Voices of Transformation: Unveiling Critical Pedagogy for Social Justice in South African Classrooms through the Lived Experiences of Educators

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A minor dissertation in partial fulfilment for the award of the degree of Master of Education.

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Abstract

This dissertation explores how critical pedagogy in the educational landscape of South Africa presents itself in the teaching lives of five pedagogues in finding elements that amplify education as a public good and strengthen teaching for social justice. The discussion foregrounds concepts of critical pedagogy as the teacher-participants reflect on their teaching history which informs their pedagogic repertoires.

In doing so, the dissertation introduces the voices and reflections of five teachers residing in the Western Cape of South Africa. The small selection of teachers from contrasting socio-economic communities offers the opportunity to tease out the similarities and contradictions in their teaching repertoires, as critical pedagogy posits that educational spaces are sites of contention intricately shaped by historical influences. It asserts the absence of political neutrality within schools and underscores the fundamentally political nature inherent in the act of teaching (Kincheloe, 2008).

The goal of the dissertation is to present a window into the lives of five South African teachers who attempt to use their work as a social and cultural critique in arguing for a better and just world. By engaging their lived experiences and teaching repertoires, the dissertation draws attention to the opportunities, conditions, and contradictions within the educational landscape of South Africa that teachers often confront.

The dissertation utilises critical pedagogy as a framework to consider the nuances, conflicts, and challenges that teachers in contrasting socio-economic schooling communities face. In doing so the study teases out the agentic power of teachers who critically engage education in South Africa and challenge the reproduction of injustice to be truly transformative intellectuals.

Plagiarism Declaration

I, Angelika Snyders, solemnly declare that this dissertation is the result of my own independent research and work. It has not been previously submitted for any degree or examination at any other university. All sources utilized and quoted in this dissertation have been duly acknowledged through complete and accurate references. This work is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of education (Education Policy, Leadership and Change) at the University of Cape Town. I affirm that I have not engaged in plagiarism or any form of academic dishonesty in the completion of this dissertation.

Date: March 2024

Signed: Signed by candidate

Dedication

In loving memory of my brother, Zach Arnold de Beer, whose indomitable spirit, and unwavering strength continued to inspire every word penned in this dissertation. His remarkable journey, marked by triumphs and challenges, mirrors the resilience and determination that fuelled his ascent of El Capitan – an achievement symbolic of the heights one can reach with courage and perseverance.

Arnold was more than a brother; he was my mentor, my protector, and my guiding light. In the face of a challenging upbringing, he assumed the role of a father, instilling in me values of right and wrong, and relentlessly pushing me to become the best version of myself. His high expectations were a testament to his belief in my potential, and his unwavering support provided solace during times of hardship.

His work ethic, evident in his rigorous 14-hour workdays, demonstrated a commitment to excellence. Yet, amidst his dedication to his profession, he maintained a rich social life, including live music concerts, climbing, mountain biking, 4x4 driving and enjoying the simple pleasures of life, such as sharing a beer with friends. His ability to balance ambition with an appreciation for life's joys was a lesson in itself.

Arnold was a man of integrity, earning the respect of both employees and friends. He treated every individual with dignity and respect, transcending boundaries of race, class, and gender. His inclusive worldview reflected in his grappling with profound questions about societal structures, often engaging in debates that showcased his intellectual curiosity and willingness to challenge preconceived notions.

A true advocate for change, Arnold believed in the transformative power of hard work and continual self-improvement. He embraced the philosophy that changing one's mind is synonymous with growth and learning. In a world often marred by cynicism, he held onto the conviction that sustained effort and commitment to "doing the right thing" could lead to a brighter future.

As I embark on this academic journey, I dedicate my achievements to Arnold. His legacy lives on, not just in the memories we cherish but in the enduring impact of the lessons he imparted – lessons of resilience, compassion, and an unwavering belief that, indeed, things can be better if we work hard and continue trying our best. In recalling a conversation while being overwhelmed by this research, he said: "*Gela, how do you eat an Elephant? With just one bite at a time!*". This was the best advise anyone could have given me. In not attempting to tell me what was wrong or advising me on how to do it better, it took him a brief second to

understanding the magnitude of my situation and to make me laugh. More so, he instilled in me the belief that I possess the capability to achieve anything upon which I focus my mind. Arni, I hope you are proud; I ate my whole elephant.

Forever in my heart,

Gela

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To my husband, Maricus, your steadfast love and understanding sustained me during the challenging moments. Your belief in my abilities and constant encouragement were my pillars of strength. I am truly fortunate to have you by my side and cannot imagine taking on life without you.
I am deeply appreciative of my mother, Irmela, whose unwavering love and support have been a guiding light. Your strength and encouragement have shaped my character, and I am grateful for the lessons of resilience and determination you imparted.
I would also like to extend my heartfelt thanks to my friend, Helen. Your friendship has been a source of comfort and solace, especially during the most trying times. Your willingness to listen, offer support, and share in my triumphs and struggles has been a cherished gift.
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With sincere gratitude,
Angelika Snyders

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

To plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow, to become a teacher is to believe in the future - Unknown.

This dissertation draws inspiration from my personal teaching career, encompassing thirteen years of reflection in the pursuit of becoming a better teacher. This reflection involves a nuanced evolution, wherein changes[1] are acknowledged, while others remain open to exploration. Notably, my focus has extended beyond 'curriculum issues' to encompass aspects of teaching related to how learners retain and apply knowledge, the impact of certain lessons, and their far-reaching implications. It is within this evolving focus that my passion for the concept 'critical pedagogy' emerged.

The primary objective of this study is to explore the experiences and perceptions of teachers as they conceptualise and apply critical pedagogy in their daily teaching practices. This study specifically examines the journey of teachers in articulating and integrating a critical pedagogical orientation in their classroom practices. A central inquiry arising from this focus pertains to how global and local education policies[2] either support or disrupt teachers in enacting critical pedagogy.

Giroux (2013) posits that critical pedagogy is not a fixed set of references or prescribed practices but an ongoing project. It serves as both a lens for understanding education and a means of actively participating in shaping the world we inhabit. This study seeks to investigate critical pedagogy in relation to how teachers intentionally orient their teaching to challenge social inequalities.

Key questions posed in the study revolve around teacher agency concerning pedagogy, conceptualisations, and enactment in specific schooling contexts. This exploration delves into how teachers comprehend education, their roles in shaping the world, and their engagement with various forms of power within schools, including their interactions with school policies. The study adopts Giroux's (2013 *et al*) perspective, urging an examination of how teachers learn and act as social agents within their unique struggles, considering contexts, students, communities, available resources, histories, diverse experiences, and identities.

[1] These pertain to the social and economic changes in South Africa.

[2] "Policy refers mainly to the sphere of government. Policy is one way in which the government of modern states envisage what they would like, and how they intend to 'make it happen'." (Christie, 2008, p. 117)

Reflecting on my own teaching experience, the study acknowledges instances of disempowerment, often rooted in my tacit acceptance of known and unknown, existing power relationships. It posits that critically questioning power is not an instinctive skill, but rather a learned and consistently applied disposition within a teaching repertoire. Aligning with Giroux's view, the study situates itself in an understanding of critical pedagogy that illuminates the dynamic relationships between 'knowledge', 'authority', and 'power'.

In navigating this complex network of knowledge, authority, and power, the study acknowledges the influence of stakeholders, especially in the context of evolving relationships between the public education sector and private capital. The infiltration of economic actors into education, driven by human capital theory, has altered the nature of these relationships, aligning educational and school reforms more closely with private sector culture than public sector values (Livingstone, 1997; Rose, 2002; Vally & Motala, 2014).

Giroux's (2015) observation that in neoliberal societies, major corporations wield significant power over the production of knowledge and policy implementation, is crucial in understanding the current landscape of education. Education, as the cornerstone of societal development, is posited as the means through which critical pedagogy empowers teachers to transcend classroom boundaries, challenge social inequalities, and contribute to a socially just world.

In light of these considerations, this study focuses on investigating teachers' perceptions of critical pedagogy as part of their pedagogic repertoire.

The research questions driving the study are:

- How do teachers define and operationalise a critical pedagogy approach in their classrooms?
- How do teachers articulate factors that promote and inhibit a critical pedagogical orientation in their teaching lives?
- How does school policy enable teachers to engage with critical pedagogy?

It is important to note that due to the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting restrictions, only virtual interviews were permitted at the time of my data-collection, rendering in-person data-collection impossible.

What follows in Chapter 2 is the exploration of the literature relevant to this study, including critical pedagogy, and the educational landscape of South Africa. Following a description of the methodological approaches and issues addressed by the study in Chapter 3, the findings are

presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 4 provides an in-depth description of each participant's teaching journey and their understanding of education in South Africa. Chapter 5 discusses and analyses the ways in which critical pedagogy is perceived and enacted in the teachers' narratives. Chapter 6 summarises the major findings along with their importance and contributions to the research fields that frame this study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This study analyses the narratives of teachers with a focus on how they understand education and the performative nature of their agency as an act of participating in shaping the world. The focus of this study is not on learners, but rather on the journey of teachers as they conceptualise and apply critical pedagogy[3] in their daily teaching lives. A key part of this focus is to question how education policy[4] globally and locally supports or otherwise interrupts a teacher's ability to enact her/his/their agency and apply critical pedagogy. This review of literature is aimed at conceptualising "a good teacher" in the context of South Africa as they work for the public good by advocating a socially just world.

The first section discusses critical pedagogy and frames the concept of "the good teacher". It aims to present critical pedagogy as a mechanism and guiding principle of "good teachers" as they work for social justice and education as a public good. Authors Alexander (2008b), Giroux (2015), and Kincheloe (2012) develop this conceptualisation as they advocate for a pedagogy that critically questions knowledge, authority, and power.

The second section of the review provides an outline of the landscape[5] in which South African teachers are 'created'. The works of Kallaway (2002), Soudien (2019a), Chisholm (2019), Christie (2010) and Sayed (2002) are of particular importance to understanding the complexity of the history of education and policy reforms in the pre-apartheid to post-apartheid eras. The work of Musara, Grant and Vorster (2020) guide the study in understanding social justice as a major feature in post-apartheid South Africa and lays a foundational conceptualisation of what is known as 'the public good'.

The third section presents the educational change agenda in post-apartheid South Africa where neoliberalism, espousing market mechanisms, is employed. The works of Harvey (2005), Giroux (2015), McLaren (2015), Vally & Motala (2014), and Novelli & Sayed (2016) frame this critical evaluation of neoliberalism and further contextualise socially just education.

Finally, the key insights are drawn together to construct a conceptual framework.

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[3] Critical pedagogy will be defined and contextualised in greater detail in the sections to follow.
[4] "Policy refers mainly to the sphere of government. Policy is one way in which the government of modern states envisage what they would like, and how they intend to 'make it happen'." (Christie, 2008, p. 117)
[5] I use the term 'landscapes' in the same context as Pam Christies' (2010, p. 695) adaptation form the work of Arjun Appadurai (1996, p. 33). 'Landscapes' suggest a "fluid and situated approaches rather than static and generic one" (p. 695).

2.2 Critical Pedagogy: conceptualising the "good teacher"

This section reviews the literature on critical pedagogy, laying the foundational knowledges around the concept of pedagogy and how critical pedagogy is an extension that orientates teachers' work in specific ways. Thereafter, education as a public good is outlined and, to conclude, the "good teacher" is conceptualised within the framework of critical pedagogy.

2.2.1 Pedagogy: a framing definition

Critical pedagogy is embedded into pedagogy. This section develops a foundational understanding of pedagogy to recognise the potential that a critical pedagogical approach has in terms of working towards a socially just world.

As this research holds the teacher at the centre of the discussion, pedagogy can be understood as what teachers do and, more importantly, how they do it. Alexander (2008b) defines pedagogy as

> …both an act and a discourse. Pedagogy encompasses the performance of teaching together with the theories, beliefs, policies, and controversies that inform and shape it. Pedagogy connects the apparently self-contained act of teaching with culture, structure, and mechanisms of social control (Alexander, 2008b, p. 3)

Alexander (2008b, p. 1) further explains that pedagogy can be understood as the "bigger picture" in teaching. It is visible when teachers work with a "bigger picture" in mind and invisibilised when they do not. When they do not have a "bigger picture" mindset, it results in reducing the act of teaching from an educative process to a merely technical one (Ball & Olmedo, 2013). The concern arises that teachers are increasingly seen as merely needing to implement a prescribed set of curricular requirements or skills. This perception suggests that their job is viewed as a technical duty, where they only have to showcase their abilities to school inspectors in order to be considered compliant. Beyond this compliance there seems to be a lack of evaluation regarding how effectively the teacher teaches (Alexander, 2008b).

This is a dangerous discourse as effective pedagogy is far more nuanced than a set of competencies or standards (Biesta, 2009). Later, when the findings are discussed in Chapter 4, the data shows how an online school reduces teaching to a technical task as the schooling organisation manages to harvest the knowledges from teachers who, sadly ironically, actually embody the ideal pedagogical process. Once all the knowledge has been harvested and packaged into a sellable product, the educators are let go of, and facilitators are introduced: facilitators who technically manage the learning process. These facilitators have no "bigger picture" as they have not been trained in this regard and therefore cannot act as pedagogues.

Effective pedagogy should also constantly change as teachers evolve regarding their theories, beliefs, policies, and in their controversies that shape them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). This study explores what teachers-participants have experienced in this regard, and analyses their pedagogic repertoires in relation to these career-evolving changes. The literature will later show how governments manipulate powers by making pedagogy prescriptive. In the frame of governmental control, where pedagogy becomes more and more prescriptive, a culture of compliance is developed (Alexander, 2008a; Giroux, 2015). In this vein, critical pedagogy provides us with a way of counter-thinking this 'culture of compliance'. This discussion around 'critical pedagogy' is continued in the next section.

2.2.2 Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy arises from the greater concept of critical theory. In relating pedagogy to critical theory, three main obstacles present themselves:

1. "There are many critical theories;"
2. "The critical tradition is always changing and evolving;"
3. "Critical theory attempts to avoid too much specificity, as there is room for disagreement among critical theorists."

(Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011, p. 163)

With these obstacles in mind, Kincheloe (2012) contends that:

> It is highly suspicious of theories that fail to understand the workings of power, that fail to critique the blinders of Eurocentrism, that cultivate an elitism of insiders and outsiders, that do not understand the complexities and complications of what is referred to as democratic action, and fail to discern a global system of inequity supported by diverse forms of hegemony and violence. It is uninterested in any theory – no matter how fashionable – that does not directly address the needs of victims of oppression and the suffering they must endure (Kincheloe, 2007, p. 19).

A critical quality, state, or nature[6], which is grounded in human suffering is needed as a lens to dissect any theory or pedagogy resembling any of the failures mentioned above. This criticality lays the foundation for critical pedagogy which, as Giroux (2013, p. 1) explains, is:

> …an ongoing project instead of a fixed set of references or prescriptive set of practices – put bluntly, it is not a method. One way of thinking about critical pedagogy in these terms is to think of it as both a way of understanding education as well as a way of highlighting the performative nature of agency as an act of participating in shaping the world in which we live.

[6] This is the definition of "Criticality." *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/criticality. Accessed 20 Jul. 2022.

Critical pedagogy is therefore ever-evolving as education and the performative nature of our agency evolve. In this understanding, there are consistently new ways in which human suffering is intentionally and unintentionally cultivated. Therefore, critical pedagogy searches for new theoretical insights to critically expose/oppose conditions that perpetuate injustice. Consequently, critical pedagogy must "question the value-laden curriculum of everyday life (Apple, 2004), the power structures that manipulate rationality and truth (Foucault, 1984; Giroux, 2007) and how subjectivity becomes a political ontology (Foucault, 1984; Giroux, 2007; McLaren, 2005)" (in Foley, *et al.,* 2015, p. 114).

Furthermore, critical pedagogy argues that the skill of critical thought, combined with an explicit knowledge of the mechanisms of economic and political power, is what brings individuals to 'human completeness': individuals who are empowered to implement actions towards a socially just world.

Post-apartheid South Africa is a democratic state but "democracy means many things to many people" (Carr, 2011, p. 3). Dewey (1927, p. 436) suggested that a "public comes into being when the indirect consequences of transactions between a single person and groups are important, when the effect of these transactions go beyond those immediately engaged and affect others." Carr (2011) argues that the organisation of these transactions is the foundation of democracy. Hence, to organise these transactions towards that which is recognised as being good for the immediately engaged as well as to all the others, without marginalising a single person or group, is the 'public good' critical pedagogy advocates for.

Democracy can be conceptualised as both a pledge and a formidable task. It represents a commitment that autonomous individuals, collaboratively engaged, can self-govern in a way that advances their pursuits of individual liberty, economic possibilities, and social equity. Simultaneously, it poses a challenge as the efficacy of the democratic endeavour relies exclusively on the active engagement and responsibility of its citizens (Leon, 2012; Mannion, Biesta, Priestley, & Ross, 2016). Hence, education plays a fundamental role in building citizenship. Education in South Africa was used as a powerful tool in the colonial and apartheid eras to reduce the citizenship rights of certain 'races'. "The black poor were supposed to be poor and were supposed to remain poor" (Myambo, 2011, p. 66). Breaking these ideologies requires a form of pedagogy that builds critical thought and enables individuals to become educated citizens of an active and equal nature.

Giroux and McLaren (1986) address the idea that teachers play an incremental role in developing active citizens working towards the democratic ideal. They argue that:

> The idea that teacher education programs should center their academic and moral objectives on the education of teachers as critical intellectuals, while simultaneously advancing democratic interests, has invariably influenced the debates revolving around the various "crises" in education over the last fifty years. Moreover, it has been precisely because of the presence of such an idea that a rationale eventually could be constructed which linked schooling to the imperatives of democracy and classroom pedagogy to the dynamics of citizenship (Giroux & McLaren, 1986, p. 214).

A critical intellectual is an individual who employs their knowledge, expertise, and creativity to question prevailing ideologies and power frameworks that mould society, striving to advocate for social justice and human rights (Giroux 1983a, 2007b in Bridges, 2019). Critical intellectuals also engage in dialogue and collaboration with others to develop democratic citizenship and civic participation (Freire, 1970; Kafyulilo & Fisser, 2019). Hence, teacher education programmes must aim to develop teachers as critical intellectuals who can advance democratic interests, which include promoting equality of opportunity, diversity, inclusion, democracy, human rights, social responsibility, environmental sustainability, and global citizenship. Furthermore, as Giroux and McLaren have advocated since 1986, they must influence the debates revolving around the various 'crisis' in education which to this day continue to include:

- The crisis of curriculum: How should teachers design curricula that are relevant, meaningful, engaging, and responsive to the diverse needs and interest of learners? How should teachers balance between academic standard and social justice goals?
- The crisis of pedagogy: How should teachers use effective teaching methods that foster critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, problem-solving, inquiry-based learning, and life-long learning? How should teachers facilitate democratic dialogue and participation among learners?
- The crisis of assessment: How should teachers assess learners' progress and achievements in a fair, valid, reliable, transparent, and constructive way? How should teachers provide feedback that is supportive, informative, actionable, and developmental?
- The crisis of school culture: How should teachers create a positive school climate that is safe, respectful, supportive, inclusive, collaborative, and empowering for all learners? How should teachers manage conflict, diversity, and change in schools?

- The crisis of teacher identity: How should teachers develop their professional identity as critical intellectuals who can contribute to social change? How should teachers cope with the challenges, stress and burnout that may arise from their work?

(Giroux & McLaren, 1986)

Ideally, as consciously acting human beings, teachers are consistently paying attention to the subtle cues guiding our thinking and acting by highlighting power relations and challenging them. This can only be achieved by their own continued education through curiosity and questioning.

The life work of Paulo Freire and the many authors who have been guided and inspired by his work believe that critical pedagogy

> …threatens the culture of silence that informs our everyday life as educators in the world's greatest capitalist democracy, one overarching saga of which has been the successful dismantling of public schooling by the juggernaut of neoliberal privatization and the corporatization of the public sphere." (McLaren, 2015, p. 25).

The next section outlines education as a public good to give context to how public schooling is being undone.

2.2.3 The Public Good: A key concept for social justice in education.

The public good in education conceptualises education as accessible, affordable, and beneficial for all people, regardless of their background, location, or ability (Locatelli, 2018). Education is seen as a public good because it contributes to the social, economic, and political development of individuals and societies. Since education also promotes human rights, democracy, peace, and environmental sustainability, it becomes foundational to a democratic society.

However, the public good in education is not always easy to achieve or maintain. There are many challenges and barriers that prevent people from accessing quality education or benefitting from it fully. These challenges include poverty, inequality, discrimination, conflict, corruption, lack of resources, poor governance, and marketization (Giroux, 2015). These factors can undermine the public interest in education and create gaps between those who have access to quality education and those who do not.

Since this study grounds itself in the ideology of education being a public good, an understanding of the fundamental constructs of public and private goods is needed. According to Rondinelli, *et al*. (2008) public and private goods are distinguished as:

> ***Public goods*** are those that are consumed jointly and simultaneously by many people, and from which it is difficult to exclude people who do not pay. Payment (usually through general taxes) for the goods is not closely related to demand or consumption, allocation decisions are made primarily by political processes, individuals generally have little or no choice about whether or not to consume them, and the quantity and quality of such goods are relatively difficult to measure. (p. 63)

> ***Private goods*** are those that can be consumed by individuals. Those people who cannot or will not pay for them can easily be excluded. Allocation decisions are made primarily by market mechanisms. Payment for the goods is closely related to demand and consumption, and individuals have a good deal of choice about the kind and quality of goods they consume. It is relatively easy to measure the quality and quantity of these goods and to allocate per-unit and marginal production costs. (p. 66)

In relation to education, Menashy (2009, p. 311) argues that "any nation that provides free, universal access to primary education (not to mention compulsory attendance) conceives of schooling as a public good by design". Basic education policy in South Africa makes provision for school fees to augment education budgetary allocations, and therefore does not provide classic, unfettered 'universal access to basic education'. In this formulation, the provision of basic education is exclusionary and by design cannot be considered a complete public good in terms of the definitions above.

Designing education reforms that enhance education as a public good in South Africa is possible. However, given the presence of policy technologies that drive private sector values, public education remains at risk of reproducing inequalities and injustices (Ball, 2003). In South Africa, education as a public good has been recognised and encouraged by various policies and initiatives since the end of apartheid in 1994, including the South African Schools Act (Act No. 84) of 1996, The White Paper on Higher Education: A New Vision for South Africa, The National Development Plan (NDP) 2030, and The National Qualification Framework (NQF). However, South Africa is in dire need of addressing the challenges fashioned by our colonial and apartheid histories, these challenges including reducing inequalities in access, participation, achievement, and outcomes among learners based on race, gender, class, disability, location, language, religion, and culture. In addition, the quality and relevance of teaching and learning at all levels needs to be improved. Furthermore, the governance and management of education systems need to be enhanced, and partnerships and collaboration between various stakeholders in education need to be strengthened to ensure coherence, coordination, and alignment of policies and programmes in education.

