English teachers' perspectives on their agency for change: Striving to care in a neoliberal, 'post'-colonial climate

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Abstract

South African and international reform agendas are guided by the goal of quality, equitable schooling for all. The achievement thereof, however, remains elusive. Included in discourses surrounding this goal is a focus on teachers, in recognition of the crucial roles they play in student learning. Teacher-focused research on education reform tends to foreground teachers as professionals or agents of change tasked with implementing top-down education reforms. Yet apart from a small body of literature focusing on teachers' professional motivations towards change agency, little attention is paid in the literature to educational change as *teachers* define it, and to contextual constraints and enablers of agency – particularly in Global South contexts.

Guided primarily by Priestley, Biesta and Robinson's (2015) ecological approach to teacher agency, this dissertation aims to contribute to the literature on bottom-up perspectives on change. It does so by examining how four high school English teachers of historically disadvantaged learners in Cape Town, South Africa, articulate the sense of purpose which drives their change agency, in a context characterised by the inequality and narrow understandings of education associated with neoliberalism. Taking an interpretive, exploratory approach to research design, the study uses a thematic analysis methodology to explore the types of pedagogic practices that participants declare are influenced by their sense of purpose. The study then explores the extent to which these teachers feel they can act agentically to fulfil their purposes in practice. What emerges from the data is an emphasis on an expansive and holistic moral professional agenda, which I argue is largely consistent with ethics of care, particularly as conceptualised by scholars like Noddings (1992) and Grant, Jasson and Lawrence (2010). This expansive agenda has the potential to inform agentic practices which are responsive to students' needs and contextual realities, while countering narrow approaches to education. However, the agenda can negatively impact agency if teachers do not receive the requisite structural and relational support. These findings may advance understandings of ground-up perspectives of quality education and how these intersect with social justice and the realities facing disadvantaged school contexts. The findings also suggest avenues to better support teachers in the development and enactment of their agency.

Declaration

I declare that *'English teachers' perspectives on their agency for change: Striving to care in a neoliberal, 'post'-colonial climate'* is my own work, that it has not previously been submitted in whole or in part for any degree or examination, and that all the sources I have used and quoted have been cited and fully referenced.

Signed by candidate

Mikhaila Steenkamp
November 2023

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This minor dissertation would not exist without the input of my remarkable participants, and their openness and generosity in sharing their time, experiences, and perspectives with me. I am immensely grateful for what they have shared and what they have taught me, and I hope I have done justice to the care, determination, and tenacity they embody.

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DoE	Department of Education
FAL	First Additional Language
GEAR	Growth, Employment, and Redistribution
HDE	Higher Diploma in Education
HL	Home Language
Hons	Honours
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NQT	Newly Qualified Teachers
NSC	National Senior Certificate
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PGCE	Postgraduate Certificate in Education
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SASA	South African Schools' Act
SGB	School Governing Body
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UCT	University of Cape Town
UFH	University of Fort Hare
Unisa	University of South Africa
UWC	University of the Western Cape

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Men and women make the history that is possible, not the history that they would like to make or the history that sometimes they are told should be made.

-Paulo Freire, “Editor’s Introduction”,
Teachers as Intellectuals

My heart is moved by all I cannot save:
so much has been destroyed

I have to cast my lot with those
who age after age, perversely,

with no extraordinary power,
reconstitute the world.

-Adrienne Rich, “Natural Resources”,
The Dream of a Common Language

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This study seeks to explore the perspectives of four high school English teachers of historically disadvantaged learners in Cape Town, South Africa, in relation to the sense of purpose which drives them professionally. It further explores the extent to which these teachers feel they can act agentically to realise their sense of purpose through their daily work and seeks to account for the factors influencing their achievement of agency.

The research topic is thus situated within a body of literature on agency, a concept which sociologically refers to an individual's capacity to exercise "some sort of power" by intervening intentionally in the world (Giddens, 1986:14). This study is guided by Priestley, Biesta and Robinson's (2015) ecological approach to understanding teacher agency, in which agency is 'achieved' through the interplay of individual capacities and the broader contextual and structural environment. The ecological approach describes agency as involving choice and intentionality and – when oriented towards change – necessarily emanating from a sense of purpose which guides the direction of change and all practical strategies to realise it.

1.1. Rationale

Achieving quality, equitable schooling is a key commitment around which international and national South African development efforts are structured. "[Ensuring] inclusive and equitable quality education and [the promotion of] lifelong learning for all" is the United Nations' (2022:11) fourth Sustainable Development Goal, and this goal is shared by numerous organisations, not least by pre-eminent international education agenda-setting body the World Bank (Fontdevila & Verger, 2015). In these commitments, education is framed as an inherent right, and as a means for the achievement of peace and equality. Even more prominent is the role education plays as a tool for national development, conceptualised mainly as economic development (The World Bank, 2022; Avelar & Adamson, 2021). Yet the achievement of quality, equitable schooling remains elusive (Spaull, 2019; Avelar & Adamson, 2021), a reality which has devastating consequences for the lives of people excluded from education's benefits.

South Africa is a striking example of the close links between schooling and society, as well as of how stubbornly inequality in schooling can persist. Declared the world's most unequal country by The World Bank (2022), South Africa's schooling system reflects broader societal inequality. Schools serving the poorest 80% of the country's students appear largely dysfunctional, evidence of which is seen in studies like the *2023 Reading Panel Background Report* (2030 Reading Panel, 2023) which suggests that 80% of South African students enter Grade 4 unable to read for meaning. Without serious intervention, these students' learning gaps only widen as they advance in their schooling journey (Spaull, 2015), losses reflected in the poor results achieved on South Africa's school-leaving National Senior Certificate (NSC) examinations, and the reality that 30-50% of learners in each cohort leave the schooling system before writing NSC examinations (Spaull, 2015; Nodada, 2023)[1]. There are thus hundreds of thousands of children left behind in education in every cohort, whether through incomplete schooling or through matriculating without the skills, knowledge and attitudes needed for self-actualisation and meaningful contributions to socio-democratic or economic facets of society.

There is considerable debate about the mechanisms through which quality schooling can reach all people equitably, yet the meaning of 'quality' is seldom explicitly defined in these debates. Spaull (2015), echoing South Africa's Department of Basic Education (DBE) (2011a), defines quality education as education which leads to learners' successful acquisition of the knowledge and skills deemed valuable by society. Conceptions of what those skills and knowledge should be, and how – and by whom – those decisions should be made are not uncontested. These debates will be traced in Chapter 2, but there is consensus that change is needed in schooling in South Africa and globally.

In reform agendas and public narratives alike, teachers are most frequently positioned as the actors responsible for making that change (see Fontdevila & Verger, 2015; Shalem & Hoadley, 2009). This seductive narrative of teachers as change agents drew me to the teaching profession. Although raised in a disadvantaged Cape Town community, I was educated in privileged school contexts outside of that community and by aspirational, educated family members who reinforced my school learning at home. The juxtaposition

[1] The Grade 12 National Senior Certificate, or 'matric', exam, is often treated as the preeminent marker of quality education and educational progress in popular narratives. See Spaull (2015) for a discussion of why it is inadvisable to use the matric results to draw conclusions about student learning and academic ability.

between the opportunities available to me and those available to my neighbourhood peers impressed upon me the value of education for self-actualisation. At university – once I had begun to unlearn the sense of alienation from my home community which accompanied my education – I became incensed at the injustice that meaningful education was denied to so many, despite promises to the contrary in South Africa's Constitution (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 1996). Becoming a teacher seemed like the most direct path I could take towards remedying that injustice, albeit on a miniscule scale, changing society by empowering its young people, one student at a time.

Yet when I began teaching, it became clear that the narratives focusing on the power of individual teachers in effecting change were so simplistic as to be disempowering in their ignorance of other factors impacting both learner performance and teacher efficacy. I taught in a well-managed, relatively well-resourced school serving historically disadvantaged learners. Even there I struggled with the weight of my strong sense of purpose, and the difficulty of achieving it when basic teaching, marking, extracurricular, administrative, and interpersonal care loads left me little time and energy to reflect on my practice and develop and empower *myself*. I saw my own struggle reflected in the professional journeys of my colleagues, and later the teachers I worked with in teacher support roles. We were committed to changing trajectories of learners' lives and often, of entire communities. The reality was more complex.

Teachers certainly play a crucial role in student learning. They translate curricular and other reforms into practice, and research has consistently found teachers to be the most significant in-school determinant of student academic performance (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2005; Lingard & Keddie, 2013). It follows that teachers would need strong content knowledge, knowledge of learning processes, and support in developing and applying their expertise effectively within their contexts. The latter need is especially pronounced given that teachers are not the most significant determinant of student academic performance overall; the same research referenced above show that teachers' influence pales in comparison to the role played by learners' socio-economic and home backgrounds. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2005:25-26) acknowledges that teachers are focused upon because they are thought to be factors most easily influenced by policy. Regardless of the reasons, in dominant narratives and discourses teachers are seen as the most important factor in learner achievement, while

less attention is given to meaningful teacher professional development (Msibi & Mchunu, 2013) and beyond-school factors which influence learning.

The discursive overemphasis on teachers, and concomitant underemphasis on meaningful development and societal contexts, has wide-ranging implications. Significantly, teachers are blamed in both media and policy narratives when education reforms fail and goals for education are not met (see Bisseker, 2022; Fontdevila & Verger, 2015). Accordingly, and consistent with dominant neoliberal meta-discourses reaching far beyond education, efforts to improve education veer towards tighter controls and one-size-fits-all strategies which limit teacher autonomy, discretion, and thus professionalism. Such constraints reinforce the narrative of failure surrounding teachers, making teachers still less likely to be developed and consulted as experts regarding education policy and governance decisions. This is particularly true for teachers serving disadvantaged communities, and in severely resource-constrained schools.

Much research explicitly referencing ‘agency’ or ‘change agency’ in relation to teachers and education reform, tends to foreground teachers as professionals or agents of change tasked with implementing reforms over which they have no say, and which emanate from external stakeholders like education ‘experts’ with little knowledge of daily realities in classrooms and schools (Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2015; Brown, White & Kelly, 2021). These experts thus recognise neither the specific constraints nor opportunities affecting the work of the teachers whose outcomes or practices they aim to influence. Under these conditions, teachers are expected to accomplish tasks impossible within their contextual constraints, and blamed or demoralised when they fail.

Guided by Fullan (1993), Fataar (2015), and Morrison (2013), this study holds it as axiomatic that if education is to be improved, the meaning and mechanisms of improvement cannot be shaped without the input of actors with knowledge of the material and discursive realities on the ground: teachers. Furthermore, the actors tasked with implementing reforms must feel a sense of ownership over them for the reforms to succeed. Reforms must therefore emanate not only from a material reality, but an ideational reality which begins with teachers’ motivations and their perspectives on what truly matters for their learners, and for education more broadly. Teachers’ motivations need to be better understood if they are to be sustainably developed and harnessed at systemic levels to positively transform education,

their students, and society. This study is a contribution towards the realisation of this vision, and an attempt to place teachers' voices at the centre of conversations about education's purpose and how this purpose can be achieved.

1.2. Research questions and complementary matters

Guided by the afore-mentioned problems and knowledge gaps, this study aims to answer the following research question: *How do four high school English teachers of historically disadvantaged learners articulate themselves as agents of change in Cape Town schools?*

The conceptualisations of agency by Fullan (1993) and Priestley, Biesta and Robinson (2015) highlight the salience of purpose, its connections to practice and the contexts within which agency can be achieved. These conceptualisations informed the three sub-questions into which the main research question is operationalised, namely:

1) How do teachers articulate the sense of purpose which drives their agency?
2) How do teachers' senses of purpose shape their reported pedagogic practices?
3) How equipped do these teachers feel to be agents of change?

Central to the research questions are the perspectives of teachers: how teachers define quality schooling within the context of their school community and subject, how they view their professional identities, and the degree to which they feel they are equipped and have the opportunities to make the change they feel (or have felt) motivated to make. The questions therefore lend themselves to the qualitative, interpretive, and exploratory methodologies which guide this study, and which will be elaborated in Chapter 3.

Further elements of the research question demand demystification. Firstly, what is the meaning of the term 'historically disadvantaged' in this study's context, and why are teachers of these students focused upon? Secondly, why does the research question inquire into *English* teachers' perspectives? These questions will be addressed in turn.

1.2.1. Why focus on teachers serving historically disadvantaged learners in Cape Town, South Africa?

The legacy of apartheid in South Africa continues to echo through all spheres of contemporary social and institutional life. The apartheid regime (1948-1994) heralded a legal system of racial segregation and discrimination, underpinned by an ideology of white supremacy consistent with the country's colonial history. Presided over by a white minority government, apartheid laws classified people into racial (and ethnic) groups, while working to reify those group identities by preventing different groups from living in the same areas, marrying across racial lines, and enjoying the same public amenities. The best residential areas and amenities, as well as the highest paying jobs, were reserved for white citizens. Everyone not white – either labelled coloured, Indian, or African (black) – were either treated as second-class citizens or non-citizens; they were barred from voting, had their movements restricted, and received a fraction of the public spending that white South Africans did.

Education, too, was an institution weaponised by the apartheid government to reproduce social fragmentation and the ideology of white supremacy. Under apartheid, each racial group had a separate education department, with massive inequalities in how resources and expertise were distributed between them (Soudien, 2012:107). Schools were thus racially segregated, and funding followed apartheid racial hierarchies: white schools at the top of the hierarchy received up to 20 times more per learner than black schools at the bottom (OECD, 2007 cited in Mestry, 2014:852). Moreover, there were different curricula for each education department, a separation justified as protecting 'inferior' races from the disappointment of aiming beyond the limited employment opportunities available to them (Soudien, 2012:106).

When the post-apartheid government came to power in 1994, their mandate was not only to run the country but to change it, by unifying diverse groups, "[building] a democracy, [developing] the economy, and [regulating] society in line with the values of human dignity, equality, and justice" (Christie, 2008:3). Again, education was a key institution implicated in these broader social goals. Yet for reasons that will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2, the vision of the achievement of social justice and unity remains unrealised. Although legal racial discrimination was officially abolished, Spaull (2019:3, 8) notes that the country's "levels and patterns of inequality are still steep and map onto the axes of apartheid oppression [that is, race and racialised space] with uncanny regularity". These patterns are modified

slightly by the additional axes of wealth and class, as more people of colour enter the middle and upper classes and are accordingly able to afford access to the privileged social spaces now legally open to them.

In this study, 'historically disadvantaged' refers to people of colour: those labelled African (black), coloured[2], and Indian under apartheid. Although these racial categories are socially constructed and have no scientific basis (Jansen, 2020:3), the decades in which race materially structured the lives and attitudes of South Africans have resulted in continuing material effects and racialised attitudes and discourses. It is in recognition of these legacies that apartheid-era racial categories and terms like 'historically disadvantaged' and 'people of colour' are still used in this dissertation.

To understand the ways in which race continues to structure the lived realities of participants in this study, a more localised lens is required: that of the city through which these participants move, and within which their schools are situated. Fataar (2015:18) notes the importance of the city for understanding schooling, as schooling practices stem less from policy per se, and more from the "localised processes arising out of networked relationships" which reinterpret those policies. Even more fundamentally, Soudien (2006) demonstrates how the city plays a crucial role in how people are allocated to their social positions, particularly in the era of globalisation in which the influence of the state on these processes of subjectification is weakened. Soudien (2006) argues that in Cape Town, as a modern colonial city, those social positions are inevitably classed, gendered, and racialised.

There are parallels between Cape Town and the colonial city described by seminal decolonial scholar Fanon (1968). According to Fanon, the colonial city is compartmentalised into two mutually exclusive, racially exclusive sectors. One sector is for the wealthy "white folks… foreigners" (Fanon, 1968:4). It is a world of permanence and plenty, "built to last, all stone and steel" and in which food, leisure, light, and other good things are abundant (Fanon, 1968:4). By contrast, the colonised's sector is characterised by lack: lack of food and nutrition, light, and space, as "people are piled on top of the other, the shacks pressed tightly

[2] This is a contested term even within the so-called coloured or Cape coloured community. Here it is used in the apartheid sense to refer to people of 'mixed' race, generally the descendents of indigenous Khoi and San people, European settlers, and people of African and Asian origin (Adhikari, 2006).

together" (Fanon, 1968:4). Fanon (1968) argues that to justify the system's inequality, the colonised subject is dehumanised or constructed as evil, which has profound psychological effects on both colonised and coloniser. This situation is unjust and unsustainable, although Fanon (1968) asserts that through decolonial thinking and mobilisation, the colonised can reclaim their humanity and destroy the colonial world. Destruction and rebuilding are key tenets of Fanon's (1968:6) argument: mere elimination of the borders between the separate sectors will not result in equality and "right of way" between sectors.

Fanon's writing has limitations in applicability today, not least given the awareness in many disciplines of the *assets* as well as the limitations inherent in historically underdeveloped areas like the 'colonised's sector' (see Paris & Alim, 2014). Yet like Fanon's colonial city, the implementation of the 1951 Group Areas Act rigidly divided Cape Town and cities like it into separate sectors. Instead of a Manichaean black/white binary separation, Cape Town was divided between white, black, coloured, and Indian racial groups; the latter groups were forcibly removed from areas designated white. Soudien (2006:108-9) powerfully captures the near-barren, underdeveloped character of the "sandy wastes" to which these people of colour were moved, and the messages about residents' worth and belonging which these geographies communicated: namely that the removed were unworthy of basic human rights, and unworthy of the right to belong in the city of Cape Town.

With the abolition of apartheid, the legal borders between areas were abolished. This allowed families of colour who had the necessary funds to move to more privileged areas, or at least to send their children to the better-resourced schools in those areas (Fataar, 2015). Yet the persistence of colonial spaces Fanon (1968) warned about is evident in Cape Town: economic and spatial transformation has been so slow that race can often still justifiably be used as a proxy for class or neighbourhood, albeit to decreasing degrees (Bray et al, 2010:30).

Cape Town areas designated white under apartheid remain predominantly inhabited by white people, who thus have continued access to the educational and other privileges those areas confer (Bray et al, 2010; Spaull, 2019). Meanwhile, the majority of people of colour in Cape Town continue to live in the urban and peri-urban ('township') areas designated to them under apartheid. These areas remain marked by decades of underinvestment in infrastructure, and contend with challenges of poverty, increased violence, gangsterism (Cappy, 2016:126), and historical traumas attendant on apartheid-era violence and displacement. Participants in

this study teach across diverse schools, and diverse are the axes of advantage and disadvantage their learners may occupy. Yet by virtue of their race and class, these learners have all been raised in a society which has marked them as inferior. Even though apartheid was abolished before they were born, most continue to live within a spatial and arguably ideological geography which still communicates the message of their inferiority and lack of belonging, and it is this legacy to which the teachers in this study speak in profound ways.

1.2.2. Why *English* teachers' perspectives?

With 12 official languages and the presence of many other languages from elsewhere on the continent and the world, South Africa is a multilingual country. Yet owing to a complex colonial history and the power of English globally, English has retained symbolic value as the lingua franca in South Africa, and certainly within the country's formal economy and higher education (Anthonissen, 2013; Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2011a:9). Therefore, even though 76% of citizens speak home languages other than English (Moholwane, 2019: 114), most South Africans will study English at school, either as a home language (HL) or a first additional language (FAL). Proficiency in English is needed for social mobility in South Africa, and for most learners to succeed in school: for the majority of high school learners English is the official language of learning and teaching, regardless of learners' proficiency (DBE, 2011a:9). One reason English teachers are important, then, is not only because of their roles in developing skills and learners' "aesthetic and imaginative ability" (DBE, 2011a:8, 2011b:8), but doing so in a language which is crucial, albeit problematically so, in learners' lives and school and post-school careers.

The skills rather than content focus of language subject curricula make language teachers particularly appropriate participants in studies on agency for change. South African language curricula articulate subject outcomes to be the skills of literacy, listening, effective verbal self-expression and critical thinking (DBE, 2011a, 2011b). Creative pedagogies may be used to meet these outcomes, and are encouraged by the curricular positioning of language as a tool for learners to "make better sense of the world they live in" and to engage with ideas that can improve that world (DBE, 2011a:8, 2011b). The skills focus also means that teachers have some autonomy over literature and other texts; teachers therefore may choose themes with which classes engage, and how that engagement proceeds. However, autonomy may be constrained by existing lists of literature from which to choose, school policies, and school

resources. It should further be noted that although autonomy – defined as the comparative absence of regulation – does not necessarily lead to greater agency, the presence of the former may help bring about the latter (Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2015:8). Nonetheless, English HL and FAL curricula are theoretically supportive of teacher agency, as well as engagement with critical themes like social justice, more explicitly than many other school subjects.

The study's focus on English teachers as agents of change extends an international body of literature on language teacher agency (Vitanova, 2018; Leal & Crookes, 2018; Pillay, 2017), demonstrating the amenability of language teaching to a study into change agency. Finally, given this project's awareness of the inevitable intertwinement of researcher and research, my experience teaching English HL to Grades 8 to 12 places me in a productive position to undertake this research, owing both to my familiarity with the subject and curriculum, and shared experiences with participants upon which I could build rapport. My approach towards eliminating the bias which may result from my positionality will be addressed in Chapter 3.

1.3. The structure of this minor dissertation

Having explained the research questions and the background and significance thereof, Chapter 1 has laid the foundation upon which the remainder of this dissertation will be built. Chapter 2 consists of a literature review in which existing literature relevant to this study will be discussed. In Chapter 2, the research landscape and context of the research problem will be laid out, and the conceptual framework employed in this study will be explained.

Chapter 3 will then outline the methodology. The type of study, as well as the site selection, participants and sampling approach will be detailed in this chapter. Issues relating to data collection and analysis will be explored, as will the thinking around the ethics of this study.

Thereafter, Chapter 4 will present the findings from the data collected. In Chapter 5, the findings will be discussed and analysed in relation to the literature and conceptual framework. Finally, the critical conclusions this study reaches will be identified in Chapter 6, together with the limitations of the study and recommendations for future research and policy.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

2.1. Chapter introduction

To gain a nuanced understanding of teachers' perspectives on agency, key concepts implicated in the research question must first be established, deconstructed, and defined. This chapter sets out to do this deconstructive and definitional work by teasing out salient strands from the most authoritative literature on these concepts (Mouton, 2001:114).

Consequently, this chapter begins with an explication of the view of teacher agency which this dissertation adopts, situated within the theoretical traditions surrounding it. Given the context-dependent nature of agency as conceptualised here, the global and national education reform milieu will then be laid out, characterised as it is by dominant policies and logics associated with neoliberalism.

Debates around the purpose of education in schools, that are central to questions about the meanings of change that teachers may work towards, will be discussed in the following section, 2.4, of this chapter. The South African policy perspective on schooling's purposes, and teachers' roles therein, follow the theoretical discussion. Section 2.5 turns the discussion to the concept of pedagogy which inheres in an inquiry into teacher purpose and agency in practice. The concept of pedagogy will thus be theorised, with particular reference to productive pedagogies of care. Section 2.6. situates this study within literature foregrounding intersections between teacher change agency and productive pedagogies, highlighting the lacunae in the research field which this study aims to fill. Finally, key insights from this literature review will be summarised in the chapter conclusion.

2.2. Theorising teacher agency

The concept of teacher agency builds upon a rich theoretical history in the social sciences. Giddens' (1986:14) influential definition sums up what is meant by agency in sociological debates: individuals act as agents when they realise their capability to "intervene in the world", thereby exercising power through their intentional actions. According to Giddens (1986:25), agency is both constrained and enabled by social structure, defined as the

"recursively organized sets of rules and resources" implicated in the (re-) production of social systems. Sociological conceptualisations of agency have been developed across intellectual traditions such as the postmodern (Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2015) social cognitive, and sociocultural (see Lasky, 2005). Within these conceptualisations, social actors are generally understood to have some degree of agency to modify external structures. The degree to which structures are understood to shape, constrain and enable individuals differ (Giddens, 1986:25), although the emphasis tends to remain on individuals, with agency understood to be something they possess.

A similar emphasis is seen in studies on *teacher* agency, that is, agency "theorized specifically in respect of the activities of teachers in schools" (Leal & Crookes, 2018:39). In the past two decades – with an even sharper increase since 2015 (Cong-Lem, 2021) – teacher agency has become a popular concept through which to understand how teachers enact practice and engage with policy (Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2015). Despite the volume of work on teacher agency, there is significant divergence regarding how it is conceptualised across the literature (Cong-Lem, 2021:719; Pantić, 2015:760). Priestley, Biesta and Robinson (2015:20) note an inclination in social research to either focus on an "over-socialized, macro view of agency – thus ignoring the local and specific – or to concentrate on over-individualized notions […] thus ignoring questions of structure, context, and resources". This tendency is evident across many of the 104 studies in Cong-Lem's (2021) review of teacher agency literature, in which studies focusing on individual traits associated with agency predominate.

Another subset of work on teacher agency has foregrounded agency's purpose, be it change (Fullan, 1993), social justice (Pantić, 2015), or social cohesion (Halai & Durrani, 2018; Sayed et al, 2017). Fullan's 'change agentry' model is seminal in this regard. Fullan's (1993) experience in education convinced him that a desire to create change is the moral purpose that motivates most teachers to enter the profession, and certainly all 'good' teachers. However, many teachers become disheartened: numerous studies are invoked to argue that teachers' sense of purpose gradually gives way to growing feelings of frustration and "inconsequentiality" (Farber, 1991, cited in Fullan, 1993:57) as the "inevitable difficulties of teaching… interact with personal issues [,] vulnerabilities", social pressures, and values, resulting in them unable to make the difference they hope to. Fullan (1993) proposes 'change agentry' as a paradigm to revitalise the teaching profession, connecting teachers' moral

purpose with the best strategies to accomplish it, namely the cognitive and institutional elements of change agentry.

