived ideas or expectations of what type of learner I would be teaching. I knew that the school would be very different from the school where I completed my practice teaching. I knew that there would be more challenges (discipline and lack of resources, amongst others). My former teachers gave me some advice, and it was hard to know which to follow and which to discard, but I found clarity in the fact that I know myself and that my values and agency would enable me to make the daily decisions that would come my way.

The next part of the narrative describes and discusses my experiences in terms of the school setting and organisation. I relate the story from my perspective as a young teacher, a novice teacher in terms of the context. I was faced with the following challenges during my first year of teaching.

## **4.12 Obstacles**

### **4.12.1 Non- existent Induction programme**

One of the expectations I had was that there would be a structured induction programme to support my entry as a novice teacher, but there was no form of induction or a support programme for novice teachers. At the beginning of 2010, I requested to be provided with four sets of guidelines concerning: a) what was expected of me in terms of additional language teaching and facilitation; b) a practical guideline on school policies and procedures; c) discussion of curriculum content of the grades assigned to me; and d) guidelines on how to approach the setting up of assessments for learners. In response to the points raised, I was told by the Head of the Department (HOD) that I should consult the previous teacher's file and that, if I had any further questions pertaining to my request, I had to consult another teacher who was also teaching in the General Education and Training Phase (hereinafter referred to as the GET phase). I made it clear to her that this was my first experience in teaching grade 8 and 9 First Additional Language (FAL) full time and that I only had three months teaching experience in a South African context. A survival tip that I remembered from teaching abroad was that preparation is the key to a successful lesson, but I started feeling anxious and began to doubt myself because I did not feel confident in my teaching, due largely to my perception that I was inadequately prepared for my lessons.

### **4.12.2 Discouragement**

These feelings were brought on because I was given no guidelines and it felt as if I was incompetent. The lack of support appeared to be grounded in the erroneous belief that I should have learned all I needed to know to be successful at the start my tenure after my teacher training education. I felt that, if I was not successful, it would be my own fault; I was not tough enough or not fit in some way for the rigors of teaching. I wanted to become more efficient, proficient and, most of all, to be regarded as a good teacher. Without much support it was difficult to cope with the demands of teaching, managing and keeping control, finding adequate resources, planning lessons, setting up assessment tasks and dealing with learning disabilities of learners.

#### **4.12.3 Managing large class sizes**

I was forced to soldier on with little assistance, and was required to teach large classes that other teachers did not want to teach. During my teaching practice I had become accustomed and comfortable teaching twelve to fifteen learners. It was a reality shock when I was faced with 50 learners in a class. It also became a challenge because not all learners learned in the same way. It was difficult to establish / pinpoint which learners had specific needs, as well as how to address the needs that I was aware of. I felt perplexed because my learners seemed to lack so many of the necessary underlying skills and prior knowledge that would allow them to work at the expected level at which they were to be for the grade and where I wanted them to be. I had to scramble around to find material that was appropriate and suitable for their level. Large classes also tend to have a lot of disruptive learners who would do anything for attention. Learning and teaching became a constant battlefield every single period and day.

#### **4.12.4 Managing learner participation in the classroom**

During the first two terms I found it very difficult to manage how the learners participated in class. I continuously changed my managing style to suit the mood the class was in that day. I did not like this inconsistency in my managing style.

One of the courses (Didactics - Educational Innovation) which I did in my Honours year (2010) was about cooperative learning. One of the assignments that we had to do concerned using cooperative learning in the class and writing a report about it. I decided to test it out on one of the most difficult classes I had. I wanted to use it as a tool to improve not only my classroom pedagogy, but also to improve learners' behaviour and attitude towards learning. The specific class consisted of 50 grade 8 English Home Language learners. The class comprised 80% girls and 20% boys. At the beginning of the year, all the grade 8 learners wrote a Mathematics test and they were placed in the different grade sections according to their results. The medium to weak learners were placed in this specific grade class.

Four out of the 50 learners were repeating the grade. Including these four, there were at least fifteen learners who presented serious behavioural problems. As a result of the size of the class and the difficult types of learners in the class, teaching often was

impossible. All the other teachers in the other learning areas complained about this class. The principal also spoke to the class on numerous occasions, but to no avail. A few teachers also suspected that some of the learners in this class abused drugs at school, because they usually were jittery before intervals, and after intervals they were always hyperactive and full of energy.

Despite the class's poor discipline and lack of respect for teachers and other authority figures, there also were a few learners who showed promise. I explained what cooperative learning was to the learners and then divided them into groups. They worked in these groups for the duration of the third and fourth term. The skills that the learners learned through using cooperative learning involved the need to be able to communicate and listen to others. They were taught how to take accountability for their actions, and how teaching a fellow classmate can boost their own self-confidence as well. All the cooperative learning activities were done in the school hall. After a series of lessons, there was a visible improvement in the behaviour of this specific class. They started enjoying working together and the relationships they were forming within the group grew stronger. Most importantly, learning became something to enjoy.

I also experienced other difficulties. It was not always possible to use the school hall for lessons, and I found that lessons were more successful in a place that was not restrictive. I did not achieve the same success when I taught the lessons in my own classroom. Monitoring the groups was also exhausting, because I was the only one who could make sure that everyone in the group was participating fully, but I managed. I used this method with my other classes as well. In some classes it worked well, because some groups understood that they had to discover new knowledge on their own. Other classes found it difficult to cultivate the habit of working together with little assistance from me. Those classes needed more time and attention.

#### **4.12.5 The age factor**

My age seemed to play a role in how I was treated by senior colleagues, especially the Head of Department. At first I did not think that my age was an issue, as I was qualified and I had the necessary teaching experience. It became more apparent once all my ideas for teaching creatively were shot down by the Head of the Department. Things

that I have done well were always ignored, and the only comments that I received addressed deficits and difficulties. The Head of Department was very cynical about my new ideas and focused almost exclusively on negative problems and wrote negative and unconstructive comments on assessments that I planned on my own. I had no choice but to deal with this and I managed to overcome indifference and neglect from senior colleagues. At times it felt that I was being tested and that I had to prove my mettle as an organiser and a disciplinarian. On numerous occasions the Head of the Department also stated that I am too young to effectively implement the curriculum in my class and that I do not have the knowledge to become an effective teacher because I am too young. I felt that I could not utter my grievances and I was also not given opportunities to list my grievances. My age also played a role as to how learners viewed me and the respect that they would give me. To the learners I was young enough to be one of their friends, and sometimes that is how they would see me. I had to remind them constantly that I am an adult and want the same respect that they show to the other teachers. It was difficult to be seen as an authoritative figure.

#### **4.12.6 Expectations**

It was difficult to cope with the expectations I had for myself and those expectations that the school had. The expectations I had involved that I would make a success of every lesson and to make a significant change in the lives of the learners. I expected that I would be given guidance and some mentorship to lead me on this new path. The school's expectation was that I had to deal with disruptive problems on my own, and at the end of the year the school expected results. I wanted to become more efficient, proficient and most of all be regarded as a good teacher. Without much support it was difficult to cope with the demands of teaching, managing and keeping control, finding adequate resources, planning lessons, setting up assessment tasks and dealing with learners' learning disabilities.

#### **4.12.7 Planning, organizing and managing instruction, as well as other professional abilities**

Lesson planning had been easy in the past, as I knew what the expectations and goals were. Since I did not receive any guidelines, planning was a constant struggle in the first two terms of 2010. After the second term I realised that I was placing myself in a very

unsafe position and that, if I were to receive no assistance, I had to take it upon myself to improve the situation. I started consulting teachers at other schools who were teaching the same grade and level that I was teaching. With the guidelines and some resources from these teachers, I was able to create meaningful lessons that helped to develop the skills the learners needed.

I found it difficult to manage and organise my workload and keeping up with competing demands. The content that needed to be taught and assessed felt overwhelming at times. It felt as if I was teaching to test and teaching towards completing the next task or assessment. There was no time to do remedial work, and it was discouraging to know that you had to move on to the next task, even though you knew that the learners were not grasping the work. I soon realised that I was not only employed as a teacher, but that skills other than teaching skills were also required of me; being an administrator, athletics coordinator, social worker, acting as a parent (in locus parentis), mediator, disciplinarian, school counsellor and behaviour support teacher.

#### **4.12.8 Assessing learners and evaluating learners' progress**

Assessing and evaluating learners' progress became difficult, because of the amount of tasks that needed to be assessed. The assessment rubrics that were prescribed by the department omitted some of the skills that the learners showed in their assessments, but they were not awarded the marks. The assessments were not true reflections of learners' capabilities. There also was never time to do remedial work, because of the amount of tasks that had to be completed. I realised that I was not teaching, but working towards tasks. The learners did not gain any skills, because there was never any time to review their old tasks and assessments.

This is largely impacted by a rigid and structured curriculum. As indicated, prescribed assessment tasks prescribed drive and determine teaching and other classroom activities. This leaves little room for review of previous work, remedial action and development of basic skills. This structure in a sense determines how much agency is possible.

#### **4.12.9 Motivating learners**

I found it very difficult to 'read' my learners. Some of them seemed to have no motivation or goals in their lives. Their only goal seemed to be to get to school in the morning and chat and spend time with their friends. A misconception among these teens was that they only had to do the minimal to pass to the next grade, and only had to put in a little bit of effort when they reached grade 12. Learners had no aspirations at all. I recall telling a colleague that these learners had everything and that they did not have to worry about tomorrow, because their thought processes stops at today. I would often start my lessons with a motivation speech. It seemed that I could only capture their attention for a few minutes, and whatever I said was out of their thoughts a few minutes later. I would often tell learners my own story in the hope that it would inspire some of them. My story touched a few, and I could see a change in some learners, but the others could not be bothered to think about what their future would entail.

#### **4.12.10 Parental involvement**

I feel that parental involvement is crucial in a child's education. To have parents involved actively would be a valuable resource in my classroom management plan. I feel that it is each parent's responsibility to be involved in classroom or educational activities. Involvement can mean to supervise homework, help their children study, monitor their child's progress and be involved in home-based activities. It was difficult to contact and get a hold of the parents of learners who had difficulties and who were difficult to manage. Often the learners' parents could not come to school for meetings. Some of them simply had no interest in their children and the mentality that they had was that they could not control their children at home, and if their children were at school, the problem became that of the teacher solely. Parents of disruptive and poor performers also did not attend parental meetings and intervention meetings.

#### **4.12.11 Dealing with individual needs, abilities and problems**

Having classes of more than 45 learners, it often became difficult to attend to individual learners' needs. It was easy for some learners to fly under the radar, because I, as a teacher, just never had time to attend to their needs. The only time I became aware of some of the learning disabilities was when I assessed tests and assignments. Some of the learners were not on the level they were supposed to be according to the grade in

which they were. One learner in Grade 9 was only able to write his name and grade on tests and assignments. He was not able to read or write. This was apparent in all his subjects. His parents were informed, but refused to help him and get into contact with the school. Another reason could also be that they did not want to acknowledge the fact that he could not benefit academically from attending a mainstream school. It became impossible to tend to his needs as I was not equipped with the skills to deal with learners like that. There was no assistance from the education department either.

#### **4.12.12 Dealing with disruptive and unruly learners**

It was difficult to manage disruptive and disengaged learners. I was battling switching from being caring to being controlling. There was a great lack of in-school as well as district support. It felt as if learners were using up my emotional resources and draining my enthusiasm for teaching. Learners, especially male learners who showed violent tendencies towards me, became a problem. On two occasions in my first year I felt unsafe in my own classroom. One of the incidents that occurred in my class had to be reported to the principal. Below is a summary of that account.

This particular Grade 8 boy had showed disruptive behaviour in class since the start of the 2010 school year. He was involved in numerous incidents in the Life Orientation class. On May 6<sup>th</sup> 2010, he had cigarettes in his possession. I confiscated the cigarettes and placed it in my drawer. He took the cigarettes out of my drawer without permission. He had been involved in fights, truancy, using foul language towards his fellow classmates and teachers (on a daily basis) and was rude and showed no respect towards me. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of August 2010 he stole my permission card from the table and left the class without permission, after I had repeatedly told him that he could not leave the classroom.

He did what he wanted and he did not care about the consequences of his actions. He disobeyed almost all of the school rules, and showed no respect towards authority figures. He showed no interest in his school work and his academic performance, specifically in Life Orientation, was unacceptable. Tasks from Term 1 and Term 2 were outstanding and he made no effort to hand in the tasks. On the 17<sup>th</sup> of August 2010, his disruptive behaviour escalated. He started spitting at the girls in class, and refused to



listen when I asked him to stop doing it. I told him to leave the class, if he could not behave himself. He assured me that he would behave and that he would stop spitting at others.

After a few minutes he decided that it would be a good idea to start playing soccer in class. I told him repeatedly to stop playing and he refused to listen. I went over to him and told him that I have had enough of his behaviour and that he should leave the classroom immediately and to go to the principal. At that moment he retaliated by trying to hit me. Some of the learners in class shouted at him and told him that he should not hit me. I felt threatened by his behaviour and told him to take his bag and leave immediately and to make his way to the principal's office. As he was leaving I closed the door. In return to this action he kicked the door wide open. Luckily I was not standing directly behind it, or else the door would have hit me in the face.

All of the above-mentioned incidents were reported to the Head of the Grade 8's; his class teacher and the principal. A letter was also sent to his parents to inform them about his situation at school. The outcome of this incident was inconclusive. The boy reluctantly apologised for his behaviour, and I was told that he should be allowed to come back into my classroom. This incident showed me that I, as a teacher, have no rights at all. The learners are in control of everything, and the little power I thought I had, meant absolutely nothing at all.

#### **4.13 Lack of Support**

The lack of support became a very pressing issue. The situation escalated and I requested a meeting with the principal and the Head of the Department. I felt that the issues should have been dealt with internally, but due to the HOD's unprofessionalism, which again was evident during a departmental meeting; it had escalated to the extent that issues that were not addressed were beginning to affect both my personal and professional development.

Throughout 2010 the HOD never provided me with positive feedback or constructive criticism. These became more intense towards the end of the year and caused a very unpleasant climate in general. In spite of several requests (asking for resources and

assistance), help was never afforded. This later led me to stop approaching the HOD and rather consulting other teachers in the department. I do believe I would never have been able to experience a positive teaching climate without the help given to me by these teachers.