2.2.4 The "good teacher"

To educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching in which anyone can learn.
bell hooks (1994)

When looking at the top-performing educational systems globally, three key aspects are established. Firstly, the effectiveness of an education system is limited by the competence of its educators. Secondly, enhancing instruction stands as the sole means to enhance results. Thirdly, achieving superior performance necessitates the success of each and every child (Barber & Mourshed, 2007). This section of literature argues that teachers are a fundamental priority in having a good education system.

In South Africa, teachers face poor pay, poor preparation, poor support structures and, overall, a poor reputation (Du Plessis & Letshwene, 2020). This study suggests that the teaching profession and the individuals working as teachers in South Africa are marginalised and discriminated against.

One origin of this marginalisation is the way in which teachers are recruited and trained in South Africa. Barber & Mourshed (2007) argue that to have a 'top education system' one needs the right people to become teachers. They suggest that top performing countries[7] create a sense of elitism around the profession by lowering the enrolment and introducing evaluations to determine teachers' abilities and commitment to the profession (Barber & Mourshed, 2007). The teaching profession in these countries are also highly incentivised through competitive salaries, which shifts people's views on teaching from a last resort to a valid, rewarding option, requiring skill and professionalism. In the South African context this is harder to achieve as inherited and exacerbated socio-economic problems bedevil us. The shortage of qualified teachers results in increased teacher-learner ratios, particularly in rural, lower-income schools, and the teacher-training curriculum does not prepare teachers to survive in the complex, highly differentiated South African schooling system. In addition, the remuneration offered to South African teachers can only be viewed as disgraceful, which further prevents new teachers from entering the profession (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019).

There are two main training options to becoming a teacher in South Africa. An individual can complete a four-year Bachelor of Education degree, or they can complete an appropriate undergraduate degree, followed by a one-year Advanced Diploma in Education, or Post-

[7] I do not subscribe to their evaluation of determining these top performing systems as they rely heavily on standardised testing but do agree that the countries identified as top performing have a common understanding of a healthy a supported school structure.

graduate diploma, which allows for registration with the South African Council for Educators (SACE) (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2015).

In the early post-apartheid period, South Africa needed to remedy the shortage of teachers (discussed later in the chapter). Bursaries and lowering of university requirements to aid the shortfall in teachers allowed for just about anyone to enrol and study as a teacher. This process was also designed to quickly churn out teachers. Thus, a substantial number of underqualified teachers entered the schooling system without the necessary skills and training needed to succeed in the complex learning environments (Schäfer & Wilmot, 2012). This is supported in the data of this study, as three teachers specifically recall being underprepared for the conditions they had to face, sharing that what they had learned at college was not the case in the real world.

To combat this poor quality of teaching, SACE introduced a professional teacher development system that monitors teachers' professional development to incentivise continuing education and teacher development. Sadly, they took a punitive approach, which was, and still is, very poorly received. Teachers were challenged to complete a series of development tasks in a 3-year cycle. A variety of tasks were made available to attain professional points, and at the end of the 3-year cycle a teacher must meet the required point count to retain her/his/their SACE registration which enables them to work as a teacher in South Africa. Teachers were threatened, as the consequences of not attaining the correct number of points would place their careers, salary progression, and employment at risk (Kimathi & Rusznyak, 2018).

In theory, improving the competencies of underqualified and poorly trained teachers is an admirable and important undertaking, but without taking their teaching environments into account, very few teachers were able to comply with this regulation set out by SACE. The state does not adequately consider teachers' workloads, and places unattainable expectations on teachers, especially those in poor socio-economic spaces. This results in said teachers being unfairly labelled as uncooperative and lazy (Du Plessis & Letshwene, 2020).

The education system needs to provide adequate professional development options, free of charge, that is positively incentivised for teachers to be enabled to move out of the margins and into the centre of the educational debate in South Africa. In the words of Paulo Freire (2012, p. 45): "changing implies knowing that it is possible to do it". Teachers cannot act as agents of change if they are oppressed by the conditions of the state.

2.3 Education in South Africa – a brief overview

Critical pedagogy contends that educational environments are contested and shaped by history, emphasising that teaching is political (Kincheloe, 2008). Therefore, it is important to locate this study in the historical[8], ideological, and economic contexts of South African education to understand how the teacher participants were schooled and trained as teachers (Kallaway & Swartz, 2016, p. 21).

South Africa's history is marked by complexity, shaped by the enduring legacy of colonialism and apartheid, both of which continue to influence the social landscape of the country (Christie, 2016), having left an indelible mark on the nation, fostering racial divisions and reinforcing the empowerment of certain racial groups at the expense of others. The transition to democracy in 1994 marked a pivotal moment for South Africa, with the establishment of a new constitution[9] striving towards the realisation of a socially just society for all its citizens.

Christie (2010, p. 694), in examining the shift from apartheid to post-apartheid era, underscores the intricate frameworks of post-apartheid policies designed to reform the educational system. The educational system during apartheid played a significant role in perpetuating racial disparities. 'White' students received an education that equipped them with diverse possibilities for their future, while 'Black', 'Coloured' and 'Indian' students were relegated to versions of 'Bantu', 'Coloured', and 'Indian' education, which offered only basic skills aimed to maintain the superiority of the 'white' population[10] (Christie, 2016). Addressing and rectifying these historical injustices remains an ongoing struggle in the present.

> The National Development Plan's (NDP) vision for 2030 is that South Africans should have access to training and education of the highest quality, characterised by significantly improved learning outcomes. Education then becomes an important instrument in equalising individuals' life chances, ensuring economic mobility and success, and advancing our key goals of economic growth, employment creation, poverty eradication, and the reduction of inequality (DPME 2014 in Sayed, *et al.*, 2018, p. 34)

To understand the complexity in achieving the vision for 2030 summarised above, a brief historical account is needed to appreciate the difficulties of the present as influenced by the past.

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[8] Social, economic, and political forces.

[9] Refers to the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act, No. 108 of 1996.

[10] I do not subscribe to racism. The terms used in the proposed study are sadly descriptive in South Africa with no accurate alternatives to capture essence.

2.3.1 Pre-apartheid education

South Africa is infamously known for its unjust past, namely apartheid. But even before the institutionalisation of apartheid legislation there were policies in place that mark the start of the injustice. Kallaway and Swartz (2016, p. 20) write that

> …there are many generalisations that can be broken down, but one strong belief held by many is the common understanding that education provided by the state in South Africa can only be understood in the terms of oppression.

There are historical milestones that lead to this common understanding of inequality that reach as far back as the first colonisers entering the African continent in April 1652 and providing dehumanising schooling experiences to the enslaved colonised population (Soudien, 2019b). Although not the specific focus of this study, it is important to note these origins.

According to Christie (2020), South Africa's violent and complicated colonial past predates apartheid by a significant period, making it difficult to categorise. However, the important note here is that missionaries were the only ones responsible for schooling 'Black' people during the later period of colonial rule. As stated by Kallaway:

> In the Cape Colony, throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the dominant tradition of missionary education stressed the need to ensure that schools for indigenous people offered the same curriculum and education of the same quality (whatever that might have meant) as schools for the colonist (Kallaway, 2002, p. 9).

This indicates that the objectives of missionary schooling, although segregated, strived to bring equal opportunity to the enslaved colonised population. The state later began to close missionary schools and shift 'Black' education under tight state control. The interplay of the different logics of racial segregation and labour reproduction become evident in this shift. Soudien (2002) and Kallaway (2016) support this view by arguing that the shift in educational governance from missionaries to state control led to further differentiated provisions which deepened the already prevailing inequality and injustice in education. Mission schools as religious-led institutions strived to provide education to the labouring classes. By the state taking control of these schools and prescribing the curriculum, they ensured the working class would remain an underclass in society. This demonstrates how state power has influenced the educational agenda and that South African educational spaces have always been politically charged. Hence it is important for teachers to know and understand South Africa's educational past, and how far back inequality and injustice reaches, to be educated about the political nature of education, in order to make better sense of their educational spaces and their daily work.

The following subsection briefly discusses apartheid education.

2.3.2 Apartheid education

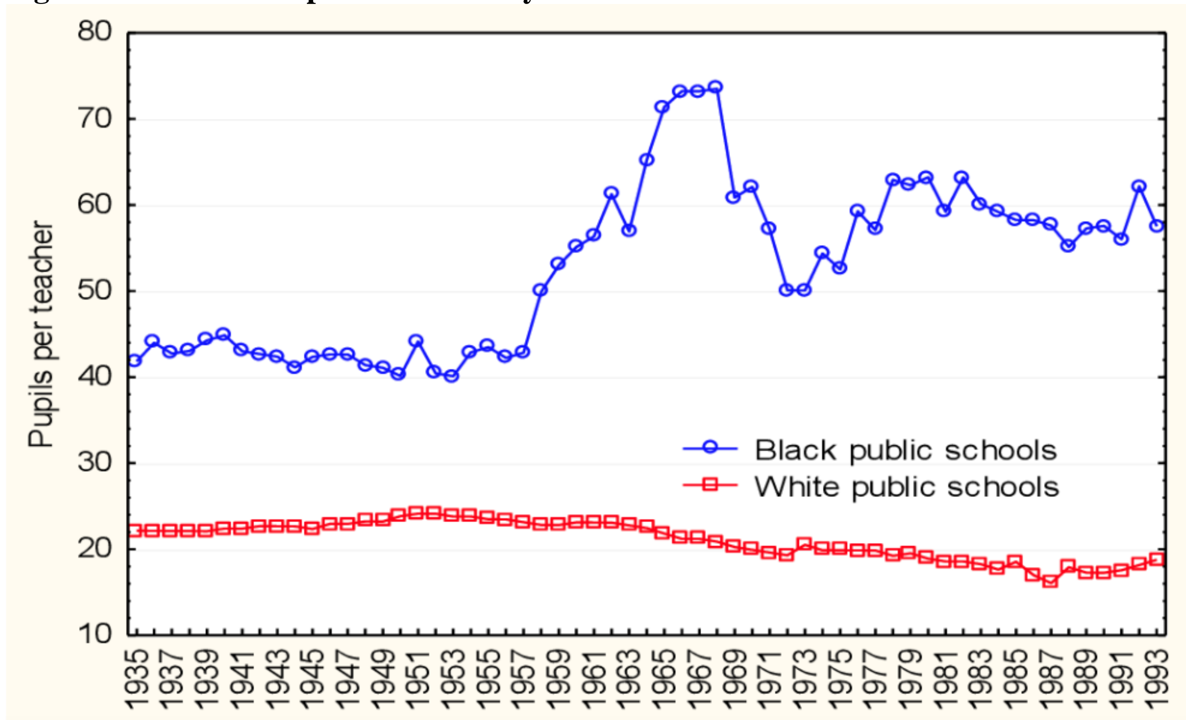
In 1948, in the aftermath of World War 2, the South African state led by the National Party (NP) pursued a social policy of "separateness" based on racial segregation called apartheid. Within months, they introduced a new educational policy framework to support apartheid ideology through establishing the Native Education Commission[11]. The commission passed the Bantu Education Act in 1953[12] (Soudien, 2002).

The Bantu Education Act of 1953 governed the education of African children. In developing a socioeconomic plan for South Africa, schooling for Africans was reported to be centred around the needs and values of the culture and the communities in which the schools were located. These needs and values reduced their schooling to fulfil manual labour and basic jobs that the government judged suitable for their 'race', as the ideology was that indigenous African people needed to accept being servile to all 'white' South Africans (Bauer, 2020; Hyslop, 1988).

With the introduction of Bantu Education and making schooling compulsory for all, the education system was faced with a large shortfall in qualified teachers. This resulted in classroom sizes of 40 to 60 children per teacher. Alternative schools were established by activists but were shut down and made illegal by the end of the 1950s to ensure no unsanctioned education could be received by 'Black', 'Coloured' and 'Indian' South Africans (Chisholm, 2019; Hyslop, 1988; Kallaway, 2002). As an example of the vastly different lived realities of school-going children categorised according to 'race'', the figure below shows the vastly unequal pupil-to-teacher ratios from 1935 to 1993 in South Africa:

[11] Under the leadership of W.W.M Eiselen and is therefore also referred to the Eiselen Commission.
[12] It followed this with the establishment of the Commission on Coloured Education under the leadership of De Vos Malan in 1953. This led to the Coloured Persons Education Act in 1963, which provided a model for the passage of the Indian Education Act, which was formally accepted by parliament in 1965. Bantu Education was officially introduced into schools in 1955, Coloured Education in 1964, and Indian Education in 1966 (Soudien, 2002, p. 212).

Figure 1: Teacher- Pupil ratio for the years 1935 to 1993.



(Khumalo, 2014, pg. 41)

Teachers were not exempt from the ideology of apartheid as the state took control of schooling and training teachers (Chisholm 2019; Soudien, 2002). As a result, teachers could not extend their repertoires even if they wanted to, mainly out of fear for repercussions. This did not hinder all teachers; some illegally taught content in protest but could only do so if they were fortunate enough to have received 'uninfluenced education' themselves. Neville Alexander (Alexander, 2023) and Alie Fataar (Omar, 2015) were amongst many who risked their lives to act as agents for social change.

One of the most forceful ways the apartheid government protected 'white' power was through unequal distributions of resources and funds (Smith, 1992). A report by Amnesty International (2020, p. 19) highlights these unequal distributions:

> By the 1970s per capita government spending on black education was a tenth of that for white education. As a result, black schools had inferior facilities, teachers, and textbooks. By 1978, only 20% of university students were black even though they comprised 70% of the population. Teacher-pupil ratios varied significantly. In primary education they averaged 1:18 in white schools, 1:24 in Indian schools, 1:27 in coloured schools and 1:39 in black schools. Discrimination was compounded by difference in teacher qualifications.

These inequalities are still present today, even though attempts have been made to reform policy to undo them. "Racial hierarchies and different forms of labour control were put in place

in coercive ways long before apartheid institutionalised these" (Christie & McKinney, 2017, p. 1) and continue to exist long after the end of apartheid.

From 1948 until 1994, schooling and education for the 'white' minority and the 'Black', 'Coloured', and 'Indian' majority remained unequal, strengthening the minority and neglecting the majority with the use of state powers. It is from the context of these injustices that the 1994 South African democratic period was born.

2.3.3 Post-apartheid education – the promise of social justice

After the fall of apartheid in 1994, the post-apartheid government of national unity (GNU) framed and swore to uphold the new democratic constitution[13] working towards a socially just system. This form of democracy aligns with a society in which individuals actively engage in its establishment, allowing for the flourishing of individual freedoms and fostering harmonious coexistence among its people. The role of education is crucial for the creation of such a democracy (Foley, *et al.*, 2015, p. 115), but what type of education?

South Africa needed an education system that could address the three functions of "ensuring distributive justice, providing the conditions for capital accumulation, and ensuring greater responsiveness and participation in forging unity/nationhood" (Sayed, 2002, p. 38). In this context, education becomes vital to the social world we construct (Biesta, 2004; Christie, 2010; Christie 2016; Fontdevila & Verger, 2015; Fontdevila, Verger and Avelar, 2019; Giroux, 2013; Jansen, 2004).

While the advocacy for free and compulsory education as an inherent human right, central to the 'Black' (inclusive 'Coloured' and 'Indian') resistance predates the year 1994, the formal recognition and institutionalisation of this occurred through the enactment of the new democratic constitution of South Africa in 1994 (Mestry, 2014). In 1996, the South African Schools Act (SASA) was promulgated to "provide for a uniform system for the organisation, governance and funding of schools" (South African Schools Act, 1996). For this to occur, a large commitment and investment by the state was needed (Ahmed & Sayed, 2009, p. 203). The state coffers were left depleted after apartheid and the post-apartheid government opted for certain compromises[14] which led to constrained government investment and a dependence on private funding (Ahmed and Sayed, 2009). The tension created through the transition from

[13] Refers to the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act, No. 108 of 1996.
[14] This is a point of debate as this policy approach was not universally (in South Africa) accepted.

apartheid to democracy prompted the educational change agenda where the choice for neoliberalism espousing market mechanisms were employed (Christie, 2008).

The end of apartheid also "resulted in an agreed commitment to education decentralisation and devolution" (Sayed, Motala, Carel, & Ahmed, 2020, p. 2) by restructuring the 'white' education system, in anticipation of democracy. Schools were categorised into a "Models" system: Model A being a private school, Model B a public school and Model C a semi-private school with greatly increased autonomy (Christie, 2020). Power was handed over to the School Governing Body (SGB) comprising mostly of parents (50%+1, relative to other stakeholders) to control the conditions of admission, finance, and language of instruction in their schools (Christie & McKinney, 2017). Some time after the implementation of SASA (1996), the "Model" system was replaced by classifying schools into quintiles (assessing the wealth status of a school relative to the geographical location in which these schools are situated), which unintentionally reproduce these hierarchies of inequalities in schools[15]. Schools in low-income communities were categorised as quintiles 1-3, with relatively larger state subsidies, and schools in higher-income communities were categorised as quintiles 4-5, with lower state subsidies. What follows are the national quintile subsidies extracted from the Government Gazette 44254, Government Notice 192 of 10 March 2021:

Table 1: National table of targets for school allocations (2021-2022)

Year	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**
NQ1 – Q3	R 1466	R 1536	R 1610
NQ4	R 735	R 770	R 807
NQ5	R 254	R 266	R 279
No fee threshold	R 1466	R 1536	R 1610
Small schools national fixed amount	R 33968	R 35598	R 37307

(Republic of South Africa, 2021)

Furthermore, SASA (1996) connects the contentious issue of school fees to the school budget. The goal was for the governing body to provide parents with all the relevant information regarding the school's funding. After that, parents would determine whether school fees are required. Therefore, parents carry the responsibility for determining if fees are charged, the level of fees, and the conditions for exemption from paying school fees (Makhafola, 2022).

[15] A more detailed history and formation of school governance and funding can be gained through reading Sayed, *et al*., 2020.

This is a classic case of the state decentralising its fiscal responsibility without providing the full quantum of required resources.

In 2007, with the implementation of the ‘no-fees school’ policy enactment of 2006, certain schools in poor communities were declared ‘no-fee schools’ to support families in poor communities. Ahmed and Sayed (2009), through reviewing Section 39(7) of the South African Schools Act (1996), argue that the intention to support the poorer communities by providing free education only increased the gap between the privileged and the marginalised communities. As the parents were able to determine the school fees, the previously advantaged communities utilised their privilege to invest even more capital in their schools, making access to such institutions unattainable for the marginalised and poor communities. Through the power of the SGB in affluent schools, they capitalised on their “societal, material as well as organisational advantages” (Dyk & White, 2019).

Teacher education reform initiatives in post-apartheid South Africa have been significantly influenced by overarching global and local narratives shaping their trajectory and ongoing development (Chisholm, 2019). However, Chisholm (2019) contends that among the contentious reforms implemented by the post-apartheid government was the decision to shut down all teacher training colleges designated for “Black’, ‘Coloured’, ‘Indian’ and ‘white’ populations, assimilating the larger institutions into higher education establishments. Higher education institutions (universities and universities of technology), to this day, hold a certain identity of privilege as they were primarily accessible to ‘white’ students in the years of apartheid, and now are of such a nature that aspects of funding, governance, and curricula are still withholding equal access for all South African citizens (Chisholm, 2019; Jansen, 2003).

> Post-apartheid South Africa continues to be profoundly divided along socio-economic lines, and the wealth/poverty divide continues to overlap with racial designations for most of the population except for a small elite. (Christie & McKinney, 2017, p. 8)

In the realm of policy settings, education persists in perpetuating inequalities, both consciously and unconsciously. This phenomenon undermines the intended roles of education within the framework of the new democratic state, encompassing distributive justice, the facilitation of conditions for capital accumulation, and the fostering of increased responsiveness and participation for unity (Ahmed & Sayed, 2009; Christie, 2010). As highlighted by Ahmed and Sayed (2009) and further supported by Christie (2010), this perpetuation of disparities contributes to the deepening socio-economic divide.

Kallaway (2016), in arguing the importance of history, especially in education, states that post-apartheid South Africa

> …did not take the trouble to understand with care what was wrong with apartheid education before attempting to remedy the problems through grand plans, which included the reform of governance and curriculum. The country was, in fact, suffering from historical amnesia and has had to pay a high price. (Kallaway, 2016, p. 36)

The price South Africans continue to pay is that of injustice consistently prevailing after the many efforts made in pursuit of a socially just South Africa. What Kallaway (2016) is advocating is that a deliberate look at what was wrong in the past is needed to find a better way forward in the future.

2.4 Social Justice as a major feature of post-apartheid education

The idea of social justice is about how society can share opportunities and fair benefits for all (Mollenkamp, 2022). Different social factors and situations affect how social justice is achieved. In this vein, oppression and discrimination make it impossible for certain people to reach their goals. Social justice tries to safeguard the basic rights and freedoms of everyone but must also deal with the problems caused by past injustice (Given, 2008). For example, the legacy of colonialism and apartheid still shapes and frames the current South African education system (Amnesty International, 2020).

In reading Musara, Grant and Vorster (2020) a plethora of definitions are provided to define, but more importantly, *understand* social justice. They conclude their literature review on social justice with:

> ...social justice is a complex concept; its numerous contested definitions converge on key conceptual points: a sense of distributive justice relating to fair allocation of resources; status equality for all members of society and, associative justice focusing on representation and equitable distribution of power (Cribb and Gewirtz *2003*; Fraser *2008*; Shriberg and Clinton *2016*). These views of justice are key to the understanding of social justice in education. (Musara, Grant, & Vorster, 2020, p. 9)

The key conceptual points in understanding social justice provide this study with a foundation in comprehending the conditions of education in South Africa as unjust and unequal. As previously stated, the post-apartheid government established a new democratic constitution pivoted towards social justice. Such a democracy should correspond to a society where people can participate in its formation, where individual freedoms blossom, and where there is harmonious coexistence among people.

The post-apartheid government implemented a series of policies that applied these key conceptual points of social justice to reform education. As an example, the National Education Policy Act (NEPA) of 1996 provided a framework for development of a democratic, equitable, quality and relevant education system to meet the needs of all citizens in South Africa; the National Norms and Standards for School Funding (NNSSF) which aimed to ensure equitable and adequate funding for all public schools, and The National School Governance Policy (NSGP) which aimed to promote democratic governance at all levels of school management through decentralisation, participation, accountability, and transparency. However, although well-intentioned, many of these policies knowingly and unknowing perpetuated the prevailing injustice of South Africa's past (Badat & Sayed, 2014; Sayed, Motala, Carel, & Ahmed, 2020).