Fullan (1993:15) identifies four “interrelated and mutually reinforcing” cognitive elements which, if teachers are to be change agents, must be constantly refined: 1) Personal vision-building, 2) Inquiry, 3) Mastery, and 4) Collaboration. Personal vision-building relates to the implicit or explicit motivating purpose which drives all other cognitive elements. This element emerges from individual teachers, although it is ideally refined and converted into a social agenda with others. Inquiry is necessary for refining purpose, being synonymous with "persistent questioning" and "internalising norms, habits, and techniques for continuous learning" such as reflective practice (Fullan, 1993:15). It, too, emerges from within but “must be fueled by information, dilemmas and other [environmental] contentions” (Fullan, 1993:15). Inquiry is necessary because societies are complex and ever-changing, so purposes and strategies to meet its complexities – for both teachers and students – will need to change accordingly (Fullan, 1993). Simply learning and questioning does not go far enough, however; teachers need to master change strategies and innovations, and make mastery a habit (Fullan, 1993:15). Finally, Fullan (1993) acknowledges the impossibility of learning as much as is necessary for change when working in isolation. Accomplishing major changes requires collaboration with others, be they colleagues, peers or mentors, or larger scale school districts, communities and business agencies. Collaboration is therefore the final element of change agentry.

Fullan’s model has proved useful in guiding empirical studies into teacher agency. Van der Heijden et al (2018) use a change agent scale adapted from Fullan’s model to quantitatively inquire into change agent characteristics, while studies like Pillay’s (2017) qualitatively explore agency among English teachers in South Africa’s Kwa-Zulu Natal province. However, although the change agent approach does acknowledge structural factors impacting agency in its inclusion of an institutional counterpart for each individual cognitive ‘change agentry’ element, it dichotomises contextual and individual factors, over-emphasising the latter. This overemphasis is reflected in Van der Heijden et al and Pillay’s studies. Absent from this change agent literature then, are studies which bring together context and individual factors.

Priestley, Biesta and Robinson's (2015) ecological approach, which Cong-Lem (2021) notes has become dominant since its publication, offers a framework for more context-sensitive studies. The ecological approach views agency as something which can be 'achieved' through the interplay of individual capacities and the resources and contextual and structural factors of the individual's environment (Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2015:19). It thus highlights that actors always act by means of their environment rather than simply within it.

The ecological approach builds upon the temporal/relational understanding of agency theorised by Emirbayer and Mische (1998, cited in Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2015), which sees agency as influenced by three dimensions. First, the 'iterational' dimension consists of past personal and professional experiences or 'histories'. These histories shape beliefs and knowledge which impact upon the achievement of agency in the present. Second, the 'projective' dimension is oriented towards future short- and long-term aspirations, thereby acknowledging that agency is necessarily motivated by change in that it is linked to an intention to bring about a future in some way different from the present and the past (Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2015). Yet agency can necessarily only ever be enacted in the present, as is expressed by the third, 'practical-evaluative', dimension. This dimension entails actors' capacities to make practical and normative judgments among different possible trajectories of action, "in response to the emerging demands, dilemmas, and the ambiguities of presently evolving situations" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, cited in Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2015:25). Cultural ideas, values and discourses affect the possible trajectories of action available, as do social structures (relationships, roles, trust, and power) and material resources and environments. This temporal/relational theoretical underpinning establishes the ecological approach as particularly nuanced, and thus appropriate for this study.

Additionally, Priestley, Biesta and Robinson (2015) highlight aspects of their ecological approach which resolve misconceptions around agency. Examining motivations and perspectives is a necessity when exploring agency, since what may appear to be agency may not necessarily be. For example, teachers' resistance to reform, enacted as reproduction of old praxes, can be mistaken for lack of agency until teachers' motivations and institutional conditions show otherwise (Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2015). Agency involves reflection, purpose, choice, and intentional action; when these factors are not present, resulting action is not agentic. These contributions establish the immense value of using qualitative, interpretive methodologies when inquiring into agency.

2.3. The education reform context

2.3.1. Education reform in the global neoliberal moment

The ecological approach to agency demands an understanding of the context in which teachers work, as this shapes the environment by means of which teachers act. In South Africa, as globally, that context is increasingly shaped by policies and ideologies which can be labelled 'neoliberal'.

Albeit with local inflections, policies impacting education are largely global, and spread through processes collectively associated with globalisation: namely innovations in information, communication, and travel technologies which allow people, goods, images, money, and ideas to move across the world at unprecedented speeds and volumes (Christie, 2008: 44-48). The monumental impact of globalisation on the world, and on the positioning of education on the global agenda, is evident in Tarabini's (2010:205) formulation of globalisation as "transforming" an entire world order, as well as the socio-economic context on which that order is based. According to Tarabini (2010:205), globalisation is

> changing the socio-economic context, the political framework and, as a result, the conditions for addressing the problems of development and poverty as well as the role of education in these processes. Globalisation… has served as a catalyst for the introduction of new discourses, new practices and new agendas.

Of all the domains transformed by globalisation processes, the economic domain is arguably the most significant, with the furthest-reaching implications. Christie (2008:45) and Bottery (2006:7) describe an integrated global economy that has come to operate in a single time unit, the characteristics of which can broadly be labelled neoliberal. Rooted in neoclassical economics, neoliberalism denotes a theory and set of practices (Harvey, 2005:7,21) geared towards the economic freedom of the individual, and the idea that "profit-seeking" will lead to greater efficiency and the ultimate development goal: economic growth (Maistry, 2020:2). Theoretically then, neoliberalism is characterised by the supremacy of the market and minimal government involvement, and its principles find form in the privatisation of state enterprises, regressive taxation, and the reduction of government spending on social services like welfare, education, and health (Maistry, 2020:2; Connell & Dados, 2014:117). However,

in practice, the state is expected to be sufficiently strong to enforce conditions for unconstrained private capital accumulation, a reality which Harvey (2005:21) recognises as emblematic of the inconsistencies of which neoliberalism is comprised.

The spread of the neoliberal ideology has considerable political and social consequences. As states relinquish their ability to fund, provide, own and regulate social services, an ever-expanding vacuum is created – which non-state actors come to fill (Robertson & Dale, 2013:432). On the global scale, Robertson and Dale (2013:432) and Verger, Novelli and Altinyelken (2018:4) show how organisations like the World Bank have become increasingly influential in not only regulating education problems and solutions, but defining them, and doing so through a neoliberal lens epitomised by the encroachment of private sector logics of efficiency into public sector institutions like schools. On national and local scales, Verger, Novelli and Altinyelken (2018:4) note that private or market forces, parents, and communities become increasingly responsibility for school funding, while governance and decision-making power similarly shifts from the state to the afore mentioned actors or is devolved to provincial government or schools.

The reality of devolution on teachers' work is at odds with its alluring rhetoric of participatory democracy and inclusion. Devolution is promoted as a means of "loosening bureaucratic controls", in so doing increasing the freedom and autonomy of school communities to directly make decisions on issues which affect them (McInerney, 2003:57-58). Yet in reality, site-based decision-making policies tend not to substantively shift power from central government to the school level (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010:120). What occurs is akin to what Rizvi and Lingard (2010:121) define as functional or fiscal decentralisation: instead of schools having autonomy to govern, they are only responsible for financial and quality management (Ahmed & Sayed, 2006:213). In this way, the roles of actors like teachers and school leaders expand, but in ways which are not chosen by them, and which many argue simply obstruct their core pedagogical work.

Paradoxically, governments' oversight role tends to engender more sophisticated ways of exerting control over school actors, through "overt forms of accountability that have actually increased the grip of the state" (McInerney, 2003:57-58). McInerney (2003) refers to situations in which central governments set the broader educational goals through prescribing and auditing curricula, conducting teacher appraisals, setting and monitoring national

standards and competencies for schools and school staff roles, and implementing state-wide standardised testing. Schools' successes are evaluated through these accountability mechanisms, resulting in simplistic criteria for success which do not only lack context sensitivity, but which are set by powerful policy centres rather than teachers and the communities which schools serve.

2.3.2. South African schooling in the neoliberal moment

The national education system in which this study's participants work is characterised by extreme and deepening inequality. An extensive body of literature describes South Africa's public schooling system as bifurcatory, or two-tiered (see Spaull, 2019, Shalem & Hoadley, 2009). One tier consists of high fee charging schools attended by the wealthiest 20 to 25% of the country's learners (Spaull, 2019:8). Most of these schools were designated white under apartheid and have resources and infrastructure which reflect those superior investment legacies. Learner performance on national and international benchmark tests are also better at these schools; learners perform up to four grade levels above their poorer counterparts in numeracy and literacy competency tests (Spaull, 2019), while Grade 12 passes sufficient to guarantee university acceptance are the norm rather than the exception (Shalem & Hoadley, 2009).

By contrast, the no-fee and low-fee public schools which serve up to 80% of South Africa's poorest and mostly black learners remain poorly resourced in terms of learning materials and basic infrastructure (Spaull, 2019:8). Where libraries, computer labs and other resources exist, burglaries and vandalism often compromise their sustained use (Kapp et al, 2017:17). Classes tend to be overcrowded; teachers are more likely to be underqualified (Bray et al, 2010), and are often described in literature as demoralised, disengaged, and frequently absent, at schools with a high staff turnover which leaves learners without teachers for long periods (Kapp et al, 2017). Learners in Kapp et al's (2017:20) study note that this makes teachers seem unreliable; yet learners also described influential teachers who embrace custodial and pastoral roles, particularly appreciated by learners who face a dearth of these figures at home.

Kapp et al (2017) further chronicle the lack of engaging and academically rigorous classroom practices within these disadvantaged schools. The students in their study described teaching as "test-driven" and "formulaic", in which a narrow focus on simply passing results in rote

learning (Kapp et al, 2017:21-22). Content summaries, worksheets, and exam revision were said to be ubiquitous, but there was little opportunity for problem-solving, direct engagement with readings, or cognitively demanding writing (Kapp et al, 2017). Notably, students in Kapp et al's (2017) study acknowledged that some teachers tried to make learning engaging but were often thwarted by environmental factors like overcrowded classes and insufficient resources. This acknowledgment reflects the interplay of individual and environment which is the foundation of Priestley, Biesta and Robinson's (2015) ecological approach.

Although the gulf between the two tiers of schooling is often highlighted by their being labelled 'functional' and 'dysfunctional' respectively, this study shares the view articulated by Muller (2020) that the normative binary inherent in these labels erases the complexity of the efforts expended in many struggling schools. Like Muller, I instead use Teese and Polesel's (2003, cited in Muller, 2020:5) labels of 'fortified' and 'exposed'. Teese and Polesel's labels emerged from a large-scale Australian study, in which they found that similar factors tended to cluster in schools that performed well, while other factors clustered in poorly performing schools. Factors exacerbated one another, ultimately resulting in fortified schools which are more resilient and insulated against changes in curriculum, society, and policy, while exposed schools are left vulnerable.

Shalem and Hoadley's (2009) view of South African teachers' work conditions through lenses of inequality suggest ways in which certain factors cluster around schools in the South African context. In richer, high-performing schools, teachers can expect physically healthy students who are cognitively well-prepared for learning and come from fortified primary school backgrounds and homes which are "culturally and cognitively congruent with the learning demands of the school" (Shalem & Hoadley, 2009:129). These teachers can rely on educated parents to support school learning, either at home or through hiring tutors (Shalem & Hoadley, 2009:128). School management is often functional and supportive at these schools, protecting teacher autonomy and professionalism and encouraging teacher collaboration. These schools can therefore not only afford to employ more and better qualified teachers, but to retain them owing to more attractive working conditions. The elements listed here fortify these schools against disruption and uncertainty.

On the other hand, in the poorest schools, many learners are cognitively and linguistically underprepared for curricular demands, and do not have parents or tutors to reinforce school

learning through helping with homework or instilling norms and values congruent with those of the school. Teachers at these schools must therefore expend considerably more effort to develop learners. However, this task is "insurmountable" (Shalem & Hoadley, 2009:128) owing to insufficient school infrastructure, lack of effective and supportive management, and sparse staff knowledge resources. Challenges tend to reinforce one another: with fewer resources, and greater effort needed to develop learners and meet curricular demands, the school is less able to attract and keep the best qualified teachers who can contribute to "the stock of good teaching practices" (Shalem & Hoadley, 2009:125) to be shared. These factors expose schools to disruption and uncertainty.

The school categories discussed here highlight the intimate links between schooling and society in their explanation of school underperformance. As Spaull (2019:8) notes, the two-tiered education system mirrors what are effectively "two South Africa's [sic] co-existing within the same borders, poverty and privilege living side by side". Shalem and Hoadley's (2009) analysis shows the limitations of individualising the challenges faced by schools, and of treating teachers as mainly if not solely responsible for change through education.

2.3.3. Neoliberal reform and South Africa's educational inequality

Political economy analyses of the policy mechanisms which contribute to South Africa's educational inequality foreground the neoliberal logics which underlie them. Post-1994 devolution of government functions to School Governing Bodies (SGBs), detailed in the South African Schools' Act (SASA) (Department of Education [DoE], 1996) is one such neoliberal-inspired policy. Comprising staff, parents, and – in high schools – students, SGBs are responsible for matters like budgeting and managing state funds allocated to them. SGBs in schools in richer socio-economic areas may also charge school fees; they therefore determine fee amounts, as well as how fees will be spent. Like devolutionary bodies elsewhere, SGBs are justified by progressive rhetorics of participatory, democratic decision-making. Yet Mestry (2014:853) chronicles how SGBs have increased inequality, as SGB members at the wealthiest and most historically advantaged schools use their social capital and resources to develop the school in ways poorer SGBs are unable to.

Ahmed and Sayed (2009) and Maistry (2020) also demonstrate how charging fees is itself a significant contributor to school inequality. The Norms and Standards of School Funding

policy (RSA, 1998, cited in Mestry, 2014) guarantees equitable school access through granting exemptions to learners who cannot afford fees, and through allocating differential state funding to schools based on need. Yet these measures' potential to equalise the education landscape is offset by the amount school fees add to the effective per capita expenditure per pupil, which far outpaces state expenditure (Ahmed & Sayed, 2009:207). Deeper entrenchment of historical privilege or lack thereof is further exacerbated by the "flight of the economically astute" (Maistry, 2020:4) to more privileged schools. Ahmed and Sayed (2009:212) trace the roots of South Africa's fee charging policy to the 1996 national macroeconomic Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy, whose neoliberal cutting of social service spending had a stronger influence on education policies than did Constitutional guarantees of equity.

State accountability mechanisms proliferate in the South African school context, too. Teachers' work is regulated by performance appraisals, and their autonomy is heavily circumscribed by the curriculum. Also encroaching on teachers' autonomy is the standardised testing regime, particularly the school-leaving National Senior Certificate (NSC) examinations, known colloquially as the 'matric exam'. Dominant South African narratives evaluate the quality of schools based solely on the NSC pass rate (Berkhout, 2007:407), a situation emblematic of what Biesta (2004:2) defines as a culture of performativity, in which indicators of educational quality are taken as *definitions* of quality and thus become end goals in themselves. Yet although it may be attractive to convert understandings of 'quality' education into apparently simple and objective performance indicators (Biesta, 2004:2), this simplification is highly inaccurate, as numbers tell only a miniscule part of a complex narrative of performance.

Still, the policy landscape in South Africa is complex and does not fit neatly and uncritically into any single ideological category. Indeed, as Gerrard (2015, cited in Dadvand & Cuervo, 2020:141) cautions, no policy ideology can be viewed as a monolith: each is invariably shaped by more localised contexts. Ball's (1993) conceptualisation of policy provides further complexity which is useful for shaping a more complete understanding of policy reforms, and how they translate into practice at the level of schools and teachers.

For Ball (1993:11), policy is more than the policy text and resulting practices: it also consists of the processes of collective decision-making, and the outcomes of those processes (see also

Christie, 2008:17). Policy entails both a vision of what "governments in modern states" (and presumably by extension, the citizens they represent) would like, as well as a plan for how that vision is to be realised (Christie, 2008:117). However, a focus on the processes which shape that vision draws attention to the fact that policy products may be coded representations, but they are not necessarily complete or even cohesive; rather, they are the products of struggles and compromises, at "various stages" of the policy process, between often multiple 'authors' and stakeholders with competing ideologies and agendas (Ball, 1993:11). Policy products can therefore be problematised as lacking ideological coherence even in their textual form.

Just as policy-making processes involve contestation, so do the ways in which policies are decoded by policy interpreters like civil servants in education departments, or leaders in school communities. Interpretations may differ depending on the histories, resources, contexts and understandings of policy readers; in the realm of meaning, decoding and enactment, then, policy is necessarily "always in a state of 'becoming'" (Ball, 1993:11). The effects of policies are impossible to fully predict for other reasons as well, not least because policies enter specific contexts, and the "existing patterns of inequality, markets, local class relations" within these contexts all affect how policies are adopted as well as their impact (Ball, 1993:11-12). Furthermore, policies enter existing policy configurations, and their impact will therefore be affected by the degree of compatibility with these configurations (Ball, 1993). The reasons laid out here make it evident that although a reform landscape may broadly be described as neoliberal, this does not necessarily translate into coherently neoliberal policy texts, nor overtly neoliberal *education* policy texts, let alone texts which are translated wholesale and uncritically into actual schools and classrooms.

2.4. Purposes of education

2.4.1. Theorising the purposes of education

If teacher agency is exercised through reflective judgement and guided by purposive intention, then empirical explorations of agency need to engage with what the purposes of education may be. As noted in Chapter 1, school reform literature is seldom explicit about education's purpose: that is, what education is *for*, or what 'good' or quality education constitutes. Biesta (2009:36) postulates that the "remarkable absence" of attention to what is

educationally desirable is partially a result of the issue being labelled too difficult to resolve, or even irresolvable, because it is seen as subjective and thus beyond 'rational' discussion. Yet in the avoidance of explicit discussions of educational purpose, Biesta (2009) notes that a 'common-sense' understanding of purpose is implicit – one which serves the interests of some (powerful) groups at the expense of the less powerful. What this common-sense assumption is can best be explained in relation to Biesta's (2009, 2015) account of the multidimensional purpose of education.

Biesta (2009) argues that the purpose of education can be extrapolated from the different but related functions education systems potentially play in society. The first function is 'qualification', which refers to the transmission and acquisition of skills, knowledge and dispositions which qualify young people to 'do' something, be that a specific job, or economic or civic participation in modern society more generally. The second function is 'socialisation', which denotes the transmission of certain norms, values and "ways of doing and being" associated with existing cultural, social and religious traditions (Biesta, 2009:40). Even when schooling is not explicitly engaged with socialisation, education practices have a socialising effect. Although labelled differently, Soudien (2006) engages with these functions of schooling as well and offers a more detailed explanation than Biesta as to how implicit socialisation occurs. According to Soudien (2006), schooling *could* be an equalising social force by exposing all learners to an education which is relevant to all social groups, including marginalised ones, while also equipping all with high-status knowledge needed to succeed in the globalising world. However, schools tend to acknowledge and privilege only the cultural norms, traditions, and forms of knowledge of powerful groups. Therefore, learners from powerful groups attain academic success more easily while their disadvantaged counterparts are excluded, leading to the de facto reproduction of social inequalities through schooling.

The final function Biesta (2009, 2015) identifies, 'subjectification', potentially enables resistance to the status quo of reproduced inequality. Subjectification refers to the process of developing students' independence of thought and judgment, thereby developing learners as "subjects of initiative and responsibility rather than as objects" of others' actions (Biesta, 2015:77). Whether, and the extent to which, all education leads to this independence of thought is debatable; yet Biesta (2009) argues that education inevitably has some impact on the individual, and thus the 'quality' of subjectification should feature in discussions about education's purposes.

If education always functions in relation to or impacts the afore-mentioned broad areas, Biesta (2015) argues that educators should define what must be achieved in each area to guide practice. The functions of education are therefore also domains of educational purpose, sufficiently broad to account for the diversity of views inherent within domains around, for example, knowledge, knowledge acquisition, or "what it means to exist as a human being" (Biesta, 2015:78). Importantly, for Biesta (2015), teachers are central to answering these questions because answers must be formed in relation to specific contexts and students.

Biesta (2015) identifies the common-sense assumption of education's purpose as residing solely within the qualification domain, focalised around qualifying students for tertiary studies and the job market. This assumption is consistent with neoliberal logics: neoliberalism's assertion of the value of the individual over the collective, and the superiority of the economic over all other aspects of societal development, finds form in the construction of schooling as a lever to produce human capital: that is, consumers trained to meet the needs of the job market and participate in economic growth (Christie, 2008). This narrow understanding of education and educational success can most easily be measured through context-insensitive numbers on standardised tests. Given the dominance of the neoliberal discourse throughout education policies and debates, it is unsurprising that the qualification domain has become the common-sense assumption, foreclosing debates about what the purposes of education are and could be.

While neoliberal logics elevate a single domain of educational purpose, logics associated with alternative values like democratisation or social justice can guide engagement with education's *multidimensional* purpose. Discourses of schooling which foreground democratic values engage with democracy, or rule reflecting the will of the majority (Brooks, Ngwane and Runciman, 2020), in the most expansive sense. Rather than merely referencing citizens voting for representatives to make decisions on their behalf, expansive democratisation incorporates more direct and sustained popular participation in political and civic life. Lipman (undated, cited in Sharp, 2018:192) encapsulates what this understanding of democracy requires of its citizens, when he defines a democratic society as:

> A reflective, participatory community engaged in self-correcting inquiry with regards to its problems and its options… individuals are encouraged to inquire and to reason

> together, to contribute to the work of the society, to influence its government and to share in […] its benefits.

Democratic discourse is woven through critical emancipatory approaches to schooling (see Giroux, 1988), and in approaches by theorists like Lipman (in Sharp, 2018) and Sharp (2018) which centre political ethics of care. For the afore-mentioned theorists, school, as the institution through which all young people pass, is uniquely placed to develop young people's capacities to "inquire and reason together", to reflect, and to influence decisions regarding the direction of social life. Although qualification remains an important function of schooling, important too are ideas about thinking and acting, both individually and collectively in diverse communities.

Inherent within this democratic concern with *equal* participation and opportunity is the concept of social justice. In general, achieving social justice refers to achieving parity of participation of all people, in all dimensions of social life (Fraser, 2005). Overcoming social injustice therefore requires dismantling "institutionalized obstacles" which prevent equal participation (Fraser, 2005:73). Initially, those obstacles were viewed solely as distributional, relating to material and non-material resources needed for equal interactions (Gewirtz, 1998). Yet theories of justice like Young's, later developed by Fraser, have demonstrated the insufficiency of distributional justice (Gewirtz, 1998). Young and Fraser highlight the cultural and political structural processes and forms of oppression which may both result from and contribute to distributional forms of injustice, but which cannot be reduced to them.

For Fraser (2005), additional obstacles to justice include injustices of recognition, that is, of cultural hierarchies which assign differential status to social groups. Furthermore, injustices of representation refer to political structures which specify the boundaries of who is included and excluded from just distribution and cultural recognition, but also from the processes of public contestation and decision-making (Fraser, 2005:74-75). Social justice comprises the targeting and elimination of these multiple forms of injustice; but the "what, who, and how" of justice needs to be democratically determined by those affected (Fraser, 2005:87), thus gesturing once again towards the intertwinement of social justice and democratic values.

The earlier discussion of education's socialisation domain introduced the ways in which social justice is inherent in schooling regardless of whether it is acknowledged as such:

fundamentally, classroom practices and educational governance frameworks "structure, and are strategically selective of, some life chances and social trajectories over others" (Robertson & Dale, 2013:427). In discussing the ways in which schooling structures these trajectories in colonial cities like Cape Town, Soudien (2006) echoes ideas about the purposes of education being fundamentally social and democratic; for him, education should "prepare young people for taking up their rightful places within a democracy" by developing the skills and attitudes necessary for living meaningfully in, making informed decisions about, and exercising responsibilities and rights in a democratic society.

The conceptions of democratisation, equality, redress, and social justice introduced here are thus shown to be intricately connected, mutually reinforcing, and with the potential to guide engagement with what Biesta (2009) argues is education's multidimensional purpose. Neoliberal discourses, on the other hand, mitigate against explicit debate about purposes of education, instead elevating a narrowly defined qualification domain of purpose.

2.4.2. Purposes of education: South African policy visions

Despite an increasingly neoliberal global climate, South African education reforms since 1994 have been couched in the language of social justice and democratisation. Indeed, education reform has been positioned as a key vehicle through which to realise the post-apartheid vision of dismantling South Africa's discriminatory past and establishing foundations for a more inclusive, socially just, and equitable future (Christie, 2008:128). This positioning is evident in the Constitution (RSA, 1996, Section 29), to which all South Africa's policies are subject, which guarantees the right to education for all. Accordingly, the 1995 White Paper on Education and Training states that education policies must "address the legacies of under-development and inequitable development and provide learning opportunities for all". The South African Schools Act (SASA) (DoE, 1996), answering the White Paper's call, articulates a vision for a schooling system which, in addition to improving quality and contributing to citizens' economic well-being, will also:

> redress past injustices in education provision […] lay a strong foundation for the development of all our people's talents and capabilities, advance the democratic transformation of society [… combat] all forms of unfair discrimination and

> intolerance, [and] protect and advance our diverse cultures and languages.
>
> (DoE, 1996: Preamble)

Therefore, although a close link between education and the economy is discernible in the SASA, clearly present too is a democratic discourse which views the status quo of inequitable education structures as unjust. 'Change' in education is positioned here as being about the improvement of learners' lives through holistic development, which should lead to the improvement of society. Yet neoliberal countercurrents in policy have worked against these normative discourses in practice, as Section 2.3. has shown.

Consistent with international trends, South African policy documents portray teachers as key translators of the country's democratic visions into practice. These documents highlight the expansiveness of teachers' mandates. The National Norms and Standards for Educators (DoE, 2000) (hereafter, 'Norms and Standards'), in attempting to "integrate the roles and competences" outlined for teachers in other policy documents (Harley et al, 2000:290), is most instructive in communicating these expectations. The Norms and Standards (DoE, 2000) specifies seven roles which teachers must be trained to play, operationalised into practical, foundational and reflexive competences. Teachers are expected to be leaders and administrators, learning mediators, interpreters and designers of learning programmes and materials, assessors, subject specialists, and lifelong learners/ scholars/ researchers. The remaining "community, citizenship, and pastoral role" expands the idea of what it means to be a teacher still further, as is evident in the description of the educator as having to:

> … practice and promote a critical, committed and ethical attitude towards developing a sense of respect and responsibility towards others. The educator will uphold the Constitution and promote democratic values and practices in schools and society. Within the school, the educator will demonstrate the ability to develop a supportive and empowering environment for the learner and respond to the educational and other needs of learners and fellow educators.
>
> Furthermore, the educator will develop supportive relations with parents and other key persons and organisations based on a critical understanding of community and environmental development issues… (DoE, 2000:14)

The above description thus adds caregiving to teachers' multifaceted role, most clearly in its exhortations for teachers to "support educational and other needs" of learners, and enter into supportive relations with colleagues, parents, and other relevant persons and organisations. Yet scholarship has criticised these articulations, showing how roles envisioned in the Norms and Standards (DoE, 2000) are too extensive for any teacher to perform with equal emphasis, yielding particular problems for teachers in exposed school environments (see Harley et al, 2000; Francis & Le Roux, 2011; Morrow, 2007). These arguments will be expanded upon in Section 2.5.

