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Co-constructing a Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan in a Community of Practice

by

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

MAGISTER EDUCATIONIS

in the Faculty of Education

at the

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

Supervisor: Dr Tanya Smit

22 November 2022

DECLARATION OF ORGINALITY

I declare that the dissertation/thesis, which I hereby submit for the degree Magister Educationis at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution."

.....

Michelle Silveiro

21 November 2022

ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

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CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**CLEARANCE NUMBER:** EDU184/20
DEGREE AND PROJECT	MEd Co-constructing a self-regulated professional learning plan with educators
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- Compliance with approved research protocol,
- No significant changes,
- Informed consent/assent,
- Adverse experience or undue risk,
- Registered title, and
- Data storage requirements.

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Finally, to the Lord of my life, Jesus Christ, thank you for giving me the strength and confidence to pursue avenues that I could previously only dream of. Thank you for giving me the strength and endurance I needed during the process and for guiding my thoughts. I honour you as the Lord of my life. The Lord has made a way to glorify His Name.

Roman 8:28 (NKJV)

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose

ABSTRACT

This Action Research study explores the implementation of self-regulated professional learning in an online Community of Practice with teachers with a view to empower the self and others. The objective of the study was the co-construction of a Self-regulated Professional Learning Plan in the Educator Community of Practice, with the researcher facilitating the process.

Action Research was used as methodological approach. In the online Community of Practice, five teachers and the researcher as the facilitator together progressed through an adapted 3P self-regulated learning model of planning, processing and producing the product. During the four Community of Practice sessions, qualitative data was collected by semi-structured informal interview discussions, feedback questionnaires, observations of own practice, the keeping of a reflective journal and collective visual evidence. The data was collected over a period of four weeks and I innovated my practice while observing data sources. Our semi-structured informal interview discussions focused on the Miro app, which is an online interactive whiteboard that allowed participants and the facilitator to interact with one another. The data pertaining to my practice as a Community of Practice facilitator was collected before, during and after the online sessions.

The outcome of my study was the co-construction of a Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan and the meaning constructed during the implementation of Action Research in my practice. In general, professional development plans for educators can be enriched by using a socio-constructivist approach.

Keywords: Self-regulated professionalism, professional learning, Professional Learning Plan, Community of Practice, socio-constructivism

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

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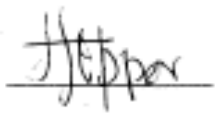
CO-CONSTRUCTING A SELF-REGULATED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PLAN IN A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE



18 November 2022

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

IQMS	Integrated Quality Management System
SACE	South African Council for Educators
ELRC	Education Labour Relations Council
i.e	Id est or that is

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Smullin (2009) underlines the value of lifelong learning, which Huber and O'Meara (2019) define as learning that is both diverse and continues for the duration of one's life. I agree with Goh (2019) that professional lifelong learning is imperative due to globalisation and the need for innovation within the workplace. According to the National Education Policy, Act 27 of 1996, the South African Department of Education should provide opportunities for professional development to teachers and encourage lifelong learning (Department of Basic Education, 1996a). The notion of continuous professional learning in the field of education is supported by the essential twenty-first-century attributes which, Du Toit (2017), emphasise the notion of the 'self'. Bissonnette and Caprino (2014) agree that educators should constantly be learning professionally.

According to Huber and O'Meara (2019), lifelong learning focuses the learning process on four components, namely learning to be (focuses on learning about oneself), learning to do (focuses on what one need to do in their teaching practice), learning to know (focuses on learning to understand content in depth) and lastly learning to live together (focuses on an social understanding to live interdependently). In essence professional learning is therefore an ongoing endeavour (Loveland, 2012; Smullin, 2009) to identify areas for improvement (Janssen, Kreijns, Bastiaens, Stijnen & Vermeulen, 2013) or innovation in practice (Smit & Du Toit, 2021). The educators who participated in my study explored their professionalism and professional learning. I agree that in the twenty-first century educators are required to develop the skills needed to equip learners for the authentic workplace environment. According to Loveland (2012), professional learning in the education sector creates an ultimate desire for continuous development.

Burgess and Sievertsen (2020) refer to how educators had to adapt during the COVID-19 pandemic, when they were required to facilitate learning in an online environment. In my view, the need to adapt required educators to reconsider and take responsibility for their own professional development. I agree with Webster-Wright (2009) that

educators need to adopt an action-oriented approach and should identify their professional learning needs by observing, reflecting and evaluating their practice. According to Beausaert, Segers, Fouarge and Gijselaers (2013), Professional Development Plans are well known in various health professions and also in the field of education.

Beausaert *et al.* (2013:146) define a Professional Development Plan as 'an assessment tool for companies or organisations embedded in the larger assessment cycle of development and performance interviews'. Personally, I regard a Professional Development Plan not merely as an assessment tool, but as a way to place the 'self' at the centre of the educator's professional development. A Professional Development Plan typically has a fixed template form prescribed by the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC), which is used to gather and document information about the competencies and performance standards an employee is working on and is planning to develop further in the next five years (Council, 2012). A Professional Development Plan is also referred to as a Professional Learning Plan (Janssen *et al.*, 2013) or a Personal Education Plan (Evans, Ali, Singleton, Nolan & Bahrami, 2002) that is used to plan an educator's professional development process. I, however, find the rationales for implementing a Professional Development Plan conflicting. Beausaert *et al.* (2013) indicate that Professional Development Plans focus mainly on the needs of organisations, in other words, the standards set by the establishment. The self as a professional, with specific reference to personal professional development, is therefore not central.

Self-regulated learning creates opportunities for individuals to take responsibility for their own learning. Self-regulated learning encourages individuals to plan, implement, monitor and evaluate their own learning. Smit and Du Toit (2016) regard these components of self-regulated learning as being in line with Action Research. In the context of my Action Research, the teachers who participated in the Community of Practice and I co-constructed a Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan. I empowered the self while I facilitated the Community of Practice and conducted Action Research in my practice. Action research is comprised of several steps, which will be discussed later in this chapter. One of the steps requires reflection (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). Reflection on practices forms an integral part of lifelong learning (Goh, 2019). In the following section I will share the context and background of my

study as it influenced my ontological underpinning of what I did during the Action Research study.

1.2 CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

I have been a Grade 6 primary school educator in South Africa for ten years. As specified by the South African Schools Act of 1996 (Department of Basic Education, 1996b), primary schools in South Africa are responsible for educating learners from Grade R (aged 5) to Grade 7 (aged 13). I specialise in working with learners from Grade 4 to Grade 6. I am also a part-time tutor for the Distance Education Unit at the University of Pretoria, where I work with honours students completing an Educator Professional Development module.

In South Africa, educators accumulate Continuous Professional Teacher Development (CPTD) points from the South African Council for Educators (SACE, 2013). SACE safeguards the education profession in terms of professional and ethical behaviour in what is referred to as The CPTD Management System (SACE, 2013). Teachers are supposed to take responsibility for their professional development; however, according to the South African National Department of Education, many teachers are not involved in any professional development activities (Department of Basic Education, 2011). The CPTD points system is structured to allow educators to accumulate points over a three-year period in order to retain their SACE registration. Although non-compliant educators can be penalised, details of the penalties have not yet been finalized (SACE, 2013). For this study the teachers may manually record their participation in the study for CPTD points.

During my time as an honours student, I planned my professionalism and strategised my career for the next five years. As a part-time tutor in the honours programme, I work with teachers from across South Africa and learnt about various demands in their practice (Smit, 2020). I agree with Webster-Wright (2009) that professional learning entails planning and structuring opportunities that will support the educator as a lifelong learner.

The participants and I co-constructed a Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan and explored our living theories. McNiff and Whitehead (2010) explain that a living

theory changes as an individual grows and develops. In Action Research, the concept of practice-based research is applied: the researcher is part of the research and a collaborative approach is followed (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). We developed a new living theory for our professionalism.

1.3 RATIONALE

The epistemological and methodological rationale for my study is grounded in the socio-constructivist theory. Socio-constructivism is the underpinning theoretical framework for this study, which provides insight into how meaning was made during our Community of Practice sessions. The participants and I constructed our own meaning epistemologically as we explored our professionalism. The socio-constructivist framework grounded my study since we collectively made meaning of our professionalism in an innovative Community of Practice (Smit, 2020).

The Department of Basic Education implements the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) and educators are expected to identify areas of professional need according to set performance standards. Bolam (2000) indicates that budget constraints in school districts and at schools influence educators' professional learning opportunities. I agree that difficult economic circumstances limit quality professional development opportunities in South Africa. Wittmann and Olivier (2020) also point out that some courses are too expensive for teachers to afford. The epistemological question I asked throughout was: ‘How can we empower the self and others while co-constructing a self-regulated professional development plan?’ According to Bjork, Dunlosky and Kornell (2013), the co-construction process challenges the ‘self’ to adapt to the changing twenty-first-century education environment, and we opted to take responsibility for our professionalism.

In the epicentre of the ontological stance, I acknowledge the self as scholar, researcher, facilitator of professional learning and educator. I conducted Action Research in my practice as the facilitator of the Community of Practice sessions with the participants. I had to share my lived experiences (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010) and eventually realised that I could benefit professionally from interacting with peers.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

My study was directed by the following main research question:

How can a Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan be co-constructed using an Action Research design?

My study focused on co-constructing a Professional Learning Plan together with other educators in a Community of Practice. As an Action Researcher, I was a part of the Community of Practice and the facilitator of the sessions as we explored our self-regulated professionalism.

The following sub-questions refine the main research question:

1: How can I facilitate the process of co-constructing a Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan with educators?
2: How are the participants' and my own self-regulated professionalism cultivated in a Community of Practice?
3: What will a Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan entail?

1.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In my research study, I used constructivism as my theoretical framework. According to Hershberg (2014:2) 'constructivism is been defined as a theory of learning, as a theory of knowing and, more recently, as a paradigm guiding contemporary social science research.' Even though Hershberg (2014) refers primarily to learning, his definition is also applicable to professional learning, with which my study is concerned. I agree with Bruner (1987) that constructivism is congruent in professional learning (Bruner, 1987; Piaget, Gruber & Vonèche, 1982). The constructivist theory encourages reflective practices that allow for the innovation of teaching practices (De Boer, du Toit & Bothma, 2015). Wolvaardt and Du Toit (2012) noted the connection between the constructivist framework and the innovation of practices. In essence the socio-constructivist theory aims to empower the self as people interact and learn from one another (Sicilia (2010).

Biggs (1996:348) agrees that learning is a meaning-making process and that meaning is arrived at 'by actively selecting and cumulatively constructing our knowledge, through both individual and social activity'. Thus, the individual who is learning actively participates in the learning process (Bada & Olusegun, 2015). Therefore, as Biggs (1996) advises, we need to reflect on our assumptions, motives, intentions and previous knowledge. Clark (2018) views constructivist thought in terms of making meaning from past experiences, attitudes and beliefs. The Cultural-historical Activity Theory aligns with the socio-constructivist approach in my study and similarly surmises that individuals construct their knowledge based on their culture and historical facets. Sannino and Engeström (2018) state that according to this theory, people's meaning-making is influenced by their cultural components. Thus, according to Foot (2014), different individuals in a community will perceive an activity differently due to their perception of the activity, which is based on their cultural and historical influences. In the context of our Community of Practice, the socio-constructivist meaning-making process is rooted in the individuals who form part of the group and their unique cultural and historical experiences or viewpoints influence the self and others. Furthermore, the Cultural-historical Activity Theory epistemologically endorses the Action Research design I used, as will be discussed further in Chapter 2.

Goh (2019) observed a shift in focus from individualised professional learning to a more shared approach in education literature. A socio-constructivist notion suggests that educators reflect on their practice in groups as individuals learn from one another (Goh, 2019). Clark (2018) explains that socio-constructivism is learner centred. The construct that frames the study will be explained in the next section.

1.6 CONSTRUCT FRAMEWORK

As a constructivist researcher and practitioner, I chose to refer to a construct framework (Smit & Du Toit, 2021), rather than to a theoretical or conceptual framework, which is commonly used in research studies. In Figure 1.1 the different constructs explored by our Community of Practice are illustrated. The construct

framework captures the notion of educator professionalism. I will discuss the construct framework in more detail in Chapter 2.

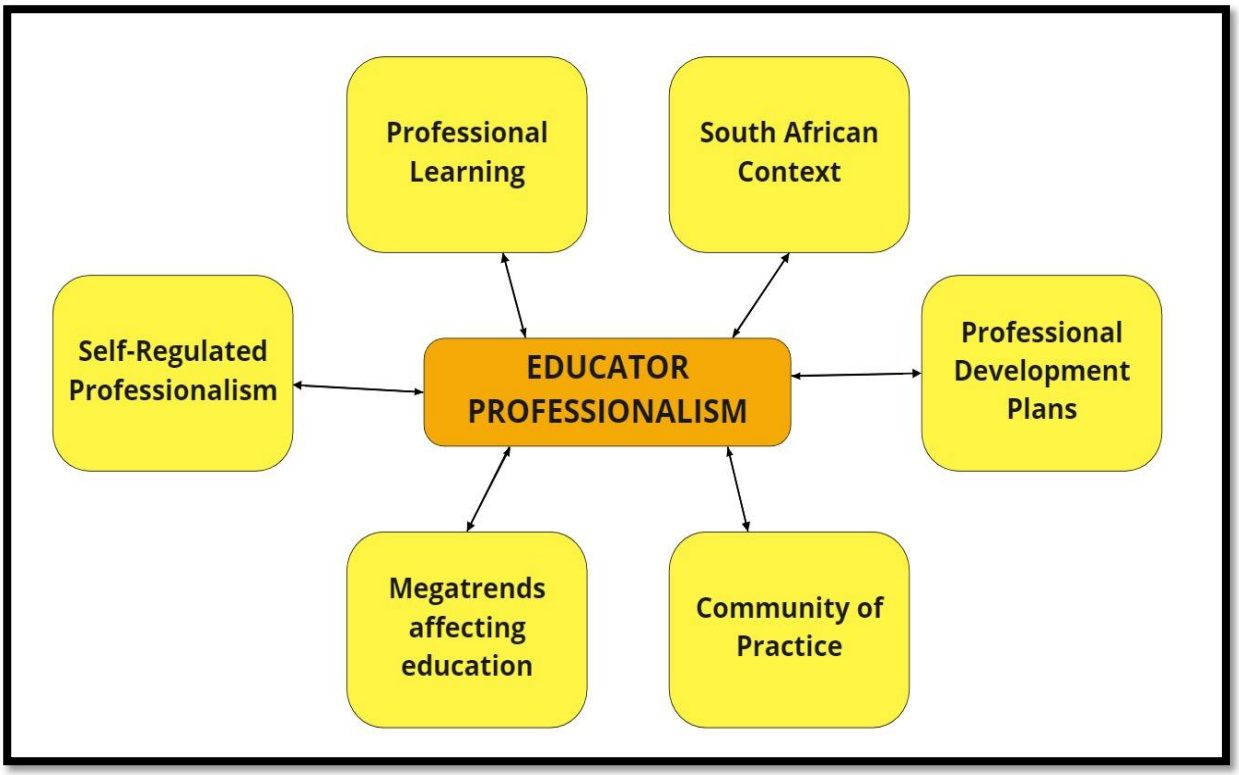

Figure 1.1: My construct framework

As shown in Figure 1.1, I view these constructs as affecting professional learning since in my study the participants also constructed their own meaning. I will discuss each of these constructs in detail in Chapter 2. The arrows in Figure 1.1 link the constructs in a reciprocal manner, illustrating how they affect educator professionalism and vice versa. Action Research was at the epicentre of the research process. A brief discussion of each of the constructs is included in the following sections.

1.6.1 Educator Self-Regulated Professionalism

According to the Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM), a Post Level 1 educator is expected to teach (Department of Basic Education, 1999:5) between 85% and 92% of the school day, as is the case in primary schools, and between 85% and 90% of the school day in secondary schools. The participants and I are all Post Level 1 teachers. The duties of a Post Level 1 educator include 'scheduled teaching time, relief teaching, extra and co-curricular activities, pastoral duties, administration, supervisory duties,

professional duties and planning, preparation and evaluation' (Department of Basic Education, 1999:6). Cole (2004:3) describes professional learning as 'the systematic and formal attempts to advance teachers' knowledge, skills and understanding in ways that lead to changes in their thinking and classroom behaviour'. I am not convinced that professional learning is always a formal, structured attempt, but agree with Van der Klink, Kools, Avissar, White and Sakata (2017), and Loveland (2012) that it is a never-ending process of empowerment and learning. In this study, the participants who are all currently employed as educators reflected on their professionalism by identifying what they envision for their professionalism and formulating personal professional visions for their careers. De Clercq (2013) outlines how professionalism speaks to educators' values and practices in their teaching. I regard professional educators as educators who have a broad knowledge base that enables them to make decisions on the school-related matters for which they are accountable (Creasy, 2015). I agree with Bjork *et al.* (2013) that educators need tools that will enable them to adapt to changes in educational, for example during the COVID-19 pandemic. I also agree with Bjork *et al.* (2013) that the focus should be on learning about one's own professionalism and developing from this point, indicating that self-regulation is a survival tool in the current educational context. Evans *et al.* (2002) further note that the identification of the individual's personal needs is essential for active professional learning to take place. Wolvaardt and Du Toit (2012) provide the link and explain that self-regulated professional learning is fostered in Action Research.

Professional learning can take place in various ways, for example through peer coaching (Karnes & Shaunessy, 2004; Stein, 1997), mentoring (Nyanjom, 2020; Schunk & Mullen, 2013), workshops in the post-school education training field (Moon, Potdar & Martin, 2014) or in Communities of Practice (Buysse, Sparkman & Wesley, 2003). Professional learning can also occur in the form of webinars and free online courses (Karnes & Shaunessy, 2004), Coursera (Ng & Koller, 2020) or other formal courses. As an educator, I acknowledge that it is not always easy to address my professionalism. Van der Klink *et al.* (2017:167) mention some of factors that limit the value of professional learning as being 'lack of time, a considerable workload, lack of resources, absence of managerial attention for and reinforcement of professional development, or an unproductive working climate'. I therefore decided to use a self-regulated learning approach to professionalism.

The concept self-regulated professional learning links metaphorically (Hugo, Slabbert, Louw, Marcus, Bac, Du Toit & Sandars, 2012:130) to a 'voyage of discovery'— a meta-learning process during which one's own and others' professional learning is empowered. Figure 1.2 shows my adaptation of Biggs (1996) 3P self-regulated learning model, which illustrates the voyage of discovery that the participants and I undertook together during our Community of Practice sessions. I elaborate in detail on the development of 'My Self-regulated Process for Professional learning in a Community of Practice'. We journeyed through a discussion of our current professionalism and discussed the professional learning that had taken place in our teaching practice. This was followed by a discussion of self-regulated professionalim and how we can journey towards self-regulated professional learning. We learnt from one another's experiences and made meaning of out own professionalism.

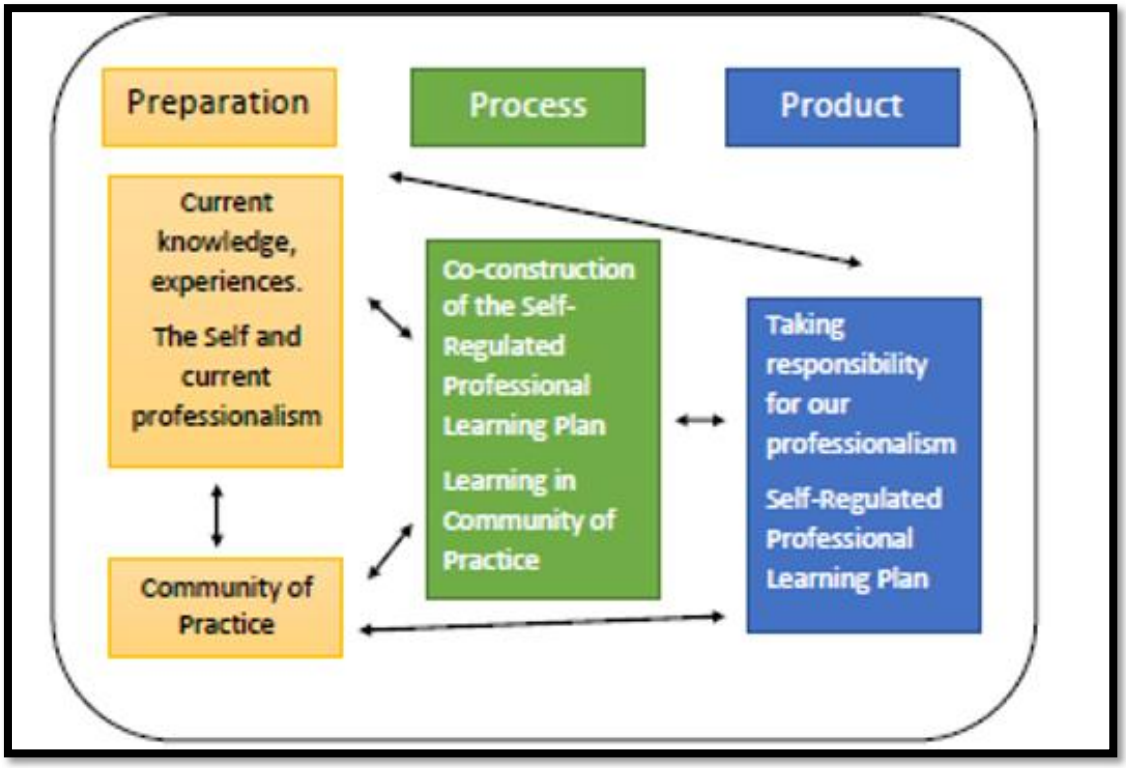

Figure 1.2: My Self-regulated Process for Professional Learning in a Community of Practice (Adapted from Biggs (2001); (Smit & Du Toit, 2021)).

As shown in Figure 1.2, the participants and I progressed as a collective and learned professionally in a self-regulated manner. The self-regulated process consisted of

three phases: Preparation, Process and Product. The Preparation phase was the first Community of Practice session during which we discussed our current knowledge, experiences and role in professional learning with the focus on the 'self' in our professionalism. The Process phase consisted of two Community of Practice sessions and we discussed our self-regulated professional learning and the co-construction of the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan that would encourage self-regulated learning to take place. During the final Product stage, we had our last Community of Practice session, during which we explored the notion of taking responsibility for our professionalism and finalised the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan. During each of the phases, I was the Action Researcher and the facilitator of the Community of Practice. The three-stage Self-regulated Professional Learning model will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

1.6.2. Communities of Practice

Bissonnette and Caprino (2014) highlight the importance of being part of a learning community, a network, or a professional group. According to Hajisoteriou, Karousiou and Angelides (2018), a Community of Practice can include a group of people who have a similar passion. I fully agree that a Community of Practice is just where people meet to discuss their experiences and tensions (Luguetti, Aranda, Nuñez Enriquez & Oliver, 2019). More specifically, in relation to my context, in the education sector I acknowledge Wenger (2011) reference to a Community of Practice as a group of teachers who meet regularly to improve their teaching practice and professionalism. Collective learning is regarded by Bissonnette and Caprino (2014) as more meaningful than individual learning. A Community of Practice can be an informal gathering during which educators discuss their teaching practices or functions with a specific purpose in mind (Hajisoteriou *et al.*, 2018). Educators who become part of such communities connect with other educators in a meaningful way, which impacts their practices (Bissonnette & Caprino, 2014). We opted to envision and work towards the co-construction of the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan in a Community of Practice while empowering the self.

1.6.3. The Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan

As stated earlier, I deem professional learning to be self-directed (Gibbs, 2000), which implies that educators go through a process of identifying what they envision for the self and how they intend to get there (Gibbs, 2000; Janssen *et al.*, 2013; Karnes & Shaunessy, 2004). Biggs (2001) discusses Prospective Quality Assurance as a method that questions whether an institution is achieving its goals and considering ways in which it can improve in order to achieve those goals I acknowledge that the individual in the organisation is at the centre of this process, as Biggs, Kember and Leung (2001) point out that the educator is at the heart of all teaching and learning. I disagree with Bissonnette and Caprino (2014:13) statement that professional learning is a 'one size fits all' approach, but agree with Cook, Jones-Bromenshenkel, Huisinga and Mullins (2017), and Karnes and Shaunessy (2004) that professional learning should be individualised.

The Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) was used in South Africa schools until the end of 2021 to identify areas of need in an educator's teaching practice. This system uses a Professional Development Portfolio to identify areas of need and also shows what professional development has taken place during the assessment period as proof of Professional Development (Council, 2012). A revised Quality Management System (QMS) was implemented in schools in 2022. The first part of the Professional Development Portfolio focuses on process goals, in other words, didactic skills such as instructional and assessment strategies, work ethic and communication skills, or managing the classroom atmosphere. The focus in the second part is on content goals, i.e. the content of the subject (Loveland, 2012). I agree with Janssen *et al.* (2013) that the Professional Development portfolio adds to educators' administration workload (Janssen *et al.*, 2013). The focus of the Integrated Quality Management System is on the organisation—the school where the educator is employed—but I agree with Bissonnette and Caprino (2014) that educators should not be passive, but should be active participants in and contributors to their own professionalism (Bissonnette & Caprino, 2014). Therefore, the notion of co-constructing a Professional Learning Plan in which teachers are not just participants but are part of its development.

1.7 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

1.7.1 Action Research design

The term Action Research was coined by John Dewey (1933) to describe a research design for solving problems in education studies (Tomal, 2003). I opted to innovate my practice as a facilitator in a Community of Practice (Du Toit, 2012; McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). As suggested by McNiff and Whitehead (2010), the participants and I explored our living theories regarding our education practices as we made meaning of our professionalism. De Boer, Du Toit, Scheepers and Bothma (2013) encourage reflection on the self's authentic situations, thus creating and altering a living theory.

Action Research is a process of 'iterative cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting' (West, 2011:1). McNiff and Whitehead (2010:5) define the Action Research process as 'what you do and how you learn about and explain what you do'. The Action Research design might focus on an identified problem or innovative practice (Bissonnette & Caprino, 2014; De Boer *et al.*, 2015; Tomal, 2003). I chose to use an 'asset-based approach' to Action Research, which Du Toit (2012:1222) explains as 'planning for innovation' or 'planning for transformation.' The asset-based approach allowed me to look at the self as the starting point for the study, not only at a specific problem that needed to be solved. In our Community of Practice each participant contributed according to their specific experiences and knowledge as we had opted to learn from and with others to innovate the construction of a professional learning plan.

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1.7.2 My Action Research process

As suggested by Du Toit (2012), Action Research can be visually illustrated in the form of a spiral. My Action Research spiral (Figure 1.3) illustrates our progression through four cycles labelled A, B, C and D. To innovate practice, I progressed through the following steps in each cycle: plan, act, observe, reflect and evaluate (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). The Action Research process took place in the Community of Practice with the participating educators. During the Community of Practice sessions, I acted as the Action Researcher and facilitator. Each Action Research cycle

represents one of our self-regulated professional learning sessions, the process. The four cycles, A, B, C and D, are illustrated in Figure 1.3.

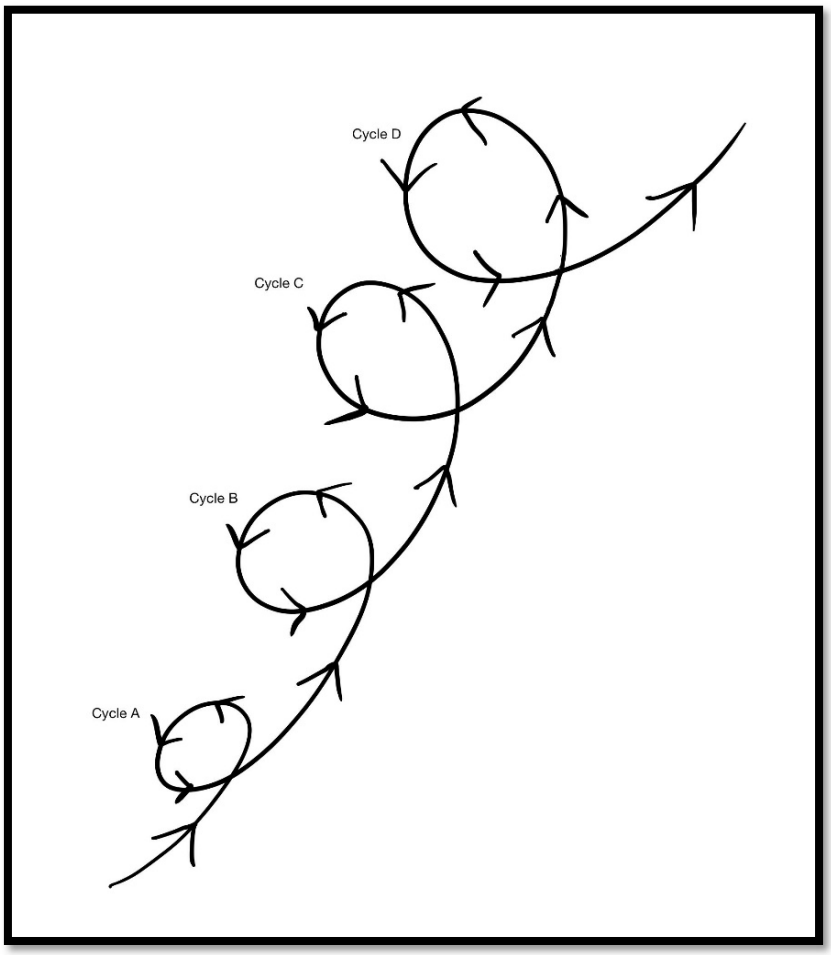


Figure 1.3: My Action Research spiral

In each cycle (A–D), as seen in Figure 1.3, I progressed through five Action Research steps. I planned each session, acted by leading the session, then observed the session by watching the video recording I had made and reflected on it. Lastly, I evaluated my practice before progressing to the next cycle. I acknowledge that Action Research is a never-ending process (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). In Cycle A my vision was to prepare the Community of Practice and to cultivate a trusting relationship between the members. In Cycles B and C, my vision for the session was to go through the process of discussing past experiences of professional learning, what professional learning involves and the value of professional learning in our teaching practice. Cycle D, which was the final cycle, was to create the product, which was the Self-Regulated

Professional Learning Plan. During our sessions we focused on becoming self-regulated learning professionals.

McAteer (2013) describes the data collection and analysis methods used in Action Research as ongoing and happening simultaneously. I therefore did not wait until the end of the data collection process to analyse the data, but started the analysis during the observation and reflection steps. My findings are shared in Chapter 4. I used an adapted 3P self-regulated learning model, which is discussed in Chapter 2, to inform my practice in the Community of Practice. My focus within the Community of Practice was to innovate my practice and to co-construct an innovative Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan. In the following section, I will elaborate on the data collection methods and instruments I used.

1.7.3 Data collection

I used a qualitative data collection method as I made meaning since I interpretively assumed that people's actions have meaning (Willig, 2017). We collectively explored our development from a socio-constructivist notion and I chose the data collection methods and instruments with that in mind. Tomal (2003) explains that the researcher takes a 'naturalistic, emergent and case-oriented' approach. In essence, I became part of the process as I was part of, as well as the facilitator of the Community of Practice. I used various data collection methods, such as the visual evidence from the Miro app, where we worked together in a whiteboard online, video recordings of our sessions and visual and photo evidence. I also used a qualitative feedback questionnaire used for input by the participants after each session, my own observations, my self-reflection journal and any contributions made by the participants to the Self-regulated Professional Learning Plan. The data collection instruments are discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

I initially employed homogeneous sampling as educators with specific traits (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016) were selected, explicitly looking for Post Level 1 educators in in Gauteng. My sample included five participants from two different primary schools who were selected by way of purposive sampling.

The Action Research process commenced and the first session was guided by the adapted 3P self-regulated learning model, which will be discussed in Chapter 2. Due

to the restrictions imposed during COVID-19 pandemic, the four Community of Practice sessions were held using the online platform Microsoft Teams. The Community of Practice included some pre-session activities during which the participants processed and reflected on their own professionalism. The participants were actively involved and afterwards again reflected on their professionalism as linked to our session.

Personally, as the Action Researcher and facilitator of the Community of Practice sessions, I also continuously reflected meta-reflectively in my self-reflective journal, but also in relation to each Action Research cycle which, according to McAteer (2013), is an integral part of the Action Research design. After each cycle, I used observation sheets while watching the video recordings, reflected on what I had done and evaluated what had happened in each session with a view to innovating in the following cycle. The rationale behind the observations was to allow me to consider what I had done in my facilitation practice and how I could innovate the next Community of Practice session (McAteer, 2013).

Furthermore, during the sessions, I used semi-structured informal interview discussions while we co-constructed a Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan. I took photo evidence and used visual evidence of the contributions in the Miro app. A discussion of how I analysed the data follows below.

1.7.4. Data analysis

Alber (2010:148) defines data analysis as to 'organise, sort, compare, contrast, and categorise the data collected'. I employed thematic analysis to search for themes in the qualitative data I collected during the Action Research process and classified the data sets into themes (Reyna, 2019). According to Lapadat (2010), thematic analysis seeks to find common traits or patterns in the data collected. Thematic analysis can be completed manually or by using a computer program (Archer, Jansen Van Vuuren & Van Der Walt, 2017), for example AtlasTi. I manually analysed the data I collected as I divided the data into fragments and then created codes for the fragments. I proceeded by reducing the codes, as Creswell (2014a) advises, and transferring it to themes.

During the Action Research process I continuously observed the facilitation of each session using the video recordings. The other data included the interview transcripts, my reflections and photo evidence. In more detail, during the coding process, as Gibbs (2014) advises, I reviewed, sorted and sifted the data as I opted to identify the meaning emerging from the collective contributions from the participants and myself. According to Creswell (2014a:268), codes can take on various formats, for example, they can be categorised in terms of 'setting and context; perspectives held by the participants; participants' way of thinking about people and objects; processes; activities; strategies and relationships and social structures'.

After interpreting the qualitative data, the themes emerged from the data. The themes that were derived from the data included both what Creswell (2014a) refers to as 'expected in the specific field of study' and themes I did not expect to find. The findings of the study are discussed in Chapter 4.

1.8 OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

In this chapter I provided a brief overview of the research I conducted, my rationale and the unique methodological, conceptual and theoretical context of the study. I also briefly discussed the epistemological and methodological aspects. Chapter 2 includes a discussion of the literature that is relevant to my study and a review of the theoretical and conceptual framework of the research.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the Action Research design, methods, instruments and data analysis and in Chapter 4 I share the findings of my study. The research questions are answered in Chapter 5 and in the final chapter, Chapter 6, I present my meta-reflection on my Action Research study and my conclusions and make recommendations for further related research.

CHAPTER 2:

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I review relevant literature dealing with the constructs professional learning, professional development, megatrends affecting education, Communities of Practice, self-regulated professional learning and the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan. In the following section, I discuss and outline the theoretical framework. Socio-constructivism and the Cultural-historical Activity Theory are the theoretical framework which underpins how meaning was made during our Community of Practice sessions. A constructivist paradigm used as the theoretical framework provides guidance in the different constructs discussed in the literature review in this Chapter. I outline in my rationale in Chapter 1, the theoretical lens of the study, which I discuss further in this Chapter.

2.2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

I start this section with a discussion of the constructivist theory, which underpins my study, and in the following section I justify, in more detail, how the Vygotsky's Socio-constructivist and the Cultural-historical Activity Theory further frames my study.

2.2.1 Constructivism

Constructivism is grounded on the notion of constructing knowledge (Amineh & Asl, 2015; Hershberg, 2014; Onyesolu, Nwasor, Ositanwosu & Iwegbuna, 2013). Constructivists argue that meaning is made based on experiences (Sarbah, 2020), while Amineh and Asl (2015) state that individuals make meaning of new knowledge in a constructivist manner. The origin of constructivism links to the work of Vygotsky and Piaget. The latter worked in the 1920's in relation to child development. Piaget's theory on the development of children was based on children understanding the world as they make meaning and construct knowledge. Lev Vygotsky acknowledged the

children make meaning from their social experiences and thus create their reality (Hershberg, 2014).

The constructivist approach advocates learning as a social and active process and this is why, in my study, the participants and I engaged professionally in a Community of Practice. According to Hershberg (2014), individuals need to reflect through a constructivist lens on what has been learnt. A Community of Practice is discussed later in Chapter 2. Like Onyesolu *et al.* (2013), I essentially support the constructivist notion that the individual is not a passive participant, but actively constructs knowledge. According to Zehetmeier, Andreitz, Erlacher and Rauch (2015:163) 'constructivism focuses on communicative, socially determined constructions of truth'. Bada and Olusegun (2015) state that people have an innate need to search for meaning. As the participants and I progressed through our sessions in the Community of Practice, we were able to communicate with one another and collaboratively make meaning of our professionalism.

According to Sarbah (2020), two important terms in constructivism have to be considered before delving into the different aspects of constructivism, namely assimilation and accommodation. To assimilate means to integrate new experiences into the old experiences, and accommodation refers to reframing the known world (Amineh & Asl, 2015; Hershberg, 2014; Sarbah, 2020). Constructivism has been one of the leading theories for educational practice for many decades (Onyesolu *et al.*, 2013; Schrader, 2015), and the perspectives, approaches and types of constructivism are discussed by various scholars (Amineh & Asl, 2015; Onyesolu *et al.*, 2013; Schrader, 2015).

Before elaborating on how socio-constructivism framed my specific study, I briefly discuss the three types of constructivism, namely cognitive, social and radical constructivism (Amineh & Asl, 2015; Barak, 2017). Cognitive constructivism refers to learning as an independent process that occurs while a person develops and learns during certain life stages (Amineh & Asl, 2015). Social constructivism is a theory that refers to where people learn in a social setting (Barak, 2017). According to Amineh and Asl (2015), language is regarded as the primary form of constructing reality in social constructivism. Since in my opinion constructing meaning in a social setting encompasses more than language, I chose not to use social constructivism in this

study. Although we were interacting, we were innovating our professionalism. Radical constructivism refers to how an individual will function concerning their environment and construct knowledge, modify and interpret the information that is their own of their world (Sutinen, 2008).

Socio-constructivism is, according to Sicilia (2010), a theory that brings together knowledge and learning as a theory, a notion of constructing meaning through our experiences (Smit, 2020). Concepts such as a Community of Practice are part of the socio-constructivism framework (Wenger, 2011). Viewed from a socio-constructivist perspective, learning needs, strategies and resources are identified by the individual (Olivier, 2020) as a self-regulated notion.

2.2.1. Socio-constructivism in the context of educator professionalism

Socio-constructivism was developed after the second world war according to Blankenship (2010) The theory originated from Piaget's and Bruner's work and is grounded on the notion of constructing meaning together (Smit, 2020), similar to what the participants and I did in the Community of Practice. Socio-constructivism promotes learning through the construction of problem-based activities involving interaction with others (Onyesolu *et al.*, 2013). In a group, one person may create an image, whereas another may use sentences or auditory means to explain their solution, and everyone is involved in the solution phase (Sicilia, 2010). As stated in Chapter 1, I used an asset-based approach to socio-constructivism whereby the participants and I shared our previous experiences and knowledge with one another in the Community of Practice to innovate our self-regulated professionalism and a professional learning plan. I was not only the Action Researcher, but also the facilitator and a member of the Community of Practice.