The following section outlines neoliberalism, the ideology that, it is argued in this study, undermines any attempt towards social justice in education.

2.5 Unveiling Neoliberalism: Tracing the roots of South Africa's departure from social justice ideals

The post-apartheid government needed to "build a just and equal society" amidst big global change (Christie, 2008, p. 2). Hence, the imperative was to construct a democracy, foster economic development, and regulate society in accordance with the principles of human dignity, equality, and justice. Initially, the macro-economic plan (Reconstruction and Development Programme - RDP) implemented by the post-apartheid government served as a strategy to address the interrelated problems of housing, unemployment, education, health, and others (Vally & Motala, 2014). As fiscal problems deepened, and the new "Capitalist World Order" was in full swing in the US and UK, South Africa changed their macro-economic plan to a neoliberal Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) policy, largely echoing global policy trends. GEAR realigned education policy toward economic growth, which is driven by neoliberal ideology[16](Christie, 2020). Neoliberalism is a global phenomenon defined as:

> The theory of political economic practices proposing that human well-being can be best advanced by the maximisation of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade. (Harvey, 2007, p. 22)

By aligning education with economic growth and encapsulating neoliberal ideology, the question of purpose in education again arises. Education as an enlightening experience through social interactions amongst students and teachers is a sacred tradition which is now being

[16] Ideology is defined as: "The framework of thought constructed and held by members of a society to justify or rationalize an existing social order".

altered by foregrounding economic growth (Ball, 2003; Giroux 2003a; Giroux, 2015; Havey, 2005). Biesta (2009) writes that measurement and comparison of educational outcomes are dictating the discussion around educational purpose and instructing educational policy and practice. According to Giroux (2015, p. 40), "education is about more than harnessing capital… it is at heart the laboratory where public values, justice and democracy come together to provide the foundation for critical agents and engaged global citizens." In driving an economic growth agenda as the core policy framing for education, poor performing public schools have been identified as spaces where private entities can infiltrate public educational spaces by promising growth and opportunity to the marginalised.

Verger and Moschetti (2017, p. 1) define public private partnerships (PPPs) "as arrangements between public and private actors for the delivery of goods, services and/or facilities." In education, this delivery of goods and services comes at a cost in the form of educational reforms that are geared towards capitalist exchange values and in turn changes the nature of education as a public good. Amaral and Fossum (2021, p.305) state that

> …privatization is a controversial topic not only because evidence is scant as to its capacity to improve efficiency or to offer better 'value-for-money', but also due to its problematic relationship with the widely articulated view of education as a fundamental human right.

Thus, as the education Public-Private-Partnerships (ePPPs) supposedly present various benefits such as reducing costs, improving quality, and increasing efficiency, they also pose challenges to matters such as equity, accountability, and governance.

In South Africa, where the state is responsible for education provision, the decision to implement ePPPs in the form of the Collaboration Schools Pilot Project (CSP) involved 18 schools in the Western Cape that are run by private companies or trusts that receive funding from the Department of Education (DBE) and other sources (Feldman, 2020). The decision to implement these ePPPs arose from various factors such as policy objectives, legal frameworks, stakeholder interests, and evidenced-based analysis, which are all geared towards neoliberal ideology. They do so by supporting the commodification and commercialisation of education (Giroux, 2015). The consequence thereof is that the concept of education as a public good is wilting as the state shifts its responsibility in education provision to that of private entities, whose values and objectives do not align with equality and social justice, but rather with neoliberal technologies of performance, competition, marketization, and profits. Draxler (2008) argues that ePPPs should be assessed through a human rights lens, considering how they affect the access to quality education for all learners.

It is no secret that the schooling system in South Africa is struggling, although it has made marked improvements since apartheid.

> High enrolment rates hide the fact that around 15 percent of learners do not complete Grade 9, and only around half achieve the National Senior Certificate after 12 years of schooling. The likelihood that a child from a poor socio-economic background reaching matric by age 19 or 20 is 17 percent, compared to 88 percent for a child from a more privileged background (Taylor & Robinson, 2017, p. 26).

Private actors use such statistics to gain access to public spaces as they have good regulatory capacity and management skills. Market-oriented PPPs, which partner with low-fee or commercial private schools, that aim to expand the market for private education, increase choice and competition. This slow incursion of private values reconfigures an understanding of public schooling as a service towards the public good, and infringes on our right to education.

For teachers, these neoliberal mechanisms have dire consequences. Teachers' conditions of work and pay are regularised together with the implementations of a teacher appraisal system (Christie, 2008). Teachers are oriented to teach towards a test or exam for learners to qualify with a certificate, diploma, or degree of sorts to facilitate them being economic and competitive actors within society. The better a teacher's class averages and student achievements, the better teachers perform in their appraisals. Teacher success is now measured by the success of their students using standardised testing. Furthermore, this neoliberal ideology values competition and individualism, and "legitimises a culture of cruelty" (Giroux, 2015, p. 125). These values reduce teachers' work to market mechanisms, turning education into a sellable product.

To conclude, this shift in ideology drives what was initially a broadly social democratic approach of the post-apartheid government to a conservative neoliberal position (Williams & Taylor, 2000) with dire consequences for the pursuit for social justice. This study attempts to illustrate how these two forces, one being the democratic ideal and the other neoliberalism, present themselves in teachers' pedagogic repertoires and learning spaces.

2.6 Insights from the Literature Review

This study sets out to explore the concept critical pedagogy in relation to the teaching repertoires of five experienced teachers in South Africa (further detailed in Chapter 3). For this exploration, the literature review introduced key concepts that are used to analyse and discuss the teacher's narratives. The chapter and specifically this section, equips the reader with a conceptual framework with which to view the data and findings.

The purpose of the study is not to define the participants as critical pedagogues, but rather to attain, from the conceptual field of critical pedagogy, the central principles of their critical

pedagogical orientation to the world i.e. looking to draw out the social justice pedagogical orientations as presented in the teacher participants' narratives.

The literature review conceptualises critical pedagogy as the way in which teachers understand education and the performative nature of their agency (Giroux, 2013). Moreover, the study argues that teachers who orientate their pedagogical approach to social justice, teach from a standpoint that society can share opportunities, and benefit fairly in opposition to the dominant "Capitalist Order" in which competition, marketization, and individualism are prioritised (Christie, 2020; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2015; Kincheloe, 2008; McLaren, 2005).

Within a social justice pedagogical orientation, education is a public good. Locatelli (2018) states that education must be accessible, affordable, and beneficial for all people, regardless of their background, location, or ability. In the historical landscape of South African education, defined by colonialism and apartheid, education has never been accessible, affordable nor beneficial for all people (Kallaway, 2020; Chisholm, 2019; Christie, 2020). The political and economic forces that perpetuate the inequality and injustices then become a central tenet framing the pedagogic repertoires of South African teachers who orient themselves towards social justice (Giroux, 2013; Harvey, 2005; Soudien, 2002).

In this vein, as critical and transformational intellectuals; *where* the participants teach, *how* they teach, and *what* they teach provides insight to the current education debate in which the neoliberal agenda is revealed as a driving force to perpetuate inequality and injustice in South Africa and globally.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Chapter Outline

This section aims to systematically describe the research approach and strategies used in this study, and justifies the methodological choices made. The chapter explains why the study is qualitative in nature and outlines the procedures used to sample participants, determine the research setting, and analyse and report data within the qualitative approach. Furthermore, issues of validity and reliability will be discussed, and the chapter explains the ethical considerations of the study.

3.2 Research Strategy – a qualitative approach

A research strategy refers to the overall approach employed in conducting social research, as outlined by Bryman (2012). The focus of this research centres on teachers and their involvement with critical pedagogy, initiating from a process of personal reflection and the potential transformation of my own pedagogical perspectives and practices.

As per Creswell (2003), research can generally be approached through three methodologies: quantitative, qualitative and a mixed method approach. Quantitative research is an approach in which the "variables will be controlled, and the study will be guided with an acute focus on how the variables relate" (Henning, 2013, p. 3). Qualitative research places a primary focus on the use of language and textual data rather than numerical quantification. It predominantly employs an inductive approach to explore the connection between theory and research (Given, 2008): the theory is produced from the data. Qualitative research foregrounds how individuals interpret their social environments. It also represents a view of social reality as a "constantly shifting emergent property of individuals' creation" (Bryman, 2012, p. 36).

This study adopts a qualitative approach, as the variables are not controlled as the "freedom and natural development of action and representation is captured" (Henning, 2013, p. 3). This study seeks to develop a complex narrative, analysing accounts, reporting the detailed views of the teacher-participants, and conducting the research in a natural setting as evidence to legitimize the study (Creswell, 2007).

Although qualitative research is critiqued for not being 'scientific' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 2) this study utilises this approach to unpack teachers' narratives and explore how (if at all) critical pedagogy is inserted into their engagement with all aspects of teaching and learning. In selecting this approach, the study attempts to contribute to the body of qualitative research studies by using rigorous research techniques, and producing trustworthy data that enhances

the knowledge base regarding teachers' work and the lives of teachers in pursuit of social justice in South Africa.

3.3 Research Method – an exploratory study

This qualitative study is empirical in nature, with an exploration of new (primary) textual data collected in a natural field setting, and utilises an exploratory research design (Mouton, 2001). There are three types of research design, as outlined by Robson (2002): descriptive, explanatory, and exploratory. Each design has a specific purpose. A descriptive design "provides a picture of the situation, person or event to show how things relate to each other and as it naturally occurs" (Lelissa, 2018, p. 1), but it cannot explain said picture, event, or person. An exploratory study is employed when insufficient knowledge exists about a phenomenon, in this case, teachers' reflective journeys in advancing the public good and social justice through their teaching repertoires. Unlike explanatory studies that assign 'why' or 'how' to descriptive data, exploratory designs delve into previously unstudied research questions, facilitating (here) the discovery of new information about teachers' work as agents of progressive social change. This approach can introduce subjectivity and potential bias in the production of new data, and attempting broad generalisations from a small sample is deemed unethical. Consequently, this exploratory study aims not to provide conclusive 'answers' but rather explores teachers' reflective narratives to prompt a deeper understanding, paving the way for more conclusive research (Lelissa, 2018, p. 2).

In addition, Denzin and Lincoln (2018) argue that behind any qualitative research project is the researcher's own history, as they work, write, and argue from the standpoint of a particular class, gender, racial, cultural, and ethnic community. Therefore, a brief introduction of the researcher follows:

I am a mid-30s middle-class female teacher with 13 years of experience in South African schools. Raised in a community of native German speakers in Pretoria, South Africa, I am fluent in German, English, and Afrikaans, with conversational skills in Northern Sotho. My education includes a 4-year Bachelor's degree in Education from the University of Pretoria and an Honours degree in School Management and Leadership form the University of Johannesburg. Currently pursuing a Master's in education in Cape Town, specialising in Education Policy, Leadership and Change. I faced challenges due to geographical unfamiliarity during my research, initially impacting participant recruitment and integration into the schooling environment. The solution to this conundrum is explained later in this chapter.

Passionate about teaching, I embarked on this research project to explore my values concerning education in South Africa. I view teaching as a powerful tool for community enhancement, upholding public good values, and advocating for social justice. Throughout the

study, I maintained self-reflection on my biases as a teacher and privileged South African citizen to uphold the research's integrity.

The following steps were taken to conduct this research. Firstly, general research questions were explored within the research interests of the researcher, namely teachers in South Africa. In a second and third step, a selection of relevant participants was made, from whom relevant data was collected by means of virtual (because of lockdown restrictions during the COVID-19 global pandemic), semi-structured, in-depth interviews. In a fourth step, the data collected was transcribed and interpreted to explore key concepts. The data was then analysed in relation to the literature review and by comparing the participants' narratives. Finally, the research was written up and presented in the form of a minor dissertation. These steps will be set out in more detail in the following subsections.

3.4 Setting

The research context is defined as the physical, social, and cultural environment where the researcher carries out the study. This study focuses on teachers' narratives and reflections through virtual interviews due to COVID-19 restrictions. Acknowledging the limitations of a virtual platform, it poses challenges to building natural relationships but remained feasible. The pandemic not only altered the physical setting but also influenced the psychological context of the teacher-participants. Their concerns about work and learners were noted during the data collection process. The participants all reside in the Western Cape, representing diverse socio-economic backgrounds and working in various school classifications detailed in Chapter 2. The next subsection details participant selection.

3.5 Sampling Strategy and Participants

"Sampling is the process of choosing actual data sources from larger set of possibilities" (Given, 2008, p. 799). To effectively conduct the research on teachers' pedagogic repertoires, a stratified purposive selection was made.

Purposive sampling refers to an intentional selection of participants and sites in line with the specific requirements of the study itself (Creswell, 2007, p. 125). Stratified purposive sampling refers to "sampling of individuals within subgroups of interest" (Bryman, 2012, p. 419). In exploring the perceptions of teachers regarding critical pedagogy as part of their pedagogic repertoire, I sought out five female teachers, with extensive (10 or more years) experience, as the study is interested in how teachers' work experiences awaken a deeper understanding of education and professional agency. As my research stems from a point of self-reflection as a female teacher in South Africa, my experiences have shown that female teachers experiences

instances of disempowerment due to the strong patriarchal structures of South African schools. I therefore deliberately sought to select female teachers as my participants. A sample of five participants were selected due to the limitations of a minor dissertation and time constraints implicit to qualitative research. Furthermore, in understanding the unjust and unequal schooling landscape of South Africa, participants from all classifications of South African schools were chosen, to allow for the exploration of how the social world we inhabit impacts the way teachers perceive and understand education.

A key concern was to find participants form various classification of schools e.g., independent/private, public upper quintiles, and public lower quintiles, as well as racial classification in order to be conscious of the ever-present faultline of 'race' in post-apartheid South Africa. I was aware of and concerned about the appropriateness of requesting teachers' participation as an "outsider". Approaching marginalised schoolteachers as a 'white' female may construct a disproportionate relationship of power. Therefore, connections were made through a third-party, a fellow Master's student who was a prominent figure in a national teachers' trade union. This individual introduced me to potential participants that met the criteria of the study, and who were perceived to be people that would find pleasure in sharing their knowledge and narratives with me. In this manner, participants were selected who met the criteria of the study, while still allowing these potential participants to enact their agency in choosing whether or not to give of their time and to share their insights.

The search for participants concluded with two teacher-participants from private schools, one teacher-participant from a public quintile 5 school, and two teacher-participants from public lower (1-3) quintile schools. Hereafter the teachers-participants will be denoted using an abridged description in parentheses, which appears in a smaller font and light colour text so as not to distract from the overall 'optics' of the writing. The abridged participant descriptions are detailed in the table below:

Participants Name		Sana	Subira	Sabine	Sofia	Sarah
Gender		Female	Female	Female	Female	Female
Self-identified 'race'		'Coloured'	'Black'	'White'	'White'	'White'
Age		52	45	62	39	42
School	Public / Private	Public	Public	Public	Private	Private
	Quintile	3	3	5	n/a	n/a
	Fee-Paying	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Primary / High School	Primary	Primary	High	High	High
Length at School		17	16	37	changed schools frequently	changed schools frequently
Length in Education		28	16	39	17	19
Abridged Description		(F,C,52,PubQ3,LS-17,LE-28)	(F,B,45,PubQ3,LS-16,LE-16)	(F,W,62,PubQ5,LS-37,LE-39)	(F,W,39,Pvt,LE-17)	(F,W,42,Pvt,LE-19)

More detailed descriptions of each participant can be found in Chapter 4 as they pertain to the findings of the study.

3.6 Data Collection Instruments

"The term *data* refers to a collection of information" (Given, 2008, p. 185). There are many different research instruments in qualitative research such as observations, interviews, focus groups, documents analysis, tests, surveys, or checklists that are used as a tool to collect, measure, and analyse data. The interview is the most utilized technique when collecting qualitative data (Bryman, 2012, p. 469). This study used interviews as the primary instrument.

Various interview types exist, such as unstructured and semi-structured interviews. This study utilised semi-structured interviews, a data collection method where pre-determined open-ended questions are posed to the participants. Unlike unstructured interviews, this approach provides the researcher with more control over the interview topics, while avoiding fixed response

ranges associated with structured interviews or closed-question questionnaires (Given, 2008, p. 810). Utilising semi-structured interviews offers the advantage of fostering two-way communication, allowing for follow-up questions and clarification requests to delve into participants' responses.

In crafting the interview schedule for semi-structured interviews, careful attention was given to its development. This schedule, a predetermined list of structured questions, served as a guide during interviews (Mouton, 2001). Multiple revisions were conducted to ensure clarity, relevance, and avoidance of leading questions. I personally sat for my own interview schedule, with a friend posing the questions, in order to test the schedule's effectiveness. The questions on the interview schedule featured a combination of open-ended queries to delve into the inner workings of teacher-participants, and planned, direct questions to facilitate straightforward findings, aligned with research objectives (Appendix 1).

3.7 Operationalising the Study

The following section describes the procedure of collecting the interview data.

Before embarking on the process of collecting data, ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Cape Town (Appendix 5) and the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) approved data-collection in the schools (Appendix 4). After the participant sample had been identified, participants were contacted and provided with consent forms (Appendix 2) and information sheets (Appendix 3).

Once informed consent had been given, I arranged for the interviews to take place via an online platform, Zoom. The estimated time required for one interview was three hours (divided into two sessions). The online platform allowed for a good quality video and audio recording which participants verbally consented to a second time before the beginning of each interview. The interviews took place at a time selected by the participants, and each participant attended the interview from their homes, which ensured a calm private space. During and after each interview, the researcher took extensive notes to supplement the recorded video data, and to ensure no meaning, theme or concept was lost during the transcription process. These notes included non-verbal communication and tonal changes, as qualitative research holds that what participants say is important, but more so *how* they say it (Bryman, 2012. Own emphasis).

It is noted here, as an example of being mindful of the participant, an instance during an online interview when the participant left to answer her front door and never returned to the interview! Although the participant's actions came across to me at the time as disrespectful, the researcher

was reminded that the participant was gifting her/his/their information and offering her/his/their time for zero profit to them, and the researcher should be grateful that the participant conducted a follow-up interview a few days later.

In some cases, Internet connectivity interrupted the flow of the interview sessions. The researcher was able to repeat the question and have the participant repeat her/his/their response in each case, ensuring no data collection was lost during these connection failures.

Once the interviews were completed, they were transcribed by the researcher. This is the process whereby recorded interviews are written into text that later serves as the primary data for analysis. (Given, 2008, p. 884). The raw and transcribed interview data was then stored on a password protected laptop as well as on the University of Cape Town's student drive, which is also password protected. One copy of the transcribed data was printed and bound for analysis purposes, and a full copy of all the research files was stored on one encrypted external hard drive. This is to ensure all the data is protected from both natural hazards and ethical breaches. Throughout the research process the data and documentation relating to the study, was only accessible to the researcher and her supervisor Dr Y. Omar.

The next subsection delves into the ethical considerations and measures taken in the study.

3.8 Ethical considerations

Given (2008) suggests that qualitative research is a moral and ethical endeavour because they are human endeavours. In every research endeavour, informed consent and avoidance of harm are paramount when working with human subjects. Given that this research project falls within the domain of social and educational research, it involves the collection of data from the lives and activities of teachers. Adhering to an ethical framework rooted in respect for individual knowledge, democratic values, and academic freedom is imperative (Dowling & Brown, 2009, p. 33). Ethical principles guiding this research encompass 'Consent', 'Transparency', 'Right to withdraw', 'Minimizing Harm', 'Respecting Autonomy', 'Protecting Privacy', 'Offering Reciprocity', and 'Treating All Equitably', as outlined by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018). Upholding these ethical values is essential in safeguarding the well-being of participants and advancing social justice in research practice.

During the sampling process, the researcher provided the participants with reasonable and sufficient knowledge about the researcher, including the background of the researcher and the intentions of the study by means of an information sheet (Appendix C). Once the potential participant demonstrated interest, the researcher secured informed consent from each

participant. A consent form which was approved by the supervisor of the study was shared and explained. Both the information sheet as well as the consent form were signed and dated by all participants and the researcher and filed. The consent letter noted that participants agreed to participate in interviews and had the right to withdraw at any stage of the research process without providing a reason. The participants were provided with the researcher's and supervisor's contact information, and any questions or queries could be directed to the researcher at any point and would be addressed within 24 hours. It was important for the researcher to have an open channel of communication with the participant to foster a trusting relationship throughout the study. Research participants were briefed on the measures in place to safeguard data confidentiality. They were also informed about who could access the data (researcher and supervisor only). This provided participants with the opportunity to assess the sufficiency of the protection and to determine the acceptability of potential disclosure of private information to involved parties. No objections were recorded. All participants graciously agreed to the terms.

Confidentiality refers to the obligation of a researcher to safeguard entrusted information (University of Cape Town, 2020). In social and behavioural research, the main concern for participants is typically the invasion of privacy or a violation of confidentiality. By upholding privacy and confidentiality, the researcher ensured the safeguarding of participants from potential adverse effects, including psychological distress, embarrassment, as well as social consequences such as job loss or financial harm (University of California, 2024).

In safeguarding the confidentiality of the participants, measures were taken to ensure the participants privacy was protected. Privacy is the regulation of the scope, timing, and conditions surrounding the disclosure of oneself, encompassing physical, behavioural, or intellectual aspects, as articulated by Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey (2011). Therefore, the researcher anonymised all the data in addition to the steps detailed below.

The following practices were implemented to enhance the level of confidentiality and privacy:

- Securely stored data documents within locked locations;
- Assigned codes to data documents to capture identifiable details. Simultaneously, a distinct document is maintained to connect the study codes with the subjects' identifying information, ensuring exclusive access only for the primary researcher;
- Limiting access to identifiable information;
- Encrypting identifiable data.

Additionally, the following contextual information was not made available in the study:

- Names – pseudonyms were created for each participant.
- Addresses
- Phone number
- E-mail addresses
- Identity numbers
- School names – these have been removed from the transcripts and replaced with '[School name]'

The researcher believes that all ethical considerations were adhered to and that the research study complies in such a way as to add to the existing body of knowledge in a trustworthy way.

3.9 Data analysis

Data analysis guides the process of "gathering data and linking the findings with higher order concepts" (Given, 2008, p. 186). As per Sun (2011), qualitative data analysis shares common features such as simultaneous data collection and analysis, the generation of memos during and after data collection, the application of coding, the utilisation of writing as an analytical tool, and the formation of concepts and connections to existing literature in the field. Henning (2013, p. 127) notes that "data analysis in qualitative research is ongoing, emerging and iterative process".

