‘My heart keeps getting in the way’: A collaborative journey towards holistic support for pre-service teachers during teaching practice

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare herewith that the work contained in this dissertation is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

Signature

22/11/2021

Date

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ABSTRACT

Teaching practice is an important component of any teacher training programme as it provides an enriching opportunity for pre-service teachers to engage in real-life teaching activities. But because of the challenges they encounter, it can also prove to be a make-or-break phase for them, influencing their perception of the whole teaching profession and even leading to their leaving the profession before or during their first years of teaching. This study aimed to explore pre-service teachers' experiences of holistic support during and after teaching practice. Providing for the individual and unique needs of pre-service teachers is an integral component of the teaching practice process that deserves the attention of role-players, including teacher educators, higher education institutions, schools and mentor teachers.

In this study, participatory action learning and action research (PALAR) cycles were combined with data generation methods such as photovoice, a future-creating workshop and reflective group conversations. These vehicles assisted in the collaborative conceptualisation of the challenges and needs of the pre-service teachers or co-researchers during and after teaching practice. The co-researchers and I devised possible ways of improving holistic support during and after teaching practice. Five final-year (fourth-year) pre-service teachers at the North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus, participated in the study.

The findings showed that in most cases pre-service teachers had negative perceptions and experiences of holistic support, during and after teaching practice. A feeling of isolation was identified as a recurring challenge faced by pre-service teachers during teaching practice. The lack of support from role-players such as the mentor teacher, the teaching practice administrative office and pre-service teacher liaisons also contributed to the negative perceptions and experiences.

Keywords: Pre-service teachers; B.Ed. programme; teaching practice; teacher educators; mentor teachers; pre-service teacher liaisons; holistic support

OPSOMMING

Blootstelling aan die onderwyspraktyk is ’n belangrike komponent van enige onderwysopleidingprogram, omdat dit verrykende geleenthede vir voordiensonderwysers bied om aktief betrokke te wees by werklikewêreldonderrigaktiwiteite. Aangesien voordiensonderwysers tydens dié komponent van die onderwyseropleidingsprogram verskeie uitdagings in die gesig staar, word dit egter ook as die maak-of-breek-fase gereken. Hierdie uitdagings kan ’n invloed op hul persepsie van die onderwysberoep in sy geheel hê en selfs daartoe lei dat hulle die beroep verlaat, voor of tydens die eerste paar jaar as praktiserende onderwysers.

Die doel van hierdie studie was om die ervaring van voordiensonderwysers ten opsigte van holistiese ondersteuning, tydens en ná onderwyspraktyk, te verken. Die rede hiervoor is dat die voorsiening in die individuele en unieke behoeftes van voordiensonderwysers ’n integrale komponent van die onderwyspraktykproses vorm, wat die aandag van verskeie rolspelers verdien, insluitend onderwysopvoeders, hoëronderwysinstellings, skole en mentoronderwysers.

In hierdie studie is deelnemende aksieleer en aksienavorsingsiklusse (PALAR) gekombineer met data-insamelingsmetodes, naamlik fotostem, ’n toekomsskeppende werkswinkel en retrospektiewe groepbesprekings. Die data wat deur dié data-insamelingsmetodes genereer is, het gesamentlik bygedra tot die konseptualisering van die uitdagings en behoeftes van voordiensonderwysers en medenavorsers, tydens en ná blootstelling aan die onderrigprojek. Daarby het ek en die ander medenavorsers moontlike aksies wat geneem kan word om holistiese ondersteuning tydens en ná die onderwyspraktyk te verbeter, bedink. Vyf finalejaarvoordiensonderwysers (oftewel voorgraadse studente wat vierdejaars is) aan die Noordwes-Universiteit, Potchefstroomkampus het aan die studie deelgeneem.

Die kernbevindinge van die studie sluit in dat voordiensonderwysers in die meeste gevalle ’n slegte ervaring en negatiewe persepsies van holistiese ondersteuning tydens en ná blootstelling aan die onderwyspraktyk het. Die gevoel van isolasie is as ’n herhalende uitdaging geïdentifiseer. Die gebrek aan ondersteuning deur rolspelers, onder andere die mentoronderwyser, die onderwyspraktyk- administratiewe kantoor en voordiensonderwyserleiers dra ook by tot die negatiewe ervaring van voordiensonderwysers.

Sleutelterme: Voordiensonderwysers, B.Ed-program; onderwyspraktyk; onderwyseropvoeders; mentoronderwysers; voordiensonderwyserleiers; holistiese ondersteuning

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION TO AND OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

It is universally acknowledged that an effective teacher training programme has an integrative design of coursework, learning from practice and learning in practice (Darling-Hammond, 2006; SA, 2015). An important requirement of all such programmes is teaching practice pre-service teachers spend time in schools under the supervision and guidance of a mentor teacher (Lilach, 2020). Teaching practice provides pre-service teachers with the opportunity to practise the knowledge and skills gained in their teaching training programmes in a real-life classroom context, to develop graduate attributes and required professional competencies (SA, 2015). In addition, teaching practice contributes to the development of pre-service teachers' professional identities (Ivanova & Skara-Minclne, 2016; Mangope et al., 2018; Özdaş, 2018).

In addition to the enriching opportunities that pre-service teachers experience during teaching practice, they may also encounter challenges that can hamper their ability to get the most out of these opportunities (Botha, 2020; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Foncha et al., 2015; Mahmood & Iqbal, 2018). Teaching practice may become overwhelming for pre-service teachers and lead them to experience a range of negative emotions (Kihwele & Chuma, 2020; Villarama et al., 2017). Negative emotions such as fear, anxiety, insecurity and disappointment may hamper pre-service teachers' motivation and undermine their professional development (Timoštšuk & Ugaste, 2012; Yuan & Lee, 2016).

Supporting pre-service teachers during teaching practice can be seen as a crucial element in the development of the professional identities of pre-service teachers (Wilson & Huynh, 2019; Yayli, 2018). Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) remind us that pre-service teachers may have differing needs and face different challenges, and therefore require different kinds of support to be motivated and enabled to grow. For this reason, a more holistic approach to supporting pre-service teachers is needed. Through not receiving adequate support, pre-service teachers may suffer long-term consequences, such as finding themselves resigning as beginner teachers (Mudau, 2016). Van Overschelde et al. (2017) claim that, on the contrary, when teachers (pre-service teachers and beginner teachers) receive the support they need, they become more effective teachers capable of meeting all the demands of the profession. "The more effective the teacher, the more willing they are to stay in the profession" (Markle, 2020, p. 20).

1.2 Problem statement

Supporting pre-service teachers is an integral factor in the teaching practice process that cannot be ignored by role-players, including higher education institutions, teacher educators, schools and

mentor teachers. Pre-service teachers can encounter challenges during and after teaching practice that – if not appropriately addressed – can negatively affect their personal and professional development. A more holistic approach is needed to provide pre-service teachers with adequate support during and after teaching practice. But it is first necessary to understand the perceptions and experiences of support among pre-service teachers to be in a position to give them the support that they need.

1.3 Concept clarification

1.3.1 Pre-service teacher

The phrase pre-service teacher describes a student who is enrolled in a pre-graduate teaching training programme at a university to qualify for a degree in education (Amankwah et al., 2017).

1.3.2 B.Ed. programme

The Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) programme is an initial teacher training programme that runs over four years and includes both the academic course work and practicum required by a student to become a teacher (SA, 2015).

1.3.3 Teaching practice

Teaching practice is a form of work-integrated learning (WIL) that can be described as a type of learning associated with the integration and application of knowledge, involving learning in practice (school placements) and learning from practice (in lecturing halls). This is an opportunity to apply theory in practice and work towards ethical and professional praxis (Kiggundu & Nayimuli, 2009; Knoetze, 2020; SA, 2015).

1.3.4 Teacher educators

Teacher educators are instructors at higher education institutions who teach pre-service teachers in their teacher training programmes (Obonyo, 2019).

1.3.5 Mentor teachers

A mentor teacher is an experienced teacher who models good teaching practice by informing, guiding, supporting and supervising new or pre-service teachers during their placements at schools (Constantinescu, 2015).

1.3.6 Pre-service teacher liaisons

Pre-service teacher liaisons are third- or fourth-year pre-service teachers who are appointed to act as the University's ambassador in representing all the pre-service teachers placed at the same school (NWU, 2019).

1.3.7 Holistic support

Holistic support involves helping to meet the physical, academic, emotional and social needs of an individual (Best-Start, 2012; Goodwin et al., 2021).

1.4 Research questions and objectives

1.4.1 Research questions

The primary research question that guided this study was:

- How do pre-service teachers experience holistic support during and after teaching practice?

The secondary questions guiding the study were:

- What challenges are pre-service teachers facing regarding holistic support during and after teaching practice?
- What are the needs of pre-service teachers regarding holistic support during and after teaching practice?
- What collaborative strategies can be implemented to offer holistic support to pre-service teachers during and after teaching practice?

1.4.2 Research objectives

In response to the problem statement, this research aimed, first, to explore pre-service teachers' experiences of holistic support during and after teaching practice. The second objective was to conceptualise the challenges that pre-service teachers face regarding holistic support during and after teaching practice. The third objective was to identify the needs that pre-service teachers have regarding holistic support during and after teaching practice, and the fourth, collaboratively to establish what action might be taken to improve holistic support, during and after teaching practice.

1.5 Theoretical frameworks guiding the study

Ludwig von Bertalanffy, an Austrian biologist, is credited with the invention of general systems theory (Von Bertalanffy, 1968). Although the theory originated in organismic biology, it has been applied widely in the humanities, social sciences (such as social work and business management) and behavioural sciences (Laszlo, 1972). Von Bertalanffy was interested in the study of the humanities and how to bridge the gap between natural sciences and the humanities. This led to a theorisation of "human personality as an actively striving system trying to achieve goals created by symbolic processes" (Lebow et al., 2019, p. 3121). Capra (1997) observes that systems theory embraces every system in nature and society and creates a framework for investigating matters through a holistic lens (Mwangeka & Trainer, 2020).

According to Teater (2020, p. 33), a system can be defined as "a complex set of elements that interact together to make a functional whole". For Von Bertalanffy (1968), system theory involved the interdisciplinary study of systems, of how smaller systems relate to one another and how their interaction can influence and change a larger, more complex system (Montuori, 2011; Teater, 2015; Von Bertalanffy, 1968). Kalenga and Fourie (2012) postulate that the cause-and-effect relationships among systems exist in cycles, which means that one action in a part of a system causes another action in another part of the system. In this study, the systems that contribute to teaching practice include the role-players, and the aims and challenges and other interdependent factors that ensure the functionality of teaching practice, such as apprenticeship of observation, the theory-practice gap, the mentor teacher, reality shock, classroom discipline, time management and emotional challenges, etcetera.

The Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) concept can be considered a suitable application of systems theory because it is not a particular practice or theory but a framework that aligns systems to address problems and needs (States et al., 2017). MTSS aims to address needs (one of the objectives in this study) in order to create a sustainable system (to introduce change while supporting students) (Massachusetts, 2018). The MTSS can therefore be defined as a conceptual framework for organising and implementing early evidence-based interventions to increase students' success and to respond systematically to their needs (Act, 2015; Ehlers, 2018; Rankin, 2008; States et al., 2017). It can also be seen as a tool for the holistic exploration of the various systems at play during teaching practice and in which pre-service teachers might need extra support.

Applying MTSS to the teaching practice model can provide continuous support on an academic, administrative and socio-emotional level. The system is structured in three tiers representing

levels of support that students may need at any given time during their schooling: universal, targeted and intensive support (Rodriguez et al., 2016; States et al., 2017).

Universal support – The type of support that is available to all students. The majority of students should achieve sufficient growth with only this type of support. This support contains the general support that students get from efficient teaching and the classroom instruction that they receive every day (Foght, 2021; Sherman, 2017; States et al., 2017).

Targeted support – This type of support is more strategic and focused on 10–15% of the student population. These students need more support than their peers and should receive it in smaller groups consisting of students with similar needs (Foght, 2021; Sherman, 2017; States et al., 2017).

Intensive support – Between one and five per cent of the student population needs intensive support. This type of support should be provided in individualised one-on-one sessions (Foght, 2021; Sherman, 2017; States et al., 2017).

The MTSS tiers, as illustrated below, can be applied to pre-service teachers.

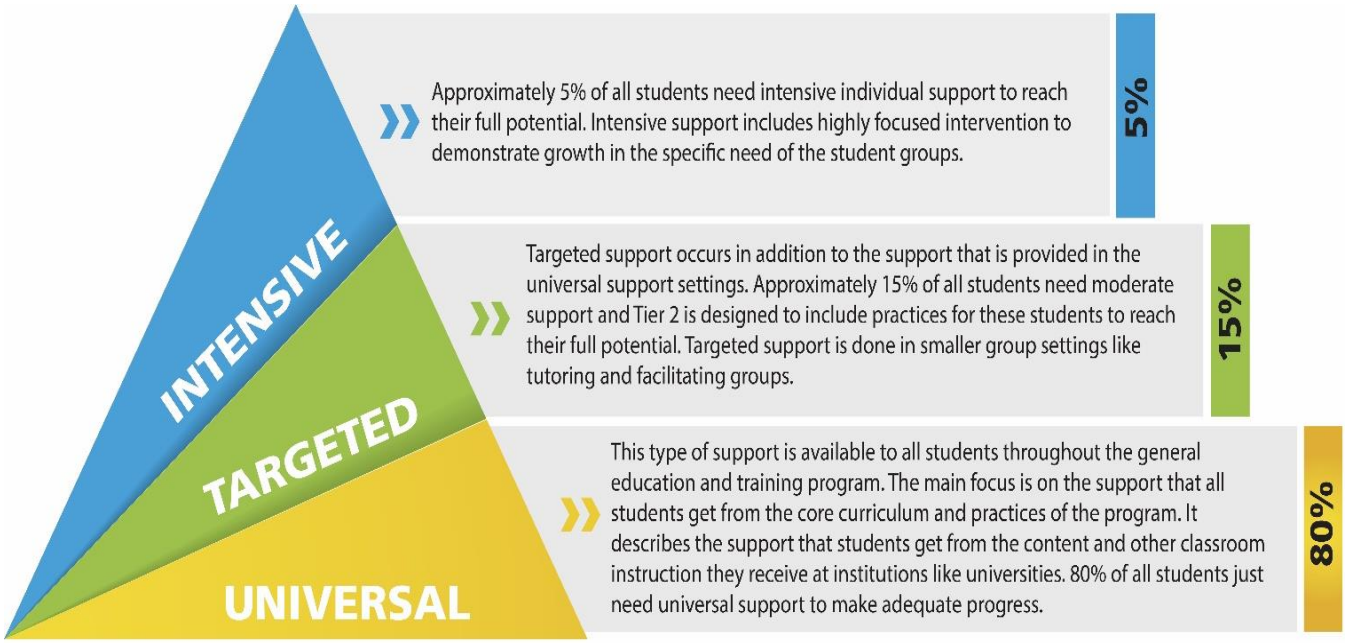

Figure 1- 1: Multi-tiered systems of support

1.6 Research paradigm, design, and methodology

A research paradigm “represents a particular worldview that informs what is acceptable to research and how research should be done” (Bertram & Christiansen, 2020). The paradigmatic beliefs of the researcher will influence the purpose and process of the research (Wood, 2020). For this study, a participatory paradigm was chosen. The epistemology that underpins the participatory paradigm is concerned with transformation through offering a valid voice to all role-players. It is associated with exploring how individuals interact with others and with the world, and seeks to go further than simple understanding (Marley, 2015).

In this study, a qualitative action research design was used. Qualitative research can be defined as “ an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2014, p. 32). Qualitative research is thus concerned with how individuals construct their worlds and what meaning they assign to their experience of a certain problem or challenge (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Action research is a realistic and collaborative form of inquiry aimed at identifying solutions to existing challenges and problems. The principles of action research acknowledge the connection between human interactions and the power generated by working towards a shared goal (Ebersöhn et al., 2020).

A research methodology comprises all the components of a research project (Akhtar, 2016). The methodology chosen for this study is participatory action learning and action research (PALAR) which, according to Zuber-Skerritt (2011), is more than just a methodology: it is a way of living and working that integrates practice and theory. PALAR is a developing genre in the large family of action research that includes participatory action research (PAR) and action learning (AL). The aim of PALAR is to improve practical conditions and to generate knowledge from participants’ reflection on their own experiences (Helyer, 2015). The researcher and the participants work together towards a shared goal to bring about social change (Wessels & Wood, 2019). In this regard, PALAR aims to equalise the distribution of power between the researcher and the participants by developing good relationships based on trust and respect (Zuber-Skerritt et al., 2015). The participants in this study are thus referred to as co-researchers.

The selection of PALAR was motivated by the desire to obtain insights into pre-service teachers’ experiences, during and after teaching practice, regarding holistic support. This aim can only be achieved if the active participation of the researcher and co-researchers remains the central point of the research through the inclusion and integration of the perceptions and experiences of both parties (Mubuuke & Leibowitz, 2013; Nicodemus & Swabey, 2015; Zuber-Skerritt, 2018).

1.7 Research methods

1.7.1 Setting the scene

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) which spread over the world from late 2019 has infected millions of individuals across the globe and led to hundreds of thousands of deaths. At the time of writing, the pandemic is still affecting almost every country around the world. It hit South Africa at the beginning of March 2020 and forced the South African government to place the whole country under strict lockdown measures (Stiegler & Bouchard, 2020). During lockdown, certain protocols were in place to control the spread of COVID-19. Individuals were advised to stay at home and only travel for necessities such as food or medical supplies. All schools and higher education institutions also closed temporarily, which led to innovative attempts to keep learning going. Learners, students and educators were forced to adapt to working remotely as there were no contact classes. Pre-service teachers were not allowed to be placed in schools for teaching practice. The situation also meant that every aspect of the research methods employed in this study had to change and adapt to new ways, such as conducting online research, as no face-to-face sessions were allowed.

1.7.2 Participant sampling

In the research, the co-researchers were purposively sampled. Purposive sampling can be defined as a method of sampling conducted with a particular purpose in mind (Pietersen & Maree, 2020). The co-researchers in this study included a cohort of fourth-year, pre-service teachers at the North-West University, Potchefstroom campus. According to Wood (2020), a PALAR process focuses on small groups of people in a community. Moreover, in participatory research the sample size is not decided upon beforehand but is determined by interest. After several attempts to sample co-researchers for this study, a process made difficult by the COVID-19 pandemic, five fourth-year pre-service teachers from the NWU agreed to participate.

1.7.3 Data generation methods

The data gathered in this study was generated through a combination of three methods. First, the visual strategy known as **Photovoice** was implemented. Photovoice is a process in which people collaboratively identify, represent, and explore experiences through a specific photographic technique (Wang & Burris, 1997). In many education and health studies in South Africa, photovoice has been used to support social change as it promotes an effective, participatory means of sharing knowledge (Carlson et al., 2006; Cornell & Kessi, 2017; Umurungi et al., 2008; Wang & Burris, 1997). It is a creative way for participants to capture their experiences in photographs. The photographs taken by the co-researchers are accompanied by personal

narratives and descriptions that reflect their reasons for selecting particular images (Wang, 1999). As writing these narratives might have been quite challenging, co-researchers were introduced to an adapted version of SHOWed questions (Wang & Burris, 1997). This served as a set of guidelines to assist them in analysing their photos and conceptualising their narratives.

The second data generation method was a **future-creating workshop**. The main aim of a future-orientated workshop is that individuals work cooperatively to create ideas and strategies for social and cultural change (Müllert & Jungk, 1987; Vidal, 2006). This data generation method is therefore perfect for a PALAR study where individuals work together towards a shared goal of transformation (Wessels & Wood, 2019). According to Wilson (2011), the basic steps of a future workshop are to identify common challenges that individuals face, to generate certain visions of how the future should be, and to discuss and analyse the feasibility of these ideas. Mary Brydon-Miller coined the term 'future-creating workshop' in 2017, characterising it as consisting of three phases, the critical phase, the utopian phase and the reality phase, anchored by a specific theme that serves as the focus of the process (Brydon-Miller et al., 2017; Raider-Roth et al., 2021).

During the critical phase, the aim is to identify the challenges and problems that individuals face in their lived experiences of a specific phenomenon or theme. Thus during the critical phase of this study, the co-researchers identified the challenges associated with holistic support during and after teaching practice.

The utopian phase aims to open a world for individuals to share their dreams, ideals and visions for the future regarding the specific theme. In this study, the co-researchers worked together, sharing each other's visions, to establish their needs – collective and individual – regarding holistic support during and after teaching practice.

In the last phase, the reality phase, individuals are encouraged to work towards creating concrete ideas and strategies for taking action to address the challenges identified in the critical phase and realise the visions proposed in the utopian phase. During the reality phase of this study, the co-researchers collaboratively suggested actions that could be taken to improve holistic support during and after teaching practice.

The third and last data generation method was the **reflective group conversation**, aimed at promoting positive and critical conversations to foster a wide range of productive perceptions and experiences. These reflective group conversations provided the opportunity to further explore the photographs and narratives, as well as to structure the future-creating workshop around the co-researchers' thoughts and comments (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Nieuwenhuis, 2020c).

1.7.4 Data analysis and coding

The verbatim transcribed data gathered from the reflective group conversations was coded by inductive content analysis. Content analysis can be defined as a systematic and detailed method of compressing large bodies of textual material to identify general themes (Nieuwenhuis, 2020a; Stemler, 2015).

1.8 Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of this study, I used five validity criteria, namely, outcome, process, democratic, catalytic and dialogic validity (Herr & Anderson, 2005).

Outcome validity is determined by whether the actions taken during the research process produced the desired outcomes. In this study, all the actions taken were evaluated through reflection and led to the desired outcomes of the study.

Process validity refers to the overall quality of the research process, including the relationships among co-researchers as an indication of validity. In this study, process validity was achieved by the use of different data generation methods as the co-researchers worked together towards the shared goal.

Democratic validity refers to collaboration among all the co-researchers participating in the study. In this study, I made sure that all the co-researchers got the chance to share their opinions and experiences, and that all decisions made were democratic.

Catalytic validity is concerned with understanding the research and being able to use the knowledge gained to transform one's own realities. In this study, the participants were encouraged by the nature of the study to take action to bring about social change.

Dialogic validity focuses on the degree to which co-researchers actively engage and contribute in and through the research process to create knowledge. In this study, dialogue was encouraged through all the data generation methods and co-researchers got the chance to listen to and reflect on each other's perceptions and experiences.

1.9 Ethical considerations

I sought ethical clearance from the Ethics Committee of the North-West University before undertaking the research. I obtained permission to conduct my study with university students as participants and secured ethical clearance from the Research Data Gatekeeper Committee.

As research is focused on the cooperative participation of co-researchers, it should be based on trust, accountability, fairness and mutual respect (Hartell & Bosman, 2016; Resnik, 2020). According to Elias and Theron (2012), three primary principles are involved in the ethics of research involving people: autonomy, beneficence and justice (not to harm). I took these principles into consideration in the conduct of this research. The co-researchers were fully informed of the purpose of the study so that they were in a position to give informed consent to participate (Cohen et al., 2017). The co-researchers in this study were informed that they were participating voluntarily and that they would not be harmed in any way. They could also withdraw from participation at any time (Bertram & Christiansen, 2020; Flick, 2018).

1.10 Limitations of the study

This research was of limited scope and possible limitations include the size and location of the participant sample. Only five fourth-year pre-service teachers from the North-West University Potchefstroom campus indicated their willingness to participate in the study. This meant that other pre-service teachers' experiences of holistic support during and after teaching practice were not canvassed, hence limiting the study's potential for generalisation.

As mentioned in 1.7.1, above, the current pandemic affected how the research was conducted. It made it more difficult to recruit co-researchers to participate in the study and I had to utilise online platforms such as Google Meet and Padlet to generate data. Face-to-face sessions would have been preferable to enable the co-researchers to engage more intensely.

1.11 Contribution of the study

The study aspired to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on the topic of supporting pre-service teachers holistically during and after teaching practice. The aim was to explore pre-service teachers' experiences of holistic support during and after teaching practice. A second aim was collaboratively to determine actions that could be taken to improve holistic support during and after teaching practice. The recommendations made by the study can be used by mentor teachers, teacher educators, and teaching practice coordinators to support pre-service teachers more effectively. The study also sought to interpret pre-service teachers' experiences in order to identify challenges conducing to the need for holistic support, to assist pre-service teachers, mentor teachers and teacher educators who work with pre-service teachers.

1.12 Outline of the chapters

Chapter 1: Introduction to the study

In this chapter, the context is established, and the research topic is introduced. The problem statement and the primary and secondary research questions are formulated. The theoretical framework which underpins this study is described and a brief account is given of the research methodology and methods. After consideration of the study's trustworthiness and certain ethical issues, the chapter ends with notice of its limitations and contribution to knowledge.

Chapter 2: The literature review

In this chapter, the theoretical framework is utilised to outline all the systems and factors that function interdependently in teaching practice. A literature review is conducted on all the aspects of teaching practice.

Chapter 3: Research methodology

This chapter provides a description of the chosen research design, paradigm, methodology and research methods. Consideration is given to issues of trustworthiness and ethics.

