


Professional development of teachers: Perceptions and challenges of foundation phase teachers

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Background: South Africa's teacher retention crisis calls for policy makers, school leaders and teachers to explore ways for professional growth. This study examined six novice teachers' experiences and views on continuous professional development (CPD) and how it benefits teachers as they transition from mentees to mentors.

Aim: The study aimed to explore novice teachers' engagement with CPD within the context of foundation phase (FP) teaching. It specifically investigated their understanding of CPD in communities of practice and how they preferred to be inducted, mentored and coached.

Setting: This qualitative case study was conducted in six inner-city public primary schools in urban Johannesburg, South Africa.

Methods: The research followed a case study design, using semi-structured interviews with six novice teachers to gather data.

Results: The findings revealed the significance of informal mentorship, offering support despite the absence of formal structures in FP settings. This highlights the need for educational institutions to establish formal mentorship opportunities to promote professional development and well-being of teachers.

Conclusion: CPD goes beyond fulfilling professional requirements – it empowers teachers. By upskilling and reskilling, CPD prepares teachers to meet modern teaching challenges.

Contributions: This research adds to the limited literature on novice teachers' experiences with CPD in FP. It highlights CPD's crucial role in enhancing pedagogical strategies, supporting diverse learners, improving teacher wellness, and informing educational policy and leadership decisions.

Keywords: continuous professional development; mentorship; induction; coaching; foundation phase.

Introduction

The continuous professional development (CPD) landscape is continually evolving in the context of education, shaped by dynamic pedagogical approaches, advancements in technology and an ever-growing awareness and understanding of diverse learner needs and teacher competencies in relation to coloniality in South African primary schools (Karlberg & Bezzina 2022; Tyagi & Misra 2021; Virtue, Ellerbrock & Main 2022). To ensure teacher quality, job happiness and holistic growth, teachers must participate in CPD, which can only be determined by their goals, challenges and expectations (Tyagi & Misra 2021). In this ever-changing educational environment, low salaries and benefits, the lack of support and resources, heavy workload and administration, large class sizes – unequal teacher-to-learner ratio, challenging work conditions, the role of teachers becomes increasingly complex, demanding a commitment to CPD in order to increase their retention in the education industry (Van den Borre et al. 2021). This is particularly crucial in the Foundation Phase (FP) of primary education, where teachers lay the groundwork for a child's holistic educational journey. It was important to explore the profound significance of CPD for teachers in the FP, emphasising the transformative impact of CPD. The niche of CPD is a growing field in teacher education. Tyagi and Misra (2021), Karlberg and Bezzina (2022), Dyosini (2022) and Mphojane (2021) have written critically about the nature of CPD for teachers and established theories on how to best comprehend various aspects of CPD. From my own experiences as a FP teacher and lecturer in a pre-service teacher education programme and an Open Distance e-Learning (ODEL) institution, I know that it is common for teachers to negotiate their professional

Note: Special collection: Interrogating Coloniality in South African Primary Schools.

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understanding; yet, it is not common for them to experience CPD at their desired level.

Teachers working in FP play a fundamental role in shaping the early learning experiences that form the basis for future educational achievements. This research argues that as education paradigms shift towards learner-centred and holistic approaches, teachers in the FP are challenged to adapt and refine their teaching practices continuously because the 21st-century teacher has to use various modalities to enhance teaching and learning, which can only be learned and practised through CPD (Mphojane 2021). 'The importance of CPD for teachers lies in the fact that it helps them to improve their professional and instructional practices' (Tyagi & Misra 2021:117). However, there is an increasing research interest about teacher capacity, professional identity negotiations as well as wellness and mental health (Phurutse & Arends 2015).

Continuous professional development is recognised as a fundamental tool for empowering teachers with the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary to meet the evolving demands of education. The FP presents a unique set of challenges, ranging from addressing diverse learning needs to navigating complex curriculum frameworks (Karlberg & Bezzina 2020). Effective CPD ensures that teachers are not only equipped with the tools to address these challenges but are also provided with opportunities to reflect, grow and refine their professional identities (Suarez & McGrath 2022). This research aimed to delve deeply into the significance of CPD for in-service teachers in the FP. Specifically, the study focuses on three essential components of professional development (PD): induction, mentorship and coaching (Kotze, Fleisch & Taylor 2019). By examining the experiences and perceptions of FP teachers, I sought to uncover their perceptions of these CPD components on their professional growth and effectiveness in the FP of education.

The aim of the study was to explore the extent to which novice teachers engage with CPD in the context of FP teaching and learning. More specifically, the study sought to explore what was understood about CPD in their communities of practice as well as what was experienced by the teachers based on their expectations of how they would prefer to be inducted, mentored and coached. The objectives were to:

- Investigate what CPD entails.
- Explore how the novice teachers expect to be supported professionally.
- Capture and describe the teachers' perceptions, experiences, thoughts and expectations about CPD exploring the challenges, standards and access to quality CPD.

Literature review

The dynamic nature of teaching in the foundation phase

Teaching in the FP is inherently dynamic, requiring teachers to be versatile, adaptable and attuned to the individual needs

of young children. The foundational years are crucial for laying the groundwork in literacy, numeracy, life skills and physical, cognitive and socio-emotional development (Piper et al. 2018). As education research continually unveils new insights into effective teaching strategies and pedagogical approaches, teachers must participate in a continuous process of learning and development to remain effective and relevant as teachers. Continuous professional development becomes the vehicle to drive teacher turnover and teacher satisfaction (Mphojane 2021).

There is a steady amount of emerging research and literature about induction, mentorship and coaching as components of CPD in the South African context for novice teachers in the FP (Cilliers et al. 2020). This speaks to the need for researchers, teachers, school management, leadership and other educational stakeholders to validate the importance of this ongoing process (Dyosini 2022; Kieser 2022; King 2016). There is room in the FP for CPD to take place in a formal manner so that the professional growth of teachers can develop from a level of being a novice teacher to being a veteran teacher (Mphojane, 2021; Leshem, 2008).

Coloniality and professional development

Experiences of coloniality in South Africa and other African primary schools can be closely linked to the issue of novice teachers in the FP lacking PD (Shizha & Kariwo 2011). This is especially true for black female teachers who work in English home language schools in inner-city Johannesburg and are first- or second-language English speakers, such as the participants of this research. Coloniality is the term used to describe the structures and after effects of colonialism that continue to exist in postcolonial cultures and have an impact on the social, political and educational spheres (Shizha & Kariwo 2011; Virtue et al. 2022).