The end of 2010 saw an escalation of hindrances and conflict. The advice and criticism offered by the HOD showed no consistency concerning how examination papers were to be set. From my assessments throughout 2010, I felt that I was well aware of the levels, capabilities and competencies of the learners. I found criticism to be inconsistent because previous examination papers and standards of previous terms had been approved thus setting the criteria, which were now revoked prior to the assessment period. The other GET teacher came to me and also voiced her frustration about the HOD's inconsistencies when it came to assessment standards. This meant that I was not the only teacher who had a problem regarding this issue. After changes were made, papers were again criticized, and sarcastic remarks were made. I viewed the sarcastic remarks as petty and vouched rather to ignore these incidents.

The HOD claimed to be an approachable person, but when I voiced my opinion on a remark that was made in a departmental meeting (teachers who are in posts should know what they should do), I was shot down again. Other remarks made in the meeting also seemed to be directed at me, which I also considered to be unprofessional. Whenever I was addressed by the HOD, the tone of voice was aggressive. The HOD undermined my knowledge and blatantly tested me in the presence of my colleagues. For example, I was asked in front of everyone if I knew what a work schedule is. This was asked when the HOD knew that I had to draw up my own schedule after she had refused to help me. I felt this to be very insulting and it made me and the rest of the staff members in the department uncomfortable as well.

I never had a problem with the HOD personally; in spite of the inconsistencies, the lack of support and her sarcastic remarks (accepting her opinion as a form of assistance). I felt that it would be better to stay out of her way. Her tone and voice in addressing me was belittling; and the way she spoke was unprofessional. This led me to focus on my

work and to do it to the best of my ability. If I had questions, I rather consulted my other colleagues.

Various incidents also occurred during the week of the Grade 9 moderation. I was told in passing that I had Grade 9 moderation the following week. Given that I started my tenure as teacher at the WCED in 2010, I informed the HOD that I had never been to moderation before and that I was not sure what I should take along to the session. In response to this I was told that I had to ask the deputy principal for the letter from the department and that everything that I needed would be stated in the letter. The HOD never came to discuss further preparations leading up to the actual moderation itself. Prior to the moderation, one of my other colleagues provided me with a document that had to accompany the learner's profile (12 learner profiles had to be taken to the moderation). The document neatly outlined the work that Grade 9 pupils were to be assessed on. If this document had been provided to me earlier in the year, it would have made my preparations so much easier, and it would have facilitated better preparation overall.

The teacher who inspected my file at the moderation session was very impressed with it and commented that everything was neatly prepared and set up and even wrote 'excellent' on my moderation form. Confusion and misunderstanding arose where I accidentally omitted the adjusted mark on the learner's portfolio, although the correct mark was reflected on the mark sheet. The HOD then assumed that I did not do the tasks as prescribed. I was told that I put the school in a bad light and that my work would be put under a microscope.

I did all the tasks that had been prescribed. I consulted Grade 9 teachers from other schools and most of them said that they only had time to do one of the tasks and not all three. I completed two of the three tasks and the third one was incomplete due to the strike that occurred at the time and learners failing to attend school. These matters were out of my control. I believe that this incident would never have occurred if I had been given the necessary assistance. I was told that if I did not know something, I should have asked. The bottom line is, I asked, but was never assisted.

At the end of the year my scripts were moderated by the HOD; she found fault with everything. But not once during 2010 was intervention of any sort provided. The irony of it all was that I had handed my papers to another teacher to moderate and she could not find extensive faults with the way I marked. To me it seemed that the HOD intentionally moderated my work to find fault in an attempt to break me down. It makes one feel disappointed and despondent when your work is put under a microscope, criticized and unfairly dealt with without any assistance or intervention having been provided.

The year 2010 was a very difficult year overall, considering the sizes of classes, the type of learner and the amount of work that needed to be presented and assessed. The HOD did not respect classroom facilitation, because she often barged into the classroom on account of trivial issues, displaying a transparently negative attitude; whilst I was busy facilitating lessons.

#### **4.14 Reflection on First year in Teaching Practice**

Through all these incidents I tried my utmost to maintain control and balance in my life and felt that, given that the HOD's support was minimal throughout 2010, the HOD would not victimize me in 2011. It would really be uncalled for if she did that. In 2010, I tried to perform to the best of my ability, yet the support provided and the remarks and the destructive criticism levelled in our encounters were both unpleasant and demotivating. I do believe that a non-threatening atmosphere is conducive to the exchange of ideas and the sharing of problems.

I also believe that the HOD should act fairly and provide constructive criticism in areas open for development. In a conversation during 2010, the HOD had told me that she is often put under a lot of pressure and stress. This is no excuse for taking it out on me, and should not be used as a reason to treat me disrespectfully and to talk down to me. Respect has to come from both sides and if she has any personal issues with me, she should not use it as an excuse for treating me less than the other teachers in the department. I have worked hard for everything that I have achieved in life. I am a team player, but fairness and professionalism is a key to effective inductions and professional development.

If support was given it would have made me feel that I was developing enough competence as to remain longer in the profession. (At times it felt that I just wanted to walk away from the profession, because I did not feel valued or appreciated). I do not mind being criticised, but it has to be constructive criticism that will encourage continued growth. I can definitely describe my first year of teaching as a having experienced a steep learning curve. In the year 2011 I will keep a written and dated account of interactions with the HOD. In this way I will have some evidence of bias, should I be placed in the position of needing a reference.

#### **4.15 Tools used for empowerment in 2010**

Completing the BEd-Hons degree has also been beneficial to my career. I was creating professional development on my own. The elective classes were useful and I could incorporate the skills that were taught into my own lessons. Didactics (Educational Innovation) allowed me to think about my pedagogy and to create a more innovative experience in learning and teaching. The Cognitive Learning course really shed light on how learners learn and the different types of techniques a teacher can use in the classroom. The Management course shed light on how a school can function effectively. I was able to think critically about my own school management, and could understand why certain things were not functioning properly because something was lacking.

Throughout the course and through course material, I gained knowledge that I would not have gained even with the help and support of the education department, but because I took my own initiative, I was able to develop professionally. The one thing that stood out for me in the postgraduate course was the interaction I was exposed to with teachers from different contexts – teachers like myself who were also frustrated due to lack of support from their school and department, and who also saw the need to empower themselves by developing themselves professionally. I now had the knowledge to acknowledge all these factors when I prepare my lessons.

I became a reflective thinker. I started thinking about my practice, questioning it and re-evaluating it. I knew that if I did not take the situation into my own hands, my first year of teaching would not have delivered effective and productive experiences. Reflective practice served as a way to improve my professional development. Through reflective

practice I was able to draw meaning from behaviours and methods in my classroom with the intention to change for the better. Before becoming a reflective teacher, I could not understand the how and why of what I was doing. I did not know what steps to take to carry me along the path to better teaching. I believe that reflective thinking can enable me to use insights generated by thinking about my practice, to create and implement new methods that will help me to become a more effective teacher in my class.

#### **4.16 Second Year in Teaching Practice (2011)**

The first day of the new school year was spent talking about the low pass rate of the Grade 12s in 2010. A school is judged by its end-of-year pass rate and ours was so low that we became one of the schools on the low-performing school list. Our director came to school to talk to the teachers. I found the way in which he did it very threatening. His words were “you cannot hide, because we will get you”. He basically blamed the results on the teachers, not taking into account other underlying factors. These factors included that learners did not attend extra classes and workshops and that learners refused to participate in class, and simply refused to hand in assignments. Where do these learners get this mentality? They know that, at the end of the day, they will get a free ride with the minimal work that they do, because this has probably happened throughout their whole school career. The education system failed them the first time that they were condoned and allowed to pass to the next grade. The department did not ask what resources the school needed to improve conditions for teaching and learning. They simply wanted to know what the teachers would do now and how they would fix the problem.

I was informed by the HOD that I would teach the same grades as in 2010, but with an additional Grade 10 FAL class, which I would be co-teaching with her. At first I did not know how to deal with the news of co-teaching with the HOD, because my goal was to stay out of sight and have little to no interaction with the HOD as far as possible in 2011.

#### **4.17 Obstacles**

Lack of time continued to be one of the greatest stresses. It seemed as if the workload threatened my motivation because there was never time to do something properly. The

priority continued to be working towards the completion of the task rather than working on remedial work and the perceived needs of the learners. I felt frustrated because I could not draw a line to where my school life stopped. When you feel like this, feelings of being undervalued, not being in control of situations, feeling that you are ineffective, feeling ambivalent about what you are doing in your class, feeling worn down by efforts that appear to have no positive outcome, feeling overwhelmed and exhausted by constant demands, not being able to prioritise, sometimes dealing with poor communication from management and not knowing what is going on lead to anxiety. Lack of support from the department's side continued to be lacking. I was in desperate need of extra desks. The order was sent in, but nothing materialised.

Time management is also closely related to classroom management. The bell did not always ring on time. Some periods were an hour long, whilst others were thirty minutes long. The staff members raised this issue in the staff room, and as with all the other problems, we were told that the matter would be looked into. No further suggestions or adjustments were ever made.

The curriculum advisor is supposed to offer authoritative reassurance, but when she herself does not have any understanding of the reality of school life, and what can and what cannot be done, one becomes downhearted. My classroom management strategies improved. The class sizes increased from the previous year, and this created a big challenge in lesson preparation, especially because I now wanted to acknowledge and accommodate various learning styles. The large classes also made it a challenge to successfully include learners with learning disabilities. It was impossible to manage the class and have one-on-one sessions with the learners in class. I encountered learners who were repeating the grade for the third or, in some cases, fourth time who were unmotivated, livid, disrespectful and impervious to my planning and good intentions. Learners with a profile like this present greater management challenges and I became unsympathetic towards their circumstances.

One thing that I regret was stepping down the learners' level. It felt that they could only understand me when I did that. I found it unpleasant and even remarked that "I do not know who I am anymore". Towards the end of the year the learners' behaviour became

very frustrating. I knew that the right thing to do was to not display anger, sarcasm or irritation as this is almost always counterproductive, but I began to feel like a puppet and the learners became the puppeteers, almost always having more rights than I did.

#### **4.18 Improvements / Support**

In my second year of teaching I taught the same grades as in the previous year, with one other grade. My lesson planning improved as I now knew what was expected of me. My curriculum was organised and I had resources that I could access quickly. The internet became an amazing resource for ideas and support in my teaching. When planning lessons, I was able to look at the 'big picture'. In planning lessons, I employed different thinking strategies. For example visualising the lesson, trying to predict what could go wrong and preparing to have alternatives in place, in case something went wrong. Instead of waiting for problems to arise, as I did in my first year, I anticipated how the activities that I planned would play out in the classroom situation. In my first year I judged the success of my lessons according to the reactions and achievement of the learners by realising the outcomes of the lesson. During my second year I evaluated my lessons more according to the needs and growth in understanding of the learners. I wanted the approaches that I was now taking to be proactive, cohesive and insightful.

I became more reflective in my teaching. I kept a journal and I would reflect on what went well in my lessons, what worked with certain classes and what did not and where improvements had to be made. Reflective thinking became an integral part of my daily school existence. Each week I would consider my progress in each different grade. I would think of effective teaching strategies and ways of how to make my lessons more creative. I also used reflection to set up personal and professional goals for myself. Reflecting on my practice enabled me to come to the realisation that teaching was an ongoing process of knowledge building.

In my second year of teaching collegial interaction was more frequent. I could share my experiences with colleagues, not necessarily in the same department, but in other departments as well. There was a collaborative spirit in sharing lesson ideas, and this made class preparation seem more enjoyable than only work. Sharing, for example, concerned how colleagues deal with certain learners, and how these problems learners



fare in their subjects. In my second year I still experienced feelings of being depressed and discouraged, but it was not as frequent as in my first year.

The HOD was much more involved in communicating with me as we shared the same grade, and she had to provide more direct assistance. The manner, in which she did it, was not always convenient, as things were just stuffed into my hands. There was no clear work schedule and I simply had to fall in step with whatever was given to me. I found that the HOD was still not approachable.

#### **4.19 Reflection on Second year in Teaching Practice**

During my second year of teaching I still experienced a sense of constraint from structural factors, for example managing my time, looking for resources and dealing with managerial problems at school. I had to develop enabling strategies to deal with these constraints in my daily / weekly school routine. Writing down my narrative on paper in my journals was very stimulating, because I could see how I evolved through 2010 and 2011 into who I am today and what I want from tomorrow. Due to my research, I would say that my reflections became autobiographical with the intention of making sense and meaning of my own practice. It became my tool of empowerment to grow and develop personally and professionally. Researching literature allowed me to see connections between the readings and my own narrative that I was composing through journal entries about my teaching beliefs and experiences.

Writing my narrative enabled me to deal with situations that encompass differing motivations and conflict and it allowed me to make sense of and interpret events. Narrative reflective writing also provided me with another means by which I could engage in self-reflection. I was able to explore my own agency and experiences in my daily interactions at school and I believe that it can also be beneficial in my future life as a teacher.

Despite the lack of acknowledgement by my HOD, my colleagues in the department acknowledged how hard I was working and were also helpful and constructive rather than critical when things did not go so well.

My work situation was difficult and presented me with many challenges. Many of these challenges were unexpected and proved to be demoralising and tiring. My personal commitment to teaching and my own values about how teachers should conduct themselves kept me going and persevering despite the odds presented in the school setting. There were glimmers of hope as students seemed to be starting to work with me and seeing my point regarding hard work and commitment. However these were countered by really bad behaviour and extreme negative attitudes. The attitudes of colleagues and particularly management of the school did not assist in the dire situation and this added to the burdens in my initial work at the school.

#### **4.20 Conclusion**

This chapter presents my experiences as a novice teacher in a permanent position at a secondary school. I have included aspects of an early teaching appointment and some pre-service experiences as a backdrop and sometimes a counterpoint to my current job situation. I highlight both conditions that enabled development and constraints that inhibited development and expression of agency. In a sense, I highlight the personal and professional development that was possible in this early career stage.

