NURTURING LEARNERS' FLAIR FOR WRITTEN COMMUNICATION:

A TEACHER'S SELF-STUDY

BY

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ABSTRACT

The focus of my self-study research was on the development of a flair for English written communication among my isiZulu-speaking grade six learners. The aim of conducting this study was to improve my teaching practice to enhance learners' English written communication. My methodological approach was self-study of educational practice. I used two main self-study methods to generate data for my study: memory-work self-study and developmental portfolio self-study. I used the memory-work self-study method to recall lived experiences that were relevant to developing a flair for communication in my own life history. I used memory drawing, artefact retrieval and personal narrative writing to generate memory stories about these communicative experiences. I composed interpretive poems to explore implications of my memory stories for teaching and learning of written communication. I used the developmental portfolio self-study method to keep evidence of my practice in teaching written communication, including: my teachers' file; lesson plans; my reflective journal; and grade 6 learners' written work, together with their journal entries. I identified six issues from my memory stories and interpretive poems that have influenced my learning and teaching of written communication. These are: (*a) parental involvement; (b) emotions and relationships; (c) cultural practices; (d) changing technology; (e) creative expression;* and *(f) writing as a process*. I took into consideration the extent to which I had been paying attention to these six issues in my teaching and the implications they might have for my future teaching practice, particularly in relation to written communication. Using a self-study approach motivated and empowered me to make some changes personally and to improve the way I teach. I came to understand that the development of flair for written communication demands support from all significant stakeholders in learners' education. Another important lesson that I drew from this study is that creativity should form an integral part of the teaching and learning process of written communication. My key learning is that written communication can be nurtured by dedicated teachers who wish to see their learners succeed in all spheres of life. As a teacher, I should offer a welcoming and encouraging classroom environment. I should present learners with opportunities that allow for creative exploration of ideas, accommodating mistakes and mutual respect for both parties involved in the teaching and learning of written communication.

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES

DECLARATION-PLAGIARISM

I **SIPHIWE BAFANA MADONDO**, declare that

1. The research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research.

2. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

3. This thesis does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.

4. This thesis does not contain other persons' writing, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other researchers. Where other written sources have been quoted, then:

   a. Their words have been re-written but the general information attributed to them has been referenced

   b. Where their exact words have been used, then their writing has been placed in italics and inside quotation marks, and referenced.

5. This thesis does not contain text, graphics or tables copied and pasted from the Internet, unless specifically acknowledged, and the source being detailed in the thesis and in the References sections.

Signed…………………………………

STATEMENT BY SUPERVISOR

This dissertation is submitted <u>with</u> / without my approval.

……………………………………………

DR KATHLEEN PITHOUSE-MORGAN

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

1.	ACE	Advanced Certificate in Education
2.	AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
3.	ANA	Annual National Assessment
4.	CAPS	Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement
5.	HIV	Human Immune Virus
6.	SADTU	South African Democratic Teachers Union
7.	SAB-A	Substandard A
8.	SAB-B	Substandard B
9.	NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
10.	UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal

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CHAPTER ONE:
BEGINNING MY SELF-STUDY RESEARCH PROCESS

Introduction

As a teacher in an English-medium primary school where the majority of learners as well as teachers speak isiZulu as a home language, I have noticed learners who seem to be struggling to express themselves with confidence, skill and flair through English written communication. As an experienced primary school teacher, I am aware that a fundamental part of my role is to teach literacy, which is reading and writing. Learners' success academically and in life in general might depend on whether they have developed these essential skills at the primary level of their schooling. For me as teacher, it is quite disturbing to hear people from the private sector or other spheres of life complaining about what teachers are doing to improve poor literacy levels of learners. This has caused me to want to investigate further by researching this phenomenon. Hence, my aim in this research is to enhance my understanding of what I can do to improve the development of flair for English written communication among my learners. I also hope that my research can contribute to the body of knowledge on teaching written communication in South African schools.

Although learners' literacy development appears to being influenced by the level of education of their parents, teachers at school also play an important role in developing learners' writing capacity (Rose, 2004). Moreover, Hyand (1998) points out that writing development is driven by willingness of the learner, and that the learners' enthusiasm and confidence may be greatly impacted by the written feedback received from the teacher. Hence, in this self-study I scrutinise my own teaching practices because I need to understand whether I as a teacher am doing enough to develop a flair for written communication among my learners. I also reflect back on my experiences of learning written communication with the aim of better understanding and improving my teaching practices.

In this chapter, I present myself as a teacher and a researcher in the self-study and give reasons for doing this research. First, I explain the focus and purpose of my study. I then explain what I learned from my initial reading about teaching and learning of written communication. Next, I specify the key research questions that guide this study. To follow, I briefly introduce the methodological approach of study. Lastly, I give a detailed explanation of how the thesis is structured.

Focus and purpose of the study

My research centres on nurturing a flair for English written communication among isiZulu-speaking primary school learners. When I first thought about a topic for my research, I focused on improving my learners' reading and writing skills. I asked myself, "Where is the problem with development of these skills in the schooling level?" I then composed a haiku poem to assist me refine my research focus. In a Teacher Development Studies research workshop, my fellow Masters' students and I were put into small groups where we assisted each other in brainstorming many words about each person's research focus. After that, I had to choose words from my list that I felt best described my research focus. I had to then count the syllables of the words so that I could put them together using the haiku pattern, which requires 5 syllables in line 1, 7 syllables in line 2 and 5 syllables in the last line. Figure 1.1 shows the haiku poem that I composed to express my research focus.
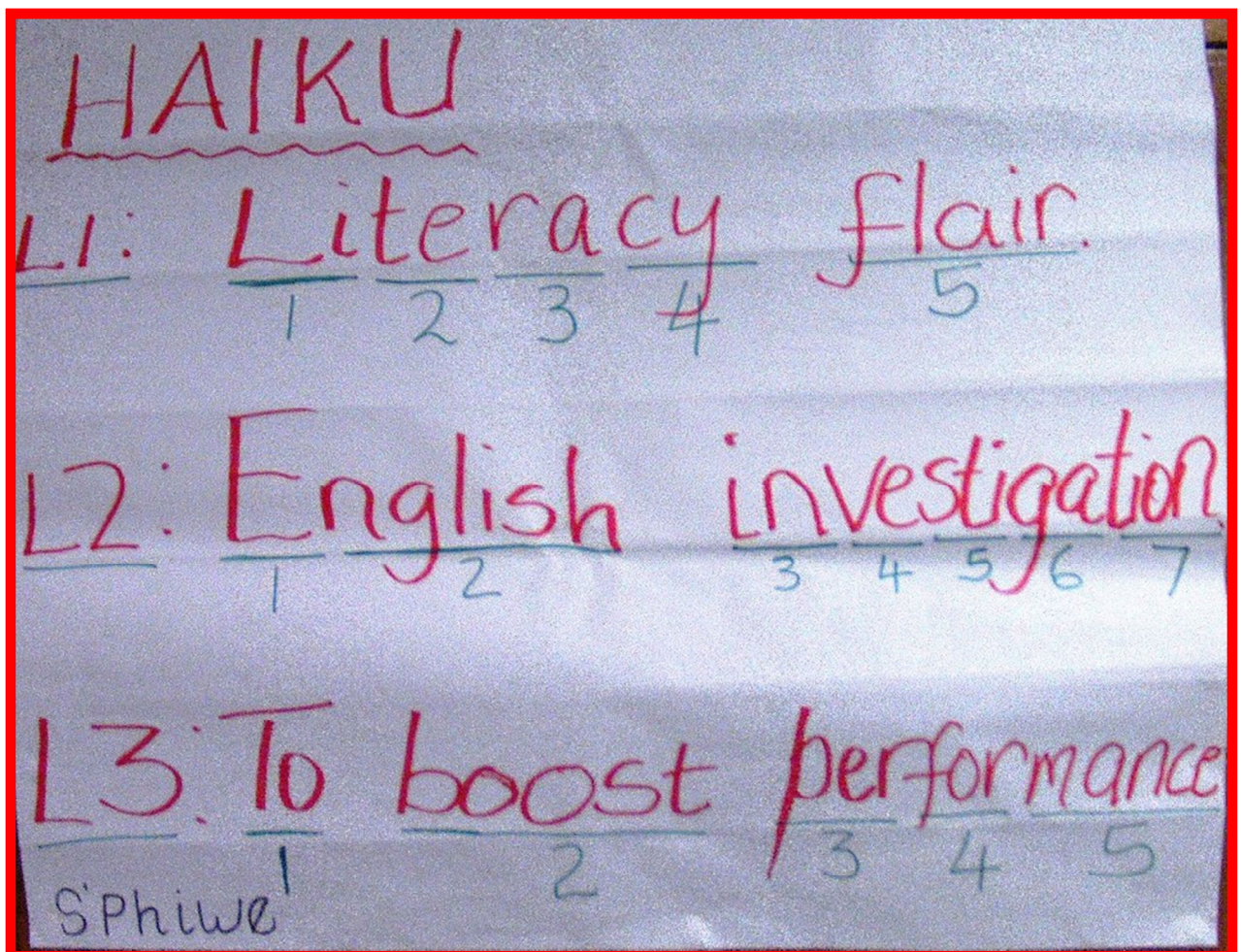
Figure 1.1 Haiku poem for finding research focus

Finally, through discussing my haiku poem with my fellow students and my supervisor, I managed to derive my research topic: "Nurturing learners' flair for written communication: A teacher's self-study".In my understanding, having a flair for written communication means being able to express oneself using written language with creativity and flamboyance. My aim is to cultivate flair or flamboyance and to motivate learners to have a love for written communication from a young age.

Flair as a key concept refers to the creativity or flamboyance that I aim to nurture in the development of written communication among my learners. Creativity involves doing things in a unique and exciting way (Simplicio, 2000). Piirto (2011) argues that creativity cuts across all disciplines, not only the arts, visual art, music or dance, and that creativity is also developed by divergent thinking. Divergent thinking stresses the modification of what is previously known, of investigating what can be discovered and of making new knowledge (Piirto 2011). This emphasises creative development as learners use and modify what is already known and come up with original ideas. This also signals to teachers to be open minded as they teach because they will get diverse and unique answers in class. Sternberg (2010) further argues that learners can be motivated to practice creativity. He states that to promote creativity development one should give opportunities for creative practice and also to give credit when learners react to such motivation and think and act creatively. To me, this signals the need for the presence of the teacher in a classroom context to nurture creativity with learners. Teachers have to create an environment that is conducive to the development of creativity.

A theoretical perspective that has helped me to understand my key concept of flair for written communication is that it is "the aim of education ought to be conceived of as the preparation of artists" (Eisner, 2004, p. 4). In my understanding, by "artist", Eisner did not automatically mean painters and dancers, poets and dramatists. He meant persons who have expanded their thoughts, their responsiveness, their abilities, and their imagination to make work that is well balanced, skilfully executed, and imaginative, whatever sphere they are working in. In my view, the highest honour we can bestow upon an individual, whether a bricklayer or a doctor, a chef or a mechanic, a scientist or a teacher, is to call him or her an artist. In relation to my topic of cultivating a flair for written communication, I understand this as the educational preparation of learners to be able to assemble words to make meaningful sequences in an

artistic and skilful manner. This is relevant to my study because, as a teacher, I should provide learners with opportunities to develop and to shape their creative minds, thus preparing them for the world beyond school. Consequently, it is important for me to find ways of developing creativity in my learners at an early stage of their schooling.

Learning from my initial reading about teaching and learning of written communication

There has been much research done internationally on factors that contribute to written communication development. Hyland (1998) argues that writing progress is driven by enthusiasm of the learner, and that the learner's interest and self-assurance may be negatively or positively affected by written feedback from the teacher. Boggs and Golden (2009) point out a range of factors that can positively influence early literacy learning experiences, such as having literate parents or being able to access reading materials. They also point out how factors such as the overuse of worksheets and ability grouping in schools can have a negative impact. Furthermore, Leggo (2005) demonstrates in his research that poetry gets us thinking about language, cultivates our imagination, motivates us to listen to our hearts, and invites creativity and creative living.

From my preliminary reading about written communication development, I was inspired to try to implement some research based strategies and suggestions my own teaching practice. In this chapter, I share some ideas that I gained from my initial reading about my topic. However, most of the reading that I have done during the course of my study is "interlaced throughout [the] text" of this thesis, rather than presented in this introductory chapter (Nash, 2004, p. 7). My intention is to show how my learning during the study happened concurrently with my reading (Nash, 2004).

What teaching and learning strategies can promote a flair for written communication?
For learners to have a flair for written communication means that they are able to express themselves in writing using language with creativity and flamboyance. There is thus a need to have teachers who will ensure that learners are nurtured with suitable classroom activities that promote the development of such panache. For this to happen, it is important that the teacher creates an environment where learners' input is valued, considered and treated with respect. For example, Boggs and Golden (2009) argue that teachers have to think about and to be watchful about their own language usage to provide learners with a supportive learning

environment. Correspondingly, Hendrickson (1980) affirms the necessity for teachers to develop a lively learning environment where learners can see that making mistakes is a natural and a necessary phenomenon in language learning. This means that learners need reassurance from the teacher that mistakes will be tolerated in the process of language learning.

All qualified teachers have gone through some form of teacher education programmes where they learn didactics and different styles of teaching. This is where they are equipped with multiple pedagogies from which they have to cultivate a flair for written language. Research also offers teachers possible strategies that they can try out in their own contexts. For example, Pithouse (2005) argues for the importance of learner ownership, which happens in the writing process when learners are free to work towards their own concerns, to take control over their learning and to feel more in charge of it.

Similarly, Harmer (2004) asserts that, for teachers to build confidence and enthusiasm in learners' writing, they have to take time to make learners to feel comfortable as authors in English and so to participate willingly in more creative activities. Additionally, Thornton (1980) points out that to do more for our children there should be evolution in the way our classrooms are arranged, in correcting written work, in setting school examinations, in the ways in which school report cards are written and in which schools explain themselves to parents.

Another perspective that is also relevant is a "genre-based approach" which assists learners to know the purpose of writing a text, who will read their text and how to write with teacher support and peer interaction (Chen & Su, 2011, p. 185). This pedagogic perspective is suitable for my study as it gives different ideas about various text forms. In developing learners' flair for written communication, it is crucial for me as a teacher to help them understand why they are writing and who they are writing for, as well as how to write a text (Chen & Su, 2011).

What have peoples' experiences been of learning written communication in South Africa?

In his study of literacy histories of South African learners, Hart (1995) shows the significance of understanding the factors which have impacted on and shaped learners' knowledge and

perceptions of writing. He argues that learning written communication in the South African schools context could have provided learners with a variety of perceptions and experiences, especially because of educational transformation during pre and post 1994 eras. These perceptions could be positive or negative, depending on the teaching and assessment methods teachers used when teaching writing. The research I have read highlights mainly negative experiences. To illustrate, Hart (1995) demonstrates discouraging experiences: "we were not encouraged to write – not taught how to be independent, create things for ourselves … we usually depend on the book, depend on the teacher" (p. 120). Furthermore, Rose (2004) asserts that indigenous learners from remote communities often struggle with writing because they have a limited range of vocabulary as compared with learners from urban and elite families who come to school with considerable experience of written stories which they successfully use to write their own stories.

What does education policy in South Africa say about teaching written communication?

In the South African context, there are policies to guide the teaching of literacy in public schools, but in my experience these do not offer teachers a variety of strategies for teaching literacy, especially writing. The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (Department of Education, 2011) clearly allocates time in the prescribed curriculum for the development of English language literacy skills. It further states:

> In South Africa many children use their additional language, mostly English, as the language of learning and teaching. This means that they must reach a high level of competence in English. They need to be able to read and write well in English. (p.8)

Hence, this policy emphasises the need for children to be well developed in literacy, especially English literacy, so that they can express themselves in a stylish way. I hope that my research will close the gap between the policy and the practicality of teaching written communication as it will explore innovative teaching strategies for enhancing learners' flair for English written communication.

Research questions

The research questions that guide this study are as follows:

Question 1: **What can I learn from my past experiences about developing a flair for written communication?** In answering this question, I reflect on my past to identify negative and the positive experiences thatI can learn from in order to enhance flair for written communication among my learners.

Question 2: **How can I facilitate a flair for written communication through my teaching?** In exploring this question, I seek to understand what impact my teaching practice can have on the development of learners' flair for written communication. I also explore new strategies that I as a teacher can use to try to nurture learners' flair for written communication.

Methodological approach

My methodological approach is self-study of educational practice. The most important features of self-study are questioning one's own practice from observations and personal experience, working with peers who act as critical friends and, lastly, trying out new methods of teaching to improve learning (Samaras, 2011). This methodology is appropriate for this study in which I am aiming to learn by scrutinising the way I teach, to help extend and transform my understanding to enhance flair for written communication among learners. (I discuss my methodological approach in more detail in Chapter Two of this thesis.)

The research is qualitative. As Nieuwenhuis (2010b) maintains, qualitative research investigates humans or systems by working with participants in their ordinary surroundings and paying attention to their meanings and explanations. Correspondingly, in my study, I am looking at my own teaching practices and meaning making in my everyday school context.

Conclusion and overview of the thesis

In this chapter, Chapter One, I discussed the focus and purpose of the study. I explained that I needed to find better working strategies to use in improving my teaching of written communication through researching the influence of my personal history and exploring my current teaching. I then outlined some ideas that I gained from my preliminary reading about teaching and learning of written communication. Thereafter, I presented and the key research questions that guide my study. This was then followed by a brief discussion of the methodological approach, which is self-study.

In Chapter Two, I describe how my self-study research process unfolded. I began by discussing the research methodology and its suitability for this kind of study, which is about practice improvement. I then describe my research context and explain the choice of participants (learners and critical friends), as well as my role as both researcher and participant. I go on to describe my self-study methods. After that, I share the challenges I

have experienced in my study. Lastly, I explain how I have addressed the ethical and the trustworthiness issues of the study.

In Chapter Three, I recall my memory stories about my own communication development, inside and outside of formal schooling. To recollect my memory stories, I used memory-work strategies such as artefact retrieval and memory drawings. I start from my early primary school days and then recall my high school experiences. This is followed by my teacher training college, early school teaching and my postgraduate experiences. In this chapter, I address my first key research question: *"What can I learn from my past experiences about developing a flair for written communication?"* I highlight negative and positive contributions from my past experiences.

In Chapter Four, I seek to find answers to continue to respond to my first research question. I present interpretive poetry that has assisted me to distil the gist of my memory stories. Each poem represents some of the most powerful and memorable experiences discussed in the previous chapter (Chapter Three). Thereafter, I follow with the implications of my memory stories and interpretive poems for teaching and learning written communication. I identify and discuss the six emerging issues: These are (a) *parental involvement* (b) *emotions and relationships* (c) *cultural practices* (d) *changing technology* (e) *creative expression* (f) *writing as a process*. From these issues, I discuss significant lessons that could be used to nurture written communication among learners.

In Chapter Five, I draw on data generated through learning activities that I conducted in my grace 6 English classroom. I respond to my second research question: *"How can I facilitate a flair for written communication through my teaching?"* In addressing this question, I look at my current teaching practice with the aim of examining my shortfalls and strengths in nurturing written communication. My discussion is organised according to the six issues that had emerged from my memory stories and interpretive poetry (as presented in Chapter Four). Each issue is discussed with relation to what emerged through the classroom activities.

Chapter Six is the concluding chapter of this self-study thesis. In this chapter, I reflect on what I have learned from my self-study research. I first discuss my methodological learning and then I consider my professional learning. Finally, I make clear how I plan to move

forward with nurturing and developing a flair for written communication among primary school learners based on what I have discovered through my study.

CHAPTER TWO:
EXAMINING THE FOOTPRINTS OF MY SELF-STUDY RESEARCH PROCESS

Introduction

This self-study research is a journey of reflection. I recollect and examine my lived private and professional experiences in order to understand how I might find new teaching strategies to nurture a flair for English written communication among my isi-Zulu-speaking learners. In the previous chapter, Chapter One, I explained the focus and the purpose of the study and I presented the reasons why I wanted to embark on this research journey. Furthermore, I stated the research questions that guide the study. Additionally, I gave a brief outline of my methodological approach. I concluded by providing an overview of the thesis.

It is crucial for me as a researcher in a self-study process to critically examine my research footprints in order to improve my practice as a researcher and teacher (Samaras, 2011). Hence, in this chapter, Chapter Three, I retrace my self-study research process. I start by explaining why self-study is a suitable overall methodology for my research. Next, I give an account of the context of the study and the research participants. I then elaborate on the self-study methods I used. Furthermore, I discuss the challenges that I have encountered in the research process. Lastly, I consider ethical issues and the trustworthiness of the study.

Research methodology

This research is qualitative, using a self-study methodology. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) assert that qualitative research gives an in-depth, advanced, and detailed understanding of ideas, activities, noticeable as well as less obvious occurrences, points of view, aims and behaviours. They further argue that qualitative research "gives voices to participants and probes issues that lie beneath the surface of presenting behaviours and actions" (p. 219). Moreover, Babbie (2001) emphasises that qualitative field research enables the researcher to watch and take note of action in a particular environment so as to give a better understanding of the occurrence. Correspondingly, in my study I am looking at my own teaching practices and meaning making in my everyday school setting.

My methodological approach is self-study of practice. According to Pithouse (2011), self-study pays attention to the researcher's own personal and professional experiences. La Boskey (2004) argues that those working within a certain profession are especially well-

located to study the practice of that profession. The self-study methodological component that best suits this study is that it is "personal situated inquiry" (Samaras, 2011 p. 74), which is evident in this research because I draw from my personal experience as a practitioner in a particular classroom context, trying to find out what works and what does not work by questioning my teaching (Samaras, 2011). As Anderson-Patton and Bass (2002) explain, "self-study is a methodology for examining one's own teaching, carried out collaboratively, with the goal of transforming one's practice" (p. 101). Hence, this methodology is appropriate for my study as I am studying my own teaching by working together with critical friends (my fellow Masters' students) to extend and transform my understanding with the aim of enhancing flair for written communication among my learners. Hamilton, Smith and Worthington (2008) observe that the focal point for self-study researchers is adding to the professional knowledge foundations of teaching as well as enhancing comprehension of the educational environment. Similarly, my study aims to contribute to the body of professional knowledge on teaching written communication as well as to enhance my understanding of the uniqueness of my teaching within my school context.

LaBoskey (2004) maintains that self-study involves researchers in generating "theories about teacher learning…through investigation of [their] own practice [and] efforts" (p. 819). Likewise, Hamilton, et al. (2008) assert that self-study aims at improving the researcher's way of doing things in his or her educational context by closely looking at self and others in and through his or her professional work. As a teacher and researcher, I aim to improve my pedagogic strategies in my classroom context through investigation of my practice and experience.

As a practicing teacher and as a member of the education fraternity who has encountered learners who are finding it difficult to use written communication to express themselves, I have decided to use self-study as a research methodology because I aim at improving my practice to bring about educational change (Hamilton at al., 2008). Because of negative comments from the public about what we are doing as teachers to improve flair for written communication in schools, I decided to engage in researching this phenomenon in my context because I am in a position to identify areas for improvement. Bass, Anderson-Patton, and Allender (2002) argues that "self-study re-centers research and grounds it in classroom practice, using the language of teachers rather than the distancing voice of erudite theoreticians" (p. 66). Thus, I feel it is vital for me as a teacher to conduct research on how I

teach and to investigate influences on my teaching styles and strategies. I also aim to share my research knowledge with other educators as Hamilton et al. (2008) stress that the central point of self-study is contributing to the professional knowledge core of teaching.

Self-study is self-initiated and self-focused

One of the crucial elements of self-study it is that is "self-initiated" and "self-focused" (LaBoskey 2004, p. 842). Hence, this study is about my self as a teacher and researcher and I am studying my own professional practice. However, the self as an individual is not the only focus in self-study research as it also takes the professional context into consideration when aiming at improvement. In this study, I am a researcher and a professional educator who has identified a phenomenon that needed special attention in order for me to improve my teaching. I am reflecting critically on my personal experiences and on my teaching styles with the aim bringing change to learning. I chose self-study because I anticipated that it would give me the opportunity to conduct research, to try out the new strategies for nurturing flair for written communication in my classroom practice and contribute the knowledge discovered to the teaching profession. I anticipated that using this kind of methodology would give me the courage to evoke change in my teaching. I believe that for any change to happen it has to start from within an individual and then others can see this change by your actions. I concur with LaBoskey's (2004) assertion that self-study focuses on what is happening in the classroom context, through the use of teachers' language, while also drawing on the language of theoretians as necessary. Through studying my personal experiences and my practice in action, I aim to better understand what transpired in the classroom during the study and report using a more accessible language, taking emotions into consideration.

Self-study is improvement aimed

Another important characteristic of self-study methodology is that it is "improvement aimed" (LaBoskey, 2004, p. 844). My research has engaged me in understanding my educational context as well as my practices in teaching written communication to grade 6 English learners with the aim of excelling in teaching and improving the level of education I offer. Hamilton et al. (2008) claim that "for educators looking to improve their practice, self-study can prove helpful in raising the particular questions that drive educational change" (p. 26). Correspondingly, my study has this element of being improvement aimed, as it requires me to take the lead and the initiative in implementing positive change in teaching using the knowledge generated by research to improve the identified problem in practice. I agree with

LaBoskey's (2004) affirmation that self-study strives to develop both individual practice and the school environment. Thus, I hope that finding better working strategies for teaching my grade 6 learners will also assist my colleagues in my school, as well as other teachers in the profession, to improve their teaching.

Self-study is interactive

Another crucial element of self-study is that it is "interactive" (LaBoskey, 2004, p. 847).

I am not the sole focus in this study as I am also involving my learners in developing new strategies to improve my practice in teaching written communication. In my study, I am working closely with my grade 6 learners to generate their responses to inform me about my teaching of written communication. I agree with Masinga (2009) that teacher learning can be informed by prompting and receiving responses from learners. As a researcher and a participant, I am also looking back at my past experiences and interacting with them to be able to give meaning to the present and future. Teaching is about our personal and as well as professional being and so "we must incorporate self-analysis and tools of self-transformation" (LaBoskey 2004, p. 843).

According to Hamiton at al. (2008), "this interactive element of self-study allows the researcher to focus on self, engage in reflection through interaction with critical friends and self, and ultimately improve practice" (p. 21). For me as a researcher it also calls for interaction with other researchers who are my fellow Masters' students. These critical friends assist in pushing my thinking about improving my approaches to teaching in a deeper way. For my study, critical friends have given feedback on my teaching portfolio and assisted me with some new teaching strategies and suggestions about meanings that emerged out of their understanding of my personal history narrative. Furthermore, interaction has also taken place between me and literature that I have engaged with when extending and deepening my ideas.

Self-study uses multiple methods

In addition, self-study researchers use a variety of methods to generate useful information for better understanding of their practice (LaBoskey, 2004). Hamilton et al. (2008) affirm that self-study researchers use a number of different methods for data generation.   In this self-study research, I have used diverse approaches to generate data which provided evidence about my past learning experiences and my current practice of teaching written communication to grade 6 learners. For example, I have employed artefact retrieval, where I

have reflected on objects that triggered certain memories. I have also done memory drawings and personal narrative writing, where I have drawn and written about critical experiences in my own learning of communication. Learners' journals and my teaching journals, as well as conversations with my critical friends, offered me ideas and feedback for professional development in my teaching. Pithouse (2011) emphasises that employing a range of strategies can empower self-study researchers to study their selves and individual experience from a number of points of view. This allowed me to be open minded as using these approaches assisted me identifying my own strengths and weakness as a teacher.

My research context

I have conducted my self-study research in my own professional context, which is a semi-rural primary school, located in the outer west area of Durban, in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. In the community surrounding the school the elders still hold on to traditional values and norms of their Zulu culture, such as observation of a traditional social hierarchy with the Chief and local community leaders called *indunas* (they are right hand men of the chief who are vested with all powers to act on his behalf). The community is close knit and is characterised by high levels of unemployment. Some of our learners are children of young single parents, some of whom were school dropouts. Some are orphans because of the new social realities of HIV&AIDS and are under guardianship of grandparents or other family members.

The school is a small primary school from grade R to grade 7 with fewer than 500 learners and 12 teachers. The principal and two heads of department form part of the school management team. It is a public school with a learner-teacher ratio of 32 to 1. The school infrastructure is inadequate as there are only seven proper classroom buildings and two mobile classrooms. The sanitation is the old pit toilet system, which is not within the school premises. There are no playgrounds for learners; to play they share with teachers' cars a small space in front of the classrooms. Our school is still regarded as an under-resourced school as there is a lack of infrastructure and equipment such as a library, sports grounds, parking bays and teaching aids – projectors, computers and so on. The language of learning and teaching in this school is English. The majority of learners as well as teachers speak isiZulu as a home language. Hence, as the medium of instruction, English is being taught, practised and encouraged for high performance in different subjects and for self-expression.

My research participants

I am the main research participant in the study. I am a professional male teacher of 36 years of age with 10 years' teaching experience in a semi-rural primary school context. As shown in Chapter Three, I have used my educational life history to inform my study because it assisted me to examine my previous experiences of learning communication to offer the background required to link new knowledge and concepts of how to teach and nurture written communication in my grade 6 class (Boggs & Golden, 2009). I am aware that I have played a dual role in the research – as a teacher and as a researcher. Thus, I look critically and reflexively at both of these roles (Samaras, 2011). According to Kirk (2005), self-reflexivity of a researcher is when he or she re-examines experiences through constant questioning, theorising or giving meaning and paying attention to feelings. This is evident in Chapter Three where I question my self in relation to past and present episodes of lived experiences of my development. Lastly, I analyse my experiences by giving meaning and making sense of those occurrences in my development of written communication.

In this study, I have also worked with 46 learner participants of mixed gender and of different ages in a grade 6 class. The whole class participated as the research activities that I conducted with learners formed part of teaching the prescribed curriculum.

Self-study methods

I have used two main self-study methods to generate data for my study. For the first research question, *"What can I learn from my past experiences about developing a flair for written communication?"* I have used the memory-work self-study method, looking at certain episodes that are relevant to developing a flair for communication in my own life history (Samaras, 2011). Data sources included journal entries where I recorded my thoughts and feelings during my research process, as well as artefacts and memory drawings. Furman, Coyne and Negi (2008) emphasise that "writing poetry, narrative, journal entries and other exercises may be useful tools for self-discovery and reflection, as well as means of inquiry into the world" (p. 75). Hence, these methods were suitable to generate data because my intention was to look back at influences that had contributed to my development. By engaging in self-study research, I have learned to pay attention to my past by recalling relevant experiences to help me provide answers to my research questions. According to Onyx and Small (2001), memory-work has the advantage of assisting the individual to tap into the past because everything recalled can be used for self-development. Cole (2011)

explains that memory-work lets us investigate a variety of feelings, which could be good or bad, and it plays a significant role in examining teacher beliefs, teacher development and teacher self. For my study, I have employed memory drawing, artefact retrieval and personal narrative writing to assist me to recall past experiences that are relevant to development of written communication.

For my second research question, *"How can I facilitate a flair for written communication through my teaching?"* I have used the developmental portfolio self-study method by keeping everything that is evidence of my professional work or practice in teaching written communication (Samaras, 2011). I chose this method because it was suitable for me to observe if there was improvement in my teaching of written communication. Samaras and Freese (2006) explain that "the developmental portfolio self-study method presents an opportunity to store, catalogue, and study your professional growth over a selected period of time" (p. 68). Data sources that helped me to keep track of my practice (Ndaleni, 2013) included my teachers' file, lesson plans and lesson reflections in my journal, where I reflected on what I anticipated and on what actually transpired during lessons. I also used the portfolio to retain grade 6 learners' written work, such as short paragraphs (creative writings), poetry work and crafted cards, together with their journal entries about each activity done in class. Additionally, as Anderson-Patton and Bass (2002) point out, teaching portfolios can support personally meaningful learning. This means that keeping a portfolio can assist the researcher to learn to do personally meaningful work as a classroom teacher. Revisiting my teaching portfolio informed me of whether development was taking place or not in my teaching of written communication. Similarly, Ndaleni (2013) affirms that using a portfolio to keep an eye on learners' work and development in correlation to his teaching was significant for him because self-study is about self-improvement in a particular professional context.