Schools are affected by social and cultural elements like changes in politics, economic shifts, migration as well as customs and traditions, claims the socio-cultural viewpoint on education (Virtue et al. 2022). It is believed that the school responds to how society defines the purpose of education and, by extension, the function of the teacher, mirroring the local social and cultural order as well as historical events (Virtue et al. 2022). Contextual requirements and limitations, in addition to political realities and pressures, impact CPD programmes. They show how deeply rooted community values are in relation to educational institutions, as well as how widely held views are regarding the role that schools play in educating learners and supporting teachers (Virtue et al. 2022).

The role of continuous professional development in teacher empowerment

Continuous professional development serves as a cornerstone for teacher empowerment in the FP. Effective CPD not only provides teachers with the latest educational tools but also fosters a sense of professional identity, agency and resilience

(Imants & Van der Wal 2020; Phurutse & Arends 2015). As teachers navigate the challenges of diverse classrooms, large class sizes, multilingualism, evolving curriculum and advancements in educational technology, CPD becomes a means by which they can not only survive but thrive in their roles (Makalela 2018). In the ever-evolving landscape of education, teachers play an essential role in shaping the minds of the future generation. However, the challenges and demands placed on teachers have grown exponentially in recent years especially post coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) where teachers are now expected to use a blended teaching approach (Ebrahim, Martin & Excell 2021). In alignment with Ebrahim et al. (2021), a blended model of face to face and online CPD can be implemented in the teaching context specifically using open distance methods and online platforms to provide accessible and relevant PD support (Piper et al. 2018). To meet these challenges head-on, CPD has emerged as a crucial tool for teacher empowerment, providing opportunities for upskilling and reskilling teachers in various areas of their practice at their various levels of expertise. The South African Council of Teachers (SACE) requires teachers to meet and uphold professional standards. Continuous professional development helps teachers fulfil these standards and maintain their professional credentials, ensuring that they remain competent and qualified to teach in the FP (Dyosini 2022). Through teacher empowerment and addressing historical barriers faced by marginalised teachers, CPD may be used as a method to decolonise education (Shizha & Kariwo 2011; Virtue et al. 2022).

Understanding CPD is an ongoing process that allows teachers to enhance their skills, knowledge and competencies throughout their careers. Unlike traditional one-time training sessions, CPD is a dynamic and continuous approach that acknowledges the evolving nature of education and the need for teachers to stay abreast of the latest pedagogical developments, technological advancements and educational research. Enhancing pedagogical practices through CPD empowers teachers by offering opportunities to refine and expand their pedagogical skills. Workshops, seminars and conferences enable teachers to explore innovative teaching methods, instructional strategies, philosophy for teachers (self-awareness, well-being and mental health and learner engagement techniques (Dyosini 2022). By staying informed about the latest educational trends, teachers can create dynamic and effective learning environments that cater to diverse learner needs.

In addition, technological proficiency is becoming an important area in this digital age; technology has become an integral part of education and teachers are having to embrace it with all the resource constraints that they face – not having digital resources, not affording data, no access to Wi-Fi and not having the practical skills of gaining epistemological access (Piper et al. 2018). Continuous professional development programmes equip teachers with the necessary skills to integrate technology into their classrooms, fostering a tech-savvy and future-ready generation. From online

teaching tools to interactive multimedia resources, CPD ensures that teachers are well versed in leveraging technology for enhanced learning experiences.

The reality of diversity in the classroom – where some schools have multi-grade classrooms, as well as a range of learning styles, disabilities and personalities – is addressed by inclusive education approaches. Additionally, CPD is essential in assisting teachers in adopting inclusive teaching strategies (Piper et al. 2018). Teachers are empowered to create inclusive learning environments where every learner feels valued and supported by receiving training opportunities about the inclusion and implementation of cultural competence, differentiated instruction and special education (Cilliers et al. 2020; Virtue et al. 2022). Teachers take great satisfaction in their capacity to identify as lifelong learners and maintain current knowledge of educational research, which is constantly changing because of new findings and advancements in the area. According to Cilliers et al. (2020), CPD enables teachers to remain current on research findings, educational theories, appropriate resources and evidence-based practices. With this information, teachers may make well-informed judgements regarding the way they teach, ensuring that it suits the dynamics of their classroom and the larger community of practice while also being in line with current best practices in education.

The three main components of continuous professional development

This research focused on three key components of CPD (See Figure 1) that are particularly relevant to teachers in the FP: induction, mentorship and coaching, which take on a step-by-step process of learning and growing (Cilliers et al. 2020).

Induction

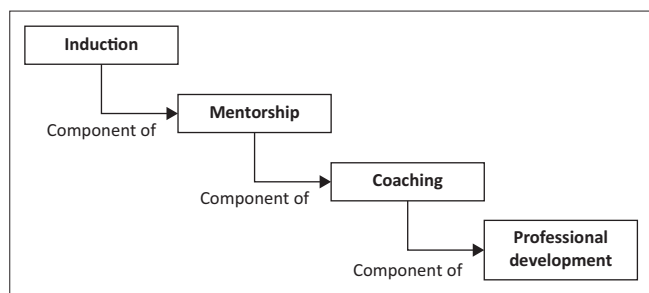
The initial phase of a teacher's career is marked by the transition from pre-service education to practical classroom experiences. Induction programmes play a crucial role in easing this transition, providing novice teachers with the tools, knowledge and support necessary for effective classroom management and curriculum implementation (Ingersoll & Strong 2011).

Mentorship

As novice teachers progress in their careers, mentorship becomes a pivotal component of CPD. Experienced mentors guide less-experienced colleagues, offering insights, sharing best practices and providing emotional support. Mentorship contributes not only to skill development but also to the establishment of a professional identity within the school community (Mpisi & Zoutendijk 2022; Phurutse & Arends 2015).

Coaching

The coaching component of CPD involves a personalised and goal-oriented approach to professional growth. Coaches work closely with teachers, addressing specific challenges



Source: Dyosini, T., 2022, *Mentorship and induction practices with novice foundation phase teachers: An exploratory case study with six primary schools novice teachers and leadership in Johannesburg, South Africa*, Doctoral dissertation, School of Education, Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, p. 189

Note: Figure 1 is an explanation in relation of the different components of professional development according to Dyosini (2022).