Chapter 4: Presentation of the findings

This chapter reports on the findings, which are analysed through inductive content analysis. Themes are identified for attention and discussion.

Chapter 5: Discussion, recommendations, and conclusion

This chapter elaborates on the findings and results of the study, draws conclusions and makes recommendations.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

A literature review was conducted to identify and summarise the literature available on the various components of the field of study. These include systems such as teaching practice as a whole, the role-players, the aims and challenges of teaching practice, and how these systems operate interdependently. Factors that influence the operation and functions of the systems will also be described. As this study seeks to explore the support experiences of pre-service teachers, the nature and importance of holistic support during and after teaching practice is included, within the framework of systems theory.

The theoretical framework of the study undergirds this chapter, providing structure and enabling the application of systems theory to each component featured in the literature review. The study of systems makes it possible to see the components of teaching practice in a more holistic way. Figure 2-1 depicts the application of the theoretical framework to the literature.

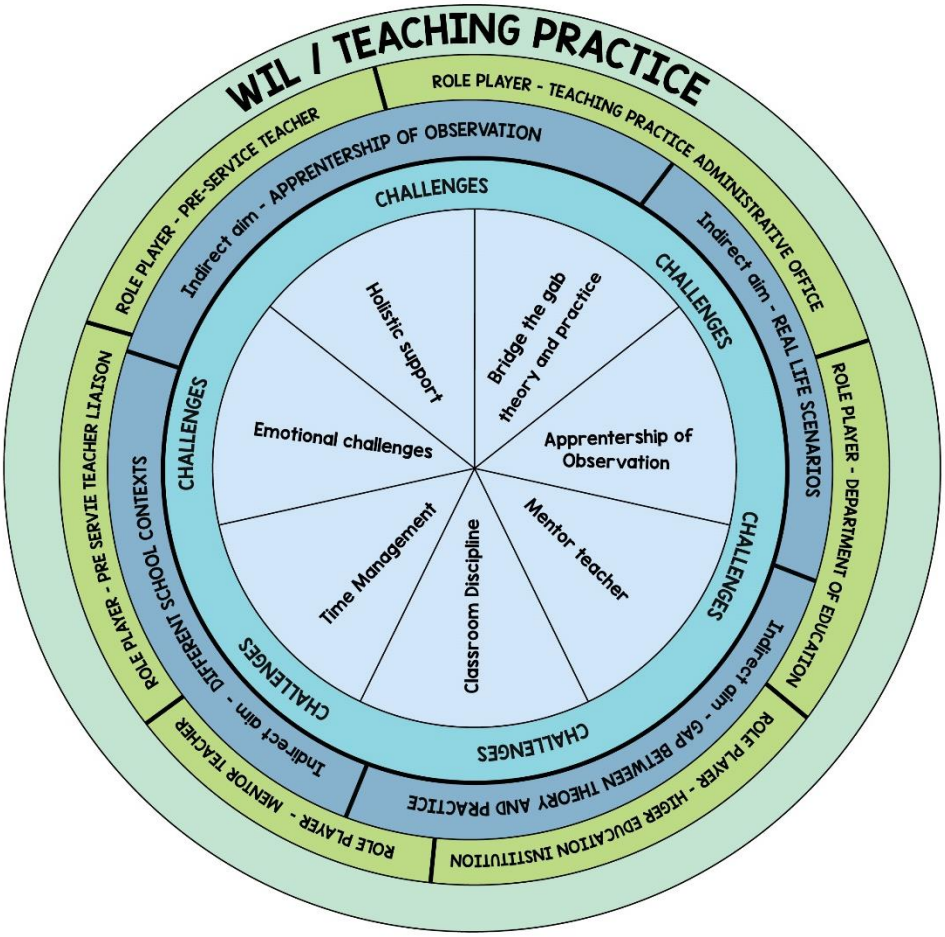

Figure 2-1: The systems and factors of teaching practice (conceptualised by the author)

2.2 Conceptualising work-integrated learning: Main system of reference

Work-integrated learning can be conceptualised as the main system and therefore appears in Figure 2-1 as the outer circle within which the other, interdependent systems are embedded.

Work-integrated learning (WIL) can broadly be defined as “a range of practical experiences designed to give students valuable exposure to work-related activities relevant to their course of study” (Australia Universities, 2019, p. 4). According to Oosthuizen et al. (2020, p. 370), in the South African context WIL “consists of a formal arrangement providing off-campus learning opportunities for students in their particular fields of interest obtaining academic credits at the same time”. Such programmes of activity are based on the educational philosophy that quality education can be achieved through experience. They are generally designed to provide students with the chance to integrate formal learning with practical learning within their learning curriculum (Atkinson, 2016; Berndtsson et al., 2020; Dorasamy, 2018; Hendrikse, 2013). They not only offer students a glance at the real-life context of the career they have chosen, but also allow them to gain valuable experience and increase their employability after graduation (Tindowen et al., 2019).

O'Connor (2019) describes WIL as a form of on-the-job training that allows students to try out possible career positions so that they can develop the professional skills needed for these positions. In certain professional disciplines like teaching, nursing, pharmacy, engineering, social work and accounting, WIL is a compulsory and established practice that is formally embedded in pre-graduate training programmes (Wade, 2016; Wales, 2017). The format of WIL is determined by the unique needs of the profession concerned, and the associated requirements, structure, length of placement and remuneration are unique to disciplines, programmes, and even tertiary educational systems. To give an impression of the sheer range of approaches to WIL, some exploration of the variety of formats, both nationally and internationally, is warranted. Table 2-1 presents the forms taken by WIL in selected academic disciplines.

Table 2-1: Formats of work integrated learning

FORMAT	DEFINITION	DISTINGUISHING FEATURES	EXAMPLES
Teaching practice	A fixed number of school-based placements imbedded in a pre-service teacher training programme (Kiggundu & Nayimuli, 2009).	Pre-service teachers are exposed to a real-life teaching environment under the guardianship of a mentor teacher (Aglazor, 2017; Komba & Kira, 2013).	Teaching- School-based placements for pre-service teachers that are supervised and assessed for a maximum of 32 weeks in a four-year education degree (SA, 2015).
Apprenticeships	Apprenticeship programmes can be seen as an agreement between an employer and a person who wants to learn new skills to achieve career success. Under these programmes, the individual earns a salary at a lower, training wage while receiving training with related academic instruction (Carliner, 2019; Lerman, 2010).	Most apprenticeship programmes last from one to four years (Workman, 2019). Apprentices are in full-time employment whilst completing this form of work-integrated learning.	Electricians- In the United States there are Youth Apprenticeship Programs that aim to give high school learners the chance to begin training for skills they will need in higher education institutions or to assist their transition into the workplace earlier (Shaw et al., 2019). An example is learners observing work and developing skills to become electricians.
Co-operative education	Co-operative education can be defined as a full-time paid practice that provides students with the opportunity to participate in professional, paid work related to their course of study (Carliner, 2019; Eames & Coll, 2010; Rowe, 2018).	Co-operative education provides students with a more in-depth work experience which generally takes one year longer than completing regular degrees (Boyington & Moody, 2019; Canada, 2019).	Mechanical Engineering- From the University of Waterloo in Canada, mechanical engineering students can, for example, gain two years of experience during co-operative education while working with a mechanical design team to redesign a component of a hydroelectric dam (Waterloo, n.d.).
Internships	Internships are a one-time, formal, structured and supervised, paid or unpaid, arrangement that provides off-campus work experiences for students in their course of study (Chennat, 2014; Oosthuizen et al., 2020; Stirling et al., 2017).	Internship opportunities may occur in the middle of the academic programme or at the end. An internship can range between 3 and 12 months and is designed for more senior students who can be given more challenging responsibilities and tasks (Brannigan, 2016; Klein & Weiss, 2011; Lucas, 2019).	Psychology internships- At the University of Mississippi, the psychology internship training programme offers students a one-year clinical rotation in both child and adult areas, divided into 3 four-month rotations (Mississippi, 2020).

From the examples adduced above, I conclude that WIL can be considered an umbrella term for a variety of educational strategies that combine the academic concepts learned in the classroom with real-world practical experience (Maseko, 2018). Such experience is an essential component in helping students develop new insights and perspectives and in preparing them to be effective professionals in the future.

The value of WIL in pre-service teacher training programmes has also been established through research and policy (Botha & Rens, 2018; Chennat, 2014; Darling-Hammond, 2006; NWU, 2019; SA, 2015; Salviana et al., 2018; Sayed et al., 2018; Scales et al., 2018; Ulla, 2016). As with other professional disciplines, WIL forms a crucial part of teacher training programmes and includes the opportunity for students to familiarise themselves with the realities of the teaching profession through school-based experience (Jackson, 2017). To establish the immediate context of the study, the role of WIL in teaching training programmes will be described.

2.2.1 WIL in pre-service teacher training programmes in South Africa

Most countries offering pre-graduate teaching education have unique protocols for WIL, with outcomes prescribed by national and institutional guidelines (Australia_Universities, 2019; Opazo et al., 2016; SA, 2015). The situation is no different in South Africa, where a great number of public and private tertiary institutions offer various pre-service teaching programmes, on diploma as well as degree level. Policy is therefore required to provide basic guidelines to all institutions, while also allowing individual institutions to interpret the guidelines to suit their particular circumstances. The Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (MRTEQ) is a policy document of the Department of Higher Education in South Africa that provides broad guidelines for all forms of teacher education in South Africa (SA, 2015). Regarding the pre-graduate B.Ed. degree, MRTEQ confirms the importance of teaching practice when it explains that this degree

> requires a specific depth of, and specialisation in knowledge, together with practical skills and workplace experience, to enable successful students to enter into teaching and apply their learning as beginner teachers in schools in varying context. (SA, 2015, p. 20)

The general requirements for teaching practice during this four-year pre-graduate degree are stipulated as follows:

> In a full-time contact programme, pre-service teachers should spend between 20 and 32 weeks on supervised and assessed teaching practice over the four-year duration of the degree. This means that a maximum of 12 weeks may

> be spent in schools in any year, but at least three of these should be consecutive. (SA, 2015, p. 23)

According to MRTEQ, all institutions that offer pre-service teaching qualifications are responsible for arranging teaching practice opportunities for pre-service teachers in line with the requirements indicated above (SA, 2015). As stated previously, these guidelines both set down non-negotiable rules and offer institutions the freedom to structure teaching practice opportunities in accordance with their institutional policies. All public and private institutions offering teacher training in South Africa are therefore obliged to meet the ever-growing need to provide teachers to nearly 24 000 schools in varying contexts and socio-economic circumstances. These schools have different levels of functionality and resources, and institutions need to be mindful of such factors when devising the teaching practice component of their B.Ed. programmes.

It is clear that WIL in pre-service teaching programmes is a complex matter and that there is no single guideline or policy determining its structure (as there may be in other professions) (McRae & Johnston, 2016; Oliver, 2015). Various terms are used in the literature to refer to WIL during pre-service teacher training. Institutions may opt to call it teaching practice, service learning, internships or simply WIL (Cooper et al., 2010; McLennan & Keating, 2008; NWU, 2019; SANTS, 2021; UP, 2021; US, 2018). The MRTEQ document currently uses work-integrated learning (WIL) as the official term, but there seems to be a lack of consistency in its usage. For the purposes of the present study, focused on one university in South Africa, the phrase teaching practice will be used to refer to all elements relating to WIL for pre-service teachers.

2.3 Teaching practice

Initial teacher training programmes provide a set of engaging learning opportunities designed for pre-service teachers to help them become competent and professional teachers (Abdullah & Mirza, 2020; Mpofu, 2019; Nkambule & Mukeredzi, 2017). Surucu et al. (2017) warn that theoretical knowledge may not be optimally useful if pre-service teachers are not encouraged to further explore and integrate it with the skills required in real teaching and learning environments. Darling-Hammond (2001) highlights this plight by arguing that pre-service teachers fail to learn best practice through merely being told what to do and what not to do, and that there is therefore no doubting the importance and necessity of teaching practice as a core element in teacher training programmes. In this regard, it is essential to point out that teaching practice is not limited to school-based sessions but includes other components that will be described in the sections that follow. In line with the MRTEQ document (SA, 2015), practical teaching can therefore be considered as “learning from practice and learning in practice”, an essential part of pre-service teacher training programmes (Masango, 2020; SA, 2017).

2.3.1 Teaching practice at the North-West University (NWU)

Having provided a generic outline of teaching practice, I proceed to focus on the setting and teaching practice programme at the NWU.

2.3.1.1 Setting the scene

The North-West University is a unitary, integrated, multi-level university with campuses in Potchefstroom (contact and distance mode of delivery), Mahikeng and Vanderbijlpark The outcomes of these programmes are aligned, and all students are required to complete teaching practice components. The expectations and outcomes for teaching practice are also aligned across all sites and modes of delivery. In 2021, there are 2083 fourth-year pre-service teachers enrolled for the B.Ed. degree at the NWU in the various programmes. The population for this study comprises the cohort of final-year contact pre-service teachers at the Potchefstroom campus, and the selected sample consists of voluntary participants from the 602 students enrolled in this programme. More information regarding the context and the participants will be provided in Chapter 3.

2.3.1.2 Structure and assessment of teaching practice at the NWU

The teaching practice environment at the NWU is complex and evolving. The Faculty of Education at this institution is constantly re-curriculating as a result of reconceptualising teaching practice in a conscious effort to stay relevant and be innovative in its approach. Changes to the teaching practice programme are guided by research at national and international levels as well as evaluation by staff and students. The programme is conceived and executed by a cohort of academic staff focusing solely on teaching practice. A comprehensive research project exploring the content and structure of the teaching practice programme from 2016–2019 indicated the need for a more academic focus in the agenda portfolios assigned to students. The findings revealed that students considered the portfolio a checklist of individual tasks to complete, rather than a holistic approach towards a set of skills to master. From these recommendations, an alternative curriculum that focused specifically on individual accountability was developed for 2020. The global pandemic forced the Faculty again to review its proposal for 2020 and a new COVID-curriculum for 2020 and 2021 was subsequently implemented. The innovative practices utilised during this time proved to be very effective and another curriculum was developed that included best practices from before and during the pandemic. The process of re-curriculation and assessment over the past few years is portrayed in Figure 2-2.

Figure 2-2: Structure and assessment of teaching practice at the NWU (Nel et al., 2021)

As indicated in Figure 2-2, above, pre-service teachers were required to complete eight teaching practice modules of eight credits each during their four-year B.Ed. degree. As indicated, the 2022 curriculum is based on year modules rather than semester modules. The co-researchers in this research study were however all due to complete their studies in 2021 and were therefore still registered in the eight-semester module programme. The content and structure of these modules are based on a co-planning and co-teaching model in terms of which students are guided through the four years from observation to independent teaching (NWU, 2019). To guide first-year pre-service teachers through the transition from high school to university and help orientate them towards their chosen career and develop their professional identity, students are not placed in schools for the first semester of their first year (Reyneke & Botha, 2020). These pre-service teachers complete a non-placement campus-based Professional Orientation Programme (POP). In the subsequent seven semesters, pre-service teachers complete a three-week block of school-based placement each semester (learning in practice) as well as additional components completed through the rest of the semester (learning from practice) (NWU, 2021).

COVID-19 profoundly affected how teaching practice at the NWU was approached. Placing pre-service teachers in schools was prohibited by national regulations and the focus of teaching practice therefore shifted towards learning from practice rather than learning in practice. Although learning from practice had always been included in the teaching practice curriculum, it was believed that the weighting of and focus on this component now had to be increased. The unique circumstances in which institutions, schools and students found themselves as a result of the pandemic had a severe impact on how pre-service teachers experienced teaching practice during 2020 and 2021. While this should be acknowledged in the context of this study, it is also essential to mention that the study dwells on their experience of teaching practice over the course of their four years of study and not only their final year (2021). These pre-service teachers have all spent many weeks of teaching practice in schools and are therefore adequately equipped to answer the research questions posed in the study.

Teaching practice at the NWU was depicted as the main system of reference and outer layer in Figure 2-1, which elucidated the relationship between the theoretical framework and the components in this study. The next section turns to the different role-players involved in teaching practice. In Figure 2-3, below, these role-players are portrayed as the second circle of the figure.

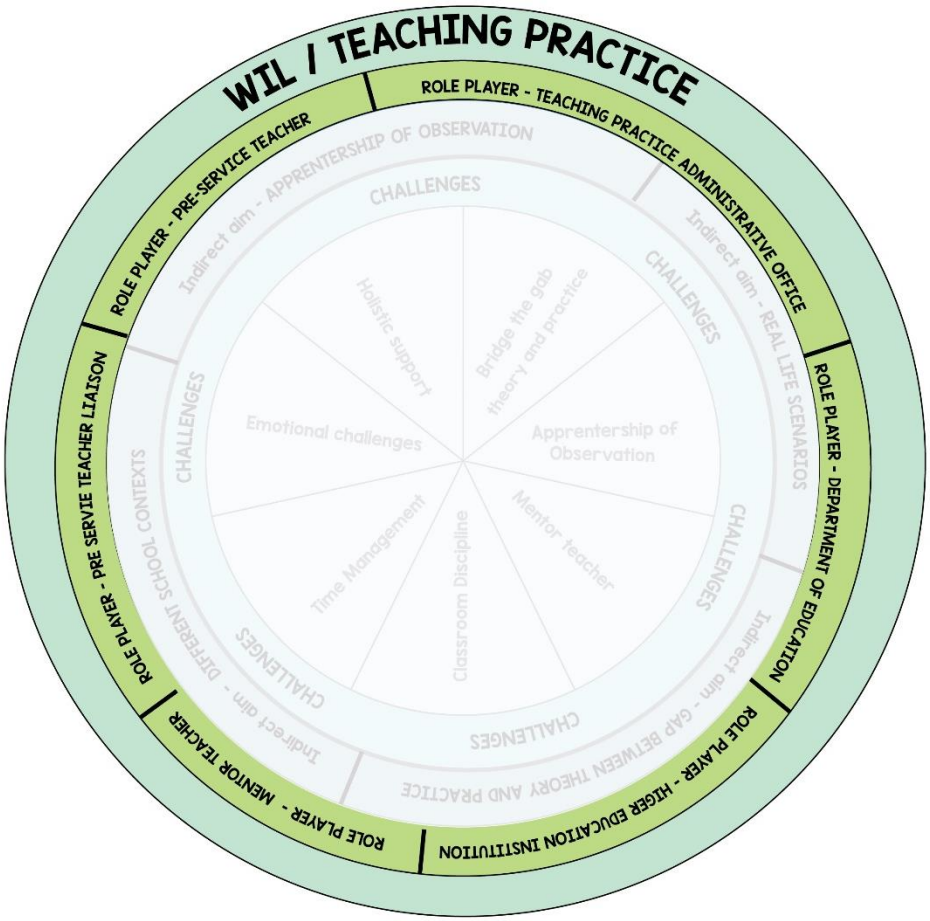

Figure 2-3: The role-players in teaching practice (conceptualised by the author)

2.4 Role-players during teaching practice

For this study, a role-player is defined as an individual or organisation that has an impact on teaching practice and/or as an entity that pre-service teachers may encounter during periods of teaching practice (Dreyer, 2015; Patrick et al., 2008). Not all role-players are directly linked to schools, as pre-service teachers complete both school-based placements and other academic components in order to meet the minimum requirements for successful completion of the module. Smith (2016) assigns overall responsibility for preparing pre-service teachers for the teaching profession not only to higher education institutions but also to the other role-players identified. Effective execution and subsequent change and development in teacher education are embedded in sustaining interaction among role-players (Bootha & Beets, 2015; Mutemeri & Chetty, 2011). Trent (2013) explores ways in which role-players might support pre-service teachers during teaching practice, while Dreyer (2015) and Taole (2020) identify certain role-

players as essential in supporting and guiding pre-service teachers to ensure that they benefit from their teaching practice experience.

Given the scope of this study, the following role-players are recognised. They are listed below, together with a summary of the roles that they play.

- ***The Department of Higher Education*****:** Determines the requirements of teacher education and qualification and stipulates the basic requirements for teaching practice. These requirements are communicated through the MRTEQ document and constant interaction with tertiary institutions (SA, 2015).
- ***The higher education institution***, academic staff: Curriculate the teaching practice programme, conceptualise components of teaching practice for various year levels; design and implement assessments; align practices with Professional Teaching Standards. They are also responsible for the implementation of the components of teaching practice other than school-based placements (e.g., the Professional Orientation Programme for first-year pre-service teachers).
- ***The higher education institution***, administrative office: Responsible for the administrative components of teaching practice. Creates teaching practice opportunities through collaboration with schools; deals with all administrative inquiries from both pre-service teachers and role-players at schools. Arranges formal assessment of final-year pre-service teachers by NWU lecturers (teacher educators) (NWU, 2019).
- ***Teacher educators***: Have the responsibility both to develop Shulman's various types of knowledge (including content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge) through teaching core and subject specialisation modules (Shulman, 1987), and to conduct formal assessments of final-year B.Ed. students during teaching practice placements. As teaching practice is a holistic endeavour, teacher educators should integrate their classroom teaching with feedback during formal assessments for teaching practice.
- ***Mentor teachers***: Mentor teachers are teachers employed in schools, and during teaching practice each student is hosted by a specific mentor teacher. Mentor teachers guide student teachers by providing modelling, mentorship and support in various areas. Mentor teachers frequently become the most significant influence in the development of a competent and qualified student teacher (North-West University, 2019). Their role is both to model best practice and to introduce pre-service teachers to real-life teaching experiences.
- ***Pre-service teacher liaisons***: Pre-service teacher liaisons are senior pre-service teachers who are appointed as convenors for cohorts of pre-service teachers placed at the same school. Pre-service teacher liaisons are responsible for logistic matters,

including initiating contact with schools before the teaching practice period, the communication of important information to the other pre-service teachers at that particular school, serving as an ambassador for the NWU teaching practice office and supporting other pre-service teachers during their school-based placement. Currently, teacher liaisons are only assigned to a school when there are eight or more pre-service teachers placed at the school (NWU, 2019).

- ***Pre-service teachers***: Pre-service teachers play the most important role in teaching practice. Not only do these students link the higher educational institution with schools, but as the main beneficiary of teaching practice, they are also the recipients of the knowledge, skills and values needed to become effective professional teachers.

After characterising teaching practice as the main system (outer layer) and the role-players as the first interdependent system (first inner layer) in Figure 2-1, I now turn to the second inner layer, the interdependent system focusing on the ***aims*** of teaching practice.

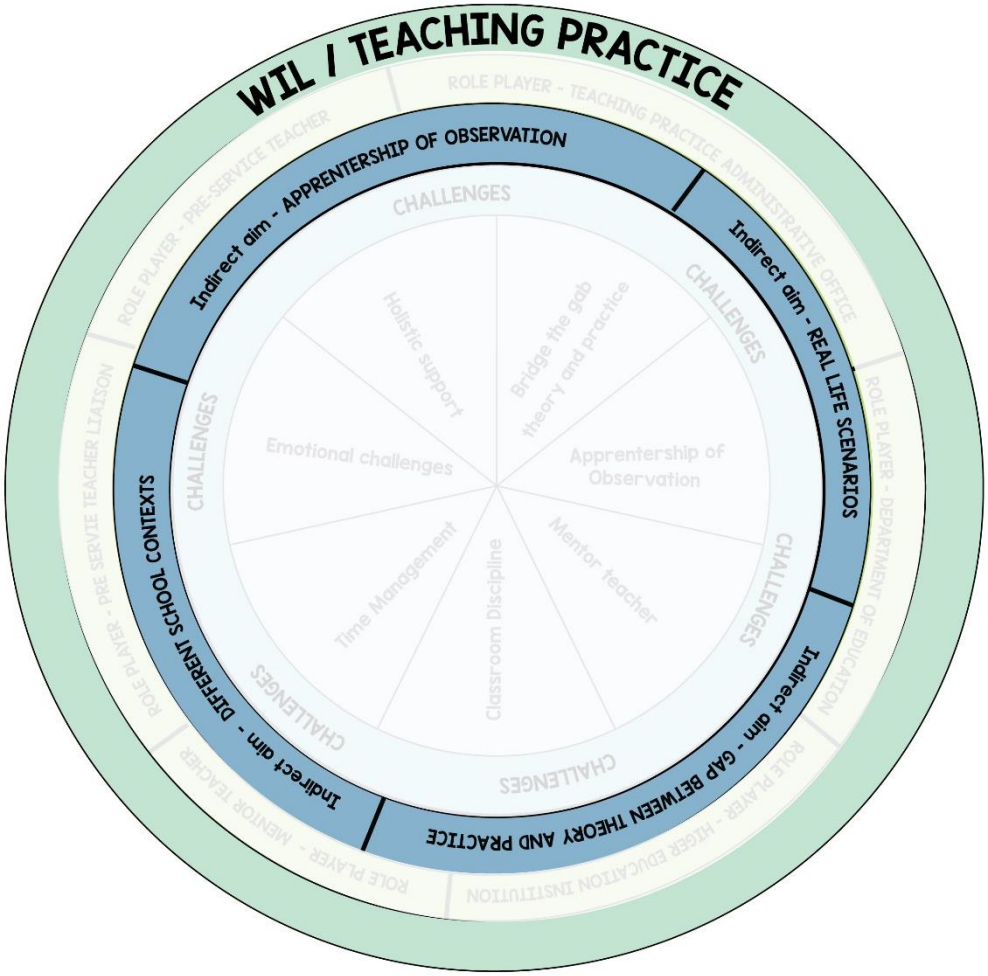

Figure 2-4: The aims of teaching practice (conceptualised by the author)

2.5 Direct and indirect aims of teaching practice

Teaching practice is one of the most important components in teacher training programmes (Aglazor, 2017; Ravhuhali et al., 2020; SA, 2015; Tang, 2003), because it

> offers pre-service teachers the opportunity to develop into professional teachers by developing their pedagogical knowledge, content knowledge, personal knowledge, knowledge about learners and knowledge about teaching in general. (Taole, 2020, p. 5)

The NWU (2019) lists the aims of teaching practice as an integral part of the B.Ed. programme as follows:

- To expose students to the holistic practice of teaching in various contexts.
- To provide students with the opportunity to practise the various roles of the teacher in an authentic class and school situation.
- To give students the opportunity to observe experienced teachers and reflect upon their experiences, thereby developing their own competencies for professional practice.
- To provide students with the opportunity to plan lessons, conduct classes and create engaging classroom environments.
- To give students the opportunity to develop towards making independent teaching decisions.
- To allow students the opportunity to participate in extra- and co-curricular activities.
- To prepare students on academic and emotional levels for full-time teaching.
- To assist students to develop 21st-century skills and to attain the graduate attributes required by the NWU as aligned with the Professional Standards of Teachers and the SACE Code of Professional Ethics (SACE, 2020).