As a construct, the Community of Practice was, according to Sicilia (2010), derived from the socio-constructivist approach. Schrader (2015) explains that educators can professionally develop as a collective referring to professionally developing in a group. I explain the socio-constructivist framework in terms of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Schrader, 2015). The Zone of Proximal Development links people's culture and their social nature for development (Edwards, 2007). Blankenship

(2010) explains the Zone of Proximal Development by showing that one can experience a place of cognitive conflict where the knowledge does not fit into one's current schema and one is therefore challenged to integrate that knowledge or different cultural aspects into one's own schema. Over time, and through discussion, one can then develop a new schema into which the new knowledge has been integrated. However, I opt to use the concept disequilibrium, which is aligned with the Zone of Proximal development. In essence, as Smit (2020) points out, imbalances occur between the known and the unknown in this setting. Thus new ideas challenge the way we, as professionals in the Zone of Proximal Development think and a state of disequilibrium is experienced, after which we try to restore our equilibrium by making meaning (Amineh & Asl, 2015; Smit, 2020). Amineh and Asl (2015) and Shabani, Khatib and Ebadi (2010) noted that the Zone of Proximal Development allows for a person to progress in knowledge, which refers to the individual gaining more knowledge and progressing to a higher level of intelligence. In our Community of Practice, there was no 'knower', but we explored our professionalism while constructing together as a collective. I regard the Zone of Proximal Development in our context as the difference between what one can learn independently and what one can learn in a group of peers (Smit, 2020). I opt to include the Zone of Proximal development, in relation to how the participants and I collectively took responsibility for our learning and during the Action Research cycles and our CoP sessions. We reached occasions where we experienced disequilibrium as we came to the realisation that we had to take responsibility for our professionalism and plan our professional learning As Smit (2020) notes that during socio-constructivism, the self becomes aware of what is known and unknown. Professionally the self progresses to be accountable for own professional learning.

In the context of educator professional development, the participants and I had to take into account our own backgrounds—our beliefs and values—and the backgrounds of others, thus including their cultures. In the following section I discuss the Cultural-historical Activity Theory, which also frames my study.

2.2.2 The Cultural-historical Activity Theory

The Cultural-historical Activity Theory is based on how individuals 'purposefully transform natural and social reality, including themselves, as an ongoing culturally and historically situated, materially and socially mediated process' (Roth, Radford & LaCroix, 2012:1). Cultural-historical Activity Theory is a practice-based approach that analyses the individual's practices in social interactions (Foot, 2014). The Cultural-historical Activity Theory was found by psychologist's Lev Vygotsky, Alexander Luria and Aleksei Leont'ev where they point out that we develop our mind sets from our cultural and historical attributes (Sannino & Engeström, 2018).

The Cultural-historical Activity Theory acknowledge that individuals have cultural backgrounds that influence their understanding and are connected to their history (Foot, 2014). Wolvaardt and Du Toit (2012) refer to the 'emotive self', and I recognise its impact on professional development. In India, the teaching practices and professional learning of educators have been strongly influenced by family and friends, personal experiences and mentoring relationships (Gupta, 2003; Sicilia, 2010). Although Blankenship (2010) warns against educators including cultural ways of thinking when teaching, he agrees that a level of culture does infiltrate the practice. I thus acknowledge that the 'self' is central to the professional development process, a teaching practice and a Community of Practice. I opted to use the Cultural-historical Activity Theory—as explained by Sannino and Engeström (2018)—as providing a lens through which we reflect on how we interact and co-construct meaning with others. McNicholl (2013) agrees as the concept of self as we cannot separate the mind, the world and the context from one another as each part plays an integral role. According to Khambari (2015:5), the Cultural-historical Activity Theory contributes to 'the way people see, feel, act, and think'. Therefore, in terms of the constructivist Cultural-historical Activity Theory and in our culture of professional learning, peer interactions allow for reflexivity and change to take place in the self (Edwards, 2007). Since the participants and I came from different cultural and historical backgrounds, each person contributed uniquely to our Community of Practice. Cultural-historical Activity Theory plays a significant role in collaborative settings, including teachers working together (McNicholl, 2013). Most forms of professional development focus on what the individual learns through an institution, however, the Cultural-historical Activity Theory explains that every professional is affected by their own culture and historical

background (Ellis, Edwards & Smagorinsky, 2010). McNicholl (2013) noted that teacher development is influenced by the school culture itself, referring to whether the school promotes professional learning or not.

According to Foot (2014:330), Cultural-historical Activity Theory focuses on three main ideas: acting collectively, learning by doing and communicating (Foot, 2014). In essence it is a meaning-making process that is linked to the socio-constructivist notion, which also frames my study. The participants and I thus established a Community of Practice as we made meaning of our professionalism. As the participants and I co-constructed the meaning of the self while learning professionally in a collaborative manner, socio-constructively, we understood that we might reach a point of disequilibrium as we acknowledged our personal differences. The lens I used to frame my study was the Socio-constructivism and Cultural-historical Activity Theories.

2.3 THE EDUCATION SECTOR: PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

2.3.1 South African educator professional learning

According to De Clerq (2008:8), the poor quality of education in South Africa is due to the 'socio-economic background of learners, the context of schooling, inadequate leadership and the quality of resources'. I agree with De Clerq (2008) and Mudau (2017) that quality teaching is vital for learner achievement, and that South African learners perform poorly due to educators not providing quality education. I also agree with Dauda (2018), who states that the appraisal system in South Africa is more focused on the manager's view than on the development of the educator. In the South African Basic Education sector, the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) is used for the appraisal of teacher performance. This teacher appraisal system has been examined closely as it plays a role in learner achievement (Mudau, 2017). The Integrated Quality Management System focuses on performance standards related to the school's functioning (Council, 2012) and the main focus is on enhancing and monitoring a school's performance in teaching and learning (Ntshewula, 2012). Mudau (2017) states that the Integrated Quality Management System was implemented to assist poor-performing schools with motivating teachers to develop professionally. The educator and the Departmental Head review the performance based on the stated

performance standards (Perumal, Williamson, Mkhonza, Perumal & Cebisa, 2020; Steyn, 2016). The Integrated Quality Management System also provides educators with opportunities to identify areas for improvement for the following year (Council, 2012). The Education Labour Relations Council urges educators to participate in order to receive a bonus of 1% (Council, 2012). Perumal *et al.* (2020) note that although the 1% salary increase is intended as an incentive, the educators or managers do not necessarily understand the appraisal, or do not correctly follow the steps in the appraisal. When the appraisal system is applied in South Africa, the educator participates in professional development activities to accumulate points.

The Integrated Quality Management System has two components: the first is made up of four performance standards and the focus is on the educator's teaching practice in the classroom; the second is focused on the professional development of the educator outside the classroom (De Clerq, 2008). Perumal *et al.* (2020) state that the South Africa Integrated Quality Management System was designed for school-based teachers and evaluates their performance against specific performance standards. According to De Clerq (2008), teacher appraisals in South Africa have two primary purposes, namely a developmental purpose and a performance-improvement purpose. Ntshewula (2012) acknowledges that although the Integrated Quality Management System has some good intentions, its implementation has not shown support for educators, and further argues that school management teams lack the training they need to effectively implement the system (Morake, 2013). Mudau (2017) point out that the Integrated Quality Management System uses only one instrument, a score sheet, to measure performance and appraise the educator, but that two tools should preferably be used, one tool to measure performance and another tool to appraise an educator. Wittmann and Olivier (2020) have found that most teacher development in South Africa comprises of a job description that is linked to performance standards. The performance standards seek to monitor and evaluate educators based on their job descriptions (Perumal *et al.*, 2020). A job description is a detailed explanation of what the educator is required to do, and performance standards are controlled by South African legalisation and policies.

The Integrated Quality Management System in South Africa focuses solely on the educator's professional development once a year, under the stated performance standards (Council, 2012). The appraisal system is therefore not structured to cater

for the individual needs of professional educators but is rather focused on the school's needs. Therefore educators' professional learning is focused on fulfilling the education requirements, rather than on their own autonomous professional learning (Eaude, 2018). The Integrated Quality Management System present several problems (De Clercq, 2020; Morake, 2013; Mudau, 2017; Steyn, 2016). There is an assumption that the educators are in an environment where they have the necessary resources, which is not the case in all schools (De Clercq, 2020). According to Mudau (2017), another problem is that other staff members participate in a teacher's appraisal, and peer review is not a system that works well in all schools and its effectiveness depends on the school culture . Yet another problem, which is highlighted by Perumal *et al.* (2020), is that the focus is on the 1% salary increase, rather than on educators' efforts to enhance their profession development, which means that their focus is flawed.

I will now look at how educator professional learning is viewed in other countries. In Scotland and the Netherlands, the focus is on encouraging 'a self-critical, self-developing approach to teacher and school improvement' (De Clerq, 2008:11). Dauda (2018:207) states that in the United Kingdom, as in South Africa, appraisals were found to be a 'box-ticking exercise', while in India appraisal systems were experienced as unfair and depended more on the employee and managers' rapport than on employees' work output.

I suggest that educators should engage in meaningful professional learning, as in the case of the Netherlands, the focus should be on engaging educators in meaningful professional learning (Van der Klink *et al.*, 2017), with professionals identifying areas in their practice that they would like to innovate or develop and taking responsibility for their professionalism. I also agree with the approach followed in Spain, where educators learn from practice, which involves reflection and exploratory practice (Wittmann & Olivier, 2020), and with Steyn (2008) view that educators need to keep up to date with current developments in education. Perumal *et al.* (2020:232) discuss three components that should be included and emphasised in an appraisal system in order to ensure an effective system, namely 'individual objectives, organisational objectives and also mutual objectives.' Wittmann and Olivier (2020) recommend that educators should conduct an analysis of what they need to do to advance their own professional learning. I also concur with Komba, Nkumbi and Warioba (2007:3), who state that the focus should change 'from working on teachers to working with teachers

toward improving teaching and learning for all students'. In my view, professionalism should thus rather focus on individuals constructing their own pathways for their professional learning. I therefore recommend a self-regulated process, with educators taking responsibility for their own professionalism. The various aspects that have an impact on the current basic education and professional learning contexts and megatrends will be explored in the following section.

2.4 MEGATRENDS THAT INFLUENCE THE BASIC EDUCATION CONTEXT

A megatrend is a change that is expected to happen over a specified period, or an altering process that will impact societies (Choudaha & Rest, 2018). A report compiled by Choudaha and Rest (2018:30) outlines the megatrends that are likely to affect higher education until 2030. Even though the report focuses mainly on the higher education sector, I am of the opinion that the following megatrends are also applicable to the basic education sector and are likely to affect education and teachers' professionalism.

The 'Ageing world' megatrend identifies the trend among older employees to continue studying to remain in the workforce for longer (Choudaha & Rest, 2018; Kiernan, 2018). Ongoing life-long learning implies, as Kiernan (2018) states, that the older generation will be willing to work for more extended periods. The concept of an ageing world also includes the notion that people will live longer and healthier lives (Meng, 2009). The workforce will therefore include more older people (Kiernan, 2018; Meng, 2009). For example, more veteran teachers will further their studies with a view to remaining in the profession for longer.

Choudaha and Rest (2018), Johannesson and Palona (2010), and Kiernan (2018) further indicate that educators need to be prepared for rapid urbanisation. I recognise this megatrend because my study was also located in an urban environment and I acknowledge the impact that the large numbers of learners who move to urban areas has on teachers in terms of larger classes and increased workloads. Educators would therefore have to adjust and opt to enhance innovation in practice (Oleksenko, 2019) to prepare their students for the increased competition they will be facing in the

workforce after finishing school. I agree with Johannesson and Palona (2010) that industries will become less labour-intensive and more technology-intensive.

Choudaha and Rest (2018) emphasise the importance of life-long learning, and Wittmann and Olivier (2020) refer to practice-based learning, which requires educators to ensure that they continually engage in learning from practice. I agree that educators need to focus on their practice but suggest that the emphasis should be on a more holistic approach to professionalism that includes the self and culture.

Johannesson and Palona (2010) predict that women will become more dominant than before in the workplace, and educators therefore need to prepare learners to handle gender-based issues (Johannesson & Palona, 2010). Relating to this, Kiernan (2018) discusses expected changes, one of which is that the government will have a more hands-on approach when dealing with inequality, which affects education as the Department of Education ensures equality in the education of our future leaders. Barak (2017) expresses the opinion that the workplace will require more skills than structured knowledge as a twenty-first-century skill. I agree that there will be a greater need to increase one's skills due to the changes occurring in the workplace (Kiernan, 2018).

I also agree with Meng (2009) advice that in order to be prepared for the future, we should plan for it. According to Barak (2017:284), the twenty-first-century competencies that need to be developed in learners are 'problem solving, critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and information literacy'. However, if learners are to be challenged to solve problems, educators also need to focus on the development of twenty-first-century competencies in their professional context. I therefore decided that the participants and I should work in a Community of Practice, which I will discuss next, to collaborate in dealing with challenges. Collective development would serve as preparation for the effect of the megatrends on their practice.

2.5 COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Lave and Wenger (1991) coined the term Community of Practice, which is defined as a non-formal group of people who share their knowledge and solve problems to improve practice (Printy, 2008; Van Rheenen & DeOrnellas, 2018). In this research

study the focus is on the education sector and the improvement of teaching practice. A Community of Practice is also considered to be socio-constructive (Blankenship, 2010; Mercieca, 2017; Printy, 2008) and refers to learning happening in a collective social setting (Van Rheenen & DeOrnellas, 2018). The notion of a Community of Practice was linked by Lave and Wenger (1991) to the sharing of practices (Sales & Pinto Molina, 2017). However, I agree with Mercieca (2017) that it is essential to consider the environment and the individuals.

In an effort to allow and encourage collaboration between educators, the Department of Education has focused on professional learning communities in schools. However, teachers need to be willing to allow other teachers to attend their lessons and be prepared to listen to constructive feedback (Steyn, 2016).

As discussed in Chapter 1, there is a difference between a professional learning community and a Community of Practice. A professional learning community, which is often created from an organisational or management viewpoint and has been used in South Africa since 2011, consists of a group of educators who support other educators to improve learner performance (Blankenship & Ruona, 2007; Department of Basic Education, 2011). A Professional Learning Community is a group of professionals who meet regularly to organise their developmental trajectory and create activities that will accomplish this goal (ISPFTED). The Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa (ISPFTED) was created between 2011 and 2025. The focus of the professional learning community is on what learners need to do to improve their performance so that schools can improve their results (Smit, 2020). Professional learning communities have the following characteristics: a shared mission and vision, and shared values; a collective inquiry; a similar area of expertise; and a focus on the improvement of best practices. Teachers in the professional learning community therefore focus on learner achievement and better result for schools (Blankenship & Ruona, 2007:2). However, I chose to use a Community of Practice as instead of focusing on learner achievement, we made meaning of our professionalism and co-constructed the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan.

A Community of Practice is focused on educators' professionalism as they grow while learning from one another. In a Community of Practice, the focus is on professional

and reflective practices shared in the group (Mercieca, 2017). The Community of Practice members construct their professional identities through a process whereby they gain better insight into who they are professionally (Luguetti *et al.*, 2019). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we worked online and did not have any face-to-face sessions.

According to Van Rheenen and DeOrnellas (2018), members of a Community of Practice share an array of insights. They are further identified by their shared interests and how they learn through discussions and activities undertaken as a collective (Hajisoteriou *et al.*, 2018). Group members share professional experiences, best practices and methods for solving problems within the scope of the Community of Practice (Van Rheenen & DeOrnellas, 2018) and encourage active engagement (Mercieca, 2017). I agree with Mercieca (2017) that in a Community of Practice all participants should have a voice. According to Gherardi (2009), a Community of Practices has been found to drive strategy, initiate, address problems and focus on best practices while developing professional skills.

For the purpose of this study, I opted to use an online Community of Practice. An online Community of Practice is similar to a face-to-face experience, but happens in an online setting (Gray, 2005). According to Cook *et al.* (2017) and Gray (2005), online networks are helpful as the individuals involved do not need to consider the locations of those with whom a network is created, but simply have to find a network that is appropriate for their time and pace. García-Monge, González-Calvo and Bores-García (2019) explain that one danger of an online Community of Practice is that some participants may be on the periphery while others dominate. To include everyone in the discussions and activities, I therefore opted to create social coherence by implementing the three distinctive aspects identified by Gherardi (2009), namely engagement, imagination and alignment. Through imagination I opted for us to focus on the construction of the self and then aligned what we had done with the purpose of our Community of Practice. The participants and I thus constructed meaning as a collective. I share the data in this regard in Chapter 4.

Furthermore, I was very aware, as stated by Blankenship and Ruona (2007), that social cliques can form limitations in the collaborative setting. A problem regarding a Community of Practice is that the term community would refer to the group being in

constant agreement; however, Gherardi (2009) points out that in a Community of Practice there should be discussions around the topic and that allowances should be made for potential conflict. In a Community of Practice individuals share their values and as the group grows together (Nieuwenhuis, 2018), their primary value is to innovate their professionalism (Smit, 2020). I agree with Gherardi (2009) that in this context trust needs to be earned and is not spontaneously given. For the participants and I trust was important as we shared our personal experiences and reflections on our careers and professionalism. With this said, our Community of Practice aimed to co-construct a Self-regulated Professional Learning Plan as we empowered the self and others in professional practices.

2.6 PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

The main purpose of education is student learning, and a better quality of student learning can take place when the teacher is involved in continuous professional learning (Reyna, 2019). I opt to use professional learning as to optimise continuous learning and the focus is on the self (Smit, 2020). According to Komba *et al.* (2007:3), teacher professional development comprises of 'processes, organisational mechanisms and practices'. Processes refer to the duties of the educator at the school, organisational mechanisms and the monitoring of continuous development and training programmes. Komba *et al.* (2007) regard mentoring and / or meetings held by the school or at district level as practices. I do not agree that the aim of professional development is, as Kgomotso and Mumthaz (2016) explain it, mainly for teachers to do their duties well. According to De Clerq (2008), defining what an effective teacher is in the context of the 21st century is daunting, but it is essential.

Although Fong and Lewis (2017) state that teachers are aware of their professional learning needs and the types of professional learning activities they would like to take part in, I disagree. Since, as mentioned in Chapter 1, the Integrated Quality Management System is the appraisal system used in South Africa and is focused mainly on the school's functioning. I therefore suggest that teachers should have more opportunities to plan their professional learning. Kiernan (2018) suggests that in the workplace more bite-sized learning should take place so that employees can focus on

skills required for their careers. I do not agree but suggest that teachers should rather take responsibility for their own professional learning.

According to Zehetmeier *et al.* (2015), professional development has four dimensions. Figure 2.1 illustrates the four dimensions of professional development, namely autonomy, action, networking and reflection.

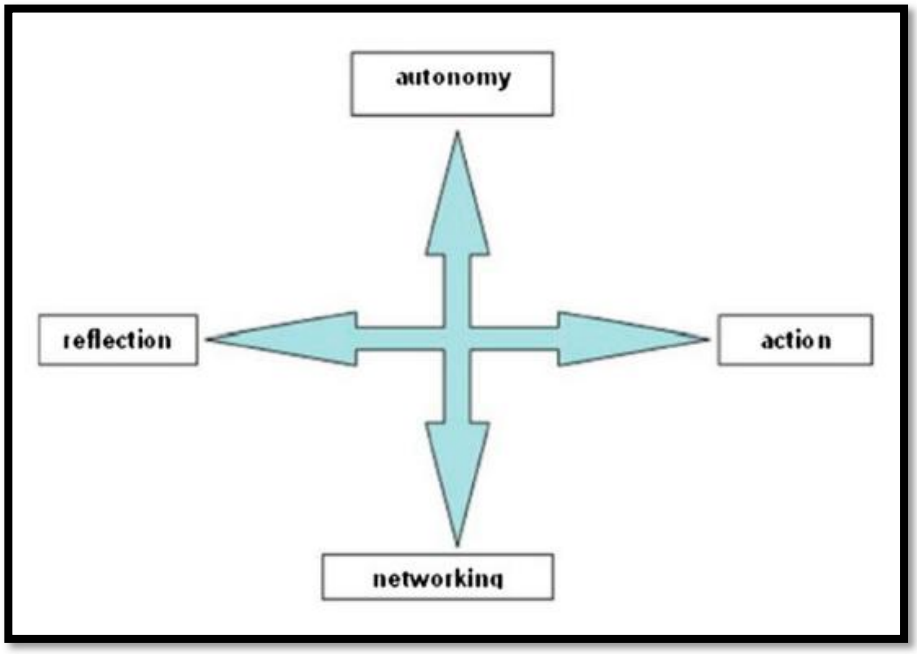


Figure 2.1 Dimensions of professional development (Zehetmeier *et al.*, 2015:166)

In Figure 2.1 the first dimension, action, comprises the attitude and competence of the experimental work and the goal-directed activities for professional development. Reflection is the ability of individuals to reflect critically on their practice, while autonomy refers to when individuals initialise activities or organise opportunities. Lastly, networking is the ability to communicate cooperatively with other people (Zehetmeier *et al.*, 2015). According to Zehetmeier *et al.* (2015), the four dimensions may be used to inform a professional development programme and show how teachers learn. Although I agree with the aspects mentioned above, I consider the diagram to be incomplete as a more holistic and integrated approach is recommended, as also discussed in Chapter 5.

Reyna (2019:6) noted that professional learning should be 'intensive, ongoing, connected to practice, focused on teaching and learning, and building strong working relationships with teachers'. I agree with that the abovementioned elements should be included in professional learning, but would add that the professional learning should be individualistic, i.e. in keeping with each educator's nature. Bjork *et al.* (2013) suggest that an educator should understand how the self learns professionally in the authentic context. However, this does not always happen, as teachers do not always have the time to construct their own professional learning. Wittmann and Olivier (2020) agree that teachers struggle when trying to implement professional learning into their own authentic practice. Professional learning has three phases: the initial, induction and continuous professional learning phases. The initial stage is the process of attaining a higher education at an institution, the induction phase process, is when the novice educator gains knowledge in the workplace as a new educator, while the continuous professional learning phase continues throughout the educators career (Nieuwenhuis, 2018). However, Eaude (2018) notes that the coherence in a structure of continued professional learning varies drastically.

Komba *et al.* (2007:3) state that the four levels of personal or professional change are 'active initiation and participation, pressure and support, changes in behaviour and beliefs, and ownership'. However, I do not agree with Komba *et al.* (2007) that a process of professional transformation or change is one-dimensional. In my opinion, professional development is multi-dimensional and educators are not always at the same level in their professional learning. My view is that it is not linear, whereby educators move from one stage to the next, but that educators may be in different stages in their professional learning during a specific period in their careers.

Since educators operate in different contexts, I agree with Morake (2013) that individuals should have personalised strategies for their professional development, and with Fong and Lewis (2017), who mention the need for continuous professional growth. The educator thus takes responsibility and constructs his or her own professionalism, as Hajisoteriou *et al.* (2018) suggest. Du Toit (2012) adds that this needs to be done with others with a view to innovating practice. Bjork *et al.* (2013) agree that educators should become self-regulated professional learners. Reyna (2019:55) lists some of the many opportunities for professional learning: 'reflection, learner-centred instruction, collaborative learning, group problem-solving,

experiencing cohort groups, on the job training, authentic assessments such as professional portfolios, and Action Research such as gathering classroom evidence for fact-based decision making.' The educator has a variety of avenues to choose from for professional learning to take place, and in my opinion professional learning should be promoted through self-regulated professional learning.

The construct teacher identity is a component of professional learning (Vermunt, Vrikki, Warwick & Mercer, 2017) that influences the learning experiences of the teacher and is regularly reconceptualised (Noonan, 2019). Three components that emerge are: how teachers see themselves as professionals; how teachers see themselves as experts within the education field; and finally, the teachers' knowledge regarding the use of the skills they have (Vermunt *et al.*, 2017). I agree with Williams (2013) that teacher identity influences what teachers do and how they view education. Vermunt *et al.* (2017) assert that teachers gain more from self-regulated learning and collaborative learning, an innovative approach to professional learning. Thus, in a self-regulated manner, teachers have the freedom to take responsibility for their own development (Vermunt *et al.*, 2017). According to (Van der Klink *et al.*, 2017), a teacher decides what kind of teacher he or she wants to become and this shapes the teacher identity. Teacher identity has been a vessel for transferring knowledge, but the new approach to professional learning allows the teacher to be part of the learning process (Vermunt *et al.*, 2017). Hamilton (2018) identifies how the construct acknowledges prior knowledge and beliefs. Next, I will discuss self-regulated professional learning, which shapes a teacher's identity.

2.6.1 Self-regulated professional learning

Self-regulated learning was introduced in the early 2000s (Fontana, Milligan, Littlejohn & Margaryan, 2015). During self-regulated learning individuals take control of their learning (Zumbrunn, Tadlock & Roberts, 2011) and retrieve knowledge and skills on their own (Wallin & Adawi, 2018). They continue to adapt their learning according to their needs through self-reflection (Fontana *et al.*, 2015) which, according to Panadero, Jonsson and Botella (2017), is goal driven. Self-regulated learning encourages lifelong learning (Zumbrunn *et al.*, 2011) and is an independent learning method (Jossberger, Brand-Gruwel, Boshuizen & Van de Wiel, 2010). According to

Littlejohn, Hood, Milligan and Mustain (2016), self-regulated learning is a cyclical process whereby individuals self-regulate their thoughts, feelings and actions, which are planned and regularly adapted to achieve their personal goals.

Self-regulated learning is not limited to one, but includes many forms of learning (Bjork *et al.*, 2013) and Littlejohn *et al.* (2016) suggest that individuals' contexts and current roles will influence their ability to self-regulate their learning. According to Panadero (2017:1), self-regulated learning includes 'cognitive, metacognitive, behavioural, motivational, and emotional/affective aspects of learning'.

In the context of a professional learning setting, I do not regard self-directed learning and self-regulated learning as synonyms. Jossberger *et al.* (2010) state that in the case of self-directed learning the trajectory is placed on where the individual wants to be, therefore only the final goal is regarded as valuable, while according to Olivier (2020), self-directed learning occurs when an individual identifies goals, devises plans and means to meet those goals, acquires the necessary resources and is able to evaluate the progress made. During self-regulated learning the focus is on the process, rather than on the final destination (Jossberger *et al.*, 2010). I furthermore recognise that the self-regulated learning process is also similar to the Action Research process I followed in the study, for example, the participants and I began at a certain point with our current knowledge and went through a process of becoming self-regulated professionals. In my role as facilitator, I went through a process of innovating and improving my facilitation of the Community of Practice. Action Research is a cyclical process, which is similar to self-regulated learning, as noted by Littlejohn *et al.* (2016). From a constructivist point of view, Lee, Watson and Watson (2019) regard self-regulated learning as a process by which professional goals are actively constructed, thus modulating the self or practice.

In the context of educator development, there is a connection between self-regulated learning as it occurs in a learning environment or classroom and how I choose to learn professionally to innovate my practice. Professional learning 'involves coaching, participation, and collaboration; and is content-focused, reflective, and sustained' (Fong & Lewis, 2017:1). However, I do not agree that professional learning involves coaching, as a notion of taking responsibility for professional learning should rather emerge. Critical reflection encourages the individual to reflect on the self—the

educator professional to reflect on his or her experiences in a social and cultural context (Williams, 2019). I acknowledge that educator professional learning has changed over the past few years and, as Bjork *et al.* (2013:418) affirm, that in our ever-changing world there is a need 'for self-initiated and self-managed learning'.

Self-regulated professional learning ultimately combines the two constructs self-regulated learning and professional learning (Smit & Du Toit, 2021). It is a process of planning, monitoring and assessing your own professional learning and, as Littlejohn *et al.* (2016) assert, it needs to be specific to your own context. Smullin (2009:435) asks the question: 'Education for life or life-long education?' With regard to this question I agree with Du Toit (2017:1), who states that in the professional learning context lifelong professional learning is a twenty-first-century attribute required in the education sector. During self-regulated professional learning educators reflect on their current professionalism while taking responsibility for development of the self (Schunk & Mullen, 2013).

2.6.2 Self-regulated Professional Learning models

In this section I discuss different self-regulated professional learning models. The models that I identify are those of Zimmerman and Schunk (2001), and Winne and Hadwin (1998). I also discuss Boekaerts' and Efklides (2011) models, and finally Biggs *et al.* (2001) 3P model of teaching and learning.

Zimmerman and Schunk (2001) developed a three-step model for self-regulated learning. As shown in Figure 2.2, the model comprises of three steps: Forethought and planning, performance monitoring and reflections on performance.

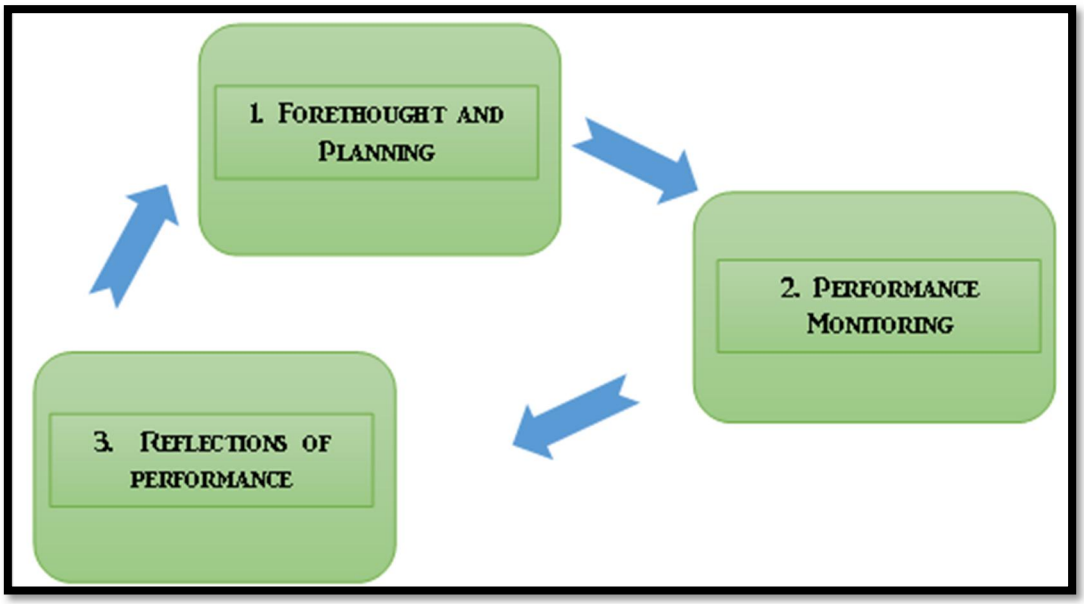


Figure 2.2 The three-step Self-Regulated Learning Model (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2001)

As shown in Figure 2.2, the self-regulated model comprises of three steps through which individuals progress. In the first step, forethought and planning, they identify areas of need in their own learning and set goals to improve their practice. In Step 2, the monitoring of performance entails evaluating the implementation of the needs areas identified in Step 1. Lastly, the reflection step encourages individuals to identify new areas of need. Once Step 3 has been completed, they return to Step 1. I opted not to use this model as we did not do Step 2 (monitoring our performance), but rather co-constructed a Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan.

The second self-regulated learning model is the Winne and Hadwin Model, which is based on the metacognitive theory (Panadero, 2017). Individuals are encouraged to monitor their learning with metacognitive strategies since this goal-driven notion motivates individuals to pursue their goals. Winne and Hadwin's of self-regulated learning model has four phases, namely task definition, goal setting and planning, enacting study tactics and strategies, and lastly metacognitive adaptation (Greene & Azevedo, 2007).

I notice that reflecting and analysing are overarching in both the Zumbrunn *et al.* (2011) and Winne's models (Greene & Azevedo, 2007). I also recognise similarities between the latter and my chosen research design: Action Research. Reflecting and analysing

are crucial components of the Winne (2010) and Zumbrunn *et al.* (2011) self-regulation models, and during the Action Research process reflecting and evaluating (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010) are components that lead to innovating practice for the following cycle.

The third model I review includes Boekaerts self-regulated learning models (Panadero, 2017). The first is called the dual processing model and focuses on two mechanisms, namely cognitive and affective/motivational self-regulation. Panadero (2017) identifies two motivators in Boekaerts dual processing model: the first motivator is for growth and uses the metacognitive strategy or the well-being pathway, and the second is the self-regulated learning model (Panadero, 2017), as explained in Figure 2.3. The task in context is the beginning of the model and from here individuals progress to the appraisal, after which they seek to use either a learning strategy that leads to a gain in resources or an increase in knowledge and skills. Otherwise the individual seeks a coping strategy, which leads to the prevention of a loss of resources and a focus on the self.

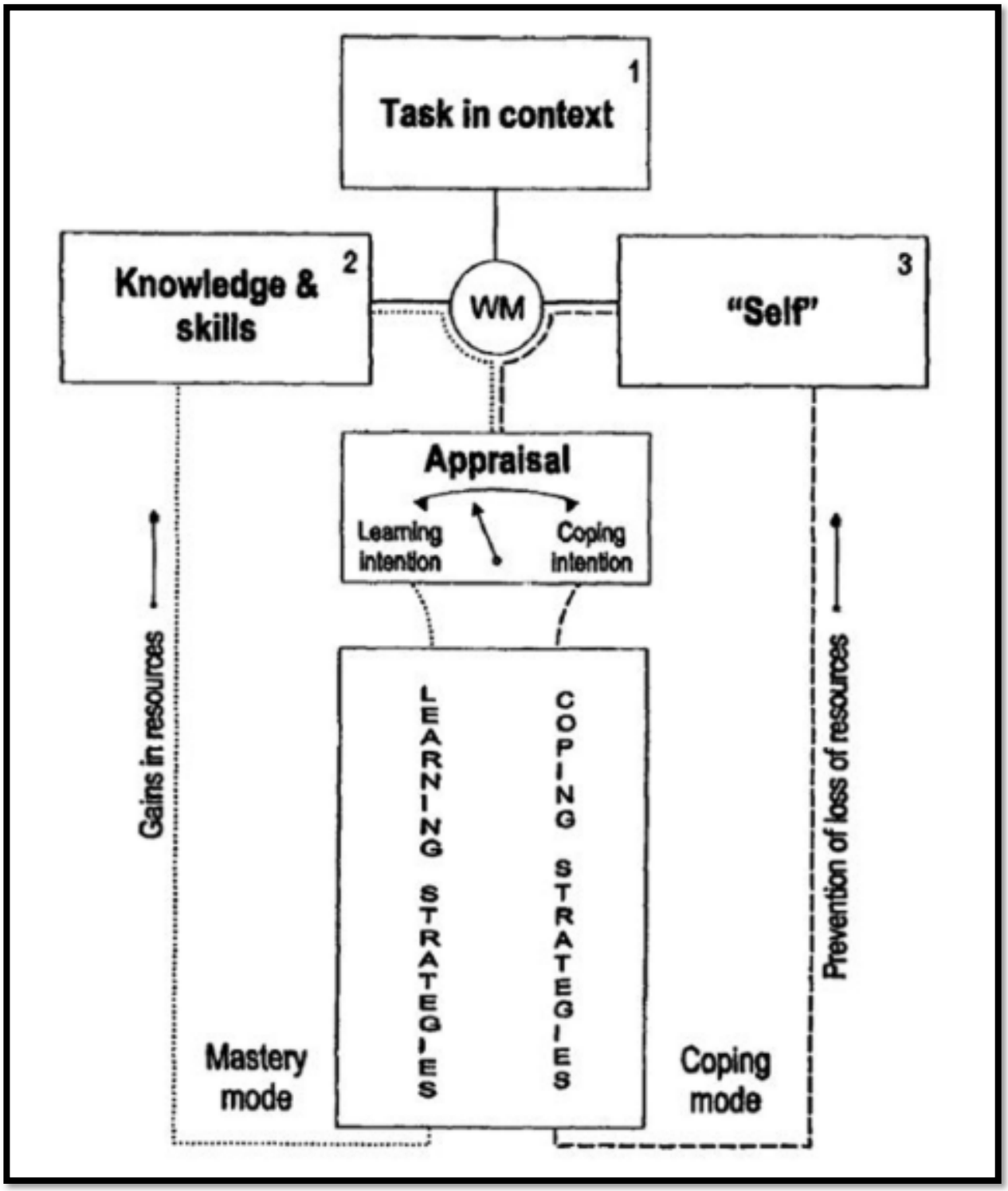


Figure 2.3 Boekaerts' Self-Regulated Learning Model (Panadero, 2017)

I do not regard self-regulated professional learning as being either in mastery or coping mode, but rather than value merely the task or goal, I value the process. The fourth self-regulated learning model is that of Efklides (2011), which has a strong focus on

metacognitive background, as also seen in the work of Winne (2011). This model is called the Metacognitive and Affective Model of Self-regulated Learning (MASRL) (Efklides, 2011). Two levels, namely the Person and the Task X Person levels are identified. The Person level refers to the motivation, affect, self-concept and the metacognition of the individual. The Task X Person level refers to the interaction between the individual's characteristics and the task that the individual needs to complete. This model of self-regulated learning emphasises that an individual is primary during self-regulated learning and therefore influences the task (Panadero, 2017).

I opted to rather implement the Biggs *et al.* (2001) 3P model of teaching and learning in my study. This model progresses through three steps, namely presage-process-product. The three steps are referred to as levels. The presage level is about the individual, for example, prior knowledge, prior skills or abilities and preferred approaches to learning, or, as in my study, professional learning. The process level refers to the teaching or learning period that takes place. During this period the desired outcome may or may not be achieved. Finally, the product level is about the differences in the contextual approaches and is worked out by the means of the data. It is important to note that the results from the product rely on both the individual characteristics and the teaching context in order to achieve the desired outcome. As seen in Figure 2.4, the presage-process-product model has interlinking arrows that move back and forth between the two concepts, showing how each level affects the others and how the different characteristics of learning and teaching can play a role in achieving the desired outcome. The initial Presage-process-product Teaching and Learning Model by Biggs *et al.* (2001) is shown below.

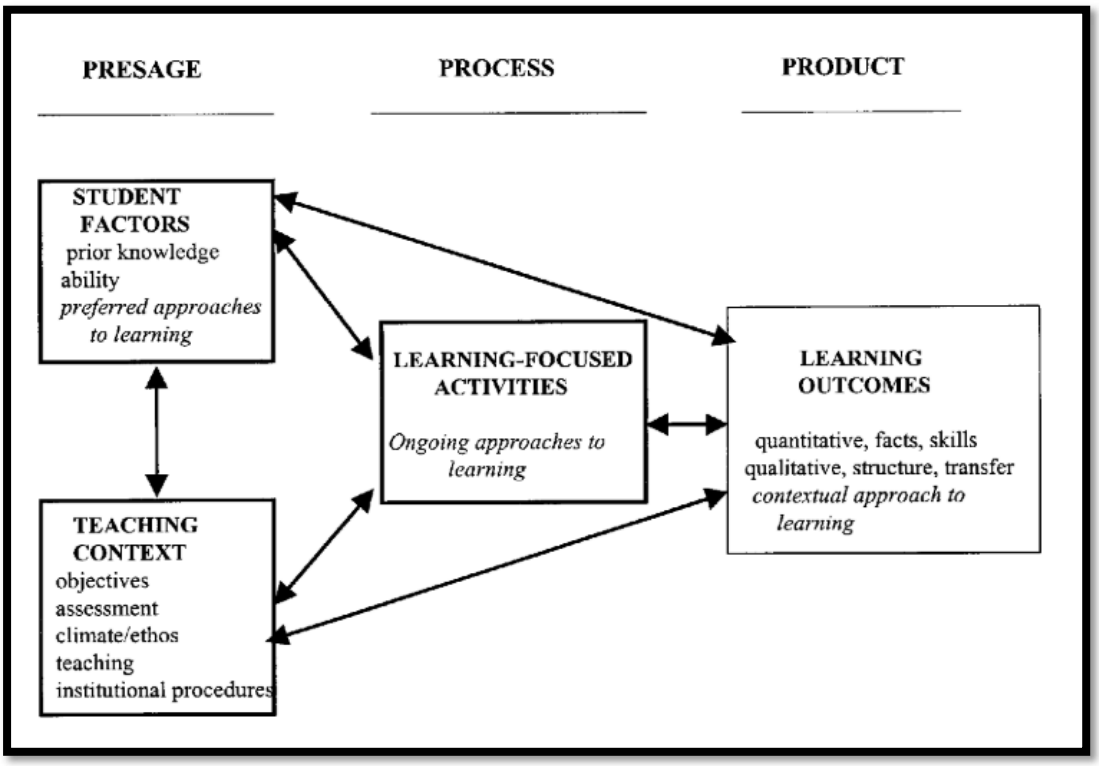


Figure 2.4 Presage-Process-Product (Biggs *et al.*, 2001)

As explained in the following section, I adapted the 3P model of teaching and learning in Figure 2.4 for my research context for professional learning and as we progressed through the self-regulated professional learning process in order to co-construct a professional learning plan and innovate our professional practices. I used the adapted 3P self-regulated learning model as the process that I went through during the four Community of Practice sessions.