FIGURE 1: Components linked to the process of continuous professional development in the context of teacher education.

and refining teaching techniques. Coaching fosters reflective practice, allowing teachers to continually assess and improve their methods (Cilliers et al. 2020).

The ongoing nature of continuous professional development

It is essential to recognise that CPD is not a one-time event but rather an ongoing, cyclical process (Mpisi & Zoutendijk 2022; Phurutse & Arends 2015). Teachers, as lifelong learners, must engage in continuous reflection, adaptation and learning to meet the evolving needs of their learners and the educational landscape (Cilliers et al. 2020). Moreover, as teachers progress in their careers, they become the potential mentors and coaches for the next generation of teachers, contributing to the sustainability and perpetuity of the CPD cycle (Ingersoll & Strong 2011).

Upskilling teachers for career advancement through leadership development

Continuous professional development is not only about improving classroom practices but also about nurturing leadership skills among teachers. The teaching profession is known for being stagnant as many teachers will stay in the same class, grade or position for over 15 years with little to no promotion (Dawson 2014; Kraft & Lyon 2022). Leadership development programmes within CPD frameworks empower teachers to take on roles beyond the classroom. This also lends itself to the positioning theory that allows the teachers to work through the various hierarchical levels they may find themselves in as teachers, heads of departments and principals (Harré & Langenhove 1999). This includes mentorship (mentor and mentee), curriculum development and even administrative responsibilities, paving the way for career advancement within the education sector.

According to Zamir (2018), PD is defined as a process in which teachers:

[M]anage to change via learning throughout their professional life, as a result of aspects relating to personal biography and individual characteristics regarding the demand for autonomy

and the attitude towards any change in work modes. This is a process that results from the development itself and the work in the profession, and involvement in various formal programs in the work place. (p. 149)

This allows for building specialised expertise, which some teachers do through continuing with their educational advancement post attaining their undergraduate degrees, diplomas and/or postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE) (Harré & Van Langenhove 1999; Piper et al. 2018). Educational advancements can be a catalyst to promotion and career advancement through specialising in a postgraduate degree such as an Honours degree in the South African context, a Master's degree and even a Doctoral degree (Dawson 2014; Kraft & Lyon 2022).

Similarly, CPD allows teachers to specialise in specific areas of interest or need within education. Whether it is STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) education, language acquisition, early childhood care and education (ECCE) or special education, teachers can upskill in specialised domains (Piper et al. 2018). This not only enhances their teaching competence and personal repertoire but also contributes to the overall improvement of the education system (Piper et al. 2018). Adapting to educational reforms is a challenge many teachers face, and CPD is a stepping stone to supporting them as they navigate education policies and standards which are subject to change, and teachers need help to adapt accordingly (Piper et al. 2018). Continuous professional development provides a structured framework for teachers to upskill in response to educational reforms. By staying abreast of changes in curriculum, assessment methods and teaching standards, teachers can ensure they remain effective and compliant with evolving educational policies also being internationally competitive. This may entail reskilling and upskilling teachers in response to challenges. The global pandemic COVID-19 highlighted many gaps in the education sector during the years 2020 and 2021 where access to quality education became the main challenge (Ebrahim et al. 2021). Crisis response and remote learning became the main tasks that teachers had to navigate in order to reach their learners. This was not possible for many teachers who come from resource constrained contexts such as township schools, rural schools and farm schools (Mpisi & Zoutendijk 2022; Phurutse & Arends 2015). The global landscape of education supply and demand has witnessed unprecedented challenges beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, which necessitated a swift transition to remote learning or hybrid opportunities for teaching and learning (Ebrahim et al. 2021). Continuous professional development has played a crucial role in reskilling and upskilling teachers to navigate the challenges of online education, equipping them with the necessary tools and strategies to deliver quality education in a virtual environment (Mpisi & Zoutendijk 2022; Phurutse & Arends 2015).

Moreover, the holistic development of learners involves not only academic knowledge but also social and emotional well-

being (Dyosini 2022; Mpisi & Zoutendijk 2022; Phurutse & Arends 2015). Continuous professional development addresses the importance of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and provides teachers with resources and training to foster a positive and supportive classroom environment (Zolkoski et al. 2021).

Reskilling and upskilling in SEL helps teachers address the emotional needs of learners, promoting a conducive atmosphere for learning. In addition, teachers need support for themselves as human capital; if teachers are not emotionally available and stable, it makes for a hostile teaching and learning environment. This is also related to the need for mental health awareness for teachers in the context of education, which Dyosini (2022) refers to as Philosophy for Teachers (PFT). The mental health of both learners and teachers has gained recognition as a critical aspect of education, which needs on-going capacitation, resources, time and intention. Continuous professional development programmes should also incorporate training on mental health awareness and coping strategies (Dyosini 2022). This reskilling and upskilling empowers teachers to recognise signs of mental health issues in learners and themselves, offering appropriate support and resources.

Theoretical framework: Positioning theory and Ubuntu theory

Positioning theory

Harré and Van Langenhove (1999) describe that the positioning theory explores how individuals position themselves and are positioned by others in social interactions. Understanding the dynamics of teacher-learner, teacher-leader relationships and teacher-teacher interactions is essential for effective CPD. The intersection of the positioning theory and coloniality in South African primary schools highlights several key points for CPD; awareness and reflexivity, culturally responsive CPD, leadership training and empowerment through informal mentorship (Harré & Van Langenhove 1999; Virtue et al. 2022). The positioning theory is a useful tool for understanding how teachers connect with one another and how colonialism affects professional growth in South African primary schools (Dyosini 2022; Harré & Van Langenhove 1999; Virtue et al. 2022). Education stakeholders may design more equitable and successful CPD programmes that promote the development and well-being of all teachers by being aware of and responding to these dynamics (Dyosini 2022; Harré & Van Langenhove 1999; Virtue et al. 2022).

Ubuntu theory

Ubuntu, an African philosophy, emphasises interconnectedness, community and shared humanity (Letseka 2016). Applying the Ubuntu philosophy to education encourages collaborative learning, collective responsibility and the recognition of each teacher's role in the broader educational ecosystem (Letseka 2016). To explore the experiences of

teachers in the FP, this research adopts an interpretivist paradigm (Nickerson 2022):

Interpretivism is an approach to social science that asserts that understanding the beliefs, motivations, and reasoning of individuals in a social situation is essential to decoding the meaning of the data that can be collected around a phenomenon. (p. 1)

The positioning theory serves as a lens through which we examine how teachers position themselves and are positioned by others within the social interactions of educational settings (Harré & Van Langenhove 1999). Additionally, the theory of Ubuntu, rooted in an African philosophical framework emphasising interconnectedness and shared humanity, is applied to highlight the collaborative and communal nature of CPD (Letseka 2016).