To achieve these aims, a strong philosophical and research-based underpinning is necessary. The following section elaborates on the components of such an underpinning, namely, the development of a professional identity, deconstructing the apprenticeship of observation, and the exposure to different school contexts. These components can also be construed as the indirect aims of teaching practice.

2.5.1 Developing the professional identity of pre-service teachers

Identity is described as the sum of experiences through which an individual defines and develops him- or herself in the diverse roles s/he plays in different social settings and contexts (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Breakwell, 1993; Gross & Hochberg, 2016). In this regard, professional identity

can be seen as “the self that has been developed with the commitment to perform competently and legitimately in the context of the profession” (Tan et al., 2017, p. 1505).

During the course of their studies, pre-service teachers embark on various ways of constructing their professional identities, which later evolve into the professional teaching identities with which they enter into and adapt to the real school environment (Yuliyana, 2019) uring this development process, pre-service teachers should gain an understanding of “what they are, what they are not and who they would like to be” (Ivanova & Skara-Mincāne, 2016, p. 530). Appropriate development of this professional identity enables pre-service teachers to evolve a perception of themselves across multiple roles, such as “I as teacher” and “I as learner” (Lee & Schallert, 2016). Zhao and Zhang (2017) remind us that a self is (re-)formed during this process of developing a professional identity, which means that pre-service teachers develop self-concept, self-image, self-participation and self-confidence in the course of teaching practice.

Individual experiences during teaching practice (including both school-based placements and other components) play an important role in the formation of the beliefs, knowledge and skills that will eventually amount to a professional identity (Ivanova & Skara-Mincāne, 2016; Ulvik & Smith, 2011). Development can be seen as the space where the self and the profession meet, and where professional identities and perceptions are subsequently fostered (Jackson, 2017; Trede, 2012).

The development of a professional identity is only one indirect aim that is expressive of teaching practice’s commitment to motivating pre-service teachers to take ownership of and be accountable for their own growth (Botha, 2020). A second indirect aim of teaching practice, closely linked to the personal and professional development of pre-service teachers, is concerned with the exploration of the apprenticeship of observation on an individual level.

2.5.2 Deconstructing the apprenticeship of observation

The term apprenticeship of observation was developed by Lortie (1975), who argued that pre-service teachers have a predetermined set of ideas about the teaching profession and often adopt the personality and practices of the teachers they were exposed to while at school themselves. The apprenticeship of observation defines the background of pre-service teachers, who begin teacher training programmes with 12 years of observing and experiencing the teaching profession as school learners (Borg, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2006). As learners, pre-service teachers observed their teachers and acquired various perceptions about the teacher’s role and the content and methods of teaching. These perceptions can have a direct impact on the teachers they become, as they replay remembered actions and methods (Cancino et al., 2020; Lortie, 1975; Tabacbnick & Zeichner, 1984). The positive side of the apprenticeship of observation is that some

pre-service teachers draw inspiration from their teachers; the negative side is that it can conduce to misconceptions about teaching, as pre-service teachers have no realistic perception of the complexity and challenges of the career (Hammerness et al., 2005). They rely on their one-dimensional and linear observation of teaching and remain unaware of all that happens behind the scenes.

According to Mewborn and Tyminski (2006), Lortie (1975) did not take into account pre-service teachers' ability to transform their perceptions and experiences. Teaching practice can serve as the basis for deconstructing the apprenticeship of observation, and creating another lens for pre-service teachers critically to reflect on and possibly alter their views of and beliefs about the teaching profession (Botha, 2020; Glazier & Bean, 2019). Teaching practice provides experience of real-life classrooms and allows pre-service teachers to embrace aspects of teaching and learning – such as classroom management, lesson planning and dealing with diverse learners – they did not encounter as mere observers (Lortie, 1975). During teaching practice, pre-service teachers are invited to acknowledge their own apprenticeship of observation and, with the assistance of the mentor teacher and teaching practice curriculum, deconstruct this apprenticeship.

According to Ribaeus et al. (2020), teacher training programmes should take into consideration the context in which pre-service teachers will teach, as this could also influence their perception of the teaching profession. The opportunities that teaching practice affords for pre-service teachers to develop an understanding of different school contexts will be described below (Knoetze, 2020).

2.5.3 Exposure to different school contexts

In a developing country like South Africa, the resources allocated to schools and their functionality vary greatly. Some schools boast the latest technology in their classrooms, whilst other schools are concerned about the safety of their learners who have to use pit toilets. In addition, cultural differences and nine official languages create barriers that divide schools and learners. Public schools in South Africa are graded into five quintile categories that depend upon the socio-economic context of the school (Grant, 2013). This contextual diversity and the array of challenges that certain schools face emanate in part from the country's political history (Amin & Ramrathan, 2009; Robinson, 2014). Comparing Finnish teacher training programmes with those in South Africa, Mentz and de Beer (2020, p. 159) note that the "South African context is more complex and diverse in terms of culture and language, as well as in terms of the spectrum of the schools' socio-economic status".

Dreyer (2015) therefore advocates that the schools in which pre-service teachers are placed for teaching practice should be chosen carefully to ensure the students experience a range of teaching contexts. Robinson (2018) indeed argues that the teaching practice process is only worthwhile when pre-service teachers are exposed to different contexts, in response to which they can form their own opinions and grow professionally. Fraser and Honneth (2003) argue that such exposure is crucial from a social and moral perspective, as well as a professional one (Robinson, 2014). This forms part of the reason why higher education institutions are required to place pre-service teachers in school environments where they can experience a reasonable sample of the actualities of the classroom and the school in South Africa (Mokoena, 2017; SA, 2015).

The foregoing analysis of the aims and importance of teaching practice has demonstrated that it is a necessary and enriching opportunity for pre-service teachers in all teacher training programmes. Pre-service teachers are mostly excited to be placed in a school for teaching practice (Moosa & Rembach, 2020). However, both earlier and more recent studies claim that despite the enriching opportunities offered by teaching practice, pre-service teachers face several challenges during and after the process (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Du Plessis et al., 2010; Foncha et al., 2015; Kiggundu & Nayimuli, 2009; Marais, 2016; Ravhuhali et al., 2020). The next section will unpack these challenges in terms of the declared aims of teaching practice, because, as Kiggundu and Nayimuli (2009) claim, teaching practice can be the make or break phase for pre-service teachers.

While the second interdependent system in Figure 2-1 comprised the direct and indirect aims of teaching practice, the third interdependent system emphasises the challenges that pre-service teachers face during teaching practice and their influence on the functionality of the system as a whole.

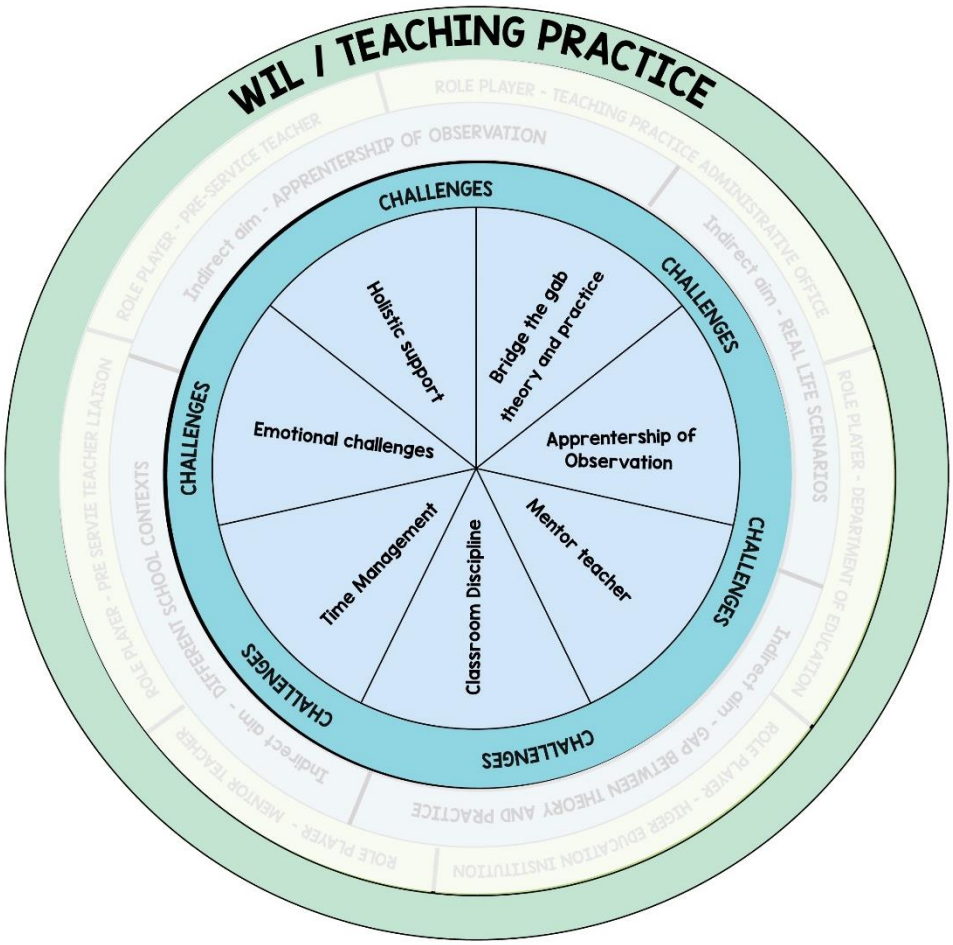

Figure 2-5: The challenges of teaching practice

2.6 The challenges of teaching practice

Teaching practice aims to expose pre-service teachers to real-world experiences, so it is not surprising that in addition to the enriching opportunities that most pre-service teachers report encountering during teaching practice (Flores, 2017; Korthagen, 2010; Olusola & Olusile, 2017; Özdaş, 2018; Spooner et al., 2008), they can also face challenges that hamper their ability to get the most out of these opportunities (Botha, 2020; Botha & Rens, 2018; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Du Plessis et al., 2010; Foncha et al., 2015; Kiggundu & Nayimuli, 2009; Ravhuhali et al., 2020). The extent and severity of these challenges are dependent on various factors.

The challenges may be “the result of additional demands from the field placement itself, or the field experience could amplify pre-existing challenges” (Burns et al., 2019). They can have a lasting effect on one’s development of a professional identity, or influence the decision whether

or not to enter and remain in the teaching profession. In addition, experiences undergone during teaching practice can greatly impact the kind of teacher one might become.

After extensive reading and research, I realised that it would not be possible to explore all the challenges that pre-service teachers could possibly face, whether practical, emotional, social, logistical, etc. I therefore opted to discuss the following challenges, which seemed commensurate with the limited scope of the study: the theory-practice gap, the apprenticeship of observation, mentor teachers, classroom discipline, time management, the partnership between tertiary institutions and schools during teaching practice, and emotional issues.

2.6.1 The theory-practice gap

To develop a better understanding of the relationship between theory and practice, and their possible integration, it is necessary to distinguish between theory-based knowledge and experience-based knowledge. Theory-based knowledge is what is taught in a higher education institution classroom and experience-based knowledge is what is acquired through experience inside school classrooms during teaching practice (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Cheng et al., 2012). In order for pre-service teachers to develop as professionals, they need both practice and a solid theoretical foundation (Androusou & Tsafos, 2018). They need to reflect on their experience-based knowledge in relation to the theoretical knowledge they have gained (Ribaeus et al., 2020)

Research shows that teaching practice might not be altogether successful in preparing pre-service teachers for the realities of a teaching career (Botha & Rens, 2018; Foncha et al., 2015; Yin, 2019). The gap between what they have been taught at university and the realities they encounter in practice remains substantial (Allsopp et al., 2006; Ribaeus et al., 2020; Yin, 2019). It is evident that the gap between theory and practice is not sufficiently bridged by the experience of teaching practice, which raises the question of whether more attention to the teaching practice curriculum can address the issue, or whether the theory-practice gap might be the result of greater systemic issues in pre-service teacher training.

The challenges associated with applying theory learned in coursework to practical teaching experiences are not new. Both Hammerness et al. (2005) and (Zimmerman, 2017) warn that pre-service and beginner teachers often assume that university coursework equips them with theories that can easily be applied in teaching practice. Such assumptions only broaden the theory-practice gap, as pre-service teachers struggle to find the links between theoretical work and the realities they face in the classroom. As a result, they feel inadequate and insufficiently prepared for teaching (Greenway et al., 2019; Napanoy et al., 2021; Yasar, 2019). Napanoy et al. (2021) illustrate this point when they report that pre-service teachers in their study found it difficult to plan

and execute a lesson. This may be the result of students' only having the 'theoretical' experience of planning a lesson on paper, and not delivering that lesson to test its practicality. In-service teachers seldom use comprehensive lesson plans like the templates pre-service teachers are trained with. So pre-service teachers become aware of the gap between the theoretical knowledge they gained at university and the best practice they see from mentor teachers during teaching practice.

The realities of the theory-practice gap can also be seen in the struggles that pre-service teachers experience with classroom discipline (Yasar, 2019). Students might be taught the various models of classroom discipline in a lecture hall, but once they stand in a class of forty learners with unique personalities and individual needs, they lack the skills to apply the theoretical models to the practical situation they find themselves in.

Korthagen (2010) and McGarr et al. (2017) refer to the epistemological roots of the pre-service teacher and the teacher educator as constituting another contributing factor to the theory-practice gap. According to McGarr et al. (2017), the epistemological views of pre-service teachers might differ greatly from the dominant epistemological views of the teacher educator they encounter in a lecture hall. Teacher educators often present systematised theory and knowledge to pre-service teachers rather than imparting valuable knowledge for practical integration during teaching practice (Korthagen, 2010; Tom, 1997). The understanding of theoretical knowledge differs between teacher educators and pre-service teachers in ways that can broaden the gap between theory and practice for pre-service teachers, especially when they attend teaching practice in a school (Gravett, 2012; Kwenda et al., 2017). In addition, the curricula of teaching programmes are packed, and teacher educators rely on mentor teachers to address these matters during teaching practicum sessions.

In recent studies, Gravett et al. (2019) and Paatsch et al. (2019) argue that a lack of partnership and clear communication between schools and higher education institutions might contribute to the felt discrepancies between theory and practice and the resulting challenges that pre-service teachers experience. They highlight the situation in which teacher educators rely on schools to contribute to learning without communicating specific needs to the relevant mentor teachers. Ribaeus et al. (2020) concur that communication and partnership between schools and higher education institutions are crucial to ensure quality teaching practice as pre-service teachers face the overwhelming task of integrating theoretical knowledge into real-life practice.

According to McGarr et al. (2017), pre-service teachers approach teaching practice at schools with expectations not only stemming from memories of themselves as learners but also generated by the learning gained in the lecture halls of a tertiary institution. These possibly competing

influences may also broaden the theory-practice gap, so it is time to discuss the apprenticeship of observation as a potential challenge that pre-service teachers might face during teaching practice.

2.6.2 The apprenticeship of observation

Section 2.5.2, above, made it clear that events before and during teaching practice might reinforce the pre-existing ideas with which pre-service teachers enter teacher training and the profession. Mewborn and Tyminski (2006) concur, suggesting opportunities for critical reflection on these pre-existing ideas and behavioural patterns through creating awareness of and subsequently deconstructing the apprenticeship of observation. In line with Lortie (1975), they warn about long term challenges that may arise should the impact of the apprenticeship of observation not be addressed. Darling-Hammond (2006) lists the apprenticeship of observation as one of the three biggest challenges in teacher training programmes. More recent studies (Botha, 2020; Cancino et al., 2020; Moodie, 2016) also highlight the consequences of the apprenticeship of observation as a potential obstacle for pre-service teachers.

The apprenticeship of observation presents as a challenge to teaching practice when pre-service teachers are placed in schools and because of the strong influence of the apprenticeship of observation in their developing professional identity do not succeed in applying new knowledge to their practice. They often fail to realise that the aspects of teaching that they observed as school learners only represent a partial view of the teaching profession (Borg, 2004; Petersen et al., 2020). Pre-service teachers enter teacher training programmes with their own local knowledge, sets of beliefs and experience of school practices, which may be hard to change because they are hidden and in many cases barely discernible (Erkmen, 2014; Smagorinsky & Barnes, 2014). They are also likely to have an impact on how pre-service teachers will adapt to new knowledge and extend their understanding of learning in new directions (Conner & Vary, 2017; Sayed et al., 2018; Timperley, 2010).

They subsequently build their professional content knowledge on the perceptions and experiences they have of teaching rather than on what they have learnt at university. The apprenticeship of observation serves as a default option on which pre-service teachers tend to fall back when they are uncertain of how to proceed (Hammerness et al., 2005; Smagorinsky & Barnes, 2014). Instead of applying the new, valuable knowledge that they have gained at teacher training institutions, they emulate the way their schoolteachers taught.

An example of such behaviour would be pre-service teachers reverting to old teacher-centred strategies like reading from a textbook, rather than using the student-centred approaches that

they have been taught in lecture halls. This would reinforce the theory-practice gap that they report to be a problem (Botha, 2020; Gray, 2020; Lortie, 1975).

Tertiary institutions rely heavily on mentor teachers to assist pre-service teachers by recognising regressive behaviour on their part and helping them to implement the skills and strategies they have been taught. This expectation is however often not met, as the mentor teachers may themselves still be using outdated teaching strategies and thus only reinforce the perceptions with which the pre-service teacher enters the classroom. Institutions therefore need to find alternative ways of challenging the apprenticeship of observation and equipping students with critical thinking skills to enable them to realise that they have to deconstruct their pre-conceived notions and pre-existing ideas if they want to gain optimally from teaching practice experiences.

In an ideal world, the mentor teacher would strengthen and reinforce the learning that students bring to teaching practice. It is, however, unfortunately true that in many cases, the mentor teacher, through various actions or a lack of action, presents another challenge that pre-service teachers must face and overcome.

2.6.3 The mentor teacher

According to Cronin (2020), a mentor is a specialist teacher who can provide support and advice to guide pre-service teachers during teaching practice placements. Graves (2010) accentuates the importance of developing a mentoring relationship built on mutual trust between the mentor teacher and the pre-service teacher. She points out that the quality of teaching practice largely depends on the existence of a positive relationship between the mentor teacher and the pre-service teacher. Yoon and Larkin (2018) also emphasise the importance of developing and cultivating these relationships, which they found to be pivotal in the construction of pre-service teachers' identities and practices.

When such a relationship does not develop between the mentor teacher and the pre-service teacher completing a teaching practice placement, the mentor teacher might merely observe and formally assess the pre-service teacher, in that way reinforcing hierarchic power relations and failing to realise opportunities to nurture professional growth.

Olaniran and Gugu (2019) observe that mentor teachers are expected to be willing and committed to guiding pre-service teachers in the teaching and learning environment of their school. A mentor teacher should act as a model of best practice in teaching while supporting and monitoring pre-service teachers under their care, preparing them to meet the challenges of the teaching profession (Naidoo & Wagner, 2020). In general, mentor teachers are responsible for improving the teaching performance of pre-service teachers, thereby promoting their personal and

professional growth and transmitting to them the culture of the school system (Ambrosetti, 2014; Capello, 2020; Smit & du Toit, 2021).

Yet research indicates that not all mentor teachers contribute appropriately to the development of the pre-service teachers placed under their mentorship (Ambrosetti, 2010; Özdaş, 2018; Yuan & Lee, 2014). Problems encountered include the inability of the mentor teacher to complete the task, the physical absenteeism of the teacher, mentor teachers expecting pre-service teachers to complete tasks far above their ability level, etc. (Graves, 2010; Jiyane & Gravett, 2019; Mkhasibe et al., 2018; Nkambule & Mukeredzi, 2017; Yoon & Larkin, 2018).

Jiyane and Gravett (2019) address the first problem cited by pointing out that mentor teachers often do not take this commitment very seriously, or may just not be equipped to fulfil the role required. These teachers are often appointed as mentor teachers by their principals and have not volunteered for the position. Although tertiary institutions provide schools with criteria for mentor teachers, these are not always followed, and pre-service teachers might end up with mentor teachers who are also still categorised as beginner teachers. Mentor teachers who are ill-equipped, inexperienced or unwilling, could pose a serious challenge to pre-service teachers who are placed with them (Nkambule & Mukeredzi, 2017; Özdaş, 2018).

Teaching practice is meant to provide pre-service teachers with a safe environment not only to expand their classroom management skills, but also to experiment with different teaching strategies and apply the knowledge gained at university (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Achieving these aims can be difficult if a pre-service teacher is placed with a mentor teacher who is not an expert in the subject in question (Mkhasibe et al., 2018) or who lacks experience in teaching the subject. According to Genç (2016), mentor teachers should not be passive observers who only provide feedback after the pre-service teacher has completed teaching practice. They rather need to be co-teachers who guide the pre-service teacher on a continuum from observation towards co-planning and co-teaching. As mentioned in Section 2.3.1.2, above, the NWU follows a co-planning and co-teaching model for teaching practice. Younger pre-service teachers should therefore first observe the mentor teacher and then gradually start co-planning and co-teaching to improve their skills and their confidence. In the latter years of their study, pre-service teachers should become more independent and confident enough to prepare and teach lessons by themselves. They should also be guided to take over management of the classroom. This should, however, all occur in the presence of the mentor teacher. As indicated in the teaching practice materials, mentor teachers are not allowed to leave pre-service teachers alone with learners (NWU, 2019; US, 2018).

As previously mentioned, a lack of support from the mentor teacher can include physical absence from the classroom (Deacon, 2016). Both Jiyane and Gravett (2019) and Moodley et al. (2018) discuss the situation that arises when delinquent mentor teachers expect pre-service teachers to teach or take over a lesson while they leave the classroom to take a break or attend to other business. This is an unsafe state of affairs for the pre-service teacher that could have dire repercussions should an incident occur while the mentor teacher is absent. It goes without saying that being left unsupervised contributes nothing to an effective mentoring relationship between the pre-service teacher and the mentor.

In addition to mentor teachers taking responsibility for guiding students' development in terms of teaching, they are also responsible for modelling best practice in classroom management and discipline. Research shows that pre-service teachers find maintaining good classroom discipline a major challenge during teaching practice and in their early years as teachers (Flores & Day, 2006; Moussaid & Zerhouni, 2017; Nkambule & Mukeredzi, 2017; Polat et al., 2013; Yasar, 2019). The following section discusses problems with classroom discipline that pre-service teachers encounter during teaching practice.

2.6.4 Classroom discipline

Classroom discipline is a component of classroom management (Grover, 2019) and serves to ensure that routine in the classroom is maintained, class and school rules are followed, and a safe learning environment for learners is created (Carnevale & Pisano, 2019). In an earlier study, Zeidner (1988, p. 69) noted that

> adequate classroom discipline is generally regarded to be one of the most essential aspects of education as well as an absolute prerequisite to achieving instructional objectives and safeguarding students' psychological, social, and physical well-being.

Maintaining classroom discipline can nevertheless be a real challenge for pre-service teachers. According to Yasar (2019), teacher educators assume that pre-service teachers are prepared to take control of a classroom and that during teacher training programmes, pre-service teachers learn both theoretical and practical knowledge and skills to cope with the demands of taking control of a class (Brackenreed & Barnett, 2006; Polat et al., 2013). Yet in many studies it emerges that pre-service teachers really struggle to achieve and maintain proper control (De Jong et al., 2014; Flores & Day, 2006; Heeralal, 2011; Moussaid & Zerhouni, 2017; Nkambule & Mukeredzi, 2017; Polat et al., 2013; Tulley & Chiu, 1995).