A qualitative strategy produces volumes of raw textual data to be processed. In choosing thematic analysis "by which qualitative data are segmented, categorized, summarized and reconstructed in a way that captures the important concepts within the data set" (Given, 2008, p. 867), the study was able to explore the teachers' experiences and perspectives of education. It takes time to process the raw data and divide it into themes that emerge from the text to address the initial research questions. This process uses tools such as memoing and coding. This study chose the strategy of thematic coding as an approach to identify relevant themes in a large quantity of data. During the initial data collection process, the researcher made notes on personal, philosophical, and theoretical thoughts or reflections whilst gathering and evaluating the data, which is known as memoing (Given, 2008, p. 186). Each participant was interviewed for between 2 – 3 hours in total, resulting in a large amount of data. The researcher studied the transcribed data line-by-line to become conversant with the information the teachers shared. The researcher then thematically coded the data, which is the process whereby the researcher reworks the data to first make empirical observations and finally draw conceptual insights. The coding process was iterative, including repeatedly reading through the transcripts, coding, reviewing codes, and considering more general themes in relation to the codes. Thereafter, the researcher formed key themes to recontextualise the data by looking for

repetition, ‘indigenous typologies’ or ‘categories’, ‘metaphors and analogies’, ‘topic transitions’, ‘similarities and differences’, ‘linguistic connectors’, missing data and theory-related material (Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

The themes that were identified from the study’s data were; teaching for the public good versus for individualised, private fulfilment, critical pedagogy and the (un)shaping forces of curriculum, and fostering agents of change. These themes, constructed through the iterative analysis process, constitutes the framework for Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

The following section unpacks the process of establishing trustworthiness in this study.

3.10 Trustworthiness of collected data

Trustworthiness of a study refers to the degree of confidence in the data, interpretation, and methods utilised, collectively ensuing the overall quality of the study (Polit & Beck, 2014). In assessing the quality of qualitative research, Guba & Lincoln (1994) outline criteria that include credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability, and authenticity, noting that not all criteria must be used in every study. This study utilises credibility and transferability to assess the quality of the collected data, each of which is outlined below.

Credibility

Credibility is the assurance in the accuracy and truthfulness of the research findings (Connelly, 2016), hence, the way the research questions were formulated and the data collected was arranged in accordance with the research strategy. Credibility was ensured using accurate methodology in connection to the sample, the research instrument, and the data collection process. The researcher paid attention to the various scientific and institutional requirements of the research and implemented regular cross-checking of data to enhance trustworthiness.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which research findings can be applied to individuals in varied settings (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). It is up to the reader to assess how applicable the findings are to their own situation (Connelly, 2016). The analysis and discussion that emerged from the findings lifted out several elements that provide insights that readers will hopefully find informative and meaningful. Amongst these elements are the gaps in initial teacher education that need to be addressed; the broader sociology of education and social justice; the agentic power of teachers who work under conditions that can optimistically be described as socially challenging; and the power of the conditions of our birth in impacting on our long-

term life and teaching trajectories in ways that we are not even aware of, and therefore do not question.

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter delineated the methodological decisions involved in crafting the study. The study unfolds its findings extracted from the data, engaging in a comprehensive discussion and analysis. The concluding chapter teases out the broader debates that are generated from the study.

The next chapter represents the main findings of the study.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a contextual overview of the five participants in this research project and their interview narratives. As indicated in Chapter 3, the participant overviews may well have been included in Chapter 3, but the researcher felt it useful to integrate the participant bio-sketches with the data produced by each participant, so as to provide an immediately accessible set of contexts. This overview lays the foundation for the subsequent discussion chapter as this research study aims to explore the participants' own perceptions regarding critical pedagogy as part of their teaching repertoires. It will further attempt to reveal if and how each participant engages the dialogical nature of teacher and learner agency in shaping the world we live in as an endeavour for social justice.

In structuring this contextual overview four key features are presented. The researcher describes the teaching experiences of each participant and discusses how the participants view themselves as teachers as well as how they view their peers. In addition, the researcher describes how the participants perceive their learners, education, and teaching as a political act. In doing so, a detailed understanding of each participant's context is constructed.

4.2 The Participants as Pedagogues – a contextual overview

Sana (F,C,52,PubQ3,LS-17,LE-28)

Sana is a 52-year-old, self-identified 'Coloured' teacher at a no fee-paying, quintile 3 public primary school in Western Cape, South Africa. The school is situated on the Cape Flats which is made up of 'Black' townships, 'Coloured' and 'Indian' ghettoes, and shantytowns. The Cape Flats was the area that most "non-white" people were moved to after specific areas in South Africa were declared 'White Only' through the Group Areas Act of 1950 during the apartheid era. Sana's school community is still troubled by the complexities of South African history. She is a political teacher-activist who refers to herself as an "*anti-apartheid-baby*", and describes her whole life as being influenced by the injustice of apartheid, saying: "*I'm 52 years old, so if you calculate, my whole life was during the apartheid years"*.

As Sana describes teaching and education, she foregrounds social justice by emphasising the importance of building citizenship.

> *For me what is more important right now is that we raise citizens of our country you know good citizens, model citizens of our country so that they can grow up to be people*

> *that are aware of other people in their lives and are able to cope with realities of life, that in itself is education for me right now*. (Sana,F,C,52,PubQ3,LS-17,LE-28).

In emphasising the importance of being "aware" of other people, Sana advocates for social justice which appears to be central to her identity as a teacher. This awareness led Sana to work in schools where she felt she could make a difference in society by raising "good citizens, model citizens" in marginalised communities. She describes her teaching experiences as follows:

> *I've been teaching in mostly hm, in areas where hm, we have the deprived learners you know they deprived of social capital so, hm I'm very happy to be in those areas. […] the more I'm teaching there the more I realise that is where I want to be*. (Sana, F, C, 52, PubQ3, LS 17, LE 28).

Although she had the opportunity to teach outside of South Africa, she chose to remain in South Africa to do her part in working towards social justice and equality as she recognised that "*they* [children in other countries] *don't need me as much as South African kids need me, so I am still here"* (Sana,F,C,52,PubQ3,LS-17,LE-28). Sana's experiences with historical injustice and inequality shape her perspective on problematic educational environments.

Throughout her teacher training and career, Sana explains how family, friends, and colleagues guided her decision-making and led her on this path as an activist teacher. She recalls not being able to write her final Grade 12 examinations due to the "*biggest boycotts in 1995*" (Sana,F,C,52,PubQ3,LS-17,LE-28). The following year, Sana embarked on her matric preparations independently whilst completing a secretarial diploma. She then worked as a secretary for 2 years, after which she was granted the opportunity to attend a university by virtue of a bursary. This bursary allowed Sana to complete a Higher Diploma of Education qualification at the University of the Western Cape. Sana came from a family of teachers who supported her and were proud of the profession: "*I am surrounded by teachers in my life. So, my mother was a teacher,* […]. *So, I was basically raised you know with a teacher."* (Sana,F,C,52,PubQ3,LS-17,LE-28).

In her early teaching years, although she already identified as an activist, she worked at a school where a group of colleagues introduced her to their community of activist teachers where she describes experiencing camaraderie in standing against injustice to become a good teacher.

> *I was a strong activist by the way very strong anti-apartheid activist [...] I'm working with people that know things you know like YEAH, THEY KNOW STUFF! [...] I was very inspired by those group of people at that school [...] I was surrounded by people*

that love teaching. You have to love teaching to stay at [marginalised school name] [...] they truly inspired me to be a very good teacher. (Sana,F,C,52,PubQ3,LS-17,LE-28).

For the entirety of her teaching career, Sana chose to teach at schools located in the marginalised areas of Cape Town which she describes as '*very tough*' environments where most of her colleagues presented the same determination. In joining a progressive teacher's union, Sana deepened her engagement with educational problems as she grew as a teacher-activist, saying: *"I am shaped by them, I am really and truly shaped by them"* (Sana,F,C,52,PubQ3,LS-17,LE-28). In doing so, she evolved her pedagogical practices, skills and agency to work towards a more socially-just society.

Sana describes her approach to teaching as developing and changing over the years. Initially, she describes being a very strict teacher, saying: "*I came there with the approach, my mother's approach, very strict yeah, 'jy luister vir my en jy luister vir niemand anders nie!'* [Engl: "you listen to me and not to anyone else!"]" (Sana,F,C,52,PubQ3,LS-17,LE-28). Getting to know her learners and their life struggles shifted her teaching approach, realising their focus on safety and survival. It 'softened' her pedagogical approach.

It was a matter of them wanting to have a safe place to stay with you. And as the year progressed, I realised I had to change that very strict person that I am, okay, into a more softer version of myself and work toward what they needed from me, okay, not what I want from them. (Sana,F,C,52,PubQ3,LS-17,LE-28).

Sana strived to create a learning and teaching environment that fosters her learners' sense of human fullness, enabling them to learn and grow beyond the curriculum's objectives. Furthermore, it was mainly through her teaching experience that she developed her own love for learning and discovering new knowledge.

I am a wonderful student, I love learning, I love finding things out from other people, and I like enriching myself in terms of knowledge for teaching mostly, also knowledge in terms of raising kids, and when I talk about raising kids in the classroom, I am talking about giving them the teaching that is not lessons but more life lessons, life skills, that they can carry along with them. (Sana,F,C,52,PubQ3,LS-17,LE-28)

Sana focuses on teaching content essential for community survival, recognising that her role extends beyond the classroom. Her awareness of broader community events informs her teaching, motivating her to address social issues within the community through dedicated and careful efforts, by saying: "*your lesson planning is most important* […] *but for me to teach based on context is very important* (Sana,F,C,52,PubQ3,LS-17,LE-28).

In addition, Sana views teaching and learning as an ongoing process which should focus on developing skills that are more far-reaching than only teaching children how to write in a particular manner or to perform perfect arithmetic. Sana details it as follows: *"Learning, writing and doing math is very, very important BUT it's also being a good person, that is more important for us right now*." (Sana,F,C,52,PubQ3,LS-17,LE-28). She places great significance on incorporating the lived experiences and existing knowledge of her learners into her lessons. This pedagogical approach provides possibilities for them to develop the necessary insights and skills to go beyond the boundaries of their marginalised lives, saying: "*We make them realise certain social issues that they are confronted with, but yet we try to uplift them"* (Sana,F,C,52,PubQ3,LS-17,LE-28).

She emphasises that there is nothing wrong with questioning knowledge, authority, or power, as long as they do it respectfully, explaining:

> *In their communities because the women and the men shout at each other using verbal abuse and so on, then I actually use that language in the classroom. I ask them: Did I gain your respect now? And then I give them the same argument using a very intelligent way of setting things right with another person.* (Sana,F,C,52,PubQ3,LS-17,LE-28).

Sana models values alongside skills like speaking and writing, which encourages learner agency, building their sense of self, and moulding their sense of citizenship.

In foregrounding learner agency, Sana prioritises the needs of her learners by establishing a respectful relationship with them, saying: *"I think they respect me more because I allow them to be their own personal beings in the classroom. They all know we are teaching in an environment where we are basically raising the child and helping them out more for who they are"* (Sana,F,C,52,PubQ3,LS-17,LE-28). Through nourishing this reciprocal relationship, Sana's educational goal is to create an environment conducive to teaching and learning.

In describing what teaching is, she says:

> *You have to be open-minded. You have to be transparent. You have to be inquisitive. You have to be respectfully confrontational or okay, you'll have to ask deeper questions so that you can get answers for the way you do things and why you do things.* (Sana,F,C,52,PubQ3,LS-17,LE-28).

Sana proposes that teachers should be respectful, honest, critical, reflective, and thoughtful individuals. In providing not only knowledge to her learners, Sana also believes she has made, and continues to make, a difference in children's lives from '*very tough*' communities. She

recalls running into an ex-learner who said to her: *"Yeah Miss, I remember your words to me, it actually carried me through my life. I had to prove to you Miss that I was not going to be a serial killer."* (Sana,F,C,52,PubQ3,LS-17,LE-28). As Sana shared the highlights of her teaching career, it became evident that she valued the impact she made in the lives of her learners in becoming "*good citizens*".

Sana's definition and approach to teaching and learning can, perhaps, best be located within a political activist frame, as her approach to teaching is not politically neutral and heavily informed by South African history. Sana states: "*Political strategy influences your teaching and your personal being a lot a lot, for sure*" (Sana,F,C,52,PubQ3,LS-17,LE-28). Furthermore, Sana believes in the dialogical nature of teacher and learner agency as an act of participating in shaping the community, country, and world we live in.

Subira (F,B,45,PubQ3,LS-16,LE-16).

Subira was born in 1974 and is a 45-year-old, self-identified 'Black' teacher at a no fee-paying, quintile 3 public primary school in Western Cape, South Africa. The area in which her school is located is known for the contrasting socio-economic communities that live there, one being the privileged and rich elite, and the other being the marginalised and poor community who primarily work in service of the privileged. Subira has shown great dedication to teaching in her community and advocates for change among the marginalised community. She strives to teach young children in ways that give them hope and to present alternatives to the marginalised and disposable narratives they are conditioned to believe. Throughout the interview, Subira's views and work in the classroom designate her as a teacher who works for social justice and equality.

Subira originated from King Williams Town (now Qonce) in the then Ciskei in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. The Ciskei was a Bantustan territory, also referred to as a "homeland", which was set aside for 'Black' inhabitants of South Africa by the apartheid government. The Bantu Homelands Citizenship Act of 1970, enacted by the National Party, resulted in the revocation of South African citizenship from 'Black' South Africans. As per Amesty International (2020), this measure not only stripped them of their remaining political and civil rights but also categorized them as citizens of particular homelands. The Bantustans were ultimately dismantled in 1994 (The Black Homeland Citizenship Act of 1970).

After Subira's mother passed away, she moved to Port Elizabeth (now Gqeberha) in the Eastern Cape to live with her aunt where she could go to school and potentially attend a college. She had a difficult start to life: "*Growing up without a mother, you can imagine. It so happened that when I was doing grade 12, I fell pregnant at a very young age. So, I needed something that would make me earn a salary*." (Subira,F,B,45,PubQ3,LS-16,LE-16). This forced her to look for opportunities to earn an income to support her family. In 1996, Subira landed a bursary to study at the College of Education in Port Elizabeth. Here she completed her teaching diploma and described herself as being *"one of the lucky ones"* (Subira,F,B,45,PubQ3,LS-16,LE-16) not only because she was able to procure a bursary, but because she found a path that gave her hope for a better future. Thereafter, she moved to Cape Town in search of a teaching post.

Subira encountered with both support and discouragement from family and friends regarding her training to be a teacher, and during her teaching career. Nonetheless, Subira persevered:

> *I was getting that kind of negativity from my friends and sometimes from my family members. Teacher! Why are you choosing teaching? Where are you going to get a job? Teachers earn so little! Teachers work hard, and all those things*! *I then said to myself, I know I will make a good teacher and I know I will get a job"* (Subira,F,B,45,PubQ3,LS-16,LE-16).

Subira's difficult life circumstances, having had a child at very young age with no parental support, but still finding a way to become a teacher in early post-apartheid South Africa, reveals her self-belief and confidence in breaking the boundaries of social norms and prescriptions. Subira continues this dedication through her work as a teacher and believes her choices and actions can bring about similar change for her learners in marginalised communities where violence and gangsterism are rife. She describes the community she teaches in as:

> *Most of the people in the community are illiterate. Most of the people in the community are unemployed. The community is a poverty-stricken kind of community. It is an informal settlement; you know all of those challenges that people are experiencing. So, when I say we can change the community, I mean that by educating the learners form that community we will be empowering those children and also in the future those children will be able to get employment and these children might be able to change the environment in the community, they will be able to change the environment at home, by changing the environment at home it might change the situation in the community* (Subira,F,B,45,PubQ3,LS-16,LE-16).

Subira, committed to working in marginalised education spaces and addressing social issues in informal settlements, asserts the potential for change. She challenges the impact of South African history on children, emphasising that they need not succumb to historical constructs

based on race and heritage. Subira's journey, shaped by apartheid-era challenges, demanded self-assurance and internal belief. Gangsterism, a significant obstacle in her teaching, emerged from the Group Areas Act's consequences, leading to severe unemployment, poverty, and social marginalisation in the Western Cape. Accordingly, Subira recognises that all schooling spaces are not equitable, and that her classroom is riddled with obstacles resulting from South African history, but she firmly believes that it can become better, and that their marginalised lives can improve over time. She notes: "*In some schools [...] things are not the same. It is easy to just go and walk in your class and teach. But in some schools, it is even difficult to just walk into the classroom.*" (Subira,F,B,45,PubQ3,LS-16,LE-16). In acknowledging the complexity of teaching in marginalised schooling spaces due to the impact social issues have on the learning environment, Subira prioritises addressing these problems by saying:

> *There are many other things that you need to look at, many other things that you need to consider before you even open those textbooks. Sometimes you don't even open that textbook. You end up teaching them life skills* (Subira,F,B,45,PubQ3,LS-16,LE-16).

Subira trusts her experiences which enable her to make sound methodological choices that then foster a learning environment that allows her learners to develop a sense of hope by showing them a path to a better future through education. Furthermore, Subira started teaching at a time when finding teaching positions was difficult. She initially could not find a posting and worked in retail while looking for a teaching post until her first principal recognised her potential and gave her an opportunity when very few others would. Subira recalls: "*He saw something in me"* (Subira,F,B,45,PubQ3,LS-16,LE-16). Due to her loyalty and dedication to marginalised communities, she still teaches at this very same school.

With the backing of her principal, Subira emphasises the pivotal role of the trade union membership in her growth as a teacher. Joining the union expanded her perspective on the world and education, enabling her active engagement in discussions on leadership, power, and the critical examination of educational and social issues. Through there interactions, Subira gained valuable support and knowledge, which she highly values, stating:

> *If you are a member of a union there is no way you cannot be clued-up about education because they take you to lots of workshops and they take you to lots of engagements with people. [...] Most of the things I learnt especially around teaching and how to do my lessons and how to deal with certain issues in education, I have learnt that through becoming a union member and also being active in the union.* (Subira,F,B,45,PubQ3,LS-16,LE-16).

Subira differentiates between mere membership and active involvement in the union. It was Subira's *participation* in the union itself that produced her conviction that teaching is not necessarily an independent endeavour. She holds the union in high regard. The boost in confidence empowered her to work towards social justice and equality, and she acknowledges the inherently political nature of education, asserting that "*politics will always have a place in education"* (Subira,F,B,45,PubQ3,LS-16,LE-16).

Subira believes that she was placed at her school for a reason, this reason being *"These children need people like us. They need teachers like us. If we are all going to run away from them, then who is going to assist them?"* (Subira,F,B,45,PubQ3,LS-16,LE-16). By empowering her learners to dream of alternative paths and teaching them the skills to envisage a better future, she highlights the importance of learner agency, which was lacking in her own early life. Just like Subira was able to envisage a new path through educational opportunities, she believes this too is possible for her learners through good education. Furthermore, Subira trusts that effective education and cultivating teacher-learner agency begins with basic tools such as reading for meaning. She describes it as follows: *"My main focus is always on reading. Reading, reading, teach them to read, you must be able to understand. If they can do that, then everything else follows after that*" (Subira,F,B,45,PubQ3,LS-16,LE-16). In this vein, Subira defines education as the moment of "*moving into the light. Going from the darkness into the light*" (Subira,F,B,45,PubQ3,LS-16,LE-16). She argues that without foregrounding fundamental skills such as reading, a child cannot become enlightened.

In addition, she promotes critically questioning knowledge and a dialogical approach in her lessons, giving an example as follows:

> Teacher: *"Where do you think rain comes from?"* Learner A: *"I think teacher, Jesus is urinating."* Learner B: *"I should think teacher, Jesus is sweating." [...]*
>
> *Then as soon as you start talking about the water cycle and what happens then, you see that light in their faces, in their eyes.* Learner: "*Yo, I did not know all of this*". (Subira,F,B,45,PubQ3,LS-16,LE-16).

In this way, Subira makes space for the knowledge her learners present without judgement or prejudice, as she knows their contexts, and thus prioritises conversations with her learners for her to hold this understanding. Although she sees prescribed skills as important, she

simultaneously emphasises that the children she teaches need an ability and understanding that reaches far beyond the curriculum's confines.

In communities such as the one Subira teaches in, violence and poverty are so severe that skills to survive are essential. Subira acknowledges that what her learners go through is unbearable and admires their resilience as they keep coming to school. She explains: "*If I had happened to be one of them, I would not be able to cope. [...] I would never be able to go through what my kids are going through in that community"* (Subira,F,B,45,PubQ3,LS-16,LE-16). She acknowledges the intensity of the experiences and integrates them into her lessons as she uses her time with them to unpack these difficult topics, they experience daily. Despite this often-harsh environment and having moments of despair, Subira asserts: *"I still believe in teaching and learning, I still believe in making a difference or changing our community, our communities by empowering our learners"* (Subira,F,B,45,PubQ3,LS-16,LE-16).

Sabine (F,W,62,PubQ5,LS-37,LE-39)

Sabine is a 62-year-old, self-identified 'white' teacher at a fee-paying, quintile 5 public high school in Cape Town. This leading academic school is situated in a suburb known for its privileged community. Sabine comes from a family of dedicated teachers, and has a great passion for explaining concepts and finding new ways to present information, which is what propelled her into education. When she began her journey into education, she viewed herself as an inexperienced individual due to her conservative past, saying: "*I was really naïve, in worldly terms*" (Sabine,F,W,62,PubQ5,LS-37,LE-39). Her exposure to the wider world and escape from her bubbled life initiated her development in seeing and engaging with the injustices around her. This led Sabine to develop her agency in participating in reshaping the world through education.

Sabine was schooled and trained in the years of apartheid and segregation. As a 'white' female in the years of apartheid, she felt powerless and bound by the rules of the racist and misogynist ruling Nationalist Party.

> *I came from an Afrikaans High School, Christian National, in my day you didn't talk about politics or religion, and we were kept quite small in many ways, in the home as well. If you ask questions about why black children did not go to school, you were shut down*. (Sabine,F,W,62,PubQ5,LS-37,LE-39)

It was only when she began her tertiary education through the University of Cape Town, after securing a bursary, that she began thinking critically, fields such as history, politics, and power, and how these influenced her life and the lives of her fellow South Africans. Sabine recalls a memory of her student days at UCT and how her thinking was being challenged:

> *[...] we would sit there and discuss education issues. He* [the lecturer] *was criticising the National Party and the way they ran education. Then he was saying that this stupid decision and that stupid decision, and I was mystified. Why would you make such a stupid decision?* (Sabine,F,W,62,PubQ5,LS-37,LE-39).