## CHAPTER 5

### ANALYSIS OF DATA

***Teaching involves a search for meaning in the world. Teaching is a life project, a calling, a vocation that is an organizing center of all other activities. Teaching is past and future as well as present, it is background as well as foreground, it is depth as well as surface. Teaching is pain and humor, joy and anger, dreariness and epiphany. Teaching is world building, it is architecture and design, it is purpose and moral enterprise. Teaching is a way of being in the world that breaks through the boundaries of the traditional job and in the process redefines all life and teaching itself.***

**- William Ayers**

#### 5.1 Introduction

The above quote from William Ayers captures the many difficulties, contradictions and pressures that characterise a teacher's daily life in the classroom. This research study is my attempt at giving a voice to what I experienced as a novice teacher in my first two years of teaching. The aim is to bring my stories to life and to show the complexities that new teachers embark on once they have entered the teaching profession. Initial experiences play an important role in further career development, and it is important to have a comprehensive understanding of these experiences and support mechanisms, whether formal or self-support, that act as both a 'survival tool' and a means that can successfully lead to professional development of teachers.

Three main themes emerged from my global analysis of data. These are: lack of support, absence of an induction programme and engaging in self-support activities, and the role that agency plays in personal and professional development. For this study I captured data from my own experience as a novice teacher. The focus of the study is particularly on reflective practice as a potential process for professional development and a self-support mechanism for novice teachers.

In this chapter, the data presented as my narrative of experiences in Chapter 4 are analysed. Essentially I develop interpretations of my reflections with a view to link my reflections with PD. My international experiences form part of my early teaching career and are discussed briefly. My initial teaching experience is presented over a two-year period but I deal with these experiences as one period and not as individual years.

Three important aspects are included in my discussion. One concerns the reflective processes (types of reflection) and the other concerns the links between the reflective processes and my own stages of professional development. Lastly, I look at human agency and how this plays a role in personal and professional development. I use main ideas from my narrative to illustrate the reflections and link these to understandings of professional development.

As mentioned above, my international teaching experience formed part of my early teaching career. It is important to my research to firstly highlight these experiences as it initially led to my decision to return to South Africa and to enrol in a postgraduate course in education. I would also like to highlight the differences between my experiences as a novice in a foreign country without any knowledge of educational facilitation and that of a novice starting my career with some knowledge of educational techniques that I obtained through vigorous training and observation sessions overseas.

Secondly, I would like to draw upon Villani (2002:5) who adapted Moir's (1999) five phases experienced by first year teachers for her work (Figure 2.1). This model was specifically designed to depict the different stages that novices experience, as well as their attitude towards teaching. Over the past few years many newer models have been developed, but I specifically chose this model as I feel that these stages stood out particularly and are applicable to my initial career. They benefit from ongoing professional development in a number of aspects of their teaching responsibilities, including classroom management, curriculum standards and assessment, alternate ways to meet the needs of diverse student populations, promoting parent and community involvement, problem solving, conflict resolution and time management. Using the Five Phases of teacher development, I describe my own development and

experiences within each of the different phases, focusing especially on how reflection has led to my own professional development in each phase.

Learning to teach has been described by Flores (2001) and Flores and Day (2006) as a very complex process and these authors point out that initial experiences as a teacher have a significant impact on later career experiences. Learning to teach is often described as an expedition, an exploration of stages. Teacher development literature indicates that effective teaching develops over time and that teachers have different learning and support needs at particular stages of their career. Villani's (2002) adapted model of Moir's (1999) stages is used specifically to analyse my own development as a novice teacher in my first two years of teaching while employed at a school under the Western Cape Education Department (WCED).

Secondly, the work of Bell and Gilbert (1994) forms an important theoretical and analytical framework and is discussed briefly to indicate how this informed part of my analysis. The main purpose of Bell and Gilbert's (1994) research was to give an embodied overview of the adult learning process as it relates to the teacher's learning or teacher development. Bell and Gilbert (1994) describe the three main types of development of the teachers involved in their research as professional (action and cognitive), personal, and social development. Their long-term study makes allowances for different stages of development in each category and although my study was of much shorter duration, the levels within the categories proved useful and were adopted where possible.

As in Bell and Gilbert (1994:485), I describe teacher development in terms of their categories as part of my research project. Summaries of texts, personal observations and quotations from my narrative are used to illustrate the overview of development in my teaching career. Data presented describe aspects of development, but are not intended to be discrete or isolated as there was a lot of interaction between learning tasks in each type of development and each aspect.

Thirdly, the last theoretical aspect influencing my analysis and discussion is reflection. According to Reddy and Menkveld (2000) there are different levels or types of reflection.

Reddy and Menkveld (2000) use categories that were developed by Van Maanen (1977) to distinguish the different levels of reflection.

- Technical Reflection focuses on classroom competency and effectiveness that can be demonstrated by measurable outcomes (Reddy & Menkveld, 2000). In such a technical orientation, reflective questions focus on making the teaching / learning process more effective (Van Maanen, 1977, cited in Reddy & Menkveld, 2000:178).
- Practical / Problematic reflection is concerned with the resolution of problems which occur within regular contexts of teaching, yet defy easy routine solutions (Reddy & Menkveld, 2000:179). The teacher is placed in a position where he / she is able to question learner-teacher behaviour in an attempt to observe whether goals and objectives are met.
- Critical reflection incorporates moral and ethical criteria such as whether important human needs are being met in the discourse about practical actions (Reddy & Menkveld, 2000:179). Critical reflection is conceptualised as a higher form of reflection. Whereas reflection is a process whereby one thinks on a more concrete level about the learning experience, critical reflection allows one to think descriptively about one's lived experience.

## **5.2 International Teaching Experience vs South African Teaching Experience**

My discussion begins with my reflection on my experience abroad as a novice teacher. This has provided me with a frame of reference to work with and to view my current practice. One of the things that stand out from my teaching experience overseas is the fact that values and education played a pertinent role in family life. The teaching profession was highly regarded in Taiwan. The central focus of education was the child and the development of the child as an individual. As indicated by my narrative:

*The values of the school were to nurture the development of the whole child. Education was described as something that addresses the development of all children's capacities, may it be physical, emotional, artistic, social and moral. The educational approach strived to be child-centred.*

During my International Teaching career, I was exposed to a lot of developmental programmes that supported my development in the teaching profession. Oberg and Underwood (1992:163) state that each teacher's development is unique, and is affected by his or her history, insights, talents, and desires. Prior to teaching in Taiwan, I had no exposure to teaching, and the ongoing support that I received there armed me with the necessary skills I needed to make a success of my international teaching career. As indicated in the following excerpt:

*The training was interactive and allowed me to gain basic teaching skills, become more familiar with the curriculum and to learn how to teach it effectively while taking into account my own individual style of teaching.*

The follow-up training that I received was an empowering refresher course as it enabled me to build onto my prior knowledge and experience of teaching. The ongoing support through the follow-up training sessions empowered me, and gave me the confidence I needed to develop and to do my job effectively.

*The follow up trainings provided me with an opportunity to take the next step with my teaching and to build stronger relationships with my co-teachers and the rest of the staff.*

The type of subjects that were covered in the follow-up training sessions were also meaningful as it pertained to what happens in the classroom. These sessions, in turn, provided me with the tools to use to handle situations that might occur within the classroom. This type of ongoing support and exposure to developmental programmes was absent and impaired my initial development as a novice teacher in a South African context. In my opinion the support I had received was beneficial to my practice as a novice teacher and instilled confidence and a sense of professional competence.

### **5.3 Practicum Experience**

I saw the Post Graduate certificate in Education (PGCE) course as a course that would build onto my existing knowledge as an educator. My International experience was filled with opportunities for growth and development and I expected that I would gain the same sense of confidence to be an effective teacher in South Africa. The expectations

that I formed for my pre-service teaching experience was that I would gain the necessary skills that would enable me to be an effective teacher in a South African context. As indicated:

*I expected that through the course I would gain more insight into the current teaching situation that South Africa was facing as well as to develop and feel more empowered as a professional.*

My experience was completely the opposite. I was encouraged to think about the South African educational system as a Utopian one. I did not gain a sense of professional development at all. We were taught the tricks of the trade, but as students we were not exposed to the actual business of teaching. Arends and Phurutse (2009:6) assert that, in addition to the limitations of the initial teacher education programmes concerning keeping up with classroom realities, it has been found that the transition from university teacher trainee to practicing teacher is fraught with difficulties. This is indicated in the following extract from my narrative:

*During the PGCE course we were trained in the latest classroom management skills, curriculum development, philosophies of education, sociology of education, active and co-operative learning techniques to mention but a few. The things mentioned are important, but there is so much more to teaching that helps shape a teacher, than just to show them and to familiarize them with 'new tricks' of the trade.*

The actual exposure to teaching and the realities thereof lasted for one term (three months). This time was not nearly enough to be exposed to the realities of school life. Arends and Phurutse (2009:6) defend teacher programmes by stating that it can be argued that beginner teachers have legitimate and specific needs that cannot be grasped in advance or outside of the context of teaching.

I concur with Arends and Phurutse (2009) that beginner teachers have different and specific needs. Teacher programmes should surely recognise these needs of teachers and address such needs and adapt the teacher programmes that have been offered by the different institutions.



The curriculum course in English was definitely not of any benefit to me at all. As students we were graded on wonderful ideas and lessons that would work in a perfect school, and I was actually criticised when pointing out that the ideas of some students would not work in reality. When I started my practice teaching at a high school, I felt incompetent because I did not understand the terms the teacher was using. At that time I felt that I was not ready to teach English as a subject, as I did not even know how the assessment programme worked for all grades. As indicated in my narrative:

*Instead of feeling prepared and confident upon entering my teaching practice (practicum), I felt confused, because I did not know whose ideals and visions to follow, the lecturer's or my own vision which I felt was more realistic.*

Arends and Phurutse (2009) indicated in their study that 63% of most beginner teachers considered teaching practice, the practical component of the education course, to be the most beneficial programme preparing them for the realities of teaching. I did not feel that I developed professionally throughout the course of the year and wanted to gain as much knowledge about teaching and specifically teaching in my own subject matter.

From the start of my practicum I felt that I was part of the school. I was assigned to work with an experienced English teacher. She encouraged me a lot and I feel that I learnt more from her in three months than during the entire course of English as well as the PGCE programme. The classes were small and the learners were well disciplined and motivated. The school also had a good management system and discipline system in place. Teachers at the school were co-operative and any task that the school attempted to complete was done with the help of parents, staff, management and learners. The school's ethos about education was similar to what my own ethos about education was. The practicum time was a time to observe how different teachers taught. I was able to see different management and teaching styles. The practicum period also gave me a chance to observe learners and their behaviours. I perceived the following as a lack for me personally in the overall PGCE course: not enough time spent on the curriculum itself; methods of assessment; dealing with restraints; teaching and managing styles and how to work with learners with learning disabilities. These factors are also prominent in Arends and Phurutse's (2009) study. My practicum experience was a

successful one, but during it I formed ideals and expectations of how, once I started teaching full time, I would have the same optimistic ideas and expect things to be the same as or similar to my practice teaching school.

## **5.4 The Stages of Teacher Development**

In this section I discuss my experiences in terms of the framework presented above. I use snippets from my narrative to illustrate some of the key moments in my initial years of teaching and interpret these in terms of current debates and studies similar to this research.

### **5.4.1 Anticipation Phase**

During my practicum in the year I did the course in education I soon realised that what we learned in theory could not always work practically. I realised that there were a lot of procedures with which I was not familiar. I started feeling anxious, unprepared and, most of all, anticipated that, without any type of support, chances would be that I was not going to be the effective teacher that I wanted to be. The practicum experience is the first stepping stone to one's professional development.

*During the PGCE course we were trained in the latest classroom management skills, curriculum development, philosophies of education, sociology of education, active and co-operative learning techniques, to mention but few. The things mentioned are important, but there is so much more to teaching that helps to shape a teacher, than just to show them and to familiarize them with “new tricks” of the trade.*

I felt confident that I knew my theory, but it soon became apparent that these “new tricks” were not practical at all. This was particularly relevant as I was expected to teach large classes and deal with administrative duties. The teachers at the school expected novice teachers to know what their role as teachers comprises, but I often found that I could not answer some of their questions and I was unfamiliar with the terms that they used.

The confidence that I thought I had, slowly started to crumble, and that made me realise that I was in for a great shock once I entered the profession as a qualified teacher. The

three months' exposure to practical teaching was not enough. The period was too short to grasp and take in everything that happened at a school. Three months is too short to learn the most important skill that will either make you or break you as a novice teacher and that is learning survival skills.

#### **5.4.2 Survival Phase**

Farrell (2003) describes the survival stage as the level where the novice teacher begins to react to the reality shock of the classroom and feeling overwhelmed by the complexity of the classroom. I started my tenure at my former high school. I was comfortable with my surroundings; I knew some of my colleagues as some of them were my former teachers. I knew that teaching there would be different to what I remembered school to be like when I attended there. I was familiar with the school context and the school's culture. I did have a few expectations. I expected an orientation / information session and a structured induction programme.

I expected to be assigned a mentor, as I had heard that some of my former classmates were appointed one at their schools. I also expected that I would be guided through the curriculum that I had to teach. I was faced with the reality shock when none of my expectations were realised. These feelings coincided with the synthesis study completed by Barry and King (1999) of the work of Veenman (1989). It is the shock that novice teachers get when they enter the teaching world and discover that their preconceived ideas about teaching were nothing like reality. Barry and King (1999) assert that during pre-service education students build up an image of their ideal teaching situation and what they would like to achieve.

*During my teaching practice I got accustomed to and comfortable teaching 12-15 learners at a time. The management system at the school functioned perfectly. The learners also gave their full cooperation and having these things in place made me feel that I would be ready to work in similar circumstance. It became a reality shock when I was faced with 50 learners in a class and realised that learning and teaching would become a sort of battlefield every single period of the day.*

It was difficult to cope with the expectations I had for myself and those expectations that the school had. The expectations I had was that I would make a success and make a change in the lives of the learners. I expected that I would be given guidance and some mentorship to lead me onto this new path. The school's expectation was that I had to deal with disruptive problems on my own, and that they expected results at the end of the school year. I wanted to become more efficient, proficient and, most of all, be regarded as a good teacher. Without much support it was difficult to cope with the demands of teaching, managing control, finding adequate resources, planning lessons, setting up assessment tasks and dealing with learning disabilities.