This research endeavours to contribute to the existing body of knowledge surrounding CPD in the FP from the South African context. By exploring the transformative impact of induction, mentorship and coaching, we aim to shed light on the nuanced dynamics of teacher development in the foundational years of primary education (Cilliers et al. 2020). This study seeks to provide valuable insights that can inform educational policies, school leadership and management practices and teacher training programmes, ultimately enhancing the quality of education in the FP (Harré & Van Langenhove 1999; Kieser 2022; Letseka 2016). The dynamic nature of educational landscapes necessitates a commitment to lifelong learning and adaptation. In this context, induction, mentorship and coaching emerge as crucial components of CPD, offering teachers the necessary tools for growth and development (Cilliers et al. 2020; Kotze et al. 2019).

Continuous professional development plays a pivotal role in the growth and effectiveness of teachers, particularly those in the FP. This research article aimed to comprehensively explore the significance of CPD, with a specific focus on the components of induction, mentorship and coaching. By employing an interpretivist paradigm and drawing on positioning theory and the theory of Ubuntu, the study delves into the experiences of FP teachers (Harré & Van Langenhove 1999; Letseka 2016). The research also seeks to understand how teacher agency, coupled with guidance from stakeholders, contributes to effective CPD (Imants & Van der Wal 2020).

Theoretical application of the positioning theory and Ubuntu theory

Positioning theory

This study demonstrated how teachers position themselves within the educational context and how external forces, such as mentors and school principals and/or heads of departments, contribute to shaping their professional identities (Harré & Van Langenhove 1999; Phurutse &

Arends 2015). This was illustrated by the participants voiced expectations of wanting to be supported and mentored by veteran teachers who are in-tune with their individual needs (Leshem, 2008).

The philosophy of Ubuntu

The principles of the philosophy of Ubuntu, emphasising interconnectedness and collective responsibility, align with the collaborative nature of CPD, which encourage collaboration and the notion of working together as opposed to working in silos (Du Toit-Brits, Potgieter & Hongwane 2012; Letseka 2016). Implementing Ubuntu in educational settings fosters a sense of community and shared goals (Du Toit-Brits et al. 2012; Letseka 2016). This study upholds that the interconnectedness of humanity which reveals that we need each other to grow and excel in their communities of practice. This is seen in the manner in which the participants have expectations of their peers, colleagues and school leadership to assist in the provision of CPD at different levels.

Research methods and design

Background and context

The study has been conducted in three FP inner-city schools situated in the geographical context of the Gauteng province. They all face similar limiting factors in relation to the CPD they have received or a lack thereof, which might differ in intensity from one person to another. The study adopts an interpretivist paradigm, highlighting the individual experiences and perceptions of teachers through semi-structured interviews. The qualitative approach used allows for an in-depth study of the difficulties surrounding CPD in the FP (Silverman 2013) by six African, female novice teachers in their early 20s. The teachers are all First Additional English (FAL) language speakers working at schools that use English as the home language and language of instruction. This study aims to be a voice for the six teachers chosen to participate in this research as their different experiences matter, and they give other teachers an opportunity to feel seen and have a sense of belonging.

Participants

The main participants are six novice teachers, each identified by pseudonyms: Novice Teacher A, Novice Teacher B, Novice Teacher C, Novice Teacher D, Novice Teacher E and Novice Teacher F. In addition, as shown in Table 1, the participants teach various grades in the FP at inner-city

schools in Johannesburg located in the Gauteng province in South Africa. Their ages range from 23 to 26 years, all of them being female and all of African ethnicity. The years of teaching experience in their respective schools vary, with Novice Teacher F being the most recent addition with only 3 months of experience, while the others have between 1 to 3 years of teaching experience in their current schools. The inclusion criteria focused on teachers with varying experience levels, ensuring diverse perspectives on CPD.

The novice teacher participants, as shown in Table 1, were purposively selected to participate in semi-structured interviews (Silverman 2013). The study chose FP teachers because of the following reasons: (1) It is the phase where formal schooling begins. (2) Context-relevant research is needed to understand teachers' CPD experiences and expectations. (3) The participants all graduated with a Bachelor of Education degree specialising in the FP from various universities. Furthermore, the novice teacher participants are all speakers of vernacular South African languages, meaning their primary languages are indigenous to South Africa and are not home language English speakers, which indicates that English is not their first language. Their experiences and relationships within the educational system may be influenced by their language background, especially in a post-colonial setting where English frequently plays a major role in PD and formal schooling.

Data collection

The study's data collecting approach included individual semi-structured interviews, which were done to gather rich, contextual data about teachers' experiences with CPD, with an emphasis on induction, mentoring and coaching (Silverman 2013). Firstly, all six participants completed an informed consent form to be interviewed and audio recorded. Secondly, a lengthy semi-structured interview using open-ended questions was conducted with each of the six teacher participants to gain a detailed understanding of their various contexts. Lastly, the interviews allowed the teachers to express their CPD experiences, perceptions and challenges. The progression of a teacher's career advancement from novice to veteran, emphasizes the critical role of continuous professional development in fostering growth and expertise, see Figure 2.

Data analysis

The study looked at the elements that influence FP novice teachers' experiences with CPD. Given the nature of

TABLE 1: Novice teacher participant demographics.