Data generation strategies

Memory drawing

I have used memory drawing to reminisce about and to relive my childhood experiences. Thinking about drawing as a self-study method was an intimidating task because I knew I was not good at drawing, but what consoled me was the understanding that researchers should remember that what is crucial is not how well they can draw, but rather the new ideas and meaning they generate during the process of drawing (Pithouse, 2011). I have thus created some memory drawings of significant experiences related to learning written

communication, for example, my scary primary classroom interaction (see Figure 3.1, Chapter Three).

Drawing sketches of my memories brought back mixed feelings depending on the events that I was recalling. Pithouse (2011) explains that through drawings self-study researchers can gain entry to and represent facets of their personal experience that they might not remember or have ignored. Using self-study drawing helped me to look back at things that were in my subconscious mind (Mlambo, 2013).

Artefact retrieval

According to Allender and Manke (2004), artefacts are objects that can offer "tangible evidence of the realities of teaching and learning" (p. 20). In my study, I have chosen some important artefacts and used them to help me to recall my personal experiences so that I could learn about how better to teach and nurture written communication in class. I have learned that artefacts are not just like any other objects because they can prompt all kinds of feelings and can evoke some discussions about certain experiences. Correspondingly, Mitchell (2011) explains that artefacts are objects that carry personal memories and that can evoke personal narratives when scrutinised to answer certain questions about their significance to the possessor.

I have retrieved objects and also done memory drawings of those objects that I had long forgotten about and that had to do with my learning of communication during my formal and informal schooling. Allender and Manke (2004) assert that "artefacts come from our past, and are often found in file drawers and dusty boxes" (p. 21). I have gone back through my mind and recalled many artefacts that were to do with my research and that were potentially in a position to evoke new meanings for my professional development. This is evident in my Chapter Three where I re-examine my lived experiences by using artefacts to elicit discussion. Some examples of artefacts that I could not find in boxes and files were the slate that I used to write on in primary school and examples of my written work from high school. Hence, I drew memory drawings of these artefacts. More recent examples of artefacts that I was able to find are my university assignment drafts of the writing process, which have enlightened me on the significance of offering learners several chances and written comments or feedback on drafts for the improvement of the final draft. Artefact retrieval has broadened my understanding of the value of the objects I encounter in my educational experiences as

they might become artefacts which can have deep implications when analysed in a personal narrative.

Personal narrative writing

I have used personal narrative writing to describe and explain the meaning of my memory drawings and artefacts. According to Pithouse, Mitchell and Weber (2009), in personal narrative writing teachers engage themselves directly with the words they are writing and write about matters that are individually significant to them. I have used personal narrative writing to reflect on significant lived experiences and to give details that were evoked by each artefact and memory drawing (Mlambo, 2013). I have used memory drawings to relive experiences while I was writing descriptions. Likewise, Pithouse (2011) notes the significance of combining self-study drawings with written narrative descriptions to recall early childhood experiences. An example of a personal narrative description is shown in Chapter 3 where I present and explain the memory drawing of my scary school beginning (see Figure 3.1).

This personal narrative writing assisted me to change the way I think and the way I teach in class. Makhanya (2010) asserts that memory writing can help self-study researchers and teachers to reflect on and to think about things in a different way. In my understanding, this means that if you employ personal narrative writing in self-study research it is likely that you will never be the same as before. For example, recalling most of my negative primary school experiences (see Chapter 3) made me want to think and teach differently from those teachers who taught me in the past. Allender and Allender (2006) confirm that teachers who are passionate about teaching usually make an effort to improve on how they were taught.

Journal writing

My journal

I did not know about journaling and its function until I was a postgraduate student in the Teacher Development Studies specialisation when we were expected to keep and then submit journals for a specific module. At first, it was difficult to get used to the idea because the only similar thing I knew of was keeping a diary which helped me to get organised. I concur with Makhanya (2010) when she explains that writing about emotions and ideas has not been a common habit in our Black African culture in South Africa. Thus, I had to get used to the culture of writing down reflections in my journal.

Pithouse et al. (2009) explain that they promote the use of journals for teacher development as it provides a platform where a teacher can write about his or her own ideas informally, without being judged and not conforming to any structure or layout of a certain genre. Thus, a journal allows an individual to write his or her thoughts freely. Pinnegar and Hamilton (2009) explain that journal writing seems to allow individuals to express feelings, explanations, and decisions. Hence, the journal is a writing space where researchers can expose their own emotions and points of view. Similarly, Mlambo (2012) agrees that journaling is where "one can write daily responses to one's life experiences and events" (p. 10). Masinga (2007) emphasises the use of journals by self-study researchers and participants as a vital tool where they can reflect upon experiences, feelings and observation of their lives, as well as on the classroom activities.

In my journal, I wrote about my feelings and ideas about my past and present lived educational experiences, which were related to my development and experiences that I have had of written communication as learner and as a practising teacher. It was crucial for all my journal daily entries to have the date and the venue to assist me to easily remember ideas and issues discussed. I have found that journal writing is personal because writing entries involve emotions and thoughts about certain events that have occurred in your life. There were some 'touchy' moments while writing because some experiences were unpleasant to relive, while some were quite fascinating in such a way that they still make me feel proud even now – decades after they happened. To illustrate:

> *I'm having mixed feelings about today's task to reflect back and relive some experiences that were evoked by some artefacts I retrieved. Writing about my scary primary school interaction reminded me of hatred that I had of my cruel class teacher. Thinking about her made my body tense and shake as memories of stick strokes on my back still clouds my mind. Writing and reliving about my experiences has brought the deeper and broader understanding about the use of corporal punishment by my teacher. I now understand that corporal punishment was the only available aid to enforce desired learning outcomes. It is true that artefacts are not just any objects but are the ones about which the owners have stories to tell.*
> (My personal journal, 4 December 2012)

As my journal entry highlights, "including journaling recognises and therefore allows for the inclusion of the emotional in the process of teacher development" (LaBoskey, 2004, p. 836). In my experience, writing and reliving some emotional experiences sometimes help you to heal the inner soul and can provide you with new meaning at that point in time. As Richardson (2003) affirms, "writing the story was not emotionally easy; in the writing I was reliving horrific experiences, but writing it released the anger and pain" (p. 513).

Learner journals

Journal writing with learners was meant to be a whole class activity where I would engage learners to document their thoughts and feelings on paper. My intention in using learner journals was to give learners the opportunity to write their reflections about what affected them in their learning. Zaragoza and Vaughn (1995) assert the importance of being influenced by what children say to improve our teaching. Therefore journal writing helped the learners to document their reflections and for me it worked as a tool to highlight some aspects that needed my attention for improvement in my teaching.

I allocated 10 minutes in each lesson for learners to make entries of reflections about the previous lesson and to write down how they felt. Giving them time in class lessened their responsibility for writing a journal entry after school as some of them did not have time for journal writing at home. Some had excuses of being swamped by an overload of homework and household chores. Others thought it was not a crucial task to make journal entries because I had stated at the beginning of the research process that the journal writing was to be done voluntarily. According to Masinga (2007), journals are important instruments in self-study research because they give both expressive and reflective evidence of how things unfolded. Although they were not used to documenting their thoughts on paper, in their journals learners were able to document their reflections and thoughts. The following journal extract (Figure 2.1) shows an example of such a reflection made by a learner after a lesson based on a past test paper where they had to re-arrange mixed up letters.

22.July 2013

Today I feel ☺ because on Surbaday
I was at the party it was nice I ate
the perfect cake.
The work that I did on ann exam
the letter was difficalt because
the letter was mixed up ✳ I coold
not see enething
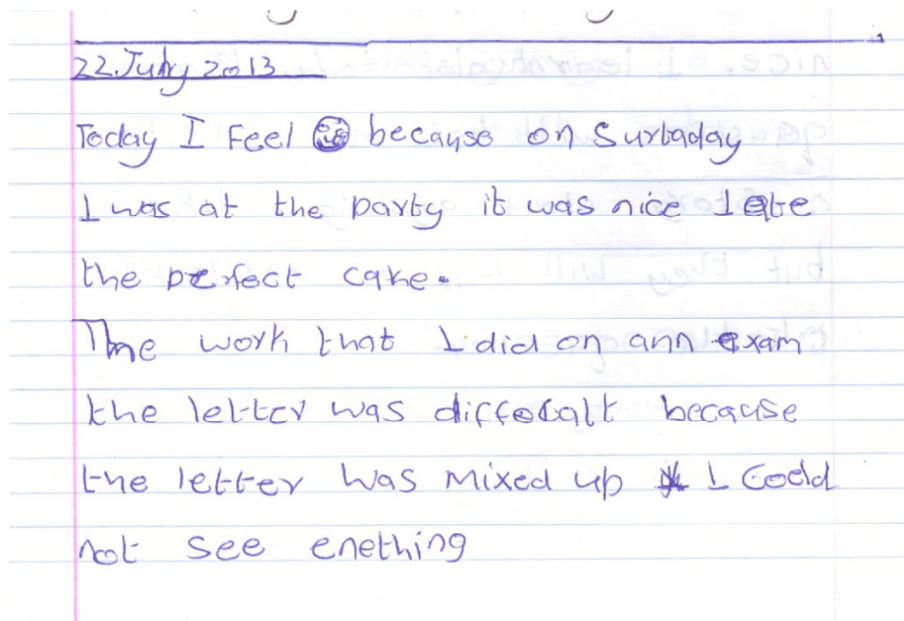
Figure 2.1: An example of a learner's journal entry

Conversations with critical friends

It was crucial for me as a teacher in the self-study process of researching my practice to be involved in the formation of a critical friend team (Samaras, 2011). This was important because it is where I gained courage and support for the completion of study, along with critical guidance. According to Samaras (2011), "critical friend(s) could be from a grade-level or discipline-based school or a group of teachers from diverse disciplines in your own school or even across schools" (p. 117). She further explains that it is a learning community of trusted colleagues who ask questions for clarification of the research and offer different points of view in a productive manner. In my case, my critical friends were my fellow Masters' students conducting self-study research in the same discipline of Teacher Development Studies. We met regularly over a period of three years while conducting our research. Our conversations were audio-recorded and I also reflected on our discussions in my journal.

My critical friends are all school teachers, with the exception of one who is a lecturer in a private tertiary institution. Our aim as self-study researchers was to develop and improve ourselves in our respective places of practice. These five critical friends are professional teachers of mixed races, genders and ages working in diverse educational contexts. My critical friends come from a range of backgrounds and they have varied learning and teaching

experiences. Thus, their answers and views have differed and they have offered me a range of perspectives on my research.

Because we were sharing the common goal of improving our practice it was of great help to be together and critically share ideas. The other important aspect that developed was trust in one another which helped us to critically analyse data and offer one another different perspectives. Furman, Langer, Davis, Gallardo and Kulkarni (2007) affirm that doing research analysis as a group can reduce fixed ideas and allow for deeper thinking about the data. They also highlight that trusting relationships amongst researchers are important in order for them to explore potential susceptibilities in their responses to the data. Having critical friends in self-study research can strengthen the credibility of the data analysis and interpretation process by allowing different people to think deeply and offer possible solutions.

Working together as critical friends has broadened my understanding of the concept itself as it offered a shoulder to ease the burden of my research study. Pithouse et al. (2009) contend that "the support of caring, sensitive, and interested critical friends to help us through the study can make it easier to remain open to further learning and professional development" (p. 47). I concur with this statement because my critical friends have been helpful in many ways. They were the source of my strength as I received motivation and encouragement from them in times of despair during the research process. Assistance and knowledge was shared by those who were more advanced in certain aspects. For example, I gained assistance in terms of knowing how to use computers more successfully in order to complete my study. To illustrate: the following is a post that was uploaded by one of my critical friends on Edmodo (www.edmodo.com), which is a social network used by teachers or groups of teachers:

26 November 2013
Mr….. to Memory & Teacher Development

Hi all
Please follow the following to insert an image in a document so that the image can be moved anywhere on the page.

1. Move to the point on your document where you want to insert the image.

2. Create the space – press enter until you have the required space.

3. On the Menu Bar, find Insert, click and select shapes, select the text box (hover your cursor over the icon to find its name)

4. Draw the textbox, to the required size. Make sure the textbox is active (with dots around it)

5. On the menu bar, find Format

6. Find Shape Fill, open and scroll down to Picture

7. Click on Picture and select the image from your Picture folder

8. Click on Insert. Viola! the picture is in the box and is movable!

Ciao!

Other critical friends showed interest in my study by offering valuable suggestions as to how might I develop new teaching strategies. They offered suggestions on different types of learning activities I could try to nurture a flair for written communication. This is evident in the following extract from my journal:

> *These are activities suggested by my critical friends to try in my grade 6 class for nurturing flair for written communication.*
> 1. *Invitations – to traditional ceremonies, parties etc.*
> 2. *Menus – for different functions, pictures, catchy phrases*
> 3. *Cards – valentines, birthdays, Christmas etc.*
> 4. *Programmes – party, wedding, school awards function,*
> 5. *Recipes – they choose their best meal, write measurements of ingredients to to used etc.*
> 6. *Poetry – praise songs of pets, mom, dad etc.*
>
> (My personal journal, 10 January 2013)

The journal entry above shows how helpful it is to be surrounded by a group of critical friends during the research process as they can offer valuable options. This is further demonstrated in the following journal entry:

- *T... suggested that when doing work I should try to group learners according to their neighbourhood so that they develop friendships.*

- *Allow them to choose who they want to work with.*
- *Group work writing – give the topic for the class, then each group writes a different paragraph of the composition.*
- *Answering comprehension – divide questions amongst the groups.*

(My personal journal, 28 June 2013)

All these suggestions further lead me to value the importance of engaging with critical friends with the goal of improving my teaching practice.

Lesson planning and learners' work

The audio recordings of the conversations with critical friends and my journal entries assisted me to design lesson plans that became part of the research process. To achieve my desired research outcomes, I worked with my grade 6 class in English lessons. During this period of my study, the Department of Basic Education had introduced and prescribed a new curriculum policy for all public schools in South Africa named the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (Department of Basic Education, 2012). The year in which I conducted self-study research in my classroom was the first year of the introduction and implementation of CAPS in the Intermediate Phase (grade 4, 5 and 6). As a teacher and a researcher, I worked with grade 6 learners as participants in the study. The lessons that I designed and taught had to be in line with the ones prescribed in the annual teaching plan (First Addition Language Document, 2012) which stipulates what is to be taught and when. The CAPS document focuses on four skills to be achieved and mastered by learners of English in respective grades. These skills are reading and viewing, writing and presenting, listening and speaking, and language structures and conventions. Writing is one of the four crucial skills and is allocated three hours per two weeks cycle. The learning activities that I designed for my research, as well as the learners' response to those activities, are demonstrated in Chapter Five. As explained above, I documented all the lessons in my teaching portfolio.

Representation and interpretation of my lived experiences

In my understanding of self-study, it is important to represent and interpret lived experiences in a manner that helps the reader to relive all the experiences and the meanings of those experiences through the lens of the researcher in the journey. Likewise, Bullough and

Pinnegar (2001) assert "that the purpose of the telling and interpreting is to enable the reader to experience the narrative as if they lived it with insight of the interpretation" (p. 16). In Chapter Three of my thesis, I composed memory stories of my own learning journey, to answer my first research question: *What can I learn from my experiences about developing a flair for written communication?"* As explained above, the memory stories were created through the use of artefact retrieval, personal narrative writing and memory drawings. I composed memory stories about my past lived experiences of learning about written communication. I also recalled other kinds of communicative experiences as a young growing Zulu African boy, such as informal learning of diverse ways of interacting with others and for conveying my thoughts about my environment.

I employed an arts-based method (Samaras, 2011) by using interpretive poetry to make meaning of my memory stories (as represented in According to Butler-Kisber (2002), arts-based methods offer several ways of looking at research material and may to lead to new insights and perspectives on the part of the researcher. Furthermore, Weber (2008) explains that art-based modes can bring to mind emotional reactions because they enable empathy, and as a result attract and engage the readers' attention to the work of the researcher. This means that the reader 'gets into the researcher's shoes' to feel the emotions of the experiences and see things from the writer's point of view. Additionally, LaBoskey (2004) offers an additional benefit of using art-based methods by explaining that it can capture and disclose those features of our experience and understanding that cannot be articulated in words. This means that poetry, for example, has the potential to evoke meanings and reaction that are not evoked in written descriptions. Similarly, Richardson (2003) agrees "poetic devices – rhythms, silences, spaces, breath points, alliterations, meter, cadence, assonance, rhyme, and off rhyme – engage the listener's body, even if the mind resists and denies" (p. 516).

Writing interpretive poetry offered me insights to identify significant educational and emotional episodes of my past experiences. Similarly, Furman (2007) emphasises that poetry can help researchers to "synthesise, process and make meaning" (p. 304). I had to re-read my memory stories with the aim of selecting words and arranging them in such a way that would capture the gist of the experience in a more compressed poetic form of writing. In this approach, I used the words and ideas from my memory stories to develop poetic interpretations (Butler-Kisber, 2005).

I then used an inductive approach where I "searched for emerging patterns, associations, concepts and explanations" in my interpretive poetry (Nieuwenhuis's, 2010a, p. 107) and memory stories (see Chapter Four). I used highlighters to colour-code, in order to identify sections from my interpretive poetry and memory stories that seemed important and relevant to the teaching and learning of written communication. This helped me to see vital emerging issues. I then classified sections from my poetry and stories according to these issues that I had identified. To demonstrate a few, I used orange to highlight sections of information about the issue of *parental involvement*. I then decided to use a different colour, blue, for the issue of *emotions and relationships*. I did the same with other issues. From there, I had to think carefully about each issue's significance and implications for my teaching of written communication. I also had to consult relevant literature to support and enrich the issues identified. While interacting with literature and thinking critically about each issue, I gained insight and deeper understanding of the phenomenon and on how to assist learners to develop a flair for written communication. I also worked with my group of critical friends to get different viewpoints during this process.

The issues that I identified in response to my first research question – (a) *parental involvement* (b) *emotions and relationships* (c) *cultural practices* (d) *changing technology* (e) *creative expression* (f) *writing as a process* – then assisted me in formulating my response to my second research question. In Chapter Five, I show how I built on my learning from my memory-work to explore my teaching of written communication. I re-considered the six issues which emerged from my memory stories and interpretive poetry in relation to my teaching of written communication. To classify items from my teaching portfolio according to each issue raised, I re-read the whole portfolio. I then selected examples that seemed relevant to for each issue. To further narrow it down, I used the colour-coding method where I used coloured highlighters to identify the most appropriate examples in relation to each issue.

Challenges encountered

My enormous challenge in doing this self-study research was the "work to rule" called by the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU). This was a national mandate "to go slow" when working by all teachers who are members of this union. This disrupted my research as it happened while I was working with my learners to generate data. During this "work to rule" period all SADTU members were expected to be at work for each schooling

day, but not to have any contact time with learners in classrooms. This frustrated me as I was scared to transgress the union mandate by going to class to continue with my planned data generation lessons. This situation continued for almost a whole term of schooling. Hence, planning and rescheduling of some research activities had to take place.

The other main challenge I encountered while conducting my research was the use of journal writing where I recorded my personal feelings and thoughts about teaching and my study as it unfolded. The main problem was finding time to write entries in my journal during my lessons. Sometimes I would use every minute of the whole period for teaching and marking. Thus, I ended up not getting any time for my journal. Similarly, sometimes I also ended up not giving my learners the opportunity to document their thoughts and feelings about lessons in their individual journals. However, I overcame this challenge by writing in my journal in the staff room after I had taught each lesson. In the staff room I would find a quiet space where I would sit down and reflect back on what had transpired in the classroom. As for learners' journal writing, I started offered them a chance to write their journal entries at the beginning of every period. This means that they reflected on what they had learned from the previous lesson and stated how they felt before the lesson commenced. All these valuable suggestions for journaling were offered by my critical friends during group meetings.

Ethical issues

Samaras (2011) highlights the importance of the acknowledgement by the teacher researcher of rights, privacy and confidentiality of the participants that are taking part in the self-study research. This means that all people involved in this study must be protected and should be informed of their rights. They should also be advised that any information given for the study will be treated with strictest confidentiality. Because my study is a self-study, I am the main research participant who also intends to improve his teaching. Therefore, I wrote an application requesting the Provincial Department of Education (KwaZulu-Natal) to grant me the permission to continue to conduct the proposed study. I also forwarded an application for ethical clearance for the proposed study the University of KwaZulu-Natal. I then wrote a letter, together with a consent form, giving the details of the proposed study to the principal of my school.

To seek informed consent from my participants, I first wrote consent letters for parents to sign on behalf of their children so that their school work could be used in the study (see

Appendix A). I stated that it was not compulsory for their children to take part in the study and that they could withdraw at any point of the study and that this would not jeopardise them in any schooling achievements. I also mentioned that the study was about enhancement of my teaching and there would not be any personal gain for participants. Additionally, I organised a meeting with parents where I met them to explain in their home language (isiZulu) to ensure that they understood what the study entailed. Some parents asked questions such as: "Is the content of the study relevant to what is prescribed by the Department of Basic Education?" Others asked if their children would be asked to add extra hours over and about normal school hours. I explained to them that all activities were in line with prescribed work for the grade, and that no extra hours were to be added to their contact time. However, I made them aware that there were some activities that were to be done at home such as journal entries and some creative writing. Some parents signed the consent letters in the meeting, but some took them home in order to have more time to consult and think about it and then returned them with their children.

Secondly, I asked my critical friends to sign consent letters to give permission for the use of their comments/discussion during our meetings (see Appendix B). All consent forms have been kept safely in my file throughout the study.

In ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, I have not revealed participants' names and I have not shown their faces. Pseudonyms have been used throughout the study to maintain confidentiality of all participants as they were promised before the study commenced. My other ethical concern was that I might not get desired outcomes because I was working with learners over whom I have power. Similarly, Masinga (2009) asserts that it was a dilemma and difficult to change the situation to having power shared with children and to acknowledge that their views were valuable to the study. Therefore, I asked learners to give feedback on lessons in anonymous journal entries.

Trustworthiness

This is a small scale, in-depth study that has taken place in a particular context. Therefore, I understand that the findings could not be generalised to any other context or across South African schools. However, I believe that the study offers useful insights and highlights some key issues other teachers could consider and draw on when nurturing written communication in their classroom contexts. As Vilakazi (2013) explains, I am utilising a self-study

methodology in order to investigate an educational phenomenon that is relevant to me and to others who are teachers.

As a researcher, I have tried to consider all angles that should warrant my study as valid and trustworthy so that readers would have sound reasons for trusting it. Lahman, Giest, Rodrigues, Graglia, Richard and Schendel (2010) confirm that trustworthiness is enhanced if the piece of writing is moving and touching to the reader. This is commonly achieved by using poetry as research. As Lahman et al. (2010, p. 43) highlight, one participant from a research poetry group explains, "If I read a book and it makes my body so cold no fire can ever warm me, I know that is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry". Likewise, Weber (2008) confirms that art-based methods can enable the reader to feel and see the details of lived experiences so that its quality and form assists to make the representation believable.

I also employed suggestions for validity in self-study made by Feldman (2003) as I have given clear and detailed explanations of how I generated data and provided details of variety of multiple methods used. I have also been explicit with details of the interpretation processes that I have used (Feldman, 2003).

Conclusion

In conclusion, I have discussed in detail my self-study research process. I first gave account of why I chose self-study as a suitable research methodology for the study. Then, I have shared with the reader my professional research context as well as the research participants. I have also given a detailed explanation of my self-study methods and data generation strategies. I have then explained how I made meaning of my lived experiences. In addition, I described challenges encountered during the research process. Finally, I presented ethical issues and trustworthiness of the study.

A key message of this chapter is that using a self-study methodology to seek improvement in practice is not only about learning as the personal experience of an individual; it is also about learning with critical friends who are from different contexts but within the same fraternity. Another important learning is that self-study has helped me to realise that I can capitalise on unpleasing and unimaginative experiences that I encountered during my schooling in order

get develop new and better teaching strategies. It has motivated and empowered me to make some changes personally and improve the way I teach as a practicing classroom teacher.

In following chapter, Chapter Three, I recall lived experiences relating to my own written communication development. To help reminisce about those long forgotten memories, I have used various strategies such as memory drawing and artefact retrieval to engage the reader to relive, imagine and feel the experiences of my learning journey.

CHAPTER THREE:
REMEMBERING COMMUNICATIVE EXPERIENCES

Introduction

The focus of this self-study research is on nurturing a flair for English written communication among isiZulu-speaking learners. The aim is to learn from my past and current experiences related to learning and teaching of written communication in order to improve my practice as a teacher. In the previous chapter, Chapter Two, I retraced the footprints of my self-study research process. I discussed the research methodology and presented my research context and participants. I explained my methods of generating data, as well as my data interpretation. I highlighted the main challenges I encountered and addressed ethical issues and trustworthiness of the study.

In this chapter, Chapter Three, I am responding to my first research question: *"What can I learn from my past experiences about developing a flair for written communication?"* In answering this research question, I remember my past lived experiences of learning about written communication at primary school and at home. I also recall other forms of communicative experiences as a young growing Zulu African boy, such as informal learning of different ways of interacting with others and for expressing my thoughts about my environment. I consider the positive as well as the negative lessons that I learned from these experiences. I also look back at my high school learning experiences as well as post secondary and university learning occurrences. In composing the memory stories that are represented in this chapter, I have chosen important memory artefacts and done memory drawings of my past lived experiences to prompt my inner speech to better understand my experiences and to consider how I can learn from them to enhance my teaching practice. According to Weber and Mitchell (2002), the purpose of critical memory-work is to learn from past experiences in order to improve in the future. Therefore, this means that the aim of recalling and reliving my past experiences related to learning and developing flair for written communication is for me to improve on negative experiences and capitalise on positive experiences for future growth. Significantly, LaBoskey (2004) notes,

> the assumption is that the accuracy of our memories does not matter: whatever shape they take, they influence the construction of our identities, our current thinking, and our future behaviour. Therefore, if we begin to access and interrogate those memories, we can have more control over them and their impact on our teaching. (p. 843)

In my understanding, this means my personal memory-work is crucial for the future improvement of teaching and learning in my educational context.

My primary school days

My early primary years

I started my primary schooling in 1982 at the age of seven. My school was in a rural area of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, in the Valley of a Thousand Hills, which was not far from the nearest town. It was one of those disadvantaged schools without proper buildings and toilets as the apartheid government of that time was not fairly distributing resources to public schools. Black schools were not given resources equal to those given to schools that were for white learners only. The white schools had superior premises, sports fields, libraries, swimming pools, tap water, electricity and so on (Kallaway, 2002). The Valley Trust was a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) that provided community development through overseas donations for projects such as water and sanitation. So, our school was provided with such basic facilities as clean drinking water and proper toilet buildings. Nevertheless, there were more learners than the classrooms could hold and therefore some junior phase classes had to use a nearby church to conduct lessons. However, this was also not a suitable building as the walls were made of zinc and there were no toilets or drinking water. Thus the weather had an impact on our learning and teaching as sometimes it became extremely hot or cold in the church. The church/classroom had a small portable chalkboard and rows of benches instead of proper desks and chairs designed for sitting and writing. Because of the large number of learners, we were divided into two groups, a morning class and afternoon class.

Looking back, I can see that a lack of availability of teaching aids had a significant impact on learning and teaching. There was a shortage of teaching aids and the environment was not conducive for teachers to improvise. Charts fell off the zink walls when the weather was hot. The teacher could not write clearly because of the restricted chalkboard space. A small, shiny, green portable chalkboard without a proper stand was used for lessons (see Figure 3.1). On front of the chalkboard were lines used for writing words and the back was drawn as a grid to write numbers. The stand for the chalkboard was very low and so for the teacher to write she had to bend her back. Due to the number of learners in the class, it was not easy for us to copy the correct spelling from the small, low chalkboard in front of the classroom. Consequently, those who were sitting in the last row of the benches struggled with writing. It

was worse for those who were short-sighted. However, it was not easy for us to tell our teacher about our difficulties as we were expected to show respect at all times and to be submissive.

Figure 3.1. "Improper teaching aids": A memory drawing of a small portable chalkboard used by junior phase teachers

In the second term of the first year in school we were grouped according to our perceived cognitive ability to grasp information. Fortunately, I was with the afternoon group, which was considered to be a group of fast learners. I remember that on one of the hottest days of summer I was sitting in the back row with my friends, copying words from the small portable chalkboard. The heat was intense and it was difficult pay undivided attention to classroom activities. I was not careful when copying words and so I copied them incorrectly. Our teacher made sure that all our work was seen and marked and we were disciplined for writing incorrect work. When I submitted my work, the teacher discovered that almost half of my work was incorrect. She asked me to stand in front of the whole class and read out all those words that were incorrectly spelt. However, I could not read them as when I tried I found that they were tongue twisters. I recall standing there sweating and shaking as it was boiling hot

in the zinc classroom and I was also afraid of the stick. However, the teacher decided not to use corporal punishment that day. Nevertheless, she made me stand there in front of the class for the whole afternoon. I was so embarrassed and I also felt dizzy because of the extreme heat.