Farrell (2003:95) concludes that new teachers have to deal with many influences during the first year of teaching, two of which include structural influences and personal influences. Farrell (2003:95) defines structural influences as things that happen at classroom level and societal level. As a novice teacher, I had to learn to adapt to the expectations of the school. It was difficult to establish a classroom routine that was conducive to learning, because disruptive behaviour, and disciplinary problems and an overcrowded classroom were all contributing factors. As indicated in my narrative:

*It was difficult to manage disruptive and disengaged learners. Personally I was battling switching from being caring to being controlling. There was a great lack of in-school as well as district support. It felt as if learners were using up my emotional resources and draining my enthusiasm for teaching.*

Farrell (2003:95) defines personal influences as something that comes from other persons with whom the teacher interacts, such as learners, colleagues, administrative people at the school and the parents. As a novice teacher, I was forced to soldier on for my own survival with little assistance, and required to teach classes that other teachers did not want. I had to deal with and manage indifference from and neglect by senior colleagues. At times it felt as if I was being tested and that I had to prove my mettle as an organiser and a disciplinarian by overcoming the trials of receiving no assistance or support from seniors.

Managing learner participation and discipline, as mentioned before, became a constant battle to fight and survive. I remembered from the teaching education programme that you have to be consistent in your managing style. I continuously changed my style in accordance with the learners' behaviour on the particular day. I learned how to move back and forth between the past, present and future and, in doing so, support myself to grow each and every day.

#### **5.4.3 Disillusionment Phase**

I experienced this phase almost on a regular basis. It was largely brought on by the fact that I had no guidelines to follow and I constantly questioned my competence and commitment as a teacher. Renard (2003) contends that it is expected of new teachers to assume the same responsibilities and duties as seasoned professionals; and it is expected of them to execute the same duties with the same level of expertise and within the same time constraints. When I could not cope with all the demands, I started questioning my ability as a teacher and constantly tried to find ways to understand and make sense of my experiences.

*The lack of support appeared to be grounded in the erroneous belief that I should have learned all I needed to know to be successful in my post graduate studies during my teacher education. I felt like if I was not successful it was my own fault; I was not tough enough or not fit in some way for the rigors of teaching. I wanted to become more efficient, proficient and most of all be regarded as a good teacher.*

Feinman-Nemser (2001:18) is of the opinion that, no matter what kind of preparation a teacher receives, some aspects of teaching can be learned only on the job, and no college course can teach a new teacher how to blend knowledge of particular students and knowledge of particular content in decisions about what to do in specific situations.

Problems for beginner teachers included "too high self-expectations", lack of encouragement or help from fellow teachers and a Head of Department who may give frequent criticism and no support. We should move away from the thought that beginner teachers should mimic more experienced teachers. The emphasis should be on

becoming more reflective thinkers who explore their own individual teaching style. There is a need for classroom experience early in teacher education preparation. It is important to link theory and practice working closely with schools early in a pre-service teacher's career. In this way pre-service teachers could relate 'what' the practice of teaching is to the 'why' – the theories underlying the practice – to better comprehend why a particular practice does or does not work in a class.

At times I felt very disconnected from my career. I often described myself as a puppet, with the learners, school, district offices and department of education being the puppeteers controlling every move that I made. Feinman-Nemser (2001:28) reaffirms that mentoring has the potential to foster powerful teaching and to develop the dispositions and skills of continuous improvement. I did not have a mentor to turn to for any guidance or support.

#### **5.4.4 Rejuvenation Phase**

I experienced the rejuvenation phase during the weekends and for longer periods during school holidays. During this period I had more time to prepare lessons for the coming week or term. I reflected on what the positives and the negatives were during the week and at the end of each term I reflected on how I had developed professionally, the new skills that I had gained and what worked well and what I could build onto in the coming term. At times I did feel that school work was overwhelming and that it took away a lot of my own time during holidays and during weekends. It was difficult to find a balance between school life and my personal life. I knew that if I did not give myself some time away from sourcing materials and setting up papers during holidays I would suffer burnout.

If more support and guidance had been given, I would not have felt the immense pressure to use my weekends and holidays to work on school materials and administrative duties. According to Arends and Phurutse (2009:31), a high number of beginner teachers have difficulty coping with the school environment in the absence of support and, as a result, develop burnout symptoms and opt out of the system.

#### **5.4.5 Reflection Phase**

Reflection has been described by l'Anson, Rodrigues and Wilson (2003) as a process that comes about and allows the teacher to become more aware of processes in order to negotiate participation within schools. Reflection was a term that I first heard during the PGCE programme. As students we were encouraged to engage in this type of action after all lessons taught, as well as after lessons observed. We, however, were not taught the different types and levels of reflection. It was a term that I was familiar with, but I did not know the value that reflective practice could have for my own practice. I consider this phase to be one of the most important phases of my own development as a novice teacher and consider this phase to be one of the main focuses highlighted throughout this research project.

Reflective practice played a very central role in my growth as a novice teacher. My understanding of what is possible and what is less possible arose from using the reflective process to critically question my practice. I was able to evaluate my practice by using my knowledge, as well as knowledge or advice gained by collaborating with colleagues to improve the teaching and learning process during my first year.

According to Reddy and Menkveld (2000) there are different levels or types of reflection. Reddy and Menkveld (2000) use categories that were developed by Van Maanen (1977) to distinguish the different levels of reflection: These levels became more evident to me once I was able to identify them within my practice. Identifying the reflection levels simplified and clarified where I had to change and improve my pedagogy, not only to improve the learning process for my learners, but to improve the teaching process for myself as well. In section 5.5 I describe the different levels of reflections and also give some examples to show how each level developed in my practice as a novice teacher.

### **5.5 Types of Reflection**

#### **5.5.1 Technical Reflection**

During my first year of teaching, controlling classroom management and classroom participation were among the many concerns that I had. I struggled immensely in the first two terms of year one, as I was not used to teaching such large classes, as well as dealing with so many disruptions and outbursts by learners. The curriculum was densely

packed and I at times felt that I was only teaching to cover the curriculum. I was not teaching the learners the skills that they so desperately needed to cope with the work, because deadlines were set for assessments to be completed. As indicated in my narrative:

*It became a reality shock when I was faced with 50 learners in a class. It also became a challenge because not all learners learned the same way. It was difficult to establish / pinpoint which learners had specific needs, as well as how to address these needs. I felt perplexed because my learners seemed to lack so many of the necessary underlying skills and prior knowledge that would allow them to work at the expected level, they should have reached for the grade and where I wanted them to be.... Learning and teaching became a constant battlefield every day.*

I set high expectations for myself and for my learners and I wanted to meet them all, but it was difficult to try out new techniques like group work activities when the learners firstly had no interest in the subject and some of them refused to give their cooperation. I continued doing group work activities in class, and each time it improved. The more the learners understood what was expected of them, the more they cooperated. I knew that learning could only take place once learners gave their full cooperation. Resources like overhead projectors were limited at the school. I was fortunate enough that an overhead projector was donated to me by the University. Having this type of equipment transformed the learning process immediately. Discipline problems became fewer as I was now able to face the class when teaching them, instead of turning my back towards them. I was also able to use visual aids in my lessons, which made the lessons interesting for learners, and it gave them a better understanding of what they needed to grasp.

### **5.5.2 Practical / Problematic Reflection**

I engaged in this type of reflection with the view of improving my practice. I noticed that there was a need for improvement in my practice when assessing the work of learners. I had to find a strategy to collect information and document classroom procedures and to look at classroom culture and dynamics more carefully. In year one I was studying



towards an Honours degree. Exposure to educational research projects and literature on educational processes enabled me to gain skill in resolving problems which occurred regularly. One example of this was using cooperative learning as a means of instruction. By using this type of technique I could see that there was a visible improvement in how this specific class, who performed very poorly before this type of instruction was used, improved.

*After a series of lessons, there was a visible improvement in this specific class's behaviour. They started enjoying working together and the relationships they were forming within the group. Mostly, learning became something enjoyable for them.*

Ghaye and Ghaye (1998:5) drew on the work of Schön (1983) and describe reflection in practice as something that is based on rapid interpretation of the situation, where rapid decisions are required. During my first year of teaching, I learned that, no matter how well your lesson is planned, you should always be prepared for what could happen. I often engaged in this type of reflection. Sometimes the periods at school last for 45-50 minutes and sometimes they are 30-35 minutes long. There is never any consistency in the lengths of the periods. In such instances I had to deal with the problem on the spot, for example, for longer periods, continue with the lesson and reiterate what was said, or highlight the main points. In a shorter period of time, ask learners to do the work at home and the next day do follow-up work with them.

### **5.5.3 Critical Reflection**

Ghaye and Ghaye (1998) argue that critical reflection is not a process of self-victimisation, but about taking a questioning stance towards what teachers and schools do, and it questions the means and ends of education. Throughout the two-year period I drew on all of these different types of reflection. I think I relied a little more on the first two, technical reflection and practical / problematic reflection in my first year of teaching. During the second year I was much more familiar with the reflective process and the different techniques. I was now able to coin phrases and use different types of techniques to reflect.

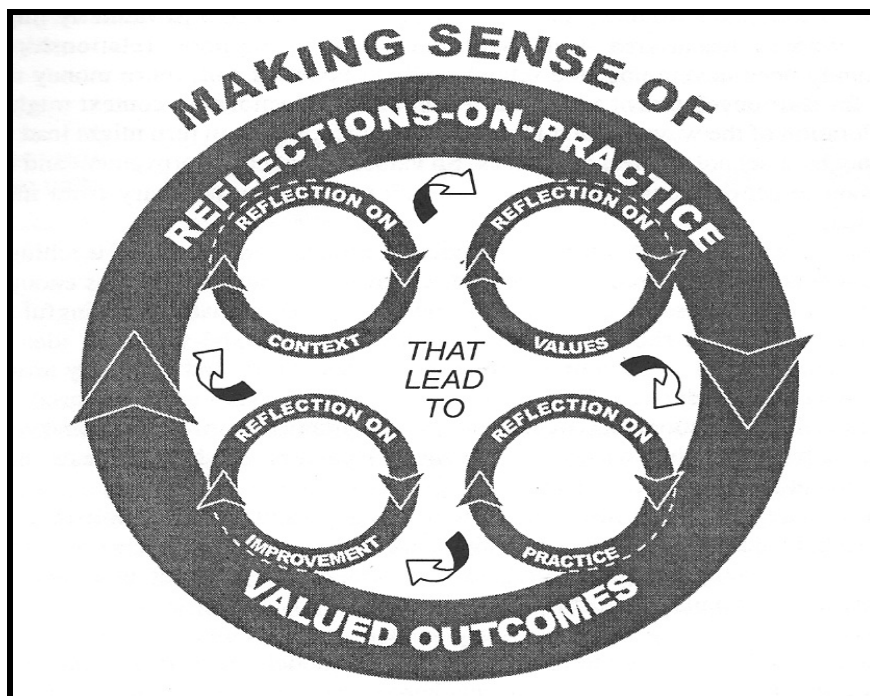
At first I would always reflect after my lessons. After some time, reflecting occurred before, during and after my lessons. Through writing personal narratives I discovered the intrinsic role that reflection plays in the daily experience of a teacher. Writing a personal narrative became a way to connect educational theory with classroom practice and experience. I was able to constructively reflect on my teaching experience, rethink, expand and enhance my beliefs. My narrative study allowed me to see first-hand growth. I was able to notice the change and growth in myself at a personal, professional and social level.

I started thinking like a reflective teacher, continually examining, assessing and re-shaping my teaching beliefs and practice. As I remembered some key moments in my life, I realised how each one of them affected me as a person and, most importantly, as a teacher today. At first I felt nervous about sharing my narratives, but as I continued to share I found that an audience of colleagues and my professor supported and enhanced my writing. In a sense I perceived that my autobiographical writing would be less powerful and expressive if it was only written for myself. A primary concern was to develop a sense of own efficacy; a sense of agency in the social context of schooling. The problem of agency is critical in education. A sense of personal efficacy can be encouraged through emphasis on autobiography as a social endeavour.

In becoming a teacher, I entered a career-long agreement to become responsible for the school lives of my learners, and accordingly, for the chances they will have in life once they leave my classroom. I realised very soon that the teaching profession in South Africa and everywhere else in the world, for that matter, has been placed under an immense amount of scrutiny. Society has formed greater expectations for what teachers should know and be able to accomplish with their learners. Despite the external pressures that teachers have to experience on a daily basis, the choices that they make individually have an impact on the learners that they teach and the quality of the learning that takes place. Through reflective practice I was able to understand that the concept of making choices as a teacher and taking responsibility for those choices are central to my own development.

Schön (1983) considered two kinds of knowledge that professionals use in practice: 'technical rationality' and tacit knowledge. Technical knowledge is in force when we apply the theory that we have learned to solve practical day-to-day problems. This often failed me because the situations I encountered were not as they were described in the textbooks, thus I had to rely on my tacit / intuitive knowledge, thinking on my feet to solve the problem. Reflection became the tool by which I was able to focus on my own lived experiences in ways that helped me to confront, understand and work towards resolutions. By doing this, I became more empowered to take more appropriate action in future situations. Reflective thought did not only occur when something went wrong, it also occurred when something was spectacularly right. Through reflective practice I was able to identify learning needs.

Critical reflection led me to engage in reflection on practice on a deeper level. Ghaye and Ghaye (1998:6) assert that reflection on practice helps us make sense of teaching and learning, and making sense is also about becoming more aware of the interaction between ourselves and the context in which we teach. Research conducted by Reed, Davis and Nyabanyaba (2002:133) found that those teachers who appeared more able to be reflective-in-action during lessons and reflective-on-action when planning their teaching or discussing their work do offer learners richer, more coherent and more appropriate scaffold learning experiences than those who appeared less able to teach reflectively. It is important to create opportunities to practice thinking and writing reflectively. Instilling habits of reflection, critical inquiry and training in reflection should be part of every educator's own practice. The proposed model that Ghaye and Ghaye (1998) use for making sense of reflections on practice has four characteristics: cyclical, flexible, focused and holistic. This model is illustrated in Figure 5.1.