2.5. Pedagogy

2.5.1. Theorising pedagogy

This study's second research question, *How do teachers' senses of purpose shape their pedagogic practices?,* explores teacher purpose and agency in practice, hence centring pedagogy. 'Pedagogy' has been variously defined, but the connection between practice, purpose, and context acknowledged by the ecological approach this dissertation takes lends itself to an expansive understanding of the concept of pedagogy, such as that posited by Alexander (2001).

In his influential book *Culture and Pedagogy,* Alexander (2001) expands the traditionally narrow definition of pedagogy as solely the act of teaching. Instead, his (2001:3) documentation of the intimate relationships between the "world of the classroom" and the "context of structure, culture and policy in which it is embedded" yielded an understanding of pedagogy as incorporating the act of teaching as well as "its contingent discourses about the character of culture, the purposes of education, the nature of childhood and learning and the structure of knowledge" as set out in the curriculum and elsewhere (Alexander, 2001:540-551). This understanding accounts for contextual nuances which shape teaching and learning, and views a discussion of teachers' purposes, related practices, and the discourses and ideologies underlying them, as fundamentally a discussion about pedagogy.

Extensive literature provides insight into ways in which dominant neoliberal policy regimes work to curtail teacher agency and autonomy, while insufficiently engaging with pedagogy (Alexander, 2001; Lingard & Keddie, 2013). Lingard and Keddie (2013:430) show how the idea that high-stakes testing improves educational standards influences what is taught, when,

and often how, as teachers are encouraged to 'teach to the test' when there is so little room for discretion. Consequently, there is little opportunity to explore, implement and reflect upon pedagogies most suited to their students' needs and their understandings of the purposes of education. In South Africa, Msibi and Mchunu (2013) argue that a focus on curriculum, guided by the idea that curricular reform will improve performance standards, has resulted in misguided attempts to 'teacher-proof' the curriculum. Their analysis of the current Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) reveals curricular documents which "spell out" content coverage per term and the number of weeks allocated per topic, allowing teachers "little leeway to work on the basis of process" (Msibi & Mchunu, 2013:25). Although the English curriculum is primarily skills driven rather than content-prescriptive, teachers' pacing is similarly suggested in CAPS, and controlled by constant assessments. This prescriptiveness narrows the teacher's role to technician (Msibi & Mchunu, 2013), in opposition to the agentic professional discussed earlier in this chapter.

Yet despite – and fuelled by – this lack of engagement with pedagogy, Lingard and Keddie (2013:430) argue that the neoliberal-era policy discourses nonetheless produce certain pedagogies, which they label 'pedagogies of indifference' or 'pedagogies of the same'. The lack of agency afforded to teachers, and the related belief in universal education best practices, results in classroom practices and approaches which do not account for differences between contexts or learners. This situation results in an education system that perpetuates inequality, as the ideal learner envisioned by these policies tends to be privileged in terms of social categories like class and language. Learners from more marginalised backgrounds are thus left behind, relegating the meritocratic ideal driving education in democratic societies to the status of mere fiction.

On the opposite end of the spectrum are what Lingard and Keddie (2013) categorise as 'productive pedagogies' or 'pedagogies of difference'. In focusing on learners' full humanity and funds of knowledge, productive pedagogies have been empirically found to make a difference in the lives of marginalised students within the Australian study that Lingard and Keddie (2013) invoke. These pedagogies view the status quo of inequitable education processes and outcomes as unjust and aim to restore schooling as a public good and a mechanism for social justice and democratisation. To fulfil these aims, productive pedagogies are guided by Fraser's (2005) redistribution, recognition, and representation remedies to injustice. Characteristics of productive pedagogies include intellectual quality, connectedness,

supportiveness, and a valuing of difference (Lingard & Keddie, 2013:433), underscored by the necessary condition of an attitude of care for all students, regardless of background. However, elements of care in schooling are not uncontested, and the contours of these contestations will be explored hereafter.

2.5.2. Theorising pedagogies and ethics of care

Pedagogies of care are largely consistent with both productive pedagogies and the Norms and Standards' (DoE, 2000) vision for teachers' academic, community, citizenship, and pastoral roles. These pedagogies emerge from and are practical expressions of ethics of care, and it is through a discussion of these care ethics that pedagogies of care will be presented.

Caring has been positioned as integral to the purpose and practice of schooling by Noddings (1992), Christie (2005a, 2005b) and Lingard and Keddie (2013). These theories of care build upon Gilligan's (1982) 'ethics of care' approach which, in patriarchal societies, differs from male-centred views of ethics. Gilligan's (1982) approach sees care ethics as a form of fully human attachment, which leads to inclusion in its focus on reciprocity and relationality. As Waghid (2019:7-9) argues when relating Gilligan's work to pedagogical encounters in higher education, for parties to be in a caring relationship they need to treat each other, speak, and listen as if each has something meaningful to contribute to the encounter. Listening to and engaging with others – including those with different perspectives – with openness results in inclusion, which in turn is a precondition for the kind of democratic engagement detailed in Section 2.4. This connection between care ethics and expansive notions of democratic citizenship can therefore be found in early notions of care ethics, and recurs, most notably in the work of Christie (2005a, 2005b).

Noddings (1992) extends Gilligan's understanding of inclusive caring to highlight caring as a practice in schooling. According to Noddings (1992), an ethics of care has four practical components. The first is modelling, in which teachers 'show' students how to care by entering into a care relationship with them. Dialogue is the second component, a concept Noddings (1992:23) links to pre-eminent critical pedagogy theorist Freire's understanding of dialogue as an open-ended, genuine search for understanding, which builds empathetic knowledge of the other on which caring responses must be founded. Opportunities for the cared-for to practice caring is another necessary component, as is confirmation, or "affirming

and encouraging the best in others" (Noddings, 1992:25). A starting point for Nodding's' (1992) and later work on care ethics in schooling (see Dadvand & Cuervo, 2020:142), is the understanding that teaching and learning are ultimately relational and interdependent activities. Therefore, for learning to happen, teachers not only need to build human relationships with learners, but they must also draw upon learners' own motivations, anxieties (Noddings,1992:10), funds of knowledge and worldviews.

If ethics is defined, as Yeatman (2004, in Christie, 2005b:238) defines it, as "the practice of thinking about what living as a human subject in relation to fellow subjects and the world they share demands of us", then democratic discourses of schooling demand engagement with ethics in ways that neoliberal discourses – concerned as they are with a narrow definition of success as qualification – do not. Similarly, ethics of care proponents argue that intellectual development cannot be isolated from valuing and nurturing concerns for what it is to be human (Noddings, 1992, Christie, 2005a, 2005b). Work into care ethics in schooling, despite different inflections, tends to have as its overarching aim the creation and maintenance of schools as places where being human "means caring for each other" based on a shared humanity which transcends social differences but does not render them invisible (Christie, 2005b:246). Although the difficulty of transcending social differences should not be oversimplified, there is scope to engage with these issues within ethics and pedagogies of care, as is discussed below.

'Care' in education is not without criticism. Noddings' work has been critiqued for paternalism in insufficiently incorporating reciprocity and acknowledging learners' knowledge about caring, its silence regarding issues of power and privilege, and its emphasis on feeling rather than transformation of power structures (Sosa-Provencio, 2019). Indeed, the emphasis on feeling is emblematic of a broader "therapeutic turn" in education which represents excesses of care divorced from intellectual rigour, as noted by Dadvand and Cuervo (2020:142). The therapeutic turn advocates "an emotional form of introspective individualism", which treats problems as individual and psychological, thereby solvable through counselling and coaching rather than engaging with problems' structural roots (Ecclestone & Hayes, 2009:136). Studies cited by Lingard and Keddie (2013) found that this therapeutic ethos tends to dominate in resource-constrained, marginalised schooling environments. Dadvand and Cuervo (2020), Lingard and Keddie (2013) and their cited studies agree that care alone is insufficient to achieve equality of opportunity in education;

what is needed is for education to reconcile demands for psychological wellbeing with demands for intellectual rigour.

The afore-mentioned criticisms reference a form of care in schooling which is distinct from care as defined by contemporary ethics of care scholars, who extend care far beyond the interpersonal realm. Even for Noddings (1992), care also incorporates care for ideas, reflecting the principle that content should be meaningful and relevant to be effectively learned. Lingard and Keddie (2013:428) likewise argue that care in its strongest sense can be defined as caring and acting for social justice, while Waghid's (2019) ethics of care is inseparable from questioning, doubt, intellectual accountability and ultimately, greater intellectual demand. In these definitions, then, care ethics and intellectual rigour are indivisible.

More importantly, whereas traditional Western ideas of education – which feminists like hooks (1994) and Salami (2020) categorise as patriarchal, European ('Europatriarchal') and white supremacist – view knowledge and learning as involving reason alone, an ethics of care rests on a view of education which sees the limitations therein. Instead, teaching and learning are viewed as embodied practices, inspired equally by reason and affect (Waghid, 2019). Europatriarchal binaries between mind and body, reason and emotion, and even masculine and feminine are exposed as false within this alternative perspective. "What an idea makes us feel is just as important as what it makes us know", summarises Salami (2020:39). Reducing knowledge and learning to reason alone can only ever offer a partial understanding of the world, and deprives knowledge of its humanness (Salami, 2020:22). What is needed to make learning exciting – and thus knowledge transformative – is a "marriage of emotional intelligence with intellectual skill" (Salami, 2020). Salami (2020) refers to this as 'sensuous knowledge', and hooks (1994) as 'engaged pedagogy'. Waghid (2019) demonstrates that the same principles are inherent within an ethics of care.

Yet within resource-constrained environments in developing contexts, South African scholars suggest ways in which ethics of care may extend beyond classroom-bound practices. In a study engaging with care as a precondition for school resilience in South Africa's Kwa-Zulu Natal province, Grant, Jasson and Lawrence (2010) isolate two notions of care within the Norms and Standards' (DoE, 2000) formulation of teachers' community, citizenship and pastoral roles. The first is pedagogical care, which refers to caring in relation to learners'

"educational needs" (DoE, 2000), thereby incorporating the creation of a positive, empowering, and rigorous classroom learning environment. The second notion is welfare care, which denotes care in relation to learners' basic welfare or survival needs like emotional support, adequate nutrition, and freedom from hunger (Grant, Jasson & Lawrence, 2010:93). A similar distinction is found in Morrow's (2007:103) presentation of teaching and caregiving as related but analytically distinct functions of schooling in society.

Morrow (2007) argues that it is impossible for teachers in disadvantaged contexts to live up to the Norms and Standards' (DoE, 2000) expanded expectations of them. The Norms and Standards' inclusion of caregiving functions in its expectations of teachers assumes that young people live in "secure family settings" which provide adequate "shelter, nutrition, clothing, emotional support, cognitive stimulation… protection from violence" and healthcare (Morrow, 2007:103). When most learners have these needs met at home, caregiving functions can be valued in schools while being sufficiently limited to enable teachers to focus on roles more directly related to teaching (or pedagogical care). However, in the absence of basic needs being met – which is the case for most students in resource-constrained environments – teachers easily become overwhelmed by caregiving tasks which must be carried out before effective teaching and learning can occur. The inability to adequately fulfil both caregiving and teaching roles results in burnout and professional guilt, Morrow (2007) contends, negatively affecting teachers' health, morale, and resilience and, as Lingard and Keddie's (2013) work further suggests, the intellectual rigour of their classes.

For Morrow (2007), to make effective teaching achievable even within resource-constrained environments, teaching should firstly be defined in relation to its formal elements of 'organising systematic learning', rather than elements which presuppose certain (ideal) material conditions. Where significant welfare needs exist, additional actors should be employed to fulfil these caregiving roles so teachers may focus on teaching. Of course, Morrow's (2007) proposition requires resources which, within the current funding system, disadvantaged schools do not have. Yet the teachers in Grant, Jasson and Lawrence's (2010:94-95) study demonstrate that teachers and schools can ensure both welfare and pedagogical care occurs even within resource-constrained environments, by drawing on the "social capital of their community networks". Community networks in Grant, Jasson and Lawrence's (2010) study were often non-governmental organisations (NGOs) who helped supply food, blankets, or healthcare. Schools also reported fundraising help from parents and

the SGB to meet further welfare needs. These South African studies therefore suggest both challenges attendant on approaches centring care, and forms teacher agency may take in meeting diverse care imperatives.

2.6. Change agency, critical pedagogies, and pedagogies of care: intersections

While productive pedagogies have been linked with teacher agency for change in South African literature, these pedagogies have most commonly taken the form of critical pedagogy. Associated with the work of Freire, McLaren and Giroux, critical pedagogy may be as diverse as the people and places that inspire and utilise them, but its various strands have certain principles in common (Monchinski, 2010). Critical pedagogy is concerned with power and politics, reflection and action, all of which cohere around the belief that schools can play a significant role in creating a just and democratic society (Giroux, 1988). To achieve this, classes must foster democratic values through what Freire (2017) labels problem-posing education, in which students, in non-hierarchical relationships with teachers, are active participants in learning and co-producers of knowledge which critiques and analyses social, cultural, and political issues. Critical thinking is fundamental to problem-posing education, as is its translation into emancipatory action or 'praxis': a combination of theory, reflection, and action.

Cappy (2016) draws on critical pedagogy and Fullan's (1993) change agentry theory to empirically explore how teachers, in 'low-income' township and rural schools, encourage students to reflect critically on their lives and take action. For the Kwa-Zulu Natal teachers in her study who recognised their role as change agents, imparting values of respect and morality emerged as most important in their transformative missions, reflecting their "short-term goals of maintaining school order, as well as longer-term goals of fostering social cohesion" (Cappy, 2016:128). The most common practice which exemplified her teachers' agency was narrative instruction, in which teachers simply told learners how to behave. Teachers – particularly English teachers with some flexibility regarding materials selection – also used texts to elicit emotional responses and critical reflection on learners' own lives (Cappy, 2016:133). Most impactfully but infrequently, teachers used debates about social issues to encourage reflection and deeper learning. Some teachers recognised education's potential to further social justice, but most were unclear about how they could foster critical

reflection into action (Cappy, 2016:136). Critical pedagogy is thus a normative ideal rather than descriptive reality in Cappy's (2016) study as well as Moloi's (2019), which argues that exposing teachers to critical pedagogy in "dysfunctional" South African schools will guide and equip them to become agents of (curricular) change. Moloi's (2019:S1) paper is theoretical, but there is no discussion of how mere exposure can occur within – and indeed, transform – the systemic problems she diagnoses as abundant in the "mismanaged" schools where teachers lack subject knowledge and commitment.

Critical pedagogies have much in common with pedagogies of care. In arguing that these pedagogies may greatly benefit one another, Monchinski (2010) notes that they both conceive of education as praxis. Moreover, they are descriptive in that they critically analyse the world and do not take the status quo as inevitable or unalterable, and prescriptive in their fundamental belief that humans must work to transform the world (Monchinski, 2010:14). Monchinski (2010) asserts that critical pedagogies vaguely appeal to an as-yet-unexamined ethics, but an ethics of care may form the ethical foundation upon which critical pedagogies are grounded. Furthermore, care ethics may borrow strategies from critical pedagogy to better transcend the boundary between political and moral realms (Monchinski, 2010), thus becoming more grounded in reality and impactful. This literature therefore calls attention to the overlap between these pedagogies and establish both as productive pedagogies, although critical pedagogy is most explicitly transformative, emancipatory, and socially just. An emergent field of literature around critical ethics of care in schooling (Sosa-Provencio, 2019) attests to the intersections between these ethical and pedagogical forms, although this field is insufficiently developed to be foundational to this study.

2.7. Chapter conclusion

Agency, purpose, and pedagogy are concepts central to this study, and their definitions have been introduced here. Regarding agency, Giddens' (1986) understanding of the concept as an individual's ability to intervene in the world through intentional action remains a useful point of departure, but this study specifically takes the ecological approach to teacher agency proposed by Priestley, Biesta and Robinson (2015). In this approach, agency involves purpose, choice, reflection and action across temporal dimensions, in so doing collapsing the

traditional sociological structure/agency binary by regarding agency as 'achieved' through individual capacity by means of the environment.

The dual focus on individual and environment moves this study towards contextual nuance, which often seems to be overlooked in South African literature on teacher agency. In seeking nuance, this study demands engagement with the material and discursive environments shaping teachers' work, which this chapter has shown cannot be understood in isolation from neoliberalism: a theory and set of practices foregrounding increasing privatisation, individualism, and economic reductionism (Harvey, 2005). Neoliberal policies have resulted in the increased inequality and lack of teacher autonomy that characterise the schooling sector in South Africa. Yet neoliberal discourses coexist uneasily with national education policies foregrounding democratic values, with significant implications for how educational purpose may be defined and enacted.

This chapter's discussion of Biesta's (2009) distillation of different facets of the purpose of education has demonstrated how democratic and socially just discourses of schooling may drive engagement with education's purposes, while neoliberal discourses preclude this engagement and implicitly reduce education's purpose to qualification. Under neoliberal discourses and policies there is similarly a lack of engagement with pedagogy, a concept defined expansively by Alexander (2001) as the act of teaching *and* contingent discourses about culture, education's purposes, childhood, and knowledge. This lack of engagement produces 'pedagogies of the same' (Lingard & Keddie, 2013) which, in their misguided one-size-fits-all philosophy, deepen educational inequality and discourage teacher agency.

Yet context-sensitive, social justice-focused 'pedagogies of difference' have also been recorded by theorists. In South African studies on teacher agency for change, like those by Cappy (2016) and Moloi (2019), critical pedagogy is most commonly invoked. Yet critical pedagogy performs a normative rather than descriptive function in these studies. In descriptive work on schooling in resource-constrained contexts, the notion of 'care' emerges, and may be connected to a rich tradition of care ethics and pedagogies in novel ways within South African basic education research.

The conceptual framework laid out here will guide the analysis of participants' sense of purpose, and the pedagogies through which they enact it, in Chapter 5.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1. Introduction

The previous chapter has situated this study within bodies of literature focusing on purposes of education and their practical expressions in and beyond South Africa, as well as teacher agency and change agency. These concepts provide necessary background to the main research question: *How do high school English teachers of historically disadvantaged learners articulate themselves as agents of change in Cape Town schools?* This chapter focuses on this study's research design and the methods employed in collecting and analysing its findings. What follows are therefore discussions on the research approach which guided this study, as well as the sampling praxes involved in the recruitment of participants. Participant profiles will then be presented, as will the modes of data collection and methods of data analysis. Finally, the ethics involved in the design and execution of this study will be discussed, and the chapter will be concluded.

3.2. Research approach and type of study

This study's exploration of teachers' perspectives on their change agency necessitates a qualitative research approach. The point of departure in qualitative research is the insider perspective – also referred to as the 'emic' perspective – on social action (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:270). Indeed, a distinctive feature of qualitative research is the researcher's "attempt to study human action from the perspective of the social actors themselves" – an attempt which stems from a phenomenological and interpretive belief that human behaviour is "a product of how people interpret their world" (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:271).

Within the broad qualitative orientation, this study can also be classified as interpretive. The interpretivist methodology "rests on a belief in the existence of (potentially) multiple, intersubjectively constructed 'truths' about social, political, cultural, and other human events" (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012:4). The research process is a key element in accessing, and to a degree co-generating (Manning & Cullum-Swan, 1994, cited in Punch, 2014:187), those understandings, as researcher and participant "interpret… events and make those interpretations legible to each other" (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012:4). Like other

interpretive work, the focus of this study is on the "specific, situated meanings and meaning-making practices" (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012:1) of the English teacher participants.

Most fundamentally, however, this is an exploratory study. Stebbins (2001:4) defines exploration in the social sciences as "a broad-ranging, purposive, systematic, prearranged undertaking designed to maximise the discovery of generalizations leading to description and understanding of an area of social or psychological life." In this approach, effective exploration of a phenomenon requires flexibility in seeking data, and open-mindedness in where to find data and how to interpret it (Stebbins, 2001:5). An exploratory study encourages that findings be primarily guided by the data rather than pre-existing theoretical frameworks, hence the suitability of the exploratory approach among these teachers, whose perspectives on change agency have not been studied before.

3.3. Sampling approach and methods

The research question calls for the inputs of teachers who 1) teach English Home Language (HL) or First Additional Language (FAL), 2) teach at schools catering to historically disadvantaged learners, and 3) are or have been committed to effecting change in their schools and communities. The research question thus requires participants to be selected via purposive sampling, which Maxwell (2013:97) defines as a method in which "settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately" to provide information particularly relevant to the research questions and goals.

Cognisant of the volume of the data required from each participant and the limited scope of a minor dissertation, I planned to include no more than five participants. Even within the small sample, I endeavoured to ensure sufficient diversity for rich, comparative insights to emerge. The literature suggests that understandings and attitudes towards agency for change may be influenced by age, years in the profession (Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2015), and educational and home backgrounds (Halai & Durrani, 2018). Consequently, as far as possible, care was taken to ensure participants represent teachers from different schools, but also different age groups, backgrounds, higher education institutions and levels, and levels of experience.

I began the search for participants within my network, hoping that friends in education would lead me to 'change agent' teachers likely to trust me with their honest perspectives because of our social proximity. I do administration and research work at the Newly Qualified Teachers' (NQT) Project, a programme aimed at supporting and capacitating early-career teachers. After informing a colleague at the NQT Project of my participant criteria, she sent me WhatsApp details of a handful of English teachers she knew from years working as a teacher and teacher educator. I contacted these teachers via individual WhatsApp messages.

Only one teacher, Zainab – a name which, like the names of all participants and schools in this study, is a pseudonym – replied and agreed to participate. Owing to Covid-19-related restrictions on face-to-face meetings, we met for an online interview, which resulted in significant refinement of the interview schedule. Our inability to meet for a follow-up interview, as well as my post-data analysis realisation that five participants was too many if I hoped to engage with sufficient contextual detail, resulted in me treating Zainab's interview as a pilot. As such, her perspectives do not form part of the data in this dissertation.

I found participants through other avenues. Two English teachers from my 2020 Honours degree and 2021 NQT Project research interviews had stood out because of their commitment to change. I sent them versions of my Whatsapp messages to potential participants (Appendix B2) and they became my first and second participants, Sifiso and Rachel. I initially planned to interview two teachers per school to gain a clear picture of school-level influences on agency, so I asked my first participants to connect me with a colleague who fulfilled the research criteria. Only Sifiso's colleague, Thembi, consented to become the third participant. The fourth participant was recommended by her principal, whom I had called to request a meeting after reading on social media about transformative community work led by their school and driven, I suspected, by change agent teachers. Providing basic data collection and ethical clearance documents, I discussed my research with the principal and asked if she could suggest a teacher I could interview with her permission. She connected me with Khadija, described as "just the teacher [I was] looking for".

Since participants are central to this study, what follows is an attempt to contextualise Chapter 4 and 5's data and analysis by introducing each participant.

Rachel

34-year-old Rachel was a likeable interviewee, forthright and deeply critical and reflective. She accompanied our meeting at a Bootleggers Coffee shop with jokes about being a "coffee snob", yet she also seriously and readily discussed her own "privilege as a white person", her and her students' identities, and justice. She has long engaged with these issues, notably through her Master's research on oral histories in rural communities and her career in the NGO space, which saw her learning and 'unlearning' from social justice activists.

Burnout and disillusionment with the fast-paced, performative NGO world were factors in her decision to leave, as was a desire for "long-term engagement" with people, which she believed was necessary for positive social change. So she interviewed some teachers to learn about the profession, enrolled in a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) course at the University of South Africa (Unisa) – and when she first stepped into the classroom as a teacher intern almost five years ago, she knew "instantly" that she "was home". Rachel works for justice and inclusivity on her School Governing Body (SGB) and, before Covid-19 lockdowns, through supporting the school's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex (LGBTI) and Social Justice portfolios and founding an extracurricular intersectional feminism club.

Khadija

Of all participants, 54-year-old Khadija was most effusive about her love for teaching, and most certain about her belief in teachers' power to make a difference in students' lives. Initially, I was afraid that her certainty meant she did not yet feel comfortable to share critiques and vulnerabilities, so I organised a second interview at her school. Thereafter, I concluded that she is likely just someone whose impulse is to act to improve things rather than discussing their parameters, and whose 20 years of teaching experience has solidified many deeply held beliefs.

A coloured woman educated in apartheid South Africa, Khadija laughs easily but is clearly a force. Since obtaining her Higher Diploma in Education (HDE)[3] at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), she is constantly upskilling and unafraid to speak her mind ("we as English teachers […], we have the verbal ability. In my case, the tongue is mightier than the

[3] A precursor to the PGCE.

sword!") even though it may make her unpopular with colleagues. She has variously juggled being an Islamic school teacher and principal, parttime correspondence student, community relief organisation member, daughter, wife, mother, head of Language subjects at her school, acting Head of Department, and always: schoolteacher. She sees teaching as her God-given purpose, and beyond her faith she credits good time management for her successes, as well as the influence of her artisan father, who had little formal education but loved literary classics and was determined to raise children who knew they, and their voices, matter.

Sifiso

27-year-old Sifiso was eager to be involved in this research, likely influenced by the same desire to help that he says brought him to teaching. A black, first-generation university graduate from a small town in the Eastern Cape province, Sifiso believes strongly in the power of community, which he sees as necessary to develop teachers, learners, and schools.