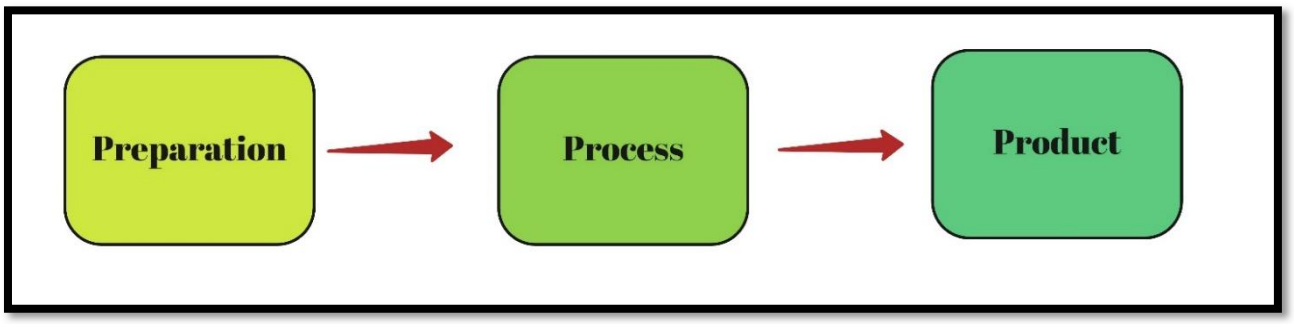


Figure 2.5 Adapted 3P self-regulated learning model

As illustrated in Figure 2.5, the adapted 3P self-regulated learning model is made up of a reparation phase, a process phase and finally the product phase. The preparation phase was completed in one session, the process phase spanned over two sessions and the product phase was our last session in the Community of Practice. The 3P self-regulated learning model will be discussed in more detail in section 2.6.

2.7 SELF-REGULATED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PLAN

The planning of professional learning is vital and should be something educators ponder over to achieve desired outcomes (Zareie, Nasr, Mirshahjafari & Liaghatdar, 2016). Bjork *et al.* (2013) emphasise the importance of making sound decisions regarding the professional learning activities chosen to participate in according to what individuals envisions for their professionalism. Appraisal systems are focused mainly on what schools need (Dauda, 2018) whereas, as previously stated, I deem professional learning to be focused on the individual's needs. According to Wittmann and Olivier (2020), when teachers were asked what their development needs were, the majority focused on keeping up to date with curriculum or context developments and not necessarily on personal or 'self' needs in their teaching (Hajisoteriou *et al.*, 2018). Although curriculum developments are essential for teachers, professional learning is of the utmost importance for a teacher to be equipped for the authentic workplace.

I acknowledge that appraisal systems have been effective in workplaces as they provide a formal and structured method for assessing where employees are and the schools' needs (Dauda, 2018). As mentioned in Section 2.3.1, the Basic Education system in South Africa, the appraisal system in South Africa is the Integrated Quality Management System and professional learning plans should be individualised so that educators can decide what professional learning they require (Wittmann & Olivier, 2020). When an appraisal system adapts to the individual, the employee is inspired to achieve these expectations (Dauda, 2018). The focus of the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan is on educators taking responsibility for their own professionalism. Since self-regulated learning is a contextual process, an ever-changing process (Zumbrunn *et al.*, 2011), I suggest that a Self-Regulated

Professional Learning Plan should be separated from the appraisal system so that the individual's needs can focus on the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan.

I adapted Biggs *et al.* (2001) 3P teaching and learning model for the facilitation of my Community of Practice sessions by changing the presage, process and product phases to the preparation, process and product stages, as illustrated in Figure 2.6. As illustrated, the process is continuous and may go back and forth between the three phases.

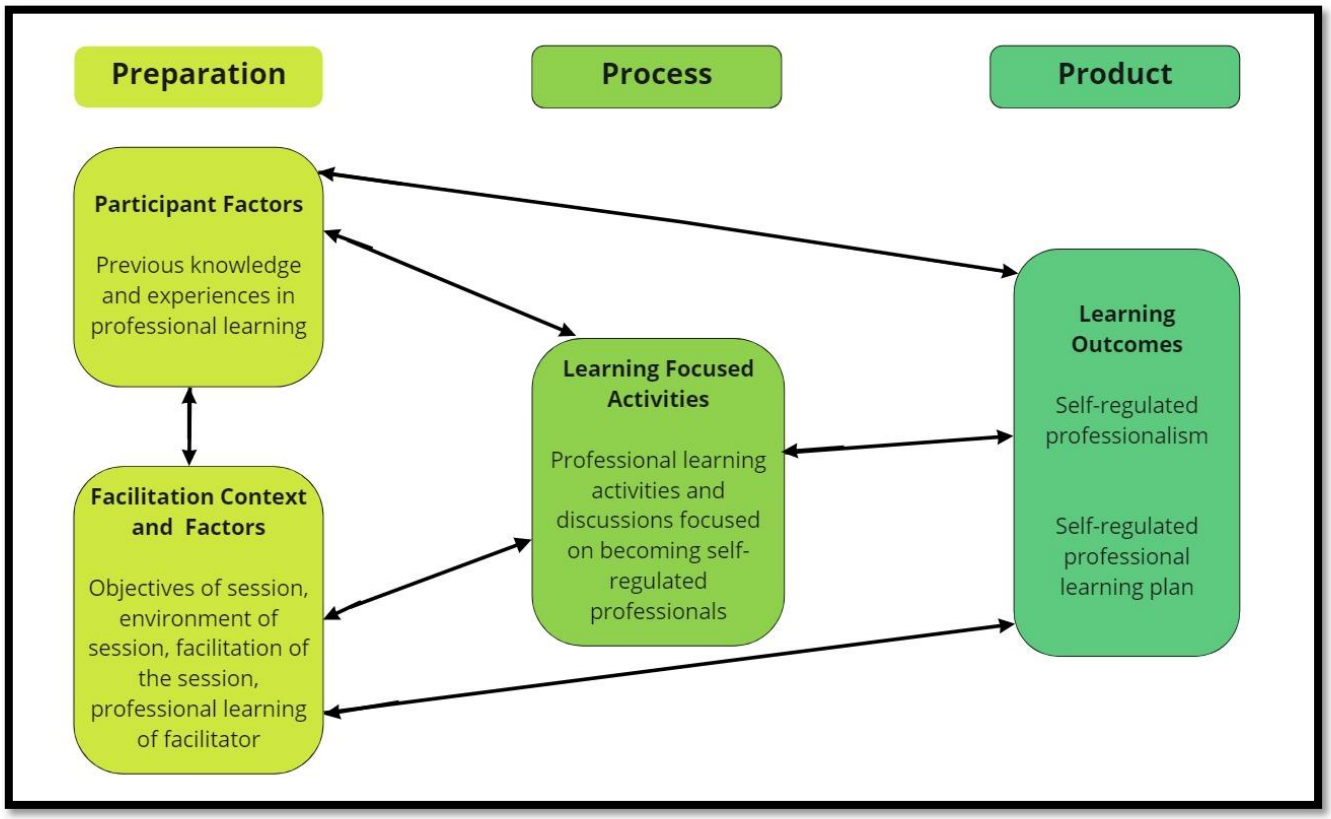


Figure 2.6 Adapted 3P self-regulated learning model (Biggs *et al.*, 2001)

As illustrated in Figure 2.6, I adapted the 3P model of teaching and learning and used a model with three phases, which are compartmentalised in Table 2.1 to show the focus of each session held in our Community of Practice. Table 2.1 below outlines and describes how the self-regulated co-construction process in my study took place.

Table 2.1: Self-regulated professional learning process

Preparation	The participants and I shared our previous knowledge and experiences and reflected on our professionalism as educators. The Community of Practice was formed and trust was built in the first session.
	I, as the researcher, facilitated the Community of Practice discussions through the Action Research design steps.
Process	The participants and I learnt from and with one another during each Community of Practice session. We discussed the How, What, Why and When questions about professional learning, questioning and confronting our professionalism, and journeyed together towards self-regulated learning.
	As a Community of Practice, we progressed to co-construct a Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan
Product	In the product phase, the participants and I reflected on our self-regulated professionalism, the process and the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan we co-constructed. We also reflected on how we could take responsibility for our professionalism.
	The Community of Practice co-constructed the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan and the participants and I worked concurrently through each of the 3P self-regulated learning model phases (preparation, process and product) to develop a Self-regulated Professional Learning Plan. The final product was created during the data analysis, which will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Figure 2.9 and Table 2.1 explain how we progressed in the Community of Practice. As mentioned earlier, my Action Research study was conducted in a Community of Practice during which the participants and I met on an online platform and discussed our professionalism and professional learning. During our four sessions we created a community of trust and openness to discuss our professionalism. Our transition through the preparation, process and product phases was, however, not a linear journey. Rather, it was multi-dimensional and never-ending to the extent where we would revisit the preparation phase in sessions two, three and four, and visit the

product phase during the first session. We confronted our self-regulated professionalism in each of the sessions. The data collected during each of the four sessions will be discussed in Chapter 4.

2.8 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the literature review focused on the professional learning of educators and the construct of taking responsibility for your own professionalism. The notions of Community of Practice and a Professional Development Plan were explored. The theoretical underpinning of my study was also discussed. I focused on the construct of Self-Regulated Professional Learning and the different learning theories which apply to Self-Regulated learning.

In Chapter 3, I will discuss my chosen research design, Action Research. I will share how I progressed as I also used qualitative data collection instruments and theoretical data analysis methods.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 3, I discuss the research design and methods I used. Tomal (2003) states that research is only conducted when there is an unknown solution, a desire to understand relationships between the constructs of a problem and the discovery of new facts about the concepts in the field. My research was not about finding solutions to a problem, but rather, as indicated in Chapter 1, to innovate self-regulated learning and co-construct a Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan.

I used qualitative methods or instruments to collect data. I agree with McNiff and Whitehead (2010:8) that all research has three primary purposes, namely 'creating new knowledge and making claims to knowledge; testing the validity of knowledge claims and generating new theory'. In Chapter 3, I discuss the research design and my Action Research process, how I collected data in our Community of Practice and what the thematic data analysis process entailed.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

According to Creswell (2014b), the investigation process is known as the research design. Action research is a form of research that requires an inquiry process to address a specific issue (Coghlan, 2019). Two aspects that are central during Action Research are what is done and the research process as such, i.e. the explanation of how you learn and why you do what you do

3.2.1 The Action Research Design

McNiff and Whitehead (2010:8) state that 'the aims and purposes of Action Research are about improving learning for improving practice'. I therefore agree with Lawrence (2018) that this sets Action Research apart from the more traditional forms of research, such as applied research and mixed-methods or qualitative research. Action Research is transformational as it aims to improve or innovate, practice. Action research, my chosen research design, entails an ongoing cyclical process (De Boer *et al.*, 2015). Tomal (2003) explains that a theory explains a seen phenomenon through the

research process. In the next paragraph, I will discuss the different steps in Action Research and explain how applied them.

The Action Research design is practice-based research (McAteer, 2013; McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). Tomal (2003) explains it as being more about improving the situation than about making generalisations, and according to Du Toit (2012), Action Research promotes innovation and allows the Action Researcher to understand why people do what they do. I acknowledge that as the Action Researcher I am also part the research (McAteer, 2013).

During Action Research, new knowledge and theories are generated (McNiff and Whitehead (2010). In the context of my research, with a socio-constructivist notion, the participants and I co-constructed meaning. During our Community of Practice sessions we scrutinised our current professional practice with a view to innovating our professionalism.

Action Research encourages change, more specifically social and cultural change, according to Hershberg (2014). However, McNiff and Whitehead (2010) disagree and are of the opinion that the individual rather needs to choose to change. Since I agree with McNiff and Whitehead (2010) that it is important to create a space for this to occur, a space was created where the participants and I shared stories and learned from one another in terms of our professional learning. Tomal (2003) agrees that in Action Research a researcher and a specific group of people collaborate to create change. Gustavsen, Hansson and Qvale (2008) suggest that conversations play an essential role when research is being conducted. During the Community of Practice sessions, I conducted Action Research in my practice as we co-constructed a Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan. We epistemologically reflected on how we wanted to be empowered.

3.2.1.1 Action Research features

According to McAteer (2013), Action Research has significant factors to consider, for example Action Research has a personal and professional value, Action Research has improvement and the study should be within your locus of control. and allow you to develop explanations relating to one's practice. I fully agree with this. Since this

study underpins a personal and professional value to myself and my working environment, the aim is to improve my professional practice. I used homogenous sampling, which allowed the majority of the participants to be from my own school or the nearby environment.

According to McNiff and Whitehead (2010), Action Research is practitioner research as I mentioned earlier in this chapter. Action research further is focused on the creation of living theories (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). The research design promotes creativity, according to De Boer *et al.* (2015), and focuses on values (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). Nyanjom (2020) agrees that the self is an integral component of the research.

I agree with McAteer (2013:30) that Action Research may appear 'messy' and unpredictable to those involved. As discussed in Chapter 2, the theoretical framework for this study is based on socio-constructivism and the Cultural-Historical Activity Theory and is, in essence, about constructing meaning while keeping in mind our cultural ideologies. I therefore decided to use qualitative methods and instruments, which permit the researcher to be more personally involved in the study (Tomal, 2003).

I used an Action Research design to develop my own professionalism, taking responsibility for it as I facilitated the co-construction of the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan in the Community of Practice. According to Zehetmeier *et al.* (2015), in order to develop professionally, reflection is a meaningful action that allows the educator to see the readiness for further development, which sums up the reason for my decision to use an Action Research design. McAteer (2013:27) confirms that action research incorporates and builds critical reflection, and De Boer *et al.* (2015) agree that reflection is central to the process. The process will be explained in detail in the following section.

3.2.2 The Action Research process

The Action Research process entails a combination of spirals, cycles and steps (Du Toit, 2012; McNiff & Whitehead, 2010; Smit & Du Toit, 2016; Wolvaardt & Du Toit, 2012). I will start by discussing several approaches to Action Research shared by

Tomal (2003), McAteer (2013) and McNiff and Whitehead (2010), and how I decided to proceed with my research.

Tomal (2003) outlines six stages in the Action research process, as shown in Figure 3.1.

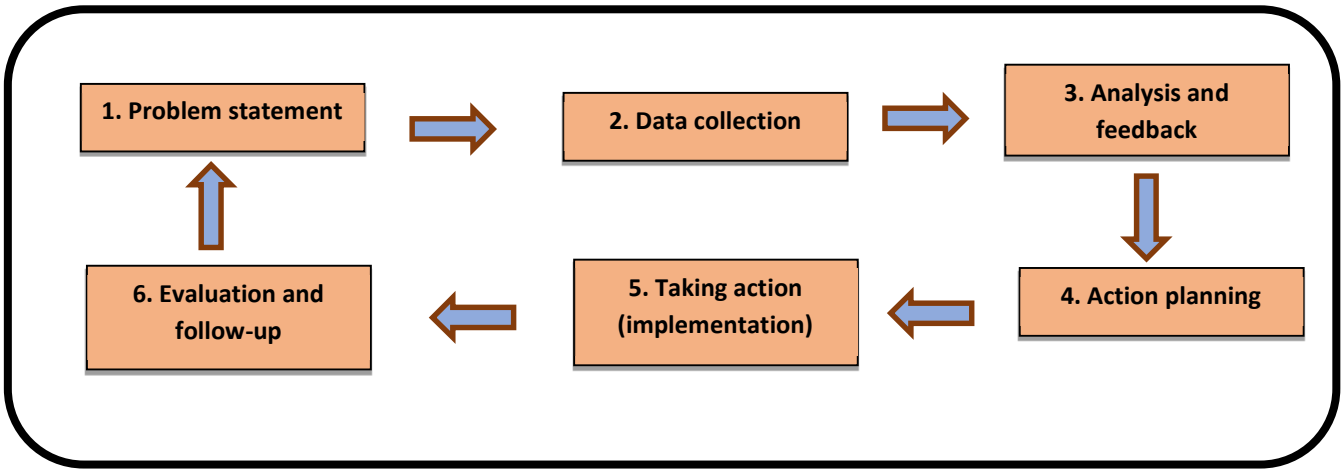


Figure 3.1 The Action Research stages according to Tomal (2003)

As illustrated in Figure 3.1, Action Research comprises of six stages. During the first stage the researcher identifies the initial problem and formulates a problem statement identifying the need. During Stage 2 the Action Researcher explores the need identified by assessing the problem. Next the information is analysed and feedback given to those involved. During Stage 4 the group is involved deciding what needs to be done to solve the problem, and during Stage 5 action is taken and the method is implemented. During the final stage the situation is evaluated to assess the action results. A follow-up is essential here to report on how successful the action was. I agree with Tomal (2003) that the process is continuous, however, in my study there was no problem and therefore I chose not to use these stages. According to McAteer (2013), Action Research requires four steps, as shown in Figure 3.2. It is a cyclical process that will be discussed below.

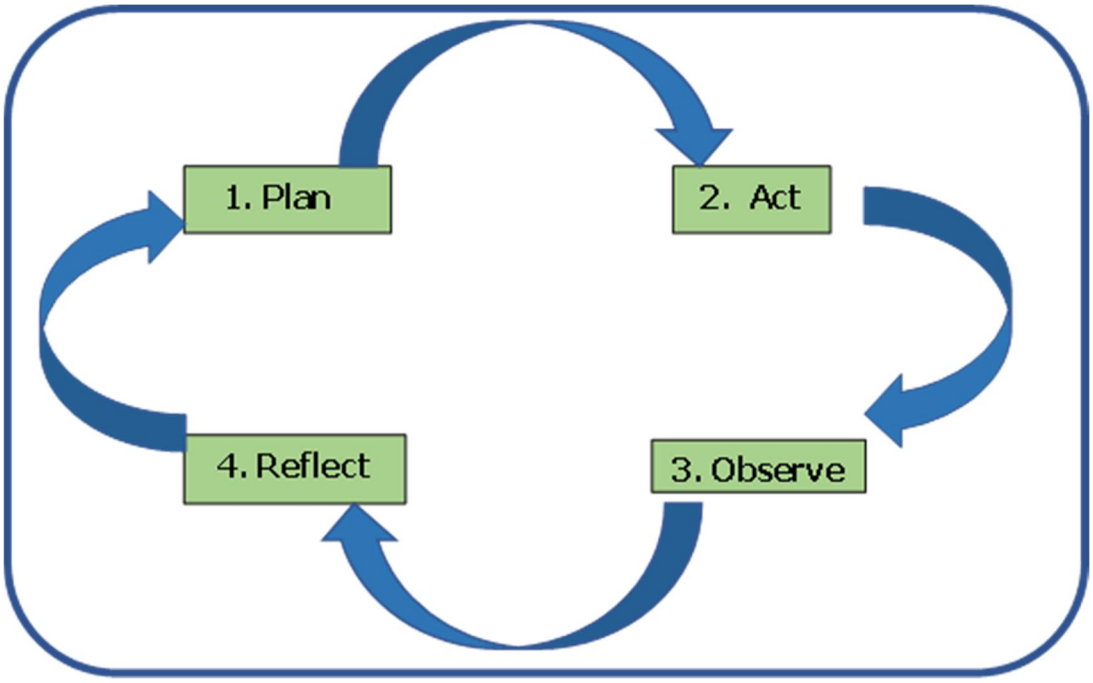


Figure 3.2: Four- step Action Research process (McAteer (2013)

According to McAteer (2013), the Action Researcher first plans what will happen and then acts out the plan in a session. Next, the Action Researcher observes and then reflects on what has taken place. I also used a cyclical process, but opted to rather use the process outlined by McNiff and Whitehead (2010), which involves the five steps shown in Figure 3.3 below.

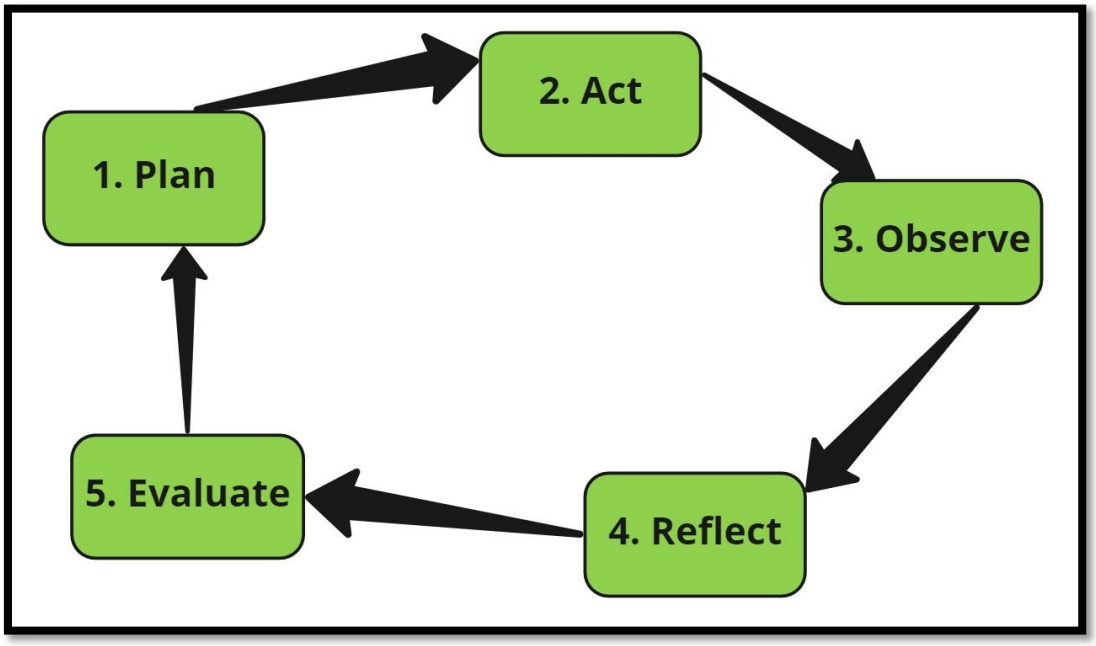


Figure 3.3 An Action Research cycle (McNiff and Whitehead (2010)

According to McNiff and Whitehead (2010), the steps in Action Research include the following: Plan, act, observe, reflect and evaluate. In Step 1, the researcher plans, and in Step 2 the researcher acts or does what was planned. In Step 3 the researcher observes what happened during the session, and Step 4 requires reflection. During Step 5 the researcher evaluates before proceeding to the next Action Research cycle.

I chose to use this McNiff and Whitehead (2010) five-step process for my Action Research since Step 5 (evaluate) provided an opportunity to organise myself to evaluate each session before proceeding to the next cycle. Zehetmeier *et al.* (2015) promote reflection on practice and encourage the nurturing of abilities to boost further development in professional learning. During the Action Research process I saw a need for a final step, which I included in Figure 3.4 below. This step is envisioning, which I included as I was able to envision (Smit, 2020) the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan produced by our Community of Practice.

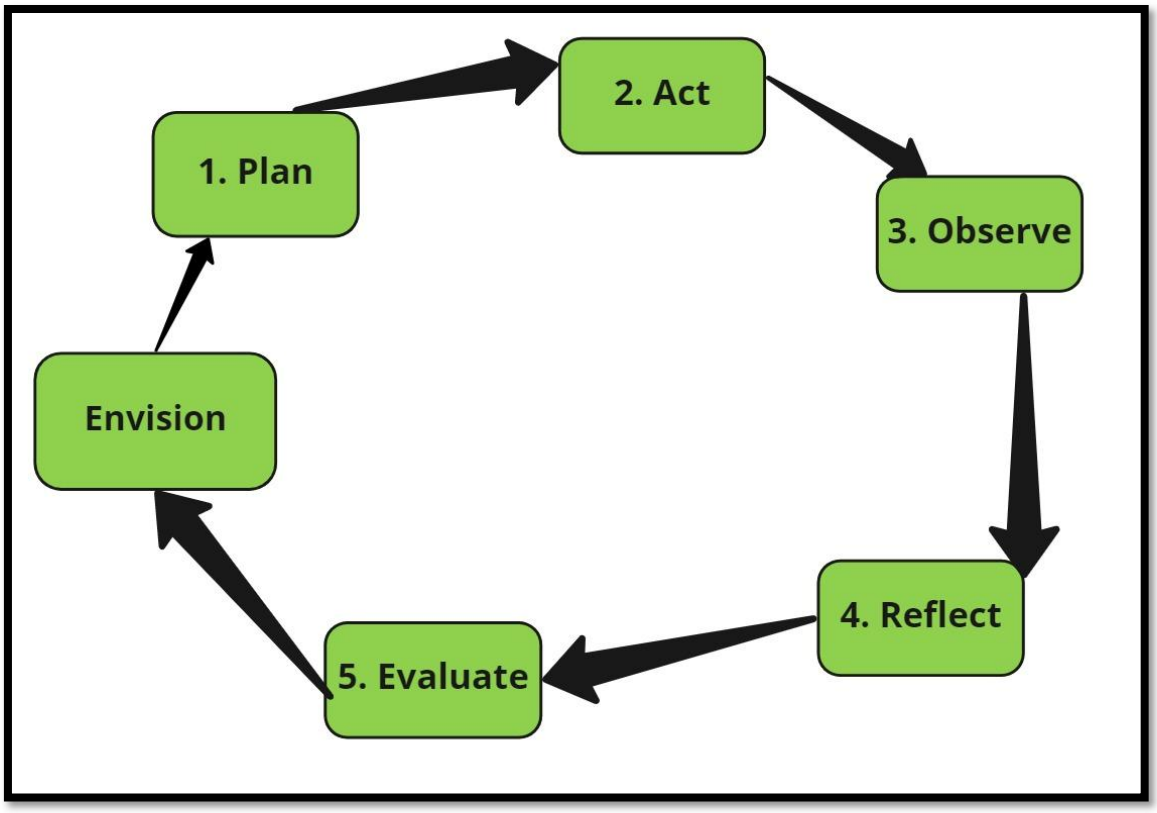


Figure 3.4 My Action Research process

Instead of only solving a problem, Action Research also includes the researcher envisioning an innovation to be implemented, as suggested by Wolvaardt and Du Toit (2012). Like De Boer *et al.* (2015), I therefore included an envisioning step before my planning step, as can be seen in Figure 3.4. Next I will discuss my Action Research spiral and the steps through which I progressed through during each cycle.

3.2.3.1 My Action Research spiral and steps

My study was made up of one spiral with four cycles and, as illustrated in Figure 3.5, I progressed through the five steps in each cycle. I refer to the cycles as cycles A, B, C and D. The cycles spanned over a four-week period during the third school term. In cycle A, the first session of our Community of Practice, I discussed the purpose of our journey and explained the Miro app, which was used during each session. In sessions B and C I facilitated professional learning activities as we progressed towards the product stage of our professional learning, and in session D we finalised the co-construction of the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan.

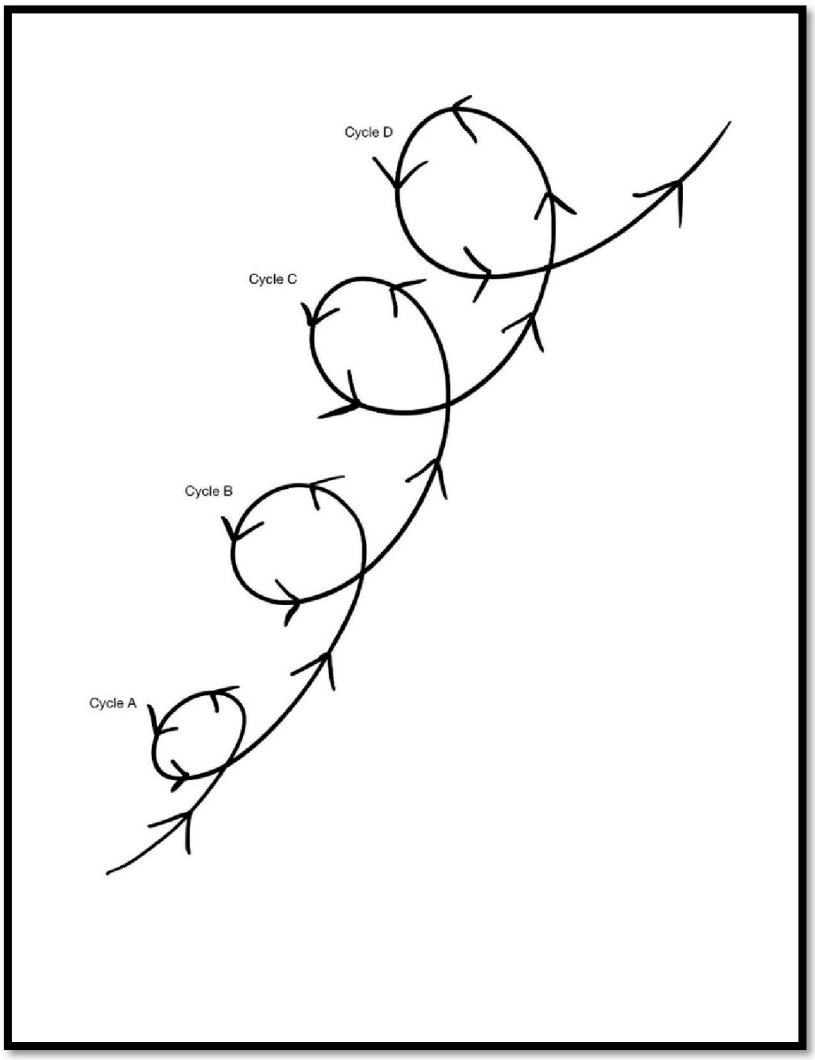


Figure 3.5 My Action Research spiral

As illustrated in Figure 3.5, I progressed through one Action Research spiral consisting of four cycles (A-D) while I proceeded through the envisioning of the session and the five steps of Action Research during each cycle. Although each cycle comprised of the same steps, each had a specific vision for the session. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4. I will now discuss how the data was collected and analysed.

3.3 DATA GATHERING

In this section, I explain what type of data I collected and how it was done. According to McNiff and Whitehead (2010), data refers to all the data collected, whereas evidence refers to data items that relate directly to one's research questions.

As stated in section 3.2.2, the researcher is at the centre of the research during Action Research. For the purpose of this study, I implemented Action Research in my practice as the facilitator and a member of the Community of Practice and conducted four sessions with the participants.

3.3.1 Sampling

I used purposive convenience sampling, a qualitative sampling technique (Afungmeyu & Vuyisile, 2018) and followed Etikan *et al.* (2016) suggestion regarding which participants to select. Purposive sampling is used when the researcher has a specific type of participant in mind (Etikan *et al.*, 2016). Since purposive sampling is based on the participants' characteristics (Etikan *et al.*, 2016), I chose to use it as I wanted to include individuals with various levels of experience in the teaching field. I also used convenience sampling, which draws on the availability of participants (Waterfield, 2018) as I chose participants from schools close to the school where I work. Convenience sampling is a method of sampling that has two qualities, which are that the participants are easily accessible and are willing to participate (Afungmeyu & Vuyisile, 2018).

As the time to initiate the Community of Practice drew closer, I decided to begin the sessions as an online Community of Practice due to the restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic. I therefore used only purposive sampling in order to achieve a certain representation within the Community of Practice as I intended to involve teachers with different levels of experience, such as novice teachers, teachers with ten to twenty years' experience and veteran teachers. I used convenience sampling as four out of the five participants were from the school where I taught and the fifth was the spouse of one of my colleagues. I created a WhatsApp group to be used by all the participants between sessions as we develop together as a Community of Practice

3.3.2 Ethical considerations

During the initial stage of my research, I obtained ethical approval from the Education Faculty, University of Pretoria before requesting approval from the Gauteng, Department of Education. Once my research study had been approved, I made appointments to speak to the principal at my school, who referred me to the deputy principal to explain the purpose of the study and obtain permission to discuss it with other staff members who I hoped would agree to participate. I approached several schools in Pretoria, Gauteng, but the principals were not keen on allowing teachers from their schools to participate as at the time they were overworked and it was felt that it would not be advisable to put them under more pressure.

I then booked an appointment with the deputy principal at the school where I teach, who signed the principal consent form that was also signed by the educators who had agreed to participate. Four of the five participants were employed by the primary school where I teach and the fifth was from a neighbouring secondary school. In the sections that follow I will discuss the instruments I used to gather data during the Action Research process.

Trustworthiness and ethics were vital to my research as I was a responsible researcher who respected and understood the participants. Building trust is an integral part of a Community of Practice (Gherardi, 2009) and the participants and I started building relationships in the first session where we were in the preparation phase. Trustworthiness is both an aim of research as well as a practice (Morgan & Ravitch, 2018). In each of the sessions, I focused on building trust and ensuring that I facilitated the sessions in a manner that would promote commitment and after the session I would not discuss anything regarding the sessions to anyone else. As discussed in 3.3.1, sampling, four of the five teachers were from the same school as me, I worked on not speaking about the sessions outside of the sessions with the participants. Morgan and Ravitch (2018) note that there are different strategies for trustworthiness, one being triangulation which is used in this study; triangulation shows that multiple data sources are used and that data collected speak to each other as one tool confirms the data shared from another tool. Triangulation will be discussed in greater detail in 3.3.4, the instruments used for gathering data.

3.3.3 Data gathering methods

I used qualitative methods ‘for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem’ (Creswell (2014b:32). Tomal (2003:3) defines qualitative methods as ‘naturalistic, emergent, and case-oriented’. I therefore regard my Action Research as being focused on improving my learning and bringing about change. Action Research has three elements of data collection, namely, observations (what I see happening), descriptions (describing what is happening), and explanations (explaining what is happening in the context of the situation). These three elements guided the instruments used to obtain relevant data.

3.3.4 The instruments used for gathering data

I collected data using instruments designed for qualitative methods. The data was collected during my Action Research process, for which I used video recordings, visual evidence, semi-structured informal interviews, qualitative feedback questionnaires, observation sheet and a reflection journal in each cycle. The final product, the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan, forms part of the data collected. The data collected informed my facilitation practice and allowed me to innovate my practice for the cycles that followed as my research continued. Figure 3.6 below shows the instruments used for data collection. To show triangulation, the arrows indicate the links to the instruments that were used to collect data.

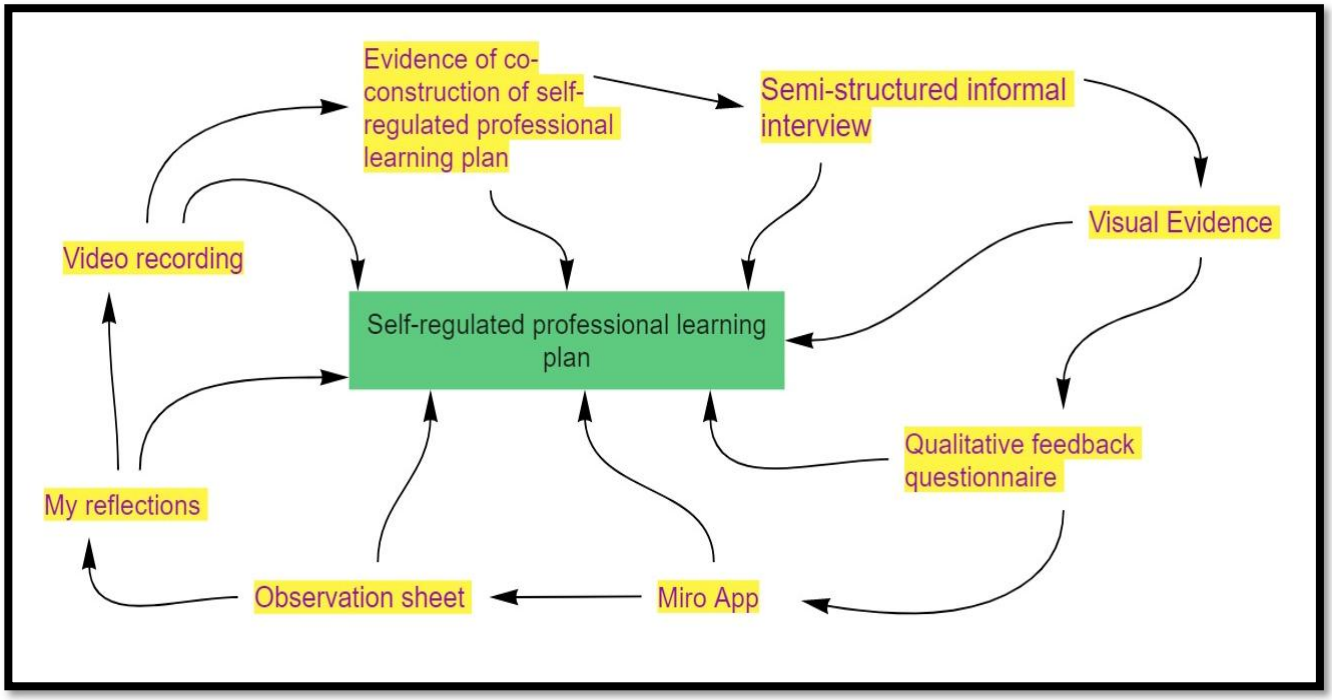


Figure 3.6 Data collected during the four sessions

Since data was gathered from various sources, I opted to use triangulation, which refers to when data from other sources provide a supporting explanation for a concept (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). I will now discuss each of the instruments chosen for data collection. A video recording is a moving image that is captured in order to study details such as behaviour or interactions between people and may or may not have sound (Gibson, 2008). A video recorder was used to record what took place during a session so that I could watch it afterwards and reflect on my own practice. I also used qualitative feedback questionnaires to obtain qualitative feedback on the sessions. The qualitative feedback questionnaire was conducted by using Google Forms, which allows responses to be anonymous. I acknowledge that questionnaires should be constructed in a way that makes them easy to understand and does not manipulate the participants' responses (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). A reflective journal is a tool used to show how your thinking and actions changed over time (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). I used my reflective journal to reflect on the sessions and the processes and experiences that occurred throughout my research process. The reflective journal is therefore a record of one's personal reflections (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). The use of a reflective journal is common practice in

Action Research and provides, in chronological order, the narrative of what occurred in each step of the research process (McAteer, 2013). I reflected regularly as this is an integral part of Action Research (McAteer, 2013). I used a reflective journal throughout my action research journey as part of meta-reflecting about the complete research process (De Boer *et al.*, 2015). Semi-structured informal interviews are often used in Action Research as the interview is aligned with a discussion, rather than a formal interview. In the case of a semi-structured interview, the interviewer has a guideline indicating the questions that will be asked and the participant and researcher have more freedom to explore the concepts that are discussed.

The visual evidence of the co-construction of the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan and the data from the semi-structured discussions are shared in Chapter 4. I also used an observation sheet to observe specific aspects of a session and thus of the Action Research cycle. McAteer (2013) notes that an observation is done in order to have an empathetic understanding of the situation so as to understand what is happening inside the participants. However, I did not extend an empathetic understanding to the participants as we were examining our own professionalism and becoming self-regulated professionals; rather, I viewed an observation as a structured view of what had occurred during the sessions and used notes and checklists to recount what had occurred during a specified period of time (Tomal, 2003). I created an observation sheet, which I used to observe five-minute intervals of what took place in the session. The observation sheet included note making and checklists for identifying the desired outcome of each session. The final product, the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan, is part of the data collected and was finalised during the completion of Chapters 4 and 5.

3.4 THEMATIC DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected during the four Community of Practice sessions was analysed by myself as the researcher and facilitator by using a thematic analysis method.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, I opted to use thematic analysis to identify patterns of meaning (McAteer, 2013). Thematic analysis, which is widely used in social sciences research, was used to analyse the written data and data gathered from interviews and

observations during the research process (Gavin, 2008) to identify recurrent information (Reyna, 2019). An analysis can be done in order to complete a comparative analysis and theories can be understood from the data (Chun Tie, Birks & Francis, 2019), or can be used to generate meaning from the data by looking for regularly occurring themes or atypical concepts (Gavin, 2008).