Moussaid and Zerhouni (2017) explore pre-service teachers' experience of discipline issues and identify three main causes for the collapse of classroom discipline: learners' lack of interest and/or motivation, learners' perception of the pre-service teacher's role in the classroom, and the mentor teachers' absence. Lack of classroom discipline can present a serious challenge for the pre-service teacher who needs to present a lesson and manage the classroom environment. Ekiz (2006) confirms that when mentor teachers leave pre-service teachers alone in the classroom, they experience substantially more difficulty with classroom discipline than they would have had the mentor teacher been physically present throughout. Tsotetsi and Mile (2021) claim that the absence of the mentor teacher makes it difficult for the pre-service teacher because s/he does not feel entitled to assume the mentor teacher's authority to act.

Focusing on learners' perceptions of the role of the pre-service teacher, Mikulec and Hamann (2020) claim that classroom discipline is a particular challenge for secondary pre-service teachers who are completing teaching practice in classrooms with learners who are only a year or two younger than themselves. This creates tension between the wish to have a good relationship with the learners and the need to maintain discipline in the classroom (De Jong et al., 2014). The problem is exacerbated should the pre-service teacher be completing teaching practice at the same school they were attending only a year or two before. Learners struggle to relate to their former school friend in the role of teacher.

From all the above, it is clear that classroom discipline is a challenge for most pre-service teachers during teaching practice. When pre-service teachers struggle with classroom management, they inevitably also experience problems with time management. But even pre-service teachers who do not have any difficulty with maintaining discipline struggle with managing their time and doing all that is expected of them at school and in other areas of their lives.

2.6.5 Time management

As already established, all pre-service teacher training programmes stipulate specific goals for learning from practice and learning in practice, and many of these goals are achieved during teaching practice (Torres & Ulmer, 2007). Yet while pre-service teachers are completing their teaching practice, they often have other academic responsibilities to meet. They also struggle to manage all the roles and responsibilities they have to cope with at the school where they are placed.

Many studies indicate that the lack of proper time management skills and time pressure present a challenge during teaching practice (Gorgoretti & Pilli, 2012; Harding & Hbaci, 2015; Mairitsch et al., 2021; Moussaid & Zerhouni, 2017). Time pressure during teaching practice can be extremely

stressful for pre-service teachers, who feel obliged to complete a multiplicity of tasks with too little time to do so (Paquette & Rieg, 2016; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). In addition to teaching responsibilities (including observing, planning and presenting lessons), pre-service teachers are required to perform administrative tasks and take part in school activities like school assemblies, extra-curricular activities and staff and parent meetings (Sandholtz, 2011).

It is important to bear in mind that while pre-service teachers are shouldering all these responsibilities at school, they also have to complete a portfolio depicting their activities and what they have learned during their teaching practice placement. Further than that, they are still expected to meet all the requirements of the academic schedule for their university degree (Kiggundu & Nayimuli, 2009). In addition to responsibilities at school, all pre-service teachers need to find and maintain a balance between their personal and professional lives (Mairitsch et al., 2021). And while it is clear that pre-service teachers are kept extremely busy during these teaching practice placement blocks, it is also evident that some individuals lack the time management skills to be able effectively to manage all their responsibilities.

Teaching practice demands deep engagement and commitment from pre-service teachers. Some individuals find it hard to deal with the emotional burden that this places upon them during their placements (Hobson et al., 2008; Lindqvist, 2019).

2.6.6 The emotional burden of teaching practice

As established throughout this chapter, the journey to becoming a teacher can be an overwhelming experience for some pre-service teachers. This section examines some of the negative emotions that pre-service teachers might encounter during teaching practice.

For the purposes of this study, emotions can be characterised as comprising “a complex state of feelings that result in physical and psychological changes” (Teng, 2017, p. 118). Emotions are socially constructed as an individual makes judgements regarding the experience of success or failure in a social context, in this case, the school environment (Chen, 2016). According to Hargreaves (2000), emotions are at the heart of teaching and school environments are complicated emotional spaces where teachers, including pre-service teachers, experience emotional demands. They undergo a range of emotions, from love, joy and pride, to fear, worry and anxiety (Kokkinos & Stavropoulos, 2016; Teng, 2017; Timoštšuk & Ugaste, 2012).

Some pre-service teachers experience emotions such as fear, insecurity and disappointment, which can result in their being uncertain about themselves during and after teaching practice (Timoštšuk & Ugaste, 2012). Since emotions form an integral part of a teacher’s professional identity (Jones & Kessler, 2020), the experience of negative emotions during teaching practice

may have an impact on the development of pre-service teachers' professional identity (Teng, 2017; Timoštšuk & Ugaste, 2010). It may undermine their motivation and cast a shadow over their expectations of the teaching profession (Kihwele & Chuma, 2020; Yuan and Lee (2016).

Negative emotions may also increase stress and anxiety levels. When pre-service teachers enter the teaching profession and experience the differences between the reality of teaching and the expectations they had entertained, the result may be shock, stress and anxiety with which they cannot cope (Brookhart & Freeman, 1992; Chesnut & Cullen, 2014; Ewing & Smith, 2003). In an earlier study, Hart (1987) identified four sources of anxiety among pre-service teachers that are still regarded as valid (Azmi et al., 2012; Han & Tulgar, 2019; Machida, 2016):

- Teaching practice requirements – having anxieties about fulfilling the expectations of teaching practice, including having to plan and present lessons
- Assessment – anxiety about being assessed by the mentor teacher or the teacher educator
- Relationship building – anxiety about building positive relationships with other pre-service teachers and mentor teachers
- Classroom discipline – being anxious about managing the behaviour of the learners in the classroom.

The challenges experienced by pre-service teachers during and after teaching practice, as described above, are real enough (Lindqvist, 2019). Many studies attribute them to a lack of appropriate support (Fook et al., 2011; Jakšić & Malinic, 2018; Kiggundu & Nayimuli, 2009; Modipane & Kibirige, 2015; Stang & Lyons, 2008). To address one of the aims of this study, namely, to explore pre-service teachers' experiences of holistic support during and after teaching practice, it is important next to discuss holistic support as a factor ensuring the functionality of the interdependent systems.

2.7 Holistic support during and after teaching practice

Support can be described as a generic term for a range of services to assist students with their learning needs (Arko-Achemfuor, 2017). Support becomes holistic when the support is focused on an individual as a whole and the physical, emotional, social and academic needs of the individual are considered (Best-Start, 2012; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Voko et al., 2014). Pre-service teachers may have individualised needs and therefore require different types of support from different role-players to access growth and motivation (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

When support is enhanced, the potential for professional development among pre-service teachers increases, just as the absence of support diminishes their ability to develop on a professional level (Tang, 2003). Sutherland and Markauskaite (2012) argue that the structure of teacher training programmes often ignores provision for systematic and holistic support for pre-service teachers. As discussed in Section 2.5.1, above, one of the aims of teaching practice is to develop a personal and professional identity for pre-service teachers, and an inclusive and supportive environment is one of the major factors associated with pre-service teachers' development of a positive and sturdy professional identity (Zhang et al. (2018).

An inclusive and supportive environment for pre-service teachers during teaching practice is composed of various sources of support (Le Cornu, 2009). It is also crucial for different role-players to form a strong support system for pre-service teachers so that challenges they might encounter during teaching practice can be identified and swiftly addressed (Abas, 2016; Abebe & HaileMariam, 2011). These sources of support can be divided into formal and informal types of support. Both Laker et al. (2008) and Kaldi and Xafakos (2017) claim that one of the main sources of formal support is the mentor teacher, while informal support may include support from peers.

2.7.1 The main source of support: The mentor teacher

As mentioned in Section 2.4, the role of the mentor teacher is to guide and support pre-service teachers during teaching practice. Mentor teachers' failure to fulfil their role becomes a challenge for pre-service teachers and retards their development of professional identity and self-efficacy (Izadinia, 2015; Moulding et al., 2014). Self-efficacy appears to be an important motivating factor for pre-service teachers, and they can easily become demotivated when they feel unsupported (Arnold et al., 2011; Chaplain, 2008; Colson et al., 2017). In this regard, the participants in the study by Zhao and Zhang (2017) emphasised the impact and importance of mentor teachers' support during teaching practice for pre-service teachers to stay motivated. According to Zhang et al. (2018), support, guidance and positive feedback from the mentor teacher during teaching practice have a great impact on the shaping and reshaping of the professional identity of the pre-service teacher.

2.7.2 Informal support: Support from peers and other pre-service teachers

In several studies it emerges that pre-service teachers need support from their peers and other pre-service teachers (Goodnough et al., 2009; Kaldi & Xafakos, 2017; Laker et al., 2008; Le Cornu, 2009; Nguyen, 2013). In the study by Laker et al. (2008), pre-service teachers indicated that they felt most comfortable in the company of other pre-service teachers, seen as a community of practice to which they belonged (Ekici, 2018; Wenger, 1998). In this community of practice,

pre-service teachers can support each other by sharing experiences – the ups and downs that they encounter during and after teaching practice – and this support helps them to gain confidence in their teaching (Goodnough et al., 2009; Nguyen, 2013). During teaching practice, pre-service teachers have to start developing critical reflection on their own practices, and having a conversation with peers about teaching and learning may assist them to reflect usefully on their own experiences (Paris et al., 2015; Patrick, 2013).

Having thus established the importance of the various sources of support for pre-service teachers during and after teaching practice, it is important to note that several studies reveal that pre-service teachers encounter many challenges on account of a lack of sufficient support (Chaplain, 2008; Deacon, 2016; Farrell, 2007; Kiggundu & Nayimuli, 2009; Napanoy et al., 2021; Özdaş, 2018). The following section examines the consequences of pre-service teachers' not receiving the support that they need for the functionality of the interdependent systems.

2.7.3 Without adequate support

Veenman (1984, p. 143) defines the phrase "reality shock" as "the collapse of the missionary ideals formed during teaching training as a result of the confrontations with the hard and rude reality of everyday classroom life". Botha and Rens (2018) similarly characterise reality shock as the experience of a gap between what pre-service teachers have learned in teacher training programmes and the reality they face as beginner teachers. The lack of support from different role-players during and after teaching practice can be seen as a contributing factor to reality shock when beginner teachers enter the teaching profession (Crosswell & Beutel, 2017; Gürler & Polat, 2019).

Woest (2018) warns that negative experiences stemming from a lack of support may generate negative emotions that become a hurdle in the process of developing from pre-service teacher to beginner teacher, and may end in early attrition or loss of teachers from the teaching profession (Madumere-Obike et al. (2018). In South Africa, between 18000 and 22000 teachers leave the teaching profession each year, a higher number than the teachers who join the profession (Maphalala & Mpofu, 2019). Attrition among beginner teachers is a "long-running concern" for role-players in teacher education (Kelly et al., 2019, p. 93). Various reasons have been adduced to explain teacher attrition among beginner teachers, for example, teacher education, the expectations, the workload, experience of high stress levels, salary, lack of job satisfaction and a lack of support for pre-service and beginner teachers (Botha & Rens, 2018; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; DeAngelis et al., 2013; Dias-Lacy & Guirguis, 2017; Marinette, 2019; Trent, 2019).

2.8 Summary of the chapter

In this chapter, I have integrated systems theory as a theoretical framework by addressing all the systems and factors that together ensure the functionality of the interdependent system of teaching practice. These aspects include all the components of teaching practice at the NWU, the aims of teaching practice and the challenges that pre-service teachers face during teaching practice. Lastly, I described the holistic support that pre-service teachers may need during and after teaching practice. In Chapter 3, I will explore participatory action research as both a paradigm and a methodology.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe and explain the research methodology employed in the study. In consonance with the theoretical framework underpinning the study, I selected participatory action learning and action research (PALAR) as a research method and ideological paradigm. This chapter will feature discussion of the research aims, research design, methodology, participants, data generation, methods of analysis and ethical considerations pertaining to the study.

3.2 Qualitative research

Research is a process of systematic inquiry that aims to explain how experiences are connected and why the world works as it does (Bertram & Christiansen, 2020). A research methodology indicates the structure of the research project, encapsulating all the components involved (Akhtar, 2016). It serves as a guide to the research by indicating how the study will progress from the research questions to its outcomes and conclusions (Abutabenjeh & Jaradat, 2018).

This study made use of qualitative action research. Mohajan (2018) characterises qualitative research as a form of social action that focuses on how individuals make sense of the world in order to provide an in-depth understanding of people's experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Tong et al., 2012). Creswell and Poth (2016) observe that the process of qualitative research is emergent, which means that a plan for the research cannot be prescribed in advance because the phases of the process may change. As the qualitative researcher is involved at all stages of the study and assumes the role of primary instrument for the collection and analysis of data, s/he must be able continuously to adapt and assess the research process, taking note of verbal and non-verbal communication to verify the accuracy of interpretations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Sanjari et al., 2014). Qualitative research is based on the idea that reality is subjective and that individuals form their worldview as a result of their interaction with the external world (Cropley, 2019). As the researcher and architect of this study, I am not objective. I am subjective in a trivially true sense, but also in the particular sense that I am a teacher and therefore have myself completed compulsory teaching practice placements during my pre-service teacher studies. I thus entered this research endeavour not as a blank slate, but with my own subjective lived experience and local knowledge that are evident in the narrative and discourse of the study.

3.3 Participatory action learning and action research: An introduction

Action research is a qualitative research approach that can be described as a process in which the researcher and the participants collaboratively identify social and educational problems to transform the status quo and effect social change (Kajamaa et al., 2019; Wood, 2020).

The term action research was coined by Kurt Lewin in 1934, who developed the research strategy to foster the taking of action to address specific social matters (Lewin, 1946; Tsou, 2019). He was mostly concerned with minority groups and wanted them to "overcome the forces of exploitation and colonialisation that had been prominent in their modern histories" (Adelman, 1993, p. 8).

The principles of action research therefore acknowledge the connection between human interaction and the power of working towards a shared goal of change and improvement (Ebersöhn et al., 2020). Action research as an approach has the potential to make a real contribution to knowledge and democracy by involving participants in unpacking and addressing their situations and challenges, and consequently taking planned action to improve these situations (Wood, 2020; Zuber-Skerritt & Wood, 2019). Subsequently, the notion of participatory action research (PAR) emerged, based on the recognition that individuals in a particular context know best how to improve their circumstances (Wood, 2020) and should be an integral part of conceptualising as well as executing research. Later it became evident that in order to optimise the value of the research for the participants, they needed not only to take part in the research but should also learn through the process. Such learning was never intended to be a linear and one-dimensional process, but rather a dynamic and constantly evolving one. Wood (2020) describes action learning as a series of cyclic processes in which participants actively collaborate to solve their own real-life problems (Bradley, 2021; Zuber-Skerritt, 2018).

Action research has over several decades evolved into a family of approaches that includes, amongst others, action learning, action learning and action research, lifelong action learning, educational action research, participatory action research and participatory action learning and action research (PALAR) (Zuber-Skerritt, 2015). Zuber-Skerritt (2018) characterises PALAR as a still-developing genre in this family that integrates aspects and processes from various cognate approaches. PALAR is a "transformative, collaborative and democratic approach to educational research" (Wood, 2020, p. 1) dedicated to transforming and improving the lives of people. According to Kearney et al. (2013, p. 113) PALAR has the potential to "(1) promote mutual learning and development; (2) foster the cascading of learning and knowledge to others in the community; and (3) co-create knowledge that is relevant, contextualised and useful".

PALAR is more than just a methodology, it is a way of living and working together to integrate practice and theory. The following section focuses on the implementation of PALAR in this study.

3.4 Research design

3.4.1 Research paradigm and approach

A research paradigm can be defined as a way of thinking that influences what is acceptable to research and how research should be conducted (Bertram & Christiansen, 2020). In this sense, the paradigmatic beliefs of the researcher will influence the purpose and the process of the research (Wood, 2020). During my pre-graduate studies, my exposure was limited to the interpretive paradigm in terms of which the researcher attempts to understand the realities experienced by others. I never felt very comfortable with the assumption that I could fully understand another and claim the power to interpret his or her experience. It seemed presumptuous and elitist. Participatory research, on the other hand, entails so much more than just interpretivist research. It embraces a paradigm aligned with notions of inclusivity that encourage collaboration, transformation and democracy (Zuber-Skerritt & Wood, 2019). For this reason, I embraced PALAR as a methodology and paradigm.

Skolimowski (1994) introduced a theory of knowledge that provides the intellectual foundation for the participatory philosophy and has been incorporated into the epistemological principles of participatory forms of research (Breu & Peppard, 2003; Heron, 1996; Reason, 1998). The epistemology that underpins the participatory paradigm is concerned with offering a valid voice to all stakeholders in exploring the way individuals interact with others and with the world, and thereby goes further than just claiming to understand the world (Marley, 2015). Rather, the participatory paradigm is action-orientated and transformational, emphasising the co-creation rather than repetition and interpretation of knowledge. Researchers positioning themselves within a participatory paradigm are thus specifically concerned with enhancing social justice through accepting diversity and generating an understanding of the role of individuals in creating an inclusive community (Wood, 2020).

PALAR as a paradigm rests upon specific ontological foundations. Ontology is rooted in beliefs about the nature of the social world that seek to answer the question “What is reality?” (Bertram & Christiansen, 2020; Nieuwenhuis, 2020b). A PALAR study is therefore conceptualised around relational ontology, which focuses on understanding the social world through the experiences of individuals in relation to each other (Wood, 2020). Participation is central to this paradigm and the relationship between the researchers and the participants is crucial for co-conducting the research and co-creating its outcomes (Breu & Peppard, 2003; Evered & Louis, 1981). Through

this paradigm “multiple realities can exist and reality is dynamic” (Wood, 2020, p. 24), which suggests that as a researcher I cannot only focus on one reality and must be open to the diverse realities of the participants (Cohen et al., 2017).

3.4.2 Implementing PALAR

In this action research endeavour, the co-researchers and I were interested in participating (P) and working together to identify the challenges and needs they might have experienced in respect of holistic support during and after teaching practice. We learned from each other’s lived experiences (AL) and through engaging in systematic inquiry (AR), whereafter action was taken to address the challenges and needs (Wood & Zuber-Skerrit, 2013). This objective could only be achieved if the active participation of the co-researchers and myself remained the central focal point throughout the research (Mubuuke & Leibowitz, 2013; Nicodemus & Swabey, 2015; Zuber-Skerritt, 2018). The following figure was adapted from the PALAR processes of Zuber-Skerritt (2002) and (Wood, 2020) to illustrate the components that are crucial in my PALAR process:

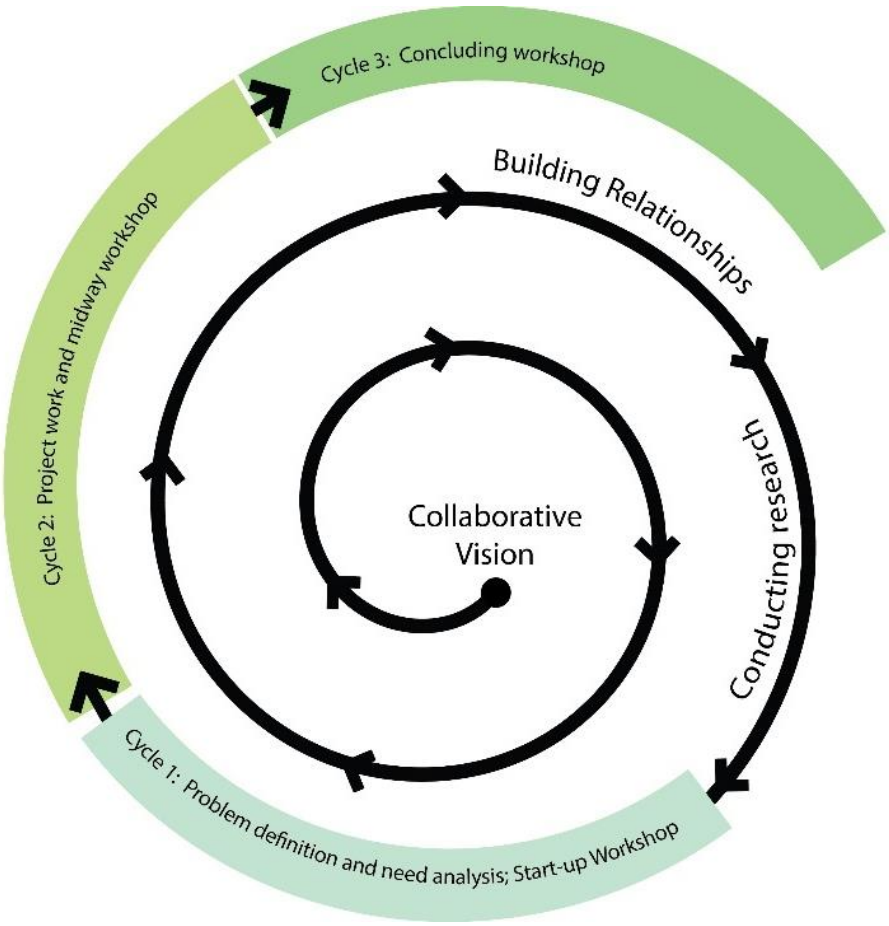

Figure 3-1: My PALAR process

The first component of the PALAR process is the creation of a collaborative vision among the action learning set. During an action research endeavour, the researcher and co-researchers form an action learning set based on the principle of people learning from and with each other (Zuber-Skerritt, 2015). This requires intentional power-sharing and democratic decision-making at all times during the PALAR process (Ponic et al., 2010). Creating a collaborative vision among the action learning set focuses on understanding the context of the study in order to address the issues at hand.

The second component of the PALAR process is to develop solid relationships to ensure active participation before attempting to conduct the research (Wood, 2020; Wood & Zuber-Skerrit, 2013). During this component, the researcher becomes an active participant in the process and plays a supportive and facilitating role in working with other participants to develop mutual relationships based on trust and accountability (Rahman, 1991; Wood, 2020). This is why action researchers choose to refer to co-researchers rather than participants.

It is crucial to remember that in all parts of a PALAR process, there is a constant cycle of planning, taking action, observing and reflecting, to gain a better understanding of the ongoing process of change and development (Zuber-Skerritt, 2018). The third component of the PALAR process comprises conducting the research. The generic model of PALAR research developed by Zuber-Skerritt (2002) was adapted and utilised in this study. The model consists of 8 phases that were selectively combined to create the three cycles of this study. The 8 phases consist of the following:

Table 3-1: The eight phases of the generic model of a PALAR process (Zuber-Skerritt, 2002)

1.	Problem definition and need analysis
2.	Start-up workshop
3.	Project work
4.	Midway specialist workshop
5.	Project work
6.	Concluding workshop
7.	Preparing for presentation
8.	Presentation and celebration

Having described the research design that included the paradigm and the methodology, I will now elaborate on the research methods that I used to select the co-researchers and collect and analyse the data (Johnson & Christensen, 2019).

3.5 Research methods

Before discussing the research methods of the study, it is important to outline the circumstances in which the research was conducted. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the current pandemic had a severe impact on most components of the study, including how the research was conducted. The COVID-19 pandemic forced many schools and universities (including the NWU) to close and discontinue contact teaching. This made co-researcher recruitment difficult. Alternative arrangements for remote learning were also put in place at the NWU, the site for this research study. As a result, the strategies for recruiting co-researchers and undertaking the research cycles needed to be reconceptualised. COVID regulations proscribing face-to-face sessions necessitated my use of online research methods that would still work towards the aims and objectives of the study, while keeping the components of PALAR as well the principles of ethical conduct in mind.

3.6 Population and sampling

As the primary researcher and conceptualiser of the study, I needed to define its population (Bertram & Christiansen, 2020) and decide on the minimum number of co-researchers required to conduct the research and produce valid and trustworthy findings. The population from which a sample would be selected included 602 fourth-year (final-year) B.Ed. pre-service teachers from the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University. Final-year pre-service teachers were selected because of their extensive experience of being placed in schools for teaching practice.

PALAR traditionally favours community-based research methods (Wood & Zuber-Skerrit, 2013) and pre-service teachers at this specific campus of the North-West University constitute a community (Krafona, 2014). It is well documented that in-service teachers are motivated to join and work in communities of practice (Jimenez-Silva & Olson, 2012; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). To highlight the suitability of considering cohorts of teachers as communities, Wood (2020) explains that the PALAR process focuses on small groups of people in a community who engage in a collaborative effort to address an important situation or issue, because they are all directly affected by it. The final-year pre-service teachers enrolled in the B.Ed. programme at the North-West University can be construed as a community of practice and learning and thus a suitable population for this study, in part because they all have to complete eight sessions of teaching practice during their undergraduate studies.

The population that received the initial invitation consisted of 602 pre-service teachers enrolled in the final-year B.Ed. programme. Nieuwenhuis (2020c) notes that the size of a sample depends on the purpose and type of the inquiry, which in this case was PALAR. For that reason, the sample size should not be so big as to make it difficult to extract rich data. In addition, in participatory research the sample size is not decided upon beforehand but is determined by interest. After several attempts to recruit participants by posting invitation posters on the NWU's learning and teaching platform, Efundi, five final-year B.Ed. pre-service teachers from the North-West University indicated their willingness to be co-researchers in this study.