Participants	Grade	Age (years)	Years teaching	Gender	Race	School	Home language
Novice teacher A	1	24	2 years	Female	African	School 2	IsiZulu
Novice teacher B	2	24	1 year	Female	African	School 1	IsiZulu
Novice teacher C	3	24	2 years	Female	African	School 1	Sesotho
Novice teacher D	2	23	2 years	Female	African	School 3	Setswana
Novice teacher E	2	24	1 year	Female	African	School 2	IsiZulu
Novice teacher F	2	26	4 months	Female	African	School 2	IsiZulu

Source: Dyosini, T., 2022, *Mentorship and induction practices with novice foundation phase teachers: An exploratory case study with six primary schools novice teachers and leadership in Johannesburg, South Africa*, Doctoral dissertation, School of Education, Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, p. 8

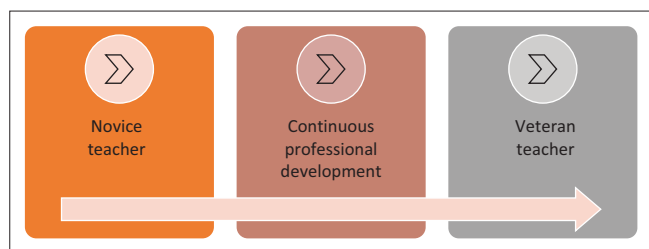


FIGURE 2: Teacher career advancement from novice to veteran through Continuous professional development.

qualitative phenomena in the classroom, this study used a qualitative research approach to acquire a thorough knowledge of the application of CPD (Babbie, 2013). Thematic content analysis was helpful in identifying, analysing and understanding patterns of meaning (themes) within the qualitative data collected from the semi-structured interviews, providing valuable insights into the participants' experiences and perceptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Following the guidelines outlined by Clarke and Braun (2017), the data from these interviews were thematically analysed. The process involved several steps:

1. Familiarisation with the data: I familiarised myself with the interview transcripts to gain an understanding of the participants' responses.
2. Generating initial codes: Initial codes were generated to identify patterns, concepts and ideas within the data. These codes were applied to segments of the text that represented similar ideas or concepts.
3. Searching for themes: Codes were then grouped together to form potential themes. Themes were identified based on recurring patterns or significant concepts across the data set.
4. Reviewing themes: The researcher reviewed and refined the identified themes, ensuring they accurately reflected the data and captured the essence of participants' experiences and perceptions where themes were defined and named.

The final step involved synthesising the thematic analysis which presented the findings in a clear and structured manner, supported by quotes or examples from the interview data to explain each theme. The repetitive process allowed for a nuanced understanding of the teachers' experiences with CPD components. Some of the themes that were identified from the teachers' experiences were: Teacher Agency and Stakeholder Support, the Importance of Induction, the Role of Mentorship as well as the Impact of Coaching (Imants & Van der Wal 2020).

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this research study was obtained from the University of the Witwatersrand – WSoE Research Ethics Committee (Protocol Number: 2018ECE018D).

Discussion and findings

Results

Drawing on teachers' critical incidents, I explain the experiences and perceptions that show important turning

points in the teachers' journeys. The analysis of the data revealed three distinct phases in the teachers' journey into real-world teaching. An interpretivism lens was used for the study because it 'looks for an understanding of a particular context, because this context is critical to interpreting the data gathered' (Nickerson 2022:14).

Moving from being a new teacher to a seasoned pro happens through learning and growing on the job. When teachers start out, they're learning the ropes, trying to figure out how to manage classrooms and teach effectively. They get help from mentors and training sessions to get better at what they do. As they gain experience, they become more confident and skilled. They learn more about what works in teaching and start to develop their own style. They keep learning through workshops and talking with other teachers. Finally, they become veterans, really good at what they do. They might even start teaching other teachers or helping to make decisions about teaching in their school. They keep learning because they know there is always more to discover. Throughout this journey, having support from colleagues and opportunities to learn and improve are super important. It is like climbing a ladder, where each step makes you better at teaching.

During the data analysis process, the study was flexible and asked the following three open-ended questions: (1) What type of formal or informal professional support through mentorship are you receiving as a novice teacher in the FP? (2) What characteristics and qualities are important in a mentor? (3) What would a good mentorship programme entail?

Novice Teacher A responded to the question 1 as follows:

'No, it is very informal, there is no guideline it just happens if you are lucky and a teacher takes a liking to you or she feels as though you need help then they help you get better, they mentor you. But there is no formal thing at school, like the deputy principals – nothing, the principal – nothing. So, it is basically up to your phase and the people in your grade or your team that will help you and mentor you. There is always that one person who will just put you under their wing, hopefully.' (Novice teacher A)

The Novice Teacher A's response highlights the informal nature of mentorship within the school environment. There is no formal guideline for mentorship, and it typically occurs based on personal connections and rapport. Teachers rely on colleagues they 'gel with' or who they perceive as supportive to provide guidance and assistance. Formal structures within the school, such as deputy principals and the principal, did not play a significant role in her mentorship process. Instead, she affirms that mentorship is primarily driven by individual relationships within grades or teams. Novice Teacher A notes the importance of having a supportive team but acknowledges that not all teams are equally friendly. Based on Teacher A's response, it is possible to interpret teachers 'gelling' with particular colleagues as a type of self-

positioning in which they stand with individuals they consider to be allies (Harré & Van Langenhove 1999). Shared cultural, racial or gender identities, which foster mutual understanding and trust, frequently have an impact on this alignment. But these processes can become more complex because of the history of colonialism (Shizha & Kariwo 2011; Virtue et al. 2022).

The findings emphasise that time, social interaction, organisational environments and individual qualities all influence how informal mentoring occurs (Du & Wang 2017). Furthermore, informal mentoring focuses on information gathering and occurs infrequently, with little follow-up. This is relevant to the teacher participants, who described having informal mentoring relationships in their communities of practice. Moreover, novice teachers would also benefit from coaching opportunities because coaching provides personalised support tailored to their specific needs and challenges. Coaches can offer constructive feedback, guidance and practical strategies to improve teaching skills and navigate classroom issues effectively. Coaching also fosters reflection and growth by encouraging novice teachers to set goals and work towards them in a supportive environment (Cilliers et al. 2020). This personalised approach helps build confidence, enhances PD and ultimately improves teaching quality and learner outcomes (Cilliers et al. 2020).