'Ubuntu', the African philosophical principle Sifiso defines as "[thinking about] other people, [putting them] first" and caring for and being compassionate towards them, is a principle he tries to reinforce in his learners and in his own life. Ubuntu is evident in his mentoring and holiday tutoring of youth in in his home village, while studying towards his undergraduate degree at the Eastern Cape University of Fort Hare (UFH) and his PGCE at the University of Cape Town (UCT). Ubuntu guides his current engagements with struggling learners, too. With almost two years' teaching experience, Sifiso coaches school sports and sits on various school committees. He is serious about being a role-model and takes pride in how far he has come, and how far his profession and planned future studies may take him. His challenges are significant, but he is adamant that he will not give up. "I fight. I fight," he told me. "That's what I always tell my learners: you need to fight."

Thembi

30-year-old Thembi at first appeared shy and reticent in our interview. However, by the time she had answered my second question, she was speaking animatedly and passionately about her professional struggles, and about her learners to whom she affectionately refers as her "babies". After obtaining her PGCE from UFH and teaching in a private Eastern Cape school for a year until it closed, Thembi moved to Cape Town to find work. Thembi is a black first-generation graduate from a small Eastern Cape town, and the city still feels too noisy and dangerous, while her current school feels overwhelmingly large. She therefore plans to

eventually return to the Eastern Cape, and dreams about travelling and becoming a published poet.

Yet her plans do not seem to detract from her commitment to teaching now. Most of her challenges involve dealing with her learners' behaviour, engaging them, and supporting them, particularly in the absence of adequate support structures. Despite her challenges, she demonstrates abundant optimism: learners may not pass the way she wants them to, but it is only her first year with them – all she needs is more time.

Figure 1 summarises salient biographical information about this study's participants, including their age, race, teaching experience, and post-school education. The information about their schools will be explained in Section 3.4.

Partici-pant	Age	Race	Gender	Years teaching	Post-graduate tertiary education	Current school (and Quintile)	School fees 2022	School's 2021 'matric' pass rate
Rachel	34	White	Female	4	PGCE, Unisa MA Oral History	School C (Quintile 5)	R10 700 p/a	99%
Khadija	54	Coloured	Female	20	HDE, UWC Paused BA (Hons) in Psychology	School B (Quintile 4)	R400 p/a	52.7%
Thembi	30	Black	Female	2	PGCE, UFH	School A (Quintile 3)	R0	59.8%
Sifiso	27	Black	Male	2	PGCE, UCT	School A (Quintile 3)	R0	59.8%

Figure 1: Participant backgrounds and school information

3.4. Participants' school contexts: site selection

All participants were recruited from public schools as these are most accessible, serving up to 93,5% of South Africa's learners (Statistics South Africa, 2019). Chapters 1 and 2 have discussed the extreme inequality across these schools, and one key indicator of a school's position in the resourcing hierarchy is its Quintile classification, determined by the socio-economic profile of the area in which the school is located. Quintile 1, 2, and 3 schools are in the poorest (often exclusively black) areas. They do not charge school fees and are instead provided with the largest government subsidies (Ahmed & Sayed, 2009:206). However, these schools remain disadvantaged, as parents who can afford to invest in schools send their children to private schools, or fortified schools in fee-charging Quintiles 4 and 5 (Ahmed & Sayed, 2009:207). Quintile classifications are a helpful starting point in ensuring the diversity of school environments represented in this study, although there are limitations to the classificatory system which are also evidenced by this study's schools.

Participants teach in schools which serve students from historically disadvantaged backgrounds – that is, students officially classified as black, coloured, and Indian, and who generally still live in areas historically designated for those racial groups. Sifiso and Thembi teach at School A, a Quintile 3 school in a historically black peri-urban area where they both live. Khadija's School B is in Quintile 4, located in the historically coloured area where Khadija grew up. School C, located in a historically white area where Rachel lives, falls under Quintile 5. However, School C itself is not historically white – it was established post-apartheid and is a commuter school, serving a black and coloured student body from diverse areas, including areas served by Schools A and B. Therefore, although the area may be Quintile 5, the school body is not, and the school must seek creative ways of cutting costs and raising funds accordingly. No Quintile 1 and 2 schools appear in this study because of its location: the Western Cape Education Department's (WCED) (2022) 2022 list of no-fee schools shows that schools in these Quintiles are situated outside of the urban and peri-urban areas of Cape Town.

Some differences between School C and the other schools in this study merit brief discussion. School C's fees, at R10 700 per annum at the time of the interview, are significantly higher than Schools B (R400) and A (R0). However, they are much lower than surrounding schools

and schools similarly highly ranked for academic performance. Its staff body is the most diverse of participating schools, and many of its teachers have worked at other top-performing schools. Admission to School C is thus in high demand, enabling the school to hold interviews to inform their student admissions – a barrier to entry Schools A and B do not have. Many of School C's students are funded by bursaries and scholarships, and the school employs a dedicated marketing and fundraising officer to assist with financial growth. At Schools A and B, fundraising tasks simply fall to the SGB, management and teachers. Even within this small sample, then, the limitations of the Quintile classification system are evident, as are the limitations of viewing schools through financial lenses alone.

3.5. Methods of data collection

Two methods of data collection were used in this study. Firstly, when informed about the study and invited to participate, teachers were asked to complete an online questionnaire (Appendix C) about their schooling and university backgrounds, career (how long they have been teaching and at which schools), why they decided to become teachers, and their level of job satisfaction.

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were the second and main method of data collection. Punch (2014:154) describes the utility of in-depth interviews in accessing respondents' "perceptions, meanings, definitions of situations and constructions of reality". Semi-structured interviews have similar concerns, being organised around an interview guide (Appendix D2; see also the matrix in D1 demonstrating the literature and research question coverage which informed the guide) which is flexible to allow for the wording of questions, the questions themselves, and their sequence to be shaped by both interviewee and interviewer. Unexpected themes may therefore emerge, and participants' "knowledge, understandings, interpretations" (Lewis-Beck, Bryman & Liao, 2004:1020) may be fully contextualised and focalised. In-depth semi-structured interviews were therefore deemed most appropriate to this interpretive study into teachers' perceptions and understandings.

The first group of interview questions were broad and open-ended. Facts about participants' educational and work histories had already been captured in questionnaires; by asking teachers to "tell me the story of your teaching journey thus far", and how their professional

expectations compared to the reality, I invited them to articulate the nuances, motivations, and challenges involved in their professional histories. Moreover, the broad opening questions attempted to set the tone for the interview, demonstrating to participants, as Yeo et al (2014:188) suggest, that "their role is to answer questions in their own words" which I would then follow up on.

The interview guide's second section, titled "Questions on teachers' views on change agency", contained more pointed questions about participants' professional purpose, what that looks like in practice, and the extent to which they feel they can make the difference they described wanting to make. This section was therefore shaped by the language and motivations established by teachers in the first section; for example, the key question "What does making a difference look like practically in the classroom for you? Can you give me examples?" may be phrased: "Your goal of building confidence and getting the kids to think critically – for you, what does that look like practically in the classroom?" The approach described here allowed participants and I to collaboratively set the agenda.

I spoke to each participant for between 81 and 152 minutes, spread over one or two interviews depending on the time participants had available and the extent to which all research questions were covered in the first interview (see *Figure 2*). Interviews were conducted between July and September 2022, and took place in person or over videoconferencing tool Microsoft Teams. Participants could choose between these formats, as Covid-19 prohibitions on maskless interactions had just been lifted and I expected comfort levels with in-person meetings to vary. Most preferred to meet in person at their chosen venue: my university (Khadija), a coffee shop (Rachel), or their school (Sifiso, Thembi, and Khadija's second interview). Just the pilot and Sifiso's second interview occurred online.

It was relatively easy to plan for and switch between online and in person formats: Janghorban, Roudsari & Taghipour (2014:2) have noted the similar "authenticity" levels, influenced by their synchronicity and the non-verbal signals involved. Participants and I were in our homes during online interviews, resulting in comfortable and convenient interactions. Yet these were electricity- and technology-dependent; a cumulative half hour was lost owing to Zainab's Wifi dropping, for example, breaking the conversation's flow. I built up my comfort level with in-person interviews more slowly given that they involve full body language which made me more self-conscious, although rapport was built more quickly.

	Rachel	Khadija	Thembi	Sifiso
Interview 1 length	112	94	81	64
Interview 2 length	No second interview	23	No second interview	88
Total	112	117	81	152

Figure 2: Table indicating the length of participants' interviews (in minutes)

Data collection methods were designed to ensure validity, defined by Maxwell (2013:122) as the "correctness or credibility of [a study's] description, conclusion, explanation, [or] interpretation". Firstly, audio recording interviews helped ensure descriptive validity, or factual accuracy, of the data. Secondly, the in-depth semi-structured interviews elicited rich data, which Maxwell (2013:244) argues can help "counter the twin dangers of respondent duplicity and observer bias" as it becomes difficult for a researcher to restrict her observations to only what supports her expectations and prejudices.

Furthermore, the value of data triangulation has been continually emphasised in literature on research design (see Maxwell, 2013; Robinson, 2014). In this study, pre-interview questionnaires enabled triangulation: written questionnaire information was checked against the verbal interview responses, and if apparent discrepancies were found, careful data readings and follow-up interviews contributed to clarifying the reasons for those discrepancies. Triangulation here also assisted in ensuring consistency across methods, time periods or conditions in the study (Drost, 2011:108; Maxwell, 2013:117). Information shared in questionnaires was additionally used to contextualise interview data, and to spark participants' thought processes on the core questions of the interview.

3.6. Methods of data analysis

3.6.1. Transcription

Although Reissman (2008:26) rightly asserts that interpreting data begins during data collection, more focused interpretation and analysis first occurs during transcription. Bird (2005, cited in Widodo, 2014:102) describes transcription as "the act of representing original spoken […] data in written discourse as well as analysing and interpreting" it, thereby alluding the often-overlooked reality that transcription is not a direct reflection of interactions (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1998:4). Instead, researchers make choices regarding how they transcribe the original data based on their theories, which should be explicit if the resulting findings are to be adequately examined and interpreted.

This study's approach to transcription is one which Widodo (2014:105) labels denaturalism, in which "idiosyncratic elements" such as stutters, pauses, filler words and non-verbal signs are removed. The underlying belief is that broader narratives and perceptions of meaning

construct one's reality, rather than the language itself. This method is well suited to thematic analysis (Reissman, 2008:57), discussed in the following section.

I transcribed at least half of each interview to gain familiarity with the data before formal coding, and to reflect upon emerging themes (Widodo, 2014:15). Additional benefits of transcription which Widodo (2014:102) lays out held true as well, particularly relating to transcription's facilitation of reflective critiques of interviewing techniques, prompting me to improve upon techniques in subsequent interviews.

To achieve the above outcomes, I followed Widodo's (2014:103) recommended steps involved in transcribing. He recommends an initial 'warm-up' listening session, deep analytical listening while transcribing, and recording ideas about research themes and interviewing techniques on memos throughout the process – that is, on notes which both record and facilitate the researcher's analytic thinking about the data (Maxwell, 2013:105). I began writing memos while designing this study and continued throughout the research process. Where transcription software Descript or another transcriber transcribed the final half of each interview, I still carefully checked and edited those transcripts, deeply listening and analysing as I did so.

3.6.2. Thematic analysis

Punch (2014:169) and De Wet and Erasmus (2005:27-28) argue that the reliability, credibility, and trustworthiness of a study depends not only on a cohesive research design, but also on a data analysis methodology that is systematic and transparent. What follows is an elucidation of this study's analysis methodology, which is based on Miles and Huberman's (1994) approach to thematic analysis.

Punch (2014:171) describes Miles and Huberman's approach as being designed to trace out "relationships among social phenomena, based on the regularities and sequences that link them". The approach is therefore appropriate in an exploratory study, here allowing for the discovery of patterned themes across teachers' narratives. To make these connections, Miles and Huberman (1994:10-11) specify three iterative analytic processes to be followed: data reduction, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions. Integral to all these processes is coding, which refers to the attachment of labels to 'chunks' of data, thereby indexing it

(Punch, 2014:173). Miles and Huberman (1994) distinguish between 'first level' descriptive codes and 'second level' pattern codes. First level codes require little or no inference beyond the data and enable researchers to summarise and 'get a feel' for the data. Second level codes go beyond this, pulling together data "into a smaller number of more meaningful units" (Punch, 2014:173).

My analysis was assisted by computer-based qualitative data analysis software NVivo. NVivo is valuable in its facilitation of analysis across large amounts of data (De Wet & Erasmus, 2005). In NVivo it is easy to move between the levels of codes which you create, and to verify and edit codes as the software collates quotes beneath each coding label. Each code can be assigned a colour, and the coded text highlighted accordingly in the transcript, for better visualisation.

Punch (2014:187) warns that Miles and Huberman's approach could fragment the data, causing the researcher to lose sight of the full narrative contexts in which data are embedded. To counteract this fragmentation, I constantly revisited the interviews, and viewed fragments in their broader context when drawing conclusions and developing the conceptual ideas, commentary, and justification for coding decisions in memos. These memos, whose importance was underscored by Miles and Huberman (1994:72), proved essential in suggesting patterns and connections and reaching conclusions. Finally, where possible and relevant, larger "bounded" narratives (Reissman, 2008:61) instead of mere fragments were coded, inspired by thematic narrative analysis methods.

In accordance with Miles and Huberman's (1994:58) recommendations, the coding process began with a provisional "start list" of codes within which the first-level codes could be framed. Guided by literature and the preliminary analysis completed during transcription, the start list codes were: 1) Sense of purpose, comprising 'histories' and 'practical-evaluative' factors; 2) Autonomy; 3) How equipped teachers feel; and 4) Pedagogical strategies. These codes were constantly transformed throughout the coding process.

Finally, I used versions of Miles and Huberman's (1994) network and matrix displays (Appendices E and F, and *Figures 3, 4,* and *5*) to diagrammatically "partition the data in a way which facilitates the recognition of patterns, configurations and associations" (Fielding & Lee, 1998:42). These display methods allowed me to clearly see how participant's first

level articulations related to the second level pattern codes within and across research questions. For example, in the diagrams relating to the ‘purpose’ and ‘practice’ research questions in *Figures 3* and *4* respectively, numbers are assigned to each ‘purpose’ pattern code, and then matched to the ‘practice’ pattern code which addresses them. Information was later summarised diagrammatically in *Figure 5,* which formed the skeleton of the thesis argument.

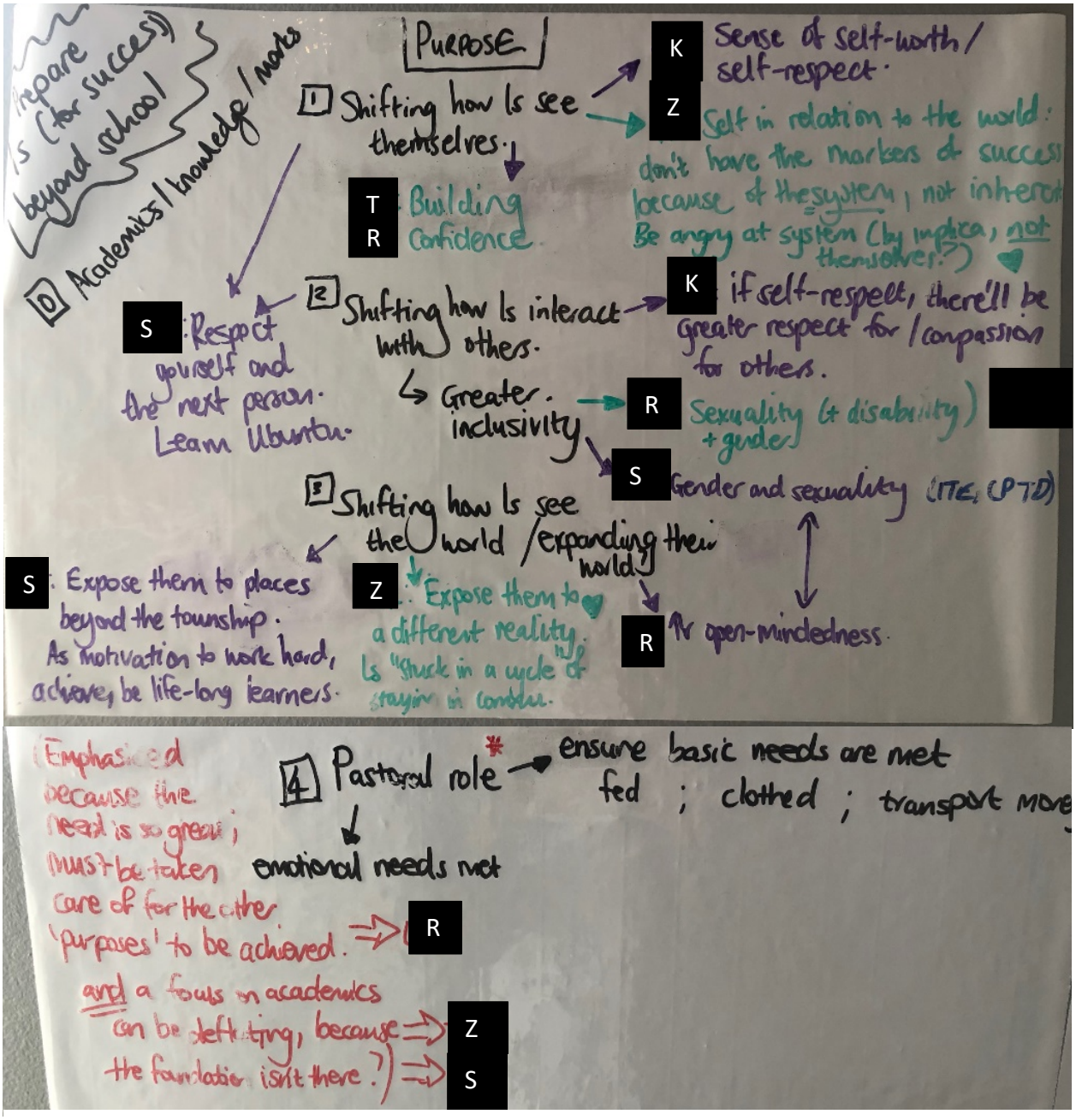

Figure 3: Diagrammatic display of 'Sense of purpose' second level (in black) and first level codes. Participants' initials are covered by their pseudonym initials: Rachel (R), Khadija (K), Sifiso (S), Thembi (T), and Zainab (Z).

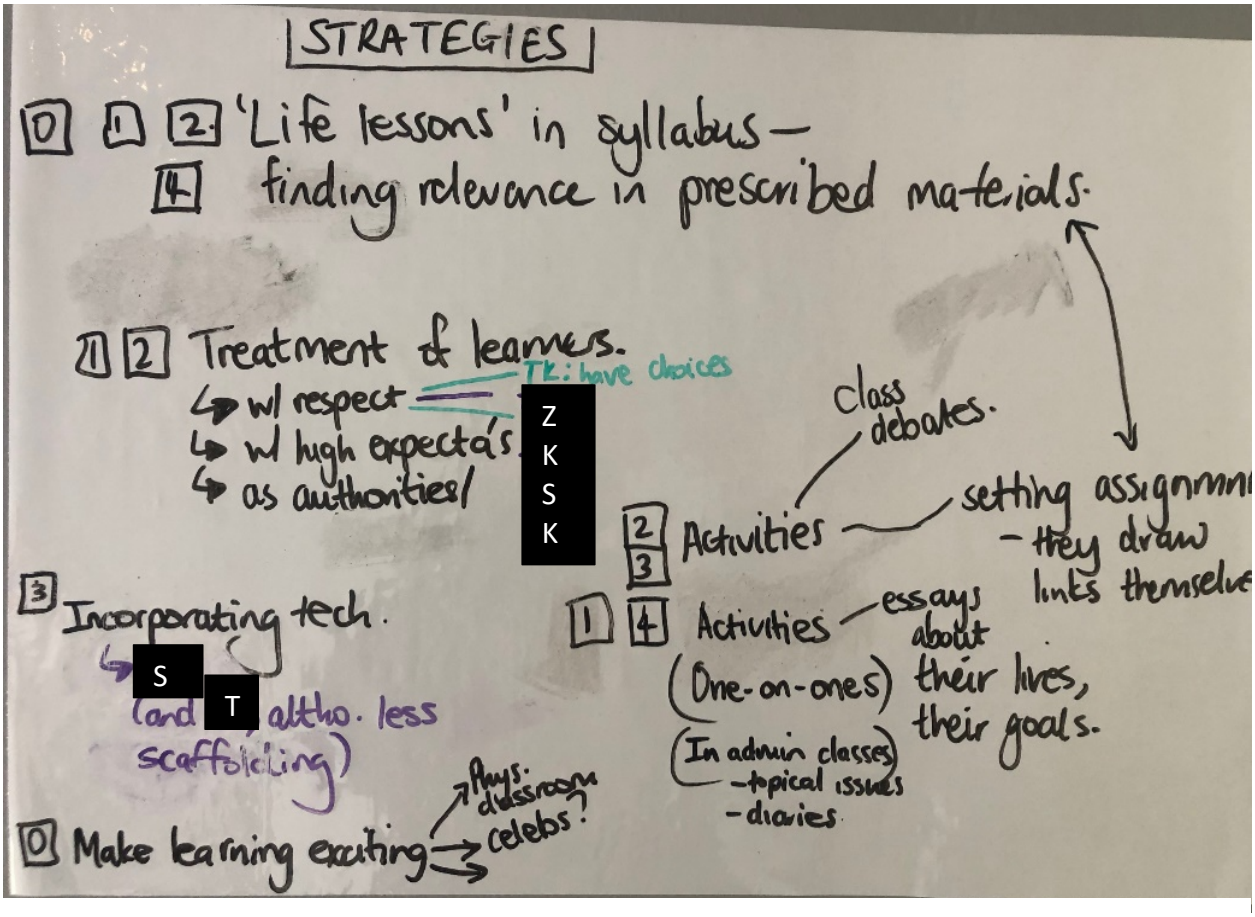

Figure 4: Diagrammatic display of the codes relating to the research question on teachers' practices.

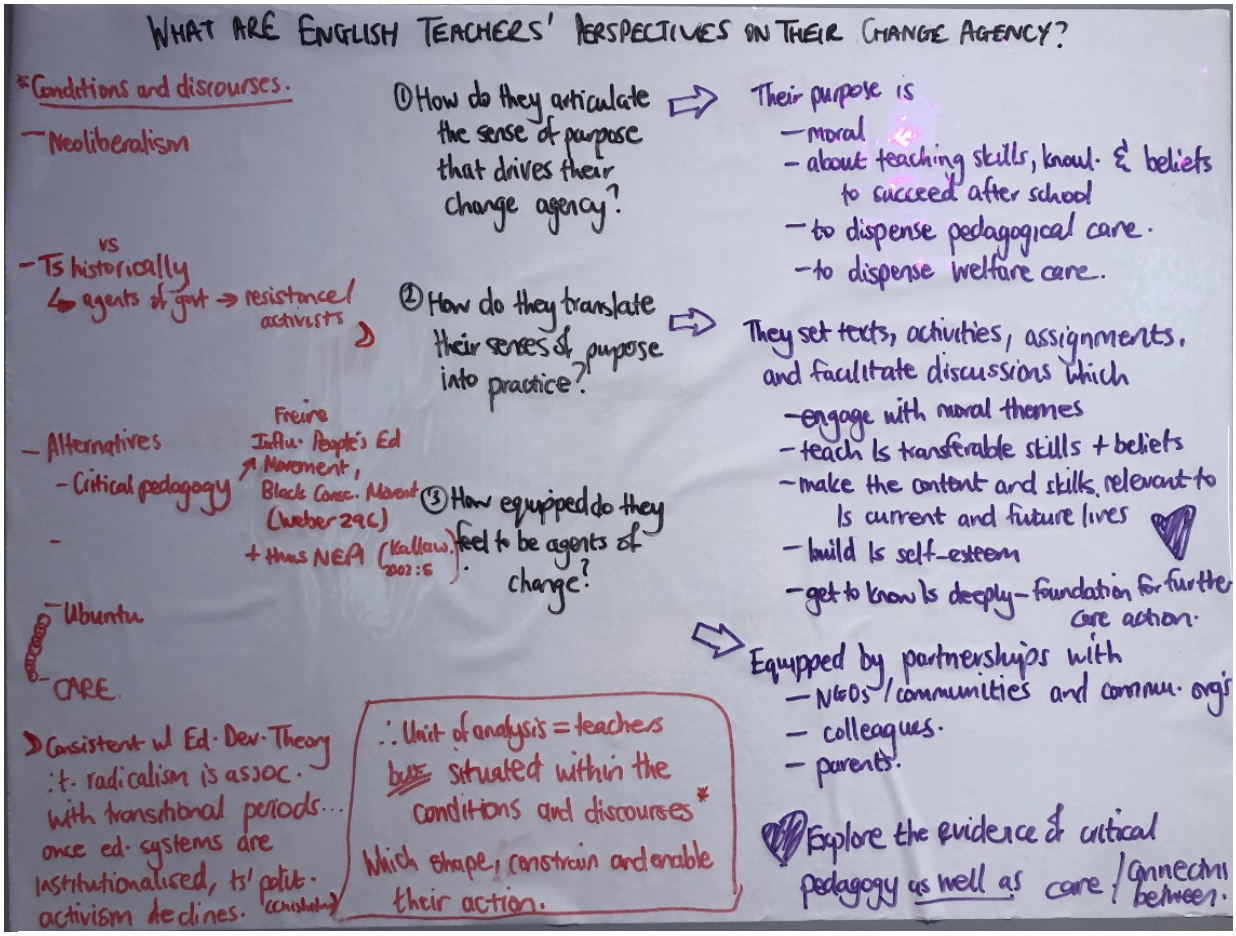

Figure 5: A summary of the information in Figures 3 and 5 (in purple), connected to the research questions (in black) and literature (in red).

3.7. Research ethics

There is a wealth of literature on ethics in research, as researchers and research bodies have become increasingly cognisant of how intertwined ethical concerns are with everyday research practice, not least in the social sciences (Guilleman & Gillam, 2004:261; Posel & Ross, 2014:1). Guided by this knowledge, I engaged with actual and potential ethical concerns throughout all stages of this project: from conceptualisation to my interaction with participants, to the writing of this minor dissertation.