In SUB B (now called grade 2), we had a new teacher and new subjects were introduced. We were also introduced to Writing as a subject. For the junior phase, teachers did not specialise, instead they taught all the subjects. As for me, I was stuck with this teacher whom I remember as the cruelest teacher of all that I met in my schooling career. Mrs Linda was in her middle age, good looking and always dressed formally with stockings, pretending to be a good teacher. However, in my view she was not a born teacher. The way she taught showed me that she never really cared for us learners as children of her own. She abused us physically when she was exercising discipline. She used corporal punishment for no good reason. As far as writing is concerned, she would dictate for us to write on our slates and then she would ask us to leave our slates next to us and lie on the benches which were used for both sitting and writing. If it happened that you wrote something incorrect you would feel it when you receive those cruel strokes on your back (see Figure 3.2). Mrs Linda never used hands and buttocks for corporal punishment. I was always scared to be in that class as Mrs Linda would consistently shout at us. I was so frustrated and that resulted in me failing that class. Hence, for me, learning to write in my early school days was not a pleasant experience.
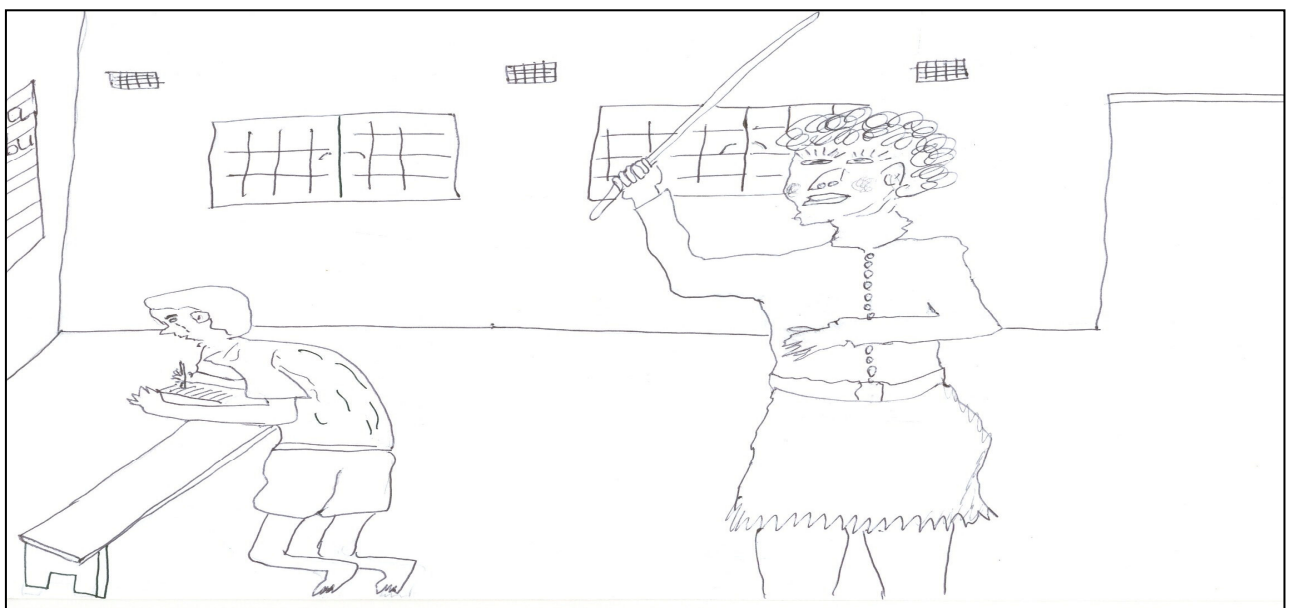
Figure 3.2. "My scary school beginning": A memory drawing of a primary classroom interaction

My parents were not highly educated as they had only completed their junior phase classes. When my parents were children, they were sent to school only to gain the skills to write their names and to write letters as a communication tools. I felt bad that my parents were not well educated but, looking back, I can see how that actually worked for the best to teach me to write meaningful sentences. Because my parents were not used to writing, they turned to me to help them write letters that were posted to our relatives who lived far away and to my brother who worked in Johannesburg at that time or to write short invitations to our neighbours (see Figure 3.3). My parents used to dictate while I wrote the message and they would ask me to read it out to them again and again (see Figure 3.4). It was a very tiring task as I had to read the sentences again and again. If it happened that I made a mistake I was shouted at and asked if I was learning anything at school. However, I really enjoyed doing this task because I was the first one to know what was going to happen in the family. These parents are the ones who sent me to school to receive an education despite their own level of education. They strived and sacrificed all they had in order for me to gain educational exposure and to gain experiences through schooling. For me, this has proved that, out of the worst situation, you can bring out the best.
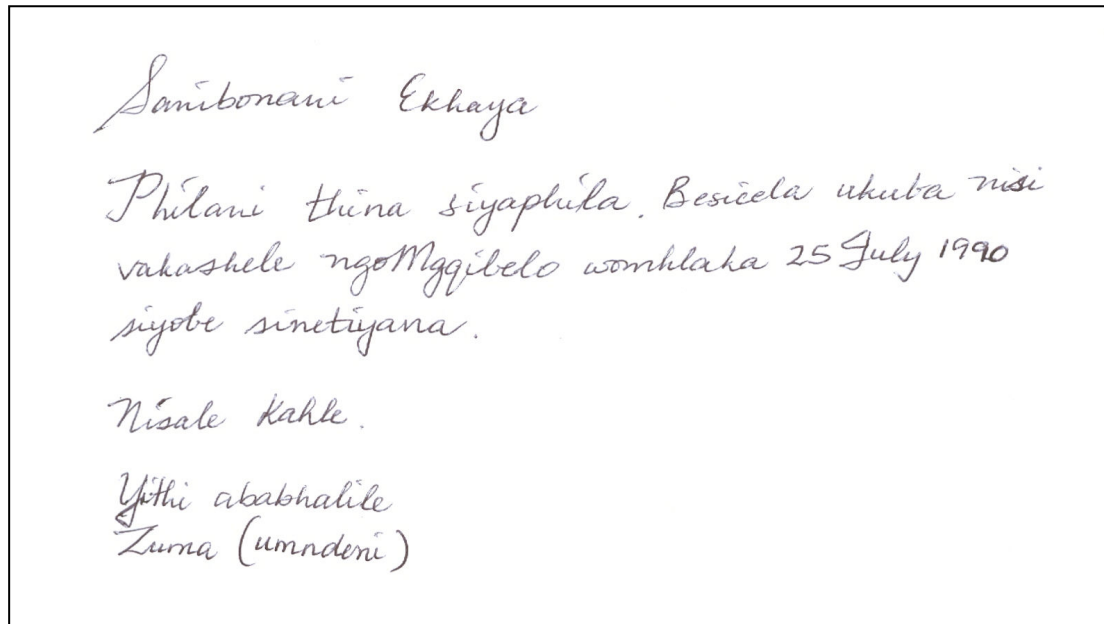
Figure 3.3. A memory drawing of an invitation to neighbour
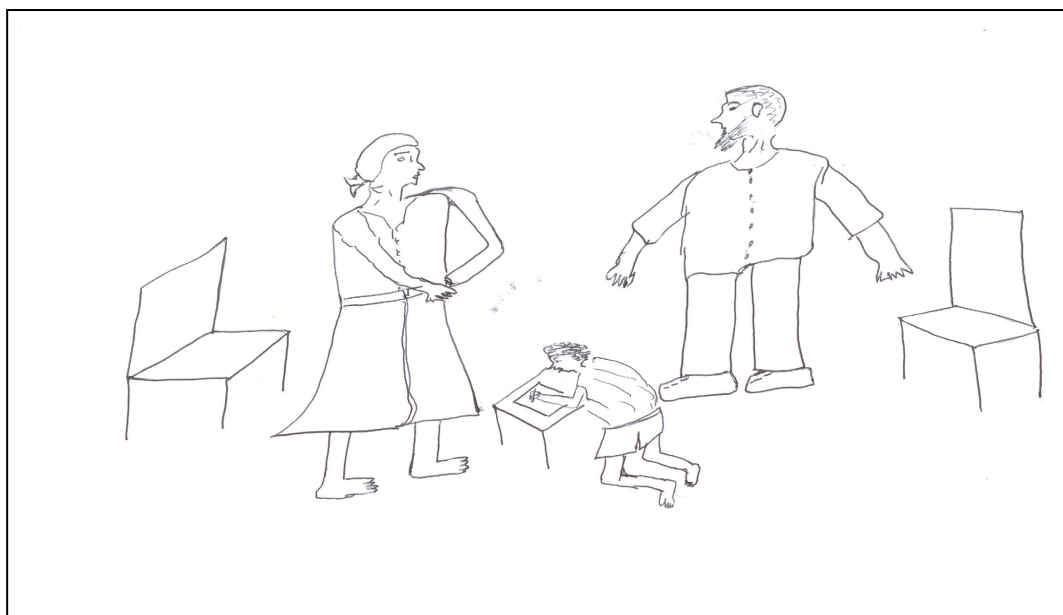
Figure 3.4. "My parents' impact": A memory drawing of me scribing letters for my parents

My primary school was about half a kilometre's walking distance from home, but the church we used as a temporary classroom structure was about kilometre away. As it was in a rural area there were no tarred roads; instead, there was a gravel road to and from school. I had to walk this distance barefoot whatever the season, winter or summer. The playground that was used by the SUB-A and SUB-B classes, both boys and girls, was not big enough to be shared by two classes. The very same area that we played in was also used by local vendors who sold us refreshments during break. This area was very dusty as it was not covered with a well maintained lawn. As a child, I was not worried with the conditions of my environment, but looking back, I can see the negative effect it had on my learning.
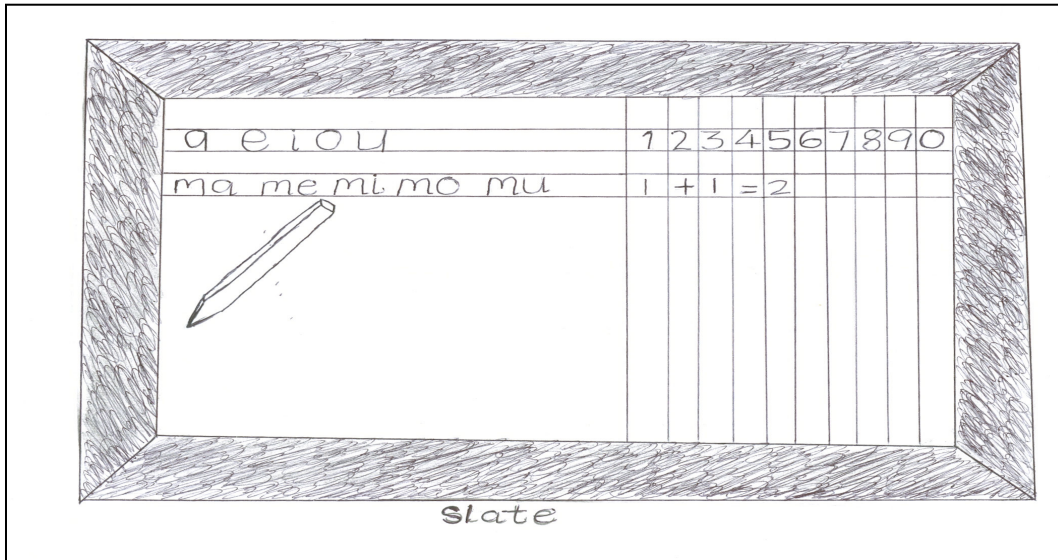
Figure 3.5. "Fragile exercise book": A memory drawing of a slate

During my early primary years, I used a slate to write on. A slate was fragile, four cornered and made of a thin black stone-like substance, with a wooden frame to keep it together if it broke into pieces. It was designed to be written on just like a chalkboard and it was not difficult to wipe with a cloth for corrections. It was essential to hold the slate with dry hands as the writing was easily erased. It was simple to keep the slate in a school bag as it was A3 size. The pen used to write on it was made from the same stone as the slate. It was suitable to write on both smooth sides of the slate. The slate needed to be handled with extra care as it was easily broken. Because of the environment in which I lived in and the age I was, it was difficult to keep this fragile object in good condition.

Our parents were responsible for providing us with slates and so they bought them for us. I now understand that for my parents who were unemployed and struggling to make ends meet, it was difficult and maddening for them if we asked for new slates. I remember that, one day, I was running on my way home from school and it happened that I fell over. As I was trying to find my balance with both hands, I forgot that I had something fragile in my bag. I heard a loud bang, but never thought that it could be my slate. As I was dusting myself off, I heard a sound from pieces of my slate and I looked inside my bag and there were the broken pieces. My heart beat faster and I started to shiver. I was scared and frustrated as I knew what was going to happen when I got home and at school the following day. As I was about to get home, I decided to start crying out loud so that my parents would think I had injured myself, but that did not work. I explained what had really happened, but I was given a harsh beating

as a punishment. Even at school, I was severely punished as I could not write enough work on the bigger piece of broken slate that I was able to save. I used that broken piece of slate for two weeks before my father bought me a new slate. This made me feel embarrassed as children were laughing at me and it made me acutely aware of my home financial status. Now I can see that this gave me a better understanding of my home background. But, as time went by, it did really not matter as I became used to it.

An outdoor school

Growing up as an African boy in a rural area where Zulu culture was dominant was full of challenges and expectations from peers and from elders of the community. The community was close knit as we knew everyone in our neighbourhood. Elders of that time believed that it takes a village to raise a child. In IsiZulu, this is expressed as: *Umuntu ophilileyo wakhiwa yisizwe esiphilileyo*. We were taught that every elderly person you met was your parent and had as much right as your biological parent to discipline you if you were caught behaving in an unacceptable way. The observation of protocols for the community leadership, for example the chief and *iNduna* (village leaders appointed by the chief) were of utmost importance, especially when it came to social gatherings, as these were expected to be reported to the authorities well in advance. Particular values were emphasised and passed on from generation to generation through teaching of a philosophy of respect and humanity (known as *Ubuntu*). We were brought up in a manner that also inculcated traditional values of the Zulu culture with respect to gender identity; there were cultural activities that were gender orientated as boys were being prepared to grow up into manhood and girls were prepared to become women.

Figure 3.6. "A school in the veld": A memory drawing of myself taking part in cowherding

One crucial cultural activity that I had to engage in as a growing young boy was to do cow herding (*ukwalusa*) (see Figure 3.5). It was considered important by most elders, especially male parents, to have their sons taking part on this "outdoor school" because it was where boys taught one another many skills that were supposed to prepare them to be strong men who understood and valued their culture. Even if your parents did not own any cows, you were expected to take part and to accompany neighbourhood boys. However, if you did not take part, you were considered a mother's boy *(umnqolo)* and it was believed that you would not grow to be a real man.

I consider cow herding as an informal school because I had to leave home to herd cows in the morning and would come back late in the afternoon during school holidays and on weekends. (During school days we only went to herd cows in the afternoon. I never missed formal schooling because of cow herding.) When we got to the *veld* (pastures), we met boys from

other villages bringing their cows for grazing and later we took the cows to a nearby river to drink water. While cows grazed, we had time to learn "boys' stuff". The first basic lesson was to learn to communicate with the cattle. I was taught how to shape my mouth if I needed to whistle to communicate with cows as they sometimes disappeared while we were busy. I would also whistle as a sign of warning if the cows were going off to the mealie (maize) field. Cows were named according to the choice of the owner. Each cow's name had a history behind it. Some were named after food for example, *sosishi* (sausage) or after kitchen utensils, *thispuni, mfoloko* (teaspoon, fork) or after places where they were bought from or where the owner worked, for example, *mkhomazi, ntransvali* (Mkomaas,Transvaal).

To provoke the cows, especially the bulls, to become involved in a fight we sung praise songs in a skillful way to evoke the feeling of uncontrollable impulse for a fight. As Molefe (1991) explains, "Praises are chanted to encourage the bulls to fight gallantly" (p. 21). These cows knew whether songs were sung by their herders not. If songs were sung by strangers they would just ignore them. The praise songs were sung again and again. The praise songs repeated the name of the bull several times because most of the time the praises emerged from its name. I remember that at home we had one bull named after a kitchen utensil basket (*Bhaskidi).* That was a bull we were proud of as it was good at fighting. This bull had so much strength and power to fight. It showed resilience in many encounters. Bhaskidi's praises were: *Bhaskidi welala!Bhaskidi welala! Uyangene makethe! Bhaski, Bhaskidi, Bhaskidi!*

I recall how, even if a bull was busy grazing, when we sang the praise song it would just start to dig the ground with its horns and make a growling sound, signalling its readiness for a fight. If two herders sung their praise songs concurrently that meant that those two bulls would be involved in the fight because they would recognise their names in the praises. The two bulls would fight until one would run away, meaning it was defeated by the other. When my bull was involved in a fight I felt anxious and I crossed thumbs for good luck because I hoped for a win on every match.

As the pastures were where we spent many of our days, we also learned how to entertain ourselves by designing different musical instruments such as guitars made from five litre oil tins with a few fishing strings added. Music was another creative form of communication that I learned. When playing the guitar, we composed lyrics that came from within our selves to

make songs. These songs varied from happy to sad songs depending on an individual's mood at the time of composition. We used music to express our inner thoughts and to communicate with the environment surrounding us. Sometimes we made up songs to praise our cattle or to relate one specific event that had occurred while we were herding cows. The kind of music would mostly be traditional music where others would chant, dance and whistle to the beat of the guitar. Soul songs were also composed where the singer would sometimes express his feelings about certain things that he appreciated or sing about an event he had experienced in real life. Cowherding is where many of the well-known Zulu traditional singers for example, Phuzekhemisi, Mqabulasheshe and Mfaz'omnyama, began to nurture and to notice their talents. However, the problem with our musical performances was that we lacked an audience as we never had opportunities for the whole village to come and enjoy the music.

To alleviate hunger while cowherding, we also learned to provide something to eat for the day. We made special tools to hunt for animals such as birds and rabbits in the surrounding area. We collected wood to make fire to cook the meat. Or we set alight an ant hill which worked as an oven and we also used it as a heater in the cold weather.

We swam to cool down during hot days. Nevertheless, this it was very unsafe because we were not sure of the water depth in the dams and rivers we used and there could be dangerous animals such as crocodiles. However, we enjoyed swimming. Anyone with a little swimming experience was a coach. I remember how I nearly drowned when someone pushed me into the centre of a deep dam although I had not yet learned to swim. When I was in the water I could not keep my head above the water level as I was in the deep end. Fortunately, the other boys quickly recognised that I was struggling and some came to assist me and I survived. I was so frightened and never mentioned that dreadful event at home and made a promise to myself that I would never try swimming again without adult supervision. It was a scary experience.

My higher primary schooling

My higher primary classes were offered in the very same school as my early primary schooling because it was in a combined school. The difference was that we were now learning in proper building structures as we were then considered as the seniors in the school. Looking back, I can see that the classrooms were more conducive to learning and teaching because they were cool in summer and warm in winter as a result of their structure.

Teachers taught all the subjects in one class. I now realise that it was boring because I had to sit with one teacher for the whole year, no matter how ineffective he/she was in teaching certain subjects. All teachers were expected to be expects in all subjects, which is challenging. I can still remember very well some of the things I learned by heart, for example, the highest multiplication table of 9 which we recited every morning, some Bible verses for religious purposes and some poems, such as *"Luph' ulwandle"* (Where is the sea?).

The style of language teaching promoted rote learning. For example, we were expected to read and memorise poems. Assessment was based on how excellent we were in reciting the exact words of the poet. I do not remember any lessons which demanded our creative thinking or writing. Every morning, before the teacher came into the class, we were expected to recite all the poems we knew. The emphasis was not on creative writing but rather was on factual recall. The only essay I remember writing was on the topic of "my school" because it was written for us by the teacher on the chalkboard and we had to learn it by heart and write it back to her during the examination. We were not given the opportunity to choose topics that we wished to write about. I recall that it was such a boring activity to write a composition if you were not good at memorising words. The essay topics were not relevant to what we knew and experienced in our context at that particular time; instead, they were imposed on us by the teacher.

My high school experiences

I began my high schooling in 1991. During this time, political violence was at its peak. People were fighting one another due to political intolerance. Some political parties were fighting for liberation from the oppressors of that time (the apartheid government) and so there were so many massacres of innocent individuals. Because of the violence we were faced with many obstacles. For example, I remember that on certain days there were meetings where all comrades for a particular political party met to discuss and to discipline those who did not comply with their party policies. Because they had warned us that who were not taking part would be punished, my parents decided to move us to our relatives' homes. We children had to leave our homes on certain days, especially on weekends, to hide in safe places of relatives. So, we would return home on Sunday afternoons or Monday mornings without our homework done. Leaving home made me feel very unsafe as we were not under

our parents' protection and supervision. We were also not certain about our parents' safety at home and that resulted in us feeling uneasy.

We had to walk about five kilometres every day to the high school. I was lucky enough to be accepted into one of the few best high schools in the area, which was a comprehensive high school. It was not a big school and so the admissions process was strict as the number of spaces was limited. It was a school with a good reputation for matriculation (final year) results. It was the only high school that offered commerce, general and technical streams to learners in the area. It was well equipped with necessary resources and well-funded by the KwaZulu Government that was in power at that time. Because of that, it had tight security.

The school went from standard six up to standard ten (now called grade 8 to 12). It was named after a local *induna* (the right hand man of a chief), who donated a piece of land for the school to be built. There were about 15 classrooms, excluding workshops and a science room, but there was no library. The teaching staff comprised a mix of whites and blacks, which was unusual in my area as I think that in that era white people were scared to go to the areas of black people. The learners were all blacks. Discipline was instilled in learners by frequent use of corporal punishment. There were proper flushing toilets and electricity in all classrooms. My school had no sports grounds. Seemingly, the principal was not a sports person. He had no interest in developing learners' physiques but only their intellectual ability and so it was study, study all the time. Our school was referred to as a "university" because of the 100% pass rate every year.

I was so excited to be at high school, yet there were feelings of uncertainty as I was not sure what to expect. I was also faced a dilemma of not knowing which stream to choose. We had a choice to take subjects that were career orientated. There were commerce, technical, science and general subjects to choose from. The transition from primary to high school standard was also a concern for me. One of the challenges was handwriting because I was used to cursive writing from primary school and then had to adapt to printing in high school (see Figure 3.6).

09 May 1987

The Age of European Exploration

The time in history when Europeans began to explore other parts of the world is called the 'Age of European Exploration.' This was in the 15ᵗʰ and 16ᵗʰ centuries. Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch and British ships left the shores of Europe on long voyages to explore the seas and the continents they knew very little about. The map on page 120 shows where Portugal, Spain, Holland and British are.

1. THE VOC and the CAPE
During the 16th century, European ships started to sail around the Cape on their way to trade. The voyage was long, and the Cape was about half way. The ships would stop at the Cape and get fresh water for their ships. They also traded with the Khoikhoi and San they met there.

The Dutch ships were controlled by a company called the Dutch East India Company (DEIC). (We call it the VOC, for its Dutch name.) The VOC set up a permanent settlement in the Cape where fruit and vegetables could be grown and animals kept for the ships to take with them as food. They also wanted a hospital for sick sailors. In 1652 they started a settlement of 90 people in the Cape under Jan van Riebeeck.

Figure 3.7. "From cursive to printing": A memory drawing of primary and high school hand writing

On the first day of high school, as an introduction activity, we were asked to write a paragraph explaining who we were and our likes and dislikes. When I had completed the task, it was all written in cursive style. When we showed the teacher, she then explained how

we should write using printing. She even wrote on the chalkboard to show us. It was difficult to use this new style of handwriting. I had to learn fast because my peers were ahead of me and it was essential to conform to the school norm of printed hand writing. However, with the assistance of my peers I quickly learned as we assessed each other's hand writing. I remember that girls were doing especially well where hand writing was concerned. Some boys were struggling like me and so, to make a good impression, boys tended to ask girls to write their names on the cover pages of their exercise books.

Another new experience was when we were taken to a room called the typing room. The room was full of single desks with chairs and on each desk was a machine. It was my first time to sit in front of a typewriter. Before that, a typewriter was something I had only seen on television. I was so excited when the teacher showed us how the typewriter worked. This time I was not going to use a pen to write, but rather to use my fingers to press the letters I needed. The first thing we were instructed to do was to type our names and surnames. It was a self-fulfilling experience to have my name written with that machine (see Figure 3.7). I kept that piece of paper and showed my parents at home with confidence that it was my work.
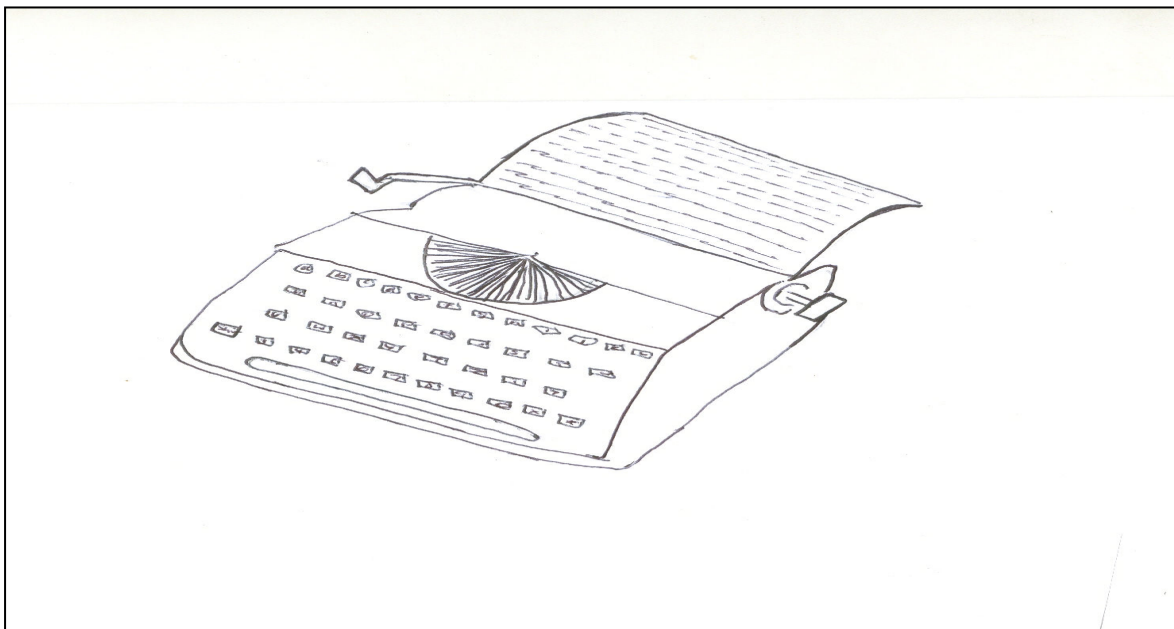

Figure 3.8. "Un-electrified noisy typing machine": A memory drawing of a manual type writer

High school cultural activities

Despite being in a "university high school" where intellectual learning was more prioritised than developing learners' talents in extra-mural activities, we were given a chance to take part in school cultural activities which were held annually. It was the only time where we were given an opportunity to show our showcase our talents. All the local high schools joined together to compete in activities such as Zulu dance (*indlamu and ingoma*), poetry and traditional music such as acapello (*isicathamiya*), wedding songs *(umshado)* and gospel singing. Our strict school principal was keen for the school to take part in such competitions. That made me wonder about what his favourite extra mural activity during his schooling days had been because he never bothered with sports. It took so much time and dedication to practice and prepare items to be rendered at these events. Teachers and learners had to sacrifice a great deal in terms of adding extra hours after school hours and sometime on weekends.

In preparation for these cultural activities, teachers gave us a chance to be creative and come up with originally composed songs and poems. We were given themes to work with, such as HIV/AIDS. The whole school was given a chance to compose these items and submit them so that teachers could select the best. Even if your song or poem was selected as the best, teachers would still have to help the writer to meet the criteria and requirements for the competition. Teachers had also to find the appropriate person to perform the poem or song on stage if the writer was not able to.

I remember that one year when we were asked to write poetry and songs, I decided to give it a try by writing a poem about HIV/AIDS. In writing the poem, I used my limited knowledge and I did not ask anyone for assistance as I wanted it to be my original work and also did not want anyone to steal my ideas. We were writing a once off piece. The teachers expected us to write our best at our first attempt. It was delightful and proud moment for the school to be represented by your work if it was chosen. You were respected and praised by teachers and learners. That is what motivated me to enter.

On the afternoon of the announcement of chosen items we were gathered in the school hall, which was fully packed with learners and teachers. Later, the cultural committee, which was assigned to evaluate items, arrived. Before giving the results they motivated us and encouraged us to never give up on creative writing as it could be a career for some of us.

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They briefed us on what they were looking for when selecting the best poems and songs. It was a nerve-wracking moment as I was not sure of what to expect. My heart beat faster. Finally, the announcer came to my category. It was unfortunate and disappointing to find that it was not my poem that had caught the adjudicator's attention. When I followed up, I found out that my poem was more of a praise song whereas they were expecting the opposite. Looking back as a teacher, I now realise that although we were encouraged to take part in creative writing, it was not fully nurtured and developed in a structured programme or through curriculum activities.

My teacher training college experiences

Transformation in my level of education came when I received a letter confirming my acceptance at a teacher training college in the mid 1990's. As I stated before, my home background was very disadvantaged. Thus, to move from a rural area and to adapt to a new urban environment was a challenge. The college was in the township of a black community located in the Pietermaritzburg region. The township had just been through the political violence of the 1990's. However, the college was a well-resourced institution with tight security which had previously belonged to the Department of Education and Training (DET) during the apartheid era. The DET was a system of education for blacks that was designed by apartheid government of the National Party to segregate people based on race and therefore that resulted in inadequate distribution of resources to black and Indian institutions as compared to white institutions (Kallaway, 2002).

Although the college was for black students, it was far superior compared to the rural schools where I came from. It was well equipped with modern technological facilities such as micro teaching rooms where we were videotaped practising teaching with fellow students. It also had the technical stream to train teachers for technical and comprehensive high schools. The college trained teachers for junior, senior primary and secondary teachers' diplomas. Most of the lecturers, including the rector, were whites. The college was considered a top quality producer of competent teachers in the midlands region because all lecturers were known to be dedicated to their work and the medium of instruction was English. This was considered to be more desirable because people thought that if you were taught by English speaking people you were more likely to be fluent in speaking English and would thus make a good teacher.

College life was very exciting as there were many facilities for sports and a range of extra mural activities to choose from and participate in. I decided to take part in choral music as I believed it was a kind of music for people who were disciplined and behaved well as gentleman and ladies. Music was where I de-stressed from the tiring work of the college and I forgot all my worries. It was satisfying to be part of a team that entertained for the college functions such as graduations, memorial services and so on. I also had a love for the sport of dance. I joined the ballroom and Latin American dance society. This is where I enjoyed myself. I did not join the society for competition purposes, but it was for my own satisfaction and for fitness purposes.

Learning at the college equipped us with subject content knowledge as well as teaching methodologies. Didactics and content classes were separately conducted by different lecturers. In language teaching classes, we were taught how to teach creative writing but the emphasis was not on how to develop learners' writing gradually. Creative writing was considered to be a once off thing rather than a process. What was important was the end result of compositions and essays that were to be awarded marks using a rubric to assess that piece of writing. Our own experiences of creative writing at school had created a perception in us as student teachers that it was a boring task that needed to be done because it was part of what we were expected to teach at schools. Thus, learning to teach creative writing was part of the curriculum at the college, but was not given much attention. Due to the fact that I was training to teach higher grades classes, it was expected that the learners I would teach would have already learned how to read and write in the junior phase (grade 1-3). That meant that I was not taught how to improve learners' written communication. Thus, we students had a perception that teaching writing was only for junior phase teachers. We thought that if learners were not able to write that meant that junior phase teachers would have failed to fulfil their duty.

Because at high school we had only used manual typewriters, it was at college where I first had a chance to sit in front of a computer. Computers was not my major subject, but it was an elective subject. For me, it was a dream come true to have first hand experience of sitting and using that machine (see Figure 3.10). I remember that Mrs Wens was a competent lecturer who introduced us to the course and skilfully scaffolded us to upper levels. At first, it was a frightening yet exciting experience because it was something that we had only heard of at

high school, but we had never had a chance to touch a computer. It was quite a fulfilling experience when I had my work printed on paper.

I wished everyone back at home could see how advanced I was. We used computers to type some of our work for modules and also for personal use such as writing letters to communicate with friends and relatives back home. However, the culture of writing letters did not last for long as cellular telephones (cell phones) began playing a significant role as a communication tool. Cell phones were designed for mobile connection as opposed to landline telephones that were previously solely for home use only. Some privileged students started to show off with this new modern gadget. This started to put pressure on most other students and our perceptions started to change as we then considered the cell phone as a necessity, not a luxury. In my view, this also had negative implications for the development of our written communication as we students were more interested in cellular phones as a form of communication. I remember when I first received my first cell phone which was given to me as a gift by a relative (see Figure 3.8). I received it during the summer holidays. I was now over the moon with excitement as I was going to be the part of the conversation with other students during college vacations. It was a large heavyweight phone with an aerial for better connection. It was almost the full size of a trouser pocket. Cell phones were mainly used for talking at that time and for text messages because they had few other functions.
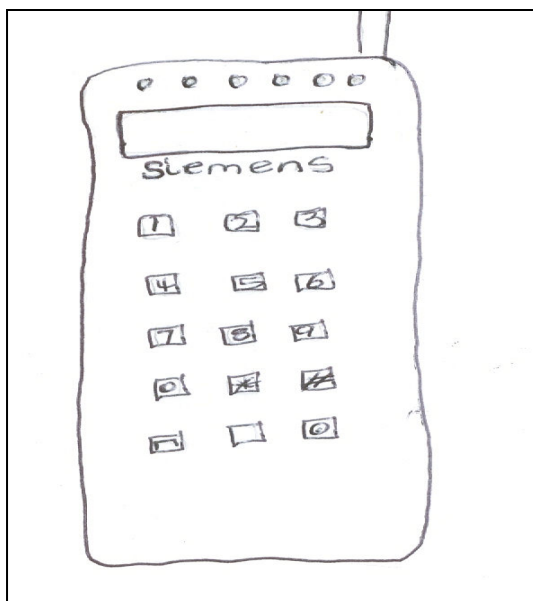

Figure 3.9. "A communication tool which was heavy with a long aerial for signal reception": A memory drawing of my first cell phone

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My early school teaching experiences

When I got my first teaching post I was given a work load that included English language as a subject. That meant that I had to teach creative writing to my learners as part of the prescribed content. I taught it using the same approach that I had learned at the college and in the same way that I was taught as a learner during my schooling years. I think that I had a negative attitude towards teaching innovative creative writing because I then would have had to mark all kinds of stories. Just as my former teachers had done, I used to give learners examples of compositions that they needed to read and learn by heart. During exams, I would let them choose a topic from those ones we had done together in class and then ask them to write about it. This made my work much easier for marking. When writing comments on learners' scripts, my aim was to show how they should have written certain ideas and some errors of incorrect spelling, punctuation and so on, but not to develop their writing in the process for improvement. Awarding marks was more important to me than involving and giving learners a chance to write creatively at their own pace. I did not allow them to make mistakes and to submit several drafts to me before scoring their writing.