The process of thematic analysis begins with the researcher making annotations of the data; in other words, the researcher makes notes based on the data and then, from this point, will identify common themes or meaning that emerges from the annotation process (Ignatow & Mihalcea, 2021; McAteer, 2013). According to (Ignatow & Mihalcea, 2021), thematic analysis involves organising and describing data in the most basic form to the interpretation of the data. According to Gavin (2008), thematic analysis involves the following five stages: Stage 1: Compilation, during which the participants and I generated data by using the Miro app, video recordings, discussions and qualitative feedback questionnaires. Stage 2: Thematic overview, which included an overview during which the researcher worked through the data to find themes within the data sets. Stage 3: Sub-categorisation was when I identified the subthemes and linked them. During Stage 4: Linkage of sub-theme, the researcher linked the different sub-themes and compared the different themes and linked the themes together. Stage 5: Direction of response, which was the final stage when the researcher could comment on the different themes that were noted, and which could have included both positive and negative comments. I then emerged myself in the data, meaning that I was part of the data and this assisted me in identifying the data themes (McAteer, 2013).

McAteer (2013) acknowledges that the thematic analysis process can be time consuming. Thematic analysis is an inductive data analysis process that leads to theory generation (McAteer, 2013). Other forms of research require the researcher to apply theory to practice or test practice against a theory, whereas Action Research allows the researcher to generate a theory of practice (McAteer, 2013). Another link between Action Research and thematic analysis is that neither is linear and therefore the researcher is required to repeatedly go back and forth (Ignatow & Mihalcea, 2021; McNiff & Whitehead, 2010).

Essential steps to be taken in thematic analysis are that the researcher has to become immersed in the data, find areas of agreement within the various data collected, find points of disagreement with the data set and identify points of data that were not expected to be found (McAteer, 2013). Thematic analysis is either inductive or deductive. Inductive refers to linking the themes to the data being analysed, whereby the deductive analysis is completed using the researcher's theoretical standpoint and research questions (Ignatow & Mihalcea, 2021). In this study, deductive analysis was used as the researcher used the research questions and socio-constructivism as the driving points for data analysis. Triangulation was used as there were various different data sets with the focus of finding meaning for our professionalism (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). Triangulation creates a complete picture of the research action and the strength of the data collected lies in the convergence of the data being collected in a qualitative method (Reyna, 2019).

3.4.1 Thematic Analysis Process

For my research study, I went through a process that in thematic analysis is known as 'coding' (Gibbs, 2014; Reyna, 2019). During the coding process, I created subthemes in which were identified through the data collection and analysis process and created groups within the subthemes. I identified different linkages between the different themes that had emerged, which will be discuss in Chapter 4.

After interpreting the qualitative data obtained from the sources, the video recordings, visual evidence, semi structured informal interviews, evidence of co-construction of the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan, the qualitative feedback questionnaire, my observations and reflections on each session and the final product, the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan, I identified the subthemes, looking for the themes that emerged from the data and reflections (Gavin, 2008). I recounted the events that took place in each Community of Practice session and shared the participants' experiences through thematic analysis.

During the Action Research process, I continuously observed the facilitation of each session using an observation sheet as I watched the video recording after every session to reflect on and evaluate the session. As indicated in the data collection

section, the participants completed a qualitative feedback questionnaire. I used Google Forms to summarise and save the data obtained from the qualitative feedback questionnaires. The Miro app feedback, opinions, or participant reflections introductory to further discussions in our Community of Practice semi-structured interviews. The Miro anonymous responses assisted me in in guiding the process of deciding how to proceed with the participants' progress towards becoming self-regulated professionals. Miro also assisted with brainstorming ideas as we co-constructed the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan in the session. The interview transcripts were used for exploring our professionalism as co-constructors. The photos I took during the Community of Practice sessions serve as evidence of our professional learning journey.

I used Microsoft Word to create the final Self-regulated Professional Learning product.

3.5 CONCLUSION

I have discussed Action Research as the research design I used for my study and that one spiral proceed with four cycles. I explained the process and methods used for data collection, and how the data will be analysed. I discussed the process of thematic analysis that took place to analyse the data. In the next chapter I will discuss the data that was collected during the research process. The data was collected during the four-week period whereby we, the Community of Practice met to discuss our professionalism.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 4 contains a detailed discussion of the findings that emerged during each of the four Action Research process cycles as the process unfolded. I acknowledge the unending and ongoing nature of the research I conducted, recognising that the participants' and my own professional learning is on-going and that the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan is emerging and open.

4.2 DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Five participants participated in the research study and formed the Community of Practice. They were all from Gauteng, South Africa and will be referred to by using pseudonyms. The participants had been involved in education for varying periods, and while one was already close to retiring, another was a novice who was in her first year of teaching.

Participant 1: Nadia is a first-year Post Level 1 female teacher employed at a private school. She is English speaking and has completed a Postgraduate Certificate in Education and an honours degree in publishing, which is the field in which she first worked. She is qualified to teach English Home Language and English First Additional Language in the Further Education Training (FET) phase and currently teaches English Home Language to learners in Grades 9 to 11.

Participant 2: Victor is a male English-speaking Post Level 1 educator who has two years' teaching experience and is currently employed at a public primary school. He holds a Bachelor of Education degree and is qualified to teach Natural Sciences, Technology, Mathematics and English Home Language in the Intermediate Phase. Victor is currently teaching Grade 6 Natural Sciences and Grade 7 Geography.

Participant 3: Olivia, an English-speaking female teacher in her tenth year of teaching at a public primary school, is a Post Level 1 educator and is qualified to teach Mathematics, Social Sciences and English in the Intermediate Phase. She completed

a Bachelor of Education degree and is currently teaching English Home Language to Grade 4 learners.

Participant 4: Mia, an Afrikaans-speaking Post Level 1 educator with a Bachelor of Education degree, has 15 years' experience in teaching and is currently employed at a public school where she teaches Afrikaans First Additional Language to Grade 6 and Technology to Grade 7 learners. Although Mia's husband had passed away shortly before we started with the data collection, she chose to continue with the research study as planned as she was interested in it and it provided a form of distraction.

Participant 5: Sue, an Afrikaans-speaking female who holds a Higher Education Primers Diploma, has been teaching for 45 years and is due to retire soon. One of her majors was Remedial Education, which she is still using today. She is qualified to teach English, Afrikaans, History and Geography, Media, Art and Bible Studies in the Intermediate Phase. She currently teaches Creative Arts to Grade 7 learners and assists with remedial work at the school where she teaches.

The data collection took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, when strict regulations were enforced to limit the spread of the virus worldwide and also in South Africa. Restrictions included the compulsory wearing of masks, a curfew from 22:00 to 04:00, a limitation on the number of people allowed inside a building, depending on the floor space, regular sanitising and maintaining a physical distance of one and a half metres between people. Although work-related gatherings were allowed, all protocols had to be followed. To avoid the risk of being exposed to the virus, the participants and I opted for online Community of Practice sessions, as I indicated in Chapter 2. We had four Community Practice sessions in Microsoft Teams during a four-week period

4.3 MY ACTION RESEARCH SPIRAL

My Action Research spiral, which was explained in Chapter 3, is shown below. The four cycles—A, B, C and D—of my Action Research spiral are illustrated in Figure 4.1 and will now be further explained.

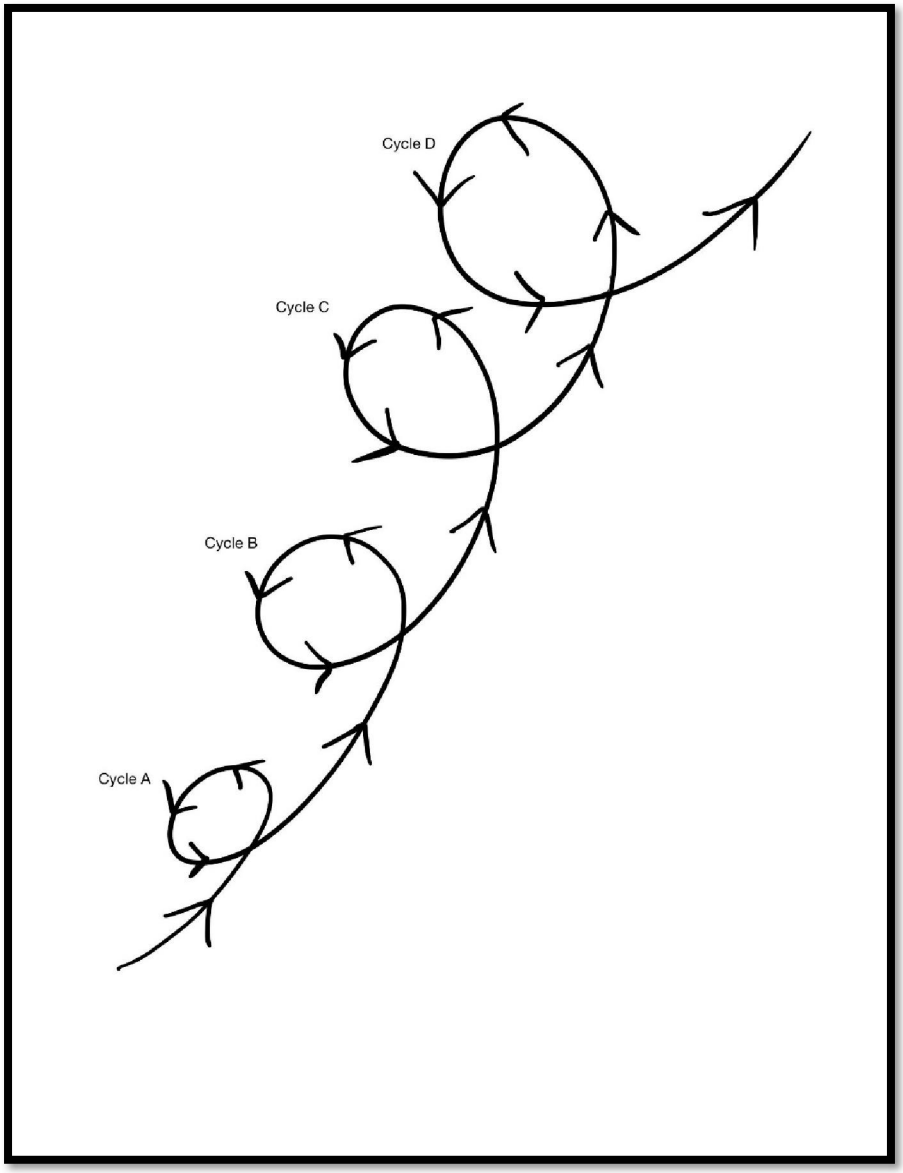


Figure 4.1 My Action Research process

As seen in the Figure 4.1, my Action Research process comprised of one spiral and the four cycles (A, B, C and D). In each cycle I went through the five steps of Action Research, namely plan, act, observe, evaluate and reflect. In the following section I will outline the pre-planning I did for the Action Research spiral before progressing to Cycle A.

4.4 PRE-PLANNING FOR THE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE CYCLES

Sampling participants for the study was not easy. One of the people who had agreed to participate in the study cancelled a day before our first planned Community of Practice session when he realised what the time frame for the session was. During the pre-planning phase, when I spoke to principals about my research study, some of them told me that their teachers were tired and that they were not prepared to put more pressure on them by asking them to become involved in more after-hours activities. I share my reflections in this regard in Chapter 6. Before the first Community of Practice session, I created a WhatsApp group to organise the session times and days. I welcomed the participants and then we organised our first session via the WhatsApp group, as shown in Figure 4.2

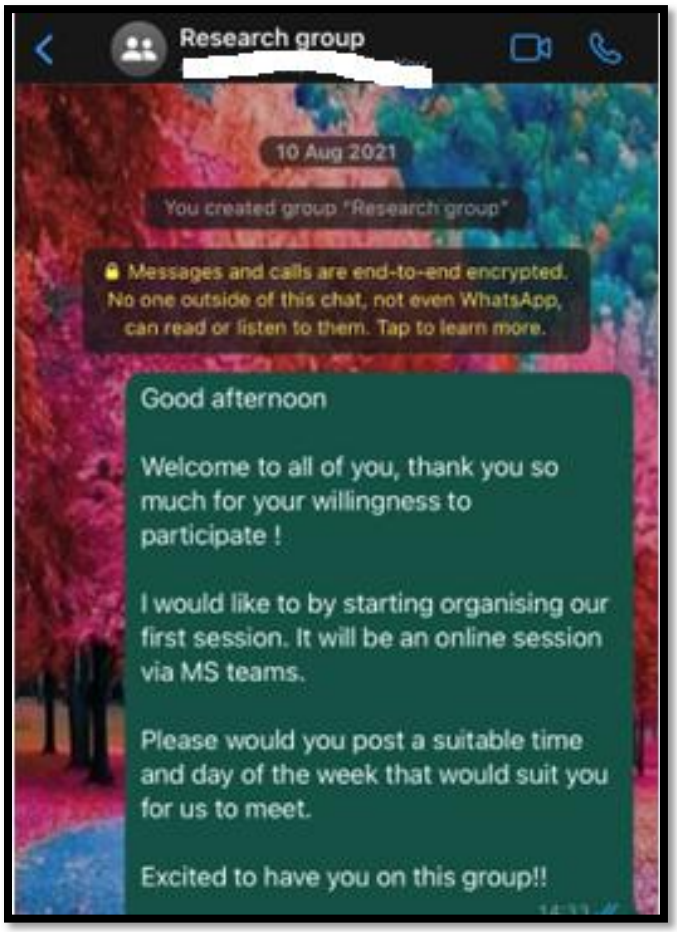


Figure 4.2: The Community of Practice WhatsApp group communication

As can be seen in Figure 4.2, the main purpose of the WhatsApp group was to organise our sessions. I informed the participants about the Miro app that we would be using during the Community of Practice sessions and shared the links for the participants to download the Miro app from the Apple Store or Google Play Store and start exploring it. I also created a basic five-minute video to introduce them to how Miro works. I realised that some participants would not use the video and would be learning during the session. I explained that I would send the participants the links for the Online Platform MS Teams and the Miro app Whiteboard for each session on the day of the session via the WhatsApp group.

The Miro app allows participants to choose different tools, such as sticky notes, text boxes, pencils or pens to contribute to the whiteboard. The participants who were active on the whiteboard used markers different colours by which they could be identified. This was a helpful tool since I, as the facilitator, was able to identify where the participant was. In the top right-hand side of the screen there was a box illustrating the entire Miro board page we were working on, which enabled the participants follow us on the whiteboard and contribute constructively.

I helped Sue to familiarise herself with the use of the Miro app as she was nervous about using an online program. All the participants were accustomed to using Microsoft Teams, which they had to use often during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, Sue felt nervous about using technology such as the Miro app and stated that she did not want to '*ruin my data collected*'. I helped her to download and open the Miro app, after which she started to explore the different tools we used during the Community of Practice Sessions. In the following section the data that was collected during Cycle A will be discussed in detail.

4.5 MY ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE A

In this section, I share the findings from Cycle A of my Action Research spiral, which I conducted during the '*preparation for self-regulation*' stage, guided by the adapted 3P self-regulated learning model shown in Chapter 2. In Table 1, Chapter 2, I explained that during the first session we shared our expectations, discussed our current professional learning and established the Community of Practice. Our vision for the first session was to create an association within the Community of Practice to develop a relationship as we collaborated, but also to share ideas and experiences about our professionalism. My Action Research Cycle A is illustrated in Figure 4.3 below.

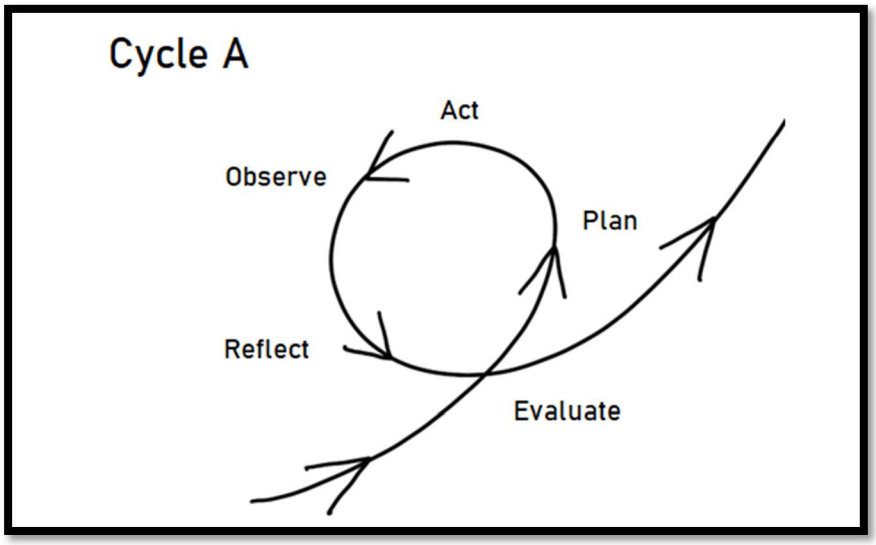


Figure 4.3 My Action Research Process: Cycle A

As shown above, my Action Research Cycle A comprised of the five Action Research steps: Plan, Act, Observe, Reflect and Evaluate. I will discuss each of these steps in the following paragraphs and share the findings that emerged during this cycle.

4.5.1 Planning for innovation

My vision for the first session was to establish a Community of Practice and begin the exploration of our professionalism. I thus planned the implementation of innovative activities for us to cultivate our professionalism. Since four of the five participants

worked at the same school, I deliberately planned to include the fifth participant and give her the opportunity to become part of the group.

I had planned for us to start constructing meaning of our professionalism and exploring the ideas around self-regulated professional learning during the first session of 90 minutes.

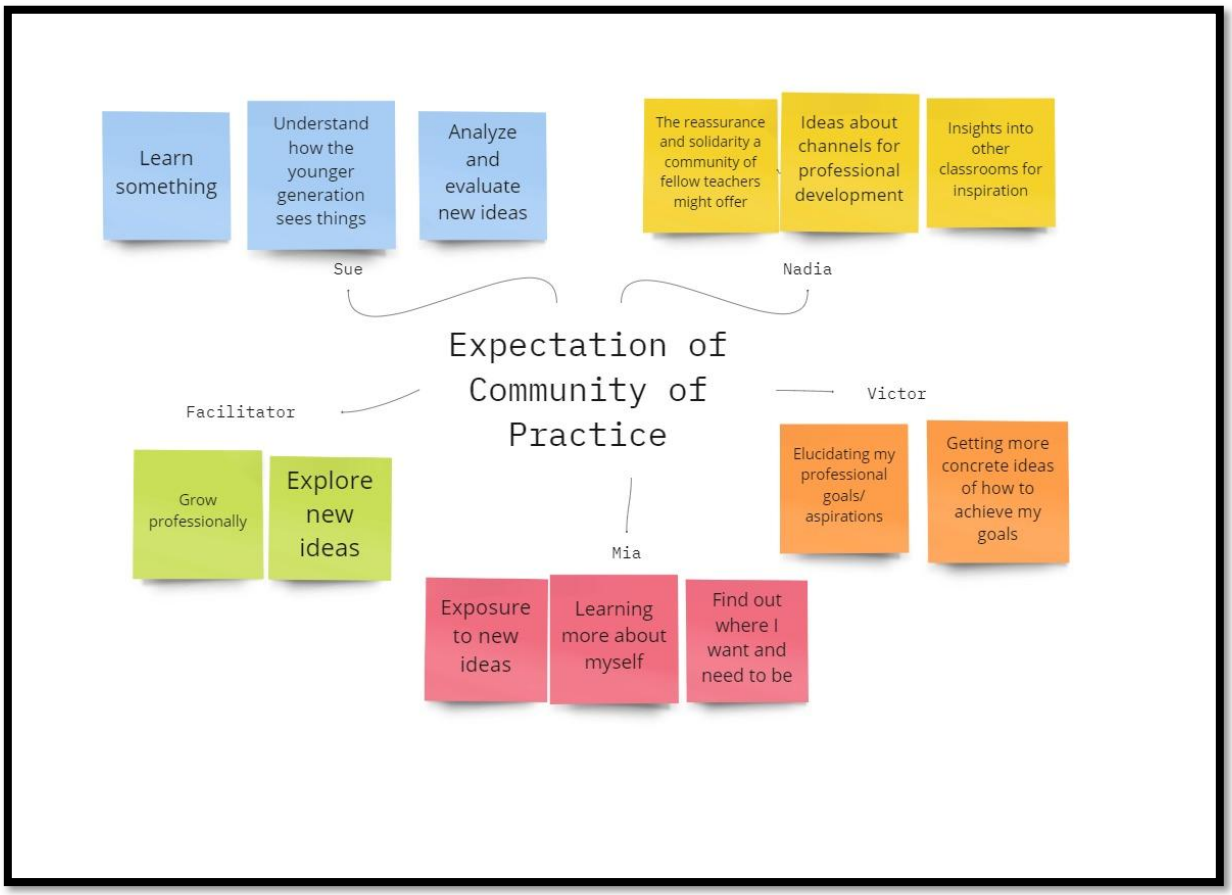
Time for reflection at the beginning and end of the session was planned for and the participants also had to complete a feedback questionnaire afterwards. The feedback questionnaire was a Google Form, which I had created and planned to share via WhatsApp afterwards. Feedback was anonymous as they provided feedback on the Community of Practice and my practice as the facilitator.

4.5.2 My Act to Innovate step in Cycle A

During the Act to Innovate step I implemented self-regulated professionalism in a socio-constructivist manner by focusing on our Community of Practice learning from one another and making meaning of our current professionalism and how we envisioned our careers as teachers. In the first phase of the adapted 3P self-regulated learning model— the preparation phase—we began to form relationships within the Community of Practice and discussed our professional learning and professionalism. Olivia, one of the participants, was unable to attend our first Community of Practice due to unforeseen circumstances, and Mia struggled to participate as she had not downloaded the Miro app beforehand.

The first session was planned for a Friday evening. Realising that the participants might be tired, I started the Community of Practice session by giving a brief introduction to my research study. The participants and I then took part in an icebreaker to become better acquainted, and Nadia discovered that she actually knew Sue, who had once been her teacher. The participants and I reflected on how we were at that stage and checked in with one another by completing the activity in Miro, which was an informal activity during which we shared more about ourselves. We discussed our hobbies and three values that are important to us, which we also discussed while working in Miro. I then encouraged the participants to explore the Miro app further by

challenging them to create an animal using any of the tools in the Miro app. I asked them to explain why they had chosen to draw specific animals and we discussed our choices, which was a valuable icebreaker. We then discussed our expectations of the Community of Practice, which are shown below in Visual Evidence 4.1.



Visual Evidence 4.1 Expectations of the Community of Practice

As illustrated above, my vision was for us to explore and to empower ourselves and others. The participants generally agreed that they too wanted to learn and be empowered. Sue, Mia and Nadia identified the need to explore new ideas. I found it interesting that Sue, with many years' experience, was ready to learn from the younger members of the group. Mia specifically referred to learning about the self. The participants indicated that they too desire to be empowered to innovate their professional learning and to learn more about themselves during our sessions. Our discussion of our expectations facilitated the process of becoming self-regulated

professionals. All the participants expressed a desire to grow professionally and discussed their goals and how they planned to achieve those goals.

We discussed what a Community of Practice is and when Nadia noted the need to be part of a Community of Practice we discussed how it differs from a professional learning community. As educators we had been introduced to professional learning communities through workshops and the Department of Education districts, but we had never been part of a Community of Practice.

We continued with our discussion on professional learning and what professional learning is. Workshops, courses and other professional development opportunities were mentioned when I challenged them to create a rubric for professional learning. Rather than do one category per participant, they chose to work together to construct the rubric. I then asked them to use their rubric to rate their own professionalism. They reflected on how they hoped to develop professionally and concluded that they needed to take responsibility for their own professionalism, which was something they had not done before. Sue had taught for many years and had been exposed to many different activities, while Nadia, a first-year educator, had never yet participated in professional learning. We then continued with the last session as we did not want to exceed the time limit for the session.

During the last activity, we reflected on what a teacher does. We concluded that the manner in which teachers do things impacts their professional learning. All the participants creatively illustrated what they regarded as important concerning the role and description of a teacher, as shown in Visual Evidence 4.13 in section 4.9. Each participant then made a drawing as a starting point for our co-construction of the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan.

During our semi-structured focus group discussion we also discussed how we envisioned our careers, i.e. our practice and professionalism as educators. We continued to briefly discuss what a teacher does and how we need to prepare ourselves for our teaching practice. As we discussed this, we also used the Miro app to reflect and share as this helped the participants to reflect on our discussion and participate in our semi-structured focus group discussion.

The final activity was our check-out and the participants shared what they valued about one another. Mia was valued for her willingness to share her reflections and Nadia was valued for her openness as a first-year teacher. Nadia mentioned that she was very grateful to meet other teachers with whom she could discuss professional learning to innovate her own practice. Victor was valued for his contribution to our reflection on professional learning, and Sue was valued for her vast knowledge of, and experience in teaching practice. At the end of the session the participants admitted that they had not expected the session to be so much fun and said that they had thoroughly enjoyed the interaction. In closing the session, I thanked everyone for being so open and honest. I then shared the qualitative feedback questionnaire with the participants via the WhatsApp group.

4.5.3 Observe to innovate in Cycle A

In the third step of the Action Research process, I watched the video recordings of the session, recorded in Microsoft Teams. I observed and analysed the visual evidence, which included the Miro app visuals and photographs taken during the session to make meaning of my practice. I used an observation sheet by first watching the full recording, and then five-minute sections so that I could analyse the session by focusing on how the participants reflected, constructed meaning, collaborated and regulated their own professionalism and meaning. I also analysed the participant feedback received from the Google Forms questionnaire. I observed how Nadia and Victor immediately started to learn the Miro system and Sue soon followed by experimenting with the Miro app.

I also observed that the participants felt comfortable to share their views and were open to reflect and be challenged. It became evident that the time allocated to each activity was not sufficient and had to be increased. I will now reflect on what I observed during the following session, and on the feedback received from the participants.

4.5.4 Reflect to innovate in Cycle A

Feedback from the participants and my own observations assisted me during this step in which I reflected on the session. The participants rated aspects of my practice and

the Community of Practice on a scale of one to five, one being poor and five excellent. With regard to how the participants experienced the first session, three participants rated it as excellent and one said that it was good. One participant commented that it had been a fun, engaging, productive, thought-provoking, informative session, while another described it as informative and inspiring. Victor stated that *'it felt good to talk about professional development and where I could possibly go one day'.* Two participants indicated that my facilitation of the session was good and two rated it as excellent. Nadia commented that '*the facilitator was kind, patient and asked relevant questions'.* I was satisfied that the participants had been challenged, as shown in Figure 4.4.

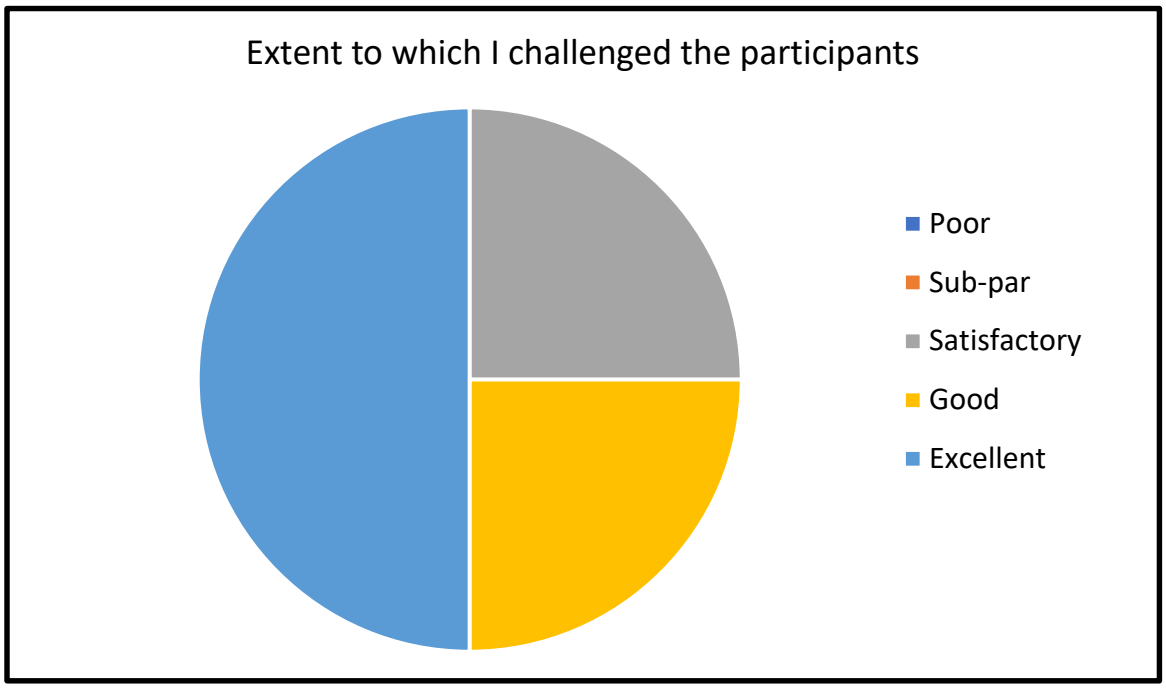


Figure 4.4 The extent to which I challenged the participants in first session

As shown in Figure 4.4, all the participants were challenged during the session and two experienced it as very challenging. I noted that in order to innovate practice, it was important to challenge the participants to promote self-regulated learning for the development in their own professionalism.

I planned for the session to be open and for the participants to feel comfortable to share and one of them assured me that I had created *'a safe, informative space'.* In response to my question in the qualitative feedback questionnaire about how I could

improve my facilitation, one participant commented: '*The audio was sometimes a bit too quiet. The presenter can maybe prompt specific people to share instead of waiting for someone to speak up*.' I did not make a video recording during the session, which I think would have helped in this regard. I also did not want to make participants feel forced to share their perspectives if they did not yet feel comfortable to do so.

I found it interesting that in the qualitative feedback one participant wrote that it would be good to hear more of my opinion. In my constructivist practice I wanted to challenge the participants, and not give them answers. I therefore found this comment challenging for my own facilitation as I was intentionally not steering the conversations in a specific direction so as to obtain the results I was looking for. I created discussion points and allowed the participants to build the discussion from those points while I facilitated them by constantly questioning their assumptions, ideas and views. I concluded that they were unaccustomed to this type of professional development and being challenged in such a way. I chose to proceed in a socio-constructivist manner as I facilitated the further regulation of their learning and professionalism.

It surprised me that while two participants rated the use of the Miro app as an excellent experience, one did not approve of its use. This low score could perhaps be ascribed to the fact that they were not yet sufficiently familiar with the Miro app.

In the qualitative feedback questionnaire, I asked the participants how they had contributed to the Community of Practice in the first encounter. All the participants indicated that they had not contributed effectively, although they had shared ideas and reflected. I valued in of the cultural history activity theory framing my study as the participants previous experiences are based on their perceived cultural and historical views. As well how one participant shared that '*through conversation and sharing it was evident that experienced teachers and new teachers could and should work together to create a very authentic culture for self-developing and learning'*. During the session I had intended to innovate our professional learning and in their feedback two participants referred to how they had to challenge their views on what professional

development entails: '*I was given the space and support to start actively pursuing that part of my practice—professional development.'*.

In their feedback, the participants indicated that they were learning and being empowered as they shared and reflected. One said: '*Thank you. Michelle. We really appreciate, really appreciate this. It really was really.'* As I reflected on the first session, I also started to evaluate what I had to change in the next, Cycle B, or in phase 2 of the self-regulated professional learning process. I will share more in this regard in the following section.

4.5.5 Evaluate to Innovate in Cycle A

The last step in my Action Research process was to evaluate the session and make changes to improve or innovate my facilitation in the next cycle. In the process phase I opted to also consider each participant's unique context. Nadia and Victor were novice educators, Mia had been involved in education but was also a busy working mother who had recently lost her husband, and Sue was close to retirement.

During my reflection stage, I further realised that I would need to work on the following aspects in Cycle B: First, I would need to be more time-bound, challenging participants to work more focused in certain activities to allow for more time for discussion and sharing in the Community of Practice. Second, my audio should be louder as the participants had pointed out. To be more professional, I decided to use a headphone set during Cycle B. Considering that the Community of Practice session was held online, the computer connection was vital, therefore I opted to work from home and position myself in the best possible manner. The participants had also requested that we turn our videos on for the following session to create a community.

With the first session, my vision was to implement the Community of Practice, reflect on our professionalism and discuss aspects of our previous experiences of professional learning. During my reflection I indicated that the session was focused on our previous understanding of what professional learning is and our discussions about what professional learning was continued into Cycles B, C and D, since making meaning of professional learning is of great importance in becoming a self-regulated

professional. I was satisfied with how I challenged them, but wanted to encourage more critical thinking without offering too much assistance, for example with the use of Miro app. Rather, I wanted them to assist one another to solve the problems. In preparing for Cycle B, I took note of the above challenges and innovated my practice to better facilitate the second Community of Practice session.

4.6 MY ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE B

In this section I share the findings of Cycle B of my Action Research spiral. I conducted Action Research Cycle B during the '*process for self-regulation*' stage. The second Community of Practice session took place during the '*process*' phase, as guided by the 3P self-regulated learning model shown in Chapter 2, Figure 2.7. In Table 1, Chapter 2, I outlined that the vision of the second session was to question and confront our professionalism and learn from one another within the Community of Practice by sharing our ideas about and experiences in professional learning. My Action Research process for Cycle B is shown in Figure 4.4 below.

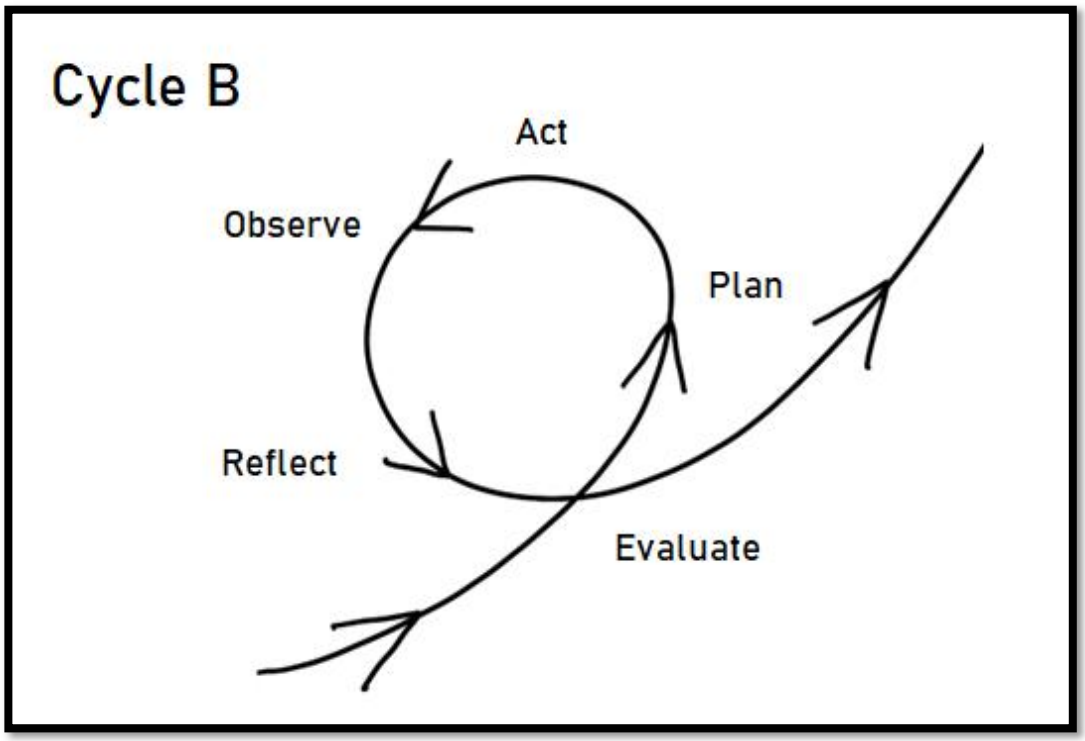


Figure 4.5 My Action Research Process Cycle B

As illustrated in Figure 4.4, in Cycle B I again proceeded through the planning, acting, observing, reflecting and evaluation steps, which will be discussed next.

4.6.1 Planning for innovation

I planned for us to challenge our current standpoint on who regulates our professional learning and where our focus should be with regard to our own professional learning. The participants had been exposed to and encouraged to develop professionally as they used the Integrated Quality Management System. I planned for us to explore and question our own individual journeys instead and planned for the co-construction of the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan to enhance our further development. In this session I planned to challenge the participants and myself to confront and question our current professionalism. I planned an activity for us to question the who, what, when, how and why of our professional learning and discuss the construct self-regulation in relation to our professionalism.

As I had done for the previous session, I sent out the Miro app link. Each Miro app was a separate interactive whiteboard on which I, the facilitator, had prepared activities to guide our discussion on our professionalism. I also sent the participants the MS Teams link. Sue had not yet sufficiently explored the technology we used and asked for my assistance before the start of the session.

During the evaluate step in Cycle A, I indicated areas I in which wanted to improve innovate in my practice. I therefore developed activities and discussion points for the participants to ensure that the discussion would flow faster. As previously stated, Mia had recently lost her husband and since the second Community of Practice session took place just after the funeral, she was very emotional and could not attend. Olivia had not attended the first session due to unforeseen circumstances and told me that she was nervous about participating as she did not know what to expect and was not familiar with the Miro app.

As in Cycle A, I planned to again start with a check-in. During this check-in for Cycle B I planned to ask questions to see how the participants were feeling, and also about their hobbies and what superpower they would choose if they could have one. The focus of the check-in was to regroup and allow the participants to think creatively.

As Cycles B and C were part of the Process Phase, I decided to focus this session on innovating our professionalism and to initiate the co-constructing a Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan. I had planned for us to define professional learning for ourselves and to reflect on our past experiences in relation to our professionalism.

As the session was held online, it was important for me as the facilitator and researcher to engage all the participants and for them to explore the activities and be challenged.

4.6.2 My Act to Innovate in Cycle B

In our second session I implemented—in a socio-constructivist manner—self-regulated professionalism and focused on our Community of Practice learning from one another and making meaning of our current professionalism. We were making meaning of our professionalism and how teachers envision their careers. In the second phase of the adapted 3P self-regulated learning model—the process phase—we began to discuss previous experiences of professional learning and the professional learning we would like to participate in in the future.

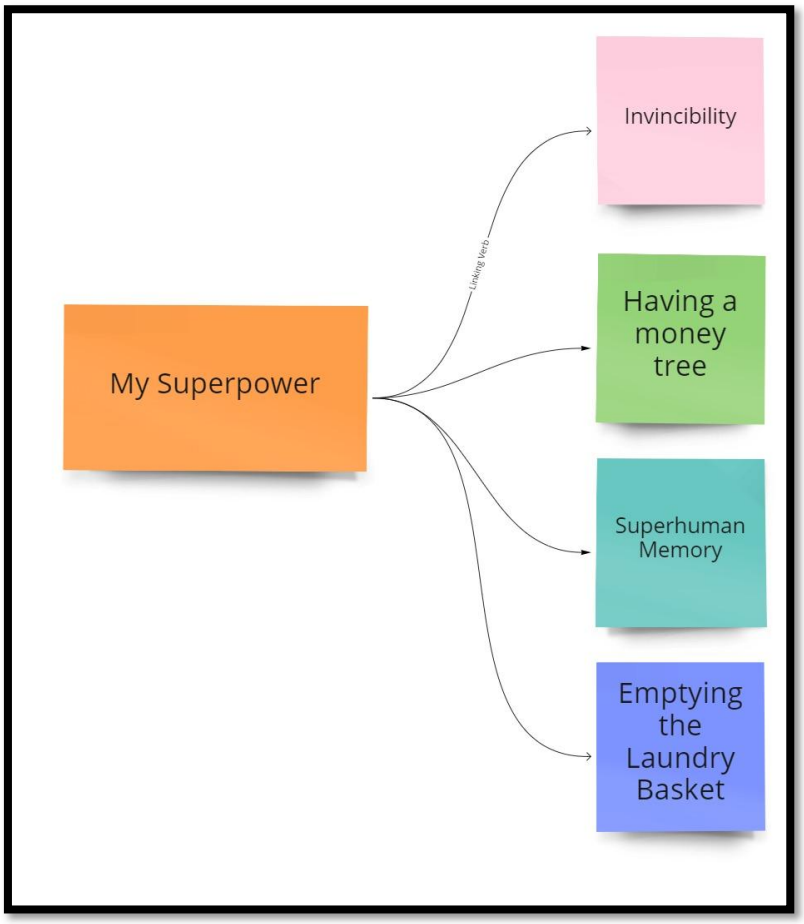
We began our session with a check-in activity. The check-in activity feedback (Visual Evidence 4.2) was used for reflection and to check in with one another. The first question was asked to find out how each person was feeling, as the Miro app said, '*I am feeling* …'. The responses are illustrated below in Visual Evidence 4.2.