Before research began, ethical clearance was obtained from the UCT School of Education Ethics Committee and the WCED Research Directorate (Appendix A1 and A2). This clearance confirmed my study met the ethical standards to which all UCT Humanities Research, and all research conducted in WCED schools, are subject. Three principles recur within the afore-mentioned organisation-based ethical standards and loom large in scholarship on research ethics (see Hammersley & Traianou, 2012; Guillemin & Gillam, 2004): namely respect for autonomy, avoiding harm, and ensuring privacy. This study was designed around these principles.

Participants' autonomy was respected by providing all salient information about the study, its goals and what participation would entail, via information sheets (Appendix B1). Written (Appendix C) and verbal consent to participate based on this information was then secured from participants prior to their interviews. Verbal consent was again secured at the start of each interview, where I reiterated that they could withdraw at any point, or refuse to answer any question, without having to furnish reasons. Guillemin and Gillam (2004:271) observe that shared goals between researcher and participant mitigate the ethical tension of "asking people to take part in […] procedures that they have not actively sought out" and from which they will not directly benefit. The information provided thus invited teachers to share my goals, in so doing joining the project as research participants rather than subjects.

hooks (1989) identifies equal relationships as essential to ethical research which is empowering for all involved. Although this is difficult within the time limitations of a Master of Education degree, I strove to maintain equality through an exploratory research

orientation, building interviews around (and thus amplifying) participants' stated purposes, experiences and conceptual language over my own assumptions.

Anonymity was ensured by giving participants and their schools pseudonyms. These measures further contribute to securing their privacy, and minimising harm by ensuring that no reputational harm or other negative consequences ensue for participants or their schools because of what is shared. These concerns extended to my approach to obtaining consent from participants' principals. WCED research guidelines specify that principals must be informed, but to minimise potential harm and foreground participants I first ensured each was comfortable with the principal knowing about the study and their involvement. When approached, each principal was presented with the study's information sheet, ethical clearance letters, and basic questionnaires and interview schedules.

More context-dependent, difficult-to-anticipate "ethically important moments" (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004:274-5) emerged during research. According to Guillemin and Gillam (2004), these everyday moments can be dealt with ethically if the researcher is continually reflexive, a process which implies constant evaluation of their actions and their positionality in relation to participants and subject matter (hooks, 1989). Through reflexivity, it is possible to critically reflect on both the type of knowledge generated through research, and how it is generated (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004:274-5).

Chapter 1 mentioned opportunities presented by the experiences and identities I share with participants as an English teacher. Indeed, these experiences proved solid bases for connection and rapport, while emphasising our similarities hopefully mitigated against any power and privilege I could be perceived as holding through my postgraduate education from an elite university, and my own symbolic and cultural capital.

Paradoxically, that same proximity to participants was also a potential source of bias. Empathising with teachers could make it easy for me to make excuses for them, not ask them sufficiently critical questions during interviews, or present them too sympathetically. I could also privilege the perspectives of participants with whom I have cultural, work, and educational backgrounds in common, as was the case with Rachel. I guarded against these biases through constant reflection and a concerted effort to analyse all participants'

perspectives with equal rigour, scheduling additional interviews if necessary to check my understanding or build more trust.

3.8. Chapter conclusion

This chapter has discussed how participants were recruited and the ways in which thematic analysis methods were applied to the analysis of the questionnaire and interview data collected. All methods were guided by the study's qualitative, interpretive, and exploratory orientation, and all methodological and ethical decisions are discussed in some detail here to contribute to this study's reliability and validity. Details of the findings which emerged from this methodology will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1. Introduction

The previous chapter discussed how data were collected to answer the research question: *How do high school English teachers of historically disadvantaged learners articulate themselves as agents of change in Cape Town schools?* This chapter will present the results which emerged (Mouton, 2001:124). Four participants were interviewed: Khadija, a female, coloured teacher who teaches at a Quintile 4 school and has been teaching for 20 years (abbreviated as F,C,Q4,EXP20 when quoted); Rachel, a female, white teacher who teaches at a Quintile 5 school and has been teaching for four years (F,W,Q5,EXP4); Thembi, a female, black teacher at a Quintile 3 school, teaching for two years (F, B, Q3, EXP2); and Sifiso, a male, black teacher who has been teaching at a Quintile 3 school for two years (M, B,Q3,EXP2).

The conversations with participants yielded rich data, emblematic of the complexity of these teachers' work and motivations. Although there was overlap within and between the themes which emerged, it became clear during analysis that the data could productively be organised under four meta-themes largely corresponding to the research sub-questions, namely: teachers' sense of purpose, translating purpose into pedagogical practice, purpose into practice beyond the classroom, and how equipped teachers feel to enact their purpose. Key quotations from participants are thus presented and discussed here.

4.2. Teachers' sense of purpose

When participants discussed the sense of purpose which drives them, the overarching trope was the transformation of their learners' lives by equipping them to succeed – in school and, more crucially, beyond. For some participants, 'success' should be defined by the learners. Sifiso aims to empower his learners to "achieve their goals", while Rachel aims to empower learners to create the change they want, or "give [them] spaces to create their own change" through sustained engagement with them.

One way in which teachers reported empowering learners for success was through the academic literacy skills and knowledge taught in English lessons. According to Khadija, skills like summarising and expressing oneself clearly, both visually and in writing, are extremely useful in everyday life. These communication skills, together with comprehension skills, also help with learning and excelling in other school subjects, Khadija further argued.

Just as Khadija highlighted the broader relevance of empowering academic skills, so too did Rachel and Sifiso. Rachel aims to create a classroom environment in which learners can feel safe to engage with what she sees as the ultimate purposes of English as a subject, which is "[sharing] their ideas, [and unpacking] their own ideas and opinions and thoughts". Sifiso expresses relevance differently; for him, he is laying the groundwork for the lifelong learning necessary for his learners to continually develop and be prepared for "what the future has for [them]":

> I wish they could get to PhD you know. Because I think the more you go up, the more recognition you get, so I don't want them to just get a degree and stay at home, I want them to continue, push out and become better people, because honestly, we need to keep studying because we don't know what the future has for us [...] You need to keep learning new things. And also it gets to a point where you don't just learn for yourself, you will take that thing that you have learnt to the young people or people who come after you. (Sifiso, M,B,Q3, EXP2)

The above quotation reveals a perspective on knowledge as valuable because of its ability to transform learners into better human beings. Sifiso's quotation also ends with an allusion to his belief that education can and should be shared, so its benefits may extend beyond individuals, towards broader society. Khadija, is similarly aware of, and driven by, the connections between individuals and society:

> … Simply because I come from the community and I come from the school, I feel this way I reinvest or I repay or pay forward, what this community and this school I have done for me. And if they could have done this for me, perhaps by the grace of God, I could do this for somebody else's child. Because it's one child at a time. And I don't see them as children, Mikhaila, they are families. You know, that's gonna be a mother,

somebody's father. So if you can just change that one, you can perhaps change that whole course within the family… (Khadija, F,C,Q4,EXP20)

Despite the importance of skills and knowledge, however, participants were unanimous in their assertion that a narrow focus on academics was insufficient to transform their learners' lives. They identified needs that are more fundamental, both beyond and within school since the absence of these elements are obstacles to learning. Learners' general lack of self-esteem was mentioned by all teachers in this regard, and as such, improving learners' self-esteem – more broadly, positively transforming how learners see themselves – was a crucial element of the sense of purpose which drives teachers' change agency.

> ... you see the problem with our learners is they don't believe in themselves [and] they come from homes where there is constant swearing, where they're constantly belittled. I mean, if somebody tells you every day, you're a rubbish, or you're a this or a that, after a while you're just going to start to believe that.
>
> (Khadija, F,C,Q4,EXP20)

Thembi drew the same conclusion after speaking to learners about their lack of confidence and being told, "'I was never told at home that I'm good [...] I was never told at home that I'm beautiful. I was never told at home that I am loved." Thembi later described what all participants alluded to: that academics – or "[making] sure they pass for real"[4] – and "[making] sure that they gain confidence" are both necessary elements of "[turning] around the lives of those kids". In Rachel's conception, however, academics and building learners' self-belief are not weighted equally; the former is a rational and externally defined aim, while the latter purpose is more intuitive and emerges from her "heart". This is evident in her response to what she regards as true success as a teacher:

> …my head answer is, I want my kids to matriculate with good marks to get into university and I wanna have da, da, da and their academics […] But my heart answer – god, I sound like such a hippie – my heart answer is if I can make someone feel like they are capable and able to do what they want to do, if they have what it takes, then I

[4] (As opposed to being pushed through to the next grade level despite their actual marks being insufficient, which commonly happens at her school.)

> feel like I've achieved something because that's kind of what happened to me at school. (Rachel, F,W,Q5,EXP4)

All participants therefore articulated connections between the transformation of learners' self-esteem and the learning that transformation enables. Khadija and Sifiso additionally expressed a connection between self-esteem and how learners relate to others – another element of the complex sense of purpose that drives all participants. Sifiso highlighted the need to reinforce respect for self and others constantly, as well as to foster mutual understanding, for the sake of equality – so no learners feel superior over others. Reinforcing respect also helps with classroom management, since Sifiso notes, "what really leads to fighting and quarrels in in the classroom between the learners, is because they don't understand each other. When you don't teach these kinds of things, you never have an organised class." Khadija echoes the reinforcement of respect, and the benefits of mutual respect on conflict resolution and other long-term goals like creating more open-minded and inclusive humans, able to communicate respectfully across differences:

> …the way […] I break it down to them is, if you see your worth, you're not gonna find that violence and swearing and profanity is always an outcome to a disagreement, you know? And I tell them, look at your own family, right. You don't agree with everyone, but you get along with everyone, and that should be our attitude. And I would want them, first of all, especially – because like I told you, our kids are very angry – so I would want them to resolve their differences differently. And to be bit more compassionate to one another. Remember, we have kids of very different sexual orientations, and you can imagine the derogatory names. And you know, in Life Orientation, they say you must tolerate. But tolerate is a horrible word. […] I said, you must *respect* one another. I don't have to agree with you, but I have to respect you. […] And I tell them, as a collective, we're accountable to one another.
>
> (Khadija, F,C,Q4,EXP20)

The origins of these teachers' valorisation of personal transformation speaks to another pattern among all participants: the significant impact of at least one of their teachers on their lives, on their decisions to become teachers, and by extension on the kinds of teachers they aim to be. Rachel enthused about a History teacher who "literally changed [her] life" by looking beyond her label as a "problem child", pushing and supporting her until she believed

in her own capability and intelligence. This teacher influenced how she aims to achieve her goal of making learners feel capable, which revolves around making them feel "supported through their schooling, and seen". Likewise, the exposure Sifiso got from his English teacher allowed him to visualise and then create a life for himself beyond the narrow confines of his village, echoes of which are seen in his desire to expose his learners to more. Both Khadija and Thembi described teachers whom they revered, whose evident passions for language and literature ignited the same passions in them – and who later mentored them when they pursued teaching careers. The continuing impact of *their* teachers may partially explain the enduring holistic, humanistic guiding purposes participants expressed: they have all experienced what transformative education feels like, and these experiences shape their actions as teachers now.

Overall, these teachers report being driven by core purposes which are shaped by their own impactful teachers, as well as their relationships with their learners and their resulting knowledge of their learners' needs. For them, academics is important, but primarily so in relation to how academic skills will empower learners to build the lives that they want and to become capable, inclusive and open-minded adults.

4.3. Translating purpose into pedagogical practice

Participants described several pedagogic strategies they use to equip learners with the skills and knowledge necessary for post-school success. Many of these strategies are related to making subject content relevant and meaningful which, for Thembi, Khadija, and Sifiso, take the form of infusing the English curriculum with moral "life lessons". Although only Rachel and Khadija reported having choice (albeit limited) over what dramas and novels are studied, all participants expressed some autonomy over the shorter texts: poems, short stories, comprehensions, and summary passages. These texts could then be carefully chosen to engage with the themes teachers feel are relevant for their learners.

Khadija was adamant that there is sufficient space within CAPS to explore relevant and topical issues. She gave examples of themes throughout set texts which not only promoted engagement with the literature and intellectual transformation but enabled her to reinforce "life lessons". She explained:

> …If you look at that, the poem within the grade 12 syllabus, where they speak about the African pride, the African people. You know, we are people of Africa. So, so how does that translate to you and I, you see? And I think perhaps what we should be doing is to use the curriculum and schedule our life skills around it, and not teach a poem in isolation. And that is why for the kids, poetry has no value. *Othello* has no value. But if I can show there's gender based violence in there, there's feminism in there, whatever there is in there, and you can point it out to them. Then […] perhaps, they will see the world slightly differently. (Khadija, F,C,Q4,EXP20)

Some participants described moral life lessons which seemed to take the form of direct instruction; other participants emphasised activities they used to highlight the relevance of texts, moral and otherwise. Khadija described how her assignments and pre-reading discussions allow learners to explore the relevance of literary themes in their contexts. For example, when her Grade 12s study Shakespeare's *Othello*, she sets essay questions and oral assignments asking learners to discuss the relevance of a theme from *Othello* in their 21st century context, thereby allowing learners to grapple with salient themes from their perspectives. Thembi does something similar with the Grade 10 drama, *The African Dustbin*. The play deals with issues of neocolonialism, poverty, corruption, and whistleblowing, although Thembi mentions just two of these themes when noting, "we always relate [*The African Dustbin*] to our situation, because there's poverty, we live under poverty. There is corruption." She also used an assignment to draw on learners' knowledge in engaging with the literature, asking them to research corruption in South Africa and present their research. According to Thembi, learners "came out with flying colours because they know all about it", particularly those who study History. Like Khadija then, Thembi also acknowledges interdisciplinary connections between English and other subjects, and how these connections may deepen learning. Thembi's requirement to use online research is further emblematic of how both she and Sifiso prepare their learners for an increasingly technological world.

Yet Thembi expressed a belief that life skills within the English FAL curriculum are only prescribed for lower grades; in Grades 10 to 12, "we only have lessons, like straightforward lessons, that you have to teach literature this way and that…". Therefore, although she takes opportunities to explore deeper themes and relevance, these are seen as transgressive.

Apart from assignments, class discussion was also mentioned as a powerful strategy to transform mindsets and explore difficult literature-related themes. Rachel was clearest about how debates with peers engage learners more deeply than direct instruction by teachers:

> I see how the kids change each other. […] If I stand there and deliver a lecture to them on my opinion, I see their eyes often glaze over because it's just the teachers talking at them. But when I see them in the middle of a class debate, challenge each other. Like, I'll see an Aziza going, Hey, but da da da da. Ohhh, okay. There's almost like those small little shifts in perceptions around things. Around whether it's like race or gender, or when they like take each other on, in a way sometimes. So they start debating with each other. But maybe I'm being optimistic, because I always wonder, are they still gonna hold their beliefs on certain things because of where they come from home. Some things like homophobia is very bad at School C […] Some kids just don't shift their view. Some kids do over time. (Rachel, F,W,Q5,EXP4)

The potentially transformative, topical conversations in Rachel's class are enabled by her beliefs about the purpose of education, but also by the highly collaborative school English department in which she works. All English teachers at School C have an hour-long weekly department meeting built into their timetable, which they use to discuss pacing, pedagogical strategies and learning materials – they seldom use textbooks, and instead co-create learning modules which guide each content section. This constant collaboration ensures the curriculum remains "modern, fresh-ish" and contextually relevant, according to Rachel.

Rachel points out valuable connections between English and History, particularly during the Grade 11 module accompanying the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)-focused play, *Nothing but the Truth*. Learners "go through the process of the TRC" through extensive pre-reading activities, and "deal with issues of reconciliation". For Rachel, then, there is transformative value in the relevant content as well as the activities and discussion constructed around it. Finally, Rachel showed how getting maximum participation in class discussion also aligns with her goal of developing learners' self-esteem:

> In class discussions, really trying to get more voices in the room heard. And when they do say something that's interesting and important, acknowledging that. And

> saying that's really important and interesting, I'm so glad you brought it up. And bringing it up later. Just little things. And especially with the more shy kids.
>
> (Rachel, F,W,Q5,EXP4)

While Rachel used positive reinforcement during class activities to improve self-esteem, other teachers relayed how they hoped their general approach to engaging with learners would meet the same goal. Khadija and Sifiso emphasised treating learners with respect, which also served to model the respectful interpersonal relationships they hoped learners would develop. Khadija explained:

> … At School B, the kids are difficult. They're a difficult bunch. But you see, if you show respect, it's reciprocated. But I can't say 'jou ma se'[5] and I can't swear at you and expect people to respect you. […] that's why I tell my colleagues also, don't swear at the children. Because that is what they hear every day. So if I want to make an impact then what I need to – I need to show them that things can be better.
>
> (Khadija, F,C,Q4,EXP20)

Khadija's respectful treatment of learners translated into having higher academic expectations of them than many of her colleagues, thus reinforcing learners' sense of self-respect and capability. Khadija emphasised how instead of just giving her learners summaries of more "challenging" literary content like Shakespearean texts – telling them "'you're never gonna pass, you're never gonna be able to cope" otherwise – her learners read the parts in class and are excited to do so. With prose texts, she pushes learners to "take responsibility for their own education" through having them read and summarise chapters at home, which then frees up class time for discussion and other meaningful activities. Yet Khadija seems to differentiate between general respect, which goes both ways, and the respect for authority which she teaches and expects from her learners:

> … my kids, they will stand when somebody comes in, they know already. Military style they need to stand, you know, because respect is non-negotiable. Whether the cleaner comes in, whether the principal, I don't care. You know? Respect is universal. And they know that by now. So it takes time but you get there, man. And I feel so

[5] An allusion to an offensive, vulgar South African (Afrikaans) insult.

> proud when they just stand and they wait, and they know they must wait until somebody says you need to sit down and people say 'ag, it's military style.' But I mean, respect is one thing that takes you very far in life. (Khadija, F,C,Q4,EXP20)

Khadija's respect for authority suggests a hierarchical relationship between adults and learners, reflecting a more traditional view than the egalitarian understanding of respect evinced by this study's younger participants. Although all participants stress the importance of building trust between them and their learners, Rachel's positionality as a white teacher of students of colour adds an additional obstacle to the establishment of trust, which her nurturing of an egalitarian form of respect helps remedy:

> I'm very aware of how unrelatable I am to those kids […] Because of my race and my, where I live and so much about me. So for me coming in there and just showing them respect and just treating them like equals, even though a lot of them take advantage of me, I'm actually, I'm glad I have that approach because it just, that's what felt instinctual to me. Because trust has been hard. To get a lot of the learners to trust me. And... so that took a lot of time. But I love, I just love them so much. I just have such an amazing bond with the kids. (Rachel, F,W,Q5,EXP4)

Despite deepening their bond, Rachel's explanation does indicate a trade-off between treating learners as equals and classroom management. Rachel's school environment, with its strong culture of learning and carefully-selected students, likely makes this trade-off navigable for her in ways it may not be for the other participants. Rachel, along with Khadija, also reported turning to parents for reinforcement when learners misbehave or do not do their homework, which further contributes to her ability to experiment with more progressive classroom arrangements.

4.4. Purpose into practice beyond the classroom

Parents play a significant role in reinforcing teachers' work, and are also seen as primarily responsible for learners' emotional and material welfare care. However, the three teachers located at the poorest schools in this study describe parents who do not or cannot fulfil these care roles. When fundamental welfare needs are not met – when learners do not have enough

to eat, cannot afford school transport, or struggle with emotional trauma or self-esteem, for example – teachers "become literally the only hope for those children" (Khadija) and feel compelled to meet their needs – which all three teachers refer to as their 'parental' role. This role requires significant time and energy beyond classroom hours.

Within the classroom, teachers explained that class discussions and assignments yielded deep insights into students' lives and experiences. Their knowledge and connection with learners often enables them to see when their learners are struggling with something, and they invariably followed up by meeting learners individually, during breaks or after school. Participants' further responses to learners' needs are as diverse as the needs themselves.

Thembi's 'parental' role has involved paying school transport costs, rubbing learners' backs after they have been abused by their parents, and – particularly when the school social worker is overloaded – lying awake at night worrying,

> I wonder if she is going to come to school tomorrow. I wonder if the parent beat her today. I wonder if they have food? (Thembi, F,B,Q3,EXP2)

Khadija has hosted a learner who needed accommodation for weeks, and organises counselling, clothing, food parcels, transport money, academic support classes, and even bursaries and beds for her learners. These provisions are enabled by partnerships with community organisations. Khadija serves on the board of an Islamic non-profit focused on socio-economic relief and educational empowerment, and she is an active member of a feeding scheme in the community in which the school is situated. She reported joining those organisations for the same reasons she became a teacher: being from the community herself and with a strong faith, she is grateful for her blessings and wants to "give back". Clearly, the roles she plays in the school and community reinforce each other, and her learners benefit significantly from her community ties.

Rachel's community involvement also benefits her learners. Reaching out in community Facebook groups and being active in her local Community Action Network has resulted in donations of 400 Young Adult books to the school library, a sanitary towel vending machine, and even a famous South African poet doing poetry workshops centring around memory – the

kinds of deep work which, together with writing and being creative and playful with language, Rachel wishes there was more space for in the English curriculum.

Sifiso notes that having a "great impact" on learners' lives necessitates getting to know them on a personal level; when his learners need additional help, he tries to connect them with NGOs. For him, more directly meeting learners' welfare needs is too great a task for teachers in severely resource-constrained environments to accomplish:

> Some of the things […] teachers don't deal with. Because we see those problems as problems that are supposed to be sorted out by the psychologists in schools […] and also the parents. So we tend to say, as much as we are the teachers, we cannot mother those children. Because it's not our fault at the end of the day. If ever you are going to help a learner, what about the other one, what about the other one? And then, how much energy or resources are you going to need? Where are you going to get those resources? (Sifiso, M,B,Q3,EXP2)

Clearly, fulfilling the sense of purpose that drives these teachers takes multiple forms. Participants use the autonomy they do have to engineer activities and environments which fulfil many of their learners' pedagogical, emotional, and material care needs. The implications for their practices, and the extent to which teachers feel equipped to be agents of change, will be discussed in the following section.

4.5. How equipped do teachers feel to be agents of change?

Previous sections suggest that because participants conceptualise their purpose as providing *holistic* care and transformation of learners' mindsets and lives, the nature of their work differs based on the extent to which learners' emotional and material welfare needs are already met – or on the extent to which teachers can draw on support to meet learners' expansive needs. Participants reported feeling differently equipped to be agents of change, and their statements about how equipped they feel, and the main relational and systemic reasons for these feelings, will be presented here.

Where present, strong relationships with colleagues emerged from participants' narratives as a key factor in capacitating them as effective, agentic professionals. Khadija's strong belief in teacher agency, exemplified in assertions like "as teachers, we become agents of change if we want to be", seems to have become solidified through years of agentic teaching; a professional longevity to which she partially credits early close mentorships and collegiality:

> When I started out, I think I was very clumsy. I think, I wasn't doing too well. At one point – within that first year of teaching. Then you sometimes wonder, you know, will I ever get the hang of this? But I think we've had very good role-models. Remember when I started teaching, the staff complement was probably 40, 50 staff members, and most of the teachers had taught me. So that was invaluable for me. because you could draw from their experience. (Khadija, F,C,Q4,EXP20)

Khadija's teaching journey has thus been strengthened and enabled by a community-oriented teaching tradition: as a newly qualified teacher she already knew, trusted, and respected her colleagues because they had been her schoolteachers. Her relationships with colleagues are more strained now, as she generally sees younger teachers as "lazy" and "entitled". Still, early mentorship enabled more effective teaching and closer relationships with learners, both of which are necessary for continuing effective agentic action.

The same is true for Rachel. She too reported a belief in her agency to change learners' lives and mindsets in small but meaningful ways such as making them "feel supported":

> I do actually feel like I can [make a positive change] as a teacher. I am finding that, and maybe that's where I'm finding the rewarding part of it. Because it's not perfect, but I've also, as I got older, become more realistic […] I think for me, it's even small things. Like if I can just make one learner feel supported, and seen…
>
> (Rachel, F,W,Q5,EXP4)

The positive affective experience Rachel describes above does not automatically translate into intellectual rigour. She laments lacking time to reflect and "think deeply about what is it that I want my class to have by the end of the year educationally" because of the fast pace of having to just "[blaze] from one module to another". It is due to her colleagues that she is still

able to ensure rigour under these circumstances: she leans on the expertise of her more experienced colleagues whom she notes have likely thought deeply about educational aims.

When mentorship and pedagogical collaboration is lacking, its absence is deeply felt, as Sifiso's experience demonstrates. Sifiso believes in the necessity of collaboration to "grow [himself]":

> I think it's very important to have people at the same field as you, people who will relate to what you say, people who will support you, people who do the same subject as you […] To get that kind of support, when you need resources you are able to relate to that person and say, like give me this give me this, okay, I can give you this, give you this, you know, that kind of sharing. So I think that's the most important thing that I need in order to grow myself. (Sifiso, M,B,Q3,EXP2)

Yet English department meetings happen in an ad hoc manner at his school, and generally only when Sifiso requests them. Despite his relative inexperience, Sifiso explained that his constant "pushing" to stay on track means that even his more experienced colleagues defer to him about mark allocations and what content to cover. Unable to get the support he needs from school colleagues, he has turned to teachers at surrounding schools, whom he met through previous teaching experience and a Western Cape Education Department (WCED) workshop. These teachers have a WhatsApp group through which they coordinate pacing and meetings to do administration tasks, like filing, together – activities which Sifiso's school colleagues, "especially those old teachers", do not prioritise. It is in this collaborative work that Sifiso's sense of agency and initiative is most evident. Leaning on teacher networks is a theme throughout the data, with Rachel and Khadija similarly nurturing and drawing on relationships with teachers from other schools they meet during continuing professional development (CPD) and other events.