Through Sabine's initial conversations and experiences, she began to question her knowledge of the world, initiating her agency as an educator and undoing her '*naivety*'. Sabine came to understand that educational matters seemed to be different on paper than what was happening in real life. She describes being shocked when she first saw the under-resourced school where she would be completing her first teaching practicum, saying, "*Eventually* [I] *got to Mary and Joseph's stable and this was the school! [...] We* [the student teachers] *went through what we had to teach tomorrow and with what! There was nothing!"* (Sabine,F,W,62,PubQ5,LS-37,LE-39). Here, Sabine began to develop the skills to meet the needs of the children regardless of the environment. From her internship in South Africa's former homelands to where she is currently teaching, her need to acquire new skills to reach her learners and guide their development dialogically has never subsided. She states: "*I had to do quite a bit of thinking and research around what would be good methodology"* (Sabine,F,W,62,PubQ5,LS-37,LE-39). Therefore, she views herself as a teacher constantly discovering new ways and new methodologies to achieve her goal of educating children.

Beginning to work as a teacher, Sabine was confronted with the ideology of the patriarchal system of apartheid. The expectation was that she could only work as a teacher until she got married, saying: "*In my day, as a woman, you were only allowed to teach until you got married. Then you had to leave teaching and the school had a quota of married women…"* (Sabine,F,W,62,PubQ5,LS-37,LE-39). To avoid this path, Sabine did not get married nor had children of her own, saying: "*It was very clear to me that I wanted to be a teacher and my parents supported that."* (Sabine,F,W,62,PubQ5,LS-37,LE-39).

Sabine received her first posting at an Afrikaans public high school in a leafy suburb in Cape Town. Here, they took full advantage of Sabine and her dedication to her work as a teacher by overloading her timetable and giving her additional extra mural activities in comparison to her male colleagues. She explains: "*I taught 7 classes of German and 3 grades of English; I had*

10 classes and I had matric English and matric German [...] and I think well you just had to do it. I had three and a half hours off in a week." (Sabine,F,W,62,PubQ5,LS-37,LE-39). Sabine left the school as she saw no future for herself there and pursued a Master's degree in education through the University of Cape Town. Her decision to continue her studies was fuelled by the incentive that she would earn a greater salary in addition to aspiring for a leadership position. The difficulty she encountered in achieving such a leadership position was that it was a male-dominated field which was unattainable to females unless they met special requirements, stating: "*I thought if I can't do it while working in the school, I'll do it with my brain. All the people in leadership posts were men"* (Sabine,F,W,62,PubQ5,LS-37,LE-39). After completing her degree, she was offered a post at the privileged public girl's high school where she still teaches to this day, and has become the Head of Academics.

Sabine describes encountering many obstacles in her teaching journey, such as being a female at a time when there was a limited definition of what a woman could and should be and do. Not only was she female she was also English, trained and schooled in an English institution. During the apartheid era, English culture was seen as direct opposition to Afrikaner hegemony. She describes it as: *"Any person from UCT was 'Rooi Gevaar'* [Red (Communist) Danger]*"* (Sabine,F,W,62,PubQ5,LS-37,LE-39). Her perseverance in addressing these obstacles demonstrates her dedication to the teaching profession and the enacting of teacher agency. She remarks: "*I then changed things at the school [...] I used my negative experiences to maybe make it better for others*" (Sabine,F,W,62,PubQ5,LS-37,LE-39).

Sabine views teaching as empowering and a privilege to be actively involved in, as it centres around the formation and development of, not only children, but also society. In the process of teaching, Sabine foregrounds the individual, saying: *"*[Teaching] *is working on a lot of levels, trying to get materials across, but you also have a human being with a psyche and an emotional side that needs caring."* (Sabine,F,W,62,PubQ5,LS-37,LE-39). With high standards and expectations, Sabine expresses her commitment to ensuring every student excels: "*I am somebody that if I could, I would have every kid get 100% [...] So I try and keep everybody moving up together"* (Sabine,F,W,62,PubQ5,LS-37,LE-39).

Her perseverance to reach her goal, that "*every kid gets 100%"* indicates that Sabine believes every child has the potential to learn through finding the right methodology. Sabine underscores the importance of creativity, shaped by her learning and teaching experiences. While acknowledging the guidance of a prescribed curriculum, she emphasises adaptability: "*I*

can think on my feet, and I must move with how the pupils go" (Sabine,F,W,62,PubQ5,LS-37,LE-39).

Sabine prioritises each student, considering their unique circumstances in her lesson planning and assessments. Her meticulous approach includes sensitivity to diverse family dynamics, cultural variations, and religious differences.

> *So last year we had a child that was traumatised because [...] he* [her father] *took his life. [...] So I decided to kind of never to use father as a word in a sentence, so I often used, when I needed a male word, the uncle, or the brother.*" […] "*In setting my test and papers I am very careful that my little pictures represent the different colour people in my school if I can say that.*" (Sabine,F,W,62,PubQ5,LS-37,LE-39).

Furthermore, in addressing the influence that politics has on education and specifically her classroom and how she teaches, Sabine highlights topics that lead to political discussion but also acknowledges her fear in doing so. She explains it as follows:

> *Themes that we are doing like "Integration"* [Engl: integration] *and "Zugehörigkeit"* [Engli: belonging] *and those sorts of themes, we can have big discussions. Politically, I have always had to cover my back.* […] *I'm not a political person but like I said about being careful to talk about certain things that are politically loaded, [...]. One has got to be careful of the vocabulary one uses* (Sabine,F,W,62,PubQ5,LS-37,LE-39).

Although she claims that she does not identify as 'political', Sabine does not shy away from topics that lead to political discussions. However, she verbalises her fear of political discussions, which reveals the effect her own schooling and training during apartheid still has on her today. She recalls:

> *I grew up in a time where actual politics you weren't allowed to discuss. In the time of the student riots and 1976 and all that time, I was in the Afrikaans school for those first years and a lot of the pupils came from the military base [...]. It was quite scary in some ways"* (Sabine,F,W,62,PubQ5,LS-37,LE-39).

Throughout her interview, Sabine conveyed the complexity of the South African educational landscape and how she as a female English teacher has progressed by forging a path that has, although difficult, brought her great enlightenment and success as a person. The fear she describes in teaching as a political act suggests how powerfully her lived experiences have influenced her teacher-being. Sabine centred her methodological and pedagogical choices around the individual learners as she foregrounds the aspect of care in education.

Sofia (F,W,39,Pvt,LE-17)

Sofia is a 39-year-old, self-identified 'white' teacher at a well-resourced private high school in the Western Cape. Sofia comes from a family of teachers and believes that "*teachers are made as much as they are born*" (Sofia,F,W,39,Pvt,LE-17). Her manner of speaking indicates that she is a well-educated and knowledgeable pedagogue who is confident in her ability as a teacher, specifically in advocating for learner agency in the classroom.

Sofia was drawn to teaching as a university student involved in high school leadership and educational camps, where she worked with diverse groups of learners from different socio-economic backgrounds. This experience led her to pursue a Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) after completing her Drama degree at the University of Stellenbosch. She describes coming to the realisation that she wanted to teach, by saying, "*It was obviously so much more than just going to teach them Biology* […] *I have to teach. I have to teach, this is it, I have got to teach"* (Sofia,F,W,39,Pvt,LE-17). This certainty as a teacher and belief in her ability is what continues to drive her career. She emphasises her need to work with diverse groups of learners in multiple curriculum areas to be the best teacher. Sofia speaks to her teaching manifesto as follows:

> *I want to be a teacher who can walk into any class, anywhere in the world, at any time and connect with those students and use where they are, physically, but also where they are kind of in time…if you can do that, you can teach them anything* (Sofia,F,W,39,Pvt, LE-17).

In the quotation above, Sofia demonstrates her commitment to intrinsically perfecting the art of teaching curricula that she perceives as the path of reaching learners globally.

Sofia's confidence in her teaching ability comes across in the way that she describes her teaching philosophy, and in the general way that she speaks about teaching. She makes numerous references to literature and educational theorists, saying, "*I think it is definitely shaped along the lines of Piaget, Vygotsky and Feuerstein like the idea that we are co-mediators of the learning experience for kids"* (Sofia,F,W,39,Pvt,LE-17*).* In using references to the educational literature, which she does throughout her interviews, Sofia is positioning herself as a 'knower' in the field of education and, thus, validating her teaching choices and behaviours. She describes her practices as follows:

> *It is about holding each student and being broad enough in yourself to do that and to encompass, to be able to work with each of them individually and differentiate. But the*

> *bottom line is to walk alongside them through the journey so that you can mediate between them and their lived experience, so they can process what they are experiencing and then they will learn from it. So, it is the idea of absolutely everybody can learn (*Sofia,F,W,39,Pvt, LE-17*).*

Sofia identifies her teaching practice as grounded in learner autonomy and focused on the specific needs of her learners. In addition, she views herself teaching in the context of South Africa as being rooted in providing opportunities to students from underprivileged backgrounds and undoing the injustice left by apartheid. She is swift to indicate that her intentions differed from those of her peers, saying:

> *Like 90% of them* [PGCE students] *were NOT like 'I am going to be a teacher in South Africa to make a change or to uplift the country or this is what we need', they were just like, 'this is an easy thing to do because then I can go overseas'* (Sofia,F,W,39,Pvt,LE-17).

Sofia differentiates herself from her PGCE peers and identifies as a South African teacher doing her part to reform education. Despite her inferring the need to uplift the country, however, Sofia's teaching background has primarily involved teaching at well-resourced schools which traditionally serve only middle and upper-class learners.

Unlike the previous participants who mostly taught at one or two schools, Sofia's teaching history consists of several schools. Her first teaching position was at a reputable Model C school (quintile 5), where she worked for 2 years, before leaving due to cultural differences, saying "*I love the Afrikaans culture, but it has its moments where I just don't understand it*" (Sofia,F,W,39,Pvt,LE-17). For the next 4 years, Sofia taught at a small independent school offering the international Cambridge[17] curriculum in the northern suburbs of Cape Town.

Sofia describes really buying into the structure and values promoted by the independent (private) school system at this time, saying: "*It* [The school] *had kind of sold itself to me as like a real bastion of what teaching can be*" (Sofia,F,W,39,Pvt,LE-17). In 2018, after eight years at the independent school, Sofia chose to leave and teach at a public school with a more diverse learner population, "*I chose the school because they were so well integrated. It was the only school in [area name withheld] that had many kids across the racial divide.*

[17] The Cambridge curriculum is an international schooling qualification and consists of four stages catering for learners between the ages of 5 and 19. Because it is an international qualification it allows learners to begin their studies in one country and complete them in another as the syllabus aims and assessment objectives are standardised worldwide.

(Sofia,F,W,39,Pvt,LE-17). *S*he describes working with these learners as gratifying but leaves and returns to the independent school within the same year, noting:

> *It was like teaching back in what I think it must have been like in the 1960's you know. You talk to a girl, and you like "So what do you want to do one day?" and she was like "I don't know, I guess I can be a secretary, a nurse or a teacher." "What do you like to do for fun?" "Oh no, I paint, and I design." "So why don't you go into graphic design?" "What's that?"* (Sofia,F,W,39,Pvt,LE17).

Sofia struggled to work in this school due to the deeply entrenched inequalities left by apartheid South Africa. In her decision to then return to the independent schooling system, she brings to light the paradox in her own ideology and practice. Although she advocates for "*walking alongside the leaners and mediating between them and their experiences*" as well as "*to uplift the country"*, she experiences frustration and chooses to insert herself primarily into schools known for their elitism.

While Sofia promotes learner agency, her description of privileged learners in private schools suggests that agency is often negatively mediated in affluent societies. She argues that their abundant resources, including private tutoring and educational psychologists, may hinder the development of agency by providing excessive support. Sofia explains her view as follows:

> *I just feel like our kids [*private school children*] are over-supported. They have so much support and there are so many systems holdings them up that they aren't doing the work. Even if they are doing the work, they aren't doing the emotional work* (Sofia,F,W,39,Pvt,LS-,LE17).

Sofia expresses frustration at the fact that these learners are not employing their agency and privilege in the way that she believes they could or should be. Sofia also appears to judge the marginalised learners from lower-resourced public schools based on their specific backgrounds and experiences. When discussing specifically the boys in these schools, she states:

> *Their dream at like age 17, 18 was to graduate [...] Then to go and do an internship at one of the factories, [...] so they could learn to be a boilermaker. Then they are going to work hard, and they are going to make R 7 000 a month. And then they are going to ask their high school sweetheart to 'trou'* [Engl.: marry]. *They not going to have much but they are going to be happy.* (Sofia,F,W,39,Pvt,LE-17).

She gets frustrated that their hopes for the future do not align with what she believes they could be striving for, even though she acknowledges that their choices would make them happy. Throughout much of her interviews, although she appears to advocate for learner individuality

and differentiation, the way that she frames these specific groups of students suggests that her practice might not necessarily be aligned with her stated philosophy.

In a similar contradiction between professed ideology and practice, Sofia acknowledges the importance of political themes in teaching English, while recognising that she does not address it enough.

> *I wish I was doing more, very important and also on trend, decolonization of education. You know from a gender perspective from a socio-political perspective but then I must also say, I can't, like one of the things that is like a core value to me and which as a result is one of my guiding principles for the department is to be flexible and responsive and I can't think of more ways in which whatever is happening at the moment we try to circularize."* (Sofia,F,W,39,Pvt,LE-17).

Although Sofia goes to great lengths to incorporate current political events and movements into her lessons, she expresses the lack of impact it has on the privileged learners she teaches.

> *They're still not seeing this as an opportunity to give you something gritty and edgy [...] what they really think, but the sad thing is that they just think the vanilla. [...] I mean really, to politicise it to stir. It is to present the other voices and that was a wonderful opportunity to do that* [referring to Black Lives Matter]. *Although even there the [school name] kid tendency is to use moral relativism to be like: "Well then you can't judge anybody, everybody's opinion is equal and everybody can think what they want, so why are we even having this conversation?" So, getting them to think up is like really hard! [...] It was a way in.* (Sofia,F,W,39,Pvt,LE-17).

Her disappointment is evident as she expresses the challenges of engaging learners at the expected level, particularly in discussing controversial or political topics. She notes their lack of interest and tendency to resort to "*moral relativism*" as a way to avoid in-depth discussion and debate on these subjects.

Sofia spoke with great enthusiasm for education and advocated the importance of building relationships with learners to mediate between required knowledge and the lived experiences of the individual learner. She is focused on theory to support the approaches employed in her classroom, and has a strongly-held conception of learner agency. Throughout the interview, Sofia demonstrates her frustration with the lack of teacher and learner agency in South African schools. The way that she frames her learners from various contexts as well as her limited experience in a diverse range of schools, demonstrates inconsistencies in the way she talks about education and the way she enacts teaching.

Sarah (F,W,42,Pvt,LE-19)

Sarah is a 42-year-old, self-identified 'white' teacher in the Western Cape, South Africa. She has taught at various schools in South Africa and abroad, implementing multiple curricula. Sarah has never specialised in a specific learning area or teaching phase and has taught an array of subjects, ranging from languages, mathematics, and science in both primary and high schools. It is this diversification of work that initially drew her to teaching, saying: *"There's nothing else in life that's going to give me this range of interest as being a teacher*" (Sarah,F,W,42,Pvt,LE-19). Sarah also rose to the challenge of stepping into educational leadership roles when required, which she identifies as a highlight throughout her journey as a teacher. While Sarah initially intended to go into the field of applied linguistics, she found teaching after briefly working as a teacher's assistant at a public high school in KwaZulu-Natal province. She describes this shift as follows:

> *At the end of the day, I realised that, once I have gone along that path* [teaching]*, that was really what I should have done from the beginning. It fitted all my interests and personality, and I love working with kids and the more I work with kids the more I enjoyed it.* (Sarah,F,W,42,Pvt,LE-19).

She completed a Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) through the University of South Africa (UNISA) after completing her Bachelor's degree in Art, English and Linguistics. Whilst completing her PGCE, Sarah worked at a public primary school and thereafter taught in South African public and private high schools and primary schools, as well as internationally in Angola, Bangladesh, and Cambodia. Her commitment to education in diverse contexts is evident throughout her journey as a teacher.

Sarah's exposure to different schooling environments, curricula and structures has developed her sharpen her educational skills and reveals her agency as a teacher. In schools where she was viewed as a professional and given greater autonomy, support and empowerment, her love for teaching was cultivated:

> *So, I absolutely loved it. I could, for the first time, I did not have to work within a system or a set curriculum. [...] each child came from a different background, so you had to understand where they were coming from and where they were going to.* (Sarah,F,W,42,Pvt,LE-19).

In addition, schools which enabled Sarah to perform leadership tasks and work on the school structure, enhanced her enthusiasm for education. Sarah recounts this experience as:

> *It was so exciting because as a teacher I was the professional and I was expected to really engage with the kids and the parents to understand their needs and then I determine the programme for them and the assessments and the report. [...] It was also really exciting.* (Sarah,F,W,42,Pvt,LE-19).

In this way, Sarah values being regarded as a professional teacher who is respected for doing quality work. In addition, she advocates for teacher agency through greater autonomy. In contrast, in schools where she experienced failing structures and curricula curtailing her teacher agency, mostly South African public schools, she developed feelings of discouragement and disenfranchisement.

> *I was really wanting to get out of the government system [...] I was really disheartened by, for example when we get the kids to grade 9 and then to just get them out of the system the marks were just pushed up. [...] I felt it was dishonest, and I felt the kids were not actually being helped* (Sarah,F,W,42,Pvt,LE-19).

As a result, Sarah chose to insert herself in private and international educational spaces rather than public ones, as she felt her agency as a teacher and that of the learners in the non-public-schooling spaces offered her greater support in her desire of achieving her educational ideals.

At the core of Sarah's teaching persona, she prioritises the individual learner that is consciously guided and trained in knowledge and skills. When executed competently, she asserts that society can be altered for the better, saying:

> *I understand education as developing skills, marketable skills, but to me, the true educator is also somebody who is teaching a child to think, to question and to view things from many different perspectives, to become a critical thinker, to become a problem solver, [...] we [the teachers] actually want these children to become better leaders, to become better members of society, so I believe that education can actually change society if we do it well (*Sarah,F,W,42,Pvt,LE-19*).*

Sarah's initial approach to teaching was centred around tasks and outcomes as she admits to having always been academically competitive. It was only later, through her teaching experience and interactions with colleagues and learners, that she states a fundamental shift in her approach was brought about, and she began prioritising building relationships over what was prescribed in a curriculum. Sarah only then began to view teaching as fluid and centred around the learner, inserting their lived experiences to guide the learning process. Although this approach did not come naturally to her, she foregrounds this learning process over the confines of specific outcomes or curricula. She describes her approach as follows:

*Teaching kids in a way that you are truly engaging their interest. [...] having the freedom to teach them what will inspire them, [...] if you can take them to be independent thinking enquiry learners, you have a learner for life. That to me is so much more important than what curriculum they cover, or what exams they do or what marks they get at school. (*Sarah,F,W,42,Pvt,LE-19*).*

Interestingly, as Sarah speaks to the expectations on teachers, she asserts how they should be held accountable for achieving what is prescribed by the formal curriculum, saying:

You need to make sure that you teach what you need to teach, that you are assessing the kids constantly, so they are on track with what they need to know. You are developing the requisite skills, the core knowledge, that they need to have, in other words, if you are following a curriculum, you make sure you are following that curriculum, you make sure you are assessing according to the correct standard. In other words, YOU DO YOUR JOB as a teacher. (Sarah,F,W,42,Pvt,LE-19).

Sarah's assertion appears to stand in contrast to how she describes her approach to teaching. On the one hand, she advocates the priority in cultivating freedom in choosing content that will inspire the learners, and on the other hand she advocates strongly for adherence to the formal curriculum and formal assessments to ensure the standard of learning is adhered to by the teacher. In addition, Sarah explains the following:

I have issues with performance management of teachers but having worked through systems that actually do manage their performance and then coach them to be able to perform better there are also advantages there, I have seen teachers become really great teachers when they have had their performance managed, properly managed, and done in a really great supportive way, so in a sense it is political, […], it's definitely the corporate marketisation of education, teachers need to be better teachers you know they need to earn their bread, sort of thing. (Sarah,F,W,42,Pvt,LE-19).

Although she speaks against performance management of teachers as she views it as a political narrative, she also compliments the system when it works. In comparison to the other participants, her perceptions of teaching as political only vaguely presents itself through the interview, whereas the first 3 participants make it clear how political narratives have explicitly influenced their journey as teachers and viewing teaching itself.

Sarah also maintains a different perception between international and private South African educational spaces, and public middle-class and marginalised public educational spaces. She asserts that international learners and privileged South African learners have far greater agency through their learning environments that foster growth, empowerment, independence, and autonomy. She contrasts this to South African public middle-class and marginalised public

educational spaces that have been under authoritarian ideology for so long that both the teachers and the learners are confined to believe their powerlessness, saying:

> *Not only would the teachers need to learn, I think South African students would need to learn to take responsibility for themselves. I think they may have lived under authoritarian-type schooling for so long that they are not very good at being active learners, that they don't see the value in taking charge of their own learning, because they're so used to being told what to do.* (Sarah,F,W,42,Pvt,LE-19).

However, when she describes working with international learners she explains: "*They need to be spoken to with a certain degree of respect and gentleness and convinced rather than told what to do.*" (Sarah,F,W,42,Pvt,LE-19). Through Sarah's diverse teaching journey, she can present this important contrast in how teachers and learners are viewed in public and private educational spaces. Sarah differentiates the public from the private schooling spaces by revealing that, in her experience, private schools are where there is greater autonomy and where teachers are viewed as professionals, and a dialogical approach in education occurs. On the other hand, in public schools she expressed experiencing a lack of teacher and learner autonomy in addition to a lack of respect for teachers, which disabled both teacher and learner agency and led to teaching and learning that is centred around conformity. Therefore, Sarah has aligned with the approaches taken in private and international schools over public schools and continues to insert herself in private institutions.

Overall, Sarah presents herself as a passionate teacher who is confident in her ability to work in diverse contexts. She has shown great efforts in cultivating life-long learners, and privileges international and independent learning spaces over public ones. Sarah places great importance on empowerment, freedom, and choice in promoting teacher agency whilst also being guided by externally imposed policies and schooling structures that ensure 'good' work. Finally, while emphasising the importance of foregrounding agency, critical inquiry, freedom, and creativity in designing and delivering her lessons, it appears she often gives precedence to learning outcomes and assessments.