**Figure 5.1: Teaching and learning through critical reflective practice**

**Source: Ghaye and Ghaye (1998:7)**

Cyclical is described by Ghaye and Ghaye (1998:6) as a continuous cyclical process of reflection and action. The key word here is continuous cycle and focusing on the fact that these cycles lead one into new and more improved cycles. The continuous process of thinking and taking action made me feel empowered. I was able to continually develop professionally. The second characteristic of this model is flexible. Teachers need to be flexible. Each teacher has a different starting point as to when to start the reflecting process. For me it was to improve my practice and to improve the learning process for my learners. Ghaye and Ghaye (1998) contend that the different starting points are related to the teacher's values, practices and trying to move forward to improve things. The context also plays an important role in this characteristic. The context that teachers work in can also have an impact on the way they reflect on practice. It is affirmed by Ghaye and Ghaye (1998:8) that reflections on context may emerge as a consideration of the ways in which context impacts on practice, which in turn might lead to a reflection on whole-school and teacher values.

In essence, values, practice, improvement of practice and the context in which one works are all important factors to reflect upon. The context that I worked in definitely resonated in the type of learner that was in my class, and the values that he / she was raised in. As mentioned in my narrative:

*This school is a community-based school and the misconception is that it is not about performance; it's about bringing education to the masses. This type of mentality creates a situation whereby even the parents lack the support base they have to create for their children, and in turn learners also adopt this kind of attitude.*

The third characteristic is focused. According to Ghaye and Ghaye (1998:8), focus and direction are needed to enable meaningful learning to take place. It was important for me as a novice teacher to continue to remain focused and determine which problem areas needed attention. I knew that it was impossible to deal with a lot of problems at once, but in order to keep momentum I remained focused and mostly tried to stay in control of situations, rather than letting situations control me.

The final characteristic of this model is holistic. Ghaye and Ghaye (1998:8) assert that it links professional values with practice, teaching with intentions for improving learning and with professional development. Instead of just viewing a certain part of my teaching that was problematic and only focusing on that, I viewed my practice as a whole. Through the positives and improving the negatives, viewing my practice holistically through reflection on practice helped me develop professionally.

Reflective practice has enabled me to make informed pedagogical decisions and positively affected my professional growth and development, which, in turn, led to a positive self-awareness. It allowed me to develop new knowledge about educational practices, and it gave me a better understanding of how to deal with problems. I experienced a sense of personal achievement whenever I tried something new and found that it worked. I was able to get the best out of my learners; in a sense I got the best out of myself. Thinking about my practice gave me ways of trying new techniques to engage my learners.

Schön (1983) suggested that the capacity to reflect on action so as to engage in a process of continuous learning was one of the defining characteristics of professional practice. When we reflect, it helps us to gain a deeper understanding of our experience. It informs us about our skills, why certain things happened, what we did well, and it gives us a plan for what we might do differently in the future. Reflective practice helped me to keep an open mind, comparing and contrasting situations. I questioned how, what and why I do things, and questioned how, what and why others do things differently. Reflective practice is an intentional and personal event that takes time and commitment.

Keeping a reflective journal served as a more powerful way to reflect than merely thinking about an experience. My reflective journals helped me to construct a more in-depth analysis and were also useful as a way to record my own progress and professional development. Having the opportunities to share knowledge and understanding with colleagues of my own work made me feel less isolated and it helped me to find enduring solutions to issues raised. Through reflective writing, my teaching has become more meaningful. It is no longer something intuitive, but rather professional. I have realised that, in order to make progress, I constantly have to critique and review my own teaching methods through keeping reflective journals. Through writing personal narratives, I discovered the intrinsic role that reflection plays in the daily experience of a teacher.

In essence, reflecting on my short period of teaching has highlighted issues in my practice. Reflecting on the levels described had varying impacts on different aspects of my work. In general, reflection has led to positive and undoubted growth and professional development as an education practitioner. By articulating cognitions about my practice, I showed wholeheartedness in sharing my ideas and being open-minded. These are some of the prerequisites of a reflective practitioner identified by Dewey (1933). Over the two-year period I developed and projected more desirable skills that a reflective practitioner should have. During my lessons I listened carefully and noticed the difficulties learners were experiencing. My development and growth could be classified into three stages: planning, teaching and then reflecting. When planning the

lessons critically, I thought about what I needed to do in order to gain the outcomes I wanted and which would also be beneficial for the progression of other lessons.

## **5.6 Development as a Teacher**

In this section of my analysis I firstly focus on personal development and secondly on professional development dimensions of teacher development as espoused by Bell and Gilbert (1994). This is done to obtain a more embodied understanding of my lived experiences. The effective components present in Bell and Gilbert's (1994) study were support, feedback and reflection. It is important to note that Bell and Gilbert's study focused on the development and learning process of teachers. Bell and Gilbert (1994:485) describe personal development as development that the teacher is aware of, however inchoately, and accepting of a professional dissatisfaction or problem. The teacher needs to establish what the problem or hindrances are that inhibit him-/ herself from growing professionally, personally or socially. Bell and Gilbert (1994) ascribe three stages to Personal Development.

Stage 1: Accepting an aspect of my teaching as problematic

Stage 2: Dealing with restraints

Stage 3: Feeling empowered.

### **5.6.1 Personal Development: Attending to feelings**

#### **5.6.1.1 Stage1: Accepting an aspect of my teaching as problematic**

According to Bell and Gilbert (1994:486), the teachers entering into the teacher development activities were seeking new teaching suggestions that work, new theoretical perspectives with which to think about their teaching, to improve the learning in their classrooms, to feel better about themselves as teachers, and to learn how to put new ideas into action. It was not easy to accept that an aspect of my teaching was problematic, as I had high expectations of myself, and believed that I had achieved all the necessary skills to succeed in the teaching profession, especially in a South African context.



My international teaching experience enabled me to construct a good foundation of skills needed in the teaching profession. The training that I received was of a supportive nature, but, most importantly, the focus was on continual professional development. I formed expectations and ideals that my pre-service teaching would allow me to grow more and prepare me for a new context of teaching. I believed that the strong values of education would also be that of South African schools, as I was brought up with the value that education is the key to a good future.

*I felt relatively confident, because I was exposed to some of the skills of teaching. I expected that through the course I would gain more insight into the current teaching situation that South Africa was facing as well as to develop and feel more empowered as a professional.*

Chunene *et al.*, (1999:24) assert that, from years of teacher watching in school, pre-service teachers have long developed theoretically uninformed, underdeveloped and pedagogical naive views or conceptions about teaching. This type of idealism was further fuelled by the encouragement of thinking about an education system with no flaws, and being exposed to ideal teaching situations during my practicum teaching experience.

*I felt that I had the knowledge and confidence to start my tenure as a teacher in South Africa. Thoughts of my first few weeks' teaching abroad came back and I was confident that this new experience would be positive and life changing. To me it is a profession where individuals like myself choose to make a difference in working with young people. It was rewarding, meaningful and stimulating in the past, and I wanted to build onto this and empower not only myself professionally but also help in the empowerment of the learners that I would encounter.*

In the above quotation I express the idealism I had as a young teacher. In Taiwan I felt valued as a teacher. I did not only have the support of the company and branch that I worked for, but I also had the cooperation of the parents, as well as the learners.

My practicum experience was an important one as it gave me deeper insight into the South African educational system and I could build onto the knowledge that I had



gained from my international teaching career. I was able to experience real teaching situations. Ovens and Tinning (2009:1129) stress the importance that the practicum context plays in pre-service teaching. They (2009:1129) are of the opinion that experience, in the sense of both accumulated experience and authentic school experience, becomes important in being able to think on your feet and problem solve situations that are encountered, which is very similar to the notion of reflection-in-action (Schön, 1983).

Ovens and Tinning (2009:1130) describe this as an experience that not only shapes the ability to problem solve, but also the ability to read a situation and discern when to intervene. I was fortunate in having had six years' teaching experience prior to my practicum. I felt confident and comfortable in handling the expectations of the school management as well as the expectations that the learners would have of me. However, I feel that four weeks of practicum did not allow enough time to prepare me for the realities of teaching. It did not prepare me for the shock and overwhelming feelings of doubt that I experienced in my first few months of teaching.

The PGCE course was structured well, but it lacked relevance to what was happening in South African classrooms. I was familiar with new theories and methods of teaching in an ideal context, but did not have nearly enough exposure for what was needed. Within the first few weeks of the term the confidence that I had and belief in myself as a teacher soon disappeared and I started doubting my capabilities.

*During the PGCE course we were trained in the latest classroom management skills, curriculum development, philosophies of education, sociology of education, active and co-operative learning techniques, to mention but a few. The things mentioned are important, but there is so much more to teaching that help to shape a teacher, than just to show them and to familiarize them with 'new tricks' of the trade.*

I started feeling discouraged when my zeal and hard work was not being rewarded, and disillusionment started to prevail. I had set my expectations high, and expected that the type of learner I would be working with would have the same belief in education that

was instilled in me by my parents. My enthusiasm came to be substituted with despair. My internal light grew dimmer and this spiralled to feelings of doubt and acceptance that some aspects of my teaching could be problematic.

*I felt perplexed because my learners seemed to lack so many of the necessary underlying skills and prior knowledge that would allow them to work at the expected level they should [have reached] for the grade and where I wanted them to be.*

I entered the teaching profession with unrealistic expectations about what I could accomplish with learners and within the school itself. I often blamed myself and perceived this as personal failures when I saw that my learners could not comprehend the lessons. I later realised that I was not dealing with just one type of learner in my class with a specific learning style, but that I was dealing with all the learning styles and 45 to 50 learners staring back at me. It was impossible to give individual attention to those who really needed it. Managing the learners' discipline was problematic. Sometimes it really felt as if I was in a battle, and I lost every time.

*During the first two terms I found it very difficult to manage how the learners participated in class. I continuously changed my managing style to suit the mood the class was in that day. I did not like this inconsistency in my managing style.*

Reflection played a vital role in accepting an aspect of my teaching as problematic. I refused to throw in the towel and surrender in the 'battle' in which I constantly found myself. Through reflection, I was able to analyse my teaching practice and discover what the problems were and how I could improve on it. I realised that improvement did not happen overnight but that it was something towards which I had to work. During my second year of teaching it became much easier for me to identify the needs in my class. By then I also had the tools to critically reflect on the challenges of teaching. Research has highlighted that becoming an effective teacher is a very intricate and complicated process. It is especially difficult for novice teachers to deal with the reality shock, as indicated by Flores and Day (2006). Flores and Day (2006:219) assert that, for some new teachers, feelings of isolation, the mismatch between idealistic expectations and

classroom reality and lack of support and guidance have been identified as key features which characterise their lives. Bell and Gilbert (1994) state that no progress can be made in the development of the teacher until this stage of personal development has commenced.

#### **5.6.1.2 Stage 2: Dealing with restraints**

This stage is described by Bell and Gilbert (1994:488) as a stage in which teachers have to deal with restraints and, in particular, attend to the feelings and concerns of behaving differently in the classroom. The obstacles mentioned in the data presentation is what formed part of the restraints I experienced. Research has focused on the important value of induction programmes in a beginner teacher's initial teaching experience.

*One of the expectations I had from the school was that there would be a structured induction system to support my entry as a novice teacher to the school.*

The two extended terms in Howe's (2006) study is that although new teachers in their first year are left to sink or swim, and learn by trial and error, collaboration and collegiality are important factors in teacher induction programmes. Howe (2006) describes a successful induction programme as a programme that provides opportunities for experts and neophytes to learn together in a supportive environment that promotes time for collaboration, reflection and acculturation into the profession of teaching. According to Howe (2006), a successful induction programme should include extended internship programmes, specifically trained mentors, comprehensive in-service training and reduced teaching assignments for beginning teachers, with an emphasis on assistance rather than assessment.

The concept of teacher education may differ in different parts of the world, but the one thing that they all have in common is the declining rate of quality teachers. Howe (2006) describes such teachers as having the following qualities; teachers who can demonstrate pedagogical teaching skills, excellent communication skills, strong ethics, and continued professional development. Education systems globally are undergoing

reforms aimed at improving teacher effectiveness. South Africa needs to align itself with what is going on in the world, and stop competing with it. Howe (2006: 292) asserts that teachers need a gradual acculturation into the profession with a structured and well-supervised clinical induction period. Learning the theory behind the practice is imperative, but most of the lessons learnt are through practice. This is reiterated by Howe (2009:292), in pointing out that, while some knowledge can best be acquired through pre-service university preparation, much of what teachers need to know can only be learned through practice. Induction programmes have been proven to help beginner teachers build their own sense of professional identity and to enable beginner teachers to be ready for the realities of school.

Villani (2002:3) asserts that effective professional development is a design task that requires understanding of the needs of adult learners and selecting appropriate strategies to promote growth. There was a lack of this type of support and thus I had to rely on myself to promote my own growth. My professional development technique for dealing with the above restraint was “individually guided”. This term is used by Tallerico (2005). Tallerico (2005:38) defines “individually guided” as a process that happens when a teacher defines and directs his / her own learning. Tallerico (2005:38) asserts that the teacher first determines a goal or learning objective, then decides upon a means of working toward the goal, both completely independently.

The workload was a demanding stream of class preparation, assessment tasks to be corrected, school events and intervention meetings with parents. The pace was unforgiving, unrelenting, with few breaks. School meetings and administrative tasks often extended far beyond the school day. Galton and Macbeth (2008:5) conclude that teachers have had to cope with undisciplined and troubled children and put up with unreasonable demands from government bodies since the invention of schooling, but the scale, complexity and intensity of pressures on them in the postmodern world are unprecedented.

*I found it difficult to manage and organise my workload and keep up with competing demands. The content that needed to be taught and assessed felt overwhelming at times. It felt as if I was teaching to test and teaching towards*

*completing the next task or assessment. There was no time to do remedial work, and it was discouraging to know that you had to move on to the next task, even though you knew that the learners were not grasping the work. I soon realized that I was not only employed as a teacher, but skills other than teaching skills were required of me; being an administrator, athletics coordinator, social worker, acting as a parent (in locus parentis), mediator, disciplinarian, school counsellor and behaviour support teacher.*

During my practicum I was accustomed to teaching 12 to 15 learners in a class. At the school I intended to make each and every lesson a success, and discovered that each class needed a different managing style and that each class differed regarding capabilities and needs. After each lesson I reflected on what went well, what worked and what improvements needed to be made. This process became easier in my second year as I had come to know what to expect and how to deal with situations.