My university learning

It was in 2007 when I decided to further my studies at university by registering for an Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) diploma, which was the requirement for acceptance into an honours degree programme. During that period of two years I was a school teacher and studied part-time. I did this of my own will and made sure that it never disturbed contact time for classroom learning and teaching. The institution I chose was a well-recognised university with a good reputation for producing competent professionals. It was in a town about 30 minutes' drive from the school where I work. Classes were conducted during week days from 15h30 to 18h00 in the evening. I noticed that university learning was quite different from college learning. College learning was more practical. By contrast, university was more theoretically orientated, where you had to explain things for better understanding. When I completed my ACE, I then decided to use it as a ticket to enter into the honours programme in the same university.

I decided to pursue my studies at the honours level so that I could learn to do research and also for my personal satisfaction. There were quite a number of English medium modules which were compulsory to take, together with a mini research project. One module was specially designed to equip students with skills for writing academic essays. The module was

called Understanding Academic Literacy. It was supposed to prepare us to be able to understand academic writing and to be able to apply this when writing our essays as required in our programme. All lecturers for this module were first language English speakers. The reason why I valued this module was because at college we were not taught in much detail about how to write an academic essay.

At the beginning of the first semester of the honours programme we were given tasks in our tutorial groups to do in preparation for our first assignment in Academic Literacy. We then brainstormed ideas about the topic and started to do mind maps. I wrote my assignment using the mind map and submitted it. We were in our tutorial class when our results came back. I was very shocked and surprised to find that I had failed dismally as I got less than 40%. The reason for my disappointment was that it was my first time to get such low marks; even at college I had never achieved such low marks. I was so disappointed that I did not show it to my fellow study group members (who were my critical friends). The module lecturer gave me a second chance to rewrite the very same essay topic. That time I was confident that I would pass. However, when I went to check my result in the lecturer's office, she showed me that I had again got less than 40%. I felt so confused and frustrated by this that I showed my dissatisfaction by denying my results. I even asked the lecturer to give my essay to someone else for remarking. She agreed with me. But, when the essay came back for the third time, I was still below 40%. I then requested another chance to try again with a different topic. This time I decided to show my critical friends as this was worrying me. One of my peers suggested that I get help from someone more advanced. This time I decided to get help from a Master's student. She looked at my assignments and confirmed that both were not meeting the standard for academic writing. My introductory paragraphs were not guiding the reader and there were no thesis statements at the beginning. The Master's student explained how an essay should be structured. I then wrote with her tips and her guidance. I managed to get a pass mark, just above 50%. From there onwards I have never had such a bad experience and that has motivated me to work harder. Since I took that module on Understanding Academic Literacy my academic writing skills have developed. It has been a difficult journey, but with assistance from lecturers and critical friends I have learned to write structured academic essays, with a well formulated thesis statement introduction, followed by my arguments and scholarly conversations to substantiate my points. Additionally, I have learned that the conclusion has to highlight all the key points raised and offer the recommendations.

I was not aware of this approach to writing during my entire schooling experience. The honours programme taught me to be a teacher that gives learners a chance to write several drafts before they submit a final product of their writing. It has further assisted me to be a teacher who gives learners constant feedback when they are writing. I have learned that writing is a process where you need to be nurtured and monitored by an enlightened individual. Having a chance to make the corrections using feedback from the teacher gives you courage to be involved in the process of writing. It allows you to see development in the skills gained rather than the end result of marks. As a teacher, I have learned to teach my learners the way I was taught in some modules that I did at honours level because it worked for me. For example, Figure 3.9 and Figure 3.10 show two drafts of an assignment with handwritten feedback from my lecturer and a critical friend. In the second draft, there were alterations because of the feedback on the first draft.
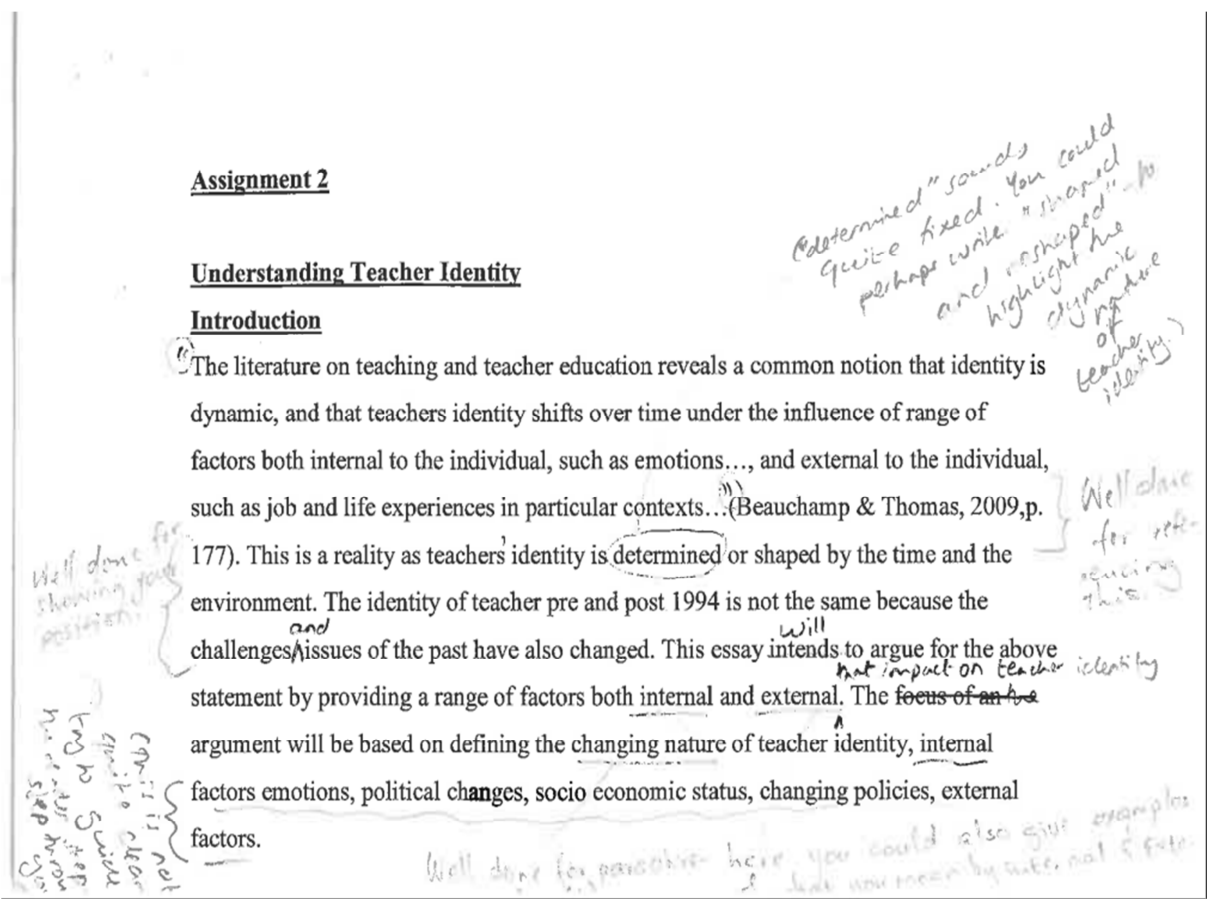
Figure 3.10: A first draft of an assignment written for the Understanding Teacher Identity module

Figure 3.10 is a copy of a first draft of assignment written for the Understanding Teacher Identity module. The handwriting shows the lecturer's and critical friends' comments for essay improvement.

Assignment 2

Understanding Teacher Identity

Introduction

"The literature on teaching and teacher education reveals a common notion that identity is dynamic, and that teachers identity shifts over time under the influence of range of factors both internal to the individual, such as emotions…, and external to the individual, such as job and life experiences in particular contexts…"(Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009,p. 177). This is a reality as teachers' identity is shaped and reshaped by the time and the environment. The identity of teacher pre and post 1994 is not the same because the challenges/ issues of the past have also changed. This essay will argue for the above statement by providing a range of factors both internal and external factors that impact on teacher identity. These factors could be things that come from within an individual or from an outside of the individuals' experiences. The argument will be based on defining the changing nature of teacher identity. Secondly argue with reference to the internal factors that have major impact such as religion, teachers' emotions and self inquiry. Lastly argue with external factors such as context and change of environment, teacher education, socio economic status, political changes.

Figure 3.11. A second, improved draft of my assignment

This is a second, improved draft of my assignment as there are alterations because of the lecturer's and critical friend's comments.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have recalled my experiences of learning about and developing written communication as my well as experiences of learning other modes of communication outside of the formal school environment. These reflections and recollections have helped me to remember how I was taught written communication at school and the effects of my informal education as well.

I undertook this memory-work in order to improve my teaching practice as a classroom based teacher. My intention was to learn from my past experiences in order to develop new strategies for nurturing written communication. The key message highlighted in this chapter is that, through engaging in memory-work, I have become aware of the influences of personal experiences on the way in which I teach and interact with learners during written communication lessons. Reminiscing about and reliving some episodes of my past experiences has offered new meanings and new ideas when recollecting those memories. Composing and reflecting on memory stories can help us teachers to see how we can improve on the way we teach. Memory-work is a powerful tool that can assist those individuals who want to re-build themselves by sharpening their techniques for teaching in an improved way.

I would not have been aware of how influential my past experiences have been on my teaching practice if I had not done this memory-work. Reflecting on my memory stories assisted me to see that I do not want to repeat what my past teachers did to me but instead to do justice in every interaction I have with my learners. Looking back now, I can see how my current teaching was influenced unintentionally by my former teachers and experiences. Therefore, this calls for a change in the future if I want to see the development of flair in written communication among my learners. Furthermore, I have learned that if the remembered experience was not pleasurable, memory-work can help you to heal because you can look at it in a different perspective.

In the following chapter, Chapter Four, I continue to respond to my first research question. I extend on what I have learned from composing my memory stories by distilling significant lived experiences into interpretive poems that are pertinent to my first research question. I also scrutinise my memory stories and interpretive poetry for issues and ideas related to teaching and learning written communication. Furthermore, I examine how I can develop and maintain my strengths and to address my weaknesses in order to develop better working strategies for nurturing written communication.

CHAPTER FOUR:
LEARNING FROM MY MEMORY STORIES OF COMMUNICATIVE EXPERIENCES

Introduction

In this self-study, I aim to learn from my own past and present experiences to discover working strategies for nurturing written communication among primary school learners. In the previous chapter, Chapter Three, I recollected my own learning journey, inside and outside of school, particularly focusing on my development and learning of different modes of communication. My intention was to begin to respond to my first research question. As explained in Chapter Two, I used memory drawing, artefact retrieval and personal narrative writing to generate the memory stories that I represented in Chapter Three.

My main intention in this chapter, Chapter Four, is to continue to respond to my first critical research question: *"What can I learn from my past experiences about developing a flair for written communication?"* I present interpretive poems (Furman, Coyne & Negi, 2008) to explore implications of my memory stories for teaching and learning of written communication. Following Butler-Kisber's (2005) advice, I have taken "words [and ideas] distilled from the texts and [shaped] them in poetic form" (p. 96). Interpretive poetry has helped me to distil the essence of remembered episodes (as portrayed in Chapter Three) into poetic form. According to Furman, Davis, Gallardo and Kulkani (2007), poetry can be seen as a tool that is used to communicate human experience. Using interpretive poetry has assisted me to sift out significant events and emotions embedded in my memory stories. For each significant episode of my experiences related to written communication, I have developed a poem. Each poem also describes the event and important emotions that were felt then. As Langer and Furman (2004) explain, a poem may more precisely convey the strength of emotions that may not be expressed in a longer narrative. Likewise, Furman et al. (2008) state that a poetry writing process could be a valuable instrument that encourages reflection on emotions and feelings that were previously not discovered. Thereafter, I identify and discuss six issues that have emerged my memory stories and interpretive poems that are significant to my learning and teaching of written communication. These are (a) *parental involvement* (b) *emotions and relationships* (c) *cultural practices* (d) *changing technology* (e) *creative expression* (f) *writing as a process*.

Scary interaction

A school in the rural village

Without proper building

Without basic needs

A school without a conducive environment

Introduction to new things

Writing as a subject

Mrs X as a cruel teacher

A teacher who never cared

A teacher who abused us

A teacher who beat us severely

A teacher who shouted at us

Writing skill hindered

Learning hindered

Interaction breakdown

A day never passed without

Being insulted

Always frightened

Always crying

Always frustrated

Wishing to leave school

Writing an unpleasant experience!

Fragile exercise book (slate)

As a child I was never

Worried with the condition of my environment

Yet it had negative and positive

Development to my writing skill

Using a fragile, four cornered object

Made of thin dark, black

Stone-like substance

What was it?

A slate

It was difficult to keep

This object in good condition

Avoiding falling over, sitting over

On a dusty, bumpy playground

Was not easy

Parents who were providers

Teachers who used the slate as a tool

All got frustrated when we broke our slates

All severely punished

Slates taught me to be a fast learner

To handle things carefully

To have a sharp memory

As they were easily erasable

My parents' impact

Both uneducated

Both illiterate

Unable to read and write

But they were excellent

Illiterate teachers

Scribing letters for them
Through dictation
Taught me to be a good listener
In order to write meaningful sentences
Reading and reading to them again
Taught me to pronounce words
The way they said in the dictation

Despite their educational level
They strived and sacrificed
For my educational exposure
From the worst situation they
Brought out the best

A school in the veld
Growing up as a Zulu
African boy
 Living up
And upholding to the norms
And values of a close knit village
Where no one owns a child but a village
 Where love for one another was a priority
With *Ubuntu* (humanity) shown in every interaction

Taking part in cow herding is
Taking part in art institution
Learning to use different modes
For communicating with the environment
Singing songs of praise for bulls
Evoking uncontrollable feelings for a fight
Using nonverbal signs to convey messages

Taking part in cow herding is

Taking part in stage performances

Portrayal of feelings and daily occurrences through

Music compositions and performances

 Designing and making of musical instruments

Spiced the renditions of compositions

Made me an autonomous individual

One who can fight his battles

One who can overcome poverty

One who understand hardships of life

As life is a journey

With ups and down

Great transitions

A school driven by excellence

Maintenance of high standards

Resilient and resisting

External political influences

Culture of teaching and learning in place

Habits are addictive

So as writing

From cursive to printing

What a great challenge?

What a great transition?

But no option

Had to comply with

Writing style

Another great transition

From printing to type writing

A paper written by machine

A piece of paper that gave

Pride, satisfaction, confidence
But it never phased out the old
Traditional way of communicating
Through paper and pen

Art expression
Participating in cultural activities
Showcased our artistic expression
It was through song compositions
Poetry and dance

All demanded artistic expressions
Free flow of ideas and words in poetry
Melody and tuning in song compositions
Perfection and rhythm of moves on dance

Teachers were adjudicators
Choosing best only
Poor items were dumped
Good items were developed
Given praise and recognition
Represented our school in competitions

It was all about competing
Rewards, recognition
Creativity opportunities were not offered

Writing as a process
Thirst for knowledge
To improve my teaching skill
And for self-enrichment
Self-fulfillment
Drove me to university learning

A well-known institution
A reputation for sharpening
Teachers' teaching skills

Understanding academic literacy
An introductory module to academic writing
A well-structured module for scaffolding

Developing academic writing skill
Setting standards for essays to
Qualify for academic stance

What a new experience of
Learning and teaching
Where good teacher-learner
Relationships are developed
Where students are allowed
To make mistakes

A new writing approach where
Students are given opportunity to
Submit draft writings
Where teachers comment
Learners improve by writing corrections

University and lecturers have improved
My teaching
Of writing in my classroom
Have taught me to give constant
Feedback and commend learners
For their efforts
Even if it's not their utmost best

Implications of my memory stories and interpretive poems for teaching and learning written communication

Parental involvement

In this section of the chapter, I re-examine my memory stories (as presented in Chapter Three) and my interpretive poetry to identify and discuss implications that emerge for nurturing a flair for written communication among learners. Firstly, in looking back at my memory stories, I have realised the importance of *parental involvement* in children's education. In my experience with some parents in my school community, it often seems to be assumed to be acceptable for them not to be involved with their children's education. Reasons given by many parents are their low levels of education or their illiteracy and some also give financial reasons. If parents do not give one of these reasons, they say they are busy with household chores or that they come home tired from work. Likewise, Ngwenya (1996) highlights examples of social barriers that can hinder parental involvement as: inadequate education; lack of parent associations; destitution; unfavourable working conditions; joblessness; and parental attitudes. In contrast, my memory stories reveal that parental involvement should not necessarily depend on the level of parents' education because even illiterate parents can facilitate educational activities that might be done at home. Informal activities that might go unnoticed could contribute to parental participation in children's learning. Morrow (1995) argues that all parents, in spite of their educational level, need to be informed about how to play their role and to understand how crucial they are in developing their children's education. Thus, without such family involvement, teaching of literacy is likely to be unsuccessful. Desmond (2010) concurs in her study of the Family Literacy Project that parents or guardians can play an important role as the 'first teachers' of their own children and support children's literacy learning through the use of everyday informal activities such as household chores. She further argues the best opportunities for learning are when parents and children are involved in action together at home (Desmond, 2010). To illustrate, in the following extract from the poem, "My parent's impact" I make note of the informal contribution of my parents:

Both uneducated
Both illiterate
Unable to read and write
But they were excellent

Illiterate teachers

Scribing letters for them
Through dictation
Taught me to be a good listener
In order to write meaningful sentences
Reading and reading to them again
Taught me to pronounce words
The way they said in the dictation

Similarly, Vilakazi (2013) explains in her personal history self-study how her illiterate grandmother used her general knowledge to help her granddaughter to value education and survive against all odds in her educational journey. Likewise, Dlamini (2013) concurs that her mother's low level of education did not stop her mother from inculcating a culture of using books at home. That exposure assisted Dlamini's teachers in developing those small beginnings to great achievements.

In writing this chapter, it has become clear to me that our level of education or socio-economic status as parents should not deter us from supporting our children's academic improvement. This has taught me that teachers need to be assisted by all stakeholders involved in educating children, especially parents or guardians. Parents or guardians should play their role by encouraging their children to maximise their knowledge and skills gained from school. Significantly, my parents did not only assist me with informal literacy activities, they went even further by giving me motivation and encouraging words. As Kajee (2011, p. 435) argues, "by involving parents, family and community members in literacy teaching, and by building existing literacies of the family and community, schools can act as catalysts in a process of the empowerment for children". This means that in my teaching of written communication I am not the only source of knowledge and educational support for learners. I should also consider the significance of the role that can be played by the learners' families and community members.

My memory stories show that having illiterate parents could have impacted negatively on my learning of written communication. But, instead this worked positively. When I reminisce about those years, I can see how neither my parents nor I knew the effect that those writing

exercises such as writing letters on behalf of my parents would have on my educational journey. Although my parents were illiterate, they made sure that I engaged in many writing activities, such as writing invitations, short notes and letters. Likewise, Morrow (1995) points out informal activities that parents can do to assist their children with written communication development such as making shopping lists, writing greeting cards for exceptional events and writing journal entries. For my parents and me, this was a way of practicing what was taught at school and also of getting certain tasks done in the right time. This experience concurs with Desmond's (2010) assertion that activities that contribute to literacy development sometimes "[occur] naturally during the routines of daily living and [help] adults and children" to complete necessary tasks (p. 8). Furthermore, Boggs and Golden's (2009) study on pre-service teachers' literacy histories reveals:

> First, families, including extended families, appear to be critical in supporting their children in the desire to learn read as they begin the early exposure to literacy through reading and writing at home. Families provided unique literacy experiences for their children. Families shared literacy experiences. They read with their children, even if these reading and writing experiences were different from the expected academic reading and writing experiences (p. 221).

This also highlights the potential impact and importance of the whole family in the development of literacy experiences for the children if all family members play an active role. Additionally, Meyiwa, Letsekha and Wiebesiek (2013) reveal in their study conducted in the Eastern Cape that, despite the low level of education of parents, their local indigenous knowledge is relevant in forming a solid foundation for developing context-relevant teaching materials to be used for teaching and learning. This demonstrates the value and the role of having parents and community members actively taking part in children's education as they can provide resources from their local knowledge and understanding. This also shows that it is not only the elite and educated parents that can make a difference and contribute to children's education. Illiterate parents with their limited formal education have vast indigenous knowledge that can be a valuable educational resource.

Dlamini (2013) also points out the importance of parental involvement in children's education as she explains how her illiterate mother became her first teacher. Likewise, Desmond (2010) claims that "the child's first and longest-standing [teachers]" are the parents (p. 8). This means that parents have an important educational role to play and can be actively involved in supporting and monitoring the development of their children's writing skills.

Reflecting back now, I have realised that my illiterate parents were my teachers as they wanted me to practice the writing I was taught at school in real life situations. This is evident in the following stanza from the poem "My parents' impact":

Through dictation
Taught me to be a good listener
In order to write meaningful sentences
Reading and reading it to them again
Taught me to pronounce words
The way they said in the dictation

In looking at my memory stories, it is clear to me that parental involvement can take the form of providing pedagogical care (Dlamini, 2013), as shown in the stanza above, which demonstrates how I was assisted to improve my writing capacity. Pedagogical care means that my parents went theextra mile to nurture and develop my writing capacity with their limited knowledge. In addition, parents can offer pedagogical care by providing children with basic educational needs such as uniforms, stationery and school fees. Dlamini (2013) highlights the tremendous contribution of families giving financial support for children's learning. Similarly, I would have not achieved so much educationally if it was not for my parents who provided school uniforms, stationery, food, and so on. Likewise, Varathaiah (2010) points out that although her father was not earning much, he ensured that she and her siblings never lacked what they needed for school. This is further highlighted in the stanza below from: "My parents' impact"

Despite their educational level
They strived and sacrificed
For my educational exposure
From the worst situation they
Brought out the best

From recalling my past experiences, I have realised how important it is to make time for your children's educational matters. When I was studying at the teacher training college, I learned about the significance and positive effects of involving parents in their children's education. Likewise, Ngwenya (1996) suggests that parental involvement matters should be part of

initial teacher education programmes. In addition, Mncube (2009) suggests that parental involvement can be promoted by making it part of the curriculum for pre-service teachers and with in-service workshops for experienced teachers. When I started teaching, I told myself that I would definitely encourage parents meetings, and try to develop teacher-parent relationships. However, to my surprise, I found some of my learners' parents still thinking that they had no role to play in their children's formal education. This puzzled me because times had changed and I expected that their state of mind and thinking should have evolved over time. But what some parents were saying is that challenges of the 21st century differ from those of the past because of new social realities such as single parenting because of the impact of HIV and Aids, unemployment and a high level of poverty among most communities, in addition to their own levels of education. However, despite all the challenges parents are facing nowadays, I do believe that they should make time to be part of their children's academic lives. Parents who are not formally educated can still support their children with the application of formal theory to informal practice at home and then teachers at school can expand on that in more detail.

I also argue that schools should empower parents with knowledge on how they can involve themselves with their children's education. I believe that parents can involve themselves if teachers invite them to meetings where they are shown how valuable their knowledge is. In a study of parental involvement, Ngwenya (1996) explains how:

> parents found realistic and practical areas where they thought they could be actively involved in the school. Parents identified skills that they thought they could transfer to the pupils, some of which, like *amacansi* (the making of a type of woven grass mats) are a lucrative business in the area. (p.66)

This shows how parents can play their role as vital stakeholders in education by passing on their indigenous knowledge. This also shows the importance of interacting with learners' parents to help them see that the knowledge they share with their children is vital for their academic learning.

I think schools should have programmes on how to involve parents as important partners in education. Mdabe (2005) maintains that school management and school governing bodies must take the initiative in passing the information to parents about educational policies and the roles they can play in their children's education. Furthermore, Mncube (2004) concurs

that there is a need to address the lack of education for parents on the importance of parental involvement. One of the parent participants in Mncube's study commented:

> Some do, like myself I have fought to get things changed, I have been an active participant all the time. Some parents definitely do not play their role to the best of their ability; because they are not in touch with the school, and this is due to the lack of capacity building on how to get involved on school activities and parental involvement. (p. 95)

Another parent governor in Mncube's study said: "Many activities in the school are new to black parents. No attempt has been made to educate black parents on their expected role or to provide accessible explanations to them on how they could be involved in school activities" (p. 96). These comments further demonstrate the need for schools to organise meetings where parents will be empowered with knowledge of how they can play their part in their children's learning.

Emotions and relationships

Emotions

In writing this chapter, I have become aware of the significance of *considering emotions and relationships* when teaching written communication. I have realised that teachers need to create an atmosphere that is conducive for learning and teaching to take place effectively and efficiently. I hope that understanding learners' *emotional needs* will assist me in improving my practice as a teacher because, like Allender and Allender (2006), I do not want to revert to the negative ways of teachers who taught me.

From retracing my past experiences, I have become aware that learning to write can be hindered if learners are not happy and are always experiencing tension in class. I concur with Rantala and Maatta (2012) who assert that "a school is not a desert of emotions" (p. 87). Hence, I have become conscious that a mistake made by some of my former teachers was to ignore learners' feelings during the learning and teaching process. Burke (2002) suggests that teachers can act as catalysts for change by understanding fully the social and emotional aspects of learning in order to help learners to manage their emotions and to develop emotional literacy. According to Masinga (2009), teaching elicits various feelings during the teaching and learning process because it is not just a technical enterprise but is connected to personal experiences. Correspondingly, Ndaleni (2013) points out that meaningful learning processes happen through the consideration of emotions by the teacher. Ndaleni further

suggests that teachers need to devise some strategies to create schools which offer emotionally considerate environments and where learners can share emotions and develop empathy for one another.

Looking back, I can see that when I was at school learners did not have a say in any issues taking place in class because the power and authority was vested in the teacher only and learners were expected to show respect at all times. Suransky-Dekker (1998) explains that this authoritarianism had an effect on the way teaching and learning took place in black schooling in apartheid South Africa. She states that learners were expected to silently assimilate and accept information as it was given. Any interference by learners such as asking questions that could signal that the teacher might be mistaken was considered as a contravention of authority and as impertinence. Hence, learners' emotions had to be swallowed and were never voiced. In my experience, some teachers even abused their power by violating learners' rights to emotional well-being. I allude to this in my memory stories in Chapter Three:

> *The way she taught showed me that she never really cared for us learners as children of her own. She abused us physically when she was exercising discipline. She used corporal punishment for no good reason. As far as writing is concerned, she would dictate for us to write on our slates and then she would ask us to leave our slates next to us and lie on the benches which were used for both sitting and writing. If it happened that you wrote something incorrect you would feel it when you receive those cruel strokes on your back. She never used hands and buttocks for corporal punishment. I was always scared to be in that class as Mrs Linda was consistently shouting at us. I was so frustrated and that resulted in me failing that class. (p. 34)*

Zembylas (2003) notes that emotions play a key role in individuals' educational narratives. He believes that "it is important that teachers identify how their emotions inform, expand or limit possibilities in their teaching, and how these emotions enable them to think and act differently" (p. 232). This means that teachers should be aware of the ways in which their emotional experiences can influence their approach to teaching. Wellington (2010), in his study of students' feelings about writing, demonstrates that while involved in the writing process students tend to experience diverse, strong feelings such as: "pain, pleasure, frustration, enjoyment, angst, annoyance, relief and stress" (p. 136). To me, shows the need

for moral and emotional support for learners who are learning to use writing as a communication tool.

I have also realised that, as a teacher, I should be tactful in finding ways of providing feedback on learners' work because they could be demotivated if they not encouraged to carry on with their writing. Hattie and Timperly (2007) contend that feedback is one of the most vital catalysts in the teaching and learning process and that "feedback is more effective when it produces information on correct rather than incorrect responses and when it builds on changes from previous trails" (p. 85). Furthermore, Zaragoza and Vaughn (1995) report from their study of learners' feedback that teachers should show their belief in their learners' abilities by respecting what they write rather than shouting or inflicting ideas on learners. They highlight the value of acknowledging that learners have an aspiration to learn to write. Moreover, Rodgers (2006) argues that, for feedback to be effective, teacher and learner relationships should involve mutual trust so that the learners will feel confident enough to take action to improve. Overall, this means that teaching and learning of written communication should not be a scary and a frightening process for learners.

Ndaleni (2013) highlights the importance of considering learners' emotions when teaching oral communication because this can support the development of emotional qualities such empathy, which can lead them to develop into sensitive and productive community members. In my view, it is imperative that learners' emotional needs are well taken care of because this forms the foundation on which we build well-adjusted human beings who are also able to express themselves using diverse modes of communication. Allender and Allender (2006) maintain that "teachers who like teaching do make some improvements on how they were taught" (p. 6). This means that when working with learners now I should not continue to be influenced by the methods that were used in the past by my teachers. These teachers did not seem to make our emotional care a priority in their teaching. Through memory-work, I have become aware that teachers need not to depict and emulate negative characteristics of their past teachers in their present teaching.

The need for emotional care is evident in the following stanza of my early schooling experience poem:

A day never passed without

Being insulted
Always frightened
Always crying
Always frustrated
Wishing to leave school
Writing an unpleasant experience!

Thus, I have become conscious of the ways in which some of my teachers used to teach us and I do not want to repeat their teaching styles in my teaching practice because of the negative emotional experiences I encountered. Likewise, Suransky-Dekker (1998) suggests that the initial teacher education curriculum in South Africa "should take those experiences, rooted in apartheid education, as the subject for challenge and change. It should actively counter the risk of students becoming teachers with similar oppressive values and beliefs imbibed from their own teachers during their schooling" (p. 300).

Zembylas (2003) proposes that if teachers want to be fair and professional in their practice, they should not come into the classroom with their emotions from their personal experiences. This means that teachers' personal problems should not influence their actions in class. Looking back, I can see that when my primary school teachers used corporal punishment excessively this might have been instigated by emotions from outside of the classroom. Through recalling my experiences and the influence of my initial teacher education, I do take learners' feelings into consideration during my lesson presentations. I do not shout at learners as I have realised that as a teacher I should create a more positive and conducive learning environment where learners are emotionally free to express themselves without fear, harsh criticism, shouting or labelling. Suransky-Dekker (1998) argues that many teachers in the apartheid era made use of humiliation as a weapon. I do not want to perpetuate this in my classroom

However, after having taught for 12 years I have realised that while I have considered learners' feelings to a certain extent, I have also lacked skill and knowledge of alternatives for using positive disciplinary measures with my learners. In the past, I understood corporal punishment to be an effective means for corrective measures for a persistent wrongdoing in the writing process. I believed in corporal punishment because my teachers used it during my early schooling years. When I meet some of my former teachers they still maintain that we

(their former learners) are successful academically because of their use of the stick. Likewise, Suransky-Dekker's (1998) study reveals a positive attitude of university students towards corporal punishment. As one said: "I was punished and look... I made it to the university!" (p. 291). What has further exacerbated the administering of corporal punishment is support from parents. Morrell (2001) points out that some South African parents believe in corporal punishment as an effective mechanism for correcting wrongdoing at home. Similarly, some parents request that teachers use it at school because they believe that it makes the learners pay attention and respect what the teacher says.