Visual Evidence 4.2: The second session – Check-in activity

As shown in Visual Evidence 4.2, the feedback was very helpful and this gave us all insight into how we could support one another, since one felt a little frazzled and another overwhelmed, while the other two were more positive and grateful. The feedback received after the second check-in session is illustrated in Visual Evidence 4.3. The next question asked as part of the check-in was aimed at finding out what hobbies the participants enjoyed. Two of the four participants, Sue and Nadia, liked to be involved in creative activities, one enjoyed spending time with her child, and Victor said that he enjoyed making people laugh. Our diverse contexts and personalities, which contributed to our Community of Practice, were outlined and celebrated.

Visual Evidence 4.3: Check-in – My hobby

As shown in Visual Evidence 4.3, the hobbies of the participants were diverse, which called for celebration. Another question asked in the check-in section was to identify our own superpowers. A superpower refers to the power to influence or project power over something or someone. Nadia jokingly indicated her superpower was '*emptying the laundry basket*', while Olivia referred to '*having a money tree'*, which was an indication of what she would like to have, rather something she currently identified as 'super' in her herself. The reason for Olivia's statement came to light later in session C, when she mentioned that she lacked the financial means to complete her honours degree. The participants' superpowers are shown in Visual Evidence 4.4 below.

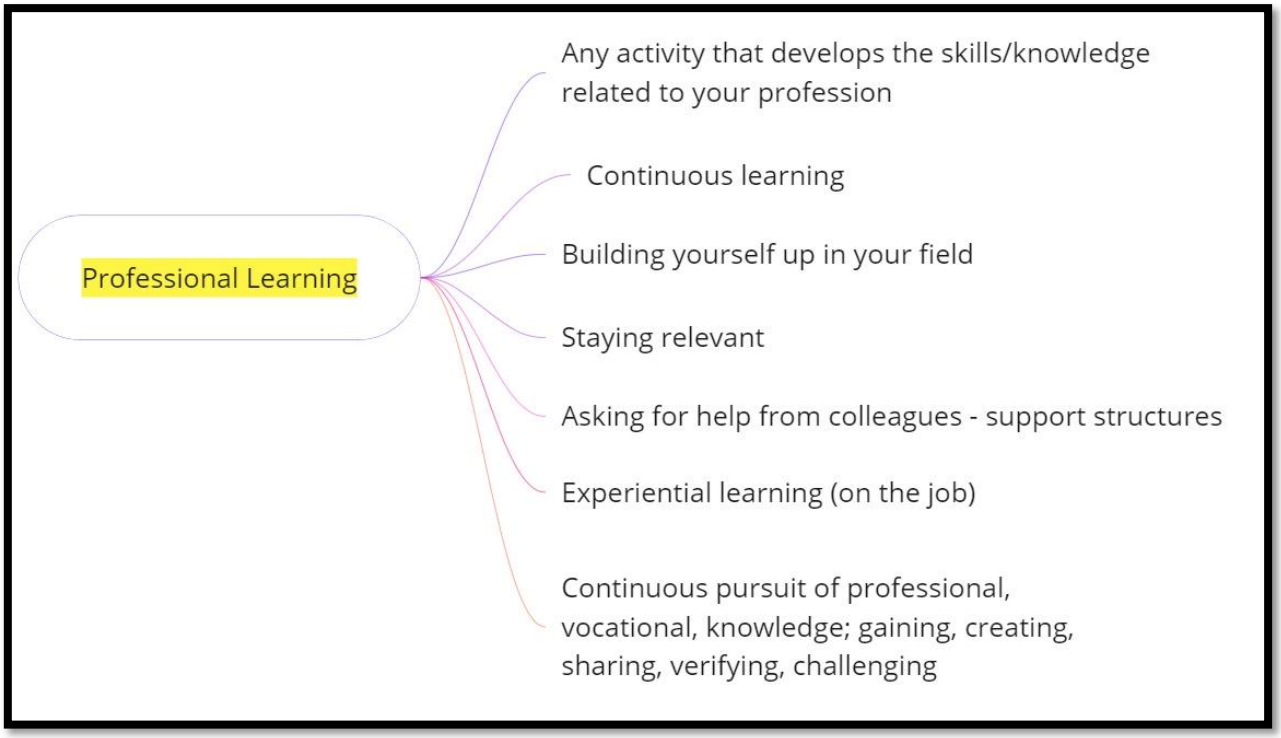


Visual Evidence 4.4: Session 2, check-in activity about 'my superpower'

During the Visual Evidence 4.4 activity, the participants and I discussed the superpowers we had chosen for ourselves, which gave us an opportunity to find out more about one another. Victor said that he would like to be invincible, Olivia shared that she would like to have a money tree, Nadia regarded the ability to empty the laundry basket as a superpower, thus something she does not regularly succeed in doing. As I facilitated the session, I shared that I would like to have a superhuman memory, which would enable me to easily recall facts about learners and the curriculum.

Next I challenged the participants to define professional learning. Our definition is shown in Visual Evidence 4.5. The participants were given time to define professional learning. We had briefly spoken about it in the previous session and now had to delve deeper to decide exactly what professional learning meant. In Cycle A, Victor had suggested that professional learning was workshops and courses, but in Cycle B he

referred to it as mainly '*any activity*' while describing professional learning and how it contributes to our professionalism, as seen in Visual Evidence 4.5. All the participants contributed to our Community of Practice definition of professional learning.



Visual Evidence 4.5. Our Community of Practice definition of professional learning

As shown in Figure 4.5, various different aspects of professional learning emerged from the activity during which we defined professional learning and will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter when I refer to the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan we co-constructed. It was vital for the Community of Practice to participate in defining professional learning as this provided the stepping stones we needed on our journey towards becoming self-regulated professionals.

For the next activity in our Community of Practice session the participants used sticky notes in the Miro app as we continued exploring our professionalism and views on self-regulated professional learning. Once the participants had written down some of their thoughts and feelings about previous professional learning experiences, we followed up with a semi-formal discussion. The participants discussed the difference

between training and professional learning. The sharing of their ideas about professionalism created an opportunity for them to reflect on the need for taking responsibility for their professional learning. The participants reflected on their experiences during workshops and courses. This activity focused on identifying previous experiences in professional learning and, if possible, to rate how we experienced the professional learning opportunities using emoji icons on the Miro app. In other words, if participants had attended workshops for new teachers, how did the workshops benefit them—had they benefited from their attendance had the workshops contributed to their professionalism?

In the Community of Practice, the participants shared what planning for one's own professionalism might look like in our education sector and in our contexts. I questioned the participants throughout as I facilitated the discussion and they started to discuss what a Professional Learning Plan should entail. I encouraged them to explore and be creative.

We concluded with a check-out activity to reflect on what we had learnt about ourselves and our professionalism during the session. Sue indicated that she had been reminded of her journey as a teacher; Victor mentioned that he valued being knowledgeable in his subject area; Mia told us that she had a wonderful team of teachers at her school; and Olivia said that she would like to be a part of a great team. To become self-regulated professionals, it is important for the Community of Practice to reflect regularly on their discussions and their own professional learning.

4.6.3 Observe to Innovate Cycle B

During my observations I watched the video recording and studied the Visual Evidence the participants had made on Miro. I completed an observation sheet in the same manner as I had done for Cycle A and the participants completed the Google Form feedback questionnaire after the session.

I observed and completed the observation sheet to show how I had challenged the participants, encouraged them to participate, reflected on and innovated their views on professionalism, constructed meaning and regulated their own professionalism and meaning. I observed that the participants struggled while using the Miro app during

the second session; however, when I decided to use the Miro app I had realised that it would take time for them to get used to the platform.

The check-in activity was effective as it was an opportunity for the participants to express themselves and for us to get to know one another while having fun and thinking of ourselves in a different way. The discussions on professional learning were valuable as we continued reflecting on our previous professional learning and sharing experiences. The experiences of the participants were very diverse. Sue, for example, had been exposed to various professional learning encounters throughout her career, while Victor and Nadia had limited experiences due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Discussing our previous experiences in professional learning was an excellent activity, although I had to explain the question a few times as it consisted of two parts and it was not immediately understood.

I also observed that that although our cameras were on, most of the time was spent on the Miro app and not on the MS Teams screen, which allowed us to look at each other's body language. During the activity on previous experiences I gave the participants an opportunity to speak openly and discuss their opinions on what they had experienced, and to delve into details for those who may not have had such experiences.

During the activities I realised that I was running out of time. The discussions went on for longer than planned as the participants were very keen to discuss and share openly. I had to skip the planned activity on self-regulation, which I then planned to use this activity in the following Cycle.

4.6.4 Reflect to Innovate in Cycle B

In step 4 of my Action Research process I reflected on the observations I had made during the session and the feedback received. Although I realised that the participants were not yet familiar with the use of the new Miro app, and some still found it challenging, I wanted them to take responsibility and learn from one another. I asked Victor to assist Sue as he had used the app on his phone, and encouraged the participants to explore the Miro app, try out the different tools and not to be afraid to play around with it. Using Miro was an opportunity for us to innovate our practice while

learning how to use a new tool that could help us to explore our professionalism. The Community of Practice consistently encouraged one another and when, after the check-in, Olivia commented: '*Gosh, that was painful! I'm so sorry everyone'*, we all supported her.

During the session I observed a change in the participants' views about professional learning, as Victor also pointed out in the observation step, and this encouraged me to innovate my practices in the Community of Practice in a self-regulated professional manner.

I reflected on my facilitation of the Community of Practice and the feedback received from the participants' responses to the qualitative feedback questionnaires. Three of the four participants indicated that they had been challenged during the session, while one had been challenged in a satisfactory manner. The reasons for this was, as one indicated, that she was forced '*to step out of my comfort zone'*. Another participant stated that '*being confronted with the fact that my desire for professional learning precedes my knowledge of what it truly means'* had been challenging. The participant who rated the session as satisfactory commented: *'The process of coming up with a framework or being able to plan our professionalism is of great importance to us as teachers as this will allow us to innovate our professionalism'.* This participant indicated that the activity done on the Miro app, where we created a professional learning rubric, had been challenging. This process had indeed been difficult since we experienced a sense of disequilibrium as the process of defining professional learning was broadened and the task of co-constructing a professional learning plan required an understanding of the many dimensions of such a plan. The plan we co-constructed needed to fulfil the needs of teachers with different facets requiring professional learning.

The observation sheets confirmed that my implementation of the activities had been effective, although one participant indicated that there should be fewer activities. However, based on my observations I was satisfied with the use of the activities as it encouraged participants to engage. I thus did not present during the session, but rather challenged the participants to participate throughout. The participant who rated the session as good said the following regarding the use of the Miro app: '*Although I found using the Miro app daunting, I have to admit that it can be a very effective tool*

as long as it does not replace conversation.' Another participant commented: '*The tech tool distracts me and then I lose track of the conversation. I know I need to learn to use this skill and I will*.' I therefore had to carefully consider whether we should be working on the Miro app throughout the session. In the qualitative feedback questionnaire for this session I asked the participants to rate their experience of the Miro app and the results are shown in Figure 4.6.

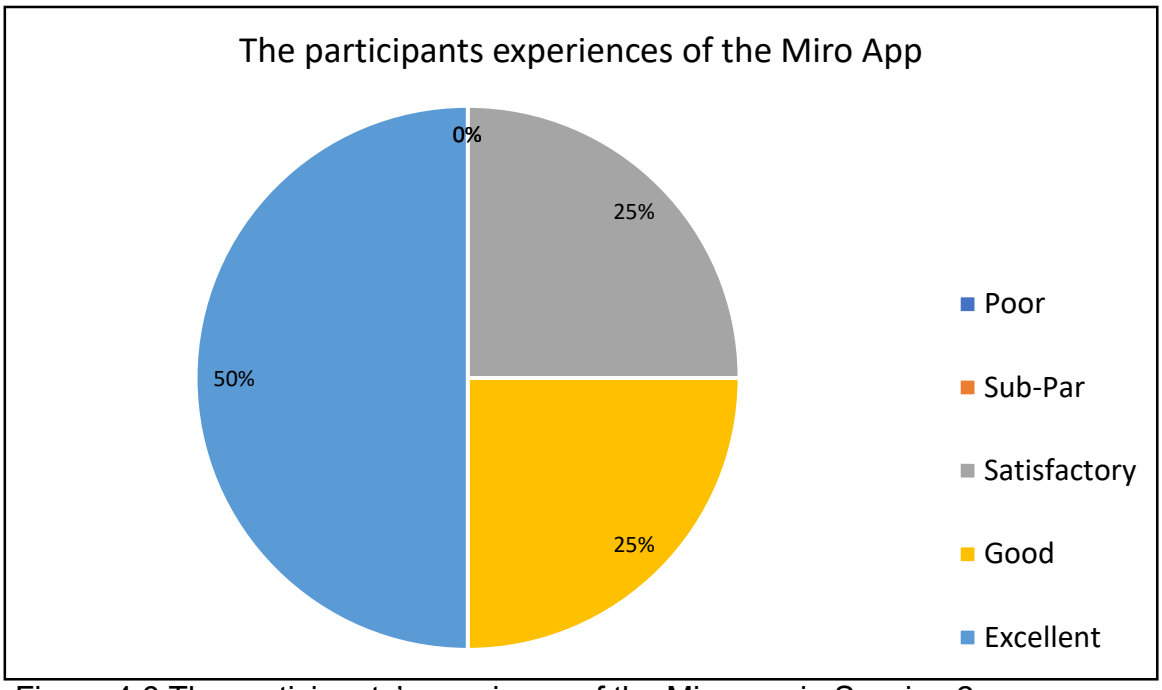


Figure 4.6 The participants' experience of the Miro app in Session 2

As illustrated in Figure 4.6, two participants found the Miro experience to be excellent, another experienced it as good and the fourth participant experienced it as satisfactory. I found that the participants wanted to contribute to the discussion and to share their views on the App. Since using Miro was a new experience for all of us, I ensured that the app was contributing to, and not taking away from the session. In my opinion my facilitation of the second session was more effective as the participants were more engaged. I challenged them to explore and they initiated the discussions more often. The video cameras were switched on for this session and although one would assume that this assisted the session, it unfortunately did not improve the session as the video image was much smaller (appeared on the bottom right of the

screen) and for half of the session the participants were on the Miro app screen on not on the Microsoft screen.

4.6.5 Evaluate to Innovate in Cycle B

In my observation and reflection, I noted that an improvement in being more time-bound was adhered to, but found that there was still room for improvement with regard to my facilitation, which would greatly assist with the consistency of the session in Cycle C. In the next cycle I would not keep my camera on and would perhaps consider sharing the Miro app less often so that we could see one another. My audio was much better and the participants could hear me very clearly, which meant that I could again use the headphones in the following session. In this session, the participants interacted well with one another. One participant described the session as '*enlightening',* which was very encouraging as it suggested that they had been empowered to develop their own professionalism through our sessions.

In Cycle C I will innovate my practice by being more time bound by giving one of the participants a timekeeper responsibility for some of our discussions. I also decided to determine the best time for using the Miro app and when to have only our cameras switched on during discussions.

4.7 MY ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE C

The third Community of Practice session (Cycle C) took place during the second part of the Process phase, as guided by the 3P self-regulated learning model shown in Chapter 2, Figure 2.7. In Table 1 in Chapter 2 I indicated that the vision for the third session was to question and confront our professionalism and learn from one another within the Community of Practice in terms of our ideas and professional learning experiences. We focused on asking the how, what, when and why questions relating to our professionalism. Session 3 was thus in essence a continuation of Session 2, in other words, the planning for Cycle C was in line with what had occurred in Cycle B. The Action Research process through which I progressed during Cycle C is illustrated in Figure 4.7 below

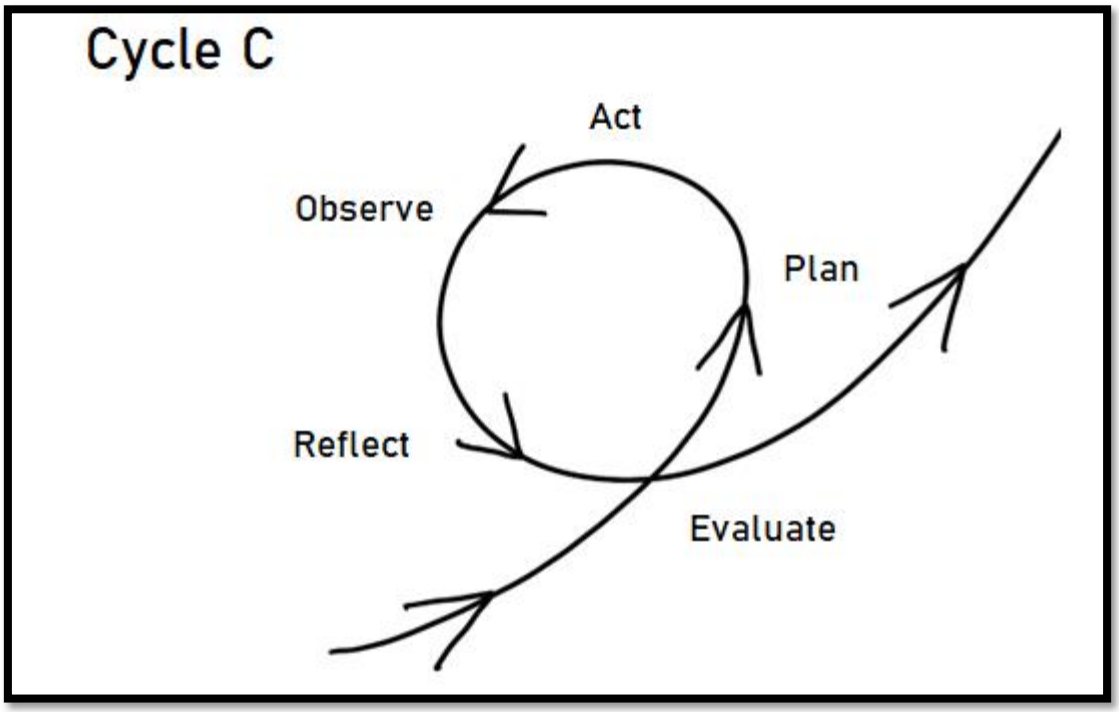


Figure 4.7 My Action Research Cycle C

As shown in Figure 4.7, in Cycle C I again progressed through the five Action Research steps: Plan, Act, Observe, Reflect and Evaluate, which will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

4.7.1 Planning for Innovation

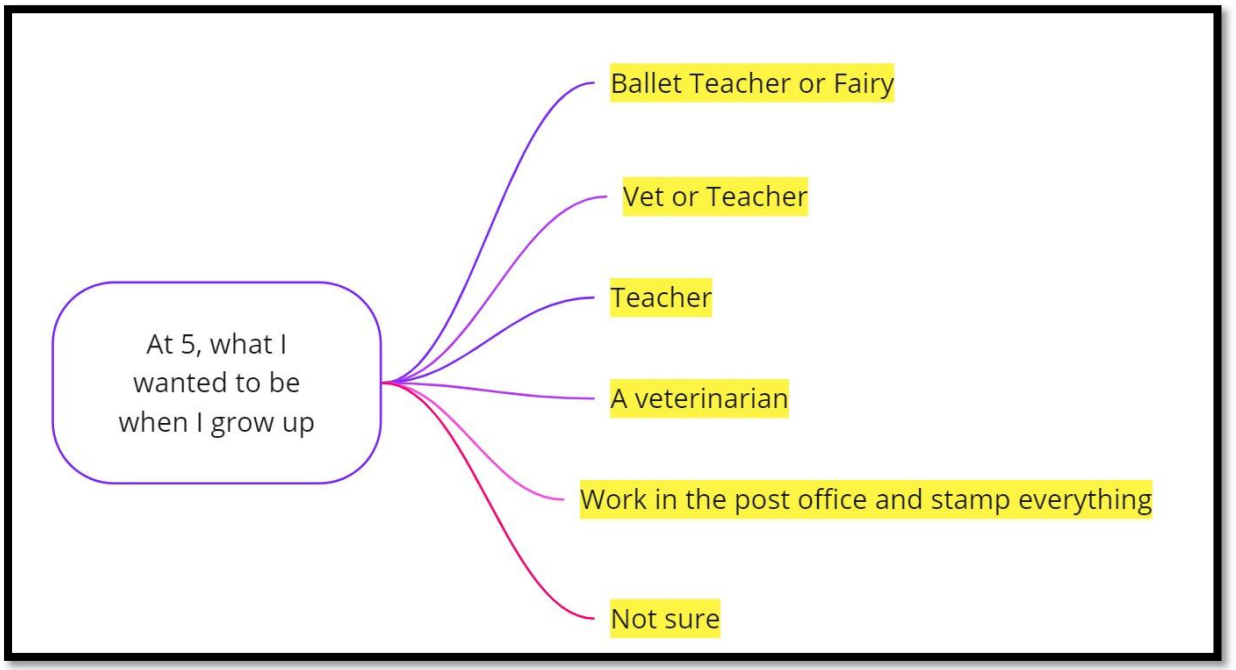
During the planning stage, I planned to avoid using cameras for the session as the video image was small and facial expressions were not recognisable.

The focus of this session was on exploring and questioning our professionalism and professional learning. During the planning phase, I had planned for us to discuss the co-construction of the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan and reflect on previous experiences in this regard. I wanted to find out how the participants would want to plan their professional learning. This discussion would include a discussion of what had not been successful in the past, and how to plan effectively for our professionalism.

As for the previous sessions, I sent each participants a WhatsApp message with links to our session and the Miro app.

4.7.2 My Act to Innovate in Cycle C

For the third session, the participants logged on and started with the check-in activity, the purpose of which was to get to know one another, relax and focus on what our professionalism in the Community of Practice. Sue was late for the session as she had been assisting a neighbour who had an emergency. When Sue joined the session, she was somewhat frazzled, but was quick in getting into the spirit of what we were doing. In the check-in activity, the participants shared what they had wanted to be at the age of five. As can be seen in Visual Evidence 4.6, the answers to this question were interesting as it showed how, for some of us, our career choices had changed.



Visual Evidence 4.6: Check-in – at the age of five, what I wanted to be when I grow up

As shown in Visual Evidence 4.6, Nadia, Mia, Olivia and Victor wanted to teach and Sue wanted to work in the post office. One participant could not remember what she wanted to be when she was five years of age. As part of the Community of Practice I participated in this activity and shared that, from a very young age, I had wanted to be a teacher or a veterinarian. As Sue had wanted to work in a post office, the activity informed us of how times have changed and why the twenty-first-century attributes are of importance to us as educators who need to prepare our learners for life in an ever-changing world. Next, we discussed our least favourite activity at school. Some of the participants answered this question as if they were still learners. I included the question as open-ended.

During the discussion, three of the participants completed the activity by referring to when they were learners at school and the other three mentioned only their least favourite activity in their teaching careers. One participant mentioned ‘ATP’ which stands for the Annual Teaching Plan, which in South African is a document that teachers receive from the Department of Education and which lists all the concepts to be taught during the term, based on the curriculum. Nadia mentioned duty, which could be playground duty or sports duty. I experienced this discussion as important as most of the educators indicated that they disliked some aspects of their job; however, since

teaching as such was never mentioned, I assumed that their passion lies in teaching the children.

Next, we discussed our professional learning, focusing first on our professional learning and then reflecting on the areas in which we needed to develop and which we had so far neglected in our professional learning. The participants completed the questions and during the discussions also added to the Miro board. We discussed our professional learning experiences, in particular those that had been effective. This was an interesting discussion to have in the Community of Practice as some of the participants indicated that they had not given any thought to establishing professional learning goals since their studies. We therefore spoke about how to create professional goals to direct our professionalism.

4.7.3 Observe to Innovate in Cycle C

During my observations I watched the video recordings of the sessions, studied the Visual Evidence the participants had made on Miro and completed my self-observation sheet as I had done after the other Action Research cycles. The participants again completed the feedback questionnaire after the session.

This was the first session attended by all the participants and, rather than focus mainly on the Miro app and activities, I allowed extra time for each activity so that everyone could share their opinion, thoughts and feelings about the topics. I did, however, try not to exceed the time planned for the session.

Since the participants and I were attending the session from home and in the evening, this created problems for Mia, who also had to attend to her children. During the session, I asked Victor and Olivia to be our timekeepers. I observed that if I put people in charge, so to speak, to keep time for the participants to write down ideas on Miro, I would allow three to four minutes to do so. Once the write-up had taken place, we began our discussion, which was an opportunity for us to discuss what had been written on Miro. I observed that by setting a time limit as a positive constraint in each activity, the participants could finish on time and also get their ideas in order for our discussion.

While watching the video recording of Session 3, I observed that the participants in the Community of Practice were speaking more openly and discussions were happening more freely, so that I did not have to ask specific participants whether they would like to comment or raise a point with regard to our discussion. I further observed that the participants were comfortable with one another and had developed as a collective. I also observed that during this session the discussions had turned from an outward focus in Sessions 1 and 2 to an inward focus towards the 'self' and professionalism. Although in Cycle A of Session 1 and Cycle B of Session 2 we had talked about who is responsible for our professionalism, the participants were inclined to ask how the school and departments contributed to their professionalism, and also how the union bodies could assist educators' professional learning. The participants' focus was still on how they could be assisted in their professionalism, rather than on looking at the self to envision and drive their professionalism.

4.7.4 Reflect to Innovate in Cycle C

Next, I reflected on the feedback from the qualitative feedback questionnaires and my observations in this cycle. I further observed and reflected on the participants' drawings or creations on the Miro app, as well as on the transcriptions of our discussions during the session.

I realised that my facilitation had been effective and that it was important to give the participants responsibilities during the session as it ensured that the time frames were adhered to. During the discussions I noticed that the participants were beginning to focus more on becoming more self-regulated. In response to the feedback questionnaire one of them had written: '*Yes. We all had the chance to reflect on what would work best for us as individuals.'* It was interesting to note that the participants had not given much thought to a goal for their teaching career, which showed that their professional learning was not goal centred. During the session, I had planned to look at the participants' goals and give them time to ponder on them. They indicated that they wanted to reflect and ponder further on where they wanted to be in their teaching practice, but, as Nadia stated, to also just try to stay afloat to survive the year. I will discuss this in more detail in section 4.9.

With regard to the structure and format of the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan, the participants initially wanted a table format as it is user friendly and simple to update. I challenged them to be creative and think differently. Although I appreciate creative thinking and creativity, I know that I am more inclined to prefer tables, boxes and neatly organised aspects when planning. This challenged me in my facilitation as I know we all need a place to express our creativity, and planning our professionalism should be an innovative journey.

The overall experience of Session 3 is illustrated in Figure 4 below. As can be seen, two participants thought that the session was good and the other three rated it as excellent.

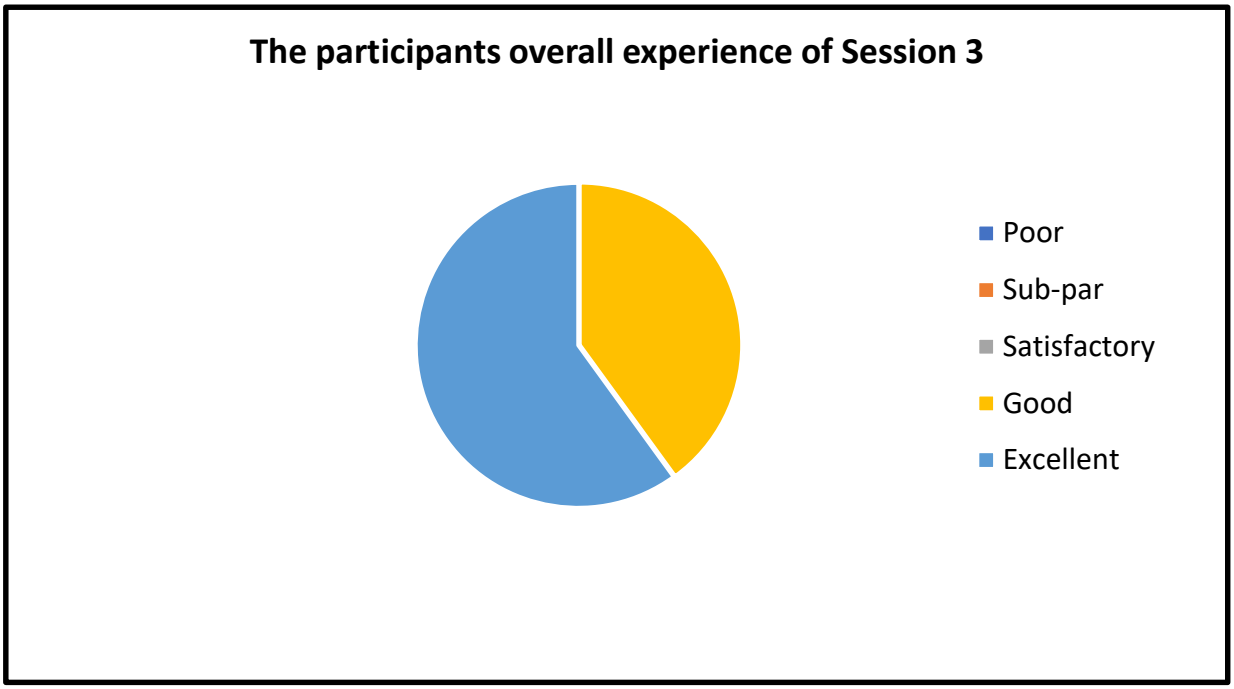


Figure 4.8 The overall experience of Session 3

As illustrated in Figure 4.8, Session 3 was experienced as positive. The participants in the Community of Practice were asked to elaborate on their overall experiences during Session 3. In response to a question in the qualitative feedback questionnaire, one participant testified to the socio-constructivist notion of the study, saying that '*teachers develop teachers. Teachers are so committed that they only think of developing their careers and teaching abilities. The self is totally denied and no attention given to physical, social, emotional and spiritual well-being is mentioned'.*

Another participant wrote '*Good – inspirational,* and a third participant commented: '*Productive – felt as though we moved closer to the final product'*.

Concerning the open-ended question on the extent to which participants experienced the session as being innovative, they responded as follows: '*Very. Co-construction of the professional development plan was novel and an informative experience'*; '*Very – the Miro boards provided new and exciting activities';* and '*The facilitator guided without inhibiting'*. My vision for this session was also to give the participants an opportunity to share and assist with facilitating the session themselves and they all indicated that they were able to contribute.

4.7.5 Evaluate to Innovate in Cycle C

In my evaluation step I took into consideration my reflections and the observations I had made during the video recording, Miro app creations and transcriptions.

I decide that it would be better to keep the cameras turned off during the session so that the participants could focus on the Miro app and freely discuss the topic. I also found it helpful to have a timekeeper to assist in keeping track of time during the activities. During the preparation and Act step in Cycle D, I focused on creating opportunities to encourage self-regulation, since during the session the participants tended to lean towards external factors when discussing professional learning. The co-construction of the self-regulated learning plan featured even more during Cycle D.

4.8 MY ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE D

In this section, I share the findings based on Cycle D of my Action Research spiral. I conducted Action Research Cycle D during the '*product for self-regulation'* stage. The fourth Community of Practice session took place during the '*product phase*', as guided by the 3P self-regulated learning model shown in Chapter 2, Figure 2.7. In Table 1, Chapter 2, I outlined that the vision of the fourth session was to look at our self-regulated professionalism and finalise the co-construction of our Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan. We focused on how to maintain our professionalism. My Action Research Cycle D is shown below in Figure 4.9.

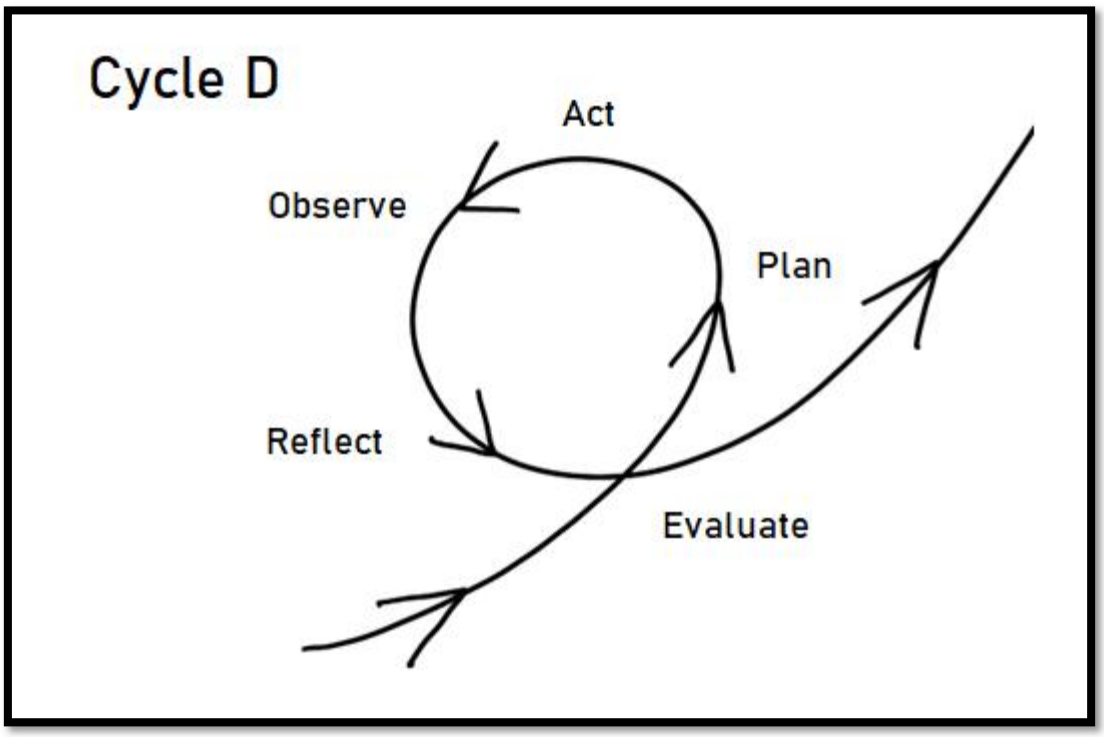


Figure 4.9 My Action Research process – Cycle D

As shown in Figure 4.9, my Action Research process for Cycle D was comprised of the five steps also followed in Cycles A, B and C. I will now discuss Cycle D.

4.8.1 Planning for Innovation

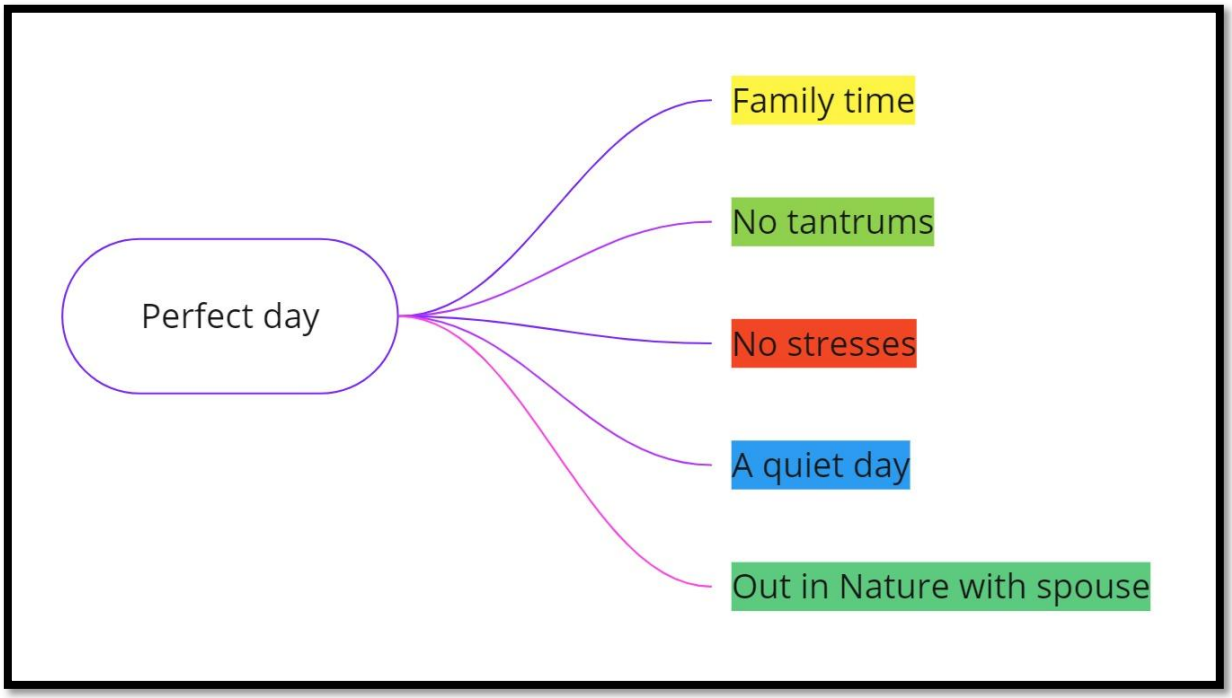
I had planned for the fourth and final session, during which we could look at the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan and establish whether the participants had gained something from the experience of being a part of the Community of Practice, to be shorter than the other three. The focus during this session was on innovating our practices to become self-regulated teachers and to maintain our professionalism by continually empowering the self.

As we progressed through the sessions, I regularly reflected and made notes on the topics we discussed and what seemed important for the professional learning plan. The activities I developed were also included to contribute to the content and structure of the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan as the participants contributed and collaborated.

As for previous sessions, I sent out a WhatsApp with the Microsoft Teams and Miro app session links a day in advance to allow the participants to download the Miro board ahead of time. As I had done in Cycle C, I planned each activity with extra time to allow participants to provide more feedback where they needed or wanted to, keeping in mind that I would ask a participant to help me keep track of time during the activity.