Even collaboration with other teachers can be limited in equipping teachers in the face of institutional and curricular constraints on teacher agency. Rachel's narrative exemplified clashes between the holistic transformation she regards as synonymous with successful teaching, and the pacing to which she is expected to adhere. This causes anxiety when she remains true to her sense of purpose, as it leaves her constantly behind in the term plan. An in-class breakthrough with a learner with whom she had long been working to build trust

exemplifies the incongruity between what is meaningful for Rachel, and external expectations of teachers. The breakthrough occurred during a Grade 9 pre-reading activity for the novel *Of Mice and Men*, where learners:

> … had to decide where they stand ethically on things […] one of the questions is, do you believe your friend – is it better to tell your friend the truth, even if it hurts. And we had a whole big class discussion about that. And then she opened up about her parents' divorce and how that made her feel, and she actually cried. And I thought to myself, okay, she has felt safe in a space with her peers to least share that. I don't know if that made her feel better or not, but at least she knows that there was a place where she could share that with an adult present. And I thought, okay, even if it's that small little thing […] *And of course I'm behind now*… (Rachel, F,W,Q5,EXP4) [Researcher's emphasis.]

The deep emotional engagement with literature, partly enabled by collaboratively produced modules, thus complements Rachel's philosophy on the purposes of teaching. However, the pressures of keeping pace mitigate against the full realisation of those purposes, negatively impacting Rachel's professional sense of efficacy and adding to her stress and exhaustion.

Rachel worries about her unsustainable work-life balance, and consequently how compatible teaching will be with her personal plans to have children. Sifiso feels the lack of work-life balance acutely, too: he spends most holidays marking, and worries about the sustainability of teaching from a mental health perspective, noting the severe toll decades of teaching have taken on colleagues. Furthermore, there are numerous aspects of teaching he finds "demotivating". That his ideas for improving learning are not listened to by management and colleagues is one aspect; having a drab physical classroom, with broken windows which never get fixed, is another. Institutional issues impact on his ability to implement engaging classroom activities in more direct ways, in a school in which unpredictability thrives:

> You will find that you would make a lesson plan and have a good strategy, but you find that learners do not – they waste your time, they do not follow the procedure that you have made. For example they come late in school, some do not attend school, you have organised debate and stuff just to motivate them but they don't adhere to that. (Sifiso, M,B,Q3,EXP2)

Sifiso's struggles to translate his ideas about engaging teaching to his context echoed in Thembi's narrative: her optimism about making a difference in learners' lives coexisted with a sense of being inadequately equipped for the realities of transformative teaching in her context. On the one hand, she proclaimed that her parental approach towards learners – founded on love, building trust, and strong boundaries – is "really working". Gesturing towards academic results as the only measurable way to evaluate progress, Thembi acknowledges that her learners do not achieve the academic results she hopes for. However, in a demonstration of her belief that change is a slow process and that her learners are capable of success, she expressed hope that more time with learners would yield better results. On the other hand, Thembi reported feeling unequipped to meet learners' emotional care needs while waiting for over-committed social workers – and unequipped to deal with her own second-hand trauma when exposed to the traumas of her learners:

> I always give them essays and say, write about your life, what you wish to achieve, how are you going to do it, what you wish to change. […] And it's a whole lot of depression, in a lot of those essays. And when you ask them to write, they go in deep. […] they pour out their hearts in those papers. And some of the stories are scary. Yho. Ooh ai, they're scary. We [teachers] really need counselling. Like really, we really need it. (Thembi, F,B,Q3,EXP2)

The emotional exhaustion Thembi describes affects ordinary lessons as well, in which she relays letting learners teach themselves while she just "[sits] there":

> I [say], today I'm listening to you. Here's your topic. Teach yourselves. Let's have someone from this group, and that group, and that group and that group. And teach the very same lesson. […] I sit there, and just listen and take notes. […] Then that's how I assess their knowledge. And I see that I think it's working when they teach each other, and they explain it to each other […] Then I tell, okay, you don't understand this part, okay. We'll repeat it tomorrow. Go home and do your homework. Do your research, and then come back tomorrow. […] So, we'll be doing the very same lesson tomorrow […] Sometimes I sit there and be a princess, and just listen to them. Especially when I'm tired. There are those days [when] I'm not in the mood. I'm just not in the mood. (Thembi, F,B,Q3,EXP2)

Thembi thus demonstrated a strategy which helps her cope with the intense demands of her expansive role, while allowing active learning and the potential flattening of teacher-student hierarchies. However, careful scaffolding of these lessons is not present, resulting in the use of time – that is, one lesson extending over multiple periods – likely being less effective.

Just as participants realise they cannot accomplish pedagogical care in isolation from colleagues and systemic support, Section 4.4. has established the need for other partnerships in providing emotional and material welfare care. Khadija and Rachel have demonstrated how the involvement of even a few parents can make teachers' work more manageable. However, Sifiso and Thembi reported more intense struggling as a result of parents' lack of involvement in learners' lives. Sifiso's understanding of parents' roles is apparent when he explains why teaching is more difficult than he initially imagined:

> Some schools I think they are more organised because if ever you have a parent that is educated, your life will be better. That parent will make sure that you do your schoolwork, because I am paying for this education. You will put in an effort. So I think it is much better. Because some other time I was listening to this learner. She told me, 'I am the only one that went to school at home, so they are not going to check my report, because they don't even know what is going on here.'
>
> (Sifiso, M,B,Q3,EXP2)

The impact of historical, generational barriers to education is evident in the connection made between parents' lack of educational experience and their lack of presence in their children's educational journeys – an insight Sifiso derived through conversations, and thus relationships, with learners. He also links parental presence to resources, theorising that if parents pour (financial) resources into the school, a greater sense of ownership of the education process will result. Thembi highlights parents' lack of control over misbehaving learners. "You call their parent," she explained, "and their parent comes and they'll say 'he's like this, even at home. I can't do anything. *I'm* even scared of him.'"

Yet where colleagues and parents cannot help, teachers have to find other partners, as Rachel and Khadija have done with community organisations. Sifiso and Thembi see the provincial department of education as responsible for these additional needs. The WCED does provide social workers and psychologists, although Thembi notes their availability is insufficient to

meet the demand, and the bureaucratic process of referring learners to them is often too slow. Therefore, both Thembi and Sifiso expressed hope that NGOs will fill the gap between learner needs and what the WCED and teachers can provide. Sifiso referred to academic support organisations that have operated in their township, to which struggling students could be referred – although he is unsure which are still operating. Thembi detailed the need for psychological academics-focused support for some learners, which an NGO had approached School A promising to address:

> One learner in Grade 10, he can't write. And I think it's a disorder, but I don't want to say it's a disorder because I'm not sure. Even the way he holds his pen, it's very funny […] I have brought it to the management, but they were still hoping for that organisation to come. […] we have put his name on the list. So we are just hoping for this organisation to come through for us. Otherwise we're in a deep hole.
>
> (Thembi, F,B,Q3,EXP2)

According to Thembi, both she and management feel unequipped to help the learners she describes. The organisation which approached them is seen as a lifeline; yet the school is completely at the mercy of the organisation, not having heard from them since they were initially approached nor knowing when (or if) the organisation will provide the help needed.

4.6. Chapter conclusion

The data presented here paint a complex picture of four teachers whose actions are guided by their sense of purpose but are significantly impacted by broader social and schooling environments. During 20 years of teaching, Khadija's aim has increasingly moved away from narrowly delivering the curriculum, towards capacitating learners to succeed at school, and in their families and communities. She works towards this aim by supporting a variety of her learners' needs and teaching academic literacy, critical literacy, and moral "life skills". Rachel, four years into teaching, continues to work towards empowering learners to make the changes they want to make, through pedagogic approaches and strategies which foreground critical thinking and expanding perspectives on the world and different 'others'. Like Khadija – and indeed, all participants – Rachel foregrounds the affective aspect of learner

empowerment, noting the emotional care work needed to improve learners' self-esteem which in turn can lead to more effective learning and action.

Less experienced teachers Sifiso and Thembi similarly framed their purposes around capacitating learners for success. For Sifiso, capacitation means imparting knowledge and hopefully values and habits aligned with life-long learning. The aims of the knowledge he references include helping learners become better humans; that is, more understanding of, and respectful and helpful towards, others. For Thembi, transforming her learners' futures is possible through enabling good academic performance as well as emotionally supporting learners to feel capable.

All participants therefore have expansive, humanistic and holistic views of what quality English education should look like. The English curricula offer space for imaginative and critical engagement, and to varying degrees participants showed evidence of seizing those opportunities and employing strategies to develop learners academically and emotionally in class. However, participants' sense of purpose also requires them to work beyond school hours to meet their learners' academic, emotional, and material needs.

The intensity of the work needed to fulfil participants' change agendas varies according to their work and community contexts. Sifiso and Thembi's school is situated in a community in which parents are least able to support their children, so Thembi and Sifiso must work harder to fulfil their change agent role. Coupled with the lack of resources and collaboration with other relevant social actors, their change agency is more tenuous. Conversely, Rachel and Khadija's narratives demonstrate the roles of partnerships with parents, colleagues, and external organisations in empowering teachers to hone and enact the expansive, transformative roles they envision. Yet like Thembi and Sifiso, the expansive teacher identity Rachel inhabits interacts unsustainably with the challenges of working with disadvantaged learners, and within the bounds of a curriculum loaded with assessments. Together these factors result in participants being constantly anxious, having insufficient time to reflect on pedagogy, and frequently sacrificing personal life for work – all limiting agency.

Through these teachers' narratives, then, the complex ways in which curricular, school, and socio-economic and historical factors affect teacher change agency begin to emerge. The following chapter will analyse these interrelationships and this chapter's broader findings.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Analysis

5.1. Chapter introduction

This chapter interprets and analyses the findings laid out in the previous chapter, in relation to existing domains of literature within which this study is situated (Mouton, 2001:124). The chapter is therefore structured around subheadings which connect the study's salient themes to the conceptual frameworks on the ecological approach to teacher agency, purposes of education, and ethics and pedagogies of care, introduced in Chapter 2. The first subheadings, 'A multifaceted sense of purpose, informed by ethics of care' and '(Critical?) pedagogies of care as practice', connect participants' motivating purposes and related practices to the ideas of care in education around which their perspectives coalesce. With the meanings of 'change' for these teachers thus established, the subsequent section provides an analysis of findings in relation to frameworks of agency, under the subheading 'Teacher agency for *care*: a temporal/ relational, ecological perspective'.

5.2. A multifaceted sense of purpose, informed by ethics of care

In this minor dissertation which asks how teachers articulate the sense of purpose which drives their change agency, all four participants articulated their vision and sense of purpose relatively clearly. Moreover, although participants' motivating purposes were multifaceted, they were remarkably similar despite the different contexts in which teachers worked – and remarkably distant from neoliberal notions of education's value.

Participants were near unanimous in their rejection of the human capital approach to education. Although all oriented their purposes towards learners' future success, success was defined in humanistic rather than economic terms, focusing on the individual and the collective. In reference to individual learners, teachers expressed their work as being about transforming learners' lives by capacitating them to craft the lives they want. Learners' abilities to explore and share ideas, continually develop their knowledge and skills, respect themselves, and believe in their abilities to succeed, were variously seen as crucial elements of their capacitation, which teachers aimed to develop.

Only Sifiso's articulation of his sense of purpose hinted at engagement with Biesta's (2015) qualification domain. The importance Sifiso places on capacitating his students towards lifelong learning is partly framed as preparing them for an unpredictable job market: he hopes his learners will "keep studying because we don't know what the future has for us." Sifiso evinces a narrow definition of continual learning as being formal, as is evident in his conceptualisation of obtaining a PhD as the pinnacle of learning. This reflects his own experience, as formal learning has had the greatest impact on his life and success thus far. Sifiso's mention of the economic realities facing his learners is perhaps also reflective of his own experience: he is a man in a society in which men are still expected to be breadwinners (Clowes, Ratele & Shefer, 2013), and his acute awareness of the limitations imposed by his learners' socio-economic backgrounds, as well as his own, is palpable. He was the only teacher to refer to the practical, economic benefits of becoming a teacher – namely, the pay and the stability of employment – as influencing his decision to join the profession. Yet his allusions to economic realities do not constitute a primary focus on these realities; they merely recognise the necessity of having an income that will ensure "you are able to live" (Sifiso). What emerged more clearly and consistently were broader motivations: namely, for Sifiso, the ability to influence the trajectories of students' lives in a positive manner. Meanwhile, knowledge was primarily valued for what he saw as its ability to make everyone a better human being, rather than simply a 'better' – that is, more successful and efficient – economic subject under neoliberalism.

For Sifiso, Khadija, and Rachel, being 'better' human beings incorporates the more collective-orientated aspect of their purpose: 'better' humans are more open-minded, and therefore more accepting of, and respectful and compassionate towards, others. Ethics, as "the practice of thinking about what living as a human subject in relation to other subjects and the world demands of us" (Yeatman, 2004, cited in Christie, 2005b:238), thus clearly guides what these teachers see as their purpose; what they fundamentally aim to instil in their learners reflects their answers to what living as a fully human subject in relation to others should look like. Reflecting fundamentals of care ethics, their answers to these ethical questions are organised around care, for self and others. Furthermore, their definition of care would seem to incorporate inclusivity, reciprocity, and relating to others as complete human beings – characteristics common to varying conceptions of care ethics.

Their care orientation sets participants apart from the demoralised and indifferent teachers which Bray et al (2010) and Kapp et al (2017) find to be the norm at many working-class high schools. Participants teaching at the two poorest schools in this study, too, cast themselves as exceptions, even among colleagues. Khadija speaks forcefully about her frustration with colleagues, particularly the younger teachers, whom she describes as "lazy", entitled, rude to and with low expectations of learners, and who act as if "they know everything" despite poor subject knowledge. The generational divide is similarly evident in Sifiso's narrative, when he discusses taking the lead in his department and seeking support from outside the school because "there is a lot of ignorance from my school, especially those old teachers". There is thus evidence of a generational gulf between teachers, mentioned by Priestley, Biesta and Robinson (2015) and Halai and Durrani (2018) but beyond the scope of this research to explore. Most relevant here, however, is how care as embodied by these teachers can resist the professional status quo.

Additionally, the care orientation may account for the ways in which participants' sense of purpose differs from the purposes which drive other teachers in South African literature on teacher agency. That instilling respect was highest on these teachers' list of priorities echoes the main findings of Cappy (2016) and Hammett and Staeheli (2013, cited in Cappy, 2016). Yet the predominant form of respect to which those studies' teachers referred was unidirectional, in that respect means deferring to and obeying teachers and authority figures. Very few teachers in these studies referenced how *they* treat learners, or the impact of self-respect on learners' abilities to respect others.

This study's four participants, on the other hand, began their discussions of instilling respect with developing learners' sense of self-respect or self-esteem. According to participants, this development was accomplished through respecting learners and treating them as adults who have agency and voices that matter. Moreover, three participants discussed how developing self-respect translates to developing respect for others. Echoing Cappy's (2016:128) findings, teachers in this study valued respect for others in relation to accomplishing the short-term aim of maintaining order in the classroom by minimising conflicts between learners; respect was also valued for the long-term aim of shaping learners into compassionate and inclusive citizens, thereby fostering the key policy aim of social cohesion through schooling. Where participants differed from the teachers in Cappy's study was in their assertion of the importance of developing self-respect as a precondition for success in the classroom and

beyond, a conclusion reached through deep knowledge of learners' needs and realities which emerged from caring relationships.

Khadija, the oldest and most experienced participant by decades, did refer to a hierarchical notion of respect for elders being about deference and obedience when she illustrates what the respect she explicitly teaches looks like practically: "[learners] just stand and they wait, and they know they must wait until somebody says you need to sit down". However, this notion coexists with her understanding of respect as being reciprocal, as she also reported seeing teachers as ultimately responsible for ensuring respect by modelling respectful behaviour towards learners:

> But you see, if you show respect, it's reciprocated […] My greatest frustration at school are the teachers. I mean, the way they speak to the kids, the way they address them, the way they speak down to them. You know, you don't treat other people – fine, [the learners] are difficult. They are naughty, they are mischievous. Some of them are outright rude, let me tell you that. But I mean, you see as an adult, you need to take charge of the situation.

These teachers' narratives show how an engagement with ethics, organised around notions of care and respect for self and others, has the potential to engender classroom relationships and pedagogies which are not only more responsive to context, but more reciprocal and anti-authoritarian than current norms. These ideas are further explored in the following section which centres on how participants' purposes translate to practice. Like the teachers in Priestley, Biesta and Robinson's (2015:52) study, largely missing from participants' discussions of purpose is explicit engagement with "wider educational values" like social justice and democratic citizenship, which Priestley, Biesta and Robinson (2015) argue is necessary for the exercise of 'good' agency. Yet the purposes and pedagogies these teachers espouse are nonetheless consistent with democratic and social justice values, as the remainder of this chapter will show.

5.3. (Critical?) pedagogies of care as practice

Given the strong assertions associated with care ethics in participants' articulations of their purpose, it is perhaps unsurprising that the strategies they reported to achieve these purposes

have much in common with practices identified in literature on care and, to a lesser extent, on critical pedagogies. As is evident in Section 5.2, modelling care practices – that is, demonstrating how to treat others inclusively and with care through teachers' treatment of learners – is one important strategy teachers use. There is clear acknowledgement that to convince learners that "things can be better" (Khadija) and that *they* can be better, teachers need to show learners the truth of those statements, rather than simply dictating it.

All participants reported some scope within English curricula to accomplish their purposes of empowering learners holistically. As in Cappy's (2016) study, participants described selecting texts which they felt would resonate with learners, and through which they could explore issues relevant to learners' lives. Sifiso, Khadija, and Thembi in particular referenced using texts as vehicles of morality (Cappy, 2016) by explicitly extracting lessons in how to live. Texts are also used as vehicles of critical engagement, as they are to some extent interrogated and interpreted rather than simply uncritically accepted. Ideally for these teachers, then, texts studied have critical and intellectual value as vehicles for linguistic development, thinking and communication skills, but the moral value is at least as crucial given its centrality to teachers' deeper motivating purposes.

Although there was evidence of direct instruction in how participants dealt with moral and ethical themes, teachers mostly emphasised the importance of learners actively grappling with subject matter themselves. Teachers created the conditions for this learner-centred engagement through building essay questions and assignments around these themes. Dialogue, in the form of class discussions and debates, was also mentioned as an important strategy for deeper engagement, although this was generally discussed in vague terms. For Rachel, however, dialogue was central to her transformatory aims. Through debates between learners which she facilitates, she reported seeing transformations in learners' viewpoints – "small little shifts in perceptions around things" – as they are pushed to not only clarify their own thoughts by making them intelligible but are also challenged by peers with differing viewpoints. Creating space for these debates, as well as creating a classroom environment conducive to them, are therefore important aspects of Rachel's role as a teacher – and a crucial aspect of pedagogical care as stated in the National Norms and Standards for Educators ('Norms and Standards') (DoE, 2000).

There are significant parallels between Rachel's description of class debate, and the 'dialogue' strategy within both critical pedagogy and pedagogies of care. In Freirean critical pedagogy, dialogue is an open-ended search for understanding of one another's view of the world, premised upon all being equal in the encounter. It is thus a way of reaching a deeper understanding of the other, as well as potentially transforming one's view of the world (Freire, 2017:69). Noddings (1992), discusses Freirean dialogue in relation to its benefits within ethics of care. For Noddings (1992), the openness and quest for understanding facilitates deep connection between dialogue participants, leading to the deeper understanding of one another – and one another's needs and contexts – which is a necessary foundation for further care responses. In Rachel's argument, equality and trust are required for true understanding and transformation of mindsets and are simultaneously strengthened through dialogue. This argument firmly situates Rachel's use of dialogue within Freire's (2017) and Noddings' (1992) theories and gives form to the desire to develop learners' subjectification as "individuals who can think for themselves" (Khadija) which both Rachel and Khadija referenced.

Other pedagogical strategies participants reported can be similarly focalised through Noddings' (1992) practical elements of care. For Rachel, class debate is one activity through which positive verbal reinforcement is used to encourage learners' voices and build their self-esteem, thereby achieving one of her key professional purposes. This reinforcement strategy corresponds to Noddings' (1992:25) act of confirmation, in which the best in others is encouraged and affirmed. Another important element of care for Noddings is providing learners opportunities to practice caring. Participants provide these opportunities through the class discussions and activities they engineer on topics about which learners may care, and through the explicit practical expectations around how learners should treat others which Khadija communicates. Pedagogies of care can therefore be found throughout participants' reported practices.

However, consistent with critiqued elements of Noddings' work, participants' constructions focused on care as primarily flowing from teachers as carers to students as the 'cared for', thus potentially overlooking reciprocity as a starting point in the care relationship through students' own knowledge about caring. The unidirectional starting point may be related to the violence and the lack of care that predominates at a structural level in their historically disadvantaged communities, discussed in Chapter 1. Yet this topic was insufficiently explored

in interviews to reach any conclusions; as Pillay (2017:9) notes, just because participants do not mention something in interviews does not mean it does not exist; rather participants may not have considered these topics "important enough or appropriate to mention in their narratives". Therefore, there is scope for subsequent studies to explore the ways in which teacher-student care relationships are truly reciprocal, so as not to reinforce narratives of deficit in disadvantaged school environments unduly and uncritically.

Importantly, this discussion has revealed the development of skills central to substantive democratic citizenship as espoused by theorists Sharp (2018) and Lipman (undated, cited in Sharp, 2018). Critical thinking, communication skills, and confidence must be developed if learners are to effectively influence decisions and the direction of social life. The dialogic strategy described by Rachel also develops her learners' capacities to "inquire and reason together" across differences of positionality and opinion, thereby forming a microcosm of the "reflective, participatory" community which constitutes Lipman's (undated, cited in Sharp, 2018:192) definition of a democratic society.

Participants' motivating purposes, together with the learner-teacher relationships which develop through pedagogies of care – and upon which these pedagogies depend – compel participants to provide for needs more expansive than the purely pedagogical. As discussed in Chapter 1, many learners arrive at school with emotional traumas which often manifest as behavioural issues or which otherwise block effective learning and development. These traumas may directly emanate from the violent, historically traumatised communities in which these learners were raised, or be exacerbated by these conditions. Material deprivation also negatively impacts effective learning, evident in participants' descriptions of learners' lacking sufficient food, warm clothing, school transport money, and sometimes basic household furniture like beds. Learners often share their traumas and worries in class activities which allow space for them, or directly with these teachers whom they trust. These expansive needs are equivalent to what Grant, Jasson and Lawrence (2010) label emotional and material welfare needs, which must be met for students to learn and thus matriculate as the empowered, compassionate human beings this study's teachers hope they will be.

One-on-one meetings outside class hours featured prominently in all participants' explanations of how they approach the emotional welfare of their learners. Often, learners' needs exceeded what teachers could reasonably meet; successfully achieving teachers'

motivating purposes then required creative action and harnessing of broader networks. However, the extent to which participants were successful in harnessing networks differed, with significant implications for the achievement of agency. How these teachers' purposes and practices interact with their agency will be the subject of the section which follows.

5.4. Teacher agency for *care*: a temporal/relational ecological perspective

Despite participants' similar purposes motivating their professional decisions – consistent with the democratic discourse of the South African Schools Act (SASA) (DoE, 1996) and the Norms and Standards (DoE, 2000) – Chapter 4 revealed considerable differences in their abilities to provide detailed examples of agentic practices, as well as in their reported abilities to act agentically and feel confident in their identities as agents of change. In accounting for these differences, strands of Emirbayer and Mische's (1998, cited in Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2015) temporal/relational dimensions of agency, evident throughout participants' narratives, are instructive.

Previous sections have shown how participants' sense of agency is shaped by a future-orientated projective dimension, consisting of the short- and long-term goals they have for their learners, and therefore for their work in (and beyond) the classroom. Yet in their narratives about their teaching journeys, it became clear that these aspirations, and how they act to achieve them, are themselves influenced by their own experiences with transformative education – Emirbayer and Mische's (1998, cited in Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2015) iterational dimension of agency. Chapter 4 laid out the parallels between how teachers defined the change at the centre of their professional purposes, and how their influential schoolteachers changed their perspectives, and ultimately, their lives.

Ethics of care are premised upon ideas of teaching and learning as practices which involve reason and emotion together, a hypothesis confirmed by the continuing impact of participants' schoolteachers on their professional purposes. These participants equate good teaching with transformation of learners' lives, and believe that teachers can positively transform lives, largely because they have affectively experienced that transformation as learners themselves. Crucially, by seeking to impact others the way they have been impacted, participants continue traditions of teaching which predate many neoliberal-aligned education narratives and social policies. The triumph of holistic, humanistic purposes over the

economic-focused discourse of neoliberalism may partly be explained by these teachers' understandings of education, which emerge from their intertwined educational and life histories and persist because these motivations transcend reason alone.

Priestley, Biesta and Robinson (2015) argue that the iterational dimension sees agency as influenced not just by past histories, but also by past agentic achievements, an argument which Khadija's narrative seems to confirm. Khadija's agency and sense of efficacy appears strengthened through having achieved agency in the past: she continues to give of her best even when the results are not immediately apparent because she has seen how her actions have resulted in the hoped-for changes in her learners' lives and outlooks over time. Moreover, the long-term perspective she has acquired after teaching for decades has contributed to her present resilience. This long-term perspective has helped her see that although the pass rate may be low, it is not directly linked to her teaching alone: other factors, like technology and home backgrounds, also impact student learning. Without this perspective, it is unsurprising that the less experienced teachers are more tentative in articulating themselves as agents of change.

Additionally emerging from the findings were conflicts between instinctual understandings of what matters in education and other, external understandings. Nowhere are these conflicts more evident, and more clearly located within a reason/emotion dichotomy, than in Rachel's description of the differences between her "head" and her "heart" regarding what true success as a teacher would look like. Although her "head" answer refers to good educational outcomes defined narrowly in terms of marks and university entrance, her "heart" answer is weighted more heavily in her estimation and refers to her desire to make learners feel capable and empowered to change their lives and communities in ways they find meaningful. Khadija similarly noted how her priorities have shifted, from focusing on "academics and finishing the curriculum" which she felt pressured to do at the start of her career, towards skilling her learners in meaningful, potentially transformative, and possibly non-academic ways.