3.7 Data generation

In accordance with the participatory paradigm which underpins the research, I elect to refer to *data generation* rather than *data collection*, because of the understanding that data is created by the participants and is not simply waiting to be collected (Bertram & Christiansen, 2020). According to Wood (2020), PALAR enables the researcher and co-researchers collaboratively to generate data by using methods designed to bring about transformation in the thinking and lives of all the stakeholders. With this and the adapted 8-phase PALAR model (Zuber-Skerritt, 2002) in mind, the following figure illustrates the cycles in which the research took place.

Figure 3-2: My PALAR Cycles

The following research sub-questions were utilised as drivers of the cycles in which the research took place.

PALAR cycle 1: What are the challenges that pre-service teachers are facing regarding holistic support during and after teaching practice?

During the first PALAR cycle, the problem definition, needs analysis and start-up workshop were combined and the data generation method selected was photovoice.

PALAR cycle 2: What are the needs of pre-service teachers regarding holistic support during and after teaching practice?

The second PALAR cycle combined the project work and midway workshop. The data generation methods selected for this phase comprised a future-creating workshop and reflective group conversations.

PALAR cycle 3: What action could be taken to improve holistic support during and after teaching practice?

During the third and last cycle, the concluding workshop was the last phase of the adapted PALAR model, and the future-creating workshop and reflective group conversations were selected as data generation methods. The various methods used are described below.

3.7.1 Photovoice

Photovoice is a data generation strategy in which people collaboratively identify, represent and explore experiences through a specific photographic technique (Wang & Burris, 1997). According to Budig et al. (2018), photovoice is a visual data generation method that gives researchers the ability to document and reflect upon concerns in their community, while embracing social change. Photovoice can therefore be used to address a problem by discussing it with other individuals and thereby bring about change (Kohfeldt et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2004). Several studies in education and health argue that photovoice as a data generation method can lead to social change (Carlson et al., 2006; Cornell & Kessi, 2017; Umurungi et al., 2008; Wilson et al., 2007).

When photovoice is used for data generation, photographs are accompanied by personal narratives that explain and reflect on the images and conduce to deep discussion among co-researchers, leading to possibilities for transformation (Call-Cummings et al., 2019). I chose photovoice as a visual data generation method because it seemed a potentially enjoyable way of promoting critical dialogue (Kohfeldt et al., 2011) that might identify problems and lead to social change.

At an appropriate point in the study, after the first steps of PALAR had successfully been conducted, I provided the co-researchers with a prompt to consider their own perception and experience of holistic support during and after teaching practice. They were invited to take photographs of objects which represented challenges encountered during teaching practice placements. As all the co-researchers owned mobile phones with high-definition cameras, they were asked to use these to take their photographs. The co-researchers were reminded of the

principles of ethical research conduct, which included not taking pictures of learners' or teachers' faces.

To provide some support, examples of photographs and narratives used in previous photovoice projects were shared and discussed to illustrate how objects could be used to symbolise the ideas that they might want to present through their own photographs. After taking several photographs, the co-researchers were challenged to select one photograph and write a narrative about it. As this might have proved quite a challenge, the co-researchers were introduced to an adapted version of SHOWed questions (Wang & Burris, 1997) to assist them with analysing their photos and conceptualising the narratives. The SHOWed questions consist of the following:

1. What do you **See** here?

2. What is really **Happening** here?

3. How does this relate to **Our** lives?

4. Why does this condition **Exist**?

5. What can we **Do** about it?

These questions were adapted in the following manner to better suit the individual focus and potential outcomes of this project:

1. Describe the photo. If you were talking on the phone, how would you describe the photo to someone else?
2. Why did you choose this photo? What does the photo tell us about a challenge associated with the support that you have/had during teaching practice?
3. How does it make you feel? Which emotions or memories come to the fore when you look at this photo?

These prompting questions helped the co-researchers not only to think about their photographs on a deeper level but also to view their lived experience and the world around them in a more critical manner (Treadwell & Taylor, 2017).

After taking the photographs and writing their narratives, the co-researchers added their photos and narratives to a Padlet page (Padlet, 2021). Padlet is a web-based application that provides a virtual wall on which users can discuss certain topics and use multimedia. Users can add words, pictures and videos to share their ideas (Fadhilawati et al., 2020; Rashid et al., 2019) or comment on the thoughts of others (Algraini, 2014). For this reason, Padlet was a suitable application to

facilitate collaboration between the co-researchers (Weller, 2013) in the current situation where face-to-face contact was not possible. In addition, Padlet also allows one to add anonymous comments to the posts of other users, which made it possible for the co-researchers to comment freely on one another's photos and narratives.

As mentioned earlier, this photovoice activity was part of the first cycle of the PALAR process, in which the co-researchers and I sought to identify the challenges relating to holistic support that pre-service teachers faced during and after teaching practice. During the start of the next PALAR cycle, these photographs, narratives and subsequent comments on the Padlet wall were used as content for a reflective discourse. They thus served as an introductory platform for the activity that comprised the second cycle of data generation, namely the future-creating workshop.

3.7.2 The future-creating workshop

Action researchers conduct future-creating workshops to provide an opportunity for a group of individuals to collaborate in addressing challenges and generating ideas in creative ways (Brydon-Miller et al., 2017). The aim of future-creating workshops is therefore to increase collaboration among individuals who share an interest in the same problem to help them to influence future decisions around the problem (Lauttamäki, 2014). The outcome is social change and transformation, in line with the general aim of action research endeavours. The structure of this data generation method resonates with the principles of action research, because it creates "free spaces" (Bladt & Nielsen, 2013, p. 374) where power differentials between researcher and co-researchers are minimised and possibilities for collaboration are maximised.

It is important to note that future-creating workshops were only conceptualised by Mary Brydon-Miller in 2017 and have since only been conducted in a face-to-face environment (Brydon-Miller et al., 2017). With the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, Brydon-Miller and other researchers on national and international levels have had to adjust this practice to conduct the workshops via digital and online platforms (Raider-Roth et al., 2021). As a result, not much literature on the implementation and results of online future-creating workshops is yet available. I had the privilege of personal communication with Brydon-Miller and a study done by Raider-Roth to guide my thoughts on using this strategy in a virtual manner in South Africa. The online future-creating workshop that was conducted for this study is therefore an important contribution to the development and future use of this strategy.

A future-creating workshop typically consists of three phases, namely, the critical phase, the utopian phase and the reality phase. These would traditionally be conducted over one full day or even two days. In an online environment, the length of time per session had to be reconsidered,

as very long online sessions are not practical or productive. It was also essential to have three different sessions. These sessions were conducted via the Google Meet platform. This also challenged the traditional notion of a workshop and invited the co-researchers to think about collaboration in an alternative way.

In this study, the phases were utilised to create actions that could be taken into consideration to support pre-service teachers holistically, during and after teaching practice. Each of the phases will be defined and explained according to how it was completed in the study. Adapted from the four distinct steps (brainstorming, reviewing and more brainstorming, voting and theme finding) that Raider-Roth et al. (2021) suggest, the phases of the future-creating workshop can be simplified into three steps: reflecting, sharing, and voting.

3.7.2.1 Phase 1: The critical phase

During the first phase of the workshop, attendees are usually invited to elaborate on all the negative aspects of the current concern or problem that they have gathered to discuss (Troxler & Kuhnt, 2007). Alminde and Warming (2020, p. 435) thus suggest that the aim of the critical phase is “to identify real problems and frustrations rooted in people’s lived experiences”. It is essential that the co-researchers in this study experienced this environment as safe enough to share their frustrations and negative thoughts. As mentioned, one of the first aims of PALAR research is the creation of a relationship of trust. As this future-creating workshop was only conducted in the second cycle of the research study, the co-researchers had by then established a relationship and a shared vision and therefore felt free to share their ideas.

Moreover, the co-researchers had already been thinking about the challenges they had experienced during teaching practice in the photovoice activity, so could simply reiterate and elaborate on their ideas. As noted in a previous section, cycle one in this study comprised the photovoice activity as well as the first component of the future-creating workshop, the critical phase.

I was initially concerned that the co-researchers might not be willing to share their thoughts and feelings as easily and openly in a digital environment as they might have had we been in the same room together. Yet it turned out that they might have felt even safer behind their computer screens because they were certainly prepared to contribute freely in this critical phase of the future-creating workshop. We also had the chat box function available, where co-researchers could type ideas if they did not feel confident enough to voice them. The prompts for this critical phase were based on the main research question, namely

What are the challenges that pre-service teachers are facing regarding holistic support during and after teaching practice?

As mentioned, three steps are suggested for the successful completion of each phase of this online workshop. When considering the critical phase, the first step (reflection) was helpful to create a context in which co-researchers were reminded of the one challenge they had already identified and discussed. During the second step (sharing), additional challenges were listed and in the third step (voting), these challenges were prioritised.

- Reflecting – The co-researchers and I reflected on the photographs and narratives that were posted on Padlet for the photovoice activity by each selecting the posts that we could most relate to.
- Sharing – After this we shared personal experiences relating to the challenges we faced during teaching practice. We also brainstormed other possible challenges that we envisioned students might experience during teaching practice. It was important that this list be as comprehensive as possible to ensure that there was enough depth of data for the execution of a successful third step. As the co-researchers listed the challenges or typed them in the chat box, I displayed an interactive whiteboard app on my screen where I made a list of all the challenges. Through continual prompting, I encouraged the co-researchers to share as many challenges as they could think of.
- Voting – At the conclusion of this exercise, I allowed them a few minutes to study all the challenges and again select a few that they could most relate to. I wanted the challenges they selected to be those that might be addressed by more holistic support.

3.7.2.2 Phase 2: The utopian phase

The utopian phase focuses on “working together to create an ideal vision for the future” (Raider-Roth et al., 2021, p. 2). During this phase, reality is excluded, which means that the phase promotes imaginative and creative ideas and attendees are free to dream (Alminde & Warming, 2020; Troxler & Kuhnt, 2007). They are in effect invited to create the utopia in which they would like to live.

The focus of the utopian phase of the future-creating workshop of this study was conceptualised around the following sub-question:

What are the needs of pre-service teachers regarding holistic support during and after teaching practice?

The three steps regarded as central to a future-creating workshop were also implemented during this phase:

- Reflecting – In order to create the context for this second conversation, it was important to remind co-researchers of the discourse during our first phase. The co-researchers and I therefore reflected on the challenges that we had selected as relevant to our own situation during the critical phase.

- Sharing – As a prompt for this utopian phase, I asked the co-researchers to think of all the needs, dreams and ideals that they had regarding teaching practice. They were also invited to think specifically of their needs in respect of holistic support during and after teaching practice placements. They were reminded that the aim of the utopian phase was to create their perfect world, a utopia in which teaching practice would be a perfect experience. They were therefore prohibited from being practical or from considering any limitations that might hamper their ideas. Since realism was not a pre-requisite in this phase, they were encouraged to share any ideas, however preposterous or farfetched they might have seemed. It is interesting to note that, as Gayá and Brydon-Miller (2017) observe, attendees often struggle more during this phase than during the first critical phase. This phase was also more difficult to facilitate, as the co-researchers were hesitant to share their ideas. It is often more difficult for people to verbalise their dreams and desires as they are so caught up in the realities of the challenges with which they are forced to cope. I again used the interactive whiteboard through the screen-sharing option of Google Meets to create a list of the co-researchers' contributions.

- Voting – For the conclusion of this phase, co-researchers were offered a few minutes to remind themselves of all the needs and dreams that were listed and identify those that they could most relate to. I wanted the dreams and desires selected to be indicative of situations where they might most benefit from holistic support.

3.7.2.3 Phase 3: The reality phase

During the reality phase, attendees utilise data from the critical and utopian phase as tools to transform their reality and provide possible solutions to the problem they presented at the outset of the workshop. This process is facilitated by concentrating on the ideas that relate most closely to existing realities (Isotalo, 2020; Troxler & Kuhnt, 2007), and subsequently generating feasible recommendations for action (Raider-Roth et al., 2021).

In the context of this research study, the online Google Meet session where the reality phase was undertaken, formed part of cycle 3 of the PALAR process. The focus of this phase was a consolidation of phases 1 and 2 and elaborated on the sub-question:

> *What actions could be taken to improve holistic support for pre-service teachers during and after teaching practice?*

In an effort to ensure consistency and to follow the format of a future-creating workshop, this phase was also structured according to the three guiding steps, namely reflection, sharing and voting.

- Reflect – At the beginning of our third Google Meet session it was essential to remind ourselves of the progress already made. We had to reflect on the data gathered during the first two phases and discuss the most important findings in terms of the challenges identified during the critical phase and the wishes for support expressed during the utopian phase. It was also an appropriate opportunity to invite co-researchers to share their thoughts and insights on the process thus far. This phase represents the practical aspect of the workshop and the data generated here will lead to the possible implementation of measures to ensure better holistic support during teaching practice placements.

- Sharing – After discussion of the content of the whiteboard lists for both the critical and the utopian phases, the co-researchers were invited to suggest practical ways in which students could receive better support during teaching practice. In this manner, the most pertinent challenges that they experienced could be addressed and their most pressing needs met. It was deemed important to spell out the detail of such action and therefore the concept of action plans was introduced.

- Voting – All action plans were subsequently listed on the interactive whiteboard and co-researchers were invited to select the plans that they felt would be most beneficial to ensure holistic support for future groups of students who had to complete teaching practice placements. As these co-researchers were final-year students, they would only have the opportunity to implement certain action plans during their second-semester placement after the study had been concluded. There were, however, other action plans that involved other stakeholders in the teaching practice arena that could be implemented and tested with immediate effect. The co-researchers were invited to take screenshots of the action plans to have them available later when they might be needed.

3.7.3 Reflective group conversations

A reflective group conversation is a form of a focus group discussion that produces rich and detailed data (Nieuwenhuis, 2020c). This strategy is often employed in action research not only to facilitate reflection but also to contribute towards the goal of growth and transformation. The co-researchers and I engaged in several online reflective group conversations during our PALAR journey. The first reflective group conversation occurred after the photovoice activity, when there was reflection on the various photographs, narratives and comments posted on the Padlet wall. Subsequent reflective group conversations were included in the second and third phases of the future-creating workshop (cycles 2 and 3).

3.8 Data analysis and coding

Data analysis can be defined as the process of bringing structure and meaning to a large quantity of data, thus revealing information that constitutes the outcome of the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Stake, 2005). The data that had been generated in this study was examined thoroughly to find themes and patterns. According to Zuber-Skerritt (2011), data generation and analysis in PALAR are ongoing processes rather than once-off occurrences. In this study, I was the primary instrument for data generation and I also analysed all the data gathered throughout the study (Merriam & Grenier, 2019).

When qualitative data is analysed, the main aim is to summarise the data (including the photographs, narratives and transcriptions of reflective group conversations) in terms of patterns and themes so as to interpret and understand it. This study therefore required an inductive data analysis approach. The data that was collected from the future creating workshop was transcribed (verbatim) and coded into themes with the help of Atlas.ti software. Additional data from the photovoice activity was then added to the emerging themes. This process of organising and sorting data, the second step in qualitative data analysis, is often referred to as coding (Stuckey, 2015). Coding involves “marking the segments of data with symbols, descriptive words or unique identifying names” (Nieuwenhuis, 2020a, p. 136).

Moustakas (1994) data analysis approach, adapted from Creswell (2013), was utilised to analyse the data in this study:

Table 3-2: Moustakas (1994) data analysis approach, adapted from (Creswell, 2013)

Horizontalization	I as the researcher gave equal attention to all the co-researchers’ contributions. I removed

	all contributions which were repetitions or not related to the research questions.
Elimination process	During this step I reduced the data in the contributions of the co-researchers to the same phrase/ word/ element (invariant constituents).
Thematical clustering to create themes	The data that was left after the elimination process was clustered into categories to create and identify themes.
Final identification and validation	During this step, I consulted all the data again to validate the themes that had been identified.
Individual textual descriptions	The identified themes were used to formulate individual textual descriptions from co-researchers to construct textual examples of what they experienced.
Individual structured descriptions	The identified themes were used to formulate individual structured descriptions from co-researchers to formulate structural descriptions of how their experiences had occurred.
Individual structured textual descriptions	The textual and structured descriptions were combined to capture the essence of the experiences of co-researchers.

3.9 Role of the researcher

The role of the researcher in PALAR is to become part of the action learning set and facilitate every phase in the whole cyclical process of the research (Kearney et al., 2013). Addressing the often-overlooked power imbalances between researcher and co-researchers is an important consideration for a researcher facilitating a PALAR research endeavour. As the facilitator in this research, my tasks included:

- Facilitating the photovoice activity as a data generation method. I explained the method to the co-researchers and gave them examples. I also explained the ethical guidelines they had to adhere to when selecting subjects and taking photographs.
- Facilitating the future creating workshop, by preparing the virtual environment and formulating probing questions for all the sessions.
- Participating as a facilitator in the future-creating workshop, by taking my own experiences of teaching practice into consideration.
- Triangulating the data by utilising more than one data generation method to ensure validity and data trustworthiness (Creswell, 2013; Nieuwenhuis, 2020a).

3.10 Trustworthiness

Stringer (2013) insists that action research remain authentic, which means that the research results must continually be confirmed by and remain recognisable to the co-researchers. Zuber-Skerritt (2011) also identified authenticity as the main criterion for ensuring quality and reliability in PALAR. In traditional research endeavours, there are clear guidelines for promoting trustworthiness. But Herr and Anderson (2014) warn that in action research, trustworthiness alone is not an adequate means of validation, because trustworthiness is only focused on the knowledge that was generated and doesn't take the emancipatory and practical outcomes of action research into account. The authenticity of research studies such as the present one should be evaluated by the extent to which the research design adheres to the principles of PALAR (Wood, 2020). Such adherence will imply, among other things, that trustworthiness can be assumed.

3.10.1 Validity

Validity can be described as an expression of the extent to which we can trust the research to have measured what it was supposed to have measured (Bertram & Christiansen, 2020; Pietersen & Maree, 2020). Herr and Anderson (2005) characterise the concept in action research in terms of outcome, process, democratic, catalytic and dialogic validities.

3.10.1.1 Outcome validity

Because of the cyclical nature of action research studies and the decreased power of the researcher to determine the outcomes of such studies, unexpected outcomes often appear. The researcher should provide evidence of such outcomes to strengthen the validity of the study (Wood, 2020). Outcome validity is further determined by the actions that were taken during the research process to yield the desired results or not. In this study, all the processes were evaluated through dialogical reflection by the co-researchers.

3.10.1.2 Process validity

According to Herr and Anderson (2014), process validity refers to the quality of the research process. In the case of this study, this means that there should be evidence that the PALAR components (see Section 3.4.2, above) guided the PALAR process employed (Wood, 2020). As this study involved a participatory process, the relationships among participants also constitute an indication of validity. Anney (2014) claims that process validity can be achieved if the action learning set uses different data generation methods and works together towards a shared goal. In the present study, various data generation methods were used to ensure the triangulation of the data. Triangulation refers to the use of more than one data collection method to confirm the accuracy and credibility of the data collected (Bertram & Christiansen, 2020). In this study, data was gathered through photovoice, a future-creating workshop, and other reflective group conversations.

3.10.1.3 Democratic validity

Herr and Anderson (2014) claim that democratic validity reflects the nature of the collaboration between the participants in a research study. In this study, I ensured that all decisions made by the co-researchers were democratic. All their perceptions, experiences and ideas fed into the data collected, further promoting democratic validity. I was part of the group as an active participant rather than as a researcher.

3.10.1.4 Catalytic validity

Catalytic validity is concerned with the ability of the action learning set to understand and to transform reality (Anderson et al., 2007). As established in this chapter, action research is always an endeavour directed towards change and, according to Zuber-Skerritt (2011), catalytic validity shows evidence of the development of action learning and leadership, both critical in a successful PALAR process. The co-researchers in this study were encouraged by the nature of the study to take action to bring about social change.

3.10.1.5 Dialogic validity

According to Herr and Anderson (2014), dialogic validity is concerned with the free space that is created within the research process to enable all the participants to engage and contribute to creating and developing knowledge. Dialogue was encouraged between co-researchers through the participatory approach in data generation, where co-researchers listened to each other's experiences, commented and added their own.

Trustworthiness through dialogic validity was further assured by member checking of final themes. According to Creswell and Miller (2000), member checking means taking the data, interpretations and findings back to the participants so that they can confirm their accuracy. I took the research findings back to the participants for them to reflect on the correctness of the data and the inductive logic employed in reaching the findings. (Herr & Anderson, 2005) note that member checking confirms the value placed on the relational aspect of the research, which is a critical component in a PALAR study.

3.11 Ethical considerations

According to Hartell and Bosman (2016), research should be based on respect, trust, protection and collaboration among the researcher and the co-researchers. Qualitative research seeks to obtain sensitive information through insight into personal experiences. In this regard, Elias and Theron (2012) cite three primary principles in the ethics of research – autonomy, beneficence and justice (not to harm) – all of which were respected in this study.

3.11.1 Autonomy

When they were first contacted, the co-researchers were informed of the purpose and intention of the proposed study (Cohen et al., 2017). They gave informed consent to the researcher's making use of the information gathered during data generation. According to Du Plessis (2016), the researcher needs to protect the dignity, privacy and confidentiality of the participants' contributions. The researcher in a PALAR study invites all the individuals concerned to participate in a study where they can develop and learn (Wood, 2020). Participatory research cannot guarantee complete anonymity, and this was explained to the co-researchers. The establishment of mutual trust was another reason for the relationship-building at the beginning of the data generation process.

3.11.2 Beneficence

According to Bertram and Christiansen (2020), the research should produce benefits for the co-researchers. Wood (2020) maintains that there should be a list of benefits and risks, and in PALAR it is crucial that ongoing assessment of risks and benefits is made throughout the study, since new risks may arise.

The purpose of the study was to explore pre-service teachers' experiences regarding holistic support during and after teaching practice. It further aimed to determine the challenges and the needs of pre-service teachers and to propose collaborative strategies that could be implemented to offer more holistic support to pre-service teachers during and after teaching practice. The co-

researchers did therefore benefit personally and professionally, by developing strategies to cope during and after teaching practice. These strategies will also be useful once they enter the profession as beginner teachers. The study might indirectly benefit the Faculty of Education of the NWU as well as the greater educational community by providing information that might be of use in supporting pre-service teachers on different levels. The co-researchers can share these strategies with other pre-service teachers or colleagues who stand to benefit from them.

3.11.3 Justice

Justice was guaranteed by informed consent. According to Wood (2020), informed consent is a crucial principle, because participants should be able to decide if they want to participate in full knowledge of the risks and benefits of the study. Wood (2020) also argues that in a PALAR study, the participants should determine their own ethical contract, risks and benefits, because they are daily facing the issues being addressed.

The required ethical clearance to conduct the study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the North-West University and the Research Data Gatekeeper Committee.

3.12 Summary of the chapter

Chapter 3 has described the research design, paradigm, methodology and the purpose of the PALAR process selected. The chapter can be summarised as follows:

Table 3- 3: Summary of chapter 3

Purpose	To explore collaboratively the experiences of pre-service teachers regarding holistic support during and after teaching practice
Paradigm	PALAR
Research approach	PALAR
Research design	Qualitative action research
Co-researchers	5 fourth-year (final-year) pre-service teachers from the North-West University, Potchefstroom campus.

PALAR Process	Cycle 1: Problem definition, need analysis and start-up workshop. (conceptualising the challenges that pre-service teachers face regarding holistic support during teaching practice)	Cycle 2: Project work and midway workshop. (Identifying the needs that pre-service teachers have regarding holistic support during and after teaching practice)	Cycle 3: Concluding workshop, presentation and celebration (Establishing the actions that could be taken to improve holistic support for pre-service teachers during and after teaching practice)
Data generation methods	• Photovoice activity, including photographs, narratives and comments • Future-creating workshop: Critical, utopian and realisation phases • Reflective group conversations		
Data analysis	Inductive data analysis to identify themes using the model of Moustakas (1994), adapted from Creswell (2013)		
Trustworthiness	Quality and reliability were achieved by: • Outcome validity • Process validity • Democratic validity • Catalytic validity • Dialogic validity		

CHAPTER 4 PRESENTATION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I report on the findings of the study by providing an overview of the patterns and themes that emerged from the data. This enables me to address the following research questions:

Primary research question:

- How do pre-service teachers experience holistic support during and after teaching practice?

Secondary research questions:

- What are the challenges that pre-service teachers are facing regarding holistic support during and after teaching practice?
- What are the needs of pre-service teachers regarding holistic support during and after teaching practice?
- What collaborative strategies can be implemented to offer holistic support to pre-service teachers during and after teaching practice?

The main themes that emerged from the data were: (1) roles and responsibilities and (2) expectations vs experience.

The findings under theme 1 will indicate that the roles and responsibilities that the co-researchers were expected to fulfil during their teaching practice placements often presented challenges. They also served to highlight areas where the co-researchers experienced a definite need for greater support on various levels.