The South African Schools Act no 84 of 1996 clearly specifies that "No person shall administer corporal punishment". Because of my self-study, I have become aware that corporal punishment can hinder the learning process. According to Mkhize (1999), corporal punishment elicits fear in the learner and this has negative consequences. Mkhize further explains that learners acquire knowledge through taking chances, making errors, and trying out innovative ideas. However, as a result of corporal punishment, learners can withdraw and the learning process will be disrupted by fear of school and the teacher. Furthermore, Ishak (2004) maintains that schools should ensure that there is intolerance of behaviours by teachers which inhibit the learning process. I had believed as my past teachers did that using corporal punishment was the easiest way to have all errors correct. I now realise that I was forgetting the aspect of emotions. I had forgotten about the scars that corporal punishment can leave on learners' minds and feelings which time will never erase. Mdabe (2005) suggests that teachers should display a professional work ethic at all times and that school management and school governing bodies should ensure that all parents are informed of all governmental policies that pertain to learners' school environment and welfare. I feel parents need to be educated on the policy of corporal punishment because many still believe and insist that if teachers act *in loco parentis,* they should administer corporal punishment just as the parent do at home (Mkhize, 1999).

In my narrative interpretive poem I make note of this handicap:

A teacher who never cared
A teacher who abused us
A teacher who beat us severely
A teacher who shouted at us

This extract shows how some teachers neglected my emotions during my learning experiences. Teachers and schools should enhance learners' joy of learning so that learners can experience a feeling of accomplishment, during and after the learning process (Rantala and Maatta, 2012). Moreover, Rodgers (2006) points out that the learning process is twofold because it involves the feelings and the intellect of the learners. Likewise, Burke (2002) explains, "a student is not simply a young person assigned to your classroom for the sole purpose of absorbing the lesson at hand" (p.110). If we fail to see each learner as a unique and emotionally sensitive individual, this can have highly negative implications for learners' academic life and teachers' work.

Relationships

Through re-examining my lived educational experiences, I have realised the vital role played by the development of a positive *relationship between a teacher and learner*. I now see how relationships in classrooms form the basic foundation for any learning to take place. For learning to be effective in class, teachers and learners have to be on good terms and one should not show off power over the other. Furthermore, Ndaleni (2013) explains that it is wrong to cause misery either physically or emotionally to a fellow human being if you want to sustain a healthy relationship. This means that for learning to take place and for relationships to develop, the classroom environment must not be threatening. For example, there should not be shouting and harsh punishment and there should be mutual trust and respect on the part of both parties. Learning to write could be hindered if the teacher distances him or herself and exercises excessive authority over the learners. Dobransky and Frymier (2004) point out that teachers are often not keen to get close to the children and they tend to remain the "authority behind the podium" (p. 221).

Looking back, I believe that it was because of these kinds of dynamics in my relationship with my SUB-B teacher I did not progress to the next class. To me, that shows the significance of a positive relationship between the teacher and the learner. Similarly, Rantala and Maatta (2012) argue that the interaction between a learner and teacher in a relaxed atmosphere promotes the growth of learners' emotional stability because learning take place in a relationship with joy. Ndaleni (2013) emphasises the development of a positive relationships which has the element of equality and mutual trust between the learner and teacher, and between the learners themselves. Zaragoza and Vaughn (1995) indicate that the

development of relationships between learners in a learning community can have impressive effects on the learning of written communication because learners see their friends as important resources who can offer useful suggestions about writing.

As a teacher who is a lifelong learner, I first experienced the positive result of a healthy relationship teacher-learner relationship when I was studying for my honour's degree at university level. In this relationship, I felt valued and listened to when we shared our reflections about what we had gained, and about the effectiveness of the lecturer's teaching methods. Similarly, Rodgers (2006) emphasises the need for the development of trusting relationships between teacher and learners for a successful descriptive feedback to take place. This means that in a healthy relationship there should be a two-way feedback from the teacher and to the teacher about how, and where to improve for successful learning to place. To illustrate, I make note of this in the poem "Writing as a process":

What a new experience of
Learning and teaching
Where good teacher-learner
Relationships are developed
Where students are allowed
To make mistakes
A new writing genre where
Students are given opportunity to
Submit draft writings where
Teachers comment and learners
Improve by writing corrections

In recalling my school days, I remember how our struggles with written communication exercises were further exacerbated by the use of 'stick' which hampered the relationship development between teachers and learners. Because we as learners were scared and frightened by the use of corporal punishment, it was not easy for us to use our creative minds freely to write creatively and to communicate our ideas and thoughts on pen and paper. Thus, from this self-study I have developed the intention to improve my practice by developing positive relationships with learners that will enhance and nurture the development of written communication.

As a teacher, I should aim to establish a friendly rapport between the teacher and learner. In this type of relationship, mutual trust and respect is maintained by both parties. Ndaleni (2013) explains that "the feeling of inferiority or superiority complex in terms of academic achievements among learners should be discouraged by teachers" (p. 58). This means that teachers should not condone feelings of being incomplete and not good enough in learners, let alone the use of corporal punishment. Teachers need to know that building healthy learner-teacher relationships acts as a catalyst to fast track the development of learning. Teachers also need to understand that learners require their attention beyond teaching what is prescribed in policy documents because learners benefit from having a humanistic teacher (Allender & Allender, 2006). Humanistic teachers provide for learners' social and emotional wellbeing and that can also enhance the development of positive relationships (Allender & Allender, 2006).

From revisiting my educational experiences as a learner, I have become aware of hardships and the discomfort I came across in learning to write that stemmed from a dysfunctional relationship with my teacher. The relationship I had with my teacher in some episodes of my lived experiences was not healthy because there was nothing that I gained from that teaching and learning process. Instead, it caused pain and hard feelings towards learning and the teacher. Correspondingly, Dlamini (2013) cautions teachers about the lasting impact of the things we say and do to learners. This is evident in my primary schooling experiences as expressed in this stanza of my interpretive poem "Scary interaction":

A teacher who never cared
A teacher who abused us
A teacher who beat us severely
A teacher who shouted at us

By contrast, in my university learning, positive relationships with my lecturers resulted in me acquiring the capacity to write academic essays and to teach the writing process to learners in my class. This is revealed by the following stanzas of the poem "Writing as a process":

What a new experience of
 Learning and teaching

Where students are allowed
To make mistakes

A new writing approach where
Students are given opportunity to
Submit draft writings
Where teachers comment and learners
Learners improve by writing corrections

The value of developing and maintaining a healthy relationship between the teacher and the learner is supported by Klem and Connell (2004) who claim that learners with loving and compassionate interpersonal relationships in school recount feeling more positive towards school and their academic work. Additionally, Dobransky and Frymier (2004) maintain that positive teacher-learner relationships have an impact on affective learning, which makes cognitive learning possible. They further define a positive relationship as an interpersonal relationship where both parties rely on each another to sustain the relationship. Through memory-work, I have learned that it is important to develop positive relationships with my learners because this can help them to can achieve more academically. I believe that learners should be given the opportunity to have a say about their learning. Positive relationships can work as catalysts in the learning process if they are maintained and nurtured.

Cultural practices

Additionally, in retracing my memories, I have become conscious of the importance of considering youth *culture* when teaching written communication. Written communication is learned through language and language is culturally constructed and reconstructed (Kajee, 2011). Moletsane (2011) highlights how an individual's cultural identity is affected by different factors at different moments and in different places. Moreover, Ndaleni (2013) points out that at certain points in time cultural practices can became outdated. Thus, the cultural activities we practiced in my youth might be totally different and irrelevant to the ones that are carried out or practiced by today's youth. To illustrate, Social Media in Learning and Education (SMILE, 2013) clarify how the connotations of the word 'friend' is an illustration of how technology may be shifting language use for young people who meet and connect with friends through social media.

The significance of youth culture for learning has emerged from my memory stories. For example: when we were herding cows as children, we taught one another so many different lessons about being raised as an African boy. Some of these lessons were very useful in life in general. It was believed by members of my community that if you were a boy you should be in involved in this youth cultural practice of cow herding. Moletsane (2011) explains that culture "encompasses in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs… culture is learned, shared, and integral to an individual or group's sense identity" (p. 195). In addition, Mkhize (2004) explains culture as information that is cascaded from one generation to another by members of a specific society or community, through which they to gain a sense identity. Likewise, knowledge that we gained from the youth cowherding culture was passed on from generation to generation. Through my memory-work, I now realise the negative impact it had on me for my former teachers not to use my cultural knowledge as a resource in my learning of written communication. The cultural knowledge and lessons learned from environmental interactions while cowherding were not used by my teachers to contextualise their lessons.

Ndaleni (2013) demonstrates in his self-study research how the cultural practice of story-telling has played a vital role in informing his style of teaching by assisting him in selecting topics that are of genuine interest to learners. Similarly, Meyiwa et al. (2013) argue that it is important to value indigenous knowledge and experience in education. This means that educators can learn a great deal by using local people's indigenous knowledge to inform or to align educational activities. Therefore, in my teaching of written communication, I have decided to encourage my learners to use and build on their cultural practices and knowledge when communicating through writing. For example, I can allow them to write using the texting style they use when they are writing messages on their cell phones. In this way, we will be using their youth culture as an educational resource.

All learners who attend school come with a home background and teachings that are grounded in language and cultural practices. Therefore, the lessons learned from cultural practices at home and at school in teaching of written communication need to inform and complement each other. This means that language and culture together can form a foundation for teachers to build written communication. This also means that learners come to start schooling not as empty vessels but with informal knowledge learned or taught as part

of everyday life. This kind of knowledge is evident in my interpretive poem "School in the veld":

Taking part in cowherding is
Taking part in art institution
Learning to use different modes
For communicating with the environment
Singing songs of praise for bulls
Evoking uncontrollable feelings for a fight
Using nonverbal signs to convey messages

Taking part in cowherding is
Taking part in stage performances
Portrayal of feelings and daily occurrences through
Music compositions and performances
 Designing and making of musical instruments
Spiced the renditions of compositions

Kajee (2011) asserts that learners can expand how they understand literacy by participating in culturally relevant literacy practices. However, this was not the case in my experience of schooling as we were not given opportunities to write about our own lives. I now see that our teachers should have given us a chance to write about issues that were culturally and socially meaningful to us to encourage us to take part in writing activities more willingly. For example, they might have asked us to write about our experiences of cow herding activities rather than writing stories on prescribed topics. Possibly, our written communication would have improved faster because it would have been more relevant to our lives and context. Meyiwa et al. (2013) affirm that using local people's knowledge and experiences can enhance the school curriculum and can create a link between the school and the community. Correspondingly, Conolly et al. (2009) maintain that when learners can identify their own personal and cultural experience in classroom activities, they can learn more successfully and competently. By contrast, the knowledge that I gained from cow herding as a cultural practice was never used to develop my written communication at school. Teachers never gave us a chance to express our thoughts on our cultural practices.

I have learned that teachers have a responsibility to seriously consider and build on the learners' existing knowledge learned through cultural practices when teaching written communication. Learning to communicate through writing makes more sense when it is learned in a cultural and social context (Kajee, 2011). As a result of my memory-work, I have learned that I should allow my learners to choose topics that are relevant to their cultural experiences and immediate contexts.

Changing technologies

As I have re-examined my learning and teaching of written communication, I can see the impact of *technological changes*. I have also realised that teaching and learning support material has an impact on written communication development. This has broadened my understanding as a classroom teacher about the effects of tools and materials used by learners for written communication. When I reminisce about my written communication learning journey, technological changes are evident in my primary and secondary schooling and at tertiary level. The learners we teach are also affected by changes that are taking place outside the classroom context as they are coming from the communities that utilise and interact with many technological developments. Edwards-Groves (2012) illuminates that classroom practices should be in line with contemporary technological practices so that formal education can equip youth "to participate fully in public, community, creative and economic life" (p.102). Furthermore, changing technology has a huge impact on changing language over time (Social Media in Learning & Education [SMILE], 2013). To be able to teach written communication to such learners, teachers need to update their knowledge in order to keep up with modern technology which can make their teaching easier and more enjoyable to the learners (SMILE, 2013). I concur with Dlamini (2013) as she asserts that technology has altered ways of doing things in classrooms and that learners are sometime exposed to these technological developments at a young age. This calls for teachers to be technologically advanced. Similarly, Hall (2003) explains that teaching is a constantly changing process that is affected by a number of social factors, including the use of technology. However, according to Hall (2003), few of these social factors tend to be addressed in initial teacher education programmes. Furthermore Social Media in Learning and Education (SMILE, 2013) suggest that teachers of the 21st century should make use of the developing technology to include social media in their school curricula as it is crucial for them to use it as another kind of a tool to encourage and fascinate learners. SMILE (2013) maintains that social media also

promote collaboration and networking where teachers' professional development and professional learning is taking place for improved teaching and learning.

In my experience, technological changes have had both negative and positive implications for me and for the learners I teach. For example, when I started at lower primary school, using a slate helped me to be more cautious when writing as it sharpened my memorisation skills and it taught me to handle things very carefully and to take responsibility for my possessions. I concur with Vilakazi's (2013) assertion that using a fragile slate taught us the importance of valuing what we have. I had to learn look after my personal learning material (my slate) very carefully. This was also enforced by consequence that I had to endure if I failed to look after the slate. These included punishment at home and embarrassment at school. This is illustrated in the following stanza from my poem "Fragile exercise book" (slate):

Slates taught me to be a fast learner
To handle things carefully
To have a sharp memory
As it was easily erasable

Referring to the use of the slate in nineteenth-century British schooling, Hall (2003) claims:
> The slate is a relatively efficient technology. It is hard wearing, portable and as marks made upon it with another softer piece of slate (usually in the form of a slate pencil) are erasable, is capable of being used over and over again. It is also a relatively cheap technology, slate being found in many locations and being easily split into thin slabs it seems ideally suited to early schooling (p. 5).

Conversely, it seems that the slate was not designed for a rural South African environment. As it was fragile and expensive, it was not suitable for the rural context and the socioeconomic status of learners and parents where I schooled. Correspondingly, Vilakazi (2013) points out that due to poverty she had to use a broken slate with embarrassment. This shows that despite some positive implications, using a slate also had an indirect negative impact on our feelings due to our socioeconomic home backgrounds. This is evident in the following stanzas of my interpretive poem:

It was difficult to keep
This object in good condition

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Avoiding falling over, sitting over
On a dusty, bumpy playground
Was not easy

Parents who were providers
Teachers who used slate as a tool
All got frustrated when we broke our slates
All severely punished

Additionally, in my high school years technological changes were evident. The use of exercise books alleviated unnecessary stress that was caused by using slates. Yet, still at the same level of education, we experienced another technical development, which was the use of typewriters. This is shown in the following extracts from my poem "Great transition":

Another great transition
From printing to type writing
A paper written by machine
A piece of paper that gave
Pride, satisfaction, confidence
But it never phased out the old
Traditional way of communicating
Through paper and pen

Typewriters had a motivational effect on my writing development because at that time we were not exposed to many modern technological devices. Manual typewriters were new to us. It was fascinating to touch the keys because they made such a funny noise when they went to print a letter on the tying paper. The sound made by of those tiny letter wires was even worse when the whole class was typing. It was self-fulfilling to see words written by the machine. What impressed me the most was that it was unusual amongst my peers from other neighbouring schools to have a piece of writing typed in print.

Furthermore, technological changes also emerged in my post secondary education where I had to learn to use a machine called a computer. The module on computers was introduced on our first year at the college. We were being prepared to do basic computing and to be more

knowledgeable in relation to computers. The module also equipped us to face challenging learners in the field: those that are fortunate enough to have and to interact with all kinds of technological devices. Lastly, another new modern development of technology that I encountered at college was the introduction of cellular telephones (cell phones) to communicate. At that time, it was a becoming modern practice to use them. Thupayagale-Tshweneagae, Nkosi, Moleki and Human (2014) affirm that most South African young people use cell phones because it allows free expression of emotions and gives them a sense of privacy. 'Texting' is a kind of writing commonly used by learners in their daily interactions to communicate with others through cell phones. Texting refers to text massages sent through the cell phone (Plester & Wood, 2009). According to Thupayagale-Tshweneagae et al. (2014), youth of today should be educated in meaningful and effective ways to use their cell phones. Plester and Wood (2009) maintain that texting can contribute to and promote the overall development of literacy positively because learners get exposure to written words and to get a chance to enjoy playing with words. They argue that this can encourage learners to master skills in written communication. Similarly, Plester, Wood and Bell (2008) demonstrate in their study that there is no convincing evidence that 'textisms' can cause harm to the development of standard language and claim that texting is a practice that is associated with high school literacy attainment.

Therefore, this calls for teachers to understand the impact of technology in formal education as well as in learners' lives in general. The learners we teach nowadays are exposed to a new world of technology. In my experience, their written communication revolves around the use of modern technology. This means that teachers need to be in advanced with technology and this calls for teachers to engage in lifelong learning in order to keep up with the developing world of technology. In my view, lifelong learners are those teachers who are not satisfied with the knowledge they have but keep on finding new knowledge. According to Dlamini (2013), teachers should be lifelong learners in order to face up to and cope with the challenges of this changing world. Day (1999) states that teaching demands the involvement of teachers with lifelong learning in order to meet the needs of the learners and for learning and teaching improvements. Day further agues that teachers who are lifelong learners are personally driven to professional development because they want to make their teaching enjoyable and to be able to connect learners to real life outside school. Additionally, Lieberman and Pointer Mace (2008) explain the need for teachers to be part of lifelong learning communities in order to advance their knowledge as they are at the forefront of the

changing world. Moreover, Kennedy (2010) emphasises the importance of provision of comprehensive professional development programmes for teachers in order to deal with poor performance in literacy. He further argues that such programmes if offered over a long period of time can have a positive effect on learners' success, motivation and participation.

Technology in teaching can play vital role in developing written communication among learners. Edwards-Groves (2012) points out that the "significance of technology use in classrooms lies not in what a device is or text 'is', nor in what it specifically does. Its significance lies in what it enables as it mediates the relationship between its use and other individuals" (p. 101). Moreover, Beach (2012) concurs that what is crucial is not the hardware or the physical parts of the technology instrument but how the device is used to cultivate learning. I recall how at the teacher training college we were fascinated by touching and using computers as technological devices. We were then excited by looking at words printed on paper. Thus, I can see how learners can be motivated by using such 'writing machines'.

Through memory-work, I have realised that learners learn best when they have interest at heart and driven from within. I have learnt that technology can bring motivation and excitement in learning. It can also bring the confidence in knowing that there are things that you can do by yourself. During my initial teacher training, the world experienced immense technological development in terms of computer and cellular phone usage. The following extract from Chapter Three bears testimony to this:

> *It was at college where I first had a chance to sit in front of a computer as at high school we had only used manual type writers. Computers were not my major subject, but was an elective subject. For me, it was a dream come true to have first hand experience of sitting and using that machine (see figure 3.10). I remember that Mrs Wens was a competent lecturer who introduced us to the course and skillfully scaffolded us to upper levels. At first, it was a frightening yet exciting experience because it was something that we had only heard of at high school, but we had never had a chance to touch a computer. It was quite a fulfilling experience when I had my work printed on paper. (p.48)*

Looking back at my memory stories, I can see how ever changing technology also demands that teachers upgrade and involve themselves with professional development in order to keep up with latest technological developments for improving teaching. Edwards-Groves's (2012) research study reveals that new technologies call for the advancement of professional development for the teachers because these technologies are challenging traditional methods of teaching. In the same way, Beach (2012) further explains that the classroom transformation brought by learners' digital technology competence to school demands the improvement of professional development that empowers the teacher with proficiency in using technological devices in their classrooms. Likewise, Chikasha, Ntuli, Sundarjee, and Chikasha (2014) contend that initial teacher training education programmes should equip student teachers with teaching didactics that include integration of technologies.

When I look at my current teaching practice, the adaptation to advanced usage of technology is not at a pleasing level as per the South African Department of Basic Education vision (Department of Education, 2003). This is not because I am against improved classroom practices or continuous professional development programmes to upgrade my knowledge with modern technology. However, the legacy of apartheid left some of our black African schools with inadequate resources as a result of insufficient funding of Bantu education by the apartheid government (Hyslop, 1999). Thus, teaching writing using computers is not possible in my school because we do not even have a computer laboratory.

Hence, some teachers may argue that there is no need to upgrade their professional knowledge of modern technology because some schools do not have such devices. Mdlongwa (2012) explains that our South African national government has financial constraints when it comes to purchasing of information and communication technology equipment and infrastructure for schools. On the other hand, the Department of Basic Education (DoE, 2003) is doing its utmost best to equip schools with such technology despite having insufficient funds and its vision is to integrate information technology within the school curriculum implementation. Chikasha et al. (2014) reveal that South Africa was ranked number 40 from over 70 countries that participated in the Digital Economy Rankings in 2010. This rating suggests that South African teachers are reluctant to bring ICT into their daily teaching. This also shows that this phenomenon will be exacerbated by teachers' resistance to change.

The implications for me as a teacher are that technology has significant influence on the development of written communication and thus I should not distance myself from technological knowledge. Technology can assist teachers to enhance learning of written communication if they integrate it in subjects. This calls for teachers to value the modern knowledge of technology that learners have in order to build on the kind of acceptable written communication required for schooling. If we do not have computers in our schools, we can make use of more readily available devices, such as cell phones

Creative expression

Reflecting on my lived experiences as a learner and as a teacher has assisted me in understanding the significance of offering opportunities for *learners to explore writing using their creative minds*. Likewise, Craft (2008) "recommends that the curriculum for learners aged 3-18 should provide opportunities to learn in and through the arts and culture by promoting creativity among young people" (p. 17). I hope that my new understanding of the value of creativity will help to develop and improve my practice as a classroom teacher. Recalling of my own educational journey has helped me to see how I have hindered learning of written communication amongst my learners. This had happened because I have taught in a way that has favoured my limited teaching skill in relation to creative expression. My teachers at primary and high school and at the teacher training college never encouraged or taught us to use our creative minds. Instead they redirected us to a cramming style of education. In my view, this suggests that those teachers were not capacitated to develop creative thinking in their classrooms. This was a null curriculum as explained by Eisner (2002b) where teachers teach what best suits them but not the curriculum as stipulated in the policy document. Quinn (2010) explains the null curriculum as, "that which is absent, left out, and overlooked how curriculum is conceptualized, created, and enacted" (p. 613). According to Eisner (2002b), a null curriculum is when some content areas or ways of learning and thinking are neglected in the school curriculum. He further argues that schools should be more holistic in curriculum implementation as they should provide learners with chances to make use of a range of intellectual processes in the course of their school work. Therefore, by what was not offered to us to develop our creativity as learners, our education was compromised. The consequences of such neglect are still noticeable even today when I reminisce about my creativity development experiences at school. Similarly, Zaragoza and Vaughn (1995 p.43) argue that "teachers should not provide ideas for the content of students' writing"; instead learners should be given a chance to think of their own ideas to develop in

their writing (p. 43). Furthermore, Zaragoza and Vaughn (1995) state that another way to build up learners' confidence is by giving them opportunities to get used to writing more often. Through my reading (Kempf, 2013) I have discovered that for learners' creativity development, as a teacher I must ensure that I offer them frequent opportunities and be there guiding them through the learning process. Eisner (2002a) argues that schools should provide learners with a platform where their creativity is utilised and not neglected.

I remember that at primary school, most of the time in class we were unhappy. Looking back, I can see that this was also an important factor that could have hindered our creativity in class. This is evident in the following poetry stanza of poem "scary interaction":

A day never passed without
Being insulted
Always frightened
Always crying
Always frustrated
Wishing to leave school
Writing an unpleasant experience

I have noticed that I have been depriving learners of engaging with creative activities at an early stage as I teach at primary school level. O'Connor (2013) argues that young children's pleasure and enjoyment in their learning is a key component in the cultivation of their creative abilities because if this is interrupted early on the learners are likely to become less and less creative. Furthermore, Eisenberger and Shanock (2003) suggest that every individual's creativity can be developed if there is encouragement and motivation in the form of tangible rewards. This means that teachers need to motivate their learners by offering them certain rewards for every creative activity carried out. Giving them incentives can reinforce creativity. However, in my primary school days, we were just given a once off opportunity to write and creativity not was encouraged by teachers. This has brought to my attention as a teacher that to nurture the writing process needs patience, and it is a trial and error process. Moreover, it all depends on the availability of the platform given for learners to learn. I have realised that I should give learners enough chances to use their creative minds by allowing them to write several draft essays of their choice and returning their drafts with more positive feedback for every effort they make.

My memory stories reveal that at high school also teachers did not encourage and motivate us as learners to develop our creativity. Additionally, when I was at high school, teachers did not create a friendly and welcoming environment for creative thoughts; instead, we had to compete for recognition. There was no structured way of being taught the development of creative thinking and writing. My teachers only focused on the finished product of creative writing. In the same way, Pithouse (2004) highlights that it was a common practice for South African teachers to regard creative writing as a talent, and to perpetuate the idea that was not possible for creative writing to be taught and nurtured from scratch even in the formerly white schools. In contrast, Zaragoza and Vaughn (1995) argue that successful practices in teaching the writing process can include noting the importance of learner autonomy, learner to learner teaching, respect for learners and their work and the role of a teacher as a facilitator. To me, this demonstrates how my former teachers deprived us of opportunities to develop our full potential in creative writing. Likewise, Pithouse (2004) argues for the importance of capacitating learners with the desire to develop personal writing skills. She states:

> When children are given the time and opportunity to chose and develop personal topics, they begin to feel control over the writing process…. Writing becomes connected to their personal work, activities and social interaction…. Their control over decisions produces the desire and motivation to learn and be active participants in the writing process. (p.16)

In the following stanzas of the poem "Art expression" it is evident that schools were places where we were judged on how well we could do things even though were not shown how to do them or given a chance to try do them:

Teachers were adjudicators
Choosing best only
Poor items were dumped
Good items were developed
Given praise and recognition
Represented our school in competitions

It was all about competing

Rewards, recognition
Creativity opportunities were not offered

Eisner (2002b) asserts that schools tend to foster competitiveness among learners either by streaming according to different abilities in groups or by assigning marks based on the distribution of test scores. In my understanding, the only positive side of my experience was to expose me to such realities of failure and success in life.

Horng, Hong, ChanLin, Chang and Chu (2005) suggest that strategies for creative instruction should be imparted at initial teacher training institutions and that workshops by professional instructors should also be held for experienced teachers to develop their creativity and improve their creative teaching strategies. When teachers have gained knowledge of teaching and nurturing creativity in their classrooms, they should teach it in early childhood education to help to develop individuals who are creative thinkers and who can come up with original ideas (Horng et al., 2005). Likewise, O'Connor (2013) explains that "children develop thinking and sensory learning through engagement with creative activities and it is essential that they are offered an opportunity to engage with their creativity in the early stages of their education" (p. 1).

Nevertheless, I recall that there were sometimes other activities that we engaged in outside of school that developed our creativity. We happily and voluntarily participated in these activities such as cowherding. Significantly, what we learned there we have not forgotten. I think that this was because it was self-fulfilling to know that you had come up with an innovative idea. I concur with O'Connor's assertion that "children that are joyful, engaged and laughing are experiencing deep learning within the creative domain. Any interruption of pleasure or fun is an interruption of an important learning process" (2013, p. 2). This means that learners can develop more creativity if they are happy, laughing and participating voluntarily in activities carried out in classrooms. This can be seen in the following stanzas of the poem "A school in the veld":

Taking part in cowherding is
Taking part in art institution
Learning to use different modes
For communicating with the environment

Singing songs of praise for bulls
Evoking uncontrollable feelings for a fight
Using non verbal signs to convey messages

Taking part in cowherding is
Taking part in stage performances
Portrayal of feelings and daily occurrences was through
Music compositions and performances
Designing and making of musical instruments
Spiced the renditions of compositions

Likewise, Furman et al. (2008) argue that creative experiences can advance the improvement of strength and resiliency. This means that being offered a chance to develop creativity could assist you to believe in your self and improve your self image because you become aware of your creative capacity. Furthermore, creative experiences can offer us a boost to rise again and survive the challenges of life. The following stanza from my interpretive poetry bares testimony to this:

It made me an autonomous individual
One who can fight his battles
One who can overcome poverty
One who understand hardships of life
As life is a journey
With ups and down

For me as a teacher this means that I should offer learners enough chances to express themselves artistically in an environment that is joyful. It is also crucial that I should allow learners the freedom of writing about what interests them or matters most to them in order for them to gain ownership and control our their writing.

Writing as a process
Re-examining my educational footprints along the way I have travelled in learning written communication, has signaled to me that learning writing communication should be a process, not just a once off activity. In recalling my learning experiences, it has become evident that

my past teachers, both at primary school and at high school level, were not well equipped with teaching strategies for enhancing the development of written communication in their classrooms. Maybe this was the case because their initial teacher training did not prepare them with necessary knowledge and skills. At primary school, we were trained mostly to memorise written compositions that were prepared by the teacher. We were then asked to reproduce these in the examination paper for mark allocation purposes. At high school, teaching writing was also a once off exercise, meaning that the high school teachers continued from the basis of our primary school teaching. This concurs with Pithouse's (2004) assertion that during her schooling "the emphasis was on matching a finished piece of writing to a set of mark category, rather than on intervening positively in the actual writing process" (p. 15). In the same way, Mbatha (2004) explains how in her study South African student teachers from under-resourced schools disclosed that in some instances teachers did not teach them the process of writing essays, but instead they were drilled to produce a model essay for the examination. This is exactly that happened to us as we were taught writing at school.

Through memory-work, I have become aware of my primary school teachers' mistakes. I think they did not have pedagogical knowledge of teaching written communication and they did not believe that we as young children were capable of developing using written words as a mode of communication. In contrast, Kempf (2013) argues that learners at primary schools do not only tell their stories in drawings but they are also able to write meaningful words "through the writing process just as well as the older students" (p. 22). Likewise, Bower (2014) explains the significance of teachers offering learners rich experiences in the writing process because this influences how learners achieve.

My primary school teachers did not make writing a pleasing and interesting exercise that we enjoyed, nor did they give us chance to improve on our essays. By contrast, Zaragoza and Vaughn's (1995) study of teaching writing reveals that learners expressed that writing should be taught in a continuous process where writing is developed through several drafts and perfection is considered only at later stages. I always associated writing with corporal punishment because in my early schooling it was taught by such a cruel teacher who punished us severely for mistakes. In particular, my language teachers taught us to memorise model essays which were given to us in advance for examination marks purposes.

At high school level, teachers used the same strategy. My teachers made essay writing a once off, boring task for examination purposes only. In the same way, Flanagan (1995) concurs that "if writing is seen only as a boring school activity that is only for marks, it has no chance at all. Children will just learn the minimum about written language and restrict themselves to the minimum required" (p.106). Writing my memory stories has helped me to identify my past teachers' shortcomings. They did not give us a chance to experience writing as a process which comes with constant feedback. In my primary and high school experiences, my teachers did not seem to be concerned about development of flair for written communication. They were more interested in the results and in what we were able to memorise and reproduce. I think they possibly believed that we learners did not need creative thinking when we finished school because the only professions that were commonly available to black youth during the apartheid era were nursing and teaching. This is evident in the following extract from Chapter Three:

> *The emphasis was not on creative writing but rather was on factual recall. The only essay I knew was on the topic "my school" because it was written for us by the teacher on the chalkboard and we had to learn it by heart and write it back to her during the examination. We were not given the opportunity to choose topics we wished to write about. I remember that it was such a boring activity to write a composition if you were not good at memorising words. (p.41)*

Mbatha's research on tertiary students demonstrates that some black students from under-resourced schools revealed that they were not taught how to write essays at school; instead, they were given a model essay to learn by heart for the assessment purposes (Mbatha, 2004). Likewise, Pithouse (2004) explains that in her personal experience of her white schooling, the writing approach during the apartheid era was more focused on the allocation of marks to the finished essay and not on a 'how to' step by step process. This suggests that South African teachers in the past from diverse schools had a similar approach to teaching written communication. In my experience, negative effects of this approach are manifested at a later stage in a learner's academic life.