These conflicts between narrow and expansive purposes of education are evident in Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) language documents, located in Emirbayer and Mische's (1998, cited in Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2015) present practical-evaluative dimension of agency. On the one hand, participants' discussions of their practices suggest that language subjects like English encourage greater orientation towards

care and pedagogies of difference. Cappy (2016) and Pillay (2017) have referenced how the skills focus of English Home Language (HL) and First Additional Language (FAL) in CAPS may result in greater flexibility regarding the texts studied, and thus the themes and engagements therewith, than many other subjects. The focus on self-expression and communication similarly allows multiple opportunities for caring teachers to connect with learners and build the deeper understanding necessary for authentic care responses. Conversations in class are one strategy through which teachers build this understanding; additional cited strategies involve assignments teachers set, which are either explicitly personal like Thembi's essay on aspirations, or otherwise allow personal perspectives to surface. In these subjects which allow space for full humanity to emerge, engaged and caring teachers may further develop and respond to learners' humanity in the expansive ways which have been discussed in these chapters.

One the other hand, participants have indicated ways in which the curriculum constrains their agentic practice. In addition to explicitly suggesting pacing, CAPS *regulates* pacing through requiring a high volume of assessments. Consequently, as Rachel says, teachers are "blazing" from task to task, with little time to reflect on pedagogy. The volume of marking required of these teachers also results in them feeling overloaded, leaving less time to rest and engage with professional development. Time to engage with socio-political issues inherent in transformation towards social justice is correspondingly precluded, limiting opportunities for more critical approaches to pedagogy and content, which authors like Monchinski (2010) argue would make pedagogies of care more emancipatory. When teachers do not have time to reflect and engage as their sense of purpose requires, agency – which necessitates reflection and intentional action – is affected. Khadija exemplifies the potential of teaching experience to mitigate the problem of curricular overload: although she improves upon lessons, most have already been prepared years ago, and she has become an increasingly efficient marker. However, the less experienced teachers' uncertainty about remaining in the profession given its vast demands on their personal lives, professional lives, and mental health, casts doubt on whether they will reach Khadija's level of experience and efficiency.

Participants' school environments have been shown to intensify or mitigate the impact of curricular and administrative constraints on agency. Relational and social structures loom large in Chapter 4's findings on factors influencing teacher change agent capacitation, echoing the emphasis placed on these factors by Priestley, Biesta and Robinson (2015). The

afore-mentioned authors lament the lack of appropriate methodologies for the analysis of school conditions which impact agency; to the contrary, Teese and Polesel (2003, cited in Muller, 2020) and Shalem and Hoadley (2009) offer useful frameworks around inequalities relevant to the South African school system through which participants' articulations of their agency can be read.

Rachel and Khadija's relatively strong sense of agency seems impacted by the ways in which their schools are 'fortified' (Teese and Polesel, 2003, cited in Muller, 2020) to develop and support teachers' agentic capacitation. Both participants describe strong management, responsive to teachers' efforts to ensure student success. The frequent collaboration between English teachers at Rachel's School C, integrated into the timetable, helps insulate her against a slew of constraints on agentic action including her inexperience, her "useless" initial teacher education (ITE), and a packed marking schedule and curriculum which limits her time to reflect and act accordingly. Although levels of collegiality are lower at Khadija' school, Khadija draws strength and guidance from other teachers in her broader network, as well as past colleagues who mentored her while she struggled early in her career.

For Thembi and Sifiso, academic rigour was more difficult to achieve alongside the challenges of learners' more immediate (and large-scale) welfare needs, in an environment in which they have less support. As discussed in Chapter 4, these teachers already face steeper challenges owing to the poverty in the community in which their school is situated. Moreover, a smaller percentage of parents are active in their children's educational journeys, and thus teachers can neither rely on parents to provide additional sites of learning acquisition, nor to support teachers' work in other ways. Importantly, consistent with Shalem and Hoadley's (2009) account of how disadvantages tend to compound in exposed schools, School A has fewer material and organisational resources to support teachers in their expansive roles. Sifiso and Thembi describe a school management team unsure of how to handle learners with severe academic and behavioural needs, and which also fails to mitigate the student late-coming, high absenteeism, and general lack of control which frequently thwart teachers' daily plans.

In comparison to Schools B and C, there is less oversight at School A over accountability regarding pedagogy and tasks more directly related to teaching and learning. Sifiso and Thembi reported being responsible for all aspects of pedagogy – including pacing,

administration, and content – with insufficient experience or knowledge to effectively carry out these duties, at least in Sifiso's case. At first, this teacher autonomy would appear to signal a welcome absence of the constraining accountability mechanisms that characterise neoliberal education reform. Yet in reality, this absence is a result of the confluence of the schools' lack of capacity to support teachers, and extreme performativity around the Grade 12 school-leaving examination, as Sifiso notes it is difficult to get help from senior teachers and Curriculum Advisors alike because they are preoccupied with Grade 12s.

The role participants envision for parents echoes what Morrow (2007) argues is the Norms and Standards' (DoE, 2000) vision: that parents meet most learners' welfare needs so teachers may focus more directly on teaching and what Grant, Jasson and Lawrence (2010) label pedagogical care. However, when parents are unable to meet fundamental needs – because of poverty, having to partake in an exploitative economy, or the negative effects of the country's history on their ability to provide welfare care – these teachers see themselves as the last vanguard or "the only hope" (Khadija) for students. Teachers accordingly take responsibility for meeting students' welfare needs themselves, positioning this expanded role as necessary if they care about their learners and learning. Yet Sifiso, the only male-identifying participant, notably rejected full responsibility for his learners' needs because "[teachers] cannot mother those children". Sifiso's statement contrasts with Thembi's foregrounding of the necessity of her parental role in responding to the same school community as Sifiso's, suggesting another way in which gendered identities may mitigate against practical expressions of care in resource-constrained and patriarchal environments.

Thembi's narrative suggests further complexity. Her parental role threatens the quality of pedagogical care and academic rigour, as exemplified by the effects of the emotional exhaustion pushing her to sometimes just "sit there, and listen" as learners teach themselves the same lesson until they all understand. This narrative therefore exposes a paradox: on the one hand, effective learning cannot occur without somebody providing for learners' material and emotional welfare needs; on the other, in resource-constrained environments where the welfare care falls disproportionately to teachers, the quality of pedagogical care and intellectual rigour are threatened, thereby working against meaningful learning outcomes.

Similar to Grant, Jasson and Lawrence's (2010) findings, the participants in this study succeed in ensuring welfare care, pedagogical care, and intellectual rigour – and therefore

enact their sense of purpose and resolve the paradox – because of the networks upon which they are able to draw. Networks of colleagues help participants ensure intellectual rigour and engagement in classes. In dispensing welfare and even pedagogical care, NGOs play a significant role, potentially filling the gap between state capacity and the extent of need at the level of school and student. Thembi's experience shows the limitations of NGOs: their capacity is limited, and the ad hoc NGO response is undoubtedly less effective than systemic and coordinated interventions. Nonetheless, Khadija and Rachel demonstrate the possibilities attendant on 'teacher agency' and 'making a difference' when teachers connect with broader communities and organisations in reciprocal partnerships.

5.5. Chapter conclusion

This chapter has analysed this study's findings, discussing them in relation to frameworks and findings from salient literature introduced in Chapter 2. Although the extent to which participants identified as successful agents of change differed, central to all participants' articulations of their change agent identities was a broad concept of care. Ethics of care were found to infuse the beliefs teachers held about the multifaceted purpose of education, and were foundational to the kinds of knowledge and values these teachers hope to develop in their learners to ensure learners' success as holistic human beings who live productively in community with others.

At best, participants' ethics of care translated practically into, and were reinforced by, pedagogies of care. Teachers' reported pedagogic approaches foregrounded connection, trust, and mutual respect, and there were significant parallels between the pedagogic strategies teachers detailed and Noddings' (1992) work on educational care practices. Crucially, care practices set teachers apart from the uncaring, disengaged norms among teachers in working class South African schools, and more generally in schools and societies influenced by neoliberal policies. However, there were suggestions of ways in which normative social ideas around males as primary providers rather than carers may influence nuances of purpose, as well as practical expressions of care, between genders.

Given the similarities of their expansive professional sense of purpose, many of the differences regarding how equipped participants were to enact those purposes were found to revolve around teachers' contexts. Frameworks of inequalities impacting upon fortified and

exposed schools were drawn upon to sketch the extent of the pedagogic, emotional and material welfare needs of learners, as well as the extent to which the curriculum and school systems support learners and teachers in the meeting of those needs. The more exposed and resource constrained schools and learner home backgrounds were, the more teachers were challenged to meet welfare needs which require action transcending both curriculum and classroom. Teachers' abilities to meet these needs were impacted by the extent to which they were able to draw on the help of partners, be they colleagues, parents, state actors or community organisations. In turn, meeting these needs seemed to beget more agentic action as a result of the sense of efficacy which ensued, affirming teachers' foundational beliefs about change through education. Yet although context structures the nature and possibilities of the agentic action needed to achieve teachers' purposes, convergences in the purpose-shaping lessons participants learned from their own diverse school experiences show how transformation through education can also transcend contexts.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1. Chapter introduction

This study emerges at a time in which research on teacher agency for change – variously defined as 'change' may be – is increasing, as are attempts at reform aimed at improving educational outcomes by focusing on teachers. Yet absent from much reform- and agency-focused work are teachers' perspectives on the structures shaping their practice, and in relation to the foundational question which is equally problematically elided: what is education *for*?

In seeking answers to the research question, *How do four high school English teachers of historically disadvantaged learners articulate themselves as agents of change in Cape Town schools?*, this study's interpretive analysis of the perspectives on agency of a small but diverse group of teachers has yielded a powerful set of engagements which promote often overlooked ways of thinking about teachers and fundamental education questions. The insights which emerge therefore have the potential to advance thought on teachers, teacher agency, and education reform. Together with the study's limitations and possibilities, these insights will be laid out in this final chapter, and recommendations for policy and future research will be suggested.

6.2. Study limitations, possibilities, and key insights

This research was shaped around requirements of a minor dissertation, and certain limitations necessarily result. Notably, its interpretive, sole focus on participants' perspectives and reported practices does not illuminate participants' *actual* practices; indeed, studies which compare data on teachers' perspectives with classroom observations suggest that observed practices often differ from teachers' intentions for a variety of reasons (see Cappy, 2016 and Philipp, 2007). Similarly, the conclusions reached are untested against quantitative data on student performance. This decision aligns with this study's argument that student performance, as indicated by formal assessment results, is influenced by factors besides teacher effort alone. It also recognises that performance metrics are severely limited indications of the holistic development that matters to participants. Yet test scores are important, as strong academic performance potentially creates opportunities for meritocratic

social mobility. Excluding data from observations and performance measures may overlook useful sources of information into observable effects of teacher agency, practices and approaches and as such, larger future studies may meaningfully contribute to the field by including these additional data sources.

Further limitations result from the sampling methodology. As discussed in Chapter 3, the number of research participants was limited to four to allow for the rich, contextually grounded data and discussion which interpretive approaches allow. Participants were therefore purposively selected through necessarily narrow parameters: this study was designed to inquire into the perspectives of committed English HL and FAL teachers of historically disadvantaged students in Cape Town, South Africa. Within the sample I tried to include enough diversity to draw meaningful, comparative conclusions; nonetheless, the sample is not representative of all teachers, nor even English teachers, and thus the findings cannot be extrapolated beyond these participants. The limited number of participants also contributed to the lack of scope to explore more definitively how agentic action is impacted by individual differences such as gender, the nature of teaching subjects (HL or FAL), or educational histories. Future studies focusing on specific impacts of individual differences may be productive, as may studies involving more representative sampling of teachers.

Nevertheless, in exploring qualitatively and in depth the views and agentic formation of its teacher participants, this study offers insights which larger and less situated studies cannot. Research questions explored the perspectives of four diverse teachers, teaching in diverse types of schools: black, female Thembi, with two years teaching experience, currently teaching in a resource-constrained, peri-urban Quintile 3 school; black, male Sifiso, also with two years' experience and teaching at the same school as Thembi; coloured, female Khadija, with almost all of her 20 years' teaching experience located in her current Quintile 4 school in a historically coloured neighbourhood; and white, female Rachel, with her four years' teaching experience, at a Quintile 5 'commuter school'. Importantly, instead of glossing over the complexities of these teachers' backgrounds, biographies, and working conditions – as larger quantitative studies and general policy studies necessarily do (Christie, 2020) – this study includes these complexities in its analysis.

The resulting analysis demonstrates firstly that teachers are not the "homogenous group" they are often treated as, inadvertently or not (Omar, 2015:62), in policy and reform-focused

research. Although there are disengaged teachers at most participants' schools, this study makes clear that teachers committed to meaningful change can also work across and be produced by these schools. Participants' similarity of purpose across diverse schools can be seen as cause for hope, and necessary common ground on which cross-contextual collaboration can be built. Moreover, these teachers empirically expose the incompleteness of narratives of failure surrounding teachers and ostensibly 'dysfunctional' schools, while the analysis provides insight into the structures which contribute to the persistence of these narratives, the creation of disengaged teachers at exposed schools – but also, the power and potential of apparently 'ordinary' teachers, even within broadly disempowering systems.

Participants' beliefs seem close to the ideal envisioned for teachers in South Africa's democratic policy discourses: participants articulate an expansive professional role, have demonstrated initiative in accordance therewith, and they believe in educational values consistent with democratisation and social justice. It is ironic, then, that the most significant factors preventing them from sustainably enacting their agency in accordance with their values stem from neoliberal-aligned policies designed to improve education, in these contexts where the legacies of colonialism remain tangible.

Indeed, the context-blind, neoliberal-aligned structures and discourses of schooling generate incongruities between policies on the one hand, and the realities of disadvantaged school contexts on the other. These incongruities perpetuate injustice on multiple levels. Chapter 2 established connections between neoliberal social and school funding policies, and the social inequalities and lack of physical and organisational resources which make participants' sense of purpose particularly difficult to realise in exposed schools. Furthermore, the neoliberal lack of engagement with purpose implicitly conflates schooling with measurable qualification, while the lack of engagement with pedagogy produces pedagogies of the same which deepen inequality in not accounting for the differences in abilities and social positioning which prevent equitable learning if unaddressed. The one-size-fits-all approach referenced here is reflected in CAPS, whose prescriptiveness can only ever suit a small percentage of classes and learners within the unequal system. For these teachers whose students' needs differ from curricular and policy-envisioned norms, CAPS limits their agency by increasing their anxiety to achieve the impossible in their contexts, while decreasing their opportunities to reflect and teach to what is most relevant.

Still, participants persist in their resistance to pedagogies of the same, to the narrative that test scores are all that matter, and to the narrative that students from disadvantaged educational and home backgrounds are less capable of success and less worthy of respect. At the core of this agentic resistance is the concept of care, often overlooked in discussions of education's purpose and teacher agency. This care agenda drives participants' context-sensitivity, from which emerges another truth easily overlooked by those outside classrooms: namely, that possibilities for learning are not just affected by how efficiently a curriculum is delivered, but also by the development of learners' aspirations, and the meeting of their basic welfare needs.

Crucially, this study's findings are limited to the perspectives of English teachers, whose skills-focused curricula allow them opportunities to embed strategies of and towards care, both within and beyond their classrooms. This study cannot speak to how and whether this care agenda concerns teachers of other subjects as well. As such, there is significant scope for future studies to explore the sense of purpose and agency of teachers of other subjects, and thereby to move towards situated theories of schooling's purpose which may transcend individual subjects.

Policy documents like the Norms and Standards (DoE, 2000) theoretically recognise that care is necessary for equitable student learning. However, this study's participants communicate the extent of the pedagogical, emotional, and material welfare care needed in historically disadvantaged resource-constrained schools, and how difficult teachers' work is when the burden of providing these expansive forms of care falls on them. Indeed, in exposed schools it is near impossible for teachers to play this expansive role and ensure academic rigour, particularly without collaboration and support.

6.3. Recommendations

In centring teachers, this study has demonstrated their potential to contribute meaningfully to conversations about what matters in education, grounded in lived reality. However, the open-ended definition of change this research incorporates has foregrounded change in learners' lives, towards which teachers can work in relative isolation. Teachers in this study describe the frustration which results from working towards a goal not necessarily shared by colleagues, seeming to confirm the arguments by Fullan (1993) and Morrison (2013) that work towards a change agenda is more effective when that agenda is shared, and when work

to realise it is coordinated. This raises questions around how teachers' leadership and change agent capacities may be harnessed and spread at the institutional level of the school. Future studies may explore these questions, investigating the meaning of change at the institutional level and how that change occurs, thereby using Brown, White and Kelly's (2021) understanding of the term 'change agent' as an individual with the capacity and opportunity to successfully transform aspects an of *organisation*. The need to study institutional change agency in the South African context is particularly relevant considering Brown, White and Kelly's (2021) finding that most research in this regard emanates from the Global North, and from external top-down policies and actors. This future research may inform successful interventions to create teacher-driven change in schools, thereby increasing the likelihood of teachers sufficiently being supported as agents, and of learners' lives being more effectively transformed.

Teacher agency, and teachers' abilities to shape and enact change agendas, may be better developed in teacher education spaces, too. Initial teacher education and continuing professional development programmes should guide teachers in making their professional motivations explicit and refining those motivations together in learning communities. Additionally, the refinement process should connect teachers' motivating purposes to broader goals like social justice and democratisation, which are implicit in these participants' articulations of purpose, explicit in key South African policy documents, and which Priestley, Biesta and Robinson (2015) and Fullan (1993) argue elevate teachers' sense of purpose. Exploring intersections between personal motivations and societal-level goals further connect teachers to ideas and practices to achieve these goals, such as critical pedagogy. Chapter 2 discusses the tendency of pedagogies of care to insufficiently engage with issues of power, and the pedagogies participants describe are no exception. Hence there is scope to combine critical and care pedagogies to create a grounded critical pedagogy of care in spaces where teacher development occurs.

Cognitive capacities of change agency exemplified by the study's most agentic teachers should be similarly developed in teacher development spaces. Reflecting Fullan's (1993) change agent capacities, Khadija has demonstrated the value of mastering subject matter, and continually learning and developing contextually relevant practices to better realise her professional purpose. These capacities should be nurtured, as should the capacities to build community and collaborate with networks beyond the school. Yet while this research has

highlighted the importance of partnerships, it has simultaneously acknowledged their often ad hoc and unsustainable nature, dependent as they are on chance and teachers' skills, knowledge, and initiative. Ideally, where the bulk of the emotional and material welfare support and additional academic support cannot be provided by parents, these expansive learner needs should be systemically addressed by government.

Importantly, given the considerable administrative and curricular constraints on teachers, adding to teachers' work and development commitments has the potential to further overload teachers, negatively impacting their agency and effectiveness. What is needed is for English teachers' marking load to be lightened, and for current policies and institutional practices regarding administrative duties to be reviewed with teachers' perspectives included. Furthermore, since teacher agency is clearly contingent on support, schools should facilitate strong collaboration and mentorship relationships between teachers, included in the school timetable, so greater collaboration may alleviate burdens on individual teachers and potentially result in more effective, transformative teaching.

The problem of achieving quality and equity in schooling is multifaceted, and complicated further in South Africa by the gross inequalities at multiple levels of the education system and society. This minor dissertation has indicated how a context-sensitive, ecological lens on teacher agency can direct researchers, policymakers, and decision-makers to questions more productive than the norm: instead of 'How do we get teachers to achieve what we want them to?' and 'Why are teachers failing?', rather, 'What are *teachers* trying to achieve? Why?' and using the answers as purpose-foregrounding starting points towards further work, with teachers as on-the-ground experts with whom solutions can be crafted.

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Appendices

Appendix A1: Ethical clearance – University of Cape Town (UCT)

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Dr. Joanne Hardman

Associate Professor: Educational Psychology

Deputy Director- School of Education
University of Cape Town, Private Bag X3, Rondebosch, 7701
Physical address: Neville Alexander 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

EDNREC20220126

26 January 2022

M. Steenkamp
STNMIK002

RE: Ethical Clearance 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: English teachers as agents of social cohesion in two Western Cape schools. We wish you all the best with your research.

Regards

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR JOANNE HARDMAN

ETHICS CHAIR

Appendix A2: Ethical clearance – Western Cape Education Department (WCED)

Western Cape Government
Education

Directorate: Research

meshack.kanzi@westerncape.gov.za
Tel: +27 021 467 2350
Fax: 086 590 2282
Private Bag x9114, Cape Town, 8000
wced.wcape.gov.za

REFERENCE: 20220309-521
ENQUIRIES: Mr M Kanzi

Ms Mikhaila Steenkamp
[redacted]

Dear Mikhaila Steenkamp,

RESEARCH PROPOSAL: ENGLISH TEACHERS AS AGENTS OF SOCIAL COHESION IN TWO WESTERN CAPE SCHOOLS.

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 **29 March 2022 till 31 August 2022.**
6. No research can be conducted during the fourth term as schools are preparing and finalizing syllabi for examinations (October to December).
7. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey, please contact Mr M Kanzi at the contact numbers above quoting the reference number.
8. A photocopy of this letter is submitted to the principal where the intended research is to be conducted.
9. Your research will be limited to the list of schools as forwarded to the Western Cape Education Department.
10. A brief summary of the content, findings and recommendations is provided to the Director: Research Services.
11. 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,
Meshack Kanzi
Directorate: Research
DATE: 29 March 2022

Appendix B1: Initial information sent to participants – Information Sheet

Teacher Information Sheet

Dear prospective participant,

My name is Mikhaila Steenkamp, and I am a Master's student at the School of Education at UCT. I would like to invite you to participate in research undertaken to complete my Education Policy, Leadership, and Change course.

The objective of this research is to better understand English teachers' perspectives on the sense of purpose which drives them professionally, as well as how they enact this purpose in their schools and classrooms.

Participation consists of a questionnaire, and – if you agree – up to two interviews with me. The questionnaire will take less than 10 minutes to complete; it contains questions about your educational and professional history, and what you regard to be the most important aspect/s of your job as a teacher.

Each interview will take place over Microsoft Teams or a similar videoconferencing tool, and will take no more than 60 minutes to complete. Interviews consist of questions about the context in which you work, and your experiences and perspectives on teaching and accomplishing your sense of purpose as a teacher.

Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you are free to decline to participate. If you say no, this will not affect you negatively in any way whatsoever. Even if you do agree to take part, you are free to decline answering any questions, or to withdraw from the study, without giving a reason. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights, or remedies because of your participation in this research study.

There is no compensation involved, but your input would be a valued contribution to research efforts towards supporting teachers and realising social justice in education.

Your name and the names of the schools you mention will be changed in the research project, ensuring that your identity and all information shared will be protected.

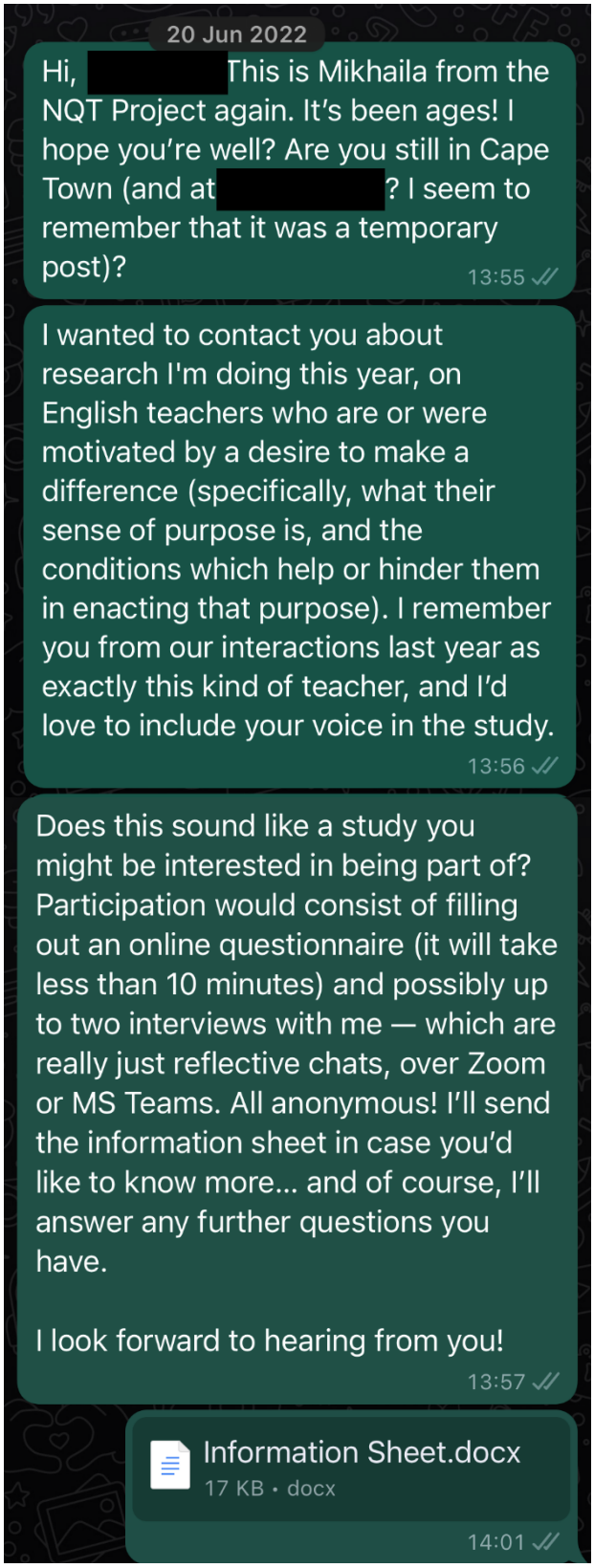
If you have any questions or concerns about the research or your rights as a research participant, please feel free to contact me, the researcher, at stnmik002@myuct.ac.za or [redacted] You may also contact my supervisor, Dr Yunus Omar, at yunus.omar@uct.ac.za.

Please feel free to save a copy of this text for later reference.