All pre-service teachers enter their teacher training programmes with expectations of what they would like to experience during their studies and, specifically, their school-based placements. The findings in theme 2 will indicate a discrepancy between these expectations and the experiences they ended up having.

In addition to the two main themes, subthemes and categories also emerged as the data was analysed. I will elaborate on each theme and, citing verbatim quotations from data emanating from the photovoice images and narratives and the future-creating workshops.

As indicated in Chapter 3, the preservation of anonymity was an aspect of ethical conduct in this study. Although complete anonymity is not possible in participatory research, the data gathering

tools in this study promoted anonymity in various ways. Padlet (2021), which was used as an online tool to gather data and promote discourse, offered users the option of posting anonymous comments on photographs and narratives. This anonymity is respected in the discussion that follows.

The main themes and sub-themes are illustrated in the following table:

Table 4-1: Themes and sub-themes of the findings

Theme 1: Roles and responsibilities			
Sub-Theme 1: Being alone on a solidary road	**Sub-theme 2**: They were supposed to be there to catch me	**Sub-theme 3**: Doing so much more than what I was supposed to be doing	**Sub-theme 4**: The expectation that I would take on different roles and the challenges associated with this
Theme 2: Expectations versus experience			
Sub-theme 1: This is not what I thought it was going to be		**Sub-theme 2:** I was not taught this at university	

4.2 Theme 1: Roles and responsibilities

During teaching practice, pre-service teachers are expected to take on different roles and responsibilities. These are defined by various stakeholders, including the Department of Higher Education (MRTEQ), the higher education institution as well as the school that they are placed at. From the data obtained in this study, it was clear that pre-service teachers were required to fulfil many roles and responsibilities of which they had not previously been aware.

In terms of the responsibilities that pre-service teachers were allocated during teaching practice, the data indicates not only that they were expected to assume more responsibilities than they were instructed to by their institution, but also that these added responsibilities contributed to a sense of being overwhelmed and isolated during their time at schools. The theme of roles and

responsibilities during teaching practice was divided into four sub-themes: (1) Being alone on a solitary road, (2) They were supposed to be there to catch me, (3) Doing so much more than what I was supposed to be doing, and (4) The expectation that I would take on different roles and the challenges associated with this.

4.3 Sub-Theme 1: Being alone on a solitary road

The following photograph and narrative that co-researcher 5 utilised to illustrate the challenge she faced during teaching practice captures the essence of this sub-theme:

Figure 4- 1: A solidary road

> *…it feels like I am standing alone at the start of a long road that seems like there is no end…it feels like you are walking on a hot road without any protection from the sun*. (Co-researcher 5, lines 6-7)

Co-researchers 1 and 3 endorsed this feeling of isolation during their first year and first teaching practice experience as they felt alone and were unsure of what was required from them, and where to start. Co-researcher 2 felt that she was thrown into the deep end and had to figure out everything for herself (school placement, teaching, coping with the school and handling the children).

From the above, it is clear that teaching practice created a feeling of isolation for the co-researchers because they were overwhelmed by the experience of being and feeling alone in the schools they were placed in. This feeling of isolation could have been alleviated had the co-researchers felt appropriately supported at the school. To understand what support the co-researchers needed or expected it was important to understand what they experienced. The following factors contributing to their feelings of isolation were isolated.

4.3.1 Being the only pre-service teacher at a school

The first factor contributing to the feeling of isolation was being the only pre-service teacher from their university to complete their teaching practice at a particular school. Co-researchers 1, 3 and 4 shared their personal experiences of being alone at a school without other pre-service teachers to talk to, to seek support from or to be with during breaks. Co-researcher 3 mentioned the following:

> *For me, it was terrible to be alone, to have no one to talk to or to be with during breaks… I just strolled alone from my first year ….* (Co-researcher 3, lines 150-152)[1]

The question of the importance of peer support during teaching practice arises from these statements. In this regard, co-researcher 1 pointed out that she felt less alone when she joined other pre-service teachers at the school to form a group to support each other. Co-researcher 5 thought it would have been helpful if other pre-service teachers in the area could have supported each other, stating:

> *For those who are placed in a school without other pre-service teachers, to create a group with pre-service teachers in the area who can support each other.* (Co-researcher 5, lines 23-25)

From these statements, it is clear that being the only pre-service teacher at a school contributed to the feeling of isolation for the co-researchers because the absence of a peer obviated the possibility of mutual support.

The second factor contributing to the feeling of isolation that emerged from the photo reproduced above will be discussed in Section 4.3.2.

[1] Data gathering activities were conducted in Afrikaans, the mother tongue of all the co-researchers. The transcribed data was translated by the researcher and then member checked for authenticity and factual correctness.

4.3.2 The unwillingness to support

The following photograph that participant 4 utilised in the photovoice activity to illustrate the pressure she experienced when she had to present a lesson for marks, was a prompt for other co-researchers to voice feelings consonant with being isolated and alone:

Figure 4-2: The feeling of isolation

Through the critical phase of the future creating workshop, co-researchers 1 and 2 indicated that they could relate to this image of a wilting plant, standing alone, because they felt that they were on their own during teaching practice. Co-researcher 1 described a personal experience that had made her feel isolated. She claimed that a mentor teacher did not want her in her class, and even though she reached out for support from the teaching practice coordinator, this was unsuccessful when the coordinator chose to believe the mentor teacher rather than the co-researcher. She mentioned that she slept every day after school, because she felt depressed about the situation and – because she was the only pre-service teacher at the school – she had no one to talk to.

It was clear that co-researcher 1 felt isolated, lacking the support structure she needed due both to the coordinator's unwillingness to help and being physically alone without anybody to talk to.

Co-researcher 2 also shared a personal experience she had when she was a first-year and a fourth-year student embarrassed her and bullied her. She needed support and did seek it from the mentor teacher, but he did not care and was in any case never around.

Co-researchers 1 and 4 agreed that mentor teachers should support pre-service teachers during teaching practice by involving them and making them feel comfortable, imparting the sense that they cared about them and thus creating a feeling of belonging in the teaching profession. This kind of support could lead to reduced feelings of isolation during teaching practice.

To summarise the first sub-theme, the co-researchers in this study felt isolated during teaching practice, because they were unsure of what was required of them, by being the only pre-service teacher at a school, and by neglect from mentor teachers who were largely absent and did not seem to care. A mentor teacher is tasked with being one of the main role-players in teaching practice placement, but these co-researchers' experience indicates that this was a role that some so-called mentors neglected or refused to play.

The next section reports on the absence of support from the putative role-players that the co-researchers experienced.

4.4 Sub-theme 2: They were supposed to be there to catch me

Through the critical and utopian phases of the future-creating workshop, co-researchers 1, 2, 3 and 5 shared their personal experiences in respect of the support they received and the support they needed during teaching practice. Through this theme, I will elaborate on support from three main role-players which the co-researchers mentioned: the **mentor teacher**, the **teaching practice administration office** and **pre-service teachers' liaisons**. These role-players are detailed below.

4.4.1 The mentor teacher

The following photovoice extract from co-researcher 1 illustrates the tension she experienced during teaching practice when a mentor teacher did not seem to want her in the classroom:

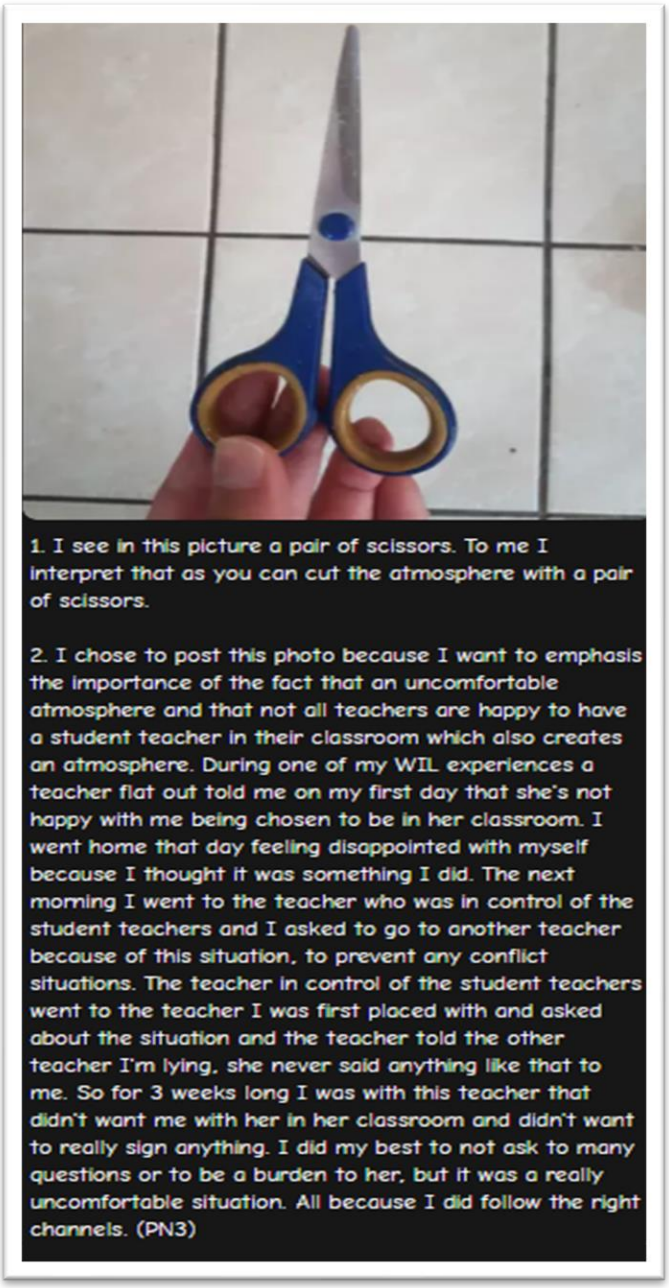

Figure 4-3: Relationship with mentor teacher

It was clear from the photovoice narrative of co-researcher 1 that she had had a very bad experience during teaching practice because of the mentor teacher. First, the mentor teacher did not seem to want the co-researcher in her class. The co-researcher indicated that she consequently felt disappointed in herself, and such a feeling of unworthiness is bound to hamper her ability to construct a positive professional identity. The mentor teacher created a space for the co-researcher in which she felt unwelcome and therefore isolated. She was nevertheless brave enough to ask for help from the teaching practice coordinator, the teacher responsible for organising and supporting pre-service teachers. Although the coordinator did the right thing by addressing the problem with the mentor teacher, this only created more trouble for the co-

researcher when the mentor teacher claimed that she was lying. During the critical phase of the future-creating workshop, co-researcher 1 added that the coordinator provided no further support after discussing the matter with the mentor teacher. This exacerbated her feelings of isolation.

Co-researcher 1 went on to say the following:

> *My second year was better and more fun because I was with a teacher…that indicated that she helps a lot of students and that she is willing to help me. She also gave me her lesson plans and resources.* (Co-researcher 1, lines 24-27)

It is evident that the co-researcher had such a bad experience with her first mentor teacher that she never wanted to go back to that school again. She had more luck the following year, being placed in a school with a mentor teacher who gave her considerable support. In contrast, co-researcher 4 elected to be placed at the same school for three years, finding herself in the same classroom with the same mentor teacher. She claimed that this mentor teacher provided her with valuable emotional support because she was physically present in class throughout her teaching practice and guided her through reflection after observing each lesson that she presented.

From the above, it appears that the relationship between the pre-service teacher and the mentor teacher plays a significant role in decisions about school placements. Co-researchers 1 and 4 felt less alone in certain schools and with certain mentor teachers, and therefore went back to the schools concerned.

The co-researchers in this study all felt that the support they received from the teaching practice administrative office was minimal or non-existent. The supposed role of the teaching practice administrative office is outlined below.

4.4.2 The teaching practice administrative office

As established in Section 2.4, the teaching practice administrative office is responsible for the administrative task of placing pre-service teachers in schools. Even though the office is only responsible for administrative matters regarding teaching practice, co-researcher 2 observed that the teaching practice administrative office effectively throws pre-service teachers into the deep end when they place them at a school, since they have to figure out how everything works by themselves. Co-researchers 3 and 5 agreed, suggesting that the office is not aware of what is actually happening in schools. These opinions made it clear that the co-researchers did not know what the roles and responsibilities of the teaching practice administrative office are.

Co-researchers 1 and 3 mentioned that they had never felt sufficiently comfortable to share a negative experience with the staff at the teaching practice administrative office, both because they tend to be unresponsive and because the co-researcher did not want to create more trouble. There was a clear sense that the co-researchers expect more from the teaching practice administrative office in terms of support. The absence of this support heightened the co-researchers' feeling of isolation. Co-researcher 2 remarked:

> *I would have wanted more support from the teaching practice administrative office – to be a link between the student and the school, to support students, for example when you have a problem with a mentor teacher…to back the students more*…. (Co-researcher 2, lines 84 and 87)

The co-researchers in this study thus indicated that they did not consistently receive the support they needed from either the mentor teacher or the teaching practice administrative office.

During the critical and utopian phases of the future-creating workshop, it became evident that they also failed to get adequate support from the pre-service teacher liaisons, discussed below.

4.4.3 The pre-service teacher liaisons

Co-researchers 1, 3, 4 and 5 agreed that the pre-service teacher liaisons at their schools did not support them in any way. The pre-service teacher liaisons have various responsibilities, including extending support to pre-service teachers. During the utopian phase, the question was asked what the pre-service teacher liaisons actually did at the schools where the co-researchers were placed. Co-researcher 1 and 5 agreed that the pre-service teacher liaisons did nothing more than fill in the necessary forms. Co-researcher 4 concurred, saying:

> *The pre-service teacher liaisons only found out about the preferred clothing and filled in the dates and times when all students arrived and left the school.* (Co-researcher 4, line 111)

These opinions suggested that the pre-service teachers were not aware of all the responsibilities that the pre-service teacher liaisons were meant to assume because of what they saw them doing during teaching practice. This indicates that the pre-service teacher liaisons were not playing the roles that they were appointed to, or they were not adequately trained by the university. However, co-researcher 1 mentioned that she was once a pre-service teacher liaison herself, but did not know how she was supposed to support and assist other students. This furnishes further evidence that pre-service teacher liaisons are not aware of their roles and responsibilities and how to fulfil

them, so the training offered by the university may well be more problematic than the work ethic of the teacher liaisons.

During the reality phase of the future-creating workshop, co-researchers 3 and 5 expressed the same wish to receive more support from the pre-service teacher liaisons in terms of inclusion, support and guidance during teaching practice.

In summary, sub-theme 2 was that the co-researchers did not feel that they received the support that they needed, and that this contributed to their feeling of isolation. Some pre-service teachers claimed to have received no support from the mentor teacher, whose role in their opinion is to support and guide pre-service teachers during teaching practice. The co-researchers further mentioned that they would have wanted more support from the teaching practice administrative office. This desire or expectation does not correlate with the responsibilities and tasks allocated by the university to the teaching practice administrative office. The office functions purely as an administrative office, not as a support structure for pre-service teachers during their teaching practice. It must be mentioned that they did not specify what support they wanted from the teaching practice administrative office. Co-researcher 2 indicated that she needed someone to support her in dealing with her mentor teacher, but this would seem to be the responsibility of the school principal rather than the university.

As indicated above, the co-researchers also felt that the university-appointed pre-service teacher liaisons do not function as a support structure so much as simple administrators. There are two possible reasons for this. One is the process of selecting the pre-service teacher liaisons, and the other, arranging the training that these persons receive. It is necessary to find out if these liaisons are trained only to complete certain administrative tasks and maintain a good relationship with the school, or are trained also to be responsive to the needs of the pre-service teachers. From the comments of the co-researchers, it seems that the needs of the university and the school concerned are more important than those of the students.

The following sub-theme focuses on the responsibilities that the co-researchers felt they were unfairly required to assume.

4.5 Sub-theme 3: Doing so much more than what I am supposed to

As outlined in Section 2.6.1**Error! Reference source not found.**, pre-service teachers should be able to observe mentor teachers during teaching practice to gain certain knowledge and skills and thereby form a clear idea of what it really means to be a teacher. According to the co-researchers who took part in this study, the physical absence of a mentor teacher from the classroom is a frequent occurrence that many pre-service teachers experience during their teaching practice.

Co-researcher 4 indicated that she was more at ease being alone in the classroom because then nobody was watching over her shoulder. This is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the situation enables the pre-service teacher to take responsibility for a classroom, but on the other, she misses out on possibly useful and educative modelling and information from the mentor teacher.

Co-researchers 2, 4 and 5 indicated that chaos usually ensued in the physical absence of the mentor teacher. Indeed, classroom discipline was the biggest problem that co-researchers 2, 4 and 5 faced when left alone in the classroom:

> *I had to take over two classes, there was learners everywhere, about 70 and it was impossible to give a lesson for all the learners in that chaos.* (Co-researcher 4, lines 210-211)

> *Classroom discipline and respect was a problem from the start. As a first year, learners do not have respect for you and they just don't care….* (Co-researcher 2, lines 212-213)

These statements make it clear that for pre-service teachers, being left alone in an overcrowded classroom resulted in chaos as learners had little respect for them. In the photovoice activity, co-researcher 5 claimed that when the mentor teacher left the pre-service teacher alone in the class, the learners did not want to listen to her or him because s/he was not their teacher. One co-researcher agreed with this statement by indicating that she found it difficult to teach learners alone because they were not disciplined. One of the co-researchers added the following:

> *I agree with this student, it is so hard to work with the learners because they see you as a stranger and they always try to first test your boundaries and … the teacher you are placed with just leaves you to try and manage on your own instead of giving you helpful advice.* (Padlet anonymous comment 4, lines 7-10)[2]

It seems that learners do not recognise pre-service teachers as teachers. Co-researchers 1, 3 and 4 mentioned that being alone in a classroom, especially with learners who are only a year or two younger than they are, makes classroom management a real challenge. Co-researchers 1 and 2 specifically described having to take over and teach a class when the mentor teacher was

[2] Padlet offers the opportunity for co-researchers to post anonymous comments

absent as contributing to their feelings of isolation. This was particularly acute if it appeared that the mentor teacher did not care.

It was clear from the statements and conversations with the co-researchers that they felt that being left alone in the classroom left them with responsibilities that they were not supposed to handle or, in some cases, were simply unable to handle. This is problematic: on the one hand, teaching practice is there to prepare pre-service teachers for the teaching profession, and they need to learn how to cope with a large class; but on the other hand, they need guidance on how to do so. While universities may want pre-service teachers to have only positive experiences during their school placements, for them to experience the reality is more important. Exposing pre-service teachers to classes where they need to cope not only with large numbers of learners but also with the discipline in that class gives them the experience and exposure that reflects the reality of teaching. But what is important is for the mentor teacher to debrief the pre-service teachers afterwards, and/or to model beforehand to the pre-service teacher how best to handle the situation. This would be constructive support of the kind that pre-service teachers can use.

To summarise this sub-theme, the co-researchers indicated that because of the physical absence of the mentor teacher from the class when they were required to assume the role of teacher, they experienced a wide range of challenges regarding class discipline. Moreover, they did not receive the support or the guidance that they needed to learn from the experience.

Up to now, the discussion has centred on the isolation that the co-researchers felt and how that influenced their experience of support. The following sub-theme explores the different roles that the pre-service teachers had to fulfil during teaching practice, and how these affected their experience of support.

4.6 Sub-theme 4: The expectation that they would take on different roles and the challenges associated with this

4.6.1 The expectation that they would take on different roles

As established in Section 2.5.1, one of the aims of teaching practice is to develop pre-service teachers' professional identity by exposing them to real-life teaching situations in schools. Although the MRTEQ (SA, 2015) clearly defines seven roles a teacher is expected to play, the co-researchers in this study chose to focus their discussion on three basic roles that they were expected to fulfil during teaching practice. For the co-researchers, it was important to find a balance during teaching practice between being a student and meeting expectations arising from these roles and their attendant responsibilities.

Co-researchers 1, 2 and 4 mentioned the following roles that they were expected to fulfil during teaching practice:

4.6.1.1 Being a student

The first role that the co-researchers felt they had to fulfil was that of a student who had to comply with academic responsibilities to the university. Although they were based full-time at school for the prescribed period, they were also still expected to submit assignments for other academic modules during and especially after teaching practice. This can be a challenge if pre-service teachers feel they do not have enough time. Co-researcher 1 claimed that it was a very negative experience for her: she had major assignments to complete for other academic modules and accordingly did not have sufficient time to work on her portfolio of evidence for the teaching practice module.

This portfolio of evidence, as mentioned in Section 2.3.1.2, itself constituted was a major assignment. During the critical phase of the future-creating workshop, co-researcher 2 stated that it was a challenge completing all the paperwork for the portfolio during teaching practice. Comments on the photograph reproduced above indicated that the co-researchers agreed that the portfolio was time-consuming due to all the paperwork that was required year after year. Co-researchers 1 and 2 mentioned that they completed the portfolio after teaching practice because they could not find the time during the school placement.

It is important to note that being a teacher entails a lot of paperwork, and pre-service teachers need to take note of this during their teaching practice. It is not the aim of the portfolio to teach pre-service teachers that the administrative tasks of the teaching profession are extensive, but they do need to learn that teaching does not only mean standing in front of a classroom. Nevertheless, it seems that some support may be needed here. The paperwork may create a feeling of being overwhelmed for a lot of pre-service teachers and render their teaching practice a negative experience.

4.6.1.2 Being a student teacher

The second role that these pre-service teachers had to fulfil during teaching practice is arguably the most important, being a student teacher in the classroom. During teaching practice, the pre-service teachers are expected to be present in the mentor teacher's class for the whole day. In addition to numerous other tasks, they have to observe, plan and present a certain number of lessons. Co-researcher 2 claimed that teaching practice was a negative time for her: because of all the lessons that she needed to prepare, she only managed a few hours' sleep a night. She added:

> *My mentor teacher got sick, and I had to take over her classes for two weeks… it was only marking of tasks and homework and I could not attend to my own work….* (Co-researcher 2, lines 72-74)

This experience contributed to feelings of isolation and solitude. The co-researcher was expected to fulfil the role of teacher by taking over the classes of the mentor teacher. Aside from not having the time to attend to her own work, the situation was contrived without considering if the co-researcher was capable of taking over the classes. She was afforded no guidance or support by the mentor teacher. As established in sub-theme 1, classroom discipline also becomes a challenge when pre-service teachers are left alone in the classroom or have to present a lesson. In the reflective conversations during the reality phase of the future-creating workshop, the question arose of whether the co-researcher felt that they were competent to take control in a classroom. Co-researcher 2 mentioned that it is easier to take over a class when the mentor teacher is present because the learners behave themselves. Co-researcher 4 indicated that she was not ready to take control of a class and that she would have liked to learn more regarding classroom discipline, rather than completing all the observations and lesson plans. This revealed the extent to which pre-service teachers depend on the support and guidance of the mentor teacher.

4.6.1.3 Being involved in extra-curricular activities

The third role that co-researchers 1, 2 and 4 mentioned that they had to play was being involved in extra-curricular activities. During teaching practice, pre-service teachers are sometimes expected to engage in extramural activities that usually take place after school hours. Co-researchers 1, 2 and 4 agreed that they were hard-pressed for time because of attending extramural activities. Once again, having to be involved in these activities gives pre-service teachers a true reflection of a teacher's life, but it was clear from the co-researchers that it contributed to feelings of isolation, being overwhelmed and having no support.

From the above, it emerges that an overriding complaint is the lack of time. The following section homes in on this.

4.6.2 Time: The challenge to meet the expectation that pre-service teachers assume different roles

It was evident in sub-theme 4.2.4.1 that time was a challenge for the co-researchers. Teaching practice, according to co-researchers 1, 2, 3 and 5, is a very busy time when they had to assume different roles, including being a student, a student teacher and a participant in extra-curricular activities. Time as a challenge was captured in the photograph and narrative of co-researcher 2:

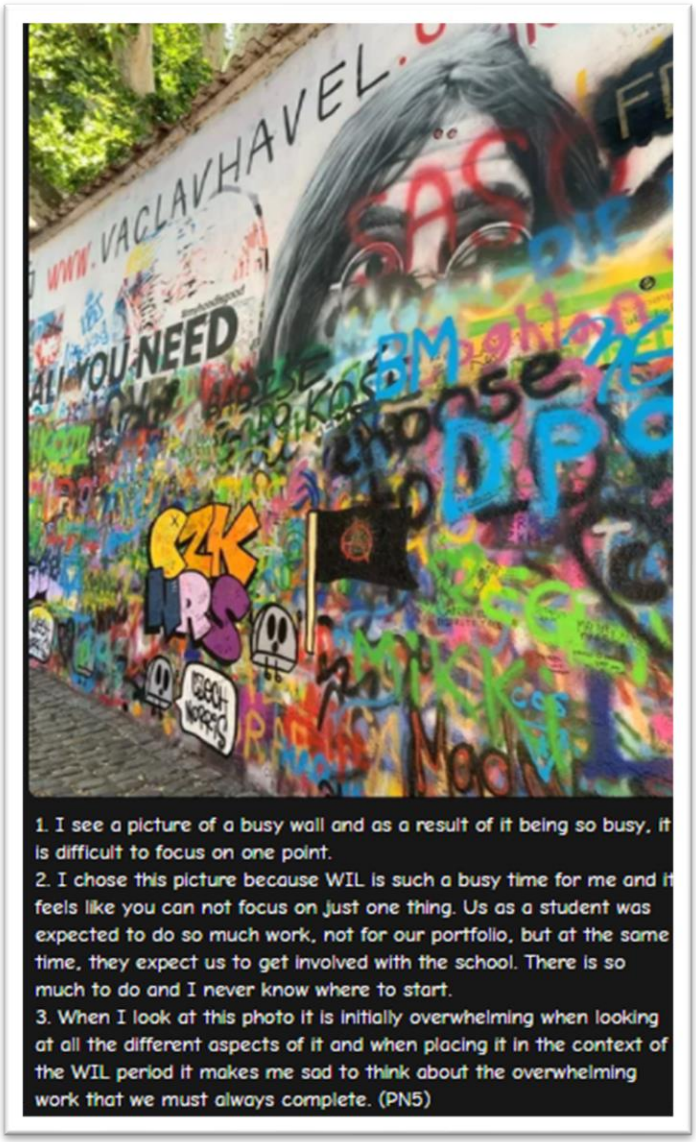

Figure 4-4: So much to do, so little time

While all the co-researchers in this study shared the feeling that a shortage of time was a challenge during teaching practice, an anonymous co-researcher added this comment on the photograph above:

> *I agree we are so busy with everything that must be done in time and everything, but I learned something out of it, this pressure we have of due dates and things, we are going to manage some day in the school when we are becoming a teacher. When you are a teacher at school, the work is just getting more and more.* (Padlet anonymous comment 13, lines 25-28)

During the utopian phase of the future-creating workshop, co-researchers 2 and 3 agreed with this statement, claiming that they developed an understanding of what it entails to be a teacher.