4.3 A summary of the findings

In working with the interview data, key features have been identified that bring to light the five South African teacher-participants' perceptions in relation to critical pedagogy. Whilst talking about their teaching journeys, the participants contextualised their perspectives of themselves as teachers, their educational peers, their learners, and most importantly, teaching and learning itself. Furthermore, they were able to articulate their insights on the performative nature of

teacher and learner agency in shaping the world in which they live as well as presenting their perceptions with regards to teaching as a political act (Giroux, 2013; Kincheloe, 2012).

In the participants' contextualisation of themselves as teachers, they all described feeling both a love and passion for teaching and learning, as well as frustration at the landscape of South African education. When looking at the similarities between the participants, it became clear that Sana (F,C,52,PubQ3,LS-17,LE-28) and Subira (F,B,45,PubQ3,LS-16,LE-16) had similar upbringings and experiences, which appeared to result in similarities in their choices and views on education. Both Sana and Subira had limited options in choosing a career and joining the teaching profession gave them hope for a better and more secure future. As teachers, they are loyal to their communities, and always chose to stay at marginalised schools in these communities when it was in their power to do so. They view pedagogy as teaching 'life skills' which is centred around addressing the social and contextual issues that the learners bring with them to develop their citizenship.

Sofia (F,W,39,Pvt,LE-17) and Sarah (F,W,42,Pvt,LE-19) shared similar backgrounds and journeys into the teaching profession, resulting in similarities in their career choices and perceptions of teaching and learning. In having greater power and autonomy in making choices, both Sofia and Sarah had dreams of becoming something other than being teachers. It was their initial teaching experience that ignited their passion for working with children. Throughout their many years of teaching in various schools, it appears that they both prefer working in privileged communities with well-resourced schools. Possibly because of these experiences, their approach to pedagogy emphasises the formal curriculum and prioritises the prescribed content.

While Sabine's (F,W,62,PubQ5,LS-37,LE-39) background and upbringing is more similar to Sofia (F,W,39,Pvt,LE-17) and Sarah (F,W,42,Pvt,LE-19), her subsequent decisions and approaches to teaching align more with Sana (F,C,52,PubQ3,LS-17,LE-28) and Subira (F,B,45,PubQ3,LS-16,LE-16). This could be a result of her falling into the same generation as Sana and Subira. This suggests that her experiences in apartheid South Africa, while different from Sana and Subira, exposed her to injustices that have affected her conceptions of education. When it comes to her pedagogical orientation, like Sofia and Sarah, Sabine sees the value of the prescribed content, but she also acknowledges that the prescribed curriculum does not necessarily align with what is happening in classrooms and the learners' lives, and has advocated for institutional change.

The outcomes of the interviews manifest a discernible impact of teachers' backgrounds and historical contexts on their present pedagogical orientations, self-perceptions in their role as educators, perspectives regarding their students, and formulations of both teacher and learner agency. This observation substantiates the notion that educational spaces are arenas of contention influenced by historical factors, challenging the assumption of schools as politically neutral entities and asserting the inherent political nature of the teaching profession (Kincheloe, 2008). A more comprehensive exploration of these dynamics, coupled with an analysis of key features, is discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5: TEACHERS AS AGENTS OF CRITICAL PEDAGOGY – AN ANALYSIS.

5.1 Introduction

In exploring the multifaceted role of teachers, it is imperative to view them not merely as isolated individuals but as active participants within diverse social contexts and institutional frameworks. As Soudien (2002, p. 214) asserts, understanding teachers necessitates an acknowledgement of their citizenship and membership in various social groups, each confronting unique challenges.

Central to the analysis in this chapter is the lens of critical pedagogy, an educational philosophy rooted in the application of critical social theory to scrutinise how schools perpetuate inequity and injustice (Beck, 2005, p. 393). The historical underpinnings of critical theory, spanning cultural, economic, and political realms, aim to prevent undemocratic, exploitative, and oppressive dominance (Dant, 2003; Sherman, 2003). This study endeavours to unravel the complexities of teachers as agents of critical pedagogy, weaving key insights from the findings into the concepts explored in the literature review.

Within the confines of a minor dissertation, the focus pivots to a central, conjoined aspect of critical pedagogy – democracy and social justice (Giroux, 2007; 2013; 2015). Challenging the prevailing belief that the state's education system is inherently oppressive (Kallaway & Swartz, 2016), the study underscores the inherent disparities among South African schools. The five participating teachers' narratives show that educational opportunities are not uniform across different school types, promoting an exploration of how their individual histories shape where, what, how and ultimately why they teach. While not the primary focus of the study, noteworthy patterns within the small sample align with self-identified 'race', a social construct acknowledging differences rather than endorsing scientific racism (Dubow, 1995).

As the distinctions and commonalities elucidate the interrelations among educational institutions, pedagogy, and societal structures, this inquiry contends that positioning education as a public good holds paramount significance within the discourse of democracy and social justice (Biesta, 2015; Department of Education, 2001; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2007; Kincheloe *et al.,* 2008; McLaren, 2015; Soudien, 2006).

5.2 Education's Dilemma: Balancing the pursuit of public good and purely individualised private fulfilment in teaching.

Giroux (2015, p. 40) asserts that "education is about more than harnessing capital […] it is at heart the laboratory where public values, justice and democracy come together to provide the foundation for critical agents and engaged global citizens". This study grounds itself in the ideology of education being a public good, hence this chapter explores the data as it seeks for insights from the participants' teaching journeys that advance 'education as a public good', as well as the elements that reconceptualise teaching as a purely individualised private fulfilment (Menashy, 2011).

From Chapter 4, we have learned that Sana (F,C,52,PubQ3,LS-17,LE-28), Subira (F,B,45,PubQ3,LS-16,LE-16) and Sabine (F,W,62,PubQ5,LS-37,LE-39) insert themselves fully and substantively in South African public schools. On the other hand, Sofia (F,W,39,Pvt,LE-17) and Sarah (F,W,42,Pvt,LE-19) prefer private schooling structures after encountering what they consider to be negative experiences in public schools. The question that arises is: Why do these teachers choose to insert themselves into the schools that they do, and what drives them to stay or leave the public institutions? Their insights into these public and private schooling spaces allow the study to explore "a central tenet of pedagogy [which] maintains that the classroom, curricular, and school structures teachers enter are **not neutral sites** waiting to be shaped by educational professionals" (Kincheloe, 2008, p.2, my emphasis). A fine illustration of this is captured in Subira's firm assertion that: "*In some schools […] things are not the same. It is easy to just go and walk in your class and teach. But in some schools, it is even difficult to just walk into the classroom*" (Subira,F,B,45,PubQ3,LS-16,LE-16). In describing her schooling environment it becomes evident:

> *Something happened on their way to school, in the morning. Maybe there is a shooting or one of them gets raped or there was something like a child that was missing on the news the previous night and we start discussing that. We don't even open the textbook.* (Subira,F,B,45,PubQ3,LS-16,LE-16)

Subira's decision to forego the curriculum when faced with her student's traumatic obstacles underscores her holistic attention and adaptive pedagogical approach. The study delves into this pedagogical response, crucial in critical pedagogy where educators, like Subira, are urged to act as critical intellectuals, questioning prevailing ideologies and power structures that lead to violent communities. Emphasising the teacher's role in championing social justice and human rights, this sections analysis will spotlight these principles, drawing on insights from scholars like Bridges (2019) and Giroux (2015, 2007).

Both Subira (F,B,45,PubQ3,LS-16,LE-16) and Sana (F,C,52,PubQ3,LS-17,LE-28) insert themselves in '*tough*' schools and, in talking about their own educational journeys through their own schooling and teacher training, they share the similarly violent and traumatic events they themselves had to overcome. Between 1984 and 1986, apartheid South Africa experienced widespread resistance as a state of emergency was declared, and troops moved into the townships (Alexander, 2023). Sana was "*thrown,*" swept up in the complexity of the resistance to apartheid, but instead of assigning blame, or using the conditions she experienced under apartheid as an excuse, she views her experience as an opportunity. Her assertion that these difficult times during apartheid were ultimately a worthwhile experience for her demonstrates the value she places on her own perseverance as a teacher.

Foley *et al*. (2015, p. 116) propose that critical pedagogy redefines teachers as transformative intellectuals which means they must "struggle for social transformation inspired the goals of democracy, freedom and justice". Both Sana (F,C,52,PubQ3,LS-17,LE-28) and Subira (F,B,45,PubQ3,LS-16,LE-16) describe growing up in complex circumstances; circumstances which affect their internal motivations. Their dedication to teaching and acting as transformational intellectuals is amplified via their internal motivations, cultivated under conditions of struggle against inequality and injustice during apartheid. Sana and Subira fight for education being accessible, affordable, and beneficial for all people, regardless of their background, location, or ability, which reinforces their alignment with education as a public good (Foley *et al*., 2015; Giroux, 2021; Locatelli, 2018).

As presented in the previous chapter, Sana (F,C,52,PubQ3,LS-17,LE-28) and Subira (F,B,45,PubQ3,LS-16,LE-16) had limited career options, and, in choosing teaching, fell prey to the conditions of the post-apartheid educational reform process. During the time of transition from apartheid to post-apartheid, South African schools needed a "shift in mentality, from being racist, undemocratic and authoritarian to being non-racial, democratic and enabling" (Carrim, 1998, p. 301). Soudien (2001) in writing about the educational reform process, presents the measures that were taken to reconstruct and develop the educational system in achieving equity and equality during this transitional period. Soudien (ibid.) foregrounds that, amid various inquiries, legislative measures, and statutes, the Department of Education Reports (1995b, 1996b), Education White Paper (1994, 1995a and 1996a) and the South African Schools Act (1996) played a significant role in addressing both the discourse and tangible disparities between

formerly exclusive 'white' schools and 'Black' African schools. Through these policy instruments, "the process of redistributing funding from schools which were highly subsidised to those which were poorly subsidised" was instituted (Soudien, 2001, p. 34). Early in 1996, the National Department of Education and the teachers' unions reached an agreement on a policy of 'rightsizing' the public sector with the aim of achieving teacher-pupil ratios of 40:1 in primary schools and 35:1 in secondary schools (Fiske & Ladd, 2004, p. 105; Jansen & Taylor, 2003, p. 31). Owing to this, teachers identified as being "in-excess" to national teacher calculations were offered voluntary severance packages or redeployment to schools with high teacher-pupil ratios, in other words, former 'Black' African schools. These 'rightsizing' policies implemented by the post-apartheid government complicated Sana (F,C,52,PubQ3,LS-17,LE-28) and Subira's (F,B,45,PubQ3,LS-16,LE-16) chances of finding a well-resourced school to work at.

Sana's narratives affirm the complexity of the racialised problem facing "non-white" teachers jostling for posts against perceived 'better' 'white' teachers by the post-apartheid government's 'rightsizing policy' in the mid-1990s (Soudien, 2001). However, once Sana had secured a permanent teaching position, she continued teaching at the same school for 17 years, stating, as she does in the quotation above, that she did so as an act of loyalty and gratitude to the institution for "raising" her as a teacher. In describing the school as "raising" her, Sana signifies the emotional impact the school had on her in forming her teacher identity. The metaphor "raising" evokes a guardian relationship in which the institution acts as a caring figure that nurtures her as a new teacher. The importance here is that, although she leaves the institution after 17 years in pursuit of a promotion post, she again inserts herself in a similarly "tough" school where she is once again 'grateful' for the opportunity. What this alludes to is that Sana's experience of inequality and injustice, in addition to her experience of this institutional "nurturing" is what she, in fact, is repaying in her choices to teach at 'tough' public schools in 'scary' neighbourhoods. Similarly, Subira (F,B,45,PubQ3,LS-16,LE-16) presents the same difficulty in securing a teaching position and, like Sana (F,C,52,PubQ3,LS-17,LE-28), shows loyalty and gratitude to the school for giving her an opportunity when no one else would. When the former principal of her school expressed confidence in Subira's teaching potential, despite the absence of a fitting position aligned with her training, she expressed deep gratitude. Subira considers this moment a highlight in her teaching journey, appreciating the acknowledgement of her capabilities even in the absence of a designated role that matched her qualifications.

Gratitude plays a pivotal role in enhancing teacher job satisfaction, fostering more meaningful and enjoyable work experiences, and ultimately contributing to the well-being and performance of both teachers and students (Chen, *et al*., 2023). Subira not only expresses gratitude for the opportunity to teach granted by her former principal but also acknowledges the school's instrumental role in cultivating her confidence and pedagogical skills, specifically in preparing her for teaching grade 4. Reflecting on her teacher training, Subira recognizes its inadequacy in addressing the challenging context of students exposed to violence, requiring her to adapt her approaches "to the level of the learners". In line with Chen *et al.'s* findings, Subira's decision to remain at the school signifies her gratitude for the institution's nurturing support, mirroring the sentiments of Sana (F,C,52,PubQ3,LS-17,LE-28). Furthermore, Subira's narrative suggests that her commitment to the school is driven by a desire to reciprocate the support she received by providing er learners with similar opportunities and nurturing experiences.

Reforming public education requires teachers to be actively involved in the processes (Giroux, 1985), therefore, as Sana and Subira consciously choose to stay in these marginalised schooling spaces, knowing that there are now better-resourced, better-paying public and private schools available to them, reveals the value that they place on the opportunities given to them, and their core belief that it is their job as teachers to remain and persevere in these spaces, in which they have learned and developed, to improve them. In actively making this choice, they demonstrate their willingness to be transformational intellectuals in perusing public values that address social justice and inequality. As Foley, *et al*. (2015) affirms that in the framework of critical pedagogy theory "teachers are not perceived as object transmitters of knowledge but rather as consciously acting human beings" (pg. 117) and therefore Sana and Subira's active choices to remain in 'tough" schools means something. Subira expresses this in response to teachers leaving her school, saying:

> *Most people do leave, most people do. And then I always tell them no man, you have to hang on. These people need you. These children need people like us. They need teachers like us. If we are all going to* ***run away*** *from them, then who is going to assist them?* (Subira,F,B,45,PubQ3,LS-16,LE-16, my emphasis)

Describing teachers leaving the school as 'running away' testifies to the relentless conditions of teaching in marginalised public schools. It is because of the poor conditions that a critical pedagogical approach is needed to bring into dialog the inequality and injustice that prevails

(Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2013; McLaren, 2015). As Sana and Subira advocate for the importance of building up these public schools, they devote themselves to teaching marginalised learners in the hope of changing the community, and ultimately society. This suggests that in their alignment with education as a public good, both Sana (F,C,52,PubQ3,LS-17,LE-28), and Subira (F,B,45,PubQ3,LS-16,LE-16) act to transform in contrast to reproduce. They work hard to change the established norms and through all their struggles they still express a love and passion for teaching and enabling change, with both stating that teaching still makes them happy.

Examining the narratives of Sofia (F,W,39,Pvt,LE-17) and Sarah (F,W,42,Pvt,LE-19) and tracing the evolution of their pedagogical repertoires provides valuable insights when juxtaposed with the experiences of Sana and Subira. It's essential to highlight that within the participants sample, Sofia and Sarah, both classified as 'white' under apartheid, experienced social advantages. To preclude any misinterpretation, it is pertinent to reiterate my positionality as a 'white' female researcher. Sofia and Sarah, having attended prestigious universities, opted for education from a plethora of career choices. Post-qualification, they encountered no challenges in securing employment, a stark contrast to Sana and Subira, who faced difficulties in finding teaching positions during the same period. Sofia and Sarah portray their entry into teaching as welcoming, having worked in both public and private school, suggesting a sought-after status. This stands in stark contrast to Sana and Subira, who describe their early teaching journeys as challenging, expressing gratitude for eventually securing positions and acknowledging the need to develop their teaching skills to merit the opportunities presented to them.

Sarah displays confidence in her subject knowledge as she perceives herself as a good student who is "academically competitive". Correspondingly, Sofia (F,W,39,Pvt,LE-17), in talking about her first post, also exhibited no insecurity, saying: "[As a student] *I landed up doing a little bit of cover work, subbing work [...] in [suburb name]. So, it was one of the places I applied to after studying and it was a nice first because I had been there before so I went there."* (Sofia,F,W,39,Pvt,LE-17). In addition, Sofia also remarks, like Sarah, that her academic ability mainly through her early childhood development has been incremental to her passion and drive for learning which underpins her confidence as a teacher.

Sofia and Sarah's nurtured confidence and empowerment through their academic ability, which later fed into their acumen as teachers, suggests the importance of developing values orientated around 'confidence, reliability, and faith' to grow trusting stakeholder relationships within

education (Sayed, *et al*., 2018, p. 106). Consequently, as Sofia and Sarah show high levels of confidence in themselves, their knowledges, education, and ability to teach, they become sought after by schooling institution leading them to move between schools with ease in search of new experiences to learn and benefit from. However, their confidence and empowerment as teachers also constructed certain expectations of the schools and curricula they would work with in the future. As Sarah reflects on her initial teaching experiences, she explicitly explains her frustration as a teacher working in the South African public school system as she felt attacked, unsupported, and disrespected. Through her experiences, Sarah became cognisant of the apparent helplessness and disregard for teachers in the public schooling system as well as feeling unprotected due to the lack of empowerment of leadership and teachers. Likewise, Sofia shared the same frustration in her initial teaching experiences at a public school, stating: *He* [the principal] *threw me under the bus in front of a group of parents* [...] *The parents took me out.* (Sofia,F,W,39,Pvt,LE-17).

In Sofia becoming conscious of the power dynamics between stakeholders at school (e.g. management, parents, and teachers), she also establishes that, as a teacher in a public school, she lacked support and empowerment. Both Sarah and Sofia leave the public schooling space and insert themselves into private schools. Through their experiences in private schools, they state that they felt supported and respected as teachers, which nurtured their empowerment as knowledge-keepers. A fine illustration of this is given as Sofia describes the private school she moved to as a "*real bastion of what teaching can be and what it means to be an educator"* (Sofia,F,W,39,Pvt,LE-17).

Sofia and Sarah present private schools as schooling spaces that maintain particular principles and attitudes. They commonly describe these private institutions as "*supportive*", allowing them to feel "*respected*" as they are treated as "*professionals*", which suggests that both Sofia and Sarah experience a greater sense of empowerment in private schools in comparison to public schools. However, this study shows how this sense of empowerment in private institutions is not unconditional. Baltodano (2012, p. 389) argues that new, for-profit educational models are progressively replacing public education. As a result, public spaces that challenge the prevailing neoliberal image of society are becoming less and less articulate. Consequently, as Sarah and Sofia insert themselves into this private schooling paradigm, they conform to new, for-profit educational models which promote "rote learning and teaching to

the test of neoliberal education that negates the possibility of even fantasizing about achieving the values of equal opportunity, justice and social mobility." (Baltodano, 2012, p. 490).

Significantly, as Sarah and Sofia acknowledge these for-profit educational models, they face the undeniable paradox of holding on to equality and social justice as their core values but also adhering to private education that models neoliberal ideology.

Sarah emphasises in her teaching philosophy the development of "*independent thinking enquiry learners"* and how this is far more important than "*what curriculum they cover or what exams they do, or what marks they get at school",* yet also, contradictorily, remarks that "*so often we are bound to the philosophy of a curriculum we have to use, and it is not necessarily our philosophy"*. Thus, although she values the development of "*independent thinking enquiry learners",* the private schooling space has prescriptions that go against her pedagogical values. Steiner-Khamsi & Draxler (2018, pg. 8) argue that public education has become diluted by for-profit entities negatively impacting "the promises of ensuring equality, serving the common good and promoting equitable learning opportunities for all". Moreover, they contend that the foundation of these 'mass production models' i.e. private entities, is defined by scripted teaching, measurable performance and standardisation of the process and desired outcomes. What this means is that although Sarah appears to align with serving the 'common/public good' where pedagogies that promote critical learning are foregrounded (Giroux, 2021), the private institution requires her and the learners to perform. Thus, she applies a pedagogical approach that values a neoliberal technology, namely performativity. In Ball's 2003 article "*The Teacher's Soul and Performativity"* he defines a category of teachers as neoliberal professionals, stating that this category of teacher's is:

> Individuals who calculate about themselves, "add value" to themselves, improve their productivity, strive for excellence and live an existence of calculation. They are 'enterprising subjects, who live their lives as 'an enterprise of the self (Rose 1989) - as 'neoliberal professionals'. (Ball, 2003 pg. 217)

The study asserts that Sofia (F,W,39,Pvt,LE-17) and Sarah (F,W,42,Pvt,LE-19), advantaged by their 'whiteness' in South Africa, wield more significant influence over their education, career paths, and school placements then their 'non-white' teacher-colleagues. While their expectation of 'control' faces challenges in public schools, characterised by unsupportive conditions, they find greater support and empowerment in private school settings. This shift consciously and subconsciously shapes their pedagogical perspectives, reaffirming their sense of personal control and individual empowerment as 'neoliberal professionals'.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Sabine's (F,W,62,PubQ5 LS-37,LE-39) circumstances and upbringing align more closely with Sofia (F,W,39,Pvt,LE-17) and Sarah (F,W,42,Pvt,LE-19), in that she, too, emerges from a relatively privileged position. However, in her narrative about working under patriarchal apartheid rule, her choices and values as a teacher align more closely with those of Sana (F,C,52,PubQ3,LS-17,LE-28) and Subira (F,B,45,PubQ3,LS-16,LE-16), whose upbringing and circumstances are circumscribed by being on the receiving end of apartheid's brutality against people classified "non-white". Sabine leaves her first posting in search of a promotion post and becomes a teacher in a quintile 5 public high school. Here she found the school to be a hostile environment, but instead of leaving, she perseveres to change the schooling environment for the better. What this suggests is that like Sofia (F,W,39,Pvt,LE-17) and Sarah (F,W,42,Pvt,LE-19), Sabine (F,W,62,PubQ5,LS-37,LE-39) was also confronted with challenges as a new teacher, but unlike them, took her "*negative experiences"* and used them to bring about change. Sabine worked herself up into school management and became a representative of the National Professional Teachers' Organisation of South Africa (NAPTOSA), actively inserting herself wherever she could to facilitate change in response to her negative experiences. Her effort in engaging the schooling community and involving herself in all aspects of the public school suggests that, like Sana (F,C,52,PubQ3,LS-17,LE-28) and Subira (F,B,45,PubQ3,LS-16,LE-16), Sabine (F,W,62,PubQ5,LS-37,LE-39) values perseverance as a teacher. This determination allowed her to form part of the schooling community which could explain why she remained at the school for the greater part of her teaching career. Thus, Sabine aligns with the community-oriented values also presented by Sana and Subira. As Giroux (2021) argues the "serious erosion of the discourse of community, justice, equality, public values, and the common good" (pg. 2), these teachers stories become essential in countering the "denial of massive inequality, social disparities, the irresponsible concentration of power in relatively few hands, and a growing machinery of social death and culture of cruelty" (Giroux, 2021, pg.2).