4.8.2 My Act to Innovate Cycle D

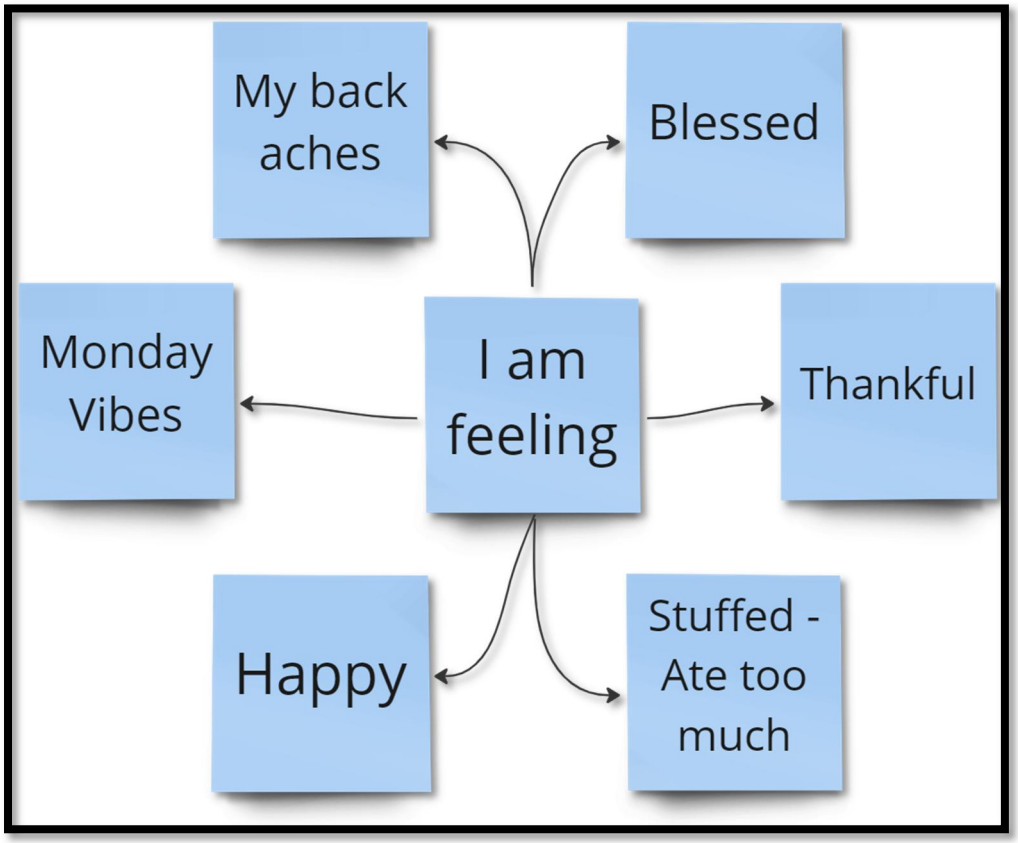
I once again began the session with a check-in activity. I asked three questions, as usual. The first question focused on how the participants were feeling. The second question was about a perfect holiday and the third was about what a perfect day for the participants would be. In Visual Evidence 4.7, I illustrate the participants' ideas about a perfect day.



Visual Evidence 4.7 Check-in activity feedback: A perfect day

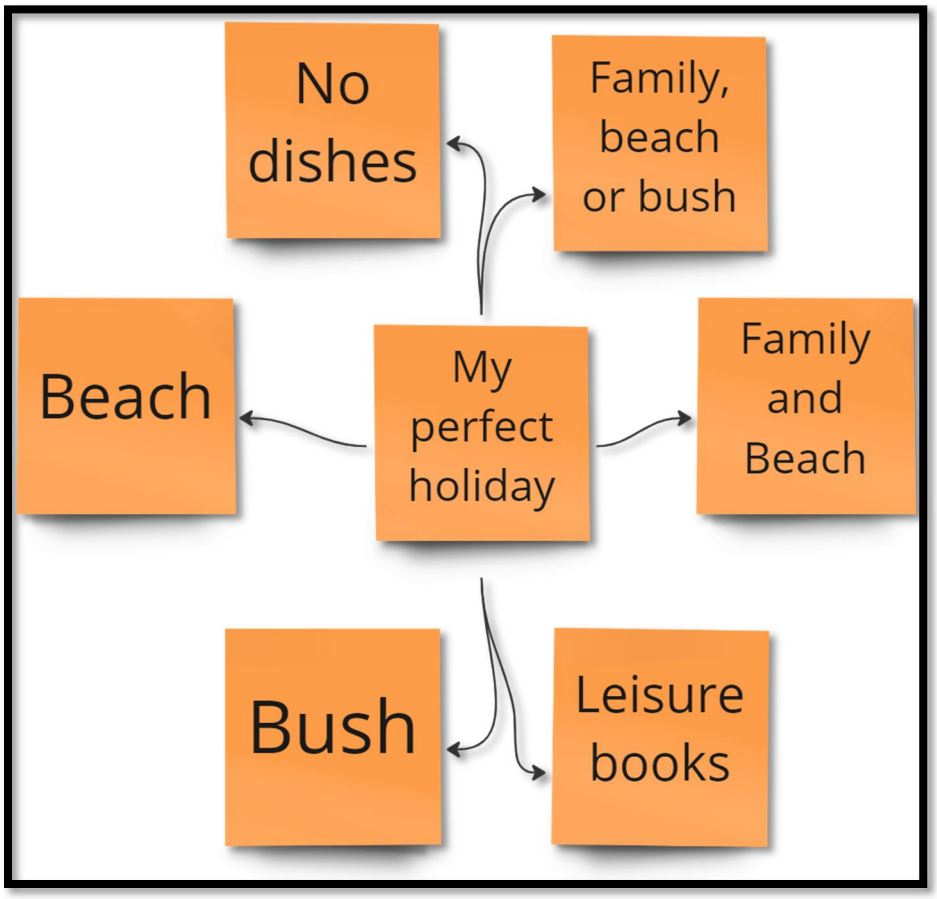
As shown in Visual Evidence 4.7, the participants described their perfect day in terms of having family time, a quiet day and spending time in nature with their spouse. During our sessions, the participants shared that they felt overwhelmed with the stresses currently experienced in teaching. The importance of well-being were emphasised. Well-being will be discussed further in section 4.9 later in the chapter.

As illustrated in Visual Evidence 4.8, during the check-in I asked the participants how they were feeling. The final session was held on a Monday evening. It was evident that the participants felt refreshed and positive during this session.



Visual Evidence 4.8 Check-in activity – Session D

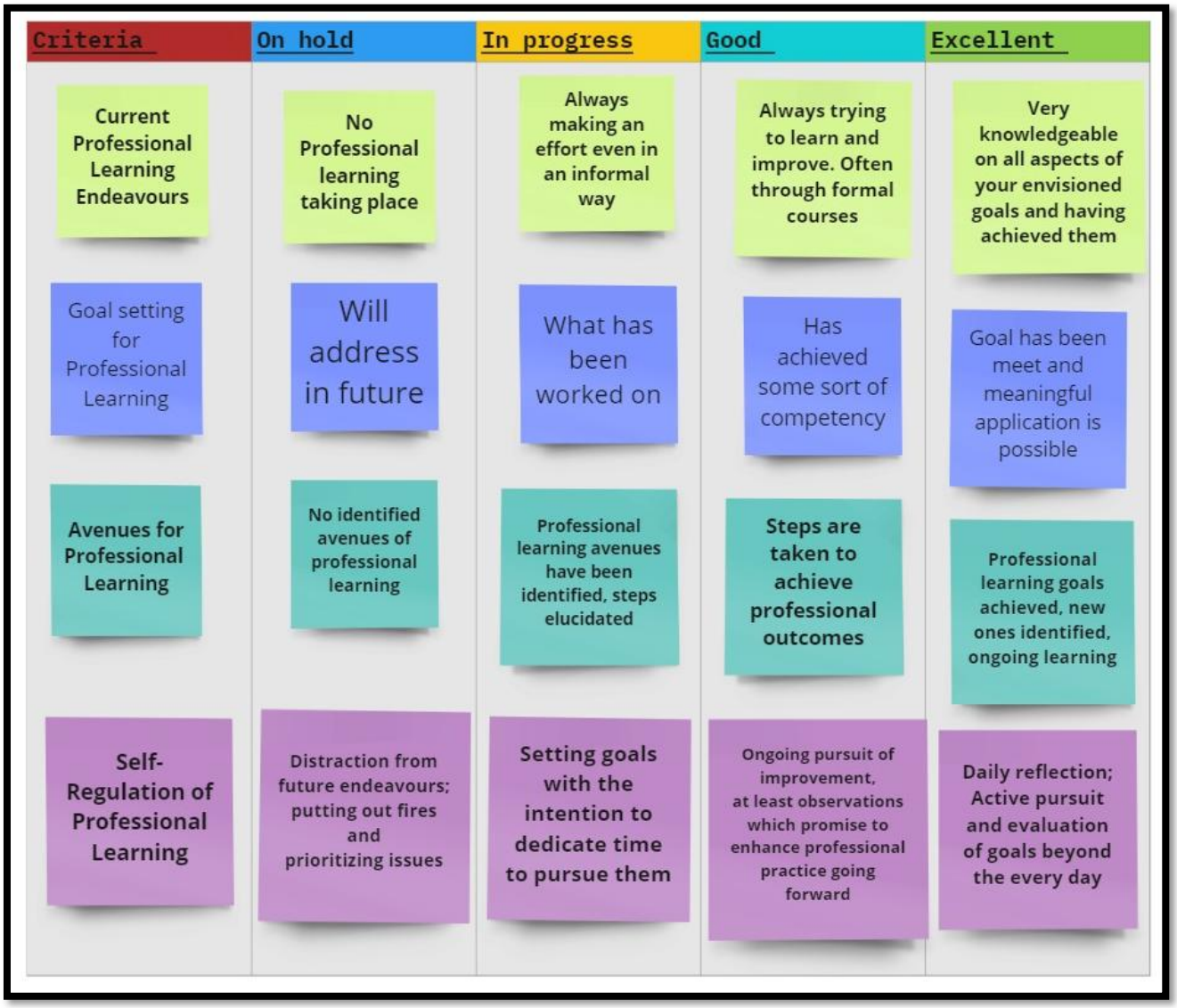
In our final session, the Community of Practice members seemed excited to be together and discussed our professionalism, as can be seen in Visual Evidence 4.8. I regard it as important to note that this was the only session held at the beginning of the week while the other three were held on Thursday or Friday evenings, depending on what was agreed upon within the Community of Practice. Three of the six responses indicated a happy mood; Victor said that his back was sore, and Sue said that she had just eaten a large meal. The spirit within the Community of Practice was positive, which indicated that the group members felt comfortable. The final component of the check-in was their idea of a perfect holiday, as indicated in Visual Evidence 4.9.



Visual Evidence 4.9 A perfect holiday

As illustrated in Visual Evidence 4.9, a perfect holiday for three of the six participants would be spent on the beach, two indicated that the bush as their destination for a perfect holiday, and Nadia stated that she would want to read leisure books.

We continued our discussion on ‘My current professional learning’ and I asked the participants to rate themselves by using the professional learning rubric they had constructed in Cycle A. The Visual Evidence 4.10 professional learning rubric is shown below.



Visual Evidence 4.10 The professional learning rubric constructed by the Community of Practice

I first asked the participants to again consider the rubric they had developed and to make adjustments as needed before rating themselves. As illustrated in Visual Evidence 4.10, the rubric included three rating scales, namely ‘on hold, in progress, good and excellent’. The participants then rated themselves according to those criteria. During or discussion, Nadia indicated that although she had not gone out and actively found ways for her to participate in professional learning, she had journeyed through our sessions and had had the opportunity to ponder and actively participate in professional learning in our Community of Practice. Our discussion clearly showed an improvement in the participants’ ability to innovate professionalism and pursue self-regulated professionalism. Most of the participants indicated that they were between

the ‘in progress’ column and ‘good’ column in relation to their professional learning. They also stated that, for example, educators may regard themselves as being at the ‘good’ stage for goal setting, but on a journey to find different avenues to utilise for their professional learning. The Community of Practice then used the professional learning rubric to indicate where they would place themselves with regard to their current professional learning by making a tick or a cross on the rubric. Their responses are discussed in section 4.9.

We then focused on our experiences within the Community of Practice and how we had grown through the experience. See Visual Evidence 4.11 below for the feedback received from the participants.

Visual Evidence 4.11 Experiences of the Community of Practice

As shown in Visual Evidence 4.11, the participants had positive experiences within the Community of Practice as it gave them an opportunity to engage with others, to reflect and to realise the value of professional learning and self-regulation. Olivia indicated that she had been encouraged to pursue her professionalism and had been able to connect with other educators. Mia was grateful to not be alone in her professional journey, and Sue felt that the sessions had helped her to think about and plan her future path. In our first Community of Practice session, we also discussed expectations for our sessions together and I will refer to those in my reflection on Session 4.

The final activity that I had planned was to discuss how we would continue with our future professional learning after the completion of our sessions together. Visual Evidence 4.12 below shows the educators' responses.

Visual Evidence 4.12 Continued professional learning

As shown in Visual Evidence 4.12, professional learning was considered to be an ongoing endeavour by educators in our Community of Practice, who stated that we were on a journey and needed to focus on our professionalism. The Community of Practice discussed the rough draft of the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan that was created throughout the Action Research cycles. In the final section of the session, I thanked the participants for their participation. I then sent the Google Forms link with a request to complete the qualitative feedback questionnaire.

4.8.3 Observe to Innovate Cycle D

During my observations I watched the video recordings of the sessions, studied the Visual Evidence the participants had provided on Miro and completed a self-observation sheet as I watched the video recording. The participants completed the feedback questionnaire after the session.

During the session I observed that the participants were comfortable sharing their thoughts and talking their favourite holiday or a perfect day in a way that revealed a sense of mutual understanding. This was especially true for Mia, who had recently lost her husband. Her perfect day was to a return to normal life. As a Community of Practice we emphasised, demonstrating how our Community of Practice had built relationship with one another over the four-week period.

I observed that during the session I had been too quick in progressing from one activity to the next on the Miro app and decided to pause at times to give the participants more time. I also kept my camera on so that the participants could see my facial expressions during my facilitation and while they were giving feedback on their professional learning experiences within the Community of Practice.

In the final session, the sound from my side was not working for five minutes, but I observed that the participants were able to continue with the activity and they proceeded to discuss aspects of the template with one another without me facilitating the session, which showed they were taking responsibility for their learning even more during the sessions. They showed a sense of self-regulation and I further focused mainly on the participants sharing and providing feedback.

4.8.4 Reflect to Innovate Cycle D

In my Action Research process, step 4, I reflected on what I had observed and the feedback received. The following reflection step was taken from the qualitative feedback questionnaires, video recordings of the session, my observation sheet and my self-reflections on Cycle D. The participants were given a link to a qualitative feedback questionnaire.

The overall experience of the participants was rated in the qualitative feedback questionnaire, which is illustrated in Figure 4.14.

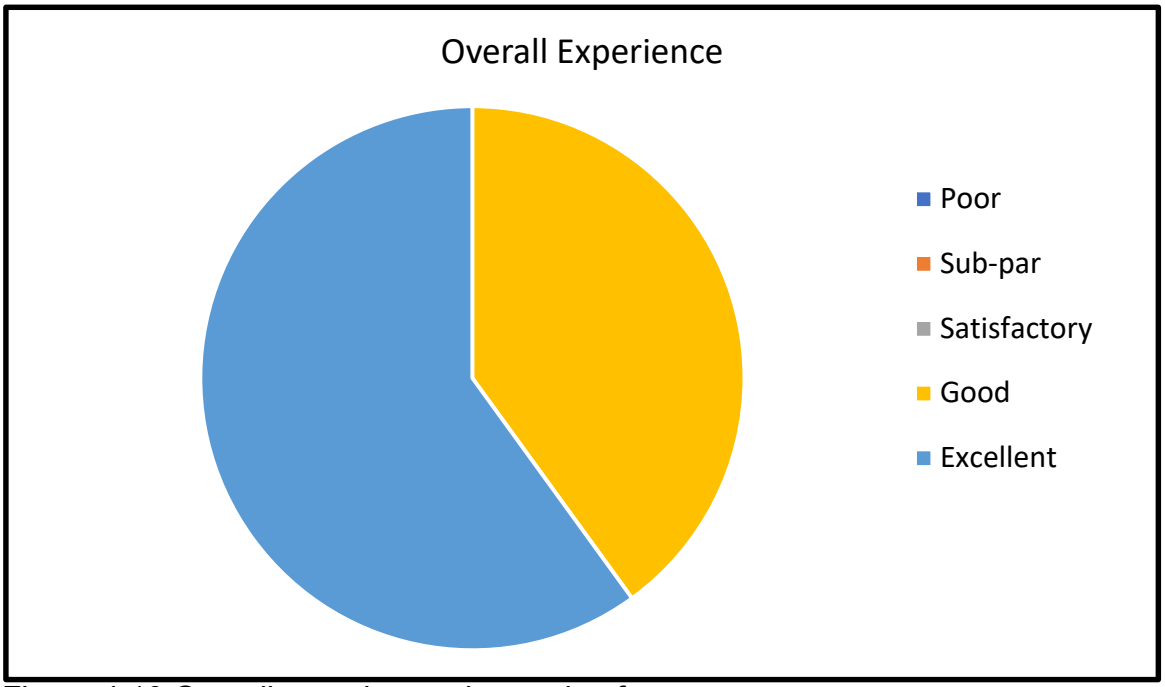


Figure 4.10 Overall experiences in session four

As illustrated in Figure 4.14, two participants rated this last session as good and the other three rated the overall experience as excellent. Regarding the value of the sessions, one participant commented: '*Helpful and informative. I felt very positive after the last session as although I had some difficulties with regards to the sound, it was a productive session where we were able to discuss aspects of our professionalism freely.*' Nadia and Olivia stated that the Community of Practice had provided a space for them to reflect on their current professional learning. So, in the same manner in which I reflected during the Action Research process and holistically, it was clear that the participants had also been challenged in this regard. I believe that in Cycle 4 I did

manage to challenge the participants to think outside the box in the context of professional learning, while being empowered as a collective. One participant stated in the feedback from the questionnaire that he or she '*was amazed at the care and bonds that developed over a period of four weeks*'. Another commented: '*It was lovely and conclusive. It gave me a comprehensive understanding of this amazing process.'* In the feedback questionnaire, I asked the participants whether they were planning to continue their professional journey by taking responsibility for their professional learning and they all replied positively. The feedback shared by Mia, who had initially been reluctant to start, was '*Definitely going to try*', and Victor said, '*Yes, most likely*'. Nadia responded enthusiastically, saying '*Yes! I plan to. This in itself is an opportunity I should not pass up!'*

As illustrated in Figure 4.12, the participants gained a new perspective through our Community of Practice and I noted that they knew that although some had not put in the time required to actively pursue their professional goals, they were not alone. They also understood that although the school has an integral role to play in encouraging teachers to develop professionally, the focus of professional learning should be on self-regulated professional learning and the innovation of their professional practices.

4.8.5 Evaluate to Innovate

After evaluating my observations and reflections, I thought about what I had done and what I would like to do in the next cycle

During my self-observations I realised that I tended to often repeat words while explaining a concept, or to use filler words like 'right', 'okay' or 'um'. This became very clear during the transcription of each session. I therefore decided to speak slower in future sessions and to take time to first process what I wanted to say before speaking. In essence, I decided to allow the participants to discuss more, with me facilitating less. I have since noticed the same problem in my teaching practice with learners and have been working on altering that to innovate my teaching practice and develop myself professionally.

I value and understand the never-ending process of Action Research and therefore I will opt to have future sessions are face-to-face. Although the use of the interactive

Miro board was successful, I do feel that face-to-face contact sessions would have allowed a stronger bond to develop between the participants.

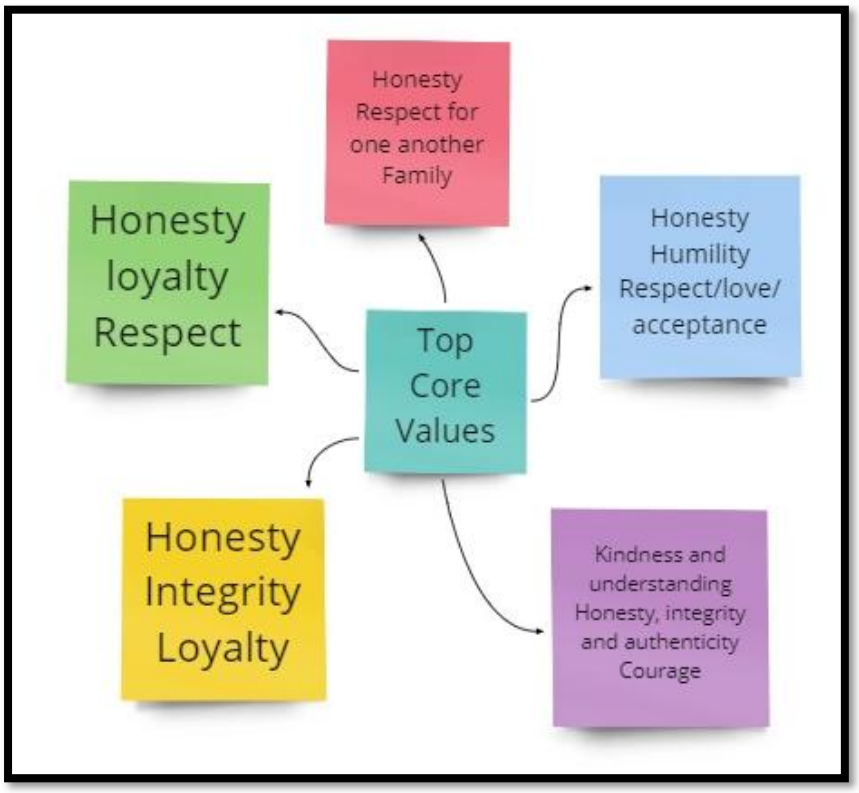
4.9 SELF-REGULATED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING OF EDUCATORS

I will now discuss the different constructs of professional learning that were highlighted during our sessions. The data was collected during our Community of Practice sessions and was thematically analysed.

I identified six themes from our discussions while working on the Miro app: Teacher identity, professional learning, teacher challenges well-being of teachers, self-regulation in professional learning and planning our professionalism. The data that emerged from our discussions also contributed towards the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan, which we co-constructed and which will be explained later in this chapter.

4.9.1 Teacher identity

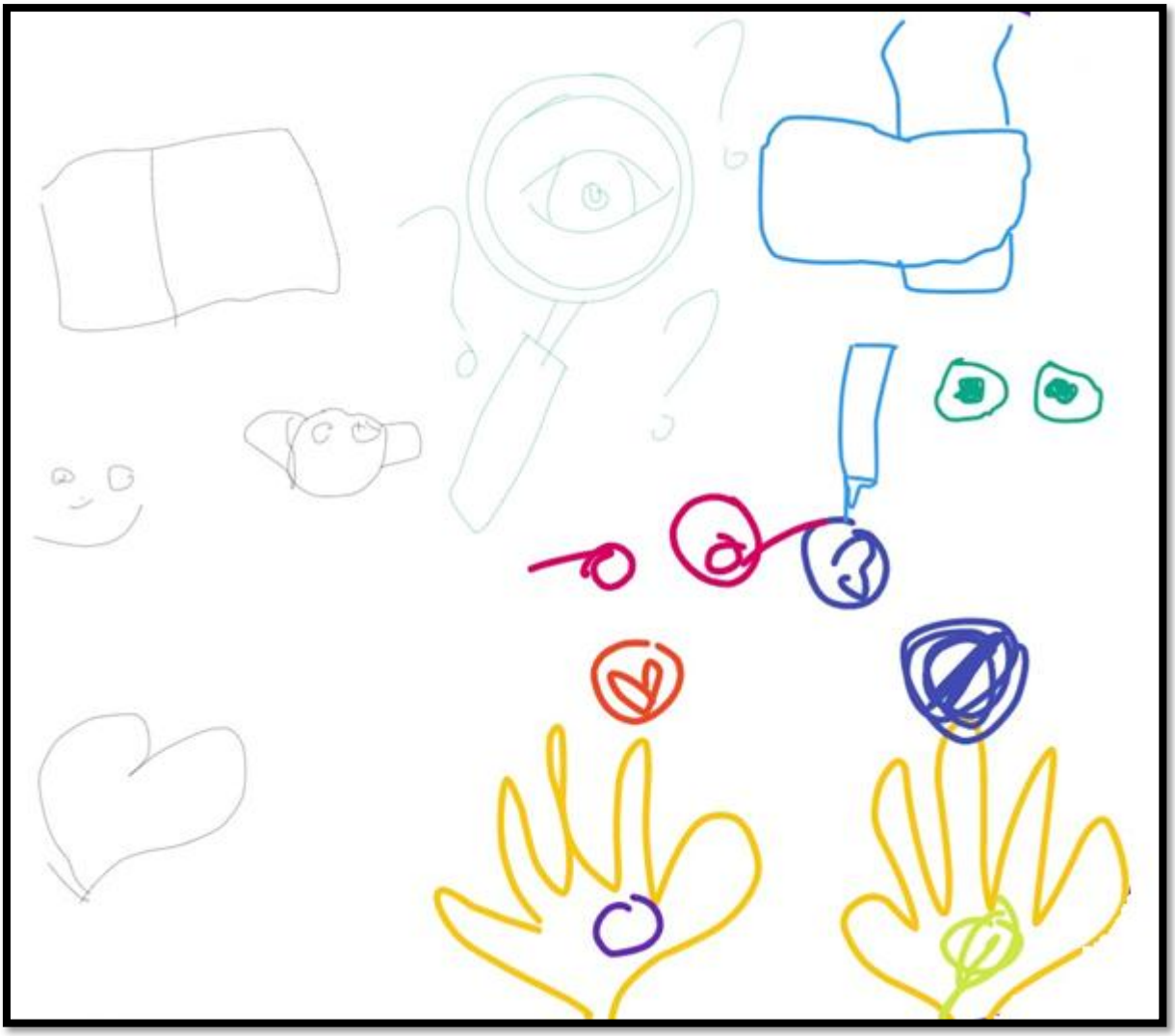
In the first session of our Community of Practice, I conducted a check-in activity during which the participants and I ranked our top three values. The check-in is shown below in Visual Evidence 4.13.



Visual Evidence 4.13 Our top three core values

As can be seen in Visual Evidence 4.13, all the participants listed honesty as a core value, while respect was mentioned in four of the five responses. The participants in the Community of Practice valued honesty and respect as core values in their own lives and teaching practices.

During our first Community of Practice, we discussed what a teacher does. This is illustrated in Visual Evidence 4.14. The discussion included everything a teacher does.



Visual Evidence 4.14: What a teacher does

The symbols identified in Visual Evidence 4.14 included a face, eyes, hands, ears, a heart, book, magnifying glass, question marks and cricket bats. The participants elaborated on what their drawings included as follows: Mia spoke of the heart she drew to indicate that teachers should be passionate about their jobs and care for the learners in their class and added that in the case of some learners the loving care shown by a teacher was all the children were likely to experience. The ears are to show that you hear the learner. Mia explained that sometimes '*You are the one that listens to them. You are the one that hears them, it's you (sic: who) see them, you*

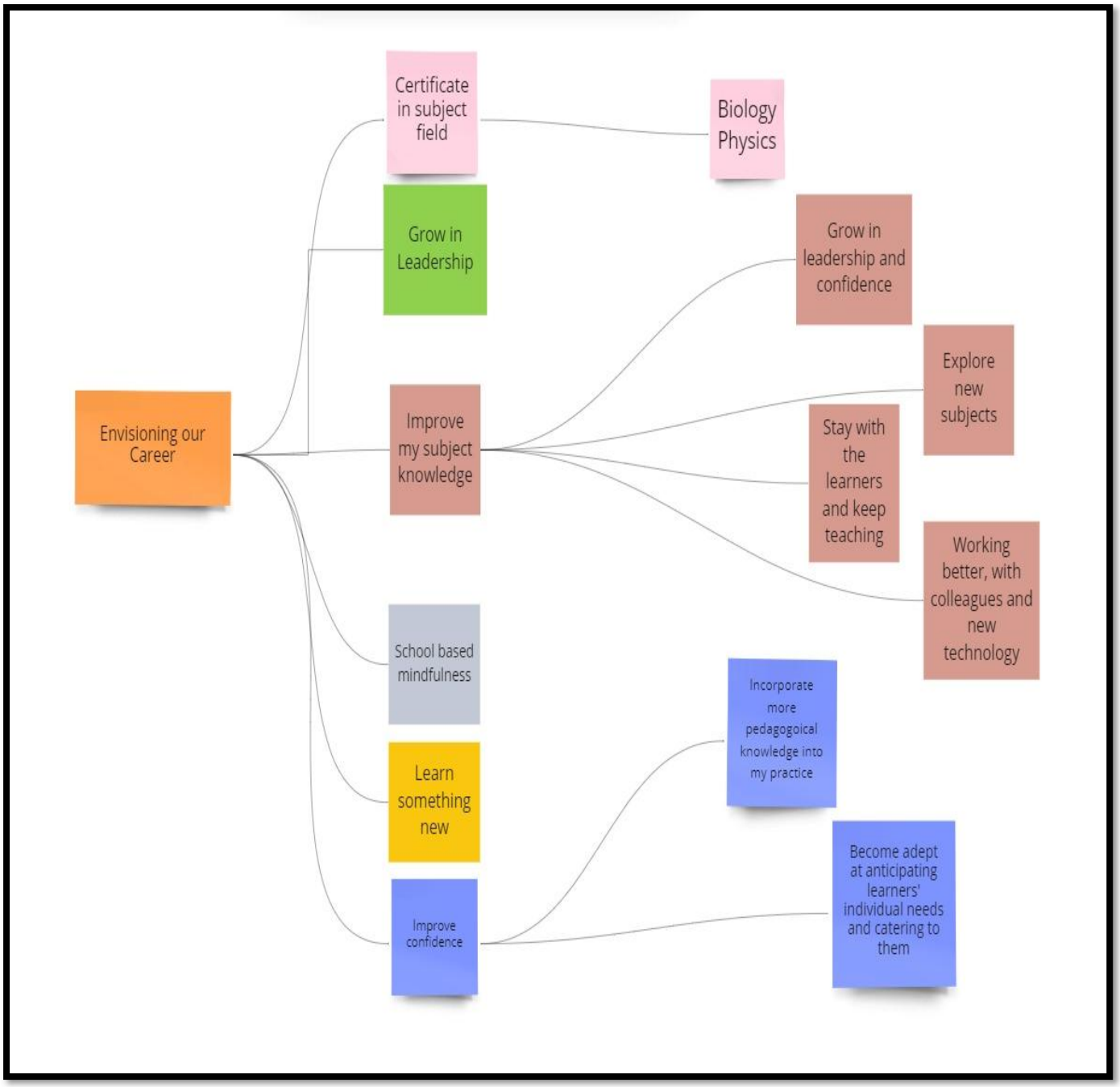
hear them, you literally acknowledge them as a person'. She then explained the book she had drawn: '*If we look at how we interact with the kids, what you teach them is more about life, and who they are as a person, and how they interact with other people, and how they deal with the challenges of life, and then, the book learning comes.'*

The magnifying glass suggests that teachers should know themselves and be willing to learn something new. Victor stated that the magnifying glass was used to '*discover themselves*'. Nadia drew hands juggling balls to illustrate the different tasks that teachers have to somehow cope with. The balls stood for nurturing the learners, being passionate about teaching, confidence in yourself and the learners, disciplining learners and helping them to reach their full potential, dealing with parents or stakeholders, and actively listening to what learners share with you. Nadia commented: '*I'm amazed at how emotionally draining the job is. So, perhaps I should've made the heart larger*.' I personally also found this to be important with regard to the passing pandemic. I continued this discussion to add my viewpoint, and I noted that we needed to walk in other learners' and colleagues' footsteps and sometimes show others more care, referring to the faces drawn. I '*envisioned that we've got to understand where the kids are coming from*'. I also drew a pen as we need to keep track of where the learners are in our classes and what their needs are.

4.9.2 Professional Learning

The second theme emerged from our discussions on defining what professional learning is. In our first session we discussed what professional learning is and formulated a definition that we would use to define our professional learning in the Community of Practice. Our definition of professional learning, which was shared in the Act to Innovate step in Cycle B, is as follows: 'Any activity that develops knowledge or skills, with the drive for continuous professional learning where sharing and mentoring take place.' Defining professional learning was to guide and innovated facilitation to empower the educators to become self-regulated professionals.

Sue pointed out that, as teachers, '*we want to be able to teach effectively'.* During Session 3, Olivia noted that we must be open to the idea of professional learning and said: '*It's (sic: professional learning is) most effective when you're open to learning*.' During the first Community of Practice session we discussed what we envision for our careers. This was a semi-structured informal discussion as Sue was only months away from retirement, Nadia and Victor were novice educators and Olivia and Mia each had more than ten years' teaching experience. Our envisioning of our careers is shown below in Visual Evidence 4.15.



Visual Evidence 4.15 Our envisioning of our careers

In Visual Evidence 4.15, the participants shared what they envisioned for their careers. During our discussion on this topic, Mia shared how she had unsuccessfully applied for a position as acting departmental head. At the time she was very disappointed, but after losing her husband she had to reorganise her life to focus on being a mom and an educator. She also noted that she actually preferred teaching in a class to managing teachers. In a school set-up, departmental heads are responsible for managing their departments and teaching less as they have other responsibilities. Referring to her above-mentioned application, Mia said that she had come to the following conclusion: '*Even though I have applied I have actually realised that my passion is to be with the kids*.' Mia showed us all that life can change our goals and sometimes we will be disappointed, but we will learn from the experience and grow.

Two participants envisioned improved leadership, which could be leadership in the class or among colleagues, or in the school management. Another referred to the concept mindfulness, elaborated on in 4.9.4 where I discuss the well-being of educators. Victor indicated that he would like to be better informed on his subject field since, while teaching Natural Sciences and Technology, learners had asked him questions that he could answer. Sue indicated that she enjoyed learning something new: '*I like teaching new subjects. If they give me a new subject tomorrow, I would be happy. because I find it very boring to teach the same thing year after year after year.'* She struggled with the new COVID way of teaching and she had to very quickly learn to use technology. However, she had coped and managed to teach on Microsoft Teams for the period she was required to. She added: '*Yes I can help myself (sic: referring to technology) and with the support of others I can cope*.'

Our discussion on support was an important discussion to have in our Community of Practice as we, as educators, can support one another in the workplace, which will promote professional learning. As illustrated in Visual Evidence 4.21, the participants all expressed a desire to grow in their professionalism. Victor noted that his list was not '*exhaustive*', referring to the fact that the list could be longer if he had been allowed more time to think about his professional goals. Although adequate time was allowed for during the session, some of the participants did not find the time to plan their professionalism. Given more time to consider his professional goals, Victor would have

been able to think of many more goals or areas in which he hoped to grow in his professionalism.

Mia said that she enjoyed the extra opportunities offered as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which had allowed her to develop professionally. '*I actually like doing the courses because I feel that's why I'm at school. I'm at school to teach. And if I can take that afternoon time that I would normally have had to do other things and actually invest it in myself and what I want to put back into class, then it's worthwhile*.' Mia added that she mainly wanted to teach as that was her passion, and that investing in professional learning would improve her teaching practice.

Mia, who spoke of professional learning as an opportunity that happens regularly, said: '*you guiding someone because what we tend to do is we focus so much on what we are doing, where we are headed, we forget that there are other people… we forget to help them and to show them like we've been shown maybe. So, we also need to take up that position, and be there for the people that need us.'* Our discussion here focused not only on our own professional learning, but also on community and building one another up.

During our second Community of Practice, we defined and discussed professional learning and formulated a definition to which we, as a Community of Practice, could refer back. This definition is shown in Visual Evidence 4.8, under the Act to innovate step in Cycle B. During our conversation, Nadia referred to professional learning as a vocational concept that includes anything that develops our professional learning. She referred to my master's degree as being part of their professional learning as in our Community of Practice we were making meaning and generating knowledge that we can use in our own teaching practices.

During our second session we discussed how teamwork is an integral part of professional learning and that we should form a team to support and care for one another. Sue spoke about how teams work in a school and said: 'Y*ou cannot stand alone. This is a team, you know, and the teams start small. You, your grade team, and then you are the phase team, and then you are the school team.'* The construct of teamwork appeared in Session 3, where it was stated that teamwork should be an integral part of our teaching practices. Olivia noted that sharing knowledge and working together is fruitful.

Sue pointed at the difference between knowledge and insight by saying: '*Knowing your subject is one thing, but having insight in that subject or topic or whatever is something different*.' She explained that knowledge is knowing the content that you will teach the learners in your classroom, however, insight is being able to anticipate challenges and prepare for them ahead of time. Sue encouraged the novice educators in the Community of Practice by saying that insight comes through mistakes, through trial and error. It cannot be learnt using a book or articles, but is learnt through experience. She added: '*You guys must be kind to yourself 'cause you can only get that when you grow with your subject*.'

In Session 4, Mia noted that she should broaden her knowledge and find more components of being a teacher to explore and said: '*I need to be a bit more receptive to different types of courses*.' She admitted that she has grown during our discussions in our Community of Practice when she said: '*And the discussion we've had has really made me think on how much we need to just share information with each other*.'

4.9.2.1 Previous experiences in professional learning

A sub-theme which emerged from professional learning, was one of the previous experiences that the participants had experienced on previous occasions. Sue mentioned that if you teach the same subject year after year, you become aware of the problem areas in the subject and can plan and prepare activities and methodologies in your teaching to overcome the challenges. However, change is good for teachers. Sue also said: '*I think you need to stay on your toes and you need to stay one step ahead. I do believe it is a very good thing for yourself to teach different subjects – I don't think we should teach the same thing for years and years*.'

During our discussion on creating a professional learning rubric, we discussed our professional learning and who is responsible for our learning, and this will be discussed in more detail in paragraph 4.9.5. We discussed the different opportunities that have been available to us. The many workshops or courses that have become online activities have allowed educators to attend professional learning opportunities that previously would not have been an option due to time constraints or having to travel. Mia noted that, '*the whole online platform has opened up opportunities that we*

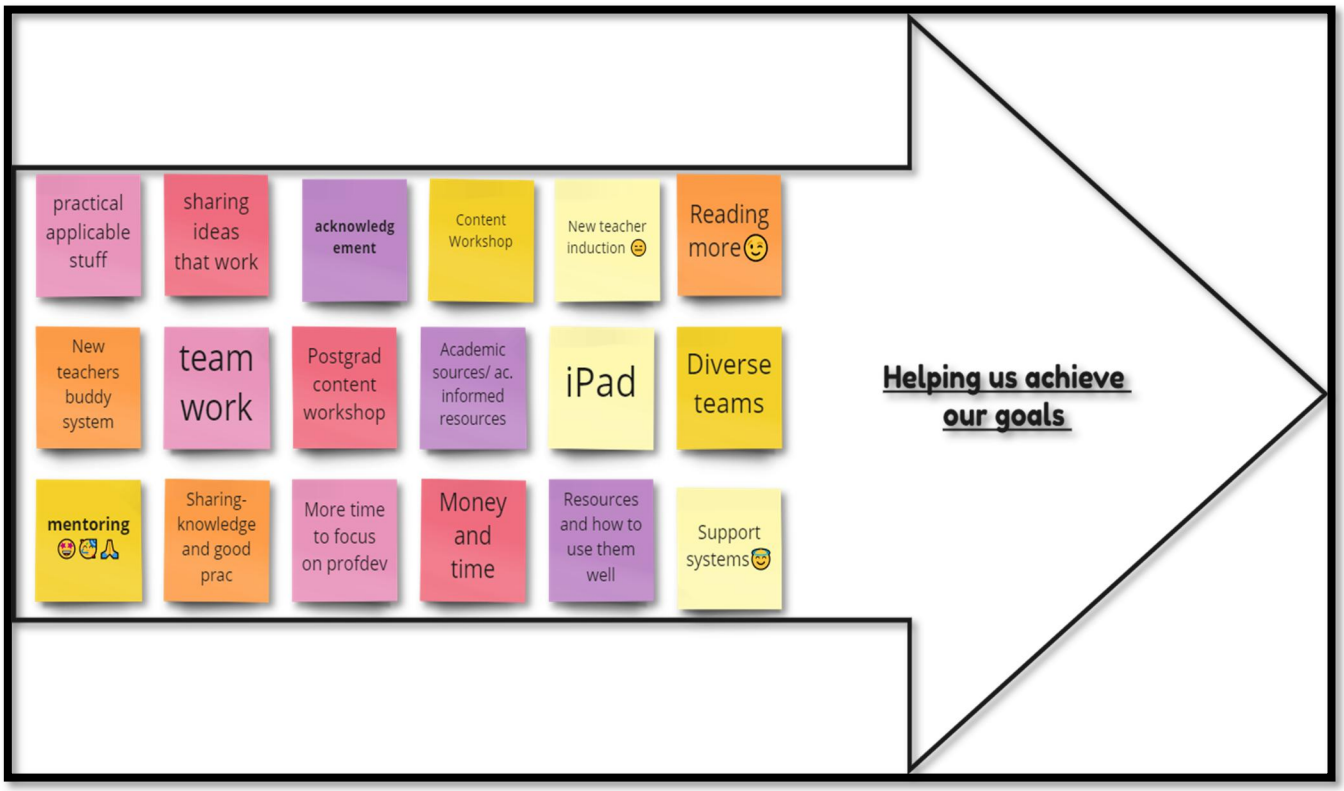
didn't have before because going to a venue to do training or something used to be difficult, and now, they can give us all the online opportunities', and Sue pointed out that professional learning not only occurs during workshops and courses, since most of the participants regarded workshops and courses as the framework of what professional learning is and as essential for professional learning to take place. Sue noted that professional learning and growth can include '*just talking to the teacher next door.'*

Sue, who has been in teaching for many years, told us how in the past they would attend a 'roadshow' for their subject, which was when a facilitator from the Department of Education would explain the timeline for work to be completed during each term and the assessments for subjects per grade. Sue explained: *'In the past, when we had to attend all these road shows, I found them actually a waste of time … It was a repetition of the previous year. This is what we do. This is how you set an exam paper. This is how much it must count.*' She summed up her opinion by saying: '*It's got no meaning.'*

Nadia spoke about her availability to attend professional learning opportunities and said that '*the school doesn't really talk about professional development, send links to workshops, make us aware of workshops. I'm not dedicating time to finding out about workshops*.' She told us that her school duties consumed much of her afternoon as she was an English Home Language teacher, gave support classes in the afternoon and also had to mark learners' work. Speaking about her experiences at her school, Nadia said that they '*don't actually have an (sic) departmental head, and we are both first year teachers, so that support we do not have*'. This information caused concern among the rest of the Community of Practice. Sue spoke her mentor: '*When I was a new teacher, my anchor was my mentor that looked after me. She was in the same grade, and even though she didn't teach the same subjects as I did, she really carried me*.' Sue continued to share that she had known her mentor as a friend until she passed away. Mia pointed out that a mentor does not need to be a departmental head, but could be a colleague who understands how the school system works. She added that while '*learning how the school system functions and what's the best way to deal with basic things, you do need that mentor*.' Nadia said that she had a '*mentor shaped hole*,' and had hoped that the Community of Practice would provide some mentoring for her teaching practice. Sue encouraged Nadia and explained to her that although she had missed the opportunity to be mentored, she herself would be a wonderful

mentor one day as she would know the areas in which a mentor would benefit a new teacher.