When I asked how this very busy time made the co-researchers feel, co-researcher 2 identified both positive and negative sides:

> *…it is unpleasant, it is busy… because you don't get to everything and it is sport in the middle and you need to work on your portfolio and other assignments, but I think it prepares us for the future…* (co-researcher 2, lines 78-79)

This statement is clear evidence of the contribution of teaching practice to the development of a professional identity, one of its primary aims (see Section 2.5.1). The overwhelming struggle with time mentioned by all the co-researchers turned out to be a valuable experience that helped prepare them for what being a teacher entails. But it remains important to acknowledge that they found it difficult and that they may well need support to be able to recognise it as a learning opportunity – help with time management or support with navigating the assignments given them in other modules of their course.

To summarise this sub-theme, the co-researchers in this study shared a sense that they were expected to play several roles during teaching practice. Lack of time contributed to their feeling that they had failed fully to meet the demands made of them.

4.7 Theme 1 summary

Theme 1, the roles and responsibilities that pre-service teachers face during teaching practice, can be summarised as follows:

- The co-researchers felt isolated on different levels
- They were physically left alone in classrooms with responsibilities when they were meant to be under the full guardianship of the mentor teacher
- In their opinion, the co-researchers did not receive support when they needed it most. They wanted more support from their mentor teachers, the teaching practice administrative office and the pre-service teacher liaisons
- They were made to shoulder responsibilities that they were not supposed to when the mentor teacher was absent and they faced the challenge of maintaining classroom discipline
- They were expected to take on different roles that they were not prepared for, with (in their opinion) no support
- Time management was a challenge, given the range of responsibilities they were required to assume.

In theme one, it was clear that the roles and responsibilities of the pre-service teachers, and their expectations regarding the roles and responsibilities of other role-players like the mentor teachers, the teaching practice administrative office and the pre-service teacher liaisons, play a crucial role in their feelings of isolation and being without support. From the conversations with the co-researchers, it emerged that their need for support is also impacted by the discrepancy between their expectations and the reality they experience when they arrive at schools. Pre-service teachers enter teacher training programmes with pre-existing ideas about the teaching profession and, to some extent, teaching practice. These ideas are largely formed by their apprenticeship of observation, as discussed in Chapter Two (Section 2.5.2). The following section will elaborate on the contrast between the pre-service teachers' expectations and what they actually encountered when they entered schools during teaching practice.

4.8 Theme 2: Expectations versus experience

The co-researchers who participated in this study had differing opinions on what they had expected and what they experienced during teaching practice. The ensuing discussion will explore these expectations and how they were impacted by subsequent experiences. This theme was divided into two sub-themes, namely, **(1) This is not what I thought it was going to be** and **(2) I was not taught this at university**.

4.9 Sub-theme 1: This is not what I thought it was going to be

Several of the challenges described in this chapter suggest that the co-researchers were disillusioned by their experiences in teaching practice. They shared anecdotes about incidents that contradicted their preconceptions. Such events and situations seemed to dampen their enthusiasm and highlight the need for support in managing their expectations of what teaching practice would entail.

Co-researcher 2 shared a personal experience she had when she was a first-year pre-service teacher during teaching practice:

> *In my first year, this fourth-year student kept on humiliating me and she said I should stop my studies in education, and I was very alone. I cried in the bathroom every day and I even cried in the car when my dad picked me up, I felt so alone, and I had no one to turn to.* (Co-researcher 2, lines 140, 143-145)

As a pre-service teacher, she expected professional and collegial behaviour from her peers, but instead she was belittled. The fourth-year student made co-researcher 2 feel that she did not

belong there, which led to feelings of isolation so intense that she cried every day. During the critical phase of the future-creating workshop, co-researcher 2 revealed that this situation made teaching practice a horrible time for her, as she was thereafter scared the whole time. This was not what she had expected from her first teaching practice experience. The fourth-year pre-service teacher did not acknowledge her as a colleague and teacher and even told her to give up on her studies. The fourth-year student was largely responsible for the fear and disillusionment that the co-researcher experienced during teaching practice, which she had anticipated would provide a professional and supporting environment.

Co-researcher 5 also shared an experience she had had when she was a first-year pre-service teacher at the school from which she matriculated the year before. She mentioned that she felt that the learners did not have any respect for her as a teacher and still saw her as one of the learners at the school. Through the photovoice narrative of co-researcher 4 it was clear that she also had negative experience as a first-year with grade 12 learners, who evinced no respect or discipline:

> *You get put on the spot to go and teach classes for grades that are only a year or two younger than you…the memories I have are matric learners that was giving me a hard time and not listening to me when I was a first year.* (Co-researcher 4, lines 7-8 and 12-13)

These experiences reveal that senior learners did not acknowledge pre-service teachers as teachers, which contributed to the disillusionment that co-researchers 2, 4 and 5 reported.

In addition to not being acknowledged as a teacher by the learners, co-researchers 1 and 4 mentioned that their mentor teachers treated them as students yet were unwilling to support them. According to co-researcher 2,

> *…when I asked my mentor teacher to help me, she said not I am just a student and I might not even be a teacher one day and then she refused to help me…I had so many mentor teachers like this and I can't do anything about it.* (Co-researcher 2 lines 46-47)

It might well have come as a shock to pre-service teachers that their mentor teacher was unwilling to provide the help they need. The co-researchers indicated that they expected their mentor teachers to acknowledge them as teachers and support them during teaching practice. Not only were certain notions formed by their apprenticeship of observation shattered, as the ideal teacher they had in mind was simply not there anymore; they also failed to receive the kind of support

while at school that could enable them to build a new vision of the ideal teacher, or of what a teacher could be.

The following sub-theme focuses on the expectations versus the experiences that the co-researchers had regarding what they were taught at the university.

4.10 Sub-theme 2: I was not taught this at university

During teaching practice, pre-service teachers get the opportunity to apply the content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and their pedagogical content knowledge acquired during their training at university. But co-researcher 5 recalled that she had no idea what knowledge was involved in studying education, stating:

> *I know I got home in my first year and told the people that this is not what I thought I was going to study, because I thought we are physically going to learn how to teach, for example plurals to learners and now we learn all these theories that we are not going to teach the learners.* (Co-researcher 5, lines 36-39)

Here the co-researcher implied that she did not obtain any pedagogical content knowledge during her coursework at the university that she could apply when she started working as a teacher. Co-researcher 3 added that from her first year, she wanted to learn how to teach learners in her coursework, and not just during teaching practice. The assumption seemed to be that the co-researcher obtained more knowledge and skills regarding how to teach during teaching practice than in the lecture halls. Co-researcher 5 explicitly claimed that she learned more during teaching practice about how it would be to have her own class in the future than she learned in her coursework. While the pre-service teachers see this as a shortcoming of their training, what they are pointing to is, after all, the aim of teaching practice: to give them experience in a real classroom.

Co-researchers 1 and 3 made other points suggesting that what they learned during their course work was not applicable during teaching practice. Co-researcher 1 claimed that the university requires pre-service teachers to complete lesson plans, but during teaching practice the mentor teacher said that they did not use lesson plans. Co-researcher 3 was also taught that they had to complete lesson plans for each lesson they presented, but nobody ever told her if she completed the lesson plan correctly or appropriately.

During the critical phase of the future-creating workshop, the question was asked if the co-researchers felt confident to manage and teach a whole class after what they had learned in

lectures as well as teaching practice. Co-researcher 4 confessed that she didn't feel confident to manage a class, while co-researcher 1 allowed:

> *Maybe I could have presented a lesson, but I do not think I could manage a class…* (Co-researcher 1, line 128)

In this regard, co-researcher 4 conceded that she still felt like the same person she was when she was a first-year attending teaching practice. She mentioned that she had taught herself how to manage a class, but that she didn't feel capable of teaching content to learners.

These statements reveal that the co-researchers felt that what they had learned at the university, in the lecture halls, was not applicable to real-life teaching during teaching practice and when they entered the profession as teachers. This contributed to their lack of confidence in their ability to manage and teach a class all by themselves.

4.11 Theme 2 summary

- The co-researchers were disillusioned because the experiences they had were not what they expected
- They were forced to dismantle their expectations and assumptions regarding being a teacher during teaching practice
- They learned more during teaching practice than in lecture halls
- They did not feel confident about managing and teaching a class.

4.12 Summary of the chapter

In this chapter, I have discussed the understanding that I and the co-researchers reached regarding the support they received and the support they would like to receive during their teaching practice. The strongest recurrent theme throughout was one of isolation, of physical isolation, but also of isolation from the support of mentor teachers, the teaching practice administrative office and pre-service teacher liaisons. This recurring theme could be seen in the responsibilities they felt they had to attend to, such as having to deal with a class alone, having to find a way to handle class discipline alone, without being able to ask for help or have an example to emulate. This feeling of isolation and being unable to cope was not only because of their responsibilities at school, but also as a result of the academic responsibilities they still needed to honour as students. This led to a sense of not having enough time, which made worse their feelings of isolation and hopelessness and – in the absence of support – helplessness.

The second aspect that the co-researchers focused on was that teaching was not what their apprenticeship of observation had led them to expect. What is more, they felt that they had not been prepared for what they found at schools and that their university studies had not helped in this regard. While the co-researchers were adamant that more support was needed, it was also clear that they themselves were not always sure of what the roles and responsibilities of all the role-players were, or what the desired support should entail. What was obvious and important from their contributions was that pre-service teachers do indeed struggle and do indeed need support. Chapter 5 features some discussion of the kinds of support that might be made available to them.

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This study aimed to explore pre-service teachers' experiences of holistic support during and after teaching practice, to explore how they experience teaching practice and how their feelings might influence their teaching practice. Pre-service teachers' experiences during teaching practice can have a lasting influence on their identity as teachers. The support they receive at this time is therefore a fundamental part of forming that identity.

Chapter 1 opened by providing an introduction to and rationale for the study. It was pointed out that holistic support for pre-service teachers is an integral factor in the teaching practice process that cannot be ignored by role-players like teacher educators, mentor teachers and the teaching practice administrative office. It was also established there are several challenges that pre-service teachers encounter, and that it is important to understand their perceptions and experiences of these challenges to identify the kind of support that they need.

The primary and related secondary research aims were stated. I also outlined the theoretical framework of the study, consisting of systems theory and the multi-tiered system of support (MTSS). I clarified the terminology and briefly described the methodology utilised in the study. I discussed certain ethical considerations, explained the limitations of the study and adumbrated its possible contribution to knowledge.

Chapter 2 offers a review of the literature on all aspects of teaching practice, focusing on the NWU. The theoretical framework of the study was utilised to identify and characterise all the factors that interdependently function in teaching practice as a whole. These factors include the role-players, the aims of teaching practice, the challenges that pre-service teachers encounter during teaching practice and the importance of holistic support during teaching practice.

In Chapter 3, I explained Participatory Action Learning and Action Research (PALAR), which served both as the study's methodology and as its research paradigm. The chapter includes some motivation for the research design and a description of how the research methods were implemented. I also discussed the trustworthiness of the data generated and gave an account of the ethical considerations observed in the study.

Chapter 4 is a report on the findings, as concluded from the data analysis. The themes that emerged from the data allowed me to explore pre-service teachers' experiences and perceptions of holistic support during and after teaching practice.

The research in this study, as summarised above, was undertaken in order to answer the following research questions (as identified in Chapter 1):

Primary research question

> How do pre-service teachers experience holistic support during and after teaching practice?

Secondary research questions

- What are the challenges that pre-service teachers are facing regarding holistic support during and after teaching practice?
- What are the needs of pre-service teachers regarding holistic support during and after teaching practice?
- What collaborative strategies can be implemented to offer holistic support to pre-service teachers during and after teaching practice?

From the information gathered through the research conducted, the research questions can now be answered as set out below.

5.2 Pre-service teachers' experience of holistic support during and after teaching practice

From the discussion in Chapter 4, it was clear that the pre-service teachers in most cases had a negative experience regarding holistic support. The co-researchers experienced a feeling of isolation, an emotion that ran through all the themes identified. In related studies, this feeling of solitariness has been described as teacher isolation (Ostovar-Nameghi & Sheikhahmadi, 2016; Schlichte et al., 2005) and has been defined as "the extent to which teachers are restricted from or restrict themselves from interaction with other individuals or groups in the school" (Bakkenes et al., 1999, p. 166). Typically it is beginner teachers who suffer social and professional isolation when they do not receive adequate support from co-workers (Brock & Grady, 2007; Cottle, 2020; Gordon, 1991; Prilleltensky et al., 2016). In this study, the co-researchers – who are pre-service rather than beginner teachers – were already experiencing this overwhelming feeling of isolation during their teacher training programme.

It came to light that the co-researchers experienced an absence of support from various role-players during teaching practice. The mentor teacher is the first level of support for pre-service teachers during teaching practice. As mentioned in Chapter 2 (see 2.7.1), a lack of support from

the mentor teacher may result in the demotivation of the pre-service teacher and may even hamper their ability to develop strong professional identities. Most co-researchers mentioned the unwillingness of the mentor teachers to support and guide them, which left them feeling helpless and anxious, exacerbating their sense of isolation. One co-researcher mentioned a negative experience she had in respect of support from a mentor teacher at a specific school. She added that after the incident she decided to go back to the school and the mentor teacher with whom she was previously placed, who had supported her and given her guidance. This is a clear indication of the value of the support that the co-researcher got from the mentor teacher. Other co-researchers' comments indicated that even if they had received adequate support from mentor teachers during teaching practice, their overall experience of teaching practice remained negative.

5.3 Conceptualising the challenges that pre-service teachers face regarding holistic support during and after teaching practice

According to the information gathered in this study, pre-service teachers experience a variety of challenges during teaching practice due to a lack of support. Having to cope with a class in the absence of the mentor teacher was the main challenge that they reported. This included co-researchers' being left to their own devices, to manage the classroom or to present a lesson. As mentioned in Chapter 2 (see 2.6.3), both Jiyane and Gravett (2019) and Moodley et al. (2018) reported high levels of absence among mentor teachers, who expected pre-service teachers to take responsibility for teaching or taking over a lesson while they left the classroom. Deacon (2016) reminds us that the lack of support is not limited to emotional aspects but can also include physical absence from the classroom, and that a negative experience while being alone in the classroom during teaching practice can have a lasting effect on a future teacher's identity.

Due to the physical absence of the mentor teacher, pre-service teachers experience problems with creating or maintaining good classroom discipline. As cited in Chapter 2 (see 2.6.4), Moussaid and Zerhouni (2017) note that the absence of the mentor teacher is a common cause of classroom indiscipline. The mentor teacher should be modelling how to handle discipline in the classroom for the pre-service teacher.

The co-researchers also recognised that classroom discipline was a challenge because they were only a year or two older than the senior learners at school. This made it difficult for them to take control and be acknowledged as a teacher, as learners in the classroom saw them only as student teachers with no real authority. The experience of the co-researchers correlates with Mikulec and Hamann (2020) claim that classroom discipline is a particular challenge for secondary school pre-service teachers who are only a little older than the learners.

During teaching practice, pre-service teachers are expected to fulfil several roles. The lack of time, and of skill in managing time, can amount to a challenge faced by pre-service teachers (as outlined in Chapter 2). It was clear that the pre-service teachers struggled to meet their classroom commitments while also having to complete their academic work and help with extramural activities.

In Chapter 2, it was established that one of the aims of teaching practice is to deconstruct pre-service teachers' apprenticeship of observation (see 2.5.2). However, achieving this could also be seen as a challenge (see 2.6.2), and – according to the findings of this study – it remains a recurrent challenge since students are not receiving appropriate support or guidance from mentor teachers. Without constructive input from mentor teachers, their apprenticeship of observation cannot be broken down and rebuilt into a constructive teacher identity. If unchallenged by an experienced mentor teacher, the effects of this apprenticeship are only strengthened.

Pre-service teachers' apprenticeship of observation is also strengthened by their feeling that they are not learning the necessary skills in their classes at university. Even though the aim of teaching practice is to bridge the gap between theory and practice, this is a continuous challenge in teacher training programmes. The co-researchers' experiences in this regard were consonant with the views of several authors who claim that what is taught in lecture halls is not applicable in real-life school environments (Botha & Rens, 2018; Cheng et al., 2010; Napanoy et al., 2021). It is clear that the school and the university are not cooperating to support pre-service teachers in applying the theory learned at university and implementing it in the classroom.

As stated in Chapter 1 (see 1.5) all systems (role players, aims and challenges) and other interdependent factors (classroom discipline, time management, apprenticeship of observation, etcetera) relate to one another and their interactions influence a larger system (teaching practice). Through the findings of this study, the challenges are clear and various, but the common thread is the cause-and-effect relationships among systems that exists in cycles, as mentioned by Kalenga and Fourie (2012) (see 1.5). By means of this study, it is clear that one action in a system, for example the lack of support due to the physical absence of the mentor teacher, causes another action in the pre-service teacher as a system, by creating a feeling of isolation, having to cope with classroom discipline and not being able to develop a positive teacher identity, etcetera. The lack of support in various systems and interdependent factors influence the whole teaching practice system.

According to the co-researchers, pre-service teachers, struggle during teaching practice and have more negative experiences than positive ones. It is therefore important to reflect on the needs of pre-service teachers concerning holistic support, bearing in mind that the main aim of all

education programmes is to equip pre-service teachers with the necessary tools and skills to be good teachers,

5.4 Identifying the needs of pre-service teachers regarding holistic support during and after teaching practice

From the findings in this study, it appears that pre-service teachers need more support from various role-players, such as the mentor teacher, the pre-service teacher liaisons and the teaching practice administrative office.

- **The mentor teacher**. In Chapter 2 (see 2.7.1) the mentor teacher was defined as the main source of support for pre-service teachers. Yet the co-researchers claimed that mentor teachers did not care and refused to help them. Nkambule and Mukeredzi (2017) and Özdaş (2018) have indeed reported that some mentor teachers appear to be uninterested in supporting and guiding pre-service teachers during teaching practice (see 2.6.3). Pre-service teachers need guidance and support on how to establish good discipline, teach good lessons and generally function within the day-to-day workings of a school. It was clear that the co-researchers had a keen need for a mentor relationship with their mentor teachers, in terms of which the mentor would give them practical advice but also act as a social and emotional guide within the school environment.
- **The teaching practice administrative office**. As established in Chapter 2 (see 2.4), the teaching practice administrative office has a purely administrative function and is not a support structure for pre-service teachers. However, the co-researchers indicated a need for support from this office. While this could be attributed to their ignorance of the designated roles and responsibilities of the teaching practice administrative office, the need for support is nevertheless real.
- **The pre-service teacher liaisons**. According to the WIL manual of the NWU, the pre-service teacher liaisons are responsible for logistics around teaching practice at a school (NWU, 2019). Although the co-researchers acknowledged that the pre-service liaisons were responsible for tasks like contacting the school before teaching practice and keeping records of attendance at school, they indicated that they expected and needed more support from the pre-service teacher liaisons. There appears to be a desire for peer support or peer mentoring, perhaps even just to be able to talk to someone undergoing a comparable experience.

5.5 Establishing the action that could be taken to improve holistic support for pre-service teachers during teaching practice

The recommendations of this study propose the steps that could be taken to improve holistic support for pre-service teachers during teaching practice. It is clear from the discussion that the co-researchers need support and that they see support as something that should be provided by the role-players who are involved in the daily workings of teaching practice – the mentor teacher, the pre-service teachers' liaisons, the teaching practice administrative office and their peers. It is not only essential to ascertain the differences and similarities between literature and findings, but it is also important to link the findings to the theoretical framework applied in this study. By applying the system theory in a MTSS model, various role players can be seen as systems of support for pre-service teachers during teaching practice. The first tier of support (universal support) is continuous support for pre-service teachers on an academic, administrative and socio-emotional level. The second tier of support, the targeted support is more strategic for pre-service teachers in need of more support than given in the first tier. Intensive one-on-one support, as third tier of support, should also be available for pre-service teachers

The recommendations are therefore structured around the role-players with whom the pre-service teachers engage while completing their teaching practice and immediately after their teaching practice.

5.5.1 Mentor teacher

As discussed in Chapter 2, the mentor teacher is a cornerstone in facilitating focused, effective and therefore successful teaching practice. It was evident from the co-researchers' comments that a mentor teacher can make their teaching practice a good or bad learning experience. The first step is evidently to improve communication with the school principal and mentor teachers. The following recommendations are made regarding the mentor teacher:

- The NWU has a WIL manual that stipulates the roles and responsibilities of a mentor teacher. It is important to start at the beginning of the process and communicate with the principals and the teachers who are available to mentor and guide pre-service teachers during teaching practice.
- The university cannot train all teachers who act as mentor teachers during teaching practice. Therefore it is important to ask mentor teachers to familiarise themselves with the WIL manual to truly understand their role in respect of pre-service teachers. This document should be communicated and can be summarised in a video or infographic to make the information more accessible to all mentor teachers.

- The NWU facilitates a short course on Mentorship for Education. It would be valuable for mentor teachers and the university if teachers could be motivated to register for this course to develop their mentorship skills and be of real help in developing the teachers of tomorrow.
- We have to cultivate a working role-player relationship between the mentor teacher and the university. While the university sends out a survey form after each teaching practice placement, the feedback is very low. It is important for mentor teachers to give their feedback to the university as this information will feed back into curriculum development and support within the university. It is important that mentor teachers feel free to share their experience of teaching practice.

Teaching practice makes a major contribution towards developing pre-service teachers' teacher identities, and these identities are strongly influenced by the mentor teacher. It is therefore important to nurture sound relationships with mentor teachers.

5.5.2 Pre-service teacher liaisons

In Chapter 2, the pre-service teacher liaisons were described as senior students who are appointed when there are eight or more pre-service teachers at a particular school. Their main function is to handle all the logistical aspects of teaching practice. This is a missed opportunity for the university to use them to provide peer support.

The following recommendations are therefore made regarding the pre-service teaching liaisons:

- The responsibilities of the pre-service teacher liaisons should not be limited to administrative tasks but should include the role of peer support. This means that the criteria for the appointment of pre-service teacher liaisons should be revisited to target seniors who are not only academically strong but also able to support their peers and handle difficult situations. They should be required to apply for the position and in the process answer questions regarding support and situations that might arise at schools, so that their suitability for the role can be assessed.
- Once these pre-service liaisons have been appointed, it is imperative that the university train them on both how to complete their administrative tasks and how to function as a peer support mentor. They need to be able to support other pre-service teachers who are struggling, or to help them to seek help elsewhere.
- The other problem is that a pre-service teacher liaison is only appointed if there are eight or more students at a particular school. From the data collected from the co-researchers, isolation is the main problem they experience. It is therefore important to create digital

communities of practice via WhatsApp or other platforms so that solitary pre-service teachers can also enjoy the peer support of a pre-service teacher liaison. These communities of practice can support students who feel isolated and guide them in handling difficult situations. It is important for all students to have a person and a place where they can ask questions without feeling anxious.

- A further community of practice can be established via WhatsApp for all the pre-service teacher liaisons to communicate with each other. A pre-service teacher liaison might struggle with some issue, but as a liaison group they can talk through the situation and come up with a workable solution.
- A good relationship goes a long way towards effective support and therefore the pre-service teacher liaison should build relationships both with the school and with the pre-service teachers at that school or in the digital group. A pre-service teacher liaison should have a meeting on the first day of school placements and introduce themselves to all the pre-service teachers, explaining what their roles and responsibilities are. They should indicate to the group in what ways they might be able to help and what situations should be handled by other role players.