Novice Teacher B responded to question 1 as follows:

'So, there is no formal structure in this school, Nobody said, 'here is your mentor, talk to this person'. Formal mentorship is not offered it's more informal, it is about who you clash with or who you gel with. Who you gel with mostly because you will find a person who has so much interest in you and they want to see you grow because the person is concerned about you and you both take that as mentorship. I saw it as informal because no one sent her to me and said here is a mentee but because she really likes me and we are from the same race and she knows how things are done at this school, helping me with whatever I want, she will take me through it if I just tell her. So, it became informal we would talk during breaks over tea, we would just listen to stories about each other's experiences and about this school and you just learn from that.' (Novice teacher B)

Novice Teacher B's response reveals a lack of formal mentorship at her school. She described having to navigate mentorship on their own, without any guidance or designated mentors assigned by the school. Instead, mentorship is based on personal connections and mutual interest between colleagues, similar to Novice Teacher A's response. Novice Teacher B emphasises the importance of relationships with individuals who show genuine interest in your growth and well-being. She shared an example related to the informal mentorship from a colleague who offered guidance and support, particularly during break time over a cup of tea. Rather than being a formal task or obligation, this mentorship was motivated by a personal bond, a shared understanding of each other's origins and experiences and a cultural

connection gained from being of the same race. Novice Teacher B pointed out that the results demonstrate how much teachers depend on unofficial mentoring for support and professional growth within the school community. The position of black female teachers is situated at the intersection of race, gender and linguistic disadvantage (Harré & Van Langenhove 1999). This intersectionality could worsen the marginalisation individuals experience at work. They could come across prejudice and hostility not only from colleagues and superiors but also from the larger educational system, which is still founded in colonial ideas (Shizha & Kariwo 2011; Virtue et al. 2022).

However, PD programmes can also provide crucial support by helping novice teachers reflect on their teaching methods, find effective strategies and navigate challenges that connect to both cultural and linguistic diversity (Stewart & Jansky 2022). This is demonstrated in Novice Teacher C's response where she shares that she has an informal mentor who she goes to for emotional support or guidance on the understanding, design and use of resources and teaching strategies in the classroom. Novice Teacher C stated the following in response to question 1:

'I don't have a mentor at the moment, I do have someone I can go to for guidance, whether it can be emotional if I am feeling frustrated or just to help me with my resources, how to actually teach certain concepts. But then still it wouldn't necessarily be mentorship if you haven't agreed as both parties that you are going to help the mentee as a mentor.' (Novice teacher C)

Novice Teacher C's response underlines the absence of a formal mentorship arrangement, yet she has identified individuals within the education field who provide guidance and support to her in different capacities on an informal basis. Novice Teacher C emphasises the importance of mutual agreement in defining mentorship relationships, suggesting that mentorship is more than just seeking help from someone knowledgeable but involves a mutual understanding and commitment between both parties; this can be done through a formal and written mentorship agreement or memorandum of understanding (Du & Wang 2017). Despite the lack of formal mentorship, Novice Teacher C acknowledges the presence of supportive individuals within her community of practice who offer assistance as needed. Similarly, Novice Teacher D stated that she only received assistance when she asked for it:

'Mainly just advice, there is nothing else. We go to meetings then they tell us this is what we should be doing or please fix this or whatever. But, there is nothing concrete that they sit down with you and say you need help with this or that. If you need to ask a question it is literally just you going to whoever you need to ask the question, you ask and then that is it, that's literally what the mentorship is, if I can put it that way.' (Novice teacher D)

Novice Teacher D's response supports the sentiments shared by the other teacher participants as well as Du and Wang (2017) that informal mentorship lacks intentional structure, dedicated time, organisation and formal mentor pairing. It mainly consists of casual advice and brief interactions, with

teachers often having to seek out assistance on their own without comprehensive, ongoing support. The experiences of Novice Teacher C are more in line with the proactive, group mentality of the philosophy of Ubuntu, where assistance is freely provided as a means of the community's commitment to one another (Du Toit-Brits et al. 2012; Letseka 2016). In contrast, Novice Teacher D's experience suggests a less integrated way to implement Ubuntu principles, with support available but needing to be actively requested. This may indicate a more reactive rather than proactive community support structure (Du Toit-Brits et al. 2012; Letseka 2016). Novice Teachers E's and F's responses display an element of instruction rather than support where they are both given instruction on how to calculate or told what to do in relation to managing the learners.

Novice Teacher shared her experience as follows:

'More informal, the formal part of it was being given random papers and being told to go through that. But then with the heads of departments it was more practical and with the other teachers they literally showed me this is how you do this. This is how you calculate this. This is what's expected of you when there's a sports event or something like that. But with higher management it is more just here's the paperwork, read through it.' (Novice teacher E)

Novice Teacher shared that her mentorship was:

'Nothing formal; it is informal as they would just say, "listen, this is our assessment, and you have to make sure the learners write". That's it, it's just an instruction, it's not even support, just instructions that I was given. "Learners need to do this, this and that", that's it.' (Novice teacher F)

In the context of CPD for novice teachers, giving instructions can be linked to the positioning theory by examining how teachers position themselves and are positioned by others during instructional interactions. When novice teachers receive instructions, their positioning – as less experienced or knowledgeable – affects how they perceive and engage with the guidance provided (Harré & Van Langenhove 1999). Equally, how more experienced teachers position themselves – whether as authoritative figures or supportive mentors – can significantly impact the effectiveness of the instruction (Harré & Van Langenhove 1999). Recognising these dynamics helps in creating a more collaborative and empowering CPD environment, where novice teachers feel valued and supported in their professional growth. The data shows that informal mentorship leads in the school community, with a lack of structured, focussed needs-based support (Du & Wang 2017). Novice Teacher E described it as receiving random papers to study, with only practical guidance from colleagues, while upper management provided no practical assistance. Similarly, Novice Teacher F perceived mentorship as simply receiving instructions without any meaningful support. This leads to the second question that asked the participants: 'What characteristics and qualities are important in a mentor?'. Deng and Turner (2024) identified three key categories essential for successful

mentoring outcomes: competency in context-relevant knowledge, skills and abilities, where a mentor must be knowledgeable and skilled in areas relevant to the mentee's context; commitment and initiative, with effective mentors demonstrating dedication and proactive engagement in the mentoring process and interpersonal skills, highlighting the importance of strong communication and relationship building.

For this question, key words related to the qualities and characteristics sought out by the novice teacher participants will be shared. Table 2 summarises the key qualities and characteristics expressed by each novice teacher from the data collected through their responses to *Question 2* regarding what they value in a mentor.

For novice teachers choosing a mentor, qualities such as being caring, firm, passionate, available, experienced, forward-thinking, empathetic, qualified, patient, approachable, supportive and non-judgemental are crucial because they contribute to a supportive and effective mentoring relationship, which is essential for PD opportunities initiated through any of the three components. Professional development should be seen as a process of culture building rather than mere skill training, recognising teachers' prior knowledge and experiences. According to Chang, Siyal and Gohar (2024), PD systems should provide opportunities for teachers to gain new knowledge while fostering meaningful interactions among teachers, administrators, coordinators and managers. These qualities in mentors ensure that PD is a collaborative, enriching experience that supports continuous growth, aligning with the idea of exploring an in-service PD model that promotes a holistic and inclusive approach to PD. Once novice teachers have identified which qualities and characteristics matter to them when seeking a suitable mentor, they have capacity to think about and design the type of PD support they need while teaching in-service. This brings us to the third research question that asks: 'What would a good mentorship programme entail?'