Mbatha (2004) argues that learners need to be engaged more in writing activities at school and to write about topics that are of interest to them. In addition, Pithouse (2004) confirms the significance of allowing learners to follow their own personal interests when choosing

and developing topics for writing. She highlights that this will assist learners to feel a sense of ownership for final written piece.

I think that there were other factors that also possibly contributed to the low levels of teaching of the writing process, such as the teacher's own motivation for teaching. In my view, some teachers were not teaching because they wanted to see learners being successful in the future, but because they happened to find themselves taking this career path because of the difficulties in admission requirements for other professions. These kinds of teachers do not necessarily have their learners' best interests at heart and are not always caring, loving or empathetic. Dlamini (2013) affirms that caring teachers do little favours for their learners every day and that this can evoke the utmost best in learners. Dlamini (2013) highlights that these acts can make a remarkable contribution and have an everlasting impact on the learners' minds. However, I now realise that in my primary school experience my teachers were probably not motivated to be caring teachers or to be professional, as the following stanzas show form the poem "Scary interaction":

Writing skill hindered
Learning hindered
Interaction breakdown

A day never passed without
Being insulted
Always frightened
Always crying
Always frustrated
Wishing to leave school
Writing an unpleasant experience

As demonstrated in the above stanzas, this teacher's attitude was a hindrance for me as a learner.

During my secondary school days, writing as a process was not promoted as teachers appraised only the best pieces of work. Teachers never bothered to nurture and to develop

writing in a process specifically designed for it. This handicap is demonstrated in the following extract from my poem "Art expression":

Teachers were adjudicators
Choosing best only
Poor items were dumped
Good items were developed
Given praise and recognition
Represented our school in competitions

It was all about competing
Rewards, recognition
Creativity opportunities were not offered

However, at postgraduate level writing was considered as a process. The lecturers understood that academic writing is not just a talent but that it can be taught and learned through a step by step process of development (Pithouse, 2004). It was very fruitful and helpful for my success in writing academic assignments to take that compulsory module on academic literacy. The following stanzas from my poem, "Writing as a process", show this:

What a new experience of
Learning and teaching
Where students are allowed
To make mistakes

A new writing approach where
Students are given opportunity to
Submit draft writings
Where teachers comment
Learners improve by writing corrections

Pithouse (2004) highlights that precise knowledge of how to carry out a task, step by step, is essential to learners' success in developing creative writing. In my understanding, this means that teachers should have the knowledge of how to teach writing as a creative process to

learners. Likewise, Furman et al. (2008) argue that "engaging in the creative process helps people maximize their full potential and draws out strengths that may not have been previously apparent" (p. 76).For my teaching practice, this means that in order for teachers to produce learners who possess flair for written communication they need to change and improve their methods of teaching as well as their attitudes. Teachers also need to understand that all learners are capable of writing creative and expressive pieces of writing if they are offered a chance in a process of development.

In the beginning of my teaching days as a student teacher, I observed during teaching practice that learners had difficulties in writing, even in writing short messages to one another or to me. It was unfortunate that I was not teaching the home language (isiZulu). That made me have a negative reaction and wrong perceptions and to quickly blame other teachers for not developing flair and creativity in the writing process. Since then, I have realised that I thought negatively about other teachers' methods of teaching written communication because I was inexperienced. Moreover, when I got my first teaching post I resorted to the same methods my fellow teachers used and that had been used by my former school teachers. In my memory stories, I allude to this limitation:

> *I taught it using the same approach that I learned at the college and the way I was taught as a learner during my schooling years. I had a negative attitude towards teaching creative writing creatively because I had to mark all kinds of stories. Just as my former teachers had done, I used to give learners examples of compositions that they needed to read and learn by heart. During exams, I would let them choose a topic from those ones we had done together in class and then ask them to write about it (Chapter Three, p. 50).*

Memory-work has revealed that it was only when I was a postgraduate student at university that I first experienced writing as a process. The assignment drafts that I wrote as first and second attempts were marked with comments which highlighted improvement and how to carry on to achieve better written communication. Kennedy (2010) confirms that teaching writing not as a once off activity but as a process can have a positive influence on learners' written communication.

Furthermore, Flanagan (1995) argues that teachers need to create an environment with plenty of time for the writing process with four stages which should be unpacked in writing lessons in the classroom if we want to develop learners who are effective writers. "To expect a perfect piece of writing in a half-hour lesson is misunderstanding the writing process" (p. 106). Pithouse (2004) states that clear knowledge with every detail on how to write is crucial for learners' writing accomplishment. In my early learning experiences, my former teachers did not tell me how I was doing and the progress I was making. This hindered the writing process as it was just a once off exercise. However, as a postgraduate student I realised the importance of giving feedback to the learners during the writing process. This is evident in the following extract from my memory stories

> *I was not aware of this genre of writing during my entire schooling experience. The honours programme taught me to be a teacher that gives learners a chance to write several drafts before they submit a final product of their writing. It has further assisted me to be a teacher who gives learners constant feedback when they are writing. I have learned that writing is a process where you need to be nurtured and monitored by an enlightened individual. Having a chance to make the corrections using feedback from the teacher gives you courage to be involved in the process of writing. It allows you to see development in the skills gained rather than the end result of marks. As a teacher, I have learned to teach my learners the way I was taught in some modules that I did at honours level because it worked for me. (p.24)*

Hattie and Timperly (2007) argue for the importance of feedback and effectiveness of it in guiding learners step by step during the writing process rather than the final allocation of marks to provide grades or symbols. They further state that this process in the teaching of written communication improves the learners' self-reliance and motivates them. Likewise, Varlander (2008) concurs that feedback is a requirement for all the learning processes and that "action without feedback is completely unproductive for the learner" (p. 149). In addition, Rodgers (2006) suggests that teachers should also make use of descriptive feedback where they interact in a two way dialogue with the aim of improving the learning process and indirectly informing teachers' teaching approaches.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have distilled memory stories of my development of flair for written communication into interpretive poetry. Each interpretive poem has been composed to elicit the significant emotions and experiences of each episode of a memory story. I have re-examined my memory stories and interpretive poetry to identify and discuss implications that emerged for nurturing a flair for written communication among learners. In revisiting and remembering my experiences, I have managed to identify six key issues embedded in my memory stories that respond to the research question: *"What can I learn from my past experiences about developing a flair for written communication?* The six issues are: parental involvement; emotions and relationships; cultural practices; changing technology; creative expression; and writing as a process.

The key message from this chapter is that teachers should be empowered with strategies for teaching written communication as a process because it is not just a talent that someone is born with. I have realised that every learner has the potential to write creatively as a means of communicating ideas on paper for personal use, career demands or for readers as audience. Additionally, as a teacher I should present learners with opportunities in a welcoming, conducive environment that allows for creative exploration of ideas, accommodating mistakes and mutual respect for both parties involved in the teaching and learning of written communication.

In Chapter Five I present and analyse the data generated through classroom lessons that I taught which I thought were relevant to offer answers to the second research question. I give an account of how I planned the lessons to keep learners motivated to complete all tasks assigned to them. All lessons were built on issues that I had learned from my memory-work (see Chapter Three). I recount how I used journal writing as a source of obtaining learners' feedback about my teaching methods, and how this it further informed me about the emotional state of each learner in my class, as emotions play a significant role for effective teaching and learning. Because my aim was to improve my teaching to be able to nurture learners' flair for written communication, I show how I scrutinised the learners' work in order to determine my current strengths and weaknesses.

CHAPTER FIVE:

MY CURRENT AND FUTURE TEACHING OF WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

Introduction

The focus of this self-study research is on cultivating a flair for English written communication among my grade 6 learners. The purpose is to discover some strategies that I could use to teach writing in a more creative way and thus improve my teaching for the benefit of the learners. In the previous chapter, Chapter Four, I re-examined my memory stories (as presented in Chapter Three) through the use of interpretive poetry, which helped me to distil and highlight by sifting and selecting words that precisely depicted crucial emotions and events related to communicative experiences. I also considered the implications of my memory stories and interpretive poetry for teaching written communication with flair to learners. I identified and discussed six key issues that emerged from my memory stories and interpretive poetry in relation to my first research question: "*What can I learn from my past experiences about developing a flair for written communication?"*

My main objective in this chapter, Chapter Five, is to address my second research question: *"How can I facilitate a flair for written communication through my teaching?* In my search for answers to this question, I draw from my developmental teaching portfolio (Samaras, 2011) which includes my lesson plans, my research journal, learners' journals and learners' written work, such as short paragraphs (creative writings), poetry work and crafted cards, together with their journal entries about each activity done in class. As shown in the previous chapter, Chapter Four, I identified six issues from my memory stories and interpretive poems that have influenced and impacted on my learning and teaching of written communication. These are: (*a) parental involvement; (b) emotions and relationships; (c) cultural practices; (d) changing technology; (e) creative expression;* and *(f) writing as a process*. Therefore, in this chapter I take into consideration the extent to which I have been paying attention to these six issues in my current teaching and the implications they might have for my future teaching practice, particularly in relation to written communication. To respond to my second research question, I explore written communication activities that were carried out in my classroom during the teaching and learning process.

Exploring the written communication activities

As explained in Chapter Two, I worked with grade 6 English first additional language speakers in this study as my research participants. The class I worked with had a manageable number of 46 learners, with girls and boys from age of 11 to 13. I chose this class because it was the class that I was teaching at the time of my research. English was one of the subjects that I was teaching to this class. For data analysis purposes, all 46 learners' work was collected and read. For the selection of learners' work to be presented in this chapter, I chose examples that could illustrate a particular point I wanted to discuss and demonstrate.

The generation of data through the lessons started in the second term of the school year. However, learners were briefed in the first term about what the research participation would involve. The lesson activities were placed on the annual grade 6 teaching plan in order to avoid any confusion or overload for learners. I designed the lesson activities with the intention of enhancing learners' flair for written communication. The activities were integrated and infused to match with the prescribed skills to be achieved by learners as per the curriculum document for English (DBE, 2011). Some of these activities were to be used for mark allocation purposes.

The lesson activities I used in class were mostly inspired by ideas offered by my group of critical friends. As discussed in Chapter Two, my critical friends were experienced teachers. Because of that, I trusted their suggestions and ideas about the lesson activities that could be useful for me to generate data for my study. I anticipated that these activities could ignite a spark of light that could help to nurture a flair for written communication. However, I had to refine these suggested activities according to my learners' grade level and place them appropriately in the teaching plan.

During the first lesson, learners were introduced to the research project and were offered a chance to ask questions for clarity. I then introduced them to the use of journal writing. My learners were familiar with the use of a diary from the transactional writing; however; the concept and the use of a journal was new to most of them. Learners were allocated small 32 page exercise books to use for documenting their feelings and reflections about lesson proceedings. As explained in Chapter Two, journal writing was allocated five minutes at the beginning of each new lesson. On the first day, learners were excited and showed keen interest in starting with the writing journal entries. I explained that journal entries are

personal and should be kept private. However, I also clarified that learners were not expected to write what they were not comfortable to share with me. I explained that I would sometimes take in the journals to read about their emotions and their reflections on the lessons. I also kept a research journal where I documented all kinds of feelings such as frustration and happiness. In my journal, I also reflected on how each lesson unfolded with regard to the lesson outcomes and achievements and some future improvements.

I had made learners aware that in their journals they could make entries about their emotions and what bothered them. I also made it clear that it should be something that they were willing to share with me anonymously as their journals were not named but were marked with symbols. I collected learners' journal entries once in a month during the period of the classroom data generation. When journals were collected I read them privately and made notes or entries in my journal too when I found sensitive issues raised by children about the learning process or about their emotional status. The process of reading the leaners' journals took place over the weekends in order to make sure that there was no lesson where they were not reflecting and making entries if they wished to do so.

In responding to my second research question – *"How can I facilitate a flair for written communication through my teaching? –* I infused new English language activities into the recommended activities in the grade 6 English Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) document for each theme in a two week cycle (DBE, 2011). My reason for incorporating these new activities was to bring in the element of creativity to my teaching and learners' writing (Craft, 2008). This meant that I aimed to offer the learners opportunities where they would have freedom to use and explore their creativity in writing through different activities.

In addressing my second research question, I look again at the written communication activities that were done in class during the teaching and learning process. I present and reflect on examples from my teaching portfolio in relation to the six issues identified in Chapter Four.

Creative expression

I started by introducing lessons that I anticipated would stimulate learners' creativity. Developing creativity at the beginning was important because it was the element that had to

be there to enhance learners' flair for written communication. Epstein (2008) argues that creativity capabilities can be taught. I tried to start from what was known (greeting cards) and then move to the less familiar (poetry). This was a pedagogic strategy that worked for me practically in class.

Horng (2005) affirms that creativity can be cultivated through improved classroom teaching strategies. Nompula (2012) explains that, for successful learning of creativity in the classroom, teachers should ensure that they tolerate liberty of expression and enjoyment, getting rid of dictatorial attitudes and developing rapport and relationships. She further states that the emphasis should be on learners' motivation through the use of praise and commendation which contributes to learning success. Moreover, Simplicio (2000) emphasises that teachers who are creative are those that wish to express their willingness to change their teaching strategies because bringing exciting and innovative lessons into class requires extensive planning and preparations. I decided to use creativity in my teaching because I wanted to change the way I had been teaching before.

Card making

Before I went to class, I prepared for the lesson by collecting different greeting cards in order to stimulate learners' interest in making cards. I also brought in A4 paper for learners to use to make their cards. I anticipated that learners would have a keen interest in this activity because I knew that they liked to draw and to use coloured pencils. To introduce the lesson, I asked learners questions about the use of cards and I asked them if they have ever received cards from other people. As I recall, one boy answered: "*Yes I know Sir, we use cards to send messages, especially if you love her*". Then they all laughed. To me, this showed that they were interested in what they were about to do because it involved something that they were familiar with. I think they assumed that cards had to do with people who are in love. When asked if they had ever received cards, they all answered yes. Some said they had received them when they had birthdays or at Christmas. After this answer the noise became softer.

Following Eisner's (2008) suggestion that "art in research promotes a form of understanding that is derived or evoked through empathetic experiences" (p. 7), I decided to start with a lesson which contained an element of art. Learners were given examples of cards and asked to look at them closely to see the designs on the outside and different styles of writing on the

inside. I then explained to them that cards are meant to deliver messages, to express and to share feelings about special days or to show appreciation.

For the first part of the lesson, I asked the learners to design the outside part of a card for someone that they knew and adored. They were given A4 papers to draw on and then to write messages they wanted to convey to special people. Learners were asked to continue with their work as homework if they did not complete it in class.

Learners seemed to be very excited and committed in doing this activity. Similarly, O'Connor (2013) concurs that the learner's pleasure in the artistic experience is a major constituent in the learning and in cultivation of creativity from within and sustaining its development. The learners were all concentrating on colouring their designs without much noise. The following day, all learners submitted their completed work on time. No learner had to be pressurised to complete his or her work. I was impressed by the work that was submitted – in relation to the expression of the messages and the way the designs appealed aesthetically (see Figures 5.1 and 5.2). Some learners did better with the content and some with the design.
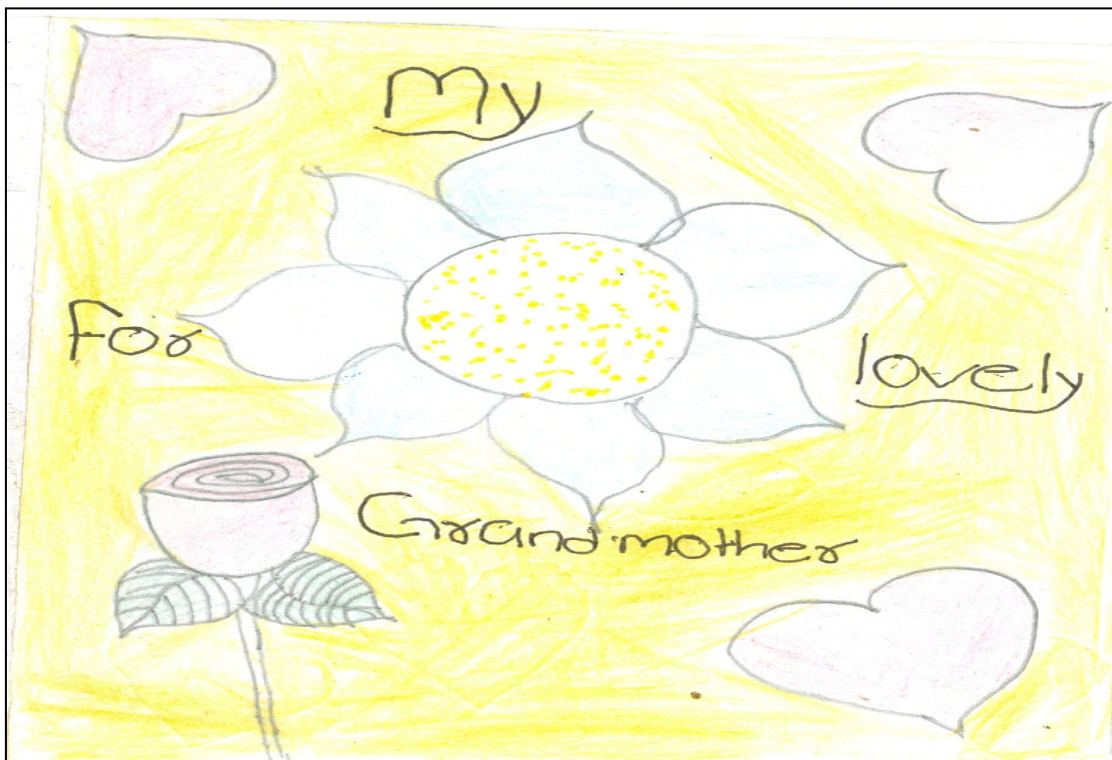

Figure 5.1. "For my lovely grandmother": An example of the cover design of a card
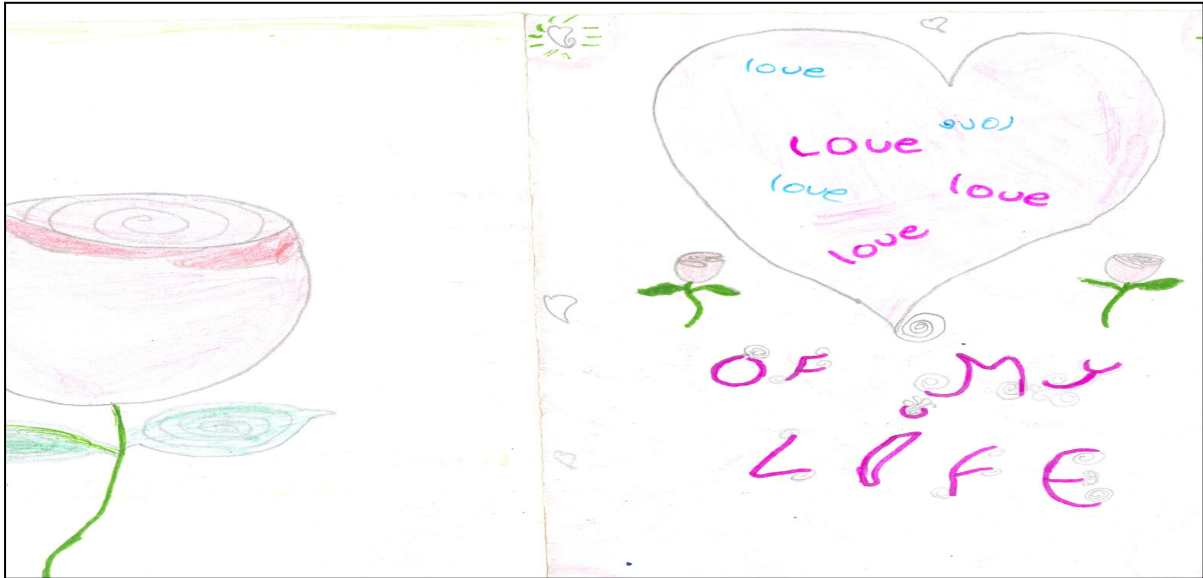
Figure 5.2. "Love of my life": An example of different designs and symbols on the cover page of a card

With this activity, I wanted each individual to be creative enough with the design on the outside of the card so that no one would have his or her card look the same as somebody else's. This would mean that the ideas would be original and the message would differ because each individual would want to convey a message from the bottom of her or his heart. The decorative designs drawn on each card also represented something that could not necessarily be expressed in words. Thus, the receiver of the card might get implicit ideas from the design on the cover. Eisner (2005) explains the most advanced aspect of what children learn in drawing is that there are thoughts, illustration and emotions that can only be articulated through visual art. Likewise, Eisner (2008) asserts that visual art can be a "powerful resource of portraying what cannot be articulated linguistically" (p. 5). Drawings can also evoke thoughts embedded in each individual's mind which can later be presented in words (Bower, 2014).

The creative designs that the learners came up with showed me that learners can excel when given freedom and an opportunity to use their creative minds, especially with work that needs to be artistic. Herbert (2010) argues that creativity requires a playful environment that does not mandate obedience to rules and compliancy. Similarly, Craft (2008) explains that learners who are exposed to creative activities can achieve personal realisation as they gain a new way of expressing themselves from the heart. Likewise, Eisner (2005) explains that, for young

children, learning to create art in form of images or drawings can provide inherent fulfillment.

Moreover, Horng, Hong, ChanLin, Chang and Chu (2005) note that creative instruction motivates learners to think autonomously, to take part enthusiastically and articulate themselves freely. What I have learned from this lesson is that when learners are engaged in a lesson that requires creativity they do not need any push from somebody else; instead, they are driven from within. My learners were very busy working during this lesson, even those who did not usually actively take part in lessons. Runco (2005) states that intrinsic motivation can encourage creativity because learners are highly creative when they experience motivation driven by the pleasure, satisfaction and challenge gained from an activity. This means that intrinsic motivation may drive an individual to perform more creatively.

The messages in the cards made by learners also revealed to me that learners can express themselves with flair when they are writing genuinely, from their hearts (see Figures 5.3 and 5.4). To me, this shows that learners can improve their flair for written communication if they are writing about something that has to do with their personal lives, experiences or surrounding environments. As Eisner explains (2008), "Arts help us connect with personal, subjective emotions, and through such a process, it enables us to discover our own interior landscape. Not an unimportant achievement" (p. 11).
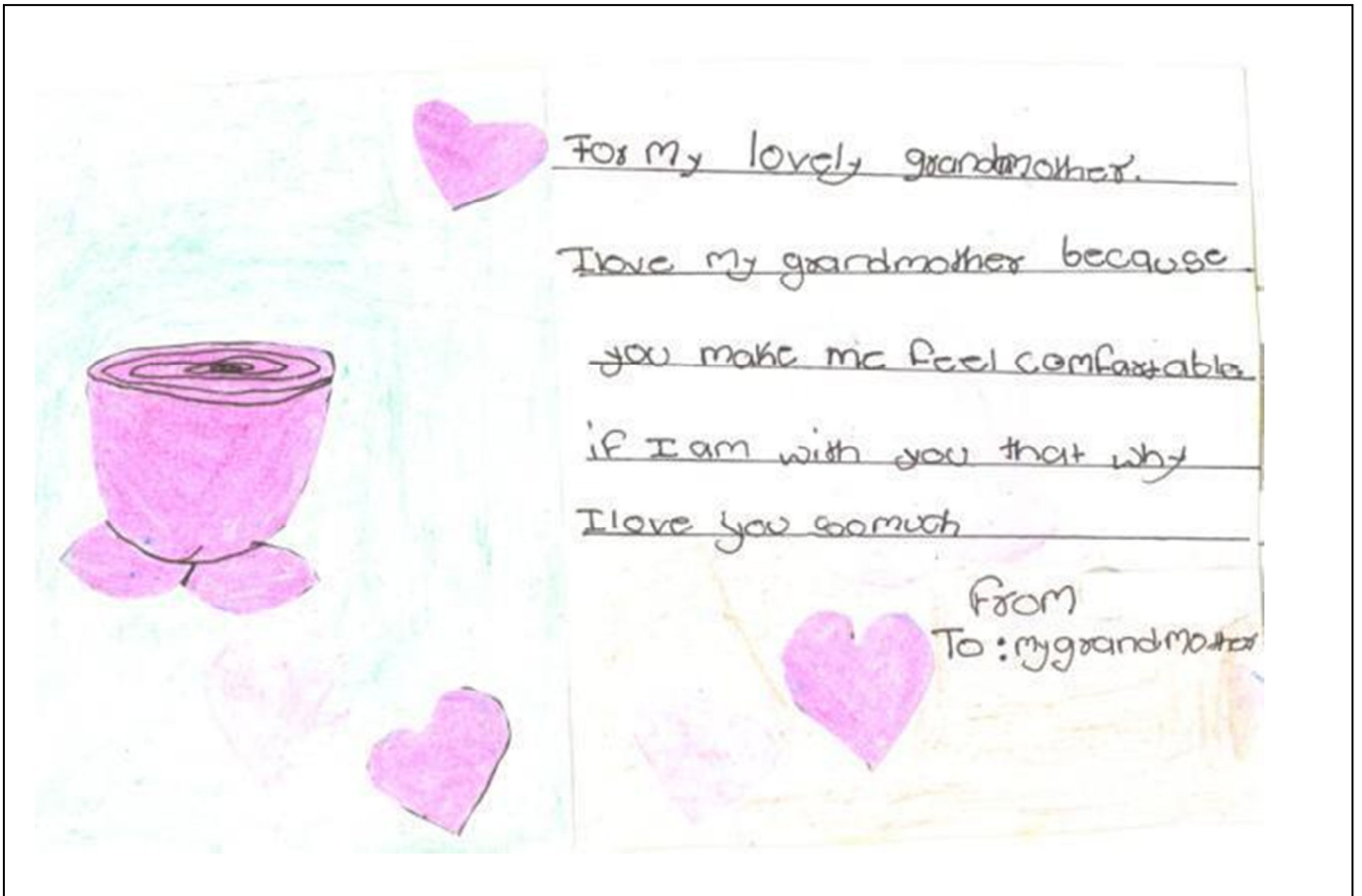
Figure 5.3. "You make me feel comfortable": A message to a learner's grandmother

Figure 5.4. "You are a flower to me": A learner's message to her mother

Writing praise poetry

The card making was followed by another lesson where I taught the learners how to write poems of praise. I first explained what a poem is and asked learners if they had ever written poems. Some said they had never been taught how to write poems. Some learners said that they had been reciting poems, mostly in the foundation phase (grades 1 to 3). They said they were trained and assessed on how to be precise in memorising poems. I then went into a discussion of the content that is supposed to be covered in relation to poetry (DBE, 2011), such as the elements and the mood of poetry. We talked about how praise poetry writing requires a deeper understanding of the language usage and the meanings behind words. As an example, I shared with the learners the metaphor poem by Grace Nichols (1984): "Praise song for my mother"

(http://www.poetryarchive.org/poetryarchive/singlePoem.do?poemId=15613).

I was pleased to see that the praise poems that the learners produced (see Figures 3.5 and 3.6) demonstrated a deeper understanding of the use of metaphors and similes in creating some comparisons. This was not something that I had seen before in their writing. This showed me that learners' flair for written communication can be nurtured if they are encouraged to express their thoughts using particular writing genres such as praise poetry. Using a genre-based approach can assist me as a teacher to help learners understand why they are writing and who they are writing for, as well as how to write a particular kind of text (Chen & Su, 2011).

09-October-2013

Poem

Grand mother

You are like a star
that is rising, shining and Glossy
You are Graeteful

You are a home that keep us 911 warm
You mean so much to me
You make me comfortable

You are like an envelope that
that we open and read
You show me what to do
You let me know when I am wrong

Ooh Grandmother
you are so kind
you are so pretty
you are so honest

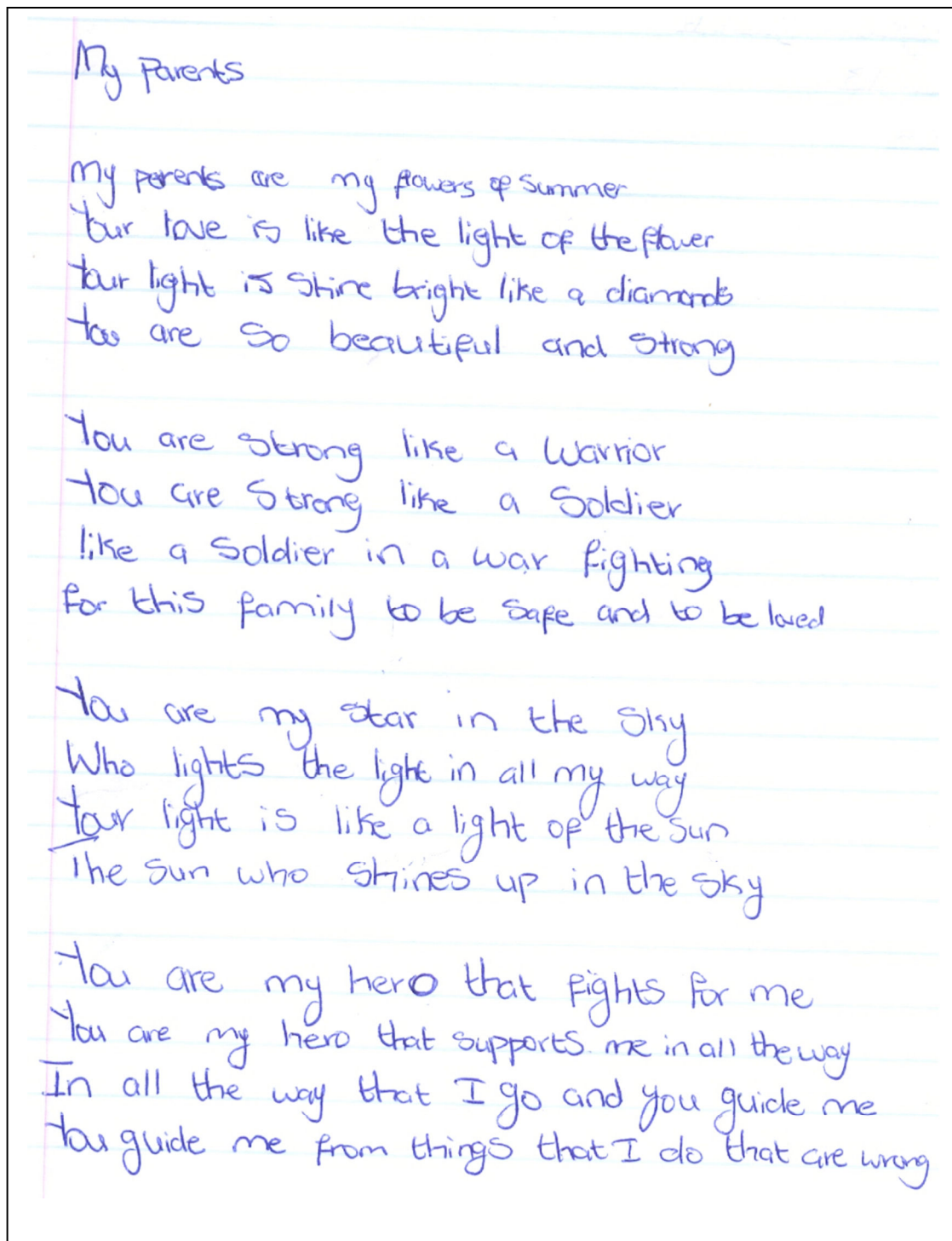**Figure 5.5. A praise poem: "Grandmother – You are like a star"**

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Figure 5.6. A praise poem: "My parents are my flowers of summer"

Writing as a process

From recalling and re-examining my memory stories of communicative experiences (see Chapters Three and Four), I have realised that it is important to engage my learners in writing as a process. My memory stories reveal that I did not learn about writing as process until I became a postgraduate student. In my primary and high school experiences, my teachers taught me writing for the examination purposes and it was a once off, boring task. Likewise,

Mbatha (2004) highlights that some teachers in disadvantaged schools in South Africa do not teach essay writing, which is a necessity for further academic education. Pithouse (2004) argues that creative writing is not an inborn talent; instead it can be taught through a writing process with the teacher's support and constant feedback provided for further improvement. Rodgers (2006) reveals that the primary rationale of giving feedback is to show learners what and how they have learned, as well as what worked in their learning and what hindered the process of learning.