This study does not profess an intellectually lazy binary, i.e. that teachers who work in public schools promote education as a public good and those who teach in private schools promote neoliberal education. What this study is trying to show is that teachers' experiences in both public and private schooling spaces as well as their individual histories, shape what they value as teachers. These values then guide their choices and actions as to where, what, and how they teach which allows the study to explore the workings of injustice and inequality in South African education. Instead, the study posits that to nurture education as a public good, South

African public schools must align their values to guide and support teachers without imposing conditions aligned with for-profit models.

5.3 Critical Pedagogy and the (un)shaping forces of curriculum: Nurturing social justice in education.

This section of the chapter analyses the data, exploring how the teacher participants perceive their teaching roles as political acts. It scrutinizes how they question and enact the curriculum, embodying the roles of transformative intellectuals, challenging traditional knowledge production in the process.

Within the realm of education, a conservative perspective reduces teaching to a set of techniques for imparting knowledge (Reid, 2021). Contrarily, critical pedagogy transcends a mere method, evolving into a political and moral endeavour (Darder, 2017; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1985, 2021; hooks, 2010; Kincheloe *et al.*, 2011; McLaren, 2007). Furthermore, as pedagogy is inherently tied to agency development, critical pedagogy delves into the intricate connections between power, authority and knowledge, framing education as a political act (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2021; Kincheloe *et al.*, 2017; Nomdo, 2023). Critical pedagogy illuminates concerns surrounding authority, control, and the conditions influencing the production of knowledge, values, and skills within specific social contexts (Giroux, 2013).

Sana (F,C,52,PubQ3,LS-17,LE-28), Subira (F,B,45,PubQ3,LS-16,LE-16) and Sabine (F,W,62,PubQ5,LS-37,LE-39) foreground being active members of teacher unions. Sana and Subira in particular identify this space as enabling them to act as transformative intellectuals. Being involved in a union exposed them to knowledge, critical thought, and debates about what it means to be a teacher in South Africa, all of which are features of the transformative intellectual (Foley, *et al.*, 2015). This empowered them conceptually, as it meant that they 'belonged' to a community of pedagogues committed to "the struggle for social transformation inspired by the goals of democracy, freedom and justice" (Foley, *et al.*, 2015, p. 116). Subira and Sana were empowered through their involvement in teacher unions, and they argue that it was within this space they learned more fully what constitutes education. Their involvement with teacher trade unions also accomplished a further set of positive modes for these teachers: it enabled them to be, and to feel, supported to not just conform to curriculum requirements, but to question them, and use "*your own set of thoughts*" (Sana,F,C,52,PubQ3,LS-17,LE-28) to address the political and moral undertaking of education. According to Giroux (2021, p.8) the art of "critically

questioning the institutions, policies, and values that shape our lives, relationships to other, and myriad connections to the larger world" is a key focus in the framework of critical pedagogy.

Kincheloe (2008) asserts in the framework of critical pedagogy, that educational spaces are challenged and formed by history. Therefore, bearing in mind Sana and Subira's own histories of struggle during the apartheid era, they advocate the importance of including social issues and their learners' everyday experiences in their lessons, as they understand that the learners' marginalised living conditions, which are not necessarily reflected in the prescribed curriculum policies, are conditions of living that resulted from the history and politics of South Africa. As Subira explains: "*Sometimes you don't even open that textbook. You end up teaching them life skills [...] Things that are happening out there, like this coronavirus. That is not part of our curriculum, but we are talking about it almost every day.*" (Subira,F,B,45,PubQ3,LS-16,LE-16). What this points to is that Subria internalises the complex lives of her learners, and recognises, explicitly, the political nature of teaching (Giroux, 2013), as she veers off the prescribed curriculum and prioritise knowledge and development that will encourage their learners to "*face life*". These pedagogical shifts are deliberate and reveal the fullness of these teachers' understandings of the nature of education and teaching under conditions of challenging (an understatement) social conditions of the communities they serve. Through their pedagogical shifts, Foley, *et al*. (2015, p. 113)'s argument that critical pedagogy "seeks to take up the subjectivity of individuals and their experiences in a world complicated by capital, reproduction and irrationality" is reinforced.

Sabine (F,W,62,PubQ5,LS-37,LE-39) also discussed the fact that she was a union representative but described her participation in a very different manner to Sana (F,C,52,PubQ3,LS-17,LE-28) and Subira (F,B,45,PubQ3,LS-16,LE-16). Sabine describes her involvement as a task, unlike Sana and Subira, who view their involvement with teacher unions as an engagement or development of their agency. Sabine elaborates: "*I was a NAPTOSA rep. This meant I had to attend meetings and things.*" In addition, how she associates education and politics is presented with fear and hesitation. This could be due to her upbringing where she emphasised that "*in my day you didn't talk about politics or religion, and we were kept quite small in many ways*" (Sabine,F,W,62,PubQ5,LS-37,LE-39). This provides insight into why she views herself as a non-political person but contradicts her perception of herself as she chooses to teach content that invites critical thought and political discussions, however in a manner that is overly cautious.

What this suggests is that although Sabine is a union representative and understands the importance and the impact of political content, she expresses unequivocal hesitation when confronted by circumstances that would require her to take a political stance in the classroom. Dunn, *et al*., (2019) argues that strict 'neutrality' on controversial subjects such as inequity, violence, and racism to name only a few, is a pedagogical approach that has the possibility to marginalise students. Consequently, as Sabine herself states, her personal history had conditioned her to believe that posing questions and talking about these controversial topics was not allowed. She then finds safety in opening up these discussions in her classroom: within the boundaries of educational themes. This is a different pedagogical approach: different to Sana (F,C,52,PubQ3,LS-17,LE8) and Subira (F,B,45,PubQ3,LS-16,LE-16), who embody teaching as a fulsome, integrated political act, and who view social issues as central to all their lessons. Sabine (F,W,62,PubQ5,LS-37,LE-39) arranges political content into specific educational themes through which she creates a framework of safety for herself as a teacher in an attempt to avoid the possibility of marginalising learners.

The narratives of Sofia (F,W,39,Pvt,LE-17) and Sarah (F,W,42,Pvt,LE-19) present teaching as a political act more external to their teacher-being in comparison to how Sana (F,C,52,PubQ3,LS-17,LE-28) and Subira (F,B,45,PubQ3,LS-16,LE-16) have internalised it. Sofia indicates that although she attempts to include political content to the best of her ability, she still perceives herself as not including it enough throughout her teaching. Sofia contends that her capacity to integrate political content into the curriculum is optimised. This implies that the performative aspect of private schooling, aligned with the neoliberal paradigm (Ball, 2003; Biesta, 2015), establishes boundaries that may hinder political content, consequently restricting the application of critical thought. Sofia's internal conflict, torn between recognising the importance of teaching political content and feeling inadequate in its practice, underscores the tension of neoliberal ideology in education (Giroux, 2015).

The previous chapter showed that Sarah required the support of the curriculum to justify teaching content that addresses social issues as she, like Sabine (F,W,62,PubQ5,LS-37,LE-39), fears the possible conflict it invites. However, as Sarah has mainly taught in private schools, her perceptions of her teaching show limited engagement with political content as she describes her teaching environment as mostly unaffected by social issues. Since Sofia (F,W,39,Pvt,LE-17) and Sarah (F,W,42,Pvt,LE-19) both favour international curricula and work in private schools where the conditions of schooling are advantageous, they perceive teaching social issues differently from

Sana (F,C,52,PubQ3,LS-17,LE-28) and Subira (F,B,45,PubQ3,LS-16,LE-16). Sana and Subira internalise education as a political and moral undertaking. In contrast, Sofia and Sarah perceive education as a political and moral undertaking external to their teacher being and based on external forces such as the content prescribed by the curriculum.

The narratives of both Sofia (F,W,39,Pvt,LE-17) and Sarah (F,W,42,Pvt,LE-19) present a confined engagement with politically inflected pedagogies as they work within the boundaries of an international curriculum and the privileged conditions of private schools. This suggests that their pedagogical approach, although foregrounding "*flexibility and responsiveness*", remains within the boundaries of their perceived duty to the private institutions.

Understanding education as a political and moral undertaking is central to exploring teachers as critical pedagogues (Darder, 2017; Freire, 1970; Giroux. 1985, 2021; hooks, 2010; Kincheloe, *et al*.; 2011 McLaren, 2007). The study suggests that, although all five participants perceive the importance of education as a political act, *how* it manifests itself within their professional and personal beings is differentiated. Could the assumption then be made that, through their lived experiences Sana (F,C,52,PubQ3,LS-17,LE-28) and Subira (F,B,45,PubQ3,LS-16,LE-16) internalise and extend everything they do as a political act, whereas Sabine (F,W,62,PubQ5,LS-37,LE-39), Sofia (F,W,39,Pvt,LE-17), and Sarah (F,W,42,Pvt,LE-19) encapsulate political ideology into themes and content, external to their being as teachers? Through this locating of teaching as a political act, *how* they teach and *what* they teach is transformed in ways that could develop learners as agents of change as they work towards equality and social justice, or alternatively reproduce the prevailing inequalities and injustices found in schools and wider society. While this study did not include any observation of practice, and thus cannot make any claims regarding the teachers' actual practices in the classroom, it does explore the perceptions and frameworks that inform each teacher's practice, which can serve as an indication of the extent to which they view teaching as a political act. This then invites future exploration into how teachers' personal histories develop their pedagogical approaches to define what they value.

The next section investigates the ways in which the teacher participants develop and encourage their learners as agents of change.

5.4 Fostering Agents of Change: Teachers' perspectives and practices in empowering learners for social transformation.

Educators play a vital role in promoting a democratic culture and social justice through their work, to act as transformational intellectuals that reject the notions of being merely technicians or functionaries in education (Giroux, 2020).

In the narrative of Sarah (F,W,42,Pvt,LE-19), she illustrates how teachers are reduced to technicians in an online high school in South Africa. She explains:

> *They are private companies; they have to retain and keep selling their courses. They have to retain students, [...] so they are very focused on finding out what works for the client, for the customer, very marketized approach [...] What was frustrating from the teachers' point of view, is that the teacher no longer had that professional control over what they designed for the students they were working with. [...] When you've got this, this sort of learning design process, [...]* ***there's none of that professional flexibility to deal with kids according to their needs****. [...]* ***So the person who actually does the teaching is no longer a teacher they are a facilitator*** *of a course pre-designed by somebody else.* (Sarah,F,W,42,Pvt,LE-19)

What this brings to light is that besides teachers being reduced to functionaries in the (virtual) classroom to deliver these pre-designed lessons, Sarah highlights the values that these predesigned lessons are formed around, which are retaining their "*clients*" and "*selling their courses*". Giroux (2021) argues:

> Pedagogy is often treated simply as a set of strategies and skills to use in order to teach prespecified subject matter. At the core of these notions of teaching is a commitment to a pedagogy of infantilization and repression that is geared towards memorization, conformity, passivity, and high-stakes testing. Rather than create autonomous, critical and civically engaged students, this approach to pedagogy kills the imagination while depoliticizing all vestiges of teaching and learning (Giroux, 2021, p. 4).

The implications of Sarah's narrative are that, although the teachers are aware of the possible barriers prevailing in their classrooms that are central to guiding their pedagogical choices, the teachers' power to engage the learners to "*create autonomous, critical and civically engaged students*" is curtailed by the boundaries of pre-designed lessons geared towards neoliberal technologies like performativity (Ball, 2003).

What this study illuminates, is that these private educational spaces confine the teachers' ability to apply a pedagogy that embrace the values of social justice and the public good in developing democratically engaged citizens. Therefore, Foley, *et al*. (2015) argues that teachers must fight for social change motivated by the principles of justice, freedom and democracy, in addition to

using teaching strategies that aim to mould their learners into engaged citizens in line with this battle. In the realms of morality and politics, pedagogy is not just a conflict concerning knowledge and values but also a contest for control and influence (Giroux, 2015). In exploring the teacher participants' descriptions of a typical lesson, i.e. pedagogical approach, and what a successful lesson entails, the study is able to draw insights into how learner agency is framed and enacted within their pedagogical repertoires as they battle to mould engaged citizens motivated by justice, freedom and democracy (Foley, *et al.*, 2015). Thus, as this subsection further explores how learner agency is framed and enacted within the teacher's perceived pedagogical repertoires, the contention between teaching processes and purpose arises.

Through the narratives of Sofia (F,W,39,Pvt,LE-17), Sarah (F,W,42,Pvt,LE-19) and Sabine (F,W,62,PubQ5,LS-37,LE-39), it becomes clear that they perceive their approach to teaching and learning in very technical formats. The goal of their teaching is to have a structured process that is centred around developing learners' skills which align with defined curriculum objectives. Their responses to describing a typical lesson developed into describing the process of learning and the development of specific skills to be understood and demonstrated, a step-by-step methodological approach. An illustration of this is provided in Sofia's description of a typical lesson. The long quotation here is included as it captures important, detailed insights:

> *I would fall back on something like a time scaffold for the lesson. [...]. So my first 10 minutes are super important so what am I introducing, what is my focus and then I want to give them 7 to 10min of processing time, [...] and then I would want them to recap or share what they have been doing in the last 10 min. So, you have at least two up times and processing times in the middle and then you can choose what you want to do. So are you going to do one-directional in the first 10min and it also depends on the material you know. Or are you going to launch a theme, that works very nicely. Or a flat chat in the first 10min so you launch the theme but they have to work in small groups and then work the room and do it silently and start commenting on each other's ideas. Then you do a little feedback, and then the actual processing activity. [...], so whatever they are doing for processing I would bring blooms into that as well. [...], I would do a launch, processing, the processing and thinking of where am I in Blooms, and then the last 10min is them doing feedback to each other.* (Sofia, F, W, 39, Pvt, LS -, LE 17)

What this suggests is that through well-thought through approaches to learning and teaching, Sofia (F,W,39,Pvt,LE-17), Sarah (F,W,42,Pvt,LE-19) and Sabine (F,W,62,PubQ5,LS-37,LE-39) foreground the development of the learner in a controlled and structured format as they navigate the lesson.

Therefore, although the teachers hold the learners at the centre of their lesson, support learner agency, and use creative methodological techniques, their pedagogical approach is geared

towards skills development, as Sarah affirms: "*...it was a very conscious way of getting them to use a tool kit"* (Sarah,F,W,42,Pvt,LE-19). Furthermore, these teachers are open to learners bringing in their own resources or to suggest a theme, but only within the framework and structures provided by the teacher. As Sofia explains: "*I like it when the kids choose the content. [...] you get a great read on where the kid is at developmentally. [...] you can see whether they are selecting material that is below, on par or above where they are and then you can help them adjust"* (Sofia,F,W,39,Pvt,LE-17). What this points to, in addition to allowing them to choose their content within the teachers' framework, is that the fundamental purpose is not to engage with the content, but rather to assess where the students are developmentally. The question that arises here is: is it possible to fully engage learner agency with the objective to develop engaged citizens, if the teacher holds full control over the learning process and the content even though it might, initially, be sourced by the learners?

In contrast, in the reflections of Sana (F,C,52,PubQ3,LS-17,LE-28) and Subira (F,B,45,PubQ3,LS-16,LE-16), the emphasis of a typical lesson was mainly geared around the purpose of the content and minimally around the process. Although they briefly describe how they go about the lesson in technical terms, they both foregrounded using the learners' knowledge as a starting point.

Approaching her lesson with the assertion that her learners bring valuable knowledge into the learning space is fundamental to being a critical pedagogue. According to Freire (1970), students are not merely passive recipients of knowledge; instead, they are active agents capable of sharing and transforming both their educational experiences and the world around them. The concepts of learners being viewed as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge, where the teachers assume the role of the 'narrator' and the learner becomes a 'listening object', is termed by Freire (1970) as the "banking model of education." This model, as described by Freire, neglects learner agency, critical thought, and reflection (p.45). Moreover, as Subira (F,B,45,PubQ3,LS-16,LE-16) engages in a description of her 'typical' lesson, she centres her description around the skills and values that are relevant to her learners' specific contexts and experiences. In classifying the learners as leaders, Subira begins to shape them into engaged citizens and, like Sana (F,C,52,PubQ3,LS-17,LE-28), empowers her learners by developing their agency. This is what Giroux (2015) and his peers, who write extensively on critical pedagogy, argue is a crucial tenet of education that serves the public good and promotes social justice.

Moreover, both Sana (F,C,52,PubQ3,LS-17,LE-28) and Subira (F,B,45,PubQ3,LS-16,LE-16) explained the importance of learning specific skills such as speaking well, reading, and writing, they perceive

the process of learning such skills as inseparable from the lived experiences and knowledges the learners have. Kincheloe, *et al*. (2011) argue that learners' lived experiences are a valuable source of knowledge that can challenge and enrich the dominant forms of curriculum and pedagogy. Sana vividly illustrates the potent notion that exposing learners to environments beyond their daily circumstances sparks possibilities for diverse futures. As an engaged critical pedagogue, Sana employs excursions outside their impoverished local communities to convey to her students that their challenging reality is not the sole way of life. Through these experiences, she instils the belief that they too have a right to a life characterised by sufficiency and belonging in diverse settings. Aligning with Giroux's (2003a, p. 501) perspective, Sana's pedagogical approach, involving physically showcasing the extent of marginalisation, aims to prompt learners to question their living conditions. Through classroom debates, she encourages resistance against the reproduction of marginalisation, fostering a sense of possibilities and hope. Such pedagogical choices, as Giroux suggests, allow educators to shift the educational focus from perpetuating inequalities ingrained in South African schooling to actively transforming social contexts.

The data suggests that, although all five teachers indicate the importance of the learners' contexts, prior knowledge, and their lived experiences as fundamental considerations of their teaching, the ways in which they frame the learners' contribution differs. On the one hand, the content the learners bring is perceived as a theme from which they can be gauged developmentally, and on the other hand, the content the learners insert is perceived to be the *purpose* of the lesson. In doing so, the ways in which the teachers execute and frame this in their practices can result in differences in how effectively or truly they are engaging and developing democratic agents of change motivated by the principles of justice, freedom and democracy (Foley, *et al*., 2015).

5.5 Conclusion

Throughout this chapter the study discusses and analyses central tenets of critical pedagogy explored through the narratives of five teachers. It is through their perceptions around what education is and their experiences that the study suggests that these teachers develop leadership, not just for individual 'leaders' - it is developed as a deliberate pedagogic act of producing socially aware learners who will become leaders that will not only benefit themselves as neoliberal individuals, but who will, primarily, become citizen-leaders who will

embrace the social challenges that affect them and their communities, both locally and in broader ways.

In exploring the complexities of teachers as agents of critical pedagogy that speak of social change, the chapter explored the choices and actions the five teacher participants make in relation to the school sites and communities in which they teach. Within these specific schooling contexts, they align themselves with values framed by their experiences. As a result, the way they position themselves in relation to what they teach, and the formal structures of power and policy become evident through their described values.

Finally, the teachers' perceptions around their own pedagogical practices, specifically relating to the development of active democratic citizenship through foregrounding learners' agency, became evident through their reflections. As agents of critical pedagogy, it is important to understand that teachers need to acknowledge the following:

> Critical pedagogy [...] is a struggle over consciousness, desire, and values. And is closely linked to the acquisition of agency through practices that constitute a dialogic and critical set of relations between teachers, texts, students and the cultural and social context of learning. (Giroux, 2021, p. 6)

This chapter has found that, while all five teachers often claimed to hold similar pedagogic and educational ideals, how they enacted these ideals and desires and negotiated their pedagogical choices were very different based on their biographies, experiences, their social positionings, and the values they hold as teachers and citizens of South Africa. In addition, an unexpected and crucial insight that must be foregrounded by policy analysts, especially in an era in which we lament the decline of teacher-involvement in progressive trade unions, is that educational institutions mould their identities and engagements with the world. Through trade unions involvement where the teacher professional agency is enhanced and fostered, the conceptualisation of education as a public good is reinforced.

Furthermore, what the study then dares to suggest, is that these progressive teachers recognise structural injustice; they recognise the need for teaching to be explicitly political; that they embrace the challenge, even though they could opt out and go to teach in cosier contexts locally and internationally. Through their recognition they are conscious to the oppressive state of education in South Africa, where the injustices and inequalities of colonial and apartheid South Africa are maintained and reproduced. However, despite the restrictive nature of these structures, many of the teachers, particularly those who have had first-hand experience of

injustice and inequality, are able to enact their agency through their specific pedagogical choices that are progressive and transformative. Thus, the question that arises is: what needs to change in the structures of South African education, teacher training, school contexts, educational policy, and society as a whole to stop reproducing injustice and inequality and provide the space for more South African teachers to further develop and enact agency in creating transformative and progressive educational spaces? This, of course, is a question that requires an entirely different study.

The next chapter concludes the study by summarising the primary research findings and connecting them to broader conceptual debates.

CHAPTER 6: A CONCLUDING REFLECTION

This chapter summarises the major research findings along with their importance and contributions to the research questions. It will also address the study's limitations and suggest areas for further investigation.

The study attempted to understand the factors that inform the perceptions of five experienced female teachers regarding critical pedagogy as part of their pedagogic repertoire within the landscapes of public and private schools in South Africa. The findings and discussion indicate that the teachers who shared similar historical experiences closely aligned in the educational spaces they chose to teach in, what they do in those educational spaces, and finally their described approach to teaching and learning. It is an important finding that, in the South African context, the groupings established generally correspond with the teachers' declared race and class positioning. Further findings show that these teachers form educational values and ideals based on their historical experiences, and that these contribute to and impede teaching practices that promote education as a public good.

Acknowledging that pedagogy involves the deliberate effort of educators to influence the formation of knowledge and subjectivities within specific social contexts is fundamental to adopting a critical pedagogical stance. By questioning the interplay between learning and social transformation, the significance of certain knowledge, and the nature of knowledge itself, it becomes imperative to thoroughly comprehend the teacher-participants' perceptions and experiences to understand the dynamics within South African classrooms and other educational environments (Giroux, 2013; 2015).

As the teachers define education it becomes evident that the marginalised teachers had perceived their work objectives and the social world they inhabit as inseparable. This implies that, by choosing to stay in their marginalised public schools, the political sphere of education forms part of everything they do as teachers in and out of the classroom. They believe they must teach their children life skills so that they too can have an opportunity to have a different and better life, one that is not overcome with violence, inequality, and injustice. In doing so, they enact their agency through the support of the schooling community and their active participation in teacher unions. This suggests that their social relations are crucial to their pedagogic practice which foregrounds social change.