5.5.3 Teaching practice administrative office

It was clear in this study that pre-service teachers are unaware of the role and responsibilities of the teaching practice administrative office. This creates a problem for the university in that pre-service teachers feel that they receive no support from the university, but it creates an even bigger problem for the pre-service teachers as they do not know where to turn to get the support they need. It is therefore important that these roles be clearly defined to facilitate collaborative support. The following recommendations are made regarding the teaching practice administrative office:

- The role and responsibility of the teaching practice administrative office should be clearly communicated to pre-service teachers. While this is part of the WIL manual it is important to create a concise video or infographic.
- If the teaching practice administrative office only serves an administrative function, this should be communicated to pre-service teachers, together with guidance as to where they can find emotional support if needed during teaching practice. This information is captured within the WIL manual, but evidently, not all pre-service teachers read this manual. A clear communication portal should be developed and communicated via an infographic (see Figure 5-1).

Except for a crisis situation, as indicated in the Communication Portal (Fig. 5.1, below), the first step (1) for a pre-service teacher should be to try and solve the problem themselves, with possible assistance from family, the teaching practice manual, the Learning Manage system and their peers. This is step one in the communication portal and the first tier of support. If they are unable to solve the problem, pre-service teachers should first seek support from within the school where they are placed. These steps include (2) ask your mentor teacher for help, (3) if the mentor teacher shows an unwillingness to assist, go to the pre-service teacher liaisons (if there are pre-service teacher liaisons appointed at the school), and (4) go to the teaching practice coordinator, who is usually the deputy principal. A crisis, on the other hand, might be precipitated by serious issues like sexual harassment, suicidal thoughts, violence or serious injury, to name but a few. In these situations, the Teaching Practice Crisis Helpline should be contacted immediately so that the situation can be handled by teaching practice management and referred to the relevant support services.

After a pre-service teacher has followed these steps and has still not received adequate support, only then should s/he contact the university by following the correct communication channels. Pre-service teachers could encounter academic, administrative and or personal challenges during teaching practice and therefore require different kinds of support. If pre-service teachers seek academic support – such as support with content knowledge, classroom management and time management – they should get in contact with their specialisation / major module lecturer. If they have any inquiries about the content of the portfolio of evidence, they should contact the teaching practice coordinators. This will ensure that pre-service teachers get feedback and support from the correct academic staff member.

As already mentioned, pre-service teachers must be made aware that the teaching practice administrative office cannot assist and support them with any academic queries. They should only contact the teaching practice administrative office if they have administrative inquiries about school-based placements (WISL), or the dates for teaching practice and the submission of portfolios. This should only happen after a pre-service teacher has visited the Learning Management system to find the answer themselves or establish whom they should contact. This will should ensure that all enquiries are answered promptly.

Support regarding personal matters can mean many different things. If pre-service teachers need and seek support with personal matters during teaching practice, the question should be asked if the matter is urgent and requires support immediately or if it can wait until the pre-service teachers return to university after teaching practice. If the matter is urgent, pre-service teachers should contact the crisis helpline. This will enable the coordinators to involve the relevant departments immediately and help handle the crisis. The helpline should be available at any time of the day

and night for calls or messages, and a quick response is required. The individuals who manage this helpline should receive training on how to support pre-service teachers or to steer them in the right direction to receive the appropriate support. This helpline should be managed and controlled by the teaching practice coordinators, because they should be aware of the kinds of problem that pre-service teachers encounter during teaching practice and be able to respond rapidly.

It is important that pre-service teachers go through the portal of the helpline to steer them in the right direction for support, because if they only receive information about whom they can contact for the required support, the crucial step is missed making the whole teaching practice programme aware of the challenges that pre-service teachers encounter during teaching practice. These challenges should be addressed, not only to support the pre-service teachers, but also to enable the teaching practice programme to grow and develop through recognising the experience of these pre-service teachers.

Matters that can be handled after teaching practice should be acknowledged and dealt with. A collaborative support system can only be developed if all the needs of the students are kept on record and the system is built on every year.

The teaching practice administrative office personnel should also receive this infographic (Fig. 5.1) and should understand that when a pre-service teacher experiences a crisis at school, they may well contact the first person they can think of. The personnel should be trained on how promptly to handle extreme cases and how and where to refer them.

Teaching practice
Communication portal

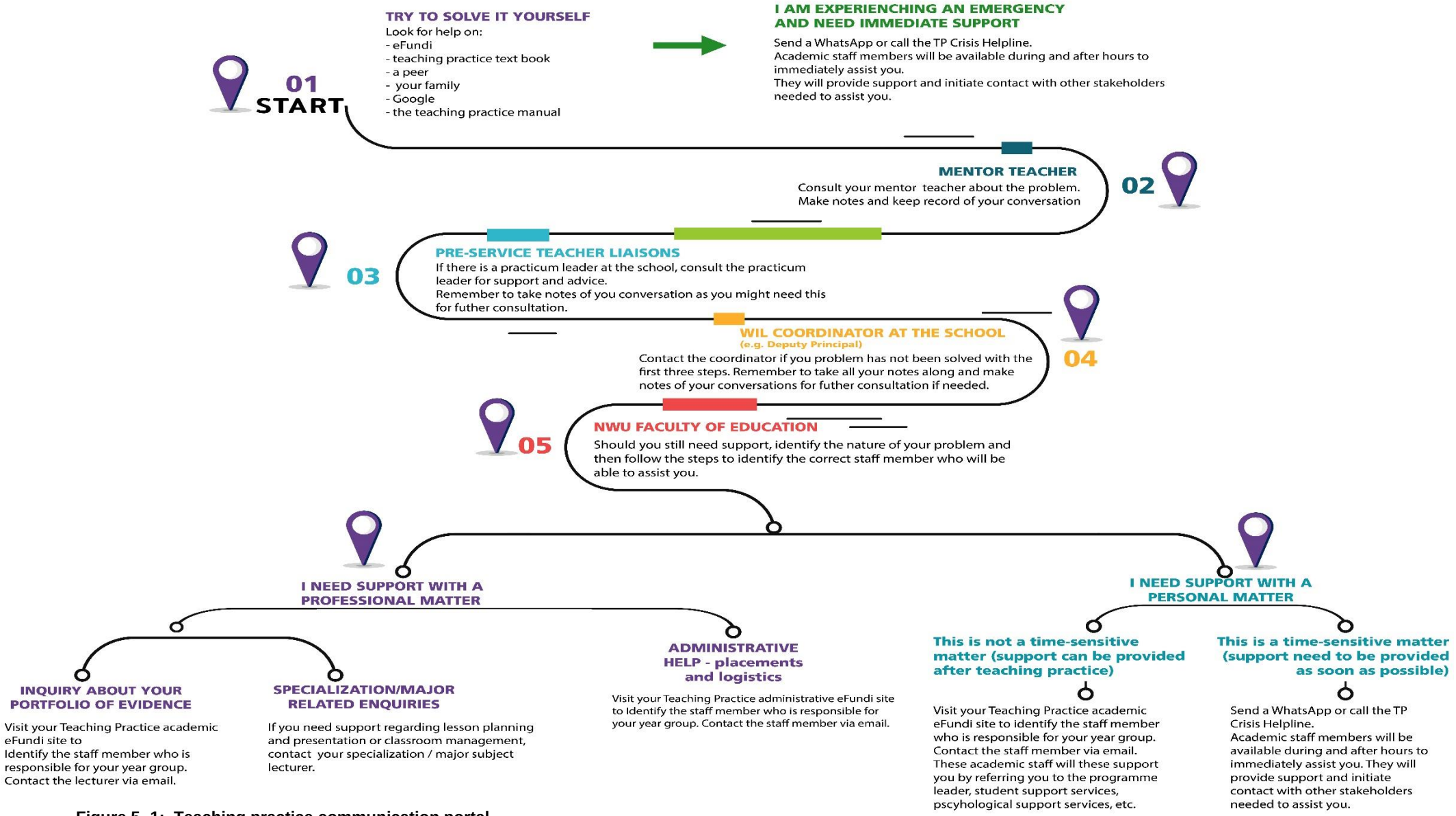

Figure 5- 1: Teaching practice communication portal

While administrative matters are handled by the teaching practice administrative office, it was evident from the data that administration is not the only aspect that pre-service teachers struggle with, and they need support, particularly, with practical pedagogy in teaching practice. This is supposedly included not only in the academic work of subject groups but within the teaching practice programme, so it is important to look carefully at this programme.

5.6 Teaching practice programme

The findings of this study reveal that pre-service teachers encountered challenges with, for example, classroom discipline and time management. They also claimed that what they learned in lectures was not what they experienced in a real-life classroom. In this regard, it is important to remember that it is not the responsibility of the teaching practice programme to teach pre-service teachers classroom management and time management skills, or how to plan and present lessons. The pre-service teacher is responsible for identifying challenges and addressing them in collaboration with methodology teacher educators. However, pre-service teachers have the perception that it is the responsibility of the teaching practice programme to equip them with these skills; alternatively, that teaching practice serves as a platform for them to practise skills that they are supposed to have been taught in methodology modules. This means that their expectations of the teaching practice programme are unrealistic. The following recommendations are made:

- Teaching practice should only be seen as a vehicle for pre-service teachers to develop and practise skills and, in this regard, an awareness campaign should be created, involving all the role-players, about the aims and limits of teaching practice programmes.

With regard to support, I make the following recommendations:

- Teaching practice programmes must be in a position to direct pre-service teachers to where they can find support if the programme itself cannot provide it. In this sense, teaching practice programmes function as a pathway to support.
- Teaching practice programmes have scheduled classes that could be utilised as debriefing sessions for pre-service teachers when they return to university after teaching practice. In these sessions, they could reflect on their experiences and learn from others' experiences. Although debriefing sessions would be ideal, the challenge faced by this specific institution (NWU) is the size of the class (above 2500 pre-service teachers per year group). So, debriefing 10 000 pre-service teachers would not be possible. In addition, this institution has a distance programme, and it would not be possible to have debriefing sessions with pre-service teachers who are spread across the country. The alternative to

face-to-face debriefing sessions would be to provide a clear communication portal for pre-service teachers to seek support from the relevant role-player.

- The need for holistic support suggests that support for pre-service teachers cannot only be the responsibility of the teaching practice programme. This responsibility is shared by the teacher educator, the mentor teachers, etc. Teaching practice may be the backbone of the whole teacher training programme, but it is not teaching practice that should be changed so much as the whole teaching programme.

5.6.1 The pre-service teachers

It was evident from the study that the pre-service teachers that took part in the study did not feel sufficiently supported, for several reasons, from their not having sufficient information regarding the roles and responsibilities of all the role-players, to delinquent mentor teachers and unprepared pre-service teacher liaisons.

On the other hand, pre-service teachers should be not passive but active participants in the teaching practice experience. They should be part of the support they want to receive by creating communities of practice where they can support each other informally. The following recommendations are made regarding pre-service teachers:

- If a pre-service teacher is placed alone at a school, s/he should join a community of practice where s/he can talk to others, on WhatsApp or any other platform. Pre-service teachers must be encouraged to join or convene a community of practice, after having the benefits of doing so pointed out to them. On these platforms, pre-service teachers could share ideas, support each other or ask questions if they are unsure about something. As pre-service teachers get to explore the experiences of others and reflect on their own, the feeling of isolation should be alleviated.
- As indicated above, a debriefing session would be a key component. These sessions should be with both the mentor teacher and the community of practice group if the university cannot debrief all pre-service teachers. Debriefing with the mentor teacher is essential. When pre-service students are left alone in a classroom or have prepared a lesson and presented it, the pre-service teacher should try to engage in a conversation with the mentor teacher. If these pre-service teachers are struggling with classroom discipline, they should ask the mentor teachers what works for them and how they would advise them to approach the problem. This is an essential part of support: if you do not ask, people do not know what you need help with. It should be communicated to pre-service teachers that they should appeal for help from their mentor teachers, the pre-service teacher liaison, and their peers.

- A key aspect of collaborative support is relationship building. Pre-service teachers should understand that they should try to establish positive relationships with the school and their peers. Changing their attitude to teaching practice will go a long way towards making their experience more positive.

While all the other role-players have a definite and important role to play in supporting pre-service teachers, it is important to keep in mind the aim of teaching practice. Teaching practice should allow pre-service teachers to explore the teaching profession and develop their professional teaching identity. To have support available is necessary, but pre-service teachers must themselves endeavour to become the best teachers that they can be.

5.7 Limitations of this study

This study aimed to explore pre-service teachers' experiences of holistic support during and after teaching practice. The following limitations must be acknowledged:

As mentioned in Chapters 1, 2 and 3, the current COVID-19 pandemic had an enormous effect on how this study was conducted. It had an impact on the recruitment of the co-researchers, the PALAR cycles and the data generation methods utilised. Ideally, live discussion would have been conducted and face-to-face engagement among the co-researchers could have facilitated deeper conversations.

The study focused on fourth-year pre-service teachers at the NWU, Potchefstroom campus, which limits the findings to this year group, university, and campus only. Furthermore, it only included 5 co-researchers. Although the smaller research group facilitated conversation, it may have produced a situation in which significantly different experiences of teaching practice and support were not heard and could therefore not be included in the findings.

5.8 Recommendations for further research

The study has found that pre-service teachers struggle during teaching practice and therefore need holistic support. This was only an exploratory study, in which the researcher and co-researchers identified the challenges and suggested possible solutions. Several further studies could be undertaken in this regard. These include the following:

Pre-service teachers' understanding and expectations of different role players. This is important as confusion about what each role player needs to do contributes to the feeling that no support is forthcoming. One might go on to evaluate the impact of the communication channel model proposed here on students' experience of support.

From the research, it was clear that the most prominent aspect of pre-service teachers negative experience is the experience of isolation. It might be useful to evaluate how that feeling of isolation contributes to their professional identity as teachers and how it can usefully be addressed.

5.9 Concluding remarks

> *Don't be afraid to ask questions. Don't be afraid to ask for help when you need it. I do that every day. Asking for help isn't a sign of weakness, it's a sign of strength. It shows you have the courage to admit when you don't know something, and to learn something new*. (Barack Obama, 2009)

Asking questions, asking for support, and learning while completing teaching practice are necessities, not options. Support for pre-service teachers cannot be underestimated and should be a priority for the university and schools, to break through the glass ceiling of pre-service teachers' apprenticeships of observation.

One of the main aims of teaching practice is to develop a teacher identity that is based on caring for learners and making a difference in their lives. The value of one's heart in teaching cannot be underestimated, but if holistic support during and after teaching practice becomes a negative experience, the heart keeps getting in the way of learning instead of promoting learning and may lead to pre-service teachers not becoming the teachers they might be. Holistic support should therefore be part of any university's teaching practice programme and planning.

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ANNEXURE 1: ETHICS APPROVAL

Private Bag X1290, Potchefstroom
South Africa 2520

Tel: 018 299-1111/2222
Fax: 018 299-4910
Web: http://www.nwu.ac.za

Senate Committee for Research Ethics
Tel: 018 299-4849
Email: nkosinathi.mashinie@nwu.ac.za

ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER OF STUDY

Based on approval by the Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee (EduREC) on 19/07/2020, this committee hereby approves your study as indicated below. This implies that the North-West University Senate Committee for Research Ethics (NWU-SCRE) grants its permission that, provided the special conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the study may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

Study title: My heart keeps getting in the way: 'a collaborative journey towards holistic support for pre-service teachers during and after teaching practice

Study Leader/Supervisor (Principal Investigator)/Researcher: Dr CS Botha

Student / Team: S Erasmus (MEd student - 26103729); Dr LM Marias

Ethics number:

N	W	U	-	0	1	2	3	0	-	2	0	-	A	2
Institution				Study Number						Year			Status	

Status: S = Submission; R = Re-Submission; P = Provisional Authorisation; A = Authorisation

Application Type: Project

Commencement date: 27/08/2020 **Risk:** Low

Expiry date: 27/08/2021

Approval of the study is initially provided for a year, after which continuation of the study is dependent on receipt and review of the annual (or as otherwise stipulated) monitoring report and the concomitant issuing of a letter of continuation.

Special in process conditions of the research for approval (if applicable):

General conditions:

While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, the following general terms and conditions will apply:

- *The study leader/supervisor/principal investigator/researcher must report in the prescribed format to the EduREC:*
  - *annually (or as otherwise requested) on the monitoring of the study, whereby a letter of continuation will be provided, and upon completion of the study; and*
  - *without any delay in case of any adverse event or incident (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the study.*
- *The approval applies strictly to the proposal as stipulated in the application form. Should any amendments to the proposal be deemed necessary during the course of the study, the study leader/researcher must apply for approval of these amendments at the EduREC, prior to implementation. Should there be any deviations from the study proposal without the necessary approval of such amendments, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.*
- *Annually a number of studies may be randomly selected for an external audit.*
- *The date of approval indicates the first date that the study may be started.*
- *In the interest of ethical responsibility, the NWU-SCRC and EduREC reserves the right to:*
  - *request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the study;*
  - *to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research or the informed consent process;*
  - *withdraw or postpone approval if:*
    - *any unethical principles or practices of the study are revealed or suspected;*
    - *it becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the EduREC or that information has been false or misrepresented;*
    - *submission of the annual (or otherwise stipulated) monitoring report, the required amendments, or reporting of adverse events or incidents was not done in a timely manner and accurately; and / or*
    - *new institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary.*

The EduREC would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher, and wishes you well with your study. Please do not hesitate to contact the EduREC or the NWU-SCRE for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

Yours sincerely

Prof JAK Olivier
Chairperson NWU Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee

Original details: (22301936) C:\Users\22301936\Desktop\ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER OF STUDY.docm
6 November 2018

Current details: (22301936) M:\Data\Institutional Monitoring and Reporting Cluster\Ethics\Certificates\Templates\Research Ethics Approval Letters\A 1.6.4.1 EduREC Ethics Approval Letter.docm
5 December 2018

File reference: A 1.6.4.2

ANNEXURE 2: NWU RDGC PERMISSION LETTER

Private Bag X6001, Potchefstroom
South Africa 2520
Tel: +2718 299-1111/2222
Web: http://www.nwu.ac.za
Research Data Gatekeeper Committee

NWU RDGC PERMISSION GRANTED / DENIED LETTER

Based on the documentation provided by the researcher specified below, on 22/01/2021 the NWU Research Data Gatekeeper Committee (NWU-RDGC) hereby grants permission for the specific project (as indicated below) to be conducted at the North-West University (NWU):

Project title: My heart keeps getting in the way: 'a collaborative journey towards holistic support for pre-service teachers during and after teaching practice.

Project leader: Dr CS Botha
Researcher/Project Team: S Erasmus

Ethics reference no: NWU-01230-20-A2
NWU RDGC reference no: NWU-GK-20-072

Specific Conditions:

- Due the COVID-19 pandemics the Committee would like to advice the researcher to practice the necessary caution and adhere to the National Covid-19 Guidelines when conducting research with participants.

Approval date: 22/01/2021 **Expiry date: 21/01/2022**

General Conditions of Approval:

- The NWU-RDGC will not take the responsibility to recruit research participants or to gather data on behalf of the researcher. This committee can therefore not guarantee the participation of our relevant stakeholders.
- Any changes to the research protocol within the permission period (for a maximum of 1 year) must be communicated to the NWU-RDGC. Failure to do so will lead to withdrawal of the permission.
- The NWU-RDGC should be provided with a report or document in which the results of said project are disseminated.

Please note that under no circumstances will any personal information of possible research subjects be provided to the researcher by the NWU RDGC. The NWU complies with the Promotion of Access to Information Act 2 of 2000 (PAIA) as well as the Protection of Personal Information Act 4 of 2013 (POPI). For an application to access such information please contact Ms Annamarie De Kock (018 285 2771) for the relevant enquiry form or more information on how the NWU complies with PAIA and POPI.

The NWU RDGC would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher, and wishes you well with your project. Please do not hesitate to contact the NWU RDGC for any further enquiries or requests for assistance

Yours sincerely

Prof Marlene Verhoef
Chairperson NWU Research Data Gatekeeper Committee

ANNEXURE 3: INFORMED CONSENT

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

I herewith wish to request your consent to participate in this research, which involves the holistic support of pre-service teachers during teaching practice. Before you give consent, please acquaint yourself with the information below.

The details of the research are as follows:

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT:

My heart keeps getting in the way: 'a collaborative journey towards holistic support for pre-service teachers during teaching practice'

ETHICS APPLICATION NUMBER

NWU-01230-20-A2

PROJECT SUPERVISOR:	Dr CS Botha
CO-SUPERVISOR:	Dr LM Marais
ADDRESS:	Private bag X1290, Potchefstroom, 2520
CONTACT NUMBER:	018 285 2869

MEMBER OF PROJECT TEAM MEd-Student: Suné Erasmus

ADDRESS:	PO BOX 313, Koster, 0348
CONTACT NUMBER:	078 019 4965

FACULTY OF EDUCATION RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
Contact person: Ms Erna Greyling, E-mail: Erna.Greyling@nwu.ac.za, Tel. (018) 299 4656

This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education of the North-West University and will be conducted according to the ethical guidelines of this

committee. Permission was also asked from the provincial Department of Basic Education/other relevant body (please describe) as well as the school principal (if relevant).

What is this research about?

The aims of this research are:

- Exploring pre-service teachers' experience of holistic support during and after teaching practice.
- Conceptualising the challenges pre-service teacher face regarding holistic support during and after teaching practice
- Identifying the needs that pre-service teachers have regarding holistic support during and after teaching practice
- Establishing the actions that could be taken to improve holistic support for pre-service teachers during and after teaching practice

Participants

- Fourth year pre-service teachers, from the North-West University (NWU) at the Potchefstroom campus.

What is expected of you as participant?

The participants as co-researchers are expected to collaboratively and actively engage in the proposed participatory action learning and action research (PALAR) cycle.

The participants should:

- Participate in photovoice, a visual data collection strategy which provides a creative way for participants to capture their experiences in photographs. The images will be accompanied by a personal narrative.
- Attend a future creating workshop.
- Be involved in the reflective group conversations.

Benefits to you as participant

The purpose of the intended study is to explore pre-service teachers' experiences regarding holistic support during and after teaching practice. It further aims determine the needs of pre-service teachers and to propose collaborative strategies that can be implemented to offer holistic support to pre-service teachers during and after teaching practice. Therefore, the participants will personally and professionally benefit by developing strategies to cope during and after teaching practice. These strategies will also be valuable once they enter the profession as beginner

teachers. The participants can share these strategies with other pre-service teachers or colleagues that will benefit from these.

The proposed study might indirectly benefit the Faculty of Education of the NWU as well as the greater educational community by providing information that could be useful in how to support pre-service teachers on different levels.

Risks involved for participants

The aim of the study is to explore experiences of pre-service teachers during and after teaching practice. There is a possibility that any of the participants may have had a challenging or negative experience. Should any of the participants indicate a need for additional support during and after the study, the researcher will connect the participant with either the Centre of teaching and learning (CTL) for any academic related support or the Student Counselling and Development Centre that provides support in all dimensions of life (emotional, social and physical wellness). The researcher will initiate contact with relevant persons at both these entities before the research commences to explore the various forms of support they can offer. Reflective group conversations cannot guarantee complete anonymity, and this will be explained to the participants. The participants will be advised that all information that is shared must be treated as strictly confidential.

Confidentiality and protection of identity

Although, the reflective group conversations cannot guarantee anonymity, the participants will be encouraged to understand that shared information is confidential. During the data analysis, the report of findings will protect all participants right to privacy through pseudonyms.

Dissemination of findings

The findings of the proposed study will be made available for all participants upon conclusion.

If you have any further questions or enquiries regarding your participation in this research, please contact the researchers for more information.

Yours sincerely
Suné Erasmus

DECLARATION BY PARTICIPANT:

By signing below, I …….…… agree to take part in a research study entitled:

My heart keeps getting in the way: A collaborative journey towards holistic support for pre-service teachers during teaching practice

I declare that:

- I have read this information and consent form and understand what is expected of me in the research.
- I have had a chance to ask questions to the researcher and all my questions have been adequately answered.
- I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary and I have not been pressurised to take part.
- I may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be penalised or prejudiced in any way.
- I may be asked to leave the research process before it has finished, if the researcher feels it is in my best interests, or if I do not follow the research procedures, as agreed to.

Signed at (place)_____on (date) _____/_____/20____

_____ _____

Signature of participant **Researcher**

ANNEXURE 4 : LANGUAGE EDITING LETTER

Epsilon Editing

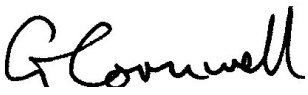
17 Kew Gardens
21 Park Drive
Gqeberha
6001
dgncornwell@gmail.com

tel. 084-9897977

12 November 2021

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This serves to confirm that the Master's thesis by Suné Erasmus, "'My heart keeps getting in the way': A collaborative journey towards holistic support for pre-service teachers during teaching practice," has been proofread and edited to my satisfaction for English idiom and correctness of expression. The referencing has been checked against the standard of the APA 7th edition.



Professor D G N Cornwell
(PhD, Rhodes University)