By teaching writing as a process my intention was to change the way things were done in my classroom. Flanagan (1995) explains that teachers should offer learners a chance to learn writing as a process that involves four writing stages. Likewise, Bower (2014) concurs that teachers need to teach writing unambiguously and everyday because it requires thorough practice. She compares it with gaining skills in music or sports. I had to ensure that I offered my learners the opportunity to expose them to writing as a means of communication and as a means to prepare them for future academic needs.

In introducing writing as a process, I involved the learners in a number of activities aimed at finding out if written communication could be successfully taught in a more interesting and relevant manner. Zaragoza and Vaughn (1995) indicate that in their study learners pointed out the value of writing as a continuing process which involves several drafts. Additionally, Pithouse's study (2004) shows how useful it can be to impart precise information to learners about how to carry out a writing task from the start to the end.

To start, I asked the learners how they felt about story writing and how were they taught story writing. Most of the responses revealed that story writing was not pleasing experience and it was carried out as a once off activity which had no follow up activities to further develop their written communication. These answers further prompted in me a longing to find out if teaching writing as a process could be a part of the answer to my second research question.

I handed out textbooks to all the learners and asked them to read aloud a letter written by a child thanking fire fighters for saving her home from fire. After some deliberations and questions, I handed out a paper with some instructions for the classroom activity that they were expected to do:

Instructions:
1. Plan: Think of a time that you helped someone. Perhaps you helped someone who was hurt. Or perhaps you helped to do something at home. Maybe you helped someone who was feeling upset.

2. Write a first draft: write a story of what you did. Write at least three paragraphs. Use this frame:

When I was_____years old, I helped_____ .
I helped him/her because _____ .
First, I _____ .

Then, I _____ .

At the end _____ .

3. Read your story and make changes. Check spelling and punctuation before submission of your first draft.

In this activity, learners were expected to recall and to write a true story of something that they had actually experienced. Haberman (1991) concurs that "first hand experience is potentially more educational than vicarious activity" (p. 294). This activity was chosen because I had learned from the card making and poetry writing activities that writing seems to flow more easily if it is related to real life experiences of learners and contextualised to their cultural upbringing and environment. Pithouse (2004) also stresses the significance of allowing learners to draw on their own experiences and choose their own topics when writing because they "begin to feel control over the writing process" (p. 16). Hence, learners were given the opportunity to choose their topics in this writing task.

Learners were expected to write their first attempt as a first draft. The worksheet I had developed provided a framework to give learners support and guidance on how to develop their story, using a writing process approach. The framework was also intended to enhance the flow and development of ideas with a sequence because the beginning of a topic sentence for each paragraph was provided. Learners were asked to complete the work at home if they needed some extra time. In the following lesson, many of them submitted their first drafts. It took me about a week to read them all and make comments on learners' work. Before I gave them back their drafts, I explained to them that they were expected to make corrections by

referring to the comments I made. The following example of a learner's work bears the testimony of my comments:
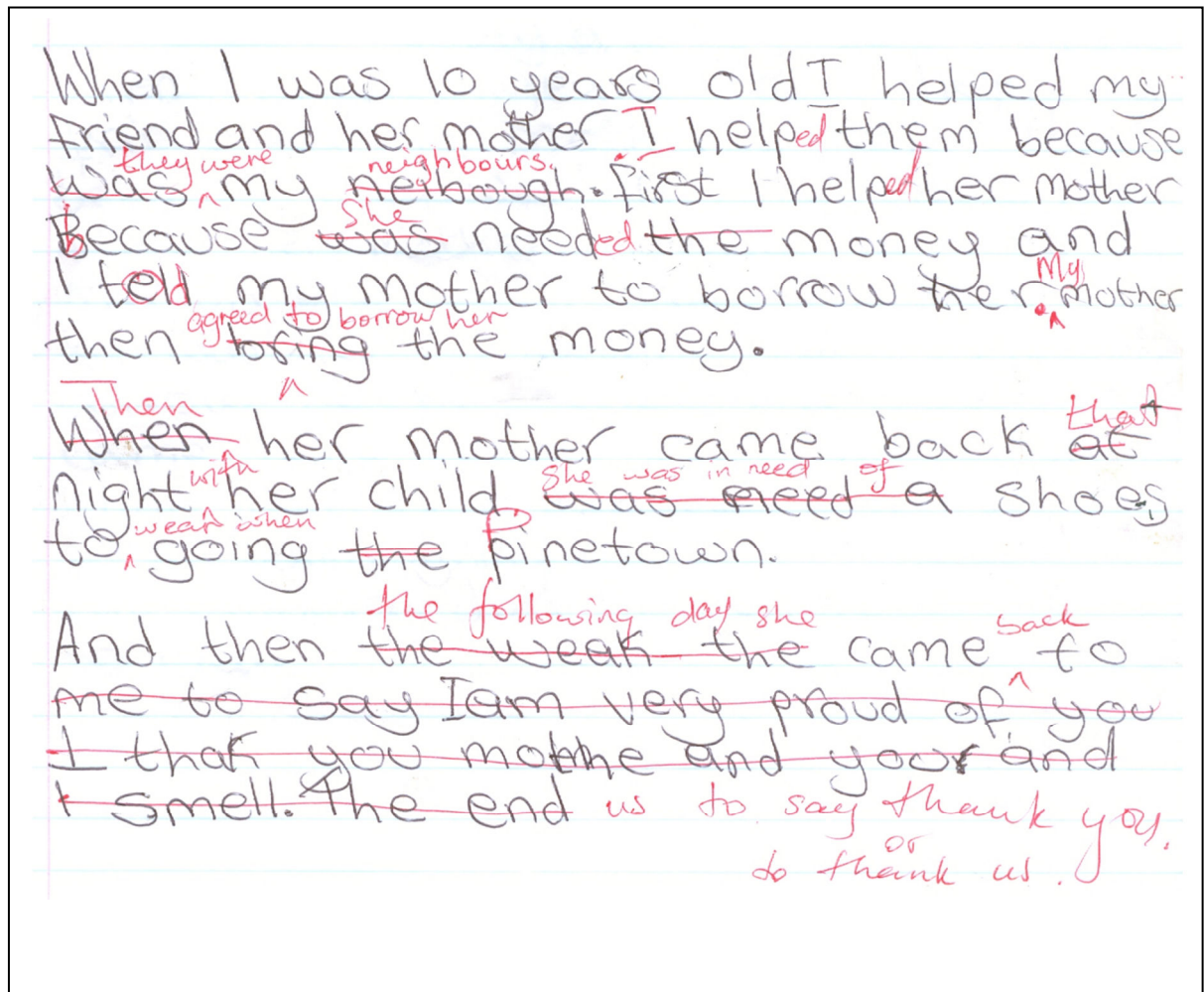

Figure 5.7: A first draft of a learner's essay

It was necessary for me to give feedback on the learners' drafts so that they would understand how and where to improve their written ideas. Varlander (2008) points out that formative feedback is offered during the learning and teaching process so as to offer opportunities for constant progress. Furthermore, Bower (2014) explains need to give regular feedback because it advises the learner about the next step to take and it offers suggestions for the learner to try in future writing tasks.

The first draft shown in Figure 5.7 shows how written communication can be nurtured in a process where teachers are giving constant support and feedback on how to improve the writing. The learners' first draft had had a number of mistakes that needed their attention,

such as grammar and punctuation errors. The number of punctuation errors also signaled to me as a teacher the areas that need attention when teaching grammar. However, the main focus of the feedback was on developing their writing. The guidance that I gave was based on assisting learners with mistakes, but I did not want to interfere with their ideas. Instead, I wanted to maintain the originality of the learners' stories. The learners were expected to make necessary changes according to my written comments. Hattie and Timperly (2007) assert the significance of providing written feedback on learners' work with because it contains information about growth and it tells them how to carry on. Moreover, Rodgers (2006) clarifies that feedback is about informing the learner about their progress in the learning process and also indirectly informing the teacher about his or her teaching.

Writing a second draft was another lesson on its own because it involved a lot of discussion between the learners and me. I had to attend to each individual who did not understand my comments and to those who had questions about their writing. It was not common for the learners to get second chances in developing their writing by using teachers' correction or comments. Therefore, it was important that I was there to guide them when they were writing their second drafts.
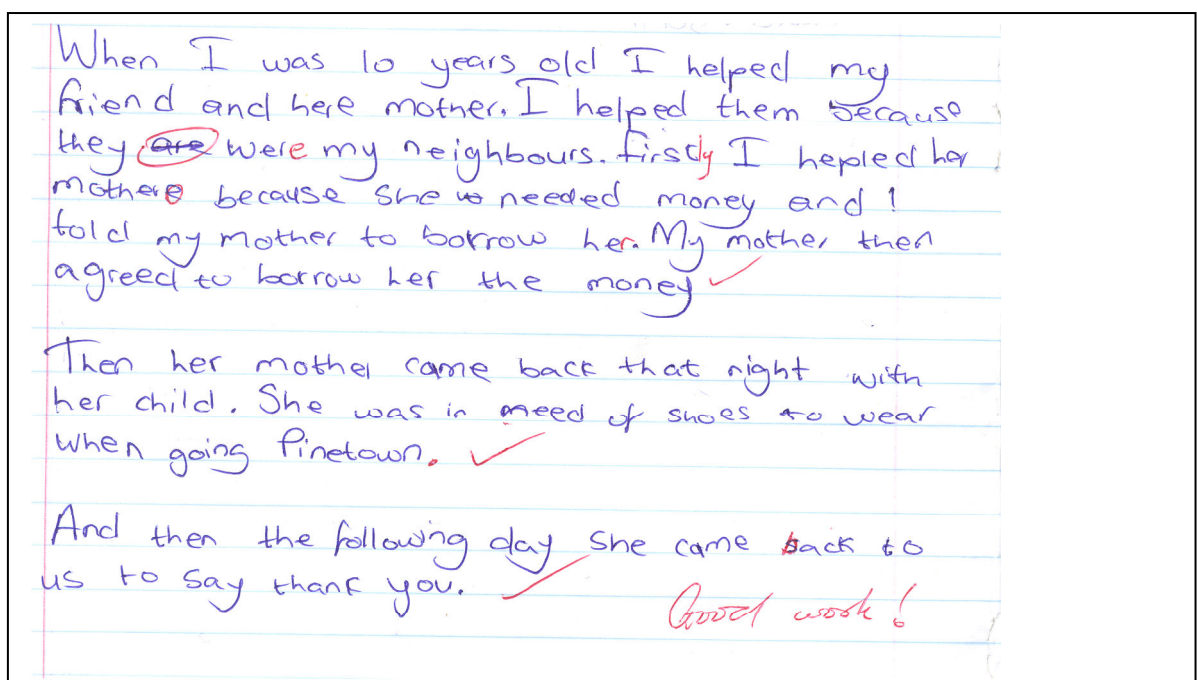

Figure 5.8. A second draft of a learner's essay: "An improved piece of writing"

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Figure 5.8 reveals and confirms that the time and effort I invested in engaging all 46 learners in writing as a process bore fruits at the end. This is evident if you look at the number of mistakes that are highlighted in the story shown in Figure 5.8 as compared to the first draft (Figure 5.7). This activity showed me that learners' written communication can be nurtured if the teacher is committed to doing his or her part of the work with dedication. I learned that support and feedback from the teacher is needed for learners' writing improvement and development. I found that when the learners received a high mark on the second draft that boosted their confidence and motivated them to excel and to believe that they were capable. Furthermore, learners also acknowledged the significance of this support and guidance to their performance and achievement. The use of journal writing offered learners a chance to give feedback about their learning. Rodgers (2006) reports that such feedback gives learners the chance to express their feelings about their learning experiences as well as their ideas about what would make their learning more fruitful. The following learner's journal entry is an illustration of this:
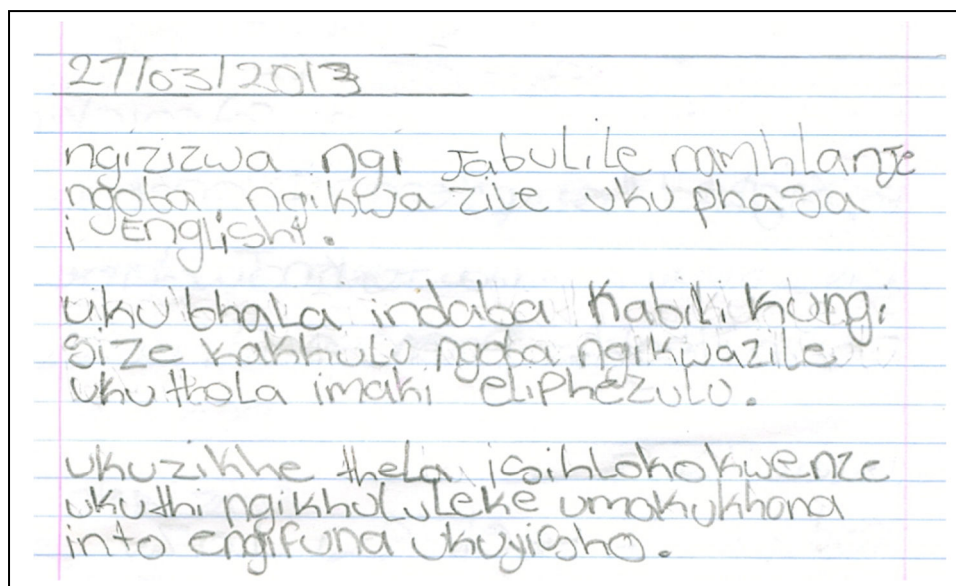

Figure 5.9. A learner's journal entry: "A second draft means fewer mistakes and a higher mark"

Figure 5.9 is a learner's reflection taken from a journal entry written in IsiZulu. As mentioned in chapter two, learners were not confined to a specific language when writing in their journals. In English, the learner's comment means:

I feel happy today, because I managed to pass English. To be given a chance to write the story for the second time has assisted me in getting better marks. To be afforded a chance to choose my own topic it made me free to express myself on paper.

To me, this meant that the learner understood the significance and the benefit of having several chances when engaging in the writing process. Haberman (1991) argues that effective teaching takes place when teachers engage learners in doing writing activities over and over again because a well written piece of work cannot be completed in a single attempt. Furthermore, he states that we should make learners aware that redoing work over and over is not a punishment, but is rather a chance to excel in their work (Haberman, 1991). Furthermore, Pithouse (2004) argues that gaining pride from the writing process is a vital motivator that keeps learners inspired to carry on writing. Kempf (2013) maintains that engaging learners in the writing process can stimulate their written communication to the highest level because their work is valued in the classroom and it can promote an environment infused with trust, encouragement and motivation.

This learner's comment also suggested that I should not restrict learners to write only about my ideas, but that I should allow them to think of their own ideas for written communication activities. Horng (2005) claims that creative instructions prompt learners to think for themselves, to take part actively in classroom activities and articulate their ideas freely. Likewise, Zaragoza and Vaughn (1995) indicate that teachers should allow learners to choose their writing topics.
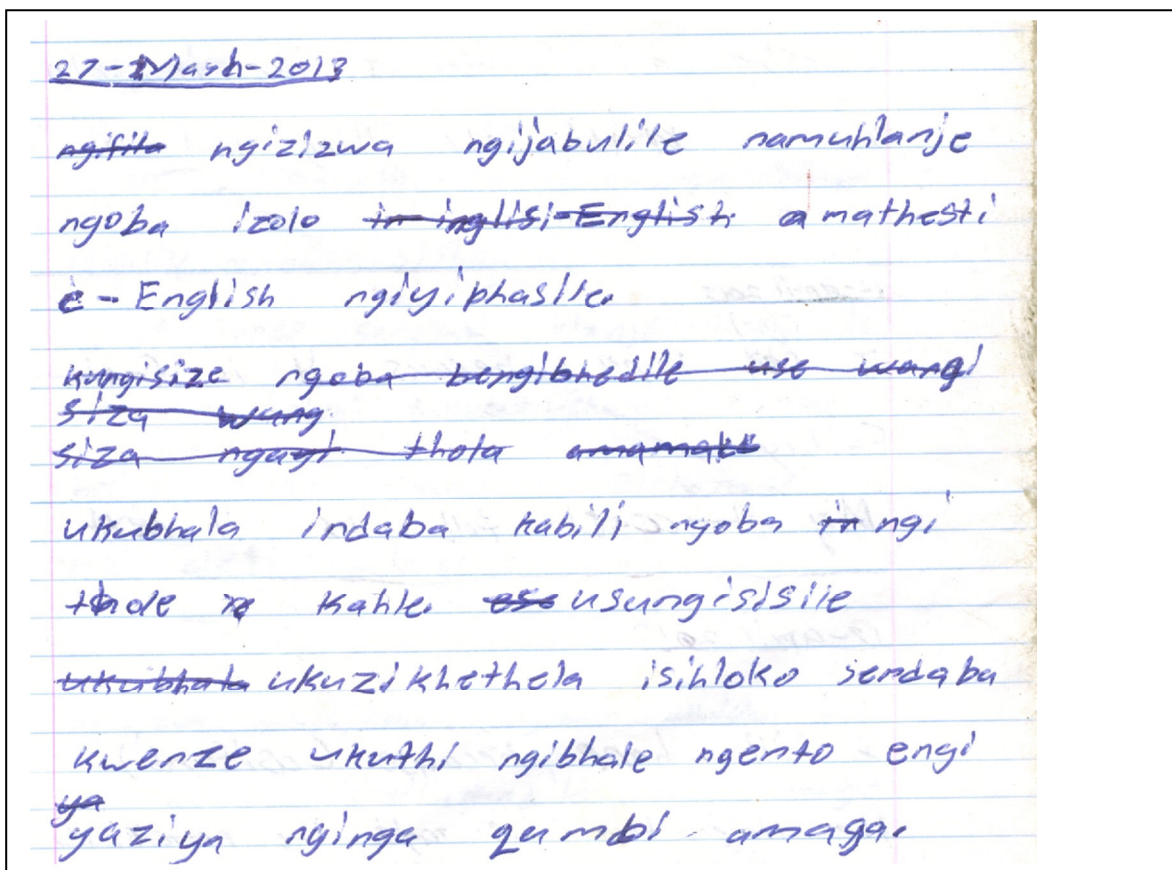
Figure 5.10. A learner's journal entry: "Before lies, lies and now, no more lies"

Figure 5.10 is another example of a learner's journal entry. In English this reads:

> *I feel happy today because yesterday I passed English test. To get the second chance in writing the story it has helped me to get better marks. To choose the topic of the story has made me to write about something that I know and not to lie.*

Roger (2006) explains that journals are tools that can be used to gather data about what learners have learned, the how of the learning process, and also about what has assisted or hindered learning. The learners' journal reflections (e.g., Figure 5.9 and Figure 5.10) showed me that giving learners chances to develop a flair for written communication through using the writing process can benefit them by helping them to achieve better marks and by giving them a platform to tell stories that they are familiar with. These reflections have made me realise that when I taught writing as a once off activity I was depriving learners of the right to self-realisation of their capabilities. Kempf (2013) explains that teaching writing as a process to young children can lead to learners trying out innovative ideas, having fun with writing and creating an enhanced understanding of themselves as writers. Flanagan (1995) argues

that teachers' ignorance of the writing process and of using a genre-based approach can make writing a boring task for learners because teachers do not explain the purpose for each piece of writing, and learners do not learn ways to express themselves for diverse readers as they only write for the teacher-as-examiner. This calls for teachers that are willing to develop primary school learners who will be confident to engage with other writing genres that they might encounter in higher education and other spheres of life.

Emotions and relationships

According to Värlander (2008):

> Emotions are constitutive of the activity of learning and shape the learning experiences, and are important in the maintenance of self-esteem and confidence. Emotions are not only to be seen as a product of individual experiences, but rather as product of social relationships in the classroom between peers, and between peer and tutors (p. 149).

My memory stories (Chapter Three) revealed that emotions and relationships must be considered when teaching and nurturing flair for written communication. In looking back at my own lived experiences, I became aware that learning and teaching can be hindered if emotions and relationships are neglected by teachers. After re-examining my memory stories and identifying some vital issues in my own learning journey, I became aware of how my teaching and interaction with learners affects their emotions and relationships. To develop a constructive learning environment, the teacher must reduce all acts that impact negatively on emotions such as administering corporal punishment or making degrading remarks to learners. The teacher must also try to ensure that positive relationships are developed and maintained among learners. As a teacher, I should set a good example for learners by building supportive relationships with them so that learning can take place.

Rantala and Maatta (2012) affirm that relationships are not just a source for learning but are also an item of learning and that schools should ensure that strategies and methods that develop and sustain human relationships are practiced. I have realised that relationship development is particularly crucial in the teaching and learning of written communication because there is constant feedback that has to be given. Rodgers (2006) contends that in order for the feedback process to work well between teacher and learners there need to be a trusting relationship. Furthermore, Zaragoza and Vaughn (1995) highlight that in an accepting and

safe environment learners do not feel threatened by a lack of knowledge, but rather feel welcomed and accepted for what they are familiar with.

Hence, as I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, my learners were given a five minute chance at the beginning of each of the research lessons to write entries in their journals. The entries were mostly about their emotions and also about their reflections and feedback on the previous lesson (Rodgers, 2006). Learners were given journal time at the beginning of each lesson because I wanted to make sure that they were all writing, as well as me.

Issues of emotions and relationships emerged as a significant component in learners' journal entries. Learners were not restricted to write in class only about what had transpired in the school environment; they were free to write about what mattered most to them and even about their feelings at home. Some learners were delighted to have a chance to note what affected their personal lives as their home backgrounds and experiences seemed to be full of psychosocial problems that influenced and impacted on their learning at school. I have realised that if this happens, it does not only affect learners; it also affects the teacher because he or she is not able to achieve the desired learning outcomes in time. From the journal entries, I realised that some parents, especially the younger ones, do not seem to give enough support to their children. Furthermore, if the relationship between both parents has turned sour, this can result in learner emotional breakdown and stress. This is evident in the following extract from a learner's journal entry (Figure 5.11):

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Figure 5.11. A learners' journal entry: "I feel like my parents don't care about me"

Reading the above journal entry showed me that as teachers we have an obligation to make the learning environment more welcoming and understanding of learners' behaviours that might be related to their various home backgrounds. This suggests to me that I should be careful when teaching that I do not cause emotional breakdown in learners; instead, I should recognise that teaching and learning involves both the intellect and emotions (Rodgers, 2006). I should be aware that some learners in my class are emotionally vulnerable because of what they experience at home. This means that classrooms must be places where learners experience emotional freedom and their happiness is prioritised. Rantala and Maatta (2012) concur that "the joy experienced together, and shared, adds up to even more joy" (p. 98). Many of the learners that I teach are children of single parents who had relationships that did

not work out. This tends to affect learners negatively because they are often not even allowed to ask questions to heal and get closure. I think that these things happen because in our Zulu culture it is customary that if you are child you do not interfere with adult affairs. So these issues are bottled up and are clouding learners' minds. Getting a chance to write in their journals allowed them to express what was worrying them. I think that maybe they did not have someone that they could trust to whom they could disclose their confidential psychosocial problems. This means that my learners treated their journals as their trustworthy friends to whom they could disclose all their bottled up emotions and troubles. From this, I have learned that it would be wise for me to consider learners' emotions as a priority in teaching of written communication. Moreover, I believe that if we engage learners in building healthy relationships and to become respectful of individuals' emotions in the early years at primary school it means that we are developing responsible adults who are likely to maintain relationships and to be sensitive to others' enduring pains.
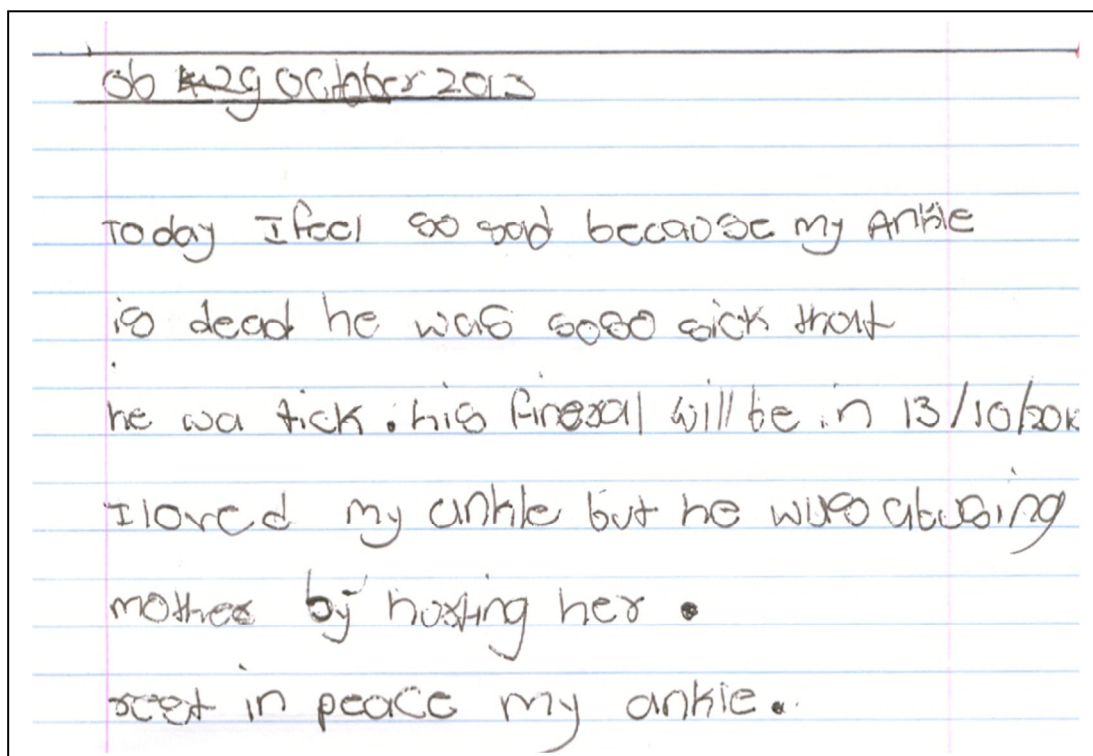

Figure 5.12. A learners' journal entry: "He was abusing mother".

The journal entry above (Figure 5.12) strongly suggests to me that schools and teachers should provide learners with a joyful environment where they can focus and learn happily because learners' lives can be negatively influenced by social ills such as domestic abuse.

These social ills affect learners' academic progress. Burke (2002) points out that learners' experiences of parental divorce, abuse, poverty and substance abuse can harm learners' development and performance at school. He further states that, although these experiences happen outside of school premises, they have deep repercussions for classroom living and teachers' work. This means that for me as a teacher, teaching learners with such emotional burdens is a challenge and it needs special attention to address such issues. Both of the above journal extracts (Figure 5.11 and 5.12) reveal that learners' emotions are at risk because of unhealthy relationships between adults. The learners' journal extracts reveal feelings of shame, embarrassment and humiliation as opposed to pride which boosts self-confidence (Värlander, 2008). Through the use of learner journal writing, I have learned that it is not easy to separate emotions from relationships. Värlander (2008) asserts that emotions are evoked and stimulated in social interaction and relationships. This means that for a teacher to establish positive relationships with his or her learners, emotional wellbeing needs to be taken care of.

What learners wrote about in their journals were issues that I would have not known about if I had not engaged in this research. This research has helped me to engage more with learners in bringing personal topics forward and discussing such issues in order to offer them some possible solutions. Burke (2002) explains that "to know a student fully, the teacher should learn about the idiosyncratic dynamics and influences of relationships at home, at school, in various community groups, and in faith-based organizations" (p.110). This means that, as teachers, we should make our learners more comfortable to have trust us, in order for them to disclose their personal experiences so that we can better understand them in our classrooms.

Parental involvement
The theme of parental involvement emerged from my memory stories (see Chapters Three and Four) as one of the most important aspects to consider in nurturing and developing a flair for written communication. Burke (2002) argues that we as teachers should never forget that the most vital adults in a learner's life are the parents and the classroom teacher. That is why it was important for me to better understand what roles my learners' parents were playing in their development of written communication and the extent to which their parents were involving themselves.

Värlander (2008) notes that receiving care in a relationship includes getting assistance to enhance understanding of crucial events and their repercussions. Kennedy (2010) asserts that parental involvement has a positive effect in developing written expression if parents assist their children at home with class activities and application of the knowledge gained at school. Similarly, Horng (2005) indicates that parents can be a model of creative thinking and can show their children the significance of nurturing creativity and the application of it to everyday life.

I explored this issue of parental engagement through the learners' class work and through their journal entries. Most of the written communication lessons that were done in class for the study were taken home to be completed as homework. I believe that some learners who were with supportive parents came the following morning with their work completed. However, those with poor parental or family support completed their work in the morning at school or while I was in class waiting for them to hand in their work.
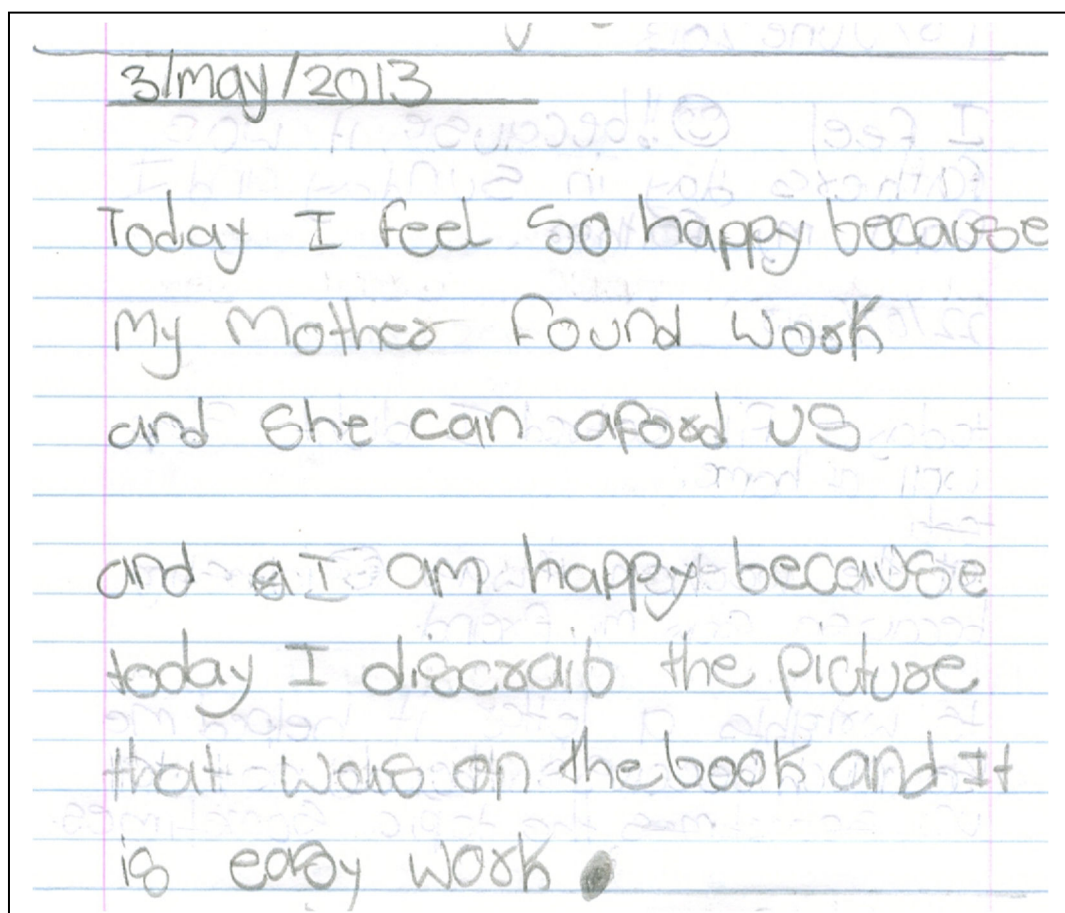

Figure 5.13 A learner's journal entry: "Today I feel so happy because my mother found work and she can afford us"

My memory stories reveal that supporting children as a parent could be in a form of providing financial support for school needs and it could be support in assisting them with their school activities to further enhance literacy development. Dlamini (2013) maintains that both kinds of support are regarded as providing pedagogical care. In my view, both kinds of support are important to learners for stability in learners' psychological and emotional wellbeing.