During our second session, we discussed our previous experiences in professional learning in more detail and we, as the Community of Practice, focused on experiences that had benefited us and were valued, and others that we found to be less enjoyable. The visual created during this activity can be seen in Visual Evidence 4.16.



Visual Evidence 4.16 Previous professional learning experiences

During the activity and discussion of Visual Evidence 4.16, I encourage the participants to rate their experience of each of the opportunities they were exposed to in professional learning. This activity consisted of two components. The first required the participants to identify the different forms of professional learning that they had been involved in, such as subject roadshows (each term the Department holds a meeting where information is given per a subject and is specific to a grade); curriculum implementation workshops (whereby the teachers are trained to implement a curriculum, such CAPS, which is the curriculum currently followed South Africa, and Franklin Covey training (which is an organisation that present the 7 Habits of Highly

Effective people, a multi-year workshop for all staff members). These workshops or training events were professional learning activities which, according to the teachers, did not contribute to their professional learning. However, Victor who is a novice educator, experienced the subject training workshops as useful as they provided direction, especially with regard to the changes in curriculum during the COVID-19 pandemic and stated: '*I really felt grateful because, especially with assessments, (sic) as you must know what you are testing, or how you want it, or how you need to test. I was really grateful about that*.' Sue spoke about the remedial conferences she attended every two years and during which researchers presented their papers to teachers. *'I loved that workshop. It was absolutely fantastic,*' she said.

We continued our discussion regarding our experiences in professional learning and Sue focused on the fact that when teaching learners, one must be able to teach all the learners in the class, regardless of their learning style. Her advice was: '*Whatever you teach them, you have to accommodate all of them.*' Olivia spoke about her experiences of mentoring. She had been mentored by Sue in her first few years as a Grade 4 educator and was very grateful for the role Sue had played in her teaching practice. She added: '*If I have a child who can't read or do this or that, I find someone who can give me advice on how to help them, I think is, is something you can't learn from a workshop*.' Olivia was referring to how Sue had helped her with her learners. Sue referred to her mentor by saying that she had taught her many things that made her teaching practice simpler, among other things '*she taught me how to teach, and how to manage my class, and simple things like lining up and where the kids should put their bags to make your life just so much easier*.'

Nadia spoke about a roadshow she could not attend due to her afternoon duties and commitments, and Olivia shared her experiences in professional learning and stated that after some of the meetings she thought to herself that the slides could have been emailed and she could have gone through them in her own time, instead of having to attend a workshop that was not necessarily productive. She commented: '*A lot of the workshops, I find to be quite, like they could have been an e-mail.'* Victor described the teacher induction workshop as '*rudimentary*' and explained that the teacher induction course, which was presented on Saturdays, went over the basics and discussed what a lesson plan is, which he considered to be a waste of his time. He

concluded by saying: '*Maybe some other new teachers found it useful, but for me, that was a bit too much*.'

In Visual Evidence 4.22 I used an arrow to focus on the activities participants would need or want to pursue with a view to their professional learning. The participants pointed out that they would want more practical application opportunities, which would include mentoring, sharing work ideas and sharing discipline strategies and techniques. They would need to set aside time for professional learning to take place and to read up on the components of teaching practice to develop and innovate their professionalism. The participants voiced their need for teamwork and resources such as technology, time and money to fund postgraduate studies. I discussed my own experiences in professional learning and again I realised the need to focus on the 'self' in the process. I attempted to steer the conversation to focus on what we can do to innovate our own professional learning to achieve my goals. I said: '*We've had training before, or opportunities that we've had before haven't always fulfilled our needs*.' I continued to steer our discussion towards self-regulated professional learning and during our discussion of what we could do to innovate our professional learning, I asked Nadia, who had mentioned that she struggled to find time to participate in professional learning, whether there was someone at her school whom she could approach to mentor her. She replied: '*It doesn't feel as though—that's not the impression I get*.' She continued to explain the culture of the school by saying that no educator seemed to be willing lend support without it being requested, and the culture among the teachers could be described as focused on the '*survival of the fittest*.' However, she noted that she probably wouldn't be turned away either.

4.9.3 Teacher Challenges

The third theme which emerged from that data was that of teacher challenges regarding their professional learning. During our discussion on envisioning our careers as shown in professional learning 4.9.2 and Visual Evidence 4.21, Nadia indicated that as a novice educator she felt very stressed and overwhelmed: '*So I feel as though with a bit of experience and improving my confidence, then I can start to look at long-term goals.*' Nadia also explained that at some point in her teaching practice, she had considered crisis management, but not necessarily using a strategy of reflecting to

improve her teaching practice. She said: '*What feels like at the moment, crisis management and relying on my existing knowledge of the school space which feels as though it is largely governed by what I had experienced when I was at school which should not be the case*.' She enjoyed the opportunity to discuss the envisioning of her career as she had not yet found the time to consider what her goal was for her teaching career. Victor, who is a novice educator, agreed with Nadia and said, '*I haven't necessarily had – maybe I am just making excuses – a lot of time or mental energy to go into what I want in the future … I am trying to keep my head above water on a more short-term basis'.* Although the educators were able to speak freely about their current circumstances, the reality was that they were overwhelmed and feeling the pressures of being teachers in the twenty-first century. They appreciated the time and opportunity they were given to consider their goals. I realised during the sessions that they found it impossible to make time to think about and plan their professionalism, or '*elucidating my professional goals/aspirations*', as one participant said, which is a pertinent part of growing in self-regulated professional learning. One participant noted that our session was productive as our time in the Community of Practice was an opportunity to go about the process of considering their professionalism. One participant indicated that '*learning about myself and where I want to be and what I need as a teacher,*' as this participant identified that learning about oneself is of importance to develop professionally.

During our second session, Nadia noted that no provision had been made for mentoring and the educators at the school where she taught did not seem approachable, so she did not feel that she could ask one of them to become her mentor.

In Chapter 2, I discussed the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) and how teachers accumulate points by attending meetings, workshops and day-to-day happenings at school to accumulate points over a three-year period. Sue talked about how things have changed over the years, saying '*when I was young, this was not at all a requisition, but now it is. So, you have to do this*'. She explained how she would participate in professional learning as it was part of her; however, nowadays teachers must accumulate points, referring to professional learning being a requirement for continuing in the education field.

Many professional learning workshops or short courses are offered online, which has been helpful to many individuals since the travel time and distance to be travelled is a challenge for teachers who attend. However Olivia noted that she struggled with the online activities and that '*having the stuff online, it's very easy to zone out. If they don't grab my attention, I just mute them, which is a danger that's we falling into with this current way of doing things*'.

In Session 1 we discussed our expectations for the Community of Practice. Sue had been challenged by having to make use of technology due to COVID-19 and the changing ways of teaching her Grade 7 class when the school went online for a period. She indicated that she wanted to learn more about what the younger teachers thought and their approach to components of being an educator, and clarified her statement by saying, '*I am saying you doing things differently, the way you do it is not wrong'.* She went on to explain that the younger teachers have a different approach to teaching and she would like to learn about that as the younger educators were more accepting to the learners.

4.9.4 Well-being of Educators

The fourth theme which emerged from the data was teachers' well-being. In our discussion in Session 2, we began brainstorming about what a professional learning plan should look like and what it should include. Sue mentioned the great need for well-being, which she defined as follows: '*Well-being(sic) means self-knowledge. Know yourself. Some people do not know themselves. They don't know their strengths. They don't know the weaknesses*.' During our Session 1 discussion on envisioning our career, Victor discussed an aspect of well-being that he had already experiences personally and explained that '*something that has really helped me personally, is mindfulness techniques. I think it is a wonderful easy thing that can really have benefits regarding stress management and quality of life. I think this is something that can really be helpful'*.

In Session 2, Sue spoke about taking care of ourselves. Nadia and Olivia are both Home Language English teachers for different grades and often have to mark learners' work in the evenings and during the weekend. Sue shared a snippet of wisdom when she said: '*Don't ever neglect yourself because you, you always have to have capacity to give, and if you empty, you can't give. So, even if you do not mark all those books,*

you have to block out time and say, "It's me time"". Sue spoke openly about the fact that she did not reserve time for herself and her family as she would stay home to mark while her family went out and spent time together and added: '*I'm telling you that because I did it—I didn't do it*.'

4.9.5 Self-Regulation in Professional Learning

The fifth theme which emerged from the data collected was becoming and being a self-regulated professional. The construct of self-regulated learning was the pinnacle of my study as I was focused on developing my own professionalism towards self-regulated professional learning. During Session 1, we discussed the concept of self-regulated professional learning and asked whether it was possible to ever be fully developed professionally—in other words, whether one can attain a point of mastery in education. Nadia stated, '*you haven't arrived because there'll be a million other things that one can then focus on and improve on*'. Sue agreed with Nadia by saying, '*You never arrived because the situation is always pliable and always changeable 'cause the children in front of you always change*'. Victor agreed with Sue and stated that in some components of education you can complete the task by obtaining higher qualification, whereas some components will change regularly and one needs to be able to adapt to the circumstances by, for example, '*trying to work on discipline every year, it's a new class (sic) and discipline measures may be needed to change 'cause they are completely different from the previous class*'. Olivia spoke added that '*we need to stay fresh, and that's the challenge in itself. And if we don't reflect, we going to be aiming at the wrong audience*'.

This concept that we discussed links to the Zone of Proximal Development (Smit, 2020:327 and the concept that one never reaches a point of perfect equilibrium. Rather, we try to restore equilibrium by making meaning of the challenges we face. I proceeded to ask the participants who was responsible for their professional learning or for equipping educators. Victor struggled with this question. At first he answered '*teachers in their own way*,' and then continued by saying '*but if the teacher doesn't know where to go, you know, nobody can help with equipping*'. This is important to note since although educators are trained at institutions of higher learning, they might not be have aware of what professional learning will look like in a school. Victor

continued to say, '*some other learning institutions, like our unions, offer courses you can take or workshops you can attend. So, that's the avenues that need to be there for you to take them*.' Sue noted that '*it's the teacher's responsibility to make sure that you grow, but you need a support system like the school or union*'. The support system is of the utmost importance for professional growth and includes the school and the Department of Education.

With reference to planning professionalism, Sue said '*if you do not now decide where you want to end your teaching career, it doesn't matter what you do. You won't get there. And you are not going to have an aim with your professional learning. You're gonna do this and that, and it's not going to contribute to where you want to end up*.'

Victor noted that he would like to improve his knowledge base in order to be more knowledgeable in the fields he taught so as to broaden his understanding and added, '*I know that's a big part of going forward or going closer to your goals, is to put something down on paper that you can move closer to. Having goals and then steps are to get to those goals.'* Victor acknowledged that although he had not planned his professionalism, he had thought about where he would like to be in the future, but had not in the past necessarily applied pen and paper to plan the trajectory he hoped to achieve.

4.9.6 Planning our Professionalism

Sue noted that planning your professionalism is to '*map your path and see where you're going. Makes you focus, makes you think about it*'. It was clear to see during our four sessions that the participants had not in the past found the time, or were too overwhelmed to plan their professional learning.

Olivia noted that she preferred to create lists and tables so that she could identify where she currently was, and to mark off the elements she had achieved. She also referred to the value of reflection and the importance of support structures in innovating your professionalism. Sue stated that although planning is done individually, teachers need to be part of a team, and that the responsibility to develop come from an internal desire, in other words, '*Every team member has to take responsibility to develop themselves and the person next to them*'. Olivia spoke about

the fact that she has two more subjects to complete for her postgraduate studies, but that there is never a right time for spending a large sum of money to complete those two subjects as she had a child and family to support. She had asked for financial assistance from the school where she teaches, as well as other institutions for financial aid as could see the need to grow but lacked the means to fund further study. '*It kind of puts us in a box where we become stuck, where, if you can't afford it, you can't do it, and that should never be the reason why we can't grow*.'

During the third session the participants were asked what the focus should be for the professional learning plan. Nadia indicated that she would focus on perpetual learning, referring to learning something and then being able to apply the new knowledge in her teaching practice, '*keeping at the fore that you never stop learning'.* Her opinion was therefore that one never gets to a point of finishing the professional learning process and that as educators we should be continuously participating and learning.

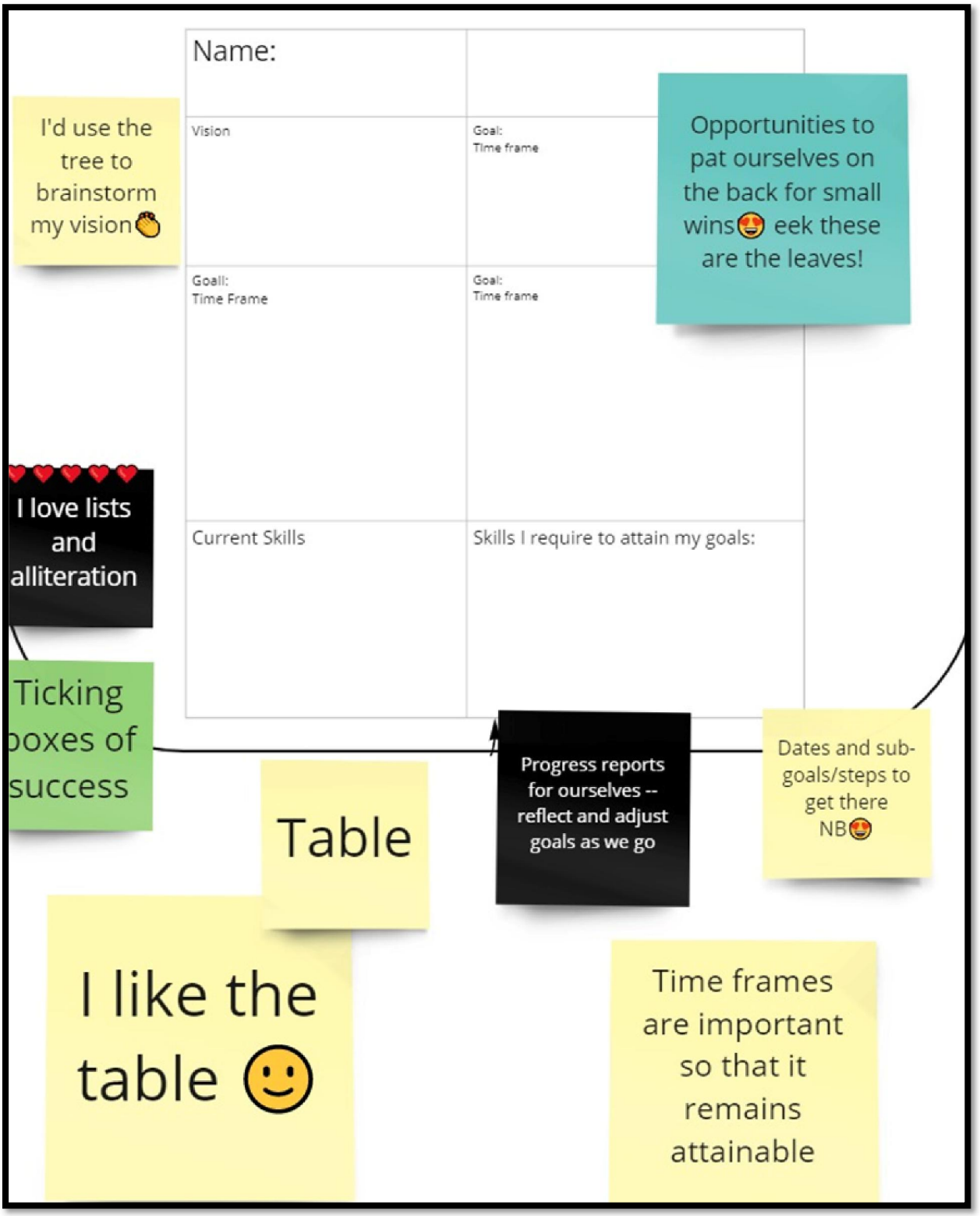
Nadia noted that she would begin planning her professionalism '*for areas that I've neglected up until this point, these sessions have been very eye-opening that I haven't thought about goals and where I want to end up*'. Being a novice educator, she would focus on first-year teacher aspects and on understanding how the school is run and how to move forward in her teaching practice. Once these basics were in place, she could focus on her future goals for her career. Nadia said, '*First things first, I'm still at the very start of things … setting goals, kind of primary thing to do*.'

Mia mentioned that she would like to focus on more subject- and skills-related concepts in her professional learning and said, '*I just want to learn more, um, basically on how I can improve all of that within what I'm trying to do in class*'. She told us that, for a small fee, she had attended online courses provided by her union, which had impacted her teaching practice. Victor would like to develop in in the area of pedagogical matters, such as '*teaching methodologies or, how I can present content differently*'. He also indicated that he would like to pursue his postgraduate studies in education in the future. He also wanted to ensure that he interacts well with the learners '*to make sure that my interaction with them, um, enriches them to their fullest potential*'. Olivia shared that she had a dream to focus on supporting the learners and building trust with the parents. She is a Grade 4 educator and is often able to pick up on issues that inhibit the learners' abilities, which has led her to dream of eventually

become an educational psychologist. Olivia noted that at the time she had to focus on her conflict management as she had a situation with someone who had stood in for her. She said, '*I think I could really benefit from learning better ways to handle those situations, because I don't like hurting people's feelings*'. Olivia admitted that she had neglected some areas of her professional learning and when I asked her to elaborate, she said, '*to be honest, all of it because it's so easy to become comfortable in your job*'. Olivia has been teaching at the same school for more than ten years and had become comfortable, and once she had a child she had felt that her time and finances had other places to be used.

In Session 3 we discussed what our Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan should look like and Sue noted that if we were to think about how the education field might change in the next 20 years, it '*might be a dream, might be a nightmare'.* Olivia noted that we should not have one main vision or goal for our careers as we would become demotivated and should therefore rather have smaller objectives to assist us in attaining our vision for our career.

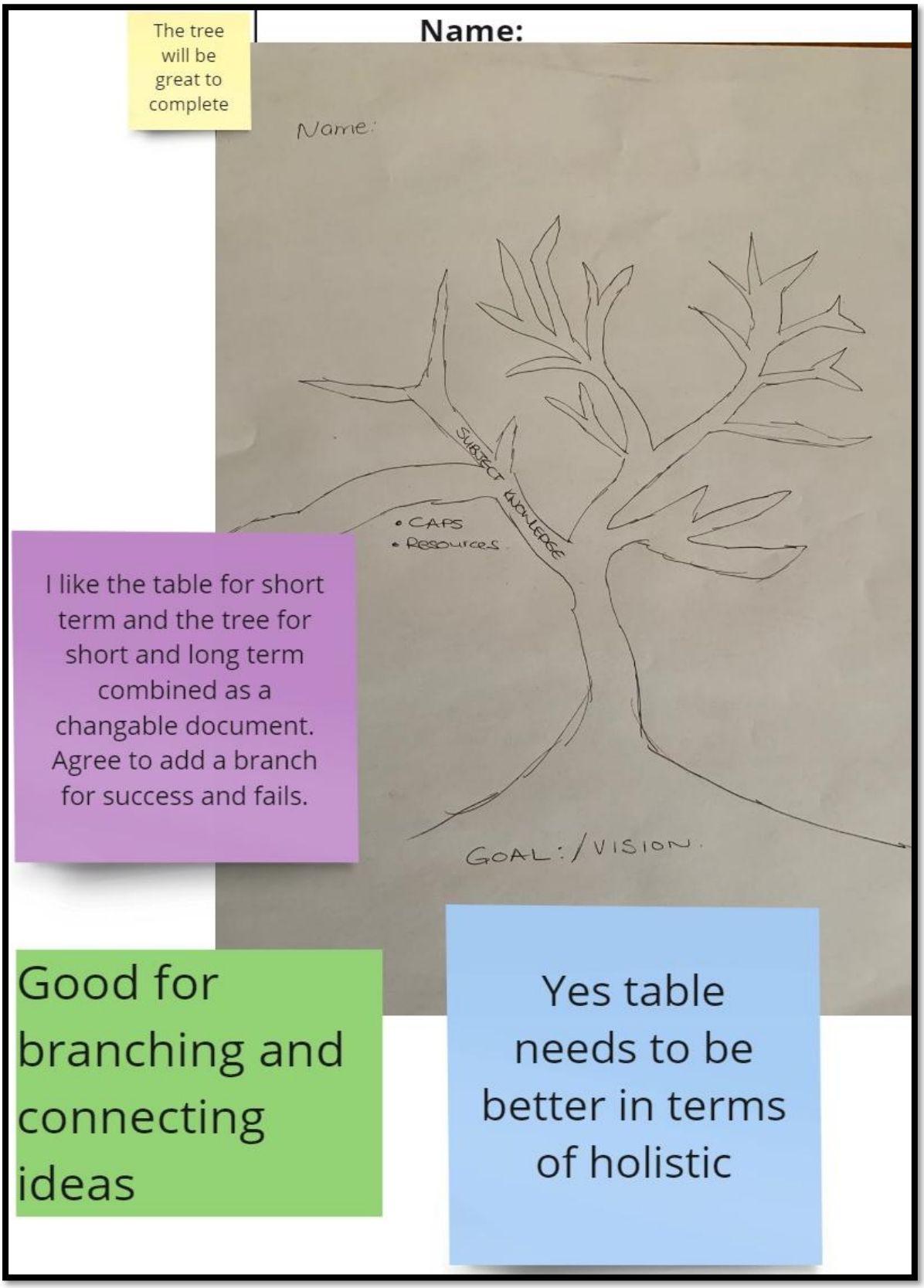
In Session 3 I analysed the data and two different themes emerged regarding the participants' ideas about what they would want in their Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan. The two themes which emerged were a structured layout to the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan and an unstructured layout to the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan. Suggestions on the presentation and structure are shared in Visual Evidence 4.17.



Visual Evidence 4.17 Structured Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan

As shown in Visual Evidence 4.17, the Community of Practice suggested having a table that is structured in a simple way that will allow for easy reading. Victor indicated

that he '*would also prefer the table, it would be so lovely to have something that you can tick off, tick a box to say that I took this small step*'. Most of the participants had opted for a table format for the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan as it was more structured for planning purposes. In Figure 4.18, the other type of Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan is illustrated. As can be seen in Figure 4.18 I, as the facilitator and the researcher, went through the data collected and noted that we spoke on growth on many occasions and a tree represented growth. I also noted during our discussions that some of the participants had not envisioned their career. The tree was developed in order to create a space for the participants to be creative and innovative in their professional learning planning. The rough drawing was made for the Community of Practice to discuss the idea of using an object such as a tree to plan their professional learning. The participants initially stated that they would prefer a structured plan that would allow them to tick off goals that had been achieved. However, during our discussion, Sue noted that she would like to use a less structured Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan as this would allow her to be creative and to innovate practice. The second Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan is shown below.



Visual Evidence 4.18 Unstructured Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan

In Visual Evidence 4.18 a more creative suggestion for the structure of the Professional Learning Plan was given by the Community of Practice. Sue preferred the symbol of a tree, which allowed for more freedom in the creative components of planning her professionalism. Once Sue had voiced her opinion, Mia and Nadia agreed with her that the tree provided a more creative and individualised approach to professional planning. As our discussion progressed, the participants indicated that the unstructured professional learning plan would be useful for brainstorming ideas.

As illustrated in Visual Evidence 4.17, the tree proved to be a useful tool to brainstorm a vision, goals to attain a vision and to establish teacher identity. The teacher identity would be altered as the teacher developed professionally. Olivia then suggested that the Visual Evidence 4.17 illustration could work as a '*vision board*'. Victor noted that although he tended to think more logically and preferred tables, the tree concept might broaden his creative thinking as '*it would challenge me to think a little bit differently and to maybe go in different directions—or lead me in different directions, whereas the table, would just stimulate that one side of my brain*'.

Sue said that she still preferred the tree as she was a holistic person to be developed. Just like a tree which growths as a whole plant, she as a person must grow altogether and could use each branch as a different part of who she is, for example, different branches could represent her social, academic and emotional development. She added that '*if I do not develop my social and my social IQ with my intellect, I am not going to be a whole person. And it's all linked. You cannot just develop your teaching life*'. During the session I observed that since each of us in the Community of Practice is different, there was not a right or wrong way in this regard. The participants and I realised that the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan should serve the purpose for which it was created, and that we should take responsibility for our professionalism. Mia and Sue suggested colour coding leaves to show their strengths and weaknesses, or to colour in the leaves once the tasks they represented had been accomplished, while Olivia said that since she was not the artistic type she would rather write down her ideas in the space. In my reflection I wrote that '*less is more'*—although the plan had to have structure, participants could add to the plan to make it appropriate for their personal needs.

Our discussions within the Community of Practice guided me as the facilitator and the participants in making meaning of our professional needs. The process of co-construction guided our self-regulated professional learning.

4.10 CONCLUSION

In Chapter 4, I discussed the spiral of Action Research through which I had progressed during my four Cycles, A – D. I discussed how I planned, acted, observed and reflected on my self-regulated learning in the Community of Practice. I explained how we our co-constructed the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan and the different components that arose from the data collected, namely self-regulating our professionalism, a Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan and the well-being of teachers.

CHAPTER 5

SIGNIFICANCE OF MY RESEARCH

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 5, I discuss the significance of my Action Research study and its potential implications for future research. I also share how the study contributed to the participants' and my own professional learning and how we co-constructed a Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan. I will structure the chapter by answering the research questions posed in Chapter 1.

5.2 UNRAVELLING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The focus of my research study was on becoming a self-regulated professional and co-constructing a Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan together with the other participants in the Community of Practice. We determined the means needed to co-construct a Professional Learning Plan and took action to start transforming our own professionalism and practices. I used Action Research in my practice as I facilitated the Community of Practice sessions. In Chapter 3, I discussed the Action Research design and the process that I went through to facilitate the Community of Practice and to innovate my practice as the facilitator, as well as the data collection methods and data analysis methods I used. In Chapter 4, I shared the findings of the study. Next, I will unpack the research questions by focusing on the main research question first, and then on the sub-questions.

5.2.1 Main Research Question

Professional learning is an integral part of an educator's teaching practice. Before embarking on my Action Research journey, I had experienced the need to grow in my own professionalism and to become a self-regulated professional. Rather than do it on my own, I opted to work together with others as we collectively explored our professionalism. The main research question covers the voyage the participants and

I undertook. I regard the joint scholarly endeavour I undertook with educators as innovative.

How can a Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan be co-constructed using an Action Research design?

As the facilitator of the Community of Practice I went through the five steps of Action Research to innovate my facilitation of the Community of Practice and to construct a Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan, in other words, I envisioned what the focus was for each stage and the adapted 3P self-regulated learning model informed my practices within the Community of Practice. I thus progressed through the steps explained in my discussion of the findings in Chapter 4, namely 'planning the session, the acting for innovation, observing for innovation and reflecting to innovate, followed by evaluating with a view to innovating the following cycle'. Throughout our Community of Practice sessions my focus was on innovating my professional practice as facilitator, but also on empowering the self, and for us as a collective to regulate our professionalism.

In essence, my research study therefore focused on co-constructing a Professional Learning Plan with educators in a Community of Practice. As stated earlier in Chapters 1 and 3, as an Action Researcher I was both part of the Community of Practice and the facilitator of the group of teachers who wanted to explore their self-regulated professionalism. My study was framed by socio-constructivist and cultural- historical activity theories. Sarbah (2020) recognises the value of constructing meaning from experiences and Foot (2014) further outlines how one's background has value in understanding social interactions and each other. Thus, the participants and I as a collective made meaning and empowered the self and others.

As a Community of Practice we opted for a co-constructive approach to the development of a Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan. During the first session, the participants shared that before our first encounter they had seldom had time, resources or opportunities for planning or envisioning their professionalism. Cook *et al.* (2017) note that time is a major factor for educators and limits professional learning from taking place, which is why online networks that are easily accessible for professional learning and gaining resources are useful. During our first session, Nadia indicated that she felt overwhelmed and had never before made any plans to enhance

her professional learning, to which she added: *'I actually struggle to see beyond next week quite frankly*.'

I realised the value of our joint contributions to the Community of Practice while at the same time taking responsibility for our own professionalism. Nadia noted that '*I haven't necessarily had - maybe I am just making excuses – a lot of time or mental energy to go into what I want in the future… I am trying to keep my head above water on a more short-term basis'.* Bjork *et al.* (2013) describe professional learning as something that a teacher should think about, which should lead to a decision to initiate professional learning. However, teachers have indicated that they do not have the time to contemplate their professional learning needs.

I facilitated the Community of Practice sessions as I progressed through the four cycles in my Action Research spiral. As explained in Chapter 4, although I initially opted to follow five steps in each cycle, as suggested by McNiff and Whitehead (2010), I later decided to also include Wolvaardt and Du Toit (2012) suggestion as the first step in envisioning in the Action Research cycle. I then opted to innovate during each cycle of the Community of Practice session. As I progressed through the four cycles during the Action Research process—as elaborated on in Chapter 4 and reflect on in Chapter 6—I began to observe how I not only innovated my practice, but also started taking responsibility for my own professionalism while challenging others to do the same.

The participants appreciated the notion of collaboration in the Community of Practice and were challenged as they contributed in the co-construction of the Professional Learning Plan. The participating teachers valued the idea of constructing a plan that they could use once our Community of Practice sessions and my Action Research study had come to an end. They were excited to be a part of the process of innovation and construction. Sue referred to the importance of planning one's professionalism when she said, '*map your path and see where you're going*'. The participants valued the opportunity to reflect on their professionalism and their plans for their own careers and futures in education. Nadia described the opportunity to be a part of our Community of Practice as insightful as she realised that she had actually neglected parts of her professional learning without being aware of it and said: '*For areas that I've neglected up until this point, these sessions have been very eye-opening that I*

have not thought about goals and where I want to end up.' The participants felt that their contributions added value to their own education practices and professionalism, and possibly to other educators in general. Nadia noted that the Community of Practice was adding value to my research study, which would contribute to education research when she commented: '*What you're [sic: referring to the researcher] busy with now is part of creating something, that will then inform other teachers, and we are then contributing to that potentially … [sic: we are] creating the actual knowledge, gaining it for our own professional practice'.* In our Community of Practice Sue pointed out that professional learning was not just about our practices, but also about knowing ourselves, thus a notion of making meaning of who we are. She continued by saying, '*there's people that do not know themselves. They don't know their strengths. They don't know the weaknesses*.' I believe that while the participants shared their thoughts in our Community of Practice we added value to one another's professional learning. In the following paragraphs I will discuss and unpack the sub-questions that link to my main research question

5.2.2 Sub-research questions

The sub-questions of my research study refined the main research questions and I further elaborate on how I chose to initiate a self-regulated professional learning approach, as adapted from Biggs *et al.* (2001), in my Action Research Cycles as I facilitated the Community of Practice sessions. I share how the participants and I worked collaboratively as we explored our professionalism and co-constructed the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan, and how I opted to cultivate the participants' and my own self-regulated professionalism. Each of the sub-questions will be discussed in detail in the following paragraphs.

5.2.2.1 Sub-question 1: How can I facilitate the process of co-constructing a Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan with educators?

In Chapter 2, I discussed literature concerning models and processes of self-regulated learning. I decided to adapt the Biggs *et al.* (2001) 3P model for teaching and learning, which focuses on classroom teaching and learning, and created a model that focuses

on self-regulated professional learning. I thus opted to use the adapted 3P self-regulated professional learning model (Chapter 2) and Action Research (Chapter 3) to innovate my practice as a facilitator in the Community of Practice. I therefore recognise that Action Research brings about change and the ability to monitor such change (Wolvaardt & Du Toit, 2012).

During our online Community of Practice session in Microsoft Teams I used a Miro app, which is an online interactive whiteboard. The participants and I were thus able to collaborate, contribute and discuss our points of view and previous experiences, and reflect on other components of our professionalism. At the end of the session I asked the participants to give feedback on the session by anonymously completing a qualitative feedback questionnaire. Their responses provided information on how they had experienced the session and enabled me to observe and evaluate what I had done during the facilitation of the session and to see what I should change during the following session or Action Research cycle. In the qualitative feedback questionnaire two participants commented positively regarding the Miro app by saying: '*[T]he tec tool distracts me and then I lose track of the conversation. I know I need to learn to use this skill and I will*' and '*[A]lthough I found using the Miro app daunting, I have to admit that it can be a very effective tool as long as it does not replace conversation.'*

A Community of Practice is a non-formal group of educators that meet together to discuss their knowledge and solve problems or share practices (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Van Rheenen & DeOrnellas, 2018). In the Community of Practice sessions, I facilitated in a socio-constructivist manner by challenging participants and myself to explore, reflect and construct collectively. Linked to the cultural history activity theory the participants considered our previous knowledge and experiences regarding professional learning and collectively innovated our professionalism.

To encourage the educators to participate in reflexive learning experiences and share their content knowledge, I facilitated in a manner similar to that used by Edwards (2007). The reflexive learning experience required the educators to rethink and reflect on their current practices. Within the Community of Practice, the participants and I realised the need to reflect on our professionalism and Olivia said, '*we need to stay fresh, and that's the challenge in itself. And if we don't reflect, we are going to be*

aiming at the wrong audience'. Olivia was explaining how teachers must reflect on their teaching practices to ensure that they are teaching the learners in front of them and preparing them for their future. This relates to the twenty-first-century attributes that affect teaching, which were discussed in Chapter 2. For the Community of Practice to become self-regulated professionals, I needed to focus on my own self-regulated learning to influence or challenge others.

5.2.2.2 Sub-question 2: How are the participants' and my own self-regulated professionalism cultivated in a Community of Practice?

According to Zumbrunn *et al.* (2011), self-regulated learning is a process of assuming control over your learning, thus a process of retrieving knowledge and skills by yourself (Wallin & Adawi, 2018). In the context of my study, the educators would assume control over their professional learning. However, I regard this process as never-ending, as is the Action Research process. While the participants and I discussed who is responsible for our professional learning, the conversation went back and forth and we finally concluded that each teacher is responsible for his or her own professional learning, with the support of the school. Sue commented that '*my development is definitely not the same as yours*', pointing out the fact that we are all unique and have different needs in our professionalism, thus we are all on our own professional journey and each educator's journey will differ from those of others, depending on how they envision their teaching careers. Olivia noted that support structures are important for teachers to continue on the path of professional learning. Nadia agreed and shared her experience as a first-year teacher who did not at the time have a departmental head and said, '*so that support we do not have'.* At the time of our sessions, Nadia mentioned that our sessions provided her with the support and community that she did not receive at her school. Olivia highlighted that although we, as educators, must take the initiative to improve our own professional learning, the school or organisation plays a role as the '*school invests in you as an individual'.*

In Chapter 2, I outlined the four dimensions of professional development mentioned by Zehetmeier *et al.* (2015), namely autonomy, action, networking and reflection. The participants and I added 'mentoring and well-being' to the four dimensions, as illustrate in Figure 5.1. The added dimensions are components of professional learning

identified and added based on our discussions about professionalism. I chose to use a honeycomb-shaped diagram as the parts fit intricately together, just like each dimension in our professionalism and development affects the other dimensions. I chose the colour green to illustrate the different dimensions and added well-being and mentoring to illustrate the journey of growth, which for the educator implies lifelong learning.

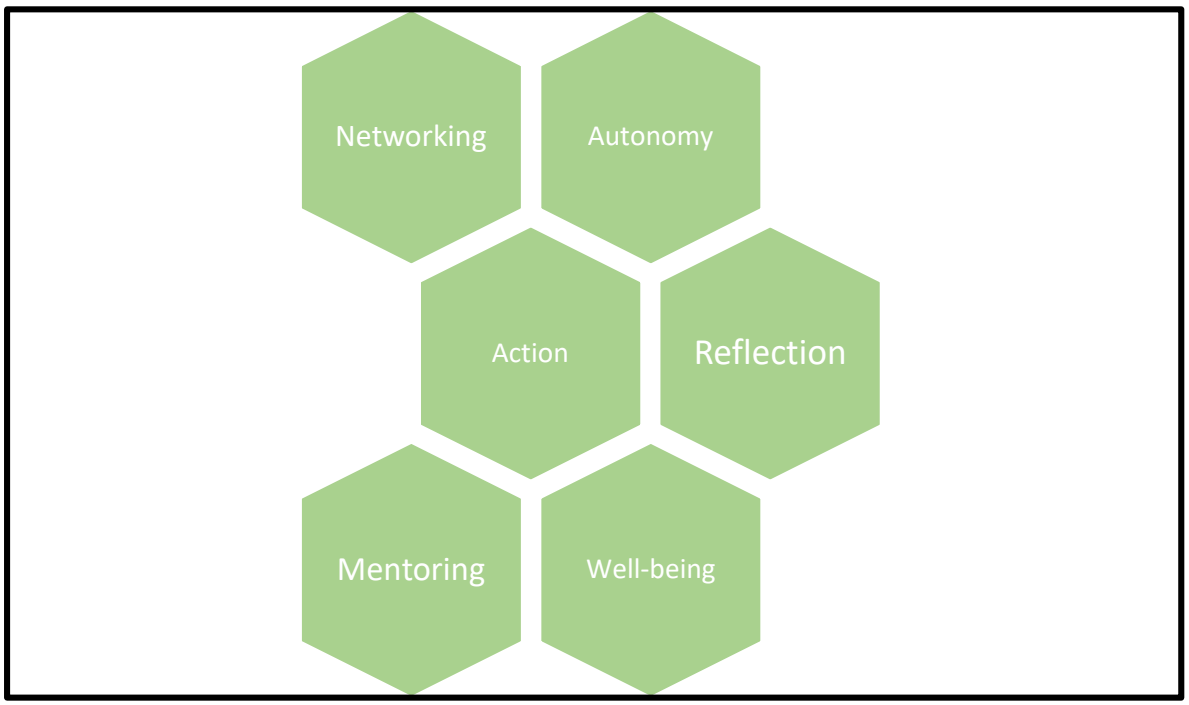


Figure 5.1 Dimensions to professional learning of educators

As a Community of Practice, as illustrated in Figure 5.1, our journey towards professionalism cannot be undertaken in isolation, but we can undertake that journey collectively. The first concept we added in Figure 5.1, namely well-being, resulted from discussions on looking after the self and the use of time. Three of the participants, Mia, Nadia and Olivia, are language teachers. Sue taught languages in previous years and shared that she would '*mark Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and I'm dead by Monday, and it wasn't worth it'*. Olivia and Nadia confessed that they were experiencing the same feeling. Nadia went as far to say, '*I got tears in my eyes (sic)'.* The Community of Practice noted that as educators our time and energy are given to teaching, and we

neglect taking care of ourselves. Victor added that he also realised the value of well-being and indicated that he used mindfulness, which helped him to be a better educator.