On the surface, teachers from historically privileged backgrounds appear to define education similarly in the ways that it can bring about social change, as they acknowledge the unjust and unequal landscape of South Africa. However, their work objectives are more often aligned with the private institutions they chose to insert themselves into. Unlike the others, teachers from historically privileged backgrounds did not present a strong alignment with a specific school or community, but rather moved from school to school to fulfil their individual needs and goals as teachers. The research suggests that, through their movements through schools, this grouping of teachers is far more independently motivated as they strive for pedagogic development by teaching international or privatised curricula, where the educational ideology that informs these curricula is aligned with neoliberal technologies that disrupt the teachers' personal understanding of education as a public good. Furthermore, as this shift occurs, their perceptions of what they do as teachers and who they are as people remain separate. Therefore, they perceive the role of politics in education as bound to the framework of educational themes and topical discussions that form part of their curriculum objectives, and not an inseparable feature of the social world they inhabit.

Within a pedagogy of repression, learners are primarily defined by their weaknesses rather than their strengths and trained to ignore issues of democracy, justice, and what it could mean to link education to social change. Therefore, all social problems are individualized, collapsing the public into the private, and making it hard for learners to relate personal problems to larger public concerns (Giroux, 2013). The study attempts to show how the features of pedagogy differ in the context of the teachers and suggests that critical pedagogical alignment is more consistently found in the narratives of teachers who occupy socially marginalised spaces. The learners experience immense social problems, and these are placed at the centre of each lesson because addressing them could be learners' only hope of social mobility and broader social change. The question then arises: What type of pedagogy is needed in privileged schools for the same emphasis to be placed on social justice? A related question is: Is it even possible to conceptualise social justice in the face of a profit-motive? The social problems learners encounter in marginalised spaces are not only their burden to carry, so how do we share the importance of social change through to the private schools? These spaces, according to the teachers' narratives, are perceived as not having social problems and, thus, they feel no need to foreground them, which further individualises these spaces instead of recognising the part they play in reproducing social injustice. As the gap between public and private school deepens

through policy technologies that foreground individualism and competition, we find ourselves reproducing inequality and injustice at an accelerated rate in South Africa.

What this research tries to present given the limitation of a small sample, is that teachers' historical experiences are fundamental to their pedagogic repertoires. Within their explored narratives, the study shines a light on the persisting inequality still present in the post-apartheid South African education system that continues to be reproduced. As the NDP envisages “a country which we have remade” by the year 2030, it becomes hard to believe in that possibility from the teaching narratives presented here (National Planning Commission, 2012). In the delineations of public schools versus private schools the questions must be posed: what can be done to change the education system to stop reproducing inequality and injustice and foster true transformation? What is the role of the teacher in this process and how does one address their historical experiences in developing their pedagogical repertoires to be transformative instead of reproductive?

A strong example of how a teacher achieved this was in the narrative of Sabine (F,W,62,PubQ5,LS-37,LE-39). She aligns more closely with the privileged group of teachers in her experiences as she shares the same race and social class, but she is the only one of the five teacher-participants who disrupts the narrative of staying in ’your space’. Sabine was the only privileged teacher to remain in a public school and demonstrated strong community values by advocating for an improved teaching environment. These features align more closely with the perceptions and values of the marginalised teachers rather than the teachers with whom she shares historical experiences of privilege. The question that is posed here is: how did Sabine break the pattern we see so strongly in all the other teachers’ narratives of historical experiences determining where and how you teach? Sabine shared a strong memory of her teacher training that could help us to understand this phenomenon.

> *We would sit there and discuss education issues and he [the lecturer] was criticising the national party and the way they ran education. Then he was saying that this stupid decision and that stupid decision, and I was mystified. [...] I was really naïve. And then in the public relations office, there was a new portfolio called rural development and the chap there [...] got the idea, that instead of sending us into the local schools that were, you know, same old, and they didn’t want us there or need us there. Why don't we go to where we could be of value and that was in the former homelands.* (Sabine, F, W, 62, PubQ5, LS 37, LE 39).

In this quote, Sabine relates an intensely disruptive experience from early in her teaching career that caused her to question her own political positionality and exposed her to teaching contexts that were different from the ones she had been socialised into. This moment of disruption is in essence critical pedagogy enacted in the questioning of dominant knowledges. The power of Sabine's experiences in the 'former homelands' in addition to the critical conversations she was engaging in at a tertiary level allowed her to move beyond her limited experiences of education in privileged spaces, where social justice is not acknowledged or relevant. In doing so, she was able to disrupt the reproduction of inequalities in the education system.

What can be learned from these narratives is the importance of disruption and critical thought in addressing the reproduction of inequalities and injustices in South Africa. In the powerful words of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: "Show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they will become" (2020, 09:36). Therefore, in 'raising' teachers and learners it is imperative to expose them to all knowledges for them to be enabled to overcome their blind spots of upbringing, schooling, culture to list only a few.

6.1 Limitations and Recommendations

> It is only by mastering an understanding of the limitations of established bodies of knowledge that it becomes possible for individuals to develop a platform upon which to fruitfully transcend the shortcomings of established knowledge frameworks. (McGettigan, 2008, p. 898)

As in most qualitative studies there are limitations to the sample selection. Only five teachers were interviewed, which suggests that further research with more teacher-narratives to support or challenge the findings of the study would be fruitful. In addition, only teachers residing in the Western Cape of South Africa were included in the study. Additional research could investigate narratives from other areas of South Africa as well as internationally, which could lead to interesting contributions to the existing body of knowledge. As part of the sample, male teachers could also have been included as well as teachers with less teaching experience to investigate other criteria in pedagogic practices.

As a minor dissertation in partial completion of a Master's in Education, the study was also bound by time constraints as well as financial constraints. Therefore, in a dreamworld where time did not equate to money, it would have been beneficial to have more time available to the study to perhaps include observations in addition to a follow-up interview. However, as the research was conducted at the time of the Covid-19 pandemic (an additional limitation), these improvements, and additions were not permitted at the time. For that reason, access to the

participants was only virtual and an in-person interaction could have added another layer of complexity to the study.

The researcher's own inexperience of interviewing individuals likely influenced the data collection, with the researcher noting during the transcription and coding process opportunities for posing follow-up and explanatory questions that she had missed. These questions could have led to even more in-depth findings. It is therefore noted that it would have been beneficial to conduct follow-up interviews after the first layer of analysis if the time and resources had allowed for it.

Finally, as in all qualitative research, researcher bias "involves influences that compromise accurate sampling, data collection, data interpretation, and the reporting of findings" (Given, 2008, p. 60). The researcher suggests regular review and critique of the study throughout the initial and final stages of the study to ensure the body of knowledge does not fall prey to researcher bias. As such, an acknowledgement of the limitations to the research design, a self-awareness of the values and assumptions influencing the researcher, and an openness to alternative interpretations of the data is recommended.

6.2 Further research recommendations

The focus of this research involved an exploration of teachers' perceptions concerning critical pedagogy as an integral component of their pedagogical repertoire. Central to this exploration was the conceptual framework of critical pedagogy which is complex and multifaceted. Thus, the research design selected only the necessary concepts of critical pedagogy in analysing the data due to the limitations of a minor dissertation. A strong recommendation would be to take further concepts of critical pedagogy to extend the research findings. The research agenda emerging from this study for those who are willing to take this type of study forward, is a deliberate appeal for more intensive research about the inner workings of teachers mind and what they think they are bringing to the world and how this focus gets shaped or unshaped through their historical experiences.

6.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, the exploration of critical pedagogic narrative among five progressive female teachers in South African classrooms has illuminated the intricate tapestry of education as a transformative process. As Samoff (1996, p.249) eloquently states, education is a marvellously

complex phenomenon, widely acknowledged for its value and political prominence, yet perpetually elusive in its workings.

This study refrains from offering a typology of critical pedagogies but, instead, engages in an inductive research process to unravel the lived experiences of these educators. Through a continuum of narratives, the study identifies these teachers as positioned on the broad left of the political spectrum, embodying the progressive ideals advocated by scholars like Giroux, Freire and Kincheloe. Their commitment to personal sacrifice and the minimization of personal subjectivity aligns with the pursuit of the greater social good, especially in the face of contemporary challenges.

While the study does not explicitly focus on 'race' or 'class', it unearths a subtle schism between historically labelled 'Black', 'Coloured', 'Indian' and 'white' individuals. The narratives challenge societal labels, urging a shift towards thinking socially in progressive ways, transcending the historical divides ingrained by apartheid. This also invites further research into the enduring influence of 'race' and 'class' in education settings.

This study has also highlighted the complexity of neoliberal individualisation. It appears that, in this small sample, teachers who have previously been advantaged by being 'white', are more susceptible to the neoliberal individualisation of their career. As Harvey (2005, p.5) writes:

> For any way of thought to become dominant, a conceptual apparatus has to be advanced that appeals to our intuition and instincts, to our values and our desires, as well as to the possibility inherent in the social world we inhabit. If successful, this conceptual apparatus becomes to embedded in common sense as to be taken for granted and not open to question. The neoliberal thought took political ideals of human dignity and individual freedom as fundamental, as 'the central values of civilization'. (Harvey, 2005, p.5)

For this reason, neoliberalism is taught as being normative, and all are susceptible to its destruction as being witnessed in the world today. For the importance of this study, where neoliberalism, presently the prevailing global political-economic ideology, shapes numerous education policy concepts that circulate on an international scale, the importance for all stakeholders in education to question education policy and not take for granted that they ought to serve the common good, becomes crucial in the narratives of teachers (Verger, Novelli, & Altinyelken, 2018). These teachers have shown complexity in valuing progressive social approaches and attempting to center the needs of learners, while at the same time being confronted with real difficulties cultivated from neoliberal thought.

By centering ‘ordinary’ teachers, this study unfolds the complexity inherent in their roles, transcending local communities to engage with global debates such as neoliberalism, individualisation, economy, aspirations, individual well-ness, and far more. Drawing from diverse fields, the study underscores the historical embeddedness of these educators and advocates for further research and critical investigation into teachers’ experiences and inner workings of what they think they bring to the world, both locally and globally. The question then arises: What happens to the learners across the world who are left to be taught by teachers who have not managed to overcome their blind spots of upbringing, schooling, culture, religion, lived experiences to name only a few?

This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities within South African education and calls for continued critical inquiry into the lives and experiences of progressive teachers. The resonance of their voices is transformative, demanding not just acknowledgement, but a resounding amplification to propel the forces of change towards the noble pursuit of social justice.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Research Instrument

Main RQ
What are the perceptions of teachers regarding critical pedagogy as part of their pedagogic repertoire?

Sub RQ 1
How do teachers define and operationalise a critical pedagogy approach in their classrooms?

1. Describe how you became a teacher.
   1.1. How did you make these decisions to become a teacher?
      1.1.1. Did you speak to anyone about teaching before you made the decision?
      1.1.2. Was there pressure on you from anyone to choose teaching as a profession?
      1.1.3. Was there pressure on you from anyone for you not to choose teaching as a profession?
   1.2. How did you go about choosing your method-subjects during your teacher training?
      1.2.1. What influenced your choice of method-subjects?
   1.3. Where have you taught at before?
   1.4. How did your career path lead you to where you are teaching now?
2. What would you say, broadly, is your teaching philosophy? Self-reflective statement of your beliefs about teaching and learning.
   2.1. Can you think about how your teaching philosophy has been shape?
      2.1.1. Has any person, e.g., a teacher, parent, friend, writer… made a big contribution to your teaching philosophy? Please elaborate.
      2.1.2. How has your teaching philosophy changed over the past years?
      2.1.3. If your lecturers during your teacher-training years were to observe you teaching now, would they be surprised at what they saw? Please elaborate?
3. How would you define 'education' to a professional in another field, say, law, medicine, accounting?
4. How would you define 'education' to your teacher-colleagues during a workshop, for example?
5. Describe your experience of teaching.
   5.1. What are the most important aspects of your teaching?
   5.2. What are the highlights of your teaching career?
   5.3. What are the lowlights of your teaching career?
6. Describe a typical lesson you would teach.
   6.1. Why would you have chosen to teach this content?
   6.2. What are your own views about the importance or non-importance of this content?
   6.3. Does what and how you teach include the experiences of everyday life?
   6.4. How far are you guided by the requirements of a formal curriculum, e.g. CAPS, in your selection of what to teach?
   6.5. How far are you guided by the requirements of a formal curriculum, e.g. CAPS, in your selection of how to teach this section/content?
   6.6. How often do you think about your students' different life circumstances when you plan your lessons?
   6.7. How well, do you think, are you able to 'reach' your students through your teaching?
   6.8. Would you describe yourself as a learner-centred teacher? Why would you say so, or not say so?
   6.9. How often do you think about changing the way you teach? Please elaborate/Why?
   Did she speak about the relationship between everyday life and what she teaches?
7. How do you know when your lesson was successful or unsuccessful?
   7.1. By what means do you measure a good or bad lesson?
   7.2. Do you encourage students to provide feedback about how they experienced a lesson you have taught? If you do, please tell me how you would go about this.

Sub RQ 2

How do teachers articulate factors that promote and inhibit a critical pedagogical orientation in their teaching lives?

1. What, if anything, has changed in your teaching from when you started teaching to now?
2. What influenced this change? (perhaps a life event, a person, furthering own education)
3. Would you describe the change in your teaching as political? Why? Why not?
4. How much, do you think, does your teaching address serious social issues, like poverty, violence, racism, homophobia, and other sorts of social problems?
5. If your teaching does address serious social issues, what gives rise to this content? Please elaborate.

Sub RQ 3

How does school policy enable teachers to engage with critical pedagogy?

1. At the school where you are currently teaching, are there particular policies that determine what you can and cannot teach in your classroom? Can you elaborate?
2. Are these policies formal, or are they not actually in formal documents? Please elaborate.
3. How have these policies influenced your teaching?
4. Have there been particular policies at any other school you have taught at that determined what you could and could not teach in your classroom? Can you elaborate?
5. At your previous schools, were these policies formal or informal? Please elaborate.
6. How did these policies at your previous schools influence your teaching?
7. Has the SMT ever addressed you about your teaching methods or teaching content? Please elaborate.
   7.1. SBG?

8. In what other ways outside of your classroom do you participate in activities related to education?
9. Why do you decide to involve yourself in these education-related activities?

Is there anything else you would like to still share that I have not touched on and has come to mind?

Appendix B: Consent Form

Applying critical pedagogy to teaching repertoires: perspectives of teachers in a South African province.

Principal Researcher: Angelika Snyders

Department: Humanities - Education

Email: SNYANG002@myuct.ac.za

Date completed ________________________

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Surname | Van Initial(s):

____

Full names:

____

Preferred name:

____

Date of Birth:

____

Institution:

____

Your cell phone number:

____

Your e-mail address:

____

CONSENT AND CONFIDENTIALITY:

Consent to take part in research.

- I.. voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand that participation involves participation in an interview and focus group activity.
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.
- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the dissertation of the researcher.
- I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm, they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.
- I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained in possession of the researcher, Angelika Snyders on a password protected platform or in a locked safe. This will only be accessed by people she feels requires access such as for commentary but they will also adhere to all issues of confidentiality and privacy requirements.
- I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained.
- I understand that under freedom of information legalisation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.

- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

<u>Signature of research participant:</u>

Signature of participant Date

<u>Signature of researcher:</u>

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study.

Signature of researcher Date

Appendix C: Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

Title of the Study:

Applying critical pedagogy to teaching repertoires: perspectives of teachers in a South African province.

Principal Researcher: Angelika Snyders
Department: School of Education, Faculty of Humanities
Email: SNYANG002@myuct.ac.za

Dear Research Participant

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study titled *Applying critical pedagogy to teaching repertoires: perspectives of teachers in a South African province*.

Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask questions if anything you read is not clear or if you would like more information.

Who am I and what is this study about?

My name is Angelika Snyders, a Master of Education student at the University of Cape Town.

The aim of this research is to identify how teachers develop or move towards the adoption of a critical pedagogy. My focus is on the journey of teachers thinking through and applying critical pedagogy in their daily teaching tasks. A key part of this focus will be to investigate how education policy[28], globally and locally, supports or otherwise interrupts this focus.

The study seeks insights regarding the idea that education lies at the heart of building a nurturing society. It centres on the idea that teachers are at the heart of knowledge-building that reaches far beyond the boundaries of the classroom, challenges social inequalities, and work towards the creation of a socially just world.

What will taking part involve?

The research process will consist of semi-structured interviews with teachers. Your participation will be in the form of sharing your insights into how you approach teaching, your teaching philosophy, and teaching styles.

Why have you been invited to take part?

[28] "Policy refers mainly to the sphere of government. Policy is one way in which the government of modern states envisage what they would like, and how they intend to 'make it happen'." (Christie, 2008, p. 117)

You have been identified as a teacher who meets the requirements of the study as you have eight or more years of experience, and through pre-project discussions have bene identified as a teacher who has made a significant impression on colleagues and learners with respect to your approach to teaching.

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary, and you have the right to refuse participation, refuse to answer any question, and to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences whatsoever.

What are the possible risks and benefits of taking part?

The research seeks to understand how teachers come to their teaching philosophies in relation to their practical applications in their classrooms. There are no foreseeable risks of physical, psychological or social harm to participants that might result from or occur in the course of this research. Your participation in this study facilitates the insertion of a marginalised voice in relation to research in teacher-pedagogies for social justice.

Will taking part be confidential?

Confidentiality pertains to the treatment of information that an individual has disclosed in a relationship of trust and with the expectation that it will not be divulged to others without permission in ways that are inconsistent with the understanding of the original disclosure.

Privacy is the control over the extent, timing, and circumstances of sharing oneself (physically, behaviourally, or intellectually) with others.

During the informed consent process, you will be informed of the precautions that will be taken to protect the confidentiality of the data and be informed of the parties who will or may have access to the data. This will allow you to decide about the adequacy of the protections and the acceptability of the possible release of private information to the interested parties.

It may be necessary to collect and link identifying information (e.g., subjects' names) to subjects' responses (e.g., questionnaire answers), but the researcher will do her best to provide the utmost confidentiality of subject data. The following are practices that will be implemented to increase the level of confidentiality:

- Use of codes on data documents (e.g., completed questionnaire) to record identifying information and keep a separate document that links the study code to subjects' identifying information (e.g., only allowing primary researcher access);
- Encrypt identifiable data;
- Remove face sheets containing identifiers (e.g., names and addresses) from survey instruments containing data after receiving from study participants;

- Limit access to identifiable information;
- Securely store data documents within locked locations; and/or

There will, of course, be non-anonymised data in the form of signed consent forms and audio recordings collected as part of the research process.

How will information you provide be recorded, stored and protected?

Signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained in an encrypted external hard drive and kept in a lock-safe only I, the researcher, have access to. A transcript of interviews in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for a further two years after this. Under freedom of information legislation, you are entitled to access the information you have provided at any time.

What will happen to the results of the study?

My plan for this research is purely for submitting it to the University of Cape Town in order to be admitted to the degree of Master of Education.

Who should you contact for further information?

This research is affiliated with University of Cape Town:

School of Education, Faculty of Humanities

Physical address:
Humanities Postgraduate Office
Beattie Building, University Avenue
Upper Campus
University of Cape Town
Rondebosch

Telephone: (021) 650 2691

M.Ed. Research Project in Education Policy, Leadership and Change

Supervisors:

Dr. Yunus Omar (Supervisor) Yunus.Omar@uct.ac.za

Prof. Azeem Badroodien (Co- Supervisor) Azeem.Badroodien@uct.ac.za

Thank you and I hope you decide to participate.

Signed by candidate	25 May 2020 ----------------------
Signature of researcher	Date

Appendix D: WCED Ethics Approval Letter

Directorate: Research

Audrey.wyngaard@westerncape.gov.za
tel: +27 021 467 9272
Fax: 0865902282
Private Bag x9114, Cape Town, 8000
wced.wcape.gov.za

REFERENCE: 20200714-6960
ENQUIRIES: Dr A T Wyngaard

Ms Angelika Snyders
27 Rouwkoop Road
Rondebosch
7700

Dear Ms Angelika Snyders

RESEARCH PROPOSAL: APPLYING CRITICAL PEDAGOGY TO TEACHING REPERTOIRES: PERSPECTIVES OF TEACHERS IN A SOUTH AFRICAN PROVINCE

Your application to conduct the above-mentioned research in schools in the Western Cape has been approved subject to the following conditions:

1. Principals, educators and learners are under no obligation to assist you in your investigation.
2. Principals, educators, learners and schools should not be identifiable in any way from the results of the investigation.
3. You make all the arrangements concerning your investigation.
4. Educators' programmes are not to be interrupted.
5. The Study is to be conducted from **27 July 2020 till 30 September 2020.** No research can be conducted during the fourth term as schools are preparing and finalizing syllabi for examinations (October to December).
6. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey, please contact Dr A.T Wyngaard at the contact numbers above quoting the reference number?
7. A photocopy of this letter is submitted to the principal where the intended research is to be conducted.
8. Your research will be limited to the list of schools as forwarded to the Western Cape Education Department.
9. A brief summary of the content, findings and recommendations is provided to the Director: Research Services.
10. The Department receives a copy of the completed report/dissertation/thesis addressed to:
    The Director: Research Services
    Western Cape Education Department
    Private Bag X9114
    CAPE TOWN
    8000

We wish you success in your research.

Kind regards.
Signed: Dr Audrey T Wyngaard
Directorate: Research
DATE: 17 July 2020

Lower Parliament Street, Cape Town, 8001
tel: +27 21 467 9272 fax: 0865902282
Safe Schools: 0800 45 46 47
Private Bag X9114, Cape Town, 8000
Employment and salary enquiries: 0861 92 33 22
www.westerncape.gov.za

Appendix E: UCT Ethics Approval Letter

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Dr. Joanne Hardman

University of Cape Town, Private Bag X3, Rondebosch, 7701
Physical address: Humanities Graduate School Building, University Ave South, Upper Campus
Tel: +27 (0) 21 650 3920 Fax: +27 (0) 21 650 3489
E-mail: Joanne.Hardman@uct.ac.za Internet: www.uct.ac.za/depts/educate

EDNREC20200604

09 June 2020

A. Snyders
SNYANG002
University of Cape Town

RE: Ethical Clearance for Masters Research project

I am pleased to inform you that ethical clearance has been granted by the School of Education Ethics Review Committee of the Faculty of Humanities for your academic project Applying critical pedagogy to teaching repertoires: perspectives of teachers in a South African province. We wish you all the best with your research.

Regards

____

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR JOANNE HARDMAN

ETHICS CHAIR

"Our Mission is to be an outstanding teaching and research university, educating for life and addressing the challenges facing our society."