

**It is more than just a Textbook, a Microscope and an Assessment : An Early Career Natural Sciences Teacher's Self-Study into Professional Development Experiences at a Rural School in South Africa**

**Luthando Mpho Molefe**

lumolefe4@ukzn.ac.za

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8980-0984>

School of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

**Abstract**

Facilitating well-ordered professional development practices for beginner teachers into the ground realities of a classroom and school environment remains a challenge in a country like South Africa. This is especially a reality in rural schools. The lack/unavailability of necessary resources in rural schools, such as satisfactory learning and teaching spaces, science and computer laboratories, books, and structured teacher professional development opportunities, has and continues to negatively affect beginner teachers' grasp of the culture of the classroom and school within the teaching profession. Framed within a qualitative self-study methodology, this research utilized arts-based methods of collecting data such as memory drawing, journaling, and object inquiry. In doing so, it aimed at eliciting my firsthand accounts of professional development practices, including the complexities I faced as a newly appointed teacher in a rural school. The research findings reveal that self-directedness can act as an essential approach in confronting the never-ending challenges in the ever-changing education landscape. This can happen in the form of initiating formal and informal conversations with other teachers alike, including the knowledgeable other, in the topic under scrutiny in a given school, space and beyond. This paper also argues that reflection can serve as a critical instrument in cultivating a more promising future through the rethinking of policy and practice for meaningful learning.

*Keywords: Self-Study, Beginner Teachers, Professional Development, Rural Schools, Teacher Learning, South Africa*