*I was forced to soldier on with little assistance, and was required to teach large classes that other teachers did not want.*

Creating a positive climate in which learners could interact positively with one another and the teacher was difficult, especially with more learners than desks. Continual disciplinary problems became a restraint, because dealing with discipline often took up the entire period. It became a restraint because work that needed to be taught could not be dealt with. Learners' apathy and lack of motivation became a constant issue. It became a daily struggle to get cooperation from learners.

*One of the courses (Didactics - Educational Innovation) I did in my Honours year (2010) was about cooperative learning. I wanted to use it as a tool to improve not only my classroom pedagogy, but also to improve learners' behaviour and attitude towards learning.*

It seemed that the value of learning, and learning in order to achieve success, was something that was foreign to these learners. I struggled to make them see what the value of learning was. Dealing with the overall management of the classroom, dealing with difficult co-workers, planning effectively (because finding appropriate resources

was a constant struggle), managing time wisely and effectively, remaining calm and professional in the face of unnerving situations, utilising the most effective teaching strategies, accommodating individual differences in learners and engaging learners in critical thinking activities, low achievement and verbal abuse from learners contributed to feelings of being restrained. The above sort of formed a barrier between me and success in the classroom and me and failure in the classroom.

*It was difficult to cope with expectations I had for myself and those expectations that the school had. The expectations I had was that I would make a success of every lesson and make a significant change in the lives of the learners. I expected that I would be given guidance and some mentorship to lead me onto this new path. The school's expectation was that I had to deal with disruptive problems on my own, and at the end of the year the school expected results.*

Research conducted by Chunene *et al.*, (1999:31) shows that problems with promoting a student-centred style of teaching resulted from a lack of discipline among students, the inability of students to follow explanations, students' lack of initiative and because of repeating students who are used to different ways of teaching. Learners have become accustomed to the spoon feeding method from primary school, thus when they enter high school they are not able to complete a task on their own, because they have not gained the skills needed to complete a task on their own.

Villani (2002) argues that most teachers in training begin their careers filled with optimism and confidence. This confidence lasts into their first year of teaching, when they are confronted with the daunting challenges of learners. In most situations these teachers are thrown into the proverbial deep end, and are expected to sink or swim. This lack of support and guidance proved to be one of the restraints I had to deal with. Villani (2002) cites studies that provide clear indications of the positive impact mentoring relationships have on new teachers' orientation to the school system, socialisation in the school culture and improved effectiveness in promoting student learning. The idea of having a mentor conveys awareness of feeling supported and confident. Mentoring can be facilitated as a bridge that can lead to teacher effectiveness, as described by Strong (2009). Harrison, Dymoke and Pell (2006:1061) concur, having explored the extent to

which different mentoring relationships allow beginning teachers to feel empowered and self-determining. Without the support or guidance of a mentor, I had to rely on my own self-supporting mechanisms.

*There was no form of an induction or support programme for new teachers at the school. In the beginning of 2010 I requested to be provided with four sets of guidelines: a) what was expected of me in terms of additional language teaching and facilitation; b) practical guideline on school policies and procedures; c) discussion of curriculum content of the grades assigned to me; and d) guidelines on how to approach the setting up of assessments for learners. In response to these aforementioned points raised, I was told by the HOD (Head of Department) that I should consult the previous teacher's file and, if I had any further questions pertaining to my request that I had to consult another teacher who was also teaching in the GET phase.*

My age also contributed to feeling restrained at school. I was the youngest teacher at the school, as well as the youngest in our department. I was not afforded opportunities to voice my opinions nor given recognition for my creative approach to teaching.

*Things that I have done well were always ignored, and the only comments that I received from her were made on deficits and difficulties. The Head of the Department was very cynical towards my new ideas. She focused almost exclusively on negative problems and wrote negative and unconstructive comments on assessments that I planned on my own. I had no choice but to deal with this and I managed to overcome the indifference and neglect of senior colleagues. At times it felt that I was being tested and that I had to prove my mettle as an organiser and a disciplinarian.*

The curriculum is probably the most important and also the biggest restraint of all. It is prescribed and all the tasks and assessments have to be reflected in the learners' portfolios and year marks. The curriculum is so packed that, at times, it feels as if one has to teach towards a task, and that there is no time to waste on teaching something perfectly until the learners understand it, because another task is waiting to be



explained and completed. No time is allocated for remedial work. This causes problems, because learners are not afforded the time to learn from their mistakes. As a teacher, you have to take responsibility for teaching the prescribed curriculum.

*Lesson planning in the past was easy, as I knew what the expectations and goals were. Since I did not receive any guidelines, it became a constant struggle in the first two terms of 2010. After the second term I realised that I was placing myself in a very unsafe position and that, if I were to receive no assistance, I had to take it upon myself to improve the situation. I started consulting teachers at other schools who were teaching the same grade and level that I was. With the guidelines and some resources from these teachers, I was able to create meaningful lessons that helped develop the skills the learners needed.*

Flores and Day (2006:220) argue that both the influence of the school context and personal background experiences during pre-service education are identified as important variables to be taken into account in the assessment of early teaching experiences.

#### **5.6.1.3 Stage 3: Feeling empowered**

Brock and Grady (2000:85) point out that teachers are viewed as professionals who are capable of directing their own professional growth. They further contend that staff development strategies encourage teachers to reflect on their teaching, as well as to learn from collegial interactions. Opportunities that are created for teachers to interact and learn from one another can be beneficial for professional development.

Upon reflecting on my first year of teaching, I discovered that my own personal agency and values created confidence and momentum in my career. Through individually guiding my own professional development, I was able to empower myself.

*I have worked hard for everything that I have achieved in life. I am a team player, but fairness and professionalism is a key to effective inductions and professional development.*

The above extract illustrates my own agency upon reflecting.



During the BEd-Hons course, I was able to use the theories and apply them to the realities of teaching. The elective classes were well structured and gave me new ideas and approaches to incorporate in my own lessons. I started feeling confident again; feeling that I had the power and control of my own pedagogy.

*I became a reflective thinker. I started thinking about my practice, questioning it and re-evaluating it. I knew that if I did not take the situation into my own hands my first year of teaching would not have delivered effective and productive experiences.*

Development activities were never considered at school level. I had to take it into my own hands and strove to initiate my own development. Whilst doing research, I was exposed to a lot of reading material and research conducted in the field of novice teachers in different contexts. I read that staff development programmes give teachers a sense of being important. Brock and Grady (2000:108) conclude that a programme that helps teachers to improve professionally is one that provides direction and opportunities.

## **5.7 Professional Development: Developing ideas and actions**

Bell and Gilbert (1994:491) define professional development as something that occurs when teachers are engaging in cognitive development of classroom practice. According to Bell and Gilbert's study (1994), teachers were enabled to go beyond their classroom management of new activities and develop new ways of interacting. Bell and Gilbert refer to three stages of professional development.

Stage 1: Trying out new ideas

Stage 2: Development of ideas and classroom practice

Stage 3: Initiating other development activities

### **5.7.1 Stage 1: Trying out new activities**

Formal education for teaching only represents a starting point for a lifetime of professional growth and development. At the school, the head of the department assumed that I was prepared and had the knowledge for teaching the grades that were

assigned to me. I knew that if I wanted to excel in this profession and to demonstrate that I take my work seriously and to challenge myself to higher levels of expertise, it was important to realise that teaching was a continual learning experience over the entire course of my career. I was aware of not knowing everything, especially in working with many different learners with many different needs that presented ongoing challenges. To meet these challenges I had to learn.

Continual professional development on my part aided me in trying out new ideas and activities to benefit my learners. I found Didactics (Educational Innovation) the elective course of study very helpful. This course gave enabled me to create more innovative lessons that improved my teaching and, in turn, improved the learning of the learners. According to Howe (2006:287) tacit understandings and wisdom in the practice of teaching can be uncovered and better understood through personal reflection and collaboration with colleagues.

Cognitive Learning, another elective course, helped me with my teaching approach, especially because I had learners with different learning levels and abilities in one classroom.

*Through the course and course material I gained knowledge that I would not have gained with the help and support of the department, but because I took my own initiative, I was able to develop professionally.*

These various sources of teaching knowledge helped me to discover new ways of thinking about teaching. When trying out new activities, it is necessary to weigh new ideas against the needs and abilities of your learners.

Feelings of being an inadequate teacher often arose in the first couple of months of teaching, because I was not so sure anymore that I was competent in my teaching practice. Being surrounded by other teachers who were following the course and listening to their experiences when we had discussions, made me feel that I was not the only one who was struggling. Some of the other teachers in the class had years of experience, and they still experienced difficulties in their own teaching practice. Valuable learning experiences were created in those discussion sessions.

*The one thing that stood out for me in this postgraduate course was the interaction I was exposed to with teachers from different contexts. Teachers like myself who were also frustrated by lack of support from their school and department, and who also saw the need to empower themselves by developing themselves professionally. I now had the knowledge to acknowledge all these factors when I prepare my lessons.*

Bell and Gilbert (1994:488) found that it was a priority for teachers to have a supportive atmosphere to develop in, an atmosphere in which they felt encouraged to use the new activities; felt that their knowledge and expertise were valued and they were seen as useful contributions; felt that their concerns about the possibility of judgment and put-downs were allayed; perceived that the feedback given was supportive and helpful; were able to share their problems and concerns publicly; felt supported; and that their feelings associated with change were attended to in a non-threatening way. Research has shown that a school environment that supports professional learning best supports life-long professional learning. In such an environment, teachers can reflect on what they are learning from their teaching experience with the help of and collaboration with their colleagues.

### **5.7.2 Stage 2: Development of Ideas and Classroom Practice**

My ideas about classroom practice certainly changed. The illusive ideas I formed about classroom practice during the period of practice teaching changed dramatically. The thought of creating 'magic' in a short period of time, was quickly extinguished when the reality shock kicked in. I realised that it was impossible to change the learners and to develop and mould them into the type of learners that I had in mind – the type of learner that I was; motivated, goal orientated and driven towards making a success of my life. Through reflecting on practice, I was able to step back and develop ideas that changed my own thinking about effective classroom practice. In order to make a success of each lesson, I had to develop ideas; in a sense, I had to re-invent myself, using the ideas that I developed. According to Bell and Gilbert (1994:491) the teachers in their study were changing from being constructivist technicians to being constructivist teachers. For those teachers, being a constructivist teacher was becoming a way of thinking and

behaving for the teachers, rather than the implementation of some new teaching activities.

I critically reflected on my practice and opted to move away from an over-concern with my 'performance' and routine discipline problems, to consider more fundamental teaching and learning issues. In a nutshell – how should I teach in order to provide richer learning experiences? If one takes a decision to change one's classroom practice so that teaching and learning can be made more effective, a natural question follows: How will I know whether the change has had any impact, beneficial or otherwise? If teaching is to develop as an evidence-based profession, the teacher needs to question such claims and make the classroom itself the site for their enquiry and their professional development.

### **5.7.3 Stage 3: Initiating other development activities**

As reported in the research by Bell and Gilbert (1994), this stage connected two aspects of professional development. In Bell and Gilbert's (1994:491) study, the teachers were reflecting on their classroom actions, not just as to whether they worked in terms of classroom management and within school restraints, but as to whether the actions matched their new ideas. I reflected on my practice to determine what the problem was and adapted my lessons to address those problems. It was important, however, to match activities to the learners' capabilities and levels.

Bell and Gilbert (1994) reported that, through planning for new action to initiate and generate new teaching activities, teachers took into account their students' thinking (Bell & Gilbert: 1994). The amount of assessment tasks to work through was enormous. I decided to work smartly, and in this way created activities to enable learners to gain skills necessary to use not only in one task, but throughout the tasks.

By initiating and developing activities of my own I was able to increase my own self-confidence and evaluated my performance as a teacher more positively. Research conducted by Flores and Day (2006:226) showed that, through reflective thinking, novices made sense of themselves as teachers in terms of their ability to exercise control. As mentioned, control of my practice was what I needed.

## 5.8 Theorising the discussion of Data

Chunene *et al.*, (1999:33) are of the opinion that teacher education programmes fail to prepare candidates for the realities of school life. They suggest the following strategies for reforming educational programmes:

1. Teacher educators should reflect and modify their classroom practice and assessment methods.
2. Strong links between school and teacher education institutions should be developed; and common purposes of pre-service training need to be agreed.
3. The role of a tutor at schools where teaching practice takes place should be clearly defined, including his / her position with regard to teaching practice assessment.

I emerged from the Post Graduate programme as an idealist. The ideals and thoughts I had formed during this period were not near to what I was faced with in the actual world of teaching. There was a definite need for induction and support, especially for some form of guidance from senior staff members. This illustrates the need for induction programmes to aid in helping to ease the process of adaptation from being a student teacher to a teacher. The Postgraduate Certificate in Education course did not prepare me well for the realities of teaching. A study conducted by Flores and Day (2006) found that pre-service teacher education had a relatively weak impact upon the way in which new teachers approached teaching and viewed themselves as teachers. The theory that was taught did not coincide with the actual business of teaching.

The recurrent themes in Flores and Day's (2006:225) study are most of the teachers (nine out of fourteen) described their first teaching experiences (i.e. teaching practice) as sudden, tiring and stressful and their accounts recorded that issues such as heavy workload, bureaucratic work, lack of support, wide variety of tasks to be performed and assessment procedures impacted on them. The themes were also present in my own experience, but much more so in my first year of teaching than in my practicum.

A supportive structure for giving guidance is imperative in the first year of teaching. Flores and Day (2006) assert that it is not surprising that teachers who taught in schools which were supportive, informative and encouraged leadership and effective working relationships amongst staff were more likely to reveal positive attitudes toward teaching. A good induction programme is needed to introduce the beginning teacher to the realities of teaching. Flores and Day (2006:230) furthermore suggest that induction processes also need to focus upon the development of the teachers' construction of identity through exploring links between personal biography, reflective practice in the classroom, student feedback, peer support and increased awareness of continuing professional development within supportive school structures. A good induction programme was glaringly absent in my case. I felt I was left to sink or swim as there was no induction or any attempt at support.