My parents provided pedagogical care. Despite being illiterate and underprivileged, they strove to provide for my school needs (see Chapter Three). Hence, I was not worried about my poor background, although I was aware of it. I learned important lessons from my home background. It taught me to survive against those hard conditions. However, the above journal entry (Figure 5.13) shows me that learners are feeling the impact of having parents who are unemployed. Looking at this journal entry, I can see that the learner had been worried for quite some time by this burning issue of joblessness of her or his mother. This means that the mother could not afford to support them and provide for their school needs. This could have a negative impact on the progress of children at school, especially because there is also peer pressure. The chances for this learner to perform well in class activities are so slim because his or her mind is confused and worried about the lack of provision for school needs. If the learner's mind is clouded with socioeconomic issues, it is difficult for the teacher to successfully achieve the outcomes of written communication lessons. Thus, I have realised that it is important to liaise with parents if a problem at home emerges from the learner's school work (Lemmer, 2012).
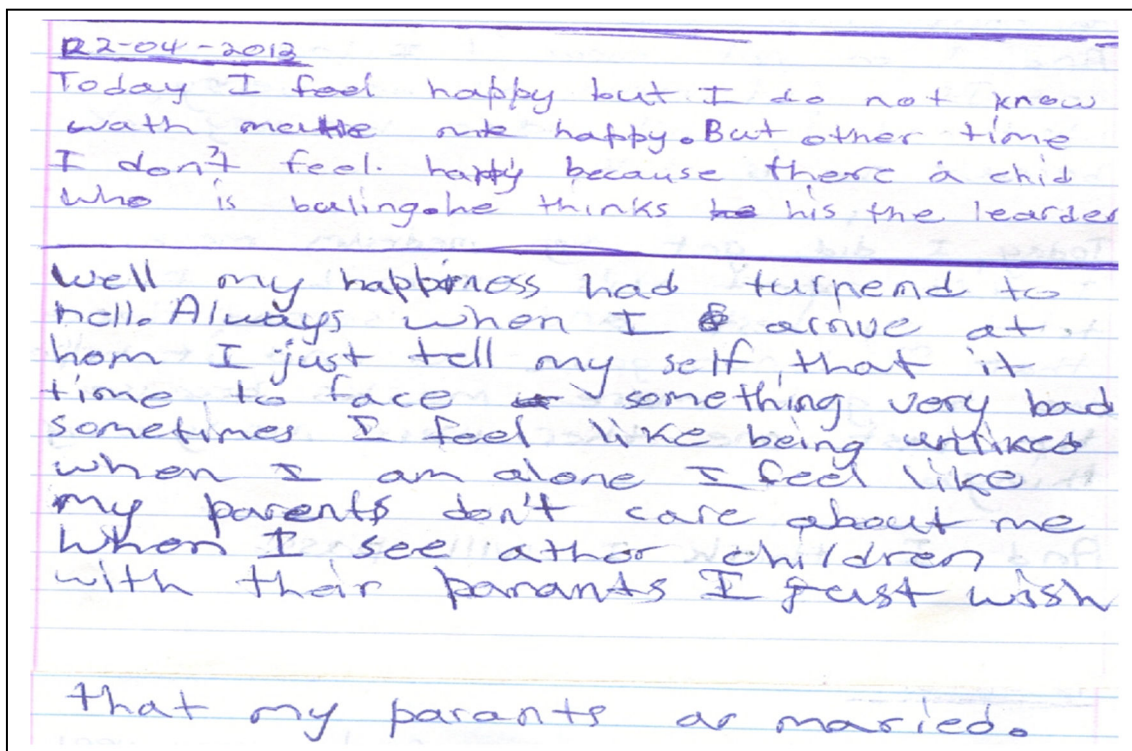
Figure 5.14. A learner's journal entry: "I just wish that my parents are married"

My memory drawing in Chapter Three (See Figure 3.4) depicts me in action with both my mother and father giving me pedagogical support by requiring me to use my knowledge gained at school. By contrast, the above journal entry (Figure 5.14) made me realise that that a learner could develop a low self-esteem if there was insufficient parental involvement. In my view, developing a positive self-esteem at a young age is important because it leaves a lasting impression on the mind for self-belief. Parents are important individuals who offer children valuable small beginnings of lessons that they never forget in life. It is those lessons that can pave the way to become strong or weak in life. It is these thoughtful comments by learners that made me aware of what learners can miss out on. Children sometimes just miss being told how much they are loved by both parents and they need that time to spend with both parents. This child wishes he or she could go to a home where there is a father and a mother. It means he or she is fantasising about a life that he or she cannot have.

Reading such journal reflections made me empathetic towards the learners' experiences that have to do with their parents. Sometimes, I would just stop reading at a journal entry and pay more attention to the thoughts about the content contained in each. Other journal entries had some responses that were emotionally disturbing. At times some learners were expressing

thoughts that seemed far beyond their level of maturity. At times, I tried to put myself in the leaners' shoes to understand their states of mind, but it was unbearable. Värlander (2008) explains empathy as "an attempt to put your self in another's shoes, which implies understanding his or her particular situation, interests, skill level, and future opportunities and problems" (p. 149). Likewise, Eisner (2008) states that empathy allows you experience another person's strong feelings in order to get deep insight into and understanding of their experiences. Reading these kinds of responses from learners made me think twice before I spoke with the learners because I now understood the problems learners were encountering in their home environments. The learners' responses also allowed me to understand that parental involvement in a child's schooling is important for academic and social wellbeing and is thus significant in developing a child holistically (Lemmer, 2012).

Hence, I realised that this issue of parental involvement is one that I need to continue to pay attention to and to try to find ways to address. Morrow (1995) advises that teachers need to assist parents in understanding the important role that they have in the development of children's writing and they should be made aware of the fact that they have skills and knowledge from their cultural heritage that they can use when helping their children.

Cultural practices and changing technology

Cultural practices emerged from my memory stories as an important aspect to be considered when intending to improve and nurture written communication. It became evident to me that the inclusion in my formal schooling of my cultural practices and knowledge gained from my informal learning experiences could have had a positive impact on my written communication development (see Chapter Four). Ndaleni (2013) explains culture as information that is commonly known to a particular group or society and is passed from one generation to the next. Moreover, Kajee (2011) claims that young children build up an understanding of writing and what it involves by scrutinising and taking part in writing practices which are culturally located.

In planning my research lessons for my study, I considered how cultural practices might have an influence in learners' written communication development. Kajee (2011) clarifies that, to ensure progress and correspondence between home and school, teaching should take place in a context that is well-matched with the culture of the learners. Hence, I thought it would be

wise to develop an activity that would involve learners in applying their cultural knowledge and practices.

I believe that my learners' written communication is culturally influenced by what they currently do as young people in the 21st century. Social Media in Learning and Education (SMILE) (2013) reveals that technology is evolving language over time for the youth of today who meet and communicate through the use of social media. The youth of the 21st century tend to be more familiar with the use of technological devices than I was as a learner at school. In particular, my learners are familiar with cellular telephones (cell phones). As my school is under resourced (see Chapter Two), we do not have computer rooms or tablet computers to be used for training computer skills. So, I decided to prepare a lesson that would combine the elements of cultural practices and changing technology where learners would be expected to apply their knowledge of the use of cell phones.

I introduced the topic of cell phone usage by asking questions to find out the most viable forms and tools of communication. The majority of the learners responded and confirmed that they were using cell phones as a tool for communication. When answering the question about the cheapest means of communication the most of them said they were writing messages by "texting" on their or a family member's cell phone. When asked if they all owned cell phones almost half of the class said that they possessed a cell phone. Plester, Wood and Bell (2008) demonstrated in their study that school children owned phones because parents provided learners with phones so that they could keep in touch while away. As a result, texting was a common practice amongst them. Thupayagale-Tshweneagae, Nkosi, Molekiand Human (2014) concur that the use of cell phones and texting can allow learners freedom of expression of their feelings and thoughts because it gives them privacy. However, at our school, learners are not allowed to bring in their cell phones to school and that is regulated in the code of conduct for learners.

The learners all agreed that texting is the mode of written expression that they more familiar with when it comes to communicating with other. Texting is when a cell phone is used to convey a message through SMS (smart messaging system).Plester and Wood (2009) highlight that texting involves the use of contractions and abbreviations because one SMS has a limit of a total of 160 characters. Additionally, Plester, et al. (2008) clarify that texting includes acronyms and symbols as well as abbreviations.

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Molestane (2011) explains that cultural identity forms when an individual possesses a sense of belonging to a particular group or community. My discussion with my learners revealed that they feel a sense of belonging to a community that tends to communicate via cell phones. Most of my learners said that they knew how to send text messages. Kajee (2011) argues that learning written communication is better understood by learners if they are taught in the context of social and cultural practices which they are familiar with and are part of.

Learners were then divided into groups of six to work on the activity of writing a message using texting language. They worked in groups to accommodate those that mentioned that they had not had such experience with cell phones. The instruction was for each group to think about and write a message that they wanted to send to someone. They then had to write the message down using the standard English style of writing and then write it again using the texting style of writing. Below are two examples of these messages:
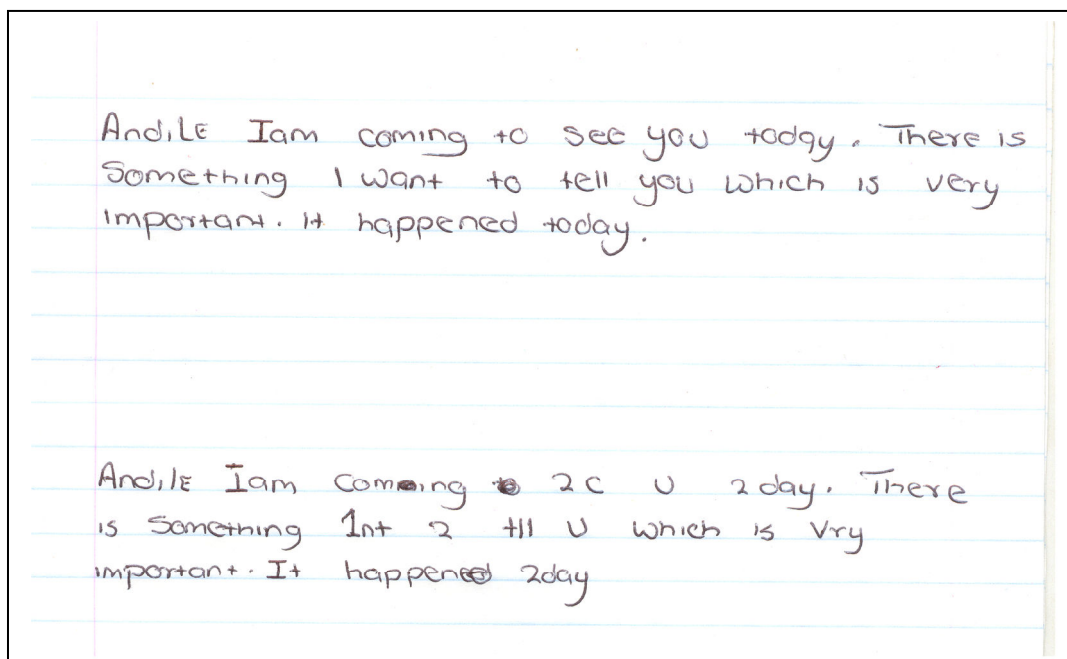

Figure 5.15 A group text message: "Andile, I am coming 2 C U 2day"

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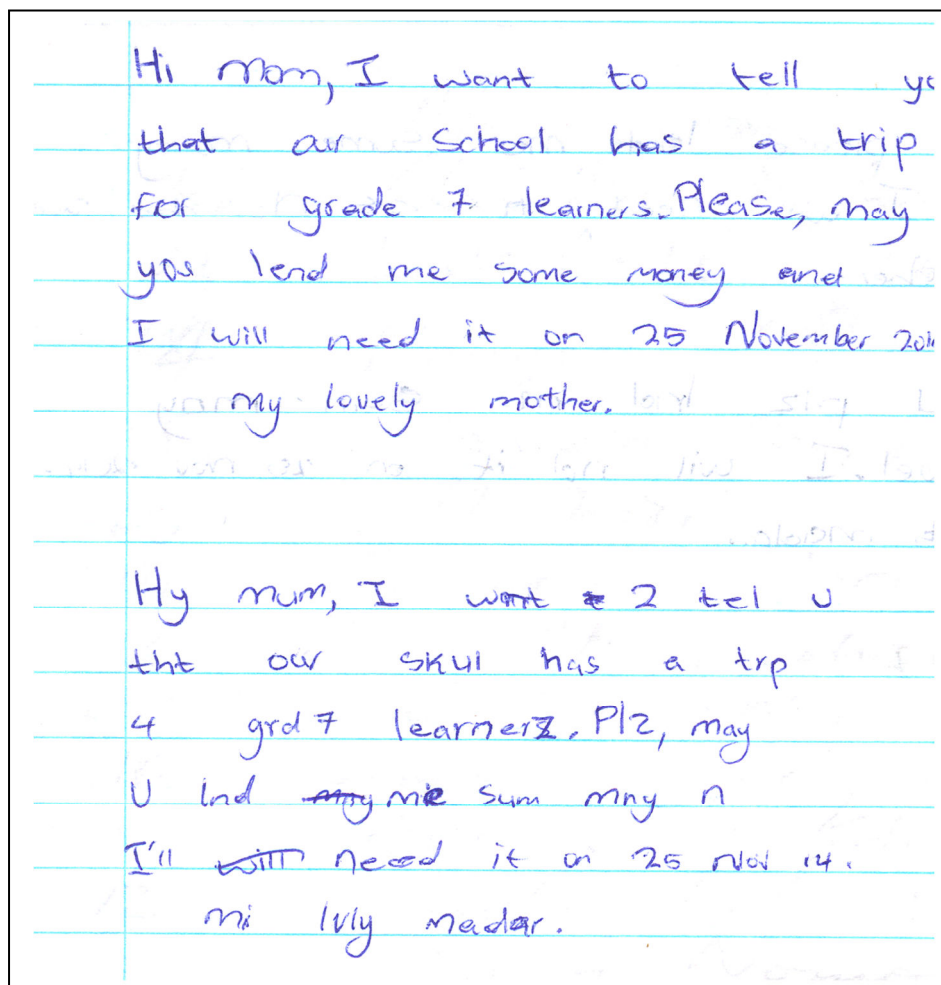
Figure 5.16. A group text message: "Plz my u lnd me sum mny"

At the end of the lesson, I collected all the messages from the six groups and then shared them with the rest of the class by writing them on the chalkboard. I wrote only the message with the standard English wording on the board. With this activity I wanted to find out other different ways that learners could write a word in texting style. Learners proposed new options or suggestions as to how to write other words even shorter than what other groups had done. What I discovered was that learners were much more familiar with texting than I had previously thought.

Plester et al. (2008) reveal that cell phones are more and more accessible to learners who are still developing their written communication capacity and therefore it is crucial to be familiar with the links between the texting and written communication. Thupayagale-Tshweneagae et al. (2014) concur that the many of the young people in developing countries possess and use

cell phones. Interestingly, the group work that I did with my learners did not suggest any negative impact of texting on the development of their written language competence. Each of the groups was able to translate a message from standard English to texting language and this showed that they understood the difference between these two modes of written communication.

In my view, the availability of cell phones to learners can add more value to teaching and learning of written communication. This technology can be used as a tool or resource in the teaching learning process. It can bring the world and information to your hands, which has been hardly accessible previously. As a school in a semi-rural area this means that having cell phones as a teaching resource could enhance our teaching because we could access online information via cell networks. Haberman (1991) argues that teachers should involve learners with technology to access knowledge. Similarly, Thupayagale-Tshweneagae et al. (2014) propose that learners need to be educated on the meaningful use of cell phones which would benefit them. This means that it is our duty as teachers to keep an eye on learners to ensure that they use such devices in an effective way that benefits them. This also calls for us as teachers to reconsider and relate our teaching strategies to what is currently practiced by learners of today.

Conclusion

In this chapter, Chapter Five, I addressed my second research question: *"How can I facilitate a flair for written communication through my teaching?"* In answering this question I explored six issues that have emerged from my memory stories about communicative experiences. One of the issues (*changing technology*) was interwoven with the theme of *cultural practices*.

In this chapter, I recounted how I planned my lessons to try to spark the element of creativity in each and every activity I conducted in the classroom. I also explained how I had to change my way of doing things in order to create a supportive environment and promote creativity in all lessons. Furthermore, I explained how I used learners' reflections from their journals to inform my teaching styles as I realised that they are unique individuals from different backgrounds with diverse needs.

The key message of this chapter is that written communication can be nurtured by the teacher who envisages improvement in his or her teaching strategies to equip learners to express themselves through writing. The consideration of emotions and the development of positive relationships are of paramount importance when nurturing written communication. Writing with flair is not just a talent that some individuals are born with; it can be taught as a process. This requires support from a dedicated teacher because it demands extra time and effort on the part of the teacher. This study has taught me the significance of creating a classroom environment which is encouraging and full of opportunities for learners to freely explore when learning to write with flair. Bower, (2014) maintains that "students learn best in an environment in which they feel safe and comfortable" (p. 35). Another important learning for me was that through the use of journals in class learners could develop a new habit of keeping personal journals for the written communication of their thoughts and emotions. Reading their journal entries allowed me to get to know my learners in a new way and to be able to provide them with additional academic and emotional support.

In the final chapter, Chapter Six, I reflect on what I have learned from my self-study research. First, I consider my methodological learning and then I look at my professional learning. To end, I clarify how I will move forward with nurturing and developing a flair for written communication among primary school learners based on what I have found out from my study.

CHAPTER SIX:
MOVING FORWARD WITH FACILITAING A FLAIR FOR WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

Introduction

The focus of my self-study research was on the development of a flair for English written communication among my isiZulu-speaking grade six learners. The aim of conducting this study was to improve my teaching practice to enhance learners' English written communication. I have employed a self-study methodology to help me to achieve the purpose of my research.

In the previous chapter, Chapter Five, I responded to my second research question: *"How can I facilitate a flair for written communication through my teaching?"* I explained how I designed and introduced new learning activities with the aim of eliciting and developing the element of creativity in English written communication lessons. In the work done with learners I was seeking working strategies for nurturing their flair for written communication. I discussed the outcomes of these activities conducted in class with reference to the six key issues that had emerged from my memory stories and interpretive poetry (Chapter Three).

In this final chapter, Chapter Six I conclude by reflecting on what I have learned from my self-study research. I begin with my methodological learning and then consider my professional learning. I then explain how I plan to use what I have learned to move forward with facilitating a flair for written communication.

My learning from the study

Methodological learning

I can see how using a self-study approach helped me to understand self-study as a research methodology that is suitable for those teachers who want to change for the better in their practice. Self-study motivated and empowered me to make some changes personally and improve the way I teach.

My self-study was not only about learning through personal experience; it was also about learning from critical friends who were my fellow students from different teaching contexts. These critical friends offered me new possible strategies for the teaching and learning of written communication in the classroom.

Through memory-work self-study, I have come to understand the influences of personal experiences on my practice as a teacher and the way I interact with my learners when teaching written communication. Recollecting my memory stories and reliving some episodes of my past experiences brought new meanings and new ideas about how I was taught written communication. I would have not been aware of this if it was not for memory-work. I have learned that if the remembered experience was not enjoyable, memory-work can help you to deal with it and find peace with it because it gives you a different perspective. Reflecting on my memory stories helped me to want to not repeat what my former teachers did to me but instead to do justice in all my classroom lessons for written communication. Thus, memory-work self-study changed my thinking about the long term consequences of our personal educational experiences. Memory-work assisted me to realise that I can build on the unpleasing and unimaginative experiences I encountered during my schooling to develop new teaching strategies for written communication. The process of writing my memory stories helped me to understand that improving teaching strategies in practice can be enhanced when teachers have a chance to revisit their past lived experiences and to think about how they can draw important lessons from them.

My self-study research allowed me to recall and write my memory stories which has helped me to learn to appreciate people and incidents that have made a contribution in my educational life and to the teacher I am today. For instance, I realized the contribution made by my parents when they asked me to write letters and invitations which sharpened my development in writing. The school in the veld taught me creativity in other modes of communication and to learn survival skills for life in general.

Memory-work self-study also taught me to broaden my understanding of the significance and value of the objects I encounter in my educational experiences as they may become artefacts which can have significant implications when analysed in a personal narrative. Artefact retrieval assisted me to bring life to my memory stories so that I could engage reader to feel and relive the experiences with me.

Additionally, interpretive poetry helped me to select significant experiences embedded in my memory stories to be expressed in poetic form. I learned that interpretive poetry is a powerful tool to be used when making meaning from personal experiences; because of the choice and selection of words it is concise and the meaning is felt even if the mind resists. Through my experience of poetry writing in my research, I realised that it is ideal for teachers to teach poetry at a young age if they want to build individuals who can express themselves with flamboyance.

Professional learning

I have realised that teachers need to be capacitated with knowledge for teaching written expression as a process because it is not just a gift from God; flair for written communication can be learned. Every learner has the potential to write creatively as a means of communicating ideas for personal use, for career demands or for readers as audience.

I have also come to understand that the development of flair for written communication demands support from all significant stakeholders in learners' education. The development of written communication does not solely rely on what the teacher is doing in the classroom; instead it should be a joint effort of all concerned. Hence, a challenge for me as a teacher is to find constructive ways involve learners' parents or guardians in their learning of written communication.

As explained in Chapter One, taking a theoretical perspective that viewed the cultivation of flair for written communication as the "preparation of artists" (Eisner, 2004, p. 4) helped me to understand that teachers should ensure that creativity should be an important element considered when planning lessons. Artists in the making need the exposure to explore creativity before they become experts in their fields. Likewise, learners need to be offered opportunities to engage in classroom activities that will spark and challenge their creativity. An important lesson that I draw from this study is that creativity should form an integral part of the teaching and learning process of written communication. Considering the perspective of education as the preparation of artists (Eisner, 2004), I had to change the classroom environment to be suitable for the exploration of ideas, for trial and error learning, and for the expression of feelings because I understood that these elements would help me to include creative elements in classroom activities.

The use of interpretive poetry helped me to understand the practicality of the idea of education as the preparation of artists. Before this, I did not know that I could better express my experiences with poems because the arrangement and selection of words is concise and to the point. Therefore, by bringing creativity into my research process, I learned firsthand about developing a flair for written communication.

My key learning is that written communication can nurtured by the teachers who are willing to execute their duties with dedication and determination to see their learners succeed in all spheres of life. Facilitating writing with flair requires support from a dedicated teacher because it demands extra effort. As a teacher, I should offer a welcoming and encouraging classroom environment. I should present learners with opportunities that allow for creative exploration of ideas, accommodating mistakes and mutual respect for both parties involved in the teaching and learning of written communication. The consideration of emotions and the development of positive relationships are of the utmost importance when nurturing written communication.

Guidelines for nurturing a flair for written communication

In moving forward with facilitating written communication, I will use the following guidelines:

Parental involvement

Parental involvement is important in the development of written communication among primary school learners. Parental involvement should not be compromised by the level of education of the parent because both illiterate and literate parents can make a contribution to expose children at home to written communication. Schools should ensure that parents are empowered with parental knowledge so as to support and complement the small beginnings teachers provide at school.

Emotions and relationships

Teaching written communication needs teachers who are considerate of the learners' emotions. Because the teacher and the learners are human beings, emotions play a crucial role in the learning process. Teachers must reduce all acts that can bring unhappiness to the fore in the learning process. Learning written communication will be more successful and

effective if the learning is filled with joy. If the emotional well-being of learners is maintained in the learning process learners are likely to develop a good relationship with a teacher and as well as with other learners. The ideal teacher-learner relationship is where teacher do not exercise excessive power over the learners and there is mutual respect from both parties. As a teacher, I can learn through reading learners' journal reflections. For teaching practice improvement, learners' concerns need to be heard.

Cultural practices

Youth culture plays a significant role in young people's lives and sometimes has a great influence on what we teach for developing flair in writing. Cultural practices may be outdated and irrelevant and so it is vital for teachers to be updated with the latest developments so that lessons relates to what learners are familiar with.

Changing technology

It is crucial for teachers to recognise the impact of new and changing technologies on written communication development. Learning and teaching support material, such as slates, exercise books, computers and so on, has an impact on written communication and the learners' academic life style. It is also important that teachers upgrade their knowledge in order to match up with learners who are ahead with changing technology. Some of the learners that we teach are exposed to new technologies at an early age. This calls for teachers who are going to try and learn as much as possible to keep up with the technological developments.

Creative expression

I should offer and expose learners to creative activities when learning to write. However, creativity cannot be developed if there is no pleasure in the learning. Cultivation of creative abilities can be inculcated if there is encouragement and motivation in the learning process.

Writing as a process

Writing as a process can be taught at the primary school level. If we are teaching writing as a process at young age, we are preparing learners for future challenges in their educational lives. Teaching writing as a process can build self-confidence because learners may start believing in themselves and get courage from the teachers' feedback on drafts. Teaching and nurturing written communication through a writing process approach demands time and patience from the teacher.

Conclusion

My interest to engage in this self-study research was sparked by what I had observed in my learners' written work. I could see that there was something that I was not doing right as a teacher. I had been shifting the blame to the foundation phase (grade 1 to 3) teachers, forgetting that I was part of the problem. I had been forgetting that there was something I could do to contribute to the improvement of my practice and to influence other colleagues for change. Hence as an English language teacher, I felt that the burden was on my shoulders to seek understanding and strategies for facilitating a flair for written communication development. My concern triggered the need to engage in this self-study research.

Self-study has enabled me to reminisce and reflect on significant memory stories of my own communicative experiences. Furthermore, self-study has helped me to explore and to learn from my past and present learning and teaching experiences. This self-study research was necessary for my teaching development and for future teaching improvements.

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APPENDIX A

P.O. Box 2011
Hillcrest
3650
25 August 2012

Dear Parent/Guardian

**<u>REQUEST FOR CONSENT TO USE FINDINGS FROM YOUR CHILD'S
CONTRIBUTION IN ENGLISH WRITTEN COMMUNICATION LESSONS.</u>**

Title of study: Nurturing learners' flair for written communication: A teacher's self-study.
The purpose of conducting this research is to better understand how I can enhance my
teaching of English as written communication to IsiZulu learners. My aim is to cultivate flair
or flamboyance and motivate learners to have a love for written communication from the
young ages.
This study is supervised by Dr Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan who is a senior lecturer at the

School of Education, UKZN. She can be contacted telephonically at 031- 2603460 for further

information.

The information will be generated through daily English lesson activities. I will use
hardcopies of learners' written work and journal entries they will keep during research
period. I therefore request your permission to refer to child's contribution in English written
communication lessons.

 I will only use your child's work if you give me your consent. It will be used in way that
respects your child dignity and privacy. Hard copies and journal entries of learners work will
be safely stored and discarded if no longer required for research purposes. You child's name
or any information that might identify him or her will not be used in any presentation or
publication that might come out of the study.

There are no direct benefits to your child from participating from this research. I hope this
study will make valuable contribution to the teaching of written communication in primary
schools. I also wish to inform you that you do not have a legal obligation to have your child
participating in the study. You may withdraw your child at any point and that will not affect
or put your child at a disadvantage.

I hope my request will be considered positively.

Thank you.

Yours truly,
 S.B. Madondo

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT TO USE CHILD CONTRIBUTION TO RESEARCH

TITLE OF THE STUDY: Nurturing learners' flair for written communication: A teacher's self-study.

I, …………………………………………… hereby confirm that I understand the content of this document and do give my consent for my child to participate in the research that will be conducted during English lessons.

I also understand that my child can withdraw from the study with or without my permission and there won't be any negative or undesirable consequences to him/her.

Choose one by writing YES in the space provided:

I consent to the data collection activities of my child's (work) hard copies and journal entries ……………………………

Or

I do not consent to the data collection activities of my child's (work) hard copies and journal entries…………………….

……………………………………………   …………………………
Signature of parent/Guardian

<div align="right">
P.O. Box 2011
Hillcrest
3650
25 August 2012
</div>

Dear Critical friend

REQUEST FOR CONSENT TO USE FINDINGS FROM DISCUSSIONS IN CRITICAL FRIENDS MEETINGS.

Title: Nurturing learners' flair for written communication: A teacher's self-study.

The purpose of conducting this study is to better understand how I can enhance my teaching of English as written communication to IsiZulu learners. My aim is to cultivate flair or flamboyance and motivate learners to have a love for written communication from the young ages.

This study is supervised by Dr Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan who is a senior lecturer at the

School of Education, UKZN. She can be contacted telephonically at 031- 2603460 for further

information.

In this study it will be useful to record our group class discussions as a method for data collection. I will request your additional time for us to meet to discuss our literacy development memories. Other contributions will be from our meetings during our group supervision meetings.

I hereby request your permission to use your valuable contributions during our critical friends meetings and to avail your self for further meeting discussions. You will be notified in advance with the date and time for our meetings.

If I receive your consent I will use your contribution in a manner that respects your dignity and privacy. Your voice recordings and my notes of our discussions will be securely stored and discarded if no longer in use for my research purposes. You will not be identified even the name of your school will not be used in any presentation or publications that might result out of this study.

There are no direct benefits to you from taking part in this study and that there are no legal obligation to the study, meaning you may withdraw at any time. there wont be any negative consequences or be prejudiced as a result of a consent withdrawal.

For further information on research participants' rights you can contact Ms Phume Ximba at

UKZN Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Office on 031-260 3587.

Yours sincerely
S.B. Madondo

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT FOR PARTICIPANTS

<u>TITLE OF THE STUDY</u>: Nurturing learners' flair for written communication: A teacher's self-study.

I, ………………………………………….. hereby confirm that I understand the content of this document and the nature of the study.

I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time from the study without any negative consequences to myself.

Choose one of the following with a tick:

I consent to the data collection activities by attending meeting discussions and the use of my view points and ideas in the study……………………….
<div align="center">Or</div>
I do not consent to the data collection activities by attending meeting discussions and the use of my view points and ideas in the study……………………….

………………………………………… ……………………
 SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT   DATE