In response to the third question, Novice Teacher A stated that a successful mentorship programme should provide support in all areas. Novice teachers require assistance with a wide range of issues – professional aspects including content knowledge, curriculum implementation, school

TABLE 2: Novice teacher participant key word responses to Research Question 2.

Novice teacher	Key words
A	Caring, Firm, Voluntary, Enjoyable, Positive (happy)
B	Patience, Passion, Good Intentions, Intentionality, Availability
C	Passionate, Forward-thinking, Goal-oriented, Experienced, Supportive
D	Sensitive, Empathetic, Experienced, Qualified, Academic
E	Patience, Openness, Willingness to share, Supportive, Approachable
F	Supportive, Welcoming, Patient, Understanding, Non-judgemental

Source: Dyosini, T., 2022, *Mentorship and induction practices with novice foundation phase teachers: An exploratory case study with six primary schools novice teachers and leadership in Johannesburg, South Africa*, Doctoral dissertation, School of Education, Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, pp. 86–92

culture, community of practice, personal and professional identity and wellness. Novice teacher A further mentioned that: A good mentorship programme would entail support in all aspects.

Novice Teacher A's statement aligns with the findings of Shanks et al. (2022) on key aspects of teacher professional growth, particularly the development of pedagogical knowledge, understanding and the negotiation of professional identity. The literature underscores that effective mentoring involves opportunities for regular reflection on practice, balanced questioning, observation and practical advice that addresses both practical and affective dimensions (Shanks et al. 2022). This is linked to Novice Teacher A's findings that highlight the significance of holistic mentorship approaches in supporting novice teachers' development and overall well-being. Similarly, Novice Teacher B's response echoes the need for a holistic mentorship programme. She stated that:

'There should be a course, or a programme that will look at the holistic being. How do you act when you are faced with certain situations in the classroom where you have to deal with hectic issues like child abuse? I mean I had to deal with that, and it was overwhelming for me, because as much as I learned about it at university it was never taught in-depth, like how do you go about it? Even the protocol, as to what you should do. What do I do, how do I solve this issue as the teacher at school?' (Novice teacher B)

Novice Teacher B wants a mentorship programme that helps teachers in many ways. They need help with understanding difficult school topics and dealing with emotional and mental challenges because they often play roles like parents or friends to their learners. The programme should also focus on the overall well-being of both teachers and learners. It is important to learn practical skills for handling tough situations in classrooms, like when a child might be experiencing abuse. The programme should teach clear steps to follow and give novice teachers opportunities to practice dealing with real-life problems they might face. This kind of mentorship will prepare teachers to handle all the different responsibilities they have beyond just teaching lessons. In addition, Dreer-Goethe (2023) affirms that teacher well-being is connected to the kind of mentoring they receive. This includes how teachers see mentoring, whether they choose to participate, how they contribute to their relationships with mentors and the styles of mentoring they use. It is also suggested that the quality of mentoring influences how mentees feel, which in turn affects their growth as professionals. Therefore, good mentoring can make teachers feel supported and help them develop better in their careers (Dreer-Goethe 2023).

Novice Teacher D suggests that a group mentorship model would be ideal for PD support. This is related to the styles of mentoring that Dreer-Goethe (2023) speaks about, which should be chosen by the novice teachers in order to best suit their needs, skills and expectations. Novice Teacher D's response speaks to the need of various stakeholders

participating in the design and implementation of novice teacher PD. She stated that:

'I think we need a group of new teachers as well, not just one on one mentorship because if it's just a mentorship programme where is only one person dealing with a mentor I think then it is easy to be afraid and you start thinking that you are the only one going through this and then you will be afraid to voice what is actually happening. At my school we had a group of new teachers. I think you need two mentors for a group of new teachers and also not too many mentees because then I think we can share without suppressing ourselves. The Department of Education needs to be involved because I don't think there is a good understanding of what's happening to new teachers and how things work. The department overlooks new teachers, like there is no support from them for new teachers, there is nothing.' (Novice teacher D)

Novice Teacher D's response relates to Tynjälä et al. (2021)'s model of peer group mentoring, which gives novice teachers a place where they can talk with others who are also new to teaching. They discuss how they see themselves as teachers and how their schools are changing. In these groups, they share their experiences, help each other with problems and learn from what others are doing. It is like having a team of supportive colleagues who understand what you are going through and can help you figure things out together (Tynjälä et al. 2021). In addition, Novice Teacher E shares about the formality of agreements that need to be drawn up and signed by both the mentor and mentee to guide the mentorship process in a formal manner. Novice Teacher E's response states that a good mentorship programme:

'Would entail official documents that need to be given to you but, as I said, the miscommunication comes when it's not really explained. So, I would've appreciated a proper workshop where they take us through the documents.' (Novice teacher E)

Bleach (2013) discusses how important it is for novice teachers to get good support and guidance when they start their teaching careers. This includes having someone assigned to help them (like a mentor), watching experienced teachers teach and getting feedback on their own teaching. There should also be other activities planned to help novice teachers learn and grow. Novice Teacher E is saying that when she started teaching, she wished she had been given official documents that explain things clearly. She felt there was miscommunication because the documents she did receive were not explained well enough. She articulates that it would have been helpful to attend workshops where someone could go through these documents step by step.