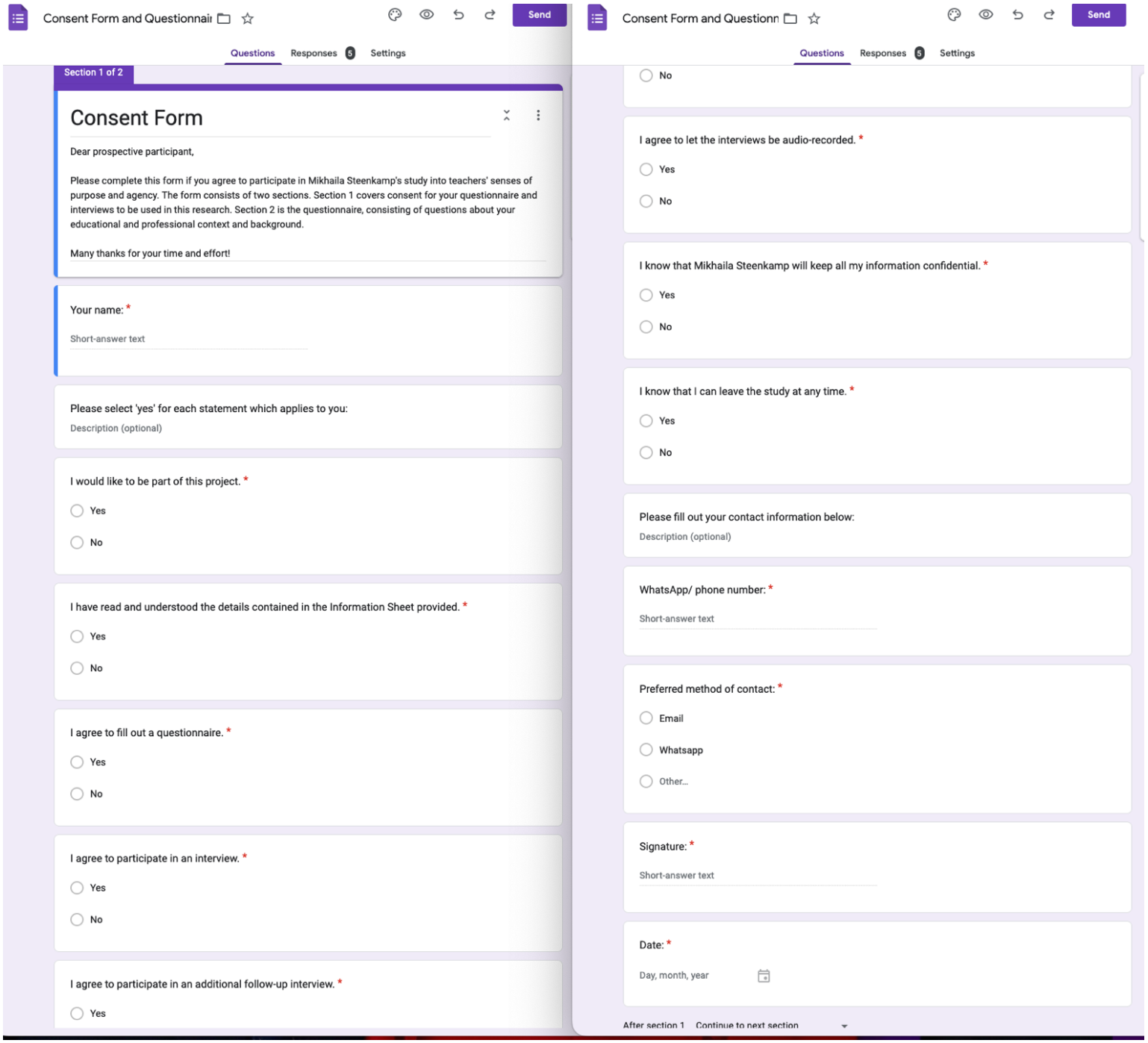
Sincerely,

Mikhaila Steenkamp

Appendix B2: Initial information sent to participants – WhatsApp message



Appendix C: Google Form screenshots of Consent form and Questionnaire



Section 2 of 2

Questionnaire

Please answer these questions as fully as you can.

1. In which year did you pass Grade 12/ matric?

Short-answer text

2. Name your previous post-school (certificate/degree/diploma) qualifications, including your teaching qualification, and indicate where you studied and when you completed them. Please lay out your answers as follows: Qualification - Institution - Year of Completion.

Long-answer text

3. Which phase/s were you trained to teach as part of your PGCE/ BEd/ teaching diploma?

- [ ] Foundation Phase (FP)
- [ ] Intermediate Phase (IP)
- [ ] Senior Phase (SP)
- [ ] Further Education and Training (FET)
- [ ] Other...

4. Which subjects were you trained to teach as part of your PGCE/ BEd/ teaching diploma?

Long-answer text

5. When did you decide to become a teacher, and why?

Long-answer text

6. At which school are you currently teaching?

Short-answer text

7. Please list any other schools where you have taught, as well as the years during which you worked there.

Long-answer text

8. What subjects are you currently teaching, and at what grade levels?

Long-answer text

9. What do you feel is the most important aspect of your job as a teacher?

Long-answer text

10. Please rate how satisfied you are with your job currently.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Extremely unsatisfied	○	○	○	○	○	Extremely satisfied

11. If you would like to elaborate on your answer above, please do so here:

Long-answer text

Thank you so much for your time and effort!

Description (optional)

Appendix D1: Interview matrix on initial interview schedule

Q. no.	Question	Literature references	Research question
1	You mentioned in your questionnaire that you're teaching [subjects] at [school's name]. I'm interested in how you got here: can you tell me about your teaching journey thus far, starting with what influenced you to become a teacher in the first place?	*Interviewer must move participant from the level of everyday interaction to the level of joint, reflective focus on a specific topic; importance of asking open, contextual questions at the beginning of the interview (Yeo et al, 2014:186-188).* *Iterational factors - past histories and experiences - inform agency (Priestley et al, 2012:4)* *Experience of successful change is likely to nurture agency (Pantic, 2015:764)*	1
2	Can you tell me about the school at which you teaching now? *(E.g. What are the students like? What is the area like in which it is situated? How does that affect your work as a teacher? What are the students like? Your colleagues?)*	*Teachers need fair conditions of service etc. to be change agents (Novelli & Sayed, 2016:34)* *Teachers don't have the capacity to depart from ineffectual pedagogies because of workloads, big classes…(Pillay, 2017)* *Pantic model: Competence/ knowledgeability of the social context is a necessary component of agency for social justice (2015:766)* *External -- institutional? -- factors enable/constrain agency (Priestley et al, 2012:3)* *Agency is relational; social relationships, roles, power and trust impact agency (Priestley et al, 2012:6)* *Senses of purpose are built collectively (Fullan, Pantic)*	2
3	Have there been times since you've started teaching when it's been so tough you've felt like giving up?	*Teacher agentic purpose is a motivating force (Pantic, 2015:766)* *External -- and institutional? -- factors constrain agency (Priestley et al, 2012:4)*	1
4	What has kept you going?	*Teacher agentic sense of purpose is a motivating force (Pantic, 2015:766)*	1
5	When you decided to become a teacher, what did you think teaching would be like?	*Practical-evaluative elements like ideas and values influence agency (Priestley et al, 2012:6)* *The projective dimensons of aspirations influence agency (Priestley et al, 2012:5)*	1
6	What did you think you would be like as a teacher?	*The projective dimensons of aspirations influence agency (Priestley et al, 2012:5)*	1
7	How does the reality compare to those initial ideas you had about teaching?	*Practical-evaluative elements like ideas and values influence agency (Priestley et al, 2012:6).*	1
8	*If very different:* Why is the reality so different?	*Contradictions between the teacher's sense of purpose and the external educational structure influences agency (Leal & Crooks, 2018).*	2
9	Where did those initial ideas about teaching come from?	*Iterational factors like life histories impact on agency; teachers tend to reproduce patterns they observed as learners unless reflection occurs (Priestley et al, 2012:4; Pillay, 2017).* *The unease and discomfort which occurs when teachers teach in unfamiliar contexts can give rise to unique opportunities " to reflect on the effects of structural inequalities, and to imagine possibilities for agency and change" (Kapp, 2022:118)*	2
	Questions exploring teachers' views on change agency		
10	What does it mean to [make a difference/ teach for social justice] to you?	*A clear sense of purpose is a necessary element of agency for social justice (Pantic, 2015:766)*	1, 2
11	What does [making a difference/ teaching for social justice] look like practically -- can you give me examples?	*Autonomy is a necessary element of agency for social justice (Pantic, 2015:766): teachers' confidence in acting agentically*	3
12	How did you learn those strategies?	*Professional (and personal) histories impact agency and agentic action, as do learned ideas (Priestley et al, 2012:4, 6)* *ITE, CPD should help equip teachers to act (NFTED, 2006:7)*	2
13	Has making a difference always looked like that for you, or have your ideas about it changed? Please explain.	*Answers may indicate teachers' reflexivity, identified by Pantic (2015:766) as being a necessary element of agency for social justice.*	1.2
14	Does [making a difference/ enacting change] extend beyond the classroom for you, too? If yes: Can you give me an example of what that looks like?	*Fullan (2003:10-11): Teachers must be involved in improving learning beyond the classroom to improve learning in the classroom.* *Possibly speaks to Pantic's (2015:766) Competence.*	3
16	Do you feel that you're able to make the difference you want to through being a teacher? Why/ why not?	*External -- and institutional? -- factors enable or constrain agency. "Actors act by means of their environment" (Priestley et al, 2012:3)*	2
17	Before teaching full time, what would have better prepared you to be the teacher you want to be?	*NPFTE (2006:7): ITE must equip teachers to respond directly to social inequalities by imparting the necessary skills in learners...*	2
18	What would help you be that teacher now? (Perhaps curricular changes, school organisational changes or a CPD programme?)	*ITE, CPD should help equip teachers to act (NFTED, 2006:7)* *External -- and institutional? -- factors enable or constrain agency. "Actors act by means of their environment" (Priestley et al, 2012:3)*	2
19	(Briefly summarise what was discussed.) Is there anything we haven't covered, that you would like to add?	*Participants should be given the opportunity to cover 'unfinished business' at the end of the interview (Yeo et al, 2014:189)*	...

(Please note: this interview matrix is an early version. The final version, reflecting greater balance regarding the research questions, had been saved on my laptop and was lost when that laptop was stolen in March 2023.)

Appendix D2: Final interview schedule

English teachers as agents of change in three Western Cape schools

(How do high school English teachers of historically disadvantaged students narrate themselves as agents of change?)

1) How do teachers conceptualise of the sense of purpose which motivates them professionally?
2) To what extent do teachers feel pedagogically and institutionally equipped to be agents of change?
3) What pedagogic strategies do these teachers foreground as exemplifying positive change agency practices?

Interview schedule

Objectives of the interview:

- *Understand how teachers conceptualise of their professional purpose*
- *Understand the degree to which teachers feel they are equipped and empowered to act upon their purposes daily*
- *Understand what training and other experiences have shaped teachers' perspectives on their purpose and the degree to which they are able to enact it*
- *Identify what enables or constrains teacher agency, and consequently the kinds of support (at the ITE, CPD, school or policy levels) which may be needed*

A. Introduction

- Thank participant for agreeing to talk to me
- Introduction to researcher *(Name, teacher history, current role as student)*
- Check that they're happy to, and **START RECORDING**
- Topic, explanation and aims of the study

  (Looking at English teachers at diverse public schools; specifically how they view their role and the sense of purpose which motivates them.

  Also exploring the extent to which they have been equipped to fulfil their roles)

- Explain confidentiality and anonymity

  (Name, identity, the name of the school in which you work will remain anonymous. Purely interested in your feelings and experiences.)
- Explain length of discussion (1.5 to 2 hours) and confirm their availability
- Explain that participant may withdraw from the interview at any time, and does not have to answer any questions they would prefer not to
- Ask if they have any questions; ask if they're happy to continue

B. Questions on teacher's context, background and (teaching) motivations

1. You mentioned in your questionnaire that you're teaching *[subjects]* at *[school's name]*. I'm interested in how you got here: can you tell me the story of your teaching journey thus far, starting with what influenced you to become a teacher in the first place?
   (I.e. Where else have you taught? What did you teach there? Why did you leave?)

2. Can you tell me about the school at which you teaching now?
   (E.g. What are the students like? What is the area like in which it is situated, and what socio-economic challenges affect the school and your work as a teacher? What are your colleagues like? What is it like to work there?)

How many classes? How big? Have you always only taught English?

3. How does your experience compare to what you thought teaching would be like, before you became a teacher?
4. What did you think *you* would be like as a teacher, and how does that compare to the reality?
5. *(If different:)* Why?
6. Where did those initial ideas about teaching come from?

7. Have there been times since you've started teaching when you've felt like giving up?
8. What has kept you going?

C. Questions on teachers' views on change agency:[1]

1. What is it you are trying to accomplish as a teacher? OR
2. What does it mean to *[make a difference/ teach for change]* to you?

- Why is that the goal of teaching for you?
- How did you reach the conclu. that this is what teachg success looks like?

3. What does *[making a difference/ enacting change]* look like practically in the classroom for you -- can you give me examples?
   (Do you go beyond what the textbook says in your lessons? How?)
4. How did you learn those strategies?
5. What materials do you use?
6. Does the CAPS curriculum enable *[social justice]* teaching? Can you give me examples?

HL / EFAL

7. Has making a difference always looked like that for you, or have your ideas about it changed? Please explain.

[1] Note: phrases in square brackets and italics indicate that precise phrasing will be adapted based on teachers own definitions of change.

8. Does *[making a difference/ enacting change]* extend beyond the classroom for you, too?
9. If YES: Can you give me examples?

10. Do you feel completely satisfied with your ability to accomplish your goal of *[making a difference…]*, or are there still some things that would help you do a better job? *(Perhaps curricular changes, or CPD programme, in-school support?)*

Did anything you learned in your _____ shape your goal to _____ or the strategies you use to achieve it?

11. What did you learn in your PGCE/ BEd year that you still apply to teaching today?
12. When doing your PGCE/BEd, what would have better prepared you to be the teacher you want to be?

13. Are there any other programmes, like professional development programmes, that were helped you be the kind of teacher you want to be?
14. If not already answered sufficiently: What would help you be that teacher now?

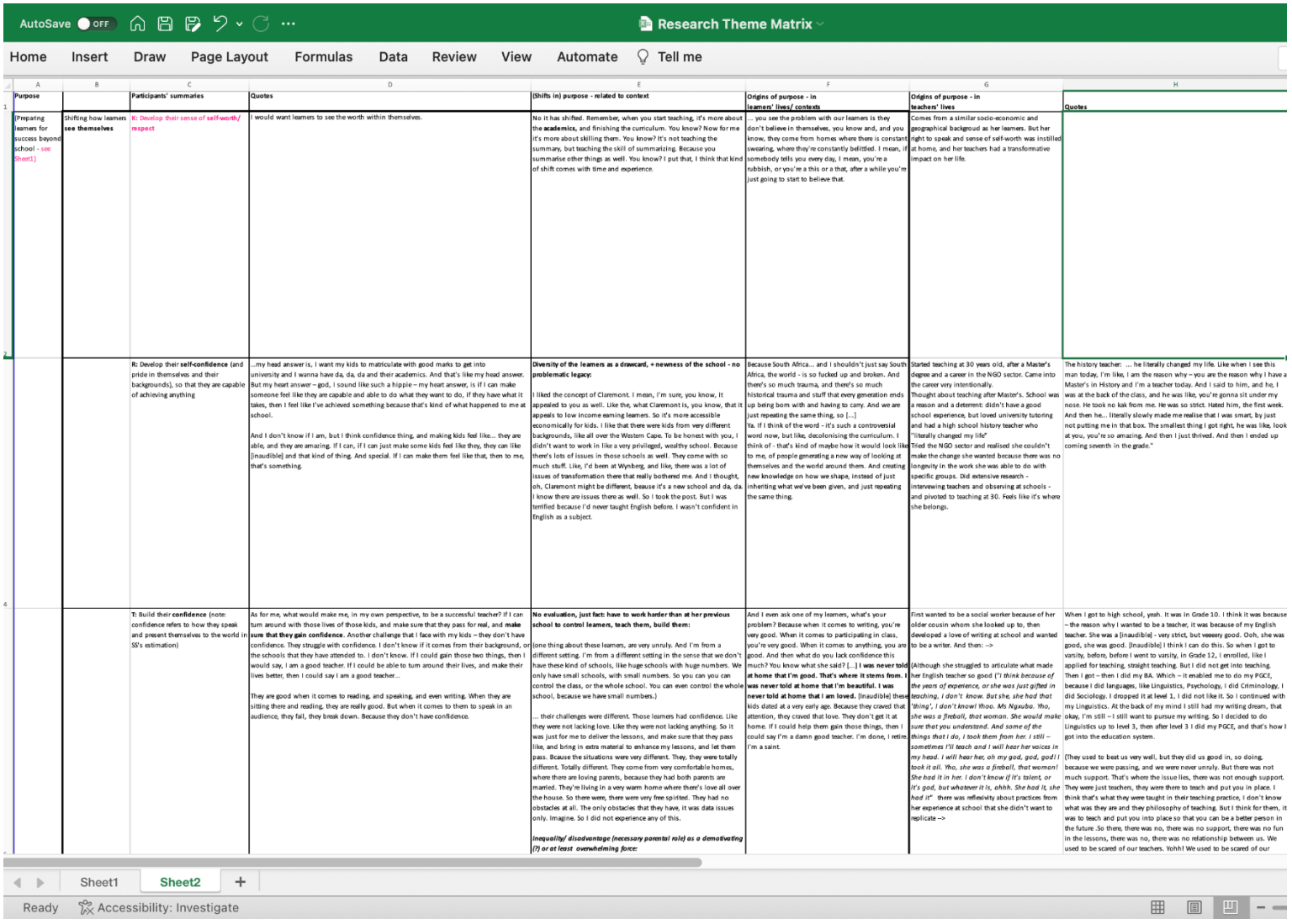
D. In conclusion

1. *(Briefly summarise what was discussed.)* Is there anything we haven't covered, that you would like to add?
2. Thank you for your time. If you do think of anything you'd like to add or any questions, feel free to contact me at any time.

END RECORDING

(Please note: Since this minor dissertation requires data from semi-structured interviews, these questions – as well as their phrasing and order – are intended as guidelines only.)

Appendix E: Extract from matrix display spreadsheet



Purpose		Participants' summaries	Quotes	(Shifts in) purpose - related to context	Origins of purpose - in learners' lives/ contexts	Origins of purpose - in teachers' lives	Quotes
(Preparing learners for success beyond school - see Sheet1)	Shifting how learners **see themselves**	K: Develop their sense of **self-worth/ respect**	I would want learners to see the worth within themselves.	No it has shifted. Remember, when you start teaching, it's more about the **academics,** and finishing the curriculum. You know? Now for me it's more about skilling them. You know? It's not teaching the summary, but teaching the skill of summarizing. Because you summarise other things as well. You know? I put that, I think that kind of shift comes with time and experience.	... you see the problem with our learners is they don't believe in themselves, you know and, and you know, they come from homes where there is constant swearing, where they're constantly belittled. I mean, if somebody tells you every day, I mean, you're a rubbish, or you're a this or a that, after a while you're just going to start to believe that.	Comes from a similar socio-economic and geographical backgroud as her learners. But her right to speak and sense of self-worth was instilled at home, and her teaches had a transformative impact on her life.	
		R: Develop their **self-confidence** (and pride in themselves and their backgrounds), so that they are capable of achieving anything	...my head answer is, I want my kids to matriculate with good marks to get into university and I wanna have da, da, da and their academics. And that's like my head answer. But my heart answer – god, I sound like such a hippie – my heart answer, is if I can make someone feel like they are capable and able to do what they want to do, if they have what it takes, then I feel like I've achieved something because that's kind of what happened to me at school. And I don't know if I am, but I think confidence thing, and making kids feel like... they are able, and they are amazing. If I can, if I can just make some kids feel like they, they can like [inaudible] and that kind of thing. And special. If I can make them feel like that, then to me, that's something.	**Diversity of the learners as a drawcard, + newness of the school - no problematic legacy:** I liked the concept of Claremont. I mean, I'm sure, you know, It appealed to you as well. Like the, what Claremont is, you know, that it appeals to low income earning learners. So it's more accessible economically for kids. I like that there were kids from very different backgrounds, like all over the Western Cape. To be honest with you, I didn't want to work in like a very privileged, wealthy school. Because there's lots of issues in those schools as well. They come with so much stuff. Like, I'd been at Wynberg, and like, there was a lot of issues of transformation there that really bothered me. And I thought, oh, Claremont might be different, beause it's a new school and da, da. I know there are issues there as well. So I took the post. But I was terrified because I'd never taught English before. I wasn't confident in English as a subject.	Because South Africa... and I shouldn't just say South Africa, the world - is so fucked up and broken. And there's so much trauma, and there's so much historical trauma and stuff that every generation ends up being born with and having to carry. And we are just repeating the same thing, so [...] Ya. If I think of the word - it's such a controversial word now, but like, decolonising the curriculum. I think of - that's kind of maybe how it would look like to me, of people generating a new way of looking at themselves and the world around them. And creating new knowledge on how we shape, instead of just inheriting what we've been given, and just repeating the same thing.	Started teaching at 30 years old, after a Master's degree and a career in the NGO sector. Came into the career very intentionally. Thought about teaching after Master's. School was a reason and a deterrent: didn't have a good school experience, but loved university tutoring and had a high school history teacher who "literally changed my life" Tried the NGO sector and realised she couldn't make the change she wanted because there was no longevity in the work she was able to do with specific groups. Did extensive research - interviewing teachers and observing at schools - and pivoted to teaching at 30. Feels like it's where she belongs.	The history teacher: ... he literally changed my life. Like when I see this man today, I'm like, I am the reason why – you are the reason why I have a Master's in History and I'm a teacher today. And I said to him, and he, I was at the back of the class, and he was like, you're gonna sit under my nose. He took no kak from me. He was so strict. Hated him, the first week. And then he... literally slowly made me realise that I was smart, by just not putting me in that box. The smallest thing I got right, he was like, look at you, you're so amazing. And then I just thrived. And then I ended up coming seventh in the grade."
		T: Build their **confidence** (note: confidence refers to how they speak and present themselves to the world in SS's estimation)	As for me, what would make me, in my own perspective, to be a successful teacher? If I can turn around with those lives of those kids, and make sure that they pass for real, and **make sure that they gain confidence.** Another challenge that I face with my kids – they don't have confidence. They struggle with confidence. I don't know if it comes from their background, or the schools that they have attended to. I don't know. If I could gain those two things, then I would say, I am a good teacher. If I could be able to turn around their lives, and make their lives better, then I could say I am a good teacher... They are good when it comes to reading, and speaking, and even writing. When they are sitting there and reading, they are really good. But when it comes to them to speak in an audience, they fail, they break down. Because they don't have confidence.	**No evaluation, just fact: have to work harder than at her previous school to control learners, teach them, build them:** (one thing about these learners, are very unruly. And I'm from a different setting. I'm from a different setting in the sense that we don't have these kind of schools, like huge schools with huge numbers. We only have small schools, with small numbers. So you can you can control the class, or the whole school. You can even control the whole school, because we have small numbers.) ... their challenges were different. Those learners had confidence. Like they were not lacking love. Like they were not lacking anything. So it was just for me to deliver the lessons, and make sure that they pass like, and bring in extra material to enhance my lessons, and let them pass. Beause the situations were very different. They, they were totally different. Totally different. They come from very comfortable homes, where there are loving parents, because they had both parents are married. They're living in a very warm home where there's love all over the house. So there were, there were very free spirited. They had no obstacles at all. The only obstacles that they have, it was data issues only. Imagine. So I did not experience any of this. ***Inequality/ disadvantage (necessary parental role) as a demotivating (?) or at least overwhelming force:***	And I even ask one of my learners, what's your problem? Because when it comes to writing, you're very good. When it comes to participating in class, you're very good. When it comes to anything, you are good. And then what do you lack confidence this much? You know what she said? [...] **I was never told at home that I'm good. That's where it stems from. I was never told at home that I'm beautiful. I was never told at home that I am loved.** [Inaudible] these kids dated at a very early age. Because they craved that attention, they craved that love. They don't get it at home. If I could help them gain those things, then I could say I'm a damn good teacher. I'm done, I retire. I'm a saint.	First wanted to be a social worker because of her older cousin whom she looked up to, then developed a love of writing at school and wanted to be a writer. And then: –> (Although she struggled to articulate what made her English teacher so good ("*I think because of the years of experience, or she was just gifted in teaching, I don't know. But she, she had that 'thing', I don't knowI thoo. Ms Ngxubo. Yho, she was a fireball, that woman. She would make sure that you understand. And some of the things that I do, I took them from her. I still – sometimes I'll teach and I will hear her voices in my head. I will hear her, oh my god, god, god! I took it all. Yho, she was a fireball, that woman! She had it in her. I don't know if it's talent, or it's god, but whatever it is, ahhh. She had it, she had it*" there was reflexivity about practices from her experience at school that she didn't want to replicate –>	When I got to high school, yeah. It was in Grade 10. I think it was because – the reason why I wanted to be a teacher, it was because of my English teacher. She was a [inaudible] - very strict, but veeeery good. Ooh, she was good, she was good. [Inaudible] I think I can do this. So when I got to varsity, before, before I went to varsity, in Grade 12, I enrolled, like I applied for teaching, straight teaching. But I did not get into teaching. Then I got – then I did my BA. Which – it enabled me to do my PGCE, because I did languages, like Linguistics, Psychology, I did Criminology, I did Sociology. I dropped it at level 1, I did not like it. So I continued with my Linguistics. At the back of my mind I still had my writing dream, that okay, I'm still – I still want to pursue my writing. So I decided to do Linguistics up to level 3, then after level 3 I did my PGCE, and that's how I got into the education system. (They used to beat us very well, but they did us good in, so doing, because we were passing, and we were never unruly. But there was not much support. That's where the issue lies, there was not enough support. They were just teachers, they were there to teach and put you in place. I think that's what they were taught in their teaching practice, I don't know what was they are and they philosophy of teaching. But I think for them, it was to teach and put you into place so that you can be a better person in the future. So there, there was no, there was no support, there was no fun in the lessons, there was no, there was no relationship between us. We used to be scared of our teachers. Yohh! We used to be scared of our

Appendix F: Diagram display relating to Research Question 3