While we discussed mentoring in detail in the second session, Olivia realised that Sue had mentored her when she began her teaching career and said that, based on that experience, she could testify that '*mentoring is … nothing can teach you better than that*'. Sue shared that she was able to mentor as she herself had had an excellent mentor for many years who had guided her teaching practices and who '*was absolutely important. And she taught me how to teach, and how to manage my class, and simple things like lining up*'. Based on this discussion, we agreed as a Community of Practice that we all need to have a mentor and to mentor others around us. Nadia shared that she had not been mentored and was experiencing a gap, which she described as '*a mentor shaped hole*'. When we discussed professional learning, Sue mentioned the importance of teamwork and planning our professionalism with the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan and said, '*Every team member has to take responsibility to develop themselves and the person next to them*'.

In our final Community of Practice session, two of the participants, Olivia and Victor, noted that as a result of our Community of Practice sessions they had already begun their journey to take responsibility for their professionalism. Olivia indicated that she had registered again to complete her honours degree in Education, for which she had two more subjects to pass. Victor shared that he had started reading articles that are in line with his subject content to improve his subject knowledge, which was something for which he had earlier indicated a need. All the participants showed an interest in self-regulated professional learning as the value of being self-driven came to light. Nadia noted, and the other participants agreed, that professional learning is a continuous process that must be in place and must be kept '*at the fore that you never stop learning.'*

As the facilitator of the Community of Practice and the Action Researcher I was aware that I preferred order and structure in my methods and had to adapt to the process of Action Research, which can be rather 'messy', according to McAteer (2013). I further implemented self-regulated professional learning as I facilitated the Community of Practice sessions. I observed that, especially in Session 1, I had used frequently filler

words such as ‘um’ or ‘right’. However, I noticed that I used less and less of those words as we progressed from Session B to Session C and finally, during Session D, I also noticed that I had managed to challenge the participants more as we worked through the sessions. Previously in my teaching practice I would teach, instead of allowing others to construct meaning or knowledge themselves. During the Community of Practice sessions I regularly challenged myself to rather question or challenge the participants. During Session 1 I asked the question: ‘Who is responsible for this equipping of teachers?’ and it was clear that the participants were challenged with regard to how they should respond. Nadia, Victor and Sue wanted to reflect on this and Victor answered: *‘Maybe, maybe the teachers in their own way.’* This was a challenging situation for me as the facilitator as I was tempted to answer the question for them and give reasons for my answer. However, in a self-regulated manner the participants and I empowered one another and the self as we made meaning together.

5.2.2.3 Sub-Question 3: What will a Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan entail?

As indicated in Chapter 2, professional learning is a lifelong journey in which all educators should participate (Smit, 2020). Reyna (2019) agrees and refers to it as an intensive and ongoing process. Professional Learning Plans are described as being individualistic, focusing on the educators’ requirements for professional learning (Fong & Lewis, 2017; Hajisoteriou *et al.*, 2018; Morake, 2013). In one of our discussions on professional learning I used the following saying to sum up what the participants had indicated: ‘*Do it (professional learning) for value and not for points.’* The educators had referred to ‘points’ as the Integrated Quality Management System expect teachers to accumulate points earned for professional learning or development, thus the focus is not on empowering the self or on professionalism, but mainly on the accumulation of points. Sue mentioned that she had developed her own professional learning plan, while Victor, Mia and Olivia said that they already had plans for their professionalism in their heads. Nadia admitted that as a first-year educator she had not found the time to plan her professionalism.

As I was progressing through my Action Research spiral and the four cycles I observed, reflected and considered the visual evidence. I also analysed the qualitative feedback from the questionnaires completed at the end of each Action Research Cycle

or Community of Practice session. The participants and I contributed during activities in Miro, constructed our own meaning and discussed our professional learning and self-regulated professionalism. The Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan was co-constructed as we focused much attention on the planning previously done for our professionalism, and why it had been done. The participants and I continuously reflected our professionalism, focusing on what the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan should entail, the visual appearance of the plan and the components that should be included in it.

Regarding the contents or constructs of the plan, the participants first outlined the importance of reflecting on where you currently are in your professional journey. (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010) refer to having a specific starting point, which I recognised as a connection to the Action Research process. Nadia suggested that the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan should '*look like a process flow diagram*', whereas Olivia recognised the support structures and the fact that one must think about how to attain the goals, using the word '*method*'. Mia said that she would prefer a skeleton to which a body could be added: '*Table form with a skeleton where you add flesh*.' Victor pointed out that goals are vital for professional learning to take place and mentioned '*Goals/aspirations, Steps to reach said goal, Actions to reach steps and time constraints*' as examples. During our Community of Practice discussion the participants noted that they would prefer a table in which they could identify the goals they would like to achieve. It was also noted that although we were working towards our goals, there were components that influenced our goals, such as teacher identity, beliefs and assumptions, and previous experiences and challenges that we had faced along the journey. Sue mentioned that '*the content of the learning plan to me will always change*'. During our discussion the participants noted that we do need a space for each educator's plan to be different to accommodate the envisioning of a career. We also discussed how self-regulated learning will be different for each of us and how, if someone wanted to complete tables for each phase, they could. However, some educators would want a space to reflect and make notes about their professionalism as a way to show growth. Thus the plan is fluid as educators can use it to plan their professionalism and can identify exactly where they are in the three phases: 'My starting point, my self-regulated process and finally, my self-regulated station.' Reaching the station is not the end of

their professionalism, as educators may enter the station for a goal and objective but may have more than one goal to achieve in their Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plans. I used a station to show that the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan is also never-ending and that once the individual reaches the completion of one goal, another goal emerges and the educator would return to the starting point. The impact of megatrends is continuously changing which shows that educator never finishes the development of their professionalism but rather continuously sets goals to journey along in their professional career. I acknowledge that each individual teacher is unique and their contexts also differ.

The structure of the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan was of importance to the participants as how individuals would engage with their plans would differ. Olivia, Mia, Victor and Nadia noted that they would prefer the Self-regulated Professionalism Plan to be in a table format rather than an image so that they could monitor progress along the path. Initially, while analysing the transcriptions from the sessions and the Miro app data, I had noticed how regularly the participants and I used the construct 'growth' and the importance of continued growth. Based on the data from Miro, the discussions and the feedback questionnaires I then opted, during our final session, to suggest a tabled Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan since Olivia, for example, stated that she preferred to make lists of the components she would like to work on: '*Even with my planning, everything, I like to do things in tables and I prefer to hand write, just because it's easier to keep adding things*.' I then developed a tree-shaped plan, representing growth and becoming. However, the participants indicated that they preferred the table and thought that the tree would be more fitting as a brainstorming activity to supplement the table format.

A further analysis of the data showed that although much of conversation had centred on growth, we also spoke about the journey of professional learning. Sue noted that we tended to lose focus in our professional learning and needed to reflect on and take note of the journey we had been on as it '*makes you focus, makes you think about it. Because I think, in teaching, it's very easy to get overwhelmed by the daily routine and daily responsibilities that you don't really have time to sit and think about it, but this (professional plan) forces you to think about it. And it also lets you look back and see*.' I then decided to use a more structured and individualised format that would allow the

user of the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan to make meaning and challenge the self. I will share more on the design and context in the following paragraphs. The feedback from the participants was that the plan should be simple and easy to use to allow individual teachers to cultivate themselves on the professional learning journey.

I share my visualisation of the Self-Regulate Professional Learning Plan draft we constructed together in Figure 5.2. The Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan comprises of one page. The Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan is illustrated as a railway track, referring to the notion of a journey.

The adapted 3P self-regulated learning model underpinned the sessions that were held in the Community of Practice. The Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan has three phases: ‘My starting point’, ‘My Self-Regulated Process’ and ‘My Self-Regulated Learning Station.’ I will now discuss each phase and its content.

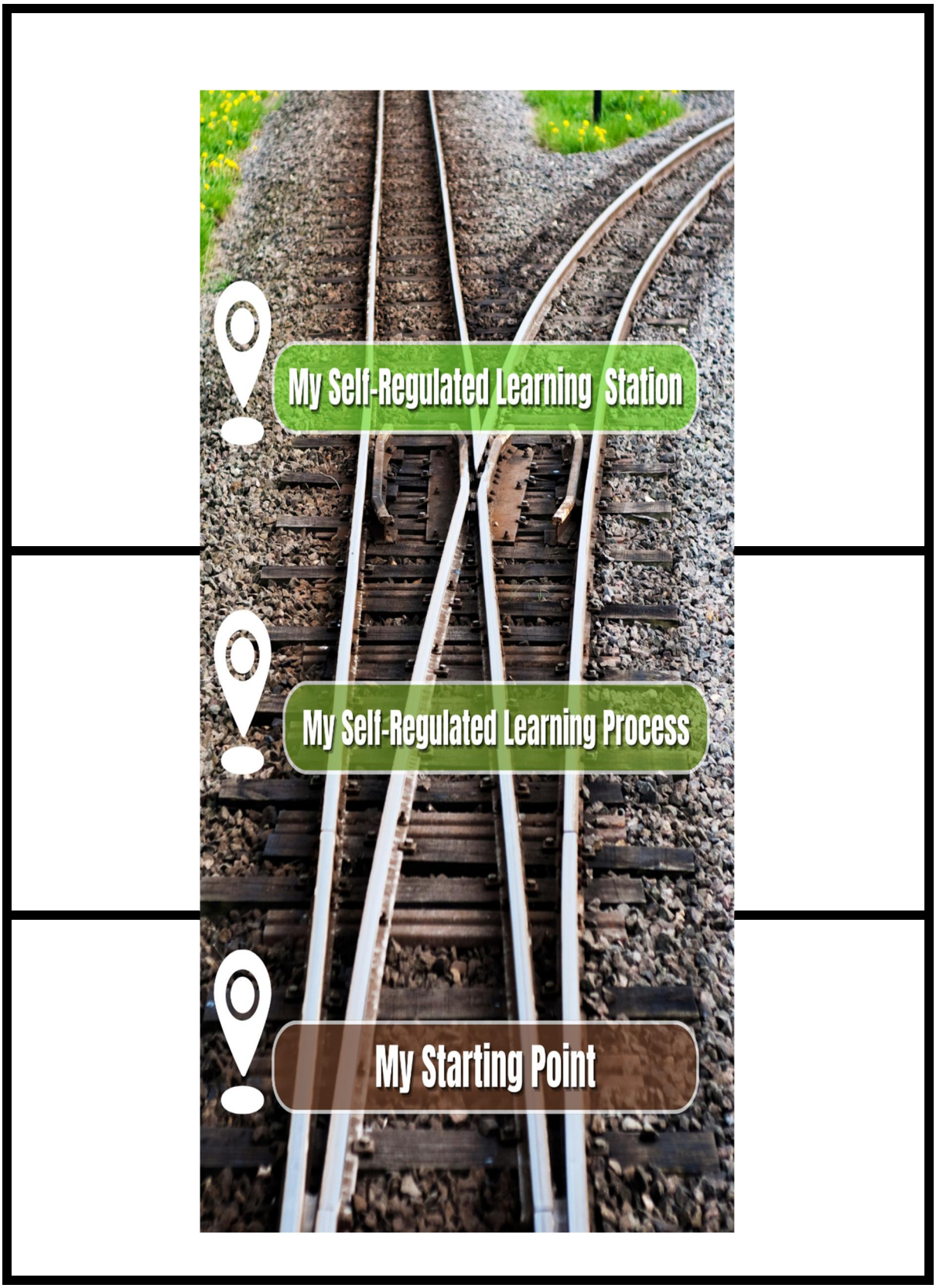


Figure 5.2 The Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan

Within each phase, as shown in Figure 5.2, the educator should have a space to reflect, make meaning and construct new professional knowledge or empower the self and others. The participants acknowledged and adapted the dimensions to professional learning by adding ‘mentorship’ to indicate that educators should not be on the journey alone. While using the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan, it is essential for the individual to go back and forth between the different phases. The process should therefore not be linear, as was the case in our adapted 3P self-regulated professional learning model.

At the top of the image the train track splits into two tracks, indicating that educators will be expected to make decisions about their professionalism—a notion of acknowledging the ‘self’ and, as Smit (2020) explains, ‘finding your own voice’ as an educator. The self-regulated learning process allows for educators to have an individual and unique focus in their professional learning. Although educators can choose to go either left or right, their journey will take them back to the starting point, the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan, where they will restart their planning for their professionalism. Different educators will envision their careers differently, which will lead to a variety of different pathways whereby they will self-regulated themselves in planning for the next phase of their professional learning journey by planning new goals based on their new starting points. Educators who reach the self-regulated learning station have not arrived at their final destination, but rather acknowledge the need for continued and lifelong professional learning through self-regulation before returning to ‘My starting point.’ Each educator will complete the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan in his or her own creative way. The Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan was created as a template that educators can use to complete the plan using the guidelines provided in the following paragraphs, but with the self as the focus. The necessary components of professionalism will be included to guide professionals in completing their Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan. Teachers who prefer to complete a table or use a more creative brainstorming mind map to complete the different phases could create an infographic or use another sheet of paper for planning their professionalism. The plan is flexible and can be adapted to suit the individual’s preferences and needs. The Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan is illustrated in Figure 5.2. It is important to note that

although not depicted in the visual, the train may go back to the previous location or move forwards or return to the starting point and begin the journey again.

5.2.2.3.1 My Starting Point

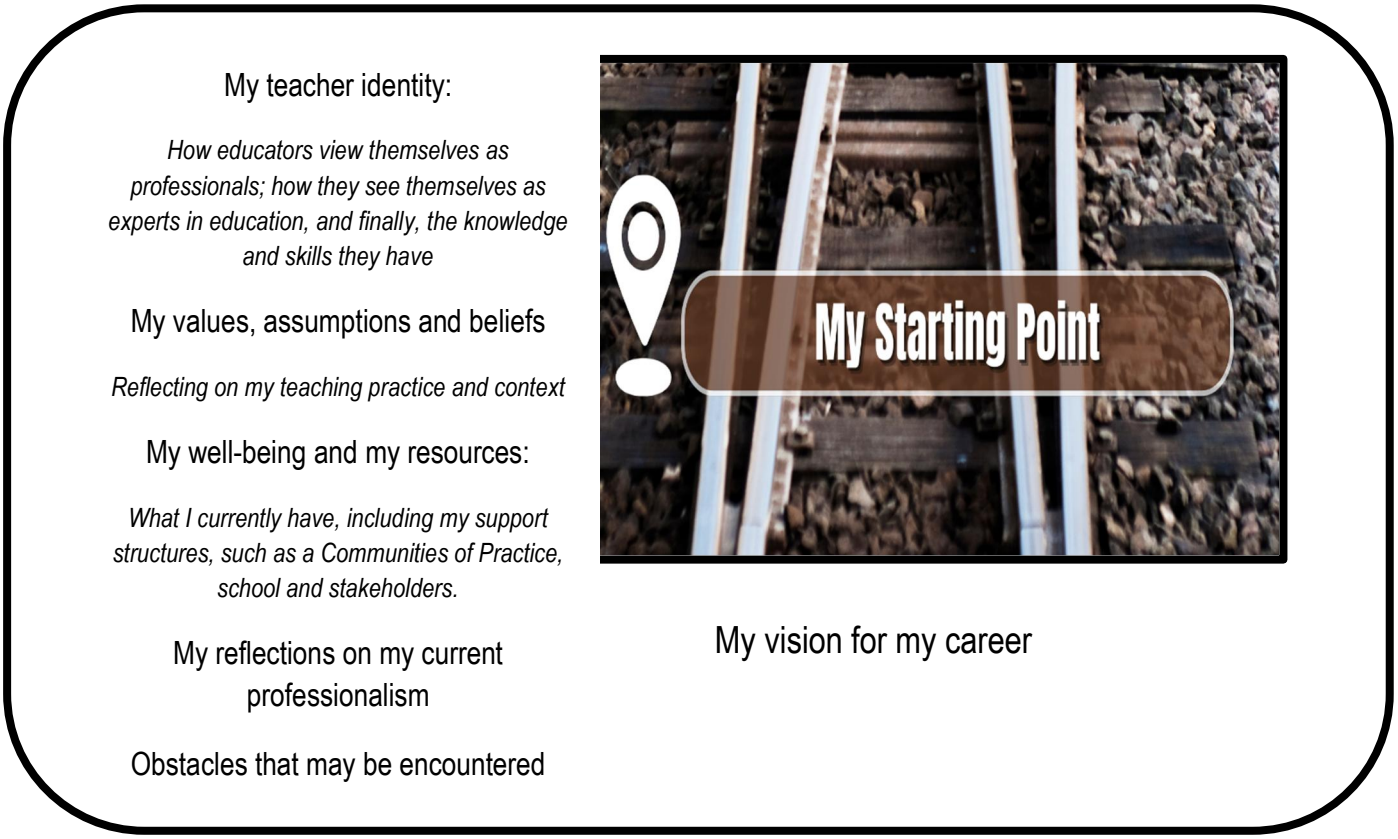


Figure 5.3 My Starting Point

My starting point is the first phase of the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan, as illustrated in Figure 5.3. I have used the colour brown to indicate the first phase to show that this is what I am, where I am currently at in relation to my professionalism, for example my values and assumptions, which reflect and challenge who I am and what I stand for. In the starting point phase, educators envision their careers, where they want to be in their careers and what they want to achieve. Every component of the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan is based on one's vision for one's career and is directly influenced by the vision. The vision for my career is created at the beginning and it is from this point where decisions are made about what I want to achieve to attain my vision. Educators may create a slogan to motivate themselves in their self-regulatory learning in order to achieve their goals, which will be leading to

their vision, which is part of the first phase of the Self-Regulate Professional Learning Plan. The first phase, ‘My starting point’, comprises of my values and my background. The starting point shows the educators’ identities, which include how they see themselves as professionals, how they acknowledge their skills and knowledge of their subjects and their views regarding their expertise in the field of education, as well as their assumptions and backgrounds. The journeys of educators will be different due to differences in their values and backgrounds. At this stage the participants and I acknowledged yet another aspect, namely the obstacles encountered during professional learning. In the first phase, educators record their teacher identities, their beliefs in teaching, assumptions about teaching and their teaching practices. This will be followed by reflection on their current teaching practices and the professional learning that is currently taking place in their practices, which will also help to guide them in planning their way forward.

During the first phase of the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan, the educators will identify the resources that are available to them or that they will need, which will include, for example, financial resources and support structures.

Together with mentoring, the notion of identifying or considering becoming part of a Community of Practice (which may be at the school, in the educator’s living or working area, or an online Community of Practice) was clearly identified as crucial. At this stage the value of the educators’ contexts, i.e. their schools and the support provided to them, was also identified as being important. It was clear to see that at Nadia’s school there was no support structure to encourage and promote educators’ professional learning.

5.2.2.3.2 My Self-Regulated Learning Process

The goals and objectives are set based on the educator's starting point.

The challenges that may be experienced during the self-regulated process may also be included.

Reflection on the self-regulated process is essential for the educator's lifelong learning.

Figure 5.4 My Self-Regulated Learning Process

My self-regulated process, as illustrated in Figure 5.4, is the second phase of the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan. I chose to use dark green as educators are developing their professional learning and making progress on their journey. During the self-regulated process phase educators start to more specifically describe their goals for their career and their objectives. Their goals and objectives are linked to their visions, for example the decision to aim for appointment as principal or deputy principal, which would require growing in leadership, learning about management and learning how to facilitate the learning of teachers. In the second phase, the 'how to' achieve the goals is established and the objectives are the focus. For each goal there are certain objectives, in other words, one can say that I have achieved my goal when I can do certain things. For example, to grow in leadership I could have certain objectives, such being tasked to lead a Community of Practice or a grade, or a team of teachers organising a function. Goals and objectives are self-regulatory in nature, so the self drives the person to achieve the objectives. The educators' goals will be influenced by the previous phase and will thus be underpinned by their teacher identity and belief in themselves. The goals and objectives will be influenced by the educators' assumptions regarding teaching and learning, as well as current challenges. Sue noted that goals must be focused on what you need now, in other words, '*you never arrived because the situation is always pliable and always changeable 'cause the children in front of you always change*'. Sue was also addressing the importance of

self-regulated professional learning goals when she noted that we '*have never arrived'.* This shows us that we need to create goals that are based on the challenges that we are currently facing. Olivia noted that '*you build on from where you left off*'. In Olivia's comment, it is important to note that you will keep developing yourself as you build and grow your professional learning, and this is based on who you are as a teacher, your assumptions and beliefs. The challenges you face may require you to act directly to overcome them, for example, a lack of financial resources, a lack of support from stakeholders and time. In obstacles you are inhibited from continuing for example, factors that may be obstacles are educators and stakeholders' preconceived ideas about what professional learning is, the role of the educator in the school, willingness from staff to mentor one another and one's own understanding of self-regulated professional learning in the education field. The goals and objectives will be based on the starting point. In other words, educators will innovate goals based on the vision they outlined in the envisioning of their careers and their values and assumptions regarding their teaching practices. The goals will be based on their social, emotional and spiritual attributes, which are aspects that affect the well-being of the educator and must therefore be considered when developing goals, since professional learning examines the holistic individual and not only his or her career-oriented facets. The goals and objectives might be influenced by aspects of the starting point, for example resources or possible obstacles already identified or emerging. I would encourage a timeline to be provided within the self-regulated process with regard to when the 'station' for a specific objective should be achieved. During the process, the individual is encouraged to meet regularly with the Community of Practice, as the participants and I did, while also being in a mentor or peer mentor relationship. The categories for goal setting are not limited to, but can include content knowledge and / or quality of teaching and instruction and / or professional matters. The goals will be based on the vision at the starting point and reflection. An individual may return to the starting point at any time and it is possible to progress with or without some aspects to the 'station'. In the second phase of the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan the educator needs to reflect on the process that has taken place.

5.2.2.3.3 My Self-Regulated Learning Station

The educator's goals and objectives have been achieved and he/she sets out to take responsibility for his/her own professionalism. If not all the goals have been attained, adjustments are made to those not attained as was planned for.

The Self-Regulated Learning Station is not the final destination as professional learning is a lifelong endeavour.

The educator now continues to self-regulate his/her professional learning and returns to the first phase of the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan.

Figure 5.5 My Self-Regulated Learning Station

My self-regulated learning station is the third, but not the final phase of our Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan, as illustrated in Figure 5.5. For some passengers the station is their destination, but for others is it just a stopover or a quick stop. For this phase I used a bright green to suggest that growth is continuing and to celebrate the professional learning that will take place from here on, as well as the possible 'product' of the self-regulated professional plan. In the self-regulated learning phase, the station is reached during the self-regulated learning station phase when some of the goals and objectives that were set out in the previous phase, 'my regulated learning process', have been achieved. During the final phase the educator must continue to reflect on the process that has taken place, acknowledge the ups and downs and grow from the journey that has taken place.

Although the self-regulated learning station is the final phase, the process continues and reverts back to the starting point, or the journey or process phase. As mentioned earlier, the professional learning process is a lifelong process that continues throughout a teacher's career. The reason for reverting to the starting phase is to redefine the identity of the educator and potentially to redefine and re-envision the

professional career of the educator before moving on to the second phase in which the goals are constructed again, and so on. A specific timeframe is not identified as in the case of other plans, since individuals take responsibility for their own professionalism and the individuals thus to set their own goals, acknowledging that we differ and do not all learn professionally in the same way and only in a specified time period of, for example, three years. Staring points also differ and this impacts on how quickly individuals acquire skills, for example technical skills in online learning.

The focus of the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan was to be individualistic and to take responsibility for one's own professionalism. Educators may interpret different portions differently and some may include all the components discussed while others may include fewer. The important aspect to note is that educators' circumstances differ, which will influence their professionalism. The Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan will look different for each educator, depending on individual needs. Once the educator has completed the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan, the process restarts at 'My starting point'. This shows that self-regulated learning is a never-ending process. In the following paragraphs, I will discuss the significance of my study

5.3 POTENTIAL VALUE OR SIGNIFICANCE OF MY RESEARCH

I consider the significance or possible meaning of the Action Research I conducted to be evident from the meaning I made in my practice as the facilitator and a member of the Community of Practice sessions. The participants and I collaborated in the Community of Practice sessions as we cultivated our own and others' self-regulated professional learning.

The findings arrived at based on my study may assist other educators in seeing their own professional learning in a new way and encourage them to find meaning in exploring the planning of their own professionalism in a self-regulated manner.

As explained in Chapter 1, methodologically I implemented Action Research in my practice as the facilitator of a Community of Practice with other educators. We epistemologically explored the need to develop and take responsibility for our

professionalism, thus we explored self-regulated professional learning to learn and grow in our professionalism.

Ontologically, even though the participants and I had different experiences, were from different schools, specialised in different fields and had different values, we opted to innovate our professionalism by making meaning and co-constructing a Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan for our professional learning,

The participants and I thus collaborated and co-constructed while being part of a Community of Practice and learning from and with one another. The value of educators being part of a Community of Practice, even if conducted online, should therefore be clear.

5.4 LIMITATIONS AND JUSTIFICATION

The limitations of this study were that regulations enforced during the COVID-19 pandemic did not initially allow face-to-face meetings. Although face-to-face meetings were allowed during the data collection period, the participants were concerned about safety and therefore decided to rather meet online. I acknowledge that some of the social interactions that would have been experienced during face-to-face sessions were lost due to this, and that I experienced other challenges, such as losing connection or ensuring all participants in the Community of Practice were on the same page in the Miro board. Although in my opinion the sessions were successful, I acknowledge that face-to-face sessions might have been more meaningful and that we would have been able to connect more as a collective. However, meeting online simplified the organisation as I did not have to make arrangement for the use of a suitable venue and the participants did not have to travel to attend the Community of Practice sessions. Due to us meeting online, participants were also able to join more of our sessions.

I was also limited with regard to space, as stated, since we worked exclusively online and I completed the data collection in a limited period. In future studies I would like to involve the Department of Education and not only Intermediate Phase teachers and one FET phase educator, but also Foundation Phase and more Senior/FET educators.

The research was limited as the sample size was small and the participants in the Community of Practice I facilitated for my Action Research came from only two

schools. I initially invited ten educators to participate, but some withdrew and in the end only five remained. However, they all contributed to the study in various ways. I had to fulfil different roles, i.e. as researcher and facilitator, which can be considered to have been a limitation, but I regard the manner in which the participants were co-constructors in the study as being of value. I believe that my study was trustworthy and even though I had various roles, I acted in an ethical manner. I acknowledge that my assumptions and bias as researcher may have been a limiting factor in the Action Research I conducted

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH AND FOR OWN PRACTICE

As I progressed through the Action Research process, I was able to see the value of this type of research for me personally in my practice. I had never conducted Action Research before and the process and steps in each cycle empowered me with, for example, the ability to plan, act, observe, reflect on and evaluate my own practice. The theory underpinning this study is the constructivist theory and I noted that through the meaning-making process I was able to make several suggestions for future related research within the field of professional learning. My own personal professionalism and practice as facilitator started to flourish.

I would like to make some suggestions regarding professional learning, a Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan and Communities of Practice within the education sector: I recommend that, rather than send the participants the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan to use or to review, another session should take place to discuss the findings with them. I further recommend that the sessions for data collection in the Community of Practice be completed in person so that the participants can interact and build and create items together. I would recommend that research be conducted on the long-term effects of a Community of Practice in a school and how this affects the professionalism of educators.

I noted that although I was the researcher, I benefitted from being part of the Community of Practice as it encouraged and motivated me to continue my professional learning. The participants suggested that Community of Practice sessions should be held more regularly and only a week after we had our last session Sue told me, '*I*

actually missed our usual weekly meeting time'. This confirmed that during the four weeks in our Community of Practice we all had an influence and impact on one another's professionalism.

In future research I will allow for more time per session to give the facilitator and the participants time to explore professionalism more deeply and to ensure more interaction between the participants and the researcher. I will encourage and challenge the participants to be more creative in their professionalism, to be self-regulated professionals and to use the Self-regulated Professional Learning Plan to plan their professionalism. I will aim to include a greater variety of educators with different levels of experience who are employed at different public and/or private schools.

In future research it will be interesting to see how the participants continue to self-regulate their professional learning practices after our Community of Practice sessions have come to an end, and to investigate how the Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan is utilised or how it may be improved.

5.6 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I answered the research questions by discussing the significance of my research, explained how the participants and I initiated the construction of a Self-regulated Professional Learning Plan and elaborated on how I used Action Research in my practice and facilitated the Community of Practice sessions.

I also discussed the limitations of this research study and made suggestions regarding possible further related research. In the final chapter, Chapter 6, I will provide a meta-reflection on the research described in the previous chapters.

CHAPTER 6

MY META REFLECTION

Figure 6.1 The Road of my Professionalism (The Namaqualand Flower Route. Image taken on 24.09.2021)

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 6 I share a meta-reflection on my Action Research study and my overarching reflections on all the components of my research study. I will, as suggested by De Boer *et al.* (2015), reflect on my reflections. Throughout the Action Research process, I reflected on each cycle, but also on a continuous basis. Reflection was therefore an integral part of the process. Figure 6.1 illustrates my own professional journey along a dusty road that is challenging but is made worthwhile by the beauty encountered along the way.

6.2 META-REFLECTION

I have structured my meta-reflection in line with the adapted 3P self-regulated learning model. The different sections of my meta-reflection on the three phases of the Self-

Regulated Professional Learning Plan are labelled as follows: My starting point in Action Research; My Action Research processes; and My own self-regulated station. I will discuss my reflections in each of these phases in the paragraphs below.

6.2.1 My Starting Point in Action Research

My research process began with finding a specific topic for research. I have a passion for professional learning and, as mentioned in Chapter 1, I have been tutoring distance education students since 2019 and have gained a wealth of knowledge concerning how educators view and consider their professionalism. I have also seen how educators require guidance concerning the completion of a professional development plan and taking responsibility for their own professionalism. I have also been an educator for ten years and experience has taught me that the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS), which I referred to in Chapters 1 and 2, is an appraisal system rather than a professional development plan as it is focused more on earning points than on promoting growth and development.

During the Action Research process I found it exciting to create a Community of Practice and to innovate my practice in that context. As shown in Figure 6.1, the beautiful flowers I saw along the way made my journey worthwhile. My facilitation of the Community of Practice sessions taught me that we all had different personalities, came from different backgrounds and had different ideas about and experiences of professional learning, and we complemented and challenged each other in our sessions.

I enjoy working with people and analysing and critically discussing aspects of a topic. I was nervous to see how the participants would respond to me as some of them were my colleagues. I was also curious to see how honest they would be when completing the feedback questionnaire. However, during the sessions I discovered that I felt comfortable and was not as nervous as expected as I knew some of the participants and knew how to work with them. I had hoped that the participants would be passionate about their professionalism and that they would be keen to examine their professionalism with the group. I value honesty, loyalty and respect. The Community of Practice sessions also showed me that I place a high value on commitment—if I say

I will do something, I will do it fully—and I struggled to accept the behaviour of a participant who had initially agreed to participate and then backed out.

I have noticed that as teachers we do not plan for our professionalism, but merely address our professionalism if required to do so by the Department or the school, for instance when general courses and in-service training are provided by the school. Against this backdrop, I became interested in the possibility of creating a professional learning plan developed by teachers themselves, which I envisaged as a basic plan that would allow teachers the freedom to innovate their teaching practices as they saw fit. I had often tried to plan my own professionalism, but realised that even though I had the desire, the planning process would be challenging if I tried it on my own. Although I had attempted to plan and be flexible in planning my professionalism, I realised that I lacked the means needed to go about the planning effectively. I also realised the value of self-regulation, which is of the utmost importance in professionalism since a one-size-fits-all structure does not work and educators cannot rely solely on others or an organisation for their professional development. My research study thus focused on the 'self' since I realised that I myself had to take the initiative if I wanted to innovate my professionalism and to grow as a professional.

During the beginning phases of my research study, the University of Pretoria held a postgraduate cohort session that focused on developing your topic and igniting a passion for research. I enjoyed the session and grew as the professors interacted with the students and we were able to critically discuss our research topics. This experience guided me in my approach to my studies. Although the professors were not necessarily Action Researchers, their knowledge and research experience was invaluable and encouraged me to start thinking about and questioning different aspects. As a result I was able to develop my title and to critically think about my research study. I also realised the value of collaboration in a group or a Community of Practice, which led me to incorporate the latter into my own study.

During my first year as a master's student, the COVID-19 pandemic began, which proved to be challenging as face-to-face meetings were not allowed. As previously mentioned, I found working in a group to be beneficial as it improved my critical thinking and guided me on my Action Research journey. The pandemic also proved challenging as I was in lockdown, which affected both my work and my studies. Another problem was that it was difficult to recruit participants as some principals objected to me visiting their schools to talk to their teachers and invite them to participate in my study. Others did either not reply to my email or replied saying that their staff members were already too busy and overwhelmed with school-related activities.

During the beginning phases of sampling participants, my supervisor told me that there should be no less than five participants. Initially I was disappointed that there were only five participants, but I was grateful as they were keen to discuss different points and a larger group would have limited participants' opportunities to discuss their opinions or concerns about professional learning. One participant who had agreed to participate opted out of the study two days before we would have started. I was disappointed as he was from another school not far from where I teach.

Since the study was undertaken as an online Community of Practice, I was able to see the value in teachers being relaxed and enjoying the session. In my reflection journal I noted that if one of the participants had not withdrawn, I might have felt pressured for time. I reflected on the value of having face-to-face sessions as initially planned, but the online sessions challenged me and I realised the value of creative problem solving. I acknowledge the impact that body language can have on communication when people meet face to face, but by meeting online we were able to enjoy longer sessions as the teachers did not still have to drive home afterwards.

My vision for my career is to be used in leadership and I believe that this will happen. I have always been somewhat reserved and prefer others to be in the limelight while I get on with my job and do it well. I am as passionate about seeing learners achieve their full potential as I am about seeing teachers being taken out of their comfort zones

and being motivated to achieve their full potential. I will now discuss my Action Research process.

6.2.2 My Action Research Process

In Figure 6.1 there are rocks on the road and it is not clear where the road will lead to. Professional learning is also a path that may present many challenges, but one should enjoy the journey as arriving at the destination will be worth any problems faced on the way. As discussed in Chapter 5, I prefer structure and struggled with the idea of Action Research being a messy process, so I knew beforehand that there would be problems and that the process would not be smooth sailing. Initially, as an Action Researcher, I experienced the Action Research design to be complicated and challenging. As I progressed through the steps I began to enjoy the process, but during the planning stages of the Action Research and the writing of Chapters 1 to 3 I could understand why McAteer (2013) describes it as 'messy'. I prefer to be well organised and to strictly follow processes or procedures. I believe I am a structured individual who prefers to plan intricately and complete steps in their logical order. However, the 'messy' nature of Action Research process allowed me to innovate my practice in the Community of Practice. I also explored the Action Research process, which I implemented in my practice and plan to use in my teaching practice. According to Bada and Olusegun (2015), experiential learning is most effective when our theory is grounded in constructivism. In my practice I am learning from the experience of facilitating the Community of Practice and going through the Action Research process.

During the Action Research process there were times when, while reflecting reflect on the feedback I had received, I would realise that I needed to be vulnerable and value the process as I was able to challenge my perceptions. Closer to the end of the process I also realised that my supervisor was simply building my self-regulated professional learning. I learnt from her and appreciated her willingness to facilitate my learning while I was in the process of completing the research.

The Action Research process showed me the value in becoming a self-regulated professional learning educator; however the 'How?' intrigued me. I must admit that

when I embarked on my master's studies, I had a workshop and mentor framework of what professional learning is. However, as time went by I redefined my own professionalism and developed a need and desire for self-regulated professional learning. I also desire to mentor teachers and to guide them in areas in which I see a need.

During my reflections after sessions, I noted that I struggled to move along from disruptions when a participant was having issues with the Miro app or struggled to move across the board as I felt that it was wasting the short time we had together. There were occasions where I had to hide my frustration and try hard to calmly assist participants or guide them through the activities. I found it especially challenging when, during a session, some participants were very confident in trying out new components of the Miro app while others struggled with it. Since the Community of Practice sessions were held online, it was impossible to help participants by physically showing them how to do things, but we could provide some guidance and support to those who needed it. As a Mathematics teacher I regularly challenge the learners to think critically to solve problems, and after my experiences our Community of Practice I started to more regularly implement critical thinking and questioning practices in my teaching practice.

Sue surprised me when she told me that she did not want to 'ruin my data'. However, I encouraged her to participate in the research study as I knew that her forty-three years of experience was invaluable and her knowledge about teaching was something that would benefit all of us in the Community of Practice. I also knew that she was not used to using technology and that I would have to assist and guide her to boost her confidence in her ability to use the tools we employed in this study. The other participants and I therefore challenged and encouraged her to try using the different tools on the Miro app and she was soon able to do so. During the sessions she pointed out that with the necessary support one can do many things. I found the Community of Practice also supported me very well and each participant was willing to learn and journey with me on out journey towards self-regulated professional learning.

My original goal was to be a grade tutor, i.e. the person who leads a grade and administers outings, honour awards for the grade. The grade head liaises with parents,

deals with discipline and works with the team of educators. I have managed Grade 6 educators for a time, which has improved my leadership skills.

I am currently an acting departmental head and my goal is to become a departmental head. I have learnt a great deal about the school, the teachers and how things work in a school from a management perspective.

I would like to continue my journey in self-regulated professional learning by focusing on using what I have gained from my master's studies.

6.2.3 My Self-Regulated Station

My self-regulated journey began when I registered for a master's degrees. I have been through many processes that enabled me to initiate my self-regulated learning. Although my decision to further my studies took me out of my comfort zone, it was something I knew I had to go through if I wanted to enhance my own professionalism.

During the process of completing my degree, I learnt a lot about my own strengths and weaknesses. I have learnt that I can take myself out of my comfort zone and thrive as I enjoy the challenges that it involves. I noted that while I was conducting my research and asking my supervisor for guidance, she would regularly ask questions instead of answering mine. Initially I struggled with this since I knew that she understood what I was asking—what the best way forward would be—but I soon realised that she also understood self-regulated learning and Action Research and therefore regularly challenged me.

During the second year of my master's studies, I was interviewed and was subsequently appointed as the Acting Department Head for Languages and Mathematics at my school. This has been a wonderful opportunity that has given me insight and experience in the running of a school and the way individuals handle facets of the curriculum and daily happenings within the school. I have also discovered my own strengths and weaknesses. Although the Community of Practice sessions were held before I was appointed as Acting Department Head, I believe that I have been progressing on my self-regulated journey since conducting the sessions. I have learnt to take the initiative to manage situations that arise during the school day. I generally

manage situations more effectively and no longer try to avoid conflict but deal with it through discussion and feedback. I have also learnt to facilitate learning in my classroom by questioning learners' questions to encourage them to develop self-regulated learning.

I noted that although the title of this research study is 'A Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan', the product could be better described as 'A Self-Regulated Professional Learning Process'. During the data analysis period, I began to realise that since professional learning is not a plan that is set in stone and should be adaptable and flexible, it can be better described as a process. During a Self-Regulated Professional Learning Process an educator can go back and forth and the journey is not necessarily a straight track from the beginning to the end of one's career. I realised that some of my own professional learning efforts have failed due to my reliance on a system, or my idea that I should stick to a plan regardless of the situation. The Self-Regulated Professional Learning Plan should be a flexible and adaptable, allowing educators to change or adapt their goals to accommodate the ever-changing world and introducing the twenty-first-century attributes.

Innovating practice and focusing on the self-regulatory components of professional learning are essential for innovation to take place in practice.

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