Therefore, both Bleach (2013)'s ideas and Novice Teacher E's experience emphasise the importance of clear guidance and support for novice teachers, especially through structured mentorship programmes and explanations of important documents. This helps novice teachers feel more prepared and confident in their teaching roles. In the final response to Question 3, Novice Teacher F puts emphasis on the importance of mentors knowing their role and

understanding how mentorship should be implemented in the context of the teaching environment. Novice Teacher F's response speaks to the fact that there needs to be provision made for:

'Mentors need to understand what this whole thing of mentorship is about, because I feel like they don't understand it. The introduction to the mentor should clearly explain that they are going to take you through this whole thing. And also, maybe, time for something that entails the chance to go and experience – I can go to observe the different teachers and how they teach so that maybe we see what would work for me or just take a bit of everything and produce our own way of teaching. I feel like that would work for me.' (Novice teacher F)

In conclusion, Novice Teacher F believes that mentors should fully understand their role and purpose in mentoring novice teachers in the FP, as they often feel that this understanding may be lacking. She suggests that a structured introduction be available to mentors, outlining what the mentoring process will involve. Additionally, Novice Teacher F expresses a desire for more time to observe different teaching styles and approaches in action. This she believes would allow novice teachers to learn what works best for them and develop their own teaching methods. This aligns with findings from Aslan and Öcal (2012), which emphasise the importance of increased interaction between mentors and mentees. Mentors should not only observe mentees but also vice versa. The study highlights the need for more structured observation processes, including preparation before and reflection after observations, and expanding the content of observations beyond just classroom teaching (Aslan & Öcal 2012). Furthermore, mentors also expressed a need for PD programmes to better support them in their mentoring roles despite their own teaching experience (Aslan & Öcal 2012).

Discussion

The data revealed that there is a lack of formal mentorship structures as a component of CPD within the school environment (Tyagi & Misra 2021). Participants emphasised that mentorship typically occurs informally, with individuals seeking guidance and support from colleagues they feel comfortable with or who show an interest in their growth. The absence of formal mentorship programmes from school leadership was noted, leaving mentorship largely dependent on personal connections and rapport within teams or grades (Zoutendijk 2021).

Participants described instances where informal mentorship emerged organically, often based on mutual respect and shared experiences (Dyosini 2022). Relationships with mentors were characterised by support in various aspects, including administrative tasks, emotional support and PD. These mentor-mentee dynamics were not mandated by the school but rather developed through interpersonal connections and shared understanding (Ellis, Alonzo & Nguyen 2020).

The informal nature of mentorship was emphasised, with interactions occurring during breaks or over tea, rather than through structured workshops or formal sessions. Despite the absence of formal mentorship structures, participants identified individuals they could turn to for guidance, assistance and emotional support, highlighting the importance of informal networks within the school community (Ingersoll & Strong 2011; Keiser 2022).

Overall, the findings underscore the significance of informal mentorship relationships in providing support and guidance to teachers despite the lack of formalised systems within the school environment. This highlights the need for educational institutions, school leadership and policy makers to recognise and facilitate formal and structured mentorship opportunities to support the professional growth and well-being of their novice teachers.

Importance of induction

Navigating the educational landscape is key and novice teachers expressed the importance of induction in helping them navigate the complexities of the educational landscape, including curriculum frameworks, administrative processes and school culture (Ingersoll & Strong 2011). When establishing professional identity in the context of teaching, induction plays a crucial role in assisting teachers in establishing a professional identity within the school community. Feeling integrated and supported positively influenced their confidence and overall job satisfaction.

The role of mentorship

Skills development and guidance: Mentorship emerged as a pivotal component in skills development and guidance. Experienced mentors provided valuable insights, shared best practices and facilitated the transfer of tacit knowledge (Mpsi & Zoutendijk 2022). Mentorship also allows for emotional support; it goes beyond PD, providing emotional support during challenging times. The mentor-mentee relationship fostered a sense of camaraderie and a safe space for open communication.

Impact of coaching

Targeted professional growth through coaching was perceived as a targeted and personalised approach to professional growth. Teachers highlighted the effectiveness of coaching in addressing specific challenges and refining teaching techniques (Cilliers et al. 2020). Reflective practice as a part of the coaching process encouraged reflective practice, enabling teachers to critically evaluate their methods, identify areas for improvement and implement changes in real-time techniques (Cilliers et al. 2020).

Teacher agency and stakeholder support

Teacher agency refers to the capacity of teachers to act purposefully, make informed decisions and shape their

professional paths (Brodie 2021; Imants & Van der Wal 2020). While agency is crucial, teachers also require support, motivation and guidance from various stakeholders, including administrators, colleagues and the broader educational community (Imants & Van der Wal 2020). Empowering teachers is critical to ignite their teacher agency and was found to be a driving force for PD. Teachers expressed a desire for autonomy, decision-making power and opportunities to shape their professional journeys (Brodie 2021). According to Imants and Van der Wal (2020), balancing agency and support teacher agency is a powerful force for PD, but it must be balanced with adequate support and guidance. Stakeholders play a crucial role in providing the necessary resources and encouragement for teachers to exercise their agency effectively (Brodie 2021; Imants & Van der Wal 2020).

Implications for practice

School leadership and policy development

School leaders should prioritise the development and implementation of effective induction, mentorship and coaching programmes. This can be done through reimagining the approach from top down where the school leadership and management tell the teachers what they need to allowing a more bottom-up approach where the teachers can suggest what they need support in (Dyosini 2022; Kieser 2022). Leadership support is crucial for fostering a culture of CPD (Dyosini 2022; Kieser 2022). Policy development pertaining to educational policies should reflect the importance of CPD in teacher effectiveness. Incentives and resources should be allocated to support teachers at all stages of their professional journeys, standardisation of programmes for implementation for a template that can be adapted to contexts and individual needs.

Conclusion

This research sought to explore the perception and experiences of in-service novice teachers in the FP. Continuous professional development is not merely a professional obligation but a powerful tool for teacher empowerment. Through upskilling and reskilling, CPD ensures that teachers are well equipped to face the challenges of modern education.

Through the use of a qualitative case study and additional qualitative data collection techniques, my comprehension of the requirements that teachers have on a personal and professional level has been strengthened (Babbie, 2013). The findings also provided me with a thorough understanding of how, in a post-colonial educational setting, intentional, formal and structured induction, mentorship and coaching may be used by CPD as a bridge to their effective and long-term retention. In South Africa, the lack of formal, pertinent and purposeful PD for inexperienced black female teachers in the FP remains firmly associated with the heritage of colonialism as well as how novice teachers position themselves within their communities of practice.

A holistic approach that takes into account historical injustices, linguistic and cultural hegemony, intersectional

discrimination, insufficient support networks and the psychological effects of working in postcolonial educational environments is necessary to address this issue. Enhancing PD requires focused, contextualised efforts that acknowledge and value the special needs and experiences of these novice teachers. It is through this ongoing commitment to PD that teachers can truly empower themselves and, in turn, empower the next generation.

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Disclaimer

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