Killeavy (2006) sees induction as a collective professional issue and emphasises a whole-school approach to professional development. The intense pressure from educational authorities and school management makes it a necessity for support structures to be in place to help beginner teachers. Killeavy (2006:169) states that teachers, particularly those new to the profession, need to develop skills that enable them to cope with the pressures of an increasingly demanding society.

Killeavy (2006) furthermore points out an induction phase offers opportunities for new teachers to become habituated to learning from the beginning, and be afforded opportunities to consult and collaborate with their colleagues to engage collectively in the learning profession. Developing professionally in my first year definitely influenced the way I perceived myself as a teacher. Killeavy (2006:171) is of the opinion that early professional development beyond the induction year may focus on deepening the newly qualified teacher's reflection skills, linking theory and practice, enhancing instructional performance, and clarifying professional values.

There was a definite change in my overall approach to teaching in my second year. I knew what was expected of me. I set goals that were reachable. I planned and organised my lessons better. I incorporated theories that I had learned in the previous year to adapt my lessons so that I could reach my learners on all their levels.

Disciplinary problems with learners were still an issue. Trying to motivate learners remained a struggle. I tried to reach out more to parents, but could not reach out to those parents whose children really needed it, and simply did not show any interest in their child's schooling. In my first year I tried to teach, but soon realised that, by teaching, I would not get assessment tasks completed. I had to work smarter and, in spite of my belief in what teaching should be, changed my approach to an assessment orientated teaching style. On some levels I did not think that this was beneficial towards the learners, but I had to make sure that the prescribed curriculum and assessment tasks were covered and completed on time. Collaborating with colleagues also saved me some time in finding resources that I needed. Exchanging ideas with fellow teachers as well as those from other schools helped me to feel more confident – confident, knowing that I was not the only one who was experiencing difficulties.

Agency manifested through my personal deliberations about my work setting and contextual arrangements. I engaged in what Archer (2007) calls autonomous reflections. These included making journal entries and personal reflection in and on action. Sometimes I reviewed my work critically by engaging in deeper thinking about the contexts. I encountered many discontinuities in the context, as described by Kahn (2009) in Chapter 2 of this report. Most important and prevalent was the fact that I was not given any form of induction or mentorship. Furthermore the conditions of work and attitudes of learners did not fit into what I, as a teacher, valued as important ways of doing. This prompted me to engage with the social context in my reflexive deliberations in the development of and exercising of my agency

I feel that my actions seem to fit the description Archer (2007) provides for progressive specification of action based on reflexive deliberation. She argues that it is through progressive specification of action in social contexts that agency of the individual emerges. I was constantly reflecting autonomously and prioritising my performativity in relation to my practice. The changes I made and approaches I adopted as a result of my considerations and reflection on my work were the result of my exercising agency. As discussed by Archer, I began to prioritise my concerns and this guided my conduct in my teaching and in relation to my responsibilities, with a view to improving my practice.

This seems to be similar to the experiences of novice teachers as described in Kahn (2009). In Kahn's study, teachers engaged in reflexive deliberation that involved imagining, reliving, planning and deciding on practical action, much of which I also engaged in. Like those teachers, my reflexive work was focused on new teaching responsibilities and finding ways to deal with these immediate concerns in my practice, hence my subjectivity influenced my agency and exercising of my agency. My changes in practice, particularly in the second year of teaching, involved strong exercising of agency. In my opinion, this also indicated professional growth – all linked to my expression and continual development of agency through reflexive deliberations and reflective practice.

## **5.9 Conclusion**

In this chapter I have discussed aspects of my narrative that formed important milestones in my career. I briefly touched on experiences in an international context and initial teacher education in South Africa. I analysed extracts from my narrative in terms of frameworks and developed these ideas to link reflective practice as a development process in my early career. I conclude the discussion by referring to structure and agency and how these constructs played out in my experiences.



## CHAPTER 6

### FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

***Half of what you will accomplish in a day will be determined before you leave home. Three quarters of what you achieve will be determined before you enter the classroom door. The number one problem in the classroom is not discipline; it is the lack of authentic learning tasks, procedures and routines.***

***Harry Wong***

#### 6.1 Introduction

The central research question in this study is, “*Can reflective practices serve as self-support mechanisms for novice teachers?*” I wanted to gain a better understanding of what reflection was and how it could possibly lead to a self-support mechanism for beginner or novice teachers. The sub-questions that were asked in exploring the central research question were:

1. Can reflective practice enable professional development?
2. Does RP hold the potential for improving the teaching and learning process?

To respond to the research questions, I employed narrative research and told my lived experience as a novice teacher. These lived experiences served as a personal justification in this study. I wanted to understand my own practice and, most importantly, wanted to improve my practice and thus develop professionally. I wanted my research to be practical as well. I wanted it to be insightful for others and myself and to change the way I thought about my own practice.

Through living, telling and retelling I began to think narratively about phenomena, thus leading to a narrative view that extended over time. This narrative view was shaped by personal and social conditions, and situated correspondingly in a multiplicity of places. My study became an intricate part of my life; in essence I started living through my study, and my study became a tool I would describe as a survival tool.

My narrative evolved through the interactions with others and it is based on my hopes and feelings. Through writing my narrative, I remembered my past experiences, relating those experiences to my present state, and, most importantly, looking forward to future possible experiences. The situation established the reasons for my embarkation to do this research study. The context and time within a physical setting with boundaries also contributed to making this a compact narrative.

## **6.2 Experiences in the study**

The study documents and discusses my experience as a novice teacher in a secondary school. I also discuss my own growth and development as a young teacher. The main ideas of my study concern the processes of reflection and the techniques I learnt and employed, as well as an interpretation of the process that led to my own professional development. Reflecting on my entry into teaching, I seemed to have already entertained pre-conceived ideas about teaching, even though I was told by other teachers not to form these. I measured the experience I had in Taiwan against the experience in South Africa. In the end the two could not compete with one another on many levels.

When I started feeling disempowered and feeling defeated, is when I started becoming a reflective practitioner. It was not in my nature to give up and surrender to the battle of teaching, as I so often referred to it. I knew that I did not want this to debilitate and affect my teaching; I wanted to avoid becoming just another statistic of leaving school because of feeling disillusioned and disempowered. Taking matters into my own hands and taking charge was a way to improve my situation. By critically reflecting on my teaching practice, I could engage in problem solving and do something about becoming a more effective teacher. My postgraduate studies contributed to broadening my knowledge of teaching skills. I became a more knowledgeable teacher and, instead of just giving up as I had in the past, I could actually see things more clearly. I comprehended what my learners' needs were and what my own needs were. By becoming a reflective practitioner, other teachers may be enabled to develop a critical understanding about their own practice. By reflecting critically on their practice, they may be more able to evaluate its effectiveness.

In hindsight, I made changes in my teaching practice after a process of reflection on the problems I was experiencing and finding solutions. In the first few months of teaching, everything centred on just surviving and getting through each period and each day of school. I had no form of support or guidance and I had to rely on my own knowledge and ability to move forward. I did not feel satisfied; I literally felt that I was a technician and my trade encompassed all the things that I was not trained to do. Reflection broadened my sense of inquiry. It gave me a new perspective on my practice, especially with regards to making the learning and teaching process more conducive to and for learners and myself.

Although my way of thinking changed, change did not occur overnight. Reflection is an ongoing activity. My professional and my personal development were congruent with one another. Personal growth influenced my professional growth and vice versa. The one encouraged the other through feelings of satisfaction, empowerment and positive change. These were the feelings I had when I started my tenure, but having no support and professional development structure in place, had resulted in feeling isolated. Agency, induction and reflection can lead to professional development and growth.

Through the use of reflection I achieved the following:

- I started questioning and evaluating my teaching practice in a more critical manner.
- I gained a greater sense of who I am as a teacher.
- I do not feel isolated or helpless.
- Through reflection I gained the understanding that I can bring about change on my own.

In my narrative, different themes are highlighted and described to focus on the different facets of teacher development as I experienced it as a novice teacher. Interaction with the personal as well as the professional domain of my development is reported. As stated by Bell and Gilbert (1994:485), the initial personal development is usually private, having been self-initiated and sustained before the teacher engages with teacher development. As a novice teacher I had specific needs, and difficulties to overcome. I made a personal decision to initiate my own development as a teacher, as well as the

learning process for my learners. I was seeking new ways of teaching, creating a more conducive learning space for my learners and regaining the confidence I lost in becoming disenchanted with the profession I dearly loved and had so many hopes and aspirations for. Through personal development and reflections, I was able to regain confidence and to value my teaching competence. As stated by Bell and Gilbert (1994), no progress can be made until personal development has been undertaken.

I developed more on a professional level; by investigating aspects of my teaching that were problematic and finding ways of improving these aspects. Through these investigations, I learned and grew in my own practice. Hargreaves (1992:217) points out that new teachers do not need to reinvent the pedagogical wheel when they begin their professional lives (even if that is what it often feels like). I needed to cultivate my own pedagogy and style of teaching, however, in order to feel confident and comfortable in the school context in which I was teaching.

### **6.3 Findings**

My study revolved on using reflective practice as a self-support mechanism to develop professionally. In my experience this was indeed possible. From my experience of using reflection, I believe it to be a useful self-support mechanism. It can lead to the fostering of personal and professional growth, and enable teachers to become more effective practitioners. Reflection can be difficult to integrate into the daily teaching routine in a substantial and meaningful way. In order for teachers to reflect, they must be provided with a wide range of ongoing opportunities to think and talk about their teaching practice. We need to cultivate the art of reflection and develop a culture of reflective thought.

It may be difficult for teachers to think and talk about their teaching practice, because no one wants to be embarrassed or feel incompetent when asking for advice or help. It can also be difficult for teachers to think and talk openly about their work in meaningful ways. Teachers, for the most part, focus in the isolation of their classrooms and have little opportunity or encouragement to engage in any type of reflective activity with other teachers. When opportunities to reflect on practice are presented, many teachers have little understanding of what reflection really means and how it is accomplished.

It is important to emphasise the importance that professional development plays in the career of a novice teacher. Novice teachers especially benefit from ongoing professional development in a number of aspects of their teaching responsibilities. There was a definite improvement in aspects of my practice such as classroom management, lesson planning and organisation, using alternative ways to meet the needs of diverse learner populations, problem solving and conflict resolution, and time management.

Collaboration, reflective practice and a shared vision for professional growth and student learning are essential guiding principles that afford scaffolding for professional development. In order that I may teach well, it was a necessity to explore my inner terrain. I found that if I did not do this on my own, the chances were I would lose myself lost, practicing in self-delusion and running the risk of self-serving. I was in desperate need of the guidance that a community of collegial discourse should have provided, in order to sustain me through the trials of teaching. It became evident that it is important for teachers to work together as collaborators and colleagues to gain a better understanding of both their own school experience as well as that of their learners.

Ghaye and Ghaye (1998:9) are of the opinion that confident and competent teaching requires teachers to reflect systematically and rigorously on evidence derived from practice. The evidence for my study came from my narratives. Through my reflections, I gathered the evidence on which to base the findings of this research study.

Another finding was that there is a lack of structured induction programmes. During my international teaching practice, I was exposed to a structured induction programme. Having never had any form of teaching experience, the training, follow-up training and support I received during this time were very beneficial to my career, as well as my development. I expected the same type of structured programme to be offered at the school where I was employed. Unfortunately this did not happen, and I felt truly alone and isolated. Feinman-Nemser (2001) asserts that on-site support and guidance are especially critical during the beginner years of teaching. In my case there was no support from the Educational Department, or the Head of the Department in which I worked. Although I felt confident with what I had learnt from my experience and training

overseas, I was not familiar with teaching in a different context, and that made me feel anxious. I had a lot of concerns that I did not know how to deal with at first.

Lack of support created a very big problem. There was no supportive management staff that showed interest in my work. There also was no active support and receptiveness for my ideas. Knowing that I had some sort of support would have created the feeling that I could rely on solid, unwavering support, which would have instilled a sense of trust. This indicates a need for induction programmes to help ease the adaptation from being a student teacher to being a teacher.

The study conducted by Howe (2006) found that much of the success of induction programmes can be attributed to the high degree of comradeship and collegiality in New Zealand. In New Zealand the teachers' attitude toward the professional development of new teachers is critically important, and veteran teachers feel that it is their duty to pass their knowledge and experience on to the next generation.

There is a definite need to create space for teachers to exercise agency. Teaching is a practice that is driven by values. These values can be personal values and the values of the school at which you are employed. In my case my practice was driven mostly by my own agency. In order to fit in, however, I had to adapt to the values of the school. My own agency gave me the power to make my own informed decisions.

Structural influence like the school I was employed at should have had the power to enable choices and opportunities, but that was rarely the case. As previously stated in Chapter 2, the power the teacher has (agency) and the constraints (structure) often have an influence on the teachers' performance. The more I used my own agency, the more I reflected and the more I grew professionally. If I had been exposed to a structured induction programme, my professional development as a novice teacher could have been developed so much more. A primary concern voiced by Coia and Taylor (2001) is that teachers should be helped to develop their sense of own efficacy and a sense of agency in the social context of schooling. Therefore agency is critical in education.

My agency was expressed through taking control of my situation. I viewed my teaching practice in a critical manner and I made the choice to change my situation. Reflecting on my practice and using my own agency led to professional development. Agency manifested through my personal deliberations about my work setting and contextual arrangements.

#### **6.4 Expressions of personal growth or transformation**

This study contributed to my ability to become a reflective practitioner. Through writing personal narratives I discovered the intrinsic role that reflection can play in the daily experience of a teacher. Writing a personal narrative became a means of connecting educational theory with classroom practice and experience. I was able to constructively reflect on my teaching experience. This narrative study allowed me to see first-hand growth. I was able to modify and enhance my beliefs as a result of my own experiences. I started thinking like a reflective teacher, continually examining, assessing and re-shaping my teaching beliefs and practice. In remembering key moments in my life, I realised how each one of them affected me as a person and, most importantly, as a teacher today.

At first I felt nervous about sharing my narratives, but as I continued to share I found that an audience of colleagues and my professor supported and enhanced my writing. In a sense I perceived that my autobiographical writing would be less powerful and expressive if it was only written for myself. A primary concern was to develop a sense of own efficacy; a sense of agency in the social context of schooling. The problem of agency is critical in education. A sense of personal efficacy can be encouraged through the emphasis on autobiography as a social endeavour. The aim of my narratives was to strongly suggest that perhaps all novice teachers need a place to share their stories about public education in order to identify what their common experiences say about teaching and education.

This research enhanced my life by bringing about positive changes and providing me with new understandings. The study reports personal change or growth; explaining how I have learned from mistakes made during planning and teaching by proposing adaptations to my instruction as a result of initial problems. Problems I experienced

included too high expectations of myself, lack of encouragement or help from fellow teachers and a Head of Department who gave frequent criticism and no support.

### **6.5 Limitations of the study**

The biggest limitation was time. Working as a full-time teacher in a very demanding job and being a part-time student often made it difficult to actively work on the research process. Ideally, I would have liked to conduct this study over a period of five years, as it is proposed that the first three years of teaching is your novice teaching period. I would have liked to use more participants from different backgrounds who work in different contexts. Working in isolation also proved to be a limitation. I was only able to investigate the first two stages, personal and professional development, discussed Bell and Gilbert (1994), as those formed an important part of my study. The context of the study did not make it possible to engage with other people.

### **6.6 Recommendations / Suggestions**

There is a definite need for support programmes and needs-based professional development sessions. Pre-service educational institutions have to be more needs based and linked with schools, to better understand real education situations and prepare students for these. Teacher programmes should be revised so as to look into the needs that student teachers have in educational programmes. Three levels (reflection, induction and agency) together are more powerful collectively. They synergise and complement each other to enable professional development. There is a definite need to create some space for teacher research.

Professional development of teachers, relationships with colleagues, rewards and leadership positions – all of these affect the quality of what teachers do in the classroom. There is a great need to start collaborative learning environments and institute structured systems of support for new teachers in the shape of induction programmes.

I recommend that school districts periodically bring new teachers together to share concerns and discuss ideas. This can be done in the form of cluster meetings in districts. An easier and plausible form of induction can be for schools to assign mentors to novice teachers. These mentors can take charge and assist in the wellbeing of new



teachers by keeping track of progress and providing assistance and ideas to novice teachers. Effective induction programmes that are geared to the needs of individual new teachers are highly recommended. A developmental approach to assist and support novice teachers is very important. When new teachers are given ongoing opportunities over time to explore new ideas and refine instructional practices among colleagues they are able to overcome the challenges and roadblocks they often face alone.

Senior teachers should be actively and passionately involved in induction programmes, and should develop a sense of commitment to the development of novice teachers. Reflection should not remain the private introspection of the individual, but should become a procedure for collective reviews and dialogue. A system should be created that goes beyond the advocacy and description of induction and what it means. This system should not only create support for novice teachers, but should also illustrate the benefits of further growth to those who have been in the teaching profession for longer. A vision of teaching and learning that extends beyond the 'survival level' and focuses on engaged learning and accomplished practice is needed.

There is a definite need for policy makers to understand how induction and mentoring programme policies can lead to teacher retention. Should the ultimate goal not be to bring novice teachers to the point of functioning as autonomous teachers? We should make teaching a more agreeable occupation for those who are already in it, as well as for those who will enter it in the future. Isolation should be replaced with collegiality and there should be structures in place to enable this process.

Opportunities must be created for mentors and mentees so that they are able to share ideas, perspectives and their own proficiency in the skills of both teaching and learning. It is vital for teachers to work together as collaborators and colleagues to develop a clear understanding of both their own school experience as well as that of their learners. I am of the opinion that this effort would combine the abilities and energies of beginning teachers with the experience of veteran teachers, and enable both to simultaneously contribute to the process of improved learning for teachers and students. Collaborative activities should be able to promote a spirit of mutual sharing and collegiality.

Individual development plans are important, yet those that are most successful involve collaboration and dialogue with other teachers. Shared visits between colleagues, team teaching and exchange programmes with other schools are valued experiences. Peer coaching, collaborative curriculum development, and action research would provide opportunities for teachers to interact and learn from one another (Brock & Grady, 2000:94). Teacher education should be focused on on-going professional development. Killeavy (2006:175) asserts that induction appears to hold promise as a possibility for encouraging learning, enhancing teaching and expanding leadership opportunities in schools.

### **6.7 Recommendations for further research**

Other areas that could be explored could include other methods that teachers use as self-support mechanisms. More empirical research could be conducted to explore different strategies for teaching novice teachers to become critically reflective. Pre-service teacher education is the framework for preparing students for independent teaching, and therefore teacher educators and curriculum developers need to make links between pre and in service programmes. This I believe needs to research based to provide meaningful opportunities for professional learning and growth. Reflective practice is a tool which can empower teachers personally and professionally. How it can empower teachers on a social level may present possibilities for further research. Further research can be undertaken to explore the existence of current induction programmes for novice teachers at schools in different contexts, while ways to improve teachers' skills and knowledge through workshops, induction and training in the current curriculum may also be suggested for further investigation.

Coordinated studies of cohorts of beginner teachers, focussing on and responding to their initial experiences and needs could be undertaken. This kind of study can guide reflections and reflective practice, mentoring and induction and might provide valuable insights into teacher support in the early career phase. These can take the forms of small case studies or extensive longitudinal studies.

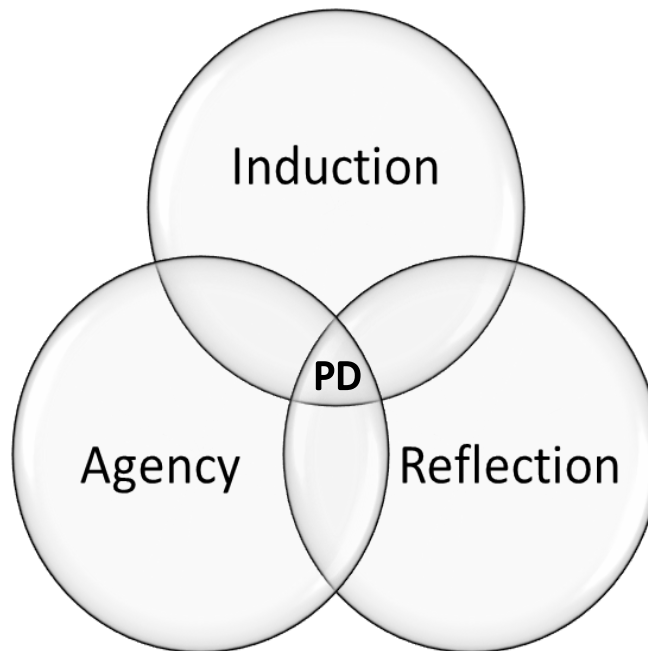
## 6.8 Concluding Thoughts and Reflections

We should move away from the thought that novice teachers have to mimic more experienced teachers. The emphasis should be on becoming more reflective thinkers who explore their own individual teaching styles. There is a need for classroom experience early in teacher education preparation. It is important to link theory and practice through working closely with schools early in a pre-service teacher's career. In this way, pre-service teachers may be enabled to relate 'what' the practice of teaching is to the 'why' captured in the theories underlying the practice, to better comprehend why a particular practice does or does not work in a class.

In becoming a teacher, I entered a career-long agreement to become responsible for the school lives of my learners, and accordingly, for the chances they will have in life once they leave my classroom. I realised very soon that today the teaching profession in South Africa, and everywhere else in the world for that matter, has been placed under an intense scrutiny. Society has greater expectations concerning what teachers should know and be able to accomplish with their learners. Despite the external pressures that teachers experience on a daily basis, the choices that they make individually have an impact on the learners that they teach and the quality of the learning that takes place. Through reflective practice I was able to understand that the concept of making choices as a teacher and taking responsibility for those choices are central.

The real value of this study lies in the critical questioning which made me reconsider and re-evaluate my teaching practice with a view to better understand and improve it. Thinking critically was a tool I used for survival. I feel that my past, present and future stories provided powerful motivation for completing this study. From this study I learned that I have a voice, and that one grows into your practice. I learned that I should never doubt my abilities and that with structure and some guidance anything is possible. At the beginning of this study, I often felt that teaching was not my vocation, as I had thought during my international career. Emergent from this study is a teacher with confidence and a love for education. Novices as well as veteran teachers must understand and espouse the value and critical components of a comprehensive professional development programme.

Figure 6.1 represents the interaction between activities in my experience as a novice teacher. The overlapping illustrates the close connection and interrelatedness of these activities.



**Figure 6.1: Induction, agency, reflection and professional development (PD)**

With reference to Figure 6.1, I essentially consider the lack of induction programmes to have been a major shortcoming in my early career in South Africa, as the experience of induction internationally made me aware of the value of well-structured programmes. However, all professionals have latent agency that can be drawn on and exercised. I constantly exercised agency despite many structural constraints. One of the important activities I learned was the practice of reflection. My reflective activities contributed to my growth in many ways. A combination of good induction, reflection and possibilities for agency in my opinion are essential for development and professional growth. In my experience, exercising agency in self-reflection at various levels (technical, practical and critical) contributed strongly to my professional development. I believe that the practice of reflection led to professional development in my case and provided the insights that I

was able to use, not only to improve my teaching practice, but also to develop a better understanding of my practice and the conditions in which it occurred.

I also developed a broader teaching repertoire, which increased possibilities and confidence, and this gave me more options to exercise agency. An ideal situation I believe would provide reflection training as part of induction which I feel can be a strong catalyst for extension of agency and ongoing professional development.

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## **APPENDIX A: Proforma for Journal Writing**

Weekly Journal

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Preparation for the week:

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2. Personal reactions to events at the school: excitement, confusion, fears and so on

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3. Challenges perceived at school or with the class during the week

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4. Successes perceived at your school or with the class during that week

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5. Challenges perceived in terms of your lesson / lessons

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6. Successes perceived in terms of your lesson / lessons

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7. Questions about issues around teaching approach and style

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8. Anecdotal notes: what a fellow colleague did or said / what a learner did or said that made an impression on you

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9. Observations about the classes, learners' behaviours

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10. Key events in the week. How did these events influence your practice?

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**APPENDIX B: Journal Entry**

This week I probably broke all the classroom management rules in the book Prof Heystek recommended us to use (losing my temper by slamming my fist on the table a few times, throwing papers off the desk out of frustration and the rule you should never break; breaking down and crying in front of the learners).

I started Monday morning (7:55 am) with lots of hope and excitement because I couldn't wait to see the end results of an investigative task I gave my gr8 and gr9 FAL learners. I was confident that I prepared them well for this task because I reflected on last year's prep for a similar task and tried to eradicate and avoid all the mistakes that were experienced by both myself and the learners last year. I gave them notes and started each lesson by doing revision of the previous day's work. Learners had to create their own questions for the surveys and I was surprised by the good quality of questions some of them came up with, hence the building up of excitement I had). Last year the gr9 learners couldn't even formulate their own questions and I basically had to spoon feed them, but this time around it seemed that the way I presented and changed my lessons actually helped the learners acquire the skill of forming questions on their own. I kept on reminding them that we only had 5 weeks left till Sept exams and that Term 3 has a lot of tasks that need2be completed and we don't have any time to waste. This specific task had two components, the written report and the prepared speech. I prepared a work sheet for the learners with three days' worth of activities to do in class and some parts that they can complete at home. The idea behind this was for them to work on their own while the rest of the learners could come up individually and do their speech for me.

The first class that came in, 2 out of 50 learners handed in their tasks. The rest of them didn't start with it yet and wanted to do it in class. Quarter of them were just not interested in this 50 mark assessment. I was angry and frustrated because this puts my schedule behind they weren't busy with the task I prepared for them and I couldn't do the oral. The next class a little more than 15 out of 47 gave in their tasks. Then some of them started doing stuff other than the sheet I prepared and just saw it as a free period.

The rest of the day went by like that. Tuesday the same thing happened. The kids were just not serious. And while I could do the oral at my desk, I could barely hear the learner speak, because the rest of the class were making such a loud noise. Yesterday was the same. I came to the conclusion that this whole situation is not fair on me, or those few learners that actually want to learn (the 5 or 6 out of the 50). Those learners that want to learn can't because a class full of disruptive and disrespectful learners are holding them back. My hands are tied, feels like my mouth is taped as well, because no matter how many reports I write about specific disruptive learners nothing "can" and "will be done" to them. This situation is making me angry, frustrated and feeling like I don't want to put an effort into my lesson planning. Making me feel like I shouldn't bother going the extra mile. Making me feel like I really don't have any control or power. I have become the puppet and the learners and department the puppeteers, as they are holding the strings and swinging me in whichever way they want to. I give warnings and the kids don't care, because they know there is no way that the department will allow me to give them a 0. Some of them don't even care if they get a 0. This week I really felt like taking my bags and leaving. I've never felt so angry. I told one of the gr8 boys to sit on the floor and to be quiet. When I asked him to please tell me why he doesn't want to listen, he simply said because he doesn't want to.

As he walked out of the class he said he is going to get a gun and shoot me. I really don't know what to tell myself anymore to get out of bed and to make an effort. One of the male teachers in another department said that he has never seen me like this before. To be honest it scares me, because I've never experienced this side before of myself, and I don't like the bitter and angry teacher that I'm becoming. I'm just thankful that it's Friday tomorrow and long weekend next week. Maybe it will do me good and get me energised for another week. Maybe I need to see things from a different perspective and come up with another game plan, because the other 550 game plans have not been working.

I decided to take control of the situation. I came to realise that I can't let 14 and 15 year old learners control me and do whatever they feel like doing. I've also discovered that I

can't let them do things on their own. I can't give them exercises and hope that they will do it, because they won't. That's how I learned, I learned by doing, and I've discovered that the youth of today, have been spoon fed for so many years that they don't know the meaning of "doing" and "practice makes perfect" .They can't comprehend these vocabulary words and it doesn't exist in their vocabulary. This makes it a lot harder for me, because I have to write all the exercises with each class over and over, because after I teach the one gr9 class, I have to erase the board and start all over again with the next class. I need to find an OHP, it will really make my